

Ecclesiastical  
Endorsement  
of Ministers  
Serving in  
Specialized  
Pastoral  
Ministries



[www.pcusa.org/phewa/paspm](http://www.pcusa.org/phewa/paspm)

Are you a candidate seeking an “endorsement” for chaplaincy or pastoral counseling that the professional organizations require and don’t know where to go for that?

Are you a presbytery staff person or serve on your presbytery’s COM or CPM and wonder what is expected when you are asked for an “endorsement?”

**T**his information will assist the Committees on Ministry and Preparation in working with persons seeking ecclesiastical endorsement. Ecclesiastical endorsement is an official declaration by the presbytery of membership/care that a person seeking certification as a chaplain or pastoral counselor has the gifts of ministry for this special calling. It is not a statement of competency.

Endorsement is the responsibility of the religious body, while certification is the work of the professional organization. The following information is intended as a resource. Additional information is available from the professional organizations or from certified chaplains and pastoral counselors serving in each presbytery. Ordained ministers and others serving in specialized

pastoral ministries are required to provide to their respective professional organizations, evidence of endorsement and validation of their ministries by their faith group. Endorsement and validation of the ministry by the faith group is a requirement for certification and for continuing membership in the professional organization.

The Leadership Team of the Presbyterian Association of Specialized Pastoral Ministries (PASPM), a network of the Presbyterian Health, Education and Welfare Association (PHEWA), in conjunction with the PC(USA) Office of Vocations, has prepared this information to assist both those persons who are seeking endorsement, certification, and/or validation of a ministry of pastoral care and those presbytery committees that have responsibility for endorsing persons and/or validating ministries of pastoral care.

This information will clarify terminology, summarize standards of the professional certifying bodies, incorporate recent statements of agreements between the professional organizations and the religious endorsing bodies, and encourage support for persons in specialized pastoral ministries.

## I. TERMINOLOGY

**Endorsement** - An official declaration by the presbytery of care/membership, that a person has met its criteria to serve in a ministry of chaplaincy, pastoral counseling, or clinical education.

**Certification** - The process whereby professional certifying agencies such as Association of Professional Chaplains (APC), American Association of Pastoral Counselors (AAPC), Association for Clinical Pastoral Education, Inc. (ACPE), College of Pastoral Supervision and Psychotherapy (CPSP), declare a person to be in compliance with professional standards as delineated by that professional organization.

**Validation** - An official declaration by the presbytery of care/membership, that a ministry complies with all of the criteria enumerated in G-11.0403, without exception.

## II. DESCRIPTION OF PROCESSES

**E**ndorsement is the work of the faith group; therefore, the professional certifying organizations encourage presbyteries to establish a process for endorsement of persons seeking to enter, and/or persons serving in ministries of chaplaincy, pastoral counseling, or clinical education seeking certification. The professional organizations also encourage these persons to initiate a relationship with their presbytery early in their training so that the presbytery, through its committees, can provide guidance, discernment, and support. The declaration of endorsement addresses the following criteria through a process that might include written papers, interviews, and mutual discernment:

- Personal history
- Statement of faith
- Theological and clinical training
- Letters of reference
- Requirements for ministry
- Good standing and accountability within the faith community
- Ability to work collegially in diverse and pluralistic environments
- Willingness to adhere to a code of ethics prescribed by the institutions served, and by the certifying bodies

A letter of endorsement from the presbytery to the certifying body is continuous unless:

- The applicant has failed to successfully complete the membership or certification process
- There is a change in membership status or level in the professional organization
- There is a change in faith group affiliation, jurisdiction or standing
- The certifying body requests a new letter

**Certification** is the process whereby professional certifying agencies such as APC, AAPC, ACPE, and CPSP declare a person to be in compliance with the professional standards as delineated by that professional organization. Certification is the work of the professional organizations. Certification ordinarily addresses such core standards as:

- Clearly articulated professional standards
- Defined admission standards
- Articulated training standards
- Clinical supervisory responsibility and accountability
- Articulated certification steps and standards
- Code of ethics
- Clearly published fees
- Sustainment training and ongoing certification
- Defined disciplinary process
- Continuing professional formation and peer review

**Validation** is an official declaration by the presbytery of care/membership, that a ministry complies with all of the criteria enumerated in G-11.0403:

- a. The ministry shall be in demonstrable conformity with the mission of God's people in the world as set forth in Holy Scripture, The *Book of Confessions*, and the *Book of Order* of this church.
- b. The ministry shall be one that serves others, aids others, and enables the ministries of others.
- c. The ministry shall give evidence of theologically informed fidelity to God's Word. This will normally require a Master of Divinity degree or its equivalent, and the completion of the requirements for ordination set forth in G-14.0482.
- d. The ministry shall be carried on in accountability for its character and conduct to the presbytery and to organizations, agencies, and institutions.
- e. The ministry shall include responsible participation in the deliberations and work of the presbytery and in the worship and service of a congregation.

Validation of a ministry is the work of the Committee on Ministry (COM) of the presbytery of care/member-ship.

Our current provisions for the validation of ministries have their roots in a document from the General Assembly in 1954. It is an excellent piece of work; and it represents the first time that the General Assembly addressed the issue of constitutional standards for presbyteries to follow as they considered “validating” the work of ministers not in local parish settings. You will be interested to know that the word “validate” and its various forms do not appear in the 26-page (single spaced) report to the General Assembly. So the term dates to some time after 1954, at which time this particular document was called “Overture J.”

– Richard Zimmerman, “The Roots of ‘Validated’ Ministry,” *The Presbyterian Outlook*. May 31, 2004. Page 7

The *Book of Order* directs that the COM shall be guided by written criteria developed by the presbytery for the validation of ministry within its bounds (G-11.0403). These criteria shall be based upon the description of the nature of the ordained office found in G-6.0100 and G-6.0200. Ministries in service beyond the jurisdiction of the church shall be reviewed by the Committee on Ministry in order to ascertain if the ministry itself is “consonant with the mission of the presbytery” (G-11.0411). In addition, the COM shall determine if the ministry meets the following standards (G-11.0403):

- The ministry of continuing members shall be in demonstrable conformity with the mission of God's people in the world as set forth in Holy Scripture, *The Book of Confessions*, and the *Book of Order* of this church.
- The ministry shall be one that serves others, aids others, and enables the ministries of others.
- The ministry shall give evidence of theologically informed fidelity to God's Word. This will normally require the Master of Divinity degree or its equivalent and the completion of the requirements for ordination set forth in G-14.0482.

- The ministry shall be carried on in accountability for its character and conduct to the presbytery and to organizations, agencies, and institutions.
- The ministry shall include responsible participation in the deliberations and work of the presbytery and in the worship and service of a congregation.

In addition, it is wise for the COM to inquire concerning:

- The status of the minister in the ministry being reviewed pertaining to sense of call, suitability for the position, and capacity to fulfill all Constitutional criteria while serving in the ministry;
- If the ministry is carried out in accountability for its character, conduct and performance to a board of directors, a management committee, or others responsible for the total ministry program.

Each minister in a validated ministry in service beyond the jurisdiction of the church shall complete the report requested by the COM annually.

While this information primarily refers to the endorsement, certification and validation of ministry for persons in pastoral care and counseling, it is hoped that this information is also helpful to COMs and CPMs as they work with candidates seeking ordination or ministers seeking validation of other specialized ministries.

Section Four of the *Committee on Ministry Handbook* contains an excellent discussion of the standards in G-11.0403 as they apply to validated ministries and selected *Book of Order* statements about validated ministries.



## BEST PRACTICES

### Ideas for supporting persons in specialized pastoral ministries

- ~ Recognize persons in specialized ministries at Presbytery meetings and in Presbytery minutes.
- ~ Provide an annual review of ministry.
- ~ Visit the place of ministry by EP, pastor to pastor, mentor, and/or COM liaison.
- ~ Encourage persons with pastoral gifts to serve on Presbytery committees.
- ~ Encourage specialized ministers to serve as parish associates in local congregations.
- ~ Install persons in specialized ministries as is done with ministers in congregational settings.
- ~ Provide friendship/support/peer-group for persons in specialized pastoral ministries.
- ~ Provide retreats and educational events for persons in specialized pastoral ministries.
- ~ Nominate certified professionals to sit on COM and CPM.

