

THE PRESBYTERY OF THE NORTHERN PLAINS
CONTINUING PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY (CPM)
TASK GROUP

HANDBOOK
for
INQUIRERS, CANDIDATES, AND PROSPECTIVE
COMMISSIONED LAY PASTORS

Presbytery of the Northern Plains
5555 South Washington St
Grand Forks, ND 58201

Telephone 701-772-0783

Website: www.northernplainspresbytery.com



www.pcusa.org

All Christians are called to ministry in the Church of Jesus Christ. This *vocation* stands at the center of our faith and practice no matter what our particular occupation. Each among us has different gifts, talents, and abilities, and therefore each Christian's call is different and particular. The responsibility of the church, then, is to assist all in discerning how they are called by God to service.

Along this journey, some in the church find themselves particularly called to ordained ministry as deacons, elders, and Ministers of the Word and Sacrament. These offices of the church do not indicate status or privilege but mark that some have been set apart for particular service through the voice of the church. The call to ordained ministry begins with an inner urgency, but the church then experiences that call publicly as it affirms that individual's gifts for ministry and confirms God's call through the acts of ordination and installation.

In the Presbytery of the Northern Plains, the Continuing Preparation for Ministry (CPM) Task Group is responsible for the church's work of discernment with those who are called to be Minister of the Word and Sacrament. The work of this Task Group is set out in section G-2.06 of the *Book of Order*.

The care process is a covenant relationship including God, the inquirer/candidate, the Session, and the presbytery's Continuing Preparation for Ministry (CPM) Task Group. The CPM of the Presbytery of the Northern Plains has a number of particular guidelines and processes that are described in this handbook. In addition to these particular guidelines, we have the following expectations of all involved in the process:

- Candidates and inquirers are to make their process a top priority. CPM expects an inquirer and candidate to complete his/her process within five years. While this may not be possible in a very few extenuating circumstances (and CPM will consider those), the Task Group ordinarily expects a five-year process in which there is cohesion, direction, and momentum, with one thing building on another. Should it appear to CPM that any circumstance – whether it is personal, financial, or other – comes between the inquirer/candidate and completion of the process in five years, the Task will discuss the situation with the inquirer/candidate to help the him/her discern what the issues are and to decide how and in what way to move forward.
- CPM, as a keeper of a care process, is a supervisory entity, not merely a consultative one. Decisions about process, goals, achievements, and requirements are made in covenant consultation with inquirer/candidate. CPM needs to be aware and approve of any and all elements in the process. Inquirers and candidates should take initiative in maintaining regular and open communication with the Task Group regarding experiences, progress in preparation for ministry, and other issues pertaining to educational, spiritual, and personal development.
- Candidates and inquirers are to respond promptly and responsibly to all communications, correspondence, and requests for reports and information by the Task Group, including pre-interview annual consultation reports, together with transcripts, signed field education/internship evaluations, and copies of ordination exams and exegesis papers.
- Please refer to the Book of Order W-1.2006 (1) for guidance in the use of inclusive and diverse language: **“Inclusive Language** Since the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is a family of peoples united in Jesus Christ, appropriate language for its worship should display the rich variety of these peoples. To the extent that forms, actions, languages, or settings of worship exclude the expression of diverse cultures represented in the church or deny emerging needs and identities of believers, that worship is not faithful to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. **Diverse Language** The church shall strive in its worship to use language about God which is intentionally as diverse and varied as the Bible and theological traditions. The church is committed to using language in such a way that all members of the community of faith may recognize themselves to be included, addressed, and equally cherished before God. Seeking to bear witness to the whole world, the church struggles to use language which is faithful to biblical truth and which neither purposely nor inadvertently excludes people because of gender, color, or other circumstance in life” (1).

We are grateful to God that you are in this process of discerning your Christian vocation, and we pray God's guidance for all of us as we seek to be faithful together.

In Christ's service, The Continuing Preparation for Ministry Task Group of the Presbytery of The Northern Plains

Table of Contents

Section 1. Introduction	4
Section 2. Understanding the Care Process.....	4
Section 3. Organization of the Continuing Preparation for Ministry Task.....	5
Section 4. Becoming an Inquirer.....	5
Section 5. Psychological Assessment	7
Section 6: Field Education: Parish & Clinical.....	8
Section 7. Annual Consultations	8
Section 8. Becoming a Candidate	8
Section 9. Constitutional Questions	10
Section 10. Ordination Exams.....	10
Section 11. The Personal Information Form	11
Section 12. The Final Assessment.....	12
Section 13. Commissioned Lay Pastor (Formerly Commissioned Ruling Elders).....	13
Appendix A: Definitions of Acronyms	16
Appendix B: CLP 1a - Application	17
Appendix C: CLP 1b - References	18
Appendix D: CLP 2 – Session Evaluation and Recommendation	19
Appendix E: CLP 3 – Annual Review.....	20
Appendix F: Mentor Evaluation and Recommendation	21

Section 1. Introduction

The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) specifies, in G-2.06, a process for preparation for becoming a Minister of the Word and Sacrament (also called a Teaching Elder) in the Presbyterian Church (USA). Each person considering the possibility of entering the ministry and every Session sponsoring and supporting such a person should be familiar with this part of the *Book of Order*.

