

PRESBYSPEAK 101

A guide for officers and committee members of Pittsburgh Presbytery

Acronyms, specialized terms, secret knowledge – Presbyterianism is full of them! This alphabetical listing of coded expressions will help you follow conversations among Presbyterians a little more readily.

A. General Presbyterian Terms

1001 New Worshiping Communities – This is a church-wide initiative begun in 2011 to start 1001 new worshiping communities nationally by 2020. New worshiping communities may eventually be chartered as new congregations. Information is available at www.pcusa.org/1001.

AC – Something that produces cold air, which Presbyterians love. Or alternatively, an “Administrative Commission” that is empowered to conduct business on behalf of a church council (i.e., a session, presbytery, synod, or general assembly). An AC is commissioned to represent presbytery at services of ordination and installation. An AC may be commissioned to assist churches seeking to dissolve, merge with another congregation, or be dismissed. An AC is commissioned to assume jurisdiction of congregations where the work of the church can no longer be rightly administered by the Session. AC’s make their own decisions on presbytery’s behalf, within the purview of what they have been commissioned to do, without further presbytery permission, but must report those decisions back to presbytery.

Administrative Commission – See “AC” above.

Black Caucus – Pittsburgh Presbytery has a local chapter of the National Black Presbyterian Caucus, which seeks to support and advance the ministries of African American churches and individuals. Among its ongoing projects is the support of the Coleman/Patrick Scholarship Fund, which provides college scholarships for African American college students. See www.nationalnbpc.org.

Board of Pensions – The Board of Pensions administers the PCUSA’s health and retirement benefits for church workers. See www.pensions.org

Book of Confessions – The Book of Confessions is Part 1 of our denomination’s constitution. It includes confessions and creeds from across the history and the geography of the church. It includes 12 documents: The Nicene Creed, The Apostles’ Creed, The Scots’ Confession, The Heidelberg Catechism, The Second Helvetic Confession, The Westminster Confession, The Larger Catechism, The Shorter Catechism, The Barmen Declaration, The Confession of 1967, A Brief Statement of Faith, and The Belhar Confession. All officers of the church promise to be guided by the Confessions in their reading of Scripture.

Book of Order – The [Book of Order](#) is Part 2 of our PCUSA constitution. It includes four sections: *Foundations of Presbyterian Polity* (shorthand *F-x.xxxx*), *Form of Government* (*G-x.xxxx*), *Directory for Worship* (*W-x.xxxx*), and the *Rules of Discipline* (*D-x.xxxx*).

BOP – See [Board of Pensions](#).

Certified Christian Educator – A Christian Educator that has passed a rigorous national standard of classes and examinations. [Certified Christian Educators](#) are provided voice but not vote at presbytery meetings, unless they are also ruling elders who are serving as commissioners from their congregation.

CIF – A “Church Information Form” was the standard congregational profile and listing of pastoral expectations for congregations seeking pastors. Churches seeking pastors would file this in a national database that could be viewed by any interested candidates. The CIF was replaced in 2013 by the “Mission Information Form” ([MIF](#)).

Clerks – Each Council of the church (i.e., session, presbytery, synod, and general assembly) elects a Clerk to record its proceedings, and to assure its compliance with the Constitution. Each Session has a clerk of session, and higher Councils have Stated Clerks.

CLP – A “Commissioned Lay Pastor,” a former designation for what is now called a “Commissioned Pastor.”

COM – Committee/Commission on Ministry. It is responsible for the welfare of the ministries of congregations and pastors in the presbytery. It approves all pastoral calls and dissolutions of calls. It visits congregations to ensure their continued vitality, and counsels with congregations in difficulty.

Commissioned Lay Pastor – An older designation for what is now called “Commissioned Ruling Elder.”

