

Procedure: Examining and Receiving Minister Members

Relevant Citations

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III. Exercise of Freedom of Conscience Within Certain Bounds (G-6.0108).

IV. Examination Questions

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Relevant Citations:

SR-9.300 Committee on Ministry

c. Authority for performing the actions delineated in G-11.0502h and G-14.0407c of the Constitution are delegated to this committee. The responsibility and power to perform the following tasks are delegated to this committee, with the provision that they be reported to the next stated meeting of presbytery:

- i. Approve the examinations of and receive ministers transferring from other presbyteries and present them at the next stated meeting of the presbytery.

G-11.0402 Minister Seeking Membership

The presbytery, through its appropriate committee, shall examine each minister or candidate who seeks membership in it on his or her Christian faith and views in theology, the Sacraments, and the government of this church, except as provided in G-14.0314. Every minister seeking membership in a presbytery shall have a call to a pastoral relation within the presbytery, or from a governing body or agency as defined in G-11.0410, or be entering a work defined in G-11.0411, for which the receiving presbytery shall give its permission, or shall be honorably retired as defined in G-11.0412.

G-14.0314 Location of Ordination - Examination and Ordination

- a. The presbytery placing the call to a candidate for ministry shall ordinarily examine and, contingent upon the candidate's successful completion of that examination and all requirements in G-14.0402, the presbytery responsible for the candidate's preparation for ministry shall ordinarily ordain the candidate.

G-14.0402 Examination for Ordination - Appearance before Presbytery

- a. The candidate shall appear before the presbytery in which he or she shall make a brief statement of personal faith and of commitment to the ministry of the Word and Sacrament except as provided in G-14.0314. The presbytery, having received certification of a diploma from a theological institution accredited by the Association of Theological Schools and acceptable to the presbytery, having heard the candidate and his or her sermon preached before the presbytery or a committee thereof (G-14.0305j(6)), and having received the recommendation of its **responsible committee** (G-11.0402), shall conduct any further examination of his or her Christian faith and views in theology, the Bible, the Sacraments, and the government of the church as it deems necessary.
- b. If the presbytery is fully satisfied of the candidate's qualifications, it shall vote to proceed to his or her ordination, appointing a time and place for the service of ordination.

I. Chronological Process:

- A. The Committee on Ministry names “the appropriate committee” (G-11.0402) and its moderator, herein called the Examination Team, to conduct the examination for presbytery membership. *(Note: It is not the Examination Team’s role or responsibility to determine whether the candidate is a good fit for the call being offered—this is the task of COM, based on the recommendation of its liaison to the PNC, task force, or operating as a committee of the whole—The Examination Team only examines and makes a*

recommendation to the presbytery for membership based on the candidate's Christian faith and views in theology, the Sacraments, and the government of this church

- B. The term "candidate" is defined as any person seeking membership in the presbytery, including those who must first be ordained as a condition of membership.
- C. The Examination Team conducts an examination of the candidate's Christian faith and views in theology, the Sacraments, and the government of this church, and makes a recommendation to the presbytery, and concurrently informs the Committee on Ministry of the recommendation
- D. The Committee on Ministry will not approve and present a call until it has received the Examination Team's recommendation to presbytery (*conceivably, COM could approve and present a call, and advocate for membership before the presbytery, knowing that the Team will recommend denial. In such a cases it is recommended that a special meeting of presbytery be called and the examination be completed before the call is presented*).
- E. COM may grant permission for a candidate to labor within the bounds, and/or appoint a candidate moderator of a session, if appropriate, until the candidate has been received as a member by a vote of presbytery. If a candidate's membership is not approved, the call shall be declared annulled.
- F. No candidate will be installed until the presbytery has voted to receive the person as a member.

II. The Examination:

- A. The candidate will submit responses to the examination questions in writing to the Exam Team moderator.
- B. The Examination Team, will conduct an in depth oral exam using, but not being confined to, the written responses, noting any items that they believe should be disclosed to the presbytery.
- C. The Examination Team's report to presbytery, distributed ten days prior to assembly, will consist of
 - 1. The written responses to the examination questions (IV 1-9).
 - 2. A written summary of those items discovered during the oral examination that the Examination Team believes should be disclosed to the presbytery.
 - 3. A recommendation to receive or not to receive into membership, and/or proceed or not proceed to ordination.
 - 4. Any statement(s) of dissent to the Reformed Faith and polity (see section III).
 - 5. **In the case of a candidate for ordination:**
 - a. the report shall also contain
 - i. receipt of certification of a diploma from an accredited theological institution acceptable to the presbytery;
 - ii. satisfaction of the requirement that the presbytery or the Examination Team has heard the candidate preach as required by G-14.0305j6.
 - b. "The Candidate shall appear before the presbytery in which he or she shall make a brief statement faith and of commitment to the ministry of the Word and Sacrament.
 - e. "The presbytery, having received the recommendation of its responsible committee (the Examination Team), shall conduct any further examination of his

or her Christian faith and views in theology, the Bible, the Sacraments, and the government of the church as it deems necessary. A member of the examination team should ask the candidate one question from each area.

