

**PRESBYTERY OF YELLOWSTONE  
COMMISSIONED RULING ELDER IN CHURCH SERVICE (CRE) PROGRAM**

**PURPOSE:**

The purpose of the Commissioned Ruling Elder in Church Service (CRE) program is to prepare Lay Persons for Missionary Services, Education, Preaching and leading worship in congregations selected by the presbytery through its Committee on Ministry (COM). The criteria for CRE are developed in accordance with the Book of Order G-14.0560 through G-14.0565, G-11.0103, G-11.0502d, and G-11.0503.

**DEFINITION OF CRE:**

A Commissioned Ruling Elder is a full-time or part-time, salaried or volunteer person, called by God and affirmed by his/her Session, and trained and commissioned by Presbytery to be the assigned preacher/worship preacher to a particular parish or congregation. (G-14.0560 through G-14-0565),(W-4.4002)

**ADMINISTRATION:**

The administration of the CRE training program shall be carried out by the Committee on Vocations. Co-Interim General Presbyters shall be seated on the Committee on Vocations, ex officio. The Committee on Vocations will carry out the functions of recruitment, training, examination and certifying readiness for commissioning. For the training process it shall act for the Presbytery according to the provisions of the Book of Order G-140560.

The Committee on Ministry will maintain a placement opportunity list within the presbytery. However, the COM cannot guarantee placement for any particular Commissioned or commissionable Ruling Elder. Placement will depend upon the desires of the Session, CRE's willingness to travel or relocate and the appropriateness of the placement as discerned by the Session, CRE and Committee on Ministry.

Judgments concerning standards, training, duties and compensation are to be on a case-by-case basis, approved by the Committee on Ministry. The Commissioned Ruling Elder Resource Book shall be used as a resource in making these judgments.

**PROCESS**

Introduction – CRE's are not ordained ministers and will follow a separate "track" from those seeking ordination. The track includes the three phases of Seeker, Learner, and Commissioned Ruling Elder and does not require the same level of sophistication and knowledge s for those seeking ordination.

A Lay Person's ability to preach, teach and lead worship comes more through experience and practice than formal training. Therefore, competency – rather than credentials – should be used as a basis for commissioning. This competency is to be understood in light of the place of local commissioning and not of the whole church.

Phase 1: Seeker – During this phase, a person believing that he/she has been called by God to be a CRE would seek validation of the call by the Session and/or Parish Council, where there is such, and then by the presbytery through the Committee on Vocations. The Committee on Vocation will examine a candidate regarding his/her personal faith, motives for seeking the commission, and their knowledge in the areas of Biblical studies, Reformed theology, Presbyterian polity and pastoral care, and worship leadership and sacraments as well as ministry expectations. The Committee on Vocations shall also secure a background check and a psychological evaluation by a qualified psychologist, approved by the Committee on Vocations, during this phase. Cost of the psychological examination shall be paid 1/3 by the Seeker, / 1/3 by Seeker's church, and 1/3 by the Presbytery when directed and accepted by all parties. Cost of the background check shall be paid for by the Seeker.

Phase 2: Learner – The Committee on Vocations shall appoint a Mentor for each Learner. During this phase, through training and experience, the Learner would demonstrate competency in theology, Bible, preaching, worship, sacraments, polity, teaching and pastoral care. Upon satisfactory demonstration of such competency, appropriate examination by the Committee on Vocations. The Mentor shall provide the Committee on Vocations written reports of the Learner's progress through the course of study.

Phase 3: Commissioned Ruling Elder – This phase is the formal commissioning of the CRE to a specific place of ministry. This commissioning is valid for a specified period of time (up to three years) and may be extended. There shall be an annual evaluation by the Presbytery's COM.

#### STANDARDS FOR CRE

- Faith as expressed by: Faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and belief in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit: Acceptance of the Old and New Testaments as the authoritative witness to that faith; Ability to articulate clearly their faith commitment and journey.
- Maturity as expressed by: An Elder in the Presbyterian Church (USA); Membership in the Presbyterian Church (USA) and faithful, regular participation in its worship and service; Demonstrated PASTORAL ability; Acceptance, understanding and faithfulness to one's vows of ordination.
- Christian Life as expressed by: Moral standards acceptable to the Christian community, as defined in the Book of Discipline, PC(USA); Commitment to personal spiritual growth through prayer, Bible reading and devotions.
- Constitutional as expressed by: Affirmative answers to the nine Constitutional questions (W-4.4003 and G-14.0565); Articulate and demonstrated affirmation of Presbyterian polity and practice.

#### DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF CRE

- Shall be the primary worship leader and preacher of the congregations(s), allowed to conduct any or all of the functions outlines in the Book of Order as approved by presbytery on a case-by-case basis.
- Shall work “under the supervision of the Presbytery through a mentor appointed by the Committee on Ministry at the time of call.
- Shall perform other pastoral functions such as teaching, visitation of members at home or hospital, visitation of prospective members, conducting funerals.
- Shall attend meetings of Session (Parish Council) and Presbytery.
- Shall participate in other services and activities of the church, such as Sunday School, choir, prayer meetings, and study groups as negotiated by the Church, CRE and Committee on Ministry.

#### COMPENSATION OF CRE

- Shall be established by written agreement between the CRE, the Session of the church(s) served, and the Committee on Ministry (See Attachment F). The amount of compensation shall depend on workload, time involved, travel necessary, and volunteer considerations. CRE’s that are serving only as pulpit supply shall be remunerated at the same minimum rate as all pulpit supplies in the presbytery; i.e., \$75.00 for one service plus mileage at the standard presbytery reimbursement rate.
- Shall preach no more than four times in a year in pulpit supply relationship/vacant church without negotiating the CRE Agreement.

#### AMPLIFICATION OF PHASE 2, LEARNER

1. Model Used- The model used is a combination of a competency-based model and an academic model.
  - a. In the competency-based part, the Learner is (A) preaching, (B) teaching, (C) conducting worship, (D) conducting funerals, and (E) pastoral care. Find out if the Learner can perform satisfactorily in these areas. Provide training in those areas where a person does not demonstrate competency.
  - b. In the academic part, the Learner must demonstrate competence in (F) the Bible, in language appropriate, (G) Reformed theology, (H) sacraments, and (I) PC(USA) polity.
2. Academic Competency- Competency in these areas shall entail familiarity as outlined.
  - a. Bible

- 1) Basic knowledge of: Content of the Bible; Literary styles; Methods of Interpretations; Development (oral tradition, time-lines, authorship).
- 2) Resources:
  - a) Cook Theological School;
  - b) Vancouver School of Theology;
  - c) Whitworth College and Summer Institute;
  - d) Western National Leadership Conference training;
  - e) Tri-Presbytery Event;
  - f) University of Dubuque Theological Seminary CRE online courses;
  - g) *The Bible Speaks to You* by Robert McAfee Brown;
  - h) *The Interpreter's Bible*, Volumes 1 and 7
  - i) *The Layman's Bible Commentary*;
  - j) *Understanding the Old Testament* by Bernard W. Anderson;
  - k) *Understanding the New Testament* by Kee and Young
  - l) (DELETE)Montana Association of Churches CLP Training
  - m) Additional resources listed on the PC(USA) Web site at [www.pcusa.org](http://www.pcusa.org) .

b. Reformed Theology

- 1) Basic knowledge:
  - a) Historical development of Presbyterianism;
  - b) Reformed confession of faith
- 2) Resources:
  - a) *Presbyterian Creeds: A Guide to the Book of Confessions* by Jack Rogers;
  - b) *Presbyterian Creeds: A Supplement on the Brief Statement of Faith* by Jack Rogers
  - c) *A Commentary on the Confession of 1967 and an Introduction to the Book of Confessions* by Edward A. Dowey, Jr;
  - d) *Major Themes in the Reformed Tradition* by Donald K. McKim;
  - e) Presbyterian Video Series by Jack Rogers and Isabelle Rogers of Synod of Lakes and Prairies.

c. Sacraments

- 1) Basic knowledge:
  - a) Nature of the elements;
  - b) Order of administration.
- 2) Resources:
  - a) Directory for Worship, PC(USA)
  - b) Book of Common Worship, PC(USA)

d. Polity

1) Basic knowledge:

- a) Organizational structure of PC(USA);
- b) The role and responsibilities of the Session and Presbytery.

2) Resources:

- a) Book of Order, PC(USA);
- b) *Companion to the Constitution: Polity for the Local Church* by Frank Beattie

3. Mentor- When the Committee on Vocations validates a Seeker to be a Learner, it will assign a Mentor to the Learner (see Atch D). The Mentor must be an Ordained Teaching Elder or Honorably Retired member of Presbytery. The mentor is responsible for documenting all meetings with the Seeker in writing to the Committee on Vocations. The Mentor is also responsible for sending a written report of the meeting to the Committee on Vocations.

