

2024 MANUAL

for ministry candidates

**prepared by the Candidates and Credentials Committee
of the Presbytery of the Southeast
of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church**

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Preface

The C&C Manual’s purpose is to help ministry candidates by collecting constitutional requirements, General Assembly guidance, presbytery rules and precedents, committee policies and deadlines, and practical suggestions all in one place.

This Manual underwent major revisions in 2008 and 2017, but still receives minor updates in most years, so please make sure you are using the most recent edition.

Another resource that candidates, their sessions, and their advisors may find helpful is *Reforming Our Expectations*, a booklet produced by the Subcommittee on Ministerial Training of the Committee on Christian Education of the General Assembly.

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Introduction

Greetings, especially to ministry candidates, from the Candidates and Credentials Committee of the Presbytery of the Southeast of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church!

In Presbyterian church government, the power to ordain and install ministers lies with the presbytery. The presbytery's power is exercised through several steps that follow the OPC *Form of Government* and depend upon the labors and recommendations of this committee. Your passing through those steps—i.e., the ecclesiastical component of your ministry preparations—is distinct from your academic, spiritual, and practical preparations. No seminary degree, parachurch organization, or inner sense of calling can make you an officer in Christ's church: the church herself, applying the word of God and discerning the Spirit's gifts, must test, call, and consecrate you for this holy service.

And you should expect this to be challenging. The OPC believes "it is highly reproachful to religion and dangerous to the church to entrust the preaching of the gospel to weak and ignorant men" (*Form of Government* XXI.3). Yet we are not trying to frustrate you in your pursuit of a "noble task" (1 Timothy 3:1). On the contrary, we want to help you as well as the wider church—starting by offering this Manual as a roadmap through the steps of (1) coming under care, (2) licensure to preach, and (3) ordination to gospel ministry.

Some Advice to Candidates

Throughout your preparations for ministry, stay in touch—especially by attending presbytery meetings whenever possible, communicating with your assigned advisor, and submitting annual reports (see the last part of the "Under Care" section). Be proactive with your candidacy instead of waiting for others to give you a nudge.

When preparing for our written exams, avoid the extremes of: (1) carelessly "winging" them, which risks dishonoring the Lord, wasting your examiners' time, and impairing your future ministry even if you pass; and (2) fearing and delaying them, as seminarians preoccupied with grades are tempted to do. In particular, delaying your *licensure* exams deprives the presbytery of access to you as a candidate, discards much of the wisdom built into the OPC's processes, and may cause you complications later in your candidacy. Besides, our exams and papers are ultimately just pass/fail—and if you fail one, you'll get a chance to take it again.

As for your oral exams:

Try to be concise. Brevity is a mark of clear thinking. Your examiner can always ask for a fuller explanation if it's needed. And trying to "run out the clock" with long answers is disrespectful.

When you can, support your answers with references to Scripture and the Westminster standards.

If you don't know the answer to a question, don't guess. It's better to admit that you don't know and are willing to learn than to give a wrong answer.

You should bring an unmarked English Bible and a bottle of water. And allow for adequate rest and travel time prior to your committee interview and the presbytery meeting. It's better to be calm and clear-headed than to be artificially inflated with last-minute "cramming."

COMING UNDER CARE

OVERVIEW

Form of Government XXI.2 describes the purposes and procedures for the presbytery to take men under its care “with a view to ordination to the gospel ministry.” Coming under care is the presbytery recognizing that you are a candidate for the ministry, and helping you (as well as the church) toward that goal in certain ways:

- Screening you with a Christian Faith & Life exam (see below).
- Giving you a ministerial advisor. Through him, the presbytery offers you encouragement and practical advice for your ministry preparations. Think of him as the church’s version of a faculty advisor.
- Requiring annual progress reports. This is a way of staying in touch; spotting developing problems, opportunities, or changes of direction; and verifying that you are making actual progress toward ordination. It’s also a chance for you to reaffirm (or change) your answers to the Faith & Life exam.
- Inviting you to presbytery meetings. Attending these as often as possible while you’re a ministry candidate has several benefits: You’ll get to know how the presbytery functions. You’ll meet members of the regional church. They’ll get to know you too. And you’ll become familiar with some of the examinations and vows that you’ll take later, by watching other candidates take them.

Coming under the presbytery’s care should help give you focus and direction by setting you on a public path toward the subsequent steps of licensure and ordination. And it puts your ministry preparations into an ecclesiastical context—not just a personal, professional, or academic one.

