

Process Guide
for Classical Licensure to Exhort
(Final Draft)
Classis Wisconsin, CRCNA

Introduction:

Church Order Article 43b states *“The Classis may grant the right to exhort within its boundaries to persons who are gifted, well informed, consecrated and able to edify the churches. When the need for their services has been established, the Classis shall examine such persons and license them as exhorters for a limited period of time.”*

Being called to bring God’s Word to God’s people is a high calling and responsibility, and Classis Wisconsin takes its role in this process seriously. This document has been written to help guide potential exhorters of the Word and their supporters in the journey towards licensure within Classis Wisconsin.¹

This process guide is addressed to four different audiences—the applicant, the applicant’s pastor or mentor, the applicant’s consistory, and the assigned examiner who will conduct the classical examination. Please refer to the appropriate section for specific details and responsibilities. It may help to read the entire document to gain a better sense of the overall process.

¹ Please Note: Some of the language throughout this document comes from documents from the Reformed Church in America’s Ministerial Formation Certification Agency.

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To the Applicant:

If you are reading this document it is because you have already begun to explore a possible call to preach the Word of God within the churches of Classis Wisconsin. This call may come to us in many different ways. However you may have experienced God's call, there needs to be public confirmation that you have gifts for ministry in this particular area, or an affirmation that this possibility is worth exploring. When one's sense of call is not confirmed by the encouragement or support of others it is a good idea to continue to discern whether this is a call to exhort or a call to some other form of Christian service.

Therefore, at a very early stage in the process of discernment it is important that you seek the honest counsel of others, including your pastor, a mentor, and other church leaders. They will be able to help you in this discernment process. In order to encourage this process of discernment, we ask that one of the first steps that you take is to have a conversation with either your pastor, a mentor, or a neighboring pastor in the CRCNA. This is necessary because the calling that you are exploring is not a general call to preach but a call to preach within the churches of a specific denomination, the CRCNA. Your pastor/mentor is able to help you discern if your understanding of the Reformed tradition and abilities in exhorting indicate that next steps towards licensure should take place, or if further training may be required. The Pastor/Mentor Recommendation (Form A, which you will find in the appendix), should then be filled out by your pastor/mentor who can continue to play an important role as encourager and advocate.

Following the conversation with your pastor, we ask that you have an interview with your consistory regarding your possible call. Applicants for licensure can only come before classis with the recommendation of their local consistory, and so we ask that this interview be one in which your familiarity with Reformed theology and approach to scripture, your gifts and abilities for exhorting and your personal spiritual fitness are all explored and confirmed. If they confirm your suitability for exhorting, we ask that they fill out the Consistory Evaluation and Recommendation (Form B). This should be sent to the Clerk of Classis.

Checklist of Responsibilities:

- Either directly, or through your pastor or church leadership, inform Clerk of Classis of your general desire to explore classical licensure.
- Meet with pastor or mentor to discuss fitness for and desire for licensure. (If next steps in the process are recommended, Form A should be filled out by Pastor/Mentor)
- Meet with Consistory for encouragement, evaluation and recommendation. (If next steps are recommended, Form B should be filled out by Consistory. Pastor or church leadership should then contact Clerk of Classis to set up date for examination.)
- Meeting or contact with Classis Examiner (2x) to prepare for examination.

- Prepare for Classis sermon and Classis examination in consultation with Clerk of Classis and Classis Examiner
- Once granted license to exhort, fill out forms to ensure annual renewal (available from Classis Clerk)

To the Applicant’s Pastors and Supporting Individuals:

As a Minister of the Word or a spiritual leader yourself, you play a pivotal role in a persons’ process of discerning whether or not they have a valid call to exhort within the churches of Classis Wisconsin. We therefore ask that you have a conversation with the applicant about this possibility. This conversation should intentionally explore the qualifications laid out in church order—whether or not the applicant is “gifted, well informed, consecrated and able to edify the churches” (Church Order Article 43b). If your process of discernment with them confirms this we ask that you fill out the Pastor/Mentor Recommendation Form and encourage them to take the next step of speaking with their Consistory.

