

Presbytery Survey About Commissioned Lay Pastors

Introduction

In the fall of 2007, presbytery executives were invited by email to complete a Web-based survey about Commissioned Lay Pastors (CLPs). After two reminders, surveys were completed by 54% of presbyteries. Of these, 92% reported that their presbytery has at least one CLP. Data gathered by the Office of the General Assembly indicate that 131 presbyteries have CLPs. Thus, we estimate that 63% of presbyteries that have CLPs (93 presbyteries) returned the survey.

Appendix A presents a statistical summary of survey responses. The figures in Appendix A show the percentages of presbytery executives who gave each answer. Since the distribution of CLPs among presbyteries is uneven—with some having none or only a few, and others having many—the results below are sometimes presented based on the percentage of CLPs rather than on the percentage of presbyteries. This approach lets us look at the results in terms of CLPs' experiences. To examine findings based on the percentage of CLPs, the responses of each presbytery were weighted by the number of CLPs in the presbytery. Appendix B shows the complete text of responses to all open-ended questions.

Highlights of Findings

Need for and Prevalence of CLPs

Eight in ten presbyteries (83%) report having determined that their “strategy for mission requires commissioned lay pastors.” Responses from most of the remaining presbyteries (14% overall) are “no”—indicating either that the presbytery has not considered this issue or that the issue has been considered and the decision made that CLPs are not required. (“Not sure” was the response of the remaining 3%.) Only 6% of CLPs are serving in presbyteries that have not determined their strategy for mission requires CLPs or in which the presbytery executive does not know if it does or doesn't.

Most respondents (92%) report that CLPs currently serve in their presbyteries. Half of presbyteries have five CLPs or fewer, including 8% with none. Several presbyteries (4%) have more than 20. In all, the 93 responding presbyteries reported a total of 594 CLPs.

CLP Preparation

When asked to indicate how educational requirements for CLPs are handled, 62% reported that the presbytery has its own educational program. Four in ten (38%) accept CLP training provided by seminaries. In addition, 16% accept CLP training provided by PC(USA) colleges and universities, and 16% partner with a seminary to meet educational requirements. These percentages add to more than 100, because a number of presbyteries have multiple ways for CLPs to satisfy educational requirements. Among presbyteries with their own training program, for example, 14% *also* partner

with other seminaries, 33% *also* accept CLP training provided by seminaries, and 12% *also* accept training provided by PC(USA) colleges and universities.

When asked to name the institutions with which they partner in providing CLP training or from which they accept training, many institutions were named (see Table 1). (The number after the institution shows the number of executives that mentioned that institution, if more than one.)

Table 1
Seminaries and Other Institutions with which Presbyteries Partner in Providing CLP Training*

PC(USA) Seminaries:	Other Seminaries/Colleges:
Dubuque (18)	New Brunswick Theological Seminary
Pittsburgh (4)	Fuller Theological Seminary
Princeton (2)	New York Theological Seminary
Louisville (2)	Whitworth (2)
Austin	Lancaster
San Francisco	Vanderbilt
PC(USA) seminaries (in general) (6)	Regional UCC seminary (unnamed)

Other Programs:
Western National Leadership Training (2)
Montana Association of Churches (2)
Institute for Pastoral Studies

* Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of presbyteries reporting each if more than one.

Asked about their satisfaction with CLP training from these sources, presbyteries that partner with a seminary expressed the most satisfaction. After excluding both respondents who did not use a particular method of training and those who reported a training program was “not applicable,” 100% of respondents with seminary partnerships were “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with such training. Almost as many using presbytery-designed programs (94%) and seminary programs (84%) were similarly satisfied.

One-half of presbyteries do not require psychological or vocational testing or evaluation of their prospective CLPs. Six in ten CLPs (58%) serve in presbyteries that do not require evaluations or testing. Open-ended responses about the nature of such evaluation often mentioned psychological or vocational assessment either through a counseling center (e.g., Midwest Ministry Development Center) or provided by a licensed psychologist. Some indicated evaluation required of prospective CLPs is the same as that required of candidates/inquirers.

How CLPs Serve and How They Are Compensated

Table 2 shows the percentage of CLPs serving in various types of positions and locations. (The appendix shows the percentages of responding presbyteries with CLPs in each position/location.) Most CLPs serve part-time (84%). Many (58%) serve as a pastoral leader in a single congregation,

and 66% serve congregations with fewer than 100 members. Yet 10% serve in associate pastor roles. Some (11%) serve in non-congregational positions (e.g., chaplain in prison, hospital, or nursing home). One-half (52%) serve in rural or isolated areas, 20% in suburban areas, and 18% in urban areas. (One in ten are in “other” locations.) Few work specifically with racial-ethnic populations (8%) or with immigrant populations (2%).

