

## **9.1 Steps to Ordination to the Vocation of Teaching Elder in the Office of the Presbyterate.**

**.01** Final authority for the preparation of men for ordination to the vocation of teaching elder is vested in the presbytery. It may recommend any theological schools or other training schemes or remediation it considers appropriate but the successful completion of courses of study shall not be deemed equivalent to approval, by the presbytery, for ordination.

**.02** Though presbyteries may differ in the details of procedures the following provisions must be observed.

Three stages of progress.

(1) Being taken under care.

1. The presbytery has to be satisfied as fully as is humanly possible that God has called the candidate to be a teaching elder and that the candidate's motives for seeking ordination in WPC are valid. In reaching its decision the presbytery shall take into account the man's church membership, personal testimony, formal education, doctrinal position, and comments by mature Christians about his character, his aptitude for the teaching eldership, and his experience in Christian work.

2. The presbytery must also establish strategies to ensure -

2.1 that an accepted candidate is officially enrolled as under its care;

2.2 that adequate pastoral oversight and counsel is provided for him for his general encouragement and in respect of theological and other education, and opportunities for supervised Christian service;

2.3 that he is thoroughly instructed in the doctrinal standards of this denomination;

2.4 that he knows the contents of this Book of Church Order and the Constitution of WPC.

2.5 that there are clearly understood guidelines to which he must conform if his candidature is not to be terminated.

3. If a candidate under care wishes to transfer to another presbytery of WPC a full statement of his status must be sent to that presbytery by the presbytery in which he is enrolled and under whose care he must remain until transfer of enrolment is completed.

(2) Licensure

1. A candidate for licensure shall have finished at least two years of his theological training, or the equivalent thereof.

2. His conduct and his progress in studies shall have satisfied the presbytery.

3. The presbytery shall require the candidate for licensure to prepare these papers:

3.1 a sermon, which the presbytery may ask to be preached in its presence;

3.2 an essay on a theological theme;

- 3.3 an exegesis of an assigned passage of Scripture, normally from the Hebrew or Greek;
- 3.4 a history of Westminster Presbyterian Church.
4. The candidate shall be examined by the presbytery in English Bible; the inspiration of the Scriptures; systematic theology; church history; Hebrew; Greek.
5. The candidate shall read a brief written statement of his beliefs before the presbytery and the clerk shall file it.
6. Though in certain cases (such as that of an evangelist) the presbytery at its discretion may make allowances that lessen the demands of examinations in Hebrew and Greek it is desirable that candidates have a working knowledge of these languages, or at least an ability to use exegetical helps which employ the use of original languages.
7. If the presbytery is satisfied with the examination it shall proceed to license the candidate. The moderator shall pray for him and require him to answer questions 1 – 7 of the Ordination Questions in BCO 2.4. Upon receiving the candidate's satisfactory answers the moderator shall declare the candidate licensed to preach the Gospel for a period of two years and shall ask for God's blessing upon him. The clerk shall record the details of the licensure and provide a statement of it to the licentiate.
8. If the licentiate is not ordained within the stated period of two years the presbytery may extend the licensure by one year at a time, but if it becomes evident that the services of the licentiate are not edifying the church or winning the lost the licensure shall not be extended indefinitely.
9. A presbytery shall make appropriate arrangements for a candidate for licensure who moves to another presbytery during the period of his examination.
10. A licentiate who moves to another presbytery shall present to its clerk a copy of the record of his licensure and a recommendation from the presbytery he leaves.

### (3) Ordination

1. A candidate for ordination shall normally be a licentiate who has completed an acceptable theological course of at least three years duration, or its equivalent, and an acceptable internship of not less than six months with an experienced teaching elder. Exceptions to these requirements must be approved by at least  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the presbyters at a meeting of the presbytery dealing with the application for ordination, and the reasons for the exception must be recorded in the minutes. Exceptions to the requirements will be valid only in the presbytery where the exceptions are approved. If the candidate transfers to another presbytery and seeks ordination there, any exceptions to the requirements must be dealt with there in the same manner as in the presbytery to which the candidate first made application for ordination.
2. The examination for ordination shall include examinations in systematic theology, church, sacraments; apologetics; the Book of Church Order, the history and constitution of the denomination, and, at the discretion of the presbytery, any of the subjects covered in the examination for licensure. The extent and depth of the candidate's theological knowledge should be appropriate to the service to which he is called.
3. The presbytery shall make sure that the candidate, if ordained, shall begin his service in the vocation of teaching elder with due appreciation of the importance of the system of doctrine taught in Scripture and set forth in The Westminster Confession of Faith.
4. If the examination is sustained and the presbytery authorises the ordination of the candidate, the time, date, and circumstances of the ordination shall be arranged at the conclusion of the examination.