PREPARING TO COME UNDER CARE

1. Plan to pursue gospel ministry and be in a position to make measurable progress as a candidate (i.e., you’ve started seminary or plan to do so soon). You don’t need to be certain about your calling yet!
2. Be a faithful communicant member of a congregation, ordinarily within the regional church governed by this presbytery.
3. Ask your session to send the presbytery (through its clerk or the committee chairman) “a written recommendation...certifying that in its judgment [your] Christian faith and potential gifts qualify [you] to be taken under the care of the presbytery” (*Form of Government* XXI.2). For advice to sessions about the possible contents of such a letter, see <https://www.opc.org/cce/undercare.html>.
4. Read this Manual in its entirety, and affirm to the committee that you’ve done so.

EXAMINATION

Christian Faith & Life

This exam covers your “Christian life, faith, service, and the motives influencing [you] to seek the sacred office” (*Form of Government* XXI.2). Through it, the committee and

presbytery hope to learn about you, your circumstances, and your family; to establish that you are a Christian, with continuing growth, exemplary holiness, and a desire to serve the church; and to establish that you have sound reasons for aiming at gospel ministry, in terms of spiritual gifts and personal motives. It will be an oral exam, administered:

1. Privately, in a meeting with the committee, usually the day before the presbytery meeting; then also, if the committee is satisfied and willing to bring you in front of the presbytery...
2. On the floor of presbytery, by a member of the committee, allowing follow-up questions from other presbyters.

You can preview this exam in its entirety in Appendix A, but be aware that you may get other questions as follow-up, too.

DEADLINES

1. Notify the committee chairman of your desire to be taken under care at least 4 weeks before the presbytery meeting.
2. Arrange for your session's recommendation to be received by the committee chairman at least 2 weeks before the presbytery meeting.

ONCE THE PRESBYTERY AGREES TO TAKE YOU UNDER CARE

You will be assigned a ministerial advisor, usually a member of the committee. From time to time he should be in contact with you and your session about your progress. You can also contact him with your questions or for guidance in your candidacy.

Submit a written progress report to the committee chairman each year by March 15. It should briefly summarize your preparations for ordination during the past year, including seminary studies, ministry activities, and your goals for the future; and it should inform the committee of any major changes or pastoral concerns in your family's life. Half a page is usually enough. Be aware that your progress reports will be visible to the full presbytery.

Attend as many meetings of presbytery as you can. Become familiar with its members and its functions.

Recognize that the presbytery's care is not a ministry credential. Specifically, the presbytery has not authorized you to preach. On occasion your own session may, if it chooses, invite you into its own pulpit to "exhort" under its close supervision (*Directory for Worship* I.D.2.e); and of course you may seek informal opportunities to teach others, share the gospel, and be trained as a preacher (e.g., in a homiletics class). But you should not undertake typical "pulpit supply" responsibilities until you are licensed to preach.

The committee advises you to start working on licensure requirements as soon as possible, and even to approach licensure as a process that may span a year or more.

LICENSURE

OVERVIEW

Form of Government XXI.1 says “candidates for ordination shall first be licensed by presbyteries to preach the gospel as probationers.” The purpose of the probationary period is to “make trial of their qualifications and service,” so that “the churches may have an opportunity to form a better judgment respecting the gifts of those by whom they are to be instructed and governed.” (So in the OPC licensure is not meant as a last-minute, end-of-seminary prerequisite for taking a call.)

In addition to the exams listed below, expect the committee and presbytery to revisit your Christian Faith & Life exam, even though you are already “under care.”

HOW TO BE LICENSED

1. Come under care of the presbytery, normally at a prior presbytery meeting.
2. Earn a bachelor of arts degree, or its academic equivalent, from a college or university of reputable academic standing.
3. Complete about half of your seminary training (*Form of Government* XXI.3) and send transcripts (which need not be official copies) of your work thus far to the committee chairman.
4. Solicit two or more letters of recommendation attesting your exemplary life, piety, and zeal in serving the church. These are usually written by a minister or ruling elder. They should be addressed to the presbytery via its clerk, but also CC the committee chairman.
5. Give your advisor access to your extant online presence, including social media and blogs.
6. Pass all the exams, and strictly observe all the deadlines, listed below.

