

Behold, We Are Doing a New Thing.....

Commissioned Lay Pastors in the Presbyterian Church

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ONCE UPON A TIME.....a preacher was sitting quietly at home and the phone rang. God and the Evangelism and Congregational Development Committee were calling: "We are in the process of beginning a Lay Academy for the training of Commissioned Lay Preachers for the presbytery and we are asking you to consider being the first director of this academy." Well, the preacher was flattered and excited to be asked to help establish a new ministry opportunity, even if the preacher was not entirely clear on the concept of a Commissioned Lay Preacher. What was a Commissioned Lay Preacher and what did such a person do in a church? The committee explained as best they could, but in those long ago days, not many had clarity on the concept--it was a developing idea.

The preacher accepted this call--on a volunteer basis. Because the preacher's spouse was in graduate school, the preacher knew that in about two years (the time projected for the first class to complete the proposed training program), they would be making moves and changes. The presbytery would have two full years to see how this Lay Academy idea worked. If it was good, a new director could be found if the preacher moved on when the spouse finished school. And if it did not work, then the idea could be laid to rest without much difficulty.

It was a time of learning for all concerned: The first thing the preacher learned was that there were no resources to help with the development of a Lay Academy for the training of Commissioned Lay Preachers. Every presbytery doing this work was inventing its own wheel. This of course ran against all Presbyterian preferences--shouldn't **SOMEBODY** be creating committees, doing research, suggesting training models, doing **SOMETHING** to help in this endeavor? For two years the preacher poked and pried and discovered no one was doing anything about this problem while the program was growing and changing and developing in that pastor's presbytery. The program flourished--there were more participants than anyone could have anticipated would be willing to commit to the discipline of the two year training cycle. Some of those participating were members of small churches and interested in being commissioned when they finished. Others were active in their churches or presbyteries and were seeking to fulfill a personal need for more in depth information, a more formal study course, a way to enhance what they were doing in the church and presbytery. Time went by, graduate school ended, the pastor moved shortly before the end of the first two year cycle of training.

After two years, the preacher happened to return to that presbytery. Now God works in mysterious ways, and approximately two minutes after phone service was established in the preacher's new house, the phone rang— it was God again: “God is calling you to head this Lay Academy up again—the one who was serving as the director has accepted a new call.”

The preacher tried the top 10 excuses—none of which worked, not even the one about “you can't go home again.” So that preacher returned to the Lay Academy work, and discovered that even with the passing of 24 or 26 months, no research, no resources, no training models, no nothing had been developed nationally by anybody. No one had even invented a conference, convention or national norm for things pertaining to Commissioned Lay Preachers! It was each presbytery for itself—no one really knew what anyone else doing because it was too much trouble to keep up with who was doing what where.

Eventually that cry was heard, and in the mid-1990's the National Ministries Division created a resource that was a compilation of the programs that remembered to send in information by the deadline. That was before the possible powers of CLPs—now called Commissioned Lay **PASTORS**—were expanded. And that resource simply listed what various presbyteries were doing—usually with volunteer leadership working on limited time and with limited resources. When the preacher tried to read that resource, it was not always even clear which presbytery was doing what. But we were still training CLPs.

By 1998 it dawned in this preacher that training CLPs was a job unto itself—it was taking 30-40 hours or more of volunteer time each month. Once again the presbytery was challenged to reconsider how this was done. Shouldn't it be an intentional and validated ministry—part of a real call for a real person? Perhaps someone should actually be paid to head this thing up and take it new places. And shouldn't **SOMEONE** be doing that research that needed to be done?

There was another who was ready to take the program to the next level—to begin organizing to seek grants for research and training and developing the program—and so the preacher passed the leadership on to the next generation. But people kept whispering, “You've been complaining for almost 10 years now, shouldn't you put your energy where your mouth is and take care of that complaint?”

The last two years have been my repentance for complaining for so long. What I offer here is the result of those months of research and probing—and still this work is but an incomplete beginning. The programs for training commissioned lay pastors are as varied as our presbyteries, and modeled to work in each one. The people and the programs are constantly changing. Most presbyteries have programs headed by a volunteer director—and most programs end up taking up more of that volunteer's time than can be appreciated by the unsuspecting. And yet there are some constants as we have grown and understood these training programs and their purpose over the last 10-12 years.

My thanks go to those who encouraged me to spend the time on research and writing: it is a scary thing to move from pastoral ministry to working on a strange project like this—but it needed to be done. My thanks also to Union Seminary in Virginia which awarded me a research fellowship that validated the need for this work. My thanks to those who helped me by sending information, inviting me to conferences and other events where CLP training happens or was discussed. And my thanks to James

Richard who put up with his mother running away to Virginia for a week each month through the 1999-2000 school year to hibernate and do research and writing.

CHAPTER I **AN APOLOGY FOR LAY MINISTRY**

When the Presbytery of New Covenant began the work of developing a training program for those who might seek to become commissioned lay ministers, the words of Paul in Ephesians were used in the purpose statement: "...to prepare all God's people for the work of Christian service in order to build up the body of Christ..." (Eph. 4:12)

How many times since those early days have Ministers of the Word and Sacrament failed to see how the ministry of commissioned lay pastors builds of the body of Christ by serving where ministers of the Word cannot or will not serve. How often have those same ministers expressed concern for what we are doing when we train and commission lay pastors: "It's a back door to ordination." "It's a way for wannabe preachers to move into the church without proper training." "Why should we waste three years in seminary when these folks can take courses and go out and have all the privileges we do?"

As we consider the training and work of commissioned lay pastors in the church today, we are called to remember our calling. To seek to be a commissioned lay pastor is not to seek a back door to ordination. It is to be ordained. Let us remember our polity and our heritage.

The Book of Order says:

The commissioned lay pastor is an elder of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), who is granted a local commission by the presbytery to lead worship and preach the gospel, watch over the people, and provide for their nurture and service. (G-14.0800)

Commissioned Lay Pastors are ordained elders unless there is an extra-ordinary circumstance (and a commission pre-dating the change in the ***Book of Order***). Each Minister of the Word and Sacrament and elder answers the exact same ordination questions—except the last one which asks about specific service as minister or elder. What we say we believe about ordination, according to our ***Book of Order***, church history, and reformed tradition is that the "purpose and pattern of leadership in the church in all its forms of ministry shall be understood not in terms of power, but service..." (G-14.0103) We are not ordained to a hierarchy, but to a service. Recall what the ***Book of Order*** has to say on the matter of the work and service of elders:

It is the duty of elders, individually and jointly, to strengthen and nurture the faith and life of the congregation committed to their charge.

Together with the pastor, they should encourage the people in the worship and service of God, equip and renew them for their tasks within the church and their mission in the world, visit and comfort and care for the people, with special attention to the poor, the sick, the lonely, and

those who are oppressed. They should inform the pastor and the session of those persons and structures which may need special attention. They should assist in worship (this is followed by 6 references to the *Directory for Worship*). They should cultivate their ability to teach the Bible and may be authorized to supply places which are without regular ministry of the Word and Sacrament. In specific circumstances and with proper instruction, specific elders may be authorized by the presbytery to administer the Lord's Supper in accord with G-11.0103z. Those duties which all Christians are bound to perform by the law of love are especially incumbent upon elders because of their calling to office and are to be fulfilled by them as official responsibilities. (G--6.0304)

In our tradition, ordination and calling are always to specific works. Commissioning is to a specific work. (When we commission fraternal workers—both Ministers of the Word and those with special medical, agricultural, teaching, or other skills—we commission them to a specific work in a specific place for a specific time period. When we commission lay pastors, we commission ordained elders to a specific work in a specific place for a specific time period.)

As I have worked with this research and writing project, it has become clear to me that those presbyteries which are clear on the concept of Commissioned Lay Pastors being called to a specific work and calling—a three way process validated by the called person, the presbytery and the calling institution—the concept of lay pastors works. It has become clear that those presbyteries that see what happens in CLP training as way of broadening ministry and mission, there has been an enormous benefit. Over and over I have heard from people who have gone through CLP training, not sure that they were called to preach, but sure they were called to increase their knowledge in the way this training could. Presbyteries have commented how one of the benefits of CLP training has been an enlarged cadre of well trained elders more willing to accept leadership positions in presbytery, synod or general assembly because of the training they have received. In those presbyteries that have not thought through how CLP's might expand the ministry and mission of the presbytery (or have started program because “everyone else is doing it”) there have been some problems—some programs have been given up in discouragement and despair.

We are not commissioning people as lay pastors to sneak into churches where ordained pastors have a right to go. We are training people to broaden the work we do—in small churches, in medium sized churches, and in large churches. We are training people to serve in rural and urban areas, for prison ministry, for college and hospital chaplaincy programs where funds have been cut, for new and creative leadership and contributions to committees all through our denomination. I have asked the same questions as many others have. I have wondered what in the world we are doing, how are we changing our church, and what will it mean for our future? I do not know the full answers to such questions. I sat in a recent presbytery meeting and considered the number of elders active in presbytery (most not commissioned as lay pastors) who had passed through our Lay Academy in the last 10 years. As elder after elder got up to make reports for committees, to help lead the worship service, who spoke of ministry

and mission their congregations are involved in, I thought how we had stumbled into a good thing with the Lay Academy—for so many had been a part of that experiment. As a result of the Lay Academy, much creative ministry and mission led by elders is being done—on a congregational as well as a presbytery level. Programs that would have been cut because of budget cuts—campus ministry, hospital ministry, jail ministry—are being continued because lay people with training and credentials care enough to be involved on a volunteer basis. People in nursing homes have the opportunity to be visited, to participate in worship and to have communion services because lay people know a special call. Elders serving on presbytery committees with no intention of being commissioned have received training that has led the presbytery forward in new ways. Yes, we are changing the church.

Do we need to be careful about what we are doing—is there something wrong with this picture? Should Ministers of the Word feel threatened by someone seeking to be a commissioned lay pastor? Certainly churches and presbyteries must be careful: It is just as wrong to endorse someone for this training because it is easier to say “yes”, as it would be to endorse someone for seminary training because a session or a presbytery does not want to hurt a person’s feelings (and figures someone or something else will “weed the person out” before the end). Yes, we need to be careful about what we do because there are those who may be irresponsible—but this is not unique to commissioned lay pastor programs. Yes, we need to be careful, but this is true whenever a presbytery, a session, or a pastor nominates or endorses anyone for a specific task, ministry or calling in the church.

Perhaps the most challenging comment/criticism I have heard came from an elder active at General Assembly level who reminded those of us gathered at Dubuque in the fall of 1999 how the *Book of Order* requirements for elders quoted above includes the fact that elders should prepare themselves to preach and teach and supply churches where needful—and shouldn’t the training we are doing for CLP’s be what every elder should prepare himself/herself to do as a matter of course? What is wrong with our officer training that elders are not ready to hear this part of their calling to serve? I have thought long on this challenge and do not have an easy answer. I have a suspicion that our world is one of such specialization that we do not dare presume on another’s territory. We have moved from all being elders—teaching and/or ruling—to being Elders and Ministers of the Word.

As we struggle with the issue of Commissioned Lay Pastors in our church, perhaps part of the answer lies with some of those first generation immigrants from Africa and other lands where lay people are necessary to lead the daily life of the church. Their situation is similar to biblical times when Paul would plant and others would water, but the daily life of the church belonged to the *laos*, the people, not the paid religious professionals. I think about Ernest who joined the church I served in southwest Houston: as he spoke to the session he warned that he could not be there every Sunday as he was helping train leaders in an evangelical church of his people not far away. He was Presbyterian and it was important for him to be a member of a Presbyterian congregation, but he was an elder who had been trained to train lay pastors in his homeland and he had spent time training lay leaders for the church there. He knew this lay leader training was still part of his call as a Christian in this new land. He knew he was being called to help preach and teach and lead a new congregation until they were ready to be on their

own. As that new first-generation church grew and was able to operate on its own because of his time and training of others there, Ernest's participation in the Presbyterian church became more and more regular. He was elected to serve on the session of that church in southwest Houston. He brings his neighbors into the church—changing the face of the Presbyterian congregation—and he follows the call to serve as an elder. As presbyteries train and commission lay pastors, as we train people who seek the knowledge but not a commission, as we train people who want to serve in the church in many quiet ways, we are changing the face of the church, we are changing the ministry we are able to do, we are growing through the wisdom and the spirit of these elders called to serve—and it could revitalize our congregations—and our presbyteries—in ways we might never expect.

CHAPTER II

THE TRAINING OF COMMISSIONED LAY PASTORS

I. A HISTORICAL NOTE:

The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America allowed for both Commissioned Church Workers and Lay Preachers. Commissioned Church Workers were generally people doing educational ministry, health ministries, lay people involved in mission service, etc. There was a candidacy process for Commissioned Church Workers similar to the candidacy process for those studying for ordained ministry.¹ At the same time, Lay Preachers were recognized more simply as qualified men and women who were granted a local commission once the presbytery had satisfied itself “concerning the piety of the applicant for it, his knowledge of the Bible, his ability to teach and preach, and the motives which influenced him to seek a commission.”² The lay pastor could receive a local commission, not to exceed three years in length (per commissioning) to teach and preach. Presiding over either of the sacraments was not permitted..

