CANDIDATE'S HANDBOOK FOR ORDINATION EXAMINATIONS

PREPARED BY: PRESBYTERIES' COOPERATIVE COMMITTEE ON EXAMINATIONS FOR CANDIDATES

Timothy B. Cargal, Executive Secretary

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INTRODUCTION

The Presbyterian Church (USA) administers ordination examinations as a reasonably uniform (standard) process for determining candidates’ readiness to begin ministry of the Word and Sacrament. An overture from the Presbytery of San Francisco in 1963 became a provision of the constitution of the predecessor UPCUSA in 1965. Examinations have been given continuously (in the UPCUSA stream) since 1967. Exams were administered nationally, and elders and ministers who were elected by their presbyteries evaluated the exams.

The 115th General Assembly (1975) of the Presbyterian Church in the United States called for standard written examinations for ordination to begin effective January 1, 1977. This assembly instructed the Council on Theology and Culture, in consultation with the General Executive Board, to prepare a plan by which such examinations could be described, developed and conducted. The 116th General Assembly (1976) approved the establishment of a Permanent Committee on Ordination Examinations. The committee designed exams in Theology, Bible, Sacraments and the Book of Church Order. Exams were administered and evaluated by the presbyteries of the PCUS.

In October 1978 discussions were begun to unite the two examining bodies. The first joint meeting of the two groups occurred April 22-24, 1979 in Erlanger, Kentucky.

The standard ordination examinations consist of five exams prescribed in the Book of Order (G-14-0431): Bible Content, Open Book Bible Exegesis, Theological Competence, Worship and Sacraments, and Church Polity. All five exams must be satisfactorily completed in order to meet the requirements for ministry of Word and Sacrament set forth in the Book of Order (G-14.0450d).

The Bible Content examination is a short answer exam administered online, and is ordinarily taken during the first year or the beginning of the second year of seminary to determine one’s basic knowledge of the Bible. The other four exams are professional examinations, not academic tests. They differ from seminary examinations which measure academic knowledge. They also differ from presbytery examinations which assess the acceptability of one’s theological convictions.

The purpose of the four senior ordination examinations is to determine one’s entry-level readiness for ministry in the Presbyterian Church (USA). Examinations present pastoral challenges whereby candidates can demonstrate how they integrate faith and theological education in ministry. The underlying questions are, “Do these examinations provide evidence that the person who wrote them is ready to engage in pastoral ministry in the Presbyterian Church (USA)? Is there evidence that the intellectual background developed in seminary can be applied to pastoral situations with integrity and skill?”
WHEN AND WHERE EXAMS ARE GIVEN

Like many other standard professional tests, the ordination examinations of the Presbyterian Church (USA) are administered only on specific dates during the year and at proctored testing sites. The Presbyteries’ Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates (PCC), which develops the tests and oversees administration of the exam program, has established policies that put these procedures in place to assure the integrity and security of the exams.

Scheduling: Bible Content examinations are given twice each year on the first Friday in February and the Friday before Labor Day from 10 a.m. until noon local time. Depending on registration patterns, the exam sites in the Central Time Zone may be shifted to the 11:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. time period to accommodate limits in the testing software.

The four Senior Ordination Examinations are given twice each year in January and August:

-- Beginning on the final Friday in January;
-- The last full weekend in August before Labor Day weekend.

The schedule for administering each of the Senior Ordination Examinations is:

**Friday**
8:30 a.m. - Orientation
9:00 a.m. - Theological Competence (3 hours)
1:30 p.m. - Worship & Sacraments (3 hours)

**Saturday**
9:00 a.m. - Church Polity (3 hours)
12:00 Noon - Bible Exegesis exams distributed; completed examination is due the following Thursday at 9:00 a.m.

Testing Locations: Examinations are administered on many seminary campuses nationwide and a limited number of presbytery offices. The Senior Ordination Exams are shipped to proctors approximately two weeks prior to the date of administration in a way that enables accurate tracking of the parcels. Lost or missing packages can be traced. The proctor accepts responsibility for confirming with the Office of Preparation for Ministry/Exams that the materials arrived in a timely fashion. Proctors are also expected to check the contents of the package for omissions or errors. Prompt checking helps assure the smooth operation of the system. When the exams arrive proctors are expected to carefully read the instructions for administering the exams.

Special Proctors: Persons registering for exams are encouraged to take them at one of the established testing sites. If a person taking exams does not live within a reasonable distance of a testing site (2 to 3 hours of driving time or public transportation), arrangements may be made for a Special Proctor. A Special Proctor must be a person who is reliable, responsible, and who will return exam materials to the Office of Preparation for Ministry/Exams promptly after exams are administered. S/he may be a pastor, CPM member, elder, or other person approved
by the candidate’s Committee on Preparation for Ministry (CPM).

All contact information for a Special Proctor is to be included in the online registration form. Since grades are currently released by fax but are being transitioned to email distribution, be sure to include a fax number and an email address or exam results may be delayed. It is recommended that those taking exams with Special Proctors cover the cost of return shipping for exam materials.

**Severe Weather Policy:** If severe weather at a testing site leads to the closing of the facilities, the examination(s) scheduled for that site only will be postponed until the next day when the facilities are open for normal operations. Those taking such rescheduled examinations will be required to submit signed statements that they have not discussed or reviewed comments about the examination(s) by those who will have taken the tests at unaffected sites. The rescheduling of exams will be determined by conditions which exist at the testing site, not local conditions at the residences of the test takers. If emergency road closures or other severe weather impacts on transportation systems prevent a particular test taker from reaching a testing site at the (re)scheduled time for the examination(s), registration fees will be refunded in accord with emergency cancellation policies (see the “Cancellation” sections in the materials related to registration for the examinations below).
## Examination Testing Sites

for the Presbyterian Church (USA) Standard Ordination Exams

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Seminary or Presbytery Site</th>
<th>City</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>Fuller Theological Seminary</td>
<td>Phoenix</td>
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<td>BC, Canada</td>
<td>Regent College</td>
<td>Vancouver</td>
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<td>California</td>
<td>Bethel Theological Seminary</td>
<td>San Diego</td>
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<td>Fuller Theological Seminary</td>
<td>Menlo Park</td>
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<td>Fuller Theological Seminary</td>
<td>Pasadena</td>
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<td>Hanmi Presbytery</td>
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<td>Pacific School of Religion</td>
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<td>San Francisco Theological Seminary</td>
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<td>San Francisco Theological Seminary</td>
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<td>Colorado</td>
<td>Iliff School of Theology</td>
<td>Denver</td>
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<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>Yale Divinity School</td>
<td>New Haven</td>
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<td>DC</td>
<td>Wesley Theological Seminary</td>
<td>Washington</td>
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<td>Florida</td>
<td>Central Florida Presbytery</td>
<td>Orlando</td>
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<td>Florida Center for Theological Studies</td>
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<td>St. Augustine Presbytery</td>
<td>Jacksonville</td>
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<td>Georgia</td>
<td>Columbia Theological Seminary</td>
<td>Decatur</td>
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<td>Johnson C Smith Seminary</td>
<td>Atlanta</td>
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<td>Iowa</td>
<td>Dubuque Theological Seminary</td>
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<td>Illinois</td>
<td>Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary</td>
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<td>McCormick Theological Seminary</td>
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<td>Trinity Evangelical Divinity School</td>
<td>Deerfield</td>
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<td>Indiana</td>
<td>Christian Theological Seminary</td>
<td>Indianapolis</td>
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<td>Kansas</td>
<td>Central Baptist/St Paul School of Theology</td>
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<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary</td>
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<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary</td>
<td>South Hamilton</td>
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<td>Bangor Theological Seminary</td>
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<td>Michigan</td>
<td>Detroit Presbytery</td>
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<td>Western Theological Seminary</td>
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<td>Luther Seminary</td>
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<td>United Theological Seminary</td>
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<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>Reformed Theological Seminary</td>
<td>Jackson</td>
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<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>Duke University Divinity School</td>
<td>Durham</td>
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<td>Union Presbyterian/Queens University</td>
<td>Charlotte</td>
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<td>Wake Forest Divinity School</td>
<td>Winston-Salem</td>
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<td>New Jersey</td>
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<td>New Brunswick Theological Seminary</td>
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<td>Princeton Theological Seminary</td>
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<td>New York</td>
<td>Auburn Theological Seminary Union</td>
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<td>Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School</td>
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<td>Ohio</td>
<td>United Theological Seminary</td>
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<td>Palmer Theological Seminary</td>
<td>Wynnewood</td>
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<td>Pittsburgh Theological Seminary</td>
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<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>Seminario Evangelico de Puerto Rico</td>
<td>San Juan</td>
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<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>Erskine Theological Seminary</td>
<td>Due West</td>
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<td>Vanderbilt University</td>
<td>Nashville</td>
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<td>Texas</td>
<td>Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary</td>
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<td>Brite Divinity School</td>
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<td>Virginia</td>
<td>Union Presbyterian Seminary</td>
<td>Richmond</td>
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<td>Washington</td>
<td>Fuller Theological Seminary</td>
<td>Seattle</td>
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THE BIBLE CONTENT EXAMINATION

The Presbyterian Church considers basic knowledge of the content of the Bible to be an essential prerequisite for ministry. The purpose of the Bible Content Examination (BCE) is to determine whether or not a candidate has such basic knowledge. It is given only twice a year, on the first Friday of February and the Friday before Labor Day. Because this is a standardized examination, there are no alternate dates for taking this exam. This exam is ordinarily taken in the first year of seminary or, with the new twice yearly administration, at the beginning of the second year (see G-14.0431). The two-hour examination contains 100 multiple-choice questions about the Bible, using the New Revised Standard Version for all quotations (English exams). The questions vary in difficulty, and cover the entire Bible as required by the General Assembly in 1978.

Languages: The Bible Content Exam is available in English, Spanish and Korean.

Registration: Unlike the senior ordination examinations, inquirers and candidates are not required to obtain their CPM’s authorization to take the BCE unless they are requesting special accommodations (see “Special Arrangements” below). Registration and payment of required fees is processed through an online system accessible from the BCE page of the examinations website (www.pcusa.org/exams/bible.htm). Access to the registration site opens approximately 75 days before the final registration deadline (see “Fees and Deadlines” below). An email confirmation is sent to each person who has registered to take the BCE. If you do not receive the email confirmation you should contact the Office of Preparation for Ministry/Exams promptly to be sure the registration processing completed successfully.

Special Arrangements: Inquirers and candidates with learning disabilities or physical handicaps and those unable to travel to one of the regular testing sites should discuss special arrangements with their CPMs and proctors. Registrations for the BCE involving any special arrangements must be made directly with the Office of Preparation for Ministry/Exams using the “Requests for Special Administrations” form available on the BCE page of the examinations website (http://www.pcusa.org/exams/bible.htm). The form must be accompanied by a letter from the registrant’s CPM indicating the special arrangements that have been approved by the committee. Technical requirements for special proctor administration sites should be discussed with the Office of Preparation for Ministry/Exams early in the process of making such arrangements.

Fees and Deadlines: The standard fee for the Bible Content exam is $100. The fee must be paid by credit or credit-enabled debit card through the online registration system. Registration must be completed by the preceding December 15 for the spring administration and by July 15 for the fall administration of the exams. Access to the registration site will be closed once these deadlines have passed.

