

Commissioned Pastor Handbook

This booklet is a compilation of information on the office of Commissioned Pastor. It is intended as a resource for individuals, church councils, and classis leaders as they consider the various ways to make use of this office and the procedures that are involved.

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General Description of the Office of Commissioned Pastor

The office of Commissioned Pastor is recognized in the Christian Reformed Church as a flexible, very localized alternate ordination into ministry. Commissioned Pastor is an “umbrella term” for a variety of ministry positions where this ordination may occur: Evangelist, Chaplain, Minister of Outreach, Youth Pastor, Minister of Congregational Life, and many more. As the Church Order Supplement to Article 23-a says, “The office of Commissioned Pastor is applicable to a variety of ministries, provided these ministries fit the guidelines adopted by Synod 2001 and that the other Church Order and synodical regulations for the office of Commissioned Pastor are observed. These include ministries such as education, evangelism, pastoral care, music, ministries to children, youth, adults and others within or outside of the congregation.”

Ordination to the office of Commissioned Pastor arises out of a local ministry context. That ministry will a) show the need for such ordained leadership and b) create a job description. The job description will then be considered by the classis in consultation with representatives from three neighboring classes (i.e. the synodical deputies). Once all are agreed that the ministry as described in the job description fits the intention of Article 23 (as described by the guidelines adopted by Synod 2001), the process toward ordination can continue. This process involves verifying relevant ministry skills, designing and engaging in a learning plan where appropriate, gathering appropriate documents, preparing a sermon to be critiqued (if preaching is part of the job description), and preparing for an oral exam at the classis level.

It is noteworthy that up to this point very little has been said about the individual to be ordained. There is an underlying assumption that an individual will emerge that can fit the ministry position being created or recognized. All parties concerned need to be in prayer that such a “match” will occur and be affirmed through this process of discernment.

If your local ministry is doing a work that would be well served by the ordained leadership of a Commissioned Pastor, you are encouraged to speak to the classis leadership in your area. If you are an individual who wishes to be used in ministry as an ordained Commissioned Pastor, talk to your local church or classis leaders. Seek out especially the members of an area CMLT. Together as a church we are actively praying to the Lord of Harvest, that workers will be sent into his harvest field. (c.f. Luke 10:2)

Flow Chart Summarizing the Process of Ordaining a Commissioned Pastor

RECOGNITION OF A MINISTRY NEED FOR ORDAINED LEADERSHIP

DEVELOPMENT OF A JOB DESCRIPTION

APPROVAL OF A JOB DESCRIPTION

PREPARATION FOR ORDINATION

EXAMINATION BY CLASSIS

Church Order Article 23 and 24 Statements

Describing the Office

Article 23

- a. Commissioned Pastors shall be acknowledged as such in their calling churches. Normally, their work on the church council shall be limited to the ministries in which they serve as Commissioned Pastors.
- b. Ordinarily, the office of Commissioned Pastors who serve in emerging congregations will terminate when a group of believers becomes an organized church. However, upon organization and with the approval of the newly formed council and the classis, Commissioned Pastors may continue to serve the newly organized church until an ordained minister of the Word is installed or until they have served the newly organized church for a reasonable period of transition. Commissioned Pastors who continue to serve a newly organized congregation beyond this reasonable period of transition must seek the permission of classis with the concurrence of the synodical deputies.
- c. Commissioned Pastors may also serve in organized congregations along with a minister of the Word and may serve as chaplains in institutional settings in the community. Commissioned Pastors who have served an organized congregation along with a minister of the Word may, in exceptional circumstances, with the approval of classis and the concurrence of synodical deputies, continue serving that congregation as a solo pastor after the minister of the Word has left.
- d. Commissioned Pastors may be called to serve as solo pastors in organized congregations if the classis, with the concurring advice of synodical deputies, ascertains that such congregations are from a ministry context where the standards for pastoral preparation required by Articles 6, 7, or 8 are not presently practical.
- e. Commissioned Pastors who desire to serve beyond their specific field of labor must secure the approval of their consistories and classes.