The Joint Committee on Presbyterian Union did not provide for either commissioned church workers, lay pastors or commissioned lay pastors in the final edition of *The Plan for Reunion* (1981). The first article of agreement provided that “any existing relationship as lay preacher or commissioned church worker shall be undisturbed by the formation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), but only for so long as the individual holding such relationship continues that relationship to the same particular congregation.”³ This plan and the *1983-85 Book of Order* did provide that “persons called to perform special services in the church or in the world may be commissioned by the appropriate governing body of the church through a service of dedication.”⁴

¹*The Book of Order: The General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America: 1958. Part II. Chapter XXIII: Of Commissioned Church Workers.* Philadelphia: The Office of the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 1958.

²*Ibid.*, Chapter XXIV: *Of Lay Pastors*, paragraph 1.

³Joint Committee on Presbyterian Union, *The Plan for Reunion of the Presbyterian Church in the United States and The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. A. Articles of Agreement: 1 Continuity of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) With the Presbyterian Church in the United States and the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.* Atlanta, New York: Joint Committee on Presbyterian Reunion, 1981.

⁴*The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Part II: Book of Order, 1983-83. Chapter XIV: Ordination.* New York, Atlanta: Offices of the General Assembly, 1981.

By the 1984 General Assembly in Phoenix, Arizona, both the Presbytery of Yukon and the Presbytery of Geneva had submitted overtures seeking amendments to the new *Form of Government* to allow for commissioned lay preachers. After referral to the Advisory Committee on the Constitution and the Assembly Committee on Professional Church workers, the proposed amendments to the constitution expanded the office of the lay preacher beyond what it had been in the United Presbyterian Church. Differences included the fact that the lay preacher would be a “commissioned lay preacher;” broad basic training was specified--candidates for commissioned lay preachers should be instructed in those subjects still appearing in the *Book of Order*: Bible, Reformed Theology and Sacraments, Presbyterian Polity, preaching and teaching; and an examination process focusing on personal faith, motives and areas of instruction was suggested. The commission granted to a lay pastor could be valid for up to 3 years and could be renewed. The commissioned lay preacher would be required to make an annual report to presbytery. Further, other chapters of the *Book of Order* would be amended to give presbyteries the authority to select, train, examine, and commission lay preachers as well as allowing presbytery to authorize lay preachers to administer the Lord’s Supper.⁵

Proposed amendments that were subsequently enacted by the 197th General Assembly (1985) included an amendment allowing elders to preside at the Lord’s Supper (for 162; against 18; abstain 1; total 181)⁶, and the amendments dealing with the reinstatement of the office of commissioned lay preachers (3 of the 4 amendments passed with a vote of 140 for, 40 against, abstaining 0 while the amendment concerned with allowing commissioned lay preachers to be authorized to administer the Lord’s Supper passed with 139 affirmative votes; 40 negative votes and no abstentions.)⁷

Later the question would arise as to whether commissioned lay preachers who were not elders could be authorized to preside at the Lord’s Table.⁸ In addition there would be other questions as presbyteries began to train commissioned lay preachers to work among their congregations: Could a person be a commissioned lay preacher while pursuing ordination? (This question became important in some first generation racial ethnic churches where there were no pastors/preachers who could preside at the Lord’s Table and speak the language of the

⁵ *Journal of the General Assembly: Minutes 196th General Assembly, 1984 (May 29-June 6, 1984; Phoenix Arizona), Part I. Advisory Committee on the Constitution (pages 592-594); and Assembly Committee on Professional Church Workers (pages 70-71).*

⁶ *Journal of the General Assembly: Minutes 197th General Assembly, 1985, Part I. Assembly Committee on Policy, Office of the Stated Clerk, page 36.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Book of Order, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Annotated Edition, 1991-92.* Louisville, Office of the Stated Clerk. Office of the General Assembly, 1991.

congregation.) Could a person be commissioned to be a lay preacher who was doing campus ministry or nursing home ministry or some other form of ministry not within a church? If they were commissioned, could they be granted permission to preside at the Lord's Table? Some of these questions are still being worked out as lay preachers became commissioned lay pastors (amendments from the 1995 General Assembly, enacted in 1996) and the powers that could be granted to them were broadly expanded by amendments to the constitution put forth by the 1996 General Assembly.

Up until 1983, a lay preacher was commissioned to preach. With the enactment of the amendments to the *Form of Government* in 1997 amendments to the *Book of Order*, in addition to the authority to preside at the Lord's Table, powers that can be granted to commissioned lay pastors include the following: The authority to preside at baptisms, the authority to moderate a session, to have a voice at presbytery meetings, to have vote at presbytery meetings (commissioned lay pastors are counted as elders for the sake of parity), and the authority to perform a marriage.⁹ These are historic changes in the Presbyterian understanding of ministry and service, and could well change the shape of ministry in some places—and yet the individual amendments enabling the various powers to be granted were as little debated on the floor of most presbyteries as they were at the General Assembly—following as they did that year's controversial “fidelity and chastity amendment.”

What will be the outcome of the proliferation of training programs for commissioned lay pastors and the growing number of commissioned lay pastors serving in various ministries in the church? Perhaps we will be called back to reconsider our reformed roots and what it means to be called to ministry. It is a unique calling to serve as a commissioned lay pastor, usually a focused call to a particular place and a particular time. We have come far from the controversies about ordination and a calling to serve a small congregation in need of ministry that helped lead to the formation of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church—or perhaps we have drawn closer to that debate. We have come far from the reformers who wondered if ordination to the office of minister was necessary for those who taught or served as chaplains or were involved in other special forms of ministry—or perhaps we have drawn closer to that debate. Our *Book of Order* reminds each of us that the meaning of our calling is never static—and is a gift enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit working among us:

...When women and men, by God's providence and gracious gifts, are called by the church to undertake particular forms of ministry, the church shall help them to interpret their call and to be sensitive to the judgments and needs of others. As persons discover the forms of ministry to which they are called, and as they are

⁹*Book of Order, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 1997-98*. Louisville, Office of the General Assembly, 1997.

called to new forms, they and the church shall pray for the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit upon them and upon the mission of the church.¹⁰

II: PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS CONCERNING CREATING TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR COMMISSIONED LAY PASTORS

Over the past 12-15 years various presbyteries have created, ended, recreated, and revised training programs for commissioned lay pastors. Some presbyteries and presbyters will throw their hands up and say “Don’t talk to us about those people!” Others will smile and say they are the best thing that ever happened to their presbyteries. Some speak of the problems that have arisen. Others speak of the opportunities that have arisen. The difference is in how the presbyteries answer the questions: *What are we going to do with commissioned lay pastors? Are they a threat—or an opportunity to expand ministry? What do we expect of them?*

It seems that in presbyteries that have a high view of the laity and expect a lot from their lay leaders, Commissioned Lay Pastor (CLP) training is not a threat. What are we going to do with the people we have trained? Not all people seek this training in order to be commissioned—some simply seek a deeper level of continuing education than they can get at presbytery, synod and other local events. In describing their original program CLP training program, (1992-1994) Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys wrote that 22 people began the training program, there was a lower than expected drop-out rate and when the first people had completed the training, the “presbytery celebrated the completion of the program and four graduates were commissioned. The greatest benefit to the presbytery has been the pool of people available for committee work and pulpit supply.”¹¹ Other presbyteries echo this positive experience with their original training programs. When the use of people who have participated in the commissioned lay pastor training is seen as an opportunity and a positive experience for the presbytery—a way to expand ministry, a way to expand knowledge among those already in the presbytery or churches or special ministries/services (working with members in nursing homes, jail ministries, working as lay people with chaplains in hospitals, jails, campus ministry programs, etc.), a way to broaden service to first-generation racial ethnic churches with specific language needs, etc., then the program has deemed to be good and worthwhile—an asset and a blessing to the presbytery.

But the first experience with commissioned lay preachers has not been not uniformly or unanimously good. Many presbyteries probably began training CLP training programs with no clear idea where those programs would lead—most programs have changed drastically from the

¹⁰ *Book of Order, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 1999-2000. Chapter VI. The Church and Its Officers, G-6.0105.* Louisville, Office of the General Assembly, 1999.

¹¹ Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys. *Leadership Development for Ministry Program.* Undated, ca 1994.

way they began. But in some cases, people finished programs before presbyteries had thought through examining processes, commissioning processes, or determined where there was a need for people to serve and how they would use these trained people, etc. Other presbyteries described commissioned lay preacher/pastor courses of study in the same language used for presbytery leadership events, synod schools, etc (e.g. “This will enable participants...”) and had individuals choose to interpret that as a promise of automatic placement and/or commissioning upon completion of the training. In at least one presbytery (South Louisiana) that has led to legal action as one person who completed the original training process felt there had been an implied promise of presbytery endorsement and/or placement for pulpit supply or commissioned service to a small church.

Most presbyteries have had to redefine and change their commissioned lay pastor training program as the role of commissioned lay pastors has grown and changed through the 1990's. The next chapter will deal with more questions and answers, but for presbyteries considering CLP training, for those that are changing their training to take in the expanded powers possible for CLPs, some questions are important to consider as a part of the initial planning process:

- 1) What are we going to do with the people at the end of the training?– Have we implied that anyone who finished this training could be commissioned (and if we implied that–did we mean to?)
- 2) What is the purpose of the training?
- 3) Do we have people interested in the training that do not intend to be CLPs–should we have a different admission requirements for them?
- 4) What will be the standards for admitting people into the training program? And who will be responsible for oversight of those in the program? (This is the same question Committees on Preparation for Ministry, Committees on Ministry, churches and seminaries debate when considering who has responsibility for determining fitness for ministry–if it is not answered responsibly, there is the potential for trouble.)
- 5) To whom will the participants in the training program be responsible through the training process (A session that endorsed them? A presbytery committee? A mentor? Someone else?)

Only when these initial questions have been worked through and answered, should a presbytery turn to all the many details about organizing and implementing a commissioned lay pastor program.

III: SOME BROAD GENERALITIES–What Works and What Does Not

A. What Works: Localized Training

Presbyterians, being Presbyterians, always seem to harbor a suspicion that what can be done on a higher level must be better than what happens locally. Surely an overarching program making commissioned lay pastor training would be better than each presbytery involved in such training re-inventing the wheel. Surely some sort of national standards or testing would be beneficial. Surely someone should be in charge somewhere. So far it hasn't worked that way:

On-going regional training programs have been planned in good faith on more than one occasion. In almost every case, good planning by presbyteries, seminaries, and synod groups has come to nought. All logic says it ought to work—but so far it has not. In a few cases two or three presbyteries have worked together because their geography makes that possible. And in some cases a neighboring presbytery may be willing to have a person from another presbytery as a part of their program either because their home presbytery has not developed a training program or because the person lives on the boarder of the presbytery and travel is an issue. But for the most part, each presbytery has had the most success developing and implementing its own program—fine tuning CLP training for its own specific needs. The main reason may be a simple one: One of the strengths of presbytery level CLP training seems to be the fellowship of the other participants, the opportunity to gather in a small group of people with similar concerns and hopes and to study closely together.

University of Dubuque Presbyterian Theological Seminary currently has a Lily Foundation grant enabling the school to produce a series of interactive classes originating from the seminary, telecast to different presbyteries through college campuses. Presbyteries invited to participate in this grant-funded program include those presbyteries in the Iowa/Wisconsin/Minnesota area; Alaska and the northwest (where travel is an issue because of distance, expense, weather and the limited time those serving as lay pastors may have to be away from daily jobs.) This experiment may prove to be a valuable use of resources combining the strengths of local training with seminary professors as leaders without the expenses of travel.¹²

B. What Works: A Flexible 2-year Time- Frame

As presbyteries have developed CLP training programs, fine-tuned them, and changed them as the powers it is possible to grant lay pastors have expanded, most have settled into a 2 year study pattern. One strength of this time-frame is that it represents a manageable

¹² Contact: Ann Hoch West or John P. Jewell at University of Dubuque Theological Seminary (319-589-3101; fax: 319-589-3110; or www.udts.dbq.edu)

commitment of time. Many programs have also discovered the advantage to being flexible about when students can enter and leave the program: If it is possible for participants to enter the training program every three or six months and begin the cycle of courses from that point, the program can be ongoing, with people entering and exiting at different times. Some presbyteries have discovered it is not always possible for a participant to attend all sessions and complete the training program in two years, and so allowances have been made for participants to take an additional amount of time to complete the program. Again if the courses repeat in a cycle, it makes it easier to plan for when courses can be taken—or made up.

