

Advisory Opinions: Note 14

Receiving Ministers of Other Denominations (G-11.0404a-f; G-11.0405a-c; G-14.0431a-e; G-15.0202)

Some of the most frequently fielded questions in the Department of Constitutional Services in the Office of the General Assembly surround a plethora of concerns associated with receiving ministers from other denominations. We hope that this Advisory Opinion will help you deal with some of these questions that may arise.

When a church proposes to extend a call to a minister member of another denomination, the presbytery needs to inquire whether the minister intends to be received into its membership and remain in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) indefinitely, or plans to serve in the position being considered without severing the present denominational relationship, and then in the future serve a church in that denomination again.

I. When A Minister Wants to Be Received Into PCUSA Membership

A minister planning to make a career change, becoming a Presbyterian, shall apply for membership in the presbytery, requesting the denominational body of jurisdiction to send his or her credentials of good standing to the presbytery. A presbytery, through its Committee on Ministry, may grant permission to a minister of another denomination to circulate a dossier or Personal Information Form only after they are satisfied of this minister's qualifications and all the constitutional requirements have been met. The presbytery and the minister then proceed to follow the steps set out in G-11.0404a or b, whichever is appropriate.

A. *Good Standing*

One of the most important requirements presbyteries will want to check is whether or not the person seeking to transfer is a member in good standing of his or her denomination and that they would dismiss to PCUSA upon request. The record of appropriate credentials should always accompany the minister transferring into this denomination.

It is absolutely critical that the presbytery check all credentials and references of the transferring minister. Checking references can sometimes pose particular problems for the presbytery as well as for the minister seeking to transfer. The Department of Ecumenical and Agencies Relationships in OGA is equipped and ready to assist you in this process. This can be particularly helpful if overseas denominations and/or theological institutions are involved.

B. *Academic Requirements*

How does a presbytery evaluate the academic experience of a person from a theological institution of another denomination or in a foreign country? To satisfy

the requirement of G-11.0404a(1) there are three options available to all presbyteries.

1. Check with the Association of Theological Schools.
2. Check with a nearby Presbyterian theological institution to see how many credits and the equivalency of courses taken would be transferred toward a degree from the institution with whom you are checking. The basic question that should be posed to the theological institution is: "Would you give credit at your theological institution for this degree?"
3. Call Carlos Malavé in the Office of the General Assembly, Department of Ecumenical and Agencies Relationships to seek input as well as assistance. The number is 1-888-728-7228, extension 5444.

In the case of ministers for new immigrant fellowships and congregations who would transfer into the PCUSA under G-11.0404f, a presbytery may, if it determines that its strategy for mission with that constituency requires it, recognize the ordination of (G-15.0202) and enroll a new immigrant minister furnishing evidence of good standing in a denomination in correspondence with the General Assembly as a member of the presbytery, even though at the time of enrollment that minister lacks the educational history required by G-14.0450b-d.

In the case of such a minister lacking such preparation, the presbytery shall undertake an evaluation of the minister's understanding of and proficiency in Bible, Reformed Theology, Sacraments, Presbyterian Polity, preaching, leading worship, pastoral care, and teaching. If the presbytery is satisfied as to the minister's preparation in and understanding of those areas, the presbytery may, by a three-quarters vote of those present, enroll that minister as a minister of the presbytery. Any presbytery taking such an action shall provide that minister with educational opportunities as seem necessary and prudent to the presbytery for that minister's successful ministry within the bounds of that presbytery. This section, when utilized, may result in exceptions to the procedures and requirements described in G-11.0403c, G-14.0450b-d, and G-14.0470-.0474.

C. Examination Requirements

Ministers of other denominations transferring in under G-11.0404a shall be required to take the ordination examinations required of candidates under care of presbyteries in the PCUSA. These examinations are identified in G-14.0431a-e. In accordance with G-14.0432 the examinations required shall be graded by representatives of the presbyteries under the supervision of Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates.

