



Commission on Ministry Manual of Operation

COM Approved: April 10, 2025

POJ Approved: June 10, 2025

I. Introduction

Pastors and congregations come into relationship with expectations and assumptions but little knowledge of one another. The effectiveness of their ministry together depends greatly on how well they build a relationship of understanding, appreciation, and trust. The aim of the Commission on Ministry, with God's help, is to be steadfast in creating healthy ministries through healthy relationships.

a. Membership

The Commission on Ministry (COM) shall consist of equal numbers of ruling elders and teaching elders. The specific composition It shall consist of

- a ruling elder and a teaching elder from each nominating region,
- a moderator and vice moderator,
- and as many as seven ruling elders and seven teaching elders serving as members-at-large.

b. Work/Role of the COM

- The responsibilities of the Commission on Ministry are to foster healthy ministries in the congregations of the Presbytery. The primary responsibilities include:
- to serve as pastor and counselor to the Presbytery's Ministers of Word and Sacrament (Teaching Elders, including Commissioned Ruling Elders and those in other validated ministries).
- to facilitate the relationship between the Presbytery and congregations, Ministers, and the Presbytery, and between congregations when yoking, merging, or utilizing the parish model.
- to enforce terms for Call Installed, Covenant Pastors, Designated Pastors, Interim/Transitional, and Certified Christian Educators.
- to receive and review Mission Study Reports.

- to authorize the formation of Pastor Nominating Committees (PNC) and Associate Pastor Nominating Committees (APNC).
- to review in consultation with the Stated Clerk;
 - Boundary Training Curriculum for the Presbytery of the James (POJ).
 - Review submitted Ministry Discernment Profiles (MDP)
- to settle difficulties on behalf of Presbytery when possible and expedient.
- to keep confidential all matters discussed in COM and its committees.

c. Permissions Granted to the COM

- Examining and receiving into membership ministers of the Word and Sacrament: To examine and receive into membership ministers of the Word and Sacrament seeking admission into the presbytery, including approval of terms of call and commissions for ordination and installation, and to approve temporary pastoral relations.
- Granting change of status and validating ministries: To grant a change of status for ministers of the Word and Sacrament to the status of retired or member at large, and to validate ministries outside of a congregation.
- Examining candidates for ordination: Once the COM grants approval, planning for the ordination and /or installation service may begin. The service, however, is not permitted until after the approved candidate is presented to the Presbytery at its next stated meeting or at a call meeting. At this meeting, the candidate will be presented for Presbytery's approval without examination on the floor.
Link: [Ordination Examination in the POJ Next Steps](#)
- Acting on behalf of Presbytery, in particular matters: To dissolve the pastoral relationship in cases where the congregation and pastor concur; to grant permission to labor within or outside the bounds of the presbytery (G-3.0306); to request the stated clerk to dismiss ministers to other presbyteries, with the provision that all such actions be reported to the next stated meeting of the presbytery.
- To appoint moderators of sessions.
Link: [Guidelines to appointing Session Moderators](#)
- To appoint co-opted members to the various committees of COM: Co-opted members service shall cease when the COM reaches full membership.

Link: [Guidelines for Co-opted Members](#)

- To appoint Administrative Commission for conflict; (Nov 2023) Visiting particular congregations over which the presbytery has immediate jurisdiction reported to be affected with disorder, and inquiring into and settling the difficulties therein [G-3.0109b(5)].
Link: [Administrative Commission Guidelines](#)
- To set aside ordination: Ordination is the act by which the church sets apart leaders to serve in particular offices. The Presbytery is responsible for the ordination of teaching elders. The COM is responsible for setting aside ordination when appropriate.
- See References: *[Book of Order: G-2.0507 and G-2.0509](#)*

d. Structure of the COM

The COM accomplishes these responsibilities through Liaisons and Committees.

- 1. Liaisons:** The Commission on Ministry (COM) shall appoint liaisons for each congregation to facilitate communications and conversations between the congregation and the Presbytery. These ruling or teaching elders, who are currently members of the COM, are an embodiment of the aim for healthy pastors, congregations, and healthy relationships.

