



Commissioned Pastor Process & Exam Book

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Commissioned Pastor Process Outline

This portion of the document outlines the before, during, and ending of the commissioned pastor process, details of being under care of Classis, and all other details involved in being in the commissioned pastor process.

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**Worship Requirement - CP Candidate will be required to turn in a written worship service including one sacrament before this exam. That document will be referred to during the exam.*

Credo

This will need to be turned in 30 days before your Commissioned Pastor Completion Exam.

This is the final CP exam. It will be completed on the floor of classis during a May session and include “Current Theology Issues” as chosen by your examiner, as well as a “ministry focus” section, that will consist of questions related to competency in the area of ministry to which you will be commissioned.

Commissioned Pastor Process

Though the process for becoming a Commissioned Pastor may seem daunting, this outline will help you understand each of the steps and your responsibility in the process. There will be four major players in your process:

- Your Consistory;
- the Student Care Team of the Southwest Michigan Classis (which includes your Team Representative);
- the chosen training entity (Western Theological Seminary or Coram Deo) and,
- the Southwest Michigan Classis.

STEP 1 – CONVERSATION WITH PASTOR

The first step is to have a conversation with your pastor. If there's affirmation from your pastor and your church's Consistory that you should proceed with the process, have the Consistory fill out the recommendation form found at swmiclassis.org > resources. A consistory recommendation form will be required with your application.

NOTE: You must be an active member of the RCA congregation that is recommending you. You must also be ordained as an elder by the time you have finished your training plan to be commissioned by the Classis.

STEP 2 – CONTACT

Complete an application form, with references, as found on the Southwest Michigan Classis website, swmiclassis.org > resources.

STEP 3 – CLASSIS APPLICATION

After you have completed your Commissioned Pastor application and your church's Consistory has filled out the recommendation form, the Stated Clerk of Classis will inform the Facilitator of the Student Care Team. The team will be forwarded your submitted documents and will be in touch with you to schedule an interview with the Student Care Team of the Southwest Michigan Classis.

After the interview, you will be contacted by a member of the Student Care Team regarding its decision to recommend you for the program. Upon recommendation, the Classis will inform those necessary to confirm our support.

STEP 4 – EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

After the Classis endorsement is completed, your training entity will contact you to arrange a meeting to determine your training plan process, or they will let you know of the classis schedule. The training plan will include the process in which you will need to follow to complete your educational needs to finish the program. Not only will this training plan include the classes that you will need to take, but it will require you to complete a psychological evaluation. The Southwest Michigan Classis requires that the psychological evaluation be scheduled within your first 24-months in the program.

A Supervisory Team approved by classis will work with your training entity to determine and approve your Commissioned Pastor training plan. This team is composed of a team representative, a mentor and a possible additional representative.

- A **Team Representative** from the Commissioned Pastor Team. This person will act as a conduit for information between the Supervisory Team and the Student Care Team of Classis.
- A **mentor** will guide you in your ministry. This person will be appointed by Classis and will be an ordained member (Minister of Word and Sacrament or Elder) of the RCA. You may make suggestions as to potential mentors. This care will include regular contact for life sharing, encouragement and prayer, and advocacy at your ministry setting.
- ***An additional representative may be added to the Supervisory Team***, who is personally acquainted with the candidate and their ministry context. For example, an elder from the candidate's church.

CLASSIS EXAMS

Student Exams are given every May. You will be contacted in advance of this session by the Chair of the Student Care Team, to arrange for taking your exams. **You must fully complete all courses listed below the specific exams and provide proof of completion to be able to take that exam.**

Biblical and Theological Exam

This exam includes the following competencies:

- 1) Old and New Testament
- 2) Church History Assignment
- 3) Theology

Personal and Professional Exam

This exam includes the following competencies:

- 1) Spiritual Formation
- 2) Leadership
- 3) Pastoral Care

RCA Specifics Exam

This exam includes the following competencies:

- 1) Sacraments and Liturgy*
- 2) Government
- 3) Standards

**Worship Requirement - CP Candidate will be required to turn in a written worship service including one sacrament before this exam. That document will be referred to during the exam.*

Preaching

During your time in the commissioned pastor process, you will be required to preach six times. Each time you preach, you will need to have three people complete a written critique of your preaching and mail it to the designated person.

Credo

Information on writing your credo is included in this document.

Commissioned Pastor Completion Exam

This is the final CP exam. It will include "Current Theology Issues" as chosen by your examiner, as well as a "ministry focus" section, that will consist of questions related to competency in the area of ministry to which you will be commissioned. Dates for these exams will be set as needed.

INACTIVE STATUS

If a student finds that he/she is unable to continue with the agreed upon process because of extenuating circumstances, they may request, either verbally or in writing, to be put under 'inactive' status for a period of six months to no more than one year, with the consent of the church he/she is currently serving in. If this is foreseen, they should also, after addressing the Student Care Team of Classis, notify their training entity.