As a general rule, the applicant should show a familiarity with the confessional standards of the CRCNA as well as Reformed doctrine at the level of Louis Berkof’s Summary of Christian Doctrine, and should clearly show their agreement with these doctrines.

There may be a case in which you do not confirm these qualities, or think that additional training is required. At this stage it is important that you speak the truth in love. The Consistory and Classis are tasked with maintaining the purity of the preaching of the Word. Advocating for an applicant whose gifts or personal qualities are marginal or inappropriate for this calling may position the applicant to be denied by either Consistory or Classis, which may lead to embarrassment or discouragement for the applicant down the line. This possibility makes the discernment process in these initial stages of the highest importance.

Checklist of Responsibilities:

- Meet with applicant to determine fitness for licensure. (To help determine this, see p. 7 for likely content of the classis examination and p. 9 for sample questions)
- Fill out Pastor/Mentor Recommendation Form (Form A) and send to the clerk of the applicant’s Consistory.
- Continue to act as guide and advocate through licensure process.
- If possible, introduce applicant on the day of their classis sermon and examination.

To the Consistory:

Your role in the process that leads to the granting of a license to exhort within Classis Wisconsin is an important one. A member of your congregation may feel an inward calling to exhort within the church and it is your task to help them discern that calling and encourage them in this process. Church Order lays out the guidelines that such an individual must be “gifted, well informed, consecrated and able to edify the churches.” The Acts of Synod 1984 further state that they must indicate that they “heartily believe and are persuaded that all the articles and points of doctrine contained in the Reformed Confessions fully agree with the Word of God.” We ask that you have a conversation with and about the potential licensee in which you explore:

1. Their familiarity and agreement with the Reformed Confessions,
2. Their gifts and abilities regarding the task of preaching,
3. Their personal qualities and Christian behavior within the life of the congregation, and
4. Whether they have the confirmation of a mentor and others in pursuing this course of action.

If you are able to answer this in the affirmative, we ask that you fill out the Consistory Evaluation and Recommendation form and send this to the Clerk of Classis.

Please be aware that the license to exhort is granted for a year at a time. It will be the responsibility of the Exhorter and the Clerk of their Council to ensure that the proper forms are filled out each year for renewal of the license.

Please also note that following your recommendation to Classis Wisconsin, there are additional steps that must take place prior to an examination at the next classis meeting. Please allow for sufficient time so that the applicant can be best prepared for the examination.

Checklist of Responsibilities:

- Meet with applicant to determine fitness for licensure, following the above criteria.
- If Consistory determines need for the applicant’s service, and suitability of the applicant for licensure, fill out Consistory Evaluation and Recommendation (Form B) and send, along with Form A, to Clerk of Classis.
- Inform Clerk of Classis of your recommendation in a timely manner so that proper preparation can take place prior to a Classis Meeting.
- If applicant is granted license to exhort, ensure that proper paperwork for annual renewal is filled out each year.

The Classical Licensure Exam

Once all of the required documents have been received and are in good order, the next steps towards your becoming licensed to exhort will be an examination at a meeting of Classis Wisconsin. There will be two elements of this examination—the preaching of a 10 to 12 minute sermon at some point during the Classis meeting, and the examination itself, which will take about 30 minutes.

1. The Classis Sermon

The sermon given at classis may be on a text of your own choosing. It is once again important to note that this sermon is for a license to preach within a specific denomination, the CRCNA, and one of the tasks of the delegates to Classis is to discern if your perspective is in line with the CRCNA's confessions, approach to Scripture, and theological perspectives. They are to determine if you are preaching a “sound Biblical message”. Here are some criteria that should guide your preparation and preaching.