5. If a successful candidate is expected to serve as a teaching elder in a particular church it is preferable that his ordination be postponed until the church's call to him has been processed, and that he be ordained and installed in the one service.

6. If a successful candidate has a call to service in a field other than that of teaching elder in a particular church the presbytery shall examine the call as to the need and appropriateness of ordination for the field of service specified. If the presbytery verifies the need and appropriateness of the ordination it shall clearly identify, and record in its minutes, the details of the call. It shall ordain the candidate in an ordination service and, if any form of installation is required, carry out such installation. A teaching elder shall not labour as such outside the bounds of his presbytery without its full concurrence.

7. An ordination service shall include:

an appropriate sermon or address;

explanation of the nature and importance of ordination to the vocation of teaching elder;

affirmative answers by the candidate to the questions in BCO 2.4;

the laying on of the hands of the presbytery, with the ordination prayer;

the charge to the newly ordained teaching elder.

And if the newly ordained teaching elder is to be installed as a teaching elder in a particular church in the same service the following shall be included:

affirmative replies by the congregation to the questions in BCO 11.12;

declaration of installation;

a charge to the congregation;

welcome by members of the presbytery;

welcome by the congregation.

8. Presbyteries should refrain from ordaining men when no clear call exists and when there is no foreseeable field of service for the candidate in the short term.

## **9.2 Status of Teaching Elder**

**.01** When a man is ordained to the vocation of teaching elder he becomes a member of the presbytery in whose bounds he resides and the clerk shall enrol him as such. If he is called to a particular church his name may also be added to the church's roll of communicant members but from the point of view of jurisdiction he is a member of the presbytery.

**.02** If a teaching elder desires to leave his vocation he shall notify the presbytery and the presbytery shall allow a year for appropriate counselling. If after a year the teaching elder still desires to leave his vocation the presbytery shall record the facts of the case in its minutes and erase his name from the roll of teaching elders.

**.03** A teaching elder may properly engage, if necessary, in remunerative employment outside of church structures. If, however, he should pursue such employment for five years (or a period decided by his presbytery), and fail, for reasons other than age or disability, to exercise the functions of the teaching eldership, the presbytery shall determine, after counselling, whether he should remain in the teaching eldership, and deal with him accordingly.

**.04** The presbytery has the right to transfer the name of a teaching elder from its roll of members to its non-voting associate members' roll if, for more than one year, he is not genuinely engaged in the work of the ministry. Removal of a teaching elder's name from all the rolls of a presbytery shall occur if he transfers to another presbytery, or moves to the oversight of another ecclesiastical body,

or if he voluntarily demits the teaching eldership, or declares himself independent of the presbytery, or if he is deposed by judicial process according to chapter 12 of this Book of Church Order, or if he dies.

**.05** Teaching elders who are not teaching elders of local churches but are genuinely engaged in the work of the teaching eldership in roles, such as in teaching, evangelism, church-planting, chaplaincy, Christian educational or missionary administration, shall have the same status as other presbyters in the assemblies of the church.

**.06** A teaching elder who is not a called teaching elder of a local church should be careful to set an example by attendance at regular services for worship and prayer. Such men are encouraged to attend a local WPC congregation for regular worship and fellowship. Exemptions to this requirement, or selection of the local church, should be made in consultation with the presbytery. The teaching elder's name may properly be recorded on the roll of members of the church, but he should refrain from voting in congregational meetings. He must exercise great care not to undermine the installed teaching elder or be party to any disaffection. He is eligible for appointment as a ruling elder, if approved by the congregation and the session. He may serve in any way deemed helpful by the session. The essential membership of a teaching elder appointed as a ruling elder and not engaged in another work of the teaching eldership shall be the same as that of a ruling elder (see BCO 7.1.02, 7.1.03). Since he is ordained to the ministry of Word and sacrament, however, he may preach and administer the sacraments if asked, and in these activities he is accountable to the presbytery.

