

PRESBYTERY OF LAKE ERIE
Committee on Ministry and Committee on Preparation for Ministry
POLICY on COMMISSIONED PASTORS
Revised by Presbytery November, 2023
Revised by COM and CPM 2025

AN UNDERLYING PHILOSOPHY

- A. The employment and use of commissioned pastors (CP) is a partial implementation of Lake Erie Presbytery's mission strategy and government of the church for our district (G-3.0106, G-3.0301, G-3.0303). Along with preaching and worship leadership, these services may include ministries of care and compassion as well as leadership in education and community outreach ministries or other ministries validated by the Presbytery through the Committee on Ministry. (G-2.10)
- B. Normally, CPs would be commissioned to serve small membership churches having fewer than one hundred active members where alternatives for using teaching elders/pastors are not feasible or available, but if the Presbytery deems it appropriate this ministry of Ruling Elders is not limited to only that setting.
- C. It is the belief of the Presbytery of Lake Erie that when leadership lacks continuity and when turn-over is inordinately high, CPs provide one alternative to assure continuity of leadership.
- D. A ruling elder who has been commissioned and who later ceases to serve in that specific commissioned ministry may continue to be listed as available to serve, but is no longer authorized to perform the functions of a Commissioned Pastor until commissioned again to a validated ministry by the Presbytery. (G-2.1002) The COM may place any ruling elder who has sufficient training including those previously commissioned on the approved Pulpit Supply List.**
- E. It is important to note that the ordained office here is that of a ruling elder and that even as a Commissioned Pastor they do not move into another order of ministry.**

ADMINISTRATION AND OVERSIGHT

1. The Presbytery through its **Committee on Preparation for Ministry** shall be responsible for the ongoing task of **recruiting and providing training** for Commissioned Pastors. When the initial training classes and evaluation of that process is completed then the continuing responsibility of **oversight, Inservice training, and commissioning of CPs shall be the responsibility of the Committee on Ministry (COM)**. When someone is actually commissioned as a CP, a mentor who shall be a Teaching Elder/Minister of Word and Sacrament member of the Presbytery of Lake Erie will be assigned for general supervision and support as required by G-2.1004. A mentor shall report to the Committee on Ministry regularly about the ministry of the CP and shall meet with the CP at least quarterly. The CP shall also be responsible to work with the Session Moderator or if appointed the moderator of Session themselves then, the Committee on Ministry liaison for continuing conversations and reflection.
2. **Applicants for CP classes shall be (1) already ordained ruling elders and (2) shall have a written recommendation from the session of the congregation of which they are a member. Copies of the current child abuse clearances are to be made available to CPM and also completion of boundary training approved by the presbytery as**

required by G-2.1002. (A person may participate in classes without being an ordained elder with the clear understanding that a person cannot serve in the PCUSA as a CP unless they are ordained as a ruling elder.) The CPM shall examine each applicant and determine that the person is potentially competent to be a CP, willing to undergo training, and is amenable to the on-going supervision of CPM. This examination shall include personal faith, motives for seeking a commission, and willingness to complete training. A mentor who is ordinarily a member of the CPM will be assigned by the committee while the applicant goes through the training process. A covenant between the CPM and the applicant should be signed that delineates the care of the CPM and the duties of the applicant during the training phase, including yearly or more frequent meetings with the committee, regular reporting and meeting with the mentor assigned by CPM during the training phase, and ongoing responsibilities to the congregation of membership and reporting to that session.

3. The applicant may begin a program of training only upon approval of CPM who may consult with COM, the Session of the congregation of which the applicant is a member, and presbytery staff as appropriate and necessary. The CPM shall design and administer a program of education for preparing applicants for commissioning in conformity with the list of training areas described in G-2.10, Old and New Testament theology and exegesis, Reformed theology, polity of the PCUSA, preaching, sacraments, and worship leadership, administration, Christian education, and pastoral care, taking into account the needs and background of the applicant. Training must include supervised practicum(s) and examination or courses in required areas.
4. The CPM shall maintain financial resources to offer assistance for the costs of training, bearing in mind the applicant holds ultimate responsibility for expenses. Books and materials shall ordinarily be at the applicant's cost, tuition assistance as needed or available by the committee, and other requirements such as psychological exams as outlined below or in other policies.
5. Those in preparation to become a CP are to be informed of Commissioned Pastor's roles regarding "confidence and privilege" and "mandated reporter" requirements of the Book of Order [G-4.03] and any requirements of these designations including updated clearances, policy adherence, or training.
6. When a certified applicant receives an invitation to serve a local congregation(s) or other validated ministry as a CP, the COM shall review the applicant's suitability for that position and make the appropriate recommendation to the presbytery regarding the applicant's commissioning in consultation with the Session (s) in question. COM requires a psychological evaluation either during their training under CPM (preferred) or at the completion of that training to authorizing someone to serve as a CP.
7. The CP shall work under the supervision of the presbytery through the moderator of the COM or their designee on the COM. COM shall maintain at least annual contact with the Session(s) and the CP's mentor while they are serving in a commission.