The Presbytery of the Northern Plains has established the Continuing Preparation for Ministry (CPM) Task Group to coordinate its work with those wishing to become Ministers of the Word and Sacrament. CPM works as an agent of all persons in the preparation process: the individual inquirer or candidate, the sponsoring Session, and the Presbytery. CPM has considerable latitude in determining the requirements and process for inquirers and candidates that will enable them to complete the requirements of the *Book of Order*. Nevertheless, there are specific points at which the Task Group cannot proceed without bringing a recommendation that must be voted by the Presbytery.

By developing this Handbook, the CPM of the Presbytery of the Northern Plains expresses its intent to:

- Explain the process;
- Be as clear and open as possible about the obligations of all parties involved; and
- Help persons in the care process understand what is, and will be, expected of them.

Section 2. Understanding the Care Process

In its present form and in its antecedents, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has a strong commitment to an educated and qualified ministry. Particular requirements have been established to ensure that members of all congregations are provided quality instruction in the Christian faith, for leadership of worship of God, appropriate nurture toward spiritual growth, and competent leadership in the administrative and programmatic affairs of the church.

It is important to keep in mind that the entire process of preparation for becoming a Minister of the Word and Sacrament, as it involves individuals, Sessions, and CPM, is a “care” process. The responsibility for personal, pastoral care and support of the inquirer or candidate remains that of the church of membership. However, the counsel, guidance, and liaison relationships of the process are designed and intended to be empathetic and supportive even though CPM may impose certain requirements that a person may not be eager to undertake.

Meeting the standards required by the church for its leadership is no easy task. The preparation for ministry process is better seen as an arduous undertaking than as an easy process with minimal requirements. The work of the CPM should be seen as a discernment process. It is only at this point in the constitutional process of the Presbyterian Church that responsibility is given for the credentialing of persons who will be Minister of the Word and Sacrament in the church.

Above all, the care process is a **covenant relationship**. In this relationship, we acknowledge that the primary commitment of the Christian community is to God as everyone involved affirms our mutual responsibility for the ministry of the church. This covenant relationship is formally made with God, the inquirer/candidate, and the CPM, but the Session and theological institution also participate in this relationship. Through this relationship, the Task and the inquirer/candidate set goals for development, evaluate progress toward preparation for ministry, and together discern the call of God to the ministry of the Minister of the Word and Sacrament.

While there are a substantial number of specific requirements that must be completed during the care process, the Presbytery through the CPM also has wide latitude in determining a person’s readiness for ordered ministry as a Minister of the Word and Sacrament. At the conclusion of this process, the Task Group must have evidence of a candidate’s wisdom and maturity of faith, leadership skills, compassionate spirit, honest repute, and sound judgment (G-2.0607) before certification (Section 11).

Section 3. Organization of the Continuing Preparation for Ministry Task

There are two key elements in the way CPM is organized that are helpful to understand how the Task understands and fulfills its responsibilities.

Continuing Preparation for Ministry Task Leader

The Task Leader schedules, prepares the agenda for, and moderates all meetings of the task. The Task Leader is also responsible for all official correspondence between the Task Group and persons under its care or the Sessions of churches in which such persons are members.

CPM Liaison

Every inquirer and candidate who is under the care of the Task Group is assigned a CPM Liaison. The CPM Liaison is the primary contact for the person under care and will provide counsel and advice to the inquirer or candidate. There is an expectation that the Liaison contact their inquirer or candidate at least once a year. It is also important that the Liaison communicate what forms will be needed to be completed for their next consultation.

Section 4. Becoming an Inquirer

According to the *Book of Order*, “the purpose of the inquiry phase is to provide an opportunity for the church and for those who believe themselves called to ordered ministry as Minister of the Word and Sacrament to explore that call together so that the presbytery can make an informed decision regarding the inquirer’s suitability for ordered ministry” (G-2.0603).

When to Become an Inquirer

A potential inquirer must be a member of the sponsoring congregation and active in its work and worship for at least six months (G-2.0602).

There are no rigid rules for when in the educational process an individual should become an inquirer, although the ideal time is at the beginning of seminary. Potential inquirers should remember that the inquiry period is just that – a time for inquiry and exploration. Initiating the process does not imply the intent or the need to see the process through until ordination or a promise from CPM or Presbytery that ordination will be the end result.

An inquirer may withdraw from the process at any time after consultation with his/her Session and the CPM. Intention to withdraw must be communicated in writing.

Length of the Inquiry Period

The formal period of preparation for ministry (the inquiry and candidacy phases) should be no less than two years, at least one full year of which shall be as a candidate (G-2.0602). While there is no minimum or maximum duration established by the *Book of Order* for the inquiry period, the Northern Plains Presbytery CPM requires that it last at least one year. In certain extenuating circumstances, exceptions to the length of the Inquiry period may be made by a three-fourths vote of those present. The phase of inquiry shall be of sufficient length for the inquirer, the Session, and the CPM to decide whether the inquirer should apply to become a candidate. During this time, the CPM will make use of resources such as information provided by the inquirer, personal references, and reports from counseling services, the Session, and the inquirer’s institution of learning, if the inquirer is a student.

