

THE MEANING OF ORDINATION TO THE MINISTRY OF WORD AND SACRAMENTS

(A&P 2008, p. 353-365; A&P 2021, p. 501-504; A&P 2024, p. 213-214, 37)

The ministry of Word and Sacraments has a significant and integral role in the life of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. For this reason, individuals sensing God's call to this ministry are required to engage with the church in extensive preparation and discernment, culminating in ordination. Presbyteries normally ordain those who have responded to God's call and have received and accepted a call from a congregation of The Presbyterian Church in Canada that has been approved as a gospel call by the presbytery.

Questions have arisen, by overture to the General Assembly, whether presbyteries should be permitted to ordain to the ministry of Word and Sacraments individuals who, although ready to receive a call to a Presbyterian congregation, accept non-congregational ministry positions. Of particular interest are positions as directors of Presbyterian Church in Canada camps or as chaplains in non-Presbyterian Church in Canada institutions such as hospitals, prisons and continuing care homes. Is ordination appropriate in these circumstances or is the call of a Presbyterian congregation essential as the final step in the discernment leading to ordination?

The questions of ordination in the context of camp ministry or chaplaincy raise other foundational questions. What does ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacraments mean? In what circumstances is ordination appropriate?

To answer these questions, the General Assembly in 2006 authorized the Life and Mission Agency (Ministry and Church Vocations) to establish a joint task group with the Committee on Church Doctrine to articulate a theology of ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacraments, including the grounds for such ordination (A&P 2006, p. 353-54). This foundation would provide the basis for the task group to address the following: the question of ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacraments and induction to a Presbyterian Church in Canada camping ministry, based on acceptance of such an appointment; the question of ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacraments, based on employment as a chaplain in a non Presbyterian Church in Canada institution; and the question of the endorsement of lay chaplains and pastoral caregivers. In addition, the General Assembly assigned two additional pieces: Overture No. 15, 2005 about the guidelines of the Committee on Education and Reception, and the study paper on multiple minister congregations (A&P 2006, p. 354-57, 358-63, 38).

A joint task group was established: The Rev. Peter Bush, Dr. Bill Klempa, The Rev. Jean Morris, and The Rev. Karla Wubbenhorst are members of the Committee on Church Doctrine; The Rev. Karen Bach, The Rev. Susan Shaffer, and Dr. Art Van Seters participated at the invitation of the office of Ministry and Church Vocations. In carrying out its task, the group has studied the following:

1. The Presbyterian Church in Canada statements about ordination.
2. Various authorities from our Reformed heritage.

With this background information, a theology of ordination is proposed, along with answers to the particular questions assigned by the General Assembly.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada documents

What has The Presbyterian Church in Canada said about ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacraments? Two recent documents provide useful background.

The Theology and Practice of Ordination

The Committee on Church Doctrine presented a paper about ordination to the General Assembly in 2003 (A&P 2003, p. 272-77). Entitled, "*The Theology and Practice of Ordination in The Presbyterian Church in Canada: A Study Paper*," it was commended for use in the church. The paper drew attention to the large number of memorials and overtures over the preceding 40 years that had raised questions about ordination and been referred by General Assemblies to the Committee on Church Doctrine (or to its predecessor, the Committee on Articles of Faith). Clearly, this church has always seen a theological understanding of ordination to be important. The paper noted three previous study papers and statements, and proceeded with an historical review of the practice of ordination from the early church to Reformed churches in the present day.

The origins of ordination in the early church are obscure. According to four New Testament references¹, in the apostolic age "people were ordained to offices of preaching and teaching and service," but there is no mention of ordination to administer baptism or the Lord's Supper. By the second century, only those ordained were authorized to conduct sacraments. During the medieval period, ordination became closely linked with the right to celebrate the Eucharist and disconnected from teaching and preaching, which were carried out largely by the non-ordained friars.

The sixteenth century Reformers unanimously rejected the Roman Catholic view that ordination changed the priests in their very being in some mysterious and indelible way. At the same time, some diversity of views and practices existed among the Reformers and the churches they led. Areas of difference included whether ordination required the laying on of hands and if so, by whom, and the role and duties of ruling elders.

Finally the paper noted the apparent tolerance among Reformed churches for more than one Reformed understanding of ordination, and described three understandings that place different emphasis on the distinctions between clergy and elders or between clergy, elders and the people. The paper concluded with the observation that the church's theology of ordination must be subordinate to and dependent upon its theology of ministry. What we believe about ordination is shaped by what we believe about the church and its ministry.

Together in Ministry

In 2003 the General Assembly accepted for use in the church a document entitled: *Together in Ministry: The Theology and Practice of Ministry in The Presbyterian Church in Canada* (A&P 2003, p. 372-412). This was the final document in a ten-year process of church-wide consultation involving sessions, presbyteries and others in studying this church's ministry as expressed through the ministry of the people of God, the courts of the church, the ruling eldership, the congregational diaconate, diaconal ministry and the ministry of Word and Sacraments. Ordination to the three offices of ruling eldership, congregational deacon and ministry of Word and Sacraments was defined as the act of setting apart an individual in an order, by authority of the presbytery.²

As described in *Together in Ministry*, many of the beliefs and practices of The Presbyterian Church in Canada can be traced back to the writings of John Calvin and to the *Second Book of Discipline* of the Church of Scotland and to *The Form of Presbyterial Church-Government*.³ Because the questions currently before this denomination concern the meaning of ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacraments and the contexts in which such ordination is appropriate, it is useful to consider how Calvin and the early Church of Scotland handled these matters.