The sermon should:

1. **Be in thorough agreement with Reformed theology and the confessions.** There should be nothing within your sermon that would cause people to question your understanding or loyalty to core Reformation perspectives.
2. **Be Christ-centered and not exemplary or moralistic.** Christ is at the center of Scripture and he should be at the center of your sermon as well. The sermon should steer clear of any application that is not firmly grounded on the finished work of Christ as savior.
3. **Be Redemptive Historical** (Awareness of the “big picture” of Scripture). If possible, the sermon should show how the particular passage being preached on fits within the scope of the larger story of scripture.
4. **Show a proper distinction between Law and Gospel.** The sermon should not be a sanctified self-help speech simply urging us to try harder. If that was all that humanity needed, Christ would not have come. If possible, it should show how “law” reveals to us our need for Christ, and how obedience is an outworking of our gratitude for what Christ has done.
5. **Be textually based.** The sermon should flow from a careful exegesis of the actual text. The text must not simply be a hook that the exhorter hangs the sermon on.
6. **Reflect an awareness of genre and context.** The sermon should show sensitivity towards how the specific genre of Scripture that the passage is written in (epistle, poetry, apocalyptic) should be interpreted, as well as an understanding of how its context helps to reveal its meaning.

7. **Be clear and organized in terms of its structure and application.** Listeners should not be confused as to the points that the exhorter is making or what the exhorter is calling them to do or to believe.
8. **Be engaging in terms of its presentation.** The sermon should be preached well, with good eye contact, proper inflection and intonation, and good use of illustration when appropriate.

2. **The Classis Examination**

The other element of examination at Classis is the examination itself. The guidelines are that this examination should take about a half hour and focus primarily on your ability to deliver a sound Biblical message and lead worship. The Clerk of Classis will inform you as to who your examiner will be in advance of the classis meeting.

Your examiner should meet or make contact with you at least twice prior to the Classis meeting to give you a sense of what you will be examined on. It is left up to the discretion of each individual examiner whether they will give you the actual questions that they intend to ask you or will instead give a general sense of what topics they might explore with you. Some of the main topics that will most likely be explored will be:

1. An awareness of, and agreement with, Reformed Confessions and doctrine
2. Familiarity with the main themes of Scripture (covenant, kingdom of God, etc.)
3. Awareness of Reformed interpretation of various key passages in Scripture
4. Clear articulation and understanding of the gospel
5. Familiarity with various books of the Bible—their content, structure and their connection to the overarching message of Scripture
6. Understanding of the basic principles of exegesis and interpretation.
7. Awareness of how to craft and deliver a sermon.

Please remember that this is a true examination and not just a formality. Classis has the responsibility of making sure that all who hold a license to exhort are properly prepared and take the awesome responsibility of preaching God’s word seriously. There is the real possibility of failure and so we encourage you to adequately prepare.

At the end of this document you will find some sample questions given to potential examiners that might help you in your preparation.

Please also know that at every step of this process we are seeking to “set you up for success” when it comes to your examination and eventual licensure! If at any time prior to the examination you do not feel that you have had enough contact with your examiner or are not adequately prepared, please contact the Clerk of Classis and your examination can be postponed or adjusted as necessary.

Guidelines for Classical Examiners

As a Minister of the Word and Sacrament in the CRCNA and as a member of Classis Wisconsin, one of your responsibilities is to aid in the examination of applicants for licensure. In Classis Wisconsin we wish all Ministers to take regular turns in participating in such examinations so that the burden can be shared and not left to a few pastors. We understand that ministry is often hectic and consuming, and at the same time want to underscore the crucial role that you play as an examiner in bringing about a positive outcome in this process.

Key to that positive outcome is ensuring that the applicant is properly prepared prior to the examination itself. This is a journey that has weighed heavily on the heart of the person being examined for a long period of time and we ask that you approach it with that same level of gravity and diligence.

To help ensure that, we recommend that you meet with the applicant twice prior to the examination itself as promptly as possible once you are assigned to them. If for some reason you are not able to meet face to face, we still encourage you to have at least two substantial conversations with them in another format. In these conversations you should:

1. Explain the specific process of the examination that will take place,
2. Do a prior evaluation of the applicant's theological and practical proficiency when it comes to the task of preaching in a church in the Reformed tradition and
3. Encourage the applicant in their spiritual journey and pray with them.

