

**A-50 EXAMINATION & SCRUPLING POLICY
PRESBYTERY OF HUNTINGDON**

PRELIMINARY PRINCIPLES

- A. Presbytery examination and approval is part of the confirmation of every call and entrance into membership in presbytery.
- B. Presbytery has the authority and responsibility to determine its members.
- C. Presbytery has the authority and responsibility to determine whether a call is to validated ministry requiring ordination as a teaching elder.
- D. Presbytery has the authority and responsibility to determine the suitability of each individual for the particular call or contract for ministry.

I. EXAMINATION OF CANDIDATES FOR ORDINATION AND OR MEMBERSHIP

A. Preliminary steps: In considering persons seeking ordination to the office of teaching elder and/or membership in the presbytery of Huntingdon or commissioning as a commissioned ruling elder in its congregations, the presbytery will take the following steps:

- 1. Reference checks will be done on all candidates at the time when the Committee on Ministry liaison deems is appropriate. Reference checks will be done by both the P.N.C. and the General Presbyter. The PNC should call all the references listed on the Personal Information Form, and the General Presbyter normally will call his or her colleagues or will delegate this task if he or she cannot do the reference check him/herself.
- 2. Interviews will be held with the candidate by the Committee on Ministry prior to the candidating weekend.
- 3. A statement of faith will be provided by the candidate. The statement of faith ordinarily will not exceed one page in length and shall be reviewed as part of the examination.
- 4. Staff will perform a criminal background check.
- 5. A written agreement to abide by the Presbytery's Sexual Conduct Policy will be required.

B. Location of Examination: Persons being examined for ordination to the office of teaching elder and/or membership in the presbytery and ruling elders seeking to be commissioned as lay pastors shall be examined by the presbytery.

- 1. Since ordination to the ministry of teaching elder is ordination for the whole church and because it represents entrance into a community, it is the policy of this presbytery that examination of candidates for ordination to teaching eldership be by the full presbytery.
- 2. Persons previously ordained as a teaching elder who seek presbytery membership will be examined by the presbytery in plenary assembly. However, the Committee on Ministry may, on behalf of the presbytery, approve the examination of honorably retired teaching elders transferring into the Presbytery of Huntingdon from other presbyteries. All persons with scruples will be examined by the full presbytery.
- 3. Ruling elders seeking to be commissioned as commissioned ruling elders will be examined by presbytery.

C. How examined: The presbytery will examine each candidate's calling, gifts, preparation, and suitability for the responsibilities of office, in fulfillment of G-2.0104b. The presbytery does not possess a "right of conscience" that would permit it to violate mandatory provisions of the Constitution.

1. Presbytery, on the recommendation of COM, will determine whether the candidate has a call to a validated ministry that meets all the requirements of G-2.0503a and those of the Continuing Membership Policy of this presbytery
2. 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-4.4003). Presbytery or Committee on Ministry on behalf of presbytery shall be guided by Scripture and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates.
3. The presbytery or Committee on Ministry will also be guided by the provisions of its "Continuing Membership and Validation of Ministry Policy" (A-43); its "Flow Chart for Nominating, Calling and Installing Pastors" (A-47); and its "Criminal Background Check Policy" (A-42) in examining candidates for ordination and/or membership in this presbytery or for commissions as lay pastors of its congregations.

D. Scruples: Individuals being examined for ordination or presbytery membership who are not able or are unwilling to make a commitment to fulfill all the requirements as expressed in the constitutional questions for ordination and/or installation shall submit a statement of exception ("scruple") expressing their disagreement to the presbytery in writing prior to their examination. This statement of exception shall be included in the pre-presbytery packet and shall be given to the Pastoral Nominating Committee and through them to the congregation and session so they are aware of it.

The provision requiring a written statement is to aid the presbytery in conducting its assessment of whether the departure constitutes an essential of Reformed faith or polity. COM will be responsible for notifying persons to be examined of the Presbytery policy sufficiently in advance so as to allow them time to prepare written statements prior to the meeting.

E. Terms of Admission: The presbytery is entitled, and has the authority, to declare the terms of admission into its membership and to determine the qualifications of its ministers and members (F-3.0102; G-2.0502). Teaching elders have membership in the presbytery only by action of the presbytery or Committee on Ministry on its behalf.