Some of the factors affecting the length of the inquiry period are:

- The individual’s level of maturity;
- The educational status of the individual; and
- The time needed for the individual to complete any of the requirements that CPM may have defined for the inquiry period.

Major Steps in Becoming an Inquirer

A person interested in becoming an inquirer should:

- Discuss interest in becoming an inquirer with his/her pastor. The pastor (or Moderator of Session) should then contact the CPM Leader to schedule a Session Orientation to explain the process and Session’s responsibilities **before** the potential inquirer meets with the Session.
- Complete Forms 1A, 1B, 1C, and 1D found at <http://oga.pcusa.org/section/mid-council-ministries/prep4min/application-forms/> and 2B found at <http://oga.pcusa.org/section/mid-council->

[ministries/prep4min/forms-enrolling-inquirer/](#) including the questions for reflection. Please limit each statement to one page, single-spaced. Number the lines, use size 11 Arial font, use 1" margins, and be certain your name appears on each page. All statements will be reproduced as submitted, so please pay careful attention to typing, spelling and grammar.

- Submit these completed forms to Pastor and/or Moderator of Session so that they may be circulated to all members of the sponsoring Session.
- Person meets with sponsoring Session and then follows up with the appointed Session Liaison.
- If the Session votes to endorse the person to become an inquirer, the Clerk of Session shall send the original and appropriately signed copies of Forms 1A, 1B, 1D, and 2B to the CPM Leader. (Be sure to keep a copy.)
- Submit to the CPM Leader a certified copy of all transcripts showing graduation from a regionally-accredited college or university.
- Person will receive an email from the CPM Leader to schedule an interview with CPM. All paperwork must be submitted before an interview will be scheduled.
- The CPM will contact the references listed in the Inquiry application.
- Meet with CPM.
- If the CPM votes to recommend to Presbytery that a person be enrolled as an inquirer, a CPM Liaison will be assigned. He/she should be contacted after the meeting to follow up on any issues that came up during the meeting.

Interview with CPM

Interviews with CPM generally take place in a conference room at the First Presbyterian Church of Grand Forks, ND – 5555 South Washington St, Grand Forks, ND. The Pastor and Session Liaison from your sponsoring church are welcome to attend, but are not required to attend.

After meeting the members of CPM, the prospective inquirer will be invited to give a five-minute account of his/her faith journey.

Members of the Task Group will ask the prospective inquirer questions of clarification, if any, concerning the forms and faith journey.

After these questions, the prospective inquirer, (and pastor/Session Liaison) will be excused from the room while the Task votes on whether to recommend to Presbytery that the person be enrolled as an inquirer.

When the prospective inquirer, (and pastor/Session Liaison) are invited back into the meeting room, the Task Leader will inform them of the Task Group's decision. If the vote is affirmative, the Task Leader will advise you of the next steps you should take, including scheduling an appointment for Psychological and Career Counseling at the earliest possible opportunity, and other goals for the coming year. The CPM Leader will then fill out form 2A and submit it to Presbytery. The CPM, at the next presbytery meeting, will recommend the student be officially enrolled as an inquirer (you need not be present for this Presbytery meeting). The student officially becomes an inquirer once an affirmative vote takes place at presbytery.

Responsibilities of Inquirers

The responsibilities of an inquirer are:

- Participate in psychological and career counseling. **This is required before moving to candidacy.**
- Continue active participation in the life and mission of the Church (G-2.0605).
- Participate responsibly with CPM in the goal-setting, evaluation, and decision-making processes related to preparation for ministry as carried out in preliminary interviews, annual consultations, and other occasions required by the Task Group.
- Register for and take the Bible Content Exam (see section 9).
- Give diligent attention to educational and developmental tasks involved in preparation for ministry of Word and Sacrament as prescribed by the Constitution, and to such additional requirements as are determined in consultation with CPM. If not already begun, the inquirer should begin studies at an accredited seminary approved by the

presbytery towards completion of a Masters of Divinity degree. Before applying for candidacy, the inquirer should complete or have a plan for completion of the following courses at an accredited seminary:

- Church History including history of the Reformation
- Introduction to Hebrew
- Introduction to Greek
- Course requiring translation and exegesis of Greek or Hebrew text, with graded final exegesis paper
- Preaching
- Ethics
- Christian Education
- Pastoral Care

The following courses must be taken at a PC(USA) accredited seminary or a venue approved by CPM.

- Presbyterian Polity
- Reformed Theology
- Reformed Worship and Sacraments

Section 5. Psychological Assessment

All inquirers and CLPs in training are required to complete an in-depth psychological and career counseling assessment, to be arranged soon after becoming an Inquirer or CLP Learner. Inquirers and CLP Learners are to be evaluated at **North Central Career Development Center** in St Paul, MN. Inquirers in The Northern Plains Presbytery who are studying or working in another part of the country may sometimes be given permission by CPM to complete their counseling requirement at another CPM approved counseling center. If you wish to pursue this option, speak to CPM during the initial interview or contact the Task Leader. CPM may require more than one Psychological Assessment if your time under care exceeds standard norms.

