READER'S EVALUATION SHEET IN POLITY

I. EVALUATIONS OF THIS EXAMINATION. The examination consists of three sections, each designed to be completed in one hour. All three sections must be answered. Section III has two options, from which the candidate is instructed to select one. Each section must be evaluated as either “Satisfactory” (S) or “Unsatisfactory” (U). The reader must also assign an overall evaluation for this examination. If any section is omitted it will receive an evaluation of “O”; the examination must then receive an overall evaluation of “Unsatisfactory.” The examination must receive an “S” on at least two out of the three sections to receive an overall evaluation of “Satisfactory.”

Each examination will be evaluated independently by two readers. If both overall evaluations are “S,” the conveners will record a final evaluation of “Satisfactory.” If both readers evaluate the exam overall as “U,” the exam receives a final evaluation of “Unsatisfactory.” If the two readers disagree in their overall evaluations, the exam will be given to a third reader. The conveners will record the final evaluation based on the two concurring overall evaluations.

II. THIS EVALUATION SHEET GOES TO THE CANDIDATE. Each reader’s comments should represent his or her considered appraisal of the paper. These comments are read by the candidate and the candidate’s Committee on Preparation for Ministry. Use the back of this sheet OR attach a separate page for comments explaining the evaluations assigned to each section of this examination.

III. EVALUATIONS: 

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IV. OVERALL EVALUATION

NOTE: COMMENTS INCLUDE A MESSAGE FOR COMMITTEE ON PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY. (Please check if applicable.)

Susan N Haskell
Reader's name printed

Reader's Signature

☐
Reader’s Evaluations:

Section 1: Presbyters and the will of Christ
This is a well organized, well thought out approach to the Required Response. It demonstrates a broad knowledge of the BOO and the concepts therein. It is creative in the citations selected (choosing them from both the Form of Government and the Directory for Worship) and how they support the principle of F-3.0204.

Section 2: Elder behavior
1. The response is acceptable with citations from 3 sections of the BOO which are discussed appropriately. The response would have been stronger with the addition of G-4.0302 Mandatory Reporting which covers the need to report to civil authorities even when only the "risk of harm" is present.
2. It is disappointing to read this response which is not informed by the Required Response 1. The pastor acts from his gut not from the PCUSA polity in his conversation with Marsha proposing conversations with the girl, others present, the offending elder. The omission of G-4.0302 above leaves the consideration of civil reporting mute.

Section 3: Tool for Ministry
Errors in this section distract from the response. "Both may be authorized...to administer the sacraments...." Only the RCP need be authorized. G-2.0503 refers only to teaching elders not "both". A candidate to be a teaching elder must (not usually) complete ordination exams. With those exceptions noted the rest of the response covers and gives appropriate citations for the similarities and differences between a teaching elder and a commissioned ruling elder.

Comments to the CPM
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IV. OVERALL EVALUATION

NOTE: COMMENTS INCLUDE A MESSAGE FOR COMMITTEE ON PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY. (Please check if applicable.)

Gayle Burns
Reader’s name printed

[Signature]
Reader’s Signature
Reader’s Evaluations:

Section 1: Presbyters and the will of Christ

Appropriate citing and referencing was shown by this paper. However, the paper may have demonstrated more strength by not using so much reference to ruling elders, and supporting more evidence for different levels of governance.

Section 2: Elder behavior

The strength of this paper is demonstrated in the knowledge during discussion of citing and referencing, which clearly identifies the processes that need to be taken. Strength for this paper would have been enhanced if the paper spoke more of an awareness of mandatory reporting.

In response to part II, the paper demonstrated a strong sense of pastoral care to Marsha, and a strong sense to minister to the female who alleged the misconduct, stating that "The fact is, this young woman was made to feel uncomfortable enough to come to you privately about the situation, and the ruling elder had something to do with that (even if he or she is ultimately innocent)." The paper failed however to expand on pastoral care for the alleged accused.

Section 3: Tool for Ministry

This paper had good resources in referencing and citing differences and similarities involved with teaching elders and ruling elders. The strong point of this paper was in the knowledge of the details explaining these differences and similarities, so that the elder posing the question would be well informed and equipped to answer intelligently, if this question was ever posed to them. Well done.

