

Report of the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates, to the 218th General Assembly (2008)

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I. Introduction to the Self-Study

Standing Rule E.11 of the General Assembly mandates regular review of all General Assembly permanent, advocacy, and advisory committees. The Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates (PCC) is being reviewed at the 218th General Assembly (2008).

The PCC has responsibility for the written examinations that are among the requirements for ordination to the office of minister of the Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (G-14.0430). The committee has 24 members, half of whom are elected by the General Assembly, and half of whom are elected by six regional reading groups that meet annually to grade the examinations. The committee recruits two additional, nonvoting members whose primary responsibility is preparation of the Bible Content Examination.

In preparation for General Assembly review, the PCC established a self-study subcommittee. Its members included: John Burgess, chair (professor at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, member of Pittsburgh Presbytery, and member of the PCC's theology task group), Chris Lenocker (pastor in San Diego Presbytery, member of the PCC's Bible task group, and chairperson of the PCC), Leeann Scarbrough (pastor in Sheppards and Lapsley

Presbytery and chairperson of the PCC's worship and sacraments task group), Syngman Rhee (professor at Union-PSCE, member of Atlantic Korean American Presbytery, and member of the PCC's polity task group), and Ernest Kimmel (stated clerk of New Brunswick Presbytery and chairperson of the PCC's polity task group). Lesley Davies, manager of examination services and member of Utah Presbytery, provided staff support from the national offices (OGA/GAC).

The subcommittee met five times (August 28, 2006; February 5, 2007; April 24, 2007; September 8, 2007; and November 29-30, 2007), gathered information about the examinations and examination process, and asked a wide range of interested individuals and church entities to evaluate the effectiveness of the examinations and the examination process:

- The subcommittee reviewed statistics from the last ten years relating to pass rates in each examination area and of the examinations as a whole
- With the help of the Office of Research Services, it surveyed in 2006 and 2007 readers of ordination examinations, current moderators of Committees on Preparation for Ministry (CPMs), ministers of the Word and Sacrament who were ordained in 2003 or 2004, and inquirers and candidates who took examinations in January or August 2007
- In October 2006, the chairperson of the PCC and the chairperson of the subcommittee sent a letter to deans of Presbyterian seminaries, asking them to comment on the current structure and administration of the examinations
- The subcommittee reviewed results of a consultation in October 2005 of Presbyterian seminary faculty and representatives of the PCC
- In February 2007, representatives of the subcommittee attended a national meeting of persons involved in PCUSA programs that assist candidates in the transition from seminary to the first call
- In April 2007, the subcommittee consulted with the entire PCC, as well as with each of its four task groups
- In June 2007, the chairperson of the subcommittee met with members of the Core Cluster of the Reforming Ministry Initiative of the Office of Theology and Worship
- In July 2007, representatives of the subcommittee attended a national meeting of moderators of Committees on Preparation for Ministry and Committees on Ministry and consulted with them about the examinations
- In September 2007, the subcommittee met with Marcia Myers, Director of the Office of Vocation
- In October 2007, the chairperson of the subcommittee met with the Committee on Theological Education (COTE)
- In October and November 2007, the subcommittee sent an initial draft of its report to CPM moderators, seminary representatives, recent readers of ordination examinations, and members of the PCC for review and response

We have drawn gratefully on this reservoir of experience and insight in preparing this report.

II. The Ministry of the Word and Sacrament

Chapter III of the *Book of Order*, "The Church and Its Mission," boldly calls the church to be "the provisional demonstration of what God intends for all humanity" (G-3.0200), to proclaim "in Word and Sacrament that the new age has dawned" (G-3.0300a), and to "engage in the struggle to free people from sin, fear, oppression, hunger and injustice" (G-3.0300c[d]). The *Book of Order* further declares that "the Church is called to undertake this mission even at the risk of losing its life, trusting in God alone as the author and giver of life, sharing the gospel, and doing those deeds in the world that point beyond themselves to the new reality in Christ" (G-3.0400).

The Reformed tradition has emphasized that the church sets aside certain persons as ministers of the Word and Sacrament to help "to equip and enable [the whole people of God] for their tasks within the church and their mission to the world," including the church's responsibility to reach out "in concern and service to the life of the human community as a whole" (G-6.0202b).

The Reformed tradition has also emphasized that those who would lead the church faithfully in its mission to the world must manifest certain personal gifts and character traits, and must receive adequate academic preparation. A significant report on “The Theology and Practice of Ordination in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.),” commended by the 204th General Assembly (1992) for church-wide study and response, carefully identifies and discusses these factors.¹

The report notes that “the formal educational requirements for those preparing for ordination . . . need to be properly rigorous, reflecting the key role these officers play in interpreting the church and its mission and equipping the church for its ministry to the world” (p. 78). “Ministers . . . need to know the text of Scripture and principles for interpreting it that respect its integrity. They also need to know the theological tradition of the church . . . and the challenges made to it by modern critical thinking” (p. 77).

The report argues, however, that “these kinds of knowledge and skills alone are, while necessary, insufficient. Ministers must also be able to discern where and how the promises and claims of God in Scripture intersect with human life in a particular context for ministry, and they must be able to communicate those promises and claims clearly and effectively to the whole company of God’s people” (p. 72). Seminary preparation must be supplemented by practical experience, for “some things can only be learned, and some skills only developed, in the exercise of ministry” (p. 78).

Intellectual preparation and practical experience are key areas in which the church assesses candidates’ readiness for ministry. Presbyteries evaluate seminary transcripts as well as candidates’ personal faith and ability to exercise appropriate pastoral wisdom, judgment, and imagination in the actual exercise of ministry.² The PCC assists presbyteries in this process of evaluation. By assessing candidates’ answers in written examinations, the PCC helps the larger church to make better judgments about candidates’ ability to relate the church’s biblical, theological, and constitutional resources to the church’s ministry in the world.

III. Discerning Readiness for Ministry

Five church bodies participate in discerning a candidate’s call and readiness for ministry: (1) the session that recommends a person to come under care of the presbytery; (2) the presbytery in which the candidate is under care (through its CPM and in cooperation with the candidate’s session); (3) the institution of theological education that a candidate attends; (4) the PCC, through the examinations that it prepares and administers; and (5) the receiving presbytery that confirms a candidate’s call to a particular ministry within its bounds. The candidate’s CPM plays the leading role in this process, and the principal purpose of the ordination examinations is to assist the CPM in determining its candidates’ readiness for ministry.