For PC(USA) inquirers and candidates ONLY, there is an early registration discount of $20 if registration is completed at least one month before the final deadlines (November 15 for spring exams and June 15 for fall exams). The online registration system will automatically apply these discounts for those who qualify.
“Special Arrangements” administrations, as noted above, cannot be made through the online system and, because of the extra processing required, are not eligible for any early registration discount. Payment of the full $100 fee must be made by check accompanying the required paperwork. All materials, including fees, must be postmarked by the final registration deadline for the examination date being requested.

Cancellation: After registrations have been confirmed, cancellation of an exam up until two weeks before the administration of the exam will be subject to an administrative fee of 50%. If an exam is cancelled within the two weeks before the exam is to be administered, all fees paid will be forfeited. In case of serious illness or emergency, please contact the Office of Preparation for Ministry/Exams and the proctor at the testing site as soon as possible; with confirmation of such circumstances registration fees will be refunded.

Scoring and Results Reporting: A score of 70 correct answers or better is required to satisfy this exam requirement. Overall and section scores by canonical divisions are displayed onscreen at the conclusion of the test. Score reports are also automatically sent via email to the test taker, the moderator of the test taker’s CPM, and the PC(USA)’s contact person at the test taker’s seminary of enrollment.
Decades of experience with the senior ordination examinations have demonstrated that the best statistical predictor for satisfactorily completing the tests is that candidates wait to write the exams until they and their CPM believe they are prepared to take all four subject areas. The Book of Order directs that these “four examinations shall ordinarily be taken by inquirers or candidates only after completion of two full years of theological education, or its equivalent, … and adequate supervised experience in the practice of pastoral ministry” (G-14.0431).

**Authorization:** Unlike the Bible Content Exam which may be taken by any inquirer or candidate, the Book of Order requires that every person who writes the senior exams must have their presbytery’s authorization to do so. The decision whether to authorize a person to write the examinations belongs solely to the presbytery. When authorizing a person to write the examinations, the Book of Order requires that the chairperson of the individual’s CPM “attest that the inquirer or candidate has completed adequate academic preparation in each examination area and adequate supervised experience in the practice of pastoral ministry” (G-14.0431). Candidates and inquirers must obtain authorization each time exams are to be taken. Authorization also certifies that the person is in good standing as an inquirer or candidate in the process of preparation for the ministry of Word and Sacrament under the care of that presbytery.

The same attestation is required of ministers of other denominations who are seeking admission to the PC(USA). Practice varies among presbyteries as to whether such attestation of such persons’ readiness to take the exams is ultimately provided by the CPM or the Committee on Ministry (COM).

**Registration:** Registration and payment of required fees is processed through an online system accessible from the examinations website ([www.pcusa.org/exams](http://www.pcusa.org/exams)). Access to the registration site opens approximately 75 days before the final registration deadline (see “Fees and Deadlines” below). Candidates and inquirers are required to complete all information requested on the online registration form, including information about any exams that have been taken previously (both the Bible Content exam and/or senior ordination exams, whether or not they were evaluated as satisfactory). Once the required online form has been submitted at the registration site (including credit or credit-enabled debit card information for the billing of the fees), an email will be sent to the CPM chair requesting authorization to administer the exams. An email confirmation is sent to the person who requested registration to take senior ordination examinations once processing is completed (for more information, see “Confirmation” below). If you do not receive the email confirmation you should contact the Office of Preparation for Ministry/Exams promptly to be sure registration processing has been completed successfully.

Requests for special needs, whether to accommodate learning disabilities and/or physical handicaps or for a special proctor at a location other than a standard testing site, are submitted during the online registration process and authorized by the CPM or COM moderator as part of the required attestation of readiness and eligibility to write the exams.

Registration for the senior ordination examinations does *not* include registration to take
the Bible Content Examination (BCE). The BCE has a separate registration site and procedures. Please see the section of this handbook headed “Bible Content Examination” for information about that exam including how to register for it.

**Timing of Exams:** Inquirers and candidates who are writing exams for the first time are encouraged to write all four exams at that time. The examinations are intentionally given over two days as a way of evaluating the person's stewardship of time and energy, an important aspect of life in ministry. (See the section, “When and Where Exams are Given,” earlier in this handbook for an overview of the schedule for taking the tests.) Introductory materials sent along with the email confirmation of registration indicate the time limits for each exam. Members of the Presbyteries’ Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates, who write and administer the exams, understand that a candidate’s response will be shaped and constrained by these time requirements. They emphasize during the readers’ training process that exams are to be evaluated on the basis of the time allotted.

**Fees and Deadlines:** The fees for the senior ordination exams are $100 per exam. Fees must be billed to a credit or credit-enabled debit card as part of the online registration process. Registration must be completed by the preceding December 15 for the spring administration and by July 15 for the fall administration of the exams. Access to the registration site will be closed once these deadlines have passed.

For PC(USA) inquirers and candidates ONLY, there is an early registration discount of $20 if registration is completed at least one month before the final deadlines (November 15 for spring exams and June 15 for fall exams). The online registration system will automatically apply these discounts for those who qualify.

**Confirmation:** Receipt of authorization is confirmed by email, generally within two weeks after the application is submitted through the Office of Preparation for Ministry/Exams registration website. The confirmation email will include the applicant's I.D. number along with attachments with information and preliminary instructions. The I.D. number is used throughout the exam process to ensure anonymity for candidates. The candidate is asked to verify the accuracy of the information in the email regarding examinations requested, testing location, etc.

*If your name, address, presbytery of care, or desired exam location should change, or if there are changes in your plans to take the examinations, contact the Office of Preparation for Ministry/Exams immediately!*

If an email confirmation has not arrived within two weeks after the online registration was submitted, please contact the Office of Preparation for Ministry/Exams. Unfortunately email notifications requesting authorization from CPM moderators or confirming registrations for test takers can be caught by spam filters and other network problems. There have been instances where individuals thought that they were registered but weren't. It is most important—and the responsibility of each inquirer or candidate—to follow instructions carefully and to stay in close contact with the links to the process (e.g., proctors, committee chairpersons, and Office of Preparation for Ministry/Exams staff). It is the responsibility of the candidate or inquirer to ensure that all necessary steps in the application/registration process have been fulfilled.

**Cancellation:** After registrations have been confirmed, cancellation of an exam up until
two weeks before the administration of the exam will be subject to an administrative fee of 50%. If an exam is cancelled within the two weeks before the exam is to be administered, all fees paid will be forfeited. In case of serious illness or emergency, please contact the Office of Preparation for Ministry/Exams and the proctor at the testing site as soon as possible; with confirmation of such circumstances registration fees will be refunded.

**Evaluation of Exams and Results Reporting:** All reader evaluations, exam materials and post-examination correspondence are distributed through proctors. Initial reports indicating whether or not papers satisfied the examination requirement are currently released to proctors by fax, although the system is in the process of transitioning to email notification. Examination papers and readers’ evaluation sheets are shipped to Proctors at about the same time as the initial reports. Exam results are not released to individuals by the Office of Preparation for Ministry/Exams - you must contact your proctor. Summary reports of whether or not papers satisfied the examination requirements are also sent to all CPM Moderators.

Inquirers and candidates are required to forward the original examination papers and readers’ evaluation sheets to their CPM moderators within two weeks of receiving them from the proctor. These materials become part of the permanent record of the preparation for ministry of Word and Sacrament process. Inquirers and candidates are strongly advised to make and provide for the safekeeping of a copy of all examination materials before returning them to the CPM moderator.
Once senior ordination examinations are administered they become part of the public domain. Copies of the most recently administered senior examination questions are available from links on the examinations website (www.pcusa.org/exams). One may also be able to obtain copies from the moderator of the CPM in the presbytery of care or from proctors at the standard testing sites.

Two Presbyterian Church (USA) seminaries currently maintain copies of some previous exams online on their websites:

Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary
http://www.lpts.edu/Academic_Resources/ordexamsnewaccess.asp

McCormick Theological Seminary
http://www.jkmlibrary.org/component/option,com_docman/task,cat_view/gid,28/Itemid,98/

Please keep in mind when using past examinations as an aid for study and preparation to take the senior ordination exams that test structures and formats are changed by the PCC from time to time. Be sure to check the examinations website for announcements regarding upcoming and recent changes to the exams and to be sure that you have a copy of the most recent edition of this handbook.
WRITING THE EXAMS

Inquirers and candidates should familiarize themselves with the description of each senior ordination examination as approved by the General Assembly and presented within this handbook. There are periodic changes to these provisions, so this review should be done in the most recent edition of this handbook.

**Preparation:** It is important for those taking the senior ordination exams to be prepared for this process. One needs to think about the sequence of the examinations and be prepared to move from one area to the next in each of the exams in an orderly fashion. The exams are designed to encourage the candidate to express an understanding of ministry. They are not designed to “trick” the candidate in any way, which would be contrary to life in the community of faith. The examinations are designed to provide opportunity for multiple approaches rather than to operate on the assumption that there is only one “correct” way of responding. Members of the PCC emphasize each of those points in training readers to evaluate the examinations.

The Office of Preparation for Ministry/Exams has posted on its website ([www.pcusa.org/exams](http://www.pcusa.org/exams)) a series of “web-ucation” modules designed to help test takers understand the structure of the senior ordination exams. These modules also present a specific, step-by-step method for analyzing test questions to better understand what must be included for a response to be evaluated as satisfactory. This process is based on the method which the PCC uses to train the readers’ of the exams to recognize whether a response covers all the required elements of the question. The modules include interactive quizzes that allow the users to practice the method of analysis on questions from previous exams in all four subject areas. Inquirers and candidates are encouraged to utilize these training opportunities as part of their preparation.

**Special Arrangements:** Special arrangements can be made for candidates with physical handicaps and/or learning disabilities upon prior approval from the presbytery of care. These arrangements must be made at the time of authorization. Instructions for how to request such special arrangements are provided in the “Registration” sections of this handbook.

**Books for Biblical Exegesis Exam:** Four weeks before the senior ordination examinations are to be administered, the names of the books of the Bible (one from Old Testament and one from the New Testament) from which the passages for the Biblical Exegesis exam will be taken are released. Candidates may choose either the Old Testament or New Testament passage with which to work. The names of the Books are available through proctors, on the PC(USA) website ([http://www.pcusa.org/exams/](http://www.pcusa.org/exams/)), or by calling the Office of Preparation for Ministry/Exams at (888) 728-7228, ext. 5771.

**Instructions:** At the time that exams are administered, test takers will receive current cover sheets and general instructions for each examination (the same instructions that are sent with confirmation materials). These instructions include the current General Assembly approved description for that subject area, criteria for evaluating responses, and any special provisions which relate to that examination.

**Languages:** The four senior ordination exams are available in Spanish. The theology, worship and polity exams are also available in Korean. It is the recommendation of Korean
members of the PCC that the Bible Exegesis examination not be translated into Korean. Their position is that the nature of the questions on that particular exam (involving as they sometimes do references to the original Hebrew and Greek languages of the text and specific wording of English translations) can create misunderstandings when translated into Korean. Inquirers and candidates whose primary language is Korean may write their responses to the exegesis exams in Korean. Likewise, those whose primary language is not English, Spanish or Korean may request permission from their CPMs for permission to write their responses to any of the four senior exams in their primary language as a “special arrangement.” Such requests approved by the CPM must be communicated the Office of Preparation for Ministry/Exams well in advance of the registration deadline to provide time to secure readers with facility in that language who can be prepared to evaluate the examination. The PCC does not permit the translation of the standard examination questions into languages other than English, Spanish, or Korean.

**Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is a serious abuse of this system. If plagiarism is suspected, the examination paper will be returned un-graded. The proctor and the CPM moderator will be notified and supplied with supporting documentation. Disposition will be determined by the presbytery committee. To avoid even the appearance of plagiarism, be sure to cite all appropriate references and quotations on your exam papers.

**Music, iPods, etc.:** Out of respect for all who are taking exams, inquirers and candidates may not use iPods, MP3 players, or other personal audio devices during any of the exams other than periods of independent work on the Open Book Bible Exegesis exam.
OPEN BOOK BIBLE EXEGESIS

“This examination shall assess the candidate’s ability to find and state a faithful interpretation of an assigned passage of Scripture, demonstrating attention to the original language of the text and ability to understand its historical situation.

“The candidate shall have access to any or all of the following:

“Hebrew and Greek texts, translations, commentaries, on-line materials and other exegetical tools, including those which presuppose knowledge of the biblical languages.

“Using these, he or she shall be asked to state a faithful interpretation of the passage, show how he or she arrived at this interpretation, and suggest how this passage might be used in the contemporary life of the church.”

—General Assembly approved description of the Open Book Bible Exegesis Examination
**Description and Preparation Guidelines for the Open Book Bible Exegesis Examination**  
by the Bible Task Group of the PCCEC

The following comments are intended as helpful advice from the Presbyteries’ Cooperative Committee to candidates preparing to take the Open Book Biblical Exegesis Exam. These are not the specific instructions for the examination; those are found on the examination itself.

**Description:**

This examination shall assess the candidate’s ability to interpret an assigned passage of Scripture by demonstrating attention to the original language of the text, an understanding of the text’s historical context, and an ability to relate the text effectively to the contemporary life of the church in the world.

The candidate shall have access to Hebrew and Greek texts, translations, commentaries, and other exegetical tools. Using these, he or she shall provide a faithful interpretation of the passage, show how he or she arrived at this interpretation, and suggest how this passage might be used in the contemporary life of the church.

**Purpose:**

The purpose of the Open Book Bible Exegesis Examination within the overall preparation for ministry process is to serve as an assessment of a candidate’s ability to apply academic training in biblical studies to contexts of ministry of Word and Sacrament. It is intended to supplement, not replicate, assessments of an ability to use Scripture in the practice of ministry within a Reformed Christian context that are completed as part of seminary courses in biblical studies and languages (G-14.0450c) and through the preparation of a formal exegetical study and sermon for the candidate’s “final assessment” (see “Expected Outcomes of Candidacy,” item f, in the Advisory Handbook for Committees on Preparation for Ministry, p. 11).

Consequently, the exegesis examination is designed to assess three areas:

1. Testing a candidate’s knowledge about the text which leads to and sets limits on the possible interpretations and applications of that text.

2. Testing a candidate’s ability to communicate the substance of careful, academically-informed biblical study, including interaction with the original languages, to those who have not had the opportunity for training in such fields.

3. Testing a candidate’s ability to develop and support a faithful interpretation of some aspect of the text for application to the life of the community.

In order to better appreciate why these particular assessments are chosen, it is helpful to consider both the historical understanding of the interpretation of Scripture within the Reformed tradition and some current presuppositions in the discipline of biblical studies.
**Rationale:**

For much of the period since the Protestant Reformation, the interpretation of the Bible was guided by principles of historical-grammatical exegesis (often called “the historical-critical method”). Such interpretations were based on the assumption that it was possible to arrive at an objective understanding of “the meaning” of a scriptural passage through the rigorous study of the text in its original language and within its original historical context. That meaning could then be applied to the contemporary situation of the interpreter. This approach to exegesis received its classic formulation in Krister Stendahl’s article on “Biblical Theology” for The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible, in which he described the twin purposes of biblical interpretation as determining the relationship between what a text “meant” and what it “means.”

The academic discipline of biblical studies has progressed over the past several decades in its understanding of how a text may be interpreted in more than one way. The notion that there is such a thing as “the interpretation” or “the meaning” of a biblical passage, or even that there might be closely paired interpretations of what it “meant” and “means,” is now considered too limited in describing the ways the church has heard God speak in and through the Scriptures. Even interpreters who employ more traditional critical methods now readily admit that there are multiple meanings when a passage is considered with regard to “its meaning relative to what” (theology, ethics, history, etc.), and that the choice of the “what” opens multiple possibilities for interpretation.

These changes in biblical studies do not challenge the use of Scripture within the church, but rather provide a theoretical support for the way the Bible is actually experienced and used within the Reformed tradition. While a Reformed understanding of Scripture would reject more radical literary theories - we believe there is not only a “what” of the text but a “who” of the Spirit that encounters us as an Other in the act of reading Scripture - it nevertheless acknowledges the multiple ways in which God has spoken in the past leading to the production of Scripture and continues to speak through the Scripture as seen in the confessional documents of the church and the ongoing life of the community.

This Reformed view of Scripture means that interpretations of the text both for the individual Christian and especially for the Christian community must be informed by a broad understanding about the text that both provides the foundation for and sets limits on those interpretations. Any interpretations of Scripture from a Reformed perspective must take account of at least the following four areas:

1. **Language of the Text:** word meanings, grammar, literary and other features with respect to both its original language and its translation into the language of the modern community.

2. **Historical Situation:** the influence of the historical and cultural context in which the engagement between God and God’s people has come.

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2 See the statements on “Presbyterian Understanding and Use of Holy Scripture” (123rd General Assembly of the PCUS, 1983) and “Biblical Authority and Interpretation” (194th General Assembly of the UPCUSA, 1982).
3. **Scriptural and Theological Context**: the passage’s relation to the broad teaching of Scripture and theological tradition of the church.

4. **Significance for the Present Situation**: the application of the passage informed by points of correspondence between the original situation and the present one, guided by “the Rule of Love”—the commands to love God and neighbor (cf. Mark 12:28-32).

The “Open Book Bible Exegesis Examination” as directed by the *Book of Order* and the description of the examination approved by the General Assembly requires that a candidate develop and present a “faithful interpretation” of an assigned text and a plan for its use in a specific ministry context. By the phrase “faithful interpretation,” the instructions for the examination mean one that is “consistent with the facts” (to take one standard definition of ‘faithful’) about the text’s wording, its historical, social, canonical, and theological contexts, and so forth. Such an interpretation should fulfill the expectations for the use of Scripture as understood within the context of the Reformed tradition.

**Structure:**

Because the Open Book Bible Exegesis Examination is neither an academic exegesis paper nor practice for the exegesis and sermon requirement of “final assessment,” it has its own particular components and arrangement. Candidates are required to address the assigned passage in terms of knowledge about the text, theological interpretation, and application to a specified ministry context. Candidates have a period of five days in which to complete the examination.

Each administration of the examination will present candidates with a choice of two passages (one each from the Old and the New Testament) together with a scenario reflecting a particular ministry context specific to each passage. These scenarios will culminate in production of a specific form of ministry work product, such as a sermon outline or lesson plan. Examples of such scenarios might include: “You will be preaching on this passage as part of a series of sermons on stewardship.” “You will be using this passage with your confirmation class as it studies baptism.” “You have been asked by the family to use this passage as the primary Scripture reading at their mother’s funeral, and so it will serve as the scriptural basis for your funeral sermon.” Candidates may choose either the Old or the New Testament passage but must formulate their responses for the ministry context specified with the particular passage.

The examination will have three major sections.

**Section I - Language, Historical Situation, Scriptural and Theological Context:**

This section tests knowledge “about the text” corresponding to the first three areas of a Reformed perspective on interpreting Scripture outlined above. The questions may be formulated so that they reflect issues likely to be raised in the context of ministry rather than merely scholarly debate. As examples: “Pastor, my NIV Bible doesn’t say at all what you read from the NRSV this morning.” “What was going on at the time that made Isaiah push Ahaz to ask for a sign that God would be with the people of Judah?”

A total of four responses will be required in this section of the examination, and there will be a 600-word limit per response. All candidates will be required to respond to three specified questions and will be permitted to select between an option of either A or B in the other response.
Section II - Presenting a “Faithful Interpretation”:

The second section of the exam responds to the final aspect of a Reformed perspective of Scripture - an application informed by points of correspondence between the present ministry context and the original setting of the passage. It will have two parts.

1. **Focus Statement:** Based on their broad study of the passage and not just the material presented in section I, candidates will write a 50-word statement about a central theme related to their “faithful interpretation” of the passage they will develop in the sermon, lesson plan, or other work product indicated in the ministry context specified for the passage. Candidates are encouraged to develop readings of the text that show their creative use of interpretational methods appropriate to the text.

2. **Supporting the Interpretation:** Candidates will write an essay presenting their “faithful interpretation” supporting the central theme in the focus statement by a careful and critical analysis of the text (1,200-word limit). This essay should draw on not only material in responses to the questions in Section I, but also exegetical methods and evidence relevant to the type of interpretation they provide. It will be assessed by the readers based upon its coherence, consistency, clarity, and whether it persuasively supports the focus statement regarding their “faithful interpretation” of the passage.

Section III - Application:

In this final section of the exam the candidate presents the sermon, lesson plan, etc. required by the ministry context specified for the particular passage. This section of the examination will be assessed on clarity, consistency with preceding sections of the exam, appropriateness for the specified context, and so forth.

**General Guidelines for Preparation:**

*Double-space your text.* For the convenience of readers, the main body of your essay answers should be double-spaced; outlines (including sermon outlines and lesson plans, as well as other short outlines within the body of the essays) may be single-spaced.

*Label your answers.* Be sure to identify your essays in a manner consistent with the section and number of the question. Within Section I label your answers “First Required Response,” etc., and indicate “A” or “B” where appropriate. Identity the parts of Section II by number. It is not necessary to include a repetition of the question, although you may do so if you wish. If sections of the exam are not clearly labeled, the exam will be returned ungraded.

*Remember your audience.* Readers of the ordination exams are both ministers of Word and Sacrament and elders, and with differing levels of familiarity with the language and tools of exegesis. While some have academic specialization in biblical studies, most do not. Write simply and directly. Avoid excessive use of technical terms, but be precise in your descriptions of grammar and syntax. Keep in mind that a primary purpose of the examination is to assess your ability to communicate the substance of careful, academically-informed biblical study, including interaction with the original languages, to those who have not had the opportunity for formal training in these fields.
EXAMINATION IN OPEN BOOK BIBLE EXEGESIS

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

This examination shall assess the candidate’s ability to interpret an assigned passage of Scripture by demonstrating attention to the original language of the text, an understanding of the text’s historical context, and an ability to relate the text effectively to the contemporary life of the church in the world.

The candidate shall have access to Hebrew and Greek texts, translations, commentaries, and other exegetical tools. Using these, he or she shall provide a faithful interpretation of the passage, show how he or she arrived at this interpretation, and suggest how this passage might be used in the contemporary life of the church. (This description approved by 2008 General Assembly.)

