

**Policy and Handbook: Becoming a
Commissioned Ruling Elder**

Presbytery of the James
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POLICY RELATING TO COMMISSIONED RULING ELDERS (CREs) PRESBYTERY OF THE JAMES

Guidelines

From time to time, there are small membership congregations that may not be in a position to extend call to a Minister of Word and Sacrament. It is the intention of this policy to outline the process for authorizing ruling elders to be commissioned to limited pastoral service as provided for in the *Book of Order* (G-2.10).

Policy

In order to be considered for authorization as a Commissioned Ruling Elder, a candidate must have been elected, examined, and ordained as a Ruling Elder in the Presbyterian Church (USA) for at least one year.

This policy is written to utilize Union Presbyterian Seminary's *Pathways to Learning and Leadership* program, specifically designed to prepare those interested in becoming CREs, but other approved programs may also be considered. Information on the *Pathways to Learning and Leadership* program may be found at www.upsem.edu/pathways. [Forms and instructions related to this policy begin on page 5 of this document.]

Those interested in becoming Commissioned Ruling Elders are encouraged to engage in the following steps:

1. Arrange a meeting with COM (Examinations Sub -Committee) to discuss their interest in serving as a Commissioned Ruling Elder and to review the requirements and expectations of the POJ.
2. Seek an endorsement by the session of their church (must be completed before starting year two of classes).
3. Take Introductory and Phase One Classes through Union Presbyterian Seminary's *Pathways to Learning and Leadership* program (or other approved program).
4. **Before Year Two**
 - a. Work with POJ to select a mentor, who must be a Minister of Word and Sacrament in the POJ.
 - b. Complete Full Application Form, which includes session endorsement and at least three references.
 - c. Work with POJ to undertake a Psychological Evaluation.
 - d. Have an Admission Interview with the COM (Examinations Sub-Committee).

5. Take Phase Two classes through Union Presbyterian Seminary (or approved program).
6. Prepare a Statement of Faith (one page) and answer two ordination vow questions.
7. Upon completion of classwork, be examined by COM (Examinations Sub-Committee).
8. Be added to Preaching Supply List and become available for potential match with congregation(s).
9. Have potential pastoral relationship approved by COM.
10. Be commissioned to Pastoral Service by COM, with scope of specific duties outlined.

11. Following Commissioning:

- a. Engage in continuing education opportunities annually.
- b. Have Annual Reviews by the session of the church you are serving and by your mentor.
- c. Submit renewal of contract each year to COM. (Commissions may be granted for three years at a time, but contracts must be renewed each year.)

“Pathways to Learning and Leadership” CRE and Church Member Education at Union Presbyterian Seminary

What is it? *Pathways to Learning and Leadership* is a program of online courses offered for church members who want to increase their knowledge and discipleship. Each course is five weeks long.

Foundational courses (Phase I) are taught entirely online, using live instruction, readings, and peer discussion.

Practical ministry courses (Phase II) for church members and those preparing to be Commissioned Ruling Elders (CREs) are taught online, with some practical exercises carried out in cooperation with the local presbytery.

Electives for church members and for CREs who want continuing education are taught entirely online. Church members may receive a certificate of completion after successfully completing six courses; the CRE course requirements are directed by the presbytery.

How much time will it take? Participants will need about six (6) hours per week per course, including two hours at a specific time online, to complete the work.

Who is it for? People interested in learning more about the church, and interacting with seminary professors and top leaders. Pathways can be a way to supplement the adult education offered in your congregation. People preparing to be CREs will join interested church members in learning together. Courses will be taught from a Reformed (Presbyterian) perspective, but are open to all.

Who will teach the courses? Most will be taught by faculty from Union Presbyterian Seminary. Some will be taught by practitioners in their field.

How much does it cost? The cost per five week course is \$100. In addition there will usually be one book to purchase per course.

Are there prerequisites to taking the courses? No. Anyone can participate.

Will I earn college credit for the courses? No. These courses do not earn academic credit. At the end of the two years, you will meet the educational requirements of your denomination toward becoming a Commissioned Ruling Elder (or your denomination’s equivalent).

When can I get started? Courses will be ongoing. We recommend that the foundational courses (Phase I) be taken first, but other courses may be taken in any order.

