

THE MINISTRY AND EDUCATION OF THE COMMISSIONED RULING ELDER IN THE PRESBYTERY OF DENVER

1. PURPOSE

The Commissioned Ruling Elder is essential in the ministry of the Presbytery of Denver. The office is one way the Presbytery seeks to serve congregations and make certain that all congregations have experienced and trained leadership available to them. The Book of Order indicates that a presbytery may “authorize a ruling elder to be commissioned to ... pastoral service as assigned by the presbytery.”(G-2.1001) It further says that such service is to be considered part of “its strategy for mission.” In the Presbytery of Denver a Commissioned Ruling Elder is seen as a servant of the church who builds up the body of Christ, enhances vitality of congregations, and uses gifts and skills to serve fully in the life of the presbytery.

A commissioned ruling elder may be authorized to “moderate the session of the congregation to which he or she is commissioned, to administer the Sacraments, and to officiate at marriages”(G-2.1001)

Commissioning of a ruling elder is ordinarily for service in congregations. He/She may work in partnership with existing pastors and ministries or complement and support congregations that serve people who need particular cultural sensitivities, linguistic skills and ministry gifts and experience. It is also possible the commissioned ruling elder might serve in prison ministry, college and hospital and/or nursing home chaplaincy programs, new immigrant fellowships, or new and creative leadership positions throughout the Church. All of these settings require people who sense a deep call from God to step out of their own congregations or the roles in which they have previously served and move into a more expansive responsibility in and for the church. It is the responsibility of the presbytery to help in discerning such a call. It is also the responsibility of the presbytery to offer careful training for this work and ministry.

2. COMMISSIONED RULING ELDER MINISTRY TEAM

Oversight and administration of the Commissioned Ruling Elder program will be the responsibility of the Commissioned Ruling Elder Ministry Team. This ministry team is accountable to and reports to the Committee on Ministry (COM) and is moderated by a member of COM. The **Ministry Team** is composed of five members appointed jointly by the COM moderator and the moderator of Presbytery Council for three-year terms. A person may serve two consecutive terms.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE COMMISSIONED RULING ELDER MINISTRY TEAM

The Commissioned Ruling Elder Ministry Team of the Committee on Ministry will

- A. Provide for an ongoing process of discernment for persons who are considering becoming Commissioned Ruling Elders including
 - i. A psychological evaluation
 - ii. Criminal background check
- B. Meet with and oversee the training of those admitted to the CRE program
- C. Recruit and train mentors for people in CRE program
- D. Recruit and train supervisors for teaching churches
- E. Meet with teaching church committees and receive reports from the supervisors and committees about progress of CREs
- F. Examine and approve CRE candidates as ready to be commissioned
- G. Approve sites for the work of CREs in consultation with appropriate ministry teams of COM.
- H. Present approved candidates to the Presbytery for commissioning.
- I. Oversee the placement and work of CREs in congregational settings.
- J. Continue oversight of assigned mentors following commissioning.
- K. Provide for and oversee a continuing education program for each CRE.
- L. Provide support for all participants in the program.
- M. Monitor the content and process of the CRE courses

4. PROCESS

A. ADMISSIONS

Admission to the CRE program is available to any member of a Presbyterian Church (USA) in the Denver Presbytery upon completion of an application. Those seeking admission to the program must be ruling elders when they are admitted and have served at least one year on session. All applications are acted upon by the **Commissioned Ruling Elder Ministry Team of COM.**

- Name
- Address and E-mail address
- Church membership
- A brief statement of faith journey leading to decision to seek commissioning
- Session endorsement
- Recommendation by the **current** pastor
- Three personal references

B. PSYCHOLOGICAL EVALUATION FOR COMMISSIONED RULING ELDERS

A psychological evaluation to determine the candidate's suitability for congregational leadership should be completed as soon as possible after admission to the CRE program and in no case later than six months after

admission. The evaluation should determine overall psychological health and personality issues that might need to be worked through. The evaluation will be conducted by a presbytery-approved professional. It is suggested that the cost of this evaluation be split equally among the individual candidate, the candidate's home church and the presbytery.

The presbytery will conduct a background check with the Colorado Bureau of Investigation.

C. MENTORING

Candidates for commissioning are expected to enter into a mentoring program with an approved mentor from Denver Presbytery. Mentoring continues during candidacy and after commissioning. Candidates must complete at least one year of mentoring before final assessment.