ASSIGNMENT OF PASSAGE

Choose from selected passages:

Old Testament  OR  New Testament

Your examination is due to your proctor at 9:00 AM, SEPTEMBER 2, 2010. The time of submission will be strictly observed.

SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONS

1. You must do your own work, without giving or receiving aid from anyone after the passages are announced. The exam will not be proctored.

2. Clearly identify each section of the exam. Within Section I label your answers “First Required Response,” etc., and indicate “A” or “B” where appropriate. Identity the parts of Section II by number.

3. In formulating your answers, remember that your readers will be looking for an ability to work with the passage in its original language and to communicate the findings of biblical scholarship to those who have not had the opportunity of formal training in the field.

4. You must provide original answers to the exam questions. When using written material from other sources, you must identify the author, title, and page number. You must also identify electronic sources, either software or on-line. You may use parenthetical citations within the text of your answers, endnotes, or footnotes.

5. Include a bibliography of consulted works.

6. Readers will be looking for logical organization and consistency within the examination. They will evaluate the exam as a unit and not in parts.
REQUIRED PARTS OF A SATISFACTORY EXAMINATION
The following sections are required parts of a “Satisfactory” examination. Failure to complete any of these sections will result in the failure of the examination as a whole. The specified ministry contexts for each passage and specific questions in each of the categories of Section I will be provided when the passages are announced.

Section I: Language, Historical Situation, Scriptural and Theological Context
After studying the passage, answer the questions in the following subject areas.
1. Language of the Text: word meanings, grammar, literary and other features with respect to both its original language and its translation into the language of the modern community.
2. Historical Situation: the influence of the historical and cultural context in which the engagement between God and God’s people has come.
A total of four responses will be required in Section I of the examination, and there will be a 600-word limit per response. You will be required to respond to three specified questions and will be permitted to select between an option of either A or B in the other response. To assist the readers of your examination, clearly label this portion as Section I and identify each response by required response number and letter (as necessary).

Section II: Presenting a Faithful Interpretation
1. Focus Statement: Write a focus statement based on your broad study of the passage (not just material presented in Section I) that articulates a central theme of your faithful interpretation of the passage. Limit your statement to 50 words.

2. Supporting the Interpretation: Write an essay presenting your faithful interpretation of the passage consistent with the central theme in the focus statement. Support your interpretation by a careful and critical analysis of the text. You may draw on any material in areas of the required responses in Section I and other exegetical methods and evidence relevant to the interpretation. Limit your essay to 1,200 words.

Section III: Application
Present a sermon outline or lesson plan (as required by the specified ministry context) based on your faithful interpretation of the passage and consistent with your focus statement. Limit your sermon outline or lesson plan to 2 pages.
FINAL INSTRUCTIONS

You may write your answers in ink in your own handwriting, type them, or use a computer. Do not use a pencil to write your responses; papers written in pencil will be returned without being evaluated. If you handwrite your examination, do not skip lines in the examination book. You may make corrections, deletions, or additions without rewriting or erasing. Identify every answer by the number and letter assigned to it (e.g., III. B). Illegible papers shall be returned without being evaluated.

You are encouraged to use a computer. You may bring your own equipment or, at some exam sites, you may use equipment provided by the proctor. You must confirm with the proctor in advance of the testing date what equipment (power strips, computers, printers, etc.) is available at the testing site.

If you use a computer:

- A printed copy of the exam must be turned in before you leave the test site. Not turning in a printed copy will result in failure. You are strongly urged to make sure that all the necessary equipment and software are properly working and coordinated.
- Number the pages.
- Include your candidate number on each page of the exam, but not your name.
- Print responses using double spacing and 12-point font size.
- When finished, staple the printed copy to the first few pages of the exam book.

Syntax or grammar will not be evaluated. However, the evaluation of papers may be affected if they cannot be understood because of poor syntax or grammar.

Maintaining the candidate’s anonymity is of fundamental importance to assure fair evaluation of examination papers. Failure to comply with any of the following instructions will result in the paper being found as unsatisfactory:

- Do not include your name
- Do not include the name of your congregation or presbytery
- Do not identify the seminary you attend or have attended
- Do not identify professors with whom you have studied
- Do not indicate whether you have taken this or other senior ordination exams before
I. EVALUATION OF THIS EXAMINATION. The examination consists of three sections, designed to be completed over five days. All three sections must be answered. Section I has four required responses, one of which will instruct the candidate to choose between an option “A” or “B.” A single evaluation of either “Satisfactory” (S) or “Unsatisfactory” (U) must be given on the examination as a whole. If any required response is omitted from a section, then the examination must receive an overall evaluation of “Unsatisfactory.”

Each examination will be evaluated independently by two readers. If both overall evaluations are “S,” the conveners will record a final evaluation of “Satisfactory.” If both readers evaluate the exam overall as “U,” the exam receives a final evaluation of “Unsatisfactory.” If the two readers disagree in their overall evaluations, the exam will be given to a third reader. The conveners will record the final evaluation based on the two concurring overall evaluations.

II. THIS EVALUATION SHEET GOES TO THE CANDIDATE. Each reader’s comments should represent his or her considered appraisal of the paper. These comments are read by the candidate and the candidate’s Committee on Preparation for Ministry.

OVERALL EVALUATION

[Blank line]

Reader’s Name (print then sign)

[Blank box]

NOTE: COMMENTS INCLUDE A MESSAGE FOR COMMITTEE ON PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY (CHECK IF APPLICABLE).

Section I: Language, Historical Situation, Scriptural and Theological Context [600 words/response]

1. Language of the Text

First Required Response

Second Required Response

2. Historical Situation — Third Required Response
3. *Scriptural and Theological Context* — Fourth Required Response (Choose A or B)

Section II: Presenting a Faithful Interpretation

1. *Focus Statement* [50 words]

2. *Supporting the Interpretation* [1200 words]

Section III: Application [2 pages]

Summary Statement (why exam is satisfactory or unsatisfactory)
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE

“This examination shall assess the candidate’s capacity to make effective use of the classical theological disciplines and of the confessional documents of the church in relating the gospel to the faith of the church in the contemporary world.”

—General Assembly approved description of the Theological Competence Examination
Description and Preparation Guidelines for the Theological Examination
by the Theology Task Group of the PCCEC

Preparing for the Standard Ordination Exam in Theological Competence

The Presbyteries’ Cooperative Committee on Examinations (PCCE) desires that these exams be a moment of blessing, in which you begin to demonstrate your ability to exercise pastoral wisdom and imagination. While drawing on your study of theology, the questions are designed to bring your written theological reflection into the arena of church life. This exam helps presbyteries and their Committees on Preparation for Ministry (CPM) assess readiness for ministry in the area of theology by going beyond the seminary classroom into the actual practice of ministry to examine how Reformed theology and confessions inform a pastor’s teaching and priorities personally and for the church.

Because of the broad scope of the theology exam, it is essential that you have prepared yourself not only in foundational areas of knowledge, but also with certain theological skills. You need to possess the ability to think theologically.

The theology exam asks you to make connections between the theology you have learned and developed in seminary on the one hand, and real-life situations on the other. You may be asked to make connections in two directions: 1) From Christian faith to contemporary life: what are the implications and practical relevance of a particular belief, or what difference does it make for Christians to confess a particular belief, 2) From contemporary life to Christian faith: what are the theological issues in a particular real-life scenario and how does Reformed theology illuminate our understanding of the particular situation or set of issues?

You will be tested on your ability to function as a competent interpreter of our church’s theological heritage, particularly as it is reflected in The Book of Confessions. You will need a basic, working knowledge of the confessional documents, a sense of the major themes and scope of the Reformed faith reflected in them, and an ability to articulate practical implications of the heritage and make connections with the contemporary life of faith.

Developing habits of ongoing theological reflection – considering the way theology comes alive in your own practice of ministry, your seminary community, or other relationships and contexts – will equip you with skills necessary for taking the exam, and far more importantly for the enriching and deepening of your work as a minister.

Finally, many candidates have found it helpful to go back to previous exams and practice taking the exam in the same amount of time allowed in the actual exam. A few practice runs of this type will help you get comfortable with the one-hour questions format, which the exam utilizes. There are several things to note about responses to the question that, in general, characterize a satisfactory answer to the questions.

- **Make sure you answer the question that is stated.** Take time to dissect the question. Ask yourself: What is being asked? Do I need to respond to a given situation, to people in the situation, or simply take the situation as food for thought?
- **Be organized and coherent in your response.** Be straightforward and clear. Many people find it beneficial to sketch out an outline of their responses before writing the
response itself. A shorter answer that is clear and coherent will often do better than a longer and rambling response.

- **Make sure you include at least the minimum number of required citations from at least the minimum number required sources.** Without the required number of citations and resources, responses, regardless of content, cannot receive a satisfactory evaluation.
- **Remember that in the ordination exams you are writing for the church, not seminary professors in seminary classes.** The readers of your exams will be elders and Ministers of Word and Sacrament, your colleagues in ministry. Make sure your theological language is appropriate to this mixed audience.
- **Be both theologically substantive and pastorally sensitive.** Remember that the pastoral response called for in many ministry situations is a theological one.
- **Note that Section I, Confessional Heritage, is an open-book exam, allowing the use of a copy of The Book of Confessions.**
- **In Section III, the you will have two options: A or B.**

Preparation for this exam takes place on two levels.

**First Level of Preparation**

*First and foremost is the preparation you began when you were first baptized.* Whether this occurred when you were a child, during your college years, or in middle age, you started soaking up the nuances of Reformed theology through worship, Bible study, participation in church life, and in church mission. This experience provides a grounding from which you may consider the many ways that Christians act and interact in the setting of shared discipleship expressed in the Reformed tradition.

In addition, you have been preparing for this exam since you first decided to become an Inquirer and then Candidate for the Ministry of Word and Sacrament. In that time you experienced different practices of discernment, such as prayer, counsel with elders and other trusted advisors, and conversation with fellow candidates. You practiced pastoral work in concrete ministerial settings; took classes in theology and other disciplines of a Reformed theological education; and studied *The Book of Confessions* and *Book of Order*.

Alternatively, you are already an ordained minister who is seeking to transfer to the PC(USA). Your rich experience has been preparing you for this same moment through your education and practice in ministry.

**Second Level of Preparation**

The second level of preparation is study specific to taking the exam. The remainder of the handbook includes orientation information for preparation, the general instructions for the exam, and readers’ evaluation form.

The ordination exam in Theological Competence “shall assess the candidate’s capacity to make effective use of the Reformed theological heritage, including the church’s confessional documents, in relating the gospel to the church and world today.” (Official definition approved by the General Assembly in 2008)

There are currently three sections on the exam:

I. Confessional Heritage
II. Constructive Statement of Christian Doctrine
III. Application to Ministry
Preparing for Confessional Heritage (I):

This section of the exam always requires use and understanding of *The Book of Confessions* as your primary resource and conversation partner. It is intended to allow you the opportunity to demonstrate your knowledge of the church’s historical doctrines. Questions in this section vary greatly – they may ask for discussion of continuities and changes in doctrine, scenarios from church life, or reflections on the intersection of doctrines.

If you receive and accept a call to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament, you will have to answer the following question in the affirmative:

c. 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?

