

Commissioned Pastors in the PC(USA)

(Formerly known as Commissioned Lay Pastors or Commissioned Ruling Elders)

Are you, or maybe another Elder you know, seeking a greater opportunity to serve the church using their gifts such as teaching, pastoral care, or faith foundation? If so, click on the link provided below to learn about becoming a Commissioned Pastor (CP) with PEVA. Also, read the personal statements of three Elders currently serving as CP's and one recently enrolled in the program.

Purpose of Commissioned Pastors

Commissioned Pastors are individuals who answer a call to delve deeper into their lay ministries to serve God and the church at a more profound level. They are called to a specific ministry for a particular time and place. Their use must be driven by mission needs, the greater good of a congregation, and the church universal, and always to the glory of God.

This article will provide an overall introduction to the Commissioned Pastor program, basic qualifications, program requirements and utilization within the PC(USA) and for use by the Presbytery of Eastern Virginia (PEVA) Commission on Ministry liaisons, sessions, ministers, and congregations to help them meet identified mission needs.

The PC(USA) constitutional foundation for Commissioned Ruling Elders (now Commissioned Pastors) is found in the Book of Order (BOO) G-2.1001 through G-2.1004.

Commissioned Pastors (CPs) must be Ruling Elders and as such carry with them all the responsibilities of a Ruling Elder, “persons of wisdom and maturity of faith, demonstrable skills in leadership and being compassionate in spirit....and together with the Ministers of the Word and Sacrament, exercise leadership, government, spiritual discernment and discipline and have responsibilities for the life of a congregation as well as the whole church.”

Training and Examination Requirements

A Ruling Elder seeking to serve as a Commissioned Pastor shall meet the training and examination requirements determined by the Presbytery. The candidate must be recommended by the session and endorsed by the pastor of their home church. Upon approval of the application by the Presbytery, the candidate must satisfactorily complete the educational requirements as defined in the PEVA CP guidance which includes coursework from approved seminaries/universities in the areas of Old and New Testament, Pastoral Care, Reformed Worship and Sacrament, Introduction to Preaching, Presbyterian Polity, Reformed Theology, and Christian Education (or provide satisfactory proof of required proficiency in these areas of study).

Upon completion of the educational requirements,” the ruling elder shall be examined by the Presbytery as to personal faith, motives for seeking the commission, and the areas of instruction determined by presbytery.” When a candidate is approved by the Presbytery, they are eligible to be placed on the Pulpit Supply list. They are also eligible to seek and accept a commission to specific duties from a PEVA church if one is or becomes available. When a CP candidate seeks to accept a commission, they will be examined by the PEVA Commission on Ministry for fit. When commissioned, the CP is regularly evaluated and mentored by an experienced minister.

The Words of Commissioned Pastors

We asked several Commissioned Pastors (CPs) and a CP Candidate to share with us why they sought to become recognized as a CP. Please read a portion of their answers:

Randy DuVall (Commissioned Pastor and Director of Missions, First Presbyterian Church, Virginia Beach, Va.). “I was a lawyer in private practice for 21 years. I had an early mission experience in Chiapas, Mexico when I was convinced me that the Holy Spirit was calling me to return every year.

Then, “Fifteen years ago I was urged by a pastor, my wife, and a dear friend to enroll in the seminary courses necessary to become a CP.” “My years as a

Commissioned Pastors have entailed a multitude of service opportunities such as Interim Pastor, leading worship in other Presbyterian churches, funerals, weddings and even the baptism of my granddaughter.”

Laura Chuquin-Naylor (Commissioned Pastor, Powelton Presbyterian Church, Wachapreague, Va). “My father was a well-loved pastor in New York. As a teen I was a YAD delegate to the Presbyterian General Assembly. I knew then I wanted to be a minister. Life, however, had other plans.

Twenty years later my wonderful pastor, Monica Gould, concluded a meeting by stating that there was a real need for Commissioned Pastors. The Spirit whispered that this was meant for me. Following course work and interviews, I was called to be the Commissioned at Powelton Presbyterian Church!

When I stand behind the pulpit on Sundays, I am never nervous or worried. I am filled with extraordinary peace, even if I stumble. God has put me where He always meant for me to be, and He is an awesome God!

Melinda Stroyeck (Commissioned Pastor at two Presbyterian churches in Central Illinois, Providence Presbyterian, and Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church of Princess Anne). “I felt called by God when I was 12 years-old but my parents and my pastor discouraged me in that pursuit.” “God kept calling me!”

Melinda served the very conservative churches in rural Illinois but “loved being there and loved the congregations.” She moved to Virginia Beach where her past seminary coursework and service in Illinois met the PEVA Commissioned Pastor requirements.

After serving occasionally at her home church Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church Melinda was called to work part-time with another pastor at Providence Presbyterian. She later returned to Grace Covenant after the full-time pastor was called at Providence where she is now the parish associate for pastoral care.

“Being a CP has been the most fulfilling time of my life. God has put me where I am needed. I am able to fulfill my life goal and serve God for the rest of my life!

Dianne Schoonover (Commission Pastor Candidate from Yorkminster Presbyterian Church). “The decision to seek the Commissioned Pastor program was first thought about while I was an active elder several years ago. Our pastor asked me to run the church after he was taken ill and in the hospital. But he never returned. He passed. As time passed and I was “running” the church I received a message from God – ‘I want you to become a minister.’

The path to become a Commissioned Pastor has been interesting. I decided to go with Union Seminary and have finished the Worship and Sacraments course. I was able to maintain the course work and learned many parts of worship and the sacraments. I decided to continue with the PEVA requirements and finish quickly. I do not want to delay finding out what God’s plan for me is going to be.

Conclusion

The authority to prepare and utilize Commissioned Pastors is given to the presbyteries to satisfy their mission requirements. Church leadership, in conjunction with their minister of the Word and Sacrament and their presbytery, are encouraged to consider the commissioning of a CP when mission needs are unable to be satisfied or broadened within existing capabilities. Common commissions for CPs include preaching (especially in small churches), pastoral/hospice visitation, faith formation, youth ministries, mission outreach including international ministries, jail ministries, and administration.

For more information on the PEVA Commissioned Pastor program, contact the Commission on Ministry’s Commissioned Pastor Committee led by Robin Cowherd. You may contact Robin by email (robincowherd@cox.net) or by cell phone (757-406-4362).