North Central Career Development Center Website:

<http://careers-opportunity.info/job-trainings/mn/saint-paul/north-central-career-development-center.html>

The cost of the Psychological Assessment at Midwest Ministry are shared between the Inquire/CLP Learner, the congregation, and the PNP.

To secure an appointment for a psychological assessment at Development Center, call the Center at 651-636-5120 and be prepared to provide the following contact information: *name, address, home and cell phone numbers, and email address* After this initial call, you will be sent quite a lot of paperwork and an inventory that must be completed before an evaluation can be scheduled. Once all of your paperwork is completed, you will be required to attend a three hour assessment at the St. Paul offices.

You will be asked to sign a form releasing the report to the CPM. Failure to sign this release form will result in your being billed for the assessment and in your termination from the preparation process.

Section 6: Field Education: Parish & Clinical

In addition to the requirements of the Book of Order (1) there are certain opportunities which will enrich and enhance your preparation for the ministry of the Word and Sacrament.

During the inquiry phase the inquirer must complete a field education placement (G-2.0606) or one unit of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). This is an essential step in the discernment process before candidacy.

To provide for parish experience, greater understanding of the workings, theology and polity of the Presbyterian Church (USA), and for continued growth into the role as a professional in ministry, the CPM requires that the inquirer complete field education in a Presbyterian church *other than and different from his or her home congregation*. The Task Group must review and approve the field education placement **before** such service begins to give its permission (G-2.0606).

In this experience the inquirer must engage in theological reflection with the pastor of the congregation on a regular and frequent basis. In addition, CPM expects all inquirers to gain a wide range of experiences in the congregation with various age groups. The inquirer should gain a deeper understanding of preaching, worship leadership, polity, pastoral care, and teaching throughout the field education experience.

The assignment of a field education placement often coincides with field education done through and arranged by the inquirer's seminary. Confirmation of a placement through an inquirer's seminary does not guarantee CPM's acceptance of it under the *Book of Order* requirements (G-2.0606). The choice of field education must be discussed with the CPM as a part of setting goals for professional development during the inquiry interview and/or annual consultations. CPM reserves the right to discern if these goals have been met in order to move to candidacy.

If the inquirer comes to CPM with field education previously completed, CPM will discuss whether the earlier experience is acceptable or if an additional placement is necessary.

Inquirers and candidates must submit a copy of midpoint and final evaluations of their field education placement to the Task Group.

The Presbytery also requires at least one unit of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) in a setting certified by the Association of Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE). A directory of CPE sites can be found at www.ACPE.edu. Your CPM must pre-approve the proposed location. Exceptions to this requirement must be approved by the full Task. A copy of the supervisor's evaluation must be submitted to CPM.

Section 7. Annual Consultations

All inquirers and candidates are required to participate in an annual consultation with the CPM for the evaluation and nurture of the inquirer or candidate.

As part of the annual consultation, inquirers and candidates will meet with Task Group members to discuss their progress toward goals for development. To facilitate this conversation and provide a written record of the meeting, all inquirers and candidates attending the meeting must confirm their attendance by submitting Form 3, "Pre-Interview Annual Consultation Report: Growth and Development in the Last 12 Months," at least thirty days before the meeting. At the conclusion of the annual consultation, the Task Group will complete Form 4, "Report of Annual Consultation," discuss it with the student, and send it via email to both the student and the liaison.

Forms 3 and 4 may be found at <http://oga.pcusa.org/section/mid-council-ministries/prep4min/forms-annual-consultations/>

In addition to the required information on these forms, inquirers and candidates should also list and describe on them any supply preaching that they have done over the past year.

Annual Consultations continue as long as the student is under care of the CPM—ie, until ordination or release from the care process.

Section 8. Becoming a Candidate

According to the *Book of Order*, "the purpose of the candidacy phase is to provide for the full preparation of persons to serve the church as Minister of the Word and Sacrament. This shall be accomplished through the presbytery's support, guidance, and evaluation of a candidate's fitness and readiness for a call to ministry requiring ordination" (G-2.0604).

When to Become a Candidate

There is no fixed duration for the inquiry period, although it generally lasts for at least one year. As part of their ongoing relationship of care, the CPM Liaison is in a good position to advise the inquirer about when to apply for candidate status.

In any case, an inquirer is expected to have completed the psychological exam and have submitted an evaluation of field education/CPE to the Task Group before he/she may be enrolled as a candidate.

Length of the Candidacy Period

The candidacy period must be **at least one full year** (G-2.0602). It lasts until the candidate receives an approved call and is examined and ordained, or until the candidate's name is removed from the roll of candidates in accordance with G-2.0609. If CPM votes to recommend to Presbytery that you be enrolled as a candidate, Presbytery will ordinarily act on this recommendation at its next regularly scheduled meeting (you **MUST** be in attendance for this Presbytery meeting). The date of your enrollment as a candidate is the date on which Presbytery votes that you should be enrolled as a candidate, not the date on which CPM meets with you and votes to make a recommendation on your behalf.

