



**THE PRESBYTERY OF MINNESOTA VALLEYS  
COMMISSION ON LEADERSHIP**

**MANUAL AND RESOURCE GUIDE**

***SECTION 8***  
**COMMISSIONED PASTORS**  
**(Also Known As**  
**Commissioned Ruling Elders)**

**COMMISSION ON LEADERSHIP MANUAL**  
**SECTION 8: COMMISSIONED PASTORS**  
**(Also known as Commissioned Ruling Elders)**

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## WHAT IS A COMMISSIONED PASTOR?

### **Vision Statement:**

A Commissioned Pastor (also known as a Commissioned Ruling Elder) is a calling acknowledged by the Book of Order to ministry within the PC (USA). God calls men and women to this ministry. Using their God given gifts and talents, along with appropriate training, Commissioned Pastors are one of the varieties of ministry the Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys may employ in assisting congregations and ministries within the presbytery to be faithful in Word, Sacrament and service.

It is the intention of the presbytery to equip people who are called, not to credential people for unspecified ministry. As such, the deployment of Commissioned Pastors within the Presbytery may include but not be limited to:

- As part-time pastoral leaders in smaller congregations with severely limited resources who are committed to conducting a vital witness in their community
- Clusters of congregations as part of a ministry team
- As temporary pastoral leaders for congregations seeking a Teaching Elder/Pastor
- New Church Developments and/or New Worship Communities (NWC), especially with new immigrant groups
- Youth or Campus Ministry positions, including UKirk
- Ministry assisting the congregation in visitation, teaching
- In new positions of ministry, as when a church seeks to add an Associate Pastor

When the presbytery, in consultation with the 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. G-2.10

### **What do Commissioned Pastors do?**

That varies a great deal from presbytery to presbytery and with particular ministries they serve. Commissioned Pastors may be commissioned to a particular ministry to:

- moderate the congregation
- administer the Sacraments
- officiate at marriages where permitted by state law, provided that one of the partners is a member of the congregation to which the Commissioned Pastor has been commissioned and the marriage takes place on church property.

**PROCEDURES FOR BECOMING A COMMISSIONED PASTOR**  
**(also known as a COMMISSIONED RULING ELDER)**  
**The Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys**

**First Steps:**

1. Those seeking to become Commissioned Pastors in the Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys:
  - a. Must be an ordained Ruling Elder in the Presbyterian Church (USA);
  - b. Must have demonstrated an active commitment toward fulfilling the ordination vows including engagement in the councils of the church beyond the session;
  - c. Must have successfully completed an approved course of study, or be in the process of completing such a course;
  - d. Must have completed an assessment with Leader Wise (formerly the North Central Ministry Development Center);
  - e. Must have completed the presbytery-mandated Background Checks, including Minnesota Statute 604.20; and,
  - f. Must have completed the presbytery's Boundary Training, or an approved equivalent.
  
2. Individuals fulfilling the requirements for commissioning, and who are interested in receiving a commission when one becomes available, will be placed on the presbytery's roster of eligible CP (Commissioned Pastor) candidates. In order to be placed on this list, an individual must make application to the COL.

The application form includes a statement by the person as to their sense of call to this ministry, a record of service to the church, the date and place of election and ordination as Ruling Elder, and formal education to date. The application is to be accompanied by the endorsement of the individual's session (page 810), along with three reference letters by Ruling Elders or Ministers of the Word and Sacrament (page 811) that address the applicant's spiritual maturity, service to the church and suitability to the ministry of a CP (Commissioned Pastor).

3. Additionally, the candidate is to prepare and send (for COL use only) written reflections on the constitutional questions following the instructions described below:

*As you apply to become a Commission Pastor candidate in the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Commission on Leadership needs to have a sense that you are prepared to answer affirmatively, and with integrity, the constitutional questions that will be asked of you upon commissioning. These questions are found in the Book of Order W-4.4003. **Please share with us (1) what each question means to you, and (2) any areas where you wrestle with the implications of these questions.***

- (1) Do you trust in Jesus Christ your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?
  
- (2) Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal, and God's Word to you?

