



PREPARATION OF COMMISSIONED LAY PASTORS

A Study of the Features of Representative Programs

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Scope of the Study

In 2007, the Office of Vocation and the Committee on Theological Education commissioned a two-part research project on the preparation and use of Commissioned Lay Pastors (CLP).

- (1) Research Services was asked to survey executive presbyters about policies and provisions for CLPs in their presbyteries, the numbers of CLPs in service, and the presbytery's experiences and evaluation of CLPs as leaders in congregational and other ministries. The results of that study were published in early 2008 and are available at <http://www.pcusa.org/clp/>.
- (2) The Center for the Study of Theological Education at Auburn Seminary was asked to complement the survey with a qualitative analysis of the features of representative programs. For this purpose, seminaries, several Presbyterian colleges, and a dozen presbyteries were asked to send materials describing their program and samples of syllabi of courses and forms used by program participants.

This is a report on the second part of the study. It is based on information about programs of the following types:

Seminary-based programs (6). Six PCUSA-related seminaries currently offer instruction for CLPs, and one more intends to open a lay academy that will serve this purpose.¹ All these programs except one—Dubuque's on-line offerings—are organized in conjunction with particular presbyteries.

Presbytery-based programs (9). Of these programs, two provide all the instruction that the programs require themselves. The other programs rely on other providers for most or all of the academic component of the program.²

Other programs (6). Two programs are based in Presbyterian colleges and one in a Presbyterian training school (Cook); two are run by ecumenical organizations for several denominations; and one is conducted by a Synod for several of its presbyteries. All of these programs except one (Whitworth College) are organized in conjunction with participants from particular presbyteries.³

Program directors provided materials describing their programs' requirements, educational offerings, including course descriptions, mechanisms for evaluation of program participants,

¹ Columbia, Dubuque, Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico, Louisville, Pittsburgh, San Francisco currently have programs; Princeton has one in the planning stages. In addition, in both the survey and this qualitative study, Austin is mentioned as a source of instruction through its continuing education program.

² Central Florida, Denver, Great Rivers, Inland Northwest, John Knox, New Covenant, Northern Kansas, Seattle, Yellowstone provided materials.

³ Hastings College, Whitworth College, Cook Leadership School, Montana Association of Churches, Institute for Pastoral Studies (TIPS), and the Synod of Lincoln Trails provided materials.

course syllabi if available, and information about administrators and teachers. Some programs provided most or all this information; others offered summary descriptions or partial information. Follow-up questions were addressed to program directors to try to obtain comparable information.

One warning about the limitations of this study: It does not tell us all that we need to know about how CLPs are prepared. The data available—which include written descriptions of programs and directors’ responses to questions about the programs—yield interesting information about the structure, requirements, and arrangements of CLP preparation programs. In combination with the survey of executive presbyters, it is possible to estimate how typical these structures, requirements and arrangements are throughout the PCUSA. This kind of study cannot, however, provide in-depth information about the quality or content of instruction or the extent of student learning. To gather information about those aspects of CLP programs and their results, site visits to programs and to the ministry settings of program graduates would be required.

Program Arrangements and Structures

The church’s intention in providing for CLPs in the *Book of Order* seems to have been that the role would be shaped to fit local mission strategies, and preparation of persons to serve would be shaped to the role as defined locally. The preparation guidelines are brief and general: “The commissioned lay pastor is an elder. . . . Such an elder is selected by and receives training approved by the presbytery. The elder shall be instructed in Bible, Reformed Theology and Sacraments, Presbyterian Polity, preaching, leading worship, pastoral care, and teaching. 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-14.0560). Under these rubrics, programs of preparation have developed that give the appearance of great variety. A first reading of the materials collected for this project gives that impression, and such was the conclusion of Mary Miller Currie, the author of the denomination’s major resource for presbytery-based preparation of CLPs: “In 2003 we discover that there is a tremendous variety of training experiences available for potential CLPs.”⁴

Closer analysis of the materials, however, shows that apart from differences of format (when and where instructional and other training experiences take place), there is more similarity than variety among programs. Where they do differ, they tend to fall into two types or categories, rather than to present an array of different models. The similarities are evident in programs’ purposes, sponsorship, basic educational approach, curriculum, and level of instruction.

Purpose

Both parts of this research project indicate that CLPs are employed for two purposes in the PCUSA: (1) to provide pastoral services in congregations and other ministries (such as campus, hospital and prison chaplaincies) that do not have the resources to call a Minister of

⁴ Mary Currie Miller, Commissioned Lay Pastors in the Presbyterian Church, PDS #72213-03-003.

