

Presbytery of Monmouth
Presbyterian Church (USA)

POLICY ON STUDENT/CLERGY INDEBTEDNESS AND
SEMINARY DEBT RELIEF ASSISTANCE

It is the policy of the Presbytery of Monmouth, through its Committee on Preparation for Ministry, to ensure that inquirers and candidates understand the real effects of indebtedness arising out of a seminary education and to help them take steps throughout their seminary studies to keep their debt to a minimum, and, through its Committee on Ministry, to ensure that eligible congregations and pastors know about debt relief available from the Board of Pensions and expedite approval of applications by eligible Teaching Elders.

The Committee on Preparation for Ministry will:

1. Require a prospective inquirer to—
 - a. Complete all financial forms in the inquiry application, and
 - b. Discuss the inquirer's plans to minimize seminary debt when meeting with the prospective inquirer to consider accepting him or her as an inquirer.
2. Require new inquirers to complete one of the following before they may be eligible to become candidates:
 - a. Meet with a regional representative of the Board of Pensions or a representative or the Presbyterian Foundation to assess net worth and make a plan for financing the cost of seminary; or
 - b. Complete a "Getting in Shape Fiscally" (or whatever title the workshop may be renamed over time) Fiscal Fitness" workshop sponsored by the Board of Pensions of the PC(USA).
 - c. Another equivalent session, with the approval of CPM.
3. Require inquirers and candidates to attend a Career and Counseling Center to obtain career guidance in pursuit of ordination in the PC(USA) to become eligible to be certified ready for a call.
4. Counsel each inquirer regarding the inquirer's level of indebtedness vis-à-vis the prospective salary that can be expected based on the current median income for the denomination reported by the Board of Pensions as well as the minimum effect salary adopted by the Presbytery at that time.
5. Encourage each inquirer and candidate, where possible, to use his or her available assets to pay for seminary expenses rather than incurring indebtedness.
6. When indebtedness cannot be avoided, monitor with the inquirer or candidate the level at which indebtedness increases as well as the assets that may be made liquid to assist with seminary debt repayment.
7. Make available at least annually to each inquirer and candidate a list of available grants, interest-free loans, funding that may be available through the Financial Aid for Studies Office of the PC(USA) and PC(USA) seminaries, and other types of financial assistance.
8. Advocate with the congregation of which each inquirer or candidate is a member, and with other congregations of the presbytery as appropriate, in order to generate financial support in the form of grants or scholarships.

The Committee on Ministry will:

1. Require any minister serving a first call following graduation from seminary who comes with any educational indebtedness to either:
 - a. Show evidence of having attended at least one of the two programs listed above under §1 under CPM; or
 - b. Complete such a workshop within twelve months of the effective date of hire (and in this instance, the cost of the registration fee, accommodation and travel to and from such a program would be considered a legitimate reimbursable expense from study leave allowance).
2. Encourage calling congregations to utilize further educational debt reduction as a point in negotiating salary with a prospective minister who is a recent seminary graduate.
3. Upon adoption of this policy, identify existing congregations and pastors eligible for the Board of Pensions' Seminary Debt Assistance program and apprise them of the availability of the program.
4. In the future, identify congregations recruiting new pastors that qualify for the Board of Pensions' Seminary Debt Assistance program (as of the date this policy is adopted, those are churches with fewer than 150 members and a budget of \$250,000 or less) and apprise their Session and/or search committee of the availability of the program and the requirements for teaching elders to be eligible (which, as of the date this policy is adopted, is that they be in a full-time called position and in their first seven years of ministry).
5. Advise teaching elders eligible for Seminary Debt Assistance how to apply (at the time this policy is adopted, the application form]“Seminary Debt Assistance Program Application,” ARH-004] is available at <http://www.pensions.org/AvailableResources/Forms/Documents/arh-004.pdf>), support their submission of the application, and complete the appropriate section of the application (at the time of the adoption of this policy, that is §2 of the application) on behalf of the Presbytery of Monmouth.

The requirements laid out in this policy will be considered binding on inquirers and candidates who come under care of CPM after it is approved by the Presbytery of Monmouth. Inquirers and candidates who are already under care at the time of approval will be strongly encouraged to comply where practical.

Approved by the Committee on Preparation for Ministry September 9, 2014

Approved by the Committee on Ministry: Date

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Sources consulted in developing this policy:

The Board of Pensions of the Presbyterian Church (USA):

- Telephone interview with Dick Liberty, Manager, The Assistance Program; 800-773-7752, x. 7222
- “Overview: The Assistance Program—Seminary Debt Assistance,”
<http://www.pensions.org/AvailableResources/BenefitsOverviews/Documents/pts-616.pdf>
- “Draft Sample Presbytery Candidate Indebtedness Policy,”
<http://www.pensions.org/availableresources/bookletsandpublications/documents/draftsamplepolicy.pdf>
- “Pastors with Vocational Leadership Needs, Seminary Debt Assistance,”
<http://www.pensions.org/plansandprograms/assistanceprogram/pages/pastors-vocational-leadership-needs.aspx>

New Hope Presbytery, “New Hope Presbytery Candidate Indebtedness Policy,” approved 2-20-2010,

<http://www.nhpresbytery.org/PDF/Publications/PreparationForMinistry/CandidateIndebtednessPolicy.pdf>

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