

MANUAL FOR CANDIDATES & TRANSFERS

Nashville Presbytery

Updated - 1.14.2026

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Nashville Presbytery

www.nashvillepca.org

Leadership Development Committee (LDC)

<https://nashvillepca.org/committees/leadership-development-committee/>

Members of the Leadership Development Committee

TE David Filson (Co-Chair) – Christ Presbyterian Church (Nashville) – dfilson@christpres.org

TE Mitchell Carter (Co-Chair) – Trinity Presbyterian Church – mitchell@trinitymboro.com

TE Ryan Anderson – Covenant Presbyterian Church (Nashville) – ryana@covenantpres.com

TE Matt Bradley – All Saints Presbyterian Church – mbradley@allsaintspres.net

TE Jamie Crampton – Parish Presbyterian Church – jamie@parishpres.org

RE Jeff Creasy – Christ Presbyterian Church (Nashville) – creasyjl@gmail.com

TE Chase Daws – RUF, Vanderbilt University – chase.daws@ruf.org

RE Buz Graham – Christ Presbyterian Church (Nashville) – bgraham@christpres.org

RE Rick Malone – Trinity Presbyterian Church – conferencetail@juno.com

TE Nathan McCall – All Saints Presbyterian Church – nathanwmccall@gmail.com

TE Jonathan Nash – Midtown Fellowship – jonathan@midtownfellowship.org

TE Brian Phillips – Parish Presbyterian Church – brian@parishpres.org

RE Bryce Sullivan – Covenant Presbyterian Church (Nashville) – dr.bryce.sullivan@gmail.com

TE Kenny Silva – Hickory Grove Presbyterian Church – kenny@hickorygrovepca.org

TE Kevin Twit – RUF, Belmont University – ktwit@ruf.org

Introduction: Pursuing Ministry in the PCA

If you are interested in pursuing ministry in the Presbyterian Church in America (especially in the Nashville Presbytery) you are reading the right document. For those unfamiliar with the process, this can seem to be a complex web of insider knowledge. We hope that this document makes this process as clear and straightforward as possible.

A Few Notes

First, this document was created by the Leadership Development Committee (LDC) of the Nashville Presbytery. We are the committee tasked with overseeing ministerial candidates and helping them through this process. We do not make decisions in this process but rather make recommendations to the Presbytery as a whole. While we know that this process is challenging, we seek to give candidates the support and structure that they need to reach ordination. We take seriously the call to ministry and also take seriously our call to shepherd the men who are pursuing ministry among us. Please see us as a resource in this process. We have no desire to shroud any of this in mystery or confusion. While we do not apologize for the challenge of exams and tasks, we have no desire for confusion to be a part of that challenge.

The co-chairs of the LDC are David Filson (dfilson@christpres.org), a pastor at Christ Presbyterian Church in Nashville, and Mitchell Carter (mitchell@trinityboro.com), a pastor at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Murfreesboro. You may contact any of the men on the committee with questions that you may have, especially if you already have a relationship with them. However, all official documents (exams, study guides, etc) should come from the links in this document or from Mitchell. Since we often update those documents, we don't want you to accidentally end up with an outdated one. And please send any completed documents to both David and Mitchell.

While you may only be coming under care or beginning an internship at this point, we suggest that you read the entirety of this document, rather than only reading the next step in front of you. We don't want you to think you are right in step with each process only to realize at the very end that you never took the original languages in seminary, or you have a difference with the Westminster Standards that could keep you from ordination in our Presbytery. Reading through the whole document on the front end will hopefully give you a complete picture of everything that lies before you.

Glossary/Abbreviations

LDC - Leadership Development Committee, which is the committee of the Nashville Presbytery tasked with overseeing candidates for ministry and examining those pursuing licensure and ordination

BCO - [Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America](#)

WCF - Westminster Confession of Faith

WLC - Westminster Larger Catechism

WSC - Westminster Shorter Catechism

Stated Clerk - This is the man in charge of all documentation and communication for the Nashville Presbytery (Ryan Hudson - clerk@nashvillepca.org). You will primarily interact with the LDC at this stage, but Ryan will also be a point of contact at several steps along the way.

