

**NATIONAL CAPITAL PRESBYTERY
COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY
EXAMINATION PROCESS**

June 24, 2007

Revised September 11, 2008

Revised September 10, 2009

Revised October 25, 2011

Revised May 23, 2017

Revised February 15, 2022

Revised December 13, 2022

In light of the action at the 217th General Assembly (2006), placing greater responsibility and power in presbyteries for examining persons seeking membership or new calls within the presbytery, the Committee on Ministry has taken steps to strengthen the process by which to recommend clearing persons for membership in National Capital Presbytery and for exercising appropriate oversight of clergy and congregations involved in moves within the presbytery.

The Committee on Ministry began working on this in August 2006. Through its Coordinating Team (now the COM Coordinating Commission), the Committee began researching and drafting a Committee on Ministry Examination Process. This process was adopted on November 1, 2006 and amended on February 2, 2007. Members of the Examination Committee¹ were recruited, and met during the spring of 2007. A draft report was then shared with the Coordinating Council (now the Leadership Council). Some suggestions were incorporated resulting in a document presented for information and feedback to the presbytery at an informational meeting May 12. Input from these meetings resulted in the final document approved by the Examination Committee on June 22, 2007 and approved by COM via email June 22-24, 2007. This new process took effect July 1, 2007. Revisions were made as noted above.

In light of the passage of the revised “Form of Government” and Overture 10-A in 2011, the Committee on Ministry took steps to make appropriate revisions to the Examination Process. The Examination Committee of COM met on September 23, 2011. Significant policy edits recommended to COM from that meeting: (1) current question 5 to be replaced [see Part V], and (2) for incoming Interim Pastors seeking to join NCP, the Examination Committee chair shall convene an ad hoc Examination Team of 2 teaching elders and 2 ruling elders. In 2017 revisions were offered to update the policy to correspond with the need for COM decisions to be conducted by Commissions rather than being left to particular committees and to streamline and clarify the “scruple” process, which, as of May 1, 2017 has not been employed.

This process serves to clear clergy for membership and/or newly installed ministry within National Capital Presbytery. The following categories of clergy go through this process:

- Candidates for the ministry seeking ordination and membership in NCP
- Ordained clergy in all membership categories seeking to transfer membership to NCP or moving to new installed relationships within NCP
- Interim pastors who are seeking to labor within the bounds of NCP without becoming minister members of NCP.

The COM Coordinating Commission or the COM Transitions Commission votes on all minister members seeking admission to National Capital Presbytery.

In accordance with actions of the 217th General Assembly and constitutional advice from the Office of Constitutional Services, the presbytery itself votes on all minister members considered for admission when there is a declared scruple that is determined to be a departure. The Examination process as outlined is the same for all three categories. That process is defined in other COM documents that can be found on the Presbytery website.

(<https://thepresbytery.org/documents/committee-on-ministry-documents-2/>) Generally the following flow proceeds as follows:

I. COM Grants Permission for a Congregation to Begin Search

Party Primarily Responsible: COM Transitions Commission

Permission to elect a Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC – for this document this includes Associate Pastor Nominating Committees, Designated PNCs, Designated APNCs) is granted by the COM Transitions Commission based on the congregation’s readiness to begin a search.

II. Executive-to-Executive Clearance

Party Primarily Responsible: General Presbyter and COM moderator

The Examination Process begins once PNC’s are ready to interview candidates “face to face.” At this point the General Presbyter of National Capital Presbytery does a “presbytery to presbytery” check of the candidates. If the General Presbyter has a concern he/she will consult with the COM moderator.

III. Practical Theology/ Operational Match

Party Primarily Responsible: PNC

The PNC’s are primarily responsible, along with COM Transitions Commission liaisons, for determining the practical theological and “operational” match with the congregation, and may involve the PNC or liaison consulting with the General Presbyter, the COM Transitions Commission Chair, or other appropriate parties of the presbytery.

