

1                   **Examinations Task Force Report to March 2007 Presbytery Meeting**

2                                           *For first reading*

3                   **Background**

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5                   On October 3, 2006, the Presbytery Council adopted the following action:

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7                   The Council **VOTED** to constitute a task force of nine members to develop a procedure for how CPM and COM are to examine candidates for final assessment or ordination, and ministers seeking membership in the presbytery. The task force shall be composed of two members of CPM appointed by the CPM chair, two members of COM appointed by the COM chair, and five at-large members appointed by the Moderator of Presbytery, one of whom shall be designated as convener. The membership of the task force shall be representative of the presbytery's diversity (age, gender, racial-ethnicity, theology, geography). The task force shall present these guidelines to the presbytery for approval for a first reading at the March 2007 meeting, with a second reading at the May meeting. In addition the Council recommends that the task force use a variety of resources including but not limited to Scripture, the *Book of Confessions*, the *Book of Order*, and the report of the task force on Peace, Unity, and Purity.

8                   The following were appointed to serve on the Task Force:

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10                   Rev. Susan Joseph (convener), Rev. Sam Massengill (CPM), Rev. Neal D. Presa (CPM),  
11                   Rev. Karen Chamis (COM), Elder Warren Braunwarth (COM), Rev. John Luyben (at-large),  
12                   Rev. Brad Crump (at-large), Rev. John Howard (at-large), Elder Claudia Heffner (at-large)

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14                   As the work of the Task Force progressed, Elder Heffner and Rev. Howard found that they  
15                   were unable to serve the following elder were appointed in their place:

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17                   Elder Kay Hurd (at-large) and Elder Helen Mosley (at-large)

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19                   **Findings and General Observations**

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21                   As the Task Force's instructions as mandated by the Presbytery Council in its October 3, 2006 action  
22                   that constituted our work confined the Task Force's work to the process and guidelines of CPM and  
23                   COM vis-à-vis the Presbytery, the Task Force could not deal directly with the culture and ethos of  
24                   the whole Presbytery. The Task Force notes the following for further consideration:

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26                   1. While there are processes and guidelines, there is an absence of an undergirding and overarching  
27                   “theology of ordination and vocation.” What do we mean by “called to ministry”? Even the Peace,  
28                   Unity, and Purity report underlines this point:

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30                   . . .Scripture does not provide a thoroughly developed theology of ordination, and a theology of  
31                   ordination has not been clearly and consistently articulated in the development of Reformed and  
32                   Presbyterian doctrine. (lines 565-567, Final Report, pp.19-20)<sup>1</sup>

33  
34                   Even in the absence of such a “theology of ordination and vocation,” we must bear responsibility as  
35                   a community of presbyters to determine whether a departure constitutes a bar to  
36                   ordination/installation. This requires study of Presbyterian polity, Scripture, our Historic  
37                   Confessions and Reformed Theology as well as seeking and discerning the guidance of the Holy  
38                   Spirit. Any guidelines or procedure used must be applied prayerfully with integrity, humility and  
39                   compassion, and on a case-by-case basis as required by the Book of Order.

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<sup>1</sup> see Martha Moore-Keish and Neal D. Presa, “Finding a Theology of Ordination and Vocation in Baptism” *The Presbyterian Outlook*, Issue 188-21 (June 2006)

40 2. Recommendation # 5 in this report takes a step towards improving community in the Presbytery.  
41 The Presbytery must do more in facilitating and encouraging presbyters and churches to become  
42 genuine ministry colleagues who can agree to disagree over theology and be united for mission.  
43 Education is only one way for the Presbytery to engage in regular theological discourse that  
44 promotes growth in our faith, propels us to mission, and deepens our love for God and one another?  
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### 46 **Work of the Task Force**

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48 The Task Force met seven times from November 2006 through March 2007. The Task Force  
49 developed and agreed upon a covenant:  
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## 51 **Examination Task Force Covenant**

52 January 8, 2007  
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54 We, the members of the Examination Task force of the Presbytery of Elizabeth, covenant  
55 together that we will:

- 56 • Worship and engage in Bible Study together whenever we meet
- 57 • Inform all our work with theological reflection
- 58 • Be open to tabling topics of discussion to allow time for thorough discernment
- 59 • Listen to each other deeply, without interruption
- 60 • Create a safe environment where everyone can speak openly
  - 61 ○ With the assurance of confidentiality
  - 62 ○ In the spirit of forbearance and forgiveness
- 63 • Speak the truth in love to each other
- 64 • Treat each other respectfully with cordiality and civility
- 65 • Offer our full participation
  - 66 ○ In shared discernment
  - 67 ○ In attendance at meetings
- 68 • Honor the value of each others time
- 69 • Act with integrity
- 70 • Eschew factionalism
  - 71 ○ REPLY ALL on emails
  - 72 ○ Share ideas, information and resources with the entire Task Force
- 73 • Report only outcomes of our deliberations to interested committees of the Presbytery
- 74 • Do our work by consensus, to the best of our ability, with the goal of presenting a  
75 unanimously endorsed recommendation
- 76 • The intent of this covenant is not to establish law, but to serve as a guide and direction  
77 for our work together.

