



Commissioned Ruling Elder (CRE) Program Policies and Procedures

Adopted Effective April, 2026

I. Delegated Responsibilities

A. CPM shall be responsible for:

- 1) Preparation and evaluation of preparedness of Candidates for Commissioned Ruling Elders (CCREs). (Section III, IV, and V).
- 2) Establishing and maintaining rolls for all CCREs, EREs, and CREs.
- 3) Final assessment and recommendation of CCREs to Presbytery for examination and approval of eligibility to be commissioned to a validated ministry. (Section V E).
- 4) Ensuring that opportunities for CRE mentorship, retreats, continuing education, and fellowship activities are made available for all persons in the program from preparation through being commissioned and post commission.

B. The COMV shall be responsible for:

- 1) Determining if a particular ministry meets the criteria specified in the PEIA *Validation of Ministry Policy* and may be classified as a validated ministry in accordance with that policy. (Section VI) (See also Appendix A, *Validation of Ministry Policy*)
- 2) Oversight, appropriate placement, and commissioning of credentialed CREs and EREs. (Section II B, V, and VI), including the commissioning of Ruling Elders being authorized to serve validated ministries in limited capacities within a specific context (such as the administration of the sacraments or session/congregational meeting moderation at a particular congregation).
- 3) Oversight of CREs during commissioned service. A CRE may serve only in a validated ministry in accordance with G-2.10 and the PEIA CRE Policy. (Section VII – X)

II. Definitions

A. Candidate Commissioned Ruling Elder (CCRE)

A **CCRE** must be:

- 1) An active member in good standing of a PC (USA) church.
- 2) An ordained Ruling Elder in the PC (USA).
- 3) Recommended by the Session of the CCRE's member congregation of the PEIA to the CRE Program.
- 4) Interviewed by the CPM or by a subcommittee designated by CPM.
- 5) Able to articulate a sense of call to serve in Christian ministry and a willingness to express that call as a CRE, to work within the Presbyterian system, and to accept the proper authority of the Presbytery.
- 6) Willing to undertake and complete the basic curriculum of the CRE program in a timely manner.
- 7) Willing to fulfill all other requirements as outlined in this policy.

B. Eligible Ruling Elder (ERE)

An **ERE** is a ruling elder who has been recommended by CPM for examination by the Presbytery and subsequently declared by PEIA as "eligible to be commissioned to a validated ministry," or a ruling elder who has previously been commissioned to a validated ministry but is not presently serving in one. ERE's may seek COMV approval to be listed on the presbytery's pulpit supply list.

C. Commissioned Ruling Elder (CRE) or Commissioned Pastor

A **CRE** (G-2.10) is a ruling elder of the PC (USA), who has passed the requirements of the presbytery's CRE Policy, has been declared eligible to be commissioned, and who is presently serving a local commission in a validated ministry. Commissions will be assigned by COMV. A commission is valid in one or more congregations, new church development, or other validated ministries of the presbytery designated by COMV on behalf of the presbytery.

A ruling elder who has been commissioned and later ceases to serve in a particular congregation, or other validated ministry, may continue to be listed as available to serve (ERE), but is not authorized to perform the functions of a commissioned ruling elder until appointed again to a particular validated ministry by COMV on behalf of the presbytery.

All CREs are ruling elders in the PC (USA) who have been selected by CPM on behalf of the Presbytery and examined and approved by the Presbytery as detailed in this Policy.

D. Ruling Elder Commissioned for Particular Service

In accordance with G-2.10, a Ruling Elder may be commissioned by the presbytery to limited pastoral service, authorized to perform specific ministry roles such as the administration of the sacraments and the moderation of session or congregational meetings. Ruling Elders may only perform these duties at the specific location to which they have been commissioned and authorized. The requirements to be commissioned for particular service are outlined in section XII.

III. Process to Enter the CRE Program

A. Consult with the pastor or the moderator of session regarding interest in the CRE program.

B. Submit a written application, Forms A and B to CPM. The application forms are attached to this policy and include a brief statement of faith.