- (3) Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God?
- (4) Will you fulfill your commission in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and continually guided by our confessions?
- (5) Will you be governed by our church's polity, and will you abide by its discipline? Will you be a friend among your colleagues in ministry, working with them, subject to the ordering of God's Word and Spirit?
- (6) Will you in your own life seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, love your neighbors, and work for the reconciliation of the world?
- (7) Do you promise to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church?
- (8) Will you seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?
- (9) Will you be a faithful commissioned pastor, watching over the people, providing for their worship? In your ministry, will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?

**When an opportunity occurs:**

When an opportunity becomes available for the use of a Commissioned Pastor (also known as Commissioned Ruling Elder) in a congregation, or other approved ministry, the following steps shall ordinarily be taken:

1. The Commission on Leadership will make contact with the session of the congregation to carefully explain the possible uses of a Commissioned Pastor. The advantages as well as the limitations shall be clearly laid out.
2. Action must be taken by the session to agree to pursue this particular form of pastoral leadership.
3. Members of the Commission on Leadership (COL) familiar with the congregation shall select eligible Ruling Elders from the presbytery's list of available CP candidates, determining who would be the best fit and then contact them.
4. Two members of the COL shall meet with the Ruling Elder to discuss the details of the position, review the possible Terms of Call, and discuss the expectations of the role, as well as limitations and boundaries. Prayerful consideration and acceptance will be sought from the Ruling Elder.
5. With the Ruling Elders agreement, the COL representatives shall present the candidate to the session of the congregation for their approval and the finalizing of the covenant.
6. Upon acceptance by the individual and the session of the congregation, a report shall be made to the COL, seeking approval of the relationship. COL approval shall occur after careful review of a completed and signed one-year covenant. (In as much as Commissioned Pastor relationships are

considered Temporary Pastoral Relationships, in accordance with the Book of Order, G-2.10, contracts and covenants may not be for more than one year at a time, but may be renewable.)

7. The Commission on Leadership shall recommend to the presbytery at the next stated meeting, that the Ruling Elder be commissioned.
8. The Ruling Elder shall, at least two weeks prior to the presbytery meeting:
  - a. Submit a biographical statement recounting their faith journey; and,
  - b. Submit a statement of faith.
9. The documents submitted by the Ruling Elder will be posted with the official documents of the presbytery meeting for the review of the presbytery. At the presbytery meeting, the Ruling Elder will be examined by the presbytery and action will be taken either to approve or disapprove the elder's commissioning.
10. If the presbytery's vote is in the affirmative, a commissioning service shall be conducted.
11. The COL shall recognize the relationship with the congregation or covenanting body by participating in a worship service with the congregation/covenanting body on, or soon after, the effective beginning date of the covenant relationship.
12. A mentor shall be appointed for the CP and oversight of the relationship shall involve four month check-ins, and regular reports to the COL during the duration of the contract.
13. The presbytery, through the Commission on Leadership, shall review each commission annually.

#### SPECIAL NOTES:

Ordinarily, the Ruling Elder chosen will not be a current member of the particular congregation or covenanting body that is seeking leadership.

Extenuating circumstances may be, but not limited to:

- Previous successful experience by the Ruling Elder in a commissioned position;
- A reasonable request put forward by the covenanting body or congregation, along with a clearly established set of guidelines and boundaries from the very beginning; and/or,
- Consideration that the position is considered an interim position with the expectation that the Ruling Elder's primary roles is to prepare the congregation for future pastoral leadership. The position will not last beyond one year and is not renewable.

**PERSONAL INFORMATION FORM FOR A  
COMMISSIONED PASTOR (also known as a Commissioned Ruling Elder)  
CANDIDATE**

*This form is to be completed, signed, and sent to the session of the home congregation. If the person is endorsed by the session, the form (signed by the clerk of session) should be forwarded to the Commission on Leadership (COL). When COL recommends this person to presbytery as an approved Commissioned Pastor Candidate, this form will be used to help match persons with available ministry opportunities.*

**PERSONAL INFORMATION**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Last) (First) (Middle)

MAILING ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Street or P.O. Box)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(City) (State) (Zip Code)

CURRENT PHONE NUMBERS: Home \_\_\_\_\_  
Work \_\_\_\_\_ Cell \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE OF BIRTH: \_\_\_\_\_

**FAMILY INFORMATION**

*This section is optional. Please provide any family information you consider pertinent to your application.*