D. TRAINING

Training for Commissioned Ruling Elders in the Denver Presbytery will fall into three categories:

- i. coursework
- ii. field education under the guidance of a supervisor in a teaching church
- iii. final project

i. Coursework

Denver Presbytery uses the Commissioned Ruling Elder courses offered by Dubuque University as its approved curriculum. This course work includes:

Reformed Theology
Christian Education
Old Testament
New Testament
Polity
Worship & Sacraments
Pastoral Care
Preaching

These classes are offered online. Before enrolling in these classes, Dubuque requires students to complete an online certification course.

The above courses will fulfill the educational requirements for the CRE program. Other comparable coursework may be substituted for these classes with the prior approval of the CRE MT.

While it is hoped that CRE candidate's home church will participate in the cost of coursework, it is ultimately the candidate's responsibility to cover the costs of his/her coursework, books and other incidental expenses. Scholarships from the presbytery may be available to assist in this program.

It also may be possible that classes are provided in certain areas by the

presbytery or that the CRE Ministry Team may approve other opportunities that also can be approved as part of the CRE program and preparation.

ii. Field Education

In order to provide a candidate with actual, hands-on experience, part of the CRE training will include a proscribed set of learning experiences within the environment of a Teaching Church under the guidance of a Supervisor.

a. Teaching Church

A Teaching Church provides an open environment for CRE candidates to allow opportunities for practical learning and experiences. The Teaching Church will be approved by the CRE MT and may not be the candidate's home/sponsoring congregation. It is expected that the CRE candidate will complete the field education within two years.

b. Supervisor

A key component of a Teaching Church is the establishment of a Supervisor in the Teaching Church. The Supervisor will:

Teach

Empower

Evaluate

Involve the CRE candidate in the proscribed aspect of ministry

A supervisor will be an ordained Teaching Elder, appointed by the session of the Teaching Church and approved by the CRE MT. The Supervisor will not be the pastor at the CRE candidate's home/sponsoring church.

The CRE candidate and the Supervisor will meet at least monthly, plus optional on-site supervisions and evaluation. Supervisors will submit a written progress report the CRE MT Mentor every 6 months detailing the candidate's progress and identifying any issue/s the candidate may need to address in order to fulfill requirements.

c. Required Field Education Experiences

Preaching – 3 sermons

Teaching – 2 adult classes of four weeks or more in length. One class is to be original curriculum prepared by the candidate and one course is to be taught from a published curriculum.

Church Administration

- Participate in the preparation of an annual budget
- Stewardship programs
- Facility management
- Worship
- Service planning and bulletin preparation
- Sacraments
- Weddings and funerals
- Integration of preaching into worship
- Pastoral care
- Pastoral calling
- Counseling required for sacraments
- Leadership
- Meeting preparation and leadership
- Creating goals and objectives
- Recruiting and nurturing volunteers
- Program evaluation

iii. CRE Final Project

The CRE Final Project is meant to demonstrate a candidate's readiness for placement by focusing on one particular aspect of ministry. The Final Project requires a candidate to:

- Address a particular need in a congregation
- Develop goals to meet that need
- Create strategy for meeting goals and objectives
- Follow strategy and evaluate its effectiveness
- Explain and summarize project within 5-7 pages

E. READINESS FOR COMMISSIONING

Candidates for CRE must be in the program for at least one year and meet at least once with the CRE MT. This committee will determine readiness for commissioning based on successfully completing the coursework, psychological evaluation, background check, reports from mentors, integrative final project, and a final evaluative interview with the candidate about the candidate's sense of call to ministry. The Commissioned Ruling Elder Ministry Team will be the sole determiner of a candidate's suitability for commissioning. Additional instruction may be deemed necessary.

F. PRESENTATION TO PRESBYTERY

The Commissioned Ruling Elder Ministry Team will present an endorsed candidate to Presbytery for recognition when the candidate has successfully completed the CRE training program.

