



SALEM PRESBYTERY

PC(USA)

# Commissioned Ruling Elder Manual

Updated November 2021

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction .....	1
Part I: Becoming a Commissioned Ruling Elder .....	1
Part II: Education .....	3
Part III: Serving as a Commissioned Ruling Elder in a Church.....	5
Part IV: CRE Annual Evaluation and Contract Renewal .....	6
Part V: Mentoring.....	6
Part VI: Performing Weddings .....	7
Appendix A: Application.....	A-1
Appendix B: Personal Information Form.....	B-1
Appendix C: Installation of a Commissioned Ruling Elder.....	D-1
Appendix D: Certification to Perform Weddings .....	E-1

## **Introduction**

The Book of Order of the Presbyterian Church (USA) provides for the commissioning of Ruling Elders to specific pastoral service (G-2.10). It is the responsibility of the Presbytery to determine the need, use, preparation of and placement of these Commissioned Ruling Elders (CRE).

A ruling elder who seeks to serve as a CRE will receive preparation and instruction as determined by the presbytery. The Presbytery can authorize the ruling elder to moderate the session of the congregation to which they are commissioned, to administer the Sacraments, and to officiate at marriages where permitted by state law.

Commissioned Ruling Elders are commissioned for a term of service not to exceed three years, but their commission is renewable. The congregation, the CRE and the presbytery shall review and renew the contract annually.

In Salem Presbytery, the Commission on Ministry (COM) is responsible for the Commissioned Ruling Elder program. It performs this responsibility through its COM Task Force on CRE Training and Oversight.

It is the intention of the COM to have consistent Presbyterian pastoral leadership in every congregation. Ordinarily that leadership is provided by an ordained Presbyterian Minister of Word and Sacrament. When that is not practical or possible, the COM's goal is to enable such congregations to have temporary supplies who are ordained Presbyterian Ministers or Commissioned Ruling Elders.

## **Part I: Becoming a Commissioned Ruling Elder**

### **Step I**

The Session of the home church must endorse the CRE candidate and be certain the individual meets the requirements in the Book of Order. The Session assesses the candidate to determine if they have sufficient background and insight into Presbyterian polity and theology to be an authentic representative of our denomination. Criteria that supports this are the length of time the person has been a Presbyterian and the number of years served as an ordained elder. The candidate is examined as to personal faith, motives for seeking the commission, and their sense of call. The Session must answer the question, "Would I want this person to be my pastor?" The candidate must be made aware of the academic requirements of the training program, and also understand that all who enter might not succeed in being commissioned. During the entire process that follows, the candidate must continue to prayerfully discern their call.

### **Step II**

The CRE candidate shall complete the "Commissioned Ruling Elder Program Application" including the endorsement of the Session (Appendix A) and submit it to the COM Task Force on CRE Training and Oversight.

### Step III

The COM Task Force on CRE Training and Oversight will interview the candidate about their faith, sense of call, personal suitability and commitment, intellectual insight, understanding of Presbyterian polity and theology, and fitness for ministry. Upon successful completion of this interview, the candidate is entered into the CRE program.

### Step IV

The CRE candidate begins the required coursework.

### Step V

After about one year of study, the CRE candidate is given a field education assignment with a minister in Salem Presbytery. Field education involves working with and under the tutelage of the minister mentor, and will include some preaching, attendance at Session meetings and other appropriate assignments. Field education is for a minimum of six months but might be more if appropriate.

### Step VI

Upon completion of coursework and field education, the candidate is interviewed by the COM Task Force on CRE Training and Oversight to determine if the candidate is ready to serve a church. The Task Force decides if the candidate is ready to serve, if the candidate needs additional coursework or field education, or if the candidate is not suited to serve a church as pastor.

### Step VII

Candidates ready for service are approved for placement on the pulpit supply list and considered for placement in a church in Salem Presbytery by COM.

### Step VIII

The COM Task Force on CRE Training and Oversight, together with the COM Task Force on Temporary Ministry and Pulpit Supply reviews those churches where a pastoral vacancy exists. If a church is open to the placement of a CRE, the COM Task Force on CRE Training and Oversight submits resumes of eligible candidates who live within a reasonable distance of the church.

### Step IX

The Session of the church seeking a pastor interviews prospective candidates. If the Session wants to call one of those candidates, they notify the COM Task Force on CRE Training and Oversight.

### Step X

The Session of the church extending the call and the CRE, in consultation with the Task Force, prepares the Commissioned Ruling Elder Contract. The terms of this contract are in keeping with this manual and the minimum salary guidelines of Salem Presbytery.