Name of Spouse (if currently married) \_\_\_\_\_

Names/Birth Dates of Children: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**ACADEMIC INFORMATION**

Institution	Dates Attended	Program Or Major	Academic Average	Diploma Or Degree
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

**WORK HISTORY**

*Please list your employers, beginning with the most recent*

<b>Employer Employment</b>	<b>Job Responsibilities</b>	<b>Years</b>
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

**REFERENCES**

*Please list two persons we could speak to about you.*

*A pastor or church member*

Name:

\_\_\_\_\_ (Title) (First) (Last)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ (Street or PO) (City) (State) (Zip Code)

Relationship: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you known this person? \_\_\_\_\_

*A co-worker or friend*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ (Title) (First) (Last)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ (Street or PO) (City) (State) (Zip Code)

Relationship: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you known this person? \_\_\_\_\_



**CHURCH INFORMATION**

Year of Baptism \_\_\_\_\_

(Name and Location of Church) \_\_\_\_\_

Year of Profession of Faith \_\_\_\_\_

(Name and Location of Church) \_\_\_\_\_

Other churches of which you have been a member:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Presbyterian Church of Current Membership: \_\_\_\_\_

Year of Ordination as Elder: \_\_\_\_\_ Years served as an Active Elder: \_\_\_\_\_

List areas of service to your local congregation:

List areas of service to the larger church (Presbytery and beyond):

List areas of service to your community:

**ADDITIONAL WRITTEN MATERIALS**

**Please attach the following written materials:**

- 1) A brief biographical introduction which includes your sense of call to the role of Commissioned Pastor in the Presbyterian Church (USA).
- 2) A description of how you see yourself using your gifts for ministry and your Leadership training in service to the Church.
- 3) A brief statement of your faith.

Signature of Applicant \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**SESSION ENDORSEMENT  
OF A PERSON APPLYING TO BECOME A  
COMMISSIONED PASTOR (also known as a Commissioned Ruling Elder)  
CANDIDATE**

*Please note that if this person was previously endorsed by the Session, you may simply fill in the date when that endorsement took place.*

On \_\_\_\_\_, the Session of \_\_\_\_\_  
(Date of Endorsement) (Name of Church)

met with (Name of Applicant) \_\_\_\_\_ who intends to seek the training and experiences necessary to become a candidate for service as a Commission Pastor (also known as a Commissioned Ruling Elder) in the Presbyterian Church (USA).

After prayerful discernment of this person's gifts and motivations, the Session voted to endorse the above named applicant.

Signature of Clerk of Session \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Feel free to include any comments from Session:**

**REFERENCE FORM**  
**FOR A COMMISSIONED PASTOR (also known as a Commissioned Ruling Elder) CANDIDATE**  
**The Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

For \_\_\_\_\_ (name of CP applicant)

Name of individual providing this letter of reference \_\_\_\_\_

Check one:

- Ruling Elder of \_\_\_\_\_ Church  
 Minister of the Word and Sacrament of \_\_\_\_\_ Presbytery

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone number \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Please feel free to answer the following questions on a separate page as needed.

- Please describe how long and in what circumstances you have known the applicant.
- Please provide information concerning the applicant's service to the church.
- Please comment on the applicant's spiritual maturity and spiritual practices.
- Please comment on the applicant's leadership capabilities.
  
- A commissioned pastor may be selected by the presbytery to serve a congregation by leading worship, preaching the gospel, watching over the people, and providing for their nurture and service. Please comment on this applicant's suitability for such a ministry. Give specific examples of the applicant's behavior that would lead you to recommend her/him for this ministry.

## **PREPARING THE COMMISSIONED PASTOR COVENANT**

### **GUIDELINES and SUGGESTIONS The Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys**

This is offered as a resource for your use. As the covenant for a CP's services is developed, it will be helpful to refer to the Compensation and Benefits Policy and Guidelines found in Section 3, pages 311ff or Section 11, pages 1119ff of this manual.