What kind of computer do I need? You will need a desktop or laptop computer, or a tablet or smart phone in order to participate. You must have a microphone; a webcam is strongly recommended, but not required.

How do I register? Go to www.upsem.edu/pathways to register online, or contact Tinsley Jones at Tinsley.Jones@upsem.edu with any questions.

Two Programs of Study For CRE education, in order to meet the educational requirements of the presbytery or other middle governing body, students must take all four courses in Phase I and all five courses in Phase II-a, a total of nine courses.

For a **Certificate of Completion** for church members, they must take all four courses in Phase I, plus two additional courses, either in Phase II-a or II-b, for a total of six courses.

Others interested in education for discipleship are welcome in any/all of the courses offered.

Phase I, II-a, and II-b courses are described below.

Phase I – Foundations (year 1) – required for both programs. This phase is open to anyone, CRE students and those seeking a certificate as well as church members who just want to take a class or two but are not seeking a certificate of completion. These four courses are foundational for both the CRE and Lay Education programs and required for both to successfully complete the course. Courses are taught completely online, with real-time contact with the instructor, interaction with other students online, and independent work. Each class includes 10 hours of instruction, 10 hours of peer interaction, and approximately 10 hours of reading/writing/other assignments.

The tuition for each five-week course is \$100, or \$400 for Phase I, and students will purchase (or borrow from a library) one or two books for each course. Instructors will report whether or not each student did the required work, but will not assign a grade or write an assessment.

Presbyteries or other middle governing bodies may do some sort of assessment if they wish, to make sure the student gained the knowledge and content desired.

For the CRE program, it is strongly recommended that a mentor be assigned by the presbytery or middle governing body, who may consider taking the courses along with the CRE student. This will help the presbytery to assess student work and their fitness for CRE work.

All courses include practical reflection and application (case studies, projects, etc.) in relation to academic content. The four courses in Phase I are:

1. Biblical Interpretation, with some Bible content, but primarily focused on how to interpret the Bible
2. Reformed Theology and Church History
3. Christian Life – worship, spiritual practices, ethics
4. The Mission of the Church in the World – evangelism, mission

After taking these courses, presbyteries consult with CRE students who show promise to see if they are interested in continuing the process toward CRE. They would then take the next five courses. Because the courses in Phase I are foundational, they must be taken before Phase II courses.

At the end of each course, students completing the assignments will receive 3.0 CEUs (12.0 for all of the courses in Phase I).

Phase II-a – A Deeper Look (year 2)

In this phase, a hybrid format will be used. This will be accomplished in one of two ways. Ordinarily, students will complete 18 hours of work online with peers and independently, and 12 hours (two full days) on the campus of Union Presbyterian Seminary, with some of the in-class courses on the Richmond campus and some on the Charlotte campus, where students can practice what they have learned. In special cases where travel and time to the seminary are prohibitive, and where a presbytery mentor is available, the face-to-face time may be accomplished meeting with the mentor, who will work closely with the seminary in planning those meetings.

The tuition for each class is \$125 (which includes two lunches and refreshments), or a total of \$625 for Phase II-a. Instructors will affirm that a student completed all assignments and was present for online and in-class learning. Presbyteries take care of assessing the readiness of the student to move on to being assigned as a CRE.

Classes in Phase II-a are:

5. Preaching the Bible

6. Teaching the Bible

7. Pastoral Care – Care of persons

8. Administration – Care of Systems: leadership, polity, stewardship, redevelopment

9. Worship and Sacraments

At the end of each course, students completing the assignments will receive 3.0 CEUs (15.0 for all of the courses in Phase II-a).

Phase II-b – A Wider Look (year 2)

The courses in Phase II-b are offered completely online, with the same format as Phase I – ten hours of instruction, ten hours of peer interaction, and ten hours of independent work per course. The two courses offered each year in Phase II-b are topically based, and would change every year. These courses are electives for church members seeking a certificate of completion, but are also open for continuing education for CREs and any other interested people.

The cost of tuition in Phase II-b is \$100 per course.

Topics in Phase II-b will be areas of interest chosen by the instructors with the requirement that they fall within one or more of the nine categories in Phase I and Phase II-a. At the end of each course, students completing the assignments will receive 3.0 CEUs.