Word and Sacrament (MWS); and (2) to provide leadership for “racial/ethnic” new church developments, fellowships, and congregations that cannot find MWSs with the necessary cultural knowledge and language skills. The majority of programs in this study are oriented to the first purpose, but a significant number have as their goal the second purpose, including three of the six seminary programs (Columbia, ESPR, San Francisco), the Cook School, and the program in Seattle Presbytery. One presbytery program (Central Florida) has tracks of both types.

The programs of the second type are notable in several respects.

- (1) All three seminary programs seem to have been based on the same template: their course descriptions and requirements are virtually identical, one of a number of examples of uniformity in CLP training that this study will report.
- (2) There seems to be more concentrated effort directed to this type of CLP training than to the other type. In the Research Services survey, respondents indicated that the smallest numbers of CLPs are working with racial/ethnic and/or new immigrant populations.⁵ Yet half the seminaries that do CLP training, the Cook School, and an unknown number of presbyteries (at least eight were identified in this study) have this as their major purpose.
- (3) Several of the programs (Columbia, San Francisco and Central Florida) have as their primary focus the training of lay leadership, especially elders, for communities of believers that are new to the PCUSA. CLP training is secondary. Potential CLPs are selected from the larger pool of program participants, and only a few of those who enroll in the program end up with commissions. CLP programs of the other type do sometimes invite and admit the participation of church members who are not preparing for commissioned service. In some cases, places are available only if there are not enough potential CLPs to form program groups. Other programs are always open to any layperson, but the education of elders and lay leaders is not described as a strategic goal as it is in the case of racial/ethnic and new immigrant fellowships and congregations.

Sponsorship

Most programs to prepare CLPs involve either some kind of partnership between presbyteries and other entities, or reliance by presbyteries on instruction from a range of sources. All the seminary programs except Dubuque are organized with or for presbyteries or, in the case of ESPR, an office of the General Assembly Council (Office of New Immigrants). Most other providers have also forged partnerships with presbyteries or local judicatories of other denominations—the exception is Whitworth College. And only one in four presbyteries, according to the Research Services survey, offers on its own all the instruction required for CLP preparation. This proportion is reflected in the program descriptions included in this study. Two of nine presbyteries organize all their own instruction. The others rely either on a designated provider—Synod, seminary, college, ecumenical organization, or Dubuque’s on-line program—or providers of the participant’s choosing for most or all of the instructional component of the program.

⁵ Q6., page A-2.

Anecdotal accounts of the history of CLP programs suggest that this pattern represents a change. Mary Miller Currie writes that “in the early days...many presbyteries conducted their own training programs.” Absent a longitudinal data base that includes all programs and their characteristics, it is impossible to know how many presbytery programs have moved from self-sufficiency to reliance on instruction from other sources. It is evident, however, that most presbyteries that commissioned lay pastors do not now feel that they can or must provide all the necessary preparation themselves.

Several of the program directors with whom we corresponded reported another change in their program arrangements: earlier they required their potential CLPs to take all their instruction in one place, whether the presbytery’s own program or the full curriculum offered by some other provider. Recently, they have become more flexible, recommending different sources and styles of instruction for different subject areas and/or different students. Interestingly, two report moving away from exclusive reliance on Dubuque’s on-line program, but several others mention that they have made their programs more flexible to permit some courses to be taken on-line through Dubuque, which, the Research Services’ survey indicates, is the most frequently used supplier of instruction for CLPs.

Educational Approach

All the programs examined in this study take one of two basic approaches to the educational preparation of CLPs.

The majority requires completion of a core curriculum, sometimes with the addition of a small number of elective activities. These core courses may be provided by a single presbytery, a seminary, or some other agency. In some cases, as just noted, the provider is specified. In others, courses from various providers are accepted. What the core curriculum programs have in common is the requirement that every prospective CLP complete formal courses in specified areas.

A smaller group of programs sets knowledge and competency goals and assesses at the beginning of the program how far participants are from meeting those goals. A learning plan is developed, with counsel from an advisor or committee, and by the program’s end, students are asked to produce evidence that they meet the presbytery’s standards. Evidence may include transcripts from earlier education, good grades in courses taken while in the program, approval of independent study projects by tutors or advisers, passing of written or oral exams, or activities that demonstrate content mastery and skill in functions of ministry. The evidence is presented to an advisor or a committee that certifies that the student has been “instructed” as the *Book of Order* requires.

