

ADVISORY OPINION:
RECEIVING MINISTERS OF OTHER DENOMINATIONS

WHAT ARE THE WAYS THAT A MINISTER OF ANOTHER DENOMINATION IS PERMITTED TO SERVE A PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.) CONGREGATION?

There are three different ways that a presbytery may have a minister of another denomination, not lay person, serve within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

1. That minister transfers to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) thereby becoming subject to the jurisdiction of the presbytery and enrolled as a member of the presbyteryⁱ,
2. That minister is a minister of one the denominations included by the Formula of Agreement (ELCA, UCC, RCA, KPCA, or Moravian) and serves under the orderly exchange processⁱⁱ, or
3. That minister enters into a temporary pastoral relationshipⁱⁱⁱ with the congregation.

In numbers 2 and 3 above, the presbytery may grant the minister of another denomination temporary membership in presbytery for a period of service. When a minister of another denomination completes her or his period of service, she/he is no longer a member of the presbytery.

HOW DOES A MINISTER OF ANOTHER DENOMINATION TRANSFER TO THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)?

A presbytery may transfer a minister of another denomination called to work properly under the jurisdiction of a presbytery of the PC(USA).^{iv} The minister must meet the constitutional conditions and furnish credentials and evidence of good standing to the presbytery, including evidence the minister possesses the qualifications of character and scholarship required of candidates of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). “Upon enrollment, the minister shall furnish the presbytery with evidence of having surrendered membership in any and all other Christian churches with which the minister [was] previously ... associated.”^v The minister may furnish the presbytery with a letter of transfer or a letter written and signed by the minister renouncing membership in previous churches or denominations.

WHAT ARE THE “CONSTITUTIONAL CONDITIONS” A MINISTER MUST MEET?

The constitutional conditions are set forth in G-2.0607. The evidence of the candidate’s readiness to being in ordered ministry in the PC(USA) includes:

- “a. a candidate’s wisdom and maturity of faith, leadership skills, compassionate spirit, honest repute, and sound judgment;
- “b. a transcript showing graduation, with satisfactory grades, at a regionally accredited college or university;
- “c. a transcript from a theological institution accredited by the Association of Theological Schools acceptable to the presbytery, showing a course of study including Hebrew and Greek, exegesis of the Old and New Testaments using Hebrew and Greek, satisfactory grades in all areas of study, and graduation or proximity to graduation, and

“d. satisfactory grades, together with the examination papers in the areas covered by any standard ordination examination approved by the General Assembly. ...”

IS IT POSSIBLE TO WAIVE ANY, OR ALL, OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONDITIONS?

Yes. The *Book of Order*, G-2.0610, sets forth the guidelines for any waivers for the constitution conditions. A presbytery may waive any of the requirements for ordination, except standard ordination examinations,^{vi} by three-fourths vote of the presbytery.

However, the presbytery may choose to waive the examination requirement if: the presbytery judges that there are good and sufficient reasons why a candidate should not be required to satisfy the requirements for exams and an alternate means by which to ascertain the readiness of the candidate in areas covered by the standard ordination examinations is approved. This approval for alternate means of examination must be by three-fourths vote of the presbytery.^{vii} The presbytery will include in the minutes the reasons for this exception.

The presbytery may grant, by a two-thirds vote, an exemption for some or all of the examinations for a minister of another Reformed church, who has been ordained for five or more years.^{viii}

WHAT IF A MINISTER OF ANOTHER DENOMINATION WISHES TO SERVE A PC(USA) CONGREGATION WITHOUT TRANSFERING?

When a church proposes to extend a call to a minister member of another denomination, the presbytery needs to inquire whether the minister intends to be received into its membership and remain in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) indefinitely, or plans to serve in the position being considered without severing the present denominational relationship, and then in the future serve a church in that denomination again.

A minister ordained in another denomination may be called to labor in the presbytery for a period of service.^{ix} The minister is hired by session. This arrangement must be approved by the presbytery. The relationship does not include a formal call or installation. A temporary pastoral relationship is for a specified period, no longer than twelve months and the relationship is renewable with the approval of presbytery.^x

WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS FOR MINISTERS OF OTHER DENOMINATIONS WHO DO NOT MEET THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONDITIONS SET FORTH IN THE *BOOK OF ORDER* AND ARE CALLED TO SERVE PC(USA) IMMIGRANT FELLOWSHIPS OR CONGREGATIONS?

In specific instances where a minister of another denomination is called to work for an immigrant fellowship or congregation, a presbytery may, if it determines that its strategy for mission requires it^{xi}, recognize the ordination and receive as a member of presbytery a new immigrant minister who furnishes evidence of good standing in a denomination, even if at the time of enrollment that minister lacks the required educational history.^{xii} The presbytery shall provide the educational opportunities that seem necessary and prudent for that minister's successful ministry in the presbytery.

WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS FOR ACCEPTING AS MEMBERS MINISTERS OF OTHER DENOMINATIONS WHO DO NOT HAVE A CALL IN THE PC(USA)?

Ministers of other denominations may contact a presbytery and request transfer to the presbytery even though that minister does not have a call in the PC(USA) or serve a PC(USA) congregation.

In these situations, a presbytery may follow their own process for enrolling ministers as a member-at-large, for example with clergy spouses. Presbyteries should bear in mind that the enrollment of a minister of another denomination as a member-at-large is a visible sign of the unity of the church and affirms the ecumenical commitment^{xiii} of the PC(USA).

Updated May 2014

ⁱ G-2.0505a—“When a minister of another Christian church is called to a work properly under the jurisdiction of a presbytery, the presbytery, after the constitutional conditions have been met, shall recognize the minister’s previous ordination to ministry. Such ministers shall furnish credentials and evidence of good standing acceptable to the presbytery, and ... of possessing the qualification of character and scholarship required of candidates of this church (G-2.0607 and G-2.0610). ...”

ⁱⁱ G-2.0505a(2)—A minister of another Reformed church who has been ordained for five or more years may be granted an exemption for some or all of the examinations required of candidates for ordination by a two-thirds vote of the presbytery.”

ⁱⁱⁱ G-2.0506—“A presbytery may enroll a minister of another Christian church who is serving temporarily in a validated ministry in this church, or in an installed relationship under the provisions of the Formula of Agreement (*Book of Order*, Appendix B; G-5.0202), when the minister has satisfied the requirements of preparation for such service established by the presbytery’s own rule.” It is important to remember that in this capacity, there are some things that a minister of another denomination may not do such as moderate session. The presbytery may appoint someone to fulfill those duties.

^{iv} G-2.0505

^v G-2.0505b

^{vi} G-2.0607d

^{vii} G-2.0610

^{viii} G-2.0505a(2)

^{ix} G-2.0506

^x G-2.0504b

^{xi} No formal action must have been approved in the past. A presbytery may determine its strategy for mission requires the action at the same time the presbytery calls the minister.

^{xii} G-2.0505a(1)

^{xiii} G-5.0101