Reformed heritage

John Calvin

Calvin's theology stressed a doctrine of calling or vocation. Not only those set apart to an order of ministry have a vocation, but all God's people are gifted and called to serve God and neighbour by their work in the world. Within this understanding that all work is sacred, done as a vocation and unto the Lord, Calvin believed that Christ also established an office of ministry within the church. The office of ministry of Word and Sacraments is provided to teach the gospel and to equip the saints (Ephesians 4). It is one of Christ's essential and continuing gifts to the church. Ordained ministry finds its authority not in the person of the minister, but in the faithful witness to Christ it provides, through the means of grace Christ gives: preaching and teaching, sacraments and discipline.

The church is assigned an essential role in the call of an individual to the preaching and teaching office, such that individuals cannot take for themselves the office of minister of the gospel. God's call has two dimensions: the inner call that the individual perceives and the outer call that the church tests and affirms. In its role of discernment, the church considers the individual's doctrine, life, fitness, ministry skills, educational preparedness and church experience. The minister is chosen by the whole people of the congregation. Calls are considered "lawful ... when those who seemed fit were chosen by consent and approval of the people, with pastors presiding over the election."⁴ Ordination is enacted in the laying on of hands by the pastors alone. Ordination binds the individual in servitude to God and to the church.⁵

With his concern for good order in the church, Calvin considered it ideal for ordained ministers to be settled in particular congregations. While he acknowledged that settled ministers might assist one another when requested, he warned them against interfering in one another's ministries, and expressed wariness of itinerant ministers travelling from place to place as seemed good to them.⁶

Historic Continuity with the Church of Scotland

The Presbyterian Church in Canada's understanding of ordained ministry has been shaped by its "historic continuity with the Church of Scotland, reformed in 1560." (Book of Forms section 1) Specific reference is made in the Book of Forms to the "principles and practice of Presbyterian Churches" set forth in the Church of Scotland's *Second Book of Discipline* of 1578 and the Westminster Assembly's *Form of Presbyterial Church-Government* adopted by the Church of Scotland in 1645 (Book of Forms sections 2-3). Although no reference is made to the *First Book of Discipline*, it must also be considered in any historical survey since its principles derive largely from John Calvin's polity and underlie those of its successor, the *Second Book of Discipline*.

First Book of Discipline (1560)⁷

In the Scottish Reformation of 1560, the hierarchical church offices of the medieval Roman Catholic Church were abolished and in their place, John Calvin's four offices of

pastor-bishop, teacher or doctor, elder and deacon were instituted. Congregations were given a voice in the selection of ministers while the examination of candidates was delegated to ministers of the soundest judgment. Unlike Calvin, John Knox shied away from the term “ordination”. Priests who came into the reformed Church of Scotland were asked to renounce Roman orders. They were “inaugurated” into their ministry without the imposition of hands which Knox believed was a practice that had ceased with the apostles. Presumably, the term “inauguration” was employed to avoid any notion of “re-ordination”. The office of superintendent was introduced as “a thing most expedient for this time” and superintendents were given the task of planting and erecting kirks and appointing ministers, and where enough ministers could not be found, appointing readers, who read homilies and prayers, and exhorters, who preached but could not administer the sacraments. Only about six superintendents out of the intended ten or twelve were appointed because of a lack of funds and it is likely the office was soon discontinued.

Second Book of Discipline (1578)⁸

A number of the principles enunciated in the *First Book of Discipline* were more fully developed. It was stated that the titles “bishop”, “pastor” and “presbyter” all referred to the same office. Superintendents are not mentioned. Apparently experimentation with that office had ceased, probably because of a more numerous and settled ministry. The term “ordination” was restored as well as the practice of the laying on of hands. Emphasis was placed on God’s call of a minister and the consent of the congregation. Calvin’s exegesis of 1 Timothy 5:17, as teaching two kinds of elders, elders who preach and govern and elders who govern only, was accepted. The ruling eldership was regarded as a “spiritual function as is the ministry”.⁹ All presbyters, ministers and elders are to be elected for life. They are also to be ordained. Pastors and doctors are to be “diligent in teaching and sowing the seed of the word” while elders are to “be careful in seeking the fruit of the same in the people.”¹⁰

The Form of Presbyterian Church-Government (1645)

Early Church of Scotland practice followed John Calvin’s theology closely, with suitable changes to reflect the emergence of presbyteries in Scotland.¹¹ Greater detail is provided about the presbytery’s examination and approval of the individual for ordination, which clearly is seen as the act of the whole presbytery. When a congregation is considering selecting a particular minister, he is required to preach and to spend several days in conversation with the people, “that they might come to know him.” When they commend the minister’s name to presbytery, they are attesting their “willingness to receive and acknowledge him as the minister of Christ.”¹²

Like Calvin, the early Church of Scotland assumed that ministers should be assigned to some particular ministry, and that congregational ministry was the norm. However, *The Form of Presbyterian Church-Government* apparently accepted ministry contexts that were not congregations. Those who were to be ordained as ministers were “either nominated by the people, or otherwise commended to the presbytery,”¹³ and they were to “be designed to some particular church, or other ministerial charge.”¹⁴ Moreover, in the extraordinary conditions of the British civil war, permission was granted to presbyteries, and even to groups of “godly ministers” acting on behalf of a presbytery, to ordain to chaplaincy in the armies and the navy.¹⁵

Towards a theology of ordination

The preceding review of relevant Presbyterian Church in Canada documents and various Reformed church influences has provided useful background. A statement of our theology of ordination is presented below, followed by proposed answers to the particular questions assigned by the Assembly.

