

**Examination of Candidates and Teaching Elders
Seeking Membership in the Presbytery of Chicago**

Purpose

The Book of Order [G-3.0306] states that “*The presbytery shall examine each teaching elder or candidate who seeks membership in it on his or her Christian faith and views in theology, the Sacraments, and the government of this church.*”

The conversation described in this policy provides the time for discussing the teaching elder’s Statement of Faith, understanding of the Reformed faith, and experience in ministry and witness.

Authority

An Examinations Team, which will include at least two teaching elders and two ruling elders, will examine each incoming teaching elder and candidate in a face-to-face conversation, and will make a recommendation to the Commission on Ministry (COM) for their recommendation to Presbytery on whether to receive each teaching elder or candidate or not.

Preparation by the Teaching Elder or Candidate

Each teaching elder and candidate shall provide a current one-page statement of theological beliefs with implications for life and ministry in today’s world and a Personal Information Form (PIF) or resume. Each teaching elder and candidate shall be provided with a copy of sample questions that may be asked.

Each teaching elder and candidate shall meet with the Examinations Team (of at least two teaching elders and two ruling elders) for the interview. The conversation shall start from, but not be limited to, discussion of the statement of faith and the teaching elder’s or candidate’s work history.

Timing of the Conversation

The Examinations Team shall have this conversation with all teaching elders or candidates who are not members of the Presbytery of Chicago, at the regularly scheduled monthly meeting of the Examinations Team, after the teaching elder or candidate has reached agreement on all terms with a Pastor Nominating Committee (or validated ministry where they are seeking membership in the Presbytery of Chicago). Those who are not receiving a call to a congregation or a validated ministry (e.g. Honorably Retired, Member at Large, etc.) shall also be interviewed at a regular meeting of the Examinations Team.

As part of this examination for membership, each teaching elder or candidate shall be asked if she or he wishes to declare a departure from the ordination standards described in *Book of Order* G-2.0105:

It is necessary to the integrity and health of the church that the persons who serve it in ordered ministries shall adhere to the essentials of the Reformed faith and polity as expressed in this Constitution. So far as may be possible without serious departure from

Examination of Candidates Policy

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these standards, without infringing on the rights and views of others, and without obstructing the constitutional governance of the church, freedom of conscience with respect to the interpretation of Scripture is to be maintained. It is to be recognized, however, that in entering the ordered ministries of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), one chooses to exercise freedom of conscience within certain bounds. His or her conscience is captive to the Word of God as interpreted in the standards of the church so long as he or she continues to seek, or serve in, ordered ministry. The decision as to whether a person has departed from essentials of Reformed faith and polity is made initially by the individual concerned but ultimately becomes the responsibility of the council in which he or she is a member

If a teaching elder or candidate – otherwise deemed ready for membership – declares a departure, the authority of COM to act as a commission of Presbytery shall end and the remainder of the examination must be completed at the next stated meeting of Presbytery. If this is a teaching elder or candidate for a pastoral position, the Pastoral Nominating Committee will be informed of this delay and the reason for it. See below for those from other denominations.

If the Examinations Team recommends reception of the new member into the Presbytery, (contingent on successful completion of a background check), the Pastor Nominating Committee may then proceed to present the candidate to the congregation for a vote to extend a call. If any departure is declared by the teaching elder and candidate, or if the teaching elder or candidate appeals to the Presbytery after a negative recommendation from the Examinations Team, the teaching elder or candidate may be presented to the congregation only after a vote of concurrence by the Presbytery at its next stated meeting.

Training

Each member of the Examinations Team will be provided with regular education for the examining task. The Team will regularly provide guidance and evaluative comment to the Commission on Ministry on their examining work.

Ministers from Other Denominations

1. The minister of another denomination makes application for membership to the Specialized Ministries sub-committee of the Commission on Ministry.
2. The Specialized Ministries sub-committee gives guidance and supervision until all requirements of *Book of Order* G-2.0505, including taking and passing the standardized ordination exams, have been met.
3. When Specialized Ministries certifies that the above requirements have been met, the minister will meet with the Examinations Team as outlined above.

SAMPLE LETTER

Presbytery of Chicago
100 South Morgan,
Chicago IL 60607
(312) 243-8300

October 12, 2010

Rev. x x
xxx Street
City, State Zip

Dear friend in Christ,

You are invited to a conversation.

As we extend a hand to welcome you into a new Presbytery home, it is important for you and for us that we test the spirits, examine ourselves, and see whether our teaching is from God or whether we are speaking on our own.

This conversation is Chicago's way of responding to the constitutional provision that *"the presbytery shall examine each teaching elder or candidate who seeks membership in it on his or her Christian faith and views in theology, the Sacraments, and the government of this church."* The Book of Order [G-3.0306]

So we invite you to meet with the Examinations Team from the Presbytery at one of our regularly scheduled meetings on the 2nd Monday of each month, at 1 p.m. We assume this conversation will last one to two hours.

If you are a candidate for a position in a local congregation, you will already have met with a few representatives of the Commission on Ministry to consider the 'fit,' the suitability of your pastoral leadership and that congregation's story. If you are considering a call to a non-parish position, you will have discussed the possibility of a validated ministry with the Specialized Ministries Subcommittee of the Commission on Ministry.

We look forward to our conversation with you.

Jane Doe
George Vasily
Melissa Ford

John Smith
Jesus Mirandez
Janet Dempsey

Tim Jones
Sally Lynn Fortune
Andre Bishop

The Examinations Team, Presbytery of Chicago, 2010

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

“The presbytery shall examine each teaching elder or candidate who seeks membership in it on his or her Christian faith and views in theology, the Sacraments, and the government of this church. (G-3.0306)

Personal Faith Experience

- How has the Gospel been good news in your life, and how might you share it?
- What are the ‘growing edges’ in your journey of faith?
- What regular spiritual practices do you follow? ...do you nurture in others?
- As you think about your life of faith, what places or moments do you identify as the movement of God’s Spirit or the working of God’s grace?

Theology and Sacraments

- Describe the meaning of Christ’s deity and humanity, and how that shapes your approach to the problems and opportunities of life.
- In view of the universality of God’s love, why are some responsive to the call of Christ and others apparently not? Is humanity lost apart from Christ? What is the relation of Christianity to other religions and worldviews?
- How do you explain Baptism and the Lord’s Supper to children? ...to adults?
- What in the Bible & Reformed theology guide you in a struggle for social justice?

Polity and Program

- In your view, how does a teaching elder exercise leadership under Presbyterian polity?
- What should a session consider when giving to denominational (or other) causes?
- Describe the Book of Order’s picture of the working relationship between Presbytery and congregations. What practical issues come up in your experience?

Mission and Constitution

- How do you balance denominational loyalty and personal freedom of conscience?
- How have you implemented evangelism? peacemaking? food for all? education?
- How do you carry out the PC(USA)’s commitment to inclusiveness and diversity?
- Do you affirm that you will be “governed by our church’s polity” and “abide by its discipline” [*Book of Order W-4.4003e*]? If you can so affirm, what does that affirmation mean to you, especially in those cases in which your conscience leads you to disagree with our church’s polity and discipline?

Ministry

- What goals have you set for your ministry?
- Describe the congregation calling you: goals, style, strengths, needs, potential.
- What is your leadership style? What leadership do you expect from others?
- How do you respond to conflict: between you and a group? you and another?
- How have/will you approach professional development and personal growth?