

**Confederation of Reformed Evangelical Churches
Guidelines and Instructions for the
Presbytery Ordination Exams and Related Matters of Ordination**

The character and situation of one who is preparing for the Sacred Office, are interesting beyond the power of language to express. Such an one, like the Master whom he professes to love and serve, is "set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel." In all that he is, and in all that he does, the temporal and eternal welfare not only of himself, but of thousands, may be involved. On every side he is beset with perils. Whatever may be his talents and learning, if he have not genuine piety, he will probably be a curse instead of a blessing to the Church. But this is not the only danger to which he is exposed. He may have unfeigned piety, as well as talents and learning; and yet, from habitual indiscretion; from a defect in that sobriety of mind, which is so precious to all men, but especially to everyone who occupies a public station; from a fondness for novelty and innovation, or from that love of distinction which is so natural to men; after all, instead of edifying the "body of Christ," he may become a disturber of its peace, and a corrupter of its purity; so that we might almost say, whatever may be the result with respect to himself, "it had been good for the Church if he had never been born."

Hence it is, that every part of the character of him who is coming forward to the holy ministry; his opinions; his temper; his attainments; his infirmities; and above all, his character as a practical Christian; are of inestimable importance to the ecclesiastical community of which he is destined to be a minister. Nothing that pertains to him is uninteresting. If it were possible for him, strictly speaking, to "live to himself," or to "die to himself," the case would be different. But it is not possible. His defects as well as his excellencies; his gifts and graces, as well as the weak points of his character, must and will all have their appropriate effect on everything that he touches.

—Samuel Miller. D. D.

Samuel Miller, D. D., *The Utility and Importance of Creeds and Confessions*, (Presbyterian Board of Publications, Philadelphia: 1839) [reprinted by A Press, Greenville, South Carolina: 1991.]

SECTION 1: THE NATURE OF ORDINATION

Ordination for Those Recognized as Pastors Within the CREC

What is ordination? The ordination of a minister (pastor or teaching elder) is the act of conferring and confirming ministerial gifts (1 Tim. 4:14). It implies qualifications and competencies (1 Tim. 3:1-7, Eph. 4:11). The pattern established in the Scriptures (2 Tim. 2:1-2) is that Timothy was to commit the things he had learned to those faithful men who would be able to teach others. Having established elders in every city, it was also the pattern that this process of succession was perpetuated by those already established in the office (Titus 1). This task clearly requires that a determination be made as to whether a man is characterized by a faithful life and whether he is skilled in teaching others.

The Purpose of the Examination Process

The examination process is designed to evaluate the ministerial competencies of the candidate. Churches cannot rise above the level of the competency of their leaders. Given the responsibilities an ordained man will assume for the flock of God, and the authority that will be conferred upon him, it is essential for us to have substantial knowledge or assurance of these four things before he is ordained to the office:

1. Who the man is [character].
2. What he knows [knowledge].
3. What he believes [understanding].
4. What he will do [wisdom].

The overseer of God's flock must possess the necessary character and skills along with the knowledge, understanding and wisdom in the Scriptures in order to adequately fulfill his calling. He must be able to feed Christ's sheep (John 21:15-17; 1 Pet. 5:1-4); convict those who oppose the faith (2 Tim. 2:24-26); make a good confession before men (1 Tim. 6:12).

The ordination examination process is designed to be demanding. It will take a considerable amount of time and effort on the part of the candidate. Nevertheless, having passed the examination, the *value* of the ordination is increased for everyone involved. When a man is examined and approved by the broader church, several benefits flow from that process that will better equip him for his public life of service to Christ and His Church.

The ordination process seeks to protect the Church by holding back those who are not called or who are not yet ready for the important work of overseeing God's people. When the Presbytery approves a man, it inspires confidence in the candidate, in the local church, in the broader church, and in those outside the Church. It is prudent for the session of a local church to seek the accountability of the Presbytery as a protection to the flock, and it is a good testimony when they do so. Ultimately, the session is charged with faithfully considering the wisdom of the Presbytery and is responsible before God for the ordination of a candidate.