THEOLOGY OF ORDINATION

The Presbyterian Church in Canada practices ordination within the framework of what we believe about Christ, the church and ministry.¹⁶ There is one minister, the Lord Jesus Christ, and one ministry, the ministry of Christ. The church is Christ together with the people whom he has called to worship and to serve him in all of life. Christ continues his ministry through the church, having provided all baptized Christians with the gifts they need to share his ministry to the world. Christ also recognizes that Christian communities need specific forms of leadership, if they are to be renewed and nurtured continually for ministry. Christ endows and calls individuals to provide this leadership, at the same time requiring and enabling the church to confirm these calls.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada gives order to these necessary forms of leadership by establishing their purposes, the scope of their duties, their qualifications and the ways the church tests and discerns their calls. In company with other Reformed churches, we ordain individuals to the offices of ruling eldership, congregational deacon, and ministry of Word and Sacraments. Ordination, the act of setting an individual in an order by authority of the presbytery, signifies the church's confirmation of the individual's call.

On the occasion of each ordination, the church affirms its beliefs about the proper role of the particular office in the church's life. Since the church is Christ together with his people, all ministries are Christ's ministry, given flesh among particular people in a particular time and place.

Ordination always involves prayer and the laying on of hands by the ordained ministers who are present. Ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacraments takes place in a worship service within the context of a presbytery meeting. Ordination to the ruling eldership or congregational deacons' court takes place within the context of a congregational worship service, with the ordained minister(s) of the congregation representing the authority of the presbytery.

The Ministry of Word and Sacraments

The ministry of Word and Sacraments is the pastoral and teaching office, one of Christ's continuing gifts to the church. To respond obediently to Christ's call, the church in every age needs the gospel of Jesus Christ to be proclaimed without distortion. Christ entrusts ministers with a special responsibility for the standards or teaching of his church (Book of Forms section 447). The authority of the office of ministry of Word and Sacraments rests in the faithful witness to Christ provided by its preaching, teaching, rightly discerning doctrine, conducting the sacraments, and offering pastoral care and discipline – never in the person of the minister.

Entry into the ministry of Word and Sacraments takes place with ordination by a presbytery. Such ordination binds the minister into service to Christ and to his church. At their ordination, ministers of The Presbyterian Church in Canada make solemn vows. They confess faith in God the Father, made known in his Son, Jesus Christ, to whom the Holy Spirit witnesses in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. They promise to uphold this church's doctrine, under the continual illumination and correction of the Holy

Spirit speaking in the scriptures. They promise to share in and submit to this church's lawful oversight and to seek the peace and unity of Christ throughout the Holy Catholic Church. Finally, they promise to live in ways that reflect Christ's gospel, and to serve Christ's word, sacraments and discipline diligently and cheerfully, sharing in his reconciling mission in the world.

The office of ministry of Word and Sacraments finds expression in a number of kinds of leadership and service that this church recognizes as valid ministry contexts for ordained ministers of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. While ministry in our congregations is by far the most frequent, our ordained ministers also serve as seminary professors; directors of Bible societies; staff of The Presbyterian Church in Canada agencies and missions, including synod staff and synod camp directors and international missionaries; pastoral counsellors; and chaplains in hospitals, continuing care homes, prisons, universities and the Canadian military. Non-congregational positions within The Presbyterian Church in Canada permit our ministers to contribute their gifts to ministries of this church beyond local congregations and presbyteries. Recognized ministry positions outside this denomination enable our ministers to contribute their gifts to ministries of ecumenical church partners and facilitate a wider Presbyterian presence, service and witness.

Particular ministries are recognized as valid contexts for service by ministers of The Presbyterian Church in Canada when presbyteries place the minister's name on the constituent (active) roll of the presbytery (Book of Forms sections 176-176.1.9). All ministers belong to presbyteries, which have responsibility to guide, care for, and (if necessary) discipline their ministers. For their part, ministers are accountable to their presbyteries for their lives and service. Good standing in one presbytery makes ministers eligible to serve in any ministry within any other presbytery.¹⁷ Ministers serving in non-congregational contexts are urged to associate themselves closely with the life and work of a particular congregation (A&P 1980, p. 361-62).

Normally, ministers serving in The Presbyterian Church in Canada congregations do so at the call of the congregation, upon approval by the presbytery, which installs the minister in a service of induction. As well, the Life and Mission Agency may appoint ministers to serve in a congregation, at the request of the congregation and its presbytery, which installs the minister in a service of recognition. However, presbyteries may also appoint ministers to serve in congregations in such positions as stated supply and interim ministry. These appointments are limited to one year for stated supply and to up to two years for interim ministry (Book of Forms section 213.2-213.3) to protect the right of congregations to call their own ministers, a right hard-won and fiercely protected throughout the course of Scottish church history.

Ministers serving in non-congregational ministries of The Presbyterian Church in Canada are commended to the presbytery by the employing body. For instance, professors at The Presbyterian Church in Canada theological colleges are commended by the college governing board or by the General Assembly. In a similar way, agency, mission or synod staff are commended to the presbytery by the General Assembly, the Life and Mission Agency or the synod.

Ministers serving in presbytery-recognized ministries not directly responsible to The Presbyterian Church in Canada include Bible Society secretaries and teachers in Bible or theological colleges. In these cases, presbyteries are responding to the minister's request when they consider whether to recognize the ministry as a valid context for

service by the minister and to place the name of the minister on the constituent roll. However in the case of institutional chaplains, presbyteries require prior approval of the appointment, by the Committee on Education and Reception, before taking these actions.

Confirming Christ's call to the ministry of Word and Sacraments

Christ's call of an individual to the ministry of Word and Sacraments is confirmed by the presbytery in the act of ordination. Such calls have two dimensions: an inner call, perceived by the individual, and an outer call, tested and affirmed by the church.

