

West Virginia Presbytery Criteria for Validation of Ministries within its Bounds

The Constitution requires that “A presbytery shall determine the ministers of the Word and Sacrament who shall be its continuing members. In making this determination the presbytery shall be guided by written criteria developed by the presbytery for validation of ministries within its bounds (G-11.0403).” Furthermore, a General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission decision “Requires a presbytery to develop separate written criteria for the validation of ministries within its bounds based on description of ordained office found at G-6.0100 and G-6.0200 and G-11.0403a-e. Thus, these written criteria should be read, interpreted, and applied in light of G-6.0100 and G-6.0200 and G-11.0403a-e.

The Validation and Review of Active Minister Membership:

Active membership in the Presbytery of West Virginia occurs in four ways: (1) service to a congregation of the presbytery; (2) honorable retirement; (3) service to a non-congregational ministry of the church; and (4) validated ministry in service beyond the jurisdiction of the church.

A. Validation and Review of Ministries within Congregations:

The approval by the COM of a call to a valid ministry within a congregation (G-11.0409) shall be considered validation of that ministry. The annual report of COM of the type of work and salary compensation of each minister in congregational service (G-11.0502, 11.0103n) shall serve as the annual review of the service of each minister so engaged.

B. Validation and Review of Honorably Retired Ministers:

By granting the status of honorably retired upon an active minister member the presbytery also confers validation of that person’s ministry [G-11.0412]. No further review shall be required.

C. Validation and Review of Ministries in other Service of this Church:

The approval of a call to other service of the church, either as extended by the presbytery for service on its staff or recommended by the COM, and consistent with the terms of G-11.0410, shall be considered validation of that ministry. For members of the presbytery staff, the annual and other review processes conducted by the Personnel and Administration Committee shall serve as review of the validation of that ministry.

D. Validation and Review of Ministries in Service beyond the Jurisdiction of the Church:

The standards of G-11.0403a-e shall serve as broad criteria for the validation of ministry beyond the jurisdiction of the church. In considering an application for validation of such a ministry, the COM shall determine whether these standards have been met. Applicants for validation shall demonstrate the validity of proposed ministries by attaching an essay comprised of five paragraphs and other necessary attestations and information.

Each paragraph of the attached essay should be devoted to answering one of the following five topics:

1. Demonstrate how this ministry will be in 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.
2. Describe how this ministry serves others, aids others, and enables the ministries of others.
3. Describe how this ministry gives evidence of theologically informed fidelity to God's Word.
4. Describe how this ministry is carried on in accountability for its character and conduct to the presbytery and to organizations, agencies, and institutions.
5. Describe how this ministry includes responsible participation in the deliberations and work of the presbytery and in the worship and service of a congregation.

Other necessary attestations and information shall include an annual written report on the minister’s performance of the ministry submitted directly to the Committee on Ministry by the minister’s supervisor, supervisory board or appropriate governing board or agency.

Process for Approval and Review of Ministries in Service beyond the Jurisdiction of the Church:

A. Approval of Application for Validation of Ministry:

- 1) The minister or candidate seeking validation for a particular ministry shall complete the Application for Validation of a Ministry and submit the application to the presbytery no later than 2 weeks before the date of the COM meeting at which the application is to be considered.
- 2) The COM Moderator shall place the application on the agenda of the committee and, if deemed appropriate, schedule an interview for the minister with all or part of the COM.
- 3) The COM shall consider the application and recommend to the presbytery whether or not the ministry should be validated.
- 4) At its next stated meeting, the presbytery shall consider the COM recommendation and shall determine whether or not to validate the ministry.
- 5) If the ministry is validated, a commissioning liturgy may be celebrated by the presbytery to mark the beginning of the ministry.
- 6) The presbytery shall notify the minister or candidate in writing of the decision of the presbytery.

B. Annual Review and Approval of Application for Validation of Ministry:

1) Annual Review

The minister engaged in a ministry validated by the presbytery shall update and resubmit an Application for Validation of a Ministry no later than 30 September of each year. The Application shall be reviewed by the COM and reported to the presbytery, ordinarily at its next stated meeting. The COM may, and in the case of recommendation to rescind validation shall, interview the minister concerning the report and the character and conduct of the ministry. If the COM recommends rescinding validation of the ministry, it shall report its findings and reasons for so recommending to the presbytery, and the minister shall be offered opportunity to respond.

