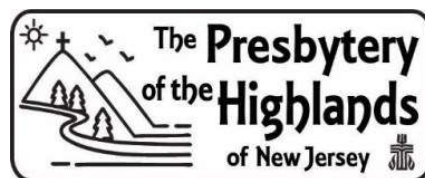


The Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey Commissioned Ruling Elder Policy



AUTHORITY

According to the *Book of Order (G-2.10)*, a presbytery may authorize a ruling elder to be “commissioned to limited pastoral service” when, in consultation with the session or other responsible committee, the presbytery “determines that its strategy for mission requires it.”

In the Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey the Committee on Preparation for Ministry (CPM) is responsible for the approval of applicants according to the qualifications below as well as their training and examination in accordance with (G-2.1002). The CPM is also responsible for approving candidates as ready to accept a position as a Commissioned Ruling Elder (CRE). The Committee on Ministry (COM) is responsible for authorizing the placement and commissioning in accordance with (G-2.1001-2.1004). The CPM and the COM consider the commissioning of ruling elders a further means of fulfilling the presbytery’s commitment to ensure that all congregations within its bounds have the best possible leadership in ministry.

COMMISSIONED RULING ELDER

A CRE is a salaried or volunteer ruling elder interested in congregational ministry, affirmed by their session, and trained and commissioned by the presbytery to pastoral service in a particular parish or congregation in the Presbytery. Normally, a CRE provides pastoral leadership in congregations that are unable to secure pastoral leadership from a teaching elder because of congregational size, geography, finances or language. CREs may also be commissioned to serve specialized ministries such as immigrant or emerging ministries. A CRE is not an ordained Minister of Word and Sacrament, but is commissioned only to a particular congregation in Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey and may not provide pastoral leadership or services outside of that commission or after the commission ends. As part of their commission, the COM will establish whether a CRE is authorized to moderate the session of the congregation to which they are commissioned, to administer the Sacraments, and to officiate at marriages. This commission shall also specify the term of service, which shall not exceed three years but shall be renewable. The presbytery, through the COM, shall review the commission at least annually.

QUALIFICATIONS

Normally, the qualifications for acceptance into the program shall be that the individual (known as an “applicant” until CPM accepts them into the CRE process, and thereafter as an “aspirant”):

- Senses that they have a call to ministry.
- Is a member in good standing of a congregation in the Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey.
- Possesses recognized leadership ability in the congregation as a ruling elder and has been ordained for at least two years.
- Demonstrates pastoral ability and shows a commitment to personal spiritual growth through prayer, Bible reading and devotions.
- Holds a baccalaureate degree or its equivalent, except in certain cases approved by CPM. The CPM shall determine appropriate credit for post high school course work and life experience.
- Is endorsed by the session of the congregation where they are a member.
- Is recommended by three references, at least one of whom is a teaching elder and a member of the Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey.
- Accepts and has an understanding of the ethical standards of the PCUSA and the presbytery of Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey.
- Is willing to accept the care and guidance of a mentor appointed by the Presbytery.

APPLICATION

Qualified individuals interested in pursuing a commission to pastoral service process (the aspirant) should complete the following steps:

1. Submit a completed *Commissioned Ruling Elder Application* (Appendix A) along with the supplemental questions and list of references to the Committee on Preparation for Ministry.
2. Obtain a letter of personal reference from three individuals familiar with their involvement in the Presbyterian Church (USA), including one from the applicant's pastor or another teaching elder in the Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey. Letters should address the following areas of the applicant's readiness to enter a program of training for ministry:
 - a. Personal faith
 - b. Commitment to the PC(USA)
 - c. Gifts, talents and skills for pastoral ministry
 - d. a recent example of service to the congregation
3. Obtain a written letter of endorsement from their home session.
4. Submit to a criminal background check, which the Presbytery will complete prior to the applicant's first meeting with CPM.
5. Meet with the CPM for an initial consultation and endorsement. At this meeting, the CPM shall:
 - a. Review the individual's application, reference letters and related materials.
 - b. Discuss the roles and responsibilities of a CRE with a specific focus on how a CRE's commission differs from the ordination of a teaching elder.
 - c. Provide an overview of the CRE training process and steps toward commissioning once it is complete.
 - d. Determine the applicant's readiness to enter a program of training and education according to the requirements below.
 - e. Assign a liaison from the committee to work with the applicant during this process.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The aspirant must complete a suitable educational/training program that will prepare them to lead congregations in all aspects of service to God and each other. The Presbytery of the Highlands in New Jersey does not offer CRE training, but will work with each aspirant, through its assigned liaison, to design a program that shall include formalized instruction in the following areas:

- Presbyterian Polity
- New and Old Testament, including Biblical Exegesis
- Reformed Worship and Sacraments
- Reformed Theology
- Preaching
- Pastoral Care
- Christian Education

The proposed training program must be approved by the CPM prior to beginning any coursework. The aspirant may choose to enroll in a designated CRE training program offered by a college, seminary, or other governing body. In cases where this is not practical due to financial and/or time constraints, the CPM will work with the aspirant to find appropriate classes, seminars and/or courses that will satisfy these requirements. Ordinarily, instruction is to be at the post-graduate level, with exceptions to be determined by the CPM.