The Role of the Presbytery and Local Church Session

The purposes in the ordination examination process are twofold: first we must examine a teaching elder candidate's manner of life and doctrine and secondly his ability to teach scripturally, along with his ability to provide wise pastoral care. The local session carries the primarily burden of this critical determination, and the Presbytery's role is to assist them in the process. The Presbytery works with the local church and session of the candidate to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the candidate's readiness for office. The Presbytery recommends that the local church session establish a process for the formal evaluation of the candidate in light of the biblical qualifications outlined in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus. These areas should cover:

1. His knowledge of the Bible and theology.
2. His family life, including his marriage relationship, childrearing and personal finances.
3. His interpersonal relationships with those inside the church (not a brawler, ability to work with others, ability to resolve conflicts, etc.).
4. His reputation outside the local church, both with other churches and with those outside the church.
5. His maturity and wisdom (not a novice).
6. His ministerial gifts i.e., pastoral and teaching.

The Candidate for Ordination

The candidate should see the examination process as *the time* for him to put his best foot forward theologically. Both for the glory of God (whose truth he is privileged to represent) and for the assuring of the church (to which he promises to minister), anyone who wishes to undertake the consecrated office of elder-teacher should aim to display the best understanding of the system of biblical doctrine that he can.

The Presbytery will be interested in evaluating the candidate's effort in terms of:

1. Knowledge of the Bible.
2. Theological understanding.
3. Historical perception.
4. Christian orthodoxy.

SECTION 2: THE PROCESS OF ORDINATION TO PASTOR

Ordination Examination Process

The examination process for ordination is divided into three phases:

- a) Preliminary written examination from the Moderator administered in the context of the local church;
 - b) A second written examination overseen by a committee from Presbytery, and
 - c) An oral examination administered at Presbytery by committee.
- I) Phase One: The Preliminary Written Examination (See Study Guide).
- A) After the local session of elders is confident of the proper qualifications of the candidate, they are to make a written request to Moderator of the Presbytery to begin the process of ordination.
 - B) The Moderator, in coordination with the local church, is to set a date for the Preliminary Written Examination and appoint a local proctor.
 - C) The Moderator of the Presbytery is to grade, or appoint someone to grade, the examination in a timely fashion and report back to the church and the candidate (in writing) the results of the exam. A score of 80 percent is necessary in order to pass the exam. If a candidate fails to make a score of 80 percent, the examination must be retaken. A passing score is required before moving on to phase two of the CREC Presbytery examination process.

II) Phase Two: The Written Ordination Examination

- A) The Ordination Committee: Upon the successful completion the Preliminary Written Examination, the Moderator of the Presbytery will appoint a five-member Ordination Committee for the candidate. Each member will be from a separate session. The session putting forth the teaching elder candidate is allowed only one seat on the Ordination Committee. This Ordination Committee will oversee the remainder of the Presbytery examination process.
- B) The Written Ordination Examination is to be prepared and administered under the direction of the chairman of Ordination Committee, in coordination with the local elders. The local session may add questions to the written examination but may not remove any of the standard, approved questions. The examination is to be completed within eight hours, with as many breaks as needed.
- C) The components of the Written Examination.
 - 1) The candidate shall translate a passage from the Hebrew Old Testament (to be selected by the Moderator) and translate a passage from the Greek New Testament (to be selected by the Moderator). The candidate is permitted the use of one Hebrew and one Greek lexicon.
 - 2) The candidate shall write a brief historical and theological summary of 20 books of the Bible (to be selected by the Moderator).
 - 3) The candidate shall write brief answers to the Ordination Questions (included in Appendix A).

III) Phase Three: The Oral Examination by the Ordination Committee.

