

CHAPTER TWO

ORDERED MINISTRY, COMMISSIONING, AND CERTIFICATION

G-2.01 ORDERED MINISTRIES OF THE CHURCH

G-2.0101 Christ's Ministry

The Church's ministry is a gift from Jesus Christ to the whole Church. Christ alone rules, calls, teaches, and uses the Church as he wills, exercising his authority by the ministry of women and men for the establishment and extension of God's new creation. Christ's ministry is the foundation and standard for all ministry, the pattern of the one who came "not to be served but to serve" (Matt. 20:28). The basic form of ministry is the ministry of the whole people of God, from whose midst some are called to ordered ministries, to fulfill particular functions. Members and those in ordered ministries serve together under the mandate of Christ.

G-2.0102 Ordered Ministries

The Church's ordered ministries described in the New Testament and maintained by this church are deacons^a and presbyters (ministers of the Word and Sacrament^b and ruling elders^c). Ordered ministries are gifts to the church to order its life so that the ministry of the whole people of God may flourish. The existence of these ordered ministries in no way diminishes the importance of the commitment of all members to the total ministry of the church.

The government of this church is representative^d, and the right of God's people to elect presbyters and deacons is inalienable. Therefore, no person can be placed in any ordered ministry in a congregation or council of the church except by election of that body.

Ordination to the ministry of deacon, ruling elder, or minister of the Word and Sacrament (also called teaching elder) is unique to that order of ministry.

G-2.0103 Call to Ordered Ministry

The call to ordered ministry in the Church is the act of the triune God. This call is evidenced by the movement of the Holy Spirit in the individual conscience, the approval of a community of God's people, and the concurring judgment of a council of the Church.

G-2.0104 Gifts and Qualifications

a. To those called to exercise special functions in the church—deacons, ruling elders, and ministers of the Word and Sacrament—God gives suitable gifts for their various duties. In addition to possessing the necessary gifts and abilities, those who undertake particular ministries should be persons of strong faith, dedicated discipleship, and love of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Their manner of life should be a demonstration of the Christian gospel in the church and in the world. They must have the approval of God's people and the concurring judgment of a council of the church.

b. Standards for ordained service reflect the church’s desire to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life (F-1.02). The council responsible for ordination and/or installation (G-2.0402; G-2.0607; G-3.0306) shall examine each candidate’s calling, gifts, preparation, and suitability for the responsibilities of ordered ministry. The examination shall include, but not be limited to, a determination of the candidate’s ability and commitment to fulfill all requirements as expressed in the constitutional questions for ordination and installation (W-4.0404). Councils shall be guided by Scripture and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates.

G-2.0105 Freedom of Conscience

It is necessary to the integrity and health of the church that the persons who serve it in ordered ministries shall adhere to the essentials of the Reformed faith and polity as expressed in this Constitution. So far as may be possible without serious departure from these standards, without infringing on the rights and views of others, and without obstructing the constitutional governance of the church, freedom of conscience with respect to the interpretation of Scripture is to be maintained. It is to be recognized, however, that in entering the ordered ministries 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 serve in, ordered ministry. The decision as to whether a person has departed from essentials of Reformed faith and polity is made initially by the individual concerned but ultimately becomes the responsibility of the council in which he or she is a member.¹

G-2.02 DEACONS: THE MINISTRY OF COMPASSION AND SERVICE

G-2.0201 Deacon Defined

The ministry of deacon as set forth in Scripture^e is one of compassion, witness, and service, sharing in the redeeming love of Jesus Christ for the poor, the hungry, the sick, the lost, the friendless, the oppressed, those burdened by unjust policies or structures, or anyone in distress^f. Persons of spiritual character, honest repute, exemplary lives, brotherly and sisterly love, sincere compassion, and sound judgment should be chosen for this ministry.