Link: [Responsibilities of Liaisons](#)

- 2. Committees:** The Commission on Ministry (COM) comprises five committees. The purpose of the committees is as follows

Administration and Pastoral Care Committee

The purpose of the Administration and Pastoral Care Committee (APCC) of COM is to review and make recommendations concerning various administrative functions (i.e., retired status, review of annual changes in terms of call, reports from validated ministries, reports from Ministers/Members-at-Large, Pastoral Care Fund, changes in minimum compensation, and Board of Pension matters). Additionally, the APCS is responsible for providing pastoral care for minister members, certified educators, and their families, within the Presbytery of the James and overseeing the assignment and work of the appointed Liaisons. Note: 1. Receive Exit Interviews (Liaison conduct) 2. Receive Covenants of Closures (Liaison get signed) 3. Acknowledgement of Retirement on the floor of the Presbytery.

Link: [Pastoral Care Discretionary Fund Policy](#)

Church and Pastor Relations Committee

The purpose of the Church and Pastor Relations Committee (CPR) supports the development of healthy pastors and congregations through coaching, training and educational events. CPR has the responsibility to work within churches, and between congregations and pastors who are in some degree of conflict. The formal involvement of a team of persons, known as Listening Teams (appointed by CPR), is for the purpose of establishing healthy communication and the resolution of the conflict in partnership with the session. In cases where the conflict cannot be resolved, the Listening Team through CPR and the Commission on Ministry may form an Administrative Commission.

Link: [*Listening Team Guidelines*](#)

Link: [*Severance Policy*](#)

Link: [*Coaching Policy Guidelines and Application*](#)

Commissioned Ruling Elder Committee

The purpose of the Commissioned Ruling Elder Committee is to support and advise candidates seeking to become Commissioned Ruler Elders (CRE's). This committee is also to receive and dismiss CRE's, to supervise the process by which churches secure the service of CRE's, and to help resolve difficulties between pastors and churches. This is not a constitutional committee but strives to maintain excellent relationships and support of all of our CRE's across the churches of the POJ.

Link: [*Commissioned Ruling Elders Handbook*](#)

Examinations Committee

The purpose of the Examinations Committee is to examine candidates for suitability for installed and designated positions, chaplains, and for any other position in which the candidate is not already a member of presbytery. Examinations shall occur prior to ordination and/or installation into these positions. Candidates cannot start a position until the examination takes place and is approved by COM. The decisions of said examinations are to be recommended by the Committee to the COM for action.

Link: [*Examinations Full Committee Description*](#)

Link: [*Examinations Committee Workflow*](#)

Documents for Examination Preparations

Link: [*Guidelines for a Statement of Faith*](#)

Link: [*Examinations Questions*](#)

Documents post Examination

Link: [Expectations for Faithfulness in Ministry](#)

Link: [Minister Information Form](#)

Link: [Sexual Misconduct/Harassment Policy](#)

Link: [Coaching Policy Guidelines and Application](#)

Link: [Ordination Examination Next Steps in the POJ](#)

Link: [Ordination and Installation Commission Guidelines 2022](#)

Documents for Churches

Link: [Terms of Call](#)

Link: [Report of the PNC to the Examinations Committee](#)

Link: [Report of the IPNC to the Examinations Committee](#)

Transitional Relations Committee

The purpose of the Transitional Relations Committee (TRC) is to oversee the work of all temporary pastoral relationships, including interviews of members of presbytery for suitability. These include Bridge Pastor, Covenant Pastor, Transitional/Interim Pastor, Shared Pastoral Leadership, Parish Associate, Commissioned Ruling Elder (in direct consultation with CRE committee), and Pulpit Supply. Additionally, TRC also appoints Session moderators as requested and receives Transitional/Interim quarterly reports.

II. Pastoral Relationships

There are two kinds of pastoral relationships recognized by the *Book of Order*: installed and temporary. In the Presbytery of the James, we refer to these as Installed, Designated, Temporary, Other, and Non-Pastoral.

a. Installed Relationships

1. Installed

Installed Pastoral relationships include that of pastor, co-pastor, and associate pastor. These positions are established by vote of the congregation and presbytery's Commission on Ministry. They are installed by presbytery. Teaching elders who are new to ministry and/or come from another Presbytery are required to participate in the New Professionals Orientation and Retreat. When a congregation has two pastors serving as co-pastors, and the relationship of one of them is dissolved, the other remains as pastor. The relationship of an associate pastor to a congregation is not dependent upon that of a pastor. An associate pastor is ordinarily not eligible to be the next installed pastor of that congregation.