Church Order Supplement

Article 23-a

General Regulations

The office of Commissioned Pastor is applicable to a variety of ministries, provided that these ministries fit the guidelines adopted by Synod 2001 [see p. 6 of this handbook] and that the other Church order and synodical regulations for the office of Commissioned Pastor are observed. These include ministries such as education, evangelism, pastoral care, music, and ministries to children, youth, adults, and others within or outside of the congregation. Before examining a person for the office of Commissioned Pastor or granting permission to install a previously ordained Commissioned Pastor in a new position, the classis, with the concurring advice of synodical deputies, will determine whether or not the position to which the person is being called fits the guidelines adopted by Synod 2001. In addition, the candidates for the office of Commissioned Pastor must have proven ability to function in the ministry to which they are called.

[*Note:* for the remainder of C.O. Supplement, Article 23-a, see page 6-7 and 8-9 of this handbook.]

Church Order Supplement

Article 23-c

The mandate, characteristics, and guiding principles that define chaplains ordained as ministers of the Word are applicable to chaplains ordained under Article 23.

Article 23-d

Guideline for calling a Commissioned Pastor to an organized congregation

The ministry context is ordinarily one in which cultural differences (e.g., ethnic, social, economic, educational, language) between the congregation and its ministry context on the one hand, and the dominant culture of the denomination as expressed in the seminary, other leadership development entities, and broader denominational life on the other hand (a) present significant obstacles to raising up indigenous leadership in ways that are sustainable by the respective congregations and communities, and (b) have resulted in limited – or non-availability of competent indigenous leaders trained for ministry via one of the prescribed routes for ministry of the Word.

Article 24

a. The task of the commissioned pastor is to bear witness to Christ through the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, church education, pastoral care, evangelism, and other ministries in order that believers may be called to comprehensive discipleship and unbelievers may be called to faith.

b. Commissioned pastors shall function under the direct supervision of the council, giving regular reports to it and being present at its meetings, particularly when their work is under consideration.

Synodical Guideline to Determine Whether a Job Description Fits the Office of Commissioned Pastor

The following statement was adopted by Synod 2001 as a guideline for classes and synodical deputies as they decide whether a job description is appropriate for the office of Commissioned Pastor*:

“The office of evangelist may be understood to have the character of pastoral extension. Evangelists extend the work of pastoral leadership by founding and working in new congregations and by extending the ministry of organized congregations into specialized areas, including, but not limited to, youth ministry, education, pastoral care, worship, and evangelism (Cf. Church order Article 24). By the broader application of the office of evangelist, with its existing regulations, to a variety of ministry positions, the church avoids the multiplication of offices and provides a way of recognizing and regulating a variety of pastoral positions in our churches. These positions may be identified by titles that indicate their ministry distinctiveness such as chaplain, pastor or education, pastor of youth, minister of congregational life, and so forth.” (Acts of Synod 2001, p. 506)

* *Note:* In 2001 the office was known as “evangelist”. The title was changed to “Ministry Associate” by the Synod of 2003, and to “Commissioned Pastor” by the Synod of 2012.

Note also that Church Order Article 24 offers some guidelines regarding the nature of the work that can be done under the “Commissioned Pastor” ordination. (See page 4 of this handbook)

The Synodical Services office has received inquiries from Synodical Deputies seeking help in the task of determining what is an acceptable job description. The Candidacy Committee office has received occasional similar requests from classes and local ministries. Synod 2012 therefore added the following statement to the Church Order Supplement Art 23, and to the Ministry Associate Handbook:

Elements of a good job description include:

1. A description of the functions and responsibilities that are ministerial in nature (see the first paragraph of Church Order Supplement 23-a).
2. A description of the supervision and lines of accountability for the position.
3. Specific notation of whether preaching and/or leading the sacraments are to be included in the position.

Qualifications for a Commissioned Pastor

This section of material is found in the CRC Church Order, Supplement Article 23a (p. 47-50), and is intended to give applicants, churches and CMLTs an idea of the sought for qualifications of a candidate for ordination as a Commissioned Pastor.