C. A representative of CPM shall consult with presbytery leadership regarding the candidate's sense of call (including at least one of the following: the Stated Clerk of PEIA, the Executive Presbyter, a presbytery moderator, or a moderator of COMV). A representative of CPM shall also meet with the session of the church to explain the process including the role of session.

D. The church's session must vote to endorse the candidate's entry into the CRE program. The clerk of session or moderator of the church must submit Form C to the CPM.

E. Send three letters of favorable reference and recommendation to CPM, including one from either the pastor or moderator of the church.

F. CPM will conduct an interview to discern whether to affirm the sense of call to validated ministry. CPM must then vote to approve entrance into the program as a Candidate for Commissioned Ruling Elder (CCRE). The CPM moderator or appointed liaison will notify the candidate, the candidate's church's session moderator, and the Stated Clerk of the PEIA of acceptance into the program.

G. If accepted into the program as a CCRE, CPM shall appoint a liaison for the candidate as a resource in navigating how to complete the course of study and other requirements per PEIA's CRE Program Policy.

IV. Participation in the Presbytery

After a ruling elder is accepted into the program, the applicant becomes a CCRE and is expected to be an active part of the presbytery community. Opportunities for participation include presbytery meetings, committees, retreats, worship, training, and other fellowship opportunities focused on mutual support, professional development, and spiritual growth.

V. Requirements for Preparation

A. Course of Study

The candidate shall successfully complete the 7 Foundational Courses prior to being commissioned and complete the additional 4 Enrichment Courses no later than 2 years after being commissioned. Approved courses of study are provided by The Academy program through the Synod of Lakes and Prairies, the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary (including online courses), or another ATS accredited theological institution or denominational program approved by CPM. PEIA requires approved coursework in the following 11 areas, with 7 Foundational Courses and 4 Enrichment Courses:

Foundational Courses:

- Pastoral Care
- Presbyterian Polity
- Reformed Theology
- New Testament
- Old Testament
- Proclamation/Preaching
- Reformed Worship and Sacraments

Enrichment Courses:

- Formation for Mission
- Spiritual Development or Christian Education
- Congregational Leadership
- Congregational Revitalization

**The cost of the course of study is the responsibility of the candidate, who should consult with their church's session and CPM about the availability of financial support. PEIA offers a CRE Scholarship. The information is available at www.peia.org

Candidates are encouraged, but not required, to take a unit in Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) to further their preparation. A unit of CPE from an accredited program approved by CPM would satisfy the pastoral care course requirement.

B. Psychological Assessment

During the first year of coursework, a CCRE shall participate in psychological and career evaluation to assess the CCRE'S suitability for ministry as a CRE. Comprehensive, in-depth evaluation helps a CCRE understand how one's values, interests, capabilities, and personality fit into the role of a CRE. Midwest Ministry Development Center and LeaderWise are recommended to facilitate this consultation. In each case the CCRE, the CCRE's church, and CPM shall share the cost of this consultation equally. The results of this consultation shall be released to the moderator of CPM and shall be shared with the members of CPM. This material shall be kept confidential. Upon receipt of the evaluation, CPM shall schedule a meeting with the applicant.

C. Boundary Training

CCRE's must complete and receive certification from a presbytery-approved resource for boundary training for pastors, which includes the topic of sexual misconduct, and child sexual abuse prevention training with recertification at least every 36 months. The CCRE must sign the Presbytery of East Iowa's Sexual Misconduct policy, signifying that the CCRE has read, understands and will comply with its contents and submit to a background check.

D. Worship Leadership Observation

CCRE's are strongly encouraged to provide CPM with a video of them leading worship and preaching in a congregational context.

E. Ongoing Consultation and Assessment

Throughout the course of study, CPM will assess the CCRE's progress in preparation for ministry at least once per year and will offer encouragement, guidance, and additional requirements as necessary. There is no guarantee that a CCRE will ultimately be considered eligible to be commissioned to a validated ministry.

