

Launch of the Presbytery of Donegal Commissioned Ruling Elder Training Program

The Presbytery of Donegal is starting a new adventure! We are preparing for the launch of our first Commissioned Ruling Elder Training Program. Although we had hoped to start a cohort in September in 2011, we have delayed until we have a group of at least five people. Commissioned Ruling Elder is the title that will be used, with the passage of the new Form of Government, for those previously designated as Commissioned Lay Pastors, or CLPs.

As Donegal Presbytery goes forward into the future which God is preparing, there are a number of ways we can imagine Commissioned Ruling Elders being called to service. Some of our congregations are dropping below the critical mass necessary to call a Teaching Elder as pastor, and might be served by a Commissioned Ruling Elder. Immigrant or ethnic congregations often are best served by Commissioned Ruling Elders. Increasingly, multi-staff congregations will be looking for part-time ministry specialists who would benefit from formal Commissioned Ruling Elder Training. Entrepreneurial church plant pastors will most likely be bi-vocational elders who will not be able to complete traditional seminary degrees.

What are the Components of the Commissioned Ruling Elder Training Program?

The training program involves rigorous preparation for ministry. The components include:

- Sponsorship by the Session of the congregation of membership
- Covenant preparation process supervised by the Commissioned Ruling Elder Committee
- Academic Training Program beginning March 2012 and concluding June 2014
- Work with a mentor
- Field Experience
- Psychological and Vocational Testing

What is the Commissioned Ruling Elder Academic Coursework Like?

For some time, the presbytery has been considering how best to establish our first Commissioned Ruling Elder Training cohort. After looking at a number of models, the Donegal Commissioned Ruling Elder/CLP Task Group has decided to use online learning for many of the courses, while teaching preaching and other “hands on” courses in face-to-face workshop settings.

As an experiment with our first Commissioned Ruling Elder training cohort, Donegal Presbytery will be partnering with the training program at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. Since 1997, the Continuing Education Office has joined with Presbyteries in the Synod of the Trinity to provide training for people preparing to serve as CLPs. This coursework fulfills the course requirements of the *Book of Order* in the PC (U.S.A.). Donegal’s Executive Presbyter, Erin Cox-Holmes, has been on the leadership team and one of the faculty for the program since the beginning.

The academic part of the program is an intensive effort that requires a serious commitment of time and energy. Careful reading of textbooks, perceptive participation in discussions, and thoughtful completion of writing assignments are expected of all participants. The program lasts two years and is presented in six three-month terms. Courses include New Testament, Old Testament, preaching, reformed theology, worship and sacraments, pastoral care, Christian education, and PC(USA) Polity. Students can expect to spend between 5-10 hours per week on course assignments.

Some classes in the program are taught online and some are conducted face to face (F2F). The F2F classes meet one weekend (Friday evening, and Saturday from 9 – 3) each month in the spring and fall; there are no F2F classes scheduled during the winter months. Here in Donegal, we will offer our own F2F courses in order to spare our students the drive across the state. The online classes use a course management system known as “Moodle.” Access to a computer and the Internet and the willingness to participate in online coursework are requirements for participation in this program.

The two classes for the Spring Term are “Shaped for God: Foundations of Learning,” taught online by the Rev. Dr. Erin Cox-Holmes and “Preaching: Exegesis,” taught at Chestnut Level Presbyterian Church by the Rev. Dr. Michael Wilson. Classes are pass/fail, with participation requirements to achieve a passing grade. Tuition per class is \$275.00

What is the Application Process for the Commissioned Ruling Elder Program?

In the PC(USA), presbyteries maintain final responsibility for the deployment of Commissioned Ruling Elders. Admission to the training program is determined by the presbyteries, not the Seminary. Approval to participate is dependent on approval by the Presbytery of Donegal Commissioned Ruling Elder Task Group. Interested persons should contact the presbytery office for further information about the program.

Those ordained as Ruling Elders (this term applies to all Ruling Elders, whether currently serving on a session or not) will follow the application process explained in the Commissioned Ruling Elder manual, available shortly on the Presbytery of Donegal website, or from the Presbytery office. In order to apply for the covenant preparation process, a person must have completed successfully one term of coursework, and must be sponsored by their church’s session. The first step is to sign up for classes, and to give them a try.

If you think you might have a call to consider becoming a Commissioned Ruling Elder, speak with your pastor first. Then, contact the Presbytery office for information in enrolling in this program. Remember that the presbytery maintains final responsibility for commissioning and deployment of Commissioned Ruling Elders. Completion of this program, therefore, does not automatically guarantee commissioning to a congregation or ministry setting.

CRE Program Short Application Form
Commissioned Ruling Elder Program of Donegal Presbytery

The Presbytery of Donegal is launching a training program for Commissioned Ruling Elders. It will involve both face-to-face gatherings on weekends (Friday evenings and Saturdays) and online class work. Some of the online coursework will be in cooperation with the CRE/CLP Training Program of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

This initial application is for the first term of course work: *“Preaching 1: Exegesis”* and *“Shaped for God: Foundations of Learning.”* Exegesis will be taught on 2 weekends in March and April or May, with weekly online assignments. The 12 week *Shaped for God* class will be taught as distance education from March – May. Once the first term is completed, the formal application to the program, along with endorsements and references, is due. They may be submitted at any time, but it is recommended to experience the coursework involved in this preparation program prior to completing the full application process. Please see the CRE announcement letter for more information about the program.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Home Phone: _____ Cell Phone: _____

Work Phone (Check if we may phone you here): _____

E-mail: _____

Occupation: _____

Home Congregation: _____

Presbytery: _____

I wish to participate in the first term of training courses for the Commissioned Ruling Elder program. I agree to complete all assignments and, barring emergencies, actively participate in all sessions of the program. I understand that taking these courses does not guarantee acceptance into the CRE program. I authorize the CRE oversight group to inform my session that I have registered. I understand tuition for each course is \$275.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

I am submitting electronically, and certify my acceptance of the requirements.

Return materials to Donegal Presbytery by submitting online or by mail: P.O. Box 10054, Lancaster, PA 17605. Please enclose: Registration fee of \$50.00, which will cover tuition for the *“Moodling in Moodle”* introduction to distance learning. In addition, please submit a one-page statement describing why you wish to participate. This may be emailed to admin@donegalpby.com.

Date Received: _____ Signature of Executive Presbyter: _____