- f. The examination concludes when the presbytery has voted to end it (this is not approving or disapproving the examination, it simply ends the examination). The candidate shall be excused.
 - g. The presbytery shall then consider, under parliamentary procedure, the Examination Team recommendation to proceed or not to proceed to ordination.
- 6. In the case of an ordained minister seeking membership:**
- a. The presbytery shall then consider, a motion to adopt or reject the Examination Team's recommendation to receive into or deny membership (*G-4.0301e: "Decisions shall be reached in governing bodies by vote, following opportunity for discussion, and a majority shall govern*);
 - b. During discussion of the recommendation, commissioners may ask the Examination Team or the candidate for any information they might require in order to "not simply reflect the will of the people, but rather to seek together to find and represent the will of Christ, (G-4.0301d) " as an exercise of the Presbyterian principle (G-4.301i) that "Governing bodies possess whatever administrative authority is necessary to give effect to duties and powers assigned by the Constitution of the church."

III. Exercise of Freedom of Conscience Within Certain Bounds (G-6.0108).

Individuals being examined for candidacy*, ordination or presbytery membership who, as a matter of conscience, dissent from some aspect of the Reformed Faith and polity as expressed in *The Book of Confessions* and the Form of Government **shall** submit a written statement to the Examination Team prior to examination, who will submit the statement to the presbytery ten days prior to assembly. The statement shall explain the candidate's dissent and declare the extent to which the candidate will (or has) or will not (or has not) adhere to Reformed Faith and polity.

- A. Each person submitting a statement of dissent shall be examined by the Presbytery in solemn assembly, which will decide whether the candidate has departed from the essentials of Reformed faith and polity. The person being examined shall be granted opportunity to defend the objection before the assembly.
- B. Persons who have departed the essential tenants of the Reformed faith and polity shall not be ordained as a Minister of the Word and Sacrament, or be granted membership in the presbytery, regardless of prior ordination or retirement status.
- C. Persons whose statements of dissent are deemed by the presbytery not to constitute a rejection of an essential tenant are nevertheless required to adhere with the faith and polity of the church. Persons willfully violating mandatory provisions of the Constitution shall be subject to disciplinary action as provided by the Constitution, including release from ordained office and presumed renunciation of jurisdiction of this church.

**The provisions of G-6.0108 apply to those seeking to move from Inquiry to Candidacy, and thus are included in the examination process provided by G-14.0305d-f.*

IV. Examination Questions

The candidate will submit brief responses to the following questions, which are based on the Constitutional Ordination Questions (G-14.0207a-g) and *The Ordination Questions: A Study for Church Officers* (Gevena, 1996), Rice & Chinn). The intent of these questions is to address the G-11.0402 and G-14.0402 topics of examination and currently relevant issues as they relate to these topics.

Answer Format: LIMIT: THREE PAGES, ONE SIDE EACH PAGE, one inch margins. 12 point Times New Roman font. Include the questions. NO EXCEPTIONS.

1. **The Church and Its Lord:** Describe how 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?
2. **The Authority of Scripture:** What makes and how are the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal? Describe how they are God's Word to you?"
3. **The Church and Its Confessions:** What does it mean to you to 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)? How are you, or will you be, instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God?
4. **Obedience to Christ:** How "Will you fulfill your office in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and continually guided by our confessions?"
5. **Governance and working in the Church:** How will (or won't) you be governed by our Church's polity, and how will you abide by its discipline, including such clauses as G-6.0106b, which require church officers' "to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, or chastity in singleness?" Who do you consider to be your colleagues in ministry, and how you will be a friend and work with them?
6. **Personal Commitment:** Describe how, in your own life, you seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, love your neighbors, and work for the reconciliation of the world?"
7. **The Peace, Unity and Purity of the Church:** Describe how you will further the peace, unity, and purity of the Church in the context of your congregation, the presbytery, and the PCUSA.
8. **Service:** What does it mean to you to seek to serve the people (a congregation and the Church universal) with energy, intelligence, imagination and love?
9. **Duties of the Office:** How will you proclaim the Good News in preaching and teaching the Word? What will you teach and practice about Baptism and Communion? What is your role in caring for people? Will you be active in the governing bodies of the church, and if so, where would you like to serve? How will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?"

V. The Examination Team

- A. That six to eight persons, elders and clergy, be identified and trained as examiners, available to conduct examinations when needed.
- B. That each examination team consist of two clergy and two elders, and a moderator.
- C. That the moderator be a member of COM, whose role is that of a neutral facilitator and observer (*and perhaps advocate*) without vote, responsible for scheduling, recording, reporting (written) and communicating as delineated above.
- D. That the examination team will responsibly prepare as follows:
 1. Allow two hours for an oral exam.
 2. Before planning the exam, each member of the team will have carefully read the candidate's responses.
 3. Plan the areas/questions that will be explored. Develop followup questions as needed.
 4. Time management is important.
 - i. A certain amount of time for each question and response should be predetermined so each of the constitution areas is responsibly covered.
 - ii. One member of the team should be charged with carefully managing time
 - iii. Stick to the plan and note areas that need followup. Cover all the areas in no more than 90 minutes, reserving 30 minutes for areas needing further exploration.