Technical Requirements of Students

- An internet connection – broadband wired or wireless (3G or 4G/LTE)
- Speakers and a microphone – built-in or USB plug-in or wireless Bluetooth
- A webcam or HD webcam – built-in or USB plug-in – or a HD cam or HD camcorder with video capture card

Contact Tinsley Jones (Tinsley.Jones@upsem.edu) for more information, or go to www.upsem.edu/pathways to read about the program and/or to register.

**Presbytery of the James
Application Form for CRE Candidates**

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Telephone: Home _____ Work _____

Email: _____

Church Membership: _____

Please answer the following (using another sheet of paper if necessary):

1. Describe Your Activities in the Life and Mission of the Church

(List churches to which you have belonged; dates of active membership; church activities you participated in; positions of responsibility you have held, etc.)

2. Describe Your Service and Experience as an Ordained Elder

3. Describe Your Community Activities

(List organizations to which you have belonged; dates of active membership; activities you participated in; positions of responsibility you have held, etc.)

Employment:

(List all significant jobs you have held; dates of active employment; job or duty, and specifically, positions of responsibility you have held, etc.)

Educational Background:

School/Location/Year Graduated/Diploma/Degree: *(start with High School)*

References:

List the name, address, telephone, email and occupation of three people (no relatives) who have known you for at least five years. One of these references should be a Minister of the Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

1.

2.

3.

I hereby authorize those inquiring into my suitability to contact my references:

_____ (signature)

Statement:

“Why I would like to be involved in the Commissioned Ruling Elder Program”

In your statement, please describe which phases of service as a Commissioned Ruling Elder you believe will be most difficult for you and which will be easiest for you. Also, please describe your most meaningful religious experience and why it was most meaningful to you.

Session Endorsement

NOTE: *You should take this completed form, together with your “Statement” (previous page) to the moderator of your session. The minister and session will talk with you about your interest in the Commissioned Ruling Elder Program. The clerk of session will then forward your application form and statement to the Presbytery’s COM.*

RECOMMENDATION OF THE SESSION

As the Session considers recommending a person to be enrolled in the Commissioned Ruling Elder Program, the following are among the criteria that should be considered:

- Is the person a committed Christian? Yes No
Comments: _____

- Is the person an active and effective member of the Congregation? Yes No
Comments: _____

- Does the person relate helpfully and positively to others? Yes No
Comments: _____

- Is the person loyal to and enthusiastic about the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)? Yes No
Comments: _____

- Does the person have strong leadership qualities? Yes No
Comments: _____

- Does the person have good communication skills? Yes No
Comments: _____

Also, in considering your recommendation, are the Session and the Congregation willing to affirm and support this person in ministry? Yes No

Comments: _____

RECOMMENDATION

The Session of _____(Church)

in _____, Virginia has met with
_____, who is a Ruling Elder in this congregation and after
due deliberation recommends this person for the Commissioned Ruling Elder Program and
pledges its affirmation and support as this person embarks upon and continues in this ministry.

Signed: _____

(date)

(Clerk of Session)

Psychological Evaluation of CRE Candidates

As part of the evaluation of candidates for Commissioned Ruling Elders (CREs) the Presbytery of the James requires a basic psychological evaluation to be done before the candidate can be considered for qualification or commissioning as a Commissioned Pastor.

Approved Providers

The following providers have agreed to perform a basic evaluation and submit a confidential report to the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery. The fee for this service is the responsibility of the CRE candidate, but may be split between the Presbytery, the endorsing church, and the CRE candidate.

List of Providers:

Ministry Development Services
Presbyterian Psychological Services
6100 Sardis Road
Charlotte NC 28270
704-554-9222
mdvs@ministryds.org

Center for Pastoral Counseling
1716 Chain Bridge Rd
McLean VA 22101
703-903-9696
pastoralcounseling.com

Ready to Be Examined

Once a CRE candidate has completed the required course work (either through Union Presbyterian Seminary's Pathways program or another program approved in advance) there are a series of steps required to be recognized as a QRE, that is a Ruling Elder Qualified to be commissioned to particular pastoral service as defined in the *Book of Order* G-2.1002.