The PCC administers five examinations, as outlined in the *Book of Order* (G-14.0431): a multiple-choice Bible Content Examination on major themes, events, and people of the Scriptures (normally taken in the first year of seminary); and four written examinations in the areas of Bible Exegesis, Theological Competence, Worship and Sacraments, and Church Polity (normally taken after two full years of seminary [G-14.0431]).

The written examinations are graded by minister and elder readers elected by the presbyteries (G-11.0103m, G-14.0432) regionally. Four groups meet in the fall, and two in the spring. Each group meets for three and a half

¹ The report is available from Distribution Management Services (DMS #272-92-411), as well as in the Minutes of the 204th General Assembly (1992). Page numbers refer to the DMS version of the report.

² The term candidate is used in this report to refer to all persons who are pursuing ordination in the Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.], regardless of whether they are formally in the inquiry or candidacy stage of presbytery care. The examinations are also required of ministers of other denominations seeking membership in the PCUSA (G-11.0404a[2]).

days. Prior to each meeting, the PCC develops and distributes resource papers to readers and encourages them to undertake additional preparation on their own. When the reading group meets, the PCC provides additional orientation to each examination question and to the examination process as a whole.

Because readers seek to discern how well a candidate communicates in writing his or her ability to relate the church's biblical, theological, and constitutional resources to issues in ministry today, the perspective of both ministers and elders is important. In order to encourage readers to focus on the content of the examinations, candidates' names and personal information remain anonymous. Each examination is graded by at least two readers. In overseeing the process, the PCC works to ensure that readers' grades have a high degree of consistency, even though readers have diverse backgrounds and differing levels of formal theological training.

Pass rates on individual examinations in recent years have ranged between 63% and 71%. Approximately half of the candidates who take all four examinations at the beginning of their senior year of seminary satisfactorily complete them at that time. Another 15% or so of these candidates will complete the examination requirements in January of their senior year (see Attachment A).

Additional statistical evidence indicates that after a second attempt to complete an examination satisfactorily, the likelihood of success decreases substantially. The PCC believes that the presbytery of care should determine whether such a candidate could better demonstrate readiness for ministry through an alternate means of examination or is better suited for a form of service to the church different from the ministry of the Word and Sacrament.

The examinations of the PCC have a limited but distinct purpose. Seminaries are especially concerned to test a candidate's academic competence; presbyteries evaluate the adequacy of a candidate's theological views and his or her personal gifts for ministry. Ordination examinations focus on a third area of concern (shared by the seminaries and the presbyteries): a person's ability to integrate what he or she has learned in seminary and through practical church experience, with pastoral situations. The ordination examinations offer candidates a significant opportunity to move from thinking of themselves as students in an academic context, to thinking of themselves as pastors and leaders in the church and for the world.

IV. The Situation Today

Ordination examinations provide an important moment for candidates to integrate biblical and theological knowledge with pastoral wisdom. They are more than a requirement to be endured. At their best, they provide a unique opportunity for candidates to bring together what they have learned in seminary and in the church.

The examinations are vitally important in a second regard: they lift up common, church-wide standards of readiness for ministry in a time in which candidates for ministry come from a wide variety of personal backgrounds:

- Some have been life-long Presbyterians, but many have moved through several denominational or religious traditions before joining a Presbyterian church, sometimes as late as during seminary
- Some have been raised in a Christian church; others had a conversion experience in their college years during their participation in a campus ministry program or a parachurch organization
- Some are members of racial and ethnic groups that have not been strongly represented previously in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
- Some have a strong college background in the liberal arts and took religion classes at the undergraduate level, but many have educational backgrounds in other areas and have difficulty meeting the demands of reading and writing that come with theological education
- Some have a clear sense of call to pastoral ministry; others seek ordination to other forms of validated ministry or are uncertain of their vocational plans
- Some come straight from college to seminary, but many are older, second-career students
- Some come with basic Bible knowledge; others are reading the Bible almost for the first time

Preparation for ministry also takes place in an ever wider variety of ways:

- Some candidates for ministry in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) attend a Presbyterian seminary; others choose a seminary based on location or theological reputation, rather than Presbyterian affiliation
- Some seminaries require a year-long internship; in other cases, students have a few hours of field work each week over the course of a year, while continuing their seminary studies
- Some students never take a class in Reformed theology, worship, or polity (which are not necessarily required courses even at PCUSA seminaries), while other students have several courses in these areas
- While candidates must attend accredited theological institutions, the level of theological preparation in different institutions and under different instructors varies greatly
- Some candidates have been closely guided and nurtured by their CPM; others feel disconnected from their presbytery and see *Book of Order* requirements as bureaucratic hurdles that stand in the way of their personal call to ministry

The church acknowledges and at points welcomes this diversity of background and preparation, even as it affirms that ministers have a common responsibility to represent and transmit the church's biblical, theological, and ecclesiastical heritage faithfully. Knowledge of this heritage, and ability to work with it pastorally, are presupposed in several of the ordination vows (W-4.4003), which all candidates for ministry take:

- Ordination vow "b": to accept the Scriptures and their witness to Jesus Christ (Bible Content Examination, Bible Exegesis Examination)
- Ordination vow "c": to receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the church's confessions (Theological Competence Examination, Worship and Sacraments Examination)
- Ordination vow "e": to be governed by the church's polity (Church Polity Examination)
- Ordination vow "i": to proclaim the good news in Word and Sacrament (Bible Exegesis Examination, Worship and Sacraments Examination)
- Ordination vow "j": to be active in the church's government and discipline (Church Polity Examination)

The five examinations of the PCC seek to ensure that candidates know the church's foundational documents (the Scriptures, the *Book of Confessions*, and the *Book of Order*, including the *Directory for Worship*, the *Form of Government*, and the *Rules of Discipline*) and are able to use them effectively in pastoral situations. The examinations encourage candidates, regardless of their personal or educational background, to familiarize themselves with the basic theology and polity of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and to relate this theology and polity to the diverse contexts of ministry in which they will be serving.

V. Strengthening the Effectiveness of the Examinations

The PCC has carefully reviewed approximately 1200 surveys that were administered to readers of ordination examinations, moderators of CPMs, ministers who have taken the ordination examinations in recent years, and candidates who have taken examinations in the past year (see Attachment B). The PCC has also reviewed more than 70 written responses from seminary representatives, CPM moderators, and ordination examination readers. The surveys and written responses provide rich material for ongoing self-evaluation by the PCC.

