

## **Alternative Examination Procedures (G-14.0313b)**

### *Caring for Candidates Who Are Having Difficulty Passing Ordination Exams*

#### **Introduction**

Hundreds of years ago, a grateful mother dedicated her young son to the service of God in the Temple of Shiloh. The boy, whose name was Samuel, grew up under the guidance and teaching of Eli, a priest at the Temple. One night, Samuel heard a voice calling him. Thinking that Eli had summoned him, the boy ran to Eli, who told him to go back and lie down. Again Samuel heard the voice. Again, he ran to Eli and was told to go back and lie down. When Samuel heard the voice for the third time, Eli realized that the voice that had awakened Samuel was not a human voice, but the voice of God. Eli told the boy that, the next time he heard the voice, he should respond with the following words: "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." God was calling Samuel. And from that day on, Eli's role was to help Samuel to respond to that call, to go where God called him to go, and to do what God called him to do.

The role of Committees on Preparation for Ministry (CPMs) in working with inquirers and candidates is much like that of Eli in preparing Samuel for his ministry as a prophet. CPMs have a sacred calling, too. Their ministry is also involved with a theological and discipleship question. How do CPMs maintain faithfulness when they work with inquirers and candidates? An individual hears or senses the call of God in his/her life, and believes that that call may be leading to ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacrament. The role of the CPM is to help that individual discern his/her call, to identify and develop gifts and skills for ministry, to help him/her to be open to the Spirit of God, and to follow where God is rightly leading for service in the church and in the world. The CPM is also to acknowledge the importance of, and to encourage, the support and nurture of others in the life of the individual (family members, trusted friends, pastor and elders of home church, and seminary faculty) during the preparation process.

This resource has been developed to assist CPMs in their guidance, care, and nurture in inquirers and candidates for ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacrament. It helps immensely for CPMs to be mindful that those under their care are beloved of God. It is indeed a blessing and a privilege of the CPMs to witness the activities of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those under their care. Sometimes it is easy to forget that to those who respond to God's call and enter the Preparation for Ministry process, CPMs represent the church, the body of Christ, with the authority and power to ordain and not to ordain. Thus, when conducting the ministries of CPMs it is all the more important to seek to be Christlike in our words and deeds. The specific purpose of this resource is to assist CPMs in working with the inquirers and candidates in the area of Examination for Ordination.

There are five standard written Examinations for Ordination - Bible Content, Biblical Exegesis, Reformed Theology, Worship and Sacraments, and Church Polity. The Bible Content

Examination is intended for inquirers and candidates who are in their first year of full-time theological education (or its equivalent). The other four examinations are intended for those who have completed the equivalent of two full-time years of theological education.

The purpose of these examinations is to provide **ONE of the assessment tools** for CPMs and presbyteries as they evaluate academic preparation and practical application in areas of ministry (i.e. readiness for ministry). It is not wise to encourage inquirers and candidates to take examinations early in areas where they have just completed a course of study (e.g. taking the Polity exam because they have just taken a Polity class). The four "Senior" examinations are intended to help CPMs and presbyteries evaluate both academic training **AND** the ability to use and apply that knowledge in hands-on ministry.

For those whose native language is Korean or Spanish, special arrangements can be made with the Examination Services Office to take the exams in Spanish or Korean.

**It is important to remember that the Examinations for Ordination comprise just one step in the larger process of preparing and evaluating inquirers and candidates for fitness in ministry.**

Research from the Office of Examination Services indicates that the general pass rate for ordination examinations is highest for first-time takers. The percentage of persons who pass on subsequent attempts of the exams **decreases** as the number of attempts increases. In other words, requiring a candidate to take an exam multiple times (more than two or three attempts) may set up that individual for failure and disappointment time and time again. The following is offered as guidance in working with inquirers and candidates who are having difficulty passing standard exams in their written format.

### **What to Do for and with Individuals Who Have Failed Exams?**

When an inquirer/candidate fails an ordination exam for **the first time**, it would be helpful for the CPM to assign a knowledgeable person on the committee to read the examination and the readers' comments **with** the inquirer/candidate. Since the examinations have been perceived by some as geared to white, middle class culture, it would be helpful for the CPM to assess the validity of the readers' comments, making sure that the comments are not biased based on gender, race, culture of large membership churches, or readers' own theological perspectives. After this is done, the CPM is to assess the reasons for failing an exam. Does the inquirer/candidate lack knowledge of the exam subject? Are the writing skills adequate? Did the inquirer/candidate misread the questions? What were the circumstances under which the inquirer/candidate took the exam? Was she/he ill? Was there a family emergency? Was the exam-taker extremely anxious? Are there language and/or cultural differences that affected the responses of the exam-taker? Are there learning disabilities?

Once the reasons for failing the first exam are identified, the CPM is to assign a mentor/coach to help the inquirer/candidate prepare for the next exam.