EXAMINATIONS

A. Written exams

These are administered by different committee members, each of whom you must contact individually before taking his exam. Exam protocol may vary between examiners. Your examiner will respond to your exam with some evaluation, and advise the committee whether to find it acceptable. But he will not “pass” or “fail” you himself; the committee will decide jointly whether it’s willing to bring a motion to the presbytery to sustain each exam.

If the committee declines one of your exams, you’ll be allowed to take it a second time, and maybe even a third. In certain cases an examiner may offer a supplemental, partial exam. But depending on his availability and the committee’s deadlines, you may have to wait for the next six-month presbytery “cycle” for such additional attempts.

1. **English Bible** – currently administered by Nick Thompson

You must have a strong grasp of the Scriptures in English in order to minister effectively to English-speaking congregations. Candidates should be able to grasp the content and meaning of books of Scripture as a whole. They should also be able to identify books and chapters in which key passages are found. This includes locating the stages of the covenant of grace as they unfold in the Bible. Recitation of the Decalogue and outlines of some New Testament books may be required as well.

2. **church history** – currently administered by James Ganzevoort

The church history exam includes identification questions but also longer essays. Do not overlook ancient, medieval, Reformation, modern, or American Presbyterian (including OPC) segments of the subject. This exam is extensive due to the far-ranging nature of the subject, but is evaluated with more leniency than others.

See Appendix E for recommended readings to prepare you.

3. **theology** – currently administered by James Ganzevoort

You may use an unmarked English Bible during this exam.

Theology exams for licensure mainly focus on confessional orthodoxy, biblical support for confessional doctrines, and clarity of thought and expression—rather than the full mastery of the field, definite opinions on current controversies, or practical applications that may be expected in a theology exam for ordination. See *Reforming Our Expectations*, a booklet by the OPC’s Christian Education Committee, for a more thorough explanation of this difference.

See Appendix E for recommended readings to prepare you. The committee also advises you to memorize the Westminster Shorter Catechism.

4. **Greek** – currently administered by Bob Horton

The Greek exam expects an “intermediate” proficiency level comparable to third-semester studies.

5. **Hebrew** – currently administered by Bob Horton

The Hebrew exam expects an “intermediate” proficiency level comparable to third-semester studies.

You will be allowed to use a reader’s Hebrew Bible (such as the one published by Zondervan) for the longer translation portions.

B. Sermon

See Appendix C for the committee’s sermon evaluation criteria and Appendix E for some recommended readings in homiletics. Aim for 20 minutes. Preach as you would to the church at large, not to the ministers and elders of the presbytery as such.

1. **manuscript** for advance evaluation – currently reviewed by Nick Thompson

2. **preach** substantially the same sermon to the assembled presbytery

C. Papers

Each paper should be 15-20 pages in length. Use footnotes, not endnotes. You should have approximately 2-3 footnotes per page and one source per page. Use a minimum of 3 journal articles as well as some contemporary commentaries. You should also interact with critical scholarship (some from outside the Reformed community) when appropriate. Use any style guide of your choosing, but be consistent in following it. Papers should include a “works cited” page as well for ease of reference.

Both exegetical and theological papers should have a clear thesis statement and outline. The body of the text should follow the outline, and every section should clearly argue towards the thesis statement. Exegetical papers should not merely be a list of exegetical notes. Candidates should include their translations of the text, and they may include structural analysis, but they must submit an actual paper such as it might appear in print in

an academic journal. Papers should be unified and readable. Please submit your papers by email as Microsoft Word documents.

As with the exams, one committee member will be assigned to review your submission. Ask him about appropriate subjects. You may be able to submit a paper that you've already written for seminary, but it will get a fresh evaluation by the committee.

1. theology paper – currently reviewed by Ryan McGraw

The theology paper should be an in-depth study of some particular doctrine, demonstrating a thorough knowledge of the various sides of a particular question, citing multiple theological positions on that particular doctrine, and responding to those who oppose that doctrine.

2. exegesis paper – currently reviewed by Ryan McGraw

The exegesis paper should demonstrate a thorough knowledge of the Greek or Hebrew underlying your Old or New Testament passage. Proficiency should be demonstrated in the following areas: establishing the text, translation, parsing, word studies, grammar studies, and commentary and journal interaction.

D. Committee interview

Prior to the presbytery meeting (usually the day before), you will meet with the committee face to face. At this meeting, expect the committee to (1) discuss your written exams and papers, especially any weaknesses perceived in them; (2) examine you orally, especially in theology, English Bible, and (once again) Christian faith & life; and (3) make a final decision whether to bring you to the floor of presbytery.