F. Final Assessment and Certification

Once CPM votes to affirm the CCRE's satisfactory completion of coursework, a psychological assessment, boundary training, background check, and any other requirements, CPM shall conduct a final evaluation of the CCRE's personal faith, motives for seeking a commission, and proficiency in reformed theology, presbyterian polity, the theology of worship and sacraments, and scripture. CPM shall then take a vote whether to recommend to the presbytery that it examines the CCRE for the purpose of approving the candidate as eligible to be commissioned to a validated ministry (ERE). The CPM moderator shall report this recommendation to the session of the church of which the CCRE is a member and presbytery leadership (including the Stated Clerk, the Executive Presbyter, the COMV moderator(s), and the moderators of presbytery).

VI. Examination by the Presbytery

Prior to being commissioned to a validated ministry for the first time and with the recommendation of CPM for preparedness to receive a commission, the CCRE shall be examined by the presbytery on their personal faith, motivation for seeking a commission, the required areas of instruction determined by CPM on behalf of the presbytery, and their statement of faith in accordance with G-2.1002. The presbytery may then declare the ruling elder as “eligible to be commissioned to a validated ministry” (ERE).

VII. Commissioning to a Validated Ministry

A. If approved by the presbytery as “eligible to be commissioned to a validated ministry” (ERE), COMV, after it determines that the presbytery’s strategy for mission in a particular validated ministry requires it or would be enhanced by it, may commission an eligible ruling elder (ERE) to a validated ministry and authorize the ERE to perform specific functions within that ministry. Commissioning will normally take place at the site of the ministry.

B. Within the ministry to which the CRE has been commissioned, the CRE may be authorized by COMV to perform one or more of the following services:

- 1) Prepare and lead worship
- 2) Provide administrative leadership in this ministry
- 3) Administer the Lord’s Supper only in this validated ministry
- 4) Administer the Sacrament of Baptism only in this validated ministry
- 5) Moderate the session of the congregation
- 6) Have a voice in meetings of presbytery
- 7) Have a vote in meetings of the presbytery (such vote to be counted as a ruling elder commissioner for purposes of parity)
- 8) Perform services of Christian marriage when invited by the session or other responsible committee, and when allowed by the state
- 9) Officiate funerals
- 10) Other duties

VIII. Continuing Support and Oversight

The CRE commissioned under the terms of G-2.1001 shall work under the care of CPM and the supervision of COMV. A Teaching Elder shall be assigned as a mentor by CPM. The CRE and COMV may suggest particular Teaching Elders to serve as their mentor. The assigned Teaching Elder shall not be the CRE’s pastor. The mentor should be a good role model for the CRE, approachable and non-judgmental, seeking to listen before giving advice and/or constructive criticism. The CRE and mentor should be in contact at least quarterly. The mentor should provide a brief written or oral report to CPM annually.

A CRE is expected to attend meetings of Presbytery and to engage in regular continuing education.

A CRE shall be accountable to COMV by providing an annual written report on their ministry.

IX. Pastoral Care

A. In exercise of pastoral care, CREs shall maintain a relationship of trust and confidentiality, and shall hold in confidence all information revealed to them in the course of providing such care and all information relating to the exercise of such care. When the person whose confidences are at issue gives express consent to reveal confidential information, then a CRE may, but cannot be compelled to, reveal confidential information. A CRE shall reveal confidential information when the CRE reasonably believes that there is risk of imminent bodily harm to any person, or when compelled to do so by state law or the Constitution of the PC (USA).

B. CREs shall be guided by their own sense of compassion, their acquired skills through CRE training, and by the Constitution of the PCUSA (W-6.3000). CREs should be prepared to make referrals to mental health professionals in their communities; they should not attempt to offer specialized care, nor should they attempt to offer counseling beyond a term of three meetings with the same person(s) about the same issue, unless they are licensed counselors over and above their CRE training (W-6.3004).

X. Limits of Commission Term

A commission shall be valid for a period up to three years as determined by COMV, the CRE, and the validated ministry. It may be renewed at expiration or terminated at any time at the discretion of any one of the parties, in accordance with the terms of their employment contract.

