COMMISSIONED RULING ELDER (CRE)
Preparation Process

1. Introduction

G-2.10 COMMISSIONING RULING ELDERS TO PARTICULAR PASTORAL SERVICE

G-2.1001 Functions
When the presbytery, in consultation with the session or other responsible task force, determines that its strategy for mission requires it, the presbytery may authorize a ruling elder to be commissioned to limited pastoral service as assigned by the presbytery. A ruling elder so designated may be commissioned to serve in a validated ministry of the presbytery. Presbytery, in its commission, may authorize the ruling elder to moderate the session of the congregation to which he or she is commissioned, to administer the Sacraments, and to officiate at marriages where permitted by state law. This commission shall also specify the term of service, which shall not exceed three years but shall be renewable. The presbytery shall review the commission at least annually.

G-2.1002 Training, Examination and Commissioning
A ruling elder who seeks to serve under the terms of G-2.1001 shall receive such preparation and instruction as determined by the presbytery to be appropriate to the particular commission. The ruling elder shall be examined by the presbytery as to personal faith, motives for seeking the commission, and the areas of instruction determined by
presbytery. A ruling elder who has been commissioned and later ceases to serve in the specified ministry may continue to be listed as available to serve, but is not authorized to perform the functions specified in G-2.1001 until commissioned again to a congregation or ministry by the presbytery.

G-2.1003 Commissioning Service
When the presbytery is satisfied with the qualifications of a ruling elder to serve a congregation providing the services described above, it shall commission the ruling elder to pastoral service as designated by the presbytery, employing the questions contained in W-4.4000.

G-2.1004 Supervision
The ruling elder commissioned under the terms of G-2.1001 shall work under the supervision of the presbytery. The presbytery may at any time withdraw the commission for reasons it deems good and sufficient. A teaching elder shall be assigned as a mentor and supervisor.

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Albany Presbytery's policy for preparation of ruling elders for particular pastoral service is based on the conviction that a responsible and effective program must be highly selective, intensely formative, educationally demanding and flexible.

Selective. The Constitution gives presbyteries the option of commissioning ruling elders to carry out virtually all the functions of Ministers of Word and Sacrament. The range of tasks that might be assigned will require specific abilities and skills. Therefore the proposed program focuses on identifying and preparing ruling elders to be commissioned either for broadly defined pastoral ministry or for particular service in more narrowly focused ministries.

Formative. CREs may be called upon to care for people at the most difficult and joyful times of their live and to lead religious communities in discerning God's will for them. Thorough spiritual and psychological grounding is required to fulfill these functions. Therefore all those participating in the preparation process or serving in a commission will be required to participate in a spiritual formation group. This group will be led by a spiritual director in partnership and consultation with Committee on Preparation for Ministry (CPM)

Demanding. Functions of CREs such as preaching and teaching the word of God and representing the denomination and its faith tradition in the larger community require knowledge of Bible and Reformed tradition and the capacity to exercise good theological judgment. Those commissioned must have solid basic preparation in the disciplines they will exercise in the practice of their ministry, such as Bible, theology, ethics, Church polity, pastoral care, education, and youth ministry, and this program's goals set a high standard.

Flexible. Prospective CREs are likely to come from a variety of backgrounds and have different levels of experience and prior preparation. For this reason, this is an individualized process of formation that is defined by learning goals rather than a fixed program. Successful completion of the process will be measured not by completing courses and attending events but by demonstrating adequate knowledge of material relevant for ministry, sufficient capacity to carry out the functions of ministry, and enough personal maturity to meet the demands of ministry practice.

2. Application Process

Only ruling elders in the PC(USA) are eligible to enter the CRE program. Applications include an initial consultation with members of CPM to explain the scope and purpose of the program. Then, if interested, candidates may submit an application form (on line at www.albanypresbytery.org or contact the Albany Presbytery office) which must be accompanied by a completed Session Assessment Form from the elder's local session. In cases of financial need, sessions are encouraged to contribute toward the costs of preparation as part of local mission; however, a recommendation from a session does not in itself entail any obligation of financial support.

If a ruling elder is accepted into the CRE program his or her session shall assign a session liaison to support the candidate and facilitate ongoing communication.

3. The Basic Program

Under the supervision of CPM, ruling elders preparing to be commissioned may be required to:

- engage in basic and/or continuing theological learning
- participate in an ongoing spiritual formation group
- engage in a period of supervised ministry experience
- undergo psychological testing

CPM will work with each elder participant to develop an individual education plan, which may include a variety of experiences such as courses offered through CRTC or local colleges or seminaries, national and local workshops, and instruction available on-line as well as courses and workshops offered especially for the CRE program.

Completion of the program will be achieved by successfully demonstrating competency in those areas (see section 6 below) that are relevant to the particular ministry to which the candidate seeks to be commissioned.

4. The Spiritual Formation Group

All those preparing to be commissioned will be required to participate in an on-going spiritual formation group, conducted by a Spiritual Director in partnership/consultation with CPM liaisons. This group will be the context for professional and spiritual formation and might also provide instruction in a number of areas, including leadership and administration, conflict management, evangelism, stewardship, and professional ethics.