E. Oral theology exam before the presbytery

One committee member will conduct this public exam, which will be followed by questions from other presbyters. You may only use an unmarked Bible. Be aware that “theology” is defined broadly for the sake of this exam: you may also get questions about Bible content, church history, or other subjects. Expect your examiner to explore areas of weakness that have arisen during your written theology exam and committee interview—not to fluster or embarrass you, but to ensure that the presbytery is fully informed and can follow up with further questions if it wishes.

DEADLINES

1. Notify the committee chairman of your desire to be licensed at least 10 weeks before the presbytery meeting; also give your ministerial advisor access to your social media, blogs, etc. at this time.
2. Contact each examiner and make arrangements for his exam at least 8 weeks before the presbytery meeting.
3. Submit all written exams, papers, and your sermon manuscript to the correct examiner or reviewer at least 4 weeks before the presbytery meeting.
4. Arrange for all letters of recommendation and seminary transcripts to be received by the chairman at least 2 weeks before the presbytery meeting.

Please note that these deadlines are bare minimums. Ideally the whole licensure process would leave plenty of time for study and for re-taking exams as needed—perhaps a year or two in total.

The committee advises you to take each licensure exam as soon as you've finished classes or readings suitable for it.

ONCE YOU'VE BEEN LICENSED

Seek to preach in various churches of the presbytery, asking their pastors and elders to give you feedback and submit written reviews to the committee (cf. Appendix D).

Observe the rules of *Form of Government* XXI.9-10 about preaching or relocating outside the geographical boundaries of the presbytery.

Keep submitting your annual reports to the committee.

Complete your seminary studies. Compare your coursework to *The Recommended Curriculum for Ministerial Preparation in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (near the back of *The Book of Church Order*) and consider whether you should undertake any additional, personal studies.

Consider the following possible ways to prepare yourself for ordination:

- a. Applying for a summer and/or year-long internship. Contact the OPC's Committee on Christian Education for more information. (An internship will often include the other items on this list.)
- b. Enrolling in an OPC Readiness in Ministry seminar, and in one or more MTIOPC classes.
- c. Attending the meetings of your local session (if permitted) as well as the presbytery.
- d. Joining your local elders in their visitation (if permitted), especially familiarizing yourself with hospital and nursing home ministry.
- e. Attentively observing weddings and funerals.
- f. Staying abreast of developments in the church by reading *New Horizons, Ordained Servant*, General Assembly reports, and missions bulletins.
- g. Pursuing ministry opportunities available to non-ordained men, like teaching Sunday school classes, leading a community Bible study, or participating in a prison ministry.

Seek a call to ministry, normally within two years of being licensed (cf. *Form of Government* XXI.11).

ORDINATION

OVERVIEW

“After a period of probation sufficient to make trial of their qualifications and service, and having received reports that their services are edifying to the church, the presbyteries may in due time proceed to ordain such probationers, or licentiates, to the sacred office” (*Form of Government* XXI.1).

You can only be ordained as a minister to a specific work of ministry. That is, prior to being ordained, you must receive a call from a church body where you’ll be installed as its pastor, teacher, or evangelist (*Form of Government* XX.3)—except in unusual circumstances wherein the presbytery approves a man to do ministerial work outside the church.

In addition to approving you for ordination, the presbytery also must approve the terms of the call prior to placing it in your hands.

If you have been called to minister within a different presbytery than the one that holds your license, then the licensing presbytery must attest that your probation was successful and must approve the terms of your call, while the ordaining presbytery also must approve the terms of your call and will conduct your exams.

HOW TO QUALIFY FOR ORDINATION

1. Get licensed at a prior presbytery meeting, and use your license to gain as much ministry experience as possible, developing and demonstrating your gifts throughout the churches of the presbytery.
2. Complete your seminary training (“an adequate course of study in a theological seminary equivalent to that required for a regular three-year theological degree,” *Form of Government* XXIII.3) and send transcripts (which need not be official copies) to the committee chairman.
3. Solicit two or more letters of recommendation attesting your “satisfactory exercise of the gifts for the gospel ministry” (*Form of Government* XXIII.6). These are usually written by a minister or ruling elder. They should be addressed to the presbytery via its clerk, but also CC the committee chairman.
4. Solicit five or more favorable sermon evaluations (see below under “Examinations”) to be sent to the committee chairman.
5. Forward to the presbytery through its clerk (and CC to the committee chairman) a copy of your call—which should resemble *Form of Government* XXII.9 and be duly subscribed per *Form of Government* XXII.7—and state your desire to accept it.
6. Ask your presbytery, if it’s elsewhere in the OPC, to attest your probation, permit you to accept the call, and communicate these actions to the Southeast (*Form of Government* XXII.12.d).
7. Pass all the exams, and observe all the deadlines, listed below.

