

THE COMMISSIONED LAY PASTOR PROGRAM

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Reformed Tradition holds that all baptized Christians are called to be active participants in the Church's total ministry. Thus, every Christian, whether ordained or not, is called to ministry. This total ministry is nothing less than the exercise of the Church's vocation to continue the ministry of Jesus Christ. God reconciled the world to himself through Christ. We are called to embody that reconciliation in our own time and in our own place through worship, through service to others, and by proclamation of God's Word to all people.
2. The Presbytery of Transylvania, in keeping with the Reformed Tradition, aware of the growing problem of providing competent ministerial leadership for smaller membership churches, adopts the Commissioned Lay Pastor Program as described in this paper in accordance with the *Book of Order*, G-14.0801.
3. The purpose of the program is to recruit, train, examine and certify, place, supervise, evaluate, and provide continuing education for persons who will serve in churches needing the ministry of a Commissioned Lay Pastor. The persons will also be recommended for occasional supply as available.
4. The Commissioned Lay Pastor Committee (CLPC) and the Committee on Ministry (COM) each have specific responsibilities in administering the program.

II. CONSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY

1. According to *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA), Part 11, The Book of Order*, G- 14.0801a, Commissioned Lay Pastors are provided as follows:

The commissioned lay pastor is an elder of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), who is granted a local commission by the presbytery to lead worship and preach the gospel, watch over the people, and provide for their nurture and service. This commission is valid only in one or more congregations, new church development, or other validated ministries of the presbytery designated by the presbytery. The elder shall be instructed in Bible, Reform Theology and Sacraments, Presbyterian polity, preaching, leading worship, pastoral care, and teaching. The elder shall be examined by the appropriate committee of presbytery as to personal faith, motives for seeking the commission, and the areas of instruction mentioned previously. An elder who has been commissioned and later ceases to serve in a particular

congregation may continue to be listed as available to serve, but is not authorized to perform the functions of a commissioned lay pastor until appointed again to a particular congregation by the presbytery.

2. Section G-14.0801b of the Book of Order establishes the limited nature of the commission and the period of its validity. It reads as follows:

“The commission shall be valid for a period of up to three years as determined by the presbytery. It may be renewed at expiration or terminated at any time at the discretion of the presbytery. Presbytery shall regularly provide resources for the person's spiritual and intellectual development. A review of the work of the commissioned lay pastor shall be conducted annually. Presbytery shall revoke the commission of any lay pastor who does not abide by these provisions or whose work is evaluated as not adequate to meet the needs of the particular congregation or the presbytery.”

3. Conditional authorization to perform functions in addition to those outlined in section G- 1 4.0801a is provided in section G 1 4.0801c, which states:

“When a presbytery, in consultation with the session or other responsible committee, determines that its strategy for mission in a local church requires it, and after additional instruction deemed necessary by the presbytery has been provided, a presbytery may authorize a commissioned lay pastor to perform any or all of the following functions described in (I)-(6) below.

- (1) Administer the Lord's Supper.
- (2) Administer the Sacrament of Baptism.
- (3) Moderate the session of the congregation under the supervision of and when invited by the moderator of the session appointed by the presbytery.
- (4) Have a voice in meetings of presbytery.
- (5) Have a vote in meetings of the presbytery (such vote to be counted as an elder commissioner for purposes of parity).
- (6) Perform a service of Christian marriage when invited by the session or other responsible committee, and when allowed by the state.”

4. Section G- 14-0801d requires that the commissioned lay pastor be supervised and have a mentor assigned to him or her:

“The commissioned lay pastor shall work under the supervision of the presbytery through the moderator of the session of the church being

served or through the committee on ministry.' A minister of the Word and Sacrament shall be assigned as a mentor and supervisor.”

III. ADMINISTRATION OF THE PROGRAM

The COM will be responsible for assessing the needs of the churches within the presbytery for the commissioned lay pastor program. The CLP will recruit, select and train applicants. An end term examination will be prepared and administered by an *ad hoc* committee of four members from CLPC, two members from COM and two members from the CPM (Committee of Preparation for Ministry). When a candidate has successfully completed the training and the examination process, the CLPC will recommend to presbytery that s/he be certified. The COM will recommend to the presbytery for commissioning those who have been certified and have been called to serve (a) particular church(es). They will be commissioned according to the *Book of Order*, G. 14-0801g. The COM will also recommend to presbytery the special responsibilities and privileges that may be granted to specific CLP's serving church in covenant relationships (G. 14-801c). Once a candidate has successfully completed the training and examination process and becomes certified, the COM will be responsible for oversight of the CLP, including the appointment of a moderator and mentor/supervisor (G. 14.802d). Continuing education opportunities will be provide by the CLPC. The COM shall conduct a review of each CLP annually.

IV. QUALIFICATIONS

1. The CLPC shall actively recruit candidates on a presbytery-wide basis. it will encourage churches to identify persons who show the abilities and talents needed for this task. Transylvania Presbytery will accept applications from members of churches within the presbytery.
2. The applicant shall complete the application and furnish at least three recommendations, one of which shall be by a minister of the Word and Sacrament of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Ordinarily, the applicant will have been a member of a Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for at least two years and the applicant must receive endorsement from his/her session. The minister of the church where the applicant is a member will then, with the approval of the applicant's session, forward the application to the CLPC of Transylvania Presbytery.
3. Members of Presbyterian churches in other presbyteries may make application to receive training according to the procedure mentioned above and with the approval of their presbyteries. Preference, however, will be given to members of churches in Transylvania Presbytery.

