

PRESBYTERY OF TAMPA BAY

Commissioned Ruling Elder Program

Approved March 17, 2022

PRESBYTERY OF TAMPA BAY

Commissioned Ruling Elder Program

I. OVERVIEW

A. Definition

A Commissioned Ruling Elder (CRE) is a ruling elder authorized by the Presbytery of Tampa Bay to serve in a limited pastoral service as a church pastor, chaplain in a church or institutional setting, or another ministry validated by the Presbytery of Tampa Bay. Candidates for the CRE program feel called by God, are affirmed by their session, and nurtured by the presbytery as they receive education and support and are commissioned to serve in a particular setting. The ministry of a CRE is distinct from the ministries a ruling elder may have in their home congregation. CREs may serve full or part time and with or without compensation. The Presbytery of Tampa Bay specifies and approves the type of commission, which may be renewed upon expiration or terminated at any time either at the discretion of the presbytery or at the request of the CRE. Individuals placed as Commissioned Ruling Elders are only authorized to work within the bounds of the Presbytery of Tampa Bay, and only in the setting assigned and approved by the Commission on Ministry.

B. Requirements

The Book of Order (G-2.10) establishes the criteria for the equipping of CREs and for their ongoing accountability to a presbytery. The CRE is a ruling elder who may lead worship, preach the gospel, administer the sacraments, watch over the people, and provide for their nurture and service. This commission is valid only in designated congregations, a new church development, an immigrant fellowship, or other validated ministry of the presbytery, designated by the presbytery, for a specified period.

C. Who is called?

“We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us” (Romans 12: 6a). Within every congregation God bestows many and diverse gifts upon the members of that church. It is important that churches actively encourage laypersons to honor, use, and build upon their gifts in the ministry of the church. The Presbytery of Tampa Bay seeks to identify and encourage those gifted for ministry as Commissioned Ruling Elders.

D. Preparation To Be A CRE

The CRE course of study is particularly designed for those seeking to become Commissioned Ruling Elders, whether for service as a pastor commissioned to work in a particular congregation, as a chaplain, or in some other validated ministry approved by the presbytery. We seek to “equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ” as outlined in Ephesians 4: 12.

E. No guarantee of placement

Completion of the program does not guarantee placement of any kind, nor does it guarantee the right to exercise all of the functions possible for a Commissioned Ruling Elder (G-2.1001). For those who are seeking to serve a congregation as a Commissioned Pastor, the Presbytery of Tampa Bay, through its Commission on

Ministry, will work person-to-person and church-to church to identify optimal placements. Those who have qualified to serve as CREs may be considered for such placements or other ministry settings

II. PROCEDURES

A. Program Responsibility

1. The Commissioned Ruling Elder preparation program of the Presbytery of Tampa Bay is administered by the Commission on Preparation for Ministry (CPM).
2. The CPM has the following responsibilities:
 - i. Admission, or dismissal for cause of candidates to the program.
 - ii. Consultation with CRE candidates as they explore their sense of call.
 - iii. Oversight of the candidate during the preparation process including monitoring progress and supporting the candidate's needs.
 - iv. Interpretation of the CRE program for churches or other institutions.
 - v. Referral of the candidate to Presbytery's Commission on Ministry for examination, approval of placement, and post-commissioning oversight (see G-2.1002--1004) once CPM concludes a CRE candidate is ready for a commission

B. Application Process for Ruling Elders

1. An applicant to the program shall be a ruling elder in the Presbyterian Church (USA).
2. Ordinarily, an applicant to the program shall have been a member of the Presbyterian Church (USA) for at least two years and active in the life of a particular church within the bounds of the Presbytery of Tampa Bay for at least one year immediately prior to applying for the Commissioned Ruling Elder program. In the case of immigrant communities with roots in the Reformed tradition, membership in the fellowship or new church development may be considered to be equivalent to membership in a particular church within the bounds of the Presbytery of Tampa Bay. Membership within a Reformed body may be considered to be equivalent to membership in the PC (U.S.A.).
3. Application to be a Commissioned Ruling Elder will be filed with the Commission on Preparation for Ministry and will include a completed application form, the completed support form from the church Session or its equivalent in the case of immigrant fellowships, and an interview with CPM (see Appendices A and B).
4. Each CRE candidate is ordinarily required to participate in the same vocational testing arranged by the CPM of the presbytery and the endorsing congregation. Entrance to the CRE program is contingent upon this report being deemed

satisfactory by the CPM. **Payment for the vocational assessment is ordinarily divided equally among the candidate, the CPM, and the church.**