Character

The Commissioned Pastor is mature in Christ. "Christ-likeness" covers all of what it means to be godly. The following guidelines, which are rooted in Scripture (references are meant to be illustrative, not exhaustive), suggest many aspects of godly character:

1. **Devoted to Jesus** - The Commissioned Pastor is "in Christ" (John 15:5), filled with his Spirit (Acts 1:8), and exercises personal spiritual disciplines.
2. **Committed to the church and its mission** (Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:1-4, Eph. 4:11-13, 1 Tim. 5:22) - The Commissioned Pastor is a person in Christian community. She/he has been tested and proven. She/he has been recognized as prepared for ministry by the community of believers and evidences accountability to it.
3. **Called and gifted** (Matt. 28:16ff, Acts 1:8) - The Commissioned Pastor has a calling from God that is confirmed by the church. That calling provides her/him with a mission, with vision, and with intrinsic motivation. She/he ministers out of giftedness (1 Cor. 12, Rom. 12, etc.).
4. **Filled with love** (Matt. 22:37-40) - The Commissioned Pastor is characterized by love—love of God, love of self, and love of others, including lost and diverse people.
5. **Possesses the fruit of the spirit** (Gal. 5:22-23) - The Commissioned Pastor gives evidence of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control.
6. **Possesses the qualities of an officebearer** (1 Tim. 3:1-13, Titus 1:5-9) - The Commissioned Pastor demonstrates such qualities as being: reputable, loyal, self-disciplined, respected, hospitable, mature, honest, sincere, teachable and able to teach, emotionally stable, blameless, lover of God and not money, resilient, responsible, not quick-tempered, not overbearing, not quarrelsome, not abusive (of others or substances), managing her/his own household well (including spousal support of ministry), risk-taking, flexible, adaptable, etc.
7. **Has a servant's heart** (Matt. 20:26) - The Commissioned Pastor is a servant-leader.
8. **Possesses wisdom** (Prov. 1:1-7) - The Commissioned Pastor lives according to God's design, recognizes Christ as "wisdom from God" (1 Cor. 1:30, Col. 2:3), and seeks wisdom from above (James 1:5, 3:13).
9. **Manages life well** - The Commissioned Pastor practices good stewardship of time, talents, finances, and physical creation (Gen. 1:27-28, Ps. 8:6-8).
10. **Eager to learn** - The Commissioned Pastor is a lifelong learner, ever studying God's word and world (Ps. 19) and demonstrates that she/he has been and is currently being mentored.

Biblical Knowledge

The Commissioned Pastor has a working knowledge of the Bible in her/his native language, and:

1. is able to identify Scripture's main themes (covenant, kingdom of God, missio Dei, etc.) and to locate their place in the redemptive history that is centered in Christ;
2. has command of the divisions of Scripture (Law, prophets, gospels, epistles, etc.), the historical and literary contexts of each biblical book, and basic hermeneutical principles required to interpret them;
3. is able to demonstrate knowledge of key Scripture passages, and to apply them appropriately to life and ministry.

Based on the above, the Commissioned Pastor is able to prepare and preach/teach meaningful and motivational messages/lessons that are true to Scripture. The Commissioned Pastor is able to communicate clearly the gospel to unbelievers and believers.

Theological Knowledge

1. The Commissioned Pastor has knowledge of doctrinal standards and systematic theology at the level of Berkhof's *Manual of Christian Doctrine*. This would include knowledge of Reformed systematic theology, the Ecumenical Creeds, and the three confessional standards of the Christian Reformed Church. Furthermore, the Commissioned Pastor is able to differentiate and defend the Reformed faith biblically from other systems of thought, both Christian and non-Christian. She/he is able to reflect from a biblical perspective on the cultures, circumstances, and events of everyday life and ministry.
2. The Commissioned Pastor has a basic knowledge of church history (including Christian Reformed Church history and culture) and is able to apply its lessons to present reality and ministry.

