

The Presbytery of New Hope's Exams and Transfers Sub-Commission Manual Process, Procedures and Questions for Examination Sub-Commission

PROCESS AND PROCEDURES SECTIONS REVISED and APPROVED May 10, 2016

Updated September 8, 2016

Updated April 21, 2017 to Include Questions for Honorably Retired Ministers

Process

The Book of Order G-3.0306 states: Each presbytery determines the teaching elders who are its members and validates the ministries in which they are to be engaged. It shall be guided in this determination by written criteria developed by the presbytery for validating ministries within its bounds. The presbytery shall examine each teaching elder or candidate who seeks membership in it on his or her Christian faith and views in theology, the Sacraments, and the government of this Church.

The emphasis for the Presbytery of New Hope's process for examining teaching elders/examinees is on collegiality through conversational inquiry. The examination will be an occasion for substantive theological dialogue among teaching elders/examinees and the members of the sub-commission to illumine the faith commitments and theological depth and breadth of those who seek membership in the presbytery.

By action of the Presbytery in 2015, the Commission on Ministry is now allowed to receive ministers/teaching elders from other approved Reformed bodies, to serve churches within our Presbytery as both transitional and permanently installed pastors, subject to rules of the Presbytery.

The Composition of the Exams and Transfers Sub-Commission

1. The Exams and Transfers Sub-Commission shall be composed of **15** members approximately equally ruling and teaching elders elected from within the Presbytery of New Hope with **1/3** of its membership elected annually.
2. Members of the sub-commission shall be elected to serve terms of no more than three years and may be eligible for re-election. However, no member shall be eligible to serve more than six consecutive years, and a member who has served six successive years shall be ineligible for election to the sub-commission for at least one year.

3. Election to the sub-commission shall be to classes as nearly equal as possible, with the term of one class ending each year.
4. **A quorum of seven members** of the sub-commission shall be required to conduct its business.
5. The Executive Presbyter/Stated Clerk is the staff resource for members of the sub-commission and shall have voice without vote.
6. The Exams and Transfers Sub-Commission should have a balance of ethnic and gender representation as well as a balance of theological perspective.

Meetings of the sub-commission will take place on a specific date and time each month. The moderator may cancel a meeting if there is no pressing business.

The examination process will be reviewed as needed by the Exams and Transfers Sub-Commission, the Commission on Ministry and Presbytery's Coordinating Body.

Procedures

The following procedures shall be used for the examination of those seeking membership into the Presbytery of New Hope. Note: The Office Manager completes a Background Check prior to the candidate's meeting with the Exams and Transfers Sub-Commission.¹

Candidate for Ordination:

- Sub-Commission receives notice from Presbytery's *Committee on Preparation for Ministry* that candidate is certified and ready for call.
- Sub-Commission reviews the candidate's paperwork (PIF, Terms of Call, Statement of Faith), the PNC's paperwork (MIF) prior to the meeting. When the sub-commission convenes it may address any area of concern. A conversation leader in each area of the examination's conversational inquiry shall be designated.
- Sub-commission² and candidate engage in an examination that ordinarily lasts about 90 minutes and includes the following:
 - Introductions
 - Brief overview of faith journey
 - Examination in the particular areas of Theology, Bible, Worship & Sacraments and Polity – using the Question Guide as a basis.
- Following the examination, the sub-commission shall hear the candidate preach.

¹ From this point forward "Sub-commission" is considered equivalent to the Exams and Transfers Sub-Commission.

² With respect to stewardship of time and resources, the "Sub-commission" may choose to divide into two groups. From this point forward, it is to be understood that, in relation to the process of examination, "Sub-Commission" may refer to the full commission OR a sub-set thereof.

- Sub-Commission shall discuss the examination and preaching and **take action which is ordinarily a vote to sustain the examination.**
- Sub-commission shall then engage in a conversation with PNC on the process leading to the call, determination of match/compatibility and, if necessary, the terms of call.
- Sub-commission shall then discuss **and take action which ordinarily is a vote to:**
 - **Affirm the call**
 - **Approve the terms of call**
 - **Report the sub-commission's action to COM and Presbytery³**
- Candidate and PNC are invited to hear a report of the sub-commission's action and join in a prayer of thanksgiving for the candidate, the congregation and the call.
- The candidate for Ordination will be presented at the subsequent meeting of the Presbytery, and after the candidate gives a brief statement about his or her sense of call, he/she will be examined by the Presbytery.