### Step XI

The candidate submits a statement of faith, faith journey, and a sermon to the COM Task Force on Examinations. A meeting will be scheduled to explore all of these attachments in

depth.

#### Step XII

If the examination is successful, the candidate is assigned a minister mentor to serve as a colleague and advisor.

#### Step XIII

The CRE is commissioned by Salem Presbytery. This commission ordinarily includes the approval to administer the sacraments and moderate the Session.

Exceptions to these steps are at the discretion of the COM Task Force on CRE Training and Oversight.

### **Part II: Education**

Coursework for the CRE program can be done through the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary on-line program, through Union Presbyterian Theological Seminary, or other approved institutions or Presbyteries. The coursework typically takes two years to complete.

If the candidate has previous theological training, the COM Task Force on CRE Training and Oversight may evaluate that training to determine if it meets some or all of the requirements.

Coursework includes:

#### Biblical Interpretation

This course provides an introduction to the Old and New Testaments with a broad focus on content, historical background, theology, and significance for the life of faith. The course also provides an introduction to scholarly, practical and pastoral approaches to interpretation of Scripture.

#### Preaching

This course leads the student through the basic steps of sermon preparation: liturgical consideration, text selection, exegesis, formation of a claim, development of a sermon outline and choice of a form, sermon writing, delivery, and evaluation.

#### Christian Education

This course introduces students to the teaching ministries of the church as a means to call and shape disciples. Attention is given to not only teaching in traditional programs such as church school, but to other opportunities, both inside and outside the church, for building up the whole body of Christ in the Christian faith.

### Presbyterian Polity

This course provides an overview of Presbyterian Church (USA) polity, both in principle and in practice. There is an emphasis on the use of the Book of Order as it applies to the local congregation as well as other governing bodies.

### Pastoral Care

This course introduces the student to the caring aspects of pastoral ministry, including biblical and theological foundations of care, the development of pastoral identity, various models of care, and varieties of essential pastoral communication skills necessary for entering diverse situations of crisis and need.

### Reformed Theology

This course introduces the theology of the Reformed tradition which is the branch of Protestant Christianity birthed in the 16th century Reformation and strongly influenced by John Calvin.

### Reformed Worship and Sacraments

This course introduces basic scriptural, historical, and theological principles of Christian worship and the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Focus is also on liturgical practice in the Presbyterian Church (USA).

### Church History

This class examines the history of the Christian Church, with emphasis on the Reformation and development of the Presbyterian Church in America. The class investigates how revivalism, education, foreign and domestic missions, moral reform, politics, and war played a role in the history of the church.

### Additional required training

#### Healthy Boundaries

This course equips ministers to understand the importance of healthy boundaries in ministry and to critically discern the complexities of boundaries in pastoral relationships. This course is offered annually by Salem Presbytery in an on-line platform.

### **Part III: Serving as a Commissioned Ruling Elder in a Church**

When a Session calls a CRE to serve as their pastor, the terms of call outlined in the Commissioned Ruling Elder contract must be approved by the COM Task Force on CRE Training and Oversight. The contract will be for one year.

The CRE contract is ordinarily for thirty hours per week or less. When serving a two-church field, the total number of hours for both churches should not exceed thirty-five hours per week.

A CRE may be considered to be commissioned to pastoral service in a particular congregation to serve as a temporary supply in the absence of the installed pastor of that congregation.

Regular attendance at Presbytery meetings is expected for all CREs unless excused. A CRE serving a particular congregation has voice and vote in the meetings of Presbytery.

CREs are expected to regularly attend the CRE quarterly meetings conducted by the Presbytery unless excused.

CREs fulfill all requirements for Healthy Boundary training and retraining.

CREs are encouraged to participate in at least two continuing education events during each calendar year.

An Elder serving as a CRE in a congregation other than the congregation in which their membership is located remains on the active roll of the church of which they are a member. CREs are encouraged to remain in good standing with the sponsoring congregation.

CREs can be re-commissioned by the Presbytery for an additional three-year period upon obtaining or renewing a valid contract for service with a particular church or churches.

## **Part IV: CRE Annual Evaluation and Contract Renewal**

While Presbytery's Commission to serve as a CRE can be for a period of up to three years, the contract between the employing Session and the CRE is for no more than one year. The contract is reviewed and renewed annually, if appropriate.