8. When the presbytery commissions a ruling elder to this service, the approved authorities granted to the Commissioned Pastor must be listed. Presbytery, in its commission, may authorize the ruling elder (G-2.1001):
 - a. to moderate the session of that congregation, or substitute for the appointed moderator
 - b. be acting moderator at a duly-called meeting of that congregation
 - c. to administer either or both of the Sacraments with that congregation, and/or
 - d. to officiate weddings when at least one person in the couple is a member of the congregation. For marriages where neither person is a member, an authorized Commissioned Pastor may officiate that wedding after consultation and approval from the (co) moderator of the Committee on Ministry. All marriages must also meet all standards of secular law in that place.
9. COM shall evaluate annually the work of the CP (G-2.1001), the continued viability of the relationship, the effectiveness of the congregation's ministry and outreach, and the adequacy of the financial compensation. This will be done in consultation with the CP, the sessions and the mentors using the contract, the annual review of CPs by sessions, and a mentor feedback form.
10. Churches utilizing CPs shall address these issues in an annual contract:
 - a. The contract shall describe the proportion of full-time work that will be expected of the CP, dates of service (recommended annual but not to exceed 3 years, still reviewable by Presbytery annually), and specific validated ministries authorized while serving this commission. Sessions should use the Presbytery approved contract form. In no case is the contract valid except if it is signed by the clerk of session, the commissioned pastor, and the Committee on Ministry moderator.
 - b. Financial compensation shall be at least $\frac{3}{4}$ of presbytery's minimum compensation for Ministers of Word and Sacrament for the percentage of time of the contract. (A person serving an a $\frac{1}{2}$ time call would be expected to receive $\frac{3}{4}$ compensation of a $\frac{1}{2}$ time call.) Continuing education shall be included in the CPs compensation. Minimum 12 weeks of paid family medical leave shall be included in all benefits for CPs consistent with Presbytery policies (G-3.0303c). Pension and medical benefits are highly encouraged through the Board of Pensions which has many options. Mileage related to church employment (excluding mileage for commuting) shall be reimbursed at the current IRS rate. Other compensation is negotiable.
 - c. It is required that the CP keeps current Presbytery-approved boundary training (required new every 36 months) certificates and child abuse and criminal clearances as required by state law and any requirements (renewed every 5 years) and keeps copies on file at both the Presbytery and Church or ministry setting offices.
11. A continuing education plan is a vital part of service in the larger church. At times there will be continuing education opportunities arranged through the presbytery; at other times there may be events arranged regionally or through a neighboring seminary. Where no

specific opportunities exist, the CP is strongly encouraged to pursue continuing education for the own spiritual health and well-being.

12. The presbytery is responsible for any expenses involved in interviewing potential CP candidates. The student is responsible for the expenses of CP training (class tuition, books, other supplies, travel, housing, etc.). COM is responsible for expenses in commissioning CPs. The cost of a psychological evaluation is shared equally by three participants: the CP applicant, the Presbytery, and the congregation that seeks the CP to serve.

COMMISSIONED PASTOR – GENERAL JOB DESCRIPTION

There may be variety in the job description of a CP; however, these basic areas would normally be included in a CP job description:

- Preach the Gospel (consistent with the basic tenets of the Reformed faith) at services of worship approved by the Session. It is expected these services will be consistent with the Directory for Worship.
- Actively engage the congregation in considering their outreach and relationship to the surrounding community.
- Promote the mission and program of the whole church including active participation in presbytery.
- During the course of her/his commission engage in a planned program of continuing education to enhance skills. COM may strongly recommend certain training to increase the likelihood of maintaining the commission to that particular church.
- Have continuing contact with mentor and COM representatives to ensure honest and open dialogue that will build the body of Christ.

The CP may provide, with a Session request and COM approval:

1. Ministries of care and compassion:
2. hospital visitation
3. home visitation
4. funerals
5. new member visitation
6. Lead Bible studies and teach in the Christian Education program of the church
7. Engage in community ministries in consultation with the Session
8. Refer parishioners to pastoral care providers or counselors
9. Moderating of Session meetings
10. Moderating of congregational meetings
11. Perform marriages
12. Administer the Sacrament of Baptism and the Sacrament of Holy Communion within the ministry of the congregation.

ROLE OF MENTORS

When a person applies for classes, the **CPM will assign a mentor for the duration of the training period.** The student and the mentor are to be in regular contact.

When a person is commissioned as a CP in a particular congregation the COM will assign a Minister of Word and Sacrament to be a mentor and supervisor [G-2.1004]. This role includes a colleague relationship, a resource for ministry, a sounding board for theological and ministerial formation, and an annual consultation with COM and the session.

WIDER PRESBYTERY MINISTRY BY COMMISSIONED PASTORS

The role of Ruling Elders is such that the Presbytery can call on any ruling elder for services within the Presbytery, membership on its committees or commissions, or as consultants and support for ministries and sessions in particular circumstances. As Commissioned Pastors whose primary ministry order is that of ruling elder, these same services to the Presbytery that all ruling elders offer as presbyters is in effect. (G-2.0102, G-2.0301)

If the Presbytery determines its strategy for mission requires pastoral duties such as administration of Sacraments, moderating of sessions or congregational meetings, or conduct of worship services not in ongoing relationship but on occasional or specific circumstances be offered by CPs, the COM may authorize a CP who is already serving in an active commission **on each specific occasion and location by action of the committee moderator or action of the COM itself.** (G-2.1002, G-3.0301)

At this time, there is no mechanism for transferring of CPs between presbyteries. Once ordained a ruling elder, this ordination is for the whole church but individual commissioning is up to each presbytery. (G-2.10, G-2.0404) Each presbytery must examine a ruling elder and their individual training and fit to be commissioned to service within its bounds.

All authorities other than those specific to the ministry of all ruling elders shall cease when a commission ceases. COM may commission those who have completed training previously to a new commission although COM also could require updated or further training if it deems this necessary for the new commission or the ministry integrity of the individual ruling elder. (G-2.1002)