IV. Documentation

Party Primarily Responsible: Administrator for the COM

Once the PNC has reached a decision on a particular candidate, and that candidate has agreed to be nominated, documentation must be completed through the Administrator for the COM in the presbytery office. At the present time, this list includes the following documents:

Documents provided to the PNC liaison and the PNC when elected

- A. Terms of Call Packet
- B. Equity Sharing templates and samples
- C. EEO/AA Policies, including Forms #1, #2 and #3
- D. PNC Handbook for Liaisons

- E. PNC Handbook for PNCs
- F. On Calling a Pastor (PCUSA document)

Documents provided to the PNC when candidate has been chosen by PNC:

- A. Terms of Call Packet
- B. EEO/AA Form #3
- C. Proposed Dates Form
- D. Procedure for the Congregational Meeting (provided after the interview)

Documents provided to the Candidate (* before the interview, ** after the interview)

- A. *Examination Process
- B. *Clergy Sexual Misconduct Policy
- C. *Signature form agreeing to Sexual Misconduct Policy
- D. *Code of Ethics for Clergy and Other Church Professionals
- E. *Signature form agreeing to Code of Ethics
- F. *Administrative Leave Policy
- G. *Signature form agreeing to Administrative Leave Policy
- H. *Release for Criminal Background Check
- I. **Ministry Crisis Fund Leaflet
- J. **Ordination/Installation Instructions and Worksheet

Documents required from the Candidate (at least one week prior to Examination Interview¹)

- A. Signature form for Clergy Sexual Misconduct Policy (signed)
- B. Signature form for Code of Ethics for Clergy and Other Church Professionals (signed)
- C. Signature form for Administrative Leave Policy (signed)
- D. Release for Criminal Background Check (signed)
- E. Candidate's PIF
- F. The Five Examination Interview Essays (see below)
- G. A brief biographical information (not to exceed 400 words)
- H. Statement of Faith (not to exceed 800 words)

The Statement of Faith should address the following:

- Trinity
- Nature of Humanity
- Person and Work of Jesus Christ
- the Nature of the Church
- Scripture
- Sacraments
- Mission
- Christian Hope (Eschatology).

Documents required from the PNC (at least one week prior to the Examination Interview)

- A. Terms of Call Form A (completed and signed)
- B. EEO/AA form #3

- C. Proposed Dates Form (completed and signed)
- D. Any Equity Sharing or loan document or covenant. If such a document is planned but will not be negotiated by the time of the Examination Interview, a general description of the anticipated agreement, including the amount of money that will be made available, must be submitted along with Terms of Call Form; full documentation should be submitted to the Transitions Team of COM when the agreement is completed.

Documents provided to the Examination Team:

- A. Statement of Faith
- B. Brief biographical information
- C. Candidate’s PIF
- D. The Five Examination Interview Essays
- E. Church Information Form

Documents provided to the COM Transitions Commission or the COM Coordinating Commission

- A. Statement of Faith
- B. Brief biographical information

V. Examination Interview

Party Primarily Responsible: Examination Teams

The Examination Interview will be a conversation based around the candidate’s written Statement of Faith, PIF, and responses to all five of the following Examination questions. The candidate will submit written answers not exceeding 500 words per question. The interview will last approximately two hours. It will be conducted by an Examination Team as assigned by Exam Team Chair. It will cover the Statement of Faith and the five essays that the candidate has written. The PIF is provided for background on the examinee. The interview is intended to be a wide-ranging discussion, including follow up questions and points of clarification. Its purpose is not only to determine an examinee’s viewpoints, but theological thought process and quality as well.

The questions are as follows (*revised October 18, 2022*):

1. The Fourth Ordination Question asks, “Will you fulfill your ministry in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scriptures, and be continually guided by our Confessions?” Given that the Confessions are Part I of the Constitution of the PC(USA), what does it mean to you to be guided by our Confessions? List which of the Confessions speak to you the most deeply and why? Is there something in our Confessions that you no longer believe to be true?
2. What led you to be a part of the Reformed tradition of the PC(USA) and what do you understand to be the “essential tenets” of the Reformed faith?
3. The Fifth Ordination Question asks, “Will you be governed by our church’s polity, and will you abide by its discipline? What does it mean to you to be governed by the polity of the PC(USA)?

4. The Seventh Ordination Question asks, “Do you promise to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church?” What do you do when these three (i.e., peace, unity, and purity) are in tension?
5. With respect to Section G-2.0104 of the Book of Order (Gifts and Qualifications), which of your gifts best serves you in your ministry in the PC(USA)? Which one or two gifts would you be looking for in potential Elders and Deacons to aid in their ministry in the church?

VI. Approval Steps

Party Primarily Responsible: Examination Team, Examination Committee, COM Coordinating Commission, COM Transitions Commission, Presbytery

The Examination Team will strive for a thorough and thoughtful recommendation on each candidate. It is the hope of the team that most recommendations will be supported by consensus by the team. In the case that such consensus is not reached, the rights of viewpoints of members of the Examination Team, Examination Committee, and/or Committee on Ministry Commissions not in the majority will be protected so that their voice is heard and considered by the next appropriate level of the process.

