



## **GUIDELINES FOR ECCLESIASTICAL ENDORSEMENT**

**For CRCNA Chaplains**

Christian Reformed Church in North America  
Chaplaincy and Care Ministry  
1700 28<sup>th</sup> Street SE  
Grand Rapids, MI 49508-1407  
(616) 224-0844 – USA  
(616) 224-0834 – Fax  
800-730-3490 – Canada  
[www.crcna.org/chaplaincy](http://www.crcna.org/chaplaincy)

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## I. CHAPLAINCY AND CARE MINISTRY

Chaplaincy and Care Ministry (CCM) endorses exceptional, well-trained ministers of the Word or commissioned pastors who serve in specialized ministries beyond the walls of the church. Chaplains are ordained, gifted and trained, called by the church, and sent by Jesus Christ to provide spiritual care to people in pain or spiritual distress.

The Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) requires chaplains to meet two requirements. First, all pastors serving in chaplaincy positions (paid full time or significant part time) must be endorsed [*Acts of Synod 1998-Article 44, I.C. 3.a., page 391*]. Second, endorsement is an ongoing process that is renewed every five years.

CCM provides endorsement for chaplains through assessment, training, and supervision of chaplains' ministries. Many institutions and organizations require ecclesiastical endorsement, as it indicates that a chaplain has the education, certification, and experience to represent and be held accountable by their faith group. CCM also provides provisional endorsements or candidate recommendations to assist future chaplains in meeting vocational or educational requirements. Those who are interested in chaplaincy through the CRCNA should apply.

Chaplaincy ministries have a wide range of settings such as:

- Active Duty Military
- Agency/Community
- Behavioral health
- Certified Educator for CPE
- Corrections
- Hospice
- Hospital
- Long term care
- Mental health
- Parish
- Pastoral counselor
- Veterans Affairs
- Workplace/Industrial community

## II. EVIDENCE OF CALL

### A. Ordination

In the process leading to ordination as minister of the Word or commissioned pastor, the church seeks assurance that the prospective pastor is fit for ministry. The church supervises one's doctrine, life, and preparation for ministry. A local church acknowledges one's individual gifts and desire for ministry with a call letter, which is generally confirmed by a thorough examination at a regional meeting (classis) of CRCNA church delegates. Requirements for ordination are established by the CRCNA [Candidacy Committee](#).

### B. Chaplaincy

In the process leading to endorsement for chaplaincy, the church seeks assurance that the prospective chaplain is fit for specialized ministry. The church ensures that the chaplain's ministry will be consistent with their call to serve as minister of the Word or commissioned pastor, also seeking evidence of the chaplain's suitability to provide pastoral ministry, care,

and counsel in a specialized setting.

One's call to chaplaincy is confirmed when:

- The chaplain begins the endorsement process with CCM
- An interview is conducted with members of the Advisory Committee
- An employing agency/institution invites a person to serve as chaplain
- A local congregation agrees to call the person to chaplaincy
- The job description has been reviewed by the calling church and by CCM
- Classis approves this call as a valid expression of ministry (with concurrence of the Synodical Deputies if necessary)
- An ordination/installation service is held
- A Covenant of Joint Supervision is signed by chaplain, church council, and CCM
- CCM issues an official Letter of Ecclesiastical Endorsement (with possible provisions if some requirements are still pending)

### III. WHAT IS ECCLESIASTICAL ENDORSEMENT?

According to the Association of Religious Endorsing Bodies (Nov. 2010), ecclesiastical endorsement is an official declaration by a recognized faith community/tradition that a person meets its standards to serve in a specialized ministry setting of chaplaincy, counseling, or clinical education.

CRCNA endorsement addresses the following core standards through a process of written papers, interviews and mutual discernment:

- Ministerial and theological competence
- CRCNA membership in good standing and accountability
- Ability to work collegial in diverse and pluralistic environments
- Willingness to adhere to the codes of ethics prescribed by the CRCNA
- Continuing spiritual formation and review
- Academic and clinical education

Endorsement is an exclusive covenant relationship between the CRCNA and the endorsee. The CRCNA pledges to provide support and discernment to those seeking to enter pastoral care ministry as well as guidance, support and supervision to those who serve in these ministries. The endorsee agrees to ongoing participation in the life of their faith community and to maintain communication and accountability to the CRCNA. Endorsement requires renewal every five years.

