



Then the apostles and the elders, with the consent of the whole church, decided to choose men from among their members and to send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leaders among the brothers.

- Acts 15:22

Dear Friends,

At the last Stated Meeting, the Presbytery established an Administrative Commission to work with one of our congregations. I thought I'd take a step back this week and talk about what an Administrative Commission is, and how it can be useful to our ministry in the Presbyterian Church.

Let me start with an example of an Administrative Commission that the presbytery forms for a vital but routine purpose. Ordaining ministers and installing them in pastoral positions in our churches is an action of the presbytery. Now, the presbytery could carry out these responsibilities during a stated meeting, but these actions take place in a full service of worship, and it wouldn't be practical to try to wedge these services into the docket. The presbytery *could* call a special meeting for this purpose, requiring the attendance of all its commissioners, ministers, and other enrolled members, but given the number of installations and ordinations needed each year, it would be burdensome to conduct them in this way.

What is needed instead is a way to vest the authority of the presbytery in a smaller group of people for a specific, limited purpose. The *Book of Order* provides just such a tool in the Administrative Commission—you can find its provisions in G-3.0109(b), along with some examples of how presbyteries (and other councils) can make use of this instrument of our polity.

An Administrative Commission:

- ... **acts in the name of the council that appointed it.** So, the decisions of an Administrative Commission appointed by NCP are considered decisions of the presbytery itself.
- ... **must have the scope of its powers and any restrictions stated specifically by the appointing council.** So, an Administrative Commission can only act with the authority that was explicitly granted to it.
- ... **must report its decisions to the appointing council.** When an Administrative Commission of NCP reports to the presbytery, the presbytery may then rescind or amend decisions it has made, or, in the absence of any such action, let its decisions stand. In this way, the commission remains accountable for its use of the council's authority.

One power that a presbytery might grant to an Administrative Commission is the power to assume original jurisdiction from the session of a particular church, so that they govern the church in place of the session (G-3.0303(e)). Not all commissions have this authority—or even need it in order to do the work they are asked to do—but it can be necessary in circumstances where the session is unable to carry out its responsibilities.

Did you know that a session, as well as a presbytery, can appoint an Administrative Commission? The *Book of Order* requires that a commission appointed by a session be comprised of at least two ruling elders and a minister in an installed or temporary relationship with the church (in other words, a pastor or associate pastor).

It suggests that one purpose of a commission might be to receive or dismiss members—so, for example, the session might ask a pastor and two elders to conduct a membership class and grant them the authority to act on behalf of the session to examine and receive the new members.

If you're a pastor or clerk looking to make use of an Administrative Commission and want to brainstorm, or if you're just curious to know more, please reach out!

Grace and Peace,

Rev. David Baer, Stated Clerk