Important LDC Dates

The following are the dates of meetings and deadlines for the LDC in 2026 and 2027:

December 20, 2025 - Written Documents Due for January 8th Meeting
January 8, 2026 - LDC Meeting (including Oral Exams)
February 10, 2026 - Nashville Presbytery Meeting

March 12, 2026 - Written Documents Due for March 26th Meeting
March 26, 2026 - LDC Meeting (including Oral Exams)
April 28, 2026 - Nashville Presbytery Meeting

June 27, 2026 - Written Documents Due for July 9th Meeting
July 9, 2026 - LDC Meeting (including Oral Exams)
August 11, 2026 - Nashville Presbytery Meeting

September 24, 2026 - Written Documents Due for October 8th Meeting
October 8, 2026 - LDC Meeting (including Oral Exams)
November 10, 2026 - Nashville Presbytery Meeting

December 21, 2026 - Written Documents Due for January 7th Meeting
January 7, 2027 - LDC Meeting (including Oral Exams)
February 9, 2027 - Nashville Presbytery Meeting

March 18, 2027 - Written Documents Due for April 1st Meeting
April 1, 2027 - LDC Meeting (including Oral Exams)
April 27, 2027 - Nashville Presbytery Meeting

June 24, 2027 - Written Documents Due for July 8th Meeting
July 8, 2027 - LDC Meeting (including Oral Exams)
August 10, 2027 - Nashville Presbytery Meeting

September 30, 2027 - Written Documents Due for October 14th Meeting
October 14, 2027 - LDC Meeting (including Oral Exams)
November 9, 2027 - Nashville Presbytery Meeting

Coming Under Care

(before reading this section, read *BCO* chapter 18)

Why would I want to come under the care of the Presbytery?

If you are considering pursuing vocational ministry as a teaching elder in the Presbyterian Church in America, you should come under care of your Presbytery.

BCO 18-1 says,

A candidate for the ministry is a member of the Church in full communion who, believing himself to be called to preach the Gospel, submits himself to the care and guidance of the Presbytery in his course of study and of practical training to prepare himself for this office.

You may not be settled upon the belief that you are called to preach the Gospel, but in considering that call you are submitting yourself to the care and guidance of the Presbytery. These are pastors and elders who will guide you in your studies, help you in your training, and advise you as you discern whether you are called to the ministry.

When do I come under the care of the Presbytery?

The easiest answer is “as soon as you decide you are considering a call to ministry.” Typically this is done before someone begins seminary training or near the beginning of that training. But it is not too late to come under care if you have already completed that training. There is no reason to wait until some marker in the process. Simply ask your Session if they would endorse you coming under our care and you can begin the process.

How do I come under care of the Presbytery?

Prerequisites:

- You must have been a member of a PCA church within the Nashville Presbytery for at least 6 months (*BCO* 18-2)

Requirements before you come under care:

- Request and receive the endorsement of your session (see [Sessional Endorsement Guidelines](#))
- Fill out the [“Application for Candidates for the Gospel Ministry”](#) form
- Type out your testimony of coming to faith and your sense of call to ministry (1-2 pages)
- Fill out the [“Experiential Religion Questionnaire”](#)
 - Each of these documents must be emailed to David Filson (dfilson@christpres.org) and Mitchell Carter (mitchell@trinityboro.com) no later than 2 weeks before the LDC meeting that you plan to attend (see “Important LDC Dates” on page 4)
- Come before the LDC (in person) at one of our regular stated meetings to give an oral account of what is contained in the above documents and answer any questions we might have. The committee will determine whether to recommend you to the Nashville Presbytery as a candidate under care.
- If they recommend you, you will have to come before the Nashville Presbytery (in person) at the next regular stated meeting to give your testimony and sense of call and answer any questions they might have. The Presbytery will then determine whether you will become a candidate under our care.

Requirements after you come under care:

- You must report annually on your progress in training for the ministry (see *BCO* 18-6). This report should include answers to the following questions (though in prose form, not bullet points):
 - Where you are in your theological studies (school, program, how many hours you have completed/have to go); please also include your transcripts for the last year (i.e., report card)
 - What have you done ministerially in the past year (church involvement, teaching/preaching, attending session or committee meetings)?
 - Are you planning to take any exams in the next year (licensure or ordination; see *BCO* 19 and 21)?
 - Are you in the midst of or are you planning to begin an internship (see *BCO* 19-7ff)
 - Are there any ways we can pray for you and/or your family?
- It will be very beneficial for you to attend any meetings of the Session of your church and the Presbytery as you are able
- Also note that you *must* complete a one year internship between the time you come under care and are ordained (see the following page for more details)

Beginning and Completing an Internship

(before reading this section, read BCO chapter 19-7 through 19-16)

What is an internship?

BCO 19-7 is clear that an internship is not necessarily a paid internship (though you can do that if it is available to you). Instead an internship is simply a period of testing of your gifts and abilities to rule as a teaching elder.