CONTRACT AND COMMISSIONING SERVICE

Upon completion of the designed training plan and examination in all the listed areas (a period no less than 24 months unless the proper waivers are completed), the process for commissioning can begin.

- 1) **Contract:** To be commissioned into the ministry defined in the training plan, the candidate must be under a contract with the church in which they are ordained as an elder. Sample contracts can be obtained from the Classis Clerk. The contracts must be issued by the church (and include all employment specifics: job description, who the CP is accountable to, termination guidelines, salary, etc.) and approved by the classis' Calls & Contracts Team. The contracts shall be renewed annually.
- 2) **Commissioning Service:** After the Calls & Contracts Team of classis has approved the contract for the candidate, the request for commissioning will go to the Leadership Team of Classis. The Classis Clerk will work with the Leadership Team, the candidate, and the President of Classis to set a date to be approved. After a date and time is approved, the candidate will work closely with the Classis Clerk to arrange the service. The liturgy for the Classical Services, 'Commissioning of a Commissioned Pastor' will be used in the service and led by the presiding officer of classis. The service as a whole, preaching, music, etc., is all arranged by the candidate to their liking. During the service of commissioning, the candidate will sign the Commissioned Pastor's Formula and be duly authorized to carry out the responsibilities designated in their call by God and His Church.

COMMISSIONED PASTOR OVERSIGHT

Commissioned Pastors are supervised and cared for according to the *Book of Church Order* (BCO) guidelines under governance of the Vitalization Team, as are all other ordained pastors.

Biblical and Theological Exam

Included competencies: Old and New Testament, Theology, Church History, Credo

1) Understanding of the Old and New Testaments and biblical interpretation

Demonstrate a thorough understanding of the Scripture, commitment to its authority as the Word of God, and insight in its interpretation. The candidate shall:

- Articulate an understanding of biblical authority consistent with the doctrinal standards of the RCA.
- Exhibit a general knowledge of the content of the 66 books and specific knowledge of key biblical doctrines necessary for faith and practice.
- Believe in and practice interpretive skills from an historical, evangelical and Reformed point of view. These include knowing and using the historical and literary context, the grasp of OT and NT theology, and the ability to faithfully apply the Scriptures to the needs and hopes of humanity.
- Able to use Scripture effectively in preaching, teaching, pastoral care and evangelism.

2) Reformed theology and tradition

Demonstrate a thorough knowledge of and commitment to Reformed doctrine, government and worship. The candidate shall:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the doctrines of the church and how they have emerged over time in the context of the church's interaction with culture.
- Show an awareness of and commitment to a Reformed creedal and confessional understanding of the church's tradition.
- Show how a consideration of the church's doctrine can assist the church in its mission and its engagement with non-Christians and people of other faiths.
- Be able to apply Reformed doctrine, government and worship to the pastoral and outreach ministries of the church.
- Articulate a Reformed understanding of worship substance and style.

3) Church history assignment

Demonstrate a working knowledge of the history and teachings of the Christian church, including her government and worship. The candidate shall:

- write a 2-page reflection paper about how church history informs and will influence their ministry. They will also be required to turn in an assignment from class for the team to review. Reflect theologically on issues currently facing the church, with special attention to their historical context.

Biblical and Theological Exam Questions

Competency: Old and New Testament

Old Testament Biblical Understanding

- 1) What are the important themes in Genesis 1-11?
- 2) What are the similarities and differences between the two creation stories? Is one better or 'more right' than the other?
- 3) How does the flood story in Genesis 6-9 show evidence of divine grace even as it relates to a tale of judgment?
- 4) Explain the significance of the altar, the Tabernacle, and the Temple in the history of Israel.
- 5) What is the significance of the offices of prophet, priest and king?
- 6) What was the exodus, and why was it important?
- 7) What are some of the unique elements of teaching that Deuteronomy gives as it presses the covenant documents and instructions of Exodus and Leviticus into a new shape for a new generation?
- 8) What parallels can be drawn between the Exodus from Egypt and the entrance of Israel into Canaan? What implications might these comparisons hold for the Israelite self-perception and identity?
- 9) Trace and explain the covenant renewal ceremonies from Deuteronomy through the end of Joshua.
- 10) Discuss the main themes of the following books:
 - a. Leviticus
 - b. I/II Samuel & I/II Kings
 - c. The Psalms
 - d. Proverbs
 - e. Isaiah
 - f. Daniel
- 11) What truths are we taught about God in the book of Judges? What truths about humanity are we taught in this book?
- 12) What is classified as wisdom literature in the Old Testament and how are these books useful?
- 13) Identify some of the differing types of Psalms, giving specific examples, and explain how these might be used today.
- 14) Is there a psalm that you hold dear? What is it, and why?
- 15) Explain the general message of Isaiah with reference to Israel's present and future?

