JOHN KNOX PRESBYTERY
VALIDATION OF MINISTRY

Background:

The Historic Principles of Church Order" [F-3.01] make it clear that a covenant exists among, and between, the members of a congregation; an individual Teaching Elder, and the presbytery. This covenantal relationship is normative for Presbyterians and extends by implication to all Teaching Elders, even those not actively called to serve in a pastoral relationship with a congregation.

As in any covenantal relationship, the vows taken (the congregation's initial covenanting service and the recurring ordination vows of all officers of whatever congregation or presbytery) find strength in mutual trust, common action and, often, forbearance or forgiveness. It is our understanding that examining, validating the ministry of and receiving a Teaching Elder into membership can best be carried out with an ear toward how the ministry reflects this covenant partnership, rather than a seeking conformity with any set of pre-determined definitions or types of service.

The **Book of Order**, **G-2.0502** states "As the Lord has set aside through calling certain members to teaching elders, so the church confirms that call through the action of the presbytery. The presbytery shall determine whether a particular work may be helpful to the church in mission and is a call to validated ministry requiring ordination as a teaching elder. In the performance of that ministry, the teaching elder shall be accountable to the presbytery. Teaching elders have membership in the presbytery by action of the presbytery itself, and no pastoral relationship may be established, changed, or dissolved without the approval of the presbytery."

Each presbytery determines the teaching elders who are its members and validates the ministries in which they are to be engaged. The Constitutional framework for this determination is described as follows (**Book of Order G-2.0503**):

a.   The ministry of continuing members shall be in demonstrable conformity with the mission of God's people in the world as set forth in Holy Scripture, the Book of Confessions, and the Book of Order of this church.

b.   The ministry shall be one that serves others, aids others, and enables the ministries of others.

c.   The ministry shall give evidence of theologically informed fidelity to God's Word. This will normally require the Master of Divinity degree or its equivalent and the completion of the requirements for ordination set forth in G-2.0607.

d.   The ministry shall be carried on in accountability for its character and conduct to the presbytery and to organizations, agencies, and institutions.

e.   The ministry shall include responsible participation in the deliberations and work of the presbytery and in the worship and service of a congregation.

What do we mean by "validation"?
The *Book of Order (G-2.0501)* speaks of Teaching Elders "shall in all things be committed to teaching the faith and equipping the saints for the work of ministry (Eph. 4:12) Therefore, a critical criterion is the assurance that the ministry in question fulfills a function that is helpful to the church in Christ's mission. Validation is the act or process of determining the covenant of mission in, by and for the church's witness and the nature of the work proposed and how it is to be carried out. Guidance in this consideration may be found in the words of the "Great Ends of the Church" *(Book of Order F-1.0304)*.

Are there different criteria for the validation of different ministries?
Our *Book of Order (G-3.0306)* gives great latitude for Teaching Elders to be "teachers, evangelists, administrators, chaplains, and in other forms of ministry recognized as appropriate by the presbytery". Therefore, the consideration by the presbytery of what constitutes a valid ministry should be the same for those seeking ordination, those seeking membership who have been previously ordained, and those who change the nature or place of service within their continuing membership in the presbytery.

What questions might be asked in making a decision to validate the work of a Teaching Elder?
The following list is not exhaustive and the judgment that a work is acceptable will be made on a "case by case" basis:

"The Church's ministry is a gift from Jesus Christ to the whole Church. Christ alone rules, calls, teaches, and uses the Church as he wills, exercising his authority by the ministry of women and men for the establishment and extension of God's new creation. Christ's ministry is the foundation and standard for all ministry, the pattern of the one came not to be served but to serve" (Matt 20:28") *(Book of Order G-2.0101)*

How does this ministry follow the pattern of Christ?
Presbytery shall designate to its ministers such work as may be helpful to the Church in mission, and complimentary to the Presbytery's mission statement *(Book of Order G-2.0502)*.

How does this ministry conform to and enhance the Presbytery purpose and witness?
In addition to the above questions related to the nature of the ordained office, the five standards listed in *(Book of Order G-2.0503)* shall provide the foundation for any further questions to be affirmatively answered for validation.

Is there a different standard for those seeking ordination to a "first call"?
Some confusion could arise from language in The **Book of Order, (G-2.0701)** that an appropriate first call may be "to a congregation or other work in the mission of the church that is acceptable to the candidate and the presbytery of call." It could be concluded that ordination is only available to work that is in a congregation or directly under the jurisdiction of the church. However, for purposes of validation, the governing function is the "acceptability" of the work to the presbytery. Therefore any work that can be validated for a previously ordained person may be considered for one seeking ordination to a "first call". This matter is referenced further in the COM Manual in COM-33.