1. Each person submitting a statement of exception shall be examined by the presbytery in plenary assembly. Each exception requested shall be considered by the presbytery as to whether it constitutes a rejection of an essential tenet of Reformed faith or polity. The person being examined shall be granted opportunity to defend the objection before the assembly. The assembly may take into account the depth and quality of theological reasoning in determining whether the position taken constitutes a rejection of an essential tenet.
2. Persons who are judged by this presbytery to reject an essential tenet of Reformed faith or polity shall not be ordained as a teaching elder, or be granted membership in this Presbytery, regardless of prior status.
3. So far as may be possible without serious departure from the standards of the church, 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" (G-2.0105). However, in entering the ordered ministries of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the officer chooses to exercise his or her freedom of conscience within the bounds of captivity 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 teaching or ruling elder seeking to serve or serving this presbytery has departed from essentials of Reformed faith and polity ultimately becomes the responsibility of this presbytery.
4. The presbytery may not take any action which binds the judgment of future assemblies in the examination of candidates, nor may it reject a candidate's statement of exception without providing the candidate an opportunity to defend the position or the presbyters the opportunity to weigh the position or its defense.

5. If a candidate's statement of exception is deemed not to constitute a rejection of an essential tenet, the presbytery may yet decline to accept the candidate into membership if the presbytery determines that the exception or other aspects of the candidate's calling, gifts, or preparation make the candidate unsuitable for this particular call or responsibility of ordered ministry in this presbytery. The presbytery has the right and responsibility to determine whether a particular work may be helpful to the church in mission and is a call to validated ministry requiring ordination as a teaching elder. [G-2.0502]
6. Persons whose statements of exception are deemed by the presbytery not to constitute rejection of an essential tenet and who are received into membership in this presbytery are nevertheless required to act in conformity with the faith and polity of the church. Persons willfully violating mandatory provisions of the Constitution shall be subject to disciplinary action. The stated clerk shall record in the minutes any exceptions granted.

II. MINISTER MEMBERS OF OTHER DENOMINATIONS SEEKING CONTINUING MEMBERSHIP IN THE PRESBYTERY OF HUNTINGDON

A. Ministers of other denominations, when applying for membership in the Presbytery of Huntingdon shall furnish credentials and evidence of good standing acceptable to the presbytery and also submit satisfactory evidence of possessing the qualifications of character and scholarship required of candidates of this church. They shall:

1. Present a baccalaureate degree from an accredited college or university and a theological degree from an institution acceptable to the presbytery;
2. Answer satisfactorily the questions on the examinations required of candidates for ordination;
3. Articulate their Christian faith and demonstrate an acceptable knowledge of theology and of the government of the PCUSA.
4. Submit to a Criminal Background Check and sign an agreement to abide by the presbytery's Sexual Conduct Policy.

B. The presbytery shall not waive any of the foregoing requirements except in extraordinary cases, in which the presbytery shall follow the same procedure required of Presbyterian candidates for ministry of whom the presbytery has judged that there are good and sufficient reasons why certain of the educational requirements should not be met by the candidate, and have made an exception by a three-quarters vote of presbytery. The exception and the reasons for it shall be included in the minutes of presbytery and be communicated to a presbytery to which the candidate may be transferred. The candidate shall successfully complete an alternate plan or course of study, which shall be specified in the exception, to fulfill the requirements of readiness to begin ministry. In the case of ministers of other Reformed churches ordained for five or more years, an exemption for some or all of the examinations required of candidates for ordination may be made by the concurrence of a two-thirds vote of the presbytery.

C. The candidate shall be required to have been called to appropriate work in this church. (*See this presbytery's Continuing Membership Policy.*)

D. Upon report from the Committee on Ministry of their compliance with the above provisions, such ministers shall provide a statement of faith and then be examined by the presbytery in their Christian faith, in theology, and in the system of government of this church, and at the discretion of the presbytery in other subjects, and shall answer in the affirmative questions contained in the ordination and installation service.

E. When a minister of another denomination seeks membership in this presbytery, that person shall, before being enrolled, furnish the presbytery with satisfactory evidence of having been removed from the

roll of ministers of any and all other denominations with which the minister has previously been associated.