Skill - Practice of Ministry

Commissioned Pastors give evidence of ministry skills. The skills necessary for ministry are many, and not all Commissioned Pastors possess them in the same measure. Someone in a ministry position will be expected to demonstrate skills in relation to the particularity of her/his position. Commissioned Pastors, whether in specialized ministry within an organized congregation or in new church development, use skills to lead the church of Jesus Christ to fulfill the New Testament purposes of outreach, worship, fellowship, discipleship, and service. Some necessary ministry skills are:

1. **Leadership & Administration** - The Commissioned Pastor is able to help people and the church move from where they are to where God wants them to be. To do this, Commissioned Pastors possess such skills as: casting vision; creating ownership; creating functional organizational systems; resolving conflict; developing gift-based ministries; planning ministry; developing and mentoring leaders; and managing time, money, and people (according to principles of CRC polity).
2. **Outreach** - The Commissioned Pastor is able personally to share (witness); to defend (apologetics) the faith; and to lead the church in reaching out to the lost, in receiving them, and in developing new churches.
3. **Worship** - The Commissioned Pastor is able to prepare and deliver messages/teach lessons (homiletics), administer the sacraments, and lead in worship and prayer.
4. **Pastoral Care** - The Commissioned Pastor possesses relational skills that enable her/him to provide personally and through the church (corporately) pastoral care, visitation, small groups, youth ministry, spiritual counsel, and conduct of weddings and funerals.
5. **Fellowship** - The Commissioned Pastor is able to foster a nurturing Christian community.
6. **Discipleship** - The Commissioned Pastor is able to raise up, teach, and nurture disciple-making disciples.
7. **Service** - The Commissioned Pastor is able to respond to personal and community needs by mobilizing the church for ministry.
8. **Specialized** - The Commissioned Pastor has any necessary skills specific to her/his particular calling within the church.

(See *Acts of Synod 2004*, p. 619 and *Agenda for Synod 2004*, pp. 373-75)

Requirement for Learning Plans, and Guidelines for Examining a Person for Ordination as a Commissioned Pastor

I. Required Learning Plans:

Synod 2013 approved that the following requirement be added to the Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a:

Before a person who will serve as the solo pastor of an emerging or an organized church is examined for a position as a commissioned pastor, that person, in cooperation with classis shall develop and complete a contextualized learning plan, adopted by classis and approved by the Candidacy Committee. Ordinarily the learning plan would include an introduction to the CRC Church Order, CRC history, CRC ministry, CRC creeds and confessions, Reformed hermeneutics, and an introduction to the discipline and art of preaching.

Grounds:

- a. This ensures that those who provide primary spiritual leadership in CRC congregations have been adequately trained in the basic denominational information that the church expects of its primary spiritual leaders.
- b. This enables a classis to have flexibility in the training mechanisms it uses for commissioned pastors, as a given learning plan can include many elements and learning experiences.
- c. This balances local flexibility and contextual sensitivity with a denominational voice via the Candidacy Committee, which is advantageous for consistency in denominational awareness among leaders in the CRC.

The grounds indicate a growing regard that the church has for the office of Commissioned Pastor. Those in positions not specified by this 2013 addition may still be required by classis to engage in a learning plan consistent with the job description that is approved. All learning plans originate at the classical level, with significant planning done by the person involved, and the classis team. In the case of those who fit the 2013 church order supplement requirement, material for developing a learning plan is available from the Candidacy Committee office. (Contact dkoll@crcna.org)

II. Guidelines for Examination:

The Synod of the CRC has adopted and placed in the Church Order a set of guidelines for the examination of those being ordained to the office of Commissioned Pastor. This material is presented in Church Order Supplement Article 23a, p 46-47, and is printed below:

The candidate shall also sustain a classical examination. The concurrence of synodical deputies is not required for the examination of a candidate for the office of Commissioned Pastor. The classical examination shall include the following elements:

- 1) Presentation of the following documents
 - a) A council recommendation from the church in which the appointee holds membership
 - b) Evidence (diplomas, transcripts, etc.) of formal general education and of specialized training in the ministry area to which the candidate is being called
 - c) A copy of the letter of appointment from the church that is requesting ordination of the candidate as Commissioned Pastor
 - d) A copy of the candidate's letter of acceptance
- 2) Where applicable, presentation of a sermon
 - a) In an official worship service, preferably on the Sunday preceding the meeting of classis and in the church to which the candidate for ordination has been called, the Commissioned Pastor shall preach a sermon on a text assigned by classis. Two members of classis shall be present to serve as sermon critics.