EXAMINATIONS

A. Written exams

These are administered by different committee members, each of whom you must contact individually before taking his exam. Exam protocol may vary between examiners. Your examiner will respond to your exam with some evaluation, and advise the committee whether to find it acceptable. But he will not “pass” or “fail” you himself; the committee will decide jointly whether it’s willing to bring a motion to the presbytery to sustain each exam.

If the committee declines one of your exams, you might be allowed to take it again. But depending on the committee’s deadlines and your examiner’s availability, it may be necessary to wait for the next “cycle” (i.e., stated meeting of presbytery) to try again.

1. **Book of Church Order** – currently administered by Bob Horton

This open-book exam is a review of the OPC *Book of Church Order* asking salient questions from the various chapters in *The Form of Government*, *The Book of Discipline*, and *The Directory of the Public Worship of God*.

2. **apologetics** – currently administered by Chris Strevel

3. **theology** – currently administered by Chris Strevel

You may use an unmarked English Bible during this exam.

Theology exams for ordination will test for full mastery of the subject and the ability to make practical applications—in addition to the confessional orthodoxy, biblical support, and clarity of thought and expression sought in an theology exam for licensure. See *Reforming Our Expectations* for a fuller explanation of this difference.

See Appendix E for recommended readings to prepare you.

4. **hot topics** – currently administered by Ryan McGraw

Ministers must be abreast of current issues that face the church today. This includes topics that potentially divide Presbyterian and Reformed churches. This exam will seek to ascertain your views in relation to some of these areas of theology. Properly speaking, this is a subset of your theology exam, but it will be administered and evaluated separately as a written exam.

This is the only exam that will be shared with the whole presbytery. After yours has been evaluated, you’ll be given one chance to revise it before the presbytery sees it.

You can preview this exam in its entirety in Appendix B.

B. Sermon

At this stage the committee won’t require you to submit a sermon manuscript, nor recommend that the presbytery call you to preach on the floor, if (1) the Presbytery of the Southeast heard and approved a sermon from you at the time of your licensure; AND (2) you’ve had at least five written sermon evaluations from your time of probation sent to the committee. These evaluations must (a) concern different sermons, i.e., expounding separate Scripture passages; (b) be authored by at least two different ministers or ruling elders; and (c) contain favorable answers to the committee’s questions in Appendix D.

C. Committee interview

Prior to the presbytery meeting (usually the day before), you will meet with the committee face to face. At this meeting, expect the committee to (1) discuss your written exams,

especially any weaknesses perceived in them; (2) examine you orally, especially in theology, hot topics, and (once again) Christian faith & life; and (3) make a final decision whether to bring you to the floor of presbytery.

D. Oral theology exam before the presbytery

One committee member will conduct this public exam, which will be followed by questions from other presbyters. You may only use an unmarked Bible. As with licensure, “theology” is defined broadly for the sake of this exam; expect a number of practical and “hot topics” questions to arise. Also expect your examiner to explore areas of weakness that have arisen during your written theology exam and committee interview—not to fluster or embarrass you, but to ensure that the presbytery is fully informed and can follow up with further questions if it wishes.

DEADLINES

1. Immediately after agreeing to accept a ministerial call, contact the committee chairman.
 - a. If time is very short before the next stated meeting of presbytery, the committee will consider whether flexibility with the following deadlines is possible and advisable.
 - b. If time is very long before the next stated meeting of presbytery, please note that the presbytery has shown a strong preference to examine candidates at stated meetings, not called meetings, and the committee is unlikely to support an exception. So, since there are only two stated meetings per year, you may experience a delay.