Commissioned Pastor – A “Commissioned Pastor” is a ruling elder who has been given a commission by presbytery to serve a particular congregation for up to a year in some aspects of ministry that ordinarily are covered by a Minister of Word and Sacrament – primarily preaching, sacraments, weddings, and funerals. Such persons were previously called “Commissioned Lay Pastors” or “Commissioned Ruling Elders.” Pittsburgh has several CPs, serving congregations as pastoral leaders.

Commissioned Ruling Elder – An older designation for what is now called “Commissioned Ruling Elder.”

Commissioners – each council of the church elects commissioners to the next higher council. Commissioners are expected to vote their own conscience prayerfully, rather than to vote as delegates that advance the opinions of the body that elects them. Each session elects one or

more (depending on church size) elders to serve as commissioners of its congregation to meetings of presbytery. Each presbytery elects an equal number of ruling elders and ministers of word and sacrament to serve as its commissioners to the Synod and to the General Assembly.

Committee vs. Commission – A Committee brings proposals to the main body for the main body's action. A Commission is empowered to make decisions and to act on the main body's behalf in specified matters.

CRE – A "Commissioned Ruling Elder" is a former designation of what is now called a "Commissioned Pastor."

Constitution – All congregations and councils of the PCUSA are governed by its constitution, which consists of the Book of Confessions and the Book of Order. Every officer in the church should have a copy of these books, and should study it carefully. In addition, each congregation and higher council is charged to develop a Manual of Operations that functions as a subordinate authority in its sphere of ministry. Copies of both the Book of Confessions and the Book of Order may be downloaded free at www.pcusa.org/oga/constitution.

Council – previously called a "governing body," a Council is a group of elected representatives that governs the affairs of all ministries under its purview. There are four levels of councils:

1. The Session – it is the Council that governs a congregation, comprising elders elected by the congregation, plus all ordained ministers serving the congregation.
2. The Presbytery – the Council that governs the congregations in its bounds. It is composed of ruling elder representatives from the sessions of congregations, and member congregations and all teaching elders that are members of presbytery. All Councils higher than the Session are mandated to comprise an equal number of Ruling Elders and Teaching Elders. There are currently 171 presbyteries in the PCUSA.
3. The Synod – the Council that oversees the ministries and staffing of presbyteries in its region. There are currently 16 synods in the PCUSA. Pittsburgh Presbytery is a member of the Synod of the Trinity, with offices in Camp Hill, PA.
4. General Assembly – General Assembly is a national council that convenes biennially to direct the ministries of the PCUSA as a whole. Each presbytery sends commissioners to General Assembly.

CPM – Acronym for "Commission/Committee on Preparation for Ministry." The CPM guides the process of candidacy of those who are preparing for ordination as teaching elders in the church.

CP – "Commissioned Pastor."

CPE – "Clinical Pastoral Education" is a supervised ministry practicum for seminarians, located in clinical settings such as hospitals or social service agencies.

Deacons – Deacons are ordained officers of the church that lead congregations in ministries of compassion and care. They may be ordained and installed individually, or in rotating classes as a board, sometimes called the diaconate. Congregations may opt not to ordain deacons, in which case the session is responsible for ministries of compassion and care.

Designated Pastor – a pastor may be elected by the congregation to serve for a specifically designated term, after which the pastor may be re-elected to a new term, or be elected to serve with an open term. When a congregation is searching for a new pastor, it consults with presbytery's COM to determine whether it should seek a pastor for a designated or an undesignated term. Presbytery provides the candidates for being called as designated pastor, rather than them being sought out by the congregation.

D-X.XXXX – A citation from the *Book of Order* section on "Rules of Discipline."

Elders, Ruling – Ruling elders are elected and ordained by each congregation to govern its affairs. Ruling elders currently serving in governance constitute its session. The pastor is moderator of the session. A ruling elder does not lose his or her ordination once their term of service on session is over, and is eligible to be elected and installed again.

Elders, Teaching – another designation for what is commonly called "Minister of Word and Sacrament."