Major Steps in Becoming a Candidate

When an inquirer believes that he/she is ready to become a candidate, he/she should:

- Have completed at least one field education/CPE unit, and submitted a written evaluation to the Task Group.
- Have completed a psychological assessment.
- Have completed, or have a plan for completing, educational requirements.
- Discuss his/her interest in becoming a candidate with the Session and CPM liaisons.
- Complete Forms 5A, 5B, and 5D found at <http://oga.pcusa.org/section/mid-council-ministries/prep4min/forms-advancing-candidacy/>
- Submit these completed forms to the pastor or moderator of Session so that they can be circulated to all members of the sponsoring Session.
- Meet with the Session.
- If the Session votes to recommend that the inquirer be enrolled as a candidate, the Clerk of Session will send the appropriately signed original copies of Forms 5A, 5B, and 5D to the CPM Leader. The inquirer should also keep a copy.
- The CPM Leader will contact the inquirer to schedule an interview with the Task Group. If there is no contact within two weeks of the forms being sent, the inquirer should contact the CPM Leader.
- Meet with CPM. Candidacy interviews with CPM follow the same general format as that of Inquiry interviews. During the candidacy interview, members of CPM will be considering the call to ministry of Word and Sacrament in deciding whether or not to recommend to Presbytery that the inquirer be received as a candidate.
- After the CPM votes to recommend that the inquirer be enrolled as a candidate, the moderator will fill out form 5C and submit it to Presbytery.
- Appear at the designated meeting of Presbytery, speak for 3-5 minutes on **sense of call**, and answer any questions that come from the floor of Presbytery on the inquirer's **sense of call**.
- If Presbytery votes to enroll the inquirer as a candidate, he/she will be asked to answer the Constitutional Questions put by the Moderator of Presbytery. Following that, the student's pastor will offer a prayer to conclude the reception of the candidate. (See Section 13 for Constitutional Questions).

Responsibilities of Candidates

The responsibilities of candidates are to:

- Continue active participation in the life and mission of the Church (G-2.0605).

- Participate responsibly with CPM in the goal-setting, evaluation, and decision-making processes related to preparation for the ministry as carried out in preliminary interview(s), annual consultations, and other occasions requested by the Task Group.
- Give diligent attention to and complete educational and developmental tasks involved in preparation for ministry of the Word and Sacrament as prescribed by the Constitution, and to such additional requirements as are determined in consultation with CPM (G-2.0607b-d). This includes completion of the Master of Divinity degree at an accredited seminary approved by the presbytery and completion of field education and CPE requirements.
- Get permission for, register for, and take ordination exams (see section 9).
- Fulfill the schedules and time requirements prescribed by the Constitution and CPM.
- Take initiative in maintaining regular and open communication with CPM regarding experiences, progress in preparation for ministry, and other issues pertaining to educational, spiritual, and personal development.

A candidate may not enter into negotiation for his or her service as a Minister of the Word and Sacrament without approval of the presbytery through final assessment and certification (Section 11). Candidates may request permission of CPM to be placed on the Presbytery's Pulpit Supply List, but they may not preach more regularly than two Sundays per month.

Section 9. Constitutional Questions

If the examination on the floor of presbytery is approved, the presbytery shall receive the inquirer as a candidate after the following manner. The moderator shall propose the following questions to the inquirer:

Constitutional Questions

- Do you believe yourself to be called by God to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament also known as a Teaching Elder?
- Do you 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 this ministry?
- Do you accept the proper supervision of the presbytery in matters that concern your preparation for this ministry?
- Do you desire now to be received by this presbytery as a candidate for the Ministry of the Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)?

Section 10. Ordination Exams

(ADMINISTERED BY THE PRESBYTERIES' COOPERATIVE COMMITTEE ON EXAMINATIONS FOR CANDIDATES)

Before final assessment and certification of readiness for examination for ordination, a candidate must submit "satisfactory grades, together with the examination papers in the areas covered by any standard ordination examination approved by the General Assembly" (G-2.0607d).

These examinations are:

1. Bible Content Examination
2. Open Book Bible Exegesis
3. Theological Competence
4. Worship and Sacraments
5. Church Polity

Timing of Examinations

Inquirers or candidates are encouraged to take the Bible Content Examination in their first year of seminary. Candidates or Inquirers are expected to take all four "senior" ordination examinations at the first examination date of the final year of seminary (see Book of Order G-14.0431) (1). CPM has the responsibility to determine whether a student is deemed ready to take these exams. The CPM Task Leader will sign the exam application form after receiving approval from the CPM. CPM's permission is not needed to take the Bible Content Examination.

The Bible Content Examination is offered once a year in the Fall. This examination assesses the candidate's knowledge of the form and content of the Old and New Testaments. It is a 100-item, multiple-choice examination. For sample tests and help preparing for the Bible Content Examination see www.whitneyhq.com/biblecontent

The other four examinations are offered twice a year, in the Spring and the Fall. These examinations are provided in the form of essay questions. Candidates or Inquirers are expected to take all four "senior" ordination examinations at the first examination date of the final year of seminary (see Book of Order G-14.0431) (1). CPM has the responsibility to determine whether a student is deemed ready to take these exams. The CPM must grant permission to third-year seminary students or candidates to take the four other ordination exams. Contact the Moderator to gain permission.

