

**Guidelines and Recommendations Regarding  
Commissioned Ruling Elders  
June 2010  
Updated November 2012**

Certification of Commissioned Ruling Elders

The **Committee on Preparation for Ministry is the certifying body.** It has the responsibility for conducting the examination and presenting the elders to the Presbytery at a Stated Meeting. The Committee will present the elders along with written statements regarding their sense of call. It is anticipated that the Presbytery might ask questions regarding sense of call but not to examine them and the Committee will so inform the Presbytery when the Committee on Preparation for Ministry brings its recommendation. These elders will be presented to Presbytery with a recommendation such as this: “The Committee on Preparation for Ministry reports that the Committee on Preparation for Ministry has examined the following elders [elders listed] and certifies them ready to serve as Commissioned Ruling Elders.”

Commissioning

**The Committee on Ministry is responsible for recommending to Presbytery that it commission Commissioned Ruling Elders for specific ministries. The Presbytery is the commissioning body.** Normally the vote to commission will be at a meeting of Presbytery other than the meeting at which the Committee on Preparation for Ministry reports that the elders are certified ready for commissioning. The Committee on Ministry has the responsibility to consider each ministry and Commissioned Ruling Elder to determine if it will recommend the elder for commissioning. When it decides to proceed with commissioning, the Committee on Ministry will bring the following motion to Presbytery, “The Committee on Ministry recommends THAT the Presbytery commission [name of elder] as a Commissioned Ruling Elder for [the ministry] with the authority to [permitted ministries listed].” The commissioning will take place within the context of a worship service at a time other than the Presbytery meeting and with three or four members of COM and CPM representing the Presbytery or within the context of a Presbytery meeting, the choice being made by those about to be commissioned.

Oversight of Commissioned Ruling Elders

Elders who seek to be commissioned as Commissioned Ruling Elders and elders who are certified ready to be commissioned are under the care of the Committee on Preparation for Ministry. The Committee on Preparation for Ministry will review tri-annually the status of those elders certified ready for commission but who have not yet received a commission, or are awaiting a new commission. Those who are not commissioned within three years of being certified ready for commission will be deleted from the roll of elders certified ready for commission.

Those elders who are Commissioned Ruling Elders are under the care of the Committee on Ministry. The Committee on Ministry will be responsible for conducting the commissioning service. Commissioned Ruling Elders will be assigned a supervisor and/or mentor and will report on their ministry annually to the Committee on Ministry. Commissioned Ruling Elders who no longer are commissioned to a ministry will remain

on the rolls of elders certified ready for commissioning for three years at which time they will be deleted from this roll.

#### Committee on Preparation for Ministry procedures and requirements

1. Both CPM and COM understand that the role and ministry of CREs is flexible and can be used in a variety of settings including
  - a. A congregation or session of a church sees a need that can be filled by a CRE and has one or more elders who are interested in meeting that need and there is a mutual agreement between the session and the elder that the elder will serve the congregation in the role of CRE. The CRE may not serve as an active elder while serving as a CRE.
  - b. An individual elder feels a call to serve as a CRE, but not in his or her own church.
2. CPM is the gatekeeper for determining whether or not those elders who desire this training are suitable.
3. CRE training will include several pauses for discernment, such as
  - a. A time of discernment with the session and pastor.
  - b. A recommendation from pastor and/or session for an elder seeking to become a CRE.
  - c. A time of reflection and discussion with the candidate, for both models.
  - d. Building in time between the application and the start of the first class.
  - e. An interview between the first and second years of training, to ask where the candidate is within the discernment process.
  - f. A spiritual mentoring/training piece, such as a week of silent meditation or retreat.
4. CPM will require Healthy Boundaries or other sexual misconduct prevention training as part of the CRE training.

#### Committee On Ministry procedures and requirements

1. Normally, congregations will not have more than one CRE for every seventy-five members.
2. A satisfactory background check will be required prior to the initial commission.
3. A written contract will be required before commissioning. Commissions for Commissioned Ruling Elders will stipulate only those authorities required for the routine duties for the ministry to which they are called.
4. COM will conduct a clearance interview before granting a commission and conduct an exit interview at the end of each commission.
5. Presbytery will not issue ID cards similar to those received by Ministers of the Word and Sacrament.
6. The Healthy Boundaries or other Sexual Misconduct Prevention training will be required prior to commissioning. Those currently serving as CREs will be required to have this training prior to the renewal of their commissions beyond the current term. After this initial training, CREs will have the same training requirements that apply to other active religious leaders in the Presbytery.

7. Within four months of their commissioning, conduct a consultation with each CRE and supervisor to review the position description and the ministry of the CRE and assess if mutual expectations are being met.
8. Require an annual interview with or written report from supervisors or mentors of CREs and from CREs.
9. Additional Training: The Book of Order says in G-14.0561: "Presbytery shall regularly provide resources for the person's spiritual and intellectual development." The CRE Commissioned Ruling Elder Support Committee (if it is formed) or the Committee on Ministry will organize a daylong seminar or retreat for CREs on an annual or biennial basis. \*
10. The Committee on Ministry will maintain rolls of CREs who are currently commissioned and who have once been commissioned but are not presently commissioned. These names will be published to Presbytery annually.