Some pastors give the applicants the questions that they will ask them prior to the examination itself. Discussing these questions together is a clear way of discerning the applicant's level of preparedness and allows "red flags" to be dealt with in a private rather than a public setting. Others simply let the applicants know the general categories of the questions that they will be asking. We leave this to your own discretion, and ask only that you give enough time and focus to the process so that the applicant is adequately prepared. A poor examination reflects not only on the applicant but the examiner themselves.

The examination itself should take about 30 minutes, and deal with the general categories mentioned in the section above. Personal introductions take place prior to the examination

itself as the pastor introduces the applicant, so please keep your own questions, as much as possible, to the specific topics relevant to licensure.

As stated before, we leave the specific questions up to your discretion and ask only that they adequately reflect the necessary categories above. To help you in your own preparation a list of sample questions is included at the end of this document.

Checklist of Responsibilities:

- Contact with the applicant as soon as possible. Determine if they have any questions or concerns about the process. Encourage them and pray with them.
- Attempt to meet, or have substantial conversations with the applicant, at least twice. Allow plenty of time prior to the Classis examination in case concerns or issues arise.
- Prepare the applicant for the content of the classis examination either through discussing specific questions with them or general categories in which they will be examined. A list of sample questions is provided below.
- Contact Clerk of Classis if there are any concerns or issues that arise.
- Conduct the examination at the classis meeting, following the criteria listed above. (see p. 7)

Sample Questions

A person called to exhort within Classis Wisconsin must be...

"Well Informed"

1. If someone asked you in a sentence what it meant to be a Reformed Christian, what would you tell them?
2. What are the three forms of unity and give us a brief summary of each? Are you committed to these and believe that they fully agree with the Word of God?
3. What are the "Five Points of Calvinism" and can you give us a short definition of each of them? Which one have you struggled the most to understand?
4. What is meant in the Reformed tradition when we are called a word centered people?
5. What's meant by the authority of scripture? What's meant by the clarity of scripture?
6. What is meant by the Reformed doctrine of Sola Scriptura?
7. Our approach to the Scriptures is called a redemptive historical approach, can you describe that for us?
8. What's the idea of the Biblical covenant and how does that work out through Scripture?
9. Describe the kingdom of God and how it develops through Scripture?
10. What is the difference between the kingdom and the church?
11. What does the Bible teach about the image of God in humanity?
12. What's the Reformed doctrine of sin? Why is it important? How does it connect with what you do as a preacher of the Word?
13. What is the gospel?
14. Describe how you might lead someone who is not a Christian through Scripture to give them an understanding of God's plan of salvation.
15. What is the relationship between gratitude and the Christian life?
16. Can you list some different genres of Scripture and give us examples of each?
17. What's the message or theme of the Book of Revelation? Genesis? Leviticus? Romans?
18. What's the difference in audience, message and purpose among the four gospels?
19. Where in Scripture might you find the doctrine of justification by faith?
20. Where in Scripture might you find the doctrine of unconditional election?
21. What's the role of the Holy Spirit in preaching?

22. What's the relationship between the Old and New Testaments?

23. What is general revelation and special revelation and what is the relationship between the two?

"Consecrated"

1. Can you give us some examples of effective ministry that you've been involved in previously?
2. Please tell us about your own devotional life and the spiritual disciplines that you practice.
3. Please describe your practice of prayer.
4. What books have you been reading lately to help you continue to grow as a Christian and as an exhorter of God's word?

"Gifted" and "Able to Edify the Churches"

1. How have others encouraged you to take this step of service to the church?
2. What commentaries and helps do you use as part of preparing for a sermon?
3. Please walk us through your process of preparation for a sermon.
4. What are the characteristics of a Reformed perspective of worship?
5. What are your priorities in leading worship?
6. How do you intend to get feedback as to your work as an exhorter of God's word? What are some other ways that you will seek to grow in this area?