Form of Government – Section 2 of the "Book of Order," which specifies the functions and relationships of congregations, their members, church officers, and church councils.

F-X.XXXX – a reference to a citation from the "Foundations of Presbyterian Polity," Section 1 of the "Book of Order."

GA – General Assembly is the biennial meeting of commissioners from the whole church, to consider and direct matters of governance and mission that relate to the entire denomination. The Office of the General Assembly maintains and directs the church's order between assemblies, and facilitates the assembly meetings. See www.pcusa.org/oga/ga.

G-X.XXXX – A citation from the from the "Form of Government" section of our "Book of Order."

Higher Council – any Council higher than the session – presbytery, synod, or general assembly – is designated a "higher council" of the church. It comprises elders and ministers of lower councils in equal numbers.

Installed Pastor – a pastor is installed in the office for either a designated or an undesignated term. A designated pastor is a pastor installed for a designated term; most installed pastors are installed for undesignated terms. A pastor may be installed only if elected by the congregation. A temporary pastor may serve at the invitation without a congregational vote.

Interim Pastor – An Interim Pastor is a Temporary Pastor called to perform specific interim functions to help a congregation address some critical issues before it calls a new installed pastor. In Pittsburgh Presbytery, a pastor who serves as an Interim Pastor is not eligible to be elected as that congregation's installed pastor.

Manual of Operations – Each congregation and higher council of the church is charged to develop a Manual that directs the body's operations, in conjunction with and under the authority of The Constitution. Pittsburgh Presbytery's Manual of Operations is available online at http://www.pghpresbytery.org/forms/pdfs/stated_clerk_resources/presbytery_manual.pdf.

Mid Council – Regional Councils of the church, Presbytery or Synod.

Minister of Word and Sacrament – Also known as Teaching Elder, Ministers of Word and Sacrament are trained and ordained to lead the church's worship and moderate the session of the churches they serve. They are sometimes referred to as "pastors" or "ministers." A seminary degree or its equivalent is required as a condition for ordination to this office.

MIF – The Ministry Information Form is the standard profile document for any organization seeking to call a pastor or other ministry worker (educator, youth worker, executive, etc.). It is available online in a denomination-wide database, and may be viewed by any interested candidate. A PNC cannot begin to solicit applicants for its vacancy until its church has filed a duly approved MIF with the presbytery.

Moderator – A Moderator leads the meeting of a church council – session, presbytery, synod, or general assembly. The Moderator of a session is ordinarily the pastor of the congregation, and ordinarily moderates official meetings of the congregation as well. When there is no pastor, COM appoints a moderator for session and congregation meetings.

Nominations Committee – Each Council has a Nomination Committee that is charged to bring the body they serve nominations for office. For the Presbytery, the Nominations Committee presents candidates for standing committees and officers of Presbytery. A special nominations committee is elected for conducting searches for new pastors of congregations or pastoral leaders for presbytery.

Office of the General Assembly – The OGA manages all the church's "machinery" at the national level. The Stated Clerk is the chief officer of the General Assembly, and is thus the head of the OGA. This office is funded largely by church per capita assessments. It manages the biennial meetings of the General Assembly. See www.pcusa.org/oga.

Officers – Each congregation and council elects and ordains officers to govern its life. The ordained offices of the church are Teaching Elder (sometimes called "pastor" or "minister of word and sacrament"), Ruling Elder (sometimes called simply "elder"), and Deacon (congregations may opt not to use the office of ordained deacon).

Ords – Ordination exams taken by Candidates for Ordination as Minister of Word and Sacraments. There are five areas of examination: Bible Content, Worship and Sacraments, Polity, Theology, and Biblical Exegesis. Candidates must pass these exams before they may be ordained as Teaching Elders.

Pastor Nominating Committee – Elected by a congregation for nominating a candidate to fill a vacant pastoral position. If the pastoral search is for a Temporary Pastor, Interim Pastor, or Designated Pastor, the PNC may be elected by the session.

