

ADVISORY OPINION

The Rev'd Dr. Christian D. Boyd, Stated Clerk
Presbytery of Milwaukee

August 3, 2020

RE: Ordination of Ministers of Word and Sacrament and their installation as pastors during extraordinary times, such as during a pandemic, war, or natural disaster.

Questions:

1. How may a candidate who has been called to serve as an installed pastor be ordained and installed under the Constitution of the PC(USA) during extraordinary times, such as the current international COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How may a candidate who has been called and approved by a presbytery to be ordained and installed to a pastoral relationship function until the call may be completed by the presbytery's action of ordination and installation, as prescribed in the Constitution, specifically W-4.04?

Advisory Opinion:

1. See Advisory Opinion, *Ordinations and Installations in the Age of COVID* by The Rev. Wayne A. Yost, JD, Stated Clerk of the Synod of the Trinity, Supplemental by The Rev. Christian Boyd, DMin, Stated Clerk of Milwaukee Presbytery (July 19, 2020).
2. See Advisory Opinion, *Role of the Presbytery in the Dissolution of Pastoral Relationships* by the Rev. Dr. Christian Boyd, Stated Clerk of Milwaukee Presbytery (July 23, 2020).
3. GENERAL OPINION
 - a. The general opinion of the Stated Clerks of the PC(USA):
 - i. It is unreasonable to hold off ordinations and/or installations until the time when worship with physical presence safely can be held. Elders and deacons have expiring terms and newly elected ones want to begin their terms of service. Sessions and boards of deacons would be hamstrung in their responsibilities if those with expiring terms just walked away without others, duly authorized, to replace them.
 - ii. For ministers to be fully authorized to perform many of their functions in the congregation and other councils of the church, they must be ordained. If in pastoral service, they must also be installed to their position. Functions such as officiating at the sacraments, officiating at weddings, and moderating session meetings require ordination. Installation establishes a particular place where they exercise these and other responsibilities.
 - iii. Presbyteries have the flexibility and authority to adapt their ordination and installation practices to accommodate the needs of the Church within the contextual reality of living through a pandemic.

- iv. It is highly advised that presbyteries exercise at the least the minimum requirements for ordination in-person, and all other acts digitally. The fullness of the service of ordination and installation, as described in the Directory for Worship may be completed at a later date, and include a reaffirmation of the constitutional questions of office.

4. AUTHORITY OF THE PRESBYTERY

- a. One of the Foundations of Presbyterian Polity is “councils possess whatever administrative authority is necessary to give effect to duties and powers assigned by the Constitution of the church. The jurisdiction of each council is limited by the express provisions of the Constitution, with powers not mentioned being reserved to the presbyteries” (F-3.0209). The Constitution, particularly the Book of Order, provides the minimum standards and expectations. Where the Book of Order is silent, the presbyteries then may establish their own rules as long as they are not in conflict with the Constitution or civil law.
- b. This foundational understanding of Constitutional administrative power, especially of presbyteries, was further illuminated in the authoritative interpretation found in the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission’s ruling on *Bolton v. Alamance Presbyterian Church* (1995): “It should be stated at the outset that the Book of Order is the part of the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) that defines the powers of the various governing bodies of the church and establishes procedures to ensure that all persons and governing bodies are treated fairly within the concept of due process of law. The Book of Order is not a straitjacket which prevents a governing body from exercising its powers in a reasonable way so as to carry out its basic functions and duties with efficiency to avoid a waste of time of its members (Book of Order, G-4.0301i). Book of Order, G-4.0301i states that ‘governing bodies possess whatever administrative authority is necessary to give effect to duties and powers assigned by the Constitution of the church.’”
- c. The presbytery has original jurisdiction to determine its membership as long as the rules are not in conflict with the Constitution of the PC(USA) or its adopted parliamentary rules, such as Robert’s Rules of Order Newly Revised.

5. PASTORAL RELATIONSHIPS

- a. As a Constitutional standard, pastoral relationships are defined in G-2.0504 as installed or temporary.
- b. Book of Order, G-2.0502, establishes that Ministers of the Word and Sacrament have membership in the presbytery by the action of the presbytery itself, and no pastoral relationship may be established, changed, or dissolved without the approval of the presbytery.
- c. Thus, G-2.0502 may be read as no pastoral relationship, temporary or installed, may be established, changed, or dissolved without the approval of the presbytery.