If the inquirer/candidate fails an exam for **the second time**, the CPM may take some or all of the following steps:

- a. Assess the candidate's **whole** experience in preparation for ministry – academic achievements, field work, CPE, Annual Consultation observations and reports, etc.
- b. Provide tutoring/mentoring help for the candidate to take the exam for the third time.
- c. Consider alternative means as a possible better option to satisfy the presbytery of the candidate's competency in the failed exam area if the CPM is satisfied with the progress made in all other areas. Some presbyteries have a policy that "alternative means" request shall only be considered for one exam. It is to be done after the CPM has determined that the candidate has fulfilled all other requirements and is otherwise ready to receive a call.
- d. Suggest a Group Discernment experience (see page 5) to help the candidate to seek the will of God.

After the candidate fails an exam for **the third time**, CPM may consider the following steps:

- a. Consider alternative means to satisfy the presbytery of the candidate's competency in the failed exam area if the CPM is satisfied with the progress made in all other areas and the candidate is otherwise ready to receive a call.
- b. Discourage taking the exam for the fourth time. Research in the past has indicated a possible one-third (1/3) only chance of passing the exam.
- c. Make hard decisions and consider terminating the preparation process and guiding candidate in areas of ministry that do not require ordination.
- d. Provide a Group Discernment experience (see page 5) to help candidate identify gifts for ministries other than the ministry of Word and Sacrament.

### **Determining Alternative Means to Meet the Constitutional Requirements**

If a candidate has not passed one or more examinations on at least two occasions, the CPM **may** develop an alternate means by which the candidate may demonstrate his/her competence in the area(s) of difficulty. This does not mean that the requirement is eliminated; it

means that there may be a better way for the individual to demonstrate his/her knowledge and aptitude for ministry in the particular area(s).

In cases where there is a documented learning disability that affects the candidate's ability to perform on standardized tests, the CPM may decide not to require a candidate to take an exam for a second time (or at all!), and explore the possibility of an alternate means of evaluating the candidate's knowledge and ability early in the testing process.

**An exception to the standard examination process (i.e. an alternate means of determining the competence of the candidate) must be approved by the presbytery of care by at least a three-fourths vote of members present upon the recommendation of the CPM. The reasons for the exception shall be clearly documented in the minutes of the presbytery meeting.**

**Any alternate process for testing/evaluating candidates must be approved by the synod before such a process may begin. The synod may approve an alternate process for up to three years in a particular presbytery. It may be wise for CPMs and presbyteries to submit a proposal for alternate means of examination to their synods before the need even arises, so that they will not need to wait for synod approval when time is of the essence.**

Alternate means of examination may include any of the following:

- a. Give the candidate an oral examination, based on standard exam questions.
- b. Require the candidate to take additional classes or to work with a tutor, and meet again with the CPM to determine competence.
- c. Ask the candidate to do additional study and write a paper in the area of examination.
- d. Provide a translator to work with the candidate – either in translating the exams into the native language of the candidate, or by translating the responses into a language that can be graded by members of the presbytery.
- e. Administer a different kind of written examination for the candidate.

Questions from past exams are available from the Office of Examination Services. Attached you will find some samples of alternate processes that have been developed by presbyteries, along with a sample Request Form for Alternative Examination, developed by the Synod of Lakes and Prairies.

## Conclusion

It is important to remember again that **exams are only one of the assessment tools** in the process of preparing and evaluating candidates for fitness in ministry. Judging the candidate by exams alone ultimately fails to serve the best interests of anyone involved in this process.

When it is necessary, alternative means to satisfy the presbytery of the competence of a candidate in the failed exam area is to be considered carefully. The CPM has to be satisfied with the preparation, gifts for ministry, and competence of the candidate in all other regards, and be certain that the candidate has taken advantage of all the remedial work and tutoring that may have been provided. In addition, the candidate is to be considered by the CPM as ready for Final Assessment of readiness to be examined for ordination in all other respects.

CPM is encouraged to use a failed exam as an opportunity for the candidate to consider his/her call through a Group Discernment Process. The Group Discernment Process provides time and opportunity for the candidate to discern God's call with a small group of people -- a trusted friend, spouse, pastor or session liaison, CPM moderator or liaison member, and an experienced spiritual guide who would lead this group through a prayer and listening process on behalf of the candidate. You may contact the Preparation for Ministry Office for a copy of the resource entitled, **Presbytery Discernment Team - The Process of Discovering God's Call for Inquirers and Candidates**. At the end of this process, the candidate's gifts and growth are affirmed and he/she may be encouraged to consider using his/her gifts in ministries other than the ministry of Word and Sacrament. Or, the CPM may decide to use the process of alternative means to test the competence of the candidate.

When a candidate decides to withdraw from the preparation process or when CPM decides to terminate the preparation process and remove the candidate from the roll, it is important that the CPM continue to be caring and nurturing, and willing to listen to the former candidate, guiding her/him to use her/his gifts in areas of ministry other than the ministry of Word and Sacrament.