III. MINISTERS OF DENOMINATIONS IN CORRESPONDENCE AND FULL COMMUNION SEEKING TEMPORARY MEMBERSHIP

A. In Correspondence: An ordained minister of another denomination in correspondence with the General Assembly, whose ecclesiastical relations have been certified by that denomination, who is serving a Presbyterian congregation in the Presbytery of Huntingdon in a temporary pastoral relationship, may be enrolled for the period of this service as a member of presbytery and have temporarily the rights and privileges of membership. Such minister shall be enrolled after the process of examination outlined above for continuing membership and following the guidelines of the Flow Chart for Nominating, Calling, and Installing Pastors, the Continuing Membership and Validation of Ministry Policy, and the Criminal Background Check Policy.

B. In Full Communion: An ordained minister of another denomination, with whom the PCUSA is in full communion, may be called, examined, approved and installed as pastor or may serve in another ministerial capacity in this denomination and may be enrolled for the period of this service as a member of Huntingdon Presbytery with the rights and privileges of membership. Such minister shall participate in the benefits plan of one of the denominations. The congregation or other employing body shall pay the fees, dues, or premiums required by the plan to which the minister belongs. Such minister shall be enrolled after the process of examination outlined above for continuing membership and following the guidelines of the Flow Chart for Nominating, Calling, and Installing Pastors, the Continuing Membership and Validation of Ministry Policy, and the Criminal Background Check Policy.

IV. EXAMINATION OF APPLICANTS FOR APPROVED PULPIT SUPPLY AND NON-PRESBYTERIANS SEEKING APPROVAL OF CONTRACTUAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH HUNTINGDON CHURCHES

A. Approved Pulpit Supply: Non Presbyterians seeking placement on the Approved Pulpit Supply list shall

1. Be ordained ministers whose theology is acceptable to this Presbytery
2. Be certified by the governing body of membership as in good standing and have the permission of the governing body of membership to serve our churches.
3. Submit to a Criminal Background Check and agree in writing to abide by the Presbytery's Sexual Conduct Policy
4. Be examined and recommended by Committee on Ministry
5. Not officiate at the sacraments unless they request such permission and are examined by the Committee on Ministry about their understanding of Reformed theology and practice regarding the sacraments.

B. Contractual relationships. Non-Presbyterians seeking to enter into contractual relationships with Huntingdon Presbytery congregations will by definition be entering into a contractual relationship with the presbytery. Presbytery will be guided by the provisions of its Flow Chart for Nominating, Calling, and Installing Pastors. These will include at a minimum

1. Be ordained ministers whose theology is acceptable to this Presbytery, who can support the mission of this presbytery, and agree to abide by the Constitution of the PCUSA.
2. Be certified by the governing body of membership as in good standing and have the permission of the governing body of membership to serve our church(es).

3. Submit to reference and criminal background check and agree in writing to abide by the Presbytery's Sexual Conduct Policy
4. Submit a statement of faith
5. Be examined by the Committee on Ministry
6. Agree to comply with the provisions of the Continuing Membership and Validation of Ministry Policy for called and installed teaching elders, including, but not limited to, attendance at a minimum of three presbytery meetings per year.

Non-Presbyterians, who are not members of Full Communion Partner denominations, will not be authorized to moderate sessions or congregations. They will only be permitted to officiate at either sacrament if they request such permission and are examined by the Committee on Ministry about their understanding of Reformed theology and practice regarding the sacraments.

C. Commissioned ruling elders: A commissioned ruling elder is a ruling elder who is commissioned to limited pastoral service as assigned by this presbytery. The presbytery will follow the guidelines contained in the Flow Chart for Nominating, Calling, and Installing Pastors, the Guidelines for Commissioned Ruling Elders and Lay Preachers, the Commissioned Ruling Elder Standard Covenant, and the Criminal Background Check Policy. In considering whether or not to grant a commission to limited pastoral service, the presbytery shall determine whether its strategy for mission requires it, and shall examine the ruling elder candidate as to personal faith, motives for seeking the commission, and the areas of instruction determined by the presbytery. [G-2.1002]. The presbytery may at any time withdraw the commission for reasons it deems good and sufficient. [G-2.1004]