



**Handbook for Preparation for  
Commissioned Ruling Elders (CRE)  
To Particular Pastoral Service**

Adopted by the  
Commission on Preparation for Ministry  
and Commission on Ministry

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**Committee on Preparation for Ministry  
Presbytery of Baltimore**

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To Particular Pastoral Service**

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**Abbreviations**

Commission on Ministry ..... COM  
Commission on Preparation for Ministry ..... CPM  
Commissioned Ruling Elder..... CRE  
Commissioned Lay Pastor ..... CLP  
Permanent Judicial Commission..... PJC

1 **Commissioned Ruling Elder (CRE) Defined**

2 A CRE is a ruling elder in the Presbyterian Church (USA) who is granted a local  
3 commission by the Presbytery to particular pastoral service as assigned by the presbytery.  
4

5 **Term of Commissioning**

6 Upon satisfactorily completing the required training, the Presbytery commissions the  
7 ruling elder for a period of up to three years. The commission shall be reviewed annually  
8 and may be renewed at expiration or terminated at any time at the discretion of the  
9 Presbytery. Once the specific commission lapses, the CRE may be authorized to serve  
10 again and, if so, must be commissioned again by the Presbytery (G-2.1002).  
11

12 **Service of the Commissioned Ruling Elder**

13 The commission depends on the particular service the Presbytery has identified. There  
14 are two forms of service: (1) Serving as a commissioned Lay Pastor (CLP) who performs  
15 all of the pastoral functions in a congregation or set of congregations; and (2) as a Ruling  
16 Elder commissioned to a specific service (CRE) in a congregation or set of  
17 congregations, such as administering sacraments, officiating weddings, or moderating a  
18 Session. A commissioned ruling elder may moderate the Session of the congregation only  
19 if commissioned as a Lay Pastor, or if not also officiating sacraments in the same  
20 congregation. Permission for specific activities will be included in the contract  
21 established between Sessions and the CLP/CRE, with the approval of the Committee on  
22 Ministry.  
23

24 **Ministry Placement**

25 The Session of any church in the Presbytery of Baltimore may request that the  
26 Presbytery, , provide for its pastoral needs through the commissioning of a ruling elder.  
27 The Session may enter into a contractual relationship with a ruling elder whose  
28 preparation for lay pastoral ministry is certified by the CPM in this Presbytery, with the  
29 approval of the Committee on Ministry.  
30

31 **The Theological and Constitutional Basis for CREs**

32 In baptism, each of us is claimed by God and called to a life of faith and service in  
33 Christ's name. Ordination to one of the three ordered ministries (Deacons, Ruling Elders,  
34 and Ministers of Word and Sacrament) is an act of the church and gift of the Spirit to the  
35 church "to order its life so that the ministry of the whole people of God may flourish (G-  
36 2.0102). Ruling elders, together with ministers of the Word and Sacrament, exercise  
37 leadership, government, spiritual discernment, and discipline and have responsibilities for  
38 the life of a congregation as well as the whole church (G-2.0301).  
39

40 When the Presbytery determines, in consultation with a Session, that a church's pastoral  
41 needs might best be filled by an ordained lay leader, it may commission a ruling elder for  
42 specific service in the church (G-2.1001). Commissioned ruling elders are commissioned  
43 to provide spiritual leadership for specific congregations or specific ministries in the  
44 world. Such "commissioning" is for a limited time.  
45

46 Commissioned ruling elders institutionally speaking are a hybrid creation of the Church  
47 to respond to special historical and cultural needs of particular faith communities. As  
48 baptized Christians, they are ordained (priesthood of all believers) to minister in Jesus’  
49 name. As elders they are ordained to church office. Yet, they are neither called nor  
50 ordained as teaching elders for the whole Church. They are commissioned ruling elders  
51 (non-clergy).

52

53 In recognizing and empowering for service commissioned ruling elders, the Presbyterian  
54 Church (USA) and the Presbytery of Baltimore respond faithfully to God’s call to the  
55 needs of the Church in this present and emerging age. “Behold, I am doing a new thing!”  
56 (Isaiah 43:18-19).

57

## 58 **Desired Qualities in Applicants**

59

### 60 **Personal Qualities**

61 The Presbytery looks for experienced elders who have soundness of mind and spirit and  
62 who possess the judgment and inner freedom to lead, hear and be present to people in  
63 need.