4. First Conference with Mentor/Moderator

a. This conference shall be held immediately following the action of validation by the Committee on Vocations. There shall be four people present at the first meeting: the moderator of the Learner's church session, the Mentor and one member of the Committee on Vocations, as well as the Learner.

b. The purpose of the conference shall be to:

1) Discuss and explain the CRE program and answer questions concerning the process and time-line.

2) Discuss the assessment process.

a) Assess if a person can perform in the competency-based skills (Section A-E of Assessment section).

b) The Learner shall fill out his/her assessment form and discuss it with the mentor.

c) Following this conference, these same areas shall be assessed by several persons of the Learner's choosing, using the same instrument.

d) Assessment in these areas shall respond to such questions as: "Did the sermon/class/funeral help you or challenge you?" Was the service appropriate for the occasion and similar questions directed to the needs of people, rather than academic questions such as, "Did the sermon carry through a theme?" or "Did the worship flow smoothly from beginning to end?"

5. Second Conference with Mentor and member of the Committee on Vocations

a. The purpose is to review the results of the assessment and agree on a 'Course of Study' and to assess the Learner's Competence in (F) English Bible, or language appropriate, (G) Reformed Theology, (H) sacraments, (I) PC(USA)

polity. The Learner will be his/her own Bible and any other necessary materials with him/her.

- b. Assessment of items (F) through (I) shall follow the suggestions under Assessment section (F-I).
- c. At the conference, the Mentor and Learner shall agree upon those areas, (A)-(I), in which the Learner is competent, reporting such to the Committee on Vocations, and those areas which need further study and experience.
- d. A learning plan shall be agreed upon in areas of need. The Seeker, Mentor and member of the Committee on Vocations. This will be known as the "contract for learning." A copy of the contract for learning will be sent to the Committee on Vocations.

## 6. Pursuing Learning

- a. Learning plans may include a mixture of: Self-study; Studying one-on-one with a Mentor; Small classes with leadership provided either locally or by the Presbytery; Some formal classes at places such as the Western National Leadership Conference, (Delete) the Tri-Presbytery School or training provided by the Montana Association of Churches, as well as travel opportunities and online courses.
- b. Advising and evaluating: The Mentor and Learner shall periodically but at least quarterly review the Learner's progress. This will include setting realistic time-lines for completing of work.
- c. Evaluation of competencies (A-E): When the Mentor and the Learner are satisfied that the Learner is competent in a required field, the Mentor shall report that to the Committee on Vocation and nor further preparation will be required. A Learner may be working on several competencies at the same time.
- d. Evaluation of academic knowledge (F-I): Upon completion of a course (self-study, a mentoring program, or a small class with local or Presbytery leadership), where there is such, to assess progress. If all agree that there has been satisfactory mastery of the subject, no further training will be required in that area. For courses taken at an educational institution, a certification form from the institution showing satisfactory completion of the course shall be acceptable.
- e. Evaluation of the mental, emotional, and maturity level of the learner will be made using information gained to this point in the process. This is to include where the Learner is in their faith journey.
- f. If the Mentor of the Learner shall recommend that the Learner not continue in the program, the Mentor shall consult the Committee on Vocations, which shall make a determination about the Learner's future status.

## 7. Final Steps

- a. When both the Learner and the Mentor are satisfied that the Learner has completed all requirements and is ready to be commissioned, the Mentor will present the Learner to the Committee on Vocations for a final conference and appropriate examination. If the Committee on Vocations is satisfied, they shall certify to the Committee on Ministry that the Learner is ready to be

- commissioned. The Committee on Ministry shall approve the terms of call and present them along with the Learner for the Presbytery to commission.
- b. The Committee on Ministry shall oversee the placement of the CRE. This placement shall include a written agreement reached with the CRE and the Session(s) of the church(s) to be served as to the compensation and areas of responsibility, specifically the functions authorized to perform as per G-14.0562.
  - c. The Presbytery of Yellowstone Sexual Harassment Policy will be reviewed and agreed upon by the learner prior to the final commissioning taking place.. Copy of the agreement form is attached to this handbook.

## 8. Continuing Nurture

- a. An annual plan for continued improvement, study and contract renewal shall be worked out with the Session, CRE, and the Committee on Ministry mentor at the time of commissioning.
- b. Annual review shall be carried out by the Committee on Ministry and will include a review of goals and plans agreed upon above. (see Attachment I)

Amended 30 October 1999  
Revised April 2005  
Revised 17 May 2008  
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Encl;  
PCUSA CRE Definition  
Presbytery of Yellowstone Sexual Harassment Policy.