This 2-year cycle needs to be understood as a broad theme with many variations:

Some presbyteries have monthly training for 8-10 months of the year. This monthly training is typically Friday night/Saturday, using about 8-12 hours of classroom work. Some will teach one intense course over the weekend. Others will use Friday night for reviewing the previous course or for offering interest topics for 2-3 hours (e.g. a pastoral care issue, General Assembly issues, spirituality interests, etc.) and have the longer course on Saturday. Some have divided Saturday into 2 courses—one in the morning one in the afternoon. One advantage of focusing on a single course through the weekend is that it is often easier to recruit teachers or leaders for the course. The disadvantage is often on making assignments before the class or follow through. Thus, an advantage to having two courses per weekend (begun one month and completed the next) is that assignments can be made one session and be completed as assigned work for the second session. However, it is harder to find teachers for this model—and it is more difficult to account for make-up work and class hours if students must miss either weekend of the divided course.

Some programs have retreat/study weekends that last Friday evening–Sunday afternoon. More than one class can be taught on such weekends which are often held in a camp or conference setting away from all distractions. The strength of this model is having a concentrated weekend program—though some who have participated in such training report that the weekends can be overwhelming. Often this model meets about once a quarter, which can allow time for reading (either in advance of a course or as a result of a course) as well as time for significant papers or projects related to the course work. The major weakness might be that follow-through on assignments is sometimes harder if participants do not meet again for 2-3 months after the class. This retreat model makes it important to consider questions about the follow-up assignments expected of participants.

Most presbyteries also take advantage of other educational opportunities within their bounds—leadership schools, church officer training, synod school, etc. To do so requires a commitment to communicate between committees what is planned at such events so those responsible for commissioned lay pastor training can think through what courses can be used for CLP training. The strength to taking advantage of all the educational opportunities possible within a presbytery (and some committees might be surprised when they start seeking to discover what all the opportunities are) is the mutual support of presbytery programs.

Most programs have realized the need to be flexible about looking at the training people can receive from other programs and institutions. Some people come to commissioned lay

pastor training with some seminary experience—many presbyteries have theological schools within their boundaries which provide acceptable courses on church history, Bible, or other topics. It is also possible for people to take advantage of courses at other denominational institutions: Montreat, Ghost Ranch, Cook College, seminary extension courses, etc.. Although course work taken apart from courses offered by the presbytery program needs to be individually evaluated as to the way they fit into lay pastor training, the committee with oversight of the training program should have some guidelines concerning acceptable courses from outside their program.

Some presbyteries use a mentoring program to train commissioned lay pastor candidates—or have it available as an option. This requires a commitment on the part of one or a few pastors to work closely with a CLP candidate. Most presbyteries say this is not the first choice for training, one reason being the support and fellowship and opportunity for growth and discussion found in the small group settings. However, those same presbyteries would say that when they have used this option, it has worked well because those who commit themselves to this discipline are exceptionally motivated people.

VI: CONTENT OF COMMISSIONED LAY PASTOR TRAINING:

Commissioned lay pastor training programs must follow the broad *Book of Order* guidelines, which says commissioned lay pastors shall be “instructed in Bible, Reformed Theology and Sacraments, Presbyterian Polity, preaching, leading worship, pastoral care, and teaching” (G-14.0800). As the presbyteries describe the course work they offer, it is practical, taught with an eye to how will be used. It is introductory, not meant to be final, but intended to open the way for further study. Most presbyteries require 80-120 hours of classroom work, additional reading and writing, preaching experience, support of session and/or pastor. An examination is mandated by the *Book of Order*, but it is left to the presbyteries to determine the manner and form of that examination. Some presbyteries have a formal candidacy process.

After a decade of defining and refining the courses most needful to training commissioned lay pastors, there is a consistency across the denomination in those presbyteries doing such training. Where there are variations on the general scheme of the training, these variations have to do with factors particular to the presbytery involved. Those involved with teaching or learning in a seminary would not be unfamiliar with the courses offered, nor the manner in which many of the courses are offered. Courses fall into categories that are **Constitutional** (required by the *Book of Order*), **Conventional** (not necessarily required by the *Book of Order*, but helpful and mandated by the presbyteries for useful training) and **Convenient** (those courses that may apply specifically to the presbytery’s focus in using CLP’s or needful to help CLP function fully.)

Below is a list of courses most commonly covered by current Commissioned Lay Pastor training programs across the denomination. Chapter IV looks at these courses in detail and describes some of the ways presbyteries choose to evaluate participants’ work in these courses.

A. Constitutionally Required Courses

I: Bible: Introduction to the Old Testament
Introduction to the New Testament
II: Theology and the Sacraments
A. Theology/Church History (most programs at least two of the following):

A Survey of Church History
Introduction to Christian Theology
Reformed Theology

B. Sacraments

Worship: The Sacraments of the Lord's Supper and Baptism

III. Presbyterian Polity (often presented using case studies)

IV. Preaching

Reformed Worship: Liturgy and Preaching

Worship: Sermon Preparation

V. Teaching--Christian Education materials

VI. Pastoral Care--Introduction

B. Conventional Courses used By Most Presbyteries

I. Bible: Old and New Testament studies of a specific book

Interpreting the Bible

Specific Bible Study Courses (like *Kerygma*)

II. Theology and Sacraments

A: History and Theology

Creeds and Confessions of the Church

Presbyterian and Reformed History

B. Sacraments

Baptism (including time to practice a baptismal service)

The Lord's Supper (including time to practice presiding at the

table)

III. Presbyterian Polity--encourage participants to attend Church Officer Training

Moderating a Session Meeting

IV. Preaching

Sermon Workshop--Preaching and Critiquing Sermons

Preaching from the Old Testament/New Testament/Lectionary

V. Teaching

Small Group Dynamics

VI. Pastoral Care--Issues and Case Studies

VII: Elective Courses:

Spiritual Development

Ethics

Evangelism

C. Convenient Courses to Help Commissioned Lay Pastor Candidates

Small Church Dynamics and Administration

Contextual Ministry: Perspectives in Town and Country Ministry

The Concept of Calling
Weddings
Funerals
Prayer/A Prayer Retreat
Alcoholism and Other Addictions

V. SACRED COMMITTEES AND COMMITTEE WORK

There are themes and variations on how best to oversee a CLP program. Most are run on a volunteer basis. It needs to be appreciated that in a program that runs year round, a strong board or committee that supports the person in charge of the program is important as it can take 8-10 or more hours a week to oversee the running of a commissioned lay pastor training program. The committee planning and administering the actual training program needs to be separate from those who will examine the candidates—yet there needs to be good communication between the two because this exam is different from denominational ordination exams. There also needs to be good communication with the presbytery in order to keep the whole presbytery informed about the training and the work of the commissioned lay pastors. My personal observation has been that the more that is shared about the training and work of these people, the more trust and appreciation there is for commissioned lay pastors—and the more useful they become to life and ministry of the larger church.

Remembering that the coming of the kingdom will undoubtedly be hastened by the formation of more Presbyterian committees, what are the possibilities for committees related to commissioned lay pastors? The following functions need to be assigned to new or existing committees when establishing a commissioned lay pastor training program:

1) Oversight of Candidates/Screening of Applicants: What group of people is going to be responsible for screening applicants and continuing participants in the program? What will the standards for admission, continuing in the program, and graduation be?

2) A Dean or Director: Who is going to be responsible for the details and arrangements that need to be made for running a training program? Whose name is going to appear as the one to answer questions about the program? Will this person be volunteer or paid? Will this person be present at all training events? Has anyone been realistic about the time commitment this task can take?

3) A CLP Board or Committee: Who is going to do the recruiting of leaders for the courses? Who is going to define the curriculum—the courses that need to be offered and what those courses need to cover? Who is going to communicate with the other committees that deal with training events in the presbytery? Does there need to be a liaison with the Committee on Ministry? What other committees need to be kept informed?

4) A Commissioning Committee: What group in presbytery will be charged with the oversight of the examinations process, the commissioning process, the follow-up contacts with churches (or other ministries) and commissioned lay pastors after commissioning? Will this be assigned to one or more committees or sub-committees of the COM or some other group in

presbytery? What kinds of liaisons and communications need to be established between these committees and the person/committee over-seeing the educational program?

VI. A FINAL THOUGHT: HOW CAN SEMINARIES AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS BE INVOLVED?

Because the training of commissioned lay pastors is still an evolving process, it provides a creative opportunity for the involvement of the denomination's seminaries, conference centers, and other institutions.

Once upon a time (1997-98) Columbia Seminary's Lay Institute of Faith and Life responded to requests by several of the presbyteries around it and developed a 2-year program for the training of commissioned lay pastors. The program would have combined the resources of both the seminary and the local presbyteries. A task force presented the proposed program to the Columbia faculty in August 1997, it was approved and scheduled to begin in March 1998. They built it—and no one came, and the program was canceled. Perhaps offering a complete training program is not the way regional institutions can be the most helpful.

Probably the way the seminaries have been most directly involved in the past—and perhaps will remain involved in the future—is providing leaders for some of the courses offered by CLP training programs within a reasonable distance of the seminary. It will be interesting to observe the progress of the courses developed by Dubuque seminary in conjunction with the Lilly Foundation grant to see if the interactive televised courses offer a feasible alternative for people in remote areas.

Most presbyteries require CLPs take part in continuing education events. It would be helpful for presbyteries to provide seminaries with the names and addresses of CLPs (or for seminaries to request the names of CLPs) to add to their mailing lists of continuing education events and lecture series. Presbyteries could encourage CLP's to take advantage of national training opportunities offered at conference centers such as Montreat, Ghost Ranch, Cook College and Theological School, etc. Regional training could focus on continuing education at synod conference centers, synod school, special synod events for CLPs or small church conferences.

In those presbyteries where seminaries have extension courses, the committee dealing with the training of commissioned lay pastors could make sure the names of CLP candidates are included on the mailing list of seminary extension information.

In the larger cities of most presbyteries there are additional educational opportunities: Hospitals sometimes offer short-term CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education) courses for pastors (and others) who are working full-time. One day events and regional events by interfaith groups or other denominations may be useful to some CLP candidates (or commissioned lay pastors seeking continuing education opportunities). Who could pass on CLP names to those who build the mailing lists for such events?

The final suggestion is a new idea that would need to be thought through and developed by individual institutions: Although regional training on a continuing basis has not seemed to work to this point, some concentrated educational events offered on a synod or regional level for

CLP candidates and other interested lay people (and even ministers) might be a real service. Realizing that those participating in CLP programs are usually working full time, courses could be offered and repeated on a staggered basis—perhaps with an event that involves a first weekend where a choice of several courses is offered; weekday courses for those who can take that time off for concentrated training, and a second weekend, again with a choice of several courses:

Friday night—registration, etc.

Saturday/Sunday: 3 6-8 hour courses offered—2 could be chosen: polity, teaching, sacraments, small church dynamics, church conflict, etc.

Sunday night: registration for those participating in the next Session

Monday-Wednesday: 3-4 6-8 hour courses offered (could be some of the same ones offered over the weekend)—2-3 could be chosen: the longer time period could open the way for a preaching course (and time for sermons) worship leadership (and time to practice), case studies in various ministry skills (for continuing education in polity, pastoral care, moderating sessions, etc.)

This kind of opportunity might be offered through a college or a seminary either on its own campus (during the summer) or at one of the regional or national conference centers in conjunction with the presbyteries in the general geographic area, or even at the next national (or regional) small church celebrations (to take the place of more time-limited workshops for those interested). This would be additional training for commissioned lay pastors and candidates, supplementing what presbyteries are already doing, and would need to involve some commitment from the presbyteries to encourage the event, and some information from the presbyteries concerning the courses it would be most helpful to have at such an event. So far as I know, this kind of educational event has not yet been tried.

THOSE NAGGING QUESTIONS

This chapter started out as constitutional questions, but I am not an expert in the matter—and not all the questions are based in our constitution. Many of the following questions and answers – constitutionally based or not—rely on common sense. Some questions come up because not all people attending CLP programs are elders—some are church people who seek the in depth learning experience offered there for various reasons. I have run across one or two people participating in CLP training in hope their congregations will one day elect them to be elders and they intend to be ready. That’s when the person or committee in charge of admissions to the program needs to begin asking why the church endorsed this person. Some of these questions arise out of the experience of putting programs together on the run—things committees and presbyteries forgot to consider, things that worked well, things that have had to be revised to deal with reality. Some of the questions arise because committees rotate and change. At any rate, the following questions are ones I have heard repeatedly, ones people have said “Don’t forget to speak to...” as I have shared the fact that I have been doing this research.

The traditional disclaimer: Do not take these answers as official pronouncements. The cases that have been referred to the General Assembly level so far do not cover most of these questions! They are answers from Sugar Land, TX—not Louisville--and should be considered as such.

QUESTION 1: WHAT IF SOMEONE WHO IS NOT AN ELDER WANTS TO PARTICIPATE IN COMMISSIONED LAY PASTOR TRAINING? ASSUMING THE PERSON IS ADMITTED TO THE COURSE OF STUDY CAN THAT PERSON HAVE ANY OF THE POWERS GRANTED TO A CLP IF HE/SHE COMPLETES THE COURSE?