These steps include:

1. Completing a one-page **Statement of Faith** (using guidelines provided by the Presbytery of the James).
2. Completing a one-page (total) paper with answers to the **Ordination Questions** asked of all presbyters at ordination, installation, and/or commissioning. See instructions below.

Ordination/Installation Vows

Please select 2 of the 9 following questions and write a half-page response to each question (total = one page). Use the question-bullets as a guide to your answer. It is not necessary to answer each bullet point.

1. *Do you trust in Jesus Christ your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?*
 - What does it mean to you to trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior?
 - What does it mean to you that Jesus Christ is Lord of all? Head of the Church?
 - What does it mean to you to say that God is one yet made up of three persons?
 - What is the relationship between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?
2. *Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal, and God's Word to you?*
 - What role does the Holy Spirit play in our interpretation of the Scriptures?
 - In what way are the Scriptures the "unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ"?
 - How are the Scriptures "God's Word to you"?

3. *Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God?*
 - List some of what you understand to be the “essential tenets” of the Reformed faith.
 - Do you find any of them in conflict with what you think that “Scripture leads us to believe and do”?

4. *Will you fulfill your ministry in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and be continually guided by our confessions?*
 - What does it mean to you to be obedient to Jesus Christ?
 - What does it mean to you to be under the authority of Scripture?
 - What does it mean to you to be guided by our confessions?

5. *Will you be governed by our church’s polity, and will you abide by its discipline.*
 - What does it mean to you “to be guided by our church’s polity”?
 - What does it mean to you “to abide by our church’s discipline”?
 - How does the church “discern the will of Christ”?

6. *Will you in our own life seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, love your neighbors, and work for the reconciliation of the world?*
 - What is the hardest part of keeping this vow for you?

7. *Do you promise to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church?*
 - What is your role as a minister to further the peace, unity and purity of the church? Is that role different from that of any other member of the church?
 - What do you do when these three (peace, unity and purity) are in tension?

8. *Will you pray for and seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?*
 - What does it mean to you to “serve the people”?

9. *Will you be a faithful teaching elder, proclaiming the good news in Word and Sacrament, teaching faith and caring for people? Will you be active in the government and discipline, serving in the councils of the church; and in your ministry will you try to show*

the love and justice of Jesus Christ?

- How do you see your role as minister (teaching elder) in this particular church?
- If appropriate, how will you balance your service to the larger church to that of the congregation?
- How do you balance showing “the *love* and *justice* of Jesus Christ”?

Commissioned Ruling Elder's Annual Report

Name:

Home Church:

Church of *Service:*

Dates: (from _____ to _____) Do you wish to continue to serve this congregation? ___
yes; ___ no; ___ with some changes to terms.

Briefly answer the questions listed below. Additional comments may be written of the back of this form.

1. What are your major responsibilities in this congregation?
2. What are the key ministry strengths you bring to this commission?
3. What are the key accomplishments of this pastoral relationship?
4. What have been some of the challenges in this pastoral relationship?
5. In what areas of ministry could you use additional training and support?

Signature:

Date

Mentor's Annual Report for CREs

CRE's Name:

Commissioned to _____ (Church) until _____

Mentor's Name:

Mentor's Address:

Briefly answer the following questions. Additional comments may be written on the back.

How would you characterize your relationship with this Commissioned Ruling Elder?

Are you generally satisfied with the ministry of this Commissioned Ruling Elder?

What are the major strengths of this Commissioned Ruling Elder's ministry?

In what areas of ministry would you encourage this Commissioned Ruling Elder to make improvements?

What areas of continuing education would you recommend for this Commissioned Ruling Elder?

Mentor's Signature:

Date:

Session's Annual Report for CREs

CRE's Name:

Commissioned to _____ (Church) until _____

Briefly answer the following questions. Additional comments may be written on the back.

Are you generally satisfied with the ministry of this Commissioned Ruling Elder?

What are the major strengths of this Commissioned Ruling Elder's ministry?

In what areas of ministry would you encourage this Commissioned Ruling Elder to make improvements?

What areas of continuing education would you recommend for this Commissioned Ruling Elder?

Clerk of Session's Signature:

Date: