

The logo for ECO (A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians) features the letters 'ECO' in a bold, dark green, sans-serif font. The 'E' is stylized with a white negative space cutout.

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A COVENANT ORDER OF ECANGELICAL PRESBYTERIANS

# Ordination Exam Study Guide

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ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians  
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The ECO Ordination process was created with a hope that we would dramatically lower the amount of pastors who leave the ministry within five years. One of the ways we want to combat this challenge is to make sure ECO Pastoral Ministry Candidates have significant ministry experience before they move to their final assessment. The Ordination exams help ECO assess how prepared a candidate is to take on the challenge of pastoral ministry.

## **ORDINATION EXAMS**

Each Candidate must successfully complete the ECO Ordination exams. The purposes of the exams are to assess the Candidate in areas of Biblical Literacy, Theology, Worship/Sacraments, Polity, Missional Strategy and Exegesis. One of the significant differences between ECO's Ordination Exams and other denominational exams is that ECO did not create the exams with the purpose that they should be given multiple times. The tests are given to help the PMOT know the best way to direct the Candidate for the rest of their ordination journey. This may include:

- Helping a Candidate to step out of the ordination process
- Helping a Candidate work through their "blind spots" in ministry
- Creating a learning plan to help the Candidate in areas of weakness as assessed in the exams
- Additional hours of mentorship with an ordained pastor or elder

### **Failed Exams**

When a Candidate fails an exam, the chair of the PMOT will request that the Candidate submit a response to the graders comments for the failed exam. The Candidate's responses along with the graders assessments will be considered by the PMOT when completing a follow up interview. Following the interview, the PMOT will determine the best way forward for the Candidate. Again, the purpose of the exams is to know how best to disciple the Candidate, not just giving them another question on another exam to "pass" when the test has already helped to determine how best to nurture and equip the Candidate.

The exception may be the Bible Content Exam. We do not give back Bible Content Exams, so it is possible to give Candidates who fail this exam an exam from a past year, however if the Candidate does not pass the second time, the PMOT will consider other options of assessing Biblical literacy.

A candidate who is unprepared for pastoral ministry according to their PMOT will not be able to move any further in the candidacy process until those issues are dealt with to the PMOT's satisfaction.

## Preparing for the Exams

ECO exams are challenging and they are meant to be. You may take the exams one at a time and over several days, but once you see the exam, time starts. When the PMOT authorizes you to take the exams you will need to find a proctor that your PMOT approves of. Usually a staff member from your church can fulfill this role. The proctor will receive specific instructions from the PMOT on what they will need to do.

As you prepare to take your exams, please **FOLLOW DIRECTIONS** on each exam and each question. If a question asks for examples from four different sources...give examples from four different sources. If you are told to write a letter in response to issues...write a letter. Many candidates fail exams for simply not following directions.

**Type your responses.** If for some reason you only have access to pen and paper, then you may use this, however, candidates who have chosen this have failed for writing exams that were illegible. So typing exams is the preferred method in ECO. Candidates are encouraged to work with their proctor to allow for a comfortable work space. If Candidates have needs due to diagnosed disabilities, please speak with the chair of the PMOT so that they can help to set-up your exam to help with your unique needs.

## BIBLE CONTENT EXAM:

The BCE is no joke. It is 100 questions which are multiple choice and fill-in the blank. You must successfully complete the exam with 70 questions correct. The average score on this exam has been around 80. ECO is unapologetic at the toughness of this exam. ECO is committed to strong Biblical understanding in the midst of a culture that often diminishes that authority. ECO has also loosed up its requirements for formal education, but not on its standards for what one should know as an ECO pastor. How you gain the knowledge, whether from a seminary or a Bible Study, is not as important as you knowing Reformed Theology and God's word. Preparing for this exam is essential.

First, you should be familiar with common scripture passages. The test is not asking you to name book and chapter of obscure passages of scripture, but it will ask you to name book and chapter of common scriptures. So the fill-in the Blank may say:

10. \_\_\_\_\_ "For God so loved the World that he gave his one and only son..."  
This may be found in what book and chapter of scripture?

The answer is of course John 3. You will not be graded down for putting John 3:16, but you will get it wrong if you put John 3:17, so make sure the answer is correct.

Second, you will be asked to answer questions on major themes, characters, parables and the scripture passages of where to find these answers. For instance, you may be asked:

77. \_\_\_\_\_ What Gospel(s) tells the story of Jesus' Birth?

- A. John
- B. Matthew
- C. Matthew, Mark
- D. Matthew, Luke
- E. Luke, John

The correct answer is “?”. We are going to let you figure it out. You need to know prophets, kings; you should know any character that is directly related to or point towards the Messiah. You ought to know the difference between the epistles and how to tell them apart.

Candidates have prepared by doing flashcards, Bible trivia, and researching poplar verses in the scripture. The great part is all this studying...is in the Bible...you are welcome!

## POLITY AND MISSIONAL STRATEGY EXAM

The PMSE is the first of two exams which use case studies to assess how you would practically use your pastoral ministry experience, theology, essential tenets, Book of Confessions, and ECO Polity in everyday situations. We cannot emphasis enough to **read the directions** and **answer the question**. In this exam you will be given mandatory questions and questions you can choose from. The PMSE is an open book exam, so your proctor will inform you what resources you can use during your exam, and it is timed. Resources able to be used will include the Bible, ECO Polity, Essential Tenants, Theology, and the Book of Confessions. As one should already know, if you are being given an open book exam, it is because it is not going to help you all that much. Some candidates struggle in these exams because they think, “This would never have happened to me...” The problem is none of us think these issues are going to happen to us until we are knee deep in them. Please do not put caveats at the top of your exams; it really will not help you.

Graders of this exam are looking for these things:

- Did the candidate follow directions and answer the full question?
- Was the candidate's response pastorally appropriate for the situation?
  - Meaning...did the candidate properly balance compassion and empathy with theology and polity
- Did the candidate properly use ECO polity and Theology?
- Did the candidate properly understand the role of the people involved in the situation and properly heard them, taught them, empathized with them, etc...?
- Was the candidate Kingdom Minded and Chistocentric in their approach to the case study?

A candidate who successfully passes an ECO exam will receive an overall score of 3,4 or 5. An unsuccessful exam will receive an overall score of 1 or 2.

An example of an exam question may be: A couple wants to make an appointment to see you because they are having a conflict raising their children. Sports are dominating everything and Jack, the dad, doesn't believe that they are fulfilling their vows as parents to raise their kids with the value of going to church. Elise, the mom, believes that children need faith and to be active and she can't help that sports fall on Sunday mornings. How would you respond to this couple using ECO Polity, Book of Confessions, the essential tenets and Reformed Theology?

There are many factors when looking at the above question. The challenge for you will be how you will address each part of the question while maintaining your pastoral presence in the situation.

The Missional Strategy part of the exam gives different case studies of how you might lead a church through the challenge of outreach and acts of mercy. This part of the exam, candidates either did really well or very poorly. Read directions! Understand the pastoral role!

#### WORSHIP AND THEOLOGY EXAM

The WTE is similar to the Polity in every way except: The WTE is a closed book exam and is timed. You will not be able to use any resources and yet you will be asked to cite sources. There is an expectation that because the size of the Polity and Essential Tenets are so small it is reasonable to expect you to have a general knowledge of these documents. The Book of Confessions and the Bible will also need to be referenced appropriately.

#### EXEGETICAL EXAM

The EE evaluates your ability to exegete a text. You will have one week from the time you are given the exam to complete a paper with all the components asked for on the assigned text. You will have the choice of using an Old Testament or New Testament passage. You must include a work cited section. Online resources are fine as long as they are cited properly and scholarly in their approach. Wikipedia and sites like this are not considered graduate level resources. You will not be graded on language issues in the text as languages are not a requirement for ECO according to our polity. However, if you choose to address languages this will be included in your evaluation. Successful exams tend to be around 10-12 pages long. Failing exams tend to happen from poor research and/or poor execution of a sermon from the research you did. If you exegete the creation account and your sermon is on eschatology with little reference to the creation account, you will most likely fail.

Remember for all of your exams that they will be graded by elders and pastors. If your work is to sophisticated and technical that an elder cannot understand what you are talking about, it is not going to give you a successful outcome.

#### FINAL THOUGHTS

Failing the exams is not the end of the world, but it will tell the PMOT and you something. ECO does not want you to be discouraged in your walk, but we also don't want to pass candidates who may not be ready for pastoral ministry. We hope that this process of assessment will help you continue to seek God's plan for your life and the mentors needed to refine you into the person God is shaping for ministry.

Our prayers are with you!