The terms of call shall always meet or exceed any minimum requirement of the presbytery in effect when the call is made. The session shall review annually the minister's terms of call and shall propose for congregational action (G-1.0501) such changes as the session deems appropriate, provided that they meet the presbytery's minimum requirements. The call shall include provision for a minimum of twelve weeks paid family medical

leave, a sabbatical plan meeting the POJ guidelines, and participation in the benefits plan of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), including both pension and medical coverage, or any successor plan approved by the General Assembly.

Link: [Minimum Compensation Guidelines](#)

Link: [Family Medical Leave Policy](#)

[Book of Order Reference](#)

Link: [Pastoral Call Form for Called and Installed Positions](#)

Link: [Sabbatical Policy](#)

2. Designated Pastors

A Designated Pastor is a minister of Word and Sacrament. A designated pastoral relationship, full or part time, is a call to a teaching elder established by the Presbytery for a term of not less than three nor more than five years. Ordinarily in the Presbytery of the James, designated pastor terms are written for terms of three years. The term is not renewable but may be converted from designated pastor to pastor after two (2) years. The designated pastor relationships are only those of pastor, associate pastor, or co-pastor. The POJ staff and/or COM works closely with the DPNC search committee and attends all of their meetings and helps in the entire process.

Link: [Designated Pastor's Policy](#)

Link: [Minimum Compensation Guidelines 2025](#)

Link: [Family Medical Leave Policy](#)

[Book of Order Reference](#)

Link: [Pastoral Call Form for Called and Installed Positions](#)

Link: [Sabbatical Policy](#)

b. Temporary Relationships

Temporary pastoral relationships (G-2.0504b) are approved by the presbytery and do not carry a formal call or installation. When a congregation does not have a pastor, or while the pastor is unable to perform her or his duties, the session, with the approval of presbytery, may obtain the services of a teaching elder, candidate, or commissioned ruling elder in a temporary pastoral relationship. No formal call shall be issued, and no formal installation shall take place.

The presbytery has determined the titles and terms of service. A person serving in such a relationship is extended a covenant by the Session and invited for a specified period, not to exceed twelve months, which is renewable with the approval of the COM. A teaching elder employed in a temporary pastoral relationship is ordinarily not eligible to serve as the next installed pastor, co-pastor, or associate pastor unless approved by three-quarters of the members of the presbytery present and voting.

The Presbytery of the James has defined these specific temporary pastoral relationships as

1. Bridge Pastor (NEW)

A Bridge Pastor serves for a brief span of time between the departure of one pastor and the calling of another pastor. Sometimes the departure of the previous pastor is sudden, unexpected, or unwelcomed. If so, a bridge pastor tends to the grief of the people, providing a non-anxious leadership presence. The Bridge pastor can come in directly after the pastor leaves or after the interim leaves until the new pastor is called. The Bridge Pastor covenant is not required to meet Presbytery minimum for salary or leave. There is a 6-month term limit. Note: The Bridge Pastor's covenant is not renewable.

Link: [Pastoral Covenant for Temporary Positions](#)

Link: [Relations of Former Pastors to Congregations](#)

2. Covenant Pastor

A Covenant Pastor is a minister serving a congregation which is not currently seeking an installed pastor. A Covenant Pastor is a teaching elder hired by the Session in consultation with and approval by the COM, to perform the functions of a pastor in a church which is not seeking an installed pastor or while the pastor is unable to perform her or his duties. The relation shall be established only by the COM and shall extend for a period not to exceed twelve months at a time.

A Covenant Pastor may, with COM approval, serve as moderator of the session. A Covenant Pastor, who is full time, must meet Presbytery minimums for salary and leave. Covenant agreements can be renewed. Following renewal of the covenant relationship that extends to four (4) years, the Session and the Covenant Pastor shall begin the process of determining if the temporary relationship should be made a called/installed relationship.

