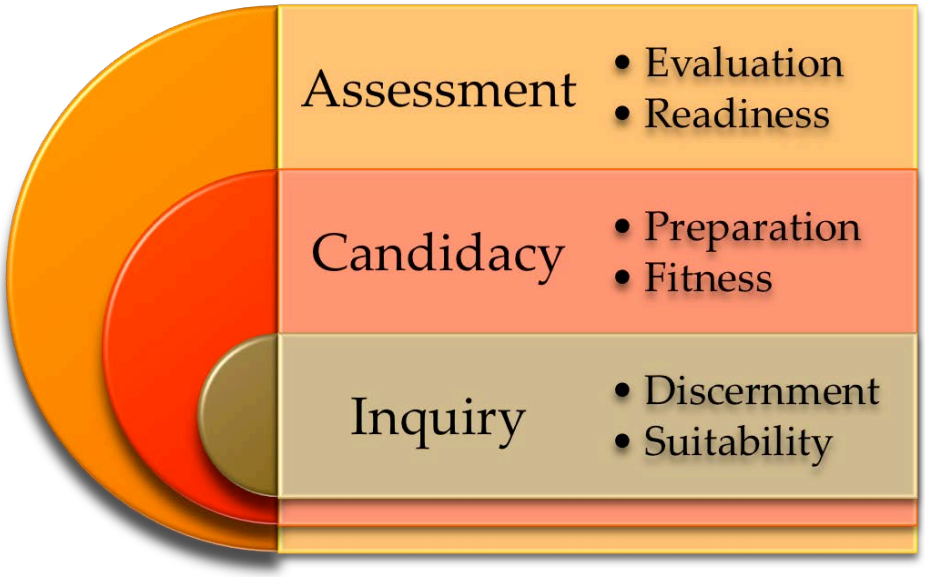
ADVISORY HANDBOOK ON PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY



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in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Prepared by Mid Council Ministries

of the Office of the General Assembly

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Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

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Advisory Handbook on Preparation for Ministry

IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)

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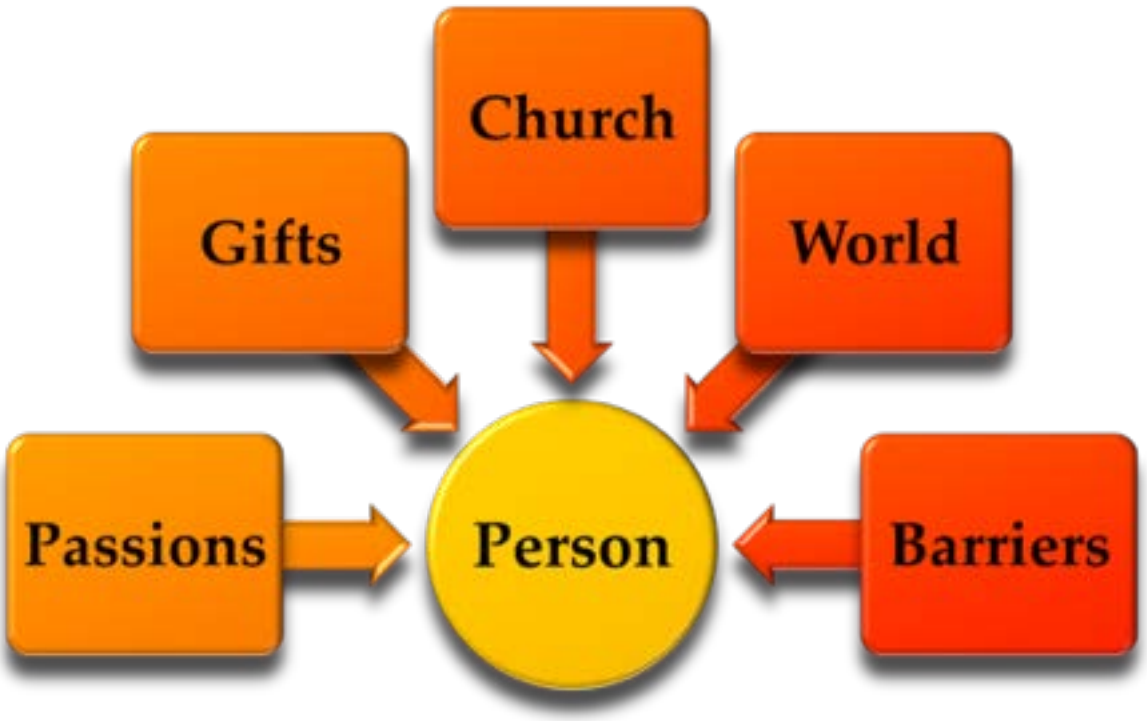
INTRODUCTION



The Need for Flexibility and Standards

One of the fundamental characteristics of the current Form of Government is that it focuses attention on outcomes rather than procedures. This emphasis requires both the gathered wisdom from the experiences of persons across the church and a recognition that what achieves certain outcomes in one place may not be the only way to achieve those outcomes elsewhere. Put another way, wisdom can be thought of as the combination of knowledge about desired outcomes *and* knowledge about context. What is a wise approach to providing support, guidance, and oversight to more than 75 persons in a presbytery located in a single metropolitan area is, at least in many of its details, going to be an unwise approach to providing those same things to two or three such persons scattered across a presbytery that is larger than a good number of states.

But the needs for flexibility are not only or even primarily about institutional differences between presbyteries. This process is about discerning and developing gifts in individuals so they can serve others. It is not about making those individuals servants of the process itself. Given the marvelous diversity God has created among God's people, the center of the preparation for ministry process must be the building of a relationship—the kind of relationship where both affirming and challenging truths can be spoken and heard. There cannot be a "one size fits all" process for building relationships to assess standards for ministry like "wisdom and maturity of faith, leadership skills, compassionate spirit, honest repute, and sound judgment" (G-2.0607a).

When the beginning isn't the beginning

Release 1.0 of this *Advisory Handbook on Preparation for Ministry in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)* that came out in September 2011 was not the very first handbook ever produced by the church to assist with understanding and implementing the requirements in the *Book of Order* for the process of discerning a person's call to service as a minister of the Word and Sacrament and developing their gifts necessary for that ministry. It was, however, a fresh start in that it consolidated into a single document resource materials for those under care, the presbytery committees that worked with them, and the persons selected by the presbyteries to moderate those committees. Yet what made it even more of a "1.0" endeavor was the fact that it was the first *Advisory Handbook* to be produced following approval by the presbyteries of a new Form of Government within the *Book of Order*.

For the preparation for ministry process, this revision was the second time in only four years that sweeping changes had been made to the number of constitutionally mandated requirements for those discerning calls to serve the church as teaching ministers of the Word and Sacrament. As expressed in the introduction to the 2007 *Advisory Handbook*, all of these changes were "intended to encourage the church's movement toward a more flexible, less regulatory polity. Such a polity recognizes that there may be different and equally acceptable ways to uphold the national standards for preparation, ordination, installation, and the practice of ministry" (i). To get a sense of just how much change for the sake of flexibility had been made over a very brief period, one can compare the 14 pages devoted to the preparation for ministry process in the

2005-2007 *Book of Order* to the roughly two pages devoted to this process in the editions since 2011.

Why "2.1" rather than "1.5"?

Even as the church was still living into these changes, it created through the 220th General Assembly (2012) a special committee to review the overall preparation for ministry process and the particular role of the standard ordination exams within it. One of the key findings of that special committee was that there had not "yet been sufficient time for the church to adjust to the changes in the Form of Government since its revision in 2011." Its recommendation, approved by the 221st General Assembly (2014), was to

> Encourage presbyteries, through whatever structure they have in place to guide the preparation of persons for ordered ministry as a teaching elder, to make full use of the flexibility provided by the Form of Government in G-2.06, particularly 2.0610, to respond to the unique needs of individual inquirers and candidates, especially those from immigrant and underserved communities. (Minutes, 2014, Part 1, page 378)

At the recommendation of its special committee, the Assembly referred to the presbyteries amendments to G-2.0607 and G-2.0610 to facilitate this flexibility in both the process and the ordination exams, and the presbyteries approved the amendments with near unanimous support.

