

PRESBYTERY OF MILWAUKEE
Policies and Procedures
Commissioned Ruling Elder/Commissioned Pastor Program
Approved 2.24.24

The purpose of the Commissioned Pastor (CP) Program is to select, train, educate, prepare and equip elders of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to lead worship, preach the Gospel, watch over the people, provide for their nurture and service, and perform duties assigned to them in conjunction with designated local commissions on a temporary basis when no approved Minister of Word and Sacrament is available. The program is also to establish minimum requirements for certification/commissioning of CPs and to provide certification/commissioning. This commission shall specify the term of service, which shall not exceed three years but shall be renewable.

I. OVERVIEW OF THE POSITION OF Local Commissioned Pastor

G-2.1001 Functions of Commissioning Ruling Elders to Particular Service

When the presbytery, in consultation with the session or other responsible committee, determines that its strategy for mission requires it, the presbytery may authorize a ruling elder to be commissioned to limited pastoral service as assigned by the presbytery. A ruling elder so designated may be commissioned to serve in a validated ministry of the presbytery. Presbytery, in its commission, may authorize the ruling elder to moderate the session of the congregation to which he or she is commissioned, to administer the Sacraments, and to officiate at marriages where permitted by state law. This commission shall also specify the term of service, which shall not exceed three years but shall be renewable. The presbytery shall review the commission at least annually.

1. An elder of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) who has received the endorsement of the session of the church where they are a member, been selected by the Commission on Preparation for Ministry (CPM) and has successfully completed the required training program, been examined by the CPM and received endorsement to appear before Presbytery of Milwaukee for an affirmative vote with regard to the person's readiness to serve as a Commissioned Pastor within the presbytery, if invited by the Presbytery of Milwaukee and a particular church or churches shall be known as a Commissioned Pastor.
2. A Commissioned Pastor with a commission is one authorized by the presbytery to lead worship and preach the Gospel, watch over the people, and provide nurture and service to a particular congregation. A CP with a commission serves a local church at the invitation of a particular church with the approval of COM.
3. A local commission is an agreement between a particular session, a CP and the Presbytery of Milwaukee. It is similar to a "call," for Ministers of the Word and Sacrament, but does not carry any rights, responsibilities, or privileges outside of the particular church. The commission shall be valid for a period of up to three

years, as determined by Presbytery of Milwaukee. It may be renewed at expiration or terminated at any time at the discretion of the presbytery.

4. The Rights and Responsibilities of CPs are limited and determined by the Presbytery of Milwaukee at the time of commissioning. When the presbytery determines that its strategy for mission in a local church requires it, the presbytery, upon receiving a recommendation from the CTM and the session of a particular church, may authorize a CP who has received the instruction and training necessary to perform any or all of the functions listed below. The Rights and Responsibilities that may be extended to CPs are:
 - a) Administer the Lord's Supper.
 - b) Administer the Sacrament of Baptism.
 - c) Moderate the session of the congregation.
 - d) Have a voice in meetings of presbytery.
 - e) Have a vote in meetings of presbytery (such vote to be counted as a ruling elder commissioner for purposes of parity).
 - f) Perform a service of Christian marriage as governed by the Book of Order.
5. Supervision for CPs will be provided by the CTM. Supervision may include such responsibilities as ongoing training and evaluation and support while CPs await commissioning as well as during and between commissions.

II. REQUIREMENTS FOR CP APPLICANTS AND APPLICATION PROCESS

1. CP applicants are required to be ordained elders of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), to have been a member of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for two full years, and to have been active within the life of a particular congregation within the bounds of Presbytery of Milwaukee for a period of at least one full year prior to seeking entrance to a CP Training Program.
2. CP applicants must complete an application and receive endorsement from the session of the church where the applicant is a member and the CPM. The session is asked to support the CP applicant throughout the training process and service to the Church.
 - a) Endorsement by the session means that it has reviewed the CP applicant's application, examined the person with regard to their motives for seeking this ministry and been made fully aware that the person intends to apply to a CP Program.
 - b) The session, in its endorsement, agrees to be supportive of the applicant during the training period and agrees to support the applicant's ministry as a CP. No person may seek CP training without the endorsement of the church where they are a member. Support may include: praying regularly for the person, providing financial assistance for costs incurred in the CP Program (books, travel, etc.),

and meeting annually with the person for regular assessments.

