**Program to Authorize and Train Elders to Serve Communion**

“Churches without pastors often struggle to schedule supply preachers for worship, sometimes choosing to go with a member of their congregation if they cannot find an available pastor or commissioned ruling elder. This task, however, gets even more difficult on Sundays when communion is served. In the past, only an ordained pastor or commissioned ruling elder could administer the sacraments. **Times and the Book of Order have changed.” From Albany Presbytery**

The Book of Order stresses that is the presbytery’s *responsibility and power to: provide that the Sacraments may be rightly administered and received. This responsibility shall include…authorizing and training specific ruling elders to administer or preside at the Lord’s Supper when it deems it necessary to meet the needs for the administration of the Sacrament*… G-3.03b

Recognizing the growing need in our presbytery as churches flux in transition and face limited availability of ordained Ministers of the Word and Sacrament to meet that need, the Commission on Congregational Vitality (CCV) offers the opportunity for elders to be authorized to serve communion.

Guidelines and Parameters:

Who may seek this authorization?

Congregations without an installed pastor, commissioned pastor, stated supply or transitional pastor. This program is intended to assist congregations without ordained or commissioned pastoral leadership. CCV will consult with the Commission on Transitional Ministries (CTM) to verify the need for this authorization and for any concerns the CTM may have with the request.

*The Lord’s Supper shall be authorized by the session and administered by a minister of the Word and Sacrament. It is appropriate that a presbytery authorize and train ruling elders to administer the Lord’s Supper in the event of the absence of pastors.* W-3.0410

What is the process for authorization?

Individuals must be ordained elders, who have been members of the congregation for at least three years and served on session for at least one year. Session must vote to approve these individuals and send a request for training and approval to CCV. Training must be completed and approved by CCV prior to the authorization to administer the Lord’s Supper. The authorization is for approved, individual elders; it is not a blanket approval for all elders in the congregation and applies only to those who have gone through the approval and training process.

How is the role to function in the life of the congregation?

First, the authorization for an elder to administer the Lord’s Supper is limited to the congregation in which the individual is a member. As the session approves the occasions in which the Lord’s Supper may take place, the session must approve the services for which the elder will administer the sacrament. As there are already provisions for elders extending the table to shut-ins, this authorization is for the context of regular worship and special services approved by the session. And as this provision is to meet the need when there is a lack of ordained or commissioned pastoral leadership, this authorization is only for those occasions for which there is no available ordained Minister of the Word and Sacrament. In the annual clerks reports to the presbytery the clerk of session will note the dates and occasions for which the authorized elders provided communion.

Is there a time limit to this authorization?

Individuals may be authorized for a term of up to three years or until an ordained Minister of the Word and Sacrament or Commissioned Pastor is called or contracted. The authorization may be renewed.

Will there be any support or guidance for authorized elders?

Elders who have been approved and trained will have a Minister of the Word and Sacrament as their mentor and as a resource.

Training

Training will be provided by the CCV. Training will cover a reformed, theological understanding of the Lord’s Supper, the Directory for Worship’s teaching on Communion, as well as review the services for the Lord’s Supper in the Book of Common Worship and practical application in the context of the congregation.

Qualifications

The Book of Order already provides standards and guidelines for those elected and ordained to the role of elder. (G-2.0104a and b, G2-2.0301) While the same standards and guidelines should be used for discerning this additional call to serve the congregation through administering the Lord’s Supper, it should be acknowledged that not every elder is suited to this ministry. Elders who have exhibited particular care and concern for the worshipping life of the congregation, exhibit both maturity in faith and also reverence for this sacred responsibility, and exhibit a gracious welcome to others as Christ does to all who comes to his table may be considered for this additional service.