Comments to the CPM
Section I.

Finding and representing the will of Christ, as opposed to the will of the people, requires mature believers capable of and practiced in the art of discernment. Accordingly, Presbyterian polity sets up the ordered ministry of ruling elders to guide and govern the church as it seeks to live into the mission of Christ in the world. The Form of Government compares the ruling elders to the 70 set apart by Moses to deal with the people of Israel and to the leaders of the New Testament church. “As there were in Old Testament times elders for the government of the people, so the New Testament church provided persons with particular gifts to share in discernment of God’s Spirit and governance of God’s people” (G-2.0301).

The office of ruling elder in its relation to congregations is one structure that enables the church to discern the will of Christ. Thus, “congregations should elect persons of wisdom and maturity of faith, having demonstrated skills in leadership and being compassionate in spirit [in order] to discern and measure [the congregation’s] fidelity to the Word of God” (G-2.0301). The office of ruling elder supports the principle of seeking the will of Christ as the elders, in both their individual capacity and in their role as members of session, guide and govern the congregation in its worship and its sanctification in daily life. Through their personal holiness and experience in putting their own wills beneath the will of Christ for their lives, the ruling elders are equipped for the task of leading others in the congregation, and the congregation as a whole, to seek to “decrease” so that Christ may “increase.”
Just as ruling elders gain experience in guiding the church at the congregational level to seek Christ's will, they carry this knowledge into roles as commissioners to higher councils, such as presbyteries.

The Presbyterian Church is, in one sense, defined by its polity. That is, the very word “Presbyterian” stems from the Greek term presbuteros, which referred to elders or a council of elders. Presbyterian polity differs from a congregational polity, where individual congregations decide how their lives will be ordered (and thus are subject to the whims of local preferences). And it also differs from an episcopal polity, where bishops or individuals in higher offices have a level of concentrated power of decision-making (and are thus subject to their own potentially capricious wills). Instead, the Presbyterian polity sets in place councils to come together to discern the will of Christ at the congregational, presbytery, synod and General Assembly levels.

Accordingly, the structure of councils is the second way that Presbyterian polity is ordered so as to enact the will of Christ rather than the will of people. Councils are composed of the ruling elders previously discussed as well as teaching elders. “Councils of the church exist to help congregations and the church as a whole to be more faithful participants in the mission of Christ” (G-3.0101). They do so by providing that the Word of God may be truly preached and heard, that the Sacraments may be rightly administered and received, and by nurturing the covenant community of the disciples of Jesus Christ.

Presbyterian polity recognizes the fallible nature of individuals (such as bishops in episcopal polities), and this recognition extends to individuals within its own body, such as ruling elders. Accordingly, ruling elders do not primarily act on their own, but in relation with others through councils. As the confessions remind the church, sin runs
deep and is never fully overcome in this life, and it affects all humans and all human institutions. Thus the church acknowledges that just as individual ruling elders may be in error, so too may councils composed of such elders. Therefore, the *Book of Order* instructs councils in how they are to conduct their meetings in order that they may fulfill their function of enabling the church to live faithfully into the will of Christ.

 Appropriately, “Meetings of councils shall be opened and closed with prayer. ... Councils may also make use of processes of discernment in their deliberations prior to a vote as agreed upon by the body” (G-3.0105). Councils also shall conduct meetings according to *Robert’s Rules of Order* (G-3.0105). These principles reflect the Reformed understanding that true prayer is an offering of our selves to God and issues in commitment to God’s work in the world (W-2.1001). Similarly, as ruling elders have demonstrated the ability to discern God’s will in their own lives, in their coming together in councils they engage in processes of mutual discernment, trusting that where two or three are gathered in Christ’s name he is there with them. Lastly, these principles demonstrate the Reformed belief that God desires that we worship, serve and do all things in an orderly way (W-1.4001). We do not seek order for order’s sake but so that in the peace afforded by order we might hear God’s Word to us.

 Therefore, it is clear that the structure of councils and the principles enacted in their meetings enable the church to seek the will of Christ through mutual discernment, prayer, and orderly service.

