

Ordination as a Minister of the Word and Sacrament for the Experienced Commissioned Pastor:

A Guide for the Commission on Ministry/Commission on the Preparation for Ministry

The Book of Order (G-2.0501) begins with the following: “Ministers of the Word and Sacrament (also called teaching elders and pastors) shall in all things be committed to teaching the faith in word and deed and equipping the saints for the work of ministry [Ephesians 4:12]. They serve in a variety of ministries, as authorized by the presbytery.” In the Presbytery of the Northwest Coast, we also strive to train those seeking commissioning as pastors to also be committed and trained to faithfully teach and equip those they are called to serve.

Some of those who have completed the preparation for ministry through the Commissioned Pastor (CP) program in this Presbytery discover that they too feel called to continue their academic training and seek ordination as Ministers of the Word and Sacrament (MWS). It is the purpose of this proposal to provide a method for supporting experienced and called CPs through the process of preparation for the role of MWS.

Since the 1500s, the Kirk has committed itself to provide congregations with an educated clergy. For most, it meant traditional academic preparation within the seminary system, requiring at least four years of undergraduate work followed by 3 years in a Master of Divinity program. This preparation provided a strong academic background however, it has become increasingly expensive and time consuming for many who may be called to serve but whose life circumstances have left them looking for a way to live out that call.

Additionally, smaller church attendance, increasing costs of goods and services, and ever-larger student loans, has resulted in a shortage of clergy prepared to serve small churches and ministries that can no longer afford full-time pastors. New expressions of the church have also arisen requiring agile leadership prepared to serve in both ministry and secular circles, bi-vocationally.

Many denominations, including the PC-USA, have recognized the need for an alternative means of meeting the goal of having educated clergy available to all congregations and ministries. The Book of Order provides for imaginative and creative means to meet that goal. Here in the Northwest Coast Presbytery, an innovative program has been developed to provide a way to accomplish this important task.

Many non-traditional prospective pastors begin their journey in the commissioned pastor training program. Candidates for commissioning meet with members of a team of at least three. These include a representative from the Commission on Ministry (COM), the candidate and their designated mentor Minister of the Word and Sacrament. It is hoped that in the future, the team will also include a member from CPM.

The team reviews the 10 competencies (These skills include competency in: Bible, Pastoral Care, Leadership, Worship, Teaching, Preaching, Reformed Theology and Sacraments, Presbyterian Polity, Missional Thinking, and Character and Call.) required for success as a pastor evaluating skills already mastered by the candidate as well as those in which the prospective CP has limited or no experience. Following the evaluation meeting, a development plan is created which guides further training to be acquired under the supervision of the MWS mentor.

This system has proven to be an effective method of assisting those without seminary level education to acquire the skills necessary to pastor a congregation, serve a parachurch ministry and develop new expressions of the church. Additionally, it has provided inspiration for some to go on to further their formal education and pursue a seminary degree.

The current preparation for ministry as described in the Book of Order consists of a covenant relationship with the presbytery (In the Presbytery of the Northwest Coast, that relationship is with the Commission on Preparation for Ministry [CPM].) the candidate's sessions as well as their congregations. Additionally, they are to be a member of the sponsoring congregation, active for at least 6 months, endorsed by the session and enrolled as an inquirer and candidate for at least two years, including at least one year as a candidate.

These requirements are useful for those beginning their ministry journey but may not be appropriate for one who has worked as a CP under the supervision and with the ongoing affirmation of the COM and a mentor MWS. With that acquired knowledge, a joint COM/CPM committee is in the best position to determine the CP's readiness for ordination.

A proposed procedure for evaluating readiness:

- 1) The CP who desires to be ordained as a MWS must complete a seminary degree. The Master of Divinity is the preferred degree however, the members of the joint committee may choose to accept another seminary degree such as the Master of Christian Education, Master of Theology, etc. from an accredited seminary. However, demonstrated competence in areas not addressed in the alternate degree programs are required, notably exegesis of scripture, a hallmark of the MDiv.
- 2) It is recommended that the CP have at least 5 years of experience as a CP under the supervision/mentorship of a MWS with oversight from the COM or designated representative of that commission.
- 3) The CP must be recommended by both their mentor pastor and the session of the congregation or board of the ministry of which they are a member. Interviews conducted by the committee, with at least two people who know the CP well, should be completed.
- 4) If appropriate, COM then recommends the CP candidate for ordination to a joint COM/CPM exam team to interview the candidate and then determine whether or not the candidate is appropriate for the standard CPM process or the alternative described below.
- 5) If the joint committee chooses to utilize an alternative means of evaluation to the standard ordination exams, the following is allowed by the Book of Order. The joint committee may either

proceed with an alternative exam utilizing questions derived from information obtained in the interviews/recommendations and/or drawn from questions in the standard ordination exams. Requiring one or more portions of the standard exam may also be appropriate.

6) Following the successful completion of the above, the joint committee would then recommend the CP for ordination as a Minister of the Word and Sacrament to the Presbytery as moved by a joint COM/CPM motion. Presbytery examination would follow with ordination following the successful completion of that final exam.