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79 Signed as brother and sisters in Christ,  
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89 The Task Force voted not to seek information from “Affinity Groups” but to rely upon official  
90 denominational resources from the Office of the General Assembly or other governing bodies  
91 the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

92  
93 The Task Force offers the following recommendations, rationale, and findings to the  
94 Presbytery for prayer, discussion, reflection and discernment:

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96 **Recommendations**

- 97  
98 1. That the CPM and COM no longer act as commissions in approving final assessments  
99 or receiving members into presbytery.

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101 *Rationale: Trust is at a low level in the presbytery due in large part to the fact that*  
102 *presbyters do not have sustained, thoughtful dialogue over issues concerning the Church,*  
103 *theology, and mission. The only opportunity in a formal sense is through examination of*  
104 *candidates and ministers on the floor. Presently, however, the final assessment of*  
105 *candidates for ordination is done by CPM and the examination of candidates and ministers*  
106 *seeking membership into presbytery ad interim presbytery meetings is done by COM.*  
107 *Actions taken by CPM/COM acting as commissions are reported to the Presbytery as*  
108 *action items for information only.*

109 *Allowing presbytery to participate in the approval of a candidate’s final assessment by*  
110 *vote and to examine all candidates/ministers seeking membership in our presbytery would*  
111 *enable the whole presbytery to deepen their trust in and knowledge of each other as*  
112 *brothers and sisters in Christ. Dialogue with candidates approaching final assessment*  
113 *(see recommendation 6b) and examination of all candidates/ministers seeking membership*  
114 *in our presbytery will allow us to become more acquainted with candidates/ministers and*  
115 *vice versa, and widen the number of conversation partners in decision-making.*

116 *Both CPM and COM would still conduct their examinations as is the current practice,*  
117 *and recommend the candidates/ministers to the presbytery. The presbytery would then vote*  
118 *to approve (or not) the final assessment or ordination/membership of candidate/ministers*  
119 *seeking entrance into the presbytery.*

- 120  
121 2. That CPM and COM ask inquirers/candidates and ministers early in their process to  
122 identify and declare any departures they might have which would require special  
123 discernment by these committees.

124  
125 *Rationale: Part of building trust and community is a culture and ethos of transparency.*  
126 *Rather than placing the CPM, COM, candidates and ministers in a position of having to*  
127 *consider a declared or discovered departure at the last stages of the candidacy/call*  
128 *process, it would behoove all parties concerned to discern and discuss early on in the*  
129 *process any potential departures. This would allow adequate time for thorough*  
130 *discussion, prayer, and discernment of each individual case.*

- 131  
132 3. That CPM and COM notify candidates and ministers that extra time for discernment  
133 regarding disagreements over departures or other weighty issues may be required and to  
134 allow for this possibility as they anticipate final assessment and/or reception into the  
135 presbytery.

136  
137 *Rationale: Connected to the rationale above for Recommendation # 2, transparency about*  
138 *the possible implications of actions made related to departures breeds trust for all parties*

139 *involved. CPM and COM are to notify candidates and ministers that a necessary outcome*  
140 *of a declared or discovered departure would require extra time for mutual discernment and*  
141 *discussion. The time needed for such discernment and discussion is not specified, but left*  
142 *to the discretion of the Committees, in conversation with the candidate/minister.*  
143

- 144 4. That the following be the beginning point for a process of declaring a departure:
- 145 a. The candidate declares a departure from or inability to uphold a doctrine or practice
  - 146 of the PCUSA, as related within her Constitution.
  - 147 b. The candidate by declaring a departure holds the burden to defend why it should not
  - 148 be a hindrance for the presbytery to ordain, install, or allow to be admitted into
  - 149 membership.
  - 150 c. The candidate shall present in writing to the CPM or COM and presbytery their
  - 151 departure and an argument rooted in Scripture and the Confessions of the PCUSA
  - 152 for why their departure should be allowed.
  - 153 d. The candidate shall be guided by the PC(USA) polity on the interpretation of
  - 154 Scripture and its use.
  - 155 e. If the presbytery finds that the departure should not bar the candidate or minister
  - 156 from office or membership, they may move forward to ordain, install and admit the
  - 157 candidate or minister in full knowledge that the action may be overturned by the
  - 158 next judicatory level.
  - 159 f. The examining body shall only permit the departure by a 3/4 vote.
  - 160 g. Even if a departure is declared and allowed, the judicatory and the departing
  - 161 candidate or minister still stand in the light of possible disciplinary and/or remedial
  - 162 charges brought forth by a member in good standing of the Presbyterian
  - 163 community, as outlined in the Rules of Discipline.
  - 164 h. If a departure is declared and allowed, the permitting judicatory shall record in its
  - 165 minutes the examination, the candidate or minister's argument, the judicatory's
  - 166 findings and action. The next higher governing body through the Stated Clerk must
  - 167 also be notified of the irregularity and provide an extract of the minutes which
  - 168 recorded the examination and decision of the body.