- d. Constitutionally, G-2.0504.b. states temporary pastoral relationships (non-installed) are approved by the presbytery but do not carry a “formal call or installation.” Unlike installed pastoral relationships, where the congregation is the body engaging in the creation of the pastoral relationship (formal call), in temporary pastoral relationships, it is the session.

6. INQUIRERS AND CANDIDATES IN PASTORAL RELATIONSHIP

- a. G-2.0606 allows for inquirers and candidates, with the permission of the presbytery of care, to engage in some form of supervised service to the church. No inquirer or candidate who has not been previously ordained as a ruling elder may serve as moderator of a session, administer the Sacraments, or perform a marriage service. An inquirer or candidate previously ordained as a ruling elder may be authorized by the presbytery to preside at the Lord’s Supper when invited by a session.
- b. “The session, with the approval of presbytery, may obtain the services of a minister of the Word and Sacrament, candidate, or ruling elder in a temporary pastoral relationship. No formal call shall be issued and no formal installation shall take place.” Thus, a temporary pastoral relationship is contractual in nature.
- c. All temporary pastoral relationship between a session and minister(s), as well as ruling elders commissioned to pastoral service, inquirers and candidates, are subject to the review and approval of the presbytery. Furthermore, as stated in G-2.0504.b, under the presbytery’s oversight and established standards, titles, and terms of service for temporary relationships are determined by the presbytery. A person serving in a temporary pastoral relationship is invited by the session for a specified period not to exceed twelve months in length, which is approved and only renewable with the approval of the presbytery. Again, presbytery alone creates and dissolves pastoral relationships, temporary and installed.
- d. Under its own Rule, a presbytery may give temporary voice to an inquirer and candidate while they serve in a temporary pastoral relationship. If the inquirer or candidate has been previously ordained a ruling elder, they may be granted vote under the presbytery’s rules (as well as commissioned to pastoral service).

7. ORDINATION AND INSTALLATION

- a. Ordination and Installation are two acts of the presbytery.
 - i. Ordination sets aside an individual to their call as a presbyter and the ministry of word and sacrament.
 - ii. Installation is the act of the presbytery establishing a permanent or tenured pastoral relationship between a minister and a congregation or agency of the denomination.
- b. The presbytery, under its own rules, may establish a commission for ordination and installations. The minimum for an administrative commission, according to

G-3.0108.b, shall be at least one ruling elder and one minister. One of those may be the moderator of the Presbytery or their designee. The commission is the designated body of the presbytery for the laying on of hands and the prayer of ordination.

- c. Under W-4.0402, the ordination and installation may take place in reality at any time or place and may be a blend of digital and in-person. “The ordination and/or installation of a minister of the Word and Sacrament shall take place at a time that enables substantial participation of the presbytery.”
- d. The presbytery’s service of ordination and/or installation focuses on Christ and the joy and responsibility of serving him through the mission and ministry of the church. The following are the minimum requirements for ordination, which requires some aspect of in-person. Installations may be conducted digitally.
 - i. The service shall be composed of prayer, scripture, and a sermon.
 - ii. As a response to the Word, the moderator (or designee) of the appropriate council briefly states the nature of the ministry to which persons are being ordained, installed, or commissioned.
 - iii. Those who are being ordained and/or installed shall be asked the constitutional questions (see W-4.0404).
 - iv. A ruling elder asks the corresponding questions of the congregation.
 - v. When all questions have been answered in the affirmative, those to be ordained will kneel, if able, for the laying on of hands and the prayer of ordination.
 - vi. The presbytery commission lays on hands at the ordination of a minister of the Word and Sacrament. Afterward, the declaration of ordination is made, and if the newly ordained minister is to be installed, the installation occurs at this time.
- e. A presbytery may decide to ordain but not install until a later time when the fullness of the service as described in the Directory for Worship, which includes the new pastor presiding at the Lord’s Table, may be done.
- f. If a minister has been called to be installed, even if ordained, the pastoral relationship is temporary and in the role of a pastor-elect until the presbytery completes the act of installation per the Directory for Worship.