Examination information, dates, deadlines, and registration are available online at <http://oga.pcusa.org/section/mid-council-ministries/prep4min/standard-ordination-exams/>

The CPM Leader will be asked to give permission to take the exams as part of the registration process.

For help in preparing, the CPM leader strongly recommends attending preparation sessions at your seminary.

When you receive your graded exams, whether passing or failing, it is your responsibility to forward these exams to the presbytery office to include in your file. Be sure to keep a copy.

Ordinarily, three failures of any exam will mean termination of the preparation process and removal from the roll of Inquirers and Candidates.

Permission to make a fourth and final attempt to pass may be granted by the CPM if:

- it is determined that the Inquirer/Candidate shows very high potential for ministry,
- the Inquirer/Candidate has passed three of the four exams, and
- the Inquirer/Candidate can clearly demonstrate that he or she has taken advantage of all appropriate study resources and reviewed these options with the CPM Leader

In order to be fair to all Inquirers and Candidates, an attempt to determine test-taking impediments will be made.

Section 11. The Personal Information Form

The Personal Information Form

The Personal Information Form (PIF) is distributed by Call Referral Services of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The purpose of the PIF is to give persons seeking a call the opportunity:

- To provide information about themselves, their sense of call, capabilities and training, experience, personal/professional style, hopes, and spiritual aspirations.
- To obtain an interview with Pastor Nominating Committees (PNCs) or other groups entrusted with the responsibility of extending a call.
- To help them prepare for the interview.

When to Submit the PIF

The *Book of Order* requires that a candidate have the approval of presbytery before entering into negotiation for his or her service as a Minister of the Word and Sacrament (G-2.0607). CPM completes this process on behalf of the presbytery.

Once those conditions have been met, the candidate may approach the CPM Task Leader to schedule his/her final assessment and to receive permission to be "certified ready to receive a call" and therefore to circulate his/her PIF (see Section 11). Once the request to circulate the PIF has been approved by CPM, and the candidate has submitted their PIF online, the Call Referral Services will contact the proper judicatory to attest to their certification.

Obtaining a Blank Personal Information Form

A blank PIF can also be downloaded from www.pcusa.org/clc

Section 12. The Final Assessment

Before a candidate can receive a call or begin negotiation for service as a Minister of the Word and Sacrament, the presbytery must certify that the candidate is ready for examination for ordination, pending a call (G-2.0607). CPM completes this certification on behalf of the presbytery in a process known as the **final assessment** and reports its completion to the Presbytery.

The final assessment may be scheduled at any time after the candidate has been a candidate for at least six months, if the following items are in the candidate's file:

- Papers showing satisfactory grades in the areas covered by the standard ordination examinations (G-2.0607d).
- A transcript showing graduation, with satisfactory grades, at a regionally accredited college or university (G-2.0607b).
- A transcript from a theological institution accredited by the Association of Theological Schools acceptable to the Presbytery, showing satisfactory grades in a course of study including Hebrew and Greek and exegesis of the Old and New Testaments using Hebrew and Greek texts, and graduation or proximity to graduation (G-2.0607c).
- The final evaluations from any and all field education and Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) placements completed by the candidate before or during his/her preparation process.

At the final assessment, the Task Group reviews the candidate's preparation for ministry and seeks to determine if he/she is ready for examination for ordination, pending a call. Four particular elements of this determination include:

- Theological views compatible with Reformed theology as expressed in the *Book of Confessions*.
- An understanding of the meaning of the questions required for ordination (W-4.4003) informed by knowledge of the church in various settings.
- A commitment to service as a Minister of the Word and Sacrament within the discipline of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) with wisdom and maturity of faith, leadership skills, compassionate spirit, honest repute, and sound judgment (G-2.0607a).
- Sound exegetical skill and preaching ability, as evidenced in the sermon submitted to and preached before the Task Group.

The documents necessary to submit to the CPM for the Final Assessment are:

1. a one page, single-spaced statement of faith. Number the lines, use size 11 Arial font, use 1" margins, and be certain your name appears on the top of the page. All statements will be reproduced as submitted, so please pay careful attention to typing, spelling and grammar.
2. a written sermon, with a description of the congregation to which it is to be preached
3. a draft of the candidate's PIF.

All documents are to be submitted to the CPM Leader no later than *30 days* prior to the date of the assessment.

At the Assessment itself:

- The Candidate will be asked to spend five minutes or less updating the Task Group on his/her education, experience, faith journey, and discernment since the last meeting.
- The Candidate will preach the sermon they have submitted.
- Following discussion of the sermon, any other questions can be asked by Task Group members in ascertaining the readiness of the candidate for ministry.
- The Leader will then direct the interview to the PIF. Task Group members will be invited to comment on the PIF, asking questions for clarification and giving advice to the candidate.
- The Leader will direct the interview to the Statement of Faith. Questions may be asked and clarifications sought. Task Group members will express his or her opinion as to its strengths, weaknesses, and omissions. Any specific requirements for alterations will be made by the Task Group after the candidate has been excused.