Link: [Pastoral Covenant for Temporary Positions](#)

Link: [Relations of Former Pastors to Congregations](#)

3. Interim/Transitional Pastors & Associates

During the period between pastors, there is a need for leadership, for maintenance for a healthy congregational life, and for the development of short-range goals. The period between pastors is also a prime time for renewal and for re-energizing the congregation for mission. In addition, an Interim/Transitional Pastor leads congregations during the transition time after an installed Pastor has departed, helping the congregation prepare to welcome the leadership of a new installed Pastor. Interim/Transitional Pastors understand the dynamics of a congregation in transition, including feelings of grief, loss, and, sometimes, relief or anger. Some

Interim/Transitional Pastors have special skills and experience that can help a congregation recover from a time of conflict or after the disclosure of clergy sexual misconduct or other trauma. In cases of misconduct, congregational communication would follow the section on Church Discipline in the BoO.

Link: [Interim/Transitional Pastor Policy](#)

Link: [Interim Pastor/Transitional Pastor Covenant](#)

Link: [Interim/Transitional Pastor Addendum](#)

Link: [Interim/Transitional Pastor's Report](#)

Link: [Interim/Transitional Training](#)

Link: [Pilot Project for Interim/Transitional Ministry within the Bounds of the PC\(USA\)](#)

Link: [Guidelines on Transitioning a Temporary Pastor to a Called/Installed Position](#)

Link: [Relations of Former Pastors to Congregations](#)

c. Other Pastoral Relationships

1. Parish Associate

Parish Associates are Teaching Elders who relate to local congregations in helpful but limited capacities. The Parish Associate relationship is a way for Teaching Elders of the presbytery, either retired, a member at large, or engaged in non-parish work, to exercise their pastoral calling.

Link: [Parish Associate Policy](#)

Link: [Parish Associate Covenant](#)

2. Commissioned Ruling Elder

When the presbytery, in consultation with one or more sessions or other responsible committee, determines that its strategy for mission requires it, the presbytery may authorize a ruling elder to be commissioned to limited pastoral service as a commissioned pastor also known as commissioned ruling elder as assigned by the presbytery. A ruling elder so designated may be commissioned to serve one or more validated ministries of the presbytery. Presbytery, in its commission, may authorize the ruling elder to moderate the session of the congregation or congregations to which he or she is commissioned, to administer the Sacraments, and to officiate at marriages where permitted by state law. This commission shall also specify the term of service, which shall not exceed three years but shall be renewable. The presbytery shall review the commission at least annually.

Processes/Training

- A ruling elder who seeks to serve under the terms of G-2.1001 shall receive such preparation and instruction as determined by the presbytery to be appropriate to the particular commission.
- Such preparation shall include a certificate of completion of boundary training, which includes the topic of sexual misconduct, and child

sexual abuse prevention training with recertification at least every thirty-six months.

- The presbytery shall determine which trainings are approved to meet the criteria of these two requirements.
- The ruling elder shall be examined by the presbytery as to personal faith, motives for seeking the commission, and the areas of instruction determined by presbytery.
- A ruling elder who has been commissioned and later ceases to serve in the specified ministry may continue to be listed as available to serve but is not authorized to perform the functions specified in G-2.1001 until commissioned again to a congregation or ministry by the presbytery.

Link: [Commissioned Ruling Elder Handbook](#)

3. Certified Christian Educator

The presbytery shall encourage sessions to make continuing education funds and time available to those seeking certification and shall affirm the skill and dedication of these certified persons by providing a service of recognition at the time of certification. The presbytery may grant the privilege of voice at all its meetings to persons in certified church service.

Link: [Certified Christian Educators Policy](#)

Link: [Certified Christian Educators Covenant](#)

4. Validated/Specialized Ministry

Validated Ministry include the calls of Ministers (G-2.0503) to ministries supportive of the mission of the church and requiring ordination to that office are in validated ministry. Pastors in validated ministry are accountable to the Presbytery and supervised by COM. Such validated ministry Pastors may be assigned a mentor by COM as well. Validated ministries may include teachers, evangelists, administrators, chaplains, and other forms of ministry recognized as appropriate by COM on behalf of Presbytery. Those so designated may administer the Sacraments at times and places authorized by COM on behalf of Presbytery. When Ministers are called to validate ministry beyond the jurisdiction of the church, they shall give evidence of a quality of life that helps to share the ministry of the good news. They shall participate in a PC(USA) congregation, in their Presbytery, and in ecumenical relationships and shall be eligible for election to the higher councils of the church and to the boards and agencies of those councils. The COM shall review annually the work of all Ministers engaged in validated ministries outside the congregation. The report is subject to annual review and confirmation by COM.

