

**THE PRESBYTERY OF ELIZABETH  
POLICY FOR COMMISSIONED LAY PASTORS**

**POLICY AND STANDARDS FOR THE COMMISSIONED LAY PASTOR PROGRAM**

**INTRODUCTION**

The Presbytery of the Elizabeth is committed to providing the best possible leadership in the areas of worship, preaching and pastoral care to all churches within our bounds. This leadership is usually best provided when pulpits are filled with ministers of the Word and Sacrament. When this is not possible, one way of seeking to meet this need is through the Commissioned Lay Pastor Program.

**A. DEFINITION**

A Commissioned Lay Pastor is a full-time or part-time, salaried or volunteer ordained Elder, called by God and affirmed by his/her Session, and trained and commissioned by Presbytery to be the primary preacher/pastor for a particular parish or congregation, where it is difficult to place an ordained minister.

**B. OVERVIEW**

1. The purpose of the Commissioned Lay Pastor (CLP) Program is to prepare and commission lay members of the Presbytery of the Elizabeth for preaching and pastoral commissions at places of need within the Presbytery through the Committee on Ministry.
2. The criteria for CLP shall be in accordance with the *BOOK OF ORDER G-14.0560-G14.0565, G-11.0103, G-11.0502d and G-14.0550*.
3. The Committee on Preparation for Ministry (CPM) shall carry out the administration of the CLP program. The CPM will carry out the function of recruitment, training, encouragement and examination, and make recommendations for deployment to the Committee on Ministry. It shall act for the Presbytery according to the provisions of the *BOOK OF ORDER G-14.0801*.

**C. PROCESS**

1. CLPs are not ordained ministers. They are commissioned only to a particular parish. Therefore, they will follow a separate "track" from those seeking ordination. The track presented is Seeker, Learner, and Commissioned. Requirements and preparation are different from ordination, not requiring the same level of knowledge and training. A lay person's ability to preach, teach and lead worship is seen as much as gifts of the *Spirit* developed through experience and practice as formal training. Consequently competency more than credentials should be used as a basis for commissioning. This competency is to be understood in light of the place of local commissioning and not of the whole church. To further the development of these gifts for a particular field, the Presbytery will provide training as outlined in PHASE II, "Learner," of the Commission process.

2. Applicants shall proceed through the following phases:

#### **PHASE I. SEEKER.**

During this phase a person, believing that he/she has been called by God to be a CLP, seeks validation of the call by his or her Session and then by the Presbytery through the CPM. The CPM will examine a candidate regarding his/her personal faith, motives for seeking the commission, and evaluate their knowledge in the areas of Biblical studies, reformed theology, administration, Presbyterian polity, pastoral care, worship, leadership, sacraments and other skills required of the particular church they will serve (urban, rural, etc.). The CPM shall also secure a background check and a psychological evaluation by a qualified psychologist, approved by the CPM during this process. The Seeker then becomes a Learner, Phase II.

#### **PHASE II. LEARNER.**

The CPM shall appoint a Mentor for each Learner. During this phase the Learner through training in area seminaries or other approved training programs, and experience would acquire and demonstrate competency and skills in the above areas. Upon satisfactory demonstration of such competency through completion of academic training, approval of the Mentor and appropriate examination by the CPM, the Learner is certified as ready and is recognized as a certified Lay Pastor.

Utilizing the wealth of educational and training programs available near the Presbytery of Elizabeth the curriculum shall be designed by the CPM to accommodate each candidate's entry level, home location, available time, and uniqueness of ministry needs. Ordinarily it is expected that candidates will complete the equivalent of one year of seminary education, some of which, with approval of the CPM may be completed concurrently with work in a church to which they seek certification.

#### **PHASE III. COMMISSIONED LAY PASTOR**

Upon recommendation by the CPM to the Committee-on-Ministry, the certified Candidate may be commissioned to a specific field of ministry as a Commissioned Lay Pastor.

#### **D. COSTS**

In partnership with the sponsoring church and a candidate's own resources, the Presbytery of Elizabeth will assist as needed to cover educational expense

#### **E. COMMISSIONING**

1. A Commissioned Lay Pastor shall be an elder who has served at least three years on a session.
2. A candidate will not ordinarily be commissioned to a church in which he/she holds membership.