XI. The Commissioning Service (W-4.4003)

A. When a CCRE has progressed to being an ERE and an appropriate placement in a validated ministry has been negotiated, a service of commissioning shall be held. This worship service is a presbytery function usually held at the site of the ERE's validated ministry. During worship, the ERE being commissioned shall be asked the following questions by the Presbytery Moderator or Designee:

- 1) Do you trust in Jesus Christ your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?
 - 2) Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal, and God's Word to you?
 - 3) Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God?
 - 4) Will you fulfill your commission in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and be continually guided by our confessions?
 - 5) Will you be governed by our church's polity, and will you abide by its discipline? Will you be a friend among your colleagues in ministry, working with them, subject to the ordering of God's Word and Spirit?
 - 6) Will you in your own life seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, love your neighbors, and work for the reconciliation of the world?
- 1) Do you promise to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church?

- 7) Will you pray for and seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?
- 8) Will you be a faithful ruling elder in this commission, serving the people by proclaiming the good news, teaching faith and caring for the people, and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?

B. Prayer and Statement

The ERE, having answered these questions in the affirmative, the moderator shall pray before saying to the ERE (now CRE):

“(Name), you are now a commissioned ruling elder in the service of this ministry for the time and in the place set by this presbytery.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.”

XII. Requirements to Commission Ruling Elders for Particular Service

In recognition of the needs of small congregations that are unable to afford consistent pastoral leadership, Ruling Elders may feel called to perform a specific type of service within a single ministry context. In such a case, where a Ruling Elder is not serving the role of a Commissioned Pastor, the requirements of the CRE Program may be prohibitively burdensome for those wishing only to be able to serve communion or to moderate session or congregational meetings. If, however, an individual Ruling Elder wishes to perform a multitude of duties in a single context (for instance, session/congregational meeting moderation, administration of the sacraments, preaching, and pastoral care), then that Ruling Elder must participate in the full CRE Program. This is because the confluence of responsibilities constitutes a pastoral relationship appropriate for a Commissioned Pastor, which requires a more comprehensive course of preparation and study. Questions on a case-by-case basis must be approved by both COMV and CPM.

The presbytery will only commission Ruling Elders to the following ministry tasks after successful completion of the following requirements, including coursework in the stated subject areas, which may be provided by The Academy program through the Synod of Lakes and Prairies, University of Dubuque Theological Seminary, or another ATS-accredited institution:

A. To Administer the Sacraments

-A course in Reformed Worship and Sacraments, ensuring the ability to:

- Conduct a service of communion using an order of service which is appropriate to our denomination's understanding of the nature of communion and relevant to the contexts in which communion is being celebrated.
- Explain the theological understanding of Communion and its historical development to a congregation.
- Be familiar with worship resources and common liturgical forms.
- Identify the different sections of the communion liturgy and explain their significance.

- Demonstrate how to perform a communion liturgy.
- Direct, as necessary, other Ruling Elders or Deacons involved in the preparation of the communion table, and their roles in removing and replacing cloths (if used) and in distributing the elements.
- Understand extended communion: who, what, when, and where.

-Boundary Training that meet presbytery requirements for all pastors (a list of approved institutions and coursework can be found on the PEIA website or provided by presbytery leadership), which includes the topic of sexual misconduct, and child sexual abuse prevention training with recertification at least every 36 months. The CCRE must sign the Presbytery of East Iowa's Sexual Misconduct policy, signifying that the CCRE has read, understands and will comply with its contents and submit to a background check.

- **To Moderate Session and Congregational Meetings**

-Completion of all steps in the CRE Program, except for the psychological assessment, worship leadership observation, and completion of all 11 classes.