Overall, presbyteries affirm the examinations and the current examination process. Forty-six percent of CPM moderators surveyed, and 62-63% of ordination examination readers, agreed that successful performance on the examinations reflects readiness for ministry "to a great extent" or "to a very great extent" (only 9% of CPM moderators and 1-5% of readers said, "to a small extent" or "not at all"). Recent ordinands were generally supportive of the examinations, though less enthusiastically so: 22% saw the examinations as reflecting readiness for ministry "to a great extent" or "to a very great extent"; 42%, "to some extent."

Current candidates also offered generally positive responses when asked to what extent each examination accurately assessed their integration of academic learning and pastoral skills. Depending on the particular

examination in question, 36-47% checked, “to a great extent” or “to a very great extent”; 29-37%, “to some extent”; and only 16-21%, “to a small extent” or “not at all.”

Extensive written comments on the surveys and in communications to the self-study subcommittee reflect strong feelings about the examinations. Some respondents strongly affirm the examinations as one of the things that the denomination does best, while others sharply criticize them. Among these critics are representatives of some seminaries, who argue that the examinations are composed and graded without sufficient sensitivity to the cultural context of many racial-ethnic candidates and are therefore a poor tool for assessing readiness for ministry.

In light of these responses, the PCC has identified four areas in which the examinations can and should be strengthened: examination content and format, grading procedures, timing of when candidates take examinations, and racial-ethnic representation in the composing and grading of examinations.

A. Examination Content and Format

The PCC regularly reviews examination content and format, seeking to ensure that each examination meets the goal of asking candidates to draw on the church’s foundational documents to order to interpret and respond to pastoral situations wisely. The PCC is recommending that the current descriptions of the Open Book Bible Exegesis and Theological Competence Examinations be revised in order to align them more closely with these goals (see below: Chapter VIII, Recommendation #1 to the 218th General Assembly [2008]).

The PCC is also actively rethinking the format of the Bible Exegesis Examination. The current examination takes four and a half days, and emphasizes detailed exegetical work that at points may duplicate assessments for which a candidate’s seminary and presbytery are already responsible. The *Book of Order* requires candidates to pass Hebrew and Greek exegesis classes in seminary. Presbyteries review the candidate’s seminary transcript, including this work in Hebrew and Greek, before certifying that the candidate is ready to receive a call (G-14.0450c). In addition, candidates normally provide an exegetical paper and sermon to their presbytery (G-14.0305j in the 2005 *Book of Order*, now part of an Advisory Handbook [see 2007 *Book of Order* G-14.0402]).

In light of these seminary and presbytery requirements, the PCC believes that the Bible Exegesis Examination should be revised and perhaps shortened, and, while retaining the church’s concern for responsible exegesis, should place emphasis on the text’s application to the church and the world.

B. Grading Procedures

The examinations will be credible to candidates and the wider church only to the degree that grading is fair and reliable. The PCC must be confident that readers have adequate knowledge and training to make accurate judgments about candidates’ answers.

The PCC works with presbyteries to recruit competent readers. It prepares resource papers and provides training prior to each grading session. New technologies (such as DVD presentations about each of the examination questions) may help to improve this training.

The PCC is particularly concerned to improve the grading of the Bible Exegesis and Theological Competence Examinations, both of which presuppose a level of expertise that normally comes only through seminary training. Survey results indicate that readers feel less secure in grading these two examinations than the others; seminary representatives have also expressed concern about the grading of these two examinations. Recruitment of readers with specialized knowledge and experience in each examination area is essential, although the PCC also benefits from the insights of elder readers without specialized training who can help to judge a candidate’s ability to communicate to a general church audience.

Because the current grading format (three and a half days at a regional grading site) makes it difficult for some pastors and elders to participate who could otherwise make a vital contribution, the PCC is exploring changes to reading group schedules. New technologies may eventually allow readers to grade from home, but potential trade-

offs in doing so would have to be carefully weighed, since the current reading group process provides for an intensity of focus and mutual learning and support.

C. Timing of When Candidates Take Examinations

Because the ordination examinations focus on readiness for ministry, they presuppose that candidates:

- have completed seminary work that familiarizes them with the church's foundational documents (such as courses in the confessions, Reformed worship, and church polity)
- have sufficient practical experience in ministry to be able to relate this foundational material effectively to various kinds of pastoral situations

The PCC is recommending that current language in the *Book of Order* be revised in order to encourage presbyteries to approve candidates to take the four written ordination examinations only after they have completed adequate academic work and practical experience in these areas (see below: Chapter VIII, Recommendation #2 to the 218th General Assembly [2008]).

D. Representation of Racial-Ethnic Persons in the Composing and Grading of Examinations

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is committed to increasing the membership and the participation of different racial and ethnic groups in the denomination. Ordination examinations must be sensitive to the church's racial and ethnic diversity, including new immigrant groups, while lifting up common, church-wide standards of theology and polity.

The PCC is deeply concerned that pass rates of racial-ethnic candidates on the ordination examinations are significantly lower than those of white candidates. Pass rates of white candidates in recent years on each examination have ranged between 65% and 77%. Pass rates of other candidates have averaged between 27-54%.

The PCC has adopted several strategies to address this concern. It actively recruits people to be members of the PCC and readers who are familiar with the pastoral contexts of different racial-ethnic groups and have cultural sensitivity in the formulation and grading of examination questions. In addition, the PCC provides for translation of the examinations into Spanish and Korean, and grading of those examinations by persons competent in those languages.

The PCC will work with the General Assembly Nominating Committee, the presbyteries, and the seminaries to increase the number of racial-ethnic identify persons who serve on the PCC and as readers. Additional strategies, however, are necessary. The PCC commits itself to constituting by 2009 a panel of persons to assist the PCC in ensuring that examination questions do not have unintentional cultural biases but rather allow candidates to relate the church's foundational documents to diverse cultural contexts. The PCC also commits itself to exploring how the examinations can better serve all candidates to integrate theological, biblical knowledge with the particular pastoral contexts in which they will be serving, including racial-ethnic contexts (a point that will be more fully discussed below, in Chapters VII and VIII).