New Testament

- 16) Highlight a few of the differences and similarities between the Gospels. What are some characteristics of each Gospel?
- 17) What does the word "synoptic" mean? Explain the "synoptic problem." What is the best solution?
- 18) What is a parable? How might you help others understand parables?
- 19) Give a general outline of Jesus' life and ministry.
- 20) What are some Biblical passages that express the significance and meaning of the death of Christ?
- 21) During the Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah appear next to Jesus. How does Jesus' ministry complete the ministry of these two Old Testament figures?

- 22) What are some of the struggles and successes of the early Church as read in Acts?
- 23) Briefly describe the life and ministry of Paul.
- 24) What are the important themes of the book of Romans? How does this letter fulfill important Old Testament themes?
- 25) What books are included in the General Epistles? Why are they called "General" or "Catholic?"
- 26) Why did Martin Luther call James an "epistle of straw?" Do you agree with him? Do Paul and James disagree about the relationship between faith and works?
- 27) Explain II Timothy 3:16.
- 28) What is the value of the book of Revelation? What advice would you give to someone who wanted to study it?
- 29) Be able to explain the main theme and general outline for each New Testament book.

Both Testaments

- 30) What is the relationship between the Old and New Testament? Are we to value one over the other?
- 31) Explain the Old Testament concept of the covenant. How does this covenant theme continue into the New Testament?
- 32) What are some of the major themes that run throughout the Bible, and give references to support your points.
- 33) How did Jesus and the New Testament writers view and use the Old Testament?

Exegetical Understanding

- 34) What major theme in the Bible is the most important to you? Why?
- 35) What are the benefits of knowing the history, background, authorship, and dating of the various books?
- 36) What is our view on the authority of scripture?
- 37) A new Christian wants to begin reading the Bible but doesn't know where to begin. What would you recommend and why?

Biblical and Theological Exam Questions

Competency: Church History

New Testament/Apostolic Era

- 1) Summarize the church's situation in its early days, as related in the Book of Acts.
- 2) What are some of the issues discussed by the apostolic council in Acts 15, and why was it important for the church's mission to resolve them?
- 3) How might the early church as seen in Acts inform the way we do ministry now?

Post-Apostolic Era through Late Antiquity

- 4) Identify one or two of the early church heretics (like Marcion, the Gnostics, etc.) and discuss why their views were claimed as heresy.
- 5) Describe the Roman persecution of the early church. What motivated the imperial authorities to try and suppress Christianity?
- 6) Discuss Constantine's impact on the life of the church. What are some of the positive and negative aspects of his legacy? To what extent is that legacy still with us today?
- 7) Discuss (one or two of) the seven Ecumenical Councils. To what extent should their decisions still make up the core teachings of the Christian faith?
- 8) Who was Pelagius, and what did he teach? How and why did Augustine confront him? What view is more popular today?

Medieval Era

- 9) How and why did the eastern and western branches of the church gradually split apart during the Middle Ages?
- 10) What led to the First Crusade? What did the crusade accomplish? How are we to view the crusades now?
- 11) Some of the great figures of the 13th century were Pope Innocent III, Francis of Assisi, Dominic, and Thomas Aquinas. Choose one and briefly discuss their influence on the church.

Reformation Era

- 12) Give a brief overview on the cause and purpose of the Reformation. What were some of the major differences between Roman Catholicism and the Reformation movement?
- 13) Give a brief outline of the life and ministry of John Calvin. Where did he spend most of his career? What were his major works and what are they about?
- 14) What significance does The Council of Trent have for Reformed-Catholics relations in the 21st century?
- 15) Trace the story of how the Dutch Reformed Church came to America.
- 16) Was the Reformation necessary? Why or why not?

The Modern Era/The North American Context

- 17) What was the Enlightenment? In what way has the Enlightenment philosophy been a challenge to Christian belief?
- 18) Discuss one or two of the American religious movements that have arisen since 1800 (LDS, JW's, etc.). How are they similar to and different from biblical Christianity?
- 19) Give a basic outline on one of the theological schools of the 19th and 20th centuries: Modernism (Liberalism), Fundamentalism, Neo-Orthodoxy, etc. Which of them has most influenced your theology?
- 20) Which of the ancient heresies do you believe poses the greatest danger to the American church today?
- 21) What do you view as the greatest challenge the Reformed Church in America is faced with today? How successfully are we meeting these challenges?
- 22) How will you draw on your study of church history to enrich your ministry? What do you see as some of the benefits to studying Church History?

Biblical and Theological Exam

Competency: Reformed Theology 1

Revelation

- 1) What is the difference between general revelation and special revelation?
- 2) What is your view of scripture?
- 3) What does inspiration mean?
- 4) The Bible is often called the “Word of God.” What does that mean?
- 5) In the Reformed Church, the Bible is our only rule for faith and conduct. What does that mean?
- 6) Are all parts of the Bible equally authoritative?

