

GUIDELINES FOR EXAMINATIONS

Presbytery of Cincinnati

On November 13, 2007, the presbytery adopted the *Report of the Examinations Task Force* which included these “Guidelines for Examinations.”

1. For those preparing to become ministers of the Word and Sacrament

Discussion of the constitutional questions for ministers of the Word and Sacrament (W-4.4003, W-4.4005a) and of the gifts and requirements for offices of ministry (G-6.0106a. and b.) shall begin prior to and/or during the phase of inquiry and continue through the candidacy phase.

a. The Session’s Role

Prior to or during the phase of inquiry, the session shall initiate such a discussion and determine whether the individual declares any departures (or “scruples” - doubt or misgivings) from the aforementioned or other provisions of the *Book of Order*. If so, this may provide an opportunity for both the inquirer and the session to consider afresh the meaning of standards they previously took for granted. A conversation in which the parties respect and listen to one another can be informative and redemptive for all of the participants. Examinations require dedication, open-mindedness, and most of all an earnest desire to serve the church faithfully. In such cases where scruples are declared, the individual shall be informed that the presbytery (as the ordaining body) will have to determine what the consequences of that departure are. Do the person’s scruples prevent him or her from abiding by the *Book of Order*?

b. The Committee on Preparation for Ministry’s Role

The CPM shall provide in-depth guidance and education to sessions with regard to this process. (G.14.0412-14.0420)

As an inquirer seeks to be received as a candidate for ministry, the CPM shall draw their attention to the constitutional documents of the church, including its statement on freedom of conscience. (G-6.0108c, G-14.0405) During the candidacy phase, CPM shall discuss with the candidate the constitutional questions for ministers of the Word and Sacrament (W-4.4003, W-4.4005) and the gifts and requirements for offices of ministry (G-6.0106a. and b.). In such cases where scruples are declared, the individual shall be informed that the presbytery will have to determine what the consequences of that departure are.

The CPM shall conduct a similar discussion with candidates from other presbyteries who are to be examined for ordination by the Presbytery of Cincinnati.

The CPM shall work to develop trust within the presbytery that such foundational work is being carried out with due diligence by the committee and by sessions. Our church processes depend upon the faith and trust we have in each other that responsibilities of governing bodies will be met. It is our intention that through this process such issues which in the past have been addressed on the floor of presbytery during examinations of candidates will have previously been asked and answered.

c. The Presbytery's Role

The process for the presbytery's examination of candidates for ordination is found in G-14.0482:

“The candidate shall appear before the presbytery and shall make a brief statement of personal faith and of commitment to the ministry of the Word and Sacrament. The presbytery shall receive the report of its appropriate committee that the candidate has completed all requirements, and has been certified ready for ordination pending approval of the call. The report shall include a summary of waivers and exceptions of requirements granted. The presbytery may conduct further examination of the candidate's Christian faith and views in theology, the Bible, the Sacraments, and the government of the church as it deems necessary. If the presbytery is fully satisfied of the candidate's qualifications, it shall approve the call and vote to proceed to his or her ordination and installation.

During "further examination", the presbytery shall be guided by the following:

1. It is appropriate to raise questions that relate to the individual's statement of faith; their biographical statement; their sermon; or the ordination questions (W-4.4003, W-4.4005).¹
2. Questions relating to understandings of the *Book of Order* should utilize the same language as that document.
3. While objective questions are allowed, subjective ones might be more helpful. (Example of an objective question: “How many books are there in the New Testament?” Example of a subjective question: “Which book in the New Testament do you most relate with?”)
4. Questions should be asked in a way that is neither prescriptive nor subscriptive in nature. There can be no pre-determined answers, for no two candidates will be, nor will answer, precisely alike. Examination is a process of discerning whether the Lord has called a particular (and unique) individual to a particular service. It is important to remember that the officer-elect or candidate has felt God's call to serve, has responded willingly by faith, and has had that call affirmed by a vote of the congregation he or she will serve.
5. Open-ended questions, or those which generate a conversation, are encouraged. For instance, instead of “Do you believe in...(the virgin birth, original sin, the incarnation)?” one might say “Talk to us about...”
6. The prior good work of session and CPM regarding examinations should be considered, with a view toward avoiding redundancy in questioning.
7. Questions may still arise, however, with regard to a candidate's fitness for office according to the gifts and requirements for that office, listed in G-6.0106. It is important to remember, in posing these questions, that we are called to exercise “mutual forbearance and Christian charity” in our examinations.
8. Examinations, while rigorous, should also remain appropriate and are predicated on the Historic Principles of Church Order (G-1.0300 through G-1.0308). Furthermore, church law makes clear that we are to conduct all of our inquiries with sensitivity and discretion.
9. It is noted that the decision to ordain a candidate for church office is subject to review by higher governing bodies. (AI d.)

2. For ministers seeking membership in the presbytery

In accordance with G-11.0402, the COM shall examine each minister or candidate who seeks membership in the presbytery. Issues addressed in the examination shall include his or her Christian faith and views on theology, the Sacraments, and the government of this church. In such cases where scruples are declared, the individual shall be informed that the presbytery will have to determine what the consequences of that departure are.

The COM shall work to develop trust within the presbytery that such work is being carried out with due diligence. Our church processes depend upon the faith and trust we have in each other that responsibilities of governing bodies will be met.

¹ Constitutional Questions For Ministers of the Word and Sacrament

W-4.4003 The moderator of the governing body of those to be ordained, installed, or commissioned shall ask them to stand before the body of membership and to answer the following questions:

- a. Do you trust in Jesus Christ your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit?
- b. Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal, and God's Word to you?
- c. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God?
- d. Will you fulfill your office in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and continually guided by our confessions?
- e. Will you be governed by our church's polity, and will you abide by its discipline? Will you be a friend among your colleagues in ministry, working with them, subject to the ordering of God's Word and Spirit?
- f. Will you in your own life seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, love your neighbors, and work for the reconciliation of the world?
- g. Do you promise to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church?
- h. Will you seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?
- ...
- i. (3) (For minister of the Word and Sacrament) Will you be a faithful minister, proclaiming the good news in Word and Sacrament, teaching faith and caring for people? Will you be active in government and discipline, serving in the governing bodies of the church; and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?