- b) A copy of the sermon shall be provided to the classical delegates. In the presence of the Commissioned Pastor, the sermon critics shall evaluate the sermon and the Commissioned Pastor's manner of conducting the entire orship service.
- 3) Examination in the following areas
- a) Knowledge of Scripture
 - b) Knowledge of Reformed doctrine
 - c) Knowledge of the standards of the church and the Church Order
 - d) Practical matters regarding Christian testimony, walk of life, relationships with others, love for the church, approach to ministry, and promotion of Christ's kingdom

The classis shall ensure that the candidate meets the standards of character, knowledge, and skill adopted by Synod 2004 (*Acts of Synod 2004*, p. 619) and inserted below.

The classis shall also ensure that Commissioned Pastors, especially those working at some distance from their calling congregations, will have proper supervision and support for their ministry.

When the Commissioned Pastors accept another call, their ordination shall require the approval of the classis to which their calling church belongs, to which the Commissioned Pastors shall have presented good ecclesiastical testimonies of doctrine and life given to them by their former council and classis.

Standards to be Met by Those Seeking to be Ordained as a Commissioned Pastor

An examination for the office of Commissioned Pastor will require that all Commissioned Pastors meet the church's standards for character and knowledge, whereas the standards for skill competence will relate specifically to the particular Commissioned Pastor's area of calling and expertise.

[See also the continuation of Church Order Supplement Article 23, printed in the Church Order]

Rules and Resources for Commissioned Pastor (Titles, Moving, Retirement, Insurance, Taxes and Salary)

The CRC denominational Candidacy Committee, in its 2007 report to synod, called the church to give the office of Commissioned Pastor “more use, more status, and more support”. This goal was offered in the context of the decision to return to a more historical use of Article 7 entry into ordination of Minister of the Word, and to utilize Article 23 as the route to ministry for those who do not have the academic training required for ordination as Minister of the Word.

Over the past four years the Candidacy Committee has spoken to a number of persons ordained as Commissioned Pastors and a number of leaders of LDNs (Leadership Development Networks which offer training that has equipped a number of those ordained as Commissioned Pastors). In addition, the Candidacy Committee has taken careful note of the comments made at synod during the past four years and the proposals offered on behalf of Commissioned Pastors.

A variety of issues have been identified. What follows is a number of areas in which clarification of the rules and resources pertaining to Commissioned Pastors may be helpful.

1. Title of the Office

Numerous concerns have been raised over the very title of the office that is being used. “Ministry Associate” felt to some to be a “2nd class” designation. The attempt of synod 2012 was to address this experience of discouragement, and to offer a title the would feel more honoring of the work done by these servants.

The Candidacy Committee first reminds the churches that all offices, according to our church order, “differ from each other only in mandate and task, not in dignity and honor” (Church order Article 2). This is a matter of biblical and polity principle for the Christian Reformed Church, and misperceptions to the contrary must be so identified and challenged. Just as the office of deacon is no longer viewed in most circles as a second class elder, but as a distinct office with a different focus than the office of elder, the church must squarely challenge negative misperceptions of the office of Commissioned Pastor.

The Candidacy Committee also would like to observe that “Commissioned Pastor” and “Minister of the Word” are both only church order terms. In practice the churches use a variety of other terms to designate those serving in pastoral and staff roles: i.e. Pastor, Reverend, Evangelist, Chaplain, Pastor of Education, Pastor of Youth, Minister of Congregational Life. The reality is that local classes, congregations, and communities develop their own language to describe both “Ministers of the Word” and “Commissioned Pastors”.

This is in keeping with the intent of Synod, as stated in the Acts of Synod 2001 (506):

“The office of evangelist [term used in 2001] may be understood to have the character of pastoral extension. Evangelists extend the work of pastoral leadership by founding and working in new congregations and by extending the ministry of organized congregations into specialized areas, including, but not limited to, youth ministry, education, pastoral care, worship, and evangelism (Cf. Church Order Article 24). By the broader application of the office of evangelist, with its existing regulations, to a variety of ministry positions, the church avoids the multiplication of offices and provides a way of recognizing and regulating a variety of pastoral positions in our churches. These ministry positions may be identified by titles that indicate their ministry distinctiveness such as chaplain, pastor of education, pastor of youth, minister of congregational life, and so forth.”

