

## **Grace Presbytery Policy on Commissioned Pastors<sup>1</sup> and Program for Recruitment, Training, and Strategic Deployment**

Approved by the Committee on Ministry on May 16, 2017

### Background

On October 6, 2016, Grace Presbytery adopted the following addition to the Standing Rules and Manual of Administrative Operations of Grace Presbytery as proposed by the Presbytery Council:

“The Committee on Ministry has oversight of the placement, recruitment and training of Commissioned Ruling Elders (CREs) and will develop a training program in consultation with the Committee on Preparation for Ministry and the Examinations Subcommittee. This will include both training and consultation with prospective CREs about the form of ministry they might best pursue. If that initial consultation leads to inquiry/candidacy, there will be an immediate referral of that individual to the Committee on Preparation for Ministry.”

As a result of this action, the CP Task Force met on April 19, 2017. Present for the meeting were: David Batchelder, Moderator (Examinations); Jimmy Chapman (COM); Nancy Drake (Examinations); Ron Holloman (Staff); and Drew Travis (CPM). Members excused: Donna Bowling; and Thom Lamb (CPM). The Task Force recommended and the Committee on Ministry adopted the following proposal.

### Policy and Program

To meet the challenge of membership churches over whom loom critical and urgent viability and sustainability questions having to do with membership, financial, and ministry capability, Grace Presbytery’s Committee on Ministry adopted the following strategy for the recruitment, training, and strategic deployment of Commissioned Pastors. Note: this strategy in no way diminishes Presbytery’s desire and preference for fully trained Master of Divinity credentialed “installed” Minister of Word and Sacrament/Teaching Elder leadership for each of its congregations. The Commissioned Pastor strategy includes the following elements:

1. The purpose of CPs in Grace Presbytery is to provide pastoral leadership that will enable local congregations to bear faithful witness to the good news of Jesus Christ in the midst of life and death, including the death of the congregation if that is what comes to pass.
2. There are two general courses of ministry for CPs in the context where Grace Presbytery finds itself: (a) a ministry of transformation; and (b) a ministry of chaplaincy.
3. A CP engaged in a ministry of transformation serves a congregation living in a change of seasons between its autumn and winter. In fact, such a congregation may lack clarity as to where it is precisely, due to the inability of any leadership to know exactly what is happening in the current “cultural climate change” and what this means for the church. What distinguishes churches identified for a ministry of transformation from a ministry of chaplaincy is that leadership discerns at the level of viability and sustainability. This

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<sup>1</sup> Commissioned Pastors (CP) were formerly referred to as Commissioned Ruling Elders (CRE) in the Book of Order and was changed in the 2017-2019 edition of the Book of Order.

criterion has not yet been fully articulated but the nature of ministry in such churches will include strong theological and pastoral engagement around the critical questions lifted up in *New Beginnings*: Who are we? (Identity). What is our calling? (Vocation). And who is my neighbor? (Mission). A CP engaged in such a ministry will be one whose gifts and call have been identified through a discernment process and whose training will have included special attention to these challenges. Among those areas of special training will be negotiating change and managing conflict.

4. A CP engaged in a ministry of chaplaincy serves a congregation in the sunset of its life. Presbytery leadership, with the congregation, has discerned that the primary calling for that congregation is to “die well.” Dying well has to do with
  - a. maintaining the full dignity of every member as belonging to the larger church (of Grace Presbytery, the PCUSA, and the “one, holy, catholic, apostolic” church),
  - b. proclaiming until its last breath the fullness of the gospel of life,
  - c. exhibiting the nature of baptism as service to the “other” remembering that such service is meaningfully expressed in prayer for church and the world’s suffering; and
  - d. contributing as stewards to the support of mission

A CP engaged in such a ministry will be one whose gifts and call have been identified through a discernment process and whose training will have included special attention to these challenges.

5. Generally, Grace Presbytery CPs will all receive training in: preaching and worship, administration of the sacraments, pastoral care (including funerals, hospital visitation, and managing conflict), finance, hermeneutics, Bible, Reformed theology (what it means to be Reformed), practical polity, and mission.
6. Grace Presbytery CPs will receive a significant level of their training through the Certificate of Ministry program at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary or denominational seminaries who are offering similar programs. It is to the Presbytery’s advantage to work with Austin from the point of view of being able to influence what courses are offered. The Presbytery may make a partial contribution to each CP being so trained.
7. CPs will receive supplemental training “in house” beyond what is given in the Certificate in Ministry program. “In house” refers to training that is likely to be provided within the Presbytery bounds, staffed by local leadership, more substantially practical in nature than Austin is able to provide, and made available regionally within the Presbytery for the convenience of CPs. Some of this training, referred to as “practicum,” will be expected of everyone; and some will be customized to one or more CREs based on a personal assessment completed by leadership on each CP. This personalized approach is considered a helpful adaptation that does not require the approach of “one-size-(of training)-fits-all.” The Supervisory Task Force will provide proactive training meaning that each CP remains active in ongoing development in ministry skills and competencies.

8. Each CP admitted into training will have undergone a thorough interview and assessment process. On an individual basis, a person can be deployed in a church setting while still in training to become a CP. This tactical decision is partially driven by urgency. Lacking available CPs, churches are turning to persons from outside the denomination and Reformed tradition who have no accountability to the Presbytery. Note: the medical profession has a substantial internship requirement.
9. Every CP will be provided a “mentor,” recruited and trained by the Presbytery to be a tutor and guide in all matters of ministry for the CP. Mentors will be persons who discern a “call,” and based on experience, wisdom, skill, and proximity to the CP.
10. The CP ministry will remain under the Committee on Ministry (COM) for its overall administration, supervision, and accountability. COM shall assign this responsibility to a Supervisory Task Force. Initially appointed to this Task Force is: David Batchelder - Moderator (*Examinations*), Donna Bowling (*Seminary trained Ruling Elder*), Jimmy Chapman (*COM Consultant*), Nancy Drake (*Examinations*), Ron Holloman (*Presbytery Staff*), Kathy Jones (*COM*), and Drew Travis (*CPM*).
11. Among the qualities Grace Presbytery will look for in its CPs is maturity of faith, compassionate in spirit, emotional intelligence, openness to learning, capacity to listen, and teachability.
12. CPs would be identified in a multifaceted way that includes solicitation of names through reliable channels in the Presbytery, and through the communication avenues already established in the Presbytery. When CP ministry is deemed the most favorable option for a church, the CP Supervisory Task Force and COM will begin a conversation with the church’s Session.
13. Current CPs will gradually cycle into this new CP structure of accountability which includes recommissioning following review. This will happen on a different timetable for each current CP (which will make it more manageable) but during the first three years all current CPs will have undergone a review of ministry and been recommissioned or not. At the review, Presbytery will communicate its new expectations regarding ongoing ministry training and ensure that continuing CPs will participate.
14. At the end of training, CPs may be recommended for placement by the CP Supervisory Task Force to COM.
15. All of the above is understood to be charting a course in new territory which means that this program will need to be under continual review and reconsideration based on what is discovered, but cannot be learned ahead of time.