169  
170 *Rationale: Recommendation 4 outlines the general process that is to be followed if and*  
171 *when a departure is declared or discovered. Since the departure is potentially at variance*  
172 *with the theology and polity of the Reformed tradition, the burden of defending the*  
173 *departure rests with the candidate/minister. Part of maintaining an open, trustworthy*  
174 *process is having all statements and decisions in writing. In order for the presbytery to*  
175 *allow the departure, and proceed with authorizing the candidate to seek a call or be*  
176 *received as a minister, the presbytery would have to suspend its own rules; thus a ¾*  
177 *supermajority is needed. Recommendation 4 also notes that even though the presbytery*  
178 *may make a decision for/against a candidate/minister, the Rules of Discipline of The Book*  
179 *of Order reserves the right for any presbyter in good standing or any governing body to*  
180 *bring remedial or disciplinary charges against the candidate/minister and/or the*  
181 *presbytery.*  
182

- 183 5. That CPM, COM and the Presbytery engage in an educational process to understand  
184 matters of preparation and examination under the rigors recommended by the 217<sup>th</sup>  
185 General Assembly's adoption of the Final Report for the Peace, Unity, and Purity of the  
186 Church. That this educational process be undertaken by the Worship and Theology  
187 Team (WATT) of the Presbytery.  
188

189 *Rationale: Members of CPM, COM and the presbytery at large would benefit greatly from*  
190 *education and dialogue on matters of Reformed theology and Presbyterian polity in light of*  
191 *the heightened rigor of ordination examination recommended by the PUP report.*

192 *Recommendation 5 calls for the WATT (Worship and Theology Team), a unit already*  
193 *approved by the Presbytery Council, to find creative ways to develop an educational*  
194 *process for all presbyters so as to enable ministers and elders alike, particularly those who*  
195 *serve in CPM and COM, to be able to think theologically and pastorally, and thereby,*  
196 *enable the rigorous, respectful, fair and non-adversarial examination process envisioned*  
197 *by the Peace, Unity, and Purity report.*

198 *As a presbytery we lack sustained opportunities for deep and broad personal and*  
199 *theological engagement with one another. This has resulted, one the on hand, in few elders*  
200 *feeling equipped to ask questions of candidates/ministers during examination. (In the*  
201 *words of one elder, “We just don’t know what to ask.”) On the other hand, when*  
202 *theologically weighty questions are asked with the intent to engage the candidate/minister*  
203 *in thoughtful discourse, the questioner and question are often perceived to be adversarial.*  
204 *Such a misplaced perception comes from the impersonal ethos of our presbytery, in which*  
205 *we too often make assumptions about each other and too infrequently work and relate with*  
206 *one another as colleagues and friends in Christ’s service. Vision 2014 of the Presbytery*  
207 *envisions that in seven years, we will be a “community of churches. . . experiencing,*  
208 *enjoying, and sharing the love of Christ” (emphasis added). Recommendation 5 is one*  
209 *step toward realizing that vision.*

- 210
- 211 6. That the following guidelines (see next page) be adopted for the candidate’s or
- 212 minister’s statement of faith which will be discussed on the floor of presbytery
- 213 a. all candidates and ministers seeking membership in the presbytery will be
- 214 examined by the presbytery on their statement of faith and praxis.
- 215 b. at some time during their candidacy and before their final assessment the
- 216 presbytery will have opportunity to converse with candidates under Elizabeth
- 217 Presbytery's care re: their statement of faith. This would not be an official
- 218 examination nor the candidate's status be subject to a vote of presbytery. This
- 219 would be an opportunity for the presbytery to get to know our candidates and
- 220 participate in the candidates preparation for ordination.