(If you and the calling body meanwhile decide to enter into something like a “stated supply” relationship, please observe the spirit of *Form of Government* XXII.13.d—if not the letter, since it concerns ministers transferring from other denominations—when it forbids moving to the field or acting as a *de facto* minister prior to approval by the presbytery. In other words: Do not represent yourself as a minister before you really are one, and be careful about “putting down roots” before the presbytery has approved you for ordination.)
2. Contact each examiner and make arrangements for his exam at least 8 weeks before the presbytery meeting.
3. Submit all written exams at least 4 weeks before the presbytery meeting.
4. Arrange for all letters of recommendation, sermon evaluations (see above), your seminary transcripts, and call documents to be received by the chairman at least 2 weeks before the presbytery meeting.

ONCE THE PRESBYTERY AGREES TO ORDAIN YOU

Immediately after your ordination exams are sustained, the committee (unless it objects to your call) will ask the presbytery to approve the terms of the call and “place it in your hands.”

The presbytery will schedule your service of ordination and installation. It will be a worship service within a called meeting of the presbytery. Therefore, you and the calling body should make no more than tentative plans for such a service until the presbytery has approved you for ordination, approved your call, and agreed to call a meeting at your desired date, time, and place.

You will be enrolled as a ministerial member of the presbytery upon being ordained and installed.

TRANSFER

MEN UNDER CARE

One presbytery's care (or a man's "under care status") does not transfer to another. If a man under care relocates, his new presbytery should take him under its care on the strength of its own exam(s), and his old presbytery should simply remove him from its list of men under care.

LICENTIATES

The committee understands an OPC license to preach to be valid across presbytery boundaries. But for regular service in, or relocation to, a new presbytery, the licentiate must observe the rules of *Form of Government* XXI.9-10. The licentiate's new presbytery has discretion to re-administer all, some, or none of the trials for licensure when taking him under its jurisdiction. For current licentiates applying to the jurisdiction of the Presbytery of the Southeast, the committee will at least require a sermon (manuscript and preached; see "Licensure," above), but its other recommendations may well vary with the candidate and the circumstances.

ORDAINED MINISTERS

The ministers who might wish to transfer their credentials between presbyteries and denominations, and the circumstances under which they might wish to do so, are too varied for the committee to provide specific directions in advance.

In general, the committee will expect a minister transferring into the Presbytery of the Southeast to have met all the OPC criteria for licensure and ordination at some point in his past—especially if he is entering the presbytery for active ministry and not simply retirement. Certain exceptions may be available (see *Form of Government* XXIII.3). But all ministers coming from outside the OPC are required by the *Form of Government* to pass an exam in theology on the floor of presbytery (though the length and intensity of such an exam may depend on the circumstances). Even ministers transferring from other OPC presbyteries should expect to be interviewed by the committee and on the floor of presbytery, and to be asked some of the "hot topics" questions in the process (see Appendix B).

In light of all the possible variables, transferees should contact the committee as early as possible so it can plan a suitable way forward.

Appendix A: Christian Faith & Life Exam

See pages 4-5 for more information about the goals and administration of this exam.

1. Describe how you became a Christian.
2. Describe your spiritual journey since conversion, and how you developed Reformed convictions.
3. Describe your personal life.
 - a. Are you married? How many years?
 - b. Have you previously been married or divorced?
 - c. Is your wife a Christian?
 - d. Have your children been baptized?
 - e. Have your children professed faith in Christ?
 - f. Do you currently have a significant moral failing to preclude you from holding ordained office?
 - 1) pornography
 - 2) outbursts of anger
 - 3) drug or alcohol abuse
 - 4) not ruling your household well
 - g. Does your wife/family support your pursuit of the ministry?
4. Describe your walk with the Lord.
 - a. Private worship
 - b. Family worship
 - c. Bible study
 - d. Prayer
 - e. Relationship with your wife
 - f. Relationship with your children
5. Describe your service to Christ.
 - a. Evangelism
 - b. Teaching Sunday school
 - c. Working with youth
 - d. Missions trips
6. What motives influence you to desire the sacred office?
7. Why do you desire to be a minister in the OPC?

Appendix B: Hot Topics Exam (rev. 2022)

This exam is a subset of the written theology exam for ordination, but it may also be used as a “views” exam for ministers transferring into the presbytery. Candidates should contact Ryan McGraw (ryan.m.mcgraw@gmail.com) for specific instructions on submitting this exam.

Try to answer concisely, and refer to Scripture where possible. You may use outside materials during this exam, but you must answer all questions in your own words.