Teaching Elder Transferring into the Presbytery to Accept a Call⁴

- Sub-Commission convenes to review the candidate's paperwork (Statement of Faith, Terms of call, PIF), the PNC's paperwork (MIF), as well as to raise any areas of concern.
- Sub-commission and candidate engage in a substantive examination that ordinarily lasts about 45 minutes and includes the following:
 - Introductions
 - Brief overview of faith journey
 - Conversational inquiry that may include views on Theology, Bible, Worship & Sacraments and Polity, the challenges of ministry, significant issues facing the PCUSA, recent books and articles read, conferences attended, struggles faced, and related topics.
- Sub-commission shall discuss and **take action which ordinarily is a vote to sustain the examination.**
- Sub-commission shall then engage in a conversation with PNC on the process leading to the call, determination of match/compatibility and, if necessary, the terms of call.
- Sub-commission shall then discuss and **take action which ordinarily is a vote to:**
 - **Affirm the call**
 - **Approve the terms of call**
 - **Report the sub-commission's action to COM and Presbytery⁵**
- Candidate and PNC are invited to hear a report of the sub-commission's action and join in a prayer of thanksgiving for the candidate, the congregation and the call.

³ When approved by the Sub-commission, the report to presbytery shall include the terms of call.

⁴ From this point forward, the word "examination" is being used in order to align with the requirements of the Book of Order. The Exams and Transfers Sub-commission prefers to engage in "conversational inquiry" or "a conversation among colleagues" with those who are transferring into the Presbytery.

⁵ When approved by the Sub-commission, the report to presbytery shall include the terms of call.

- The candidate is presented at the subsequent Presbytery meeting where he/she is asked to share his/her sense of call.

Teaching Elder Transferring into the Presbytery as a Minister-At-Large (MAL) and Validated Ministry

- In the case of a Validated Ministry, COM approves the ministry before the candidate meets with Exams and Transfers sub-commission.
- Sub-commission convenes to review the candidate's paperwork (PIF, Statement of Faith, Validated Ministry Form, if validated ministry), as well as to raise any areas of concern.
- Sub-commission and candidate engage in an examination that ordinarily lasts about 45 minutes and includes the following:
 - Introductions
 - Brief overview of faith Journey
 - Conversational inquiry in the areas of Theology, Bible, Worship & Sacraments and Polity and ministerial experiences, using the guide as a foundation for conversation.
- Sub-Commission discusses the examination and **takes action which is ordinarily a vote to:**
 - **Sustain the examination**
 - **Report the sub-commission's action to COM and Presbytery⁶**
- Teaching Elder is invited to hear a report of the sub-commission's action and join in a prayer of thanksgiving for the Validated Minister/Teaching Elder.
- The candidate is presented at the subsequent Presbytery meeting where he/she is asked to share his/her sense of call.

Honorably Retired (HR) Teaching Elder Transferring into the Presbytery

Sub-Commission convenes to review the HR-Teaching Elder's paperwork, to raise any areas of concern.

- Sub-Commission engages in approximately 45 minutes of conversation with the colleagues that includes
 - Introduction
 - Brief overview of faith journey
 - Conversation in the areas of Theology, Worship & Sacraments and Polity – using the guide as a foundation for conversation.
- Sub-Commission discusses the examination and **takes action which is ordinarily, a vote to:**
 - Sustain the examination

⁶ When approved by the Sub-commission, the report to presbytery shall include the terms of call.

- Report the sub-commission's action to COM and Presbytery
- HR-Teaching Elder is invited to hear a report of the sub-commission's action and join in a prayer of thanksgiving for the HR-Teaching Elder.
- The candidate is presented at the subsequent Presbytery meeting where he/she is asked to share his/her sense of call.

Questions

The Exams and Transfers Sub-Commission is a sub-commission of the Commission on Ministry and is charged with examining both candidates for ordination and ordained ministers who are transferring their membership from another presbytery (or denomination) into the Presbytery of New Hope.

The first set of questions, *Questions for Candidates*, are suggestions for sub-commission members as they examine candidates in the areas of Bible, Worship and Sacraments, Polity, and Theology. It is intended to serve as a guide and commission members are not bound by these questions.

The second set of questions, *Questions for Transfers*, focuses on the transferees' point of view. Again, commission members are not bound to these questions. They are intended to serve as an aid in getting to know ministers who are transferring into New Hope Presbytery.

EXAMINATION OF CANDIDATES WHO ARE SEEKING ORDINATION

Rationale:

The examination of a candidate should be for the purpose of assessing the knowledge and information he/she possesses, stimulating a candidate's thinking, and determining a candidate's level of maturity as she/he prepares for ordained ministry.

