



Process for Verification of Membership in Good Standing, Endorsement, and Validation of Ministry for Those Serving in Specialized Ministries

Note: The information provided for this process is adapted from a publication called *Ecclesiastical Endorsement of Ministers Serving in Specialized Ministry* from the Leadership Team of the Presbyterian Association of Specialized Pastoral Ministries (PASPM). Many of the definitions, as well as the template of the endorsement process come from this document. The Presbytery of Donegal is grateful for their work in clarifying standards and definitions. A copy of the PASPM document is available on the presbytery website or from the presbytery office.

Ecclesiastical endorsement is an official declaration by the presbytery of membership/care that a person seeking certification as a chaplain or pastoral counselor has the gifts of ministry for this special calling. It is not a statement of competency.

Endorsement is the responsibility of the religious body, while certification is the work of the professional organization. The following information is an explanation of the process of The Presbytery of Donegal.

Ordained ministers and others serving in specialized pastoral ministries are usually required to provide their respective professional organizations with evidence of endorsement and validation of their ministries by their faith group. Endorsement and validation of the ministry by the faith group is often a requirement for certification and for continuing membership in the professional organization.

Definitions

Verification of Membership in Good Standing – For members of congregations, an official declaration by the clerk of session of the congregation of membership is that a person is a member in good standing of the congregation. This verification is transmitted to the certifying agency. For Ministers of the Word and Sacrament, an official declaration by the stated clerk of the presbytery that the minister is a member in good standing. This verification is transmitted to the certifying agency. In some cases, this may satisfy the requirement for denominational “endorsement.”

Endorsement - An official declaration by the presbytery of care/membership that a person has met its criteria to serve in a ministry of chaplaincy, pastoral counseling, or clinical education. Endorsement by the Presbytery of Donegal is a process conducted by the Presbytery's Connecting Our Ministries Commission (Connecting Our Ministry Commission).

Certification - The process whereby professional certifying agencies such as the Association of Professional Chaplains (APC), American Association of Pastoral Counselors (AAPC), Association for Clinical Pastoral Education, Inc. (ACPE), College of Pastoral Supervision and Psychotherapy (CPSP), declare a person to be in compliance with professional standards as delineated by that professional organization.

Validation - An official declaration by the presbytery of care/membership that a ministry complies with the criteria enumerated in G-2.0503(a). Ministers of the Word and Sacrament may serve in validated ministries under the oversight of the Connecting Our Ministry Commission. Ruling Elders may be commissioned for particular pastoral service in a validated ministry under the oversight of the Connecting Our Ministry Commission.

Process For Verification of Membership in Good Standing

Some agencies, as part of their certification process, request a letter of verification or endorsement from the church or denomination of membership. In some instances, verification of membership in good standing will satisfy this requirement.

If the person seeking verification of membership in good standing is a member of a congregation, then they should request the letter verifying membership in good standing from the clerk of session. They should notify the pastor that they are making this request. The letter should be on church letterhead and sent according to instructions provided by the certifying agency.

If the person seeking verification of membership in good standing is a PCUSA Minister of the Word and Sacrament or Commissioned Ruling Elder (Commissioned Pastor), then they should request the letter verifying membership in good standing from the Stated Clerk of the presbytery. The Connecting Our Ministry Commission will be notified that they are making this request. The letter will be on presbytery letterhead and sent according to instructions provided by the certifying agency.

Process for Endorsement

When an endorsement is required by the certifying agency, this process is conducted by the Connecting Our Ministry Commission. The Connecting Our Ministry Commission will provide a

liaison to the person entering the endorsement process to coordinate needed guidance, discernment, and support. If the person is also under the care of the Commission on Preparation for Ministry, then their Commission on Preparation for Ministry liaison will be invited to join the Connecting Our Ministry Commission as part of the endorsement process. The Connecting Our Ministry Commission may provide a task group to supervise the endorsement process, or it may be undertaken by the entire Connecting Our Ministry Commission.

The person seeking endorsement should begin the process by submitting the presbytery endorsement process application. This application may be provided by contacting the presbytery office. In the application, the opportunity will be provided to give specific information about the endorsement requirements of the certifying agency.

Requirements for Endorsement Including Presbytery Requirements and Requirements of The Certifying Agency

Presbytery requirements include the submission of the following:

- Evidence of membership in good standing from the congregation or the presbytery as applicable.
- Background clearances
- Personal biography, including the person's journey of faith and call to ministry
- Faith Statement
- Recommendation from the session if the person is a member of a congregation

The Presbytery will also ascertain that the requirements of the certifying agency have been met or review plans to satisfy these requirements. The presbytery will follow the timing of the certifying agency when conducting the endorsement process. In many cases, presbytery endorsement is completed after all requirements of the certifying agency have been met. Certifying agency requirements vary but often include the following:

- Theological training, perhaps including a theological degree
- Clinical training as specified by the certifying agency
- Evidence of willingness to adhere to a code of ethics prescribed by the institutions served and by the certifying bodies
- Reference checks as appropriate
- Satisfactory work performance during the preparation process

Once the requirements for preparation are complete, the Connecting Our Ministry Commission or the Connecting Our Ministry Commission Endorsement Task Group will schedule a meeting with the person seeking endorsement to examine for endorsement.

While church members who are not ruling elders may be endorsed according to the requirements of the certifying agency, the presbytery may only validate Ministers of the Word and Sacrament or Commissioned Ruling Elders for the administration of the sacraments. Approval to administer the sacraments is not part of the endorsement process.

Letter of Endorsement

When the Connecting Our Ministry Commission has approved the endorsement, a letter of endorsement is sent from the presbytery to the certifying body.

A letter of endorsement from the presbytery to the certifying body is continuous unless:

- The applicant has failed to successfully complete the membership or certification process
- There is a change in membership status or level in the professional organization
- There is a change in faith group affiliation, jurisdiction, or standing
- The certifying body requests a new letter

Certification

Certification is the process whereby professional certifying agencies such as APC, AAPC, ACPE, and CPSP declare a person to be in compliance with the professional standards as delineated by that professional organization. Certification is the work of professional organizations. Certification ordinarily addresses such core standards as:

- Clearly articulated professional standards
- Defined admission standards
- Articulated training standards
- Clinical supervisory responsibility and accountability
- Articulated certification steps and standards
- Code of ethics
- Clearly published fees
- Sustainment training and ongoing certification
- Defined disciplinary process
- Continuing professional formation and peer review

Validation of Ministry

Ministers of the Word and Sacrament and Commissioned Ruling Elders employed in specialized ministries that require certification are required to participate in the annual validation of ministry process.

Ministers of the Word and Sacrament and Commissioned Ruling Elders who have part-time positions in specialized ministries, in addition to a primary pastoral position, normally do not need to seek separate validation unless required by the employer.

Ministers of the Word and Sacrament and Commissioned Ruling Elders who have Member-at-Large or Retired status and who serve as volunteers in specialized ministries normally do not need to seek validation unless required to do so by the place of service.

Ministers of the Word and Sacrament and Commissioned Ruling Elders who serve in Mid Council Ministry or in one of the agencies of the PC(USA) are Validated for Ministry in those positions when they begin service. The position is then validated for their entire term of service.

In situations where it is not immediately clear whether validation of ministry is necessary, the Connecting Our Ministry Commission will make the determination as to the requirement for validation.

While endorsement is a one-time process requested by the certifying agency, validation of the ministry is an ongoing requirement to fulfill oversight of the ministry as required by the Presbyterian Church (USA) Book of Order and to remain connected in the ministry within the presbytery.