221

221 **Guidelines for Statement of Faith & Praxis**

222 For All Candidates for Ordination to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament  
223 And Ministers Seeking Membership in the Presbytery of Elizabeth

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225 The Presbytery of Elizabeth is a community of presbyters – ministers of the Word and  
226 Sacrament and elder commissioners – serving congregations and specialized ministries  
227 located in three counties in central Jersey, and representative of the broad cultural, social,  
228 racial-ethnic, linguistic, political, and theological diversity of this context. As one of 173  
229 presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Presbytery of Elizabeth seeks adequate  
230 preparation for all candidates for ordination to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament in the  
231 Reformed tradition. This means that as candidates for ordination enter the Final Assessment  
232 phase with the Committee on Preparation for Ministry, the Presbytery expects candidates to  
233 be able to articulate the **contents** of the Christian faith in the Reformed tradition as the faith  
234 shapes, informs, and influences one’s **context** of practical ministry in a diverse and pluralistic  
235 world. It is to be noted that persons are ordained by the Church to the ministry of the whole  
236 Church of Jesus Christ in the world and not to any one particular congregation, governing  
237 body, or specialized ministry.

238  
239 Likewise, in the spirit of the communal and collegial nature of the ordained ministry, this  
240 Presbytery seeks a minister membership of clergy colleagues who can cogently articulate the  
241 **contents** and **context** of the Christian faith in the Reformed tradition.

242  
243 **Preparing to Write Your Statement of Faith and Praxis**

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245 Please submit to the Committee on Preparation for Ministry or the Committee on Ministry a  
246 “Statement of Faith and Praxis” of no more than two (2) pages, in which you prayerfully  
247 articulate the basic contents of the Christian faith in the Reformed tradition, and the practical  
248 implications of Christian doctrine to the Church’s mission and life in the world and the practical  
249 implications Christian doctrine has on your role and function as minister of the Word and  
250 Sacrament.

251  
252 Each doctrinal area covered may be properly annotated with attached endnotes (which will not  
253 count towards the 2-page limit) indicating written sources.

254  
255 **The Statement of Faith and Praxis**

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257 It is expected that the “Statement of Faith and Praxis” will include, at minimum, the following  
258 traditional loci of Christian doctrine in the Reformed tradition:

<u>Doctrine of:</u>	<u>Theological Term</u>	<u>Doctrine of:</u>	<u>Theological Term</u>
260 God/Trinity	261 Theology Proper	262 Sin	263 Hamartology
264 Christ	265 Christology	266 Salvation/Grace	267 Soteriology
268 Holy Spirit	269 Pneumatology	270 Church	271 Ecclesiology
272 Scripture	273 -----	274 Sacraments	275 Sacramentology
276 Creation	277 Cosmology	278 Last Things	279 Eschatology
280 Humanity	281 Anthropology	282 Christian Life	283 Discipleship

274 *Rationale: Recommendation 6 prescribes an open process for the development of a*  
275 *candidate’s “Statement of Faith and Praxis.” It would allow the presbytery to provide*  
276 *input and feedback to a candidate as they prepare for final assessment.*

277 *Recommendation 6 adds the “praxis” component to the Statement of Faith for all*  
278 *candidates and ministers. The Task Force noted that, at minimum, candidates in their*  
279 *final assessment and ministers should be able to cogently articulate the Christian faith in*  
280 *the Reformed tradition, while delineating the practical implications of how the various*  
281 *understandings of basic doctrine are exhibited in their mission and ministry, in the*  
282 *Church’s mission and ministry, and in the world.*

283 *The Task Force noted that the quality of the Statements of Faith that come before the*  
284 *Presbytery vary greatly in content and quality. The attached guidelines would assist*  
285 *candidates/ministers, the COM and CPM, and elders at large to recognize and evaluate*  
286 *statements of faith and praxis. Statements that speak to the above broad themes of the*  
287 *Christian faith in the Reformed tradition, and the real implications of those theological*  
288 *themes to faith and life in the world are invaluable for discerning together a candidate’s*  
289 *readiness for ordained ministry to Word and Sacrament, and a minister’s reception into*  
290 *membership in this presbytery.*

- 291  
292 7. That the business of the CPM and COM be prioritized at presbytery by moving their  
293 time slots closer to the beginning of the presbytery docket.

294  
295 *Rationale: The important responsibilities of preparing, examining and receiving ministers*  
296 *in our presbytery should be addressed when the presbyters are fresh and attendance is high*  
297 *and adequate time can be spent on examinations. Moving the business of CPM and COM*  
298 *out of the latter part of the presbytery meeting is an attempt to foster quality participation*  
299 *in preparing and receiving ministers in our presbytery.*

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319 Comments and questions may also be emailed to Reverend Susan Joseph at  
320 [revsjoseph@optonline.net](mailto:revsjoseph@optonline.net) and will be forwarded to all members of the Task Force  
321 in accordance with their Covenant (see page 2 of Task Force Report).  
322