

Qualifications and Procedures for Ordaining Specialized Ministers in North Grand Rapids Classis

This document provides guidance to the Classis for determining on an individual basis the qualifications for specialized minister ordination and provision for oversight of specialized ministers.

A copy of these Qualifications and Procedures for Ordaining Specialized Ministers will be provided to each applicant for ordination to specialized ministry and to every Specialized Minister who is a member of the Classis. Specialized ministers who request to transfer membership into the Classis will be expected to complete an Application for Specialized Ministry form as outlined in this document as part of the transfer process.

Background

Relationship of Specialized Ministers within Classis

The Book of Church Order (BCO) does not draw a distinction between ordaining installed pastors and specialized ministers. All ministers of Word and sacrament are called to love Christ, serve the church and provide the faithful witness of the Reformed Church in America. A specialized minister is no more or no less of a Minister of Word and sacrament than one installed into parish ministry. All privileges and responsibilities fall equally on the shoulders of any minister ordained into the office of Word and sacrament.

Qualifications for Ordination

The BCO lists the Qualifications for Ordained Ministry in BCO Chapter 1 Part II Article 10 Section 4 that becomes the foundation on which the North Grand Rapids Classis will evaluate a request for ordination to specialized ministry.

- a. A ministry which requires a theological education for its performance.
- b. Performed under the jurisdiction or with the approval of a Classis of the Reformed Church in America.
- c. Intended to witness to the Word in the world or to nurture and train Christians for their ministry in the world.

The following are recognized as common forms of specialized ministry by the Reformed Church in America and are accepted by North Grand Rapids Classis as ministries that should be approved for ordination. Note that these examples are meant to be illustrative, not exhaustive. The Classis may approve requests for ordination to other ministries as guided by this document.

- Any official ministry connected to official RCA partners; e.g., Formula of Agreement Churches, CRC.
- Ministries with historic connections to the denomination; e.g., Hope, Central and Northwestern Colleges; Western Theological and New Brunswick Seminaries.
- Ministries with relationships to North Grand Rapids Classis; e.g., The Other Way, Heartside Ministries, G.R.A.C.E, church plants.

- Chaplaincies; e.g., military, hospital, hospice, college and university.
- Professional counselor.

Any specialized minister who as his/her primary occupation provides counseling as defined by Michigan Public Act 421 of 1988, amended the Public Health Code, Public Act 368 of 1978, as amended, must be licensed by the State of Michigan and maintain adequate professional liability insurance.

The Public Health Code defines the practice of counseling to mean the rendering to individuals, groups, families, organizations, or the general public a service involving the application of clinical counseling principles, methods, or procedures for the purpose of achieving social, personal, career, and emotional development and with the goal of promoting and enhancing healthy, self actualizing and satisfying lifestyles whether the services are rendered in an educational, business, health, private practice, or human services setting.

Responsibility of the Classis toward Specialized Ministers

Classis recognizes and celebrates the role of specialized ministers in their capacities of extending the work of the gospel into the world. Classis will encourage them in their chosen vocations, provide a means for spiritual nurturing through the Specialized Ministry Team, and be accountable to the specialized minister in meeting these obligations. Classis will help facilitate opportunities for specialized ministers to use their gifts in parish settings (e.g., pulpit supply, pastoral care, and administration of the sacraments).

Accountability of Specialized Ministers

The Classis Specialized Ministry Team will be responsible for receiving and considering requests for ordination to specialized ministry, recommending action by the Classis and providing specialized ministers accountability. The Specialized Ministry Team will consider the application, interview the applicant in a formal Team meeting, and prayerfully discern the applicant's request. The Specialized Ministry Team will recommend action on the request for ordination to the Classis for action; the recommendation may be to approve or refuse the request.

The BCO Chapter I, Part II Article 12 Section 6 states that "a minister of Word and sacrament who is installed as a pastor of a local church shall be a member of that church by virtue of installation. A minister not installed as a pastor shall become a member of a local church."

All Classis specialized ministers that are not serving a congregation or a Classis recognized worshipping community as pastor are encouraged to be members of a local church and actively use their ministry gifts within a Classis congregation or approved ministry. Some examples of participation:

- Preaching or teaching in a North Grand Rapids Classis member church; administering sacraments.
- Pastoral care by visitation or other activity.
- Worship attendance and participation in congregational life.

- Meeting other ministry needs of Classis member churches as determined by the specialized minister and consistory.

All ministers are members of Classis and the Classis is responsible for providing pastoral care, professional and personal encouragement, and spiritual development. Parish ministers as members of a local church also benefit from the encouragement and development through the local church's board of elders and members at large. The Classis willingly and joyfully accepts the duty to provide care and encouragement to the specialized minister.