While they seek to discern whether Christ is calling them to the ministry of Word and Sacraments, individuals are required to invite the church into their discernment and their preparation for service. The session of the congregation where the individual is a member initially recommends him or her to the presbytery. The presbytery certifies the individual as a candidate for ministry, and thereafter annually reviews and renews that standing. Presbyteries are assisted by reports from the guidance conference and psychological testing, which offer independent perspectives on the candidate, and by annual reports from The Presbyterian Church in Canada theological college where the candidate is studying. For its part, the college assists the candidate with preparation through studies in the Masters of Divinity program, and upon graduation, with the diploma indicating readiness for ministry in this denomination. The presbytery examines and then certifies the candidate for ordination, thereby granting final permission to seek a called position. Usually the candidate spends time with the congregation that is seeking a minister and preaches for a call, preaching and leading them in worship. The call of the congregation is recognized as a gospel call, first by the presbytery to which the congregation belongs, and then by the candidate's certifying presbytery (if different). After the call is placed in the candidate's hands and accepted, the person is ordained and inducted by the presbytery. Thereafter the newly ordained minister carries out his or her work with accountability to the presbytery.

While The Presbyterian Church in Canada recognizes the importance of a calling congregation in the process leading to ordination, we also have a long history of acknowledging certain appointments to specific mission positions as the call of the whole church.¹⁸ Candidates certified for ordination and therefore eligible to receive a call may be ordained upon appointment by the Life and Mission Agency or by its predecessor, the Board of World Mission (Book of Forms section 210). Typically, such appointments are made to grant-receiving ministries in Canada or to overseas ministries of a mission partner of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. This provision enables this church to contribute the gifts of newly ordained ministers to a variety of ministry contexts, including but not limited to local congregations and presbyteries, both in Canada and abroad. When presbyteries exercise their authority to ordain in these cases (deeming all other criteria for ordination to be met), they essentially act on commendation of the Life and Mission Agency.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada requires the following evidence that Christ's call of an individual to the ministry of Word and Sacraments has been confirmed:

1. The candidate has been certified for ordination by the presbytery. This follows initial recommendation by the session, certification and annual recertification by the presbytery, guidance conference, psychological testing, studies in a Presbyterian Church in Canada theological college resulting in graduation with a Masters of Divinity degree or certification that the educational requirements

assigned by the General Assembly have been completed, the college diploma indicating readiness for ministry in The Presbyterian Church in Canada, and successful examination for ordination by the presbytery.

2. The candidate has been offered and wishes to accept a ministry position that meets three essential standards: (a) the position requires full exercise of the ministry of Word and Sacraments;¹⁹ (b) the presbytery is permitted to recognize the position as a valid context for service by ministers of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, such that it may place the name of the minister, once ordained, on the constituent roll of the presbytery; and (c) the offer of the position is understood to represent the call of this church to a particular ministry. The call of this church may be acknowledged in any one of the following situations: the call of a congregation of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, appointment by the Life and Mission Agency, or, in the case of a position in institutional chaplaincy, permission of the Committee on Education and Reception. Congregational positions require either a call from the congregation or an appointment by the Life and Mission Agency.
3. The presbytery, satisfied with the guarantee of stipend, recognizes the call of the candidate to this particular ministry as a gospel call.
4. The presbytery is prepared to enter a relationship of care for the minister, who will be accountable to the presbytery for his or her ministry while serving or living within the bounds, as legislated.

Summary

The Presbyterian Church in Canada recognizes the critical importance of the pastoral and teaching office, which we understand to be one of Christ's gifts for the continual renewal and nurture of the church for ministry. Our understanding shapes our theology of ordination to this office. In particular, it leads us to anticipate that Christ's call of an individual to the ministry of Word and Sacraments will be confirmed through extensive, prayerful engagement of this church in the tasks of discernment and preparation.

The following recommendation is presented.

Recommendation No. 21 (adopted, p. 42)

That the theology of ordination articulated above be accepted for use in the church.

ORDINATION IN THE CONTEXT OF SPECIALIZED MINISTRIES

The theology of ordination articulated above suggests criteria for deciding whether a particular ministry position is a context in which a certified candidate for ministry properly might be ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacraments. The following questions are offered for the guidance of presbyteries:

1. Does the ministry position require full exercise of the ministry of Word and Sacraments?
2. Is presbytery permitted to recognize the ministry as a valid context for service by ministers of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, such that it may place the name of the minister, once ordained, on the constituent roll of the presbytery?
3. Is the offer of the position properly understood to represent the call of this church to a particular ministry? For congregational positions, has a congregation called the candidate or is the Life and Mission Agency making the appointment? For

- other positions, is the Life and Mission Agency making the appointment or, in the case of a position of institutional chaplaincy, has permission been granted by the Committee on Education and Reception?
4. Does the presbytery recognize the ministry position as a gospel call to the candidate?
 5. Is the presbytery prepared to enter a relationship of care for the minister, who will be accountable to the presbytery for his or her ministry while serving or living within the bounds, as legislated?²⁰

It should be noted that the category of presbytery-recognized ministries is wider than the category of ministries that are properly the basis for ordination. Firstly, not all presbytery recognized ministries require full exercise of the ministry of Word and Sacraments. For instance, pastoral counsellors and refugee consultants might offer pastoral care and teach, but have no opportunities in their specialized contexts to preach or to conduct sacraments. In the same way, some professors and Bible Society secretaries might find their ministries restricted to some but not all aspects of the ministry of Word and Sacraments. Secondly, not all presbytery recognized positions in congregations are the result of a call from the congregation. As noted earlier, presbytery appointments of ministers to stated supply or interim ministry positions do not require calls and are limited to one or two year terms precisely for this reason. Therefore, ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacraments may be appropriate based on some, but certainly not all, presbytery-recognized positions.

Camping ministries of The Presbyterian Church in Canada

Should presbyteries be permitted to ordain to the ministry of Word and Sacraments when certified candidates for ordination accept positions as director of a Presbyterian Church in Canada camp? While all criteria for ordination are to be met, two particular criteria come to the fore: does the position require full exercise of the ministry of Word and Sacraments, and can the offer of the position be understood properly as the call of this church to a particular ministry?