Curriculum

The point of greatest uniformity among programs of preparation for CLPs is their curricula. The seven subject areas listed in the *Book of Order* have been adopted as the curriculum outline for all the programs included in this study, with few variations. Usually “Bible” is divided into two introductory units, one to the Old Testament, the other to the New. “Sacraments” are sometimes studied as part of Reformed Theology, in other instances as part of

worship. Often professional ethics is named as an additional topic in courses in Pastoral Care. The resulting standard curriculum has eight topics:

Old Testament	Preaching
New Testament	Christian Education
Reformed Theology (and Sacraments)	Worship (and Sacraments)
Polity	Pastoral Care (and professional ethics)

The variations on this pattern are remarkably few. Several programs to prepare racial/ethnic and new immigrant leadership require evangelism. A few programs include a course in church administration, planning, or practical theology. A handful offer or require “contextual education,” including congregational analysis, and two presbyteries in this group require a field education placement during the program. College and ecumenical programs provide a little more variety: several offer church history courses; one college-based program has courses in comparative religions and ethics; one ecumenical program has a course in ecumenical mission, another on “The Elder as Leader,” and a third adds “music” to the course in worship. Overall, however, the standard eight course pattern with minor variations prevails, in both core course curriculum and competency-based programs.

To this curricular content core, almost all presbyteries add the same elements. There is an application process that requires the approval of the session of the applicant’s home church. Participants have one or more overseers, who go by different names in different presbyteries. Generally there is an experienced minister who supervises progress in the program and non-academic activities. Competency-based programs provide an adviser who helps the participant shape a learning plan and certifies accomplishment. A number of programs also provide a mentor or advocate whose principal function is support. In the final phase, there are examinations, which may be written and/or oral, and which often take the form of trials for ordination, with a committee addressing a wide range of questions to the prospective CLP. On one point there is less unanimity: whether a formal psychological assessment is required for prospective CLPs. Half of programs in the Research Services’ survey require one; half do not.

In a number of presbyteries, the procedures for CLPs mimic those outlined in the *Book of Order* for MWSs. One presbytery among those in this study has a lengthy prospectus for the program, written in *Book of Order* style, with the same decimal numbering system and use of the verbs with imperative overtones (“shall”). Another has comprehensive written exams in all seven subject areas that read like simpler versions of the Standard Ordination Exams. Several presbyteries use the same nomenclature for prospective CLPs as for prospective MWSs: “inquirer” and “candidate” (others use “seeker” and “learner”—and some mix the terms). There are prescribed forms for the stages in the preparation process, often copied from the Currie handbook, that look a lot like the forms that are used for inquirers and candidates for the Ministry of Word and Sacrament.

Preparation: Quantity and Level and Quality of Instruction

Almost all the core curriculum programs in this study require the same amount of instruction as measured by contact hours: 120-135 for the full program of courses. There are just a few variations: one program requires only about 75 classroom hours, plus supervised ministry activities; another (Pittsburgh), which now combines classroom and on-line instruction in a “hybrid” program, has increased its requirement to a total of 196 contact hours in the programs it offers for western Pennsylvania presbyteries.

What do 130 contact hours add up to? At the college level, a full three-hour semester course requires 40-45 hours of classroom instruction. Most CLP programs, by that standard, require the equivalent of three college courses, or part of one semester’s load of four or five courses. Dubuque, the provider program most often mentioned in the Research Services’ survey, confirms this calculation on its website. It offers a core of eight courses that, it says, are each “equivalent to the work required in a one credit hour college course.” Eight credit hours equals almost three three-hour courses.

In addition to contact hours, in the classroom or on-line, participants are expected to read (Dubuque specifies 300-500 pages on average) and write (7-10 pages at Dubuque and similar amounts in the syllabi collected for this project). Except for the two programs that include formal field education, requirements for supervised ministry activity are vague, and a third of respondents to the Research Services’ survey reported difficulty in finding supervisors and mentors for prospective CLPs. Some programs require one or more retreats of the CLP cohort in addition to courses of instruction.

Auburn sent the directors of programs that offer courses supplementary questions about the level of instruction, the standards applied, and the adequacy of instruction. Most who responded said either that their courses are equivalent to college-level introductions (“but with less reading and writing than if they were credit-bearing courses”) or that they are continuing education for elders, “with no assumption of academic achievement.” Some said that all participants who choose to complete the requirements of a course receive passing grades. A smaller number noted that some have been urged to leave the CLP preparation program because they could not handle the work. One said that participants are released from the program if they “cheat or copy.” One provider of courses for several presbyteries said that courses were taught at the seminary level, but seminary-level work was not required to complete them, and that the program did not have enough leverage with client presbyteries to convince them that some students enrolled could not do the work required.