5. Applicants for whom English is not a primary language may apply to take courses in their primary languages, as available, with the prior approval of the CPM.
6. Applicants who have previous study in required areas may submit transcripts of those classes to CPM for consideration as a substitute for equivalent courses.
7. Application packets are available through the Presbytery of Tampa Bay.
8. Applicants to the program should be aware that acceptance to this program does not guarantee placement as a Commissioned Pastor or any other validated ministry in the Presbytery of Tampa Bay.

C. Application Process for Churches and Other Institutions

1. Churches or other validated ministry institutions interested in working with a CRE serving in a commissioned leadership role should consult the Commission on Ministry (COM). If approved by the COM to pursue a CRE, a church or other institution may interview CRE candidates or propose a ruling elder for preparation through the CRE program. A proposed elder would file an application with the CPM and if accepted would enter the regular process to obtain CPM approval.
2. If the presbytery, through one of its commissions, committees, or presbytery staff, discovers a person who could be a good candidate for CRE training, they should encourage that person to pray about CRE ministry, seeking discernment on the matter, and apply if so led.
3. If the presbytery, through one of its commissions, committees, or presbytery staff, envisions a ministry that could be best led by a CRE, they should bring the matter before the COM as above and proceed as would a church or other ministry institution in similar circumstances.

III. BECOMING A COMMISSIONED RULING ELDER

A. Step One — Applying

1. A Commissioned Ruling Elder is a ruling elder who, responding to God's call, carries out certain pastoral duties when commissioned by a presbytery for a specific place and time within that presbytery (G-2.1001).
2. The process may begin when a ruling elder, sensing such a call, meets with their pastor and session to seek validation of the call and their session's endorsement.
3. Upon session endorsement, the Commissioned Ruling Elder applicant shall complete Appendix A – Application for Admission. The session shall complete Appendix B-1 – Session Endorsement Form, and shall appoint a session liaison for

the applicant. The completed forms should be sent to the Presbytery of Tampa Bay office or to the chair of the CPM.

4. The Commissioned Ruling Elder applicant will undergo a Background Check using the Presbytery's regular process.
5. The applicant shall meet with the Commission on Preparation for Ministry (CPM) to discuss motivation for ministry and the particulars of the process. If the CPM approves admission, the applicant becomes a candidate and may begin Step Two – Educational Requirements. Educational requirements for each CRE candidate are designated by the CPM and may vary by candidate.
6. The CPM will appoint a liaison for the CRE candidate. (See Appendix B-2.)
7. The role of the liaison from both the CPM and session is to provide support to the CRE candidate through regular contact, praying for them, and being a source of support during the process.

B. Step Two — Educational Requirements

(Please Note: CRE training will not require the same depth and breadth of professional competency as that of a minister of the word and sacrament. This CRE program is intended as a creative response to needs as they arise within the Presbytery of Tampa Bay.)

1. Educational overview: Realizing that some CRE candidates may enter this program with a very specific ministry in mind while other candidates may not, the CPM shall formulate a course of study for each candidate. Realistic timelines for completion of the requirements will vary depending on the availability of classes and the schedule of the candidate. CRE candidates will take their required course work through University of Dubuque Theological Seminary's Christian Leadership Program or another program as approved by CPM. Some additional work may be required depending on the type of ministry a CRE candidate is preparing to undertake. Although the formal phase of *preparation* will end at commissioning, education for ministry is a lifelong process.
2. Areas of education currently required (subject to change) for completion of University of Dubuque Theological Seminary's Christian Leadership Program
 - i. Introduction to Old Testament
 - ii. Introduction to New Testament
 - iii. Reformed Theology
 - iv. Presbyterian Polity
 - v. Introduction to Preaching
 - vi. Reformed Worship and Sacraments
 - vii. Christian Caregiving for Pastors & Leaders
 - viii. Christian Education
3. All candidates must complete one unit of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE)

Note: There may be other educational requirements set by CPM depending on the type of ministry for which the candidate is preparing.