A Note on Trying Again

As has been stated earlier, the intent of this process guide is to help ensure a successful outcome for those seeking licensure. That being said, this may not always be the case. There may be various reasons why an examination is not sustained by Classis, ranging from unfamiliarity or confusion regarding points of Reformed doctrine to a lack of preparation on the part of either the examiner or the examinee.

It is understood that such an outcome may be personally difficult for the individual being examined. At the same time, however, it need not be considered the final outcome of the process. *As a general rule*, Classis invites those who may not have sustained an initial examination to a process of re-application and re-examination at a future date.

Such an individual should still be considered as being “under care” by the leadership of Classis, and as such the following process of remediation and care should be followed:

1. An attempt should be made prior to the applicant leaving the Classis meeting to arrange a meeting between themselves, their mentor, representatives of the Classical Interim Committee or the Classis Ministry Leadership Team, and possibly the examiner. The purpose of the meeting is to
 - a. Offer pastoral care and support,
 - b. Discuss what specifically might have led to the examination not being sustained, and
 - c. Give the applicant an understanding of possible next steps.
2. Reapplication is not always recommended. It may be, for instance, that the examination revealed differences with Reformed theology that the applicant is not willing to reconsider. If it is the case, however, that the issue is a matter of further training or education, then the CMLT, in consultation with the applicant’s mentor, should

recommend a specific course of study that may lead to a more positive outcome. If they have not already done so, applicants are also encouraged to take part in the Classical Leadership Development Network.

3. Re-applicants are ordinarily encouraged to re-apply a year following their last classical examination. However, prior to the scheduling of their examination, representatives of the CIC or the CLMT should meet with the applicant and their mentor to ensure that the learning plan has been carried out.
4. This process of re-application is not intended to be indefinite. If the individual does not sustain a second examination, Classis invites them to discern, with their mentor, a different way in which God may be calling them to serve.

**Pastor/Mentor Recommendation Form
(Form A)**

_____, who is a member of _____ Church, has talked with me about their interest in obtaining a license to exhort in Classis Wisconsin.

Knowing that Church Order Article 43b states that such an individual must be “gifted, well informed, consecrated and able to edify the churches” and that Acts of Synod 1984 further state that they “heartily believe and are persuaded that all the articles and points of doctrine contained in the Reformed Confessions fully agree with the Word of God”, I testify that in my conversation with them that they have clearly shown these qualities, and therefore wholeheartedly recommend them to their Consistory and to Classis Wisconsin as a potential applicant.

Signature _____

Date _____

**Consistory Evaluation and Recommendation Form
(Form B)**

Church Order Article 43b states *“The Classis may grant the right to exhort within its boundaries to persons who are gifted, well informed, consecrated and able to edify the churches. When the need for their services has been established, the Classis shall examine such persons and license them as exhorters for a limited period of time.”*

Your consistory plays an important role in conforming the gifts of a potential applicant and determining the need for their services. Please have a conversation with and about them based on some of the following questions.

1. What are the indications of a vital faith in Christ?
2. How is the applicant expressing that faith through active participation in the worship and ministry of the local church?
3. What motivates the applicant’s desire to obtain a license to exhort?
4. What current or potential strengths or gifts for ministry are evident?
5. Are these gifts being used and bearing fruit?
6. Do they have a love for and a thorough knowledge of Reformed theology as summarized in the confessions of our churches?
7. Do they have confirmation from a mentor and family members in pursuing this course of action?

The Consistory of _____ Church in _____,
met with _____ in order to determine their fitness as a potential

exhorter within Classis Wisconsin. We wholeheartedly recommend them to Classis Wisconsin as a potential applicant.

We have determined the need for their services based on the following criteria:

_____ To supplement or support the work of the Pastor and ministry at large in our context.

----- Other (please specify)

(council chair's signature)

(clerk's signature)

(date)