It is the discretion of the Presbytery to determine what the nature of the internship is “but it should involve the candidate in full scope of the duties of any regular ministerial calling approved by the Presbytery.” For this reason, we have developed an [“Internship Checklist”](#), outlining the duties we deem necessary to fulfill this purpose.

Because an internship “may be in any work which the Presbytery deems to be a suitable ministry to test the intern’s gifts,” we request that the Session which has endorsed the under care candidate (see BCO 18-2) set forth a proposed internship of ministry at that church, though the proposal may simply consist of a statement that they will seek to involve the candidate in everything suggested in the “Internship Checklist.”

How do I begin an internship?

Because an internship “may be in any work which the Presbytery deems to be a suitable ministry to test the intern’s gifts,” we request that the Session which has endorsed the under care candidate (see BCO 18-2) set forth a proposed internship of ministry at that church, though the proposal may simply consist of a statement that they will seek to involve the candidate in everything suggested in the “Internship Checklist.” If the church determines that the nature of the internship will be different than the “Internship Checklist” that may be fine, but they must submit a description of the internship to the LDC for approval *before the internship begins*.

This request for approval must be emailed to the LDC (both to dfilson@christpres.org and mitchell@trinityboro.com) not less than two weeks before the LDC’s stated meeting (see “Important LDC Dates” on page 4). The LDC will then relay their recommendation to the Presbytery for action.

When do I begin an internship?

The internship may begin at the same meeting that you come under care, as long as all the above steps are taken (BCO 19-8). However, it does not have to. Additionally, the internship may take place during the candidate’s seminary training or after. The key point to remember is that the internship is a minimum of one year.

How do I complete an internship?

The intern must make a report to the Presbytery at least annually (BCO 19-12; see the similar guidelines for under care candidate reports on page 6 above).

After the candidate has finished the stated requirements of his internship *and one full year has passed since it began*, he must submit his completed internship to the LDC for approval. It is recommended that this request come with the endorsement of a teaching elder in his church who oversaw the exercising of his internship.

This request for approval must be emailed to the LDC (both to dfilson@christpres.org and mitchell@trinitymboro.com) not less than two weeks before the LDC's stated meeting (see "Important LDC Dates" on page 4). The LDC will then relay their recommendation to the Presbytery for action.

What if I leave the bounds of the Presbytery in the middle of my internship (perhaps to attend seminary)?

BCO 19-11 says:

When any intern shall have occasion, while his internship is in progress, to remove from the bounds of his own Presbytery into those of another, the latter Presbytery may, at its discretion, on his producing proper testimonials from the former, take up his internship at the point at which it was left, and conduct it to a conclusion in the same manner as if it had been commenced by itself. Presbytery may repeat any portion of the previous Presbytery's examination it desires.

When God gives the intern the providential opportunity to serve the Church and to receive part of his training within the bounds of a Presbytery other than the one in which he has been declared an intern, the Presbyteries involved may develop a cooperative agreement to assure the proper training of the intern. In such cases the home Presbytery retains the final responsibility for and authority over the internship, but may rely to any extent considered necessary and proper in the circumstances, on the assistance of the sister Presbytery. When regular preaching of the Word is involved, care must be taken to comply with *BCO* 19-1.

In other words, the Presbytery which approved the beginning of the internship will have to determine what to do. The candidate should notify the LDC as soon as possible if they are moving to the bounds of another Presbytery to ensure that this is decided and handled in a timely manner.

Please note: You may not be ordained in any Presbytery without a completed internship. Please do not make the mistake of thinking that a job offer in the middle of your internship means you don't have to do it anymore. In this case, just as in the above situation, please contact the LDC as soon as possible to determine how the completion of your internship will happen.

Becoming Licensed to Preach?

(before reading this section, read BCO chapter 19-1 through 19-6)

What is licensure or being licensed to preach?

In some ways, licensure is very straightforward. This is the process of a man being licensed to preach the gospel within the bounds of our Presbytery (see BCO 19-1). However, the way licensure is *typically* pursued is not as an end in itself but in the process of ordination. That scenario (licensure as a step in the process of ordination) is what is assumed in the following directions. That means that you have been a candidate under care and have completed or are in the process of completing your internship. If you find yourself in a different scenario for licensure (a ruling elder, a minister from some other denomination, or someone seeking Student Supply according to BCO 22-5, please contact the LDC).

What must I do to be licensed?