- A) The candidate shall provide the Ordination Committee the following documents at least thirty days prior to the Oral Examination which will ordinarily take place during the days of Presbytery.
 - 1) A written biographical statement explaining his Christian experience, including an explanation of his call to the ministry, confessional views (including exceptions to his confession).
 - 2) The Exegesis Paper (see the guidelines below).
 - 3) One recorded sermon (in audio format) with a written outline.
 - 4) The Written Examination (of Phase Two).
- B) The oral examination will take place before or during the annual Presbytery meeting and be open to all in attendance (visiting and fraternal delegations). An audio record of the oral examination will be archived as part of the Presbytery records.
- C) At the discretion of the Committee Chairman, the Committee members will examine the candidate within the allotted time. The Committee will use the written work submitted as a foundation for questioning for clarification, assessing weaknesses and strengths, and probing the depths of the candidate's knowledge and ministerial competencies.

Recommendation for Ordination Procedures

At the end of the oral examination, the Presbytery Committee will, by majority vote, recommend or not recommend the candidate for ordination. The Committee will report their decision and any other recommendations to the Moderator of the Presbytery and to the session of the local congregation. If the Committee does not recommend ordination at this time, and the session determines to proceed with ordination against the recommendation of the Committee, then the session is to indicate in writing to the Moderator their reasons for disregarding the recommendation. The Moderator will, in

that case, evaluate the criteria of the session to determine if there is egregious sin involved on the part of the session, and then proceed as per article 4.0 of the Constitution.

Schedule for an Ordination Process

The schedule requirements for this process may be modified by the Moderator. Ordinarily, churches should comply with the following:

1. Churches must request an examination for a candidate no later than four months prior to Presbytery meeting.
2. Phase One of the examination process must be completed by the candidate no later than three months prior to Presbytery meeting.
3. Phase Two of the examination process must be completed no later than two months prior to the Presbytery meeting.
4. Given extenuating circumstances, exceptions to this schedule may be requested of the Moderator.

SECTION 3: ORDINATION TRANSFER AND "RULING ELDER" ORDINATION Previously Ordained Men Entering the CREC

We live in days where irregularity in every aspect of church life is prevalent. The Presbytery seeks to bring regularity and order to the Church. While we believe in the holy catholic Church and therefore accept the ordination of ministers outside of the CREC, it is both wise and proper for their credentials to be examined. It is recommended, though not obligatory, that CREC churches seek the wisdom of the broader church in assessing these credentials. Therefore, the following process is recommended.

Assessing the credentials and views of an ordained minister is not the same process as an ordination examination and is not to be as comprehensive. The aim in examining a transferring minister is to assist the local congregation in confirming orthodoxy and competency.

1. When a CREC church desires to call as a pastor who was ordained outside of the CREC or who is not a minister in the CREC, the elders of the church shall inform the Moderator.
2. The Moderator will facilitate the ministerial credentials examination in the following manner: A Credentials Committee composed of three CREC presbyters will be appointed by the Moderator to examine the ordained man's credentials and confirm his orthodoxy. This may take place at a time determined by the Moderator, in coordination with the local church elders.
3. The Committee will inquire concerning the minister's experience, training, ordination, and doctrinal views. This may be accomplished through a variety of means, including correspondence, telephonically, and through electronic mail, etc. The Committee will, by majority vote, recommend or not recommend the calling of the minister to the local church.
4. The Committee will provide a report of their decision and any other recommendations to the Moderator of the Presbytery and to the elders of the local congregation. If the Committee recommends the call of the minister, the church may proceed with the call. At the next Presbytery, the minister will then be received into the CREC as an ordained minister with a report from the

Committee and an opportunity for a brief examination on the floor of the Presbytery. If the session determines to proceed with the call against the recommendation of the Committee, then the session is to indicate in writing to the Moderator their reasons for disregarding the recommendation. The Moderator will, in that case, evaluate the criteria of the session to determine if there is egregious sin involved on the part of the session, and may proceed as per article 4.0 of the Constitution.