 Though the structure of councils and the principles of prayer, mutual discernment and order could be viewed as separate means by which the church seeks the will of Christ, we will conclude with one final means that runs throughout each of the foregoing.
One of the elements of worship the Presbyterian Church enacts is self-offering. In truth, this element is a fair summation of the whole of Christian life. "The Christian life is an offering of one’s self to God" (W-2.5001). We respond to Christ’s self-offering on the cross "by offering to him [our] lives, [our] particular gifts and abilities, and [our] material goods" (W-2.5001).

To offer our very lives to Christ, as individuals and as the body of believers, is to submit to his will in all things. By so doing, we recognize that to claim "Jesus is Lord" is to confess that there is nothing in the world not to be submitted to him, including and especially our own wills. Through our regular offering to God in worship—offering new gifts, but also re-offering those we have attempted to take back—we submit ourselves in body, mind and spirit to God’s will for our lives. "Therefore, in view of God’s mercy,” writes Paul in Romans 12, we offer ourselves as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. This is our spiritual act of worship. It is this self-offering that informs the structures of elders, councils and all else that the church institutes as it seeks to live into the will of Christ.

Section II.

1.

Situations like this one are the reason why the Book of Order wisely instructs sessions in their administration of the mission of the church to have a sexual misconduct policy. "All councils shall adopt and implement a sexual misconduct policy" (G-3.0106). If the session of the church has followed this directive, then the ruling elder in question would or should know in advance whether his alleged behavior constituted conduct
outside the norms of the adopted policy. As indicated by the facts of this case, such
situations often become a he-said she-said affair. A wise sexual misconduct policy can
draw clear lines that prevent members from getting into situations that are at all
questionable. Such policies should especially address what conduct is appropriate
between adult leaders and youth in youth ministry related events.

The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity, in its affirmation of the historic principle
of church order, teaches that Christ, for the building up of the church has appointed
officers, “not only to preach the gospel and administer the Sacraments, but also
to exercise discipline, for the preservation of both truth and duty; and it is incumbent
upon these officers, and upon the whole Church, in whose name they act, to censure or
cast out the erroneous and scandalous, observing, in all cases, the rules contained in the
Word of God’” (F-3.0103). As an officer of the church, the teaching elder (as well as the
other officers) must not shirk the responsibility to exercise discipline, especially in the
case of a youth and alleged improper contact. Yet this must be done with pastoral
sensitivity.

The ruling elder in question—however it proves most fitting to address the issue
with him or her—has agreed to submit him- or herself to the church’s discipline. In the
elder’s ordination, he or she would have been asked the following: “Will you be
governed by our church’s polity, and will you abide by its discipline?” (W-4.4003e).
Such affirmation by the ruling elder transforms the teaching elder’s duty to speak with the
elder into a right to speak with the elder. As a ruling elder he or she has agreed to be
subject to the church’s discipline, even if it turns out from the ensuing conversation that
the alleged conduct was harmless or misunderstood.
2. 

Marsha, thank you for coming to speak with me and thank you for your wisdom in not sharing with me immediately who the ruling elder is that allegedly acted inappropriately. I trust that you have not spoken with others about this matter. If you think the young woman would be comfortable talking to me, I would be happy to speak with her, in order to ascertain more clearly her understanding of the situation. I know you’ve recounted to me what she said happened, but I think it might be helpful to know some further information, such as whether the ruling elder actually did succeed in getting her alone and what the nature of the personal questions was. Also, in the actual touching and stroking of her hair, were others around? Did anyone else have a sense that the ruling elder was acting strangely toward the young woman?

I don’t want to ask these questions to evade eventually speaking with the ruling elder. He or she will have to be addressed no matter what. The fact is this young woman was made to feel uncomfortable enough to come to you privately about the situation and the ruling elder had something to do with that (even if he or she is ultimately innocent). Instead, I think asking these questions can actually protect the young woman in case there actually was inappropriate conduct. That is, by getting a fuller picture of what happened before speaking to the ruling elder we will know how to assess his or her reply. I am sure you are aware of the different capacities to articulate a narrative that a full-grown adult has in comparison to a middle school child.