### IV. RATIONALE FOR ENDORSEMENT

#### A. **It secures chaplaincy as a valid ministry of the church.**

Denominational endorsement is a reminder that although chaplains usually serve *away* from the church, they never provide ministry *apart* from the church. Chaplains are endorsed to extend the church's ministry, not their own.

- B. It confirms a chaplain's sense of being called to specialized ministry.**  
 Formal recognition by the church assures the individual that they have met the required standards for theological and pastoral competence expected of those planning to serve in a specialized setting.
- C. It expresses ongoing ecclesiastical supervision.**  
 Endorsement is an indicator that a chaplain has the education, certification, training, and experience to represent the CRCNA and in this capacity is held accountable by the CRCNA.
- D. It is required by most agencies and institutions that employ chaplains.**  
 Prospective military chaplains in the Canadian Armed Forces, United States Army, Navy and Air Force must submit their denominational endorsement form (DD-2088) before they can initiate their application for appointment as a reserve or active duty chaplain. The Federal Bureau of Prisons, Veterans Affairs, and most other employing agencies also require proof of ecclesiastical endorsement prior to offering a contract to a prospective chaplain. Most hospitals require endorsement or assume it as a pre-requisite for national credentialing. Other institutions may also require chaplains to be endorsed.
- E. It is a prerequisite for certification by professional chaplain organizations, such as:**
- AAPC – American Association of Pastoral Counselors
  - ACPE – Association of Clinical Pastoral Education
  - APC – Association of Professional Chaplains
  - CASC – Canadian Association for Spiritual Care
  - HCMA – Healthcare Chaplains Ministry Association
  - CPSP – College of Pastoral Supervision and Psychology

## **V. STANDARDS**

In granting ecclesiastical endorsement to persons seeking to serve in chaplaincy, the church seeks assurance that the candidate meets minimum standards in the following categories:

- Education and specialized training
  - Demonstrated competence in prior ministry settings
  - Documented experience in a specialized ministry track
  - Completion of CRCNA endorsement process
  - Professional credentials (in many, but not all, cases)
- A. Standards for civilian chaplains:**
1. Graduation from an accredited college/university and seminary/graduate degree in pastoral care or theology. Chaplains ordained through Church Order Articles 6 or 8 (minister of the Word) require a Master of Divinity (normally 72 hours). Chaplains ordained through Church Order Articles 7 or 23 (commissioned pastor) should possess a Master's degree and significant alternate training and/or experience.

2. Ordination as clergy, minister of the Word, or commissioned pastor in good standing in the CRCNA
3. A commitment to continued pastoral education
4. Two years of ministry experience is preferred
5. Minimum two units of CPE (800 supervised hours) completed. On rare occasion, well-documented equivalencies may be allowed for one unit.
6. Pursuit of certification by an approved professional chaplaincy organization is preferred

**B. Standards for military chaplains:**

1. Meet standards for civilian chaplains (CPE may not be required)
2. Citizenship in the country they wish to serve (United States or Canada)
3. Age and physical qualifications for general service based on military examination
3. Theological training (72 hour M.Div.) and ordination in the CRCNA
4. Significant ordained ministry experience before applying to military chaplain corps (Two years of full-time parish or pastoral ministry required for active duty)

**C. Standards for military chaplain candidates (in training):**

1. Member in good standing in the CRCNA
2. Enrollment in an accredited seminary M.Div. or other process that leads to full ordination and endorsement
3. Able to meet all requirements of the specific military organization for which they seek ecclesiastical approval

## **VI. LEVELS OF RECOGNITION**

Letters of Endorsement issued by CCM will fall into one of the following three categories:

**A. Student or Candidate Recommendation**

1. For clergy and students seeking to enroll in CPE programs and other extended specialized training programs that require a letter of support for participation
2. For qualified seminarians who seek acceptance into the short-term military chaplain candidate programs offered by the Canadian Armed Forces, United States Army, Navy, or Air Force
3. Time limited, and valid only for duration of the training program
4. Will require updated application for full endorsement

**B. Provisional Endorsement**

1. For prospective chaplains needing a Letter of Endorsement as part of their application for employment
2. For those meeting most, but not all, core training standards.
3. Time limited and ministry specific, and will be withdrawn if training requirements are not fulfilled.