In addition to the courses outlined above, in accordance with G-2.1002, "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. Such preparation shall include a certificate of completion of boundary training, which includes the topic of sexual misconduct, and child sexual abuse prevention training with recertification at least every thirty-six months. The presbytery shall determine which trainings are approved to meet the criteria of these two requirements." This boundary training must be completed before the year-long internship can

begin.

CPM may require the aspirant to attend additional presbytery workshops and/or training events to supplement his or her training.

INTERNSHIP

Each aspirant shall also be required to satisfactorily complete a year-long internship in a congregation of the Presbytery of the Highlands. The internship shall offer opportunities for preaching, worship leadership and pastoral care, and involvement in other aspects of the congregation's life. The congregation's pastor, who must be a teaching elder in good standing with the presbytery, will supervise and meet regularly with the intern.

Throughout the education and training phase, the aspirant will meet at least annually with the CPM to review their progress and determine other needs or future plans.

If a CRE who has been trained or formally commissioned by another presbytery seeks to be commissioned to a congregation in the Presbytery of the Highlands, the CPM will evaluate the training program and explore past ministerial experiences of the CRE aspirant. The CPM would then interview the CRE aspirant to determine if they have met the standards established for training CREs in the Presbytery of the Highlands. Any discrepancies of training will be made up at the discretion of the CPM, prior to the recommendation of the CRE aspirant to COM for recommendation to a congregation for commissioning by the presbytery.

PSYCHOLOGICAL EVALUATION

All aspirants must complete a psychological evaluation approximately one year after beginning the CRE process. They are responsible for signing the necessary releases to have the results of their psychological evaluation sent to the chairperson of the CPM. The entire psychological evaluation will be reviewed with the members of the CPM and discussed with the aspirant at their annual consultation. Confidentiality is assured. This evaluation is a tool to be used to point out strengths and areas where growth is needed. It may also highlight areas of concern and bring to light issues which need to be addressed in order for the aspirant to become effective in their future commissioning(s). Aspirants will not be commissioned until this process has been completed.

The CPM requires that the evaluation be done at:

Physis Associates

Dr. Dennis J. O'Hara

109 Fox Knoll Lane

West Chester, PA 19380

610-269-3037

<https://physisassociates.com/>

The chairperson of the CPM should be notified when an appointment has been made so that payment of the presbytery's one-third, church's one-third, and aspirant's one-third shares of the cost may be arranged. The aspirant is responsible for the cost of transportation, lodging, meals, and incidental expenses. Financial assistance may be available. Appointments are generally booked months in advance. Those interested are encouraged, therefore, to call the center for an appointment as early as possible.

ANNUAL GRANT

The Presbytery can provide a \$1000 grant annually to those persons formally in the CRE process who have completed a Financial Planning form, and who have submitted a written request indicating the purpose of the grant. This may include the psychological examination, books, or other course-related expenses.

EXAMINATION

At the successful completion of all the coursework and following the desires of the aspirant, an examination of the aspirant shall be arranged by the CPM. The examination shall be scheduled at a time, place, and location and in a manner determined by the CPM, including virtual meetings.

Prior to, and in preparation for the examination, CRE aspirants must submit to CPM (carefully prepared and typed double spaced) the following items:

- **Sermon Manuscript:** The length of the sermon, including the reading of the scripture, should be no more than 10 minutes in length. This sermon will be preached at a CPM meeting or in a setting approved by CPM.
- **Exegesis:** Exegetical study of the biblical material out of which the sermon arose including a study of key words, discussion of context, notes on significant points of grammar and variant readings, and an interpretation of the passage.
- **Statement of Faith:** This statement should be a statement of the CRE aspirant's personal faith (not a restatement of a creed) and ought to address matters of faith, including but not limited to: God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Trinity, the life and mission of the Church, the authority of Scripture, and the role of the Sacraments. The statement of faith should not be longer than one side of an 8 ½" x 11" sheet of paper. It should be single-spaced, and double-spaced between paragraphs. We recommend sensitivity to the use of inclusive language.

The material shall be reviewed by the CPM and discussed with the aspirant. In addition, the scripture will be read and preached to the CPM. Input may also be offered or requested from the aspirant's mentor or pastor. Based on this discussion and examination:

1. The CPM may request that the material be revisited or rewritten.
2. The CPM may approve the aspirant's readiness and preparedness to be a Commissioned Ruling Elder.

After the CPM has approved the candidate as ready to be commissioned, the candidate may actively seek a position as a CRE. An invitation to serve must be recommended by the COM and approved by the Presbytery. When commissioned, they come under the supervision of the Presbytery through the COM.

COMMISSIONING

Upon recommendation by the Committee on Preparation for Ministry (CPM) to the Committee on Ministry (COM), the designated commissioned ruling elder may complete a Personal Information Form (PIF) and may be considered for commissioning to a specific congregation or validated ministry as a Commissioned Ruling Elder.

Upon commissioning to a particular pastoral service, the CRE must meet the same standards of boundary training as minister members of the Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey.