The Doctrine of God

- 7) What do we mean by the attributes of God?
- 8) What are some of these attributes? Where would you find an example of these attributes in both the Old and New Testament?
- 9) Christians believe in a triune God. Why is this important?
- 10) Can you really know God?
- 11) What do we mean when we speak of a personal God?
- 12) What is the providence of God? How do you resolve the tension between the human responsibility and the sovereignty of God?

Anthropology

- 13) What is meant by the image of God?
- 14) What is the origin of sin?
- 15) What are the effects of sin on the image of God, especially in the light of the phrase in Ephesians 2 that we “*are dead in trespasses and sins?*”

Christology

- 16) Why do we call ourselves Christians rather than by some other name?
- 17) Explain the phrase, “Two natures, one person.”
- 18) We call Jesus our prophet, priest and king. How do these names help us understand His mission?
- 19) How did the cross change things between God and humanity?

Pneumatology

- 20) Who is the Holy Spirit?
- 21) What are the gifts of the Spirit?
- 22) What role does the Holy Spirit play in salvation?
- 23) What is the significance of Luke’s account of Pentecost in Acts 2?
- 24) When does the Holy Spirit come into the life of a believer?

- 25) What is faith?
- 26) What does it mean to be justified?
- 27) Is justification by faith alone or by faith and works?
- 28) What does it mean to be born again? How does this happen?
- 29) What is sanctification, and how does it relate to justification in the Reformed tradition?
- 30) What is Pelagianism, and why is it such a danger?

Ecclesiology

- 31) What is the church? How can a person identify a church?
- 32) What is the relationship of the church of Israel in the old covenant?
- 33) What is the purpose of the church?
- 34) What is the meaning of discipleship?

Eschatology

- 35) What is the second coming of Christ?
- 36) What is Heaven? Hell?
- 37) What happens when a believer dies? A non-believer?
- 38) The New Testament teaches us to hope for the “resurrection of the dead.” What is this?

Personal and Professional Exam

Included competencies: Spiritual Formation, Leadership, Preaching, Pastoral Care

1) Maturity of Faith

Demonstrate a mature personal faith in the Triune God. The candidate shall:

- Express an abiding and growing faith in, and love for Jesus Christ.
- Demonstrate an appropriate awareness of and sensitivity to the presence and leading of the Holy Spirit in Scripture, in the Christian community, and in personal experience.
- Give appropriate evidence of: an enduring trust in God's providence; a whole hearted commitment to obeying God's revealed will; an awareness of sinfulness and a deep reliance upon God's grace; a grateful life of love and service, and a confident hope in God's gracious purposes for his world.
- Demonstrate a life of prayer, a healthy relationship to God and other persons, and involvement in small groups and congregational life.
- Exhibit a spiritual maturity that is witnessed in a Christ-like life, self-awareness, humility and openness to correction, a sensitivity and care for other people, and an understanding and practice of discipleship.
- Show evidence of ordination as an Elder or else both the recognized gifts required of an Elder and an indication of the intent to be ordained by a congregation as an Elder.

2) Personal Integrity and Call

Demonstrate a life worthy of the gospel, a sense of call to be a Commissioned Pastor, an understanding of that ministry in the Reformed tradition, and a commitment to its responsibilities. The candidate shall:

- Demonstrate servant hood, measured by growth in God's grace, as well as evidence of a fruitful ministry.
- Understand the expectations, boundaries, and opportunities of ministry outlined in Scripture and the *Book of Church Order*.
- Exhibit a Reformed vision for ministry embracing the local congregation, classis, and the greater church.
- Articulate a biblical, personal, and Reformed call to ministry as prompted by the Holy Spirit and as attested to by others.
- Show evidence of personal integrity by completing a psychological assessment and successfully passing a criminal background check administered by a designated agent, and interpreted by classis.

3) Ability to preach

Demonstrate understanding and skill to lead worship and preach the gospel. The candidate shall:

- Demonstrate the ability to preach and teach the whole of Scripture in the power of the Holy Spirit, with clarity, winsomeness and passion.
- Demonstrate an approach to preaching and teaching that evangelizes and nurtures.
- Demonstrate a practice of worship and use of liturgy that is biblical, Reformed, and appropriate to the context.

4) Capability to Minister within the Church

Demonstrate the understanding and skill required to lead the people of God in faithfulness to their mission, including the areas of discipleship, evangelism, and leadership. The candidate shall:

- Give evidence of an understanding of approaches to discipleship and capacity discipling individuals toward multiplication and maturity of faith in Christ.

- Demonstrate, either through personal experience or by undergoing training, the ability and commitment for nurturing others to embrace faith in Christ, and to maximize and multiply the church's effectiveness in evangelism.
- Show understanding of the principles and practices of church leadership, both in theory and practice.
- Demonstrate the strategic dimensions of leadership, including vision formation, management skills, coping with change, and critical evaluation of self and program.
- Show ability to lead in a way that meaningfully engages the cultural context and needs of the wider community.