-A course in Presbyterian Polity, ensuring the ability to:

- Articulate the basic and essential elements of the theology and practice of Presbyterian polity.
- Facilitate a group discussion and vote using the basic parliamentary procedures of Roberts Rules of Order.
- Have proficient knowledge of the polity provided by the latest edition of the Book of Order, and to effectively navigate it to find information when needed.
- Apply the principles of Presbyterian polity with pastoral sensitivity.
- Critique the manner of power dynamics, decision-making, and group process in congregations.
- Consider constructive means of conflict resolution and management of change.

-A course in Reformed Theology, ensuring the ability to:

- Have proficient knowledge in the concepts of Reformed Theology including the Sacraments of Baptism and Communion, the Trinitarian understanding of God, Predestination, the Incarnation, Atonement, and Resurrection.
- Understand and articulate the essential biblical, historical, and theological tenets of the Reformed tradition.
- Analyze the role of scripture as interpreted by the Holy Spirit.
- Engage with the Reformed ethos bridging tradition with modern ministry.
- Apply a Reformed Theological understanding to sermon crafting, preaching, and pastoral care. .

-A course in Congregational Leadership, ensuring the ability to:

- Understand biblical and theological concepts of leadership while connecting them to current secular understandings.
- Develop spiritual practices that nurture healthy leadership.
- Develop an understanding of church administration and finance by learning practical skills such as risk management, budget comprehension, and developing policies for church operations.
- Lead with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love by being well-equipped to handle the daily

surprises in ministry.

-Boundary Training that meet presbytery requirements for all pastors (a list of approved institutions and coursework can be found on the PEIA website or provided by presbytery leadership), which includes the topic of sexual misconduct, and child sexual abuse prevention training with recertification at least every 36 months. The CCRE must sign the Presbytery of East Iowa's Sexual Misconduct policy, signifying that the CCRE has read, understands and will comply with its contents and submit to a background check.

-Newly commissioned Ruling Elders serving as session moderators shall be assigned a mentor, who will observe them moderating at least 2 session meetings within their first year of commissioning (whether in person or via Zoom).



Commissioned Ruling Elder Program Application

Form A

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Work Phone: () _____ Home Phone: () _____

E-mail: _____ Mobile Phone: () _____

Date ordained as an elder in the Presbyterian Church (USA) _____

Church/Location where ordained _____

Current Home Congregation/Location _____

Name/Contact Information for Pastor _____

I hereby affirm that all the above information is true, to the best of my ability, and I understand that upon my enrollment as an Applicant to the CRE process in the Presbytery of East Iowa, I shall be subject to the conditions and requirements of such process. I also understand that enrollment as an applicant in no way guarantees completion of the program or obligation on the part of the Presbytery to guarantee me a commission upon completion of the program.

Signature

Date

Session Endorsement

Take your completed forms (Form A and Form B) to your pastor, or, if your church is without a pastor, to the moderator of your church's session. This person will talk with you about your interest in the Commissioned Ruling Elder Program. Next, submit Forms A and B to the CPM Moderator.

Once the Moderator or designee has met with your Session to provide orientation to the CRE process, arrange a time (through Session Moderator and/or Clerk of Session) to be interviewed by the Session. Provide the Clerk with Form C (Confidential Session Endorsement Form) which the Clerk will complete after your interview and subsequent Session action on your application. No application will be considered without Form C being submitted to CPM.

References

In addition to the minister and session, please list two other people who know you well in a variety of relationships (e.g., another church member, a colleague at work, a teacher, a friend) who will serve as individual references. Duplicate and pass along an additional individual reference form to each, asking that the form be completed and mailed directly to the Presbytery Office. Please list below the persons who will be your individual references.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>City/State/Zip Code</u>	<u>Phone</u>
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Commissioned Ruling Elder Program Application Form B

Please answer the following questions. Feel free to adjust spacing or use a separate sheet of paper as needed.

Why are you interested in this program? What motivates you to apply?

What aspects of your present church life do you enjoy the most?

What aspects are the most frustrating?

What does it mean for you to be a “Presbyterian?”

What spiritual gifts and skills do you bring to this program?

In what areas of your life would you like to grow?

What are your current spiritual practices and disciplines?

What are some of your interests/hobbies?