Most program directors are satisfied with the quality of instruction in their programs, though they disagree about what background best qualifies teachers of CLPs. In general, programs based in seminaries and colleges use faculty if they are available, and programs run by presbyteries on their own and by ecumenical associations use mostly clergy as instructors. But one seminary program director says that many seminary professors do not do a good job in programs for racial/ethnic and new immigrant lay leadership, and others say that they have difficulty finding persons to teach “practical” subjects (the same complaint, it should be noted, that many seminary deans registered in an earlier Auburn study of seminary faculty).

Issues for Discussion

This method of this study—examination of written materials from a few representative programs and brief exchanges with their directors—does not provide the basis for conclusive judgments about the preparation of CLPs or recommendations for changes. It does, however, raise several issues that should be discussed by presbytery leaders, educators, and national church staff.

Curriculum

The most significant and surprising finding of this study is that the curriculum structures of the programs studied are very similar. When the role of CLP was created, presbyteries insisted on the right to shape the preparation for it to meet local needs. Every program examined in this study, however, seems to be based on the assumption that the topics listed in the *Book of Order* should be the foci of separate courses. Indeed, the publicity for Dubuque's widely-used on-line program states this: "The program offers eight core courses required of Presbyterian CLPs." Like Dubuque, most programs assign one course per topic, with the exception of Bible, which is often split into two courses.

In fact, the *Book of Order* requires instruction on broadly-stated topics, not courses per se. One can imagine many ways that those topical areas could be incorporated into an integrated curriculum without assigning one course per topic. A severe criticism of seminary education in recent decades has been its fragmentation into separate disciplines that are hard to integrate in ministry. If this is a challenge for the MWS who has been educated at the graduate level for three years, it may be even more the case for a CLP who has no more than a college beginner's exposure to all the fields of theological study. And even if the one-course-per-topical-field approach was the logical place to begin when CLP programs were initiated, it seems likely that two decades of experience with CLPs would suggest changes in emphasis—more of this, less of that, and the addition of elements that were not on the original list, which was based on a conventional and now somewhat dated outline for the education of ministers at the graduate level.

A few programs have made such responsive changes: the programs for racial/ethnic and new immigrant CLPs have always included evangelism and other topics relevant to those ministries; Pittsburgh has added spiritual formation and rebalanced the elements, so that students take three times as much Bible and twice as much theology and preaching as they do other subjects; Dubuque promises elective courses as there is demand; electives offered by the college and ecumenical programs have already been noted; and Northern Kansas and Denver require field education. But most programs still require only the canon of eight courses on the subjects named in the *Book of Order*.

One result of the literal reading of the constitutional requirements as requiring seven or eight courses is that studies that might be needed for CLPs ministries are not considered for inclusion in programs of preparation. The most noticeable omission is supervised field education. Seminary educators have long believed that there is no better way for students to learn how to

deal with the demands of the practice of ministry and to develop ministry skills than to practice ministry in a congregation or other setting under good supervision. Many also believe that field education offers the best opportunity to assess a person's fitness for ministry.

The case can be made for other missing elements as well. For instance, CLPs are called on to preach and teach the whole of Christian faith, including but not limited to distinctive Reformed doctrines and perspectives. Yet the eight-course template includes only Reformed theology, and only one program in this study explicitly makes acquaintance with basic Christian doctrine an educational goal. Preaching of the Scriptures and teaching of theological ideas require that the ministerial leader have some historical perspective in order to "apply" scripture and theology responsibly. Very few programs offer and fewer require any church history, and some CLPs may never have studied history at all beyond a high school introduction. Similarly, the study of ethics—both social and personal—is absent from these programs, except for an occasional session on professional ethics as part of the course on pastoral care, probably leaving some CLPs unprepared assist church members with ethical dilemmas that are often at the heart of the problems brought to a pastor. Social analysis is not taught, either, though many of the congregations and ministries that CLPs will serve will be struggling to cope with social forces and trends that they do not understand. Nor does the curriculum mandate attention to denominational program and resources, despite the fact that congregations that call on CLPs for leadership are frequently isolated and even alienated from the PCUSA.