**.07** An ordained teaching elder is at liberty to preach the Gospel in any community, with due respect for the legally constituted authorities responsible for the premises in which he may preach. He shall not preach or teach in any church contrary to the orders of the session thereof. All teaching elders shall carefully avoid stirring up dissension in the flocks of other teaching elders, and a teaching elder shall not receive secret accusations against other presbyters, since to do so is explicitly forbidden in the Scriptures (1 Timothy 5:19). If a teaching elder has reason to fear that a fellow teaching elder is in error, he shall proceed in obedience to Scripture (Galatians 6:1) and shall carefully avoid the sin of the talebearer or of the busybody.

**.08** If a teaching elder intends to move to another presbytery of WPC he shall request formal transfer and shall not be admitted to the presbytery to which he wishes to transfer until he has sustained its examination of his doctrine and life.

**.09** When an officer of another denomination seeks admission to this denomination as a teaching elder he shall be examined by the presbytery to which he applies in exactly the same way as a candidate for ordination and he shall also present to the presbytery testimonials from the denomination in which he previously served.

**.10** If the other denomination in 9.2.09 is a fraternally-connected denomination or presbytery (as defined in 9.5.01), then the prospective teaching elder is not necessarily required to sever his ties with his original presbytery, but may hold concurrent membership of both presbyteries with principal accountability in matters of life and doctrine remaining with his original presbytery. Realms of responsibility of each presbytery and the means of resolving any conflict should be mutually agreed between the two presbyteries in advance.

## **Chapter 11 : TEACHING ELDERS: CALLS; INSTALLATION; RESIGNATION; DISMISSAL.**

### **11.1 Call and Installation of Teaching Elders.**

**.01** When a local church desires to appoint a teaching elder the session shall seek to bring suitable candidates to the attention of the congregation.

**.02** The session shall form a committee from communicant members of the congregation to aid in the search for a suitable candidate.

**.03 Any communicant member may propose a candidate to the session and its committee.**

**.04** When the session and its committee are persuaded of the suitability of a certain licentiate or teaching elder; and when they have reasonable assurance that he would be available if called; then a proper and legal meeting of the congregation shall be called in accordance with chapter 3, for the purpose of issuing a formal call.

**.05** Determination of the percentage of voters deemed desirable for issuing a call is a matter for the local church, but a call ought not to be issued if a large minority of voters opposes it after sincere attempts have been made to secure their agreement.

**.06** When the congregation agrees to issue a formal call it shall be prepared by the session in consultation with the congregation, approved by the congregation, signed by those communicant members who support it, or by a committee acting for the congregation. If the latter, the presiding officer shall certify that the persons signing have been appointed by the congregation to do so.

**.07 The call shall include:**

- (1) a statement of the call;
- (2) terms of the call (remuneration, vacation, utilities, accommodation, other necessary items).

**.08** Copies of the call must go simultaneously to the candidate concerned, to the presbytery, and if the candidate is from another presbytery a copy should also go to that presbytery. The presbytery in

which the candidate will serve must also be informed of the circumstances leading up to the issuing of the call.

**.09 The call becomes effective in securing the teaching elder or licentiate called, after**

- (1) the presbytery of which he is a member has ascertained that he wishes to accept the call;
- (2) the presbytery has examined and approved him for this particular sphere of ministry;
- (3) any existing pastoral relationship has been dissolved;
- (4) any necessary change of presbytery membership has occurred;
- (5) the recipient of the call, if a licentiate, has been examined and ordained;
- (6) the teaching elder has been officially installed by the presbytery in the church that called him.

**.10** No church shall issue a call to a teaching elder from another denomination until he has been examined and approved by the presbytery.

**.11** At the service of installation the new teaching elder shall answer affirmatively the questions in BCO 2.4

**.12 The people of the congregations shall also answer affirmatively the following questions:**

- (1) Do you, the people of this congregation, continue in your readiness to receive ..... whom you have called to be a teaching elder in this church?
- (2) Do you promise to give him all that honour, encouragement, and obedience, in the Lord, to which he, according to the Scriptures, the Constitution of this church, and the denominational Book of Church Order, is entitled?
- (3) While he serves as your teaching elder will you continue that material provision for him which you have promised?