The root of the word “heritage” refers to that which we inherit. As members of the PCUSA and then as Ministers of Word and Sacrament, we follow Christ in the Reformed tradition that we have inherited from our brothers and sisters in faith before us. In this way, this section of the exam tests the degree to which you understand the history of the Reformed tradition.

As you study *The Book of Confessions*, consider the following approaches to analysis (figuring out what is in each confession), synthesis (seeing the connections between confessions), and development (how ideas shift and change throughout the confessional documents). Remember that confessions are statements of belief and affirmation written by the church in particular times and places to bear witness to God’s Word in a particular context.

- Read the individual creeds, confessions, catechisms, and statements as narratives. How are they different in approach? How do you perceive the tone of different documents? What topics are covered?
- Learn the order and time periods for each document. What events affecting the life of the church were taking place at these times? How is that context revealed in the document?
- Using the index, choose a particular subject heading and trace it through the documents chronologically, noting the ways in which the subject is understood by the church differently at different times. What changes and continuities do you see over time?
- Using the index, choose a particular subject heading. Study the documents in which the subject is found and consider how that subject is revealed in the life of the church. Different confessional documents highlight different nuances of the same subject.
- Finally, look at exam questions of the last two or three years. These questions reveal many different ways in which pastors connect with our confessional heritage.

Preparing for Constructive Statement of Christian Doctrine (II)

Section II, Constructive Statement of Christian Doctrine, requires you to construct a statement of Christian doctrine in accordance with the Reformed theological tradition and in response to a particular context or dilemma. For instance, at a time when you least expect it a member of the congregation you pastor may ask you a question about the significance of who God is and the meaning of our life with God. Often these questions reflect the big
questions of life, such as death, romance, suffering, happiness, etc. In these instances, the questioner wants an answer on the spot. There is no time to research or reflect on the question.

While you cannot prepare for the particular scenarios or contexts of the questions in this required section, you can prepare your own memory and skills of theological reflection. Consider the following approaches:

- Identify the particular Reformed theologians you have studied. What makes these theologians Reformed? What about their writing reveals their “broad agreement with the theology of John Calvin, the confessional literature of the Reformed churches, and The Book of Confessions?” (Taken from the General Instructions.) How do these theologians connect different doctrines or theological teachings to other doctrines? You might consider two different ways of assessing their work: what do they do systematically (that is, in terms of naming doctrines and organizing them), and what do they do dogmatically (that is, in terms of declaring the importance and vital role of doctrines).
- Identify the particular theologians you have studied who are not normally understood as being Reformed. How might they help to articulate a doctrine in a Reformed way? How do they differ from the Reformed tradition? For example, Dietrich Bonhoeffer is a well-known Lutheran theologian and pastor. In which ways is his thought in agreement with Reformed thought and in which ways is it in disagreement?
- Review books that are basic introductions to theology. Compare the organization of these books, the interrelation of subjects, and the way in which the author connects the subjects.
- Review your papers, exams, and projects for the theology courses you have taken. How do these assignments help you articulate doctrines that make a difference in human life?
- Review situations you have encountered in ministry or other areas of life in which ideas about God have been relevant. If you had a chance to participate in these situations again, what would your theological response be?
- Finally, look at exam questions from the last two or three years. Imagine yourself as the pastor in those situations. Which theological resources would you bring to bear? To what aspects of the situation would you respond?

Preparing for Application to Ministry (III)

Questions in this section deal with specific situations in the life of a congregation. In one sense, questions in this section are ethical questions. What is it one should do in a particular situation and why? Your task will be to establish the relevant theological themes, in accordance with the Reformed tradition, and to apply these themes to a situation.

This section addresses the wide variety of ethical situations: how do we decide to relate to science? How do we respond to issues of violence? How should Reformed Christians handle dilemmas of economics, the raising of children, pastoral impropriety, or ecumenical relations? As in the other sections, the form of the question will vary. You might be asked to respond to different people who are having a conversation, a person who drops by your office, someone who greets you after worship, or the session.
- Review exam questions from the last two or three years. Note the variety of themes and situations that are described and depicted in the questions.
- Review your own ministerial history. Remember situations in which you were called upon to address a particular dilemma. How did you sort through the situation? From your vantage point now, what do you think were the theological considerations in that situation? This section requires you to make connections. What theological ideas are at stake? With what resources will you have conversation about these theological ideas? How will you connect theologically to the situation?
- Remember that this section requires you to draw upon resources even though it is closed-book.

A Final Word

As you make use of this document, remember that the advice and preparation strategies contained in it are suggestions only. These are not official dictates of the exam committee. We pray for you the best possible experience in taking the ordination exams.
EXAMINATION OF THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE
(OPEN AND CLOSED BOOK)

MAXIMUM TIME: 3 HOURS

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS
WHAT IS BEING EXAMINED

The Examination of Theological Competence seeks to determine the candidate’s readiness for ministry in the use of biblical, classical, and contemporary theological insights within the Reformed heritage of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The examination may deal with questions of confessional, doctrinal, historical, or ethical significance. Accordingly, questions intend to test a candidate’s ability to discern the theological issues inherent in a situation and to address them competently as follows:

1. Articulating the contemporary relevance of the Reformed tradition as it is embodied in the confessional documents.
2. Showing that Christian doctrines as expressed in the Reformed tradition illuminate Christian faith and life.
3. Applying Reformed theology in the practice of ministry in relation to questions of ecclesiastical, political, social, economic, and personal ethics.

The word “Reformed,” wherever it is used in this examination, means a theological perspective in broad agreement with the theology of John Calvin, the confessional literature of the Reformed churches, and The Book of Confessions.

WHAT IS NOT BEING EXAMINED

This examination does not seek to examine personal faith or to determine the acceptability of the candidate’s views within Presbyterian confessional standards. That determination rests with the presbytery. Rather, this examination seeks to determine the candidate’s competence to work within the Reformed theological heritage. There is some latitude within this heritage, and an answer will not be evaluated more rigorously for taking one position rather than another within the heritage. However, answers outside the scope of the Reformed heritage would tend to demonstrate lack of readiness for Presbyterian ministry.

It is to be recognized, however, that in becoming a candidate or officer of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) one chooses to exercise freedom of conscience within certain bounds. His or her conscience is captive to the Word of God as interpreted in the standards of the church so long as he or she continues to seek or hold office in that body. [Book of Order G-6.0108b]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

A clean, unmarked, printed copy of The Book of Confessions (copyright 2002 or later) will be needed as a resource for Section I of the examination. (The Westminster Shorter and Larger Catechisms will be considered one document for the purposes of this examination.) No additional books, notes, outlines, or other outside resources may be used.

Sections II and III of the examination are CLOSED BOOK.
GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS (continued)

You may write your answers in ink in your own handwriting, type them, or use a computer. Do not use a pencil to write your responses; papers written in pencil will be returned without being evaluated. If you handwrite your examination, do not skip lines in the examination book. You may make corrections, deletions, or additions without rewriting or erasing. Identify every answer by the number and letter assigned to it (e.g., III. B). Illegible papers shall be returned without being evaluated.

You are encouraged to use a computer. You may bring your own equipment or, at some exam sites, you may use equipment provided by the proctor. You must confirm with the proctor in advance of the testing date what equipment (power strips, computers, printers, etc.) is available at the testing site.

If you use a computer:

- You may not consult or copy from personal notes or any other resource on the computer or a network during the exam.
- A printed copy of the exam must be turned in before you leave the test site. Not turning in a printed copy will result in failure. You are strongly urged to make sure that all the necessary equipment and software are properly working and coordinated.
- Number the pages.
- Include your candidate number on each page of the exam, but not your name.
- Print responses using double spacing and 12-point font size.
- When finished, staple the printed copy to the first few pages of the exam book.

Syntax or grammar will not be evaluated. However, the evaluation of papers may be affected if they cannot be understood because of poor syntax or grammar.

Maintaining the candidate’s anonymity is of fundamental importance to assure fair evaluation of examination papers. Failure to comply with any of the following instructions will result in the paper being found as unsatisfactory:

- Do not include your name
- Do not include the name of your congregation or presbytery
- Do not identify the seminary you attend or have attended
- Do not identify professors with whom you have studied
- Do not indicate whether you have taken this or other senior ordination exams before

All three sections must be answered. The paper must receive a “Satisfactory” evaluation on at least two of the three sections to be considered “Satisfactory.”
AUGUST 2010

READER'S EVALUATION SHEET- THEOLOGY EXAM

I. EVALUATIONS OF THIS EXAMINATION. The examination consists of three sections, each designed to be completed in one hour. All three sections must be answered. Section III has two options, from which the candidate is instructed to select one. Each section must be evaluated as either “Satisfactory” (S) or “Unsatisfactory” (U). The reader must also assign an overall evaluation for this examination. If any section is omitted it will receive an evaluation of “O”; the examination must then receive an overall evaluation of “Unsatisfactory.” The examination must receive an “S” on at least two out of the three sections to receive an overall evaluation of “Satisfactory.”

Each examination will be evaluated independently by two readers. If both overall evaluations are “S,” the conveners will record a final evaluation of “Satisfactory.” If both readers evaluate the exam overall as “U,” the exam receives a final evaluation of “Unsatisfactory.” If the two readers disagree in their overall evaluations, the exam will be given to a third reader. The conveners will record the final evaluation based on the two concurring overall evaluations.

II. THIS EVALUATION SHEET GOES TO THE CANDIDATE. Each reader’s comments should represent his or her considered appraisal of the paper. These comments are read by the candidate and the candidate’s Committee on Preparation for Ministry. Use the back of this sheet OR attach a separate page for comments explaining the evaluations assigned to each section of this examination.

III. EVALUATIONS:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section I (Required)</th>
<th>Documentary</th>
<th>S, U or O</th>
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<td>Section II (Required)</td>
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<td>Section III (Required)</td>
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<td>B</td>
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IV. OVERALL EVALUATION

NOTE: COMMENTS INCLUDE A MESSAGE FOR COMMITTEE ON PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY. (Please check if applicable.)

__________________________________________
Reader’s name printed

__________________________________________
Reader's Signature
WORSHIP AND SACRAMENTS

“This examination shall assess the candidate’s understanding of the meaning and purpose of corporate worship and the Sacraments, familiarity with the Directory for Worship and the Book of Confessions and their application to the life of worshiping communities.”

—General Assembly approved description of the Theological Competence Examination
Description and Preparation Guidelines for
the Worship and Sacraments Examination
by the Worship and Sacraments Task Group of the PCCEC

I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The Worship and Sacraments examination provides an opportunity for the candidate to show how *The Book of Confessions* and the Directory for Worship provide direction for those seeking to lead God’s people in worship, faithful to the Reformed heritage of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

WORSHIP AND SACRAMENTS are central to the development of faithful disciples within a community of faith. Because they are so central to our identity, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has always embraced the sense that our liturgical celebrations should be ordered according to constitutional standards. These standards are not so much “rules” as they are a communal discernment of, and reflection on, what God in Scripture would have us do and say in our worship.

II. WHAT THE EXAMINATION TESTS

In preparing for the standard examination in Worship and Sacraments, it would be helpful to know, and on occasion to review, what the examination is testing. *The Book of Order* states:

Worship and Sacraments. This examination shall assess the candidate’s understanding of the meaning and purpose of corporate worship and the sacraments, familiarity with the Directory for Worship and *The Book of Confessions*, and their application to the life of worshiping communities.”

