

# Standards for Commissioned Pastors: Explanations

## Preamble

The eight standards for commissioned pastors in the RCA listed in this document are printed in dark print and further defined in italics (*BCO* 1.II.14, Sec. 4). The expanded explanation following each of the eight named standards point to the competence necessary in character, knowledge and skills for the work of pastoral ministry by a commissioned pastor in the RCA.

When the commissioned pastor candidate, by learning and practice, can demonstrate competence in these standards, the classis may review, examine and authorize the candidate for commissioning to a pastoral ministry within the bounds of the classis (*BCO* 1.II.14, Sec. 5).

## #1 Personal faith and evangelism

Standard: *Demonstrate a mature personal faith in Jesus Christ and commitment and skill in nurturing others to embrace that faith.*

The candidate by word and deed shall

- express an abiding and growing faith in, and love for Jesus Christ,
- 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, humility and openness to correction, a sensitivity and care for other people, and an understanding and practice of discipleship.
- demonstrate, either through personal experience or by undergoing training, the ability to lead persons to faith in Christ, and to maximize and multiply the church's effectiveness in evangelism.

## #2 Call

Standard: *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

- articulate a biblical, personal, and Reformed call to ministry as prompted by the Holy Spirit and as attested by others.
- demonstrate servanthood, 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.

### **#3 Scripture**

Standard: *Demonstrate a thorough understanding of the Scripture, commitment to its authority as 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 & NT theology, and the ability to faithfully apply the Scriptures to the needs and hopes of humanity.
- demonstrate the ability to use Scripture effectively in preaching, teaching, pastoral care and evangelism.

### **#4 History and Theology**

Standard: *Demonstrate proficiency in understanding the history and teachings of the Christian Church, and insight in their interpretation.*

The candidate shall

- be familiar with the major persons, movements and historical events in the history of the church. Special emphasis is to be given to the Apostolic, Patristic, Reformation, and Modern periods of the church.
- demonstrate an understanding of how major doctrines of the church have emerged over time, in the context of the church's interaction with culture.
- show how a consideration of the church's history and doctrine can assist the church in its mission and its engagement with non-Christians, and people of other faiths.

### **#5 Reformed Tradition**

Standard: *Demonstrate a working knowledge of and a commitment to Reformed doctrine, government and worship.*

The candidate shall

- demonstrate an understanding of and appropriate adherence to the RCA confessions, *Book of Church Order*, and *Liturgy*.
- articulate a Reformed understanding of worship substance and style
- articulate an understanding of Reformed polity in relationship to other forms of church government, and the unique elements of Reformed church order.
- show knowledge of the distinctive elements of the Reformed theological tradition, including its theology of the church and sacraments.

- be able to apply Reformed doctrine, government and worship to the pastoral and outreach ministries of the church.

## **#6 Leadership**

Standard: *Demonstrate the understanding and skill required to lead the people of God in faithfulness to their mission.*

The candidate shall

- show understanding of the principles and practices of church leadership, both in theory and practice.
- demonstrate the ability to relate contemporary leadership practices to the order, doctrine, and life of the church.
- demonstrate, either through personal story or case study, a practical understanding of how leadership is defined and exercised in specific cases.
- show a basic awareness of the strategic dimensions of leadership, including vision formation, management skills, coping with change, and critical evaluation of self and program.
- lead in a way that meaningfully engages the cultural context and needs of the community.

## **#7 Pastoral Care**

Standard: *Demonstrate understanding, skill and compassion in caring for persons and congregations.*

The candidate shall

- give evidence of appropriate care and empathy toward persons in the various crises of life.
- 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 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.

## **#8 Worship and Preaching**

Standard: *Demonstrate understanding and skill to lead worship, preach the gospel and administer the sacraments.*

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.
- understand the place and significance of worship, including the celebration of the sacraments.
- 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.