



**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, through the Committee on Ministry, provide for its pastoral needs through the
27 commissioning of a ruling elder. The Session may enter into a contractual relationship
28 with a ruling elder whose preparation for lay pastoral ministry is certified by the CPM in
29 this Presbytery, with the 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 COM and the CPM.

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. A congregation might discern in
103 partnership with the COM that its pastoral needs may be best met through the service
104 of a CRE or CLP. The COM will concurrently determine if the Presbytery's strategy
105 for mission would be served by supporting this model of pastoral leadership in that
106 congregation.

107
108 Alternatively, a particular individual may sense a call to a ministry role as a CRE or
109 CLP. If the individual feels drawn to serve as a CLP, they should contact the CPM. If
110 the call is to a limited role as a CRE (perhaps in one's home church), the COM should
111 be contacted about possibilities for service before referral to the CPM for additional
112 discernment and training in that particular role.

113
114 Home Church Endorsement: In both cases described above, the individual should
115 approach the teaching elder in their home church (if applicable) and discuss the sense
116 of call to serve as a CRE. In the event there is no teaching elder formally serving the
117 congregation, the individual should contact the Session's moderator. The individual
118 shall have been a member of the local church for at least one year and shall already be
119 an ordained ruling elder. The Session shall interview the applicant and provide for an
120 agreed period for discernment. Upon endorsement, the Session shall appoint an elder
121 on the Session who will serve as a liaison to the applicant.

123 **The Preparation Process**

124 Following the initial discernment, the preparation process is under the oversight of the
125 CPM.

126
127 Application: An application is available on the website of the Baltimore Presbytery.
128 This form should be completed by the applicant and his or her Session. If the
129 applicant is pursuing commissioning as a lay pastor, the application should be
130 emailed to the Chair of the CPM along with three letters of recommendation (see
131 application form for information on references). If the applicant is seeking
132 commissioning for a limited service either in their home church or another
133 congregation, the application shall be sent to the COM which will refer it to the CPM
134 for supervised training appropriate to the service.

135

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

178 "Dismantling Racism" and "Healthy Boundaries" trainings (or another form of sexual
179 misconduct prevention training) are required as part of CLP/CRE training and must
180 be completed prior to the individual's final evaluation.
181

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

184
185 Examination and Commissioning: Once the type of placement has been identified and
186 approved by the COM and a congregation has extended an offer, the CPM will
187 present the candidate to the Presbytery for examination, “as to personal faith and
188 motives for seeking the commissioned ruling elder or lay pastor position, and the
189 areas of instruction mentioned previously.” (G-2-1002) Upon satisfactory
190 examination, the COM will recommend the Presbytery approve commissioning to the
191 particular service.

192 193 **Expenses and Cost Sharing**

194 The candidate will bear the costs including:

- 195 - Seminary/online courses
- 196 - Coursework books, supplies
- 197 - Expenses required by field education

198
199 The following costs are shared:

- 200 - The Presbytery will cover the cost of required background checks.
- 201 - The vocational assessment is shared between the presbytery, individual, and home
202 church. The Presbytery will cover one third of the total cost.

203 204 **Evaluation and Certification**

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

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

217
218 The individual’s CPM liaison(s) will provide a written report detailing the individual’s
219 suitability, strengths, and limitations as a CRE/CLP.

220
221 Upon determination that the individual has completed the requirements of the Presbytery,
222 after successful examination by the CPM it will certify the candidate ready to be
223 commissioned if the Presbytery approves. The Presbytery is the commissioning body,
224 and commissioning is not an automatic outcome of certification.

225 226 **Assigned Mentors for CLPs**

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

231

232

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

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