

# **PRESBYTERY OF MIDDLE TENNESSEE**

## **COMMISSION ON MINISTRY**

### **2024 MANUAL**

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# COMMISSION ON MINISTRY

## MANUAL SECTION 1

### INTRODUCTION AND AUTHORITY

#### **Introduction**

The Commission on Ministry serves as advisor to teaching elders, ruling elders commissioned to pastoral service, certified Christian educators, sessions, and congregations of the Presbytery. The Commission on Ministry oversees the processes for congregations in transitions in pastoral leadership and guides sessions seeking temporary pastoral relationships.

#### **Authority**

The Presbytery of Middle Tennessee has authorized the Commission on Ministry to fulfill this assigned role in *The Book of Order* (G-3.0307): *Each presbytery shall develop and maintain mechanisms and processes to serve as pastor and counselor to its ministers of the Word and Sacrament, commissioned pastors [also known as commissioned ruling elders], and certified Christian educators of the presbytery; to facilitate the relations between the presbytery and its congregations, ministers of the Word and Sacrament, commissioned pastors, and certified Christian educators; and to settle difficulties on behalf of the presbytery where possible and expedient.*

According to the Mission and Operations Manual: *The membership of the Committee on Ministry shall be 18 persons - nine ruling elders and nine teaching elders, no two elders representing the same congregation. Commission on Ministry members shall exercise appropriate confidentiality in the commission's work. The Commission on Ministry may use teaching elders and ruling elders not among its members for service in particular capacities.*

*The Commission on Ministry is granted authority by the Presbytery to act on its behalf on the following:*

- *Approve calls of teaching elder members of the presbytery within the presbytery;*
- *Recommend to Presbytery the initial commissioning of ruling elders to particular pastoral service;*
- *Annually review the commissions of commissioned pastors, and review and renew commissions, not to exceed three years;*
- *Call meetings of sessions;*
- *Approve moderators of sessions for churches without an installed pastor;*
- *Designate persons to moderate session and congregational meetings;*
- *Designate members of the Commission on Ministry, the Executive Presbyter, or the Stated Clerk, to preside at meetings of the session and/or congregation; such person may not moderate the session of the church of which that person is a member;*
- *Perform the initial in-depth examination of candidates seeking ordination by the Presbytery, after clearance of appropriate background checks;*
- *Perform the in-depth examination of all teaching elders seeking membership in the Presbytery, after clearance of appropriate background checks; if the teaching elder does not receive unanimous approval of the Commission on Ministry, a subsequent examination of the teaching elder must occur at Presbytery upon request;*
- *Ordinarily, the Presbytery of Middle Tennessee does not receive a teaching elder seeking membership in the Presbytery as a member-at-large unless the teaching elder is the spouse of a teaching elder being received by the Committee on Ministry for the Presbytery of Middle Tennessee, or a teaching elder pursuing post-graduate study within the bounds of the Presbytery of Middle Tennessee. The Commission on Ministry will review any such request on a case-by-case basis.*
- *Approve commissions for installations (commissions to ordain or to ordain and install are to be approved by Presbytery);*
- *Annually review and approve terms of call for teaching elders and commissioned ruling elders;*
- *Annually review and approve temporary pastoral relationships, including Interims, as well as concur with the termination of temporary pastoral relationships when requested by sessions;*
- *Annually review the validation of ministries of teaching elders not serving in congregations;*
- *Annually review the status of member-at-large teaching elders;*
- *Dissolve installed pastoral relationships when the teaching elder and congregation concur, and abolish pastoral positions when requested by the congregation;*
- *Dismiss teaching elders to other presbyteries, upon the request of the calling Presbytery;*
- *Grant requests from teaching elders for release from exercise of ordered ministry with the reasons for such release recorded in the minutes of the Presbytery;*

- *Grant status of Honorable Retirement to teaching elders;*
- *Grant status of Member-at-Large to teaching elders;*
- *Maintain the pulpit supply list and list of trained interim teaching elders;*
- *Facilitate Presbytery's sexual misconduct / boundaries training, held every three years; such training to be completed by teaching elders and ruling elders commissioned to service within the first six months of reception.*

## SECTION 2 THE WORK OF THE COMMISSION ON MINISTRY

The Commission on Ministry's work is divided into five categories and therefore into five teams and task forces. The team tasked with caring for the people who are members of the presbytery is the **Pastoral Care Team**. The task force charged with caring for churches as they go through transitions in leadership is the **Transitions Task Force**. The task force responsible for examining persons requesting membership in the presbytery is the **Examinations Task Force**. The annual review of active ministers - installed, temporary, validated, members-at-large - and commissioned pastors is overseen by the **Review Team**. The team responsible for the presbytery's connection with churches including times of stress and/or conflict is the **Mediation Team**.