2. Moving from Classis to Classis

Concerns have been raised regarding the need for a new classical examination for Commissioned Pastors who move from classis to classis. Those ordained in the office of Minister of the Word may move throughout the denomination without being re-examined, but Commissioned Pastors require a new examination each they take a new position.

It is important to observe that a new congregation, ministry or classis calling a Commissioned Pastor from another congregation, ministry or classis is entitled to such a reexamination, not only as a matter of church order regulation but of principle. By definition, a Commissioned Pastor is ordained to, and judged to be qualified for, a particular ministry. A different church and classis must thoroughly discern whether a Commissioned Pastor is qualified to serve in a different congregation and often a different role. A new congregation and classis contemplating the call of a Commissioned Pastor is only being responsible in making a fresh assessment of a Commissioned Pastor's qualification *for this new congregation and position*.

However, the committee also wishes to point out that the wording of the Church Order allows for classis discretion in this area. Note this statement in Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a:

"Before examining a person for the office of Commissioned Pastor or granting permission to install a previously ordained Commissioned Pastor in a new position, the classis, with the concurring advice of synodical deputies, will determine whether or not the position to which the person is being called fits the guidelines adopted by Synod 2001. In addition, the candidates for the office of Commissioned Pastor must have proven ability to function in the ministry to which they are being called." [Words underlined only for this report]

In practice, many classes have accepted as sufficient the examination of a "previously ordained Commissioned Pastor." In these cases the reputation of that person, the similarity of the ministry positions, and/or the recommendation of the previous ministry and classis have been judged by the classis as strong enough to merit no further local examination.

The Candidacy Committee judges that the reexamination requirement, when balanced with the freedom to forgo the examination under certain circumstances, gives congregations and classes the proper balance of due diligence and flexibility as they contemplate calling a Commissioned Pastor from another ministry setting.

3. Retirement Plans

In current practice, Ministers of the Word as well as Commissioned Pastors need to negotiate both insurance and retirement plans with their congregations and sponsoring ministries. In this sense, "equity" in our policies and regulations in this area between those ordained as Commissioned Pastors and Ministers of the Word already exists.

While the denomination has a retirement plan for Ministers of the Word, local congregations and ministries are encouraged to create a pension plan for those ordained as Commissioned Pastors (and any non-ordained staff working 20 or more hours per week). A number of options are available for Commissioned Pastors and the ministries that support them. In the US these include IRA plans and 403b plans. In Canada these include RRSPs (Registered Retirement Savings Plans). Such plans are "defined contribution plans" (as opposed to the "defined benefit plan" in place for Ministers of the Word) and, in the opinion of many, actually have advantages for the participant because of this.

A suggested contribution to such a plan is 10% of the offered salary and housing allowance, within limits allowed by the law. For the sake of reference it can be noted that the RCA recommendation to churches is 11%, and the CRC denomination, for its staff, contributes 6% of salary plus up to a 4% match for a total of 10%.

Minister Associates and representatives of the ministries that support them are welcome to contact the CRCNA pension office. Contact Sheri Laninga, 616-224-0722 (pension@crcna.org). She will be happy to provide advice and resources in setting up a Commissioned Pastor pension plan.

4. Insurance Plans

As was stated above, in current practice Ministers of the Word as well as Commissioned Pastors need to negotiate both insurance and retirement plans with their congregations and sponsoring ministries. As churches and ministries seek to support their ordained Commissioned Pastors by providing a health care insurance plan there may be local resources and plans that prove to be very beneficial. Information about the denominational insurance plans available for those ordained as Commissioned Pastors can be obtained by contacting the Personnel Office of the CRCNA. Call Becky Gonzalez at 1-877-279-9994 x. 6881; email: bgonzalez@crcna.org.

