

### **NCP Policy Statement on Seminaries**

National Capital Presbytery (NCP) requires its inquirers and candidates for ordination as a Teaching Elder (also called Minister of Word and Sacrament) in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) [PC(USA)] to receive theological education and pastoral preparation that is consistent with the denominational heritage of the PC(USA). For this reason, sessions and the Commission on Preparation for Ministry (CPM) should ordinarily be consulted when selecting a seminary and degree program. It is sometimes the case that individuals have already begun seminary studies before they engage the presbytery in the discernment process. Some may also seek a call to ordained ministry at a time when family and job commitments make it preferable to choose a seminary in close proximity to home rather than because it is in the Presbyterian tradition. All who are called to ordained ministry must demonstrate to the CPM a commitment to prepare for and practice their ordained ministry in and through the PC(USA).

To guide that commitment, the policies of NCP regarding seminary selection are as follows:

- a.** Prior to seminary enrollment, a prospective candidate should arrange a meeting to receive the counsel of the pastor and representatives of the session of their particular church and the CPM on the importance and implications of the aforementioned commitment and these policies.
- b.** Inquirers and candidates are encouraged to graduate with a Master of Divinity (MDiv) degree from a seminary of the PC(USA)<sup>i</sup>, where the curriculum is designed to meet all the educational requirements of the Book of Order. At a Presbyterian seminary students can be immersed in a theological education and spiritual formation rooted in the Reformed tradition. They can also benefit from a pastoral preparation and enculturation process connected to the life and mission of the Presbyterian Church.
- c.** Anyone who is considering attending a “non-Presbyterian” seminary should seek the permission of the CPM prior to enrollment. An acceptable seminary must be an accredited member of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS).<sup>ii</sup> The Office of Preparation for Ministry and Exams works with many ATS accredited institutions to identify specific “Theological Institution Contact” persons to assist inquirers, ~~and~~ candidates, and their presbyteries.<sup>iii</sup> If possible, the student should work with this faculty member to plan their course of study and connect with other PC(USA) students.
- d.** Inquirers and candidates who are granted permission to attend a non-Presbyterian seminary or degree program other than the MDiv, those who are already enrolled when entering the process, or those transferring from other Presbyteries must present a transcript from an ATS-accredited seminary documenting a course of study that includes courses (or equivalent course content) in the following areas (G-2.0607.c):
  - (1) Reformed Theology;
  - (2) Church History since the Reformation;
  - (3) Presbyterian Church Polity;
  - (4) Hebrew Language;
  - (5) Greek Language;
  - (6) Old Testament Exegesis using Hebrew;
  - (7) New Testament Exegesis using Greek.

In those cases where these courses are not offered at the candidate's seminary, CPM encourages candidates to take them at a Presbyterian Seminary. A plan for completing this requirement should be discussed with CPM early in the inquiry process.

**e.** Any degree program that includes “distance education” courses must follow ATS guidelines on residency and distance/online learning. The educational standards for the MDiv degree require “at least one year of full-time academic study or its equivalent shall be completed at the main campus of the school awarding the degree or at an extension site” as well as “regular and substantive interaction between teachers and learners and among learners to ensure a community of learning” (*ATS Educational and Degree Program Standards*, A.3.1.3 & ES.4.1). The ATS maintains a list of institutions approved to offer Comprehensive Distance Education Programs, which means that the school offers more than five distance education courses and has received exemptions for residency requirements.

**f.** CPM may also require that candidates attending non-Presbyterian seminaries do one or more of the following as deemed appropriate:

(1) Engage in one year of supervised ministry (field education), during or after seminary study, in a local PC(USA) church approved in advance by the CPM. A written evaluation by the supervising pastor shall be provided to the CPM.

(2) Work full time for a minimum of three months, during or after seminary study, as an employee of a local PC(USA) church and under the supervision of the pastor of that church. This placement shall be arranged with a clear description of tasks and responsibilities, and shall include a term of agreement for supervision and frequent evaluation by the CPM. It shall be approved in advance, and a final written evaluation by the supervising pastor shall be provided to the CPM.

(3) Attend a PC(USA) seminary for one year, if possible.

*Approved as amended by the CPM on [New date 2013]*

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<sup>i</sup> PC(USA) Seminaries:

Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary (Austin, Texas)  
 Columbia Theological Seminary (Decatur, Georgia)  
 Dubuque Theological Seminary (Dubuque, Iowa)  
 Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary (Louisville, Kentucky)  
 McCormick Theological Seminary (Chicago, Illinois)  
 Pittsburgh Theological Seminary (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania)  
 Princeton Theological Seminary (Princeton, New Jersey)  
 San Francisco Theological Seminary (San Anselmo and Pasadena, California)  
 Johnson C. Smith Theological Seminary (Atlanta, Georgia)  
 Union Presbyterian Seminary (Richmond, Virginia and Charlotte, North Carolina)

<sup>ii</sup> The Association of Theological Schools, [www.ats.edu](http://www.ats.edu), maintains a current list of accredited member schools, degree program standards, and approved distance education programs.

<sup>iii</sup> The Office of Preparation for Ministry and Exams, <http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/prep4min/>, maintains a list of Theological Institution Contacts and other resources for seminary discernment.