**C. Full Endorsement**

1. For ordained ministers of the Word or commissioned pastors with theological

- education and demonstrated competence in a specialized field
2. For those who have completed a minimum of two units of CPE (This may not apply to military chaplains)
  3. Encouragement to pursue continuing education and to seek membership and/or full certification through a professional chaplaincy organization

## VII. EQUIVALENCES

In unique situations, careful consideration will be given to requests for approval of equivalencies for training, ministry experience, and professional credentials. Such requests will be considered by the CCM Advisory Committee on a case-by-case basis. Candidates seeking equivalency will need to demonstrate that their training, education, experience, and credentials are equivalent to the standards described.

## VIII. ACCOUNTABILITY AND SUPERVISION

- A. Chaplains are involved in the following levels of accountability and supervision:
  1. By their calling church and CCM
  2. By their employing agency or institution
  3. By their professional certifying organization (when applicable)
- B. Continuation of ecclesiastical endorsement is dependent upon:
  1. Maintenance of good standing as a member/minister in the CRCNA
  2. Meeting conditions stipulated in a provisional endorsement
  3. Submission of an annual ministry report (including employer's job review) to the chaplain's calling church and CCM
  4. Formulation and adherence to a Covenant of Joint Supervision with a calling church, to be renewed every five years
  5. Satisfactory ministry reviews every five years
- C. If the chaplain's church, school, or employer notifies CCM of proven ethical, moral or legal violations, ecclesiastical endorsement will be reviewed, resulting in suspension or withdrawal.

## IX. ENDORSEMENT PROCESS

- A. **Application:** This includes providing an application form, three references, evidence of CPE units completed, and meeting other requirements outlined in the endorsement checklist. The endorsement checklist and other documents are available on-line at the CRCNA website <https://www.crcna.org/chaplaincy>.
- B. **Interview:** This will be scheduled by CCM and will involve members of the Chaplaincy Ministry Advisory Council.
- C. **Approval:** CCM will issue an official Letter of Ecclesiastical Endorsement (with possible provisions). If the applicant's request is denied, CCM will assist them in making

appropriate plans for seeking future approval of their request.

- D. **Mentor:** The CRCNA requires that all newly ordained ministers of the Word and commissioned pastors have a mentor for the first five years of their ministry. It is the responsibility of the newly ordained chaplain to choose a mentor, though the Regional Pastor of the chaplain's classis should be able to help with this process. When a mentor is found, the chaplain must inform CCM and CRCNA Pastor Church Resources.

## **X. TRAINING SUPPORT GRANTS**

Training support funds are available to prospective chaplains for specialized ministry training. Those in need of assistance may fill out the Application for Chaplaincy Training Support. Training support grants must be approved by the Advisory Committee. If financial assistance is provided, the recipient agrees to serve for a minimum of three years as an endorsed chaplain in an approved ministry setting. If the recipient opts out of chaplaincy ministry, they must repay the full amount commencing six months after the completion of their training program. Exceptions may be made at the discretion of the director of CCM and must be paid in full within ten years of receiving funds.

## **XI. CONFIRMING YOUR CALL TO CHAPLAINCY**

When you receive appointment as a chaplain, please meet with your prospective calling church council and provide them with a brief narrative of your journey into ministry, your job description, and a proposed Covenant of Joint Supervision (template can be found on our [website](#)). If they agree to serve as your calling church, the church council should compose a letter of call for classical approval (with the concurrence of the Synodical Deputies, when appropriate). A copy of classis' approval and the letter of call should be sent to the office of CCM. The final step is to complete the Covenant of Joint Supervision. This should be written and signed by the chaplain and a church council member before being sent to CCM. Copies with all required signatures will be sent by CCM to appropriate classical functionaries. Following classical approval, an appropriate service of installation should be planned (If this is done in conjunction with your ordination, please send the name of your mentor, a copy of your ordination service, and other documentation to the office of CCM).