- After the candidate is excused from the room, each member is invited to present his/her assessment and propose any further actions that should be required of the candidate. These various suggestions will be discussed by the Task and voted on or adopted by consensus. Examples include re-working an element of the Statement of Faith, reworking the PIF, expanding the exegetical paper, re-writing parts of the sermon for clarification.
- A vote is then taken as to whether to sustain the Final Assessment or stop the Assessment until the candidate meets further requirements.
- When the candidate returns to the room and the Task Group's decision is shared, he/she may request clarification of any additional requirements.
- If the Final Assessment is sustained, the CPM Task Leader will complete form 6 and submit it to Presbytery.

The newly-certified candidate closes the interview with prayer.

The candidate is now able to contact PNCs and to search for a call. He/she may be placed on the Presbytery's Pulpit Supply list without further consultation with the CPM. The candidate remains under care of the CPM until ordination and must continue the annual consultation process. The examination for ordination is conducted by the Committee on Ministry and Presbytery of the calling Presbytery.

Section 13. Commissioned Lay Pastor (Formerly Commissioned Ruling Elders)

The Presbytery of the Northern Plains has delegated the responsibility for the enrollment and training of Commissioned Lay Pastors (formerly known as Commissioned Ruling Elders) to the Continuing Preparation for Ministry (CPM) Task Group. The process for CLPs is outline in the Book of Order in G-2.1001. All policies of the Presbytery of the Northern Plains pertaining to sexual misconduct by Ministers of the Word and Sacrament also pertain to CLPs.

Purpose

The purpose of the Commissioned Lay Pastor (CLP) program is to provide pastoral services in settings where the services of a Minister of the Word and Sacrament are not available. CPM shall be tasked with recruiting, selecting, training, educating, preparing, and equipping ruling elders of the PC(USA) to lead worship, preach the gospel, watch over the people, provide for their nurture and service, and perform duties assigned to them in their local commissions.

Administration

The CPM shall carry out the following:

- Review applications and meet with those seeking to enroll in the CLP program (known as potential Learners while applying, and known as Learners while undergoing training).
- Supervise the training of all Learners.
- Appoint mentors for all Learners.
- Examine Learners who complete the initial training and decide if they should be placed on the official CLP list.

Discernment Process

- All potential Learner for the Commissioned Lay Pastor (CLP) program shall be elders in good standing ordained in the Presbyterian Church (USA) and shall be an elder for a period of at least six months. They need not be actively serving on Session to qualify. They shall be regular in attendance and active in the life of their congregation. They shall demonstrate leadership ability, pastoral concern and pastoral ability. The potential Learner shall have a Bachelor of Arts degree or the equivalent (life experience may be considered).
- The potential Learner should have an extended conversation with their pastor about the sense of call and the gifts and tasks of ministry before approaching CPM.
- The potential Learner shall fill out and submit form CLP 1A (Appendix B) to the Continuing Preparation for Ministry Task (CPM) supplying three references as outlined in the application. The three references will each fill out a form CLP 1B (Appendix C) to be submitted to CPM. The CPM Leader shall provide the forms upon request.
- The potential Learner shall meet with their Session to be interviewed to receive the Session's endorsement for application to the CLP program. If approved, the Session shall fill out form CLP 2 (Appendix D) and submit it to CPM. They shall receive endorsement from their Session on an annual and ongoing basis.

- The potential Learner will meet with the CPM having supplied all appropriate forms (CLP 1a, CLP 1b, CLP 2, and CLP 3). If the Task approves the potential Learner to enter the process, they shall vote to receive the potential Learner as a “Learner.” The Learner shall then begin their training in the CLP process.
- The Learner shall meet annually with the CPM to be examined as to personal faith, motives for seeking commission, and the areas of instruction they may have already received. The Learner will fill out form CLP 3 (Appendix E) for each annual consultation.

Educational Requirements

There are eight courses that are required that shall be taken through a CPM approved site:

- Introduction to the Old Testament
- Introduction to the New Testament
- Reformed Theology
- Introduction to Preaching
- Reformed Worship and Sacraments
- Presbyterian Polity
- Pastoral Care
- Foundations of Christian Education

The University of Dubuque Theological Seminary is one example that offers a distance learning program.

In addition to class requirements, there are other requirements that the Task Group has:

- Regular meetings with an **Appointed Mentor** appointed by the CPM. A minimum of two contacts per year with their mentor is required during the course of the CLP process.
- **A Psychological Evaluation** by North Central Career Development early on in the CLP process. (See Section 5 for more information)
- The CPM may also require a **Supervised Practice of Ministry** (SPM) if it feels it is appropriate to help prepare the candidate for ordination.

The CLP Process

The Learner shall:

- Meet at least annually with their Session.
- Meet at least annually with the CPM, supplying a CLP Form 3 (Appendix E) for every meeting
- Meet regularly with their mentor
- Demonstrate work towards completing the class requirements.
- Remain active in the life and work of their congregation.
- Receive instruction and practice in all areas of church life.

Completion of the Process

- The Learner shall present to CPM a personal statement of faith.
- The Learner shall present to CPM a brief sermon (5-9 minutes, preferably orally). Before preaching the sermon, the Task shall be told the context and setting where this sermon would be presented.
- The Learner shall submit a written self-evaluation about their experience during their training and their readiness to be ordained as a CLP. Please limit your response to no more than three pages.