The *Book of Order* says simply that “The commissioned lay pastor is an elder of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), who is granted a local commission by the presbytery to lead worship and preach the gospel, watch over the people, and provide for their nurture and service.” (G-14.0800a) The constitutional requirements for training are then listed. The Book of Order does not say that a person must be an elder to participate in the training programs the various presbyteries have set up. Most presbyteries have recognized that not everyone who participates in CLP training is seeking commissioning, so some have set up several “tracts” for people to follow depending on their needs. All that follows assumes that there is the possibility for having people in a CLP training program that may not be seeking commissioning at the end.

Hopefully your presbytery has an admissions process that it follows for its own protection. Most presbyteries require participants in CLP training be endorsed by their church Session, and often the pastor or moderator as well. What is the reason the Session gives for endorsing a person who is not an elder? If there is a time in your admissions process for an interview, what is the applicant’s reason for wanting to be a part of your program? Most CLP applications do ask some form of the question: Why are you

seeking this training? Pay attention to the answer, whether or not the person is an elder, and whether the answer is written out or given in response to an interview question.

If the person is not an elder, the presbytery committee needs to be blunt about the fact that the *Book of Order* does not provide for people who are not elders to become commissioned as lay pastors. This was settled by an amendment proposed in the 1997 General Assembly and ratified by the 1998 General Assembly after it passed the required number of presbyteries, and eliminated the conflict in the *Book of Order* where it appeared that presbyteries, in some circumstances, had the discretion (by a 3/4 vote) to commission a “Presbyterian Person” as a lay pastor.

It is important to make it clear who can be commissioned and who cannot, for there have been instances in the past in some presbyteries where those going through the training assumed they were being promised automatic opportunities to preach, teach, serve as CLPs’s etc. at the end of the training whether or not they were elders (which has not always been mandatory). By making it clear that the person cannot be commissioned and asking why the person wishes to engage in this training, the committee/person that deals with people coming into the training program, the committee that deals with the training program and the committee that deals with folks as they exit training and seek commissioning all have a consistent answer about what is possible and what is not. It is a matter of what is allowed by the constitution, and there should be no illusion that a person who is not an elder can be commissioned.

There may well be good and legitimate reasons for people who are not elders seeking CLPs training. There is nothing in the *Book of Order* that prohibits someone who is not an elder from going through the training program. A few of the reason (there are obviously others) follow:

1. Someone who is considering seminary as a second career may seek this training as part of their personal inquiry process. Many CLP programs mirror the kinds of courses seminaries offer, and this opportunity has given some people considering seminary a brief taste of theological training, and an idea about their academic skills in regard to this kind of work.

2. Church musicians, church educators, church secretaries and others who are seeking accreditation in their fields have often found that the CLP courses meet the requirements of their accreditation program. These people may or may not be elders in a church (some may or may not even be Presbyterians or members of the church they serve because of personnel policies). Does your CLP training allow for such people to come and participate in one or more classes during the training cycle without being a part of the whole program? (Think about this one because it opens up some possibilities for church officer training, Christian education training, etc. that could draw more people into such events. Some presbyteries also plan regular church officer training, education events, and other opportunities where workshops are offered with commissioned lay pastors in mind—this also broadens, gives new depth, and brings new people into these presbytery events.)

3. Members of larger churches who are not elders and may not desire to serve as elders (or lay pastors) but desire more information about the Presbyterian Church and its beliefs, theology, history, etc. for a committee (church related, presbytery related, community related), a class in a local community

college, a project they are part of, or because they are teaching a special adult class may seek to attend parts of the training program.

Sometimes a person who is not an elder may complete the entire CLPS training program. Can you utilize them in any way? The presbytery will have a person who is now a very informed—and undoubtedly motivated—who could be a valuable addition to any committee whose membership does not require the person to be an elder. With a note of extreme caution, sometimes person could be used to preach—either in their own congregation or elsewhere. If this is allowed, though, be very careful not to make the CLP training an endorsement for people to offer their services preaching wherever they can (whether they are an elder or not). Presbyteries maintain lists of supply preachers, many broken down into people who are ministers, elders and other lay people. The permission to preach should be at the discretion of presbytery and the invitation of the church, not automatic at the end of CLP training, and certainly not at the volunteering of the person.

When I returned to New Covenant Presbytery and accepted a stated supply preaching call to do conflict resolution and redevelopment work in a church there, there was an elder who had told the congregation he was a graduate of the Lay Academy. In reality he had finished the training program but had never completed any of the requirements or testing that would have led to being certified as able to be commissioned. My arrival meant he had to change his story to say he had finished the course work. He had transferred to that church after completing the Lay Academy courses, so the session had no easy way to check out what he was saying. He was not under care or supervision of presbytery in any way. He was representing himself to some of the small churches as a Lay Academy Graduate and offering his services to preach to members of churches he ran into. He was not calling churches and offering to preach, he was making casual contacts and offering to preach for free or for less than churches were normally asked to pay for pulpit supply. We had to sort through the lines of accountability—was I as his pastor responsible for telling him he could not go around offering to preach until he had been approved for the pulpit supply list by presbytery? As an elder, he maintained he should be ready to preach in small churches without regular pulpit supply, and if he had friends in such churches who invited him to preach, and if he was not on the Session on his current church (he felt his accountability was to the church who endorsed him), and if presbytery had never told him he could not preach, he did not see he was doing anything wrong. Was the session of the church responsible—they were not the session who had endorsed him for CLP training. Was presbytery's COM responsible to speak to him as the committee responsible for pulpit supply—even though he was not under their care in any way. For me the question became more critical to answer when I knew he had preached at a small (15-20 member) church on World Communion Sunday. He had volunteered to preach for them that day. When I would question him about it he was carefully elusive about whether the Lord's Supper had been part of that service, and I could get neither a yes or a no about whether he had presided at the Lord's Table knowing that he had no permission or commission from presbytery to do so. We worked through this situation by being clear with the elder about his

responsibilities and accountability as an elder (we established that it was in his current church), and by working with the small churches he tended to volunteer to preach at concerning pulpit supply and who in presbytery was on the pulpit list and why they needed to stay with that list. We were fortunate, for this was a situation that could have escalated into conflict because of the elder involved—but he moved on to become involved in a spiritual formation program and decided he was too busy being spiritual to work on his lay pastor role. These situations are the worry and nightmare of every presbytery and program contemplating CLP training and leads to the next question:

QUESTION 2: WHAT PROMISES HAVE YOU MADE?

What kind of literature do you have describing your CLP program? Do you have publicity material or information that you send out to churches? What does it say? Read it carefully and re-read it, then —give it to someone who knows nothing about the program to read and interpret for you: in these litigious days you want to be sure you are not making any promises—explicit or implicit—that you do not mean to make.

As presbyteries were creating CLP programs in the early 1990's, many of us had three-fold brochures or other information that talked about what a commissioned lay pastor (preacher) is, what a CLP could do, and asking if people felt called to this new opportunity that could benefit the church. Sometimes that material we created simply quoted the *Book of Order*, but some people read it to imply that when a person finished the CLP training process, the presbytery would place them. South Louisiana Presbytery went through the heartbreak of a law suit because an elder who completed the program felt he was entitled to preach and that presbytery had promised him CLP-type work in its material describing the program. Many dollars and many court sessions and many hard feelings later, the issue was resolved. Be as clear possible—go over it in class sessions, in admission processes, in testing processes, in everyplace you can that completing the course of study is not a guarantee of service, commissioning, or employment as a CLP.

A parallel can be drawn to seminary students—going to seminary and passing ordination exams does not guarantee a call. This is a time to talk about the meaning of calling and a call in the Presbyterian Church being a three way covenant—the person called, the organization doing the calling, and the presbytery—all must affirm the call. Sometimes people are recommended to CLP training by a particular church or pastor which a specific situation in mind—or a church may send an elder to training in order to have someone who is commissioned to serve communion because they have no regular preaching, etc. Still the guarantees should not be built in, you come, you pass, you are automatically commissioned to go to such and such. You come, you finished, you pass, we will certify you as a lay preacher and find you weekly preaching. Make sure the concept of calling is clear. Make sure people understand you are not agreeing to help them find placement (unless you are) or guaranteeing that once they finish they will automatically be employed as lay pastors, or even certified as ready to be commissioned.

Many of us began lay pastor training not sure how many would want to participate and what we were going to do with people when we were finished. New Covenant presbytery began planning to do lay

pastor training because we had one person serving a small Asian language church who was also attending seminary part-time in order to be ordained. There were a lot of questions—if he were commissioned as a lay pastor, could he preside at communion? (The answer was clearly “NO according to the *Book of Order*.) How would CLP training affect seminary course work, etc.? We never expected 25-30 people becoming part of the training from all sizes of churches—very small, small, medium, large. We never expected people to have in mind so many possibilities when they finished. Who could be commissioned for what (what about those visiting and doing worship in nursing homes? Those doing campus ministry? Those who were not in church situations?) There were no precedents. Some people were not commissioned who expected to be. Feelings were hurt. Some of these people were commissioned later. It was not until the very end of the training that COM—who had been warned for 2 years that it needed to do something—formed an ad hoc committee to deal with the people who had completed the training program. All of a sudden the COM needed requirements and guidelines for commissioning.

If your program is young, or if you are considering/reconsidering establishing a program think through what all you might be asked to commission people to do: Campus ministry? Hospital chaplaincy programs? (Some hospitals offer additional training to the CLP training.) Jail chaplaincy programs? Serving in small churches? Some of the chaplaincy type programs come into question because the institutions involved want some kind of credentialing from the presbytery/church certifying that this person is recognized by presbytery, or has some kind of training by an official body, and that the person is accountable to some church governing body. Sometime people seek training through the commissioned lay pastor courses because they need training or credentialing to continue a ministry they are already doing. All this leads to the next question:

QUESTION 3: WHAT POWERS SHOULD YOU GRANT TO THOSE WHO ARE COMMISSIONED?

Consider again what the *Book of Order* says:

“The commissioned lay pastor is an elder of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), who is granted a local commission by the presbytery to lead worship and preach the gospel, watch over the people, and provide for their nurture and service. This commission is valid only in one or more congregations, new church development, or other validated ministries designated by the presbytery. (G-14.0801a)

“When a presbytery, in consultation with the session or other responsible committee, determines that its strategy for mission in a local church requires it, and after additional instruction deemed necessary by the presbytery has been provided, a presbytery may authorize a commissioned lay pastor to perform any or all of the following functions described in (1)-(6) below.

- (1) Administer the Lord’s Supper
- (2) Administer the Sacrament of Baptism

(3) Moderate the session of the congregation under the supervision of and when invited by the moderator of the session appointed by the presbytery.

(4) Have a voice in meetings of presbytery.

(5) Have a vote in meetings of the presbytery (such vote to be counted as an elder commissioner for purposes of parity).

(6) Perform a service of Christian marriage when invited by the session or other responsible committee, and when allowed by the state. (G-14.0801c)

“An organizing pastor is a minister or commissioned lay pastor appointed by the presbytery to serve as pastor to a group of people who are in the process of organizing a new Presbyterian church.” (G-14.0513f)

In Presbytery of New Covenant (in light of a coming re-organization of the presbytery and its committee structure), we formed an *ad hoc* committee to consolidate all the information and forms we had about commissioned lay pastors. We created new forms to deal with the possible new functions that could be granted to commissioned lay pastors. We made it an all inclusive form, believing we could send it to sessions and committees that were responsible for the annual review of various commissioned lay pastors and have them check off the appropriate powers that should be granted. The responsible sessions and committees received our carefully devised forms, scanned them, checked off every box almost every single time and returned them to us. Then we had to get serious and talk about which powers were appropriate for commissioned lay pastors serving in various capacities.

We now have commissioned lay pastors commissioned to serve as the pastors of small churches, commissioned to do nursing home visitation and worship in medium sized churches, commissioned to do campus ministers in several colleges and universities, commissioned to serve as jail chaplains or hospital chaplains, people commissioned to special ministries within their own medium or large sized churches—evangelism, preaching and/or presiding at the Lord’s Table when there have been worship services added or the pastor has been sick for a time, and many other circumstances. Do all these varied ministries need all the possible powers that can be granted to commissioned lay pastors? **NO**.

My prejudice in ascertaining which powers ought to be granted CLPS serving in validated ministries that are not directly related to pastoral service to a local congregation would be to err on the side of a narrow interpretation. The reason for this would be the *Book of Order* statement that these are powers related to the strategy for mission in a local church. There is a difference between pastoral work done in a local congregation and pastoral work done in various chaplaincies and other specialized ministries. A variety of ministries, a variety of needs, sometimes means not all powers need to be granted all people.

In deciding which powers to grant, ask first: What is the need in the particular ministry situation in which the CLP is involved? Ask next: In what ways can that need be met? Ask also if the various

powers that **can** be granted **need** to be granted in order for the CLP to do effective work--and for the mission of the group/congregation to go forward.