All matters related to the reception, ordination and installation of Ministers of the Word and Sacrament shall be approved by the Coordinating Commission of the COM or the Transitions Commission of the COM upon the recommendation of a COM Examination team, with the following provisions;

- Action related to any individual that involves a “scruple” that is judged to be a departure from essentials of the Reformed tradition by the COM Transitions Commission or the COM Coordinating Commission shall be referred to the presbytery in session for disposition.
- Actions related to individuals that receive majority approval of less than 80% of the Coordinating Commission or the Transitions Commission likewise shall be referred to the presbytery in session.

In accordance with actions of the 217th General Assembly and constitutional advice from the Office of Constitutional Services, the presbytery has final approval on persons the COM is recommending for membership and current members COM is recommending for installation when there is a declared scruple that is judged to be a departure or a perceived departure.

A. In cases where no scruple is declared or departure perceived:

- An Examination team will declare one of three outcomes:
 - Pass
 - Fail
 - Or the examinee needs to do more work in a particular area before being passed. This could be additional material submitted for review or it may include a requirement to be reexamined.

- Whenever an Examination Team vote is unanimous, the action is recommended to the COM Coordinating Commission or the COM Transitions Commission which acts on behalf of the Presbytery to receive the person as a minister member of National Capital Presbytery; the PNC is free to call a congregational meeting and the candidate is free to move onto the field.
- Whenever a vote is unanimously negative at any level, the Examination is not approved and all action stops.*
- Whenever the vote is not unanimous, it moves to the next level if all three of the following conditions occur:
 - A member voting in the minority chooses to take it to the next level
 - The particular examinee agrees
 - The PNC agrees.
- Whenever a vote is negative but not unanimous and does not move to the next level because one of the above conditions does not occur, then the Examination is not approved and all action stops.
- Whenever a vote is positive but not unanimous and the members in the minority choose not to take it to the next level, then the Examination is approved and the name forwarded to the COM Coordinating Commission or the COM Transitions Commission for approval as a minister member.
- Whenever a vote is tied, the members voting for approval are considered “in the minority,” in which case it moves to the next level if a member voting for approval chooses to take it to the next level, the particular examinee agrees, and the PNC agrees.

B. In cases where a scruple is declared or departure perceived:

- The Examination Team determines whether or not the scruple constitutes a departure. If, in the Exam Team’s judgment, no departure exists, the Examination proceeds as outlined above. If, in the Exam Team’s judgment, a departure exists, it will then refer the matter to the COM Coordinating Commission or the COM Transitions Commission which determines whether the scruple is a departure. If not a departure, then the procedure continues as outlined above. If the scruple is judged to be a departure, then the matter is referred to the floor of the Presbytery which decides whether the departure is essential (whereupon the person will not be received as a minister member) or whether it is non-essential (whereupon the person may be accepted as a minister member upon the Presbytery’s vote).

- If, in the course of the examination, the person shares information that the Examination Team judges to constitute a departure which they judge to concern essential theological matters, then they shall not approve the examination and the standard appeal processes will apply.
- If, in the course of the examination, the person shares information that the Examination Team judges to constitute a departure which they judge to concern nonessential theological matters, then they shall refer the decision to the COM Coordinating Commission or the COM Transitions Commission seeking their concurrence with that judgment.
- For persons considered for parish positions in an NCP congregation:
 - If the COM Transition Commission judgment is that there is no essential departure, the PNC is free to call a congregational meeting.
 - If the congregation votes to call the candidate, the COM then recommends the candidate for consideration by the presbytery itself.
 - If the presbytery approves, the candidate is free to move onto the field and be installed.
- For persons seeking minister membership in specialized ministry categories, the COM Coordinating Commission will consider departures and scruples judged to be departures and make recommendations for action to the floor of the presbytery.
- Whenever a vote is unanimously negative at any level, the Examination is not approved and all action stops.*
- Whenever the vote is negative but not unanimous, it moves to the next level if a member voting in the minority chooses to take it to the next level, the particular examinee agrees, and the PNC agrees.
- Whenever a vote is negative but not unanimous and does not move to the next level because one of the above conditions does not occur, then the Examination is not approved and all action stops.

* *In cases where a decision moves to higher levels:*

- *A majority or minority report may be offered to the COM Coordinating Commission or the COM Transitions Commission and the floor of Presbytery by anyone involved in the Examination process.*