#### **Compensation Considerations:**

- **Compensation for Pastoral Services**  
The minimum salary for a Commissioned Pastor (also known as a Commissioned Ruling Elder) is explained in the presbytery's Compensation and Benefits Guidelines and Policy document. Refer to this document for appropriate guidance.
- **Social Security, Taxes and Worker's compensation**  
A Commissioned Pastor (also known as a Commissioned Ruling Elder) serves as an employee of a congregation and should be issued an IRS W2 form. The church pays the employer portion of Social Security. The church must withhold the employee portion of federal, state and local taxes. In addition, the CP should be added to the congregation's Worker's Compensation coverage.
- **Vouchered Reimbursement Expenses**  
Travel: reimbursed at maximum IRS approved per mile rate.
- **Vacation and Study Leave**  
The requirements regarding Vacation and Study Leave time, as well as the Study Leave allowance as contained in the Compensation and Benefits Policy and Guidelines.
- **Additional Reimbursable Vouchered Professional Expense Allowance**  
The Session may designate any other allowances the congregation is providing and for what purpose (such as internet service or meals).

#### **Accountability and Evaluation**

When a session, in consultation with COL, is interested in contracting with a Commissioned Ruling Elder, a COL liaison will meet with the session to establish the covenant and assist the session in devising a plan to interpret the work of the CP to the congregation.

The CP may only begin service after the COL has voted to approve the covenant and after the presbytery, at a stated meeting, has approved the appointment and commissioned the CP for service.

The Commissioned Pastor is accountable to the presbytery, through the Commission on Leadership. The CP and their Mentor will submit an annual report to the Commission on Leadership. At the end of the work of the CP, the Mentor and session will provide an evaluation of the work of the CP, with copies supplied to COL and the CP. The COL will conduct an exit interview with the CP and the session.

**COMMISSIONED PASTOR COVENANT**  
**The Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys**

The Session of the \_\_\_\_\_ Presbyterian Church in \_\_\_\_\_, Minnesota is fully satisfied with your ministerial qualifications to lead and assist us in the fulfillment of our corporate and individual ministries and hereby contracts with you \_\_\_\_\_ to serve this congregation as Commissioned Pastor For the period of \_\_\_\_\_ months from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_. (Not to exceed one year; may be renewed on an annual basis.)

This covenanted position is considered to be  Full Time,  3/4 Time,  1/2 Time,  1/3 Time,  1/4 Time, or  Other (Please specify here \_\_\_\_\_).

During this time, as a Commissioned Pastor commissioned to this service by the Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys, we expect you to perform the following services (please include any and all responsibilities as applicable, and remove those that do not apply):

1. Conduct worship, which includes preaching and administration of the sacraments, and any special worship services, such as Thanksgiving and Christmas Eve ( ) weekly ( ) every other Sunday ( ) all Sundays except the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday ( ) other (Please specify)

\_\_\_\_\_ Special Provision: *As part of this commission, the CP may conduct weddings with the provision that one of the parties being married is a member of the congregation to which the CP has been commissioned and the wedding takes place on the church property.*

2. Accept the supervision of \_\_\_\_\_, as mentor, and the counsel of \_\_\_\_\_, as Commission on Leadership liaison.
3. Moderate and assist the Session in its planning, organizing, and carrying out programs of nurture, fellowship, service, stewardship, leadership training, and service.
4. Actively participate in the life of the presbytery and encourage the congregation's support of the work of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys.
5. Other responsibilities:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

The Session promises and obligates itself to provide you with the following remuneration:

1. A salary of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ per month, or a total of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ per year; based on approximately \_\_\_\_\_ hours per week over a period of \_\_\_\_\_ weeks per year.
2. The Session agrees to provide SECA remuneration of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ annually.

3. Reimbursement for travel on behalf of the church and its ministries will be provided at the current Federal Allowable Rate, not to exceed \$\_\_\_\_\_ annually. The IRS will not allow for reimbursement of miles traveled between home and work.
4. Continuing Education Allowance of \$\_\_\_\_\_ annually (proof and receipts to be submitted)
5. Other remuneration: \_\_\_\_\_ (proof and receipts to be submitted)
6. Other benefits shall include:
  - \_\_\_\_\_ weeks of vacation annually, to include \_\_\_ Sundays
  - \_\_\_\_\_ weeks of study leave annually, to include \_\_\_ Sundays

I will support and promote the doctrinal stance of the Presbyterian Church (USA) as found in the denomination's Book of Confessions, the system of government as found in the "Form of Government", worship as described in the "Directory of Worship", discipline as described in the Rules of Discipline and in general the mission and program of the Presbyterian Church (USA).