5. The Knowledge Base for Ministry

Depending on the kind of ministry for which they are preparing, candidates will have an individual education plan to develop basic theological and practical knowledge in one or more areas. Their learning goals may include:

- Biblical knowledge and understanding, including a general acquaintance with the Hebrew and Christian scriptures; an overview of Biblical history and sources of various texts; and a mastery of the basic skills of exegesis of English texts, including acquaintance with a range of secondary resources.
- Knowledge of major topics in Christian theology and understanding of key themes in Reformed theology.
- General knowledge of Christian history, including a basic knowledge of Presbyterian history and the content and significance of the Presbyterian confessions.
- Fundamentals of preaching, worship leadership, pastoral care, organizational leadership, Presbyterian polity and Christian education.
- Ability to write and speak clear, correct English.

**Candidates may be expected not only to pass certain courses, like those offered at the Capital Region Theological Center, but to pass with distinction, and/or to submit papers and exams written for these courses to the task force for review.*

6. Competency Demonstrations

For each learning goal, the task force will administer a competency demonstration that assesses the achievement of each goal. Candidates who do not perform adequately on the competency demonstrations may be required to undertake additional preparation and some may be counseled not to seek a commission. Successful candidates will demonstrate their competence in the areas in which they seek to do ministry, such as:

- The capacity regularly to preach clear, engaging sermons that are faithful to their biblical texts and theologically sound
  **A candidate might be required to submit 2 sermons (video or audio), preached in congregations who provide feedback, and 1 sermon preached in person to the task force*

- The ability to administer the sacraments and to plan and lead worship
  **A candidate might be required to submit complete plans for 3 services, with bulletins and explanation of how decisions were made… according to lectionary, short sermon series, or holiday services not in sanctuary, ie Maundy Thursday*

- The ability to function as an educator in the local church, organizing a church school program, leading adult Bible studies, and instructing members in the basics of Christian faith and Presbyterian and Reformed tradition.
  **The candidate might be required to do one or more of the following:*
  - *Create leadership preparation curriculum for church officers, using Book of Order and ordination questions (including those for congregation)*
  - *Design, with the church officers, above course for adult education, led by the officers*
  - *Create a plan for teacher recruitment, preparation and support for one year of programming*
  - *Design a series of intergenerational events based on liturgical year*
  - *Plan basic outline for confirmation class*
  - *Design a series of new member classes*
  - *Create outline for parent / student classes regarding the sacraments*
  - *Design a spiritual development series for congregation*
  - *Explore a number of curricula (provided) and select one based on solid Presbyterian and Reformed theology—one for elementary students, one for youth, one for adults*

- The skills of leadership and administration and the knowledge of Presbyterian polity and procedures needed to enable a local church to function smoothly and to make progress toward achieving its mission.
  **The candidate might be required to take a written or oral polity exam.*

- The pastoral skill required to care for persons at critical points in their lives and the capacity to identify problems that require referral.

**The candidate might be required to respond to several case studies, written by a certified pastoral counselor, who would also review their responses*

- The stability and maturity needed to withstand the pressures of ministry, and the spiritual grounding and strong character required to provide a good example and guide others in Christian living.
  The candidate **will be required to undergo career evaluation and testing at an accredited site, such as Samaritan Counseling Center*

- Understanding of and willingness to observe the standards of ministerial ethics.
  The candidate **will be required to take a course in boundary issues, and respond to a case study in writing.*

- Commitment to collegiality with other religious leaders and cooperation with other churches.

** All passages which are in small font, and italicized are only illustrative, and are not to be considered part of the main text, or policy.*

7. Graduates of Similar Programs

Individuals who have completed similar programs, and who wish to be commissioned in Albany Presbytery will be expected to meet all the standards and requirements of this program. Upon acceptance as candidates, they will be under the care and nurture of CPM.

8. Relationship to CPM

All the functions of the current task force will become the responsibility of CPM, which will administer this policy in concert with their responsibilities to candidates for Ministry of Word and Sacrament. Members of the current CLP TF who are interested will be added to CPM so that continuity of the program is maintained. CPM's responsibility to the candidates in the CRE program include:

Liaisons:

- Each candidate shall have 2 liaisons with CPM, one teaching and one ruling elder, who will work with the candidate to propose to the whole committee the individual education plans and field education internships. The liaisons will also ensure psychological testing

The Whole Committee will be responsible for

- Approving individual education plans.
- Overseeing the supervision and mentoring for candidates and CREs.
- Ensuring adequate evaluation of the demonstrations of knowledge and competence that the program requires.
- Conducting annual performance evaluation of candidates.

9. Relationship to COM

CPM will maintain regular communication with COM regarding potential need for CREs, the continuing formation of current CREs participating in the program, and the education of congregations regarding the function of CREs. COM will determine whether a participant who has completed the program is suited for a particular assignment and will recommend to Presbytery any commissions to be conferred. COM is final determiner of which commissions shall be renewed, and oversees the supervision and mentoring of CREs as soon as they receive a commission.

Approved by Albany Presbytery January 28, 2012