In what community or volunteer service have you been involved?

Please attach a brief statement of your personal faith. Describe what you believe about God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – and your relationship to God. Include a brief summary of your understanding of the role of Scripture, the Church, and the Sacraments in your life – suggested length: one-half to one page single-spaced, typed.



Commissioned Ruling Elder Program Application
Confidential Session Endorsement
Form C

Primary attention should be given at this time to evaluating the applicant's natural gifts, strength of motivation, and potential for growth. Please note the importance of the Session exercising good judgment in discerning whether this individual seems to be called by God to consider service as a Commissioned Ruling Elder.

Name of Applicant _____

Home Church _____

Please respond candidly to the following questions: (You may adjust the spacing or use additional paper as needed.)

Does the applicant reveal evidence of a vital faith in God through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit? If so, how is that faith currently being expressed through the individual's participation in the worship, ministry, and mission of the congregation?

Is the applicant's physical health/stamina, emotional well-being, and maturity suitable for becoming a Commissioned Ruling Elder?

The following qualities are especially important in Commissioned Ruling Elder: (Please check all items that have been demonstrated by this applicant in the life of your church.)

- _Ability to speak publicly and communicate clearly
- _Well-developed listening skills
- _Leadership Ability
- _Commitment to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
- _Ability to relate to various age groups
- _Reliability
- _Basic Knowledge of the Bible
- _Compassion
- _Skills in personal relationships
- _Ability to keep confidentiality

Are there any reservations the session might have in endorsing this applicant? If so, please describe. (Note: A reservation does *not* disqualify an individual or indicate they are unsuitable for service. The Committee on Preparation for Ministry, however, must rely upon honest and candid evaluations.)

Would the Session be willing to provide any financial assistance for this educational process and/or psychological and career evaluation? (A yes answer to this question does not indicate a financial obligation.)

The Session of the _____ Church of _____(city) does / does not (please circle) endorse this application for admission to the Commissioned Ruling Elder Program of the Presbytery of East Iowa.

Signature of Clerk of Session

Date

Signature of Moderator of Session

Date

We have appointed a liaison to this applicant. The liaison's contact information:

Name

E-Mail

Mailing Address

Phone(s) (Home)

(Cell)

(Work)



**Covenant with Commissioned Ruling Elder
In the Presbytery of East Iowa
Form D**

NAME OF VALIDATED MINISTRY _____

ADDRESS OF VALIDATED MINISTRY _____

NAME OF CRE _____

SERVICE FROM _____ TO _____

This covenant is considered to be a _____ time position and anticipates _____ hours per week.

Review of this covenant prior to renewal or termination will be made by the Session and the Commission on Ministry.

This relationship may be terminated prior to expiration with _____ days' notice by either party and the concurrence of the Commission on Ministry of PEIA.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CRE (check those that apply to this validated ministry):

- _____ Prepare and lead worship
- _____ Provide administrative leadership for this congregation
- _____ Administer the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper only in this validated ministry
- _____ Administer the Sacrament of Baptism only in this validated ministry
- _____ Moderate the Session of this congregation
- _____ Have a voice in meetings of the presbytery
- _____ Have a vote in meetings of the presbytery (such vote to be counted as a ruling elder commissioner for the purposes of parity)
- _____ Perform services of Christian marriage when invited by the session or other responsible committee, and when allowed by the State
- _____ Officiate funerals
- _____ Other duties: _____

SPECIFIC DAYS IN MINISTRY (if applicable) _____

COMPENSATION as applicable:

Cash salary: _____/weekly, monthly, yearly (circle one)

Medical coverage: _____

Social Security withheld: _____

Travel reimbursement at IRS rate, not to exceed: _____

Other ministry cost reimbursement (telephone calls, etc.): _____

Vacation time: _____

Continuing education time: _____

Continuing education or book allowance: _____

Other:

Housing arrangements in the community: _____

Commissioned Ruling Elder

Clerk of Session

Presbytery Commission on Ministry

Moderator of Session

Date of Session Action: _____