III. THE FOCUS IN EACH SECTION OF THE EXAMINATION

The Worship and Sacraments Examination consists of three sections: Reformed Liturgical Heritage; Constructive Theological Reflection on Reformed Worship; and Application to Ministry.

**Reformed Liturgical Heritage** (One Hour, Required)

The worship life of our denomination reflects the conviction that the church’s worship, witness and service are inseparable and that the worship of our churches is to be informed by Reformed theology. It is thus important for you to demonstrate your knowledge of the theological foundations for our worship. A well-grounded knowledge of *The Book of Confessions* is essential for answering some of those “why” questions that confront pastors in a parish setting. Moreover, the Directory for Worship was “Created in harmony with Scripture and *The Book of Confessions*.”

This section of the examination is designed specifically to assess your ability to function as a
practical theologian within the distinctive framework of a Reformed theological and liturgical heritage as these are expressed within The Book of Confessions and the “Directory for Worship.” Because this question always requires you to cite specific passages from The Book of Confessions, you will be permitted to use a clean, unmarked copy of that constitutional resource for this section of the examination only.

Ordinarily, the required responses will indicate the minimum number of citations from The Book of Confessions required for an acceptable response. In some cases you will discover a potentially large number of possible citations from which to draw; in other cases, you may discover that the number of appropriate citations is more limited. In either case, you should always seek to cite those passages, which focus most directly on the issue at hand.

When the issue is addressed in several creeds or confessions, or when the confessional tradition witnesses to differences in emphasis (particularly between one historical era and another) the citations offered by you should show that you are aware of the broad sweep of the Reformed confessional tradition.

The required responses do not call for you to cite specific passages from the Directory for Worship, but they do insist that you demonstrate a sufficient awareness of the Directory’s provisions, which bear upon the issue under discussion. Some questions may move from a knowledge of The Book of Confessions to a particular liturgical situation, while others may arise within a worship context and need support from The Book of Confession.

**Constructive Theological Reflection on Reformed Worship** (One Hour, Required)

The Directory for Worship, adopted in 1989, includes mandated and proscribed practices, but it also sets forth a fundamental practical theology of Christian worship, within which pastors and congregations are encouraged to explore new possibilities for worship that are appropriate to particular congregational contexts. Thus your ability to function as a practical liturgical theologian, to develop a Reformed theological framework within which to address difficult questions, concerns or issues is a necessary dimension of “readiness for ministry” and the focus of this section of the examination.

This section of the examination asks you to engage in constructive theological reflection on a significant issue or practice within the church’s understanding and practice of worship. This reflection, which is to be shaped by the specific form of the required responses, must be done in a way that demonstrates familiarity with the provisions of the “Directory for Worship.”

In many instances, the specific issue or practice under consideration is not addressed directly in the Directory of Worship. In every case, however, it is possible to use the provisions of the Directory for Worship to develop or construct a theological framework within which the issue can be understood and addressed in ways faithful to the spirit of the Directory.

In constructing this theological framework, you will need to weave together provisions from a variety of places within the Directory, but the fundamental building blocks for this task can often be found most often in Chapter 1 (the dynamics or worship), Chapter 2 (the elements of worship)
and Chapter 3 (ordering worship).

**Application to Ministry** (One Hour, Two questions: Choose One)

You will be expected to demonstrate “appropriate pastoral sensitivity” to those persons involved in the situation. The readers will be looking for sincere and concrete expressions of the care and understanding that people deserve.

This section of the examination requires you to answer one of two questions. The distinctive emphasis in this final section of the examination is your ability to apply provisions in the Directory for Worship to concrete situations, which might occur in the practice of ministry, and to do so in ways that demonstrate appropriate pastoral sensitivity to particular persons. This section of the examination is particularly important in discerning your readiness for ministry. While knowledge of the provisions of the Directory for Worship is essential, it is also insufficient. Your ability to respond to particular persons in a pastorally appropriate manner is also essential.

Often, the questions for this section of the examination focus upon your understanding of the material in chapter 4 (ordering worship for special occasions), chapter 5 (worship and personal discipleship), chapter 6 (worship and the church’s ministries of nurture and pastoral care) and sometimes used to test your ability to apply your knowledge of the Directory’s understanding and practice of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

You will not have access to either the Book of Confessions or the Directory for Worship for this portion of the examination. Thus, while you are expected to demonstrate familiarity with the provisions of the Directory, you are not expected to be able to cite or quote specific passages. Moreover, the readers do not expect that you will be able to deal with all the possible issues and directory provisions.

**IV. HELPFUL HINTS FOR ANSWERING EACH SECTION OF THE EXAMINATION**

Perhaps the most important preparation you can make is to pay attention to the language of the Preface to the Book of Order, particularly the hermeneutical or interpretive framework for reading the Constitution which is set forth in the Preface.

1. **SHALL** and **IS TO BE/ARE TO BE** signify practice that is mandated,
2. **SHOULD** signifies practice that is strongly recommended,
3. **IS APPROPRIATE** signifies practice that is commended as suitable.
4. **MAY** signifies practice that is permissible but not required.

**Liturigical Heritage**

Begin your preparation by studying those sections of the Book of Confessions, which are referenced in footnotes throughout the Directory for Worship. These references indicate how the committee that developed the Directory attempted to do its work in conversation with our
Reformed theological heritage. These references are important in seeing the connections between particular provisions of the Directory and particular creedal or confessional texts. Expand your preparation by reflecting upon the relationship between particular doctrinal themes and the Directory’s discussion of particular liturgical elements or celebrations. For example, the Directory lifts up the theological significance of “covenant” in its descriptions of Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, Marriage, etc.

Prepare for the Theological Competence and Worship and Sacraments examinations at the same time. What you learn preparing for one will almost always help you in your preparation for the other, since both examinations require a discussion of The Book of Confessions citations.

Pay attention to the specific instructions in each of the required responses. If the response requires you to identify and discuss at least three confessional citations, then identify and discuss at least three citations, making certain that each of them is central to the issues or questions involved. If these three citations are on target, citing and discussing additional references will often lead a reader to raise the grade for this section. Failure to identify and discuss at least three citations, however, or simply listing without discussing any number of citations will result in a failing grade for this section of the examination. In addition, when the instruction require you to do something in the second part of the answer on the basis of your answer in the first part, make sure you show the connection.

Readers are given these or similar instructions in grading this section of the examination:
“One key to be considered in assigning a grade for this section is the extent to which the required responses cohere with one another. In other words, does the candidate’s answer in the second part of the question really flow from and reflect the answer given in the first section. Candidates do have access to a clean, unmarked copy of the Book of Confessions during this portion of the examination. By contrast, candidates never have access to the text of the Directory for Worship for any section of the examination. As a result, they should not be expected to cite or quote specific passages from the directory in their answers, though they should clearly demonstrate their knowledge of its provisions. Candidates will need to build links between the confessions’ and creeds’ teaching and the church’s understanding and practice.

“It is not necessary for the candidate to cite and discuss every possible The Book of Confessions reference, but those references cited and discussed should be central to the issue under discussion.”

**Constructive Theological Reflection on Reformed Worship**

In one sense, it is difficult to prepare for this section of the examination. In Section I, the focus upon the relationship between the church’s worship and its confessional heritage provides a kind of road map for how to proceed. Likewise, in Section III the need to address a specific series of comments and questions and respond to particular persons in a pastorally appropriate manner sets up the answer in a very concrete way. Section II, by contrast, is more open-ended. The situation identifies a problem or concern that you will need to address, but asks that you first set up a theological framework within which you will attempt to address the problem or problems.
In order to do that, you will need to make use of the Directory as whole, and not just those sections that may deal specifically with the topic at hand.

The most important thing to do is to focus upon the way the Directory for Worship is structured or organized, because it provides a model for how to construct a theological framework within which specific issues of understanding and practice can be addressed. The Directory begins by outlining the theological foundations for Christian worship (Chapter 1). It then moves on to identify and discuss the essential elements of Christian worship (Chapter 2). Next it discusses how worship is to be ordered in both ordinary contexts (Chapter 3) and in special contexts (Chapter 4). The remaining chapters are devoted to the relationship between the church’s common worship and personal discipleship (Chapter 5); the church’s ministries of nurture and pastoral care (Chapter 6); and the church’s mission in the world (Chapter 7).

Ordinary, a passing answer in Section II of the examination will depend minimally upon your ability to work constructively with the provisions in the first three (sometimes four) chapters of the Directory. Occasionally, Section II will involve a situation which is discussed quite specifically in one of the later chapters of the Directory, but even in such cases, you can develop a perfectly acceptable passing answer just by drawing upon your knowledge of the provisions in the Directory’s first three or four chapters. If your answer demonstrates your knowledge of all sections of the Directory, however, it will often merit you a superior score.

Work together with someone else (or several others) in your preparation, using questions of this type drawn from previous standard examinations or from questions developed by the members of the group. Focus upon pastoral situations that may seem to challenge the normative language of the Directory.

Remember that the first task is almost always to articulate a Reformed understanding or theological framework within which to address the specific issue, request or problem raised in the question. Absent that theological framework, the answer to the question will fail, even though the response to the specific situation might be in compliance with the Directory for Worship.

Readers are given these similar instructions to guide them in assessing answers in Section II:
“[This section of the examination asks the candidate to engage in constructive reflection and on some liturgical topic or issue as this in informed by Reformed theology and practice. This constructive statement is to be shaped by the specific form of the two required responses. The answer must be one that demonstrates familiarity with the provisions of the “Directory for Worship,” but not the Book of Confessions. In order to receive a passing grade on this section of the examination, the candidate must fulfill both required responses. The first required response asks the candidate to articulate a Reformed theological framework for understanding some matter within the worship life of the church. The second required response ask the candidate - informed by his or her answer in the first required response - to engage in a practical theological task (e.g., writing a newsletter article). The range of possible answers to the second required response will depend upon the number and quality of the directory resources chosen by the candidate in developing the theological framework. In every case, however, the answer to the second required response must grow out of the theological framework.”
framework offered in the first required response. In this section of the examination, there is no explicit rubric requiring the candidate to demonstrate “appropriate pastoral sensitivity” in responding. Thus, one may not grade a candidate’s answer higher or lower because of the pastoral sensitivity issue here. On the other hand, if the candidate shows either remarkable pastoral sensitivity or frighteningly high insensitivity in responding, you would be fully justified in pointing it out in a note to the CPM. One could argue the readiness for ministry includes demonstrating appropriate pastoral sensitivity all the time, not merely when one is “on duty.” Demonstration of appropriate pastoral sensitivity is specifically at issue in Part III of the examination; because of the need to bring together many ideas from the Directory in a very brief time, however, it is not central in this section of the examination.

**Application to Ministry**

Questions in this section are taken from every part of the Directory for Worship.

One of the things that make this section of the examination distinctive is the focus upon liturgical and sacramental *practices* - including some practices with which you may be unfamiliar - within a variety of congregational contexts. Thus, one of the first steps in preparing for this section of the examination would be to review chapters three and four, where the many ways in which the ordering of such “practices” is set forth. Pay attention to three things in particular: first, norms regarding sacramental celebrations; second, the fundamental patterns or frameworks for ordering Christian worship; and third, the wide variety and distinctive character of services appropriate for special purposes.