Whether the position will involve the camp director in full exercise of the ministry of Word and Sacraments depends on the scope of its duties. Will the director's work encompass preaching, teaching, rightly discerning doctrine, conducting sacraments, and offering pastoral care and discipline? Could the duties of the position be carried out by qualified lay persons or by diaconal ministers? Is ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacraments necessary to accomplish the director's work? These are questions, firstly for the synod camp board in designing the position and carrying out search and selection of suitable applicants, and secondly for the presbytery, when the successful applicant is a candidate certified for ordination. Unless the presbytery is satisfied that the position entails full exercise of ministry of Word and Sacraments, it shall give no further consideration to ordination.

Whether the offer of the position can be understood properly as the call of this church to a particular ministry involves other dynamics. On one hand, the call of this church is most readily seen in the call of a congregation to congregational ministry, the most common form of ministry in The Presbyterian Church in Canada. On the other hand, the call of the whole church has long been acknowledged in appointments by the Life and Mission Agency (and by its predecessor, the Board of World Mission).

Offers of camp director positions share similarities with appointments by the Life and Mission Agency. The Presbyterian Church in Canada body commending the individual to

the presbytery (and asking the presbytery to exercise its authority to ordain) is not one of its congregations. In the case of the camp position, it is the synod, through its camp board; in the case of the Life and Mission Agency, it is Canada Ministries or International Ministries. Furthermore, such ordinations contribute the gifts of newly ordained ministers to important ministry contexts wider than local congregations and presbytery. Therefore, offers of synod camp director positions can be understood properly as the call of this church to a particular ministry. To facilitate wider perspective on the merits of particular cases and to help ensure consistency, presbyteries must obtain permission of the Committee on Education and Reception, which reviews credentials of individuals entering our ministry by non-standard pathways.

In discerning whether to ordain to the ministry of Word and Sacraments a certified candidate for ordination who wishes to accept a position as director of a Presbyterian Church in Canada camp, presbyteries shall first ensure that all criteria for ordination have been met. If any criteria are lacking, the presbytery shall give no further consideration to ordination. Moreover, in the same way that presbyteries approve only those congregational calls displaying a high degree of support for the call, presbyteries are urged to proceed with ordination only when the parties involved achieve a high degree of consensus on the matters under consideration.

The matters relating to ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacraments based on acceptance of a position as director of a Presbyterian Church in Canada camp are significant enough that the joint task group spent much time studying and discussing them. One member remained of the opinion that the wisest decision of the church would be to disallow ordination in such contexts. Nevertheless, with the support of the other members, the following recommendation is presented:

Recommendation No. 22 (adopted, p. 42)

That with regard to the question of the ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacraments of directors of Presbyterian Church in Canada camps:

1. The synod camp board, presbytery and Committee on Education and Reception shall inquire diligently whether the duties of the camp director involve full exercise of the ministry of Word and Sacraments or whether they can be performed as readily by a member of the diaconal order or by a qualified layperson;
2. That the presbytery, to which as corporate bishop pertains the power to ordain, be urged to act responsibly in this matter of ordination, ensuring that all criteria for ordination have been met. While presbytery decisions are normally approved by a simple majority vote, they are encouraged to strive for a high degree of consensus in these cases.

Recommendation No. 23 (adopted, p. 42)

That this be the answer to Overture Nos. 13 and 14, 2004 re ordination to camping ministry.

Institutional chaplaincy

Should presbyteries be permitted to ordain to the ministry of Word and Sacraments when certified candidates for ordination accept chaplaincy positions in institutions not directly responsible to The Presbyterian Church in Canada?

While all criteria for ordination are to be met, two particular criteria come to the fore: does the position require full exercise of the ministry of Word and Sacraments, and can

the offer of the position be understood properly as the call of this church to a particular ministry?

Whether the position will involve the chaplain in full exercise of the ministry of Word and Sacraments depends in the first instance on the scope of its duties. Will the chaplain's work encompass preaching, teaching, rightly discerning doctrine, conducting sacraments, and offering pastoral care and discipline? Could the duties of the position be carried out by qualified lay persons or by diaconal ministers? Is ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacraments necessary to accomplish the chaplain's work? Moreover, concern about full exercise of the ministry of Word and Sacraments is intensified in these cases by the reality that the Presbyterian chaplain will serve in an institution not directly responsible to this (or possibly any) church. Will the chaplain be free to serve as a Presbyterian Church in Canada minister, with faithful regard for the teachings of this church, or do the values of the employing body place significant doctrinal restrictions on the chaplain? These are questions, firstly for the Presbyterian candidate himself or herself, and secondly for the presbytery, when the successful applicant is a candidate certified for ordination. Unless the presbytery is satisfied that the position entails full exercise of ministry of Word and Sacraments, including the fact that the Presbyterian chaplain has the freedom to serve faithfully in this office, it shall give no further consideration to ordination.

Whether the offer of the chaplaincy position can be understood properly as the call of this church to a particular ministry involves other dynamics. The current legislation of the church has a bearing on this question. In 1995, the General Assembly affirmed that presbyteries already had been granted permission to ordain to the ministry of Word and Sacraments based on a position in institutional chaplaincy. In a Declaratory Act, the Assembly clarified what it understood to be the existing law of the church, stating:

That it be affirmed by Declaratory Act, with respect to sections 210 and 176.1.7 of the Book of Forms, that no candidate certified for ordination may be ordained to a chaplaincy position except by appointment to such a position by a presbytery or a General Assembly committee or agency, and with the approval of the responsible committee of the General Assembly. (A&P 1995, p. 229).