5. Tax Benefits

Concerns have been raised that Ministers of the Word have benefits with the IRS and Revenue Canada that Commissioned Pastors do not have, or are not aware of. As a matter of fact, in the policies of the IRS and Revenue Canada, ordination is the key factor, not the ordination called "Minister of the Word".

Our denominational office, through the Director of Finance and Administration, John Bolt, is happy to consult with and give guidance to any ministry that wants to know how to best make use of the tax benefits that pertain to their Commissioned Pastor or Minister of the Word. Their material is available on request.

6. Salary Scale

Concerns have been raised that Commissioned Pastors are "under-paid" and "under-valued." The same concerns have been raised for Ministers of the Word. Synod has repeatedly exhorted the churches to adequately pay their pastors. The official letter of call for Ministers of the Word speaks of churches offering salary to pastors "knowing that laborers are worthy of their hire, to encourage you in the discharge of your duties, and to free you from material needs while you are ministering God's Word to us..." Synod spoke to this issue as recently as 2004 when it defined proper support this way: "Proper support of a church's minister is to include an adequate salary, medical insurance, a housing provision, payment to the denomination's minister's pension plan, a continuing education stipend, and other employment-related items" (Acts of Synod 2004, p. 611).

Although these particular exhortations apply to those serving as Ministers of the Word, the principle behind these exhortations also applies to those serving as Commissioned Pastors, especially those in full time service. Since educational requirements for Ministers of the Word exceed those of Commissioned Pastors, it is likely and defensible that the pay scales will vary some between the two. However, this does not justify the underpaying of Commissioned Pastors. The church is called to provide a "living wage" for Ministers of the Word and Commissioned Pastors alike.

Initiatives the Church Can Take to Support and Honor Commissioned Pastors

In its report to Synod 2009 the Candidacy Committee offers the Christian Reformed Church a variety of suggested initiatives to support and honor those serving as Commissioned Pastors. A number of these initiatives are articulated here with the hope that they will spur congregations, classes, and the denominational ministries as a whole to give appropriate honor and support to Commissioned Pastors.

1. Acknowledging Retirement

Our church order has an entire Article (Article 18) that deals with giving honor to those who retire as Ministers of the Word and regulates their care and service. Although it is likely not necessary to make an exactly similar set of denominational rules and regulations in this area for Commissioned Pastors, the Candidacy Committee does believe it would be fitting to honor retiring Commissioned Pastors in some way. Thus, the Candidacy Committee encourages classes to acknowledge and honor those completing service as a Commissioned Pastor when such a person reaches retirement age, or who because of physical or mental disability is incapable of performing the duties of the office. Appropriate announcements can also be made to the rest of the denomination through our denominational publications.

2. Advocate for More Exposure

Those serving as Commissioned Pastors and the ministry they represent are often anonymous and un-noticed. Certainly this is a characteristic of any "servant calling", yet there are opportunities to encourage and support Commissioned Pastors and their ministries that are worthy and proper. Well written articles in the Banner, a celebration at the classical or congregational level, a prayer moment on the floor of synod – all these and more are simple yet meaningful ways that Commissioned Pastors can be supported. The Banner is likely to allow classes to announce the ordination of Commissioned Pastors into ministry in the same way they announce the ordination of Ministers of the Word.

The Candidacy Committee, therefore, encourages synodical ministries, classes, and local churches to make a concerted effort to highlight the work being done by Commissioned Pastors who serve among us, through use of publications and corporate moments of celebration.

3. Creation of a denominational "Commissioned Pastor Profile Information Service"

Those serving as Commissioned Pastors and those who wish to serve lack a formal "networking" mechanism within our denomination. Such a network would be of help to potential and existing Commissioned Pastors, and also to ministries who are seeking such persons. The Candidacy Committee feels this could be a project assigned by Synod to the Pastor-Church Relations Office, which handles the current Minister Information Service, and to the Staff Ministry Committee, which is already gathering information about existing persons serving as Commissioned Pastors. The Director of Candidacy is in discussion with the Director of Pastor Church Relations regarding the feasibility and implementation of this profile and information database. Those interested in the progress being made in this initiative can contact the CRC Pastor-Church Relations office.