The PCC believes that the presbyteries play an especially important role in guiding racial-ethnic candidates through the examination process. First, presbyteries can interpret to all of their candidates, including racial-ethnic candidates, the examinations' significant but limited role in discerning readiness for ministry. The perspective of examination readers from the wider church must supplement, not replace, the judgment of the CPM, which knows its candidates personally. Second, the results of ordination examinations offer a presbytery an opportunity to work with its candidates to discern what further steps are most appropriate to help them to demonstrate readiness for ministry: additional seminary studies or field experience, assistance with preparation for taking the examinations, or alternate means of examination administered by the presbytery itself.

VI. A Vision for the Future of National Ordination Examinations

Issues related to racial-ethnic participation in the examinations point to deeper issues about how readiness for ministry is best discerned and by which church bodies. A key question to the PCC is: What kind of examinations will best help the church assess candidates' readiness for ministry?

In consulting with seminary faculty and students, the PCC has been concerned that many candidates see the examinations as just another hoop to jump, in what is already a long and involved road to ordination. Candidates sometimes wonder why they must take an ordination examination in an area for which they already passed a seminary course. Upon receiving their grades, candidates do not always understand readers' comments or what readers were looking for. The examinations may result in frustration rather than learning and spiritual discernment.

Imagine a different scenario: A candidate has completed basic seminary work in the foundational documents of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). He or she has extensive, supervised field experience in the church, and so has seen how biblical exegesis makes a difference for preaching; how Reformed theology and confessions inform a pastor's teaching and priorities personally and for the church; how a Reformed understanding of worship and sacraments shapes the liturgical life of a congregation; and how Presbyterian polity guides decision-making and life together in sessions, presbyteries, and the wider church.

The candidate is asked to take four written examinations. Each examination provides an opportunity for the candidate to exercise pastoral wisdom and imagination. Each asks the candidate to draw on the church's foundational documents in order to illuminate church life and to guide the decisions that pastors and congregations make.

The candidate comes to these examinations prayerfully, perhaps taking them in a church setting rather than in a seminary classroom, and beginning each examination period with worship rather than simply the distribution of examination booklets. The candidate prays not simply to pass the examinations but, more importantly, that the examinations might truly be a means by which he or she will grow in wisdom and faith. People throughout the denomination join the candidates in prayer on the days that the examinations take place.

Readers from the wider church provide an assessment of the completed examinations. Their goal is not simply to issue a grade but rather to provide insights that will enable a candidate and his or her presbytery to have an extended conversation about the candidate's readiness for ministry. The candidate values the examinations because they allow him or her to get a better sense of his or her strengths and weaknesses in pastoral ministry. The presbytery values the examinations because the readers provide a perspective from the larger church that helps the presbytery to see things about a candidate that might otherwise be overlooked or incorrectly interpreted.

The PCC now invites the church to capture this vision of the unique opportunity that ordination examinations present to candidates and their presbyteries. We invite all of the partners concerned with assessing candidates' readiness for ministry to work together for examinations and an examination process that better fulfill their promise. We call for a radical shift in thinking about the examinations, so that candidates and presbyteries alike will be able to affirm the positive role that examinations can play in strengthening pastoral leadership in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

VII. The Search for New Models

In contrast to this vision of the examinations' exciting possibilities, some respondents to the self-study subcommittee have argued that the time has come to eliminate national ordination examinations altogether, leaving the examination process solely in the hands of individual presbyteries. Other respondents have suggested that the PCC, while continuing to develop examination questions, could invite presbyteries to grade the examinations of their own candidates, aware of who they are and their personal contexts.

The PCC recognizes that the current system of nationally designed and graded examinations may tempt presbyteries to rely excessively on the judgments of readers from the wider church. Elimination of national examinations could encourage presbyteries to assume fuller responsibility for examination of their candidates. Presbyteries could tailor examinations to candidates with different backgrounds and in different contexts of ministry. Similarly, a system in which ordination examinations were nationally-designed but locally-graded could result in greater presbytery involvement in the examination process.

But elimination of national examinations could also have unintended negative consequences. The overture from San Francisco Presbytery in 1963 that led to a national system of ordination examinations noted that:

Presbyteries . . . vary widely in the level of knowledge and ability they require for ordination so that candidates for the ministry often seek a less exacting presbytery to examine them.

The wide latitude in requirements for entrance into the ordained ministry in practice shifts the burden for setting ministerial standards to the seminaries rather than the presbyteries as constitutionally provided.

Such wide latitude in entrance lowers the esteem accorded to the ministerial vocation and makes it increasingly difficult to recruit the ablest [persons] for the ministry in competition with such exacting fields as science, medicine and law.

In view of the turnover of committee personnel and the rapid expansion of skills and knowledge required in the ministry, many candidates' committees feel the need for more specific guidelines in examination standards. (Minutes of the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America [1963], Part I, p. 36)

The PCC still finds these arguments to be persuasive. We believe that the current system of national ordination examinations continues on balance to be more helpful to the church than their elimination. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is a national, interdependent church characterized by ever greater mobility of candidates and ministers from one part of the country to another and by a wide diversity of levels of academic preparation and church experience. In such a time, national ordination examinations play an important even if limited role in lifting up the church's core theology and polity. They represent the church's commitment to ordaining candidates for service to the whole church even as they minister in their particular and diverse contexts.

At the same time, the PCC affirms the wisdom in calls for the presbyteries to take the lead in assessing their candidates' readiness for ministry. Precisely because presbyteries know their candidates personally, national examinations should not replace presbyteries' judgments but rather should help to fill them out.

The ordination examinations are uniquely valuable as one place in the process of assessing readiness for ministry in which the presbytery learns from the perspectives of individuals representing the larger church. Ordination examinations resemble certifying examinations in professions like law and medicine. Or to use a different analogy: just as an attending physician may ask a partner who knows nothing about a particular patient to review the patient's charts and the attending physician's judgments, so too national ordination examinations offer a presbytery a valuable second opinion about a candidate's readiness for ministry.

Frustration may arise when the judgments of the ordination examination readers differ widely from those of the members of a candidate's CPM or his or her seminary teachers. The current process does allow a CPM to appeal a grade, but the PCC sustains such appeals only under extraordinary circumstances. A presbytery may provide alternate means of testing competence in an examination area (G-14.0472), but because this exception can come only after a candidate has twice failed to pass the national examinations, it may emotionally burden a candidate and a presbytery, especially when they together sense that the candidate has a clear call to the ministry of the

Word and Sacrament.³ The opposite situation is also possible: passing ordination examinations may actually hinder a candidate and a presbytery from asking necessary questions about whether the candidate is truly called to ordained ministry of the Word and Sacrament.