A new edition of the *Advisory Handbook* was required to reflect these amendments to the *Book of Order* and to continue the work of providing "models of ways presbyteries are responding to unique and emerging issues related to the preparation and equipping of persons for ordered ministry as a teaching elder" (Minutes, 2014, Part 1, pages 378-79). In fact, every line of this *Handbook* was reviewed and updated as necessary. The "Preparing for Ministry Today" chapter had all statistical information checked and updated where more recent data were available. In response to a recommendation from the 2014 General Assembly that presbyteries provide more information about the current realities faced by persons seeking calls to pastoral positions within the church, a new section was added to that chapter presenting the findings of a recent study into how long it is taking candidates to receive calls once they have been "certified ready for examination for ordination, pending a call."

Mid Council Ministries staff also took the occasion of those required changes to bring the style of this *Handbook* into line with the most recent editions of the *Handbook on Standard Ordination Examinations in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*. This combination of changes in both form and content advanced the *Advisory Handbook* to version 2.0, but more importantly signals to all those engaged in the preparation for ministry process the General Assembly's call for the church to continue to build on the work of recent years in developing a process that utilizes "different and equally acceptable ways to uphold the national standards for preparation, ordination, installation, and the practice of ministry."

This current edition is "2.1," and represents a much more incremental update from its predecessor. The adoption of a new Directory for Worship by the church in 2017 along with amendments to a number of Form of Government sections referenced within this Handbook

(mostly regarding the relative preference between the designations "minister of the Word and Sacrament" and "teaching elder") required updating a number of constitutional references. We once again took this opportunity to update the statistical data about inquirers and candidates in the first chapter as well.

Focus on Person rather than Process

We have often been tempted in the past to think of handbooks as checklists that compile all the requirements. Check off all the things in the list, and the decision is made. But if preparing for ministry is about discernment, then the decisions will need to be made by the persons who engage one another and not by an impersonal process. Certain requirements remain, but a handbook should both review those requirements and suggest ranges of options for meeting them. It will raise questions perhaps more than it provides answers. It will share experiences and insights gained over the years, but will try to continually push both those under care and those from sessions and presbyteries who work with them to ask *why* are we doing this and *how* does it promote discernment and development of gifts for the particular individual. We can't look to a single denomination-wide handbook of policies and procedures to make decisions for us.

An *advisory* handbook

The "release 2" editions of the *Advisory Handbook* continue to place the emphasis upon "advisory" rather than "handbook" (at least in the sense of "instruction manual"). Like their predecessors, they preserve the "gathered wisdom" from the past in terms of best practices and recommended policies, but do so while trying to avoid suggestions of "one size fits all" solutions. The handbook reviews the constitutional standards in G-2.06 and G-2.07 for preparation to be ordained as a minister of the Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), showing how these standards emphasize outcomes rather than process. It emphasizes theological principles for those constitutional standards while also offering practical advice regarding various ways to achieve those outcomes garnered from the lived experience of the church. In the end, you will not find here an "off the shelf" policies and procedures manual, but you will find ideas and suggestions that you can adapt and adopt in creating policies and processes for your particular presbytery.