5. PLACEMENT

A. When the Presbytery in consultation with the Session or COM determines that Presbytery's strategy for mission in a local church requires the placement of a

Commissioned Ruling Elder, the Presbytery may authorize a Commissioned Ruling Elder to perform any or all of the functions described in the Book of Order. (G-2.1001)

- B. The COM, in consultation with the Commissioned Ruling Elder Ministry Team, is responsible for approving sites for service and approving each match between a CRE and an approved site. The purpose of this approval is to ensure as much as possible that the time of service will be healthy and beneficial for both the CRE and the approved site.
- C. If a site for ministry is not a congregation; the CRE will work in the site with the supervision and spiritual support of a session approved by COM.
- D. The COM may end a placement at any time if either the CRE or the session requests that the relationship end. If the Commissioned Ruling Elder Ministry Team, in its judgment, decides that a placement needs to be ended, it will advise the COM of its recommendation.

6. COMMISSIONING

- A. The Presbytery will commission only endorsed candidates presented to it by the Commissioned Ruling Elder Ministry Team.
- B. When an endorsed candidate is presented to Presbytery for commissioning, the Moderator of the Presbytery will offer a prayer for the candidate and his/her work.
- C. The candidate will be commissioned at a meeting of the Presbytery or in another setting as approved by Presbytery, by a duly appointed commission of Presbytery.
- D. In the commissioning service, the candidate will answer all questions for commissioning, included in W-4.4000 in the Book of Order.
- E. Candidates will be commissioned for service in the one or more congregations or validated ministry settings designated at the time of commissioning.

7. DUTIES, RESPONSIBILITIES & ACCOUNTABILITY OF COMMISSIONED RULING ELDER

A. Duties / Responsibilities

1. The CRE shall perform functions that are spelled out in the contract with the church and approved by the Ministry Team.
2. The CRE shall attend Session meetings of the congregation(s) being served, and attend the Presbytery meetings. The CRE is given voice and/or vote in the Presbytery as determined by the particular commission or by Presbytery action.
3. The CRE shall participate on a regular basis in the life and activities of the congregation being served.

B. Accountability

1. The CRE shall work under the supervision of the Presbytery through the moderator of the session of the church being served or through the Committee on Ministry acting on the recommendation of the Ministry Team.
2. The CRE shall meet bi-monthly (every other month) with his/her mentor.
3. The CRE shall submit annually to CRE MT a written report of his/her activities and experiences.
4. The CRE shall meet annually with the CRE MT and his/her supervisor for review of performance and salary.
5. Commissioned Ruling Elders are responsible to the Committee on Ministry in the exercise of the ministry. In the event of major issues developing between the Commissioned Ruling Elder and the calling body, the Committee on Ministry is empowered to intervene for the purpose of mediation, arbitration, or helping a particular ministry to come to an end.

8. CONTRACTS AND COMPENSATION

- A. The work of a CRE in a congregation will be governed by a written contract developed and approved mutually by CRE, the session and the Committee on Ministry.
- B. The contract will specify duties to be performed, compensation (if any) for work, and the time span of the contract.
- C. Compensation, when given, will be based upon time, responsibilities, and expenses to be incurred (such as travel).
- D. Each CRE shall receive a minimum of 4 weeks vacation and 2 weeks study leave annually.
- E. Approval of specific benefits will be determined by the Session of the approved site and the Commissioned Ruling Elder for that site. Each benefit package will be determined on an individual basis.

The following benefits could be made available to the Commissioned Ruling Elder:

Compensation: salary/housing
 Health insurance and Pension through the Board of Pensions or
 Contribution to an IRA for the CRE
 Reimbursable expenses such as books, mileage, and continuing education

- F. The contract will state whether the church will pay the full amount of the compensation. If it does not, the contract will state the amount the church will pay, and the source of the rest of the compensation.

9. CONTINUING EDUCATION

- A. The Commissioned Ruling Elder Ministry Team highly recommends continuing education requirements for CREs.
- B. The Commissioned Ruling Elder Ministry Team will provide and/or identify opportunities through which CREs may obtain their continuing education.

- C. The continuing education may be met by a CRE by alternative means with the prior approval of the Commissioned Ruling Elder Ministry Team.

10. MENTORS / SUPERVISORS

- A. Each candidate and CRE will be paired with a mentor approved by the Commissioned Ruling Elder Ministry Team. The purpose of the mentor is to provide each candidate or CRE with accessible personal support and guidance throughout the program.
- B. Each candidate will meet with his/her mentor monthly. Each CRE will meet with his/her mentor bi-monthly (every other month). (G-2.1004)
- C. The Commissioned Ruling Elder Ministry Team will meet with a chosen mentor within the first 90 days to explain the responsibilities and expectations of the mentor.

