**Presbytery of Detroit**

**Committee on Ministry**

**Policy for Examination**

**of Pastoral Candidates and Other Members of Presbytery**

The purposes of this policy are: to preserve the connection between faith and order in the examination process, to provide a structure for conducting thorough examinations, and to clarify the process used by the Presbytery in examining individuals for membership.

It is the responsibility of the Committee on Ministry to examine each Teaching Elder or Candidate for Ministry who seeks membership within the Presbytery of Detroit. These guidelines are to clarify the nature, direction, and reporting of the examination. ***The examination process for Candidates for Ordination occurs in two steps: the Clearance Interview and the Examination on the floor of Presbytery.*** The Clearance Interview is an action of COM on behalf of the Presbytery. The Examination serves as an introduction to the presbytery and its mission and thus serves to facilitate relationships.

The examination process presents an opportunity in the life of the governing body, not only to invite an individual to offer a witness to the gift of faith but also to encourage the faith of all. The first letter of Peter exhorts believers, “Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence” (I Peter 3.15-16a). While it has been appropriate throughout the history of the church to test those who would be ordained to office, it is hoped that--even at a juncture in our history where passions run high with regard to matters of belief and practice—the clarity of the processes laid out for the presbytery’s approval will invite the body to approach the clearance interview/examination with a commitment to dialog and discernment. We seek to commit ourselves as a presbytery to processes that invite exploration of faith and of fit in a spirit of mutual forbearance and mutual respect true to our calling as a community of witness to Jesus Christ.

This document does not make the claim of being comprehensive. Rather it understands itself to be a continued work in progress in the spirit of the Reformed affirmation that we are a church reformed which is always in the process of being reformed according to God’s Word. We also need to acknowledge that this document will only be as fruitful and helpful as the sustained, sincere, and prayerful involvement of all members of our presbytery.

**The Clearance Interview**

All teaching elders and candidates entering this Presbytery shall participate in a clearance interview. This includes those seeking at-large, other validated, honorably retired, and pulpit supply list status. This includes all non-Presbyterians seeking to serve in Presbyterian settings.

A clearance interview is always conducted whenever a pastor, co-pastor, associate pastor, designated pastor, interim pastor, commissioned ruling elder, are interviewed face-to-face for a position in any of the churches in the Presbytery. This may include temporary positions as defined in this manual (see ***Policy on Temporary Pastoral Relationships***).

Clearance interviews are conducted in order to determine the suitability of an individual with a congregation or to be an effective presbyter. Not every person can serve every congregation or be suitable for every position. To the best of their abilities the Committee on Ministry representatives, on behalf of the Presbytery, seek to discern with the guidance of the Holy Spirit the compatibility of the individual and the position of call.

**Purpose:**

1. To understand an individual’s profession of faith and perspective on the life of the church.
2. To become acquainted with the candidate as a potential colleague and neighbor.
3. To determine, insofar as possible, whether the candidate will be a good match for the congregation and/or a good member of Presbytery.
4. To determine the gifts, skills, and level of participation desired by those entering the Presbytery who may not be exploring a call to serve a congregation.
5. To answer the candidate’s questions about the congregation and/or the Presbytery.
6. To acquaint the candidate with history of the church/congregation and Presbytery.

**Procedure:**

1. The person to be interviewed sends a copy of the PIF, statement of faith, brief biography to the liaison.
2. The COM liaison arranges for the meeting, asking for at least two additional COM members to participate (a former member of COM may be invited to fill the interview team). Every effort should be made to ensure that the examination is composed of both teaching and ruling elders. Each meeting should be opened and closed with prayer. If the candidate is to be ordained, the COM liaison invites a member of the Committee on Preparation for Ministry to be a part of the clearance interview. The meeting is usually scheduled with a serious candidate during an onsite visit with the PNC. The interview usually lasts about one hour. Often these interviews take place at the Presbytery Office, but they can be arranged at other convenient locations.
3. The COM liaison sends a copy of the MIF, PIF, statement of faith, brief biography (and job description, if appropriate) to all participants.
4. For interviewees not seeking to serve a church, two COM representatives are sufficient.
5. The candidate is given a copy of the Minister/CRE Information Form and background check to complete onsite. They are also given the Policy of Sexual Misconductof the Presbytery of Detroit or him/her/them to sign. The liaison is then responsible to submit these completed forms to the Presbytery Office.
6. A report is generated that includes- time, date, location, persons present and their role within the presbytery, questions asked and recommendation.

**Guidelines for Candidate Clearance Interviews**:

The following issues may be regarded as areas and topics for conversation and as grounds for recommendation by the clearance interview team. A list of possible questions can be found in Appendix A and an endorsement of the ordination questions is in Appendix B.