3. When the CP applicant has completed the application, it is sent to the Associate for Ministry Vitality at the Presbytery of Milwaukee. Upon receipt of the application CPM will contact the session of the applicant to arrange for a visit to discuss the responsibilities of the session for endorsing the applicant.
4. After approving the application, CPM will arrange a meeting with the individual.
5. Following the meeting with CPM, the CP applicant will complete an assessment by Leaderwise. Before the process continues, the CP applicant must grant permission for the information gained in the assessment process to be shared with the CPM. Additionally, the applicant must complete the Safe Gatherings certification, which includes a background check.
6. The CPM will make a determination whether or not to accept the applicant into the CP Training Program. All applicants will be notified in writing whether or not they have been accepted into the CP Training Program.

III. THE TRAINING PROGRAM

G-2.1002 Training, Examination and Commissioning

A ruling elder who seeks to serve under the terms of G-2.1001 shall receive such preparation and instruction as determined by the presbytery to be appropriate to the particular commission. The ruling elder shall be examined by the presbytery as to personal faith, motives for seeking the commission, and the areas of instruction determined by presbytery. A ruling elder who has been commissioned and later ceases to serve in the specified ministry may continue to be listed as available to serve, but is not authorized to perform the functions specified in G-2.1001 until commissioned again to a congregation or ministry by the presbytery.

1. CPM is the acting agent of the presbytery of Milwaukee and requires the following for CP certification:

a) Becoming knowledgeable in the areas of:

- Old and New Testament Study
- Reformed Theology
- Worship and Sacraments
- Presbyterian Polity
- Preaching
- Pastoral Care
- Christian Education

b) Ordinarily completing a minimum of two full years of preparation, followed by an examination. All training programs shall be approved by the CPM. Training is available through several Presbyterian seminaries – online and/or in person. There are also presbytery- and synod-based opportunities such as “The Academy” (co-sponsored by the Synod of Lakes and Prairies).

2. It is the responsibility of each student to enroll in approved courses as required by the CPM. The presbytery office must receive validation of successful completion of required courses.

3. CP students shall be allowed to preach as pulpit supply in local churches when invited by the session. No prior approval needs to be given by the CTM or the presbytery.

4. CP students will be assigned a liaison by the CPM for the duration of their training.

5. Mid-term evaluations will be scheduled with the CPM when at least half of the required courses are completed. At this point, it will be determined whether the student continues in the program.

6. When all class work has been completed, the CPM will schedule a final evaluation. Final evaluation may include a faith statement and biographical information, a sermon manuscript, a worship bulletin designed around the sermon, pastoral care or polity scenarios, and questions in regards to pastoral ministry deemed appropriate by the CPM.

7. Upon CPM approval, the CPM will contact the Commission on Transitional Ministry and notify the CTM that the applicant is ready to receive a commission. Responsibility for all future oversight of the CP then transfers to the CTM.

IV. COMMISSIONING

G-2.1003 Commissioning Service: When the presbytery is satisfied with the qualifications of a ruling elder to serve a congregation providing the services described above, it shall commission the ruling elder to pastoral service as designated by the presbytery, employing the questions contained in W-4.04.

1. The CTM will be responsible for providing continuing education opportunities and support for CPs. The CTM will have the right and responsibility to make sure that CPs continue to receive support and will annually review the status of all CPs.

2. An annual written report shall be submitted to the CTM by the CP and included in the minutes of the presbytery. Forms will be provided by the CTM.

V. CPs WITH A COMMISSION

G-2.1004 The ruling elder commissioned under the terms of G-2.1001 shall work under the supervision of the presbytery. The presbytery may at any time withdraw the commission for reasons it seems good and sufficient. A minister of the Word and Sacrament shall be assigned as a mentor and supervisor.