Table 2
How Are CLPs Serving?

Q6. How are the commissioned lay pastors in your presbytery serving?

	<u>Percentage of CLPs</u>
Time:	
Full-time	12%
Part-time	84%
 Roles:	
As pastoral leader in a single congregation.....	58%
As pastoral leader in more than one congregation	9%
In an associate lay pastor role	10%
In an interim lay pastor role	2%
As a pastoral leader of a new church development.....	1%
As temporary supply	4%
In some other role.....	12%
 Organizations:	
In small congregations with fewer than 100 members.....	66%
In large congregations with 100 or more members.....	14%
In a non-congregational position.....	11%
 Communities/Populations:	
In isolated or rural areas	52%
In urban areas	18%
In suburban areas.....	20%
With racial ethnic populations.....	8%
With immigrant populations.....	2%
Other.....	9%

One-half of responding presbyteries have a policy on compensation or benefits for CLPs. Of those who provided a description of their policies, 39% said it is an adaptation of the presbytery’s minimum compensation for ministers. Three in ten (29%) say compensation for CLPs is similar to that for ministers and certified educators. Two in ten (21%) have presbytery guidelines for compensation of CLPs.

When asked what percentage of CLPs are paid at or above the presbytery’s minimum for ministers, 7% responded “all.” At the other extreme, 71% report that none of their CLPs are paid at or above their minimum for ministers. In terms of the percentage of CLPs, 31% of CLPs are paid at or above

their presbytery’s minimum for ministers. Respondents report that in some cases the minimum is adjusted for the number of hours worked by the CLP.

Table 3 shows the percentage of CLPs who receive various benefits as part of their terms of call. The most common fringe benefits are paid vacation or personal leave, study leave or continuing education leave, and continuing education funds, with about 60% of the CLPs receiving each of these types of benefits. Few receive health, dental, or life insurance or contribution toward a pension.

**Table 3
CLP Benefits**

Q9. In general, what benefits do your commissioned lay pastors receive as a part of their terms of call?

	<u>Percentage of CLPs</u>
Health insurance	8%
Health insurance for spouse or dependents	5%
Dental insurance	1%
Pension contribution	4%
Life insurance	2%
Disability insurance	9%
Medical savings account option	1%
403(b), 401(k), or other supplemental retirement option	2%
Housing or manse	2%
Housing allowance	24%
Paid vacation or personal leave	62%
Paid travel expenses for reaching the church	50%
Study leave or continuing education leave	63%
Continuing education funds	60%
Paid membership in professional organizations	9%
Other	5%

Supervision, Mentoring, and Oversight of CLPs

The *Book of Order* states that commissioned lay pastors “shall work under the supervision of the presbytery through the moderator of the session of the church being served or through the committee on ministry. A minister of Word and Sacrament shall be assigned as a mentor and supervisor.” A series of questions addressed supervision and mentoring issues. When asked who provides supervision, 75% of responding presbyteries said the committee on ministry plays an active role, while the session moderator is active in that role in 48% of presbyteries. (The CLP serves as moderator in some sessions.)

Responses indicate minor difficulties finding supervisor-mentors for CLPs. One-quarter of presbytery executives (27%) agree (either “agree” or “strongly agree”) that “it is difficult to find ministers willing to supervise and mentor” CLPs, and one-third (36%) agree that “it is difficult to

find ministers who are effective” in these roles. Nonetheless, most (86%) believe providing a minister to supervise and mentor CLPs is a good way to monitor and support CLPs.

It appears that most presbyteries assign one minister to both supervise and mentor each CLP. Only 10% agree that “we ask one minister to supervise and another to mentor each CLP.” Three-quarters (73%) report the presbytery requires the work of each CLP to be “evaluated/reviewed annually.”

Evaluation of the supervision and mentoring provided for CLPs is mixed. One-third of presbyteries (32%) “agree” or “strongly agree” that “the CLPs in our presbytery need more supervision.” Another third (33%) “neither agree nor disagree,” and 35% “disagree” or “strongly disagree.” More (49%) agree that “the CLPs in our presbytery need more mentoring.” Comments to open-ended questions indicate that some presbyteries are struggling with supervision and mentoring of CLPs and hope good suggestions come from this study.

In most presbyteries, the committee on ministry (COM) has oversight of deployment (94% of presbyteries), supervision and mentoring (86%), and continuing education (67%) for CLPs. Oversight of education required to become a CLP is handled by the COM in one-third of presbyteries (37%) and the committee on preparation for ministry (CPM) in another third (36%). In one-quarter of presbyteries (27%) some other committee handles the educational requirements. Nonetheless, a large majority of CLPs serve in presbyteries where COMs oversee all aspects of service.