4. Upon entry into the CRE education phase, the CRE candidate and the CPM liaison will draft and adopt a **Learning Covenant** (see Appendix B-3) using the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary's Christian Leadership Program or another approved program. The Learning Covenant will be written and signed as a covenant between the candidate, their CPM liaison, and the CPM.
5. Special Circumstances for Certified Christian Educators: CCEs who are already ruling elders are generally considered qualified to serve having completed requirements of the Book of Order (G-2.1103) but may be required to obtain additional training in some areas as determined by CPM.
6. Final Assessment:
 - i. When the CRE candidate has successfully completed all requirements, the CPM will conduct a final assessment. This assessment will include a review of all Learning Covenant requirements, assessment and review of the CRE candidate's Faith Statement, and a final sermon review including preparation, and delivery, perhaps in a congregational or alternate setting.
 - ii. Following the final assessment, CPM will certify the CRE candidate as having successfully completed their training for service as a CRE. (See Appendix C.)

NOTE: Attendance at a workshop approved by the Presbytery of Tampa Bay on healthy boundaries is required prior to being approved for a commission.

Appendices Packet
Commissioned Ruling Elder Program

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APPENDIX A
Presbytery of Tampa Bay
Commissioned Ruling Elder Program
Application for Admission

Applicant Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Address: _____

Phone: Home () _____ Work: () _____

Email: _____ Cell: () _____

The following background information will be used by the Church Session and Presbytery's Commission on Preparation for Ministry.

This questionnaire is purposely broad in scope. Feel free to use extra paper to provide additional information and to make whatever additions you feel will give the best representation of you. Please be as accurate and candid as you can.

When you have completed this questionnaire, it should be given to your pastor or session, who will forward it to the Commission on Preparation for Ministry.

1. ACADEMIC INFORMATION:

List the various schools and academic institutions you have attended, beginning with high school and complete the information for each column. If you are currently pursuing an educational program, indicate your academic classification.

Institution	Program/Major	Academic Average	Certificate, Diploma or Degree
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

List the academic honors, awards and special recognitions, organizations, sports and extracurricular activities. Circle those which have been most meaningful to you.

2. OCCUPATIONAL HISTORY

List all full-time or part-time jobs or occupations of the last ten years, providing the information requested in each column. Indicate part-time (PT) next to the job title. Feel free to go back more than ten years for any occupations that were particularly meaningful to you.

Occupation	Length of Employment	Aspects Enjoyed Most	Aspects Enjoyed Least
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

APPENDIX A, page 2 of 3

3. CHURCH INFORMATION

Dates of: Baptism _____ (Age ____) Profession of Faith _____ (Age ____)

If you are an ordained **deacon**, give the date and place of ordination:

_____/_____/_____

If you are an ruling **elder**, give the date and place of ordination:

_____/_____/_____

Current Church membership:

Name of Church _____ Date Joined: ____/____/_____

Address: _____

List areas of involvement in the church, as participant and as leader. If current mark with an asterisk (*).

Areas of Involvement	Participant	Leader

List experiences in worship leadership as a worship leader, liturgist and/or preacher. Indicate current areas with (*).

Areas of Involvement	Leadership Function

4. COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

List the volunteer services, civic and social organizations of which you are, or have been, a member and indicate your participation and role. Indicate current areas with (*).

Type of Activity	Participant	Leader

List awards or recognition received for business or professional achievement, community involvements or leadership:

5. QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Reflect on and respond briefly to the following questions. Place your responses on separate pages and attach these to your application.

1. Briefly describe your relationship with Jesus Christ.
2. Why are you interested in becoming a Commissioned Ruling elder?
3. What experience have you had that would assist you in being an effective Commissioned Ruling Elder?
4. In what ways have you found being a Presbyterian leader to be a ministry?
5. Name some of your strengths and talents.
6. On a separate sheet provide a brief statement of faith.

COMMITMENT:

Becoming a Commissioned Ruling Elder is to enter into a covenant relationship. If accepted into the CRE program, I understand I will be entering a program having a spiritual, academic, and practical nature, involving significant investments of time, energy and finances. I am willing to make this commitment and am also willing to commit myself to continuing education after completing the program.