Per Capita – an assessment for each church member that each church is requested to collect and pay to presbytery. Most of this assessment funds presbytery work; some also funds the work of the OGA nationally, and the Synod regionally. Per capita payment is voluntary from the churches, but the presbytery is obligated to transmit full per capita to synod and GA regardless of what is collected from the congregations.

PJC – Each higher council (presbytery, synod, general assembly) elects a “Permanent Judicial Commission” to adjudicate claims made against a person or agency under its purview for alleged violations of the constitution. PJC decisions may be appealed to the next higher court.

PNC – not a bank, but “Pastor Nominating Committee.”

Presbyterian Foundation – A church-wide investment organization that invests the church’s resources and assists congregations with stewardship planning resources. See www.presbyterianfoundation.org.

PW – “Presbyterian Women” is an independent women’s organization that seeks to promote fellowship and to do mission in the name of Jesus. Most presbyteries and congregations have their own “chapters” of this long-standing organization. It has a national gathering triennially.

Robert’s Rules – All meetings of church councils and congregations are governed by Robert’s Rules of Order, by constitutional mandate, except in cases where the constitution explicitly provides alternative direction.

Ruling Elder – see “Elders, Ruling.”

Session – the session is elected by the congregation to serve as the governing council of the congregation. Session members are ordained as ruling elders in the church, and serve on session for three-year terms, which are renewable once before a mandatory break from service.

Stated Clerk – the clerk of a higher council is called the “stated clerk.”

Synod – A regional group of presbyteries. There are sixteen synods in the PCUSA; Pittsburgh Presbytery is part of the [Synod of the Trinity](#).

Teaching Elder – See “Minister of Word and Sacrament.”

Temporary Pastor – a temporary pastor is called by a session to lead a congregation instead of an installed pastor. Temporary pastor contracts may be no more than one year long, and are renewable. The designation “temporary pastor” replaces the older designations of stated supply and temporary supply pastors.

Temporary Supply – A pastor who has a short term contract to provide pastoral services for a congregation. The term “temporary supply” has been phased out of the *Book of Order*, and is now one of the forms of service of a Temporary Pastor.

Trustees – in some states a congregation is not recognized as a legal corporation, so congregations must elect trustees to serve as its legal representatives. When a congregation has trustees, they are supervised by the session.

W-X.XXXX – A citation from the third part of the *Book of Order*, called the “Directory for Worship.”

B. Terms Particular to Pittsburgh Presbytery

ACT – The “Administrative Commission on Transformation” is a permanent AC established by our presbytery to make grants to congregations seeking assistance for ministry projects for which their current resources are inadequate. The ACT is accountable to presbytery’s Executive Committee. It makes grants to deserving projects, and provides for seminary student leadership for congregations in need. See http://www.pghpresbytery.org/committees_commissions/comm_files/act.htm.

Amos 5:24 – The Amos 5:24 Ministry Team is a team of people from our congregations committed to advancing the work of racial reconciliation and multicultural ministry. It is accountable to the Executive Committee. See http://www.pghpresbytery.org/ministry_teams/amos524.html.

CAT Scan – A congregational life and ministry assessment tool administered by [Holy Cow! Consulting](#). It combines surveys with focus group feedback to provide a clear picture of a congregation’s current condition, and is often used to help a congregation gain a better sense of its mission when it is in a time of pastoral transition.

COM – common designation for Commission on Preparation for Ministry.

Commission on Ministry – Commonly known as COM, it is responsible for the welfare of the ministries of congregations and pastors in the presbytery. It approves all pastoral calls and dissolutions of calls. It visits congregations to ensure their continued vitality, and counsels with

congregations in difficulty. Pittsburgh Presbytery has opted for a “Commission” rather than a “Committee” on ministry, giving it the power to approve pastoral calls for people already ordained as teaching elders in the PCUSA. It is elected by presbytery, and meets bi-monthly.

