

Education and Candidacy

Chair: Rev. Aaron Greydanus
Reporter: Rev. Matthew Haan

III. Candidacy Committee

A. Materials

1. Candidacy Committee Report, pp. 225-241
2. Candidacy Committee Supplement Report

B. Privilege of the Floor: Susan LaClear, director of Candidacy, and to an additional member of the Candidacy Committee, if one is present.

C. Recommendations

1. That synod adopt the proposed revisions to the Church Order Supplement, Article 24-a and 24-b and the corresponding changes to the Commissioned Pastor Handbook.

Note: Proposed additions are indicated by underline, and proposed deletions are indicated by ~~striketrough~~.

B. Changes to the Commissioned Pastor Handbook

We propose that the text on pages 11-13 of the Commissioned Pastor Handbook be changed as follows (with additions indicated by underline and deletions by ~~striketrough~~):

Synodically approved rules for Article 24-a

There are three scenarios in which an individual who is already ordained as a commissioned pastor may be called to serve as a lead or solo pastor in an established church through the use of Church Order Article 24-a:

1. Commissioned pastors who are planting a church may continue to serve for “a reasonable period of transition” after the church becomes an organized congregation.
2. Commissioned pastors who serve in an organized church alongside a minister of the Word may, in exceptional circumstances, move into the senior/solo role if the minister of the Word leaves.
3. In unique ministry contexts a commissioned pastor may be called to serve in an organized congregation.

Regarding scenario 1 above:

Ordinarily, the office of commissioned pastors who serve in emerging congregations will terminate when a group of believers becomes an organized church. However, upon organization and with the approval of the newly formed council and the classis, commissioned pastors may continue to serve the newly organized church until an ordained minister of the Word is installed or until they have served the newly organized church for a reasonable period of transition. If the newly organized church desires to call the commissioned pastor to remain in this position beyond that period of transition, the commissioned pastor shall begin the process of Article 24-b “bridge ordination.” ~~Commissioned pastors who continue to serve a newly organized congregation beyond this reasonable period of transition must seek the permission of classis with the concurrence of the synodical deputies.~~

Regarding scenario 2 above:

Commissioned pastors may also serve in organized congregations along with a minister of the Word and may serve as chaplains in institutional settings in the community. Commissioned pastors who have served an organized congregation along with a minister of the Word may, in exceptional circumstances, with the approval of classis and the concurrence of synodical deputies, continue serving that congregation as a solo pastor after the minister of the Word has left. In this scenario, the commissioned pastor shall begin the process of Article 24-b “bridge ordination.”

Regarding scenario 3 above:

Commissioned pastors may be called to serve as solo pastors in organized congregations if the classis, with concurring advice of synodical deputies, ascertains that ~~such congregations are from a ministry context where the standards for pastoral preparation required by Articles 6, 7, or 8 are not presently practical possible for one of the following reasons:~~

(a) The prescribed training is not offered in a language spoken by the commissioned pastor.

(b) The context is one that ~~The ministry context is ordinarily one in which cultural differences (e.g., ethnic, social, economic, educational, language) between the congregation and its ministry context on the one hand, and the dominant culture of the denomination as expressed in the seminary, other leadership development entities, and broader denominational life on the other hand~~ (a) presents significant obstacles to raising up Indigenous leadership in ways that are sustainable by the respective congregations and communities, and (b) have this has resulted in limited- or non-availability of competent Indigenous leaders trained for ministry via one of the prescribed routes for ministry of the Word.

It is obvious that great wisdom is needed in decisions regarding approval of a commissioned pastor for service as a solo or lead pastor in an organized congregation. In all three scenarios above, the deliberation of classis and the advice of synodical deputies are required. Terms used in these statements of synod have a purposeful flexibility allowing for a contextual decision.

The calling church and classis should take into account the weight of balancing ministry and study simultaneously and extend grace in its expectations regarding the length of time it may take a commissioned pastor to complete the prescribed theological education for ordination as Minister of the Word. Terms may be renewed upon demonstration of accountable progress, and that progress may be slow and gradual, if deemed appropriate.

A commissioned pastor who is called to serve in a solo or lead role in an organized church must meet the approval of classis and the concurrence of synodical deputies, who shall be present at the examination.

We propose that the text on pages 19- 20 of the Commissioned Pastor Handbook, be changed as follows:

The Candidacy Committee pondered this matter and proposed the following guideline, approved by synod: “At some point prior to any examination for ordination of a commissioned pastor being considered for a solo pastor position in an emerging or organized church, the classis must ascertain that a learning plan has been

approved by the classis and agreed to by the Candidacy Committee, and synodical deputies must affirm through a written report that such approvals have taken place” (Acts of Synod 2017, p. 689).

~~Note also that the nature of the role of synodical deputies in this process is limited. A classis acts only to affirm that they have evidence that a learning plan has been formed and carried out in consultation with the Candidacy Committee. The synodical deputies concur only that such an action has taken place. In such cases, synodical deputies shall concur with classis on (a) the use of Article 24, (b) the job description of the commissioned pastor, and (c) the examination of the commissioned pastor candidate. It is conceivable, and likely, that such concurrence for the use and job description could be done via email and that the physical presence of the deputies at the classis meeting would be necessary only for concurrence on the examination, is not required. The concurrence of synodical deputies is intended to build broader confidence and provide consistent standards for examinations of persons serving in solo/lead roles. The task of synodical deputy concurrence with the classis judgment of fitness for ministry is not required because commissioned pastors, as locally ordained servants, serve under the authority of the local classis, not the denomination.~~

Grounds:

- a. Grounds for the proposed changes to Church Order Supplement, Articles 24-a and 24-b also apply to these proposed changes to the Commissioned Pastor Handbook.
- b. Since Calvin Theological Seminary’s M.Div. and EPMC programs are available in distance learning format, it seems that in almost all of the “exceptional scenarios” listed in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook an encouragement should be added for the individual to move toward Article 24-b “bridge ordination.” The barriers of language and of very specific cultural contexts (scenario 3) would remain an exception.
- c. Synodical deputy concurrence is appropriate because of the significance of the role of a solo/lead pastor role in an organized church for the wider denomination (cf. Supplement, CO Art. 45, b. 2).
- d. Concurrence affirms and anticipates an increasing engagement with the denomination as laid out in the learning plan.

2. The requirement to begin the process of article 24b “bridge ordination” is intended to apply only to commissioned pastors entering new article 24 calls, and not to those who are already serving in solo/lead roles in an organized church.

3. That synod affirm the process recommended by the Candidacy Committee for congregations to hire unordained individuals as temporary stated supply when no ordained candidate can be found to fill their solo/lead pastoral position (section VI).