What follows below are some steps that seem to have been taken by most presbyteries dealing with commissioned lay pastors in defining how they will grant specific powers to commissioned lay pastors:

Step 1: Training New Covenant's committees dealing with commissioned lay pastors in 1996-1997 decided that no one would be granted further powers (beyond the original commission to preach and possibly to preside at the Lord's Supper) without further course-work or training. This included people already commissioned as well as those in the training process at that time. Courses were added and/or expanded on the meaning of the Sacraments (baptism in particular), church administration/small group dynamics/running meetings; weddings and funerals etc. As I scanned the courses available in other presbyteries, comparing courses described in the 1996 resource book and the courses described in 1999-2000, most other presbyteries had obviously changed their programs to include courses dealing with the expanded powers possible.

Step 2: Need to preside at the sacraments What is the person doing and what powers do they logically need? If we commission people to do chaplaincy type work (on the basis of a recommendation by a responsible committee with oversight for that person's work), do they need to be able to preside at the Sacraments of the Lord's Supper and/or Baptism? The answer may vary from situation to situation: Is the chaplaincy at a college? (Who has authority for authorizing communion at retreat and other events of the campus ministry program?) Is the chaplaincy at a hospital? (Would there be a need for a CLPs to serve the Lord's Supper in this setting--what other chaplains/lay ministers are available? Is there a need for this CLP to be authorized to administer baptism in certain circumstances and what are the policies of the hospital chaplain's office on this?) Is the chaplaincy at a prison? (What is the CLPs's chaplaincy role and what other chaplains are there to lead worship and preside at the sacraments?). The committee granting commissions and powers may decide it is appropriate to grant the authority to preside at either sacrament, at both--or neither. A committee would be well cautioned that if the need is not clear to them, they should go back to the session or committee responsible for oversight of the commissioned lay pastor and ask why this CLP needs to be able to preside over the sacraments. Simply because the opportunity is there does not necessarily constitute a valid reason for granting the authority to do something.

Step 3: Need for voice and/or vote at presbytery Do elders who are serving in various validated ministries (usually on a volunteer basis) such as nursing home visitation and worship, jail chaplaincy, college chaplaincy need to be granted automatic voice and vote in presbytery? These are elders who can be at presbytery with full voice and vote as the commissioner from their congregation. Their church and ministry are represented in committees and by pastors and elders. Voice and vote is not necessarily a right that needs to go with commissioning when there are other places for the CLPs serving in a specialized validated ministry to have an effective voice and impact.

Step 4: Authority to moderate a session Do all CLPs's need permission/authority to moderate the session? If they are not serving in a congregational setting where they are the pastor, they should not

need this authority. The *Book of Order* has other ways to grant an elder on time permission/authority to moderate a session meeting in the absence of the regular moderator.

Step 5: Need to be able to perform a marriage service Do all CLPS's need the authority to perform a service of Christian marriage (when allowed by the state law)? **NO**. Does the committee charged with the oversight of granting this power know what their state law says on this matter? Has anybody thought about having a copy of the latest statute on the matter available as part of the information to the committee with this responsibility? Some states have very clear laws about who may or may not perform a marriage. Some states require that anyone who wants to be entitled to perform a marriage register with the state (and some require a yearly fee to be paid as a money making scheme). **Some states have more general laws that recognize as an ordained minister anyone whom the church authorizes to perform a wedding ceremony (you who like to worry about people setting themselves up as preachers without seminary education or official ordination to the ministry of word and sacrament may now worry).** Some states have common law marriage laws that say if a couple presents themselves as a married couple, they are so considered—even if no wedding has ever taken place or even if there was a wedding performed by someone not legally entitled to officiate at a wedding.

The authority to perform a service of Christian marriage is not a power to be granted as a matter of course and without thought because it could get real messy real fast. If I were on a committee looking at this particular power today, I would also go back to the letter of the law in the *Book of Order* that talks about the strategy for mission in the local church. I know several people involved in campus ministry in several presbyteries who say they feel they should be allowed to perform a service of Christian marriage—but campus ministry is not a local congregational setting. There are also times when presbyteries have given specific permission for a specific commissioned lay pastor to participate in a particular wedding ceremony (whether presiding or as liturgist), while not granting that person a general right to preside at weddings.

QUESTION 4: CAN THE COMMISSION COME AND GO?

Yes it can. The *Book of Order* says:

“An elder who has been commissioned and later ceases to serve in a particular congregation may continue to be listed as available to serve, but is not authorized to perform the functions of a commissioned lay pastor until appointed again to a particular congregation by the presbytery.” (G-14.0801a)

Following are three examples of how this may work out—drawn from New Covenant Presbytery because I am most familiar with it and its actions. Similar cases may be found in most presbyteries:

Example 1: A small racial ethnic church had several members—and the pastor as translator—attend the Lay Academy sessions. Several of the church elders completed the course work. One elder sought commissioning with the recommendation of both the pastor and the session (the pastor was involved in General Assembly level committee work and the Lay Academy experience was seen as a way some of the

church elders would be prepared to lead worship and preach when he was not available). After the initial 6 month commission was up (New Covenant's first commissioning period is always 6 months to allow the church and the CLP an initial period to determine if this is the right course for the church and the CLP to be following), the pastor suggested that this elder was not yet ready to lead the congregation: his background of leadership came from an experience where leadership was by quiet example, and not through using active leadership skills. The pastor felt the elder needed to grow more in his willingness to lead the people from a position of authority. There was no questioning the elder's faith, call, or anything else. It was a question of different cultural perceptions of leadership. When that pastor left to accept a call from the General Assembly, he came back to the committee charged with commissioning lay pastors and reported that the elder had grown both in faith and leadership abilities and he strongly urged them to again commission the elder to lead the church as a commissioned lay pastor who spoke the language of the church and could be entrusted to lead the church into the future, who should be authorized to preside at the Lord's Table. This was done, and when the powers that could be granted to a commissioned lay pastors were expanded, this elder took the additional courses needed to be authorized to be able to baptize, perform a service of Christian marriage, etc. His face glowed at a committee meeting when he reported that it was going to be his privilege to participate in the baptism of his own grandchild. His commission has been renewed each year as he continues to provide leadership to that small congregation.

Example 2: Another elder who is retired has been associated with several small churches as a commissioned lay pastor, usually with specific duties: Sometimes to preach and preside at the Lord's table in a period when the church concerned is without a pastor—once when the pastor was sick for a long period; sometimes as a parish associate kind of person to visit shut-ins or other people. He has also served as a commissioned lay pastor in campus ministry positions associated with some of the community college systems in the Houston area as well as one of the University of Houston campuses. Serving as a commissioned lay pastor in these situations has enabled the churches and institutions involved to fulfill their mission strategies. Sometimes the commission he has received has been for less than a year. Sometimes he has actually been commissioned to serve two places at once (in a small church and in campus ministry), with different powers granted in the different places.

Example 3: An elder who had been commissioned to preach and preside at the Lord's Table in a mid-sized, growing church where it was not possible for one pastor to be available at all the worship services (because of the size of facilities and needing to overlap worship and education times), was asked to chair the pulpit nominating committee when the church's pastor retired. He properly asked that his commission be discontinued when that happened. He remains on the presbytery list of people who could be commissioned again in the future.

The purpose of a commission is to enable the work of the church or institution being served to be accomplished. A commissioned lay pastor may complete his/her work in a particular situation (or the

situation may change)—whether or not that time coincides with the end of the commission—and so an elder serving as a CLP may ask that the commission be suspended.. Whether that person remains eligible to again be commissioned should be subject to guidelines worked out by the committee charged with oversight and review of commissioned lay pastors—their work, their continuing education, etc.

QUESTION 5: HOW LONG SHOULD THE INITIAL COMMISSION BE?

The first answer comes from the *Book of Order*:

The commission shall be valid for a period up to three years, as determined by the presbytery. It may be renewed at expiration or terminated at any time at the discretion of the presbytery...A review of the work of the commissioned lay pastor shall be conducted annually.... (G-14.0801b)

Many presbyteries have a shorter initial commissioning as a kind of probation period for both the commissioned lay pastor and the institution served. Some compare this to an internship undertaken by seminary students in the course of their seminary work—or following seminary by candidates who have not completed the candidacy period or who need to pass ordination exams. Sometimes this initial 6-month period allows the committee responsible for commissioned lay pastors to do follow-up work: What has the CLP learned—would some continuing education dealing with the area he/she is working with be helpful? How is it going?—this asked of both the CLP and the institution served. Is this a call that should continue? Has the CLP learned things that the presbytery should include in its basic training program? etc.

Following this initial commissioning, if all is going well, the commission is renewed for a longer period of time—the annual review and renewal of the commission can occur together. This pattern fits in well with the established pattern for contract ministries that COM's already deal with in working with stated supply and interim contracts. In my presbytery, at least, people have accepted a yearly commissioning as the norm for commissioned lay pastors because it is the only pattern we have ever followed for this unique kind of ministry. The shortened period of time does make the *Book of Order* mandated roles of oversight and review easier—and it also deals with manageable lengths of time in case problems or conflict arise: people are more willing to deal reasonably and honorably with any problems that might arise if all know there is an end to the contract where a neat break can be made for all concerned. An annual review and renewal can allow a win/win situation if there are problems, for all parties can look for ways fulfill their obligations for the time remaining in the commission instead of allowing conflict to grow. (If there is a real conflict management situation, presbytery has the right and the responsibility to end the commission immediately.)

QUESTION 6: WHAT IS THE COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY'S INVOLVEMENT?

What does the *Book of Order* say about COM's involvement? Expand that to the presbytery's implied committee role and the following advice is given:

The elder shall be examined by the appropriate committee of presbytery as to personal faith, motives for seeking the commission, and the areas of instruction mentioned previously. (G-14.0801a)

The commissioned lay pastor shall work under the supervision of the presbytery through the moderator of the session being served or through Committee on Ministry. ... (G-14.0801d)

(The COM) shall counsel with sessions regarding stated supplies, interim pastors, interim co-pastors, interim associate pastors, and temporary supplies when a church is without a pastor, and it shall provide lists of pastors, commissioned lay pastors, and qualified lay persons who have been trained and commissioned by the presbytery to supply vacant pulpits. Concurrence of the presbytery through its committee on ministry is required when a session invites an interim pastor, interim co-pastor or interim associate pastor as provided for in G-14.0513b and c. (G-11.0503f)

A temporary supply may be a minister, a candidate, a commissioned lay pastor, or an elder secured by the session to conduct services when there is no pastor or the pastor is unable to perform pastoral duties. The session shall seek the counsel of presbytery through its Committee on Ministry before securing a temporary supply. A temporary supply may not be called to be a pastor or associate pastor of a church served as temporary supply unless 6 months have elapsed since the end of the temporary supply relationship. (G-14.0513d)

How is the COM involved in the process of training, examining, commissioning, supervising and reviewing the work of commissioned lay pastors? There is a lot of latitude here. The *Book of Order* does not assign the training process to the COM or any other named presbytery committee. It says only that the appropriate committee of presbytery shall examine them. The COM comes in with the named responsibility of maintaining lists of CLPs eligible to serve in churches, and supervising the work of CLPs (which could also be assigned to a mentoring pastor).

The COMs will vary from presbytery to presbytery as geography, the urban/rural mix, the number of commissioned lay pastors, etc. all make a difference. What follows are few answers but many of the questions presbyteries with established commissioned lay pastor programs have had to work through:

- 1) How many committees does your presbytery have working on the details concerned with the training, commissioning and oversight of commissioned lay pastors—and how do they communicate?
- 2) Many presbyteries in beginning commissioned lay pastor programs (or in restarting them) end up with some kind of committee that is in charge of the training program. What does this committee communicate to whatever committee examines and commissions CLPS? Are there liaisons between committees?

- 3) Some presbytery COMs have decided that CLPs deserve a sub-committee all to themselves because of the amount of work that is involved in the work of training, supervising, advising, commissioning, etc.. What all should that subcommittee do—should it oversee the entire process from accepting those who enter the program to examining, commissioning and overseeing those who finish the training?
- 4) Does your presbytery have a candidacy process for commissioned lay pastor candidates? Is it through the Committee on Preparation for Ministry or through some other entity? Who examines these candidates? The committee charged with oversight of the training? A committee charged with a candidacy process? The Committee on Ministry? If more than one committee or group is involved, what is the communication between the committees/groups?

There are many models that work well in our various presbyteries: In some a Lay Academy type committee is in charge of the application process, the admission process, and the training program while another group is in charge of the examinations process (the examination sub-committee of the COM), and yet another on the actual commissioning/call, review and oversight. In other places one group of people is assigned the oversight of the whole process and works as a subcommittee of the COM. The important common factor seems to be that there be good communication of expectations among all the committees/groups involved with the training and commissioning of lay pastors.

QUESTION 7: WHAT IS YOUR APPLICATION PROCESS?