As an active member in a local church the specialized minister would also receive care and support through the board of elders. The Classis welcomes the shared support of the local church as a supplement to its obligation to care for specialized ministers under its care.

Accountability Statement

The Application for Specialized Ministry is a form that is the basis for the initial request for ordination and becomes the continuing accountability method for specialized ministers. Applications for Specialized Ministry will be retained by the Stated Clerk for one year from date of submission. The Specialized Ministry Team will return the application to the Stated Clerk upon completion of its review.

No later than January 15, 20XX all specialized ministers will complete and provide the Specialized Ministry Team with information required by the Specialized Ministry Accountability Statement. This provides specialized ministers with an annual evaluation similar to the annual review consistories conduct of parish ministers.

If the Specialized Ministry Team has concerns about the viability of a reported specialized ministry following its review the Team and specialized minister will meet to discuss those concerns. The Specialized Ministry Team will advise the Classis when it believes the specialized ministry no longer meets the Classis qualification for ordination. The specialized minister will have the right to appeal that finding.

The Specialized Ministry Accountability Statement will be retained by the Specialized Ministry Team for two years from date of submission for the purpose of encouraging the Specialized Minister's work. The Specialized Ministry Team will return the expiring form (after two years) to the Stated Clerk who will retain the form for an additional year.

Right to Appeal

The applicant for ordination to specialized ministry or specialized minister may appeal to the Classis the Specialized Ministry Team's finding that the ministry does not meet the Classis qualification for ordination. Appeals to the Classis may be made after the Specialized Ministry Teams makes its report to the Classis. The applicant or specialized minister will notify the Classis Stated Clerk of the appeal and the applicant or specialized minister will meet with the Classis to personally present the request for ordination.

Procedure

Application for Ordination to Specialized Ministry

1. The applicant will submit the Application for Ordination to Specialized Ministry to the Specialized Ministry Team through the Stated Clerk.
2. The Specialized Ministry Team will schedule an interview meeting with the applicant to ensure that the specialized ministry meets the Classis' qualification for ordination.
3. The Specialized Ministry Team will report its recommendation to approve or reject the application for ordination to specialized ministry to the Classis within 45 days of receipt of the application. The applicant will be advised of the Team's recommendation concurrent to its report to the Classis.
4. The applicant for ordination to specialized ministry may appeal the decision of the Specialized Ministry Team within 15 days of the date of the Team's report to Classis.
5. The Classis will hear the applicant's appeal at the next stated session of the Classis following the Stated Clerk's receipt of the applicant's notice of appeal.
6. If no appeal is received the Classis will act on the report and recommendation at the earliest opportunity.

Application for Ordination to Specialized Ministry North Grand Rapids Classis

The North Grand Rapids Classis recognizes that ministry is not defined only by the parish and there are other vocations where a minister of the Word can ably serve. This form will help provide the Specialized Ministry Team with a basis for the Classis to provide care and encouragement to the specialized minister and outline how the specialized minister performs the role of minister of Word while working in a non-parish ministry.

Please provide the Specialized Ministry Team with a written response to the following statements regarding the specialized ministry in which you serve. Submit your response through the Stated Clerk.

1. Briefly describe how your service as a specialized minister meets the following Qualifications for Ordained Ministry, BCO Chapter 1 Part II Article 10 Section 4:
 - A ministry which requires a theological education for its performance.
 - Performed under the jurisdiction or with the approval of a Classis of the Reformed Church in America.
 - Intended to witness to the Word in the world or to nurture and train Christians for their ministry in the world.
2. Name of current employer or self-employed
3. Work address and phone number
4. Job title and description
5. Accountability Structure (e.g., board of directors, employer direct report)
6. Share your thoughts about the role specialized ministry allows you in the life of the Church of Jesus Christ as well as the congregation(s) you are directly involved in.
7. Special training required to fulfill your current work
8. Continuing education requirements for your current job
9. In the past seven years have you been the subject of any disciplinary action, professional complaint, or legal action in your area of expertise or within the Church body? If yes, provide a detailed description of the nature of the action and outcome.
10. In your opinion how are you practicing within the bounds of the professional scope of practice for which you will be ordained

Scope of Ministry or Practice if a counselor

11. If a counselor Licenses or Certifications (if specialized ministry involves counseling as defined by the state of Michigan attach Michigan license documentation)
12. If a counselor Local, State, or Federal government oversight agency
13. If a counselor name of Professional Oversight agency or affiliation
14. If a counselor what Professional Standards are required
15. If a counselor name of professional liability insurer, deductible, and limits of coverage; current policy effective dates