

Policy: Validating Ministry

The Presbytery has both the authority to determine its continuing members, and the responsibility of setting guidelines for that determination. This requires that the Presbytery (through its Committee on Ministry, in conjunction the Committee on Preparation for Ministry) determine what is valid ministry within its bounds. Criteria are set forth in the Book of Order (G-11.0403); each presbytery must provide written guidelines for their application.

The book of Order (G-11.0406) defines categories of membership for ministers of the Word and Sacrament. These specify that active members shall be “engaged in a ministry that complies with all of the criteria in G-11.0403 without exception,” and that members-at-large “shall comply with as many of the criteria in G-11.0403 as possible.” An inactive member is one previously admitted to presbytery, who is “now voluntarily engaged in an occupation that does not comply with the criteria in G-11.0403.” The status of members-at-large and inactive members must be reviewed annually.

According to the Book of Order (G-11.0408), there are four categories of validated ministry: A minister of the Word and Sacrament who is an active member of presbytery may be engaged (1) in a validated ministry within congregations of this church, (2) in a validated ministry in other service of this church, (3) in a validated ministry in service beyond the jurisdiction of this church, or may be (4) honorably retired.”

No determination of validation is required for those serving in congregations of this church or for the honorably retired [(1) and (4) above]. They are considered valid by definition. The Committee on Ministry is given authority to determine valid ministry “in other service of this church” (2), according to the definition provided in G-11.0410. Therefore, the judgment of presbytery is required primarily for the validation of ministries beyond the jurisdiction of this church (3).

The criteria for validation are found in G-11.0403, quoted in full below. The interpretations that follow rely on ‘Guidelines for Applying Criteria for Continuing Membership in Presbytery’ from the Vocation Agency’s Joint Report (revised January 1987). Direct quotations from that document are given in italics.

G-11.0403 Criteria for Ministry of Continuing Members

A presbytery shall determine the ministers of the Word and Sacrament who shall be its continuing members. In making this determination the presbytery shall be guided by written criteria developed by the presbytery for validation of ministries within its bounds. These criteria shall be based upon the description of the nature of the ordained office found in G-6.0100 and G-6.0200 and following standards:

- a. The ministry of continuing members shall be in demonstrable conformity with the mission of God’s people in the world as set forth in Holy Scripture, The Book of Confessions, and the Book of Order of this church. (G-11.0403a)

A Statement of the Mission is essential in order for presbytery to determine if a particular

ministry is in “conformity with the mission of God’s people.” Such a statement... should clarify the types of ministries needed in order to accomplish this mission... and should be as comprehensive as possible. Flexibility and judgment are required in the application of this criterion, especially if this kind of specificity is not provided by the presbytery’s mission statement. It is not necessary that the particular ministry functions contribute directly to the work of presbytery; this will often not be the case. Rather, the nature and purpose of the work performed must be consistent with the vision and mission adopted by the Presbytery for ministry within its bounds. Further, “The Church’s Calling” (G-3.0300) may be considered in evaluating conformity with the mission of our church. Does the ministry proclaim the good news, offer reconciliation, address brokenness, minister to the needs of the poor, the sick, and lonely, address hunger, promote justice, etc.? Our church recognizes that ministers may be designated as “educators, chaplains, pastoral counselors, campus ministers, missionaries, partners in mission, evangelists, administrators, social workers, consultants, or in other specific tasks appropriate to the ministry of the church” (G-6.0203) in fulfillment of the church’s larger mission. Given the above interpretative guideline, can the *specific job responsibilities* be judged in conformity with the mission of our church?

- b. The ministry shall be one that serves others, aids others, and enables the ministries of others. (G-11.0403b)

The primary thrust of the work being validated is toward serving people and enabling them to serve other people, not toward things, nor toward profit-making activities. Ordinarily such work will be in a religious or non-profit setting. In the rare case that work in a for-profit enterprise is judged as validated ministry, it must be clear that the primary work functions relate to serving and helping people, rather than to the production of goods or to making a profit. In all cases, *the special gifts and training of the minister of Word and Sacrament that provide a theological perspective on the life of people must be used.*

- c. The ministry shall give evidence of theologically informed fidelity to God’s Word. This will normally require the Master of Divinity degree or its equivalent and the completion of the requirements for ordination set forth in G-14.0402. (G-11.0403c)

If the ministry is not an ordained position, and does not require a Master of Divinity or its equivalent, questions must be asked regarding the application of theological knowledge and training. What specific job functions require the use of theological and biblical understanding? *“Theologically informed fidelity to God’s Word” will be evident in the ministry if it requires the ability to apply theological competence to such skills as communication, interpretation, or the care and nurture of a person’s wholeness and growth.* A key question is whether the ministry relates God’s Word to life experience, to faith and service. If the proposed position offers no opportunity to articulate the Christian faith, as a part of the stated job functions, the ministry will not be validated.

- d. The ministry shall be carried on in accountability for its character and conduct to the presbytery and to organizations, agencies, and institutions. (G-11.0403d)

A member of presbytery serving beyond the jurisdiction of the church remains *answerable*

to the presbytery for agreed-upon end results or activities in addition to being accountable to an employing organization. Being accountable for the 'character and conduct' of one's ministry requires that it be clear from the outset what is expected in that ministry. A copy of the job description, with the financial terms of remuneration, must be provided prior to the validation of the ministry. Regular performance reviews by the employer are also expected. In order for the presbytery to exercise its oversight, face-to-face reviews will be held not less than every three years (in addition to the required annual report form). The same criteria used for full-time ministries will be used in determining validation of part-time and non-compensated ministries.

- e. The ministry shall include responsible participation in the deliberations and work of the Presbytery and in the worship and service of a congregation. (G-11.0403e)

The Presbytery of North Puget Sound has the following standards:

Active members shall be faithful participants in the life of Presbytery, including attending presbytery meetings and contributing to the work of presbytery. If a member's work schedule precludes attendance at presbytery meetings, participation on a task force or other contributions of time and talent may be considered. While minimum requirements are not specified, and allowance may be made for individual circumstances, the Presbytery expects participation that is significant and sustained, rather than sporadic and minimal.

Active members shall regularly worship and participate in the life and work of a local congregation. Ordinarily this will be a congregation of the Presbyterian Church (USA). If the person worships at another church, the reasons for this may be explored and judged satisfactory.

If one or more of the criteria cannot be met, the continuing member should ask to be designated either a member-at-large or an inactive member of presbytery. If presbytery is unwilling to grant this then the continuing member should seek release from the exercise of ordained office (G-11.0404) until he or she receives a call to ministry that fulfills all five criteria. Restoration to the exercise of the office is possible without reordination.

Active members serving beyond the jurisdiction of the church must report annually to the Presbytery the financial terms of remuneration by their employers, any change in their employment status, any significant change(s) in their job description, and the rationale for their continuing status as active members of Presbytery.

Please refer to 4.5202 for implementation