Many of the lay pastor training programs have been developed on the run. More than one has had an application that described a process that never happened in reality: Applicants were asked to fill out forms, have their session endorse them and fill out a form, have their pastor (or moderator of their session) endorse them and fill out a recommendation, and then all this was to be forwarded to the proper committee or the dean of the training program for review. And in the early days that's where the process sometimes broke down—the dean of the training program became the admissions committee. In creating an application form and process, each program needs to establish candidacy or oversight procedures for those in the commissioned lay pastor training program. The process may be formal with each person coming before a committee—a lay pastor committee or the Committee on Preparation for Ministry and entering a candidacy process with reports and a mentor, etc. Or it may be an informal process—perhaps the person heading the training program also takes care of the admissions process and the sponsoring churches are put in charge of the candidacy process for any candidate they endorse. Perhaps it is something in between. **What is important is that the process you outline in your application information is the process you follow.** If the process changes, people need to know why and how—and

how it affects them. At the end of this chapter are several application forms from different presbyteries to help committees think through what their process and their application may look like.

QUESTION 8: HOW DO YOU DETERMINE WHAT PARTICIPANTS HAVE GOTTEN OUT OF THE COURSE?

Sometimes in getting training programs up and running, there are so many details like applications, eligibility, schedules, sites, leaders, and more, that the little detail of evaluation or accountability for the classes is overlooked. How the program is structured greatly affects the evaluation process:

In programs that meet for an initial class time, have a space of time for reading and assignments (and perhaps small group discussion with other people in the program on a local basis), and then come back together for a second class time, there is the opportunity to assign specific work to be done and handed in.

In programs that meet and have a 6-8 hour class that includes lecture and discussion time, readings are often assigned before the class, but whatever assignment/evaluation comes out of that class must be done without another full class session to review it.

In programs that meet in a retreat setting several times a year—3 or 4 or even 6 months apart—and have several intensive courses over a weekend period, readings and assignments can be made prior to the classes, but follow-up evaluation is often on an independent study or project basis.

Because commissioned lay pastor programs are dealing with busy, but motivated adults, many forms of evaluation will work. And a mixture of evaluative instruments—papers, tests, projects, sermons—are appropriate. Some examples follow:

1. **Objective tests** to cover areas like Bible and Polity (Question: would it be possible to use old ordination exams--in an area like polity--or Bible Content exams such as are made available to seminary students to study?)
2. **Research papers** for areas like English exegesis, theology and history
3. **Projects** carried out in the church to cover areas like Christian Education, pastoral care, sacraments, even history and theology:

a) A project that involves teaching a class—adult church school, confirmation class, church officer training, a presbytery workshop, etc., where the project report includes a course outline, material prepared for the class sessions, an evaluation of the class, what went well, what the participant would change next time

- b) A project that involves learning pastoral care skills—many hospitals (small and large) will offer limited time courses (and less intensive than CPE courses) on visitation for pastors
 - c) A project that involves planning and leading a retreat
 - d) A project that plans a special program for Advent or Lent (a one-day program or a series of Bible Studies, informal worship services, etc.)
4. **Sermons** on assigned texts where the exegetical work is shared, the sermon typed and shared, the sermon preached and critiqued
 5. **Time lines** to show the flow of the Old or New Testament, church history, reformed history, etc.
 6. **Small group discussions** in a follow up time, either at the next gathering or carried on with a local pastor/discussion leader in a central place where some of the participants come together
 7. **Allowing the leader of the course to make an assignment** to the members of the class—and having that leader be responsible for grading that assignment as part of his/her teaching role
 8. In addition to any other evaluations or examinations, some programs have suggested a **final integrating project or paper** asking the participant to integrate the knowledge gained in the training process, especially as it relates to some aspect of the work he/she might be doing as a result (whether as a commissioned lay pastor, educator, lay preacher who does not seek to be commissioned, member or a presbytery committee, etc.)

QUESTION 9: WHAT IS YOUR EXAM PROCESS?

The idea of a national set of examination materials has been debated on various levels over the last ten years. It came before the 212th (2000) General Assembly in the form of an overture (00-81) from Presbytery of Yellowstone which sought to require commissioned lay pastors be tested by the same types of standardized examinations as those given to Ministers of the Word and Sacrament. The Assembly Committee on Church Orders and Ministry (Heidi Peterson, moderator), disapproved the overture.

The motion to require CLPS to be tested by standardized exams was then presented as a substitute motion on the floor of the General Assembly by C. Freeman McCall, a commissioner from the Presbytery of Yellowstone. He argued that standardized exams would “ensure the highest quality possible” for CLPS’s who can be authorized “to do everything that Ministers of the Word and Sacrament do.”

In the General Assembly process, any motion such as this would have financial implications, and the estimated financial implications must be reported to commissioners as part of the information in debate. The Presbyteries’ Cooperative Committee on Examinations reported that the financial burden would be \$182,640 over a two year period.. After debate, the substitute motion requiring standardized CLPS exams was defeated by the General Assembly 409 to 75, and the main motion (to disapprove the overture requiring the exams) was passed by a vote of 425 to 63.ⁱ

The *Book of Order* does not set forth an examinations process for commissioned lay pastors beyond saying: “The elder shall be examined by the appropriate committee of presbytery as the personal

faith, motives for seeking the commission, and the areas of instruction mentioned previously.” (G-14.0801a)

In general, presbyteries training commissioned lay pastors have devised their own examinations processes that cover both the areas of study mandated by the *Book of Order* as well as the additional courses each presbytery may require to meet its own circumstances. The depth and formality of the examinations process depends to some extent on the work required from participants in the course work: Some presbyteries which require examinations and/or papers from each course taken may have an examination process that spends more effort on oral exams than on written work. Others rely on a process that combines recommendations from teachers, pastors and others who know the candidate as well oral and written examinations. Some presbyteries which are still in the process of developing/redeveloping their programs have simply said they will leave it up to established committees—the committee dealing with training CLPs, the Committee on Ministry and/or the Committee on Preparation for Ministry—to work out the examinations process (which may vary candidate to candidate depending on circumstances).

Because the commission for a commissioned lay pastor is a local commission and is not automatically transferable to another presbytery, it makes good sense that the responsibility for examination remain within the presbyteries. Because training programs vary greatly—depending on the geographic size, population, and the nature of the presbyteries doing the training—there are no national standards for training. Most CLP training is done with a view of the practical realities that exist in a presbytery and what training is needful in specific ministry situations in order to further the mission of the congregation/institution the CLP serves. Most examinations of CLPs are practical in nature—more so than the examination of ministers.

Right now if a person who has been trained as a CLP in one presbytery moves to another presbytery and desires to serve as a CLP in the new presbytery, he/she would need to go through the appropriate committee dealing with CLP training, prove what training has been done, perhaps receive additional training and be re-examined according to the standards of the new presbytery. Remember a minister who moves from one presbytery to another is also re-examined by the proper committee of the new presbytery. For any of us who are ordained, the call to serve is not an absolute right, it is a calling that is subject to examination and validation by all parties concerned—the person, the congregation, the presbytery.

Below are some representative examples of what some of the presbyteries have said about their examinations process:

Minnesota Valley (in their original program) asked the instructors to give their opinion of a person’s readiness to serve as a CLP; required an interview of the candidate by a member of the presbytery who was a skilled counselor (and who also served on the faculty of the lay pastor training); had a final interview with the presbytery executive and the chair of the committee on ministry, and compiled a file including the following information:

The original application form and accompanying session endorsement

A “Journey Statement” (includes the interview with a member of presbytery who was a skilled counselor and a member of the CLP training faculty)

A Statement of Faith

An Old Testament Exegesis Paper

A New Testament Exegesis Paper

An Exegesis paper and resulting sermon that has been preached to the CLP group and critiqued by them and the instructor for the sermon class

A Resume

The notes of the exit interview.

(In 1999, Minnesota Valleys Presbytery was redeveloping the Institute for Development of Lay Ministry and committing itself to a 4 year time period of training so the 2 year cycle of classes could be repeated. Although the examinations process may also change, that was not noted in the material I had.)

(This information from 1992-93 and 1998 commissioned lay pastor program materials, information and evaluations of Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys)

The presbyteries of **Northern Kansas** and **Southern Kansas** have developed a cooperative training program to be held on the Sterling College Campus. Courses are to include lectures, discussions, papers, projects, homework and testing, including final examinations for each course. In the information I have it was projected there would be 8 courses, and a final letter grade would be given in each course. Graduates will receive a certificate from Sterling College’s Lay Pastor Institute (the training program being planned by the two presbyteries) at a stated meeting of their presbytery. Graduates of the program may serve as CLP’s only after commissioning by their respective presbyteries in accordance with the procedure and requirements of their presbytery (which is not outlined in the information about training).

(This information from materials put out by the Presbyteries of Northern Kansas and Southern Kansas, 1998)

The Presbytery of Northern Plains notes in its training model that the geography of the presbytery dictates against large groups of people getting together for training sessions, and so predict that most training will be done in one-on-one mentoring type situations, holding group classes when possible. The examinations process is colored by this. On evaluating candidates, the presbytery says this:

1. After a period of study, training, and practical experience, under the guidance of an approved mentor, the applicant and the mentor shall stipulate to the Leadership Development Committee that the applicant is ready for examination for commissioning. The applicants will be required to submit a written statement of faith, and demonstrate written proficiency and knowledge in the areas of Bible, preaching, leading worship, pastoral care (G-14.0801a). Care should be taken, however, to remember that the applicant is NOT a seminary graduate, and that their areas of expertise and proficiency are more circumscribed.

2. When the Leadership Development Committee is satisfied that the applicant is ready, it shall recommend to Presbytery that the applicant be examined. The applicant may be questioned on the floor of Presbytery as to their journey of faith, and their reason for seeking this commission. They shall be required to conduct a short worship service for the Committee on Ministry (or at Presbytery) consisting of (at least) a Call to Worship, Scripture Reading, 10-12 minute sermon, and pastoral prayer.

(This information from a Presbytery of Northern Plains document that is a proposal for Commissioned Lay Pastor Training developed by the COM and Leadership Development Committee, ca 1998.)

PRESBYTERY OF THE PINES was still developing programs for both Commissioned Lay Pastors and Certified Pulpit Supply in April, 1998. They had not prescribed a time period during which the course of study (presumed to be mostly directed study/correspondence courses) needed to be completed. The document being developed noted the following: “The committee which oversees the CLP Program recruits teachers based on areas which match their expertise. Each teacher sets the evaluation criteria. E.G.: For Christian Education they have to produce a class series, for theology they have to answer questions based on the reading.” And in regard to any examination process: “We will interview the candidates. Since we haven’t had anyone finish the program, we haven’t worked out specifically how to do this.”

(This information from the Presbytery of the Pines commissioned lay pastor program materials, April 1998)

Presbytery of South Louisiana was also in the process of reworking its CLP training program in the spring of 1999. What was envisioned in March, 1999 was that after completing a two year program, “Trained Lay Leaders” would need to pass a written exam (approved by both the Committee on Ministry and the Committee on Preparation for Ministry) as well as an oral exam by the Committee on Ministry before they can be accepted as candidates for a commissioned lay pastor position. All candidates must be recommended by the Committee on Preparation for Ministry before they can enter the training program.

(This information from the Presbytery of South Louisiana as they were working on redeveloping their commissioned lay pastor training program; March 1999.)

Although the Presbytery of Alaska does not define its examination process, its **STANDARDS FOR COMMISSIONED LAY PASTORS** gives an idea of the areas to be covered:

1. FAITH as expressed by:

- a. Trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and belief in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit
- b. Acceptance of the Old and New Testaments as the authoritative witness to that faith
- c. Receiving and adopting the essential tenets of the Reformed Faith as expressed in the confessions of the church

2. MATURITY as expressed by:
 - a. Membership in the Presbyterian Church and faithful, regular participation in its worship and service
 - b. Demonstrated leadership in the church
 - c. Demonstrated gifts for pastoral or specialized ministry
 - d. Acceptance, understanding and faithfulness to the questions and vows of commissioning (G-14.0801e)
3. CHRISTIAN LIFE as expressed by:
 - a. Moral standards acceptable to the Christian community
 - b. Commitment to personal spiritual growth through prayer, Bible reading and devotions.
4. CONSTITUTIONAL as expressed by:
 - a. Affirmative answers to the nine Constitutional questions (G-14.0801e)
 - b. Articulate and demonstrate affirmation of Presbyterian Polity and practice

(This information from the Presbytery of Alaska's draft proposal for changing the presbytery's manual of operations and describing their commissioned lay pastor training program, August, 1998)

Presbytery of John Knox says that when a candidate has completed his/her learning plan, the examination will include the areas mandated by the **Book of Order** (Bible, Reformed Theology, sacraments, polity, preaching and teaching) as well as a statement of faith, preaching a sermon, and presenting a written plan for continuing education.

