

**Authorized Ruling Elders and  
Commissioned Ruling Elders Policy**  
*Presbytery of Shenandoah*  
(Adopted November 8, 2011)

**Background**

The Presbytery of Shenandoah acknowledges ruling elders commissioned to particular pastoral services as a source of spiritual gifts suited to meet the needs of God's work among the congregations of this presbytery, and recognizes ruling elders as a source of leadership in the future. These ruling elders have served and continue to be needed in the following situations:

- a) AREs who can be called to lead worship and preach the gospel when the teaching elder cannot be there for one or more Sundays.
- b) AREs who can lead worship and preach the gospel short term (i.e. several weeks) in brief periods between a teaching elder leaving and the arrangement for an interim for the congregation.
- c) CREs who can lead worship and preach the gospel in congregations in a larger parish under the direction of a parish teaching elder.
- d) CREs who can lead worship and preach the gospel in a congregation for an extended period because it has been determined by the Committee on Ministry (COM) in consultation with the session that the congregation, because of size or cost, cannot afford a teaching elder or cannot be grouped in such a way as to share a teaching elder.
- e) CREs who serve a specific task in a congregation under supervision of the installed teaching elder.

It is understood that the ARE/CRE ordinarily will not serve their own congregations in these capacities. Each congregation/CRE relationship will be reviewed on a case by case basis.

**Basic Terminology**

The level of training received will designate the trained ruling elders and the function they are serving within the presbytery. This is for general knowledge and specific understanding of service and specific capacities.

Terminology is Authorized Ruling Elder (ARE) and Commissioned Ruling Elder (CRE).

\*Authorized Ruling Elders (ARE) are ruling elders who have received the approved training prior to being given permission to be available to preach on a temporary supply basis.

\*Commissioned Ruling Elders (CRE) are ruling elders who have received the approved training and who are commissioned by the presbytery to serve in a specific congregation for a specific amount of time.

**The Oversight Committee (ARE/CRE)**

Presbytery will establish a permanent committee to deal with the oversight of AREs/CREs and to provide for the annual evaluations of CREs. The Ministerial Relations Committee of the COM will provide oversight to this committee. The name of this committee will be the Oversight Committee. *Book of Order G-2.1004*

This committee will be composed of:

- 1 from Ministerial Relations Committee
- 1 with former Committee on Ministry service
- 1 ARE
- 1 with current CRE experience

1 with mentor experience (current or past)

Balance will be attempted for ruling and teaching elders and male/female ratio.

### **Training**

Qualification for admission will be an ruling elder who has ordinarily served at least one full term, has received recommendation of the session and its teaching elder or moderator, submits two (2) letters of reference from the congregation's membership and one (1) letter of reference from outside of the congregation's membership, and has a minimum of a high school diploma or G.E.D.

The COM, upon the recommendation of the Ministerial Relations Committee, will establish a Training Committee to have oversight of these ruling elders who will be enlisted in the training program to be prepared as ARE and will serve at the direction of the presbytery. This committee, under the supervision of the Ministerial Relations Committee of the COM, will be responsible for the period of time from admissions through the examination following course completion. It will plan the curriculum, secure and equip the instructors, and oversee the examination of those who complete the training. Areas of training will include but not be limited to, Bible, Reformed Theology & Sacraments, Presbyterian Polity, preaching, leading worship, pastoral care and teaching. A two-year program will be offered. Those who successfully complete the first year of the program, receive the recommendation of the instructors and Training Committee, and are properly examined by both the Training Committee and the Oversight Committee, will be given the designation of ARE.

There is no implication that finishing the two-year program will lead to a commission from presbytery. At the end of training the Ministerial Relations Committee will examine the elders to determine suitability for receiving a commission to serve as a CRE.

### **When an Authorized Ruling Elder becomes a Commissioned Ruling Elder**

When an ARE has been granted a commission, it shall be valid for a period up to three (3) years in duration, as determined by the COM. The first year will be probationary. Following the probationary year, the COM will visit the church session, mentor, and the CRE to determine if renewal is appropriate. The commission may be for leading worship, preaching the gospel, provision of pastoral care, moderating the session and administration of the sacraments. In West Virginia they may also officiate at marriages. The commission may be renewed at expiration or terminated at any time at the discretion of the presbytery. Annual review of the CRE will be in written form and will include a report from the mentor, session, and the CRE. It is encouraged that the CRE who has served six years at the same church take a sabbatical of six weeks at his/her regular salary.

In order to maintain the commission, the CRE shall attend a continuing education event annually. For all commissions established after January 1, 2008, attendance and participation shall be required in one of the following:

1. An Oversight Committee sponsored event,
2. A seminary sponsored event,
3. An on-line sponsored event approved by the committee, or
4. An alternative continuing education experience upon prior approval of the committee.

### **The Role/Responsibility of the Mentor with a CRE**

The CRE will work under the guidance of a mentor. A mentor is a teaching elder approved by the COM. The mentor will not be the CRE's home pastor.

The guidelines for the Mentor/CRE relationship are as follows:

1. The mentor should be a good role model for the CRE. The mentor shall demonstrate the openness and caring that the CRE should develop.
2. The mentor should be an teaching elder of the presbytery but may not be the CREs pastor.
3. The mentor should be accessible for meetings and phone conversations.

4. The mentor should be approachable and non-judgmental, should listen before giving advice, and present constructive criticism in a positive way.
5. Upon appointment, the mentor shall make the initial contact with the CRE, provide contact information (phone numbers, email address, etc.), and set up a first meeting with the CRE.
6. The CRE should attempt to contact the mentor at least monthly and should provide a recorded sermon at least quarterly, seeking feedback from the mentor. If the CRE has not contacted the mentor in several months, the mentor shall make follow-up contact. The Oversight Committee shall be contacted if this problem persists.
7. The Oversight Committee shall be contacted when any issues arise in the mentor/CRE relationship.
8. The mentor should encourage the CRE to pursue his or her own personal growth.
9. The mentor is appointed for one year and is selected by the Oversight Committee. This relationship may be renewed for a longer period upon review by the Oversight Committee.
10. No mentor should have responsibility for more than one CRE.

### **Service in a Larger Parish Ministry**

Persons who serve one or more congregations within the Larger Parish model will need to exercise particular care to understand the unique responsibility they have to enhance the entire ministry of the parish, as well as the particular congregations. The strategy of the Larger Parish requires that the CREs see themselves not only as part of a staff under the supervision of the Parish Pastor but as being deeply committed to a close, collegial working relationship with the Parish Pastor.

The Parish Pastor, in most commissions, will be assigned as the mentor. There will be an annual review of the CRE by the Parish Pastor, session(s) and the COM.

### **AREs to and from Other Presbyteries**

In recognition of the transient nature of our culture, the COM understands that ruling elders who have been trained by other presbyteries, have served in a capacity of commissioned ruling elders, or have received equivalent training and, upon moving into the bounds of our presbytery, may be a resource available to serve the congregations of Shenandoah Presbytery. At those times, when such persons become known or available, the COM, directly or through its oversight committee, will examine these elders as to suitability prior to being placed on the supply list as AREs.

If any of our ruling elders who have been trained by Shenandoah Presbytery to be AREs or have served as CREs relocate within the bounds of another presbytery, the COM will send certification of that training to that presbytery's COM.