5) Understanding of and Adherence to Pastoral Ethics and Practices

Demonstrate understanding, skill and compassion in caring for persons and congregations. The candidate shall:

- Give evidence of appropriate care and empathy toward persons in various crises.
- Show a grasp of the challenges and opportunities emerging in the various stages of life.
- Exhibit an understanding of the psychological and social forces that shape human behavior.
- Demonstrate the ability to offer accountable spiritual counsel with appropriate boundaries, utilizing the resources of faith and forgiveness.
- Show an ability to refer to appropriate community and professional resources.
- Exhibit sufficient emotional and psychological health and self-understanding to care for others in a healthy way.
- Show capacity for self-care, including appropriate use of outside mentors, coaches and/or counselors.

Personal and Professional Exam Questions

Competency: Spiritual Formation

Note to Examiner: *The first three questions are ones to be asked of every commissioned pastor candidate. The rest may be asked at the leisure of the examiner.*

- 1) What is your definition of spiritual formation?
- 2) How do you practice spiritual formation at the congregational level?
- 3) What tools would you use to:
 - a. lead your leadership team towards spiritual maturity?
 - b. lead your congregation towards spiritual maturity?Reflect on and describe how your own life has been transformed by your personal relationship with God, and how this relationship will impact and inform your ministry.
- 4) What spiritual disciplines do you regularly use to develop and maintain your relationship with God? Which ones are most helpful? Why?
- 5) Where would you like to strengthen your relationship with God? Do you have a plan for this?
- 6) Are there some emotional wounds in your life that have hindered your ministry, your personal relationship with God, your relationship with significant others, or your personal life? What steps have you taken to seek healing for these wounds, and how might your experience impact your ministry?
- 7) What are some of the potential roadblocks to a vibrant spiritual formation ministry in a church?
- 8) Articulate your call to ministry as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

Personal and Professional Exam

Competency: Leadership

- 1) How would you define leadership? What are some defining characteristics of a healthy leader?
- 2) What are some biblical examples of healthy leadership? Of unhealthy leadership?
- 3) When do you first consider yourself a leader?
- 4) How do you as a leader stay sharp, healthy, and centered?
- 5) What are some of the dangers and pitfalls of those in leadership?
- 6) Describe your own personal leadership style and how that will translate into your ministry context.
- 7) Explain a difficult situation you've encountered in ministry and how you led through that experience.
- 8) How do you handle conflict as a leader?
- 9) What do you consider your strongest leadership gift? Your greatest area of growth?
- 10) Do you prefer to work collaboratively or independently? How might this help or hinder you in ministry?
- 11) What is the relationship between leadership and discipleship?
- 12) Who is someone you consider a great leader from your own life? What makes them a great leader?
- 13) When do you know when it's time to lead, and when do you know it's time to follow?

Personal and Professional Exam

Competency: Preaching

*Each commissioned pastor candidate shall have a minimum of **six** preaching opportunities as part of their preparation for ministry during the course of the time they are under care of the Classis.*

Evaluations: At least three persons (an elder, a deacon, and a member of the congregation) shall be given the approved pre-addressed evaluation form in advance of the sermon. These forms shall be used for each of the six preaching opportunities and shall be returned to the designated member of the Student Care Team within one week of the preaching date.

The Commissioned Pastor Candidate shall do their best to inform the Student Care Team of any scheduled preaching opportunity so that they can be observed in person if possible. The Commissioned Pastor Candidate shall also make available to the committee any video of their preaching.

The Student Care Team will review all of the evaluation forms that are returned and any videos that are available to prepare a recommendation in fulfillment of the preaching competency requirement.