**.13** The moderator shall declare the installation effected and the session shall take appropriate steps to welcome the new teaching elder.

**11.2 Resignation of Teaching Elders.**

**.01** If a teaching elder desires to leave the position in which he has been installed he shall notify the session and the presbytery simultaneously at least three months before the date of his intended departure.

**.02** If, after discussion with the session, the teaching elder continues in his desire to resign, the session shall advise the congregation.

**.03** The congregation may appoint representatives to appear on its behalf at the next stated presbytery meeting or a special presbytery meeting called to deal with the resignation.

**.04** If the congregation fails to appear, or if its reasons for retaining its teaching elder are deemed insufficient by the presbytery, the presbytery shall give the teaching elder leave to resign from his position, and due record shall be made by the clerk of the presbytery.

**11.3 Dismissal of Teaching Elders.**

**.01** Dissatisfaction with a teaching elder for non-disciplinary reasons must not be allowed by members to become an item of gossip or character assassination or an excuse for their leaving

the church. It must be dealt with in obedience to the Scriptures and that entails, at the very least, prayerful, open, frank, and honourable discussion, with all participants remembering their relationship in Christ, and the necessity, even at such a difficult time, of making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit.

**.02** The session shall devise procedures by which members can, without embarrassment, raise concerns and enter into discussion that is constructive. Presbyters from other sessions may be called upon for help and advice, and assistance may be sought from the presbytery.

**.03** If, after extensive discussion, it appears that a significant number of members have made sincere, but unsuccessful, efforts to accept the continuance of the teaching elder, and if it seems that the peace of the church would be better served by the dissolution of the pastoral tie, the session shall call a meeting of the congregation to request the presbytery to effect the dissolution.

**.04** BCO 6.1.05-6.1.08 shall be taken into account by the presbytery in its dealing with the congregational request.

**.05** If procedures result in the dissolution of the pastoral tie the congregation must provide materially for the teaching elder for a period of at least three months from the date on which the dissolution becomes effective. Such material provision shall include payment of the teaching elder's stipend and of any other monies to which he is entitled by his terms of call and any subsequent provisions.

**.06** The presbytery has the right to depose teaching elders guilty of heresy or immorality. Due process must be followed to ensure the teaching elder receives a fair hearing. The principle of "innocent till proven guilty" shall be enforced and there should be zero tolerance of gossip. (See BCO 12, CHURCH DISCIPLINE.)

## **2.4 Officers' Ordination and Installation Questions.**

**.01** All presbyters, deacons, and licentiates of this denomination shall give affirmative answers to the following questions at ordination, installation, or appointment.

(1) Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, inerrant in their original writings, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?

(2) Do you sincerely receive and adopt the doctrinal standard of this church, The Westminster Confession of Faith, as embodying the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures, to the maintenance of which this church is bound before God by solemn obligation?

(3) Do you acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ as the only Redeemer and Head of this church, and do you accept the presbyterian form of church government as derived from the Holy Scriptures?

(4) Do you promise, by the help of God, such subjection to your brethren as is taught in the Word of God?

(5) Have you been induced, as far as you know your own heart, to seek the vocation of the (teaching eldership OR the ruling eldership OR the diaconate) from love to God, and a sincere desire to promote his glory in the Gospel of his Son?

(6) Do you promise, by the help of God, to be zealous and faithful in maintaining the truths of the Gospel and the purity and peace of the church, whatever persecution or opposition may arise toward you on that account?

(7) Do you promise, by the help of God, to be faithful and diligent in your personal and family life, as well as in the public duties of your office, endeavouring to adorn the profession of the Gospel by your life, and walking in exemplary piety before the flock in which you shall serve?

(8) Do you promise, by the help of God, to be conscientious in attending the assemblies of this church and in directing your best attention to the business thereof, doing all in a spirit of faithfulness, brotherly kindness, and charity?

(9) Are you now willing to accept the responsibilities of a (teaching elder OR ruling elder OR deacon OR licentiate) in this congregation as you agreed to do so when you (accepted the call of OR were elected by the members OR (in the case of a licentiate) were appointed to serve here) – and do you promise, by the help of God, to discharge your duties to them in Christian ministry as God shall give you strength?