(This information from the Presbytery of John Knox commissioned lay pastor policy manual, April, 1998)

Although the process is changing in **New Covenant Presbytery**, at one time a written examination was developed that was available to the committees involved in the training and examining process, the participants and those asked to teach. It was meant to be broad in scope in order to allow participants to reflect on what they had learned in the various areas mandated by the Book of Order. Students could choose to answer parts of the exam as they took the course work—or when they had completed the course of study. The original CLP examining committee used these exam papers as a beginning to the exam process to talk about what had been learned and how it applied to the specific ministry situation where the candidate felt called to serve—or to ask additional questions if they felt there was an area where there might be a weakness. At least two CLP candidates who were in the process of moving by the time they finished the Lay Academy used this exam as an instrument to show a committee in the presbytery where they planned to move what they had learned. (One is now serving in a hospital chaplaincy program; the other ended up remaining in New Covenant Presbytery when his company's plans changed.) A copy of this exam which was used 1994-1998 can be found at the end of this chapter. Currently the exam process has two parts: An open book exam administered by the current Dean of the Lay Academy, followed by the Examinations Subcommittee of the Committee on Ministry examining

those seeking commissioning, and the process is similar to examining a minister seeking ordination in this presbytery, though the practical nature of CLP training is acknowledged.

(This information is from New Covenant Presbytery's commissioned lay pastor packet of materials from the fall of 1998 and the current information concerning the Lay Academy)

QUESTION 10: WHAT ARE YOUR CONTINUING EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS?

The need for continuing education by lay pastors is just as important as it is for ministers. Usually either the committee that is responsible for the training program or the committee in charge of the commissioning and annual review process is responsible for keeping up with the continuing education being done by CLPs. How does the presbytery ask for accountability for continuing education? Are your requirements for continuing education for CLPs clear? How flexible are those requirements?: A person serving as the lay pastor of a small congregation might seek different continuing education courses than a person who is serving as a jail chaplain or in a campus ministry position. Does the cycle of courses offered in your lay pastor training include some elective courses that change in content and could be used for continuing education? (This allows for interaction between people serving as CLPs and people training to possibly serve as CLPs.) What opportunities lie within the presbytery (church officer training, an annual training event or leadership school, etc.)? What opportunities are provided in the synod (interim pastor training, conflict management training, synod school)? What opportunities are available from colleges, seminaries, hospitals, conference centers, etc.? Do you ask that people who do not have an active commission continue to take continuing education courses—or to take some kind of review before re-activating a commission if a year or more has passed since that person has served as a CLP?

QUESTION 11: WHAT RECOGNITION DO YOU HAVE OF GRADUATES OF YOUR PROGRAM?

The guidance from the *Book of Order* on this comes in the form of the questions that are to be asked by the presbytery when the presbytery is satisfied regarding the qualification of the applicant (G-14.0801c.) So where are these question asked of the candidate? At a presbytery meeting? At the applicant's home church in the presence of the congregation, pastor and session that endorsed the applicant and supported him/her through the training process? At an installation service in the church or institution that is to be served. Or, "Oops we forgot about that?" If you are a presbytery that has been training commissioned lay pastors for a while, you've probably figured out what you are doing. If you are a presbytery developing or redeveloping a commissioned lay pastor program—or coming to the end of your first training program period, it's another detail to plan and be aware of before the last minute so that you know what you are going to do and how you are going to do it.

Some presbyteries recognize those who have completed the training by presenting a certificate of completion at a presbytery meeting regardless of whether that person seeks to be examined, to be certified as being able to be commissioned and/or to serve as a commissioned lay pastor.

Some presbyteries will have a commissioning service for lay pastors being commissioned for the first time at a presbytery meeting. This time is often similar to the welcoming of those being accepted as candidates by the Committee on Preparation for Ministry where the members of the candidate's congregation and other support groups are asked to stand with the candidate, the constitutional questions are asked, a brief charge is made, and a prayer offered.

Some presbyteries do something both at a presbytery meeting and provide some kind of installation service in the congregation being served (or perhaps in the home congregation if the person is being commissioned for chaplaincy work in a hospital, jail, nursing home, etc.). John Knox Presbytery has provided suggested services for the commissioning and recognition of Commissioned Lay Pastors in a 1998 policy manual of their Commissioned Lay Pastor Committee. These services are found at the end of this chapter.

QUESTION 12: WILL YOU ACCEPT PEOPLE TRAINED BY OTHER PRESBYTERIES OR DENOMINATIONS?

I received a call in New Covenant about a woman who had grown up in the Presbyterian Church, had married a Lutheran and moved away from Texas, and had now returned to a small town in Texas with no Lutheran Church. She had gone through the Lutheran Church's lay pastor training program, and upon joining and becoming active in the Presbyterian church in that small town wondered if she might use the training she had already received to become a commissioned lay pastor in the Presbyterian Church.

Not too many months later I received another call from a woman who was a Presbyterian seminary student—or had been until she moved outside Houston with her husband who was completing medical training. She had been in contact with the Committee on Ministry and the Committee on Preparation for Ministry and was calling me to ask about the possibilities of serving as a commissioned lay pastor as she did not intend to immediately return to seminary or take advantage of Austin Seminary's extension program in Houston

Another aspect of this issue of deciding about commissioning people not trained by the presbytery—or trained by other denominations was raised by Scioto Valley Presbytery in 1998 with several questions presented to the Stated Clerk and the 210th (1998) General Assembly Committee on Church Orders and Ministry for clarification:

Can a commissioned lay pastor (CLP) of another denomination, over whom we have no jurisdiction, be granted the same rights and powers that the presbytery has the option of granting CLPs from within our denomination?

No. The Constitution (g-14.0800 and following) defines commissioned lay pastors as elders who have received a local commission from a presbytery. There is no provision for according permission for lay persons commissioned by other denominations to administer the sacraments, perform weddings, or moderate a session.

However, in federated churches represented by more than one denomination, a plan of federation “...shall follow provisions of G-16.000 as clearly as is practicable, and it shall be subject to the constitutions (disciplines or other organic documents) of each church involved” (G-15.02004b).ⁱⁱ

A presbytery is not required to accept the training offered by another presbytery for commissioned lay pastors. Nor can a person who is not under the discipline and jurisdiction of our denomination be granted permission to serve as a commissioned lay pastor or be granted any of the powers of commissioned lay pastors in a Presbyterian congregation.

It seems that if a person who has been trained by another presbytery moves to a new presbytery and feels called to serve as a commissioned lay pastor in that new presbytery, it is proper for that person to follow the new presbytery’s requirements for commissioning. Many programs are flexible enough to recognize some, perhaps most, of the training of another presbytery, but there should be every expectation that evidence would need to be produced about that training. Many presbyteries have specific courses or requirements for those who wish to serve as commissioned lay pastors, and since the commission is a local commission, a person moving from one presbytery to another and wishing to serve as a CLP should be willing to fulfill the requirements and additional training that may be imposed by the new presbytery.

A person who has been trained as a lay pastor in another denomination and joins a Presbyterian Church may very well plead that he/she has had extensive training in that other denomination. If that person is a member of a union congregation (Presbyterian/Methodist; Presbyterian/United Church of Christ, etc.), or becomes a member of a Presbyterian congregation ***and is an elder***, and the presbytery’s committee dealing with commissioned lay pastors is convinced that most of the training has been adequate in most areas, they may choose to ask for additional training in some of the required areas—especially Reformed Theology, worship, history, the sacraments in the Presbyterian Church, and polity before examining that person and making a decision about whether or not to commission him/her. Remember that in the case of union or federated congregations where more than one denomination’s constitution must be followed, whichever one is more conservative or restrictive is the one that must be respected. Thus, even in a federated or union congregation, a person cannot be commissioned if he/she is not an elder and under the discipline and jurisdiction of the Presbyterian Church.

QUESTION 13: WILL YOU OPEN YOUR CLASSES TO PEOPLE FROM OTHER PRESBYTERIES?

This issue may never come up—or it may arise with a call from another presbytery office, the synod office, or an individual in another presbytery. It is a question that should be considered by those responsible for a presbytery lay pastor training program—preferably before it arises.

Sometimes this question arises from practical considerations: Some of our presbyteries cover huge geographic areas, and the training for commissioned lay pastors in a neighboring presbytery may actually be closer than the training available in that person’s own presbytery. Sometimes if presbyteries share what they are doing in CLP training (through synod’s leadership/education/small church or other appropriate committee), there may be candidates or commissioned lay pastors from another presbytery in the synod who would like to participate in one or more of another presbytery’s courses because of the nature of the course(s) offered. Sometimes a person is interested in the training and is willing to travel back and forth from their home presbytery because that presbytery does not offer any training. If such a call or request came to your program what would you do?

Ignore it and hope it goes away?

Turn it over to the head of your training program?

Turn it over to the committee in charge of the training program?

Call the other presbytery to find out what is going on—Who is this person? Why are they calling you?

This is another area where there are no hard and fast answers—some presbyteries do open their programs to people from neighboring presbyteries (which have no programs of their own), and the involved presbyteries have worked out the necessary lines of communication, endorsements and accountability as they do this.ⁱⁱⁱ Other presbyteries discourage people crossing presbytery lines for lay pastor training and choose not to get involved with anyone who is not from their own presbytery. And still others will allow an elders from neighboring presbyteries to join in some of their courses when the reasons seem valid and there is some kind of endorsement/approval/communication with both the person’s church and the other presbytery involved.

Dealing with such a request does require communication with the neighboring presbytery: someone involved in the training program should know the people to call in the presbyteries or in the synod if such a request should come up. Remembering that commissioned lay pastors receive a local commission with their local presbytery which is responsible for the oversight of their training—and that the elder’s *Book of Order* accountability is within his/her session and presbytery, care does need to be taken to assure this person is seeking the class and/or training with the appropriate approval and endorsement of the church and presbytery.

QUESTION 14: ARE THERE ANY WORKING MODELS OF CO-OPERATIVE TRAINING PROGRAMS?

In collecting information for this project, I read some wonderful proposals for several joint training programs that sounded wonderful. Developed cooperatively by a cluster of presbyteries or a synod, these programs were exciting to read about. None of them ever developed because when it came to attracting participants, the logistics and lack of flexibility of the programs seemed to doom them. That was a surprising development. I asked for the reasons why these programs did not seem to work: It seemed logical to me to begin trying to initiate some regular joint training in this synod, but it also seemed unwise to invest time and money and energy in such an exercise if it met with failure everywhere it had been attempted. Repeatedly the answer came back that people cited the need for small cohesive groups from their own presbyteries—people sharing common concerns, geography, presbytery realities and identities as the main reason training does not seem to work long-term on a regional level (though in some places, as noted above, cooperation and joint training with one or more neighboring presbyteries has been successful.). It does not mean cooperative efforts cannot work on a synod or regional level, or sponsored by a college, conference center, or on-site at a seminary—it does mean that most of those who have tried it so far have not hit upon a workable model for long-term or continuing training programs. It may mean that synods, conference centers, educational institutions can more helpfully offer continuing education courses, weekend seminars, and other options that would be helpful and attractive to those in training programs or seeking continuing education as Lay Pastors on an occasional basis.

A new development for co-operative training comes from Dubuque Presbyterian Theological Seminary which received a Lilly Foundation Grant to developing a series of courses for training prospective commissioned lay pastors that would be available to interested presbyteries mostly in the Northwest, Midwest and northern Midwest. These would be similar to distance learning courses that are offered by many institutions, using interactive television—the leader can be in Dubuque or anywhere where there is access to the broadcasting capability. Students can be in a high school, library classroom, college classroom or any other place where there is the capability of receiving the program in the interactive format. For presbyteries where distance, number of candidates, and/or weather may be a factor on people being able to travel to a central site, such courses may offer a real alternative for training options. Further, video-taping the courses may offering additional options for those who cannot participate on the day the course is originally broadcast. Another possibility being considered is the development of interactive computer courses that could be available to those with Internet access. Dubuque Seminary is developing some of the basic courses—Old and New Testament, Introduction to Theology, Church History as well as some specialized courses dealing with small church characteristics, issues such as alcoholism and other needs that may be of help to those working as CLPs in small churches. The grant was received in the fall of 1999 and the courses began to be offered in 2000.^{iv}

QUESTION 15: HOW MANY OPTIONS DO YOU HAVE FOR TRAINING?

This question is actually touched upon in several of the other questions considered in this list. Rather than spend a great deal of time discussing it, consider some of the options offered by the various presbyteries (edited to make the options to make this list as parallel as possible in structure):

I am applying for the Commissioned Lay Pastor Program

I am applying for the Certified Pulpit Supply Program

I am applying for the Lay Studies Track

I am applying for the Educator Track

I am applying for personal enrichment purposes

I am applying to audit certain courses

I am applying to take courses for certification (as Director of Christian Education; as Office Administrator, as Church Musician, etc.)

QUESTION 16: WHAT ABOUT LEADERSHIP IN RACIAL/ETHNIC CONGREGATIONS?

