

**PRESBYTERY OF LAKE ERIE
COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY
POLICIES RELATING TO COMMISSIONED PASTORS**

Re-Adopted by COM February 9, 2021

AN UNDERLYING PHILOSOPHY

- A. The employment and calling of commissioned pastors (CP) is a partial implementation of Lake Erie's small church strategy. 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.
- B. Normally, CPs would be commissioned to serve small membership churches having fewer than one hundred active members where alternatives for using ordained clergy are not feasible or available.
- 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.

ADMINISTRATION AND OVERSIGHT

- 1. The Presbytery through one of its committees 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 and deployment of CPs shall be the responsibility of the Committee on Ministry (COM). When someone is actually deployed as a CP the supervision of their work shall be done through a neighboring Minister of Word and Sacrament. If a determination is made that the CP may be the moderator of Session, the Committee on Ministry will continue to provide a mentor/liaison for continuing conversations and reflection.
- 2. Applicants for CP classes shall normally be ordained elders and shall have a written recommendation from the session of the congregation of which they are a member. (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 an elder.) The committee shall examine each applicant and believe that the person is potentially competent to be a CP, willing to undergo training, and is amenable to the ongoing supervision of CPM.
- 3. Upon approval of the committee the applicant may begin a program of training. It 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. A person must complete training before being considered as a CP.
- 4. 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, 2019-2021].
- 5. Once the training is completed the applicant will be examined by the COM to determine that person's readiness for commissioning. Upon approval the trained applicant will receive written certification of successfully completion of the initial training and is

ready to be considered by COM to be placed on the preaching supply list or to serve as a CP.

6. When a certified applicant receives an invitation to serve a local congregation 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 in question. COM may choose to have an applicant complete a psychological evaluation prior to placing a person on the preaching supply list. COM will require some sort of psychological evaluation prior to allowing someone to serve as a CP.
7. The CP shall work under the supervision of the presbytery through the moderator of the Session of the church being served. COM shall maintain regular contact with the Session's moderator regarding supervision of the CP while she/he is serving a particular congregation. In the event that COM assigns moderatorial responsibilities to the CP there will still be a mentor/liaison from COM to the CP.
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:
 - 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 written approval from the 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, the continued viability of the relationship, the effectiveness of the congregation's ministry and outreach, and the adequacy of the financial compensation.
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.
 - 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. Pension and medical benefits are optional. Mileage related to church employment (excluding mileage for commuting) shall be reimbursed at the current IRS rate. Other compensation is negotiable.
9. 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.

10. 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 deploying CPs. The cost of a psychological evaluation is shared equally by three participants: the student, COM, and the home church of the student.

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:

1. 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.
2. Actively engage the congregation in considering their outreach and relationship to the surrounding community.
3. Promote the mission and program of the whole church.
4. 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.
5. Have regular contact with mentor/liaison or 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:
 - a. hospital visitation
 - b. home visitation
 - c. funerals
 - d. new member visitation
2. Lead Bible studies and teach in the Christian Education program of the church
3. Engage in community ministries in consultation with the Session
4. Refer parishioners to pastoral care providers or counselors
5. Moderating of Session meetings
6. Moderating of congregational meetings
7. Perform marriages

8. Administer the Sacrament of Baptism
9. Administer the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

ROLE OF MENTORS

When a person applies for classes the presbytery committee will assign a mentor. The student and the mentor are to be in regular contact.

When a person is appointed 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, 2019-2021].

IF COMMISSIONED TO THE PRESBYTERY AT-LARGE

The Committee on Ministry of Lake Erie Presbytery, guided by Book of Order G-2.10, “Commissioning Ruling Elders to Particular Pastoral Service”, may commission some Ruling Elders to serve at-large. Our strategy for mission requires this to meet the occasional and growing need for ruling elders who are authorized to administer the sacraments and to moderate session.

Those Commissioned Pastors (CPs) serving at-large will be assigned a mentor/supervisor and receive training. The at-large commission is a validated ministry of the presbytery and will be reviewed annually.

Commissioning of a CP to a congregation does not necessarily include an at-large commission, or vice versa. If a CP is one of those commissioned to the presbytery at-large, the approved authorities granted to the Commissioned Pastor must be listed. Presbytery, in its commission, may authorize the ruling elder:

- a. to be acting moderator for a particular session meeting
- b. to be acting moderator at a duly-called congregational meeting
- c. to administer either or both of the Sacraments, and/or
- d. to officiate at a marriage connected to the ministry of the presbytery or one of its congregations, if permitted by state law

For every one of these authorities, and for each occasion, specific approval must be granted for the at-large CP by the General Presbyter, a COM moderator or Co-moderator, or the presbytery’s Moderator or Vice-moderator. Consultation with the CP’s mentor is also expected.

Ordinarily their service will be to a specific congregation for an approved role, but may at times be paired with other temporary responsibilities.

FURTHER GUIDANCE FOR COMMISSIONED PASTORS

The deploying of elders as commissioned pastors is evolving rapidly in the PCUSA. This policy is not exhaustive. Where specific decisions need to be made the presbytery will be guided by the Book of Order and the wisdom of current policies, guidelines and practices in relationship to commissioned pastors.