3. Commissioning shall not be done until a Sexual Misconduct Statement is filed with the Presbytery through the CPM.
4. In accordance with *G-14.0562*, the Presbytery may authorize a CLP to perform certain functions, where legal, after satisfying itself that suitable training has been acquired (i.e. performing marriages shall require certification in a pre-marital counseling program and state licensure). Upon consultation and permission of the Committee on Ministry, a certified Lay Pastor may be nominated to serve a particular church(es), at which time the session(s) shall examine the candidate for the position and concur or not with the nomination. If they concur, they shall prepare a written agreement between the CLP, the Session of the church(es) served and the COM. The agreement shall establish compensation, hours and responsibilities. Upon such concurrence, the COM shall review the candidate's qualifications, the proposed agreement of the Session, and if in agreement, approve the candidate for commissioning to the specific ministry. After approval of the COM the Committee shall appoint a clergy Mentor who shall serve in a supervisory relationship with the CLP throughout the commission..
5. The Candidate shall be commissioned at a regularly called meeting of the Presbytery. (*G-14.0560*) A Service of recognition will be held at the church without undue delay. It is also recommended that the home church of the CLP suitably recognize the commissioning at a time when its congregation is gathered for worship. Upon Commissioning the CLP will be placed under the supervision of the COM.
6. The commission may be from one to three years and may be renewed at expiration or terminated for cause at any time by either the Session, the CLP, or by the COM acting on behalf of Presbytery.
  - a. If the Session(s) of the church(es) desires to renew the commission, it shall make a request to the Committee on Ministry three to six months prior to expiration. In a meeting with the Session, its moderator and the CLP a representative of the COM will review the commission and make a recommendation to the Committee on Ministry for action
  - b. If a CLP resigns or is unable to continue service for any reason, a representative of the COM will meet with the session to determine how the vacancy will be filled. A congregation may not secure an interim pastor or a CLP without the concurrence of the Presbytery.
7. All certified Lay Pastors who wish to remain certified shall continue under care of the COM and will be encouraged to participate in a Lay Pastor's Covenant Group (Support Group).

The principles stated below serve as the background by which the Presbytery will initially-assess Seekers and then as Learners, and Commissioned Lay Pastors serving in the Presbytery of Elizabeth.

## **1. ASSESSMENT OF THE PERSON'S "CALL" TO SERVE AS A CLP CALLED BY THE CHURCH**

When women and men are called by God and the church to undertake particular forms of ministry, the church shall help them to interpret their call and to be sensitive to judgment and needs of others. As persons discover the forms of ministry to which they are called, and as they are called to

new forms, they and the church shall pray for the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit upon them and the mission of the church. (G-6.0105)

## **2. GIFTS, ABILITIES, FAITH AND DEMONSTRATED DISCIPLESHIP**

To those called to exercise special functions in the church, God gives suitable gifts for their various duties. In addition to possessing the necessary gifts and abilities, natural and acquired, those who undertake particular ministries should be persons of strong faith, dedicated discipleship, and love of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Their manner of life should be a demonstration of the Christian Gospel in the church and in the world. They must have the approval of God's people and the concurring judgment of a governing body of the church, (G-6.0106)

Persons aspiring to special service as a CLP should demonstrate characteristics that set them apart for selection by the church for such service. Applicants should be persons of faith dedication, and good judgment. They should be persons of spiritual character, honest repute, exemplary lives, brotherly and sisterly love, and warm sympathies. (G- 6.0303, G-6.0401)

A Seeker for commissioning as a CLP should understand that it is important that such persons receive full preparation for their tasks. Seekers should also be willing to promise in reliance upon the grace of God to maintain a Christian character and conduct, and to be diligent and faithful in making full preparation for their special ministry. (G-14.0400)

## **3. APPROVAL OF GOD'S PEOPLE**

The approval of God's people is in no way to be seen as denial of the person's sense of individual "calling" but the exercise of prudent judgment by the body to be served as to appropriateness of that "call" to the needs and circumstances of that body. Indeed, it is the church itself that often initiates the "call" encouraging those it feels capable of such service to give-prayerful consideration to new vocations in the ministries of the church. Conversely, the church may feel constrained to discourage someone from pursuing what it believes to be a misinterpreted or inappropriate sense of personal calling.

## **4. ESSENTIALS OF REFORMED FAITH**

It is necessary to the integrity and health of the church that the persons who serve in it as officers shall adhere to the essentials of the reformed faith and polity as expressed in the Book of Confessions and the Form of Government. So far as may be possible without serious departure from these standards, without infringing on the rights and views of others, and without obstructing the constitutional governance of the church, freedom of conscience with respect to the interpretation of Scripture is to be maintained. (G-6.0108)

---

Reviewed by Committee on Ministry 06-01-06

Reviewed and Recommended for Approval by Committee on Preparation for Ministry 06-06-06

First Reading June 27, 2006

**SECOND READING** September 26, 2006