- The first step is to notify the LDC (by emailing dfilson@christpres.org and mitchell@trinitymboro.com) that you are ready to pursue licensure. This is very important to be sure that you are aware of the time commitment to studying and taking the following exams. This is not a quick process, even for a seminary graduate. Some men take multiple months to study for some of these exams. Notifying the LDC of your intent will help you set aside ample time for preparation.
- Next you will begin filling out the study guides for the following exams (each of these study guides is linked below; the theology exam also has a reader, which is linked next to it):
 - [Church Government/Book of Church Order](#)
 - [English Bible](#)
 - [Theology \(Reader\)](#)
- One extremely important step in that process is understanding what it means to have “differences” (you may have heard them called “scruples” or “exceptions”) with the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, please read our [“Directions for Candidates & Transfers How to State Differences with the Westminster Standards”](#) to be sure you understand what this means as early as possible in the process.
- When you deem yourself fit to take the exams, you will email Mitchell Carter (mitchell@trinitymboro.com) to receive each exam.
 - Please note that these are all closed book exams (as is noted at the top of each one) and do not require a proctor (we operate on the honor system).
 - Also note that these exams can be taken one at a time. For instance, you can study for the Church Government/BCO exam, take that exam, then study for the English Bible exam, then take that exam, etc. However, you will be orally examined over all three together at the LDC meeting you attend.
- In addition to these exams, you will need to turn in the following (the first two are linked):
 - [Theological Views Statement](#)
 - On the Theological Views Statement, you will be asked to state any differences you have with the Westminster Confession of Faith, Shorter Catechism, or Larger

Catechism. Please read [“Directions for Candidates & Transfers How to State Differences with the Westminster Standards”](#) to understand what you are doing here. Stating differences is not something to do in the last minute before you turn everything in. This is one of the primary factors in determining whether you are ordainable in the PCA.

- [Experiential Religion Questionnaire](#)
 - This is your character examination. If you have already come under care and filled this out, you will not be asked to do so again. The document will only be shared with the members of the LDC but issues raised may be shared with the Presbytery if needed.
- A sermon manuscript
 - This is not intended to be notes for a sermon, but a manuscript of every word you say in a sermon. It should be a full sermon (25-35 minutes). We will review this manuscript, and then you will preach a 15-minute version of this sermon before the Presbytery on the day of your licensure exams.
- Each of these documents must be emailed to the LDC chairs (dfilson@christpres.org and mitchell@trinitymboro.com) no later than two weeks before the stated meeting you will attend (see “Important LDC Dates” on page 4).
- Next you will attend the LDC meeting to be orally examined in each of these areas. We will especially press into questions we found to be weak or unsatisfactory in your written exams.
 - For those who are living far away and unable to attend in person, we allow them to meet with us via video chat, but do not offer that for people for convenience purposes and we are not able to move our meeting date to accommodate your schedule.
- If the LDC recommends you for licensure, you will appear before the Nashville Presbytery at their next meeting to be orally examined in these areas. You will also preach a 15 minute version of your sermon before the Presbytery at that meeting. The Presbytery will then determine whether to license you to preach within our bounds.

Becoming Ordained to Gospel Ministry?

(before reading this section, read BCO chapters 20 & 21)

Prerequisites

In order to be ordained for gospel ministry, you must:

- Be under care of the Nashville Presbytery (if you are under care of a different Presbytery, the Nashville Presbytery must determine if they will transfer your under care status)
- Have completed an internship (if that internship was completed in a different Presbytery, the Nashville Presbytery must determine if they will approve that completed internship; see BCO 21-2; additionally, if you are coming from another denomination and have pastoral experience that is equivalent to our internship requirements, you may request that the Presbytery accept that experience in place of the internship requirement; see BCO 19-16)
- Have been licensed to preach in the Nashville Presbytery (if you have been licensed in a different Presbytery you still must be licensed by the Nashville Presbytery; licensure is not something that can be transferred; see BCO 19-5)
- Have completed a Bachelor's or Master's degree from some approved college or university (BCO 21-4.a)
- Have completed a Bachelor's or Master's degree from some approved theological seminary (BCO 21-4.a)
 - Or, alternatively, authentic testimonials of having completed a regular course of theological studies, or a certificate of completion of and endorsement from a theological study program as approved by the General Assembly and one of the Presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church in America (BCO 21-4.a).
- Have received an official call from a church or ministry (e.g., RUF) within the bounds of the Presbytery (see BCO 20-1; 21-1).
 - This final point is extremely important to understand. Ordination is not like a certificate that you are given before you seek out a call to a work (e.g., a state teacher's license). A man may only be ordained *to a particular work*. The church can't say they might like you to be a pastor one day; they must have officially called you as a pastor in order for you to sit for ordination exams.