¹ Very early in the history of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, even before the General Assembly was established, the plan of reunion of the Synod of New York and Philadelphia contained the following sentences: ‘That when any matter is determined by a majority vote, every member shall either actively concur with or passively submit to such determination; or if his conscience permit him to do neither, he shall, after sufficient liberty modestly to reason and remonstrate, peaceably withdraw from our communion without attempting to make any schism. Provided always that this shall be understood to extend only to such determination as the body shall judge indispensable in doctrine or Presbyterian government.’ (Hist. Dig. (P) p. 1310.) (Plan of Union of 1758, par. II.)

G-2.0202 Under Authority of the Session

Deacons may be individually commissioned or organized as a board of deacons. In either case, their ministry is under the supervision and authority of the session. Deacons may also be given special assignments in the congregation, such as caring for members in need, handling educational tasks, cultivating liberality in giving, collecting and disbursing monies to specific persons or causes, or overseeing the buildings and property of the congregation. Deacons shall assume other duties as may be delegated to them by the session, including assisting with the Lord's Supper. (W-3.0414). A congregation by a majority vote may choose not to utilize the ordered ministry of deacons. If the congregation has neither a board of deacons nor individually commissioned deacons, the function of this ordered ministry shall be the responsibility of the ruling elders and the session.

G-2.03 RULING ELDERS: THE MINISTRY OF DISCERNMENT AND GOVERNANCE*G-2.0301 Ruling Elder Defined*

As there were in Old Testament times elders for the government of the people, so the New Testament church provided persons with particular gifts to share^g in discernment of God's Spirit and governance of God's people. Accordingly, congregations should elect persons of wisdom and maturity of faith, having demonstrated skills in leadership and being compassionate in spirit. Ruling elders are so named not because they "lord it over" the congregation (Matt. 20:25), but because they are chosen by the congregation to discern and measure its fidelity to the Word of God, and to strengthen and nurture its faith and life. Ruling elders, together with ministers of the Word and Sacrament, exercise leadership, government, spiritual discernment, and discipline^h and have responsibilities for the life of a congregation as well as the whole church, including ecumenical relationships. When elected by the congregation, they shall serve faithfully as members of the session. When elected as commissioners to higher councils, ruling elders participate and vote with the same authority as ministers of the Word and Sacrament, and they are eligible for any office.

G-2.04 GENERAL PROVISIONS FOR RULING ELDERS AND DEACONS*G-2.0401 Election of Ruling Elders and Deacons*

Ruling elders and deacons are men and women elected by the congregation from among its members. The nomination and election of ruling elders and deacons shall express the rich diversity of the congregation's membership and shall guarantee participation and inclusiveness (F-1.0403). Ruling elders and deacons shall be nominated by a committee elected by the congregation, drawn from and representative of its membership. **Congregations may provide by their own rule for a congregational nominating committee. The rule shall meet the following criteria: (1) the minimum size of the committee as specified in the rule shall be at least three persons; (2) at least one member of the committee shall be an elder currently serving on session; and (3) a majority of those persons on the committee who are eligible to vote shall consist of persons not currently serving**

on session. The pastor shall serve ex officio and without vote. When elections are held, full opportunity shall always be given to the congregation for nomination from the floor of the congregational meeting by any active member of the congregation. A majority of all the active members present and voting shall be required to elect.

G-2.0402 Preparation for Ministry as a Ruling Elder or Deacon

When persons have been elected to the ordered ministry of ruling elder or deacon, the session shall provide a period of study and preparation, after which the session shall examine them as to their personal faith; knowledge of the doctrine, government, and discipline contained in the Constitution of the church; and the duties of the ministry. The session shall also confer with them as to their willingness to undertake the ministry appropriate to the order. If the examination is approved, the session shall appoint a day for the service of ordination and installation.

G-2.0403 Service of Ordination and Installation

The service of ordination and installation shall focus upon Christ and the joy and responsibility of serving him through the mission and ministry of the church, and shall include a sermon appropriate to the occasion. The moderator of session or person authorized to preside shall state briefly the nature of the ministry of ruling elder and deacon. The act of ordination and installation takes place in the context of worship. The order for that service of worship in the Directory for Worship (W-4.04) shall be followed.