Link: [Validated Ministry beyond the Congregation Policy](#)

Link: [Validate Ministry beyond the Congregation Report](#)

III. Non-Pastoral Relationships

1. Member at large

Is a minister of Word and Sacrament defined by G.2.0503b. This minister has previously been engaged in an installed, validated, or temporary ministry relationship. Now, without abandoning the exercise of ministry, is not currently so engaged. A Minister may be designated a member-at-large because she or he is limited in her or his ability to engage in a ministry fulfilling all of the criteria for a validated ministry due to family responsibilities or other individual circumstances recognized by the Presbytery. A member-at-large shall comply with as many of the criteria in the Book of Order as possible and shall actively participate in the life of a PC(USA) congregation. A member-at-large is entitled to take part in the meetings of the Presbytery and to speak, vote, and hold office. The status of a member-at-large shall be reviewed annually by COM. The COM may consider that ordination has been set aside after five years of consecutive at-large designation.

Link: [Member at Large Policy](#)

Link: [Member at Large Report](#)

2. Retired Pastors

a. Retirement

God's call to ministry is life-long. Retirement is a new phase of God's continuing call. Retired ministers continue to be members of presbytery, exercising voice and vote in presbytery meetings, although their attendance at meetings is not mandatory and they do not need to request to be excused from presbytery meetings. They may serve on presbytery committees, commissions, and other work groups. In consultation with the COM on Ministry, they may serve congregations as temporary pulpit supply or as session moderators. They may be elected to presbytery office (moderator, vice-moderator, stated clerk, treasurer) or as commissioners to Synod or General Assembly.

Within the post-retirement service guidelines of the PC(USA) Board of Pensions, retired ministers may choose to accept post-retirement employment with congregations or with other agencies. This should be arranged in consultation with the Commission on Ministry. It should be noted that the Board of Pensions places restrictions on post-retirement service in the congregation most recently served before retirement.

Link: [Board of Pensions Administrative Rule 801, "Post-Retirement Service."](#)

b. Pastoral Care

Because retired ministers continue to be members of the presbytery and not of a local congregation, the presbytery has responsibility to provide pastoral care and support to them through life's transitions and crises (G-3.0301b; G-3.0307). Either the POJ General Presbyter or the Stated Clerk, and Administration and Pastoral Care Committee will extend supportive care.

c. Following retirement from congregational ministry

It is essential that former pastors establish healthy boundaries, disengaging from ALL congregational life and function of the congregations they have served. It is strongly recommended for pastors' spouses to do so as well. This is to provide sufficient space for the new pastoral relationship to become firmly established and to bond with the congregation.

The Book of Order's ethical standard, "Officiate by Invitation Only" (G-2.0905), applies to retired ministers, just as it does to ministers in active service: "...former pastors and associate pastors shall not provide pastoral services to members of their former congregations without the invitation of the moderator of the session."

Link: [Relation of Former Pastor to Congregation Policy](#)

3. Pastor Emeritus/Emerita

This honor signifies that the Pastor has retired from active ministry and is no longer a Pastor of the Church they served previously. As an honorary position, it does not convey any monetary compensation, nor is it to be considered a regular ministry staff position.

The designation of this status is an honorary relationship with no Pastoral authority or duty. It involves no remuneration, no expectation of service, no office space, no mail received at church, no Pastoral duties. It is the responsibility of the Session of the congregation and the Pastor emeritus/emera to be clear on this matter and to clearly make this known to the congregation at large.

The guidelines for retired pastors are to be followed by all Pastors. If anything, the pastor emerita/emertus has increased responsibility to follow and interpret the ethical guidelines to those who may misunderstand the relationship and assume a continuing Pastoral relationship. (Link)

This shall occur no sooner than a year after the new pastor is installed. This designation is an action of the congregation. A congregation may have more than one Pastor emeritus/emera.

[Conferring Pastor Emeritus/Emerita Status Policy](#)

IV. Other Work of the Commission

a. Creating a Way Forward: Training for Ruling Elders and CRE's to Preside over the Table

The Commission on Ministry provides training to ruling elders, who are endorsed by their session, to enable the ruling elder to be the celebrant at the Lord's Supper. The training includes the theology of the Lord's Supper, the elements of the Eucharist, writing of a Prayer of Great Thanksgiving, and practice of celebrating the Lord's Supper.

b. Presbytery of the James Benefits Policy: Coming Soon