64

### 65 **Spiritual Qualities**

66 The Presbytery of Baltimore looks for elders who give evidence of the possession of  
67 gifts and graces fit for service to congregations and ministries, including but not limited  
68 to:

69

- 70 - Lively faith in the triune God
- 71 - The ability to articulate one’s faith clearly
- 72 - Personal maturity, as evidenced by emotional stability, flexibility, integrity in  
73 handling personal and family financial matters, and the willingness to accept  
74 appropriate responsibility for errors in judgment
- 75 - An inquiring mind that is open to learning
- 76 - Willingness to further the peace, unity, and purity of the Presbyterian Church  
77 (USA)

78

## 79 **Educational Requirements for Applicants**

80 Ordinarily, applicants must hold a bachelor’s degree from an accredited college or  
81 university. The CPM may make an exception if the candidate demonstrates the necessary  
82 gifts and talents for this ministry.

83

## 84 **Concurrent Preparation for Ministry of Word and Sacrament**

85 Commissioned ruling elders who are actively serving may apply to enroll in the  
86 preparation for ministry of word and sacrament. The CPM will determine what steps are  
87 necessary and notify the COM prior to enrolling the CRE.

88

89 Individuals may not apply for preparation as a CRE while engaged in preparation for  
90 ministry of word and sacrament. The CPM shall not enroll individuals in both courses of

91 preparation concurrently, and no inquirer or candidate for ministry of word and  
92 sacrament shall be certified ready for examination as a CRE.

## 94 **Preparation for Commissioned Service**

### 96 **The Discernment Process**

97 Initial discernment occurs collaboratively between an individual, their home church, the  
98 the CPM and the COM.

#### 100 Discerning the Call:

101 The initial steps for preparation to become a commissioned ruling elder may be taken  
102 by either the congregation or the individual. If a congregation feels its pastoral needs  
103 may best be met by a CRE in limited service or a CLP, it should be in touch with the  
104 COM to determine if the Presbytery's strategy for mission would be served by  
105 supporting this model of pastoral leadership in that congregation.

106  
107 Alternatively, a particular individual who is already ordained as a Ruling Elder may  
108 sense a call to a ministry role as a CRE or CLP. If an individual feels drawn to serve  
109 in either role, whether in conversation with their home congregation or not, they  
110 should first contact the CPM. If the call is to a limited role as a CRE (perhaps in one's  
111 home church), the CPM will contact the COM about possibilities for service before  
112 enrolling the individual for additional discernment and training for that particular  
113 role. If the Individual is discerning a call to serve a congregation as a CLP they may  
114 be enrolled by the CPM for preparation and certification before exploring possible  
115 placements for commissioning.

116  
117 Home Church Endorsement: In both cases described above, the individual should  
118 approach the Pastor of their home church (if applicable) and discuss the sense of call  
119 to serve as a CRE. In the absence of pastoral leadership, the individual should contact  
120 the Session's moderator. The individual shall have been a member of the local church  
121 for at least one year and shall already be an ordained ruling elder. The Session shall  
122 interview the applicant and provide for an agreed period for discernment. Upon  
123 enrollment by the CPM and endorsement by the Session, the Session shall appoint an  
124 one of its members to serve as a liaison to the applicant.

### 126 **The Preparation Process**

127 Following the initial discernment, the preparation process is under the oversight of the  
128 CPM.

129  
130 Application: An application is available on the website of the Baltimore Presbytery.  
131 This form should be completed by the applicant and his or her Session. If the  
132 applicant is pursuing commissioning as a lay pastor, the application should be  
133 emailed to the Chair of the CPM along with three letters of recommendation (see  
134 application form for information on references). If the applicant is seeking  
135 commissioning for a limited service either in their home church or another

136 congregation, the application shall be sent to the COM which will refer it to the CPM  
137 for supervised training appropriate to the service.

138  
139 Background Check: Upon receipt of an application, the Presbytery will conduct a  
140 criminal and driving background check. Any concerns by the ruling elder regarding  
141 this routine check should be brought to the attention of the moderator of the Session  
142 early in the process of preparation.

143  
144 Initial Interview: When the application and background check are complete, an  
145 interview will be scheduled with the CPM. Based on the results of that interview, the  
146 successful applicant will be enrolled in the preparation track that they have selected.

147  
148 Liaisons: One or more liaisons from CPM will be assigned and keep CPM informed  
149 of the progress of the applicant.

150  
151 Program of Study: A program of study will be approved by CPM, who will take into  
152 consideration evidence of previous study relevant to preparation for ministry, relevant  
153 life experiences and the specific track the candidate is pursuing.

