**Commissioned Pastors**

**[Commissioned Ruling Elders]**

**What is a Commissioned Ruling Elder?**

The particular role of commissioned ruling elder (commissioned pastor) is an extension of the ordered ministry of ruling elder which is an ordained ministry of the church. The role was created in the mid-1980s in response to the mission needs of presbyteries which did not have enough teaching elders to adequately serve their churches. At first it was termed “Commissioned Lay Preacher”. A decade later, the role was expanded to give presbyteries the option for authorizing a CLP to administer the sacraments and other pastoral functions and the name was changed to “Commissioned Lay Pastor”. In the most recent revision of the Form of Government, the role’s title was changed to “ruling elder commissioned to particular pastoral service” to provide clarity about its place within the ordered ministries of the church. The title was amended in 2016 to Commissioned Pastor.

**Quick facts about CPs**

* A Commissioned Pastor is a ruling elder in special service, meaning they retain membership in the congregation where his/her active membership resides.
* Service requires special equipping (education) for responsibilities
* The examination is on personal faith, motives, and areas of instruction
* Commissioned in a service of worship during which they respond to constitutional questions.
* The role is limited – in time and place of service, as defined by presbytery in the commission.
* They must work under the supervision and mentoring of a teaching elder.
* Term to be specified up to 3 years, renewable.
* Must be reviewed annually.

When commissioning ruling elders to particular pastoral service the presbytery may authorize them to:

* serve in validated ministries
* moderate session
* administer the sacraments.
* officiate at marriages if permitted by law.

**Mobility**

This authorization applies only with the presbytery of their congregational membership and for the particular service to which they are commissioned. While all Presbyterians may offer themselves for service to the church through Church Leadership Connection, there is no reciprocity for commissioning to pastoral service, so ruling elders are not eligible for pastoral positions in presbyteries other than their own. Should they relocate and move their church membership, they should consult with their pastor and new presbytery about mission needs for commissioned ruling elders.

**STEPS IN THE PROCESS (G-2.1000)**

1. The process begins with a proposal for the ruling elder to perform a validated ministry (see G-2.0503a) within the presbytery.

* “The presbytery may authorize a ruling elder to be commissioned to limited pastoral service as assigned by the presbytery ... to serve in a validated ministry of the presbytery.” (G-2.1001)
* The proposal should include a position description, average hours per week of the position, and any financial terms.

1. Committee on Ministry examines the ruling elder and recommends approval of the commission to presbytery.

* Commissioned Pastors “shall receive such preparation and instruction as determined by the presbytery to be appropriate to the particular commission.” (G-2.1002)
* Training usually is provided by a Presbyterian seminary, such as Dubuque (online), plus any additional courses which may be required by the presbytery.
* The examination before the committee and presbytery is on “personal faith, motives for seeking the commission, and the areas of instruction determined by presbytery.” (G-2.1002)

1. Specifics about the commission are determined by the presbytery and may only be performed in the context of the approved ministry.

* The commission is not specifically about preaching, teaching, or providing pastoral care. The session can authorize any member to perform these tasks.
* The specific tasks listed in the Constitution are:
  1. Moderate the session of the congregation to which he or she is commissioned
  2. Administer the Sacraments
  3. Officiate at marriages where permitted by state law (G-2.1001)
* “This commission shall also specify the term of service, which shall not exceed three years but shall be renewable.” (G-2.1001)
* “The presbytery shall review the commission at least annually.” (G-2.1001)

1. If the commission expires …

* “A ruling elder who has been commissioned and later ceases to serve in the specified ministry may continue to be listed as available to serve, but is not authorized to perform the functions specified in G-2.1001 until commissioned again to a congregation or ministry by the presbytery.” (G-2.1002)
* The Committee on Ministry has placed the names of Commissioned Pastors whose terms have expired on the Approved Pulpit Supply list, and authorizes them to celebrate the Sacraments when invited by a session.