

**Commissioned Ruling Elder Policy
for Washington Presbytery**
Approved at 1-17-15 meeting of presbytery

PURPOSE

To define the role of the Commissioned Ruling Elders in Washington Presbytery as an option to provide pastoral leadership to local churches for certain periods of time; to describe the process of training and the process of discerning a call along with COM input; to explain the boundaries of the CRE's relationships with the Presbytery and the local church; to clarify guidelines that must be followed to ensure healthy ministry within the bounds of Washington Presbytery.

COMMISSIONING

When the COM determines in conjunction with a particular congregation that there is need of a Commissioned Ruling Elder (CRE), the prospective CRE shall then be chosen from those persons designated by the Committee on Ministry (COM). A trained ruling elder cannot be commissioned to a church where their spouse is on the search committee. This person will be commissioned by the presbytery, according to the agreed upon terms of the commission. Once commissioned, the following guidelines shall be followed:

1. Terms of the commission: Will be determined by the COM according to the needs of the congregation and the gifts/experience of the CRE. Any agreement will have a provision informing all parties that the presbytery may terminate the commission at any time.
 - a. Length of service: The term of service will be for one year, renewable by presbytery.
 - b. Work hours: A CRE will serve for a maximum of half-time (24 hrs/weekly) in the first year. Any increase of hours must be approved by the COM after the first full year of service.
 - c. Salary and benefits: Minimum salary guidelines are as follows: CREs should not receive less than 50% of Washington Presbytery's recommended minimum effective salary of an ordained pastor for the same time period. Also to be required are auto/travel reimbursement, continuing education and other agreed upon allowances. Eligibility for pension plan participation may also be considered. This does not preclude paying a higher salary or medical benefits through the PCUSA Board of Pensions.
 - d. The annual commissioning service of Washington Presbytery shall be held during the worship service at its first Stated Meeting of the calendar year, which meeting is normally held on a Saturday in January. All Ruling Elders to be commissioned or re-commissioned to service in a particular congregation are expected to be present. If extenuating circumstances should prohibit attendance, her or his presence is expected at the next Stated Meeting for a commissioning service. If after three successive Stated Meetings of the Presbytery a Ruling Elder has failed to attend and submit her or himself to the authority of the Presbytery and the responsibilities encumbered herein cited by this policy, she or he will have forfeited her or his privilege of serving as a Commissioned Ruling Elder.
2. Mentoring/Supervision: The CRE shall be assigned a mentor/supervisor by COM. Ordinarily the mentor/supervisor is serving as moderator for the church to which the CRE is commissioned.
3. Annual review: The work of the CRE shall be reviewed by the COM annually in consultation with the Session and, in some instances, with the mentor/supervisor assigned. (G-2.1001)

4. Ministerial privileges: The CRE may be authorized by the COM to administer the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper; to preside in services of Christian marriage for members of their commissioned church; preside at the ordination and installation of elders and deacons; moderate Session and congregational meetings. CREs may perform these functions *only for members of congregation to which they are commissioned*. COM shall report these privileges to the Presbytery.
 - a. If authorized to perform weddings by COM, all weddings must be approved by the Session. The Session should have a wedding policy in place which provides for premarital counseling. At least one of those entering into the marriage covenant must be a member of the congregation to whom the CRE is commissioned. Any marriage that takes place outside the church building needs COM approval, and it is the responsibility of the Session or CRE to notify COM in a timely manner of such out-of-the-ordinary services so that COM can give guidance.
 - b. If authorized to perform baptisms and/or serve the Lord's Supper, CREs will have received prior training by the Committee on Preparation for Ministry (CPM) and be mentored by an experienced pastor, which would include an understanding of the reformed theology involved and practical application.
 - c. CREs may moderate the session and meetings of the congregation with the approval of the COM, which shall report such action to the Presbytery.
5. Trust and confidentiality: In the exercise of pastoral care, the CRE shall maintain a relationship of trust and confidentiality, and shall hold in confidence all information revealed to them in the course of providing care and all information relating to the exercise of such care. *(G-4.0301)*
6. A CRE can serve as an interim pastor provided he/she has had presbytery approval and Interim Ministry Training. If a CRE is designated as an interim, he/she will not ordinarily be commissioned to that church in a more permanent role. The COM must unanimously recommend approval of that CRE/church relationship.
7. Presbytery authority: The presbytery may at any time withdraw the commission for reasons it deems good and sufficient. *(G-2.1004)*

CRE RELATIONSHIPS WITH:

1. CPM
 - a. CPM will select and oversee the training of persons seeking to become a CRE. Persons interested in exploring the possibility of training should contact the CPM chairperson.
 - b. The candidate will cooperate fully with the CPM to fulfill the requirements for continuing education and any mentoring/supervisory relationship with an experienced pastor.
 - c. At the end of the presbytery's prescribed training, potential CREs will receive training on the preparation of a CRE Personal Information Form (CRE PIF) and will be asked to write a statement of faith, which will be reviewed by CPM and COM.
2. COM:
 - a. Will have oversight of commissioning, decommissioning or changes of commission. The CRE will communicate directly with the chair of the COM regarding any of these and provide their updated CRE PIF and statement of faith.
 - b. After one half of CRE training is completed, COM will consult with CPM and the Ruling Elder in training to establish a relationship; assess their readiness to be placed on the Presbytery's pulpit supply list; and to provide ongoing guidance.
 - c. No person shall provide pulpit supply without the prior approval of COM

- d. Completion of CRE training does not indicate that one will be commissioned or placed on the pulpit supply list.
 - e. COM shall examine persons seeking their first commission by Washington Presbytery as to personal faith, motives for seeking the commission, and areas of required instruction.
 - f. The COM may delegate a liaison to meet with a previously commissioned Ruling Elder in regard to a new commission. The liaison will consult with the Ruling Elder, Moderator of Session/PNC as they contemplate an agreement for commissioning.
 - g. Conversations and negotiations between a CRE and church about potential commissioned service should take place in the presence of the liaison or with the approval of the COM.
 - h. It shall be the responsibility of the CRE and/or the Clerk of Session to inform COM when a commission is within one (1) month of termination. COM will conduct a review prior to the end of the term of the commission and make any recommendation to Presbytery for renewal or termination of the commission.
3. His/her church of membership:
- a. The CRE may be a member of the church he/she is serving only with the approval of the COM.
 - b. If the CRE maintains membership in the church of service, he/she shall give up his/her right to vote as a member for as long as he/she is commissioned there.
4. Congregation being served:
- a. Will fulfill those responsibilities, which are jointly determined by the Session, COM and the CRE.
 - b. Will meet with the Session at least annually for a review.
 - c. May benefit from funding for seminary training if the church can provide for this. The church is strongly encouraged to do this and COM recommends that a fund be established for this purpose.
 - d. Neither the CRE nor his/her spouse will serve on session during the time of the commission.
 - e. The CRE shall support and encourage the congregation in filing all statistical reports according to the deadlines set by the presbytery and the PCUSA.
 - f. The CRE shall encourage the Clerk of Session to have the roll books and the minutes of session prepared and updated for the annual examination by presbytery.
 - g. The CRE is strongly encouraged to attend the presbytery's annual Leaderfest
5. Moderator of Session:
- a. Ordinarily the moderator of session will also serve as the CRE mentor/supervisor.
 - b. And the CRE shall work closely for the benefit of the church, through the leadership of Session. The two should establish regular meeting times for prayerful review of ministry responsibilities, with the goal of the CRE's growth in service.
 - c. For those who have previously moderated session, the COM will appoint a moderator to attend the first session meeting and to make a recommendation on when the CRE should moderate on his/her own.
6. Presbytery:
- a. COM will maintain a file of all available trained Ruling Elders with their PIF and Statement of Faith, available to eligible vacant churches.
 - b. Shall examine a potential CRE in regards their statement of faith.

- c. Shall have a service of commissioning with representation from the church where the CRE is to be commissioned. The Presbytery should send representatives to participate in a commissioning service at the church.
- d. Will offer pastoral care to the CRE through their mentoring pastor, Presbytery staff and the COM.
- e. Presbytery privileges: CREs shall have voice and vote at Presbytery meetings, during the time of their commission. CREs are strongly encouraged to join in the work of the Presbytery; attending meetings; participating on committees; encouraging the same for members of their commissioned church; and communicating the work and mission of the Presbytery to their commissioned church.

SAMPLE OF PROCESS

1. Applicant meets with CPM for an interview, providing approval of their Session and pastor to begin CRE training.
2. If approved, training begins. Ordinarily one Friday evening and Saturday each month.
3. When one half of the Presbytery's prescribed training is completed, CPM will do an assessment and make a recommendation on whether to continue the training in consultation with instructors. Included in this assessment and recommendation shall be the question of service as a pulpit supply preacher.
4. When training is successfully completed, CPM will receive final assessments from training instructors. Guidance will be offered in the completion of a Personal Information Form and a Statement of Faith.
5. If approved for possible commissioning, CPM will make a recommendation to COM for further consultation.
6. Students meet with COM for initial interview/assessment.
7. COM will work to arrange interviews between churches and CRE candidates for possible commissioned service.
8. Once an agreement between church and CRE is completed, COM will make a recommendation to the Presbytery for commissioning.
9. Presbytery will conduct an examination of the CRE's Statement of Faith.
10. With Presbytery approval, the CRE will be commissioned by the Presbytery.