Personal and Professional Exam Questions

Competency: Pastoral Care

- 1) Briefly explain your theological understanding of the human person.
- 2) Briefly explain your theological understanding of the nature of Christian community.
- 3) How does sin affect us as individuals?
- 4) What are some of the social effects of sin?
- 5) How do we receive the healing graces of Jesus through others?
- 6) What are the primary tasks of the Church with regard to pastoral care?
- 7) Who is ultimately responsible for pastoral care of a church community? What is the involvement of the pastor, the elders, the deacons, and the congregation?
- 8) What are the primary offices of the church and how do these function together in bringing pastoral care?
- 9) What are the primary roles of pastors in defining, developing, and delivering pastoral care?
- 10) Imagine that a new family has moved into a community; what pastoral care might be appropriate and how might it be provided?
- 11) What are some of the critical points of a person's life in which pastoral care might be warranted in special ways? Explain.
- 12) How would you seek to participate in and provide pastoral care at the time of the birth of a baby?
- 13) How would you seek to participate in and provide pastoral care at the time of an unexpected death?
- 14) How would you seek to raise the overall level of hospitality within your congregation?
- 15) Name one or two people who have provided excellent pastoral care for you in the past. How did they accomplish this? What might you learn from their example?
- 16) What is particularly compelling to you in the character of Jesus' expressions of care? How might these become a regular part of your own ministry?
- 17) What are your current strengths in pastoral care ministry? What are areas of your pastoral care ministry that need further development? How so you plan to go about sharpening those skills?
- 18) In what manner would you like to see a community of pastoral care develop around you among lay sstaff leaders of a congregation? What care structures would most fully utilize your particular gifts in pastoral care, and allow others to step in where their pastoral care gifts are broader and more developed than yours?
- 19) What is the relationship between preaching and pastoral care?
- 20) How is pastoral care related to the rhythm of the liturgical year?
- 21) How is pastoral care related to the life-stages of individuals and families?
- 22) Name one or two people who have provided excellent pastoral care for you in the past. How did they accomplish this? What might you learn from their example?
- 23) What is particularly compelling to you in the character of Jesus' expressions of care? How might these become a regular part of your own ministry?
- 24) What are your current strengths in pastoral care ministry? What are the areas of your pastoral care ministry that need further development? How do you plan to go about sharpening those skills?
- 25) In what manner would you like to see a community of pastoral care develop around you among lay or staff leaders of a congregation? What care structures would most fully utilize your particular gifts in pastoral care, and allow others to step in where their pastoral care gifts are broader or more developed than yours?

RCA Specifics Exam

Included competencies: Government, Standards, Sacraments and Liturgy

1) Knowledge of and adherence to the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America (Government, the Standards and the Liturgy)

Demonstrate a functional understanding and adherence to the government, Standards, and liturgy of the Reformed Church in America. The candidate shall:

- Demonstrate an understanding of and appropriate adherence to the RCA confessions (Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, Athanasian Creed, Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, Canons of Dort, and Belhar Confession), *Book of Church Order*, and Liturgy.
- Articulate an understanding of Reformed polity in relationship to other forms of church government, and the unique elements of the Reformed church order.

2) Nature and Administration of the Sacraments

Demonstrate understanding and skill for the administration of the sacraments that the theologically Reformed and contextually relevant. The candidate shall:

- Show knowledge of distinctive elements of the Reformed theological tradition, including its theology and administration of the sacraments.
- Demonstrate a commitment to an appropriately Reformed practice of infant and adult baptism and the Lord's Supper.
- Understand the place and significance of worship, including the celebration of the sacraments.

RCA Specifics Exam Questions

Competency: Government

Book of Church Order

- 1) What is included in the constitution of the RCA?
- 2) What is the primary benefit of having a *Book of Church Order*?
- 3) What are the major strengths of the RCA's form of church government? Weaknesses?
- 4) List the offices of the RCA.
- 5) List the government units of the RCA? Describe them.
- 6) What are the lines of accountability between these units of the RCA?

Consistory

- 7) What are the general responsibilities of an elder?
- 8) What are the general responsibilities of a deacon?
- 9) What characteristics (spiritual gifts) must a person have to be called to be an elder? A deacon? A commissioned pastor?
- 10) To be a commissioned pastor, you must first be an elder? Why?
- 11) Theologically, why do we have deacons, elders, commissioned pastors, and minister of Word and Sacrament?
- 12) How do these four minister together?
- 13) What are the lines of accountability between pastor, commissioned pastor, elder and deacon?

Classis

- 14) How is pastoral care and supervision carried out?
- 15) What are the primary responsibilities of the Classis?
- 16) What is the balance of authority between the local church and the Classis?
- 17) How does the classis act as an assembly? As a judicatory?
- 18) Our classis motto is "Better Together." In what ways are we?

Practical Integration

- 19) If, in the Classis exam, the candidate does not hold to certain doctrinal standards of the RCA, what is to be done?
- 20) In what kinds of situations can the Classis step into the local church situation?
- 21) The mission of the RCA is to carry out the ministry of Jesus Christ. From your experience, give one example as to how that mission is carried out by each of the four levels of the structure of the RCA (General Synod, Regional Synod, Classis, and the Consistory).
- 22) A couple in your congregation has a new baby. You've talked with them about baptism, but they reply that they would like to "dedicate" their child to God and that their child should make her own decision about being baptized. What do you do? Why?

RCA Specifics Exam Questions

Competency: Standards

General Questions

- 1) How are we to understand the standards and creeds in relationship to scripture?
- 2) Are these documents inspired by God? Explain.

Apostles' Creed

- 3) What is the historical background to this creed?
- 4) Why is this creed considered Christocentric?
- 5) What is the value of the Apostles' Creed? How will/do you use the Apostles' Creed in your ministry?