Commission on Preparation for Ministry – Commonly known as CPM, it guides the process of candidacy of those who are preparing for ordination as Ministers of Word and Sacrament (also known as Teaching Elder) in the church. Pittsburgh Presbytery has opted to have a “commission” rather than a “committee” on ministry, with various powers to approve the progress of candidates for ordination. It is elected by presbytery, and meets bi-monthly.

Congregational Advocate – COM designates each of its members to serve as a congregational advocate (CA) to COM on behalf of each congregation. The CA develops an ongoing relationship with the congregation.

Congregational Vitality – A sub-committee of the Commission on Ministry.

Council – former designation of what we in Pittsburgh now call the Executive Committee.

Crestfield – Pittsburgh Presbytery’s covenant partner Camp and Conference Center. It is located on Taggart Rd, a few miles south of Slippery Rock PA, and about one hour north of Pittsburgh city center. It provides summer camps for youth of all ages, assists congregations in developing and running Vacation Bible Schools, and serves as a year-round retreat center for many groups both within and beyond our presbytery. See www.crestfieldcc.org.

CPM – Common designation for Commission on Preparation for Ministry.

Crestfield Board – The Board of Crestfield is populated by a majority of members from Pittsburgh Presbytery, and is responsible for all Crestfield operations. In 2016, Pittsburgh Presbytery, which formerly wholly owned and operated Crestfield, acted to make Crestfield a separate non-profit corporation in covenant with Pittsburgh Presbytery, so it can reach out more effectively beyond the bounds of Pittsburgh Presbytery.

EC – Pittsburgh Presbytery’s legal corporate board is known as its “Executive Committee.” It used to be called “Council.” It is responsible for directing meetings of the presbytery, overseeing the ministry teams of the presbytery, overseeing presbytery’s staff, and managing the properties and finances of the presbytery. It is elected by presbytery, and meets bi-monthly.

Ecclesiastical Committee – a sub-committee of EC, the “Ecclesiastical Committee” recommends to EC agendas, dates, places, and polices for EC and presbytery meetings. It also nominates members to the Presbytery Nominating Committee.

Ethical Training – All ministers receiving calls to serve as pastors in Pittsburgh Presbytery are required to complete a day of “ethical training,” which is offered annually by COM. It covers

broadly the exercise of power, maintenance of boundaries, financial management, and professional ethics.

Executive Committee – see “EC”

Great Commission Ministry Team – Pittsburgh’s ministry team that coordinates our efforts in supporting the church’s worldwide ministry. It is accountable to the Executive Committee.

Hunger Fund – Pittsburgh Presbytery has a Hunger Fund team that channels hunger relief donations to appropriate agencies. Half of the offering at each presbytery meeting is designated for hunger ministry, and the Hunger Fund team determines its allocation. The Hunger Fund Ministry Team is accountable to the EC.

Lazarus Fund – The Lazarus Fund is a Pittsburgh Presbytery mission to provide needy households with one-time utility payment assistance. Applications for assistance come either directly to the presbytery office, or through congregations of our presbytery. Offerings to support this fund are collected at each presbytery meeting, and congregations are urged to collect a special Lazarus Fund offering each February. The Lazarus Fund Ministry Team is accountable to EC.

Manual of Pittsburgh Presbytery – This is the presbytery by-laws, and is available on the presbytery website. See http://www.pghpresbytery.org/forms/pdfs/stated_clerk_resources/presbytery_manual.pdf.

Ministry Teams – any group seeking to advance our presbytery’s mission in some particular area may apply to the EC for recognition as a ministry team. All ministry teams are accountable to EC for their roster and for their work. See http://www.pghpresbytery.org/ministry_teams/ministries.htm.

Mission InSite – This is a service purchased by the presbytery for the benefit of congregations, who may access it to learn demographic details about the neighborhood they serve, and how they relate to the church’s work in that neighborhood. See http://www.pghpresbytery.org/forms/form_files/missioninsite.htm.

