



Christian Reformed Church  
**Chaplaincy and  
Care Ministry**

**GUIDELINES FOR  
ECCLESIASTICAL ENDORSEMENT, CALLING, AND  
JOINT SUPERVISION OF CHAPLAINS**

**Christian Reformed Church in North America**

**Chaplaincy and Care Ministry**

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# Guidelines For Ecclesiastical Endorsement

## I. CHAPLAINCY AND CARE MINISTRY

Chaplaincy and Care Ministry (CCM) endorses 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.

Some of these specialized ministries include 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

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](#).

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:

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

## Guidelines For Ecclesiastical Endorsement

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 monitoring of chaplains' ministries. This process is significant because it allows the church to more closely follow and support the chaplain's life, ministry, and doctrine, and to withdraw endorsement should a chaplain no longer meet the standards required of CRC ministry professionals. CCM and the calling church provide joint ecclesiastical supervision for those called to chaplaincy ministry.

### II. JOINT ECCLESIASTICAL SUPERVISION AND ECCLESIASTICAL ENDORSEMENT

Joint ecclesiastical supervision should be intentional and meaningful for the calling church, the chaplain, and CCM. Cooperation and mutual accountability between the calling church and CCM will ensure that chaplains are supported as persons ordained by the church, and are a genuine extension of the church's ministry. 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. Therefore, if the chaplain's church, school, professional association, or employer notifies CCM of proven ethical, moral or legal violations, ecclesiastical endorsement will be reviewed with the possibility of suspension or withdrawal of endorsement.

Endorsed 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)

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](#) to the chaplain's calling church and CCM
4. Formulation and adherence to a [Covenant of Joint Supervision](#) (CJS) with a calling church, to be renewed every five years
5. Ministry review and renewal every five years

The Church Order reflects decisions made by synod regarding the need for the church to attend to relationships with their chaplains through joint supervision. The Church Order provisions are:

- The prospective chaplain initiates, engages, and works with CCM to achieve endorsement
- The local church calls and ordains men and women to chaplain ministry (Church Order Articles 12-b, 12-c, 23-c)
- The calling church's council assumes responsibilities in the calling process: in securing the approval of classis for the new chaplain position, in obtaining an endorsement from CCM, and in the ecclesiastical supervision process (Church Order Article 13-b and Church Order Supplement 12-c)
- The calling church will seek the assistance and counsel of CCM at the beginning of the

## Guidelines For Ecclesiastical Endorsement

calling process and maintain contact during the process of joint supervision (Church Order Supplement, Article 12-b, 12-c and the synodical rules related to the calling of chaplains as adopted by Synod 1998, [Acts of Synod 1998, pp. 391-92])

- The calling church council, the chaplain, and CCM will make a Covenant of Joint Supervision (CJS) clearly outlining the responsibilities, communication requirements, and reporting procedures that will be used in the joint supervision of the chaplain. This covenant will be reviewed every five years to ensure continuity in the supervision of ministry
- If the chaplain position is routine or has previously been approved, as determined by classes and CCM, then concurrence of the synodical deputies is not needed for the chaplaincy position. However, if the chaplaincy position is not commonly understood to involve traditional chaplaincy ministry, synodical deputies will need to concur in the approval of the position as being consistent with the ministry of the Word (Manual of the Christian Reformed Church Government, Commentary Article 12-b)
- Church visitors are tasked to inquire if the calling church supervises and maintains contact with ministers in specialized settings
- CCM requires all newly endorsed chaplains, including commissioned pastors, to have a mentor for the first five years of their chaplain ministry. It is the responsibility of the newly ordained person to choose that mentor, though the regional pastor of the classis in which the ordination occurs should guide and monitor the process. CCM may assist the regional pastor in this process

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.

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 meeting 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 collegially 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.

## Guidelines For Ecclesiastical Endorsement

*Endorsement confirms a chaplain's sense of being called to specialized ministry.* Formal recognition by the church assures the individual that he or she has met the required standards for theological and pastoral competence expected of those planning to serve in a specialized setting. It also means that the individual has the education, certification, training, and experience to represent the CRCNA and in this capacity is held accountable by the CRCNA.