- CPM shall examine the Learner in a style modeled after the ordination exams.
- After successful completion of the examination, CPM will present the Learner to Presbytery for certification for a commission.
- CLPs are commissioned by the Presbytery of the Northern Plains upon the recommendation of the CPM to one of the following areas:
 - A specific congregation
 - A specific group or cluster of cooperating congregations
 - A new church development
 - A validated ministry

Appendix A: Definitions of Acronyms

CCP:	Care for Congregations Pod
CPE:	Clinical Pastoral Education
CPLP:	Care for Pastoral Leaders Pod
CPM:	Continuing Preparation for Ministry Task
CPML:	Continuing Preparation for Ministry Task Leader
CLP:	Commissioned Ruling Elder (Formerly Commissioned Lay Pastor)
GA:	General Assembly
MIF:	Ministry Information Form
PC(USA):	Presbyterian Church (USA)
PIF:	Personal Information Form
PNC:	Pastor Nominating Committee
PNP:	Presbytery of the Northern Plains
SPM:	Supervised Practice in Ministry
TRE:	Trained Ruling Elder

Appendix B: CLP 1a - Application

Name: _____ Occupation: _____

Address: _____ Work Phone _____

_____ Home Phone _____

Church of Membership _____ Date Received _____

Offices Held (Dates of Ordination) _____

Formal Education:

List of informal learning experiences that will help you in this ministry (e.g. travel, public speaking, volunteer work, etc.)

Describe your present activities in the life of the Church:

Why are you interested in considering this ministry?

What gifts and skills do you bring to this ministry?

Signature _____ Date _____

Please e-mail your report to the CPM Leader or mail your report to:

Presbytery of the Northern Plains
Attn: CPM
5555 S Washington St
Grand Forks, ND 58201

Appendix C: CLP 1b - References

References

Please list three people who will serve as references. One should be your pastor or a pastor within PNP Presbytery.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Relationship: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Relationship: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Relationship: _____

Please ask your references to answer the following questions and send their responses under separate cover directly to the Continuing Preparation for Ministry Team at the following address below.

1. To what extent does the applicant adhere to Christ's teachings?
2. What is your experience of the applicant's commitment to the Presbyterian Church (USA)?
3. What special gifts, talents and skills does the applicant exhibit for service as a Commissioned Lay Pastor?
4. What is the most recent example of the applicant's service to the church?
5. If the applicant were your Commissioned Lay Pastor, what specific areas would you wish him/her to improve?
6. If you are a Minister of the Word and Sacrament and a member of PNP Presbytery, would you be willing to serve as the applicant's mentor if asked?

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Please e-mail the CPM Leader or mail to:

Presbytery of the Northern Plains
Attn: CPM
5555 S Washington St
Grand Forks, ND 58201

Appendix D: CLP 2 – Session Evaluation and Recommendation
--

The Session of _____ Presbyterian Church of _____ met with
_____ on _____ and submits the
following report:

The Session

_____ **Endorses** the applicant to be trained by the Presbytery to become a Commissioned
Lay Pastor.

_____ **Does not endorse** the applicant to be trained by the Presbytery to become a
Commissioned Lay Pastor.

This report was prepared for the Session by the Clerk:

Clerk

Date

Attested by the Moderator of the Session:

Moderator

Date

The Session will copy and mail the completed application and attachments to the Presbytery at the following address:

Presbytery of the Northern Plains
Attn: CPM
5555 S Washington St
Grand Forks, ND 58201

Appendix E: CLP 3 – Annual Review

Name: _____ Date: _____

Address: _____ Work Phone _____

_____ Home Phone _____

Church of Membership _____

Please reflect on your past year. Answers should be in the form of a short paragraph.

- I. Classes Completed:
- II. Reflect on and respond briefly in the following areas of your training:
 - a. Old Testament:
 - b. New Testament:
 - c. Church History:
 - d. Practice of Ministry:
- III. Briefly describe your spiritual disciplines, including your participation in the worship and mission of a Presbyterian congregation.
- IV. Describe your relationship with your peers, authority figures, family, and others who are significant to you.
- V. Describe recent experiences of emotional impact, if any, and how you dealt with them.
- VI. Comment on areas in which you believe you are growing and identify areas in which you feel the need for progress.
- VII. List other areas which you wish to discuss with the Task Group including financial needs, family concerns, etc.

Please e-mail your form to the CPM Leader or mail your report to:

Presbytery of the Northern Plains
Attn: CPM
5555 S Washington St
Grand Forks, ND 58201

Appendix F: Mentor Evaluation and Recommendation

Name: _____ Date: _____

Address: _____ Work Phone: _____

_____ Home Phone: _____

Church: _____

Name of Commissioned Lay Pastor you are mentoring: _____

Please reflect on the past year and answer the following questions to the best of your ability:

How many times did you meet with the CLP in Training in the past year?

What growth has the CLP in Training exhibited in the past year?

What areas of challenge still present themselves for the CLP in Training?

Do you recommend that the CLP in Training continue in the process of ordination?

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Please e-mail your report to the CPM Leader or mail your report to:

**Presbytery of the Northern Plains
Attn: CPM
5555 S Washington St
Grand Forks, ND 58201**