The Commission on Ministry normally meets monthly and its members are assigned to one or more task forces or teams. The teams and task forces meet separately as needed. The teams and task forces have chairs who coordinate with the Chair of the Commission on Ministry and with the Executive Presbyter to ensure that the work is being accomplished. In addition to serving on task forces or teams, members of the Commission on Ministry will serve as liaisons to assigned churches. Since some of the work of Commission on Ministry overlaps with the functions of the Executive Presbyter and the Stated Clerk, the Executive Presbyter and the Stated Clerk meet with the Commission on Ministry and serve as resources as needed.

Each task force and team of the Commission on Ministry will develop the necessary resources to fulfill their functions. These documents must be approved by the Commission on Ministry. These documents, attached as appendices to this manual, will be updated as necessary by the presbytery staff, upon approval of the Commission on Ministry. The presbytery staff maintains files on congregations, teaching elders, commissioned ruling elders, etc. The Commission on Ministry has access to these files through the COM Chair and may have opportunity to provide information to be placed in the file.

## **SECTION 3 TRANSITIONS TEAM**

The Transitions Task Force works in conjunction with sessions, teaching elders, and congregations through training, resources, and support. The Transitions Task Force

1. guides sessions and congregations during times of transition from the announcement of a pastor's departure until the time of the installation of new pastoral leadership;
2. makes recommendation for dissolution of pastoral relationship when pastor and congregation concur;
3. recommends approval and dissolution of pastoral positions;
4. assists congregations without installed pastors in obtaining leadership, recommending the appointments of moderators of sessions without installed pastors;
5. approves Ministry Information Forms;
6. approves temporary pastoral relationships, including contracts and terms of call;
7. approves commissioned ruling elder relationships, including contracts, responsibilities, and terms of call;
8. reports significant concerns affecting health of congregations to the Mediation Team;
9. provides guidance and adapts transitional resources and processes according to the needs of the congregation.

## **SECTION 4**

### **EXAMINATIONS TEAM**

The Examinations Task Force conducts the in-depth examination of teaching elders requesting membership in the Presbytery of Middle Tennessee, as well as candidates, and ruling elders for commissioning to particular pastoral service. The Examinations Task Force

- performs the in-depth examination of all teaching elders seeking membership in the Presbytery, after clearance of appropriate background checks; if the teaching elder does not receive unanimous approval of the Committee on Ministry, a subsequent examination of the teaching elder must occur at Presbytery upon request;
- performs the in-depth examination of all non-PCUSA clergy seeking calls in one or more of our churches prior to approval of their contract.
- performs the initial in-depth examination of candidates seeking ordination by the Presbytery; as part of the examination by the presbytery, the candidate will be required to present a sermon / homily at the presbytery meeting;
- oversees the training process of those becoming Commissioned Ruling Elders (CRE) including recommending appropriate course work, receiving annual reports on their training, and conducting the final in-depth interview prior to the COMs recommendation to presbytery that they be commissioned.
- works with the Executive Presbyter and Stated Clerk to insure that all required background checks are performed prior to the examination; and
- reviews the statement of faith and autobiographical statement of the person being examined. Upon approval of the examination by the COM, these documents will be presented to the presbytery at the time of the examination by the presbytery.
- maintains the pulpit supply list ensuring that it is current and that those listed have been examined prior to being added to the list.
- maintains a roster of teaching elders within the presbytery who have successfully completed Week I of Interim Training and who are open to serving as interims.