In several of the General Assembly debates—and I am sure on the floor of more than one presbytery—the argument has been made by seminarians and ministers of the Word and Sacrament that they struggled to make it through seminary and pass ordination exams so they could serve the church, and to allow CLPs to serve the small racial ethnic congregations they feel called is to dishonor what they have accomplished. Others have argued that to “foist off” CLPs on small racial ethnic congregations is to dishonor the congregations: Sometimes such small churches feel they “have to take” whatever person is willing to serve them in their out of the way place—and if they are asked to consider a CLP because a “real Minister”, the request can feel like another put down, another nail in the coffin of inevitability.

Perhaps this is the wrong attitude to take when considering leadership for small racial/ethnic churches—I would say in considering leadership for small churches, no matter what their make-up. When was the last time the mission and ministry and purpose of the church was considered? What is the future story of this church—and how can the congregation live into that future? Where are the creative thinkers working with small and redeveloping congregation who are willing to work out future mission and ministry and purpose with the available resources of money, people, grants, etc. Perhaps this challenge is an opportunity, and not a put down—either of the congregation or those who have struggled to be ordained Ministers of the Word and Sacrament. Leadership in small congregations—no matter what the racial/ethnic make-up—is different from leadership in larger congregations, and needs to be taken into account in lay pastor training—sometimes we need to rely on common sense and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in doing what is right and helpful in building up these congregations.

I have already spoken of the Lao congregation that has been served by an ordained pastor and is now being led by a commissioned lay pastor. This has proven to be an opportunity for that congregation to develop its leaders. There are other anecdotal examples from this presbytery of small racial/ethnic churches seeing CLP leadership as an opportunity in times of change:

Example 1: I became clear at one of our training weekends that while we Ministers of the Word and Sacrament may feel threatened that there are potential commissioned lay pastors out there who covet our calls, most of those who have been trained and commissioned are much more focused and realistic concerning what they are about. We have in our presbytery a small African American congregation (now served by a designated pastor), that during their long pastoral search was having trouble securing pulpit

supply and having communion on a regular basis (temporary or stated supply options were not a financial option). They approached the presbytery asking if one or two of their elders could be trained and authorized to serve communion according to the provisions of the *Book of Order* (G-6.0304; G-11.0103z and W3.3617d and e). Eventually the request made its way to the committee charged with commissioned lay pastor training and I was asked if we could allow those elders to come to the next courses planned on worship and the sacraments.

That congregation happened to have among its members three strong women elders who had completed the full program of training for commissioned lay pastors, and one of those women had been commissioned as a lay pastor doing campus ministry. So I made a few phone calls to see why the request was being made when there were already elders from that congregation who could be commissioned for the purpose of presiding at communion. I called the woman who had actually been commissioned, and was told very clearly that she did not feel called to preach—that was not her strength in ministry—and if she did not feel called to preach, she did not feel she should be presiding at the communion table since preaching and the sacrament had to go together. However, she continued, there were elders currently on the session who would often preach, and who also led Sunday School, and who, therefore, should also be presiding at the Lord’s Table as part of their leadership of the church. I took this word back to the appropriate committees and we went on from there.

The two elders from that congregation came to the next Lay Academy weekend, which happened to deal with baptism and communion. Presbytery had said these two elders could be authorized to serve communion if they took that course and several others that were coming up in the course rotation. The elders had last names that were familiar to me—they were the husbands of two of the women who had completed the Lay Academy. And they let me know that no matter what the presbytery had said about authorizing them to serve communion after taking certain courses, if they intended to preach and serve communion in their congregation, their wives expected them to complete the entire Lay Academy rotation of courses so they would be properly trained in church leadership for the times in the future their church might need to draw on them and their skills. The wives maintained they had successfully mastered the two year commitment, course work and requirements of the Lay Academy, and they expected their husbands to do no less. Talk about peer pressure! As I handed them the proper forms, I could hear generations of students talking about how rough things had been when they were in school and how easy students have it now. I could hear the debate assertions: “I spent/sacrificed three years of my life to get through seminary and be ordained, why should they have the same opportunity without the hard work and training.....” I could hear the concerns about lay pastors being wannabe preachers. I could appreciate a congregation that was serious enough about its work and worship and mission and purpose that they were willing to require of themselves and their elders the fullest possible training when it came to internal leadership and leadership development for times when they might be without a pastor. Note: I completed my work with the Lay Academy at the end of that year (1998) and do not believe these two elders completed the entire rotation of Lay Academy classes as the church was able to call the designated pastor and make use of some redevelopment grants and funding within a few months of this event.

However, the intention of the church was and is clear—those who have been trained there as commissioned lay pastors are going to work according to the call they feel, and they will ask others to show the same commitment in the future if they need to raise up worship leaders from among themselves for a period of time. They see this call/commission as being for a specific purpose, time, and reason, and for the strengthening of the church.

Example 2: We have a strong Native American congregation outside Livingston, Texas. It is a small, rural church that provides many leaders for our presbytery. When they have had installed pastors in recent years, those have been part-time, tent-making situations. And the search for a pastor willing and able to serve in that creative situation takes time. In this, I believe that many of our racial/ethnic congregations are no different from small congregations in general, and again, we are called to creativity in ministry options as we talk about their strong future witness. This congregation also decided it would be well to have within its membership at least one elder trained in the Lay Academy: As an active congregation in the presbytery they knew this would benefit both the church and the person and probably the presbytery too as they assumed the person receiving training would be active in presbytery. I was asked to come and speak to the congregation about the Lay Academy one Sunday during their evening worship service. They asked a man who had grown up in that church, who had been recently elected chief and newly elected an elder, to attend the Lay Academy. He filled out the applications, the session and moderator of the session endorsed him and he began attending faithfully every training weekend. And his wife came each time too, though she had not applied to be a part of the training program.

Now what do you do? Flexibility has long been the strength of most of the lay pastor training programs I know of—the flexibility to do what is right in a particular situation even if it does not quite fit into the rules. Sometimes exceptions need to be made to the rules, with those allowing a situation making it clear as you do that you are not necessarily setting an allowable precedent, you are recognizing a particular exception to your own rules and standards. Two former pastors of that congregation asked me if she were attending. Their assumption was that she was, and it was the right thing to happen, even if she attended the entire rotation of courses and never filled out any of the proper forms and paperwork. (We do allow people to come and visit/audit individual courses, and the fees required of each course are published when the dates and content of the course are made known, so those coming to visit are expected to help cover the expenses of that particular weekend. Normally if a person starts coming on a continuing basis, application as a regular participant is required.)

What was at stake had nothing to do with the Lay Academy itself. It was a cultural and comfort thing—if we wanted one person from that congregation to participate in the Lay Academy, we needed to be prepared for a second person to come, even if only one enrolled in the program. What was important was the company on the drive into the training, the support during the training, the comfort of knowing there was always another person present who was a friend and companion. Both the husband and wife are elders—the wife had been an elder in the church for many years. She would listen and sometimes participate in the class. Mostly she just enjoyed being with us and receiving the blessing of being allowed

to be part of us. We enjoyed and profited from the contributions she made—we enjoyed her company and fellowship during meal times and free times. She has no desire to be commissioned as a lay pastor in her congregation—she came to be the support and the companion. She is a leader in her own right in her church and on presbytery committees—her support role in coming to the Lay Academy every month was for the benefit of her husband as he came to the training to make it possible for the church to have the option of lay pastoral leadership during the times between pastors.

Note: This is not a male/female thing or a husband/wife thing or a liberation/chauvinist thing. This is a support thing. If a woman elder with a husband had been asked/chosen by that congregation to attend the Lay Academy, her husband would have come with her each weekend. If a single elder, male or female, had been the one asked, that elder, would probably have brought someone with him/her each time. In the beginning of the Lay Academy, when we thought we would be dealing almost entirely with small racial/ethnic congregations, we actively encouraged those congregations to send two or three or more people (even if those coming were not all elders, even if those coming did not desire to become commissioned lay pastors, even if those coming came only to translate, even if those coming came to support those who were there for “real” training), because it seemed this would be a help, a support, and an encouragement for all involved—both those attending the training, and those leading the training.

QUESTION 17: WHAT ABOUT NEW CHURCH POSSIBILITIES?

In answering this question, consider first generation churches—people new to this country and perhaps new to the Presbyterian Church, though some have reformed backgrounds. These are people who bring with them the ways of their homelands—the culture, the language, the songs, the dress, and so on.

New Covenant is a presbytery that is rich in varied cultures and first generation immigrants. Some of these people come from places where the Presbyterian Church has a long history of mission/fraternal work—Asian and African nations, Central and South American countries, each group clustering together to preserve language and culture important to them and to their children. Some come from places where they know the Catholic church and the Pentecostal church and are looking for a way to worship that is neither Catholic nor Pentecostal and are open to the worship and theology of the Presbyterian Church. Where are we to find leaders for first generation churches whose primary language is not English?

Sometimes there are among the people in a fellowship/Bible Study/small new church development those who have received formal seminary training or lay leader training in their native land. This is not always clear because of language difficulties. In most of these congregation/fellowships there are those who are willing to be trained to help lead the people. Though many of these potential leaders may work more than one job to support their family, they also express a willingness to commit to the training needed to become a commissioned lay pastor in the Presbyterian Church so they can serve their people and develop a new congregation.

In presbyteries where the need for native language speaking church leaders far out-paces the availability of seminary trained leaders available, an accelerated program for commissioned lay pastor

training and intensive continuing education after the initial training period may be an option (and an opportunity) for evangelism and growth. It is an option that requires imagination and flexibility within the presbytery. It is a cooperative effort that requires several committees working supportively together—new church development (or church redevelopment), the committees concerned with training and overseeing CLP's, the Committee on Ministry, the racial ethnic committee, etc. The 210th General Assembly (1998) passed the amendment to the *Book of Order* that allowed commissioned lay pastors to serve as the organizing pastor of a new church development—and these first generation churches can be a great opportunity for some presbyteries.

QUESTION 18: ARE YOUR COURSES OPEN OR CLOSED—WHY OR WHY NOT?

Most commissioned lay pastor training programs have a regular cycle of courses that repeat approximately every two years. Are your courses open to people not regularly in the CLP program?

A case can be made for limiting participation in these courses to those who have gone through a formal admission process to the program: There is a closeness that develops among the participants. Smaller groups make it possible to do more discussion and dialogue during class periods. It is disruptive to have people coming and going and different standards for different kinds of students. Some fear having people pick and choose among classes without ever going through an application process can cause problems down the road if someone takes enough classes over a period of time to say they have completed all of the required CLP courses, etc. These concerns need to be addressed by the committee responsible for planning the training program.

Having said this, there are compelling reasons to open courses to people who are not regular participants in the CLP training program. The CLP training program could be a further service to the presbytery if certain courses are opened to those seeking accreditation in other professional programs: Church Administrators, Directors of Christian Education, etc. have certain courses they must take to meet accreditation qualifications (church polity, Bible, theology, etc.) If the courses the CLP training program offers meet the standards of these accreditation programs (including whatever papers, project, or demonstration of accountability is required of such participants), they can be of real benefit to church employees who do not have to travel great distances or take time off of work to attend the training. Some of the courses—church polity, Christian Education, small church dynamics, moderating meetings, etc. may be of help and interest to new pastors, moderators of committees, Presbyterian Women, new church school leaders or Christian Education committee members, and can enhance and build upon other training opportunities offered by the presbytery. Sometimes the CLP training is both geographically and time-wise more convenient than other presbytery training opportunities. While the first consideration of the CLP training should be upon those admitted to the training program, if some courses are also open to others, the CLP program could enhance and enlarge the presbytery's educational opportunities.

Several presbyteries have separate registration forms for people who may want to take one or more courses in the CLP training program. These registration forms usually make it clear that auditing

or taking such courses does not constitute admission to the program, and if the person chooses to become a regular participant in the program the regular application process must be completed for full admission.

ⁱEmily Enders Odom, “GA000146 Standardized exams not to be required for commissioned lay pastors” in **NEWS BRIEFS–Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)**; Issue No. 19, July 14, 2000, pages 14-15.

ⁱⁱFrom 1998 General Assembly Minutes–Request for Interpretation from Scad Valley (Request 98-4 to the Assembly Committee on Church Orders and Ministry) Committee Moderator: Rev. Carol McDonald; Vice-Moderator: Elder Robert Gee; 16.0201-16.0203

ⁱⁱⁱNorthern and Southern Kansas Presbyteries have a cooperative training program; Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys’ program also served three of its neighboring presbyteries when it began in 1992-93; “South Carolina Presbyteries” participate in a Lay School of Theology (information on the Spring, 1999 Session shows the training to be at White Oak Conference Center), Presbytery of the Peaks reports they have one of the few CLP training programs in their area, and are often asked to accept candidates from neighboring Virginia presbyteries.

^{iv}For more information, the contact person is John P. Jewell, Director of Seminary Technological Services, University of Dubuque Theological Seminary (2000 University Ave; Dubuque, IA 52001). Phone: 319-589-3101