During the tenure of the Board of Ministry, its Institutional Chaplaincy Committee served as the responsible committee of the General Assembly noted above.²¹ However, this committee was discontinued with the formation of the Life and Mission Agency, and in 1997, the General Assembly reassigned this role to the Committee on Education and Reception (A&P 1997, p. 374).

These actions of the Assembly mean that under certain conditions, namely appointment to an institutional chaplaincy position by a presbytery or a General Assembly committee or agency and with the approval of the Committee on Education and Reception, the offer of an institutional chaplaincy position may be understood as the call of this church to a particular ministry. Unless the presbytery is satisfied that these conditions are met, it shall give no further consideration to ordination.

In discerning whether to ordain to the ministry of Word and Sacraments a certified candidate for ordination who wishes to accept a chaplaincy position in an institution not directly responsible to The Presbyterian Church in Canada, presbyteries shall first ensure that all criteria for ordination have been met. If any criteria are lacking, the presbytery shall give no further consideration to ordination. Moreover, in the same way

that presbyteries approve only those congregational calls displaying a high degree of support for the call, presbyteries are urged to proceed with ordination only when the parties involved achieve a high degree of consensus on the matters under consideration.

The matters relating to ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacraments based on acceptance of an institutional chaplaincy position are significant enough that the joint task group spent much time studying and discussing them. One member remained of the opinion that the wisest decision of the church would be to disallow ordination in such contexts. Nevertheless, with the support of the other members, the following recommendation is presented:

Recommendation No. 24 (adopted, p. 42)

That with regard to the question of ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacraments based on acceptance of a chaplaincy position in an institution not directly responsible to The Presbyterian Church in Canada:

1. Presbyteries and the Committee on Education and Reception shall inquire diligently whether the chaplaincy position involves full exercise of the ministry of Word and Sacraments, including the fact that it can be performed freely without any doctrinal restriction of our Reformed faith by the employing body; and
2. That the presbytery, to which as corporate bishop pertains the power to ordain, be urged to act responsibly in this matter of ordination, ensuring that all criteria for ordination have been met. While presbytery decisions are normally approved by a simple majority vote, they are encouraged to strive for a high degree of consensus in these cases.

Recommendation No. 25 (adopted, p. 42)

That Overture No. 24, 1997 and Petition No. 3, 1997 re ordination in the context of positions in institutional chaplaincy be answered in terms of the preceding report.

Endorsement of lay chaplains and pastoral counsellors

Overture No. 23, 2000 asks for study of the matter of recognition, endorsement or mandate of lay persons for some specialized ministries (A&P 2000, p. 525). At issue are the requirements of the Canadian institution that prepares ministers, theological students and lay persons, through competent supervision, for ministries of pastoral care (in hospitals, prisons, long-term care facilities) and of pastoral counselling. The Canadian Association for Pastoral Practice and Education/l'Association Canadienne pour la Pratique et l'Education Pastorales (CAPPE/ACPEP) requires students of its advanced level programs to be "endorsed for ministry by the appropriate religious authority." In addition, the annual renewal of this endorsement is necessary for graduates of advanced programs to maintain their certification (and therefore in some cases, to maintain their employment as pastoral caregivers or pastoral counsellors.) Since CAPPE/ACPEP draws participants from many different Christian denominations, the required endorsement is provided by different levels of church government within them. For instance, CAPPE/ACPEP regularly accepts congregational endorsement for students in completely congregational denominations, while accepting endorsement from bishops and superintendents for students in denominations with such officers.

In The Presbyterian Church in Canada, the question of endorsement for ministry is straightforward for ordained ministers of Word and Sacraments, diaconal ministers, or certified candidates preparing for either of these ministries. All such individuals fall under the care and guidance of the presbytery that guides their discernment and preparation,

while candidates, and later holds their ministerial credentials, after ordination or designation. Therefore it is the presbytery that would endorse such an individual to CAPPE/ACPEP for advanced study and annually renewed certification.

More complicated is the endorsement of Presbyterian lay persons who are in advanced CAPPE/ACPEP programs and who are not seeking entry into either the ministry of Word and Sacraments or diaconal ministry.²² Should the endorsement for ministry that they require for CAPPE/ACPEP purposes be provided by the session of the congregation where they are members or by the presbytery?

In The Presbyterian Church in Canada, all lay persons (except certified candidates for ministry) fall under the care and guidance of the session of the congregation where they are members. For this reason, the session as endorsing body seems the choice that fits better with our polity and practice. Moreover, there is no precedent in the church of John Calvin or in the early Church of Scotland that is known to inform a different decision.

Notwithstanding this basic principle, the particular session or the lay person himself or herself could invite the presbytery to share in the discernment and support of the lay person's ministry. Some presbyteries have done so, following their own discretion in developing a relationship with the lay pastoral caregiver or lay pastoral counsellor and deciding the grounds on which they would base their endorsement.

What is proposed here is that the church be given freedom in this matter. Sessions are free to work out their endorsement of the lay pastoral caregivers and lay pastoral counsellors who are members in their congregations. At the same time, sessions or the individuals themselves are free to invite the presbytery to share in this relationship and the tasks of discernment. In addition, presbyteries that have been endorsing lay persons for these ministries up to the present time are encouraged to continue their involvement until CAPPE/ACPEP has been apprised of this approach by The Presbyterian Church in Canada, so that the certification and employment of the particular individual is not put at risk.

Recommendation No. 26 (adopted, p. 42)

That Overture No. 23, 2000 re recognition of lay persons in special ministries be answered in terms of the preceding report.