154  
155 Course Work: Candidates for commissioned for lay pastoral service will be required  
156 to complete training in: Reformed theology; worship and sacraments; Presbyterian  
157 polity; pastoral care; Old Testament exegesis; New Testament exegesis; and  
158 homiletics. The CPM will maintain a list of approved courses and institutions and  
159 prior approval should be sought before enrolling in a particular course. [Additional  
160 explanation on courses and competencies are detailed in the appendix]

161  
162 Those preparing for a commission to limited service in a congregation will be advised  
163 as to what courses will be required for the particular service. The applicant will be  
164 advised to complete the coursework from the same approved institutions  
165 recommended for those preparing for lay pastor commissioning.

166  
167 Vocational Assessment (CLP candidates only): During the first year, the individual is  
168 required to schedule and complete a two-day vocational assessment at an accredited  
169 center approved by CPM. CPM considers the results of this testing to be important in  
170 determining the fitness of the individual for lay pastoral ministry. The fee for testing  
171 will be paid in equal one third shares by the applicant, the applicant's congregation,  
172 and the Presbytery (through the Committee on Preparation for Ministry).

173  
174 Field Internship (CLP candidates only): Working with a member of CPM, the  
175 individual will be assigned to a program of field study under the guidance of a  
176 teaching elder of the Presbytery of Baltimore in a congregation other than the  
177 candidate's home church. This field internship is to prepare the individual for the role  
178 and responsibilities of a CLP. A written field evaluation report will be submitted to  
179 CPM by the internship supervisor.

180

181 “Dismantling Racism” and “Healthy Boundaries” trainings (or another form of sexual  
182 misconduct prevention training) are required as part of CLP/CRE training and must  
183 be completed prior to the individual’s final evaluation.  
184

185 Final Evaluation: Following completion of the program of preparation, the individual  
186 will meet with the CPM and will be assessed for readiness to serve.  
187

188 Examination and Commissioning: Once the type of placement has been identified and  
189 approved by the COM and a congregation has extended an offer, the CPM will  
190 present the candidate to the Presbytery for examination, “as to personal faith and  
191 motives for seeking the commissioned ruling elder or lay pastor position, and the  
192 areas of instruction mentioned previously.” (G-2-1002) Upon satisfactory  
193 examination, the COM will recommend the Presbytery approve commissioning to the  
194 particular service.  
195

### 196 **Expenses and Cost Sharing**

197 The candidate will bear the costs including:

- 198 - Seminary/online courses
  - 199 - Coursework books, supplies
  - 200 - Expenses required by field education
- 201

202 The following costs are shared:

- 203 - The Presbytery will cover the cost of required background checks.
- 204 - The vocational assessment is shared between the presbytery, individual, and home  
205 church. The Presbytery will cover one third of the total cost.  
206

### 207 **Evaluation and Certification**

208 Official records shall be provided for all required instruction. The individual shall:

- 209 1. Send transcripts showing the satisfactory completion of the course work required  
210 by the commission.
- 211 2. For those on the CLP track, write an exegetical paper (8 to 10 pages, double  
212 spaced).
- 213 3. For those on the CLP track, submit a sermon manuscript or audio/video recording  
214 of a recent sermon.
- 215 4. Meet with members of the Committee on Preparation for Ministry for an extended  
216 oral evaluation to assess the individual’s overall preparation for the particular  
217 track, including their required coursework. If the group leading this oral exam  
218 determines that the candidate is ready and answers satisfactorily, they will  
219 recommend a final meeting with the whole committee.  
220

221 The individual’s CPM liaison(s) will provide a written report detailing the individual’s  
222 suitability, strengths, and limitations as a CRE/CLP.  
223

224 Upon determination that the individual has completed the requirements of the Presbytery,  
225 after successful examination by the CPM it will certify the candidate ready to be

226 commissioned if the Presbytery approves. The Presbytery is the commissioning body,  
227 and commissioning is not an automatic outcome of certification.

228

229 **Assigned Mentors for CLPs**

230 Upon commissioning as a CLP, a teaching elder of Baltimore Presbytery will be assigned  
231 by the COM as a mentor. The mentor will make regular contact with the CLP to support  
232 the individual in their sense of call and personal/professional wellbeing. The mentor shall  
233 report to COM annually.

234

235

236 **Primacy of the Book of Order and Permanent Judicial Commission Interpretations**

237 If any discrepancy which exists between this policy and the Book of Order or any  
238 authoritative interpretations of G-2.1001-2.1004 provided by the GA Permanent Judicial  
239 Commission (PJC) or the Office of Constitutional Services, the Book of Order and  
240 interpretive readings shall prevail.