1. What is the relationship of the Bible to the Westminster standards? What do you believe about the nature of confessional subscription?
2. What is your position regarding the length of the days in creation? Defend your answer from Scripture, and if possible, interact with the 2004 General Assembly report on this issue.
3. What is your view of the Mosaic Covenant? How does it relate to the covenants of works and grace?
4. Do you believe in the free offer of the gospel? Explain your understanding of what the free offer means and does not mean. Refer specifically to the “well-meant” offer, and if possible, interact with the 1948 General Assembly report on this issue.
5. Do you believe in common grace? How do you define common grace?
6. How do you regard the New Perspective on Paul? Federal Vision theology?
7. What is the proper role of the law of God in the Christian life?
8. Do you believe that Christians are obligated to tithe?
9. What is your position regarding Theonomy and Christian Reconstruction?
10. How do you understand the “Two Kingdoms” theology? Evaluate it briefly.
11. How do you think a biblical concept of social justice compares to modern social justice movements?
12. What is your stance on civil disobedience? How does it apply to state restrictions on public worship?
13. What is your view of the Sabbath? Relate your answer to the teaching of the Westminster standards.
14. What is your view of extra-biblical holidays (e.g. Easter, Christmas, Good Friday, Lent, etc.)?
15. Are visible representations of Christ lawful?
16. Explain how men, women, and children should relate within the family, including your evaluation of the modern Christian patriarchy movement and the use of birth control.
17. What are your views concerning parachurch ministries?
18. Do you accept or reject Roman Catholic baptism?
19. Assess paedocommunion from Scripture.
20. What is your view regarding the number of offices in the church?
21. Do you believe the Bible permits divorced men to hold church office?
22. What is your view of ministers of the gospel who have unbelieving children? Do you believe that they should continue in ministry? Make reference to Titus 1:6 in your answer.
23. What are your views about the role of women in the church? (e.g.: Are women officers permissible? May a woman lead a women’s Bible study? Read Scripture or lead a prayer in public worship?)
24. How do you view redemptive-historical preaching? What do you believe about the nature and necessity of application in preaching?
25. How do you understand the millennium in Revelation 20?

Appendix C: Sermon Evaluation Criteria

Below is a list of criteria that the committee considers in evaluating sermons. (Not every sermon is expected to meet every single criterion, but candidates should know what the committee and its reviewer are looking for.)

This list pertains to content more than delivery, but the committee is aware that gifted delivery is essential to the communication of God's word. Please also see the prescriptions for preaching in *Directory for Worship* II.A.3.a-b and *Larger Catechism* #159.

1. Is the sermon **expositional**?

- Does it faithfully draw the meaning out of the text (i.e., exegesis), rather than read a foreign meaning into the text (i.e., eisegesis)?
- Does it give due attention to the literary, historical, and biblical-theological context of the passage?
- Does it sufficiently grapple with the genre and structure of the text?
- Does it reflect an understanding of the original languages without being obtrusive?
- Does it explicitly root each point and sub-point in the text?

2. Is the sermon **theological**?

- Does it present the central doctrinal truth(s) in the text?
- Does it proclaim Christ in His person and work in an unforced, organic way?
- Does it accord with the Westminster Standards and refer to them when fitting?
- Does it promote exultation in the Triune God of creation and redemption?

3. Is the sermon **experiential and practical**?

- Does it distinguish between different categories of hearers (e.g., saved/unsaved; backslidden/discouraged; children/elderly), or does it assume a uniform audience?
- Does it reach past the intellect to the conscience and affections?
- Does it practically apply the text in a relevant and non-superficial manner that is grounded in both the text and the gospel?
- Does it tell people not only what they need to do, but also how and why?
- Does it apply throughout, rather than tacking on a list of applications at the end?

4. Is the sermon **clear and engaging**?

- Does it communicate a singular message in a memorable and coherent structure?
- Does it have an introduction that arouses interest, commands attention, and leads naturally to the text?
- Does it connect the various points with appropriate transitions, rather than having abrupt and unconnected shifts in thought?
- Does it anticipate questions, objections, and misunderstandings hearers might have?
- Does it effectively use illustration to crystalize the doctrine and/or application of the text?
- Does it strategically utilize the conclusion, rather than simply give a summary of the message?

Appendix D: Sermon Review Form

Ministers and ruling elders should use this form to evaluate sermons preached by licentiates, and send their evaluations to the committee chairman. (Positive reviews of five different sermons on separate texts, from at least two reviewers, will be needed for a candidate to avoid a new exam in preaching.)