Guidelines of the Committee on Education and Reception

In its report to the General Assembly in 2006, the Life and Mission Agency (Ministry and Church Vocations) presented its response to an overture requesting revision to sections of the guidelines of the Committee on Education and Reception. On motion from the floor of the Assembly, this response was referred to the joint task group on the theology of ordination (A&P 2006, p. 354-57, 38). The theological question that belongs within the purview of this report about the theology of ordination is whether it is appropriate for the church to place limitations on the right of the presbytery to proceed to ordination.

The Committee on Education and Reception reviews the applications of individuals seeking to enter ministry of Word and Sacraments or diaconal ministry of The Presbyterian Church in Canada by other than the standard route. For all approved applicants, the committee recommends programs of study, based on comparison of the individual's education with a university undergraduate degree followed by a Masters of Divinity degree from a Presbyterian Church in Canada theological college – the educational standard used in this denomination for many decades.

The subject of the overture is the sections of the guidelines that apply to certified candidates for ministry who have graduated from theological colleges other than the three Presbyterian Church in Canada seminaries. The requested revisions would have the effect of permitting candidates for ministry of The Presbyterian Church in Canada to complete their theological studies in any seminary accredited by the Association of Theological Schools, followed immediately by examination for certification for ordination by their presbyteries.

The joint task group agreed to direct its attention entirely to the theological question of whether it is appropriate for the church to place limitations on the right of the presbytery to proceed to ordination, leaving all other considerations regarding guidelines of the Committee on Education and Reception to others.

In The Presbyterian Church in Canada, the right to ordain or to receive into ministry belongs to the presbytery. Our Presbyterian understanding of ministry, however, is that ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacraments by a presbytery provides entry into the ministry of the whole denomination. Once ordained, a minister is eligible to seek and accept any call within The Presbyterian Church in Canada. By contrast, some branches of the Christian church permit limited ordination – different regions within the denomination are not obliged to recognize one another's ordination. However, this has not tended to be the belief or practice in Presbyterian or Reformed denominations, including our own.

In keeping with this understanding that ordination by a presbytery provides entry into the ministry of the entire denomination and as an expression of our commitment to being a connectional church, The Presbyterian Church in Canada has always placed limitations on the rights of its presbyteries. For instance, presbyteries may not exercise their right to receive ministers from other denominations until permission to receive has been granted by the General Assembly (Book of Forms section 248.1). In a similar way, presbyteries may not exercise their right to examine candidates for certification for ordination until the individuals have fulfilled the numerous requirements that precede this step in the candidacy process approved by the General Assembly.

In summary, the church's practice of placing limitations on the right of presbyteries to ordain, in ways that seem best to General Assemblies, is consistent with our theology and practice of ministry. Therefore, the theological basis of the response of the Life and Mission Agency (Ministry and Church Vocations) to this overture appears to be sound. The joint task group has forwarded its findings to the office of Ministry and Church Vocations.

Calls to congregations with two or more called ministers

In its report to the General Assembly in 2006, the Life and Mission Agency (Ministry and Church Vocations) presented a paper about calls in congregations with two or more ministers and requested permission to circulate it to sessions and presbyteries for study and comment. On motion from the floor of the Assembly, this report was referred as well to the joint task group on the theology of ordination (A&P 2006, p. 358-63, 38).

In the following year, however, the Committee on Church Doctrine critiqued the report on theological grounds and forwarded its opinion to the Life and Mission Agency (Ministry and Church Vocations) (A&P 2007, p. 348-49). On review of this response by the Committee on Church Doctrine, the joint task group on the theology of ordination was

unaware of additional comments that needed to be made. The joint task group has forwarded this opinion to the office of Ministry and Church Vocations.

Special Thanks are extended to the individuals who shared the work that has produced this document: Peter Bush, Bill Klempa, Jean Morris and Karla Wubbenhorst were members of the Committee on Church Doctrine, and Karen Bach, Art Van Seters and Susan Shaffer (Associate Secretary) participated at the invitation of the office of Ministry and Church Vocations.

SUPPLEMENT – GENERAL ASSEMBLY DECISIONS SINCE 2008

Ordination to non-traditional ministries

In its response to an overture requesting an alternative path to ordination for those seeking a call to non-traditional ministries, the Life and Mission Agency (Ministry and Church Vocations) proposed a process which built upon and extended the processes for ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacraments to a synod camp director position and to an institutional chaplaincy position. The 2021 General Assembly (2021 A&P, p. 501-504) approved the following:

Recommendation LMA-035 (adopted, p. 38)

That the following be the process for ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacraments to a non-traditional ministry position:

1. Presbyteries and the Committee on Education and Reception shall inquire diligently whether the non-traditional ministry position meets the criteria for ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacraments in accordance with the *Theology of Ordination to the Ministry of Word and Sacraments* adopted by the 2008 GA (A&P 2008, p. 353–65) and in particular the following:

- Does the ministry position require full exercise of the ministry of Word and Sacraments?
- Is presbytery permitted to recognize the ministry as a valid context for service by ministers of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, such that it may place the name of the minister, once ordained, on the constituent roll of the presbytery?
- Is the offer of the position properly understood to represent the call of this church to a particular ministry?
- Does the presbytery recognize the ministry position as a gospel call to the candidate?
- Is the presbytery prepared to enter a relationship of care for the minister, who will be accountable to the presbytery for their ministry while serving or living within the bounds, as legislated?

2. The presbytery, to which as corporate bishop pertains the power to ordain, is urged to act responsibly in this matter of ordination, ensuring that all criteria for ordination have been met. While presbytery decisions are normally approved by a simple majority vote, they are encouraged to strive for a high degree of consensus in these cases.

Recommendation LMA-036 (adopted, p. 38)

That the above statement be the response to Overture No. 9, 2019 re ordination to and funding for non-traditional ministries and Overture No. 7, 2020 re ordination guidelines for part time and tent making ministries.