The question of curriculum goes directly to the question of the role of the CLP. The programs focused on educating lay leadership for new immigrant and racial/ethnic communities seem to have clarity about the goals of their programs and the role of CLPs in relation to that goal: the programs aim to introduce American Presbyterianism in culturally sensitive ways to people who are considering an alliance with the PCUSA, some of whom will be CLPs. For that purpose, the standard curriculum is appropriate, though it might be strengthened by the addition of church history taught from a multicultural perspective and tools of social and congregational analysis.

The role of CLPs in other settings is less clear. Is the aim to offer congregations that cannot support an MWS a CLP who can conduct worship, provide first-line pastoral care, moderate meetings and organize some program with a Presbyterian flavor? If so, the eight-course curriculum may serve, though it should be noted that it offers limited exposure to both theological and ministry studies, the equivalent of part of a college semester of study, without rigorous performance requirements. Comparison with preparation for other paraprofessional roles, such as physician's assistant, raises the question of whether the standard amount of study is enough to prepare a person for extended paraprofessional service in a multifaceted field like ministry. One hopes that CLPs will bring extraordinary natural abilities, long church leadership experience, and additional relevant educational background (though none of these is specifically required by any program in this study) which will enhance the CLP's ability to help a congregation keep a Presbyterian presence in a particular community.

If the goal of the CLPs ministry is not merely to maintain a denominational presence but rather to lead a struggling congregation to discover new possibilities for mission, the eight-course curriculum may not be adequate. Leadership means lifting sights to broader horizons. It is

precisely such broadening studies—theology beyond our own tradition, history, contemporary personal and social ethical issues, evangelism and church development, social trends and community development, worldwide and ecumenical mission—that are absent from the eight-course curriculum and from most programs.

Educational Modes and Methods

Though the eight-topic curriculum is standard for all programs, there is, as noted earlier, some variety in educational approaches, and considerable diversity in delivery systems. Most programs require the prospective CLP to complete the courses of a core curriculum, but some are based instead on the achievement of knowledge and competency goals. Both educational approaches rely on an array of delivery systems and formats: courses that meet weekly, monthly, or in weekend or week-long intensive modules, on campuses, at local sites, or on-line, augmented by independent study and workshops and conferences.

Which of these modes of education and delivery formats is most effective, and for whom? Neither segment of this research project was designed to compare the outcomes of different approaches and formats. There are some hints in the data of how different patterns have worked on the ground, for instance, the apparent trend to permit some on-line study in many programs but not to accept only on-line study as sufficient academic preparation, but this project cannot form conclusions about whether these observed trends can be generalized. Providers of CLP training are not in a good position to assess the different options either, because they tend to work alone in one mode: on-line, course-giving or competency-based. Presbyteries that contract with other agencies for instruction may have some basis for comparison, but for the most part, evaluation is difficult, because most of the actors in the CLP drama see only part of the play. Further, there is no outside body that can make judgments. CLP programs, unlike the degree-programs of seminaries and colleges, are not accredited or evaluated in any consistent way.

If the PCUSA cares about the quality of church life, however, and if CLPs form some part of the church workforce, there may be reason to focus on evaluation, not in order to regulate programs, but to give them information that may help them to become more effective. It could be a great benefit to all the program organizers and providers if a team knowledgeable about adult learning and Christian ministry were to conduct a careful study of the impacts of programs that use different educational approaches and delivery formats, documenting their strengths and drawbacks with different kinds of learners.

Second-Best Pastor or Extraordinary Elder?

The fundamental issue raised by this research project is how the church should understand the identity of the elder commissioned to pastoral service. The current view is that the CLP is, for the period of service, a species of pastoral minister. In Chapter 14 of the *Form of Government*, the description of CLPs is included under “officers of the church,” sandwiched between stated supply ministers and parish associates. The handbook that the denomination provides for CLP programs refers repeatedly to “powers,” “rights” and “authority” that may be conferred on the CLP, strongly suggesting that the CLP process is a route to obtaining the special status of clergy. Presbytery handbooks and policies, many of which mimic the procedures for inquirers/candidates for the ministry of Word and Sacrament, communicate this view. The

survey findings that ten percent of presbyteries that have CLPs have some serving as associate pastors and that one-third of the respondents had fielded requests from CLPs who wanted to transfer their “status” from one presbytery to another suggest that the understanding of CLPs as paraprofessional ministers has taken hold rather widely, not least among CLPs themselves.