**West Virginia Presbytery
Application for Validation of Ministry**

Job Title or Position Description: _____

Applicant's Name: _____

Applicant's Home Address: _____

Applicant's Home Phone: _____

Applicant's Professional Address: _____

Applicant's Professional Phone: _____

Applicant's Email: _____

West Virginia Presbytery's Criteria for Validation of Ministries within its Bounds requires applicants for validation to demonstrate the validity of proposed ministries by attaching an essay comprised of five paragraphs and other necessary attestations and information to this application. Each paragraph of the attached essay should be devoted to answering one of the following five topics:

1. Demonstrate how this ministry will be in 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.
2. Describe how this ministry serves others, aids others, and enables the ministries of others.
3. Describe how this ministry gives evidence of theologically informed fidelity to God's Word.
4. Describe how this ministry is carried on in accountability for its character and conduct to the presbytery and to organizations, agencies, and institutions.
5. Describe how this ministry includes responsible participation in the deliberations and work of the presbytery and in the worship and service of a congregation.

Other necessary attestations and information shall include an annual written report on the minister's performance of the ministry submitted directly to the Committee on Ministry by the minister's supervisor, supervisory board or appropriate governing board or agency.

BACKGROUND

Membership in presbytery and validated ministries

Each presbytery must have a policy to guide its decisions about what constitutes a validated ministry

Membership designations

An active member is a minister of Word and Sacrament who has been admitted to the presbytery in accordance with G-11.0401, and is now engaged in ministry that complies with all of the criteria in G-11.0403 without exception. An active member may be engaged in

- a validated ministry within congregations of the church (G-11.0409),
- in a validated ministry in other service of this church (G-11.0410),
- in a validated ministry in service beyond the jurisdiction of this church (G-11.0411),
- or may be honorably retired (G-11.0412).

An active member is entitled to take part in the meetings of the presbytery and to speak, vote, and hold office. (G-11.0406a)

A member-at-large is a minister of the Word and Sacrament who has previously been admitted to the presbytery or another presbytery as an active member, 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-11.0403. A minister 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 because of family responsibilities or other individual circumstances which presbytery recognizes as important. A member-at-large shall comply with as many of the criteria in G-11.0403 as possible and shall be encouraged to become a parish associate in 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 each member-at-large may be granted by the presbytery upon the minister's application and shall be reviewed annually. (G-11.0406b)

An Inactive member (G-11.0406c) is a minister of the Word and Sacrament who has previously been admitted to the presbytery or another presbytery as an active member, but is now voluntarily engaged in an occupation that does not comply with all of the criteria in G-11.0403. The presbytery may, at the minister's request or on its own initiative after notifying the minister in person or by certified mail at the last known address, determine that the minister's category of membership is that of inactive member.

An inactive member is not entitled to take part in the meetings of the presbytery or to speak, vote, hold office, or serve on committees, except that the inactive member may speak when the matter under consideration concerns that minister.

The continued status of each inactive member shall be reviewed annually up to three years. If at the end of three years the minister has not been restored to active membership or membership-at-large, the presbytery shall delete that person's name from the appropriate roll of presbytery and may give that person a certificate of membership to a particular church. (G11.0414)

A presbytery shall determine the ministers of the Word and Sacrament who shall be its continuing members (G-11.0403). This is an important assertion! The presbytery has the authority to decide its members. In making this determination the presbytery shall be guided by written criteria developed by the presbytery for validation of ministries within its bounds. Each presbytery (appropriately with involvement by Committee on Ministry) must develop criteria to guide decisions about membership. The process of developing criteria can be enriching to those involved as they grapple with theological and practical issues about ministry. These criteria shall be based upon the description of the nature of ordained office found in G-6.0100 and G-6.0200 and the following standards (11.0403):

- a. The ministry of continuing members shall be in demonstrable 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 Presbytery mission statement is needed to determine if a particular ministry is in "conformity with the mission of God's people." This statement should be as comprehensive as possible, flexible,

dynamic, periodically assessed and modified as new concerns emerge or new human resources become available. It should include:

Ministry within its congregations;

Mission projects and other forms of ministry that the presbytery believes it should address, for example, schools, day-care projects, chaplaincies and pastoral care, pastoral counseling and pastoral education services and health care facilities and services;

Ministries in other service of this church that are related by organization, accountability, or structure to governing bodies, agencies, mission and ministry units or seminaries, and to interdenominational organizations such as councils of churches, CROP, and the Heifer Project;

Ministries beyond the jurisdiction of this church such as nondenominational or other service, for instance organizations dealing with housing programs, the farm crisis, drug and alcohol addiction or marriage and family problems.

- b. The ministry shall be one that serves others, aids others, and enables the ministries of others.