Remit B, 2023 re Book of Forms 176.1.6 and 176.1.7 re presbytery constituent roll

The Life and Mission Agency (Committee on Education and Reception) recommended changes to the Book of Forms which would remove the need for a presbytery to seek the approval from the Committee on Education and Reception in order to add the name of an already ordained minister serving in an institutional chaplaincy to the constituent roll (Remit B, 2023):

That the following changes to the Book of Forms 176.1.6 and 176.1.7 be approved and remitted to the presbyteries under the Barrier Act. (Life and Mission Agency Committee, Rec. LMA-015, 2023, p. 180, 24)

176.1.6 who make request and are serving in agencies not directly responsible to The Presbyterian Church in Canada as Bible Society secretaries, teachers in Bible or theological colleges or university departments of religion; workers in inner-city, national or overseas missions (the last when residing within the bounds); (Declaratory Act: A&P 1989, p. 268, 65); or institutional chaplains, appointed for not less than one year (Declaratory Acts: A&P 1992, p. 383, 63; A&P 1995, p. 229, 38; A&P 2017, p. 279–80, 15).

176.1.7 Deleted.

The 2024 General Assembly approved Remit B, 2023 (2024 A&P, p. 213-214, 37).

Presbyteries must still receive the approval of the Committee on Education and Reception before they can proceed to ordain a certified ministry candidate to an institutional chaplaincy position.

Endnotes

1. Acts 6:1-6, Acts 13:1-3, 1 Timothy 4:14, and 2 Timothy 1:6-7.
2. *Together in Ministry: The Theology and Practice of Ministry in the Presbyterian Church in Canada*. Toronto: The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 2004, p. 68.
3. The *Form of Presbyterial Church-Government* was written in 1645 by the Westminster Assembly, the same body that authored the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647). Both documents were embraced by the Church of Scotland at the time they were written. The Presbyterian Church in Canada, like the Church of Scotland, recognizes the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the basis of faith and regards the *Westminster Confession of Faith* as one of its subordinate standards.
4. Calvin, John, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John T. McNeil, ed., Ford Lewis Battles, tr., Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960. 4.3.15.
5. Ibid., 4.3.16.
6. Ibid., 4.3.7.
7. *First Book of Discipline*, J.K. Cameron, ed., (Edinburgh, 1972).
8. *Second Book of Discipline*, J. Kirk, ed., (Edinburgh, 1980).
9. *Second Book of Discipline*, VI, 2, 3; and Book of Forms section 106.
10. Ibid., VI, 12.

11. Presbyteries were developed in Scotland to meet the geographic needs of the new Reformed church in widely dispersed and often isolated communities, an invention which had not been needed or anticipated in the city state of Geneva.
12. *The Form of Presbyterial Church-Government*, in *The (Westminster) Confession of Faith*, Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons, 1979, p. 180. Today Presbyterian Church in Canada congregations are asked to affirm this same understanding in the worship service when their new minister is inducted. The original document refers to ministers in the male gender, because only men were ordained at that time.
13. Ibid., p. 182, point 1, under the heading “The Directory for the Ordination of Ministers”.
14. Ibid., p. 180, under the heading “Touching the Doctrine of Ordination;” and repeated on p. 182, point 6.
15. Ibid., p. 186-187, point 1 and point 3. “By reason of the publick troubles” no doubt refers to the then current British civil war that was pitting Scottish and British Parliamentary forces against the Royalist forces of King Charles 1. Clearly, men were being “chosen or appointed” as chaplains for the service of the armies and the navy and, on that basis, being ordained to the ministry.
16. “The Preamble to the Ordination Vows”, Book of Forms section 447, Toronto: The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 2007, and *Together in Ministry*, p. 8-9.
17. Except immediately following the disruption of Church Union in 1925, The Presbyterian Church in Canada has never practiced limited ordination – ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacraments that is valid within the church only in one particular ministry context. In the period after 1925, student ministers were ordained and inducted into particular congregations before finishing their theological studies, with the restriction that they could not serve elsewhere until they graduated. A&P 1926, p. 47, A&P 1927, p. 46-47.
18. A&P 1977, p. 370 and *Canada Ministries Policy and Procedures*, 2000, p. 4.
19. The ministry of Word and Sacraments involves preaching, teaching, conducting sacraments and offering pastoral care, in its fullest expression.
20. The General Assembly in 1989 clarified the rules for presbytery membership by means of a Declaratory Act on Book of Forms section 176. The names of ministers serving on our college faculties or employed on the staff of courts or agencies of this church (176.1.5) and ministers such as Bible Society secretaries who make request and who are serving in agencies not directly responsible to this church (176.1.6) are placed on the roll of the presbytery where they live. The names of ministers who have been appointed to mission work in Canada or appointed to part-time service, as per section 201.2, are placed on the roll of the presbytery where they are serving for the duration of the appointment, even if different from the presbytery where they live. A&P 1989, p. 267-268.
Additional note - The 2024 General Assembly deleted Book of Forms 176.1.7 and added institutional chaplains to the list of cognate ministries in 176.1.6 so presbyteries could add the names of already ordained ministers serving in institutional chaplaincies to the constituent roll without seeking the approval of the responsible committee of General Assembly (currently the Committee on Education and Reception); A&P 2024, p. 213-214, 37
21. A Declaratory Act in 1988 named the Board of Ministry’s Institutional Chaplaincy Committee as the committee of General Assembly that would approve an institutional chaplain before the presbytery placed the name of the chaplain on the constituent roll of the presbytery. A&P 1988, p. 394.

Additional note - The 2024 General Assembly removed this step to allow presbyteries to add the names of institutional chaplains to the constituent roll directly (see footnote 20 above).

22. In some particular cases, these persons have been ordained as ruling elders in their congregations.