One-third of presbyteries (36%) have had CLPs from other presbyteries move into their bounds and seek commissioning. When asked to describe how the most recent such case was handled, most report that the presbytery where he/she was authorized to serve as CLP was contacted to learn about the CLP’s education and assessment. This informed the presbytery’s decision about commissioning.

Continuing Education for CLPs

Fifty-three percent of presbyteries (covering 67% of CLPs) require continuing education for CLPs, and two-thirds (67%; covering 86% of CLPs) offer continuing education for CLPs. A follow-up question asked for a description of the presbytery’s continuing education requirements and offerings. The most common types of such education are workshops, retreats, and other short-term events that may or may not be specifically for CLPs.

CLPs and Ministers of Word and Sacrament

Three in ten respondents (30%) think CLPs are “becoming replacements for ministers of Word and Sacrament.” A review of comments made when respondents were asked to elaborate on their response revealed that some think it is good that this is happening.

Two-thirds of presbytery executives (66%) report that “all” or “most” of the CLPs in their presbytery serve in positions that, given the circumstances of the congregation, would be difficult to fill with a minister of Word and Sacrament. Few (12%) report that “a minority” or “none” of their CLPs were in such positions. (The remaining 13% report that “a majority” or “about half” are in

such positions.) Only 6% of CLPs serve where the presbytery executive believes none or a minority serves in positions that would be hard to fill with ministers of Word and Sacrament.

Evaluation of the CLP Program

Respondents were asked to indicate their opinions on 11 statements about the roles of CLPs. Results indicate that many executives see benefits of the CLP program, along with a few challenges. Majorities agree that CLPs “address the growing problem of providing competent ministerial leadership for all churches” (72% either “agree” or “strongly agree”) and that CLPs “serve in positions where ministers of Word and Sacrament are not willing to serve” (67%). At the same time few (6%) believe that CLPs “take jobs away from ministers.”

Opinions are mixed as to whether CLPs are “more in tune to the culture of the congregation and community being served than are ministers,” with one-third agreeing (33%), one-third disagreeing (32%), and the remaining third neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

A few presbyteries have “more people interested in becoming CLPs than we have need for” (36%). Yet this does not appear to be an attempt by potential CLPs to circumvent seminary. Only 14% of executives believe people become CLPs “to avoid the rigors of seminary training.”

The acceptance of CLPs remains incomplete. Only 24% of respondents agree that most of their congregations “are open to having CLPs provide pastoral leadership.” Similar numbers say ministers in their presbytery “tend to look down on CLPs” (28%), and CLPs “tend to feel they have second-class status” in the presbytery (27%).

There is some support (but minority) for standardization of the examination process for prospective CLPs. One-third of executives (34%) agree that this process should be “uniform across all presbyteries.”

Closing Comments

When asked to identify the advantages of the CLP program, responses often fell into these broad categories: providing service to congregations that cannot afford an ordained minister or where ministers typically do not want to serve, providing ministry to non-English speaking groups for which ordained ministers are unavailable, serving other groups (e.g., immigrant populations) with which ordained ministers are not trained to serve, and providing additional opportunities for service for laypersons in the presbytery.

Respondents were also asked to specify the challenges presented by the CLP program. Commonly mentioned themes in the responses include: providing adequate training, supervision, mentoring, and deployment of CLPs; finding qualified candidates; and having too many qualified candidates. A number of executives said the challenges were similar to those faced for ministers of Word and Sacrament.

Many presbyteries are interested in help from the Office of Vocation. One often-mentioned topic relates to standards. There is interest in consistency of policies and procedures across presbyteries and some call for uniform standards. Others seek help in getting all presbyteries to understand the

purpose of CLPs and to uphold the current standards. Many also seek greater sharing of resources, policies, and experiences across presbyteries so that all can learn from the experiences of others.

Appendix B presents all responses to these and other open-ended questions, including the final one, “Please use the space below for any other comments about commissioned lay pastors.”

It is interesting that most respondents focused on positives in this space, including this example:

“This is a ministry whose time has come; a ministry that gives strong evidence of God’s reforming hand at work in the church of this time and this place. The CLP program is a rich enhancement to the current system for providing pastoral leadership. It complements the traditional system in that it provides effective, affordable leadership for small congregations. But just as importantly, it provides a venue for service which invites those who are called into pastoral leadership, but for whom seminary is not a viable option.”

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