This commission shall be valid for a period up to three years as designated by the session, COM, and the CRE and approved by the Presbytery. It should document in writing the CRE's full compensation package, including salary, vacation time, study leave and other allowances as determined by the Session, the CRE, and COM. A CRE's commission may be renewed at expiration or terminated at any time at the discretion of the Session, the CRE, or COM, with approval of the Presbytery.

The commissioning of a ruling elder to a particular congregation or specialized ministry is an act of the presbytery. Ordinarily, the commissioning service shall take place at a stated meeting of the Presbytery. If other circumstances warrant, and if Presbytery approves, the commissioning may take place at another

time and place. Refer to the *Book of Order* (W-4.0404) for questions asked at the time of commissioning.

The CRE may perform pastoral functions not requiring ordination as a teaching elder, in agreement with the session such as teaching, visitation of members in home or hospital, visitation of prospective members, supervising Sunday school, leading music, prayer meetings, or study groups or conducting funerals. If commissioned to a congregation, the CRE will ordinarily be the primary leader of worship and preacher for the congregation.

Upon the written request of the session to the COM, and with the recommendation of the mentor and supervisor, the CRE may also be authorized by the Presbytery to carry out other functions allowed in the *Book of Order*, G-2.1001:

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 voice in meetings of the Presbytery;
5. Have a vote in meetings of the Presbytery;
6. Perform a service of Christian marriage when invited by the session or other responsible committee of the Presbytery.
7. May be appointed by the Presbytery as moderator of the session to the congregation to they have been commissioned.

If the CRE is to be commissioned to a validated ministry, rather than a congregation of the Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey, then the CRE will follow the same procedure through the COM for confirmation of that field of service as a validated ministry as followed by teaching elders. (*Book of Order*, G-2.0503a)

RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The Commissioned Ruling Elder shall work under the supervision of a mentor who is assigned by the COM and is a teaching elder. The mentor and supervisor will meet regularly with the CRE, at least annually with the CRE and members of the session of the commissioning congregation to conduct the annual review of the work of the CRE. The results of this annual review will be communicated to the CRE and the COM.

The CRE shall comply with the polity of the Presbyterian Church (USA), including **G-4.0301**, and the by-laws of the congregation(s) being served. The CRE is expected to participate in continuing educational training experiences while commissioned.

Appendix A **Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey Commissioned Ruling Elder Application**

Name:

Mailing Address:

Phone: Home, Work

Email:

Occupation/Place of Employment:

Academic Background

List the academic institutions you have attended, beginning with high school and complete the information requested:

<u>Institution</u>	<u>Dates Attended</u>	<u>Program or Major</u>	<u>Diploma or Degree</u>
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Describe any previous experience in Preaching or CRE Training:

Occupational History

List the three most recent full-time or part-time positions in which you have been employed and also provide the following information: job title, dates of employment, aspect most enjoyed, aspect most disliked.

1. Current employment:

2. Next most recent:

3. Second most recent:

Congregational History

Date and place of baptism:

Date and place of profession of faith:

Congregation Membership (name, city, and state):

Date joined:

Date ordained an elder:

Date ordained a deacon (if applicable):

List other congregations where you have been a member:

List areas of involvement in your local congregation both as a participant and leader. Indicate areas of leadership.

List areas of involvement in Presbytery, Synod or General Assembly.

List voluntary services, civic or social organizations of which you are or have been a member. Indicate your extent of participation and your role.

List any factors that may place limits on your ability to receive training or to serve as a Commissioned Ruling Elder:

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Questions for Reflection

Write a response to each of the following. These responses should be attached to this application.

1. In one or two paragraphs, describe yourself as a person.
2. Describe briefly what it means to you to be a Commissioned Ruling Elder. What has motivated you to consider this program?
3. Write a brief statement of your personal faith describing what you believe about God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit and your relationship to them.
4. What does it mean to you to be Presbyterian?
5. Describe your current spiritual journey, spiritual practices, prayer life, and disciplines.
6. Who/what is your ideal/role model for ministry? What do you expect in your ministry? What aspect of ministry do you find least interesting?

References

On a separate sheet attached to this application, please list three people who will serve as references. One should be your pastor or a teaching elder within Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey. Please include name, mailing address, email, daytime phone number and relationship to you.

Please ask your references to answer the following questions and send their responses under separate cover directly to the Committee on Preparation for Ministry at the following address: The Presbytery of the Highlands, 390 Route 10 West, Randolph, NJ 07869 or email it to one or both co-moderators.

1. How long have you known the applicant and would you say you know the applicant well?
2. What is your relationship to the applicant and under what circumstances have you observed his or her leadership in the church?
3. To what extent does the applicant's way of life demonstrate the teachings of Christ?
4. What is your experience of the applicant's commitment to the Presbyterian Church (USA)?
5. What special gifts, talents and skills does the applicant exhibit for service as a Commissioned Ruling Elder?
6. What is the most recent example of the applicant's service to the congregation?
7. If the applicant were your Commissioned Ruling Elder, what specific areas would you wish him or her to improve?

After completing the application, email it to one or both co-moderators.