11. ANNUAL REVIEWS AND REPORTS

- A. Candidates, CREs, mentors, and sessions will make annual reports to the CRE Ministry Team.
- B. All candidates will meet annually with the Commissioned Ruling Elder Ministry Team to review their annual reports and to review the annual reports of their mentors.
- C. The CRE Ministry Team may request to meet annually with all Commissioned Ruling Elders to review their year of service and all reports submitted by themselves, their mentors, and the session of the congregation or site served by the CRE.
- D. The CRE Ministry Team will make an annual report to the Presbytery about the program. (G-2.1001)

12. EXPIRATION, RECOMMISSIONING, REVOCATION

- A. A commission will be given by Presbytery for a specific period, which shall not exceed 3 years, but shall be renewable.
- B. A CRE may be recommissioned at the expiration of the time of one's commission by the approval of the Committee on Ministry (COM), in consultation with the CRE Ministry Team.
- C. A former CRE whose commission has been expired for more than 12 months may be approved by the COM for recommissioning upon recommendation of the CRE Ministry Team, without having to go through the training process again. However, the COM, in consultation with the CRE Ministry Team, may require the candidate to complete any new elements added to the training process since the former CRE went through the process. The COM may require additional work in any of the subject areas that are warranted.
- D. A commission may be revoked by Presbytery for non-compliance with the Book of Order provisions, violations of vows of commissioning, or failure to meet the terms of contract.

13. PROCESS FOR CHURCHES DESIRING THE SERVICES OF A COMMISSIONED RULING ELDER

- A. The session will meet with the COM to determine the appropriateness of the CRE option based on the needs of the congregation or validated ministry, the support potential of the congregation or validated ministry, and the mission strategy of the Presbytery.
- B. The COM will explain the nature and the details of the program as contained in these guidelines.
- C. The local session votes to apply to the COM to be a congregation or validated ministry served by a CRE.

14. TRANSFERRING

- A. CREs from other presbyteries who move to the Denver Presbytery will be invited to visit/interview with CRE Ministry Team members. During this meeting, Ministry Team members will encourage the CRE to choose a home church in the presbytery. Ministry Team members will also explain the requirements for serving as a CRE, including completing required coursework and internship and/or work experience.
- B. CREs from other presbyteries who seek a position in Denver Presbytery will be asked to submit a transcript of coursework completed so it can be evaluated according to the coursework required by the presbytery. Candidates will be asked to complete missing classes. Candidates will also be asked to supply evidence of work experience as a CRE or in a supervised internship program. Reference checks will be conducted by the presbytery office.

APPENDIX

1. Book of Order
2. Mentors
3. Commissioning
 - a. How to Arrange for a Service
 - b. Example of a Commissioning Service
4. Forms
5. Certificate of Commissioning
6. Sexual Misconduct Policy

G-14.0800

S. Other Certified Employees

G-14.0801

Commissioned

Lay Pastor presbytery

a. The commissioned lay pastor is an elder of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), who is granted a local commission by the presbytery to lead worship and preach the gospel, watch over the people, and provide for their nurture and service. This commission is valid only in one or more congregations, new church development, or other validated ministries of the presbytery designated by the presbytery. Such an elder is selected by and receives training approved by the presbytery. The elder shall be instructed in Bible, Reformed Theology and Sacraments, Presbyterian Polity, preaching, leading worship, pastoral care, and teaching. The elder shall be examined by the appropriate committee of presbytery as to personal faith, motives for seeking the commission, and the areas of instruction mentioned previously. An elder who has been commissioned and later ceases to serve in a particular congregation may continue to be listed as available to serve, but is not authorized to perform the functions of a commissioned lay pastor until appointed again to a particular congregation by the presbytery.