This criterion implies that the work being validated is oriented toward serving people and enabling them to serve other people. Conversely, it implies that a validated ministry is not primarily concerned with profit-making activities. This does not suggest that a person in a profit-making position cannot perform ministry; many laypersons do. Nor does it imply that the minister cannot be employed in a profit-making enterprise. The primary functions of one's work, however, should relate to the service of people rather than to the production of goods or of profits. In this way the special gifts and training of a minister of Word and Sacrament provide a theological perspective.

A distinction should be made between validated ministry and the secular work that a Tentmaking minister might do. In the case of many tentmakers, a part-time ministry is validated, but secular work (such as being a farmer or teacher) is not.

- c. The ministry shall give evidence of theologically informed fidelity to God's Word. This will normally require the Master of Divinity degree or its equivalent and the completion of the requirements for ordination set forth in G-14.0402.

Presbytery needs to determine where theologically informed skills are needed to carry out its mission. This implies that work to which a continuing member is called makes active and effective use of the biblical and theological training that is required for ordination. Normally this means that such work should provide opportunities to articulate the Christian faith. If a proposed calling does not provide such opportunity, questions should be raised as to whether it can be a validated ministry.

Committees on Ministry and Committees on Preparation for Ministry need to evaluate the relationship between the Master of Divinity degree and the meaning of "theological fidelity." This should be done on the basis of the requirements of the ministry to be performed, and not on the basis of the individual under consideration. Being theologically informed and faithful to the theology need not be equated with possessing the M.Div. degree.

- d. The ministry shall be carried on in accountability for its character and conduct to the presbytery and to organizations, agencies, and institutions. Accountability here implies that a member of presbytery is answerable to the presbytery for agreed-upon end results. It is clearly inadequate for a presbytery to exercise its accountability relationship solely by collecting and reviewing annual report forms. At the very least, accountability to presbytery should involve a face-to-face review of the ministry of every continuing member not less than once every three years.

Presbytery should provide support that enables the person to carry out the ministry with maximum effectiveness. (For ministers in congregations this support is provided in part through triennial visits to sessions and regular visits with ministers by the COM.) Persons serving in validated ministries might be given periodic opportunity to interpret their ministries to the presbytery so as to enlarge the presbytery's horizons. They should be included in the COM's pastoral care for all ministers of Word and Sacrament.

The presbytery should also decide whether it would validate ministries for which there is no compensation. While neither the amount of time spent in the particular ministry nor the amount of compensation should be prime considerations in applying the criteria for validation, it must be noted that lack of compensation and large time demands can be a means of misusing people and abusing the system of validation.

- e. The ministry shall include responsible participation in the deliberations and work of the presbytery and in the worship and service of a congregation.

This criterion suggests that some minimum standards should be established by presbytery for attendance at presbytery meetings. One who is never present at meetings can hardly be described as an "active" member. Attending a committee meeting or working on a task force of the presbytery is sometimes seen as an adequate substitute for attending a stated meeting of the presbytery itself. The working hours of some specialized ministers do not permit them to attend presbytery meetings. Some may lose money when they are not at work. These factors must be considered when requirements for presbytery attendance are decided.

Worship and service in a congregation also needs to be considered. Does this mean a congregation of this presbytery? Would work and worship in a church of another denomination other than one in which we are related under the Formula of Agreement qualify? Would work and worship in a church of another denomination qualify? Most presbyteries assume that a Presbyterian minister's participation should be in a Presbyterian (U.S.A.) congregation. Fair judgments about a minister's accountability and participation in the life of the church and the presbytery require establishing some standards by which to make these decisions. Our Form of Government properly leaves such matters to the presbytery itself.

If not validated ministry, what other options?

If one or more of the criteria cannot be met, the continuing member should ask to be designated either a member-at-large (G-11.0406 b) or an inactive member (G11.0406 c) of presbytery. If presbytery is unwilling to grant this, the continuing member should seek release from the exercise of ordained office (G-11.0414) until he or she receives a call to ministry that fulfills all five criteria.

Restoration to the exercise of the office is possible without re-ordination by:

Application to and approval of the presbytery that granted release,

Reaffirmation of ordination vows, and

Resumption of a ministry that qualifies for continuing active membership in presbytery.

These steps provide for ease in movement and are in no way judgmental. They are permissive in that re-ordination is not necessary. People should be encouraged to use them.

Additional information about validated ministries is found in the Book of Order, G-6.0203 (Teachers, Chaplains, and Others), G-11.0409, (Service in Congregations of This Church) G-11.0410 (In Other Service of This Church) and G-11.0411 (In Service Beyond the Jurisdiction of The Church).