

**POLICIES RELATING TO
COMMISSIONED RULING ELDERS
FOR THE PRESBYTERY OF LAKE ERIE**

(Approved 2/21/2009, superseding previous policies. This policy was updated in 2012 to comply with new Form of Government references and terminology changes. No actual changes were made to the policy at that time.)

AN UNDERLYING PHILOSOPHY

- A. The employment of commissioned ruling elders (CRE) is a partial implementation of Lake Erie's small church strategy. Along with preaching and worship leadership, these services may include ministries of care and compassion as well as leadership in education and community outreach ministries.
- B. Normally, CREs would be commissioned to serve small membership churches having fewer than one hundred active members where alternatives for using ordained clergy are not feasible or available.
- C. It is the belief of the Presbytery of Lake Erie that when leadership lacks continuity and when turn-over is inordinately high, CREs provide one alternative to assure continuity of leadership.

ADMINISTRATION AND OVERSIGHT

- 1. The Committee on Preparation for Ministry (CPM) shall be responsible for the ongoing task of recruiting and providing training for CREs. When the initial training classes and evaluation of that process is completed then the continuing responsibility of oversight and deployment of CREs shall be the responsibility of the Committee on Ministry (COM). When someone is actually deployed as a CRE the supervision of their work shall be done through a neighboring Minister of Word and Sacrament. This person may moderate Session. If a determination is made that the lay person shall be the moderator of Session the Committee on Ministry will continue to provide a mentor/liaison for continuing conversations and reflection.
- 2. Applicants for CRE classes shall normally be ordained elders and shall have a written recommendation from the session of the congregation of which they are a member. (A person may participate in classes without being an ordained elder with the clear understanding that a person cannot serve in the PCUSA as a CRE unless they are ordained as an elder.) The CPM shall examine each applicant and believe that the person is potentially competent to be a CRE, willing to undergo training, and is amenable to the on-going supervision of CPM.
- 3. Upon approval of CPM the applicant may begin a program of training. CPM shall design and administer a program of education for preparing applicants for commissioning in conformity with the list of training areas described in G-14.10. A person must complete training before being considered as a CRE.
- 4. Once the training is completed the applicant will be examined by CPM to determine her/his readiness for commissioning. Upon approval the trained applicant will receive written certification from CPM that she/he has successfully completed the initial training

and is ready to be considered by COM to be placed on the preaching supply list or to serve as a CRE. Once this certification has been received from CPM the responsibility of oversight passes from CPM to COM.

5. When a certified applicant receives an invitation to serve a local congregation as a CRE the COM shall review the applicant's suitability for that position and make the appropriate recommendation to the presbytery regarding the applicant's commissioning in consultation with the Session in question. COM may choose to have an applicant complete a psychological evaluation prior to placing a person on the preaching supply list. COM will require some sort of psychological evaluation prior to allowing someone to serve as a CRE.
6. The CRE shall work under the supervision of the presbytery through the moderator of the Session of the church being served. COM shall maintain regular contact with the Session's moderator regarding supervision of the CRE while she/he is serving a particular congregation. In the event that COM assigns moderatorial responsibilities to the CRE there will still be a mentor/liaison from COM to the CRE.
7. COM shall evaluate annually the work of the CRE, the continued viability of the relationship, the effectiveness of the congregation's ministry and outreach, and the adequacy of the financial compensation.
8. Churches utilizing CREs shall address these issues in an annual contract:
 - a. The contract shall describe the proportion of full time work that will be expected of the CRE.
 - b. Financial compensation shall be at least $\frac{3}{4}$ of presbytery's minimum compensation for Ministers of Word and Sacrament for the percentage of time of the contract. (A person serving an a $\frac{1}{2}$ time call would be expected to receive $\frac{3}{4}$ compensation of a $\frac{1}{2}$ time call.) Continuing education shall be included in the CREs compensation. Pension and medical benefits are optional. Mileage related to church employment (excluding mileage for commuting) shall be reimbursed at the current IRS rate. Other compensation is negotiable.
9. A continuing education plan is a vital part of service in the larger church. At times there will be continuing education opportunities arranged through the presbytery; at other times there may be events arranged regionally or through a neighboring seminary. Where no specific opportunities exist the CRE is strongly encouraged to pursue continuing education for the own spiritual health and well being.
10. CPM is responsible for any expenses involved in interviewing potential CRE candidates. The student is responsible for the expenses of CRE training (class tuition, books, other supplies, travel, housing, etc.). COM is responsible for expenses in deploying CREs. The cost of a psychological evaluation is shared equally by three participants: the student, COM, and the home church of the student.

COMMISSIONED RULING ELDER – GENERAL JOB DESCRIPTION

There may be variety in the job description of a CRE; however, these basic areas would normally be included in a CRE job description:

1. Preach the Gospel (consistent with the basic tenets of the Reformed faith) at services of worship approved by the Session. It is expected these services will be consistent with the Directory for Worship.

2. Actively engage the congregation in considering their outreach and relationship to the surrounding community.
3. Promote the mission and program of the whole church.
4. During the course of her/his commission engage in a planned program of continuing education to enhance skills. COM may strongly recommend certain training to increase the likelihood of maintaining the commission to that particular church.
5. Have regular contact with mentor/liaison or COM representatives to ensure honest and open dialogue that will build the body of Christ.

The CRE may provide, with a Session request and COM approval:

1. Ministries of care and compassion:
 - a. hospital visitation
 - b. home visitation
 - c. funerals
 - d. new member visitation
2. Lead Bible studies and teach in the Christian Education program of the church
3. Engage in community ministries in consultation with the Session.
4. Refer parishioners to pastoral care providers or counselors.
5. Moderating of Session meetings.
6. Moderating of congregational meetings.
7. Perform marriages.
8. Administer the Sacrament of baptism.
9. Administer the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

ROLE OF MENTORS

When a person applies for lay pastor classes the CPM will assign a mentor. The student and the mentor are to be in regular contact. When a person is appointed as a CRE in a particular congregation the COM will assign a mentor.

FURTHER GUIDANCE FOR COMMISSIONED RULING ELDERS

The deploying of elders as commissioned ruling elders is evolving rapidly in the PCUSA. This policy is not exhaustive. Where specific decisions need to be made the presbytery will be guided by the current wisdom of the Book of Order and/or current CPM and COM Handbooks in relationship to commissioned ruling elders.

CLPPolicy2008 (Book of Order references and a terminology shift from Commissioned Ruling Elder to Commissioned Ruling Elder was completed in 2012.)