Pay attention to the ways in which the directory links the whole of the Christian life to worship, such that worship shapes and is shaped by personal discipleship, communal nurture and care, and the church’s mission in the world. Note the explicit ways in which patterns and norms from earlier chapters in the directory take form in the directory’s discussion of the relationship between, e.g., worship and the church’s ministry of evangelism or social justice.

This section of the examination is focused in a very particular way by the setting of the question. Often, the comments or questions of other persons will lift up the issues to be explored and you will be required to show “appropriate pastoral sensitivity” in responding to these persons. Pastoral sensitivity includes both affirmation and confrontation, but it never involves manipulating or demeaning the persons involved.

Readers of the examinations are reminded that there are often multiple issues that could be addressed on the basis of the situation, and that candidates may choose from among them in answering the question. If the situation involves several people and you asked to discuss at least one issue raised by each of them, your answer needs to show that you have done so. Occasionally, the questions in this section of the exam will ask you to discuss particular types of worship services or to write prayers appropriate for sacramental celebrations, based on the provisions of the Directory for Worship. In such cases, readers are advised of the possible alternative ways that candidates may take in developing passing answers.
GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

This examination shall assess the candidate's understanding of the meaning and purpose of corporate worship and the Sacraments, familiarity with the Directory for Worship and The Book of Confessions, and their application to the life of worshipping communities.

Questions on this examination deal with both WORSHIP AND SACRAMENTS. You will be expected to demonstrate the following:

- An ability to illustrate the connection between the contemporary understandings and practices of worship set forth in the Directory for Worship and the theological heritage of the Reformed tradition as it is expressed in The Book of Confessions.
- An ability to articulate a Reformed theological framework for addressing issues and practices related to worship and sacraments that arise from contemporary contexts for ministry.
- An ability to discern theological components in liturgical situations that may arise in ministry.
- An ability to discuss provisions of the Directory for Worship and to apply them in concrete contexts for ministry.
- An ability to reflect theologically and pastorally on the many different relationships between the ways the church understands and carries out its ministry and mission in the world and its worship and celebration of the sacraments.
- An ability to respond to individuals or groups in given situations with sensitivity to their needs, while also expressing the spirit of the constitutional standards.

In writing your answers, bear in mind that presbyteries elect elders as well as ministers of the Word and Sacrament to serve as readers. Examinations should be written in jargon-free language. Technical language should be used only where the task requires it or where it is appropriate.

The examination is divided into three sections: Section II is a required one-hour question calling for a Constructive Theological Reflection on Reformed Worship. No books or resources shall be used.

Section I is a required one-hour question about Reformed Liturgical Heritage. When you complete Section I, give your copy of The Book of Confessions to the proctor who then will give you Sections II and III of the examination.

Section III is a required one-hour question dealing with Application for Ministry. There are two options. Select only one option. No books or resources shall be used.

Identify every answer by the letter and number assigned to it (e.g., 1.1 or III.A.I.). All three sections must be answered. The paper must receive a “Satisfactory” evaluation on at least two of the three sections to be considered “Satisfactory.”
AUGUST 2010
WORSHIP AND SACRAMENTS EXAMINATION

PAGE 2 OF 7

A CLEAN, UNMARKED, PRINTED COPY OF THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS MAY BE USED AS A RESOURCE ONLY DURING SECTION I OF THE EXAMINATION. NO OTHER BOOKS ARE ALLOWED.

You may write your answers in ink in your own handwriting, type them, or use a computer. Do not use a pencil to write your responses; papers written in pencil will be returned without being evaluated. If you handwrite your examination, do not skip lines in the examination book. You may make corrections, deletions, or additions without rewriting or erasing. Identify every answer by the number and letter assigned to it (e.g., III. B). Illegible papers shall be returned without being evaluated.

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- Do not include the name of your congregation or presbytery
- Do not identify the seminary you attend or have attended
- Do not identify professors with whom you have studied
- Do not indicate whether you have taken this or other senior ordination exams before
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Each examination will be evaluated independently by two readers. If both overall evaluations are “S,” the conveners will record a final evaluation of “Satisfactory.” If both readers evaluate the exam overall as “U,” the exam receives a final evaluation of “Unsatisfactory.” If the two readers disagree in their overall evaluations, the exam will be given to a third reader. The conveners will record the final evaluation based on the two concurring overall evaluations.

IV. THIS EVALUATION SHEET GOES TO THE CANDIDATE. Each reader’s comments should represent his or her considered appraisal of the paper. These comments are read by the candidate and the candidate’s Committee on Preparation for Ministry. Use the back of this sheet OR attach a separate page for comments explaining the evaluations assigned to each section of this examination.

V. EVALUATIONS: S, U or O

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section I</th>
<th>(Required)</th>
<th>Baptism</th>
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<td>Section II</td>
<td>(Required)</td>
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<td>Section III</td>
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<td>-OR-</td>
<td>Sacrament</td>
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IV. OVERALL EVALUATION

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NOTE: COMMENTS INCLUDE A MESSAGE FOR COMMITTEE ON PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY. (Please check if applicable.)

__________________________________________
Reader’s name printed

_____________________
Reader’s Signature
“This examination is intended to assess the candidate’s working knowledge of the constitutional structure of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the method by which differences are properly resolved and programs to fulfill the mission of the church are determined.”

—General Assembly approved description of the Church Polity Examination
Description and Preparation Guidelines for the Polity Examination
by the Polity Task Group of the PCCEC

We orderly Presbyterians go about our ministries believing that one evidence of faithfulness to God is an ordered life together rooted in our sense of discipleship.

Polity is a relational expression of the Church's theological commitments (foundation). The Church Polity examination provides an opportunity for the candidate to demonstrate an understanding of polity as a tool for ministry in the context of church life.

The examination is open-book and assesses how the candidate interprets, communicates and utilizes the *Book of Order* in his or her practice of ministry. Literature

**WHAT CANDIDATES OUGHT TO KNOW**

- That the *purpose of the Section I question*, grounded in chapters I, II, III, and IV *Book of Order*, is to test the candidate’s understanding of constitutional order as founded on basic theological principles that have been passed down to us over the years.

- That the purpose of the Section II and Section III questions is to test the candidate’s ability to apply constitutional provisions to life in the church.

- That the Section II question addresses concerns that repeat themselves regularly in the practice of ministry.

- That many essay questions are based on actual contemporary situations in the church, and that they tend to have a preferable direction or resolution or range of responses rather than cut-and-dried correct answers: e.g., there is the general expectation that *a satisfactory resolution of a situation is reconciliation rather than victory*.

- That one should appreciate what “Pastoral” means out in the church - not mushy or permissive, but caringly constructive.

- That one should *read and follow directions*, carefully; that “list” does not mean “evaluate,” and that sometimes one is asked to respond to an individual and sometimes one is not.

- That one should *keep track of time*.

- That *at least two of the three sections must be passed*.

- That at least two people will be reading and evaluating the paper - and eventually the candidate's CPM will read it, too; as well as a calling Presbytery Committee.
- That, repeatedly, new readers and seminarians who attend the reading group process comment on the fairness and care of this system.
GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

This examination is intended to "assess the candidate's working knowledge of the constitutional structure of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the method by which differences are properly resolved and programs to fulfill the mission of the church are determined."

The intent of this examination is to test readiness for ministry, which includes using the *Book of Order* effectively. Candidates shall utilize a clean, unmarked, printed copy of the 2009-2011 *Book of Order* of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in responding to the questions. No additional books, notes, outlines or other resources may be used. Questions will be from the Form of Government, the Directory for Worship, and the Rules of Discipline.

ESSAY QUESTIONS       THREE HOURS                OPEN BOOK

The examination consists of three Sections. All three sections are required. Section III has two options. Select one option. Each Section is designed to be completed in one hour.

In order to receive a Final Evaluation of “Satisfactory” on this exam, two of the three sections must receive a “Satisfactory.”

The readers, in evaluating the examination, will use the following criteria to assess readiness for ministry:

- Recognition and knowledge of the polity issues applicable to the question, and ability to cite relevant sections of the *Book of Order*;

- Ability to relate the polity issue to the situation, considering both the letter and the spirit of the constitution;

- Ability to express concern for the individual(s) involved in the situation and for the welfare of the church as a whole;

- Knowledge of the process by which programs to fulfill the mission of the church are determined; and

- Ability to be coherent in expressing thoughts.
You may write your answers in ink in your own handwriting, type them, or use a computer. Do not use a pencil to write your responses; papers written in pencil will be returned without being evaluated. If you handwrite your examination, do not skip lines in the examination book. You may make corrections, deletions, or additions without rewriting or erasing. Identify every answer by the number and letter assigned to it (e.g., III. B). Illegible papers shall be returned without being evaluated.

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- You may not consult or copy from personal notes or any other resource on the computer or a network during the exam.
- A printed copy of the exam must be turned in before you leave the test site. Not turning in a printed copy will result in failure. You are strongly urged to make sure that all the necessary equipment and software are properly working and coordinated.
- Number the pages.
- Include your candidate number on each page of the exam, but not your name.
- Print responses using double spacing and 12-point font size.
- When finished, staple the printed copy to the first few pages of the exam book.

Syntax or grammar will not be evaluated. However, the evaluation of papers may be affected if they cannot be understood because of poor syntax or grammar.

Maintaining the candidate’s anonymity is of fundamental importance to assure fair evaluation of examination papers. Failure to comply with any of the following instructions will result in the paper being found as unsatisfactory:
- Do not include your name
- Do not include the name of your congregation or presbytery
- Do not identify the seminary you attend or have attended
- Do not identify professors with whom you have studied
- Do not indicate whether you have taken this or other senior ordination exams before

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IMPORTANT: READ THE ENTIRE QUESTION BEFORE BEGINNING TO WRITE YOUR ANSWER.
I. EVALUATIONS OF THIS EXAMINATION. The examination consists of three sections, each designed to be completed in one hour. All three sections must be answered. Section III has two options, from which the candidate is instructed to select one. Each section must be evaluated as either “Satisfactory” (S) or “Unsatisfactory” (U). The reader must also assign an overall evaluation for this examination. If any section is omitted it will receive an evaluation of “O”; the examination must then receive an overall evaluation of “Unsatisfactory.” The examination must receive an “S” on at least two out of the three sections to receive an overall evaluation of “Satisfactory.”

Each examination will be evaluated independently by two readers. If both overall evaluations are “S,” the conveners will record a final evaluation of “Satisfactory.” If both readers evaluate the exam overall as “U,” the exam receives a final evaluation of “Unsatisfactory.” If the two readers disagree in their overall evaluations, the exam will be given to a third reader. The conveners will record the final evaluation based on the two concurring overall evaluations.

VI. THIS EVALUATION SHEET GOES TO THE CANDIDATE. Each reader’s comments should represent his or her considered appraisal of the paper. These comments are read by the candidate and the candidate’s Committee on Preparation for Ministry. Use the back of this sheet OR attach a separate page for comments explaining the evaluations assigned to each section of this examination.

VII. EVALUATIONS: S, U or O

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section I (Required)</th>
<th>Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory/Omit</th>
<th>Justice and Obedience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Section II (Required)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Treasurer’s concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section III (Required)</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Membership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-OR-</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Wedding</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

IV. OVERALL EVALUATION

NOTE: COMMENTS INCLUDE A MESSAGE FOR COMMITTEE ON PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY. (Please check if applicable.)