1. The CTM shall determine whether the individual is eligible for a commission. Prior to the commissioning, the CTM must examine the CP in person and report to the presbytery its recommendation.
2. The CTM shall report its local commission recommendations to the Presbytery of Milwaukee. The following shall be included in the recommendation to the presbytery:
 - a) The terms of the contract negotiated by the CTM, the CP, and the session using the presbytery's contract guidelines, and may include any or all of the rights and responsibilities outlined in section I.4 of this policy.
 - b) The minimum salary for a CP will meet the presbyter's minimum terms of call for a Commissioned Pastor. Also required are auto/travel reimbursement at IRS allowable rate and continuing education and professional expenses as determined by the presbytery. Other agreed upon allowances may be negotiated, including health care and pension plan participation..
3. The presbytery shall examine the individual as to personal faith, motives for seeking the commission, and the areas of instruction determined by presbytery and upon approval ask the church or churches of the local commission to conduct a Service of Commissioning.
4. It shall be the responsibility of the CTM to oversee the work of the CP and provide the proper support during the CP's tenure in a local commission. The CTM shall assign a mentor to the CP, ordinarily this mentor is a Minister of the Word and Sacrament.
5. During the tenure of the local commission,
 - a) The CP shall ordinarily attend all session meetings.
 - b) The CP shall ordinarily attend all meetings of the presbytery, being seated as an elder with voice and vote.
 - c) The CP will remain a member of the church where their membership is held. While serving as a CP with a commission, they may not serve as an active elder of their local congregation.
6. Opportunities for continuing education will be provided, and CPs will have access to the same supports and opportunities as all those in pastoral ministry.

7. CPs will be held to the same standards and expectations of Ministers of the Word and Sacrament when it comes to Ethical Boundaries and Training and Mandatory Reporter Training.

8. Dissolution of a local commission will be based on an agreement reached by the CTM, the session and the CP.

VI. CPs WITHOUT A LOCAL COMMISSION

1. Those not assigned a local commission do not have the rights, responsibilities and privileges of a CP with a Commission. The presbytery must approve all commissions.
2. Have no formal responsibilities as a CP in their home church. They are free to be active elders in their church and represent their congregation at presbytery as a commissioner. They may be placed on the Presbytery's Pulpit Supply list or preach at congregations within the Presbytery when invited by the session or pastor.
3. Will be provided with opportunities for continuing education.
4. CPs are encouraged to maintain an on-going relationship with their assigned mentor to review work and continued study. While CPs are not serving in a congregation this does not excuse them from an annual evaluation conducted by the assigned mentor with the results reported to the CTM as necessary.
5. CPs who are in good standings with their home session and the presbytery may be considered by CTM for a new commission. CTM may conduct the examination and grant approval for commissioning on behalf of the Presbytery for all commissions following the initial commission and may consult with the CPM regarding the readiness of a CP to accept a new commission if significant time has elapsed between commissions.

VII. SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES: Elders receiving training in other contexts.

1. A person may submit a letter of request to be considered as a CP in the Presbytery of Milwaukee. The request must include verification of all classes taken, a letter of recommendation from the previous certifying body, and a personal interview with the CTM.
2. All requirements for CP acceptance and training will need to be met. (See section II of this policy).
3. If CTM approves, see section IV for procedures.

VII. Commissioned Ruling Elders

1. A Ruling Elder commissioned to serve more than one local church, or the presbytery at large in a validated ministry, with the approval of the Commission on Transitional Ministry (CTM), shall be known as a Commissioned Ruling Elder.
2. Prior to being commissioned as a Commissioned Ruling Elder, an elder must first have completed the process and training to become a Commissioned Pastor and served as a Commissioned Pastor for at least one year. The CTM may also designate further training as it deems necessary to ascertain a CPs readiness to serve as a Commissioned Ruling Elder.
3. Commissioned Ruling Elders will receive the same compensation as a Minister of the Word and Sacrament when fulfilling the services of pulpit supply or moderating a session or congregational meeting and may set their own fee for officiating at weddings or funerals. Any contract beyond these limited services must be approved by the CTM. All services provided must be at the request and approval of the session or local pastor.
4. Commissioned Ruling Elders will provide an annual report to the CTM delineating their services to the Presbytery. The CTM will conduct an annual review of the CTM and report to the Presbytery.
5. Commissioned Ruling Elders may be commissioned for up to 3 years which may be renewed by the CTM.
6. The CTM may withdraw the commissioning at any time.