4. A Summary Report at Synod

Finally, Commissioned Pastors can be more "honored" at Synod. As Synod's practice of recognizing the candidates for Ministry of the Word each year is a highlight for candidates as well as for many synodical delegates, similar recognition can be given to those ordained to the office of Commissioned Pastor. With the conscientious help of the clerks of each classis, a list could be made each year listing all those who have been ordained to the office of Commissioned Pastor in the past year, along with the task to which they have been ordained. This same report could note those who have retired in the past year. Such a report could be received as information, accompanied with a moment of celebration and prayer for any new or retiring Commissioned Pastors who are present. By doing so we would do a more effective job of celebrating the work God is doing through Commissioned Pastors.

Commissioned Pastors as Chaplains

Church Order Article 23-c states that Commissioned Pastors “may serve as chaplains in institutional settings in the community.” Synod 2003 discussed this use of the office of Commissioned Pastor and gave its endorsement of the concept. Note the statement added to the Church Order Supplement, Article 23-c: “The mandate, characteristics, and guiding principles that define chaplains ordained as ministers of the Word are applicable to chaplains ordained under Article 23.” For more information and reflection on this issue, look at the appropriate report in the Acts of Synod 2003.

Commissioned Pastors Being Called to Serve as Solo Pastor in an Organized Congregation

Synod 2007 dealt with the issue of organized congregations seeking to call a Commissioned Pastor to serve as their solo pastor. Synod decided to allow such practice in certain ministry contexts. The guideline approved by synod as ratified in Synod 2008 reads as follows:

“The ministry context is ordinarily one in which cultural differences (e.g., ethnic, social, economic, educational, language) between the congregation and its ministry context on the one hand, and the dominant culture of the denomination as expressed in the seminary, other leadership development entities, and broader denominational life on the other hand (a) present significant obstacles to raising up indigenous leadership in ways that are sustainable by the respective congregations and communities, and (b) have resulted in limited - or non-availability of competent indigenous leaders trained for ministry via one of the prescribed routes for ministry of the Word.” (Church Order Supplement Article 23-d)

Commissioned Pastors Being Delegated to Synod and Appointed to Serve on Denominational Boards and Committees.

Synod 2007 decided that Commissioned Pastors serving in solo ministry in an organized congregation can be delegated by a classis to synod as a ministerial delegate. Note the following statement added to Church Order Supplement Article 45.b.2: "Commissioned Pastors serving as a solo pastor of an organized congregation may be sent as a ministerial delegate to synod and nominated to serve in other denominational functions where a person must normally be a minister of the Word."

Synod 2013 made adjustments to Church Order Article 23-a, removing reference to Commissioned Pastors as "elders". This same synod made clear that Commissioned Pastors may be delegated to synod and may be appointed to serve on denominational boards and committees, as the following statement was added to Church Order Supplement Article 45.b.3: "Commissioned pastors serving in emerging churches and associate staff positions may be delegated as elder delegates to synod and nominated to serve in other denominational functions where a person must normally be an elder."

Invitation to Share Resources and Concerns Regarding Commissioned Pastors

The Candidacy Committee is very aware that our use of the office of Commissioned Pastor is relatively new and evolving. Although by definition the office has a very local focus and the responsibility for the office needs to remain localized, the Candidacy Committee also believes it may be able to serve the CRC, its congregations and classes by being a clearinghouse of ideas, practices and concerns regarding this office. This handbook is one effort at performing that task. Anyone with further questions or suggestions that may be of benefit to local congregations and classes is invited to contact the Director of Candidacy, Rev. David Koll. He will compile a record of the suggestions and concerns, and pass them along to other ministries as appropriate.

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Invitation to Use the Commissioned Pastor Tools

The Candidacy Committee website of the Christian Reformed Church (www.crcna.org/candidacy) offers a variety of tools and resources related to the administration of the office of Commissioned Pastor. These include forms and instructions for the various routes to ordination. Please contact the Director of Candidacy, Rev. David Koll, (dkoll@crcna.org) if you need any help finding your way to these resources, or if you have any questions regarding the office of Commissioned Pastor.