

Validated Ministries and Members-at-Large in Grace Presbytery 12.01.20

The Presbytery has the authority to determine its continuing members and the responsibility of setting guidelines for that determination. This requires that the Presbytery through its Committee on Ministry, determine what is valid ministry within its bounds; each presbytery must provide written guidelines for their application.

The book of Order (G-2.0503) defines categories of membership for ministers of the Word and Sacrament. "A minister of the Word and Sacrament is a member of a presbytery and shall be engaged in a ministry validated by that presbytery, a member-at-large as determined by the presbytery, or honorably retired."

No determination of validation is required for those serving as installed pastors, associate pastors, or co-pastors within a congregation of this church, or for those service councils or agencies of the General Assembly. All other positions require validation by the Commission on Ministry.

The criteria for validation are found in G-2.0503a, quoted in full below.

G-2.0503a. Engaged in a Validated Ministry - A validated ministry shall:

(1) demonstrate conformity with the mission of God's people in the world as set forth in Holy Scripture, *The Book of Confessions*, and the *Book of Order* of this church;

A Statement of the Mission is essential in order for the presbytery to determine if a particular ministry is in "conformity with the mission of God's people." Such a statement... should clarify the types of ministries needed in order to accomplish this mission... and should be as comprehensive as possible.

The stated mission of Grace Presbytery is "Grace Presbytery claims God's mission as our calling: to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ who saves, redeems, and reconciles the world to God through ministries of witness, justice, and mercy. Grace Presbytery prepares and supports leaders to build vital congregations that reach seekers and those in need, nurture disciples, and send apostles of our Lord into the world."

In order to be validated, a ministry must either engage in the work of reconciling "the world to God through ministries of witness, justice and mercy" or support leaders to "build vital congregations that reach seekers and those in need, nurture disciples, and send apostles of our Lord into the world."

The nature and purpose of the work performed *must* be consistent with the vision and mission adopted by the Presbytery for ministry within its bounds. Further, “The Church’s Calling” (F-1.03) may be considered in evaluating conformity with the mission of our church. Does the ministry proclaim the good news, offer reconciliation, address brokenness, minister to the needs of the poor, the sick, and lonely, address hunger, promote justice, etc.? Our church recognizes that ministers may be designated “to work as teachers, evangelists, administrators, chaplains, and in other forms of ministry recognized as appropriate by the presbytery.” (G-3.0306). Given the above interpretative guideline, can the *specific job responsibilities* be judged in conformity with the mission of our church?

(2) serve and aid others, and enable the ministries of others.

The primary thrust of the work being validated must be toward serving people and enabling them to serve other people, not toward profit-making activities. Ordinarily such work will be in a religious or non-profit setting. In the rare case that work in a for-profit enterprise is judged as validated ministry, it must be clear that the primary work functions relate to serving and helping people, rather than to the production of goods or to making a profit. In all cases, the special gifts and training of the minister of Word and Sacrament that provide a theological perspective on the life of people must be used.

(3) give evidence of theologically informed fidelity to God’s Word.

If the ministry or position does not require ordination, or does not require a Master of Divinity or its equivalent, questions must be asked regarding the application of theological knowledge and training. What specific job functions require the use of theological and biblical understanding? *“Theologically informed fidelity to God’s Word” will be evident in the ministry if it requires the ability to apply theological competence to such skills as communication, interpretation, or the care and nurture of a person’s wholeness and growth. A key question is whether the ministry relates God’s Word to life experience, to faith and service. If the proposed position offers no overt opportunity to articulate the Christian faith, as a part of the stated job functions, the ministry will not be validated.*

(4) be carried on in accountability for its character and conduct to the presbytery in addition to organizations, agencies, and institutions served.

A member of presbytery serving beyond the jurisdiction of the church remains *answerable to the presbytery for agreed-upon end results or activities in addition to being accountable to an employing organization. Being accountable for the ‘character and conduct’ of one’s ministry requires that it be clear from the outset what is expected in that ministry. A copy of the job description, with the financial terms of remuneration, must be provided prior to the validation*

of the ministry. Regular performance reviews by the employer are also expected. In order for the presbytery to exercise its oversight, face-to-face reviews should be held not less than every three years (in addition to the required annual report form). The same criteria used for full-time ministries will be used in determining validation for part-time ministries.

(5) include responsible participation in the deliberations, worship, and work of the presbytery and in the life of a congregation of this church or a church in correspondence with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (G-5.0201).

Grace Presbytery has the following standards:

Active members **shall** be active participants in the life of Presbytery, including attending presbytery meetings and contributing to the work of presbytery. If a member's work schedule precludes attendance at presbytery meetings, participation on a commission, committee, task force or other contributions of time and talent may be considered. While minimum requirements are not specified, an allowance may be made for individual circumstances. The Presbytery expects participation that is significant and sustained, rather than sporadic and minimal.

Active members shall regularly worship and participate in the life and work of a local congregation. Ordinarily this will be a congregation of the Presbyterian Church (USA). If the person worships at another church, the reasons for this may be explored and judged satisfactory.