The Ordination of Elders Not Recognized in the CREC as Pastors (“Ruling Elders”)

The CREC, in a desire to assist local congregations, makes the following *recommendations* for their own examination of candidates for elders who are not recognized by the CREC as pastors. These are often called “ruling elders”:

1. The Presbytery is not involved in the process of a “ruling elder’s” examination or ordination. Nevertheless, since all elders are required to perform the same primary function of ruling and overseeing the church as do pastors, a similar standard of
2. Biblical and doctrinal knowledge should be encouraged. Use of the CREC Study Guide and exams are useful tools to assist those seeking to become elders. These may be used in an “open book” exam.
3. It is not the expectation that elders who are not pastors will have the same competency in Biblical languages.

Guidelines for Exegesis Paper (As Required in Phase Two)

1. Three Bible passages will be selected for the candidate by the committee in which there are at least two conflicting interpretations. The candidate will then choose one of them on which to do his paper, selecting the passage they think will best serve to demonstrate their proficiency in hermeneutics and exegesis.
2. The paper is to be typed, single spaced, and no more than 5000 words.
3. The candidate will employ at least ten different scholarly sources in his research that will be cited in the body of the paper (sources such as lexicons, commentaries, journal articles, theologies, specialized books on a subject, books on manners and customs, etc.).
4. The paper should adhere to the following general format.
 - a. Statement of the problem.
 - b. Proposed solutions
 - i. View A
 1. Statement of view & major proponents
 2. Hermeneutical factors in favor of View A
 3. Hermeneutical factors against View A
 - ii. View B, C, D—and so on
 - c. Preferred solution—the last view to be stated in the paper should be the solution that you think has the greatest merit. Again, state the view and its major proponents. List the factors for and interact with the factors against your preferred view, and the decisive exegetical reasons for maintaining your position.
 - d. Pastoral applications—How does the proper exegesis of this passage bear on the lives of God’s people?

APPENDIX A

Ordination Questions

Personal

1. Do you love the Lord Jesus Christ?
2. Do you live in a manner consistent with this profession?
3. Is there anything in the pattern of your life which this body needs to know in order to prevent scandal in the Church?
4. Why do you believe you are called to the ministry?
5. Do you believe that you meet the biblical qualifications with regard to personal character? (1 Tim. 3:1-7, Tit. 1:5-9, and 1 Pet. 5:1-4.)
6. Do you believe that you meet these qualifications with regard to personal ability? (1 Tim. 3:1-7, Tit. 1:5-9, and 1 Pet. 5:1-4.)
7. What is the spiritual condition of your marriage?
8. Does your wife support you in your call to the ministry?
9. What is the spiritual condition of your household? What is the spiritual state of each of your children?
10. What is your understanding of the covenant household, and the varying roles of husband, wife, and children?
11. What is your approach to the training and education of your children in the Lord?
12. Why do you believe Christian education for your children is a necessity?
13. What is your educational background?
14. Describe your relationship with your parents and particularly with your father.
15. Describe your personal ministry.
16. Describe and explain your personal devotional life.

Biblical

17. What translation of the Bible do you use? Why?
18. Which text or text tradition do you follow? Why?
19. Do you hold to the doctrine of *sola Scriptura*? How do you understand that doctrine?
20. What is the difference between infallibility and inerrancy?
21. What is the canon of Scripture, and why?
22. What is your familiarity with Hebrew?
23. What is your familiarity with Greek?
24. What is apologetics? What is its importance?
25. What is the difference between presuppositionalism and evidentialism?
26. Why is apologetics important to a minister of the Word?
27. How would you refute a denial of scriptural authority?
28. Explain and defend your basic hermeneutical approach to the text.

Theological

29. Define and defend the doctrine of the Trinity from Scripture.
30. What is the difference between a communicable and incommunicable attribute of God? Illustrate with examples.
31. What is meant by the economical Trinity and ontological Trinity?
32. What is the difference between the *opera ad extra* and the *opera ad intra*?
33. Why do you hold that the heavens and earth were created in six ordinary days?
34. Why do you believe this doctrine is important?
35. What is the nature and importance of the Creator/creature distinction?