#### \*Commissioned Ruling Elder Support Committee

COM and CPM should each consider creating a joint team appointed by both the committees to serve an indefinite number of one-year terms to support the CREs and to oversee the relationships between the CREs and the two committees. The innovative use and status of CREs needs attention regarding their roles and morale. This committee can give attention to that. Ordinarily both committees will each appoint two people to serve on the committee and COM will also appoint one or two CREs. This team would report to both COM and CPM, as needed. This team could be responsible for the training day and CPM would decide if this committee would also be responsible for the training of those seeking to become CREs. The Training Day might also be an opportunity for the annual report on ministry to be submitted and discussed.

#### Changes to the Presbytery Manual

In order to reflect these procedures, the following additions and amendments are recommended:

Add section 18.2 (under Examination of Candidates):

#### **18.2 Candidates for commissioning as Commissioned Ruling Elders**

- 18.2.1. The Committee on Preparation for Ministry is charged with the examination of those it certifies as prepared to be and suitable for the role of Commissioned Ruling Elder.
- 18.2.2. The Committee on Preparation for Ministry will present candidates in person to the Presbytery, with a written statement from the candidates concerning their sense of call.
- 18.2.3. The Committee on Ministry will recommend the commissioning of Commissioned Ruling Elders to particular ministries. The commissioning may take place either within the context of a worship service at a time other than the Presbytery meeting with three or four members of the Committee on Ministry and the Committee on Preparation for Ministry representing the Presbytery or within the context of a Presbytery meeting, the choice being made by those about to be commissioned.

**The Committee on Ministry (8.8.5.15) is to**

8.8.5.15.1 recommend to Presbytery those churches, new church developments, and other ministries appropriate to be ministered to by a Commissioned Ruling Elder (CRE).

- Authorize CREs to lead worship, preach, and undertake such other duties as may be required, in accordance with the Book of Order.
- Recommend to Presbytery the commissioning to these ministries of persons certified as ready to be commissioned and their appointment to said ministries; ~~and~~
- Supervise CREs undertaking commissioned ministries; ~~and~~
- ⊖ Review annually the status of elders who are certified and have been commissioned but are currently without a commission and delete from this roll any who have been without a commission for three or more years. Those who are deleted from this roll and wish to be certified ready for commissioning must re-apply through the Committee on Preparation for Ministry.

**The Committee on Preparation for Ministry (8.10.4.6) is to**

Receive applications from elders of the particular churches of the Presbytery to be Commissioned Ruling Elders; maintain a roll of elders who have applied; supervise their preparation; examine them as to personal faith, motives for seeking the commission, and on the areas of instruction [G-2.10]; and report present them to the Presbytery for certification as ready to be commissioned. Review annually the status of elders who are certified but have not yet been commissioned. After three years of non-commissioned status, Commissioned Ruling Elders certified ready for commissioning will be deleted from the list of Commissioned Ruling Elders certified ready for commissioning.

**Section 26, Sessions:**

26.7. Commissioned Ruling Elders may, with the approval and supervision of the COM, celebrate the sacraments and perform marriages. No CRE may serve as an active elder in a congregation he or she is serving as a CRE.

**History**

At the March 2009 meeting of the Council of the Presbytery of Baltimore, the Council expressed concern that the process COM and CPM were proposing for the class of certified Commissioned Ruling Elders, that is, that the examinations for the CREs be done by CPM rather than before the Presbytery and the commissioning taking place in a worship service, rather than before Presbytery, could result in certified Commissioned Ruling Elders being commissioned without ever appearing before the Presbytery. As a result, the Committee on Ministry and the Committee on Preparation for Ministry agreed to form a joint team to look at the way we transition the CREs from the care of the CPM to the care of the COM, with particular attention to how we would require the newly certified Commissioned Ruling Elders to appear before the Presbytery.

The joint team, consisting of COM representatives Catherine Blacka, Mary Gaut, and David Fischel and CPM representatives Bill Starke and Ronnie Hankins, met twice to discuss these and other issues concerning our Commissioned Ruling Elder program. The initial issue, ensuring the presentation of certified Commissioned Ruling Elders to the Presbytery prior to commissioning, is already covered in the new Presbytery Manual, item 8.10.4.6, that is **“The Committee [on Preparation for Ministry is to] receive applications from elders ... to be Commissioned Ruling Elders ... and present them to the Presbytery for certification as ready to be commissioned.”**

The original process suggestions were presented to both COM and CPM and members of each group have since met and agreed to certain changes that bring clarity to the original recommendations.

Approved by CPM June 2010 and COM May 2010  
Updated to reflect Book of Order 2011-2013 July 2012