Although Mid Council Ministry staff members receive requests from time to time for one-page summary charts of the preparation process, this edition of the *Advisory Handbook* does not provide "checklists" or "step-by-step" guides. Preparation for ordination as a minister of the Word and Sacrament in the PC(USA) is not like certification programs where by completing all the requirements you are guaranteed to reach the goal at the end. Inquiry is "an opportunity ... to explore" a person's call to ministry "so that the presbytery can make an informed decision about the inquirer's suitability for ordered ministry" (G-2.0603). Candidacy is about "provid[ing] for the full preparation of persons to serve the church as ministers of the Word and Sacrament... through the support, guidance, and evaluation of a candidate's fitness and readiness for a call to ministry requiring ordination" (G-2.0604). "Decisions," "support," "guidance," "evaluation"—

those really are terms more related to "relationship" rather than "procedures." Consequently, this *Advisory Handbook* focuses more on ways to develop relationships of support and guidance where evaluations and decisions can be made. While we still speak about a "preparation for ministry process," it is a process of personal, communal, and spiritual discernment and growth—not an assembly line for mechanistically producing new pastors.

A *digital* handbook

Mid Council Ministries remains committed to making this an *Advisory Handbook* for our digital age. One of the new realities of our current circumstance is the accelerating rate of change which itself requires that we become more flexible both in how we do things and how we share insights and information. We are making the *Advisory Handbook* available in "print-friendly" formats, but distributing it in electronic forms. There are many reasons for this approach. Certainly it saves natural resources. In an age when Amazon sells more e-books than print editions, it makes the *Advisory Handbook* easily accessible to those who prefer netbooks, tablets, and e-readers to three-ring binders. But most importantly, it encourages easier sharing of best practices yet to be developed as the users of the *Advisory Handbook* contribute their ideas for inclusion.

Beginning with release 2.0, auxiliary materials presented as marginal notes in release 1 editions of the *Advisory Handbook* have been moved into the main body of the text. These auxiliary materials are where possible moved to the end of sections, but also usually displayed in text boxes to clearly distinguish them from the primary text. Three types of auxiliary materials continue to be offered, each now designated by a particular icon.

A red question mark accompanied by a person figure indicates "Questions for Reflection." These materials can be thought of as suggestions for conversations between the various partners in the preparation for ministry process about issues of mutual concern. The prompts may arise from the broader context of ministry in the twenty-first century, or from particular situations that may arise specifically within the preparation for ministry process.

Figures of two persons ascending a staircase are used to designate "Next Steps." While these materials are also often presented as questions, they identify specific actions that will need to be taken by different participants in the preparation for ministry process or particular decisions that will need to be made as either general policies and procedures are established by presbyteries or individual "covenant agreements" are negotiated by presbytery's committees or commissions and those under their care.

The abbreviation "FAQ" is now widely recognized as standing for "Frequently Asked Questions." These materials will be found primarily in the chapter reviewing "Roles and Responsibilities" for the different partners in the preparation for ministry process, and are presented in the format of questions often asked by persons who are fulfilling the particular role under consideration at that point in the discussion. The questions are presented in italics, and a response can be found in the following paragraph. If you have a suggestion for an FAQ that arises from a frequently recurring situation in your work

with the preparation for ministry process, please forward it on to the Mid Council Ministries staff for possible inclusion in the next release of the handbook.

Finally, all references to materials on the Internet have been included as functional hyperlinks for the convenience of those who will reference the *Advisory Handbook* within an Acrobat Reader application on an electronic device, and spelled out in full (where practical) for those who will have printed a hardcopy. These links have been checked, and all were active as of the date this edition was released.

PREPARING FOR MINISTRY TODAY

"We find ourselves in the midst of monumental change in this country and throughout the world. Breathtaking technological advances are influencing how we interact with others, obtain information, and structure our lives. Shifting demographics are reshaping homogeneous neighborhoods into multicultural communities. Tumbling economies are erasing job security and impacting individuals and families in critical, perhaps permanent, ways in areas such as housing and healthcare. Environmental concerns and catastrophes are compelling us to reconsider our patterns of consumption. The world order itself is feeling seismic shifts as popular uprisings challenge and even topple longstanding governments.

"Being in the world, the church – especially in North America – finds itself in the midst of these changes."

—Report of the Six Agency Leadership Initiative Consultation

Surveying the Current Landscape

The world is changing rapidly. Some have estimated that, on average, the sum of human knowledