

**INDIAN NATIONS PRESBYTERY POLICIES  
RELATING TO COMMISSIONING RULING ELDERS  
TO THE SERVICE OF THE CHURCH**

**UNDERLYING PHILOSOPHY**

- A. Many of the congregations of the Indian Nations Presbytery (INP) are small and underfunded. As a result, they are also underserved in a number of vital areas, including but not limited to preaching and pastoral care.
- B. The calling of commissioned ruling elders can provide a substantive response to the needs of these underserved congregations.
- C. CREs will ordinarily be graduates of established seminary programs or other programs recognized by CPM and COM (e.g. programs sponsored by a presbytery) and may be authorized by INP to provide a broad range of services including preaching and worship leadership, ministries of care and compassion, administering sacraments, moderating meetings, as well as leadership in education and community outreach ministries.
- D. While it is the intent of this Policy for CREs to serve small membership churches, INP may commission some CREs to serve at-large. Our strategy for mission requires this to meet the occasional and growing need for ruling elders who are authorized to administer the sacraments and to moderate session.
- E. Service may be in either a voluntary or paid capacity.

**AUTHORITY**

The Book of Order **G-2.10 COMMISSIONING RULING ELDERS TO PARTICULAR PASTORAL SERVICE**, empowers Presbyteries to commission ruling elders as follows:

G-2.1001 Functions – When the presbytery, in consultation with the session or other responsible committee, determines that its strategy for mission requires it, the presbytery may authorize a ruling elder to be commissioned to limited pastoral service as assigned by the presbytery. A ruling elder so designated may be commissioned to serve in a validated ministry of the presbytery. Presbytery, in its commission, may authorize the ruling elder to moderate the session of the congregation to which he or she is commissioned, to administer the Sacraments, and to officiate at marriages where permitted by state law. This commission shall also specify the term of service, which shall not exceed three years but shall be renewable. The presbytery shall review the commission at least annually.

**ADMINISTRATION AND OVERSIGHT**

INP through a joint effort of the Committee on Preparation for Ministry (CPM) and the Committee on Ministry (COM) shall be responsible for the ongoing task of recruiting, providing training for and supporting CREs.

1. CPM will be responsible for the care of individuals as they enter and complete the process.
2. Once an individual has successfully completed the commissioning requirements, the continuing responsibility of oversight and deployment of CREs shall be the responsibility of the COM, provided however,
  - a. The COM may allow the CRE to work under the supervision of the presbytery through the moderator of the session of the church being served, or, if CRE is acting as moderator of session, COM shall continue to provide a mentor/liaison to CRE.
  - b. In the event that COM assigns moderator responsibilities to a CRE, COM shall continue to provide a mentor/liaison to the CRE.
  - b. The person serving as the CRE's mentor and supervisor shall not be a member of the staff of the congregation being served.

### CRE QUALIFICATIONS AND PROCESS

1. Applicants for CRE shall be ordained elders and shall have a written recommendation from the session of the congregation of which they are a member. CPM shall examine each applicant to determine that the person is potentially competent to be a CRE, willing to undergo training, and is amenable to the on-going supervision of CPM and COM. Either CPM or COM may perform background checks on applicants.
2. Upon approval of CPM, the applicant may begin a program of training. Should an applicant have initiated a program of training prior to making application to CPM, CPM may recognize and approve the applicant's prior training. An applicant must complete a program of education prior to commissioning in conformity with the list of training areas described in G-2.10. A person must complete training before being considered a CRE.
  - a. The following two programs have been identified as examples of programs which may meet the above requirements. Other programs may be considered.
    - i. Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary Certificate in Ministry (CIM) at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary
    - ii. University of Dubuque Theological Seminary Commissioned Ruling Elder/Christian Leadership Program Online Courses
3. Those in preparation to become a CRE are to be informed of Commissioned Pastor's roles regarding "confidence and privilege" and "mandated reporter" requirements of the Book of Order [G-4.03, 2019-2021].
4. Once the training is completed the applicant will be examined by a joint committee of CPM and COM to determine that person's readiness for commissioning. Upon approval, the trained applicant will receive written certification of successful completion of training and that the person is ready to be considered by COM to be commissioned as a CRE. Any person who is being

considered for CRE certification will be required to complete a psychological evaluation within the first 6 months of entering the CRE program.

5. When a Commissioned applicant receives an invitation to serve a local congregation as a CRE, the COM shall review the applicant's suitability for that position and make the appropriate recommendation to the presbytery regarding the applicant's commissioning in consultation with the session in question.
6. When the presbytery commissions a ruling elder to this service, the approved authorities granted to the CRE must be listed. Presbytery, in its commission, may authorize the CRE to perform some or all of the services listed below under the General CRE Job Descriptions.
7. COM shall evaluate annually the work of the CRE. When assigned to a specific congregation, the evaluation shall include the continued viability of the relationship, the effectiveness of the congregation's ministry and outreach, and the adequacy of the financial compensation, if any.
8. CREs may serve in either a voluntary or paid capacity. Churches utilizing paid CREs shall address compensation prior to the commencement of CRE services. Compensation and the job description in a contract between a session and a CRE must be approved by COM.

COM shall have authority to appoint an administrative commission for a service of commissioning of a CRE who will be serving a particular congregation(s).

9. A continuing education plan is a vital part of service in the larger church. At times there may be continuing education opportunities arranged through INP; at other times there may be events arranged regionally or through a seminary. Where no specific opportunities exist, the CRE is strongly encouraged to pursue continuing education for the benefit of those whom they serve as well as their own spiritual health and well-being.
10. INP is responsible for any expenses involved in interviewing potential CRE candidates. INP may consider contributing to other expenses of CRE training (class tuition, books, other supplies, travel, housing, etc.), based upon a potential CRE candidate's financial need. COM is responsible for expenses in deploying CREs. The cost of a psychological evaluation and related expenses are typically shared equally by the potential candidate and COM.
11. Unless otherwise provided herein, training must be approved in advance by CPM and COM.
12. Responsibility for costs related to non-INP training must be agreed upon in advance by the potential candidate and COM.

## GENERAL CRE JOB DESCRIPTIONS

There may be variety in the job description of a CRE; however, these basic areas may be included in a job description:

1. Preach the Gospel (consistent with the basic tenets of the Reformed faith) at services of worship approved by the session. It is expected these services will be consistent with the Directory for Worship.
2. Actively engage the congregation in considering their outreach and relationship to the surrounding community.
3. Promote the mission and program of the whole church.
4. During the course of her/his commission engage in a planned program of continuing education to enhance skills. COM may strongly recommend certain training to increase the likelihood of maintaining the commission to a particular church or mission.
5. Have regular contact with mentor/liaison or COM representatives to ensure honest and open dialogue that will build the body of Christ.

The CRE may provide, with a session request and COM approval:

6. Ministries of care and compassion:
7. Hospital visitation
8. Home visitation
9. Funerals
10. New member visitation
11. Lead Bible studies and teach in the Christian Education program of the church
12. Engage in community ministries in consultation with the session
13. Refer parishioners to pastoral care providers or counselors
14. Administer the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

CREs may provide, with a session request and COM approval:

15. Moderating of session meetings.
16. Moderating of congregational meetings
17. Performing marriages, if allowed by state law
18. Administering the Sacrament of Baptism
19. A Service of Ordination and Installation of Ruling Elders or Deacons

For every one of these authorities not granted in the original commission, specific approval must be granted for the at-large CRE by the COM moderator in consultation with ~~or~~ the Coordinating Council moderator, and the CRE's mentor.

Ordinarily their service will be to a specific congregation for an approved role but they may at times be asked to perform other temporary responsibilities.

CREs will not be authorized to provide pastoral or other counseling without the express approval of COM, which approval may be conditioned on the CRE obtaining additional training to be specified by COM.

### ROLE OF CRE MENTORS

When a person applies to the CRE program, the joint CPM/COM presbytery committee will assign a mentor. The student and the mentor should agree on a schedule for regular monthly contact.

When a person is commissioned as a CRE in a particular congregation the COM will assign a Minister of Word and Sacrament to be a mentor and supervisor [G-2.1004, 2023-2025].

### FURTHER GUIDANCE FOR CREs

The deploying of ruling elders in service to the congregations and other missions is evolving rapidly in the PCUSA. This policy is not exhaustive. Where specific decisions need to be made, the CPM, COM and Coordinating Council will be guided by the Book of Order, the wisdom of current policies, guidelines and practices in relationship to interpretation, and modifications to this policy.

***Revised by INP February 22, 2025***