Nicene Creed

- 6) What was the controversy surrounding the writing of this creed?
- 7) What is the nature of Christ as expressed in this creed?
- 8) What is the value of the Nicene Creed? How will/do you use the Nicene Creed in your ministry?

Athanasian Creed

- 9) Why was this creed written?
- 10) In light of this creed, how is God both Trinity and unity?
- 11) What is the value of the Athanasian Creed? How will/do you use the Athanasian Creed in your ministry?

Heidelberg Catechism

- 12) Who wrote the Heidelberg Catechism and when was it written?
- 13) What is the historical background to the Heidelberg Catechism?
- 14) What is the general content of the Heidelberg Catechism?
- 15) The Heidelberg Catechism was meant to be a teaching tool? How can it be used to this end?
- 16) Do you feel there is value in memorizing part or all of the Heidelberg Catechism?
- 17) What is one question and answer in the Heidelberg that has meant a great deal to you?

Belgic Confession

- 18) From what historic context did the Belgic Confession arise?
- 19) How was the Belgic Confession composed (structured)?
- 20) How might you use the Belgic Confession in a congregational setting?

Canons of Dort

- 21) From what historical context did the Canons arise?
- 22) What is the structure of the Canons of Dort?
- 23) Do any of the errors addressed at Dort still exist in the church today?

24) What use can you make of this document in the life of the church?

Belhar Confession

- 25) What are the three main issues/themes addressed by the Belhar Confession? Which theme most interests you personally? Why?
- 26) How is restorative justice different from retributive justice? Evaluate each approach to justice from the perspective of the Belhar Confession. What are the end results of each approach for the offender, for the victim, and for the wider community?
- 27) In *Reconciliation*, John De Gruchy says, "But reconciliation as a final achievement is, in a sense, always beyond our grasp." If reconciliation and freedom from racism will never be fully realized on this earth, what is the point of the struggle? What does the Belhar Confession have to say in answer to this question (particularly paragraph 3)?
- 28) Is your church a safe place for people who feel excluded for any reason to speak up? How could your congregation deal with expressions of pain and anger by persons of color or other excluded groups in a way that healed rather than further alienated? What resources are available in your community to help you?
- 29) What would be required for the Belhar Confession to function in your congregation as it does in the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa, as an "instrument for profound self-examination, to help determine whether the church really lives by the faith it proclaims" (Dr. Molefi Seth Pitikoe)?

Practical Integration to Ministry

- 30) What is the pastoral value of having the ecumenical creeds?
- 31) What is the pastoral value of having the standards?
- 32) Under what circumstances do you think the RCA would adopt additional standards?
- 33) What does it mean to preach the points of the Heidelberg Catechism? How do you do this? How often must you do this? Do you hold to the standards?

RCA Specifics Exam Questions

Competency: Sacraments and Liturgy

Worship Requirement - CP Candidate will be required to turn in a written worship service including one sacrament before this exam. That document will be referred to during the exam.

Sacraments - General Questions

- 1) What impact does a sacrament have on the life of a believer?
- 2) Where do the sacraments derive their authority?
- 3) Who are the rightful participants in the sacraments?
- 4) What is the relationship between word and sacrament?
- 5) How are the senses related to the sacraments?
- 6) Why is the Lord's Supper a corporate matter rather than an individual experience, and how does this manifest itself in the celebration of the sacrament?
- 7) Why does the RCA believe the sacraments should be administered in the presence of the congregation?

Baptism - Biblical Understanding

- 8) What is the biblical support for this sacrament?
- 9) What is the biblical support for infant baptism?
- 10) Is baptism an explicit command?

Baptism - Theological Integration

- 11) What is the meaning of baptism?
- 12) Who are candidates for baptism?
- 13) What is the relationship of faith to baptism? How does this relate to infant baptism?
- 14) Does the method/mode of baptism matter?
- 15) What mode(s) does the RCA encourage?
- 16) Does the RCA believe in a baptismal regeneration?

The Lord's Supper - Biblical Understanding

- 17) How does the Passover relate to the Lord's Supper?
- 18) What Old Testament rite(s) does the supper replace?

The Lord's Supper - Theological Integration

- 19) What are the elements used in the Lord's Supper and what do they signify?
- 20) In what way is the sacrament of the Lord's Supper a feast of remembrance, communion, and hope?
- 21) What's the difference between the Catholic and the Lutheran views of the Lord's Supper as compared to the Reformed?

The Lord's Supper - Practical Application

- 22) A member of your church says, "I can't take part in communion. I'm not worthy". How will you respond?
- 23) What are the requirements upon the church regarding the Lord's Supper according to the BCO?
- 24) A couple asks you to serve communion during their wedding ceremony (to them alone) how will you respond?
- 25) How does discipline relate to this sacrament? Who is responsible for this discipline?