Requirements:

- The first step is to notify the LDC (by emailing dfilson@christpres.org and mitchell@trinitymboro.com) that you are ready to pursue ordination. This is very important to be sure that you are aware of the time commitment to studying and taking the following exams and writing the following papers. This is not a quick process, even for a seminary graduate. Some men take multiple months to study for each of these exams. Notifying the LDC of your intent will help you set aside ample time for preparation.
- Next you will begin filling out the study guides for the following exams (each of these study guides is linked; the sacraments and church history study guides also have readers linked next to them):
 - [Sacraments \(Reader\)](#)
 - [Church History \(Reader\)](#)
 - [Greek/Hebrew](#)
 - Please note that the BCO allows Presbyteries to accept a seminary degree which includes study in the original languages in lieu of an oral examination in the original languages. Our "study guide" simply tells you how this process will work.

- When you deem yourself fit to take the exams, you will email Mitchell Carter (mitchell@trinitymboro.com) to receive each exam.
 - Please note that these are all closed book exams (as is noted at the top of each one) and do not require a proctor (we operate on the honor system).
 - Also note that these exams can be taken one at a time. For instance, you can study for the Sacraments exam, take that exam, then study for the Church History exam, then take that exam. However, you will be orally examined over both together at the LDC meeting you attend.
 - Immediately upon completion of each exam, you will email the completed exam to mitchell@trinitymboro.com
- In addition to these exams, you will need to turn in the following:
 - A theological paper and an exegetical paper (the requirements for both of these papers can be found [here](#))
 - The official call from the church, including financial arrangements (see BCO 20-1); this will need to be approved by the Presbytery
- Each of these documents must be emailed to the LDC chairs (dfilson@christpres.org and mitchell@trinitymboro.com) no later than two weeks before the stated meeting you will attend (see “Important LDC Dates” on page 4).
- Next you will attend the LDC meeting to be orally examined in each of these areas. We will especially press into questions we found to be weak or unsatisfactory in your written exams and/or papers.
 - For those who are living far away and unable to attend in person, we allow them to meet with us via video chat, but do not offer that for people for convenience purposes and we are not able to move our meeting date to accommodate your schedule.
- If the LDC recommends you for ordination, you will appear before the Nashville Presbytery at their next meeting to be orally examined in these areas. They will then determine whether to ordain you.

What do I do after the Presbytery votes to ordain me?

You’re not done yet. Ordination does not happen at the Presbytery meeting. Rather, you will have an ordination and installation service. These services are done by a commission of the Presbytery. And so the Presbytery (or the LDC) will appoint a convener for that commission who will help make sure you have everything planned properly, have enough members for the commission, and will likely lead a portion of that service. Practically, the details of the service (music, time, location, etc.) will be planned and put on by the church or ministry which has called you. But officially, this is a meeting of the Presbytery where they will officially ordain you and install you to the work which you have been called. This service should happen as soon as possible after your exams are sustained by the Presbytery.

How do I plan an ordination and installation ceremony?

You will have a convener appointed for you to help you plan the service. You need to ask commissioners of Presbytery to attend the ceremony (if you do not know many, your convener may help you). Teaching and ruling elders from other Presbyteries may participate in the service (e.g., preaching the sermon, giving you a charge), but because this is a commission of the Nashville Presbytery we request that you ask at least two Teaching Elders and two Ruling Elders in our Presbytery but outside of your local church.

The service will need to include (see BCO 21-5 through 21-7): A sermon, an explanation of the proceedings (usually done by the convener), the ordination vows, the congregation vows (or Session vows if the man is being called as an Assistant Pastor), the laying on of hands and prayer, the pronouncement of ordination, a charge to the candidate, a charge to the congregation (or the Session if the man is being called as an Assistant Pastor), and a benediction by the newly ordained minister. This typically looks like an abbreviated worship service to begin (e.g., call to worship, prayer, song(s), confession of sin/assurance of pardon, song(s), sermon), followed by the elements of the ordination & installation service (beginning with the explanation of proceedings).

The proceedings must be recorded by one of the commissioners (the clerk of the commission) and the minutes sent to the Stated Clerk of Presbytery (clerk@nashvillepca.org) and the chairs of the LDC (dfilson@christpres.org and mitchell@trinitymboro.com) at least four weeks prior to the next meeting of Presbytery. A form for this recording can be found [here](#).