1. Presence or lack of skills called for in the MIF.
2. A match or mismatch of theological orientation between the candidate and the theology reflected in the MIF. If the candidate is to be ordained, particular attention should be paid to the Statement of Faith and one’s particular journey of faith.
3. The following categories should be addressed utilizing questions previously agreed upon by the interviewing team: Bible; Presbyterian and Reformed Theology; Worship and Sacraments; and Presbyterian Polity.
4. Discuss the candidate’s willingness to affirm at this time in their journey, agreement with the ordination/installation questions and an ability to abide by the constitutional standards of the PC(USA). For non-PC(USA) candidates, determine the candidate’s understanding and experience with Presbyterian polity and moderatorial duties.
5. An agreement or lack of agreement between the style and priorities of the candidate and the character of the congregation.
   1. Is the candidate comfortable within the social milieu of the congregation?
   2. Does the candidate’s leadership style match the needs of members, Session, and staff?
   3. Do the personal and professional priorities of the candidate fit with those identified by the congregation as needed by them?
   4. How does the candidate handle disagreements and conflict?
   5. How does the candidate care for him/herself?
6. Assess the candidate’s involvement in his/her current and previous presbyteries and intention of involvement as a member of the Presbytery of Detroit. Would this person be a contributing member?
7. If any concerns or evidence of irresponsibility have been identified in the governing body reference check, they shall be addressed in the interview.

**Disagreements or Reservations**

A disagreement or reservation is a conscientious declaration that there is something in the doctrine, discipline and government of the church with which the person cannot agree, to which the person cannot and does not give assent. Only the person himself/herself can declare a disagreement or reservation. The examining body does not decide when someone has declared a disagreement or reservation, only the person responding. Such person should place in writing to the Presbytery his/her declared disagreement(s). When a disagreement or reservation is declared it will be brought to the Presbytery for consideration. The presbytery should put the following question, “will you nevertheless abide by the discipline of the PC(USA) and the Constitutional Mandates of the Book of Order?” But the judgment as to whether the disagreement or reservation represents a departure from the essential tenets is the judgment of the examining body. The Presbytery has no authority to ordain or install any person unwilling or unable to abide by mandatory provisions of the Constitution of the PC(USA). At the conclusion of the examination, the candidate/minister will be excused from the room and a vote will be taken. When voting on a candidate for ordination or reception into membership in the Presbytery where a disagreement has been declared, the vote is on the person and not on the disagreement itself. If the examination is not sustained the moderator will prepare a summary of the concerns voiced by the committee or governing body.

**Recommendation:**

Once the candidate is excused, the Clearance Interview Team considers three (3) possible recommendations:

YES MAYBE NO

1. If the recommendation is YES:

The COM liaison reports the team’s decision to the COM Chair and to the PNC or other body requiring the clearance.

1. If the recommendation is MAYBE:
2. The Clearance Interview Team informs the COM Leadership and the Chair of the PNC that there was a concern around a specific issue where further conversation may need to be had.
3. If the recommendation is NO:
4. A majority of the COM shall meet either physically or by electronic means within five (5) business days to hear the report of the interview team.
5. The Chair of the PNC should be informed immediately of the negative recommendation and the COM will be meeting to confer. The PNC chair can then expect to be informed of the COM’s final recommendation once it has been made.
6. Among other follow-up actions, the Presbytery Leader, or other person designated to do reference checks for COM, may be asked to do further reference checks with the same or other governing bodies for more information.
7. If the recommendation is NO because of a disagreement or reservation:
   1. A majority of the COM shall meet either physically or by electronic means within five (5) business days to hear the report of the interview team.
   2. The Chair of the PNC should be informed immediately of the negative recommendation and the COM will be meeting to confer. The PNC chair can then expect to be informed of the COM’s final recommendation once it has been made.
   3. If the COM after further conversation or examination with the candidate sustains the NO recommendation, the PNC will be informed and will then discern whether or not to go forward with that candidate.
   4. If the COM, after further conversation or examination of the candidate changes their recommendation to be affirmative, then the PNC can move forward without hindrance.
   5. In such cases, all parties have the right to request to be heard on the floor of presbytery.

**Examination on the Floor of Presbytery for Candidates for Ministry**

**For all examinations:** The Mailed Docket for the Presbytery meeting at which the examination will take place shall include the report of the clearance interview process, a statement of faith and a one-page biographical statement.

The following docket parameters are to be maintained by the Moderator:

1. The Moderator recognizes the COM Chair or designee who introduces the candidate. The candidate comes forward alone and takes his or her place at the podium, next to the COM Chair.
2. The COM chair asks the first question, and the candidate responds. If the candidate is under care of our CPM, the CPM chair may be asked to give the first question. It has been the practice of our presbytery to inform the candidate ahead of time what the question might be.
3. A minimum of two questions is asked of each candidate and the maximum time for the examination is 20 minutes. The Moderator recognizes those who are seeking to ask questions from the floor. They identify themselves by the congregation or ministry they are a part of, and their role – ruling or teaching elder (minister of word and sacrament), and ask the question.
4. If a motion to sustain or suspend the examination is made and seconded, the Moderator calls for a vote. If the examination is not sustained, the examination continues. If the examination is sustained, the following motions may be made by the Committee on Ministry:
   * 1. To ordain the candidate
     2. To welcome the candidate into membership into the presbytery
     3. To request transfer of membership from another presbytery
5. If the candidate will be serving in an installed position, two persons elected by the congregation to present and prosecute the call are invited forward to attest to the congregational meeting at which the pastor was elected, and to describe briefly attributes which the church was seeking and has found in this candidate.
6. The Presbytery votes on the terms of call, and, if available for a previously ordained candidate, the plan for installation.
7. If the candidate will be serving in a non-installed position, the Presbytery celebrates the successful examination with prayer. The Moderator designates who will lead the prayer, and may invite those who are present in support of the candidate to come forward for the prayer.
8. Candidates who will be ordained may not schedule the service of ordination, or ordination/installation, until the Presbytery has acted to approve the candidate. Accordingly, invitations to such services shall not be distributed on an “if the way be clear” basis.