The limited data collected for this project reveal diverse opinions about the use of CLPs. The facts that three-quarters of all presbyteries train CLPs and that the numbers in service are escalating suggest that a need is being met. At the same time, some of the program materials collected show ambivalence. The Presbytery of Inland Northwest introduces its policy and standards as follows: “The Presbytery...is committed to providing the best possible leadership in the areas of worship and preaching to all churches within our bounds. This leadership is best provided when pulpits are filled with ministers of the Word and Sacrament. When this is not possible, one way of seeking to meet this need is through the Commissioned Lay Pastor Program.”

This concessive view, that CLPs as now trained and deployed are necessary rather than desirable, can be heard in articles of opinion about CLP programs and in public debates about the policies that govern them.⁶ Discomfort with the role as it is now defined may stem from a variety of practical judgments about the advisability of persons with limited training offering pastoral leadership and about the effects on ordained clergy of permitting CLPs to carry out most of the same duties. It may also be a function of the difficulty of fitting the idea of “commissioned lay pastors” into a Reformed understanding of ministry. The local or lay pastorate was pioneered by religious groups like Methodists and Disciples that resisted the seminary training of ministers until quite recently, in sharp contrast to the Presbyterian emphasis on a highly learned ministry. It took root in denominations that, unlike the Reformed churches, do not ordain church members for service as elders and deacons.⁷

Might the persons who serve as CLPs fit better into the Presbyterian ministry system if they were redefined as elders in special service rather than partial, temporary MWSs? This is the view that some programs for new immigrants and racial/ethnic commissioned elders have been promoting. Their goal is to train elders, from among whom some may be chosen for special service of various kinds. If this approach were taken and the ministerial template were not imposed on the service of elders, programs of preparation might change in a variety of ways. For instance, the curriculum flexibility that was originally envisioned would be highly desirable, so that elders could be commissioned to perform some pastoral functions but not others.⁸

Discussion about the role of commissioned elders—semi-trained ministers or specialized elders?—might also help to stimulate discussions about the future of small, struggling congregations. The current standard CLP curriculum, shaped by traditional seminary education

⁶See, for instance, Lawton W. Posey, “Commissioned Lay Pastors and the *Book of Order*,” The Presbyterian Outlook (Vol. 189, No. 24), July 16/23, 2007: 24.

⁷In fact, in Reformed terms, the commissioned lay pastorate may be misnamed. The persons who serve in it are not “laity”—non-ordained church members—but congregational leaders ordained for life to the office of elder.

⁸Elders who serve in a range of roles in the church—as presbytery executives, for instance, or religious agency directors or mission workers—could be commissioned as well, each approved when they have completed the training that is relevant to their role.

that has not always been effective in shaping ministers for new or challenged congregations, seems to orient students more to maintenance of church functions than to mission and growth. When CLPs trained in this way function as substitutes for clergy, do they sometimes help to create the illusion that struggling congregations can continue a “normal” independent existence indefinitely? Is attention deflected from alternatives that would better dispose to long-term survival and growth: alliance with a strong congregation that provides mission support (perhaps for joint leadership by commissioned elders and MWSs); cooperative parish arrangements with other Presbyterian churches; or merger with churches of other denominations to establish a strong mainline Protestant ministry in a village, town or neighborhood?

Continuing the Conversation

The Office of Vocation and the Committee on Theological Education, by sponsoring and sharing this research project, have begun a conversation about the role, preparation and deployment of CLPs. Both agencies readily acknowledge that presbyteries have the final say, within *Book of Order* guidelines, about the selection, training, examination, and use of CLPs. At the same time, though, there are indications that presbyteries are seeking information, models, and even norms for their CLP projects. The striking curricular uniformity of all programs in this study is one such indication. Many executives and program directors, when completing the survey or submitting materials, asked pointedly to see the results of this research project so that they could use them locally.

If the conversation does continue, here are some questions for discussion:

- What issues does this research project raise that the researchers have not highlighted?
- Should the impact of different educational approaches and formats of instruction be further studied?
- Is the amount of educational preparation that is now the norm sufficient? Is the level of teaching and required work appropriate for the roles that CLPs will play?
- What is the basic identity of the commissioned elder: paraprofessional minister or elder in specialized service? If the former, is the level of preparation sufficient for persons to function in pastoral roles? If the latter, what varieties of preparation are appropriate?
- Is the curriculum that has become standard adequate? If CLPs are going to continue to fulfill clergy functions, should there be more standardization of training for the role? If they are going to play diverse roles, should there be more flexibility?
- How do and should CLPs fit into church-wide strategies for redevelopment and growth?