

**THE PROCEDURES, PROGRAM & POLICIES FOR THE
COMMISSIONING OF RULING ELDERS
IN THE JOHN KNOX PRESBYTERY**

I. Overview

A. Book of Order Requirements:

The Book of Order (G-2.10) establishes the function, training, examination, commissioning, and supervision of Commissioned Ruling Elders and their ongoing accountability to a presbytery.

B. Definition of Commissioned Ruling Elder

A Commissioned Ruling Elder is a ruling elder, called by God and affirmed by his/her session and trained, commissioned, and nurtured by presbytery to be a preacher/pastor to a particular congregation. He or she may serve full or part-time, with or without salary. The local commission is valid only within the bounds of John Knox Presbytery and only in the church/es specified and is validated annually. It may be renewed at the expiration or terminated at any time at the discretion of the presbytery.

C. The Identification of Gifts

Within every congregation, God bestows multiple gifts upon the members of that church. As churches have lifted individuals and encouraged them to pursue the ministry of Word and Sacrament, it is important that churches today actively search for the gifts God has given laity of the church that can also be used in the ministry of the church in the office of Commissioned Ruling Elder to a particular pastoral service.

II. Procedures

A. The CRE Program shall be administered by the Commissioned Ruling Elder Committee. It shall be composed of 10 members: five Teaching Elders and five Ruling Elders. Nine of these persons shall be nominated by the Nominating Committee and elected by the Presbytery, and one person shall be chosen by and from the Committee on Ministry. Members of the CRE Committee are to be elected to three-year terms in classes. A person may be elected to two terms (which might include election to an unfinished term) with a limit of six consecutive years served. The Executive Presbyter shall serve Ex-Officio. The CRE Committee will carry out the functions of recruitment, training, encouragement and examination. Deployment, commissioning functions, post-commissioning care and oversight will be the responsibility of Committee on Ministry.

B. An application packet is available from the presbytery office.

C. The CRE Committee shall conduct an annual review in person with each Seeker, Learner, and person who is "Commissioned Ready" but has not accepted a Commission, to determine their status in the program.

III. Program

A. Step One - Inquirer (A time of discerning God's call)

1. A Ruling Elder believing that he/she has been called by God, and/or, an elder whom the congregation has discerned with gifts for ministry, seeks validation of the call by contacting the Session of the church where he/she is a member.
2. The Inquirer shall have been a member of the PCUSA for two years, an elder for one year, and active in the life of a particular church within the bounds of John Knox Presbytery for at least one year prior to submitting the application to the session.
3. The Session shall contact the Commissioned Ruling Elder Committee for orientation to the process.
4. The session shall consult with the Ruling Elder and, if the individual requests to enroll in the CRE Program, shall review the application form and make a recommendation to the CRE Committee using the Session Endorsement Form. Endorsement by the session means the session is aware that the member is intending to enroll in the CRE Program, sees potential in the individual and that it will be supportive through prayer and encouragement. At this time the session should appoint one of its members as a liaison to the seeker for the duration of the process.
5. After receiving the Application Form and Session Endorsement Form, the CRE Committee shall meet with the Inquirer in person. The interview shall include discussion of the individual's: personal faith, sense of call and motives in seeking enrollment in the program, competency in Book of Order requirements, communication skills, willingness to engage in study/mentoring program and review of information contained in application.
6. Upon approval by the CRE Committee the Inquirer moves to Step Two.

B. Step Two – Seeker (A time of discerning one's gifts)

1. The Seeker will participate in a professional evaluation (e.g. Minnesota Multiphasic Inventory - MMPI) at the Presbytery's expense.
2. The Presbytery Office shall conduct an ethics and background check of the Seeker.
3. The CRE Committee shall vote whether to receive the Seeker into the CRE Program. If approved, the Seeker would move to Step Three, Learner.

- C. Step Three - Learner (A time of preparation)
- Training will not require the same levels of knowledge required of Teaching Elders. The training for each learner may vary in length, depth and content, depending upon knowledge and understanding at entry into the program. Realistic timelines for completion of requirements will be set for each learner and will usually vary from six to eighteen months. Education for ministry is a life-long process.
1. Upon entry into the Learner phase, an assessment instrument will be utilized by the Learner and the CRE Committee to measure competency in Book of Order requirements and to make learning plans.
 2. The learner and the CRE Committee shall come to a mutual agreement on the selection of an advisor for the Learner throughout the process. The advisor:
 - a. Shall be recruited by the CRE Committee;
 - b. Shall be a Teaching Elder in the PCUSA and an active member in the John Knox Presbytery;
 - c. Shall have knowledge of and a supportive attitude toward the CRE Program.
 - d. Shall be available to meet with the Learner on a regular basis during the study period, generally once a month;
 - e. Shall in consultation with the CRE Committee make learning plans with the Learner; and
 - f. Shall be reimbursed for travel costs and may receive a stipend.
 3. The Learning Plan will be tailored for each individual. The basis of the learning plan will include the following core courses offered by the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary:

Introduction to Old Testament	Pastoral Care
Introduction to New Testament.	Presbyterian Polity
Reformed Worship and Sacraments	Introduction to Preaching
Foundations of Christian Education	Reformed Theology

Course assessment with instructor's feedback will be available at committee's request. Summary statements of the student's overall performance of a course will be provided at the end of each course. Other requirements may be added to the core courses. A detailed plan, including time-lines, will be written and signed as a covenant between the CRE Committee, the learner, and the advisor.