If one or more of the above criteria cannot be met, the member should request to be designated a member-at-large or to be released from ministry as a minister of the Word and Sacrament (G-2.0507).

Members not serving a congregation of the Presbytery must report annually to the Presbytery the financial terms of remuneration by their employers, any change in their employment status, any significant change(s) in their job description, and the rationale for their continuing status as active members of Presbytery. A face-to-face interview may be requested.

Validated Ministries

All Ministers of Word and Sacrament engaged in a validated ministry shall be accountable to a Board of Directors or a particular governing body such as an Association, Professional Organization or an Institution (Higher learning, Healthcare, Military, etc.). Ministers of Word and Sacrament engaged in various types of Spiritual counseling shall have liability insurance. Evidence of these shall be included the annual report to Presbytery.

The Committee on Ministry considers the following types of ministries to align with the vision and mission of Grace Presbytery:

Missional

Chaplaincies or other similar work at educational institutions, healthcare institutions and organizations, correctional facilities, and similar institutions within the geographical bounds of Grace Presbytery;

Work in interdenominational organizations such as councils of churches;

Educational

Pastoral Education services such as teaching theology or religion or related subjects at a seminary or other educational institutions including healthcare settings;

Spiritual Counseling

Spiritual Direction and Formation; Pastoral Counseling Service;

Other

Ministry or ministries as determined by COM on a case by case basis according to the particular facts and circumstances consistent with the description of ordained office found in G-2.0101 and meeting all of the standards set forth in G-2.0503.

Member-At-Large

A member-at-large is a minister of the Word and Sacrament who has previously been engaged in a validated ministry, and who now, without *intentional abandonment* of the exercise of ministry, is no longer engaged in a ministry that complies with all the criteria in G-2.0503a. A minister of the Word and Sacrament may be designated a member-at-large because he or she is limited in his or her 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 G-2.0503a as possible and shall actively participate in the life of a 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 member-at-large shall be reviewed annually.

The status of member-at-large is normally recommended for a minister member upon dissolution of a pastoral call or the ending of validated work when no other call

for ministerial service is pending. This is to provide for a period of discernment and/or the opportunity to pursue another ordained call. Members-at-large must make application for a continuation of this status annually. The Committee on Ministry will review the status of each member-at-large annually.

Considerations for continuation as member at large include:

- Compliance with as many of the criteria in G-2.0503a of the *Book of Order* including
 - Regular and ongoing participation in the life of the presbytery
 - Regular and ongoing participation in the life of a congregation of this church or of a denomination in full correspondence with the PC(USA)

Significant service to the Presbytery during the member-at-large period may warrant serious consideration as a reason for continuing the status of a member-at-large. This is attested in G-2.0503b where, along with “family responsibilities,” “other individual circumstances which presbytery recognizes as important” may constitute sufficient reason to grant continuing member-at-large status. The right of the presbytery to determine its own members is thereby upheld, but the responsibility for case-by-case wise judgment is also left with presbytery.

Failure to Engage

Currently the Book of Order describes in G-2.0508 the status of those who are no longer in a Validated, Member at Large, or Honorably Retired relationship with the presbytery.

“A minister of Word and Sacrament whom the presbytery determines no longer to be engaged in a validated ministry (G-2.0503a) or to fulfill the criteria for membership-at-large (G-2.0503b), and who is not honorably retired (G-2.0503c), shall not have voice or vote in meetings of the presbytery, except when the matter under consideration pertains to his or her relationship to the presbytery. Names of such persons shall be reported annually to the presbytery by the stated clerk. If after three years the teaching elder does not meet the criteria for validated ministry or membership-at-large, the presbytery may delete that person’s name from the roll of membership and, upon request of a session, dismiss that person to a congregation.”

It shall be the practice of Grace Presbytery to notify those who are no longer meet the criteria for Validated Ministry or Member-at-Large. Ministers of Word and Sacrament in this circumstance are encouraged to consider the process for release from ministry found in G-2.0507.

Release from Ministry Without Prejudice

“When a minister of Word and Sacrament against whom no inquiry has been initiated pursuant to D- 10.0101 and D-10.0201, against whom no charges have been filed, and who otherwise is in good standing shall make application to be released from the exercise of the ordered ministry of teaching elder, the presbytery shall delete that person’s name from the roll and upon request of a session dismiss that person to a congregation. Release from the exercise of ordered ministry requires discontinuance of all functions of that ministry. The designations that refer to teaching elders shall not be used. The person so released shall engage in the ministry shared by all active members of congregations. Should a person released under this section later desire to be restored to the ordered ministry of teaching elder, that person shall apply through the presbytery which granted the release, and upon approval of that presbytery, the reaffirmation of the ordination questions, and the resumption of a ministry that qualifies that person for membership in the presbytery, shall be restored to the exercise of the ordered ministry as a teaching elder without re-ordination.” G-2.0507

This process most efficiently enables a minister of Word and Sacrament to be released from ministry while leaving open the most efficient process to return to that service at a later date.