## **Action of Homestead Presbytery**

Regarding Book of Order G-14.0313b Extraordinary Circumstances – Examination Requirements.

Whereas Candidate \_\_\_\_ has fulfilled all requirements for certification to be ready for examination for ordination pending a call except a satisfactory grade on the Church Polity Exam, and

Whereas Candidate \_\_\_\_ has now failed the examination on three attempts, The Committee on Preparation for Ministry at its meeting on November 2, 1998 recommends that Homestead Presbytery authorize an exception for the Church Polity Exam for Candidate \_\_\_\_\_. MOTION CARRIED that the following alternative means Whereby Homestead Presbytery will satisfy itself in the area of church polity be approved (VOTE 82-0):

Candidate \_\_\_\_ will be examined in an oral examination by a panel of Homestead Presbytery to assess the candidate's "working knowledge of the constitutional structure of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the method by which differences are properly resolved and program to fulfill the mission of the church are determined." [G-14.0311d(5)]

The examination shall consist of three questions from previous standardized exams supplied by the Synod of Lakes and Prairies Associate Executive for Leadership Development, Diana Barber. The 3 hour examination shall include 90 minutes for the candidate's preparation and outline of responses, and another 90 minutes for the candidate's response to the questions. Each question will be allowed 30 minutes. In each case, the candidate will speak for 20 minutes to be followed by 10 minutes of elaborative-type questions from the examination panel. These questions shall only relate to specific remarks made by \_\_\_\_\_.

The examination panel shall consist of:

- 6 members of the Committee on Preparation for Ministry
- 1 member named from the Committee on Ministry
- 1 member named by the Christian Education Committee
- 1 member name from the Council
- Rev. Roger Harp, Executive Presbyter (Ex-officio)

The moderator of the Committee on Preparation for Ministry shall serve as chairperson of the examination panel.

Grading will be marked satisfactory or unsatisfactory by each panel member. In order to satisfactorily complete the oral examination on church polity no less than 6 of the 9 panelists must record satisfactory scores overall.

### **Action of South Dakota Presbytery** (slightly edited for this purpose)

That, having failed the exegesis ordination examination for the third time, the following alternative plan for the exegesis exam for \_\_\_\_ be approved and that the Committee on Preparation for Ministry serve as readers for the examination. (G14-0313b)

1. Assignment of passage (given by CPM on date of exam)
2. Date for examination: July 6, 1998 to July 13, 1998
3. Readers: CPM
4. Examination
  - A. Exegesis and Interpretation
    1. Exegetical Method
    2. Exegetical Findings G-14.0310d
  - B. Contemporary Use
    1. Situation and Audience (candidate's choice)
    2. Application (Sermon outline or lesson plan)

### **Action of East Iowa Presbytery**

The CPM Committee MOVED that East Iowa Presbytery, with the required  $\frac{3}{4}$  vote of those present, according to G-14.0313b, waive the requirement of the Bible Content Exam for Candidate \_\_\_\_, and that the Presbytery recommend the following alternative plan to the Synod at its October 18, 1998 meeting, in order that \_\_\_\_ can fulfill the Bible Content requirement:

The Plan: That after the action of the Synod at its October 18, 1998 meeting, and after \_\_\_\_ receives the results of this 2 ordination exams on November 4, 1998, and passes them, that 3 people from the Presbytery of East Iowa be appointed by the CPM Committee to devise alternate Bible Content Exam, to be administered to \_\_\_\_.

RATIONALE for this waiver: (as required to be spread upon these Minutes)

- 1) \_\_\_\_ has attempted the Bible Content Exam 3 times and failed. He has come within 1 and 4 points of passing the last two times. (The last time, he was undergoing an immense amount of stress before the exam, due to the stroke of his wife and the hospitalization of his daughter the night before the exam.)
- 2) Providing \_\_\_\_ passes the final 2 Ordination Exams in September, the Bible Content Exam would be the only requirement left for \_\_\_\_ to proceed toward Ordination.
- 3) The Bible Content Exam will not be administered by Louisville until February 1999. This date would prevent \_\_\_\_ from taking the necessary steps for Ordination for another 3 months. If this is waived, he could, instead, be cleared to begin searching for a call, following the results of a passing grade on his 2 ordination exams on November 4, 1998.

## Alternative Examination Request

Requested by: \_\_\_\_\_

Presbytery \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Committee \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Person \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Candidate \_\_\_\_\_

Name if examination(s) to be completed: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Reason for Requesting an Alternate Examination:** *(Be Specific)*

**Process for Examination Being Proposed:** *(Continue on back of form if necessary.)*

**Source of Examination Materials:**

**Examination to be administered by:**

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Approved by Committee (Signed) \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Approved by Presbytery (Signed) \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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