G-2.0404 Terms of Service

Ruling elders and deacons shall be elected to serve terms of no more than three years on the session or board of deacons, and may be eligible for reelection according to congregational rule. However, no ruling elder or deacon shall be eligible to serve more than six consecutive years, and a ruling elder or deacon who has served six consecutive years shall be ineligible for election to the same board for at least one year. Election shall be to classes as nearly equal in number as possible, with the term of only one class ending each year. The presbytery may, upon written request and by majority vote, grant a congregation a waiver of this limitation on terms.

Once ordained and while they are active members of any congregation of this denomination, ruling elders or deacons not in active service on a session or board of deacons continue to bear the responsibilities of the ministry to which they have been ordained, except as provided in G-2.0406, G-2.0407, or in accordance with the Rules of Discipline.

G-2.0405 Dissolution of Relationship

A ruling elder or deacon may resign from the session or board of deacons, with the session's consent. On ceasing to be an active member of a congregation, a ruling elder or deacon ceases to be a member of its session or board. When a ruling elder or deacon, because of change of residence or disability, is unable for a period of one year to perform the duties of the ministry to which he or she was installed, the active relationship shall be dissolved by the session unless there is good reason not to do so, which shall be recorded.

G-2.0406 Release from Ministry as a Ruling Elder or Deacon

If a ruling elder or deacon who is in good standing, against whom no inquiry has been initiated, and against whom no charges have been filed, shall make application to the session to be released from the exercise of the ordered ministry, the session of the congregation in which he or she holds membership, upon granting the release, shall delete that person's name from the appropriate register of ruling elders or deacons of the congregation. No judgment of failure on the part of the ruling elder or deacon is implied in this action. Release from the exercise of the ministry of ruling elder or deacon requires a discontinuation of all functions of that ministry. The status of one so released shall be the same as any church member. Should a person released under this section later desire to be restored to that ordered ministry, that person shall make application to the session that granted the release, and upon approval of the session, that person shall be restored to the exercise of the ministry from which he or she was released without re-ordination.

G-2.0407 Renunciation of Jurisdiction

When a ruling elder or deacon submits to the clerk of session a written statement renouncing the jurisdiction of this church, the renunciation shall be effective upon receipt. When a ruling elder or deacon persists in work disapproved by the session, the session shall consult with him or her and shall give notice of its disapproval. If, after having been provided opportunity for consultation and upon written notice of its disapproval, the ruling elder or deacon persists in the work, the session may then conclude that the ruling elder or deacon has renounced the jurisdiction of this church.

Renunciation of jurisdiction shall remove the ruling elder or deacon from membership and ordered ministry and shall terminate the exercise of the ministry. The renunciation shall be reported by the clerk of session at the next meeting of the session, which shall record the renunciation, delete the name of the ruling elder or deacon from the appropriate register, and take such other administrative actions as may be required by this Constitution.

G-2.05 MINISTERS OF THE WORD AND SACRAMENT: THE MINISTRY OF TEACHING AND PASTORAL CARE*G-2.0501 Minister of the Word and Sacrament Defined*

Ministers of the Word and Sacrament (also called teaching elders and pastors) shall in all things be committed to teaching the faith in word and deed and equipping the saints for the work of ministry (Eph. 4:12). They may serve in a variety of ministries, as authorized by the presbytery. When they serve as preachers and teachers of the Word, they shall preach and teach the faith of the church, so that the people are shaped by the pattern of the gospel and strengthened for witness and service. When they serve at font and table, they shall interpret and "show forth" the mysteries of grace in word and action, lifting the people's vision toward the hope of God's new creation. When they serve as pastorsⁱ, they shall support the people in the disciplines of the faith amid the struggles of daily life. When they serve as presbyters, they shall participate in the responsibilities of governance, seeking always to discern the mind of Christ and to build up Christ's body through devotion, debate, and decision.