*Endorsement is required by numerous institutions and organizations.* Prospective military chaplains in the 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 Canadian Armed Forces also require a similar endorsement. 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 prerequisite for national credentialing. Other institutions may also require chaplains to be endorsed.

*Endorsement is required 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

#### **IV. REQUIREMENTS FOR ENDORSEMENT**

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)

##### **Requirements 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. Professing member in good and regular standing in a CRC church
3. Ordination, or eligible for ordination, as clergy, minister of the Word, or commissioned pastor in the CRCNA. Those who are not currently ordained may

## Guidelines For Ecclesiastical Endorsement

inquire with the CRCNA [Candidacy Committee](#) about status and required steps for ordination

4. Minimum of two units of CPE/SPE (800 supervised hours) completed. 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
5. A commitment to continued pastoral education
6. Two years of ministry experience is preferred
7. Pursuit of certification by an approved professional chaplaincy organization is preferred

### Requirements for Military Chaplains:

1. Meet standards for civilian chaplains with the exception that CPE/SPE is recommended
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
4. Theological training (72 hour MDiv) and current ordination in the CRCNA
5. Significant ordained ministry experience before applying to military chaplain corps (Two years of full-time parish or pastoral ministry required for active duty)

### Requirements for Military Chaplain Candidates (In Seminary):

1. Member in good standing in the CRCNA
2. Enrollment in an accredited seminary MDiv program. 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

## V. LEVELS OF RECOGNITION

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

### Student or Candidate Recommendation

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

### Provisional Endorsement

## Guidelines For Ecclesiastical Endorsement

- For prospective chaplains needing a Letter of Endorsement as part of their application for employment
- For prospective chaplains needing a Letter of Endorsement as part of their call/ordination/installation process
- Time limited and ministry specific
- For previously CCM endorsed commissioned pastors who have changed employers or who are seeking new employment

### Full Endorsement

- For ordained ministers of the Word or commissioned pastors with theological education and demonstrated competence in a specialized field
- For those who have completed a minimum of two units of CPE/SPE (This may not apply to military chaplains)
- Encouragement to pursue continuing education and to seek membership and/or full certification through a professional chaplaincy organization

## VI. ENDORSEMENT PROCESS WITH CHAPLAINCY AND CARE MINISTRY

- Contact:** Prospective chaplains should contact CCM Ministry Endorser, Rev. Tim Rietkerk, [trietkerk@crcna.org](mailto:trietkerk@crcna.org), to schedule an appointment to review the application process.
- Application:** This includes the online application, three letters of reference, evidence of CPE units completed, and meeting other requirements outlined in the endorsement checklist at the end of this document.
- Application Review and Interview Prep Meeting:** CCM Ministry Endorser, Rev. Tim Rietkerk will schedule this when all application requirements have been met.
- Interview:** This will be scheduled by CCM and will involve members of the Chaplaincy Ministry Advisory Council.
- 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.
- 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.

## Guidelines For Ecclesiastical Endorsement

### VII. CONFIRMING THE CALL TO CHAPLAINCY

- A. Chaplain applicants for full endorsement should contact a prospective calling church council and provide them with:
1. A brief narrative of the journey into ministry
  2. Job description
  3. A proposed [Covenant of Joint Supervision](#)
- B. If the council agrees to serve as the calling church, the church council should do the following actions:
1. Contact the CCM Endorser, Rev. Tim Rietkerk, [rietkerk@crcna.org](mailto:rietkerk@crcna.org) to seek assistance and counsel at the beginning of the calling process and joint supervision.
  2. Compose a letter of call for classical approval (with the concurrence of the Synodical Deputies, when appropriate).
  3. Provide a copy of classis' approval and the letter of call to the office of CCM.
  4. 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).
  5. Following classical approval, an [appropriate service of installation](#) should be planned (If this is done in conjunction with ordination, please send the name of the mentor, a copy of the ordination service, and other documentation to the office of CCM).
  6. Integrate the chaplain into the life of the congregation:
    - a. Invite the chaplain to council retreats, council meetings, congregational meetings, congregational retreats.
    - b. Invite the chaplain to participate in worship services through preaching and prayers.
    - c. Create an emotional and spiritual support team for the chaplain.
    - d. Consider the chaplain for being a delegate to the major assemblies of the church
    - e. Explore how the chaplain can share their special knowledge and specialized training with church members and council.