4. CLP's from other presbyteries who wish to serve within Transylvania Presbytery shall meet with the COM and the CLPC to determine what additional training might be necessary in order to equip them to serve in this presbytery.

V. TRAINING

1. The CLPC will be responsible for selecting and training the applicants. Applicants admitted into the program will be classified as apprentice lay pastors and will be under the care of the CLPC. Classes will be taught on a 2-year rotation, and, once the rotation starts, no new candidates will be allowed to start the program. Ordinarily, an apprentice will be present for all sessions of each class and complete the assigned work. An apprentice who has to miss one session is responsible for making arrangements with the instructor to make up missed work.
2. The CLPC will work closely with each individual apprentice in designing a program of study.
3. The CLPC will provide two distinct but closely related forms of learning for the apprentices:
 - (a) An apprenticeship arrangement in which hands-on learning about the design and conduct of worship and other aspects of the preaching, teaching, and nurturing ministry of the church will be carried out under the guidance of an ordained Presbyterian minister
 - (b) Organized group and individual study,
4. The rationale for the hands-on learning arrangement is that the people entering this program will be mature adults who wish to become actively involved in their work as lay pastors as soon as possible, and that learning about their work is best accomplished in the context of doing it. The specific arrangements will vary depending on the background of the apprentice.
5. The study program will be planned and implemented by the CLPC. The principal text will be comprehensive in content and theological themes.
 - (a) The Bible, comprehensive in content and theological theme (Old Testament and New Testament)-intensive in study of the gospels.
 - (b) The *Book of Order*, with special emphasis on the first five chapters, and the *Book of Confessions*, with particular note of the Confession of 1967.
6. The CLPC will design the seminars so that these texts, along with supplemental materials, will enable the apprentices to become competent in

Bible, Reformed Theology and Sacraments. The apprentices will attend the required sessions of study. An end term examination will be required before training is completed.

7. The study sessions will demonstrate how the Holy Spirit can be active in the process of individual growth through the interaction of diverse Christians dealing with common concerns. It will encourage and enable individual spiritual growth.

8. The CLPC shall be responsible for determining who will bear the cost of training on a case-by-case basis, and within the limits of its budget.

VI. THE COMMISSION

A. ASSIGNMENT

1. The COM shall make a recommendation to the presbytery as to the specific church or churches the commissioned lay pastor may serve. Upon approval of the recommendation, a covenant agreement between the church(es), the COM, and the commissioned lay pastor shall be finalized. The agreement shall define the responsibilities of the commissioned lay pastor (in accordance with the *Book of Order*, G- 1 480la, and the covenanting church(es), including compensation for services provided.

2. Persons trained to serve as commissioned lay pastors may serve as a temporary supply for pastors away from their pulpits or for churches without pastors. Request for services shall be from a list of persons approved by COM.

B. REMUNERATION

1. Remuneration for the services of the commissioned lay pastor shall be negotiated between sessions of the church(es) to be served and the commissioned lay pastor, in consultation with the COM.

2. The terms shall include the time involved, travel expenses, and the need for continuing education. The adequacy of remuneration will be reviewed at least annually by the sessions(s) and the commissioned lay pastor, in consultation with the COM. In no case will terms of remuneration be changed without the knowledge and approval of the COM.

3. Remuneration for the temporary supply, using those trained to serve as commissioned lay pastors, shall use the following formula:

(a) An amount for preaching/leading worship, and additional duties that provide for the nurture and service of the people, plus

(b) A mileage amount on distance traveled.

C. CONTINUING EDUCATION

Presbytery shall regularly provide resources for the person's spiritual and intellectual development (G-14.0801b). The person trained to serve, as a commissioned lay pastor is to engage in at least 12 hours of continuing education experiences annually, as negotiated and approved by CLPC. This is true for the person actively serving as a commissioned lay pastor and for the person not actively serving.

D. EXPIRATION

The commission shall be valid for a period of up to three years as determined by the presbytery. It may be renewed at expiration.

E. REVOCATION

Presbytery shall revoke the commission of any lay pastor who does not abide by the provisions outlined or whose work is evaluated as not adequate to meet the needs of the particular congregation(s) or the presbytery (G-14.0801b). This action shall be taken only after consultation with COM, the CLP, and the session(s) of the church(es) being served.

F. RECOMMISSIONING

A CLP who has been commissioned and later ceases to serve in a particular congregations may continue to be listed as available to serve, but is not authorized to perform the functions of a commissioned lay pastor until appointed again to (a) particular congregations by the presbytery (G-14.0801a).

VII. SUPERVISION

The commissioned lay pastor shall work under the supervision of the presbytery through the moderator of the session of the church(s) being served or through the COM. A minister of the Word and Sacrament shall be assigned as a mentor and supervisor (G- 1 4.080 1 c).

VIII. ACCOUNTABILITY

The CLPC shall report to the presbytery at least annually, and as necessary. Its report shall include the names of applicants, the names of commissioned lay pastors, the names of supervisors, the names of those churches served by the commissioned lay pastors, and other information as may be of value to the presbytery.