Concrete proposals for change to the examinations and examination process should come only after careful study. The current examinations and examination process have been carefully developed and refined over the years. Responses to the PCC indicate that presbyteries through their CPMs and elected readers are widely supportive of the current system. Nevertheless, more effective long-term partnerships among sessions, CPMs, presbyteries, seminaries, and the PCC are needed if the church as a whole is better to discern candidates' readiness for ministry. The time is right for the church to explore new models of assessing readiness for ministry that will help the church realize more fully the promise of national ordination examinations.

VIII. A Pilot Program

In light of these far-reaching concerns, the PCC commits itself to constituting a task force that will explore new models of national ordination examinations, so that they:

- better serve as a moment for a candidate to demonstrate integrative learning and pastoral wisdom and imagination
- more fully invest presbyteries in providing gifted members to read ordination examinations
- more fully enable racial-ethnic participation in the examinations and examination process (see above: Chapter V, Section D)

This task force will:

- a. Be appointed by the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee
- b. Have 8-12 members, with representatives of the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee, at least one Presbyterian seminary, and at least three presbyteries
- c. Study examination and certification processes in other denominations and profession
- d. Determine how national ordination examinations can better enable candidates, including racial-ethnic candidates, to relate the church's foundational documents to particular contexts of ministry
- e. Develop a pilot program in which candidates, including racial-ethnic candidates, take ordination examinations only after completion of their seminary work and a significant internship in a supervised pastoral context
- f. Report its progress to the PCC by Jan. 1, 2012

As noted throughout this report, the PCC believes that the examinations best offer an opportunity for a candidate to demonstrate integrative learning and pastoral wisdom when they take place late in one's seminary education or after seminary, and after significant supervised church experience, such as an internship. New models of examination that better achieve these goals will require the PCC, seminaries, sessions, and presbyteries to avoid imposing undue hardship on candidates. The church must ensure that candidates have adequate financial support and pastoral mentoring as they make the transition from seminary, take ordination examinations, and seek a call.

The PCC has also noted that the examination process depends vitally on the readers, who give selflessly of their time and are strongly supportive of the current system. The PCC believes that increased presbytery investment in the examinations process will further strengthen the examination process. To the degree that presbyteries capture a vision of ordination examinations as a unique moment for candidates to demonstrate integrative learning and pastoral wisdom, their candidates will also capture this vision. New models that better lift up the promise of

³ Candidates with disabilities that affect test-taking ability may also demonstrate competence in the examination areas by alternate means administered by the presbytery (G-14.0472).

national ordination examinations will require new strategies for selecting readers, organizing reading groups, and coordinating the judgments of the presbytery and those of PCC readers.

IX. Recommendations from the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates, to the 218th General Assembly (2008)

1. The Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates recommends that the 218th General Assembly (2008) approve the following descriptions of each of the ordination examinations:

(1) *Bible Content.* This examination shall assess the candidate's knowledge of the form and content of the Bible.

(2) *Open Book Bible Exegesis.* This examination shall assess the candidate's ability to interpret an assigned passage of Scripture by demonstrating attention to the original language of the text, an understanding of the text's historical context, and an ability to relate the text effectively to the contemporary life of the church in the world.

The candidate shall have access to Hebrew and Greek texts, translations, commentaries, and other exegetical tools.

(3) *Theological Competence.* This examination shall assess the candidate's capacity to make effective use of the Reformed theological heritage, including the church's confessional documents, in relating the gospel to the church and the world today.

(4) *Worship and Sacraments.* This examination shall assess the candidate's understanding of the meaning and purpose of corporate worship and the Sacraments, familiarity with the Directory for Worship and *The Book of Confessions*, and their application to the life of worshiping communities.

(5) *Church Polity.* This examination shall assess the candidate's working knowledge of the constitutional structure of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the method by which differences are properly resolved and programs to fulfill the mission of the church are determined.

Rationale

The *Book of Order* directs the General Assembly to approve descriptions of the ordination examinations (G-14.0432). The following language (formerly G-14.0310d in the *Book of Order*, until condensation of Chapter 14 in 2007) currently guides the PCC:

(1) *Open Book Bible Exegesis.* This examination shall assess the candidate's ability to find and state the meaning of an assigned passage of Scripture, demonstrating working knowledge of the original language of the text and ability to understand its historical situation.

The candidate shall have access to any or all of the following:

Hebrew and Greek texts, translations, commentaries, and other exegetical tools, including those which presuppose knowledge of the biblical languages. Using these, he or she shall be asked to state the meaning of the passage, show how he or she arrived at this interpretation, and suggest how this passage might be used in the contemporary life of the church.

(2) *Bible Content.* This examination shall assess the candidate's knowledge of the form and content of the Bible.

(3) *Theological Competence*. This examination shall assess the candidate's capacity to make effective use of the classical theological disciplines and of the confessional documents of the church in relating the gospel to the faith of the church in the contemporary world.

(4) *Worship and Sacraments*. This examination shall assess the candidate's understanding of the meaning and purpose of corporate worship and the Sacraments, familiarity with the Directory for Worship and *The Book of Confessions* and their application to the life of worshipping communities.

(5) *Church Polity*. This examination shall assess the candidate's working knowledge of the constitutional structure of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the method by which differences are properly resolved and programs to fulfill the mission of the church are determined.

The PCC suggests that:

- the description of the Bible Content Examination be placed first, since it is normally the first examination that candidates take
- the description of the Bible Exegesis Examination be revised to move the emphasis away from finding “the meaning” of the text (a term not widely used in seminaries today), to interpreting the text for the sake of the church and the world
- the description of the Theological Competence Examination be revised to remove unclear language about “the classical theological disciplines” and to emphasize that the purpose of the examination is interpretation of the church’s shared theology in the Reformed tradition, for the sake of relating the gospel to the church and the world.
- descriptions of the other examinations remain identical to those in earlier *Books of Order*

2. The Presbyteries’ Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates recommends that the 218th General Assembly (2008) approve replacing the current language of G-14.0430 by the following:

Inquirers and candidates are encouraged to take the Bible Content Examination in their first year of seminary. The other four examinations shall ordinarily be taken by inquirers or candidates only after completion of two full years of theological education, or its equivalent, and shall be taken only upon approval by the committee on preparation for ministry of the inquirer’s or candidate’s presbytery, which shall first attest that the inquirer or candidate has completed adequate academic preparation in each examination area and adequate supervised experience in the practice of pastoral ministry.