### VIII. Chaplaincy Endorsement Application Checklist

*The following checklist highlights the requirements noted in this document for obtaining provisional and full endorsement. The application process for provisional endorsement averages around two months from when the completed application (to include the requested documents) has been submitted to Chaplaincy and Care Ministry.*

# Guidelines For Ecclesiastical Endorsement

## Chaplaincy Endorsement Application Checklist

### Provisional Endorsement

1. Contact CCM Ministry Endorser, Rev. Tim Rietkerk, [trietkerk@crcna.org](mailto:trietkerk@crcna.org), to schedule an appointment to review the application process
2. Complete the online [Chaplaincy Endorsement Application](#)
3. Select 3 persons to provide letters of recommendation by emailing them the online [Chaplaincy Endorsement Reference](#). Your references should include persons from the following:
  - 3.1. One from a pastor, board member, or council member of a past church or ministry you have served in a formal or informal capacity. *If you are presently in seminary or a recent graduate, a recommendation from a seminary professor may be used.*
  - 3.2. One from a pastor, board member, or council member of the church you currently attend or serve
  - 3.3. One from a vocational supervisor/mentor (CPE educator, internship supervisor, chaplain)
4. Submit to Chaplaincy and Care Ministry in an email to [chaplaincy@crcna.org](mailto:chaplaincy@crcna.org) the following attachments:
  - 4.1. Recent photo (it may be an informal picture)
  - 4.2. Transcript of master's degree
  - 4.3. Proof of Clinical Pastoral Education/Specialized Pastoral Education
    - 4.3.1. For civilian chaplain applicants: Evidence of the completion of at least two units of Clinical Pastoral Education/Specialized Pastoral Education, including copies of your supervisor's evaluation and a self-evaluation for the last two quarters of training completed.
    - 4.3.2. For military chaplain applicants: You are highly encouraged to have at least one unit of Pastoral Education/Specialized Pastoral Education. Active duty military chaplain applicants must have two years full time parish ministry experience post-MDiv.
  - 4.4. Firo B and Birkman Vocational Assessments. (If you do not have the Firo B and Birkman Vocational Assessments, Rev. Rietkerk will assist in scheduling the assessments (CCM will pay for the assessments).
5. Provisional Endorsement Prep Meeting When CCM has received **all** of the above items, you will be contacted by Rev. Tim Rietkerk for a video conference meeting to review the application, submitted materials, and prepare for the interview with the Chaplaincy & Care Ministry Advisory Committee (CMAC). As part of this review, he will coordinate with you for a date and time in which to meet with members of the CMAC.
6. Provisional Endorsement Interview with CCM and CMAC This interview will determine your eligibility for provisional endorsement. If you are declared eligible for endorsement, you will be granted provisional endorsement and you will receive a letter with the conditions of your provisional endorsement and the requirements for full endorsement.

## Guidelines For Ecclesiastical Endorsement

### Full Endorsement Requirements

Once you secure chaplaincy employment, you must provide the following to achieve full endorsement:

1. A copy of your chaplaincy job description (also send to your calling church and stated clerk of classis)
2. A copy of your chaplaincy letter of call from your calling church to classis
3. Date of your classical exam for ordination (if not currently ordained)
4. Date of your [ordination/ installation service](#)
5. A copy of your [Covenant of Joint Supervision](#) (CJS) signed by you and your calling church (Rev. Tim Rietkerk, CCM Endorser, will also sign the CJS and send back to you this completed document)
6. The name of your mentor (if your classis has not assigned one; you may be asked to work with the with the Regional Pastor to initiate this process) sent to [chaplaincy@crcna.org](mailto:chaplaincy@crcna.org) and [mentoring@crcna.org](mailto:mentoring@crcna.org)

After receiving the above items/information, CCM will grant full endorsement once the letter of call has been noted/approved in the classis minutes. CCM will send a letter of full endorsement to the chaplain, calling church, and classis. The chaplain's endorsement and Covenant of Joint Supervision are subject to review and renewal every five years.