Prior to the expiration of the current contract, the Session, the CRE and the CRE Mentor reviews the work of the CRE using the form provided by the COM. Presbytery staff notifies mentors of the renewal dates for CRE contracts. For the evaluation process of CREs to be most effective, the CRE, the Mentor and the Session should meet together in person to conduct the evaluation. If the Task Force determines there are issues with the evaluation, the COM Partner will be asked to meet with the Session.

The completed evaluation form and contract renewal is sent to the COM Task Force on CRE Training and Oversight for approval. Evaluations and contracts are maintained in the personnel files of Salem Presbytery.

## **Part V: Mentoring**

An essential part of the CRE program is the mentoring component. From the time a person applies to enter the CRE program and throughout their ministry they have a minister mentor who serves as colleague, supporter, sounding board and guide.

From the time a person applies to enter the program, during their coursework and preparation, up until the time they receive a call to serve a congregation, the mentor is usually the minister of the CRE's home church.

Tasks of minister mentors before the CRE is commissioned include:

- Pray with and for CRE candidate
- Provide spiritual and moral support during the coursework period
- Discuss and review the candidate's coursework and provide feedback
- Provide additional assignments to bolster student's knowledge
- Assign two sermons for CRE candidate to write and preach, then provide feedback
- Provide worship leadership opportunities and provide feedback
- Encourage the candidate to attend Session meetings and Presbytery meetings
- Discuss what the candidate can expect when examined by the COM Task Force on Examinations.



After being commissioned to serve a church, the COM Task Force on CRE Training and Oversight assigns a minister mentor from within the Presbytery in the general area of the CRE's congregation.

Tasks of minister mentors after the CRE is commissioned and serving a church include:

- Pray with and for CRE and the CRE's congregation
- Meet regularly to discuss concerns the CRE has about their ministry
- Periodically review and discuss CRE's sermons
- Discuss and encourage continuing education opportunities
- Be available for questions and problems as they arise
- Be aware of and proactive in the renewal of the CRE contract and evaluation of the CRE

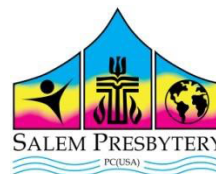
## **Part VI: Performing Weddings**

The CRE may be certified by the Presbytery to perform wedding ceremonies within their congregations. This certification is necessary to properly equip a pastor to understand the theological implications and background of marriage, and also to satisfy the requirements of the State. This training and certification is in addition to the training and commissioning described above.

The training event for certification to perform weddings includes:

- Theological issues related to marriage
- Civil aspects
- The mechanics and logistics of a marriage service
- Pre-marital counseling

**APPENDIX A**  
**APPLICATION**  
**COMMISSIONED RULING ELDER PROGRAM**  
**SALEM PRESBYTERY**



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City

State and Zip Code

Telephone: Home: \_\_\_\_\_ Work: \_\_\_\_\_

Cell: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Present home church: \_\_\_\_\_

Year joined: \_\_\_\_\_ Year ordained an Elder: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_ Sex: \_\_\_\_

Describe your activities in the life and mission of the Church.

Education and training: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Work experience: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I hereby apply for admission to the Commissioned Ruling Elder Program of Salem Presbytery. I understand that satisfactory completion of the training is a requirement of commissioning. I also understand that the completion of the training is not a guarantee that such a commission will be granted.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

STATEMENT OF INTEREST:

Please answer the following question in the space below.  
Why do you want to be a Commissioned Ruling Elder?

## SESSION ENDORSEMENT

The Session of \_\_\_\_\_ endorses this applicant for the  
Commissioned Ruling Elder Program of Salem Presbytery.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Moderator of Session

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Clerk of Session

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPLICATION PROCEDURE

1. Present your statement of interest and application to your Session.
2. Meet with the Session to secure their endorsement for the Commissioned Ruling Elder program.
3. Forward this completed application to: COM Task Force on CRE Training and Oversight, Salem Presbytery, P. O. Box 1763, Clemmons, NC 27012.