So I think our next step should be for you to talk to the young woman again. You can let her know that either you, her and I can speak together, or if she is not comfortable
speaking to me, you could try and get a more clear picture of the events yourself. Once we have that information, we will have more to “go on” in speaking with the elder. And Marsha, if you could, please write down what the young woman tells you. It seems wise in these kinds of situations to keep a record of what is said.

Please speak to her immediately. Once we hear more, we will have to determine how to approach the ruling elder.

Section III.A.

There are many similarities between teaching elders (TEs) and ruling elders commissioned for pastoral service (RCPs). These similarities reflect (as does the new language of “teaching elder”) the Reformed understanding that ordered ministries “are gifts to the church to order its life so that the ministry of the whole people of God may flourish. The existence of these ordered ministries in no way diminishes the importance of the commitment of all members to the total ministry of the church” (G-2.0102). TEs and ruling elders, along with all members, are ministers of the gospel. While there clearly are differences between ordered ministries and the ministries of individual members, there are also differences between the ministries of TEs and RCPs. These latter differences, however, tend to relate to secondary matters as opposed to the daily ministerial acts undertaken by each.

TEs and RCPs engage in nearly all of the same ministerial acts. Both may be authorized to preach, to administer the sacraments, to moderate session meetings, and to officiate at marriage services (G-2.0501; G-2.1001). Both are engaged in “validated ministry” (G-2.0503). (Though some TEs may be retired or members-at-large.) Validated
ministry is validated by a particular presbytery, which has oversight of the minister in question (G-2.0503(4)). It would seem that the shift in language from “minister of word and sacrament” to “teaching elder” seeks to allude to the potential overlap between TEs and RCPs and that TEs and ruling elders often have the same power and standing (e.g. voting in presbytery or synod meetings).

Despite extensive overlap in the ministerial acts that they may undertake, there are several differences between TEs and RCPs. First, an RCP ostensibly remains a member of his or her congregation,¹ whereas a teaching elder is a member of presbytery and not of an individual congregation (G-2.0503). A TE may enter into an installed pastoral relationship with a church as a pastor, co-pastor or associate pastor. These installations may be for an indefinite period of time (G-2.0504a). On the other hand, an RCP is not installed but commissioned to a congregation and this commission may not exceed three years, though it is renewable (G-2.1001). Though a TE in validated ministry is under supervision of the presbytery, he or she is not per se subject to annual review unless his or her ministry is outside the congregation (G-2.0503). In contrast, an RCP’s commission is subject to annual review by presbytery without qualification (G-2.1001).

There are also differences in training and preparation for TEs and RCPs. Normally, a TE must spend at least two years as an Inquirer and Candidate (at least one of which must be as a Candidate) and he or she must have completed an undergraduate education as well as graduate work at an approved theological school (cf. G-2.0602, -2.0607b,c). Moreover, he or she must usually complete standard ordination exams (G-2.0607d). In contrast, an RCP need only “receive such instruction and preparation as

¹ At least, it is not clear from the Book of Order that an RCP becomes a member of presbytery (cf. G-2.1001-.1004).
determined by the presbytery to be appropriate to the particular commission” (G-2.1002).

While both TEs and RCPs must be approved by presbytery for personal faith, theological adherence to the tenets of the Reformed tradition and the like, their required preparation and instruction can conceivably vary widely. Moreover, while a TE is not usually subject to supervision, an RCP shall be assigned a TE to mentor and supervise him or her (G-2.1004).

Another significant difference between TEs and RCPs is that the latter’s commissions are subject to termination by presbytery in a way that the former’s installations are not. “The presbytery may at any time withdraw the [RCP’s] commission for reasons it deems good and sufficient” (G-2.1004). In order for a TE’s installation to be terminated or dissolved, more steps must be taken, and usually will not be dissolved directly by presbytery (except where “the church’s mission under the Word imperatively demands it” (G-2.0904)). Cj G-2.0507-.0509; -2.09.

In sum, both TEs and RCPs join in ministries of word and sacrament for the sake of Christ’s mission in the world. The main differences between them reflect their differences in required training and the level of supervision and discretionary power that their respective presbyteries may exercise over them.