## **SECTION 5**

### **REVIEW TEAM**

The Review Team, on behalf of the COM, designs, circulates, and reviews annual reports for installed, temporary, validated, and at-large minister members of the Presbytery and for commissioned pastors (CREs). The Review Team brings pertinent information from the annual reports to the COM, including recommendations on renewal. The Review Team:

- establishes annual timeline for circulating and receiving all annual reports (see schedule below);
- annually reviews the commissions of commissioned pastors (CREs) and makes recommendations regarding their renewal, not to exceed three years;
- annually reviews and reports the terms of calls of all installed teaching elders;
- annually reviews all temporary pastoral relationships, including interims, and makes recommendations regarding renewal;
- annually reviews and makes recommendations regarding the status of teaching elders who are members-at-large;
- annually reviews the validation of teaching elders in ministries outside congregations;
- reports to the COM any teaching elders who are not in a validated ministry and do not fulfill the requirements of member-at-large.

#### Annual Report Schedule:

March- Commissioned Pastors (CREs)

May- Temporary Members and Interim Pastors

June- Installed Members

August- Validated Members

October- Members-at-Large

## **SECTION 6**

### **PASTORAL CARE TEAM**

The Pastoral Care Team will work with the Executive Presbyter and COM to ensure teaching elders in the presbytery are provided with pastoral care. This team, composed of a minimum of four people, may include others recruited from within the presbytery to extend care. The convener of the Pastoral Care Team shall be a member of COM. The Executive Presbyter shall serve as staff to the Pastoral Care Team.

The Pastoral Care Team will carry out the COM's support of commissioned pastors (CREs) and teaching elders who are making the transition from theological education to ordered ministry. This support is facilitated by appointing mentors and by overseeing and supporting these relationships.

The Pastoral Care Team will be a resource for the Examinations Team to ensure that a mentor is appointed, who is an experienced teaching elder member of the Presbytery of Middle Tennessee. The mentor shall be assigned for two years to teaching elders entering their first call and/or new to the presbytery. Mentors will be assigned to commissioned pastors (CREs) for an indefinite period of time. If for any reason the relationship needs to be dissolved, the two should first discuss the need with each other and then confer with the convener of the Pastoral Care Team, to facilitate the dissolution and assignment of a new mentor.

## **SECTION 7**

### **MEDIATION TEAM**

The Mediation Team works with congregations, sessions, teaching elders, commissioned ruling elders, and certified Christian Educators to provide congregational care and to facilitate the resolution of any conflict.

The Mediation Team, composed of 12 members (teaching and ruling elders), will be responsible for inquiring into difficulties within congregations. Members of the Mediation Team will work with the Stated Clerk, the Co-Executive Presbyters, and the chair of the Committee on Ministry to address concerns that arise within the presbytery. Ordinarily, investigating committee members shall be appointed from the Mediation Team. Mandatory training will be provided for the Mediation Team. The convener of this team shall be a member of the Committee on Ministry. The Co- Executive Presbyters and Stated Clerk shall serve as staff to the Mediation Team.

## **SECTION 8 LIAISONS**

### COM Liaisons

Purpose: COM established the liaison initiative to better serve churches and pastors. The liaisons are the primary means of contact between sessions, pastors, and the presbytery. Through these relationships, sessions, congregations, and pastors have a direct link and can ask questions or receive assistance when needed.

Expectations: Liaisons are asked to contact the pastors and clerks of session of their assigned churches to introduce themselves. Individual liaisons may choose to email and set up phone calls or even meet for coffee or lunch as convenient. Ways liaisons work to connect with congregations include:

- Visiting the church's website if available
- Subscribing and read the newsletters if available
- Reporting as needed to COM (during COM monthly stated meetings)

### Quarterly:

- Check in with clerk of session and pastor – if either has specific questions or needs, feel free to bring those to EP, SC, and COM co-chairs.

### As convenient and appropriate (at least once annually)

- If possible, attend a special event or worship service; inform COM, SC, and EP of special events as well

Liaisons to churches in transition work closely with congregational leadership; the liaison assists with the process of working toward and implementing a PNC or APNC if the session decides to pursue installed leadership; the liaison can also assist churches who choose other means of leadership such as CREs and supply pastors

Liaisons to a church whose pastor is near sabbatical work closely with the pastor, clerk, and session as asked. The liaison can work with the pastor and session if a moderator appointment is needed as well as share in planning for the pulpit needs during sabbatical.