

TO: Winnebago Presbytery Committees, Commissions and Congregations  
FROM: Commission on Ministry  
RE: Ruling Elder Training and Ruling Elders Commissioned to Pastoral Service  
Date: 11/12/16

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## HISTORY

Ruling Elders Commissioned to Pastoral Service (and formerly known as Commissioned Lay Pastors or CLPs) have been used extensively in Winnebago Presbytery. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Presbytery of Winnebago modeled a training program for Ruling Elders on the Committee on Preparation process in which students were trained in a formal curriculum concurrent with a judicatory care process, and then searched for a call. In the early 2000s the presbytery had several cohorts of ruling elders who participated in just such a two-year training program. In 2001, the first and largest cohort began their training (10 participants). Ruling Elders in the program completed the courses provided by the presbytery in 2003, were recognized for their achievement and then conferred a status of "in waiting" similar to "ready to be examined for ordination pending a call." Several ruling elders who were trained in this cohort are still serving congregations.

In the mid 2000s there were not enough students to create additional cohort groups and, at the same time, University of Dubuque Theological Seminary began to offer CLP training courses, so ruling elders who expressed interest in the training were directed to UDTs to complete course work while under the care of CPM.

This process led to a significant number of ruling elders who had completed (or were in process) some sort of training but had nowhere to serve. For a time (until quite recently), we kept lists of Student Lay Pastors (SLP), Trained Lay Pastors (TLP), Certified Lay Pastors (Cert. LP) and Commissioned Lay Pastors (CLP) and asked anyone in any of those categories to report to the presbytery annually.

By the mid-2000s there was confusion about what the training meant and what, if anything, SLPs, TLPs, Certified LPs and CLPs were authorized to do. And in 2011, the Book of Order changed the language from Commissioned Lay Pastor to Ruling Elder Commissioned to particular/pastoral service, often shortened to CRE.

In Winnebago Presbytery, there was a misunderstanding by some Ruling Elders commissioned to pastoral or particular service that the presbytery had authorized them to function as celebrants in **any** pastoral roles in the presbytery. This was complicated by the fact that for several years, the presbytery **did** approve REs who had been commissioned to celebrate communion in any congregation in the Presbytery. The presbytery ceased this practice after being cited by the synod numerous times for this 'exception' in our minutes. Our polity allows ruling elders to be commissioned to celebrate communion within very narrow parameters (location and date specific). Some REs who had been commissioned to limited pastoral service did not abide by the parameters of the commission.

The denomination and by extension Winnebago presbytery has inadvertently created a two tier system with the following unintended consequences:

- Impression that we've created a fourth ordered ministry
- Unbalance in the parity between TEs and REs in the presbytery
- Mobility issues across presbytery lines (possibly across a state)
- Impression that a credential has been conferred as opposed to a commission to limited pastoral service
- Diminishment of the ordered ministry of ruling elders

Baptism is our calling. Ordination is to a particular function.

#### AS WE MOVE FORWARD

This presbytery has benefited greatly from the ministry of commissioned ruling elders. We've learned a thing or two. As we move forward in ministry,

- We still see commissioning REs as a viable option for ministry (pastoral leadership) in particular places.
- We will no longer train cohort groups as in the past.
- We will no longer maintain a roster of persons who have taken ruling elder training (students, trained or certified) for pastoral services.
- Ruling Elders commissioned to pastoral service will still report annually using the same forms that Teaching Elders use.
- Ruling Elders commissioned to particular service will report as requested depending on the particular service (primarily communion).

RULING ELDERS NOT CURRENTLY SERVING - The people who were trained remain committed ruling elders in their congregations and congregations are encouraged to recognize REs with gifts for ministry in their midst.

In the future, as a situation arises that commends itself to pastoral ministry provided by a RE, COM will assess the context and assist the congregation in identifying appropriate leadership. COM will then work with the individual(s) to ascertain what training is needed and oversee preparation that will fulfill the needs of the place and the person(s).