PREACHER:

SERMON DATE AND WHERE PREACHED:

SERMON TEXT (AND TITLE, IF ANY):

PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING...

1. Did the candidate demonstrate the ability to exegete and expound the text of Scripture responsibly?
2. Was the main point of the sermon clear, and did the sermon have a clear outline?
3. Did the candidate aim at the heart through appropriate application?
4. Did the candidate preach the gospel clearly?
5. Do you believe that this sermon helps confirm this candidate's call to the ministry?
6. Do you have any other comments or concerns for the committee?

REVIEWER:

Appendix E: Recommended Readings

CHURCH HISTORY

general church history

“Ancient and Medieval Church History,” classroom lectures by David Calhoun at <https://www.covenantseminary.edu/resources>

“Reformation and Modern Church History,” classroom lectures by David Calhoun at <https://www.covenantseminary.edu/resources>

The Story of Christianity by Justo Gonzalez

OPC history

Christianity and Liberalism by J. Gresham Machen

Fighting the Good Fight by D. G. Hart and John Muether

Note: There are many worthy books on Machen, the OPC, and the Presbyterian conflict of the early 20th century. But this list is limited to some basics needed to prepare for an exam.

supplemental readings that may be valuable as historical theology

Early Christian Doctrines by J. N. D. Kelly

Theology of the Reformers by Timothy George

A Quest for Godliness by J. I. Packer

Reformed Theology in America by David Wells

PREACHING

Reformed Preaching by Joel Beeke

The Heart is the Target by Murray Capill

Expositional Preaching by David Helm

Preaching and Preachers by Martyn Lloyd-Jones

Preaching in the Holy Spirit by Albert Martin

Expository Exultation by John Piper

THEOLOGY (LICENSURE)

Systematic Theology by Louis Berkhof (including the 200-page “Introduction”)

Redemption Accomplished and Applied by John Murray

Westminster Confession of Faith, Larger Catechism, and Shorter Catechism—and study guides:

Confessing the Faith: A Reader’s Guide by Chad van Dixhoorn

The Westminster Larger Catechism: A Commentary by Johannes G. Vos

The Westminster Shorter Catechism: For Study Classes by G. I. Williamson

THEOLOGY (ORDINATION)

Any list of worthy theological articles, books, and systematics would be hopelessly vast, idiosyncratic, and ever-changing. But to say the least, in addition to the Westminster standards and your seminary textbooks, you would do well acquaint yourself with works that have proved specially useful to the Reformed churches over many years, such as:

Systematic Theology by Louis Berkhof (including the 200-page “Introduction”)

Institutes of the Christian Religion by John Calvin

Institutes of Elenctic Theology by Francis Turretin

Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments by Geerhardus Vos

APOLOGETICS

Van Til's Apologetic by Greg Bahnsen

Five Views on Apologetics edited by Steven B. Cowan

Christian Apologetics by Cornelius Van Til

CANDIDATE CHECKLIST

		under care	licensure	ordination	OPC transfer	other transfer
Christian Faith & Life exam	committee					<i>as needed</i>
	floor		<i>as needed</i>	<i>as needed</i>		<i>as needed</i>
English Bible exam	written					<i>as needed</i>
	committee		<i>as needed</i>			<i>as needed</i>
Greek exam (written)						<i>as needed</i>
Hebrew exam (written)						<i>as needed</i>
church history exam (written)						<i>as needed</i>
apologetics exam (written)						<i>as needed</i>
Book of Church Order exam (written)						<i>as needed</i>
theology exam	written					<i>as needed</i>
	committee					<i>as needed</i>
	floor					
Hot Topics exam	written				<i>as needed</i>	
	committee					
	floor				<i>as needed</i>	
theology paper						<i>as needed</i>
exegesis paper						<i>as needed</i>
sermon	written			<i>as needed</i>		<i>as needed</i>
	floor			<i>as needed</i>		<i>as needed</i>
seminary transcripts						<i>as needed</i>
session testimonial						
two individual testimonials						
transfer letter						

NOTE: a licentiate from another OPC presbytery seeking ordination must produce its attestation to, and get its permission to accept a call in, the PSE (FG XXII.13.d)

This checklist is only meant as a memory aid and simplification; if it is found to conflict at any point with the *Book of Church Order*, the rest of this Manual, or the committee's mandate, it should be disregarded.