### III. PROFESSIONAL PASTORAL CARE ORGANIZATIONS

The following professional organizations will provide information about their certification requirements:

#### **American Association of Pastoral Counselors (AAPC)**

9504A Lee Highway  
Fairfax, VA 22031-2303  
703-385-6967  
[www.aapc.org](http://www.aapc.org)

#### **Association for Clinical Pastoral Education, Inc. (ACPE)**

1549 Clairmont Road, Suite 103  
Decatur, GA 30033  
404-320-1472  
[www.acpe.edu](http://www.acpe.edu)



**Association of Professional  
Chaplains (APC)**

1701 E. Woodfield Rd, Suite 400  
Schaumburg, IL 60173  
847-240-1014  
www.professionalchaplains.org

**College of Pastoral Supervision  
& Psychotherapy (CPSP)**

P.O. Box 162  
432 W. 47th St., Suite - 2 West  
New York, NY 10108  
212-246-6410  
www.cpsp.org

**National Institute of Business &  
Industrial Chaplains (NIBIC)**

1900 St. James Place, Suite 880  
Houston, TX 77056  
713-266-2456  
www.nibic.com

The following documents, found on the Association of Professional Chaplains (APC) web site, [www.professionalchaplains.org](http://www.professionalchaplains.org), can be helpful as Committees on Ministry and Preparation consider the endorsement process:

Common Code of Professional Ethics

Common Standards for Professional Chaplaincy

Professional Chaplaincy:  
Its Role and Importance in Healthcare

*For I was hungry and you gave me food,  
I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink,  
I was a stranger and you welcomed me,  
I was naked and you gave me clothing,  
I was sick and you took care of me,  
I was in prison and you visited me . . .*

— Mt 25:35-36

# PRESBYTERIAN ASSOCIATION OF SPECIALIZED PASTORAL MINISTRIES

## PASPM members are active in the life of the Church

- providing chaplains to General Assembly and other PC(USA) meetings
- resourcing congregations and presbyteries
- training clergy and laity in pastoral care
- educating about health care issues
- providing fellowship and support for pastors in specialized settings
- advocating around certification and endorsement issues
- hosting annual gatherings of Presbyterians at professional conferences – Association of Professional Chaplains (APC), American Association of Pastoral Counselors (AAPC), Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE), College of Pastoral Supervision and Psychotherapy (CPSP)
- serving in congregations, presbyteries and the larger church

*Truly I tell you, just as you did it  
to one of the least of these who are members of  
my family, you did it to me.*

— Mt 25:40

**PHEWA (The Presbyterian Health, Education & Welfare Association)** is a voluntary membership organization. Its purpose is to provide resources and support for Presbyterians involved in social welfare and justice ministries. PHEWA has also worked, since its creation by General Assembly action in 1956, to make the church more responsive to the needs of the excluded and suffering. PHEWA is part of the PC(USA) Peace and Justice Ministry.

To learn more about PHEWA and our ten networks, visit [www.pcusa.org/phewa](http://www.pcusa.org/phewa). Support justice ministries by becoming a member of PHEWA.

## THE NETWORKS OF PHEWA ARE

- paa** Presbyterians for Addiction Action
- pact** Presbyterian Association for Community Transformation
- padvn** Presbyterians Against Domestic Violence Network
- pan** Presbyterian AIDS Network
- paro** Presbyterians Affirming Reproductive Options
- paspm** Presbyterian Association of Specialized Pastoral Ministries
- pcan** Presbyterian Child Advocacy Network
- pdc** Presbyterians for Disability Concerns
- phn** Presbyterian Health Network
- psmin** Presbyterian Serious Mental Illness Network

PASPM's work as specialized ministers is among the poor, the homeless, the sick, the broken, imprisoned and outcast (Matthew 25: 31-46). In soup kitchens, homeless shelters, hospitals, prisons, pastoral counseling centers and halfway houses, we try to serve those who are broken in body, mind and/or spirit, thereby feeding Christ's sheep (John 21:17). As such, our ministry is mission work fulfilling Christ's ministry of healing (physical, emotional, spiritual and social) in the world and is an extension of the work of congregations, presbyteries and the larger Church.



**pasp**

**PRESBYTERIAN  
ASSOCIATION OF  
SPECIALIZED  
PASTORAL  
MINISTRIES**

**PRESBYTERIAN HEALTH,  
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