Rationale

The PCC is concerned that many candidates take the examinations before they are sufficiently prepared. Too often the result is unsatisfactory grades and unnecessary frustration with the examination process. The examinations are meant to be comprehensive and integrative, and for this reason, the PCC encourages candidates to take them together (rather than one by one at different times of year) and in the middle of the senior year of seminary or later.

The PCC, however, affirms the need for presbyteries to have flexibility in determining when candidates take the examinations, given candidates’ diverse circumstances and in order to guard against imposing undue burdens on candidates (especially in their senior year of seminary when many wish to receive a call). The *Book of Order* currently provides this flexibility in the following way:

Inquirers and candidates are encouraged to take the Bible Content Examination in their first year of seminary. The other four examinations may be taken by inquirers or candidates after completion of two full years of theological education. These four examinations shall only be taken upon approval by the committee on preparation for ministry by the inquirer's or candidate's presbytery. (G-14.0430)

The PCC believes that this language should be revised so as to retain presbytery flexibility, while emphasizing that the examinations are best taken after candidates' completion of necessary academic work and supervised ministry experience.

X. Concluding Reflections: Ordination Examinations as One Aspect of Assessing Readiness for Ministry

The self-review has reminded the PCC that readiness for ministry encompasses a host of academic and personal factors that go far beyond the parameters of the ordination examinations. But ordination examinations do play a distinct role in lifting up the significance of the church's shared legacy in the Scriptures, the *Book of Confessions*, and the *Book of Order*. The examinations help to ensure that all candidates for ministry, regardless of their personal background and their particular course of theological education, are well-grounded in these foundational documents and are able to use them effectively in pastoral situations.

The ordination examinations work from the premise that this grounding involves more than rote memory. What ministers need is a practical wisdom informed by the Bible and the constitutional documents that orient their ministry over a lifetime. Seminaries, presbyteries, sessions, and the PCC alike are committed to training ministers who will draw on this rich legacy "with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love" (W-4.4003g) to speak to the most urgent matters of faith and life in the church and the world today. The PCC trusts that its proposals will assist in realizing this goal and looks forward to advice and counsel from the wider church.

Attachment A: Summary of Pass Rates

Table I: Recent Pass Rates on All Four Examinations, When Taken Together

	August 2005	August 2006
# of exams written	1492	1623
# of individuals writing exams	540	573
# of individuals writing exams for first time	303	330
# of individuals taking all four exams	231	255
% of individuals passing all four exams	53.7%	49.8%
% of individuals taking all four exams in Aug. who passed them by Jan.	65.3%	63.0%

Table II: Average Pass Rates in Each Examination Area⁴

Bible Exegesis	62.6%
Theological Competence	63.1%

⁴ Based on the last eight years, and with variation of plus or minus ten percentage points

Worship and Sacraments	69.4%
Church Polity	70.7%

Attachment B: Summary of Survey Results

The ordination examination process of the PCUSA is of interest and concern to several key groups. The PCC implements the process. The readers who grade the examinations are elected by their presbyteries, all of which are requested to elect readers although not all do so. CPMs are prime users of the results, as are the examination-takers. As part of its self-study and with the valuable assistance of the Research Services of the GAC, the PCC surveyed all CPM moderators, readers at both the October 2006 and March 2007 reading sessions, inquirers and candidates who took the examinations in January and August 2007, and ministers of the Word and Sacrament who were ordained in 2003 and 2004. The number of returned surveys is shown in Table I.

Table I: Groups Surveyed by the PCC

Group	# of surveys sent	# of surveys returned	Response rate
CPM Moderators	192 ⁵	106	55%
October 2006 Readers ⁶	185	167	90%
March 2007 Readers ⁷	99	76	77%
January 2007 Candidates	448	203	45%
August 2007 Candidates	573	320	56%
Ordinands of 2003-2004	616 ⁸	372	64%

Responses from each group are summarized below.

CPM Moderators

Among the CPM moderators who responded, two-thirds (69%) were men and almost all (98%) were white. Eighty-five percent were ministers of the Word and Sacrament. Less than half (47%) of the CPMs had racial-ethnic members. The responding presbyteries all had inquirers or candidates who took examinations in 2006. About three in five (58%) CPMs discuss the situation of the inquirer or candidate before granting approval, while 41% automatically approve the taking of examinations if the person under care has reached a certain point in seminary study. Ninety percent of the CPMs reported offering help in preparation when requested, three-quarters offered tutoring, and 61% shared copies of old examinations.

About half of the CPM moderators (46%) judged that successful performance on the ordination examinations reflect candidates' readiness for pastoral ministry "to a very great extent" or "to a great extent." Only a quarter thought that the examinations reflect candidates' readiness for other forms of ministry to this extent.

Most of the presbyteries (92%) reviewed the results of the examinations—typically, the CPM moderator and, in 84% of the presbyteries, the CPM liaison to a particular examinee. Ninety percent of examination-takers who did not achieve a satisfactory grade indicated that a member of CPM reviewed the examination readers' comments with the inquirer or candidate and in most (70%) of the cases, advised the inquirer or candidate to "find a knowledgeable person to tutor him or her." A quarter of the CPM moderators reported that the committee

⁵ There are 173 presbyteries; this number reflects a number of co-moderators.

⁶ Reading sites in Raleigh, Pittsburgh, Oklahoma City, and San Francisco

⁷ Reading sites in Chicago and Atlanta

⁸ 39 returned as undeliverable to address of record with PCUSA

“expected the inquirer or candidate to improve his or her knowledge of the content area without the committee’s help.”

One-fifth of the presbyteries used an alternate means of examination during 2006, typically for one candidate. The most common alternate means for assessing the candidate’s competence were conducting oral examinations (77%), administering old examination questions with extended or no time limits (43%), and administering a written examination composed by the presbytery (33%).

The majority of CPM moderators (62%) thought that candidates should take the four examinations when they were partway through seminary study. Nineteen percent thought that the examinations should be taken after the completion of seminary or after a post-seminary supervised internship or licensure period.