Period

Valid years as determined by the presbytery.

b. The commission shall be valid for a period up to three years as determined by the presbytery. It may be renewed at expiration or terminated at any time at the discretion of the presbytery. Presbytery shall regularly provide resources for the person's spiritual and intellectual development. A review of the work of the commissioned lay pastor shall be conducted annually. Presbytery shall revoke the commission of any lay pastor who does not abide by these provisions or whose work is evaluated as not adequate to meet the needs of the particular congregation or the presbytery.

authorization to Perform

Functions mission in a local church

c. When a presbytery, in consultation with the session or other responsible committee, determines that its strategy for a local church requires it, and after additional instruction deemed necessary by the presbytery has been provided, a presbytery may authorize a commissioned lay pastor to perform any or all of the following functions described in (1)-(6) below.

- (1) Administer the Lord's Supper.
- (2) Administer the Sacrament of Baptism.
- (3) Moderate the session of the congregation under the supervision of and when invited by the moderator of the session appointed by the presbytery.
- (4) Have a voice in meetings of presbytery.
- (5) Have a vote in meetings of the presbytery (such vote to be counted as an elder commissioner for purposes of parity).
- (6) Perform a service of Christian marriage when invited by the session or other responsible committee, and when allowed by the state.

Supervision

d. The commissioned lay pastor shall work under the supervision of the presbytery through the moderator of the session of the church being served or through the committee on ministry. A minister of the Word and Sacrament shall be assigned as a Mentor and supervisor.

e. A presbytery, when it deems it to be in the best interest of the presbytery and the church involved, and when it deems that the lay pastor commissioned to that church is sufficiently trained in and loyal to Presbyterian polity, may appoint a lay pastor as moderator of session to the church to which she or he is commissioned. The person assigned to the commissioned lay pastor as mentor and supervisor shall also supervise his or her work as moderator.

. In the exercise of pastoral care, commissioned lay pastors shall maintain a relationship of trust and confidentiality, and shall hold in confidence all information

revealed to them in the course of providing such care and all information relating to the exercise of such care. When the person whose confidences are at issue gives express consent to reveal confidential information, then a

commissioned lay pastor may, but cannot be compelled to, reveal confidential information. A commissioned lay pastor may reveal confidential information when she or he reasonably believes that there is risk of imminent bodily harm to any person.

Questions Asked

When the presbytery is satisfied with the qualifications of an applicant it shall ask the applicant the following questions:

- (1) Do you trust in Jesus Christ your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?
- (2) Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal, and God's Word to you?
- (3) Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God?
- (4) Will you fulfill your commission in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and be continually guided by our confessions?
- (5) Will you be governed by our church's polity, and will you abide by its discipline? Will you be a friend among your colleagues in ministry, working with them, subject to the ordering of God's Word and Spirit?
- (6) Will you in your own life seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, love your neighbors, and work for the reconciliation of the world?
- (7) Do you promise to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church?
- (8) Will you seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?
- (9) Will you be a faithful commissioned lay pastor, watching over the people, providing for their worship? In your ministry, will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ? (G-14.0207)

Prayer and Statement-

h. The applicant having answered these questions in the affirmative, the moderator shall pray and say to the applicant: -

(Name) _____ . _____ , you are now a lay pastor commissioned to lead worship and preach for the time and in the place set by this presbytery. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

2. Mentors

A mentor can be a very valuable resource for the applicant. The role of mentor is to answer questions regarding ministry, be supportive as the applicant continues classes, share insights about ministry and create a collegial relationship.

The mentor will be a Teaching Elder in the PCUSA

The mentor may not be the minister of the church where the applicant has membership.

The applicant may request a particular mentor.

The mentor-applicant relationship will be in place by the beginning of the third CRE class.

The CRE Ministry Team will maintain a list of ministers willing to be mentors.

Other ministers may be considered as mentors if requested by the applicant and approved by the CRE Ministry Team.

3. Commissioning

A. How to Arrange for a Service

When the CRE applicant has met all requirements and a site has been approved, a date and location may be chosen for the Service of Commissioning. The Commissioned Ruling Elder Ministry Team of the C.O.M. will arrange for Presbytery representation and assist the candidate in arranging the service. Additions or changes to the basic service of commissioning may be made at the discretion of the CRE candidate after consultation with the CRE's mentor or Commissioned Ruling Elder Ministry Team.

B. Service of Commissioning: See Book of Order, W-4.4000.

4. Forms

Application for Admission to the Commissioned Ruling Elder Program

Personal Reference

Session Endorsement

Certificate of Completion of Training

Covenant for a Commissioned Ruling Elder

Sexual Misconduct Policy

Certificate of Commissioning