Minister members of other Reformed churches transferring in under G-11.0404b may be exempted from taking some or all of the examinations if they have been ordained more than five (5) years. Such an exemption may be granted at the discretion of the presbytery by a two-thirds (2/3) vote of presbytery. Members of other Reformed churches who have been ordained within the past five years shall be required to take the examinations described in G-14.0431a-e.

The Office of Examination Services in the Office of Vocation realizes that timing requirements might work against a person taking the examinations at the standard time in August or January of each year. This office is always available and willing to work with a presbytery in order to satisfy this constitutional requirement concerning examinations. Contact Lesley Davies at 1-888-728-7228 extension 5746. There are several steps a presbytery should follow for their own integrity and the integrity of the examination process if it becomes necessary to administer the examinations at a time other than the normal schedule.

1. Presbyteries might negotiate with a neighboring presbytery to read and grade the examinations on your behalf, thus protecting your COM and colleagues in your presbytery.
2. The CPM Chairperson in each presbytery has copies of all examinations, which may be shared with transferring ministers. Since these examinations are in the "public domain" you are free to get and use these former examinations.
3. If a presbytery chooses to work through the Office of Examination Services to get the examinations and booklets to write the exams there will be a charge of \$85 for each exam given. Information on the examinations is available at <http://www.pcusa.org/exams/>.

The Office of Examination Services remains confident that the best way for all to satisfy these requirements is through the normal process.

D. Ordination

Finally, in accordance with G-15.0202, when a minister of another Christian denomination is called to a work properly under the jurisdiction of a presbytery, the presbytery, after all constitutional conditions have been met, shall recognize the minister's previous ordination to the office of ministry, thus making re-ordination totally unnecessary.

II. When A Minister Wants to Be Enrolled For A Period Of Service

A minister of another denomination who wishes to accept a call to serve in a church or other position as described in G-11.0405 as a Full Communion partner or to agree to a contract as a minister of a denomination with which the PCUSA is in correspondence may be enrolled temporarily as a member of presbytery with full rights and privileges. The minister is not required to take the standard ordination examinations, but is subject to the same process of interview, reference checks and examination of qualifications used by the presbytery in the approval of calls to all positions. The minister temporarily enrolled under either G-11.0405a or b has both voice and vote in meetings of the presbytery, may be elected to office or committee service, and may be appointed to moderate the session of a congregation other than the one being served.

A. *Denominations in Correspondence*

Section G-11.0405a provides the privilege of temporary enrollment to ministers of denominations with which the PCUSA is in correspondence serving in pastoral or other positions in which the presbytery and a counterpart entity are related in a yoked parish or joint sponsorship of a ministry, or in a temporary, non-installed solo pastoral position.

The Department of Ecumenical and Agency Relationships maintains a list of all denominations with whom the PCUSA is in correspondence (which changes quite often due to denominations joining or withdrawing from ecumenical partnerships).

B. *Full Communion Partners*

Section G-11.0405b permits a minister of one of the denominations with which the PC(USA) is in full communion to be temporarily enrolled and to be installed as pastor in a church of the presbytery or to serve in any of the positions in which an active member of the presbytery may serve. The Formula of Agreement partners have prepared a very helpful document, “The Orderly Exchange of Ordained Ministers of Word and Sacrament”, which is available at: <http://www.elca.org/dm/formula.pdf>.

III. *When A Minister of Another Church Serves Within the Presbytery*

Section G-11.0405c allows ordained ministers of other Christian churches to be employed by the session of a particular church in a temporary pastoral relationship, provided that such ministers present to the presbytery credentials of good standing in the ecclesiastical body to which they belong, and provided that presbytery gives its approval to the temporary pastoral relationship.

The presbytery, usually on recommendation of its COM, may allow such ministers to preach, teach, serve the sacraments, make hospital visits, provide pastoral care. Because they are not considered temporary members of the presbytery, they cannot vote or hold office and they cannot moderate the session (GA 1992, p.308, 21.088, Req. 92-10).

This provision of the *Book of Order* might apply to ministers of churches that are not in correspondence or in full communion; it may also be used if the minister could qualify for temporary presbytery membership but chooses not to do so.

Issued August 2004

Updated February 2009