Examination Readers

Forty-nine percent of the readers elected by their presbyteries served on their CPM, and most were white (94%). A total of 122 presbyteries (71%) provided readers to grade the examinations in either October or March. None of the readers responding to the survey were from the non-geographical presbyteries. In both groups, a high proportion (more than 80%) of the readers reported that they were motivated to serve because of their concern about the quality of future ministers, their concern for inquirers and candidates for ministry, and out of a desire to serve the denomination.

A plurality of readers (42-45%) thought that candidates should take the four examinations when they were partway through seminary study. A similar proportion (39-41%) thought that the examinations should be taken after the completion of seminary or after a post-seminary supervised internship or licensure period.

Several differences were evident between the readers elected by their presbyteries to serve in October and those elected to serve in March. In October, 72% of the readers were ministers of the Word and Sacrament and 28% were elders. Slightly more than half of the readers (55%) were men. The vast majority (94%) were white, and half (53%) served on their presbytery’s Committee on Preparation for Ministry. In March, only 57% of the readers were ministers of the Word and Sacrament; 43% were elders. Slightly more than half of the March readers (52%) were women, but only 40% served on a CPM.

This group of presbyters, who are intimately familiar with the examinations and the range of examinees’ responses, shared a strong consensus (60-75%) that the examinations, as presently structured, assess the examinees’ integration of academic learning and pastoral skills “to a very great extent” or “to a great extent.” Almost two-thirds of the October readers (63%) and half (52%) of the March readers judged that successful performance on the examinations reflect candidates’ readiness for pastoral ministry, while about a third of each group judged that performance on the examinations reflects readiness for other forms of ministry.

This difference (63% versus 52%) may be attributable to the different composition of the two reading groups with regard to gender and office. Table II shows the results when the data are disaggregated by gender and office for each of the two reading groups. In both groups, about three-fifths of the ministers agreed that the examinations assess readiness for ministry. In each group, the male elders were least likely to agree with that judgment. The two groups of female elders were quite divergent in their views. Because of the small numbers of respondents, these differences can only be regarded as suggestive.

Table II: Proportion of Readers Agreeing that the Examinations Assess Candidates’ Readiness for Pastoral Ministry “To a Very Great Extent” or “To a Great Extent”

	October		March		Pooled	
	Ministers	Elders	Ministers	Elders	Ministers	Elders
Male	<i>n</i> =80 61%	<i>n</i> =10 50%	<i>n</i> =23 65%	<i>n</i> =12 25%	<i>n</i> =103 62%	<i>n</i> =22 37%

Female	<i>n</i> =39 62%	<i>n</i> =36 75%	<i>n</i> =17 53%	<i>n</i> =20 45%	<i>n</i> =56 59%	<i>n</i> =56 64%
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Examination Candidates

Slightly over half of the responding examinees in both January and August 2007 were women (52%-54%); 85% of both groups were white, and 9% of the January group and 6% of the August group were African American. The median age of the January examinees was 42; the August group was slightly younger, with a median age of 38. Forty-five percent of the January group and 49% of the August group were in their third year of seminary and about two out of every five examinees had already graduated from seminary. Examinees from over three-quarters of the presbyteries (133) responded to the survey.

The majority of the responding examinees were satisfied with the timing of the examinations in August and January, and with the registration process.⁹ However, in open-ended comments, there were many pleas that the examinations be offered more than twice a year, as well as a number of comments about the cost of the examinations.

The examinees brought a variety of learning experiences to the examinations (Table III). Surprisingly, a small proportion had no seminary classroom experience in the areas in which they were being examined. Similar proportions of the examinees did not have field education, an internship, or leadership in their home congregation to provide them practical church experience. Although the examinations seek to assess the integration of classroom knowledge with its application in the life of the church, a small but non-trivial proportion of the examinees appears not to have both kinds of learning experiences before attempting the examinations.

Table III: Percent of Examinees Who Had Certain Learning Experiences Prior to Taking Each Ordination Examination

	Biblical Exegesis		Theological Competence		Worship & Sacraments		Church Polity	
	Jan	Aug	Jan	Aug	Jan	Aug	Jan	Aug
Seminary class or classes	89%	96%	93%	96%	86%	88%	87%	89%
Field education or internship	84%	84%	90%	86%	92%	86%	89%	86%
Leadership in home congregation	77%	81%	81%	86%	82%	86%	79%	85%
Clinical Pastoral Education	43%	55%	45%	59%	43%	56%	48%	56%

Table IV reports the degree to which particular learning experiences were helpful to candidates in preparation for each examination.

Table IV: Percent of Examinees Who Perceived a Particular Learning Experience as “Very Helpful” or “Helpful” Preparation for Each Examination

⁹ In order to serve candidates even better, the PCC is working toward using computer technology to allow candidates to register for examinations on-line and receive their grades quickly. This technology will also allow the PCC to increase the number of times it offers the Bible Content Examination each year.

	Biblical Exegesis		Theological Competence		Worship & Sacraments		Church Polity	
	Jan	Aug	Jan	Aug	Jan	Aug	Jan	Aug
Seminary class or classes	94%	93%	90%	93%	84%	91%	87%	92%
Field education or internship	64%	75%	80%	83%	88%	91%	79%	77%
Leadership in home congregation	59%	72%	79%	81%	78%	90%	79%	84%
Clinical Pastoral Education	46%	63%	61%	69%	54%	64%	45%	36%

In addition to these learning experiences, examinees were asked about other methods of preparing for the examinations. Table V shows that virtually everyone prayed, and 80% or more reviewed previous examinations. About two-thirds of the examinees talked with a student who had taken the examinations, and similar proportions reviewed their class notes. About half of the examinees consulted with a professor or a pastor as they prepared to take the examinations. Only about one-fifth consulted with a CPM member as they prepared. The August candidates were somewhat more likely than the January candidates to study with other students or to participate in a seminary-sponsored review course. A high proportion of examinees taking the three examinations that require use of the *Constitution* of the PCUSA did read it in preparation.