**APPENDIX B**  
Personal Information Form  
Commissioned Ruling Elder

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Office Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of CRE training completion: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of initial commission by Salem Presbytery: \_\_\_\_\_

Current church membership: \_\_\_\_\_

Formal education: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Completed CRE Coursework: (attach transcript): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Assignments as Commissioned Ruling Elder to a Particular Congregation: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Type of position sought in Salem Presbytery: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Community types: Rural \_\_\_\_\_ Village \_\_\_\_\_ Town \_\_\_\_\_  
Small to medium city \_\_\_\_\_ Suburban \_\_\_\_\_

Church size: Under 50 members \_\_\_\_\_ 50 - 100 members \_\_\_\_\_  
101 - 250 members \_\_\_\_\_ 251 or more members \_\_\_\_\_

Languages spoken (in addition to English): \_\_\_\_\_

Past Experience: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Service to the church or denomination: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Accomplishments as a CRE previously: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

References: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



## **Appendix C**

### Installation of a Commissioned Ruling Elder

#### Order of Worship

Gathering Music

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

Call to Worship

Hymn of Praise

Call to Confession

Congregational Response

Assurance of Forgiveness

Old Testament Reading

New Testament Reading

Sermon

Profession of Faith

Hymn

Constitutional Questions

Prayer of Beginning

Declaration of Installation

Charge to the CRE

Charge to the Congregation

Presentation of Tithes and Offerings

Offertory

Doxology

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Hymn

Remarks and Benediction (by the CRE)

Postlude



## Liturgy for Commissioning Ruling Elders

### Introduction of the Commissioned Ruling Elders Candidates

#### Sentences of Scripture

[The Moderator leads the people:]

We, who are many, are one body in Christ  
And individually we are members of one another.  
We have gifts that differ  
according to the grace given to us:  
prophecy, in proportion to faith;  
ministry, in ministering;  
the teacher, in teaching;  
the exhorter, in exhortation;  
the giver, in generosity;  
the leader, in diligence;  
the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Romans 12:5-8

Lead a life worthy of the calling  
to which you have been called,  
making every effort to maintain  
the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.  
There is one body and one Spirit,  
just as we were called to one hope of our calling,  
one Lord, one faith, one baptism,  
one God and Father of us all,  
who is above all and through all and in all.

Ephesians 4:1-6

[The Moderator continues:]

Salem Presbytery is satisfied that [names of CRE graduates] have met all the requirements and completed all the preparations prescribed in the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA).

We now commission them to preach and fill pulpits in Salem Presbytery, eligible to be considered for Commissioned Ruling Elders positions for Presbyterian churches within the bounds of Salem Presbytery.

#### Constitutional Questions

Do you trust in Jesus Christ your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit?

I do.

Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the church universal, and God's Word to you?

I do.

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?

I do, and I will.

Will you fulfill your commission in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and continually guided by our confessions?

I will.

Will you be governed by our church's polity, and will you abide by its discipline? Will you be a friend among your colleagues in ministry, working with them, subject to the ordering of God's Word and Spirit?

I will.

Will you in your own life seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, love your neighbors, and work for the reconciliation of the world?

I will.

Do you promise to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church?

I do.

Will you seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?

I will.

Will you be a faithful Commissioned Ruling Elders watching over the people, providing for their worship? In your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?

I will, with God's help

Prayer

Almighty God:  
in every age you have chosen servants  
to speak your Word and lead your loyal people.  
We thank you for these dedicated elders

whom you have called to serve you  
as Commissioned Ruling Elders  
in Salem Presbytery.  
Give each of them special gifts to do their particular work. Fill  
them with your Holy Spirit,  
so each woman and man may have the same mind  
that was in Christ Jesus,  
and be a faithful disciple throughout life.

[All may pray together:]

God of grace,  
in baptism you have called us  
to a common ministry  
as ambassadors of Christ,  
trusting us with the message of reconciliation.  
Give us courage and discipline  
to follow where your servants rightly lead us,  
that together we may declare your wonderful deeds  
and show your love to the world;  
through Jesus Christ the Lord of all.  
Amen.

[The Moderator greets the lay pastors]

On behalf of the Presbytery of Salem  
I welcome you to this ministry.  
May God's Holy Spirit empower you  
in the ministry of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Amen

**APPENDIX D**  
Certification to Perform Weddings  
Commissioned Ruling Elder of Salem Presbytery

Commissioned Ruling Elder: \_\_\_\_\_

Church: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Theological Issues Related To Marriage</b>		
Date of completion	Instructor (print)	Instructor (signature)
<b>Civil Aspects Of Marriage</b>		
Date of completion	Instructor (print)	Instructor (signature)
<b>The Mechanics And Logistics Of A Marriage Service</b>		
Date of completion	Instructor (print)	Instructor (signature)
<b>Pre-Marital Counseling</b>		
Date of completion	Instructor (print)	Instructor (signature)

Approval by Salem Presbytery to perform weddings at the church they are serving

\_\_\_\_\_  
Church

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Stated Clerk

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print