 - a. The Learner shall attend semi-annual weekend classes sponsored by the presbytery. The CRE Committee shall establish the requirements for instruction. Fees will be paid by the learner though the Learner may request a grant from the Session and/or CRE Committee to supplement the cost of the course work.

- b. The Learner is encouraged to attend short-term continuing education courses such as those offered at Synod School, Rural Ministry Conference, or University of Dubuque Theological Seminary Continuing Education.
 - 4. Upon completion of the terms of the learning plans, an examination will be conducted by the CRE Committee including:
 - a. A demonstration of proficiency and knowledge in the areas of Bible, Reformed theology and sacraments, Pastoral Care, Presbyterian polity and preaching and teaching.
 - b. A statement of faith.
 - c. A sermon preached.
 - d. Plans for continuing education.
 - 5. Following the successful completion of the examination of the learner, the CRE Committee will attest to Committee on Ministry that the learner has met all requirements and is ready to proceed to Step Four, a commission in John Knox Presbytery.
- D. Step Four- Commissioned Ruling Elder (A call to particular ministry or service.) This step is the formal commissioning of the CRE by the Presbytery to a specific field of ministry. Committee on Ministry has oversight of Step Four.
- 1. The learner will be interviewed by COM. Pending the outcomes, the COM may recommend that the individual be given a local commission to a particular church or churches within the bounds of John Knox Presbytery, or, his/her name may be placed on the Supply Preaching List. Before placement on the Pulpit Supply List or to a pastoral position in John Knox Presbytery the Presbytery Office shall run a placement ethics and background check on the individual.
 - 2. The following shall be included in the recommendation for a commission:

The terms of the contract, which shall be negotiated by COM, the individual CRE, and the session/s of local commission.

The terms shall include the name/s of the local commission church/es, the ministry to be provided (including whether the individual is permitted to administer the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper), the initiating date of service, the length of service and the compensation for services.

The contract shall be signed by the Chair of COM, the Clerk of Session/s, and the individual.

3. The COM shall present the individual to John Knox Presbytery. The individual shall give a brief summary of her/his faith journey and read her/his statement of faith. If applicable, the terms of the local commission shall be presented to the Presbytery for action.
4. It shall be the responsibility of COM to oversee the commissioning.
5. The COM shall work with the Commissioned Ruling Elder to develop an appropriate service of recognition which shall be conducted in the local commission church.
6. The names of Commissioned Ruling Elders serving in the John Knox Presbytery shall be presented to Presbytery annually by the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery.
7. The CRE Committee will assign a contact person from the committee to offer support and encouragement to attend annual continuing education events. The CRE Contact will report regularly with the CRE Committee.
8. The COM shall be responsible for post-commissioning oversight and care of the CRE, including oversight of the CRE's annual review, ordinarily in the Fall. COM shall assign a mentor to each active CRE. The COM will notify Sessions, asking that the reviews be done and returned to the Presbytery Office. A representative of COM is encouraged to meet with the Session as part of the process. The CRE agreement should also be updated at this time.

IV. Policies

A. The Commissioned Ruling Elder

1. Will ordinarily remain a member of the particular church where membership is held while serving a local commission.
2. Will ordinarily be advised/mentored by a Teaching Elder assigned by the Committee on Ministry. May be authorized by John Knox Presbytery and when invited by the Session/s of the local commission to perform any or all of the following functions (G-2.1001):

Administer the Lord's Supper.

Administer the Sacrament of Baptism.

Moderate the session of the congregation under the supervision of and when invited by the moderator of the session appointed by the presbytery.

Perform a service of Christian marriage when invited by the session or other responsible committee, and when allowed by the state.

3. May perform other duties as negotiated with the session/s and with the concurrence of COM.
 4. Should attend all session meetings of the local commission.
 5. Shall engage in continuing education each year.
 6. Shall be reviewed annually by the presbytery through the Committee on Ministry in consultation with the Session of local commission.
 7. Shall be enrolled as a Ruling Elder with vote in JKP for the term of the commission and shall include responsible participation in the deliberations and work of the presbytery.
- B. The Responsibilities of the Moderator of the Session/s and the Supervising Pastor
1. The Moderator of the Session/s of the local commission shall ordinarily be the Supervising Pastor of the Commissioned Ruling Elder.
 2. The Moderator, the supervising pastor, the Commissioned Ruling Elder and Session Representatives of the local commission shall participate in the annual review process convened by a member of Committee on Ministry.
- C. Terminating the Local Commission
1. Upon recommendation by the Committee on Ministry, John Knox Presbytery shall revoke the local commission of any Commissioned Ruling Elder who does not abide by the provisions specified in the Book of Order and the provisions contained in this policy.
 2. The dissolution of a local commission will be reached after a consultation including COM, the session/s of the local commission, the Moderator/s, the supervising pastor and the Commissioned Ruling Elder.