Table V: Percent of Examinees Using Various Methods of Preparation for the Ordination Examinations

	Biblical Exegesis		Theological Competence		Worship & Sacraments		Church Polity	
	Jan	Aug	Jan	Aug	Jan	Aug	Jan	Aug
Prayed	98%	99%	100%	99%	100%	97%	99%	98%
Reviewed previous examinations	80%	85%	87%	95%	87%	92%	86%	92%
Consulted a student who has taken the exam	65%	67%	70%	74%	66%	70%	64%	67%
Consulted class notes	62%	76%	68%	76%	57%	66%	62%	72%
Read the PCUSA <i>Constitution</i>	53%	63%	89%	88%	91%	93%	96%	96%
Consulted with a professor	44%	55%	46%	57%	42%	51%	44%	48%
Consulted with a pastor or minister	39%	42%	58%	54%	58%	53%	60%	51%
Studied with other students	29%	41%	43%	56%	40%	53%	44%	52%
Took a seminary-sponsored review course	29%	42%	35%	43%	35%	42%	41%	42%
Reviewed with a CPM member	16%	20%	25%	21%	18%	20%	18%	22%

Responses to the question of how well the examinations assessed the integration of academic learning and pastoral skills (Table VI) varied considerably among the four examinations and between the January and August examinees.

Table VI: Percent of Examinees Who Think that Each Examination Assesses the Integration of Academic Learning and Pastoral Skills to a “Great” or “Very Great Extent”

	January	August	Pooled
Biblical Exegesis	36%	40%	38%
Theological Competence	38%	48%	44%
Worship & Sacraments	47%	55%	52%
Church Polity	39%	55%	49%

Approximately half of the examinees thought that the Worship and Sacraments and Church Polity Examinations assessed the integration of academic learning and pastoral skills “to a great extent” or “to a very great extent.”

Only about two-fifths of the examinees felt that the Biblical Exegesis and Theological Competence Examinations were this successful in assessing the integration of academic and pastoral skills.

Recent Ordinands

In an effort to understand how the examination process was perceived after beginning ministry, a survey was sent to those ordained to the ministry of the Word and Sacrament in the PCUSA in 2003 or 2004. The respondents were divided fairly evenly between women (47%) and men (53%). Eleven percent were under age 30 when they responded, 41% were between 30 and 40, 18% were between 41 and 50, and 29% were older than 50. Four percent identified themselves as Asian/Pacific Islanders, 2% as Latino, and 2% as African-American, while 92% were white.

The proportion of ministers who had to repeat an ordination examination varied among the four examinations: 24% of the respondents had repeated the Bible Exegesis Examination; a similar percentage repeated Theology; 18% repeated Church Polity, while 15% repeated Worship and Sacraments. For each examination, one percent or less of the respondents took the examination in either Korean or Spanish. For each examination area, four percent or fewer of the recent ordinands demonstrated competence through alternate means.

When asked the extent to which preparation for and taking the ordination examinations were helpful to their current ministry, 63% reported that the Worship and Sacraments Examination was “helpful” or “very helpful.” About the same proportion (60%) found the Polity Examination to be helpful to the same extent. The proportions were lower for Theology (55%) and for Biblical Exegesis (49%). This last figure may relate to many respondents’ open-ended comments that ministers, when they prepare sermons today, rarely consult the Scriptures in Greek or Hebrew. These respondents question the continued requirements both to study and to be examined on the biblical languages.

When asked the extent to which the examinations assessed the integration of academic learning and pastoral skills, the greatest number (38-42%) responded that each examination did so “to some extent.” Similar proportions (36-44%) responded that each examination did so “to a great extent” or “to a very great extent.” Twenty-two percent of the respondents thought that successful performance on the examinations reflected readiness for pastoral ministry “to a great extent” or “to a very great extent.” Only 11% made this same judgment regarding readiness for other ministry.

Forty-two percent of the respondents thought that candidates should take the four examinations “partway through seminary study.” Thirty-two percent indicated that the examinations should be taken after completing seminary or following a post-seminary internship or licensure period. A variety of other responses ranged from “not at all” to “when they’ve taken the appropriate seminary course” to “whenever they feel prepared.”

Differences among the Groups

Each of the four surveys had somewhat different emphases; consequently, data on particular questions are not available for all four groups. It is, however, helpful to compare cross-group data where they are available. Table VII presents the proportion of the combined groups of readers, the current candidates, and the recent ordinands who judged each of the examinations to assess the integration of academic learning and pastoral skills “to a very great extent” or “to a great extent.”

The most striking difference is between those who grade the examinations, where a majority judge each examination to assess the desired integration “to a great extent” or “to a very great extent,” and those who have just taken the examinations or took them within the past decade. How might this difference be explained? Readers’ experience in seeing a wide range of responses to the examination questions may lead them to view the examinations as successfully differentiating candidates’ ability to integrate academic learning and pastoral experience. By contrast, the candidates and recent ordinands have only their own experience to go by.

Table VII: Proportion of Respondents Judging that a Particular Examination

Assessed the Integration of Academic Learning and Pastoral Skills to a
“Very Great Extent” or to a “Great Extent”

	Pooled Readers	Pooled Examinees	Recent Ordinands
Biblical Exegesis	70%	38%	36%
Theological Competence	74%	44%	38%
Worship & Sacraments	71%	52%	44%
Church Polity	71%	49%	43%

Table VIII shows that recently ordained ministers are the most skeptical about the relationship of successful performance on the examinations and readiness to begin ministry. By contrast, almost two-thirds of the readers think that successful performance on the examinations reflects readiness for pastoral ministry.

All groups recognize that the examinations are not indicative of readiness to begin other forms of ministry. Readers and CPM moderators may recognize that the examinations cover only a limited scope of demands on ministers but feel that the examinations nevertheless reflect competence within those limits reasonably well.

Table VIII: Proportion of Respondents Judging that Successful Performance on the Four Ordination Examinations Reflected Readiness for Ministry to a “Great” or “Very Great Extent”

Readiness for:	CPM Moderators	Pooled Readers	Recent Ordinands
Pastoral ministry	46%	63%	22%
Other ministry	25%	34%	11%

Table IX reflects views about when the examinations should be taken. The differences may reflect the goal of CPM moderators to help candidates get through the process and receive a call, while a substantial portion of the readers and the recently ordained ministers recognize that candidates’ performance on the examinations would be better after the completion of course work or more experience in the ongoing life of a congregation.

Table IX: The Stage of the Preparation Process When the Examinations Should Be Taken

	CPM Moderators	Pooled Readers	Recent Ordinands
Mid-Seminary	62%	43%	42%
After seminary or internship	19%	40%	32%
At another time	3%	13%	17%

Clearly, one’s perception of the national ordination examinations is shaped by one’s role in the preparation process and by the experiences that one has had. Overall there is recognition of the important, though limited, role that the examinations play in the care and preparation process.