36. Define and defend the deity of Christ from Scripture.
37. Discuss and explain the three Christological offices of prophet, priest, and king.
38. What is the hypostatic union?
39. Define and defend the full deity of the Holy Spirit.
40. Why do you hold that the revelatory or sign gifts given by the Holy Spirit in the first century have now ceased?
41. What is the function of spiritual gifts in the church?
42. Define and defend the doctrines of grace —man's death in sin, sovereign election, efficacious atonement, resurrecting grace, and the preservation and perseverance of the saints.
43. What is the importance of these doctrines of grace?
44. What is justification?
45. What is sanctification?
46. What is glorification?
47. Compare and contrast the covenant of creation before the fall and the covenant of grace afterwards.
48. Discuss the history of the covenant of grace throughout all Scripture.
49. What are the practical applications of covenant theology?
50. What is the foundation for all Christian ethics and ethical theory?
51. What is the relation between the Christian church and the law of the Mosaic economy?
52. How would you show from Scripture that abortion is a sin?
53. How would you show from Scripture that capital punishment is not a sin?
54. How would you apply the requirements of the Fourth Commandment today with regard to practical observance?
55. Why do you believe Christians gather on the first day?
56. What is your view of eschatology? What position do you take?
57. Do you believe in a literal return of Christ at the end of the world, at which time He will judge the living and the dead?
58. What is the future of the gospel in the world prior to the return of Christ?
59. What is the purpose of the church?
60. Do you hold to a presbyterial form of church government? Why?
61. Do you hold to it as a requirement *jure divino*?
62. How many offices of ministry are there in the Christian church? What are they?
63. Do you hold to an official distinction between a minister and ruling elder? Why?
64. Are women qualified to hold the office of eldership in the church? Why not?
65. How should the worship of the church be governed?
66. What is your application of the regulative principle?
67. What is a sacrament? How many sacraments are there? What are they?
68. Explain and defend your position on the baptism of infants.
69. Explain and defend your position on admission to, frequency of, and elements in, the Lord's Supper.
70. What is the reason for church discipline?
71. How should church discipline be practiced and applied?
72. What is your doctrine of prayer?
73. Explain the biblical use of laying on of hands.
74. Are women qualified to be deacons in the church?
75. What is your doctrine of Christian liberty?
76. What is your doctrine of heaven and hell?
77. What happens when you die?

Creedal/Confessional

78. Do you affirm and believe the *Apostle's Creed* without any mental reservation whatever? Any exceptions?
79. Do you affirm and believe the *Nicean Creed* without any mental reservation whatever? Any exceptions?
80. Do you affirm and believe the *Definition of Chalcedon* without any mental reservation whatever? Any exceptions?
81. Which reformational confession do you wish to affirm?
82. Do you affirm and believe the [appropriate confession] without any mental reservation whatever? Any exceptions?
83. What is the importance of confessional Christianity?
84. What is the value of Church history in the consideration of doctrinal views? What is the role of the early church fathers? The reformational fathers?
85. Explain and defend a Protestant doctrine of church tradition which is consistent with *solo Scriptura*.

Pastoral

86. What is your understanding of pastoral counseling? What is your approach?
87. What is your understanding of pastoral confidentiality?
88. What safeguards do you believe should be in place when counseling women?
89. What is your view of the working relationship between a minister and the elders?
90. What is your view on reconciling the demands of the office and the time required to maintain your household?
91. How do you rate your ability to oversee and maintain a church office?
92. How much time do you intend to reserve for study?
93. After considering these questions, do you still believe yourself called to the ministry?
94. Are you in general agreement with the polity of the CREC constitution?

NOTE: Candidates should be prepared to answer questions concerning case scenarios of practical pastoral theory/skills.