New Worshiping Community – see “NWC.”

NWC – A “New Worshiping Community” is an exploratory effort to determine whether a worshiping community might become a chartered congregation. Pittsburgh has an NWC Commission that governs such exploratory efforts, until they are able to be chartered as a church and elect a session to govern their affairs. The NWC Commission reviews applications for funding for NWC exploratory experiments. See http://www.pghpresbytery.org/new_churches/new_churches.htm.

Ongoing Care – The Ongoing Care Team is a sub-committee of COM, with primary responsibility to monitor and strengthen the relationships and welfare of pastors in the presbytery, including financial matters.

Pastoral Vitality – A sub-committee of the Commission on Ministry.

PEAL – “Pastors Encouraging and Listening” – a group of retired pastors in Pittsburgh Presbytery who offer pastoral care to pastors in need. They do not report their work to presbytery staff, thus offering a safe space for any pastor who wishes confidential pastoral care that has no bearing on present or future employment. PEAL is accountable to presbytery’s COM. See http://www.pghpresbytery.org/ministry_teams/peal.html.

Peacemaking Ministry Team – A Pittsburgh Presbytery ministry team focused on issues of peace and justice locally and beyond. It is accountable to EC.

Pittsburgh Presbyterian Foundation – Pittsburgh Presbytery maintains and promotes an investment fund designed to generate income to help presbytery accomplish its mission. It is supervised by a committee elected by presbytery for this purpose.

Pittsburgh Theological Seminary – [Pittsburgh Seminary](#) is one of ten seminaries in covenant relationship with the PCUSA. It is located in the Highland Park neighborhood of the City of Pittsburgh. Rooted in the PCUSA, it trains ministers from many denominations, and has a special covenant relationship also with the United Methodist Church, the Episcopal Church, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

PMM – “Presbyterian Media Mission” is an independent church media organization housed at the Pittsburgh Presbytery offices. It contracts with congregations and mission agencies to produce media for webcast and broadcast. See <https://presbmediamission.org/>

Presbytery Minimum – Each year COM establishes a minimum level of compensation for pastors and Certified Christian Educators in our presbytery. This equally governs temporary or installed pastors, and part-time or full-time pastors. Current annual minimums for Pittsburgh Presbytery are published at http://www.pghpresbytery.org/committees_commissions/comm_files/com.htm.

Presbytery Mission Giving – Congregations and individuals are encouraged to contribute directly to the costs of presbytery staff, offices, and mission, as they are able. Per Capita receipts cover only 40% of operations costs for the presbytery office.

Pulpit Supply – COM maintains a list of approved pulpit supply pastors that congregations may call to preach for them when they don’t have a pastor present. See http://www.pghpresbytery.org/forms/pdfs/com/pulpit_supply.pdf.

Response Team – Presbytery elects a Response Team to receive and respond to any allegations of sexual misconduct by any persons covered by presbytery’s sexual misconduct policy. It offers support to victims and advises all parties (victims, accused, coworkers, families) pastorally. It does not participate in prosecution.

Senior Vice-Moderator – Elected by the presbytery at its December meeting, the Senior Vice-Moderator will become the Moderator of Presbytery 14 months later.

Shared Mission Giving – Congregations may give to the general mission costs of higher councils through the channel of “shared mission” giving. In Pittsburgh, such gifts are distributed to General Assembly (20%), Synod (10%), and Presbytery (70%).

Stated Supply – A pastor on a temporary, renewable contract to a congregation, with no expectation that the church will be able to call an installed pastor. This term is no longer in the *Book of Order*, and what we used to call “stated supply” is now a “temporary pastor.”

Validated Ministry – A non-congregational ministry approved by COM for active service by a minister member of Pittsburgh Presbytery.

Validated Mission – A mission agency that has been approved by COM for support by congregations. See http://www.pghpresbytery.org/mission_agencies/missions.htm.