



Administrative Commission for Examinations: Topics for examination Discussion (expanded)

The Donegal Presbytery desires the process of examining ministers and candidates to be collegial rather than inquisitorial. Our hope is that the examination will be an occasion for substantive theological conversation among minister or candidates and the members of the commission that will illumine the faith commitments and theological depth and breadth of those who seek admission to membership in the presbytery. **This is not an examination of the content of the minister or candidate's knowledge, but rather of his or her views.**

Toward that end, the Examinations Commission has prepared the following list of topics about which a minister or candidate seeking admission to the Presbytery of Donegal should be prepared to share theological conversation. This document does not presume to define particular answers as acceptable and others as unacceptable. It is intended to stimulate the thinking of a minister or candidate in preparation for his or her conversation with the commission. Not all the questions listed below will be asked in any given conversation, and other questions related to these but not listed here may be asked as follow-up questions.

The examination conversation will proceed generally along the following plan:

- Introduction of minister/candidate and commission members
- Questions for conversation
- Commission discussion (minister/candidate excused temporarily)
- Follow-up questions as needed
- Commission decision and housekeeping matters

Area One: Christian Faith and Spiritual Practice

1. Spirituality

- What do you understand "spirituality" to mean?
- What regular spiritual practices do you follow? Why?
- How would you go about nurturing spiritual discipline in the life of others? Of a congregation?

2. Faith Commitments

- What does it mean to you, practically speaking, to "trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?" (Book of Order W-4.0404a)
- As you think about your life of faith, can you identify places or moments in which you were then or are now aware of the movement of God's Spirit or the working of God's grace?

Area Two: Reformed Theology

1. "Essential Tenets" of Reformed Theology

- What do you think is/are the unique contribution/s of the Reformed tradition to Christian faith and life?
- What use do you make of the Book of Confessions in the life of the church?
- Contemporary writer and pastor, Lillian Daniel, writes, "Religion at its best focuses on how to live, not what to think." As a 'confessional church', how do Presbyterians respond?

2. Scripture

- Our constitutional questions for ordination describe the Scriptures as "by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ and God's Word" to us (Book of Order W-4.0404b). What does this mean to you as you think about the place of Scripture in the life of faith? In the life of the Church?

3. Christology

- Who is Jesus, as you understand him?

4. Atonement

- What do you understand to be the meaning of the death of Jesus?
- Throughout the history of the Christian faith, there have been many ways of modeling or describing the atoning work of Jesus Christ. What ways of describing the atonement are most illuminative and meaningful for you, and why?

5. Sin and Salvation

- What do you understand sin to be?
- We sometimes speak of sin as an individual phenomenon, and at other times as communal or corporate. How do you understand these terms, and what impact do they have on the way we think about the saving work of Jesus Christ?

6. Theological Anthropology

- What do you understand the biblical account to mean in the description of human beings as "created in the image of God" (Gen 1:27)?
- How do you understand "created in the image of God" as it informs the church in the current environment relating to gender and sexuality?

7. Proclamation of the Word

- What is preaching, as you understand it?
- How do you prepare to preach, including your work with the text, your thinking about the congregation, etc.?
- Are there favorite themes to which you return most often in your preaching? What are they, and why are they significant to you?

Area Three: Sacramental Theology and Practice

1. Baptism

- As you understand the sacrament, what happens in baptism?
- What scriptural models of baptism (circumcision, ritual cleansing, dying and rising, etc) are most illuminative and meaningful for you?

2. The Lord's Supper

- How do you understand the liturgical language of the "body" and "blood" of Christ, in light of your sacramental theology?

3. General matters

- What is the place of the sacraments in worship (in terms of both your theology of worship and the placement in the order of service)?
- What is the relationship between baptism and the Lord's Supper?

Area Four: Church Polity

1. Relationship to the presbytery

What expectations do you have regarding the presbytery in the following areas:

- accountability to the presbytery?
- support from the presbytery?
- participation in the presbytery?

2. Role of polity in the evolving church

- One of the hallmarks of the PCUSA is that we do things "decently and in order". The reality is that we live in a messy world. How is our polity challenged by this reality? Or is our polity still able to help us bring order out of chaos?
- In the "Foundations of Presbyterian Polity" section of the Book of Order, what is particularly important to you and how does it affect your ministry? Please tell us about two or three concepts here.

Area Five: The Evolving Church

- What is the mission of the church in the Post Christendom, "Spiritual but not religious" age? Is Christianity "unique" or just one of a plethora of spiritual options available to people?
- In a religious atmosphere dominated by "Evangelical Christianity", does the traditional "Mainline Church" still have a role to play? The old adage, "the church is one generation away from extinction" may become a reality in a relatively few years. Should we be worried, and if so, what can we do about it?
- Historically, the Presbytery of Donegal has been a leader in mission support within the PCUSA. How can we interpret the mission of the church today in a way that is faithful to the Gospel? How will you and your congregation interpret the mission of the PCUSA to help it understand and put into practice the church's mission?

- An increasing number of “nones and dones” inhabit our neighborhoods. How do we be faithful in our witness and our outreach to them? What does “authentic” Christianity look like to those who’ve never experienced it, or to those who have been abused by it?
- “Money makes the world go ‘round.” It also makes the church go ‘round. With financial resources growing scarcer, how can the church finance its ministry and mission? The Gospels talk about abundant living, but human nature tends to dwell on scarcity. How can this be overcome?
- Is “full-time” pastoral leadership a thing of the past in the 21st century? Are you as a pastor prepared for a “tent-making” or other ways of doing ministry if need be?

Area Six: Balanced Living

- Jesus said that He came so that we may have a full, abundant life. What are your best practices for leading and living a balanced life? How are you held accountable?
- How do you build time on your calendar for critically important personal priorities such as your family, friends, and health?
- How do you take care of yourself – physically and emotionally, not just spiritually? What are your hobbies and “extracurricular” activities?
- Nurturing relationships within the church and outside are important. Where do you find support groups? Of what kind, and what support are you seeking?