

Policy #8

COMMISSIONED RULING ELDERS

A ruling elder identified by the presbytery for commissioning shall be recommended by the session of his/her church of membership and shall complete the education and training required by the presbytery, pass a background check and take the psychological assessment that is required of all persons entering the candidate for ministry process. The presbytery, church of membership, and ruling elder shall share the cost for the psychological assessment equally. Upon completion of these requirements the committee on ministry will interview the individual and send recommendation for commissioning to the presbytery. The presbytery will examine the ruling elder and vote to commission him/her to a particular service, which may or may not be in his/her congregation of membership. The presbytery shall assign a teaching elder to be mentor/ supervisor to the commissioned ruling elder. If the mentor/supervisor relationship terminates, supervision of the commissioned ruling elder will become the responsibility of the Committee on Ministry.

Procedure

According to the Form of Government G-2.10, the presbytery may authorize a ruling elder to be commissioned to limited pastoral service in churches that cannot meet minimum compensation for a minister; where teaching elders are not available; or churches that need leaders who are fluent in the language and have knowledge of the culture of the people. In such cases the presbytery will consult with the session of the church and seek ruling elders with the gifts and graces for pastoral ministry.

The ruling elder identified for commissioning shall meet with the committee on ministry. He/she must then pass a background check and have a psychological assessment. A course of study deemed appropriate by the presbytery* covering Bible, reformed theology and sacraments, Presbyterian polity, preaching, leading worship, pastoral care, and teaching will be completed. In planning this education with the committee on preparation for ministry there will be thought given about the type of ministry service for which the person will be commissioned and the cultural context in which he or she will serve.

Upon completion of these requirements, the ruling elder shall be interviewed by the committee on ministry/preparation for ministry, who will send its recommendation for commissioning to the presbytery and will provide for examination by the presbytery in the areas of personal faith, motives and areas of instruction. The presbytery will commission the ruling elder for a limited time (up to three years, renewable) and conduct a service of commissioning in the church where the ruling elder will serve. Based on the needs of that church the presbytery may authorize the commissioned ruling elder to administer one or both of the sacraments, moderate the session under supervision, perform weddings, and vote at presbytery.

*Many Presbyterian seminaries and colleges offer online courses for the preparation of commissioned ruling elders. The courses offered for certified church educators would also be appropriate.

Mentor/Supervisors

The presbytery shall appoint a teaching elder member of the presbytery to serve as mentor and supervisor to the ruling elder during his/her service to a church. Monthly meetings between the mentor and commissioned ruling elder for prayer, reflection and supervision will take place. In addition, meetings for mentors will be held periodically.

Evaluation

The committee on ministry will receive an annual written evaluation from each church session served by a commissioned ruling elder and each mentor supervisor, and the committee will conduct an evaluation with each commissioned ruling elder at least triennially.

If the Commission is not Renewed

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.

Authorization of a ruling elder for pastoral service is limited and local for service in a particular presbytery for a limited term. The commission is not transferable to another presbytery.