_________________________________________ Reader’s name printed

_________________________________________ Reader’s Signature
THE EVALUATION PROCESS FOR
SENIOR ORDINATION EXAMINATIONS

The Book of Order directs that the ordination examinations are to be evaluated “by representatives of the presbyteries under the supervision of the Presbyteries’ Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates” (G-14.0432). The involvement of elders and ministers from across the church is an important component in the standardization of these exams as a church-wide assessment of an individual’s readiness to assume the functions of ministry of Word and Sacrament on behalf of the church.

Reader Selection: Presbyteries elect all readers in accord with G-11.0103m. They are generally elected on the basis of such qualifications as: familiarity with the candidacy process; ability to discern gifts for ministry; readiness to accept a diversity of points of view within the ministry of the church; continuing intellectual vitality; a vital, inquiring pilgrimage of faith; commitment to the Historic Principles of church order found in G-1.0300; and the ability to be constructively critical.

Grading Schedule: Readers convene twice yearly to grade exams, meeting in six different locales nationwide. Their expenses are covered by the fees charged for the examinations. Grading sessions convene in early October for the fall exams and early March for spring exams. Any exam papers that are returned to the Office of Preparation for Ministry/Exams after the Reading Groups have convened will not be read.

Evaluation Process: Every exam booklet is coded with the candidate's I.D. number, thereby guaranteeing anonymity. Each exam is read by at least two readers in a Reading Group who write comments explaining their respective evaluations of the paper. If the two readers agree that the paper is either satisfactory or unsatisfactory that evaluation stands. If the two readers are not in agreement, a third reader evaluates the paper. The two readers whose evaluations are in agreement determine the disposition of the exam. Readers are not informed whether their evaluation is a first, second or third reading. Over both time and across the subject areas of the exams it has been quite consistent that about one-third of the papers receive a third reading because the first two evaluations did not agree on whether the paper satisfied the requirements. No single reader is able determine that an examination is either satisfactory or unsatisfactory.

Readers sign the evaluation sheet, return the examination booklet to the Reading Group conveners, and proceed to the next exam paper assigned to them to be evaluated. Members of the PCC conducting the Reading Group review all reader comments for clarity, support and explanation of the evaluation given, and unintentional errors.

Readers are encouraged to be pastoral in their comments. The comments are for the benefit of those taking the exams to assist them in their preparation for ministry and discernment of their call. A reader’s primary concern is for the building up of the body of Christ. Readers strive to reflect care and wisdom in representing the spirit of PC(USA). (See the Preamble for the
Results Notification: It currently takes approximately seven weeks after the examinations are written before results can be released to the test takers. No grades are released directly to inquirers or candidates by the Office of Preparation for Ministry/Exams, nor are individual results released to proctors or CPM moderators prior to the official release of all results. An individual’s exam results are not released to anyone other than the proctor and the moderator of the CPM of the inquirer’s or candidate’s presbytery of care without the prior written consent of the inquirer or candidate. The Office of Preparation for Ministry/Exams and its predecessors have maintained candidate records since 1967.

Exam results are sent to test takers via their proctors. Enclosed with each exam package is a letter from the Office of Preparation for Ministry/Exams indicating whether each examination was evaluated as “satisfactory” or “unsatisfactory.” Grade summaries are also sent to the moderator of the CPM of the presbytery which the candidate has indicated is the presbytery of care. Exam papers are returned to the inquirer or candidate by the proctor for review. Inquirers and candidates are strongly encouraged to make copies of both the exam papers and the readers’ evaluations and to secure the safekeeping of those copies. Within two weeks (14 days) of receiving the papers and evaluation sheets, the inquirer or candidate is responsible for sending the originals to the moderator of their CPM. The exams and readers’ evaluations become part of the candidate's file.
APPEALS

It is possible for an appeal to be submitted requesting to overturn an unsatisfactory grade.

An inquirer or candidate cannot appeal an unsatisfactory grade directly to the Office of Preparation for Ministry/Exams. The Committee on Preparation for Ministry (or, in the case of ministers from other denominations, the Committee on Ministry) is to review the exam to determine whether or not an appeal is warranted. If the committee concludes that a mistake was made in the computation of the grade for an exam or that the evaluation given did not accurately represent the quality of the work reflected in the exam, then the committee may initiate an appeal. All appeals must be submitted in writing to the Office of Preparation for Ministry/Exams. The appeal should include a copy of the exam, copies of the readers’ evaluation sheets, and a statement identifying specific grounds for the appeal of unsatisfactory evaluation.

Exams that are submitted for an appeal will be reviewed by a member of the Presbyteries’ Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates. If the appeal is sustained, the unsatisfactory grade will be overturned, and a satisfactory grade will be assigned to the exam. If the appeal is not sustained, the original grade(s) assigned to the exam will stand. The decision of the member of the PCC reviewing the appeal is final.

Appeals: There are two grounds for appeal of an unsatisfactory evaluation:

A. Correctable error: Occasionally, a paper will be improperly graded (e.g., grades were entered on the wrong line), or there may be other aberrations that call for corrective measures. Proctors, candidates, and appropriate presbytery representatives may request that the CPM of care bring such concerns as an appeal to the PCC, which will rule on the issue at hand.

B. Grading issues: If the appropriate committee of presbytery believes that the quality of an exam is not properly reflected in the grade(s) assigned to the paper, the committee may make an appeal of the grade. The statement of appeal should provide specific references to both the examination paper and the readers’ comments along with the reasons the committee disagrees with the assessment of the reader(s).

Requests for an appeal must reach the Office of Preparation for Ministry/Exams by:

January 15 for August exams
June 15 for January exams.
REFLECTIONS FROM A READER

For more than 10 years I have read the fall ordination exams. I return each fall for a variety of reasons, both personal and corporate.

What drew me to read the first time was my own experience with the exams in the 1970s. During the fall of my senior year at seminary, I approached the exams with fear and trembling, with a sense of “one more hurdle -- one more hoop.” My preparation to take the exams amounted to worry and also a sense of blame. Worry that I would fail and blame those who said if I wanted to be ordained in the Presbyterian Church, I needed to pass all four exams. Hadn’t all my classes and study and papers and field work prepared me for ministry? Hadn’t my sense of call convinced me that ministry was where God wanted me? My fears were often echoed by my classmates.

Yet, between me and the goal of ordination lay four exams, exams I didn’t know how to study for, exams that would be graded by some nameless person somewhere. Not only did that person not know me, I felt I had no way to tell them of my hopes and dreams, no way to convince them that no matter how I did on the exams I needed to be ordained, for I felt the certainty of God’s call upon my life.

All went well and my ordination took place later that summer, and since then I have had the chance to serve the Church in several different settings.

So, when the opportunity to read exams came to me through my presbytery, I jumped at the chance. Now, more than a decade later, I return each fall, believing what we do, as students and readers, is important and valuable to our church.

As you might know, ordained elders and pastors gather in Reading Groups around the country in October. For three, sometimes four days these men and women spend up to fourteen hours a day reading and grading and praying over the exams that are presented to them. Before each day begins, we gather for worship, and the exams and students who wrote them are always in the forefront of our approach to God. Before we begin to grade the different exams, sessions are held in which the readers talk about what we believe makes a good exam, reflecting on the preparatory work we have done in the weeks before we gather as a Reading Group.

While all four of the exams are different, calling upon different, yet interrelated and overlapping disciplines, as a reader, generally, I look for, evidence of at least three cognitive elements: knowledge, pastoral skills, and professionalism. Just as importantly, I also look for a sense of consistency between what is written in the opening sections of the exam and the practical application which follows.

Quite simply, by knowledge, I try to determine, if the exam adequately answers the question placed before it. For example, in the Worship and Sacraments examination I expect that the answer to any question will show a working knowledge of the Book of Confessions and the Directory for Worship. If the question calls for “citing by number specific passages (e.g., O.000)”, I hope to see more than one related citation. A better exam presents citations from a variety of Confessions rather than several from one, or worse yet, from one chapter. The Book of Confessions and the Directory for Worship are rich documents, filled with words of historical faith, and an understanding of their width and breadth will strengthen any answer.
By pastoral skill, I look to see if the exam is able to take theological concepts and translate them into answers and ideas that speak to today’s Church. Again, using the Worship and Sacraments examination as an example, if we are not able to take the words from the opening chapters of the Second Helvetic Confession and use them to help us form our own view of Scripture and Worship, then we might as well relegate the *Book of Confessions* to a box in the cupboard rather than keep it near our desk.

Finally, this reader looks for professionalism in all responses. By professionalism I mean pastoral sensitivity to people and their needs, joys, wants and hurts. Our Reformed theology cannot be separated from the people who sit in the pews, gather for session meetings and lay in hospital beds. In a scenario dealing with baptism in the Worship and Sacraments exam, one which expressed a reluctance on the part of parents to have their child baptized, would be my hope that the response would deal not only with the *Book of Confessions* and the Directory for Worship but also with the parents as people of God who come to their Church searching for answers.

In the other three exams, Church Polity, Theology, and Exegesis, I usually look for the same elements. But as the exams differ, so do my expectations concerning a good response.

In the Church Polity exam, I look for consistency between the *Book of Order* citations (e.g., X-O.OOOO) called for and the practical application. The answers need to show the ability to take the constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and clearly relate to issues in the local church, presbytery, community.

In the Theology exam, as in the others exams, I grade on the exam’s ability to present theological concepts in a clear and concise manner and to use those concepts to inform the scenario presented. A good paper presents more than one source, and a great paper recognizes the historical and contemporary applications of Reformed theology.

As I stated in the beginning of this letter, for more than 10 years I have read the fall ordination exams. I return each fall for a variety of reasons, both personal and corporate.

We are the Church, related, in communion with each other, teaching a commonality of faith, celebrating through the Church a Risen Savior.
CONCLUSION

The hallmark of these exams is the situational nature of the questions. Even the Open Book Bible Exegesis exam assumes some type of community of God’s people, lots of research and preparation. Field education is going to be very important on these exams. The exams put you in a situation that is possible, probable, and even likely to happen in a congregational setting. The more you have been around, talked to people, had experiences in the life of the church the better equipped you are to respond, because it will be an experiential response—you can identify with and relate to the situation.

Situational experiences very often present a “dilemma.” There is an “on-the-one-hand-and-then-on-the-other-hand” quality to the scenarios in the exams. The one thing you do not want to do is to deny the “dilemma.” Point out the good points in the situation—point out where there needs to be some correction, that is what being a pastor is all about, and gently direct them. It takes discipline to move God’s people in faith. Respond with heart and head—that combination is the hallmark of Presbyterian ministry.

Remember that these exams are not being evaluated by seminary professors who know you, but by colleagues who do not know you. In assessing your readiness for ministry they will rely solely upon the contents of your examination papers. They are your colleagues, and they know all too well that you will not get very far in ministry by denying the complexities of life. We work very hard with readers to help them see that they are engaged in ministry as they react to your written comments on these exams.

May God’s richest blessings be with you as you prepare for the ordination examinations as one part of your broader process of discernment and preparation regarding the ministry of Word and Sacrament.

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