Candidates' questions are meant to allow a candidate to demonstrate the ability to draw upon and apply the knowledge and understanding of the faith acquired through his or her training, study, and life experiences. The rightness or wrongness of answers can be determined through the logic, rationale, and insight demonstrated in a candidate's responses.

QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES WHO ARE SEEKING ORDINATION

Bible

1. How do you understand the Bible as the inspired word of God?
2. Trace the theme of "covenant" through the Bible. Explain the relationship regarding covenant between the Old and New Testaments.
3. Relate the theme of grace and law in the Old and New Testaments. Where do you find examples of "grace" in the Old Testament and "law" in the New Testament?
4. What kind of writing is Genesis, chapters 1-11? How would you explain the tension between religion and science? Do you see the relationship as a tension?
5. Share a theme from one of Paul's letters that has significance for you.
6. What is your understanding of the authority of scripture? How would you explain scripture as "authoritative witness"?
7. What individual scripture do you most readily identify with and why?
8. Why do Presbyterians value the Old Testament even though Jesus is not specifically mentioned in it?
9. Someone tells you the Bible is full of contradictions; for example, In Romans Paul writes "We are saved by grace through faith". James on the other hand says, "Faith without works is dead?" How do you respond?

Worship and Sacraments

1. What are the key elements of Presbyterian worship? Outline the order of worship as mentioned in the Book of Order. What challenges and opportunities do different styles of worship present?
2. What does baptism signify? Share your understanding of this sacrament.
3. How is Christ present in the Lord's Supper? Share your understanding of this sacrament.
4. What role does inclusive language play in the faithful worship of the church?

Polity

1. How would you help someone understand the value of the connectional church in today's culture? What is the role of the teaching elder in presbytery and other councils?
2. What is the function and role of the Session? Presbytery? Synod? General Assembly?
3. What aspects of Presbyterian polity do you value most? What aspects, if any, would you change if you could?
4. On what occasions does the congregation have a vote in the Presbyterian Church?
5. How would you explain to an Episcopalian how a Presbytery moderator or General Presbyter differs from a bishop?
6. What is the difference between the ordination of deacons, ruling elders, and teaching elders?
7. How would you help a church member reconcile the difference between his/her own personal stance with that of the denomination?

Theology

1. How would you explain the Trinity?
2. What do Presbyterians mean when we say God is sovereign?
3. How do you understand the Great Ends of the Church in light of your own theology?
4. What is your understanding of grace? Judgment? Predestination/election?
5. What is the impact of different theologians on the Reformed Church?

6. What do you value most about the Reformed tradition?
7. If God is sovereign, why does evil take place in the world?
8. Share your understanding of the atonement.
9. How do you explain to someone that Christ is both human and divine?
10. One of the questions in your ordination vows is, “Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church? What are the essential reformed tenets?”
11. What is the role of the Church in the public square?
12. What does it mean that human beings are stewards of God’s creation?
13. How does Reformed theology deal with non-Christian religions?

**QUESTIONS FOR ORDAINED MINISTERS
WHO ARE TRANSFERRING INTO NEW HOPE PRESBYTERY**

1. Share how your understanding of the Bible and theology has developed and how it functions in your faith, life, and ministry.
2. What in your ministry still excites you, for which you feel a great passion? Why are you still a Presbyterian minister?
3. Where would you most like to dedicate your time in ministry? In reality, where have you found most of your time spent in former pastorates?
4. Are there changes you would like to make in your approach to ministry and in your leadership style as you begin this new call? If so, please explain.
5. How do you define church?
6. What has been one of your greatest challenges over the years in ministry? What has been one of your greatest successes/joys? Can you identify a watershed moment in your life and ministry?
7. Share the role of social ministry in your understanding of your call.
8. How do you handle conflict? Do you have an example?
9. What are you currently doing to nurture your relationship with God? How do you spend your Sabbath? What kinds of continuing education have you done to keep your ministry fresh and conversant with new trends in theological education?
10. How do you envision being involved in New Hope Presbytery?
11. What are the challenges and opportunities that the ongoing debate over worship presents to you in your ministry?
12. What thoughts go through your mind as you administer the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper?
13. What theologians have most shaped your understanding and practice of ministry?

**QUESTIONS FOR HONORABLY RETIRED MINISTERS
WHO ARE TRANSFERRING INTO NEW HOPE PRESBYTERY**

1. Tell us about some significant moments in your ministry - moments that helped shape your ministry.
2. How would you describe the next chapter in your ministry as you live into retirement?
3. How would you describe the changing landscape in ministry from when you first were ordained?
4. Who were some of the significant people whose paths you crossed throughout your ministry, or were there any significant books?