**CP Shall Initial Here** \_\_\_\_\_

This covenant was agreed upon by the Session and Commissioned Pastor (also known as a Commissioned Ruling Elder) on the following date: \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_. If this service continues for more than one year, the Session agrees to review this contract annually with you, your Mentor and the Commission on Leadership.

Signed by: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Clerk of Session Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Commissioned Pastor (also known as a Commissioned Ruling Elder)  
 Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Moderator of Commission on Leadership Date  
 (Upon approval of the Covenant by the Presbytery)

***This form was adapted from work that was done by the Presbytery of Salem (Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.***

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**SAMPLE SERVICE FOR THE COMMISSIONING OF COMMISSIONED PASTORS  
(also known as Commissioned Ruling Elders)**

**Opening Sentences** (Responsively)

*From Romans 12:5-8 and Ephesians 4:1-6*

We, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

**Constitutional Questions**

The Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys is satisfied that \_\_\_\_\_ has/have met all requirements and completed all preparations prescribed in the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). We now commission \_\_\_\_\_ to serve as a Commissioned Pastor (also known as a Commissioned Ruling Elder) with and for (*Name of church or ministry* \_\_\_\_\_).

*Name(s)*\_\_\_\_, please respond to these questions:

Do you trust in Jesus Christ your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

*I do.*

Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal, and God's Word to you?

*I do.*

Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God?

*I do and I will.*

Will you serve as a Commissioned Pastor in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and continually guided by our confessions?

*I do.*

Will you be governed by our church's polity, and will you abide by its discipline? Will you be a friend among your colleagues in ministry, working with them, subject to the ordering of God's Word and Spirit?

*I will.*

Will you in your own life seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, love your neighbors, and work for the reconciliation of the world?

*I will.*

Do you promise to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church?

*I do.*

Will you seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?

*I will.*

Will you be a faithful Commissioned Pastor, watching over the people, providing for the worship? In your ministry, will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?

*I will.*

### **Prayer** (Responsively)

Almighty God, in every age you have chosen servants to speak your Word and lead your loyal people.

We thank you for (Names) \_\_\_\_\_, whom you have called to serve you as Commissioned Pastor(s) in and for (Name of Church/es or Ministry/ies) \_\_\_\_\_.

Give them gifts to do their particular work. Fill them with your Holy Spirit, so that they may have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus and be faithful disciples throughout their lives.

**God of grace, in baptism you have called us to a common ministry as ambassadors of Christ, trusting us with a message of reconciliation.**

**Give us courage and discipline to follow where your servants rightly lead us, that together we may declare your wonderful deeds and show your love to the world; through Jesus Christ the Lord of all. Amen.**

### **Declaration and Greeting**

The moderator says: *Name(s)* \_\_\_\_\_, you are now a Commissioned Pastor, commissioned to serve (*Church or ministry*)

\_\_\_\_\_.

On behalf of the Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys, I welcome you to this ministry. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

Adapted from *Book of Occasional Services*, copyright 1999 by the Presbytery Church Corporation on behalf of the Office of Theology and Worship.



**COMMISSIONED PASTOR ANNUAL REPORT**  
**The Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys**

***(Note: The session must act annually to renew this CP relationship on the anniversary of the original action. The action by session must be reported to the Commission on Leadership, and this form must accompany the report of session action.)***

Name of COMMISSIONED PASTOR \_\_\_\_\_

Church served \_\_\_\_\_

Name of clerk of session \_\_\_\_\_

Name of mentor \_\_\_\_\_

Date of report \_\_\_\_\_

1. Key ministry strengths of CP :

2. Accomplishments in this ministry:

3. Challenges in this ministry:

4. Areas where CP could use additional training, support, or other assistance:

5. Is there anything else the Commission on Leadership should be aware of?

\_\_\_\_\_ The CP and congregation desire to continue in this pastoral relationship

\_\_\_\_\_ The CP and mentor desire to continue in this covenant relationship

\_\_\_\_\_ COL should schedule a face-to-face meeting with this CP

Signature of Commissioned Pastor \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Clerk of Session \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Mentor \_\_\_\_\_