**Presbytery of Detroit**

**Appendix A**

**Areas for Discussion**

This document does not presume to define particular answers as acceptable and others as unacceptable. It is intended to stimulate the thinking of a minister or candidate in preparation for his or her conversation through the examination process. Not all of the questions listed below will be asked in any given conversation, and other questions related to these but not listed here may be asked as follow-up questions.

**Area One: Personal Journey**

* Describe your call to the ministry and what motivates you to stay in ministry.
* How do you balance your life between family and ministry?
* What do you do to maintain your health?
* What would you identify as your passion in ministry?
* What type of work environment do you function in most effectively?
* How do you deal with conflict?
* What do you perceive the major task of the church to be and what do you see as your role in that?
* Do you have any questions for us?

**Area Two: Christian Faith and Spiritual Practice**

* What regular spiritual practices do you follow? Why?
* How would you go about nurturing spiritual discipline in the life of others? Of a congregation?
* How do you see your faith impacting your life?
* As you think about your life of faith, can you identify places or moments in which you were then or are now aware of the movement of God’s Spirit or the working of God’s grace?

**Area Three: Reformed Theology**

* Our constitutional questions ask us to “sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and distinctive elements of the Reformed faith would you describe as “essential,” and how do they impact your life and ministry?
* What do you think is/are the unique contribution/s of the Reformed tradition to Christian faith and life?
* Our constitutional questions for ordination describe the Scriptures as “by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ and God’s Word” to us. What does this mean to you as you think about the place of Scripture in the life of faith? In the life of the Church?
* Who is Jesus Christ to you?
* Throughout the history of the Christian faith, there have been many ways of modeling or describing the atoning work of Jesus Christ. What ways of describing the atonement are most illuminative and meaningful for you, and why?
* What do you understand sin to be?
* What do you understand the biblical account to mean in the description of human beings as “created in the image of God” (Gen 1:27)?
* What is preaching, as you understand it?

**Area Four: Sacramental Theology and Practice**

* What is the place of the sacraments in worship (in terms of both your theology of worship and the placement in the order of service)?
* As you understand the sacrament, what happens in baptism?
* What is your understanding of the Lord’s Supper?
* What is your understanding of grace?
* Describe your philosophy of worship.

**Area Five: Church Polity**

* What expectations do you have regarding your relationship to the presbytery?
* Do you affirm that you will be “governed by our church’s polity” and “abide by its discipline?”
* “What is your understanding and experience with Presbyterian polity and moderatorial duties?” *(for non-PC(USA) candidates)*

**Area Six: Suitability of Call**

* After reading the Ministry Information Form, what do you see as the most crucial points of the life in the congregation?
* How do you see your skills, gifts, interests, and abilities in light of these points?

**General Questions of all Candidates and Ministers**

* Has anything changed since your PIF or Statement of Faith was written?
* Are there any aspects of our church’s Constitution, or any principle or tenet of the Reformed faith and/or polity for which you need to declare an objection of conscience?

By “objection of conscience,” we mean not merely intellectual disagreement but to which you dissent and are unwilling to conform your life and/or practice of ministry to a particular aspect of the Constitution of the PCUSA or Reformed Faith.

* Are you willing to affirm (or reaffirm) your commitment to “be governed by our church’s polity and abide by its discipline?”

***[The above material was adapted from the COM Advisory Handbook on Examinations of Ministers and from several presbyteries on topics for examination.]***

**Presbytery of Detroit**

**Appendix B**

**Endorsement of the Ordination Questions**

I trust in Jesus Christ as my Savior, acknowledging him Lord of all and Head of the church, and through him I believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

I 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 me.

I 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 I will be instructed and led by those confessions as I lead the people of God.

I will be a minister of the Word and Sacrament in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and continually guided by our confession.

I will be governed by our church’s polity, and I will abide by its discipline. I will be a friend among my colleagues in ministry, working with them, subject to the ordering of God’s Word and Spirit.

I will in my own life seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, to love my neighbors, and to work for the reconciliation of the world.

I promise to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church.

I will seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love.

I will be a faithful minister of the Word and Sacrament, proclaiming the good news in Word and Sacrament, teaching faith, and caring for the people. I will be active in government and discipline, serving in the governing bodies of the church; and in my ministry, I will try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ.

Received by Presbytery of Detroit on\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Signed\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_