_____/_____/_____
(signature) (date)

Endorsed by Session of Local Church on: ____/____/____

Signature of the Clerk of Session: _____ Date: ____/____/____

Signature of the Chair of CPM: _____ Date: ____/____/____

REFERENCES:

Please give name, address, phone number, and e-address of at least two people who know you well. Ideally this would include a pastor and a close church friend, though you are not limited to these:

1. Name: _____ Address: _____
Phone: () _____ Email: _____
2. Name: _____ Address: _____
Phone: () _____ Email: _____
3. Name: _____ Address: _____
Phone: () _____ Email: _____

APPENDIX B-1
Presbytery of Tampa Bay
Commissioned Ruling Elder Program
Session Endorsement Form

We, the Session of _____,
having reviewed the application of _____ for Commissioned
Ruling Elder, do hereby grant our endorsement.

(Use extra pages as needed to answer the following questions.)

1. The applicant has demonstrated in this congregation the following gifts for ministry:
2. As a Session, we will support and encourage the applicant in the process of seeking commission as a in the following ways:
3. The Session may add any other information or concerns that the Commission on Preparation for Ministry should know.

Applicant's Session Liaison: _____

Address: _____ Phone: () _____

E-Address: _____ Work Phone: () _____

(Signature: Moderator of the Session)

(Signature: Clerk of Session)

Date: ____/____/____

____/____/____

Be sure to make a copy for your records and return the original Session Endorsement Form and Application Form to:

The Commission on the Preparation for Ministry
Presbytery of Tampa Bay
455 Scotland St, Ste 1
Dunedin, FL 34698
Phone: 813-868-4800; Fax: 813-200-1054

APPENDIX B-2
Presbytery of Tampa Bay
Commissioned Ruling Elder Program
CPM Liaison Form

This form acknowledges the relationship between the Candidate in the Certified Pastor Program and their liaison on the CPM so that they have access to encouragement and feedback.

Applicant's CPM Liaison: _____

Address: _____ Phone: () _____

E-Address: _____ Work Phone: () _____

(Signature: Liaison)

(Signature: CRE Candidate)

Date: ____ / ____ / ____

____ / ____ / ____

Be sure to make a copy for your records and return the original Session Endorsement Form and Application Form to:

The Commission on the Preparation for Ministry
Presbytery of Tampa Bay
455 Scotland St, Ste 1
Dunedin, FL 34698
Phone: 813-868-4800; Fax: 813-200-1054

APPENDIX B-3
Presbytery of Tampa Bay
Commissioned Ruling Elder Program
Learning Covenant

Liaison

The presbytery's committee has appointed the following person to act as a liaison with the candidate and with the committee and participate with the inquirer and the committee as they explore and evaluate his or her progress.

Name: _____

(title)

(family)

(first)

(middle/natal)

Current address: _____

(street)

(city)

(state)

(zip)

Main phone: _____

(h/o/m)

Alt phone: _____

(h/o/m)

Email: _____

Agreement on Further Growth Areas

We have reviewed and jointly agree to the growth objectives for the next year, as reported below.

Signature of inquirer: _____

(date)

Signature of committee liaison: _____

(date)

Signature of committee moderator: _____

(date)

Indicate the appropriate stage of theological education for which this report applies: _____

Growth Objectives

A. In the area of education for ministry

B. In the area of spiritual development

C. In the area of interpersonal relations

D. In the area of personal growth

E. In the area of professional development

APPENDIX C
Presbytery of Tampa Bay
Commissioned Ruling Elder Program
Completion of Requirements Form

CRE CANDIDATE NAME: _____

Indicate the date when each item has been satisfactorily completed. When all items are dated and the form has been signed, forward it to the Committee on Preparation for Ministry.

Applicant Stage:

_____ Application and Session Letter of Endorsement received by the CPM.

_____ CPM votes to receive into the Commissioned Ruling Elder Program.

Candidate Stage:

_____ Application for CRE Program reviewed and signed by the Moderator of CPM.

_____ Vocational assessment satisfactorily completed.

_____ Educational Requirements successfully completed:

_____ Formal CRE Training Program approved by CPM

_____ Any additional Specialized Education required by CPM

_____ Statement of Faith submitted.

_____ Attendance at workshop on Healthy Boundaries.

ATTESTING COMPLETION:

The Commission on Preparation for Ministry of the Presbytery of Tampa Bay attests that

has met all the requirements for study and preparation and is now ready to be referred to COM for consideration as a Commissioned Ruling Elder for service as _____ in the Presbytery of Tampa Bay.

Approved by CPM: _____ / _____ / _____ (Date)

Chair of the Commission on Preparation for Ministry