

PRESBYTERY OF EASTERN VIRGINIA COMMISSIONED RULING ELDER PROGRAM

The Presbyterian Church (USA) provides an opportunity for local presbyteries to use the gifts of ruling elders in places where a teaching elder may not be available to serve specific ministry needs via the Commissioned Ruling Elder (CRE) Program.

The Presbytery of Eastern Virginia (PEVA) is responsible for determining its specific ministry and mission needs; developing its educational criteria; and determining where CREs may serve and overseeing their ministry.

PEVA's CRE program is overseen by the CRE Sub-Committee of the Commission on Ministry (COM).

The CRE sub-committee is responsible for the following processes:

- Application
- Screening
- Educational Requirements

The Commission on Ministry (COM) is responsible for the following processes:

- Examination
- Commissioning
- Deployment
- Supervision and support

WHAT IS A COMMISSIONED RULING ELDER?

(formerly called "Commissioned Lay Pastor")

When a presbytery, in consultation with a session or other responsible committee, determines that its strategy for mission requires it, the presbytery may authorize a ruling elder to be commissioned to limited pastoral service as assigned by the Presbytery. [Book of Order G-2.1001]

APPLICATION & SCREENING PROCESS

To be eligible to be commissioned for pastoral service, a ruling elder must be a PCUSA elder with special gifts for pastoral ministry that are currently needed to meet the ministry and mission goals of the Presbytery. CRE applicants should be properly screened by the Presbytery before entering the CRE program with a focus on a very wide range of topics including sense of call; gifts for ministry; and practical life experiences. It is also very important that the Presbytery examine the motives of a CRE applicant before they enter the program.

Before officially enrolling in the Presbytery's CRE Program, a ruling elder should be prepared to meet the following process:

- Must be a PCUSA ruling elder in good standing
- Must talk with his/her pastor and session about CRE ministry and receive a letter of recommendation to participate in the program from their session
- Must officially submit an application and meet with the Presbytery's CRE sub-committee for acceptance into the program. The applicant will be notified of the sub-committee's decision.
- Must participate in the educational process required by the Presbytery

EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS

The CRE candidates must take and pass a group of mandatory courses (from a PCUSA-approved seminary - either on campus or online) in the following areas of study:

1. Old Testament
2. New Testament
3. Reformed Theology
4. Presbyterian Polity
5. Preaching
6. Reformed Worship & Sacraments
7. Pastoral Care
8. Christian Education

EXAMINATION, COMMISSIONING, DEPLOYMENT & SUPPORT

After proof of satisfactory completion of the required CRE courses has been submitted to the CRE sub-committee, the ruling elder may contact the COM to begin the process of seeking a commission with an appropriate entity (church, nursing home, etc.). If a ministry opportunity matching the gifts of the ruling elder is available, the ruling elder will be examined by the COM on the topics of faith, motive and knowledge.

At this time in the process, the CRE candidate will automatically be added to PEVA's Occasional Supply List so that the candidate is available for preaching opportunities, if they wish to participate. [*Added: May 6, 2014*]

Upon satisfactory completion of the examination, a ruling elder may then be commissioned for a limited period of service, not to exceed three years (per commission). The Presbytery may authorize a CRE to administer one or both of the sacraments, moderate session meetings, perform weddings and vote at Presbytery meetings.

If commissioned, the CRE must be supervised by a teaching elder/mentor. By the end of January, the mentor should provide a report to the CRE sub-committee on the CRE's ministry. [*Additional conditions below were added on May 6, 2014*]

- CRE mentors should not be on the staff of the church where the CRE serves or be the CRE's home church pastor.
- The mentorship process should continue for as long as the CRE serves a particular ministry.
- While the CRE sub-committee will complete the background work needed to identify potential mentors, COM shall ultimately be responsible for approving mentor selections.
- The CRE sub-committee will arrange annual conversations with each CRE and receive an annual report from each CRE's mentor.

After training has been completed, the CRE sub-committee will certify the applicant ready for commission. Unlike a "teaching elder" who is ordained as a "teaching elder" (whether or not they have a call to serve at a particular place), a ruling elder can only become a "commissioned ruling elder" when they have a commission to a specific ministry.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Can a three-year commission be renewed?

A CRE cannot be commissioned for more than a three year period. If requested by a responsible entity (session, committee, board, etc.), the Presbytery may approve the renewal of the commission. There is no limit for the number of times a commission may be renewed.

What 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.

What if a Commissioned Ruling Elder moves?

It should be noted that the authorization of a ruling elder for pastoral service is limited and local. This means that the ruling elder may serve in a particular ministry, in a particular Presbytery, for a limited term. If the ruling elder ceases to serve in that ministry, the commission is no longer valid.

Since the use, training, supervision, and nurture of CREs is determined individually by each Presbytery, CREs are not eligible to use the PCUSA call system (Church Leadership Connection) for placement in service.

If a ruling elder relocates outside of the Presbytery and joins a new PCUSA congregation, they must contact the presbytery to see if there is a need for CREs. If so, reference checks would be done and the new presbytery would determine whether the previous training meets their requirements.

What’s the difference between a “commissioned ruling elder” and a “ruling elder?”

A CRE may administer the sacraments, moderate session and congregational meetings, and officiate marriages if permitted by state law.