Sacraments Case Study

Joe is a regular visitor at your worship services. He was raised in a fundamentalist church and holds to 'believer baptism.' Well liked, Joe has gotten several people to commit to join him on a mission trip to Israel. Part of the 'sell' of the trip is the opportunity to be baptized in the Jordan River. As the pastor you were asked to go along and will be going with a few others from consistory. There are two people that have decided to be baptized that are going on the trip as well. There are a few factors that come into play in this situation.

- 1) What will be planned for the two that will be baptized on the trip?
- 2) There are students from the confirmation class that want to go and be re-baptized. How do you handle this?
- 3) While on the trip, there are two people that on the spur of the moment want to be baptized as well. Do you perform them? What would be the follow-up?
- 4) What discipleship happens when you return from the trip?

Commissioned Pastor Completion Exam Questions

Note to Examiner: Please incorporate "Current Theology Issues" into this exam. The subjects are open to the discretion of the examiner, and should be communicated to the commissioned pastor candidate before the exam.

Revelation

- 1) Define general revelation and special revelation. What is the difference between them?
- 2) The Bible is often called the inspired "Word of God." What does that mean?
- 3) Are all parts of the Bible equally authoritative? What are the different types of literature in the Bible?
- 4) How does God reveal God's self today?
- 5) Does Christ's quotation of the Old Testament help establish its authority? Give an example.
- 6) What is your approach to Biblical interpretation?
- 7) Interpret passages 1 Timothy 2:11-15, 1 Timothy 3:2.
- 8) Is there a distinction between the historical and doctrinal passages?

The Doctrine of God

- 9) What do we mean by the attributes of God?
- 10) Christians believe in a triune God. How does the Bible support the Trinity?
- 11) What do we mean when we speak of a personal God?
- 12) What is the providence of God? How do you resolve the tension between the human responsibility and the sovereignty of God?
- 13) How does the love of God and the justice of God relate? Give Biblical examples of both.
- 14) What names does the Bible use for God? What do these names reveal about God's nature?
- 15) If God is a loving and caring God, why is there so much suffering on earth?

Anthropology

- 16) What is meant by the image of God?
- 17) What is the origin of sin?
- 18) How are Christ and the Imago Dei connected?
- 19) What is total depravity?
- 20) What does Reformed theology say about the effects of sin on the ability of man/woman to know God?

Christology

- 21) Why do we call ourselves Christians rather than by some other name?
- 22) Explain the phrase, "two natures, one person."
- 23) What are offices of Christ and why are they important?
- 24) What does it mean to say or believe that "Jesus is Christ?"
- 25) What do we learn of Christ in Philippians 2:5-11?
- 26) "Jesus is Lord" - What does this mean?
- 27) Explain the biblical witness of election and of free will. How do they relate?

- 28) Explain the incarnation. What significance does it have for believers today?
- 29) How can Jesus be fully human and fully divine?
- 30) Why is Christ called “the one and only Son of God?”
- 31) Explain atonement.

Pneumatology

- 32) Explain what the gifts of the Spirit are.
- 33) What role does the Holy Spirit play in salvation?
- 34) What is the significance of Luke’s account of Pentecost in Acts 2?
- 35) What is justification? Is justification by faith alone or by faith and works?
- 36) What is sanctification, and how does it relate to justification in the Reformed tradition?
- 37) What is Pelagianism? How does it compare with Reformed belief?

Ecclesiology

- 38) Explain what the church is.
- 39) What is the relationship of the church to Israel in the old covenant?
- 40) What is the purpose of the church?
- 41) What is the meaning of discipleship?

Eschatology

- 42) What is the second coming of Christ?
- 43) Explain heaven and hell.
- 44) What happens when a believer dies? A non-believer?
- 45) The New Testament teaches us to hope for the “resurrection of the dead.” What is this?

Process Checklist			
Competency	Expected Completion	Actual Completion	Exam Completed?
Step 1: Conversation with your pastor.			N/A
Step 2: Complete application form with 3 references, as found on Classis website			N/A
Step 3: Classis interview and recommendation.			N/A
Step 4: Training Plan/class schedule approval by Classis.			N/A
Psychological Profile	*Needs to be completed before taking classes.		N/A
Elder Ordination?	<i>You must be ordained as an elder before you can be commissioned.</i>		
Old Testament			<i>Biblical & Theological Exam</i>
New Testament			
Church History			
Reformed Theology 1			
Spiritual Formation			<i>Personal & Professional Exam</i>
Leadership			
Preaching Requirements	*You are required to preach 6 times as a CP candidate. Three people need to complete a written critique of your preaching and mail it to the designated person on the CP Team. Each time.		
Pastoral Care			<i>RCA Specifics Exam</i>
Church Government			
Standards			
Sacraments and Liturgy*			
Worship Requirement	*CP Candidate will be		

	required to turn in a written worship service including one sacrament before this exam. That document will be referred to during the exam.		
Credo	*Turned in 30 days prior to Completion Exam.		
Commissioned Pastor Completion Exam			