

# Steps for Coming Under Care and Becoming Licensed in The Presbytery of Philadelphia of the OPC

## COMMITTEE ON CANDIDATES AND CREDENTIALS

### Introduction

The Committee on Candidates and Credentials of the Presbytery of Philadelphia welcomes you to the process of coming under care, becoming licensed to preach the gospel, and being ordained to gospel ministry. We are grateful to the Lord Jesus Christ for giving gifts to his church and for raising up men to proclaim the gospel. We are grateful that you desire to have your gifts tested to see if the Lord is calling you to serve in this way. This document lists the steps you will need to take along the way and reflects chapters XXI and XXII of the OPC's *Form of Government*, which we strongly encourage you to read.

This committee is appointed by the Presbytery of Philadelphia to serve as the bridge between the presbytery and candidates for ministry. Ordinarily you will meet with the full committee on two occasions during the ordination process, though you are welcome to request a meeting with us at any time. At our first meeting we will interview you with a view to recommending you to the presbytery to be taken under care. At our second meeting we will examine you in theology and evaluate a sermon you will preach so that we might recommend you to the presbytery to be licensed to preach the gospel. If, as a licentiate, you receive a call from a church within the presbytery you will meet with us a third time in order to be examined in theology.

Please pay special attention to the requirements and deadlines listed in this document. The Presbytery of Philadelphia meets three times per year: on the first Saturdays in February and May and on the third Saturday in September. Ordinarily, the committee meets on a weekday, two or three weeks prior to each presbytery meeting. It is your responsibility to contact the chairman of this committee for specific dates and times for you to appear before the committee, whether you are to be interviewed with a view to be taken under care or examined with a view to becoming licensed.

Ordinarily, the presbytery will examine no more than two candidates for licensure or ordination at any stated meeting and will generally give priority to candidates for ordination. This means that if you desire to be licensed you should contact the committee as soon as you think you can be ready. The examinations for licensure are rigorous and will take you time to complete. We encourage you to begin the process as early as you can.

The committee may, under extraordinary circumstances and at its discretion, grant extensions or waivers to the deadlines listed in this document, but no candidate should ever presume that a request for such an extension or waiver will be granted.

## A. Steps for Coming under Care

1. Obtain, complete, and return to the chairman of this committee the *Application for Coming Under Care* **at least six weeks prior to the presbytery meeting** at which you would like to come under care. You must be and remain a member in an Orthodox Presbyterian congregation, ordinarily in this presbytery, in order to be taken and continue under care of this presbytery.
2. Request the Session of the church of which you are a member to send a letter to the Clerk of the Presbytery, and to copy the chairman of this committee, that attests to the session's judgment that your "*Christian faith and potential gifts*" qualify you "*to be taken under the care of the presbytery with a view to ordination to the gospel ministry*" (FG 21.2).
3. Contact the chairman of the committee to determine the date and time at which you might appear before the committee.
4. Appear before the committee to be interviewed, with a view to having the committee recommend you to the presbytery to be taken under care. The committee and the presbytery will want to hear from you your Christian testimony, why you believe you are being called to pastoral ministry, and why you desire to minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.
5. Appear before the presbytery to be interviewed and taken under care. You will be asked to testify as to the grace of God in you, your holiness of life, your Christian faith, life and service, and the motives influencing you to desire the ministry (FG 21.2).
6. Once you are taken under the care of the presbytery, a member of this committee will be assigned to provide particular oversight to you. You will be able to contact him for counsel and direction as you take steps toward licensure and ordination. You will also be required to provide this committee, in writing, an annual update on your walk with the Lord, your family life, your progress in your education, your participation in the life of the church, and what steps you are taking to advance toward licensure. We commit ourselves to pray for you and to provide whatever assistance we can along the way.
7. Once you have been taken under care, you are encouraged to arrange a meeting with someone who has recently been licensed or ordained in order to request their assistance in preparing for the theology exam; you are also encouraged to give your mentoring pastor regular updates on your life, faith, and progress in completing your licensure exams.

## B. Steps for Licensure

A man may seek licensure when he has completed a bachelor's degree and at least a year and a half of theological training (FG 21.3). We strongly recommend that you begin licensure procedures before this time and seek to be licensed well before the middle of your last year in seminary. Licensure is a "period of probation" in which you are undergoing a trial or testing of your gifts, qualifications, and service, so that both you and the church may have an opportunity to form a better judgment about your fitness to shepherd the church (FG 21.1). The licensure process covers the following four basic areas:

## 1. PERSONAL DATA:

- a. Obtain, complete, and return to the chairman of this committee the *Application for Licensure*.
- b. Submit to the chairman of this committee all transcripts of your undergraduate and post-graduate academic work to date.
- c. Obtain and submit to the Clerk of the Presbytery, and copy the chairman of this committee, two written testimonials that affirm your “*piety and exemplary life*,” and your “*personal zeal for and experience in presenting the gospel to others*” (FG 21.4). It will help you if the letters are from people known to the presbytery.

## 2. PAPERS:

You must submit two papers:

- a. ***Theology Paper:*** The theological paper will demonstrate your ability to deal with some aspect or problem in theology from the entire range of Scripture. You should deal with apparent problems or contradictions in the area, the refutation of errors when they arise, the insights of church history and our subordinate standards, and the defense of the doctrine from the Bible. This is not a paper on historical theology but on systematic theology. **The topic must be approved by either one of the two men responsible for evaluating the paper and it is your responsibility to seek their approval** (see the document, *Members of the Committee*). The paper should be 12-20 pages long and must be in their hands **no less than six weeks** prior to the presbytery meeting at which you hope to be licensed. Send copies of your paper to both of the designated evaluators and to the chairman of the committee. You should also be prepared to interact with the committee on this paper. The paper may also be circulated to the other committee members for their review.
- b. ***Exegesis Paper:*** The exegetical paper will demonstrate your ability to exegete faithfully a particular text of Scripture in the original language. You should deal with the unique questions of grammar, structure, context, purpose, textual difficulties, etc. associated with the text, but should be careful to tie the text into the whole pattern of Biblical revelation as well. **The topic must be approved by either one of the two men responsible for evaluating this paper and it is your responsibility to seek their approval** (see the document, *Members of the Committee*). Send copies of your paper to both of the designated evaluators and to the chairman of the committee. The paper should be 10-15 pages in length and must be in their hands **no less than six weeks** prior to the presbytery meeting at which you hope to be licensed. You should also be prepared to interact with the committee on this paper. The paper may also be circulated to the other committee members for their review.

## 3. SERMONS:

Candidates for Licensure are required to prepare and preach two sermons. It is your responsibility to contact the Chairman of the Committee to be given the pool of texts from which you are to choose one text from the Old Testament and one from the New. You will then **prepare two sermon manuscripts which you must provide to the committee no less than six weeks prior to the presbytery meeting at which you hope to be**

**licensed.** You will be required to preach one sermon before the committee on the same day you will be examined in theology. You will be required to preach the other sermon before the presbytery. You should take care that both sermons have a strong introduction, a clear progression in your structure (which should derive from the text to be expounded) and a pastoral purpose. The application of the gospel to the lives of the hearers so that they respond to God in faith should be clear. It is in your best interest for your sermon not to exceed 20 minutes. Your typewritten, double-spaced manuscripts should probably be around 6-8 pages.

#### 4. EXAMINATIONS:

You must sustain examinations in English Bible, Church History, Greek, Hebrew, and Theology **prior to meeting with this committee** to be examined with a view to being recommended to the presbytery. Some of these exams are oral, others written. You will find the names of the men who conduct these exams on the document, *Members of the Committee*. **It is your responsibility to contact these men and to arrange with them a mutually agreeable date on which you can take the exam.** You should ask them how best to prepare for the exam. Note: the men who administer the exams are busy and other candidates may be knocking on their door. You will do well to contact them early.

A special word about the **Theology Exam**: This exam involves three stages. First, you will sit for an extensive oral exam by a committee member who will be assigned to you; second, you will appear before the full committee to be examined by your assigned examiner; third, you will face a similar exam on the floor of the presbytery. Please note that both the committee and the presbytery expect each candidate to give full, Biblical support for all answers in the theological exam. In addition to Biblical answers, it is to your advantage to have a good grasp of the OPC's *Confession* and *Catechisms* (e.g., memorize *SC* #1-42; 84-98 if you are able—you will never regret it).

#### 5. INTERNSHIPS

When you have been granted an internship you must notify the chairman of the committee promptly and make arrangements to have copies of evaluations of your internship sent to the committee in care of its chairman.

#### A Final Word about Deadlines

You will benefit by demonstrating initiative and by beginning your licensure process as early as possible. Delaying examinations until your last year of seminary may result in a delay in your ability to be licensed if presbytery is faced with more than two candidates for licensure or ordination at any meeting. Presbytery regards the period of probation following licensure to be normally not less than one year. Therefore, early attention to licensure will ease the ordination procedure. We will give you any help we can at each step of the way. If you anticipate any problems or have any questions about these procedures bring them to us as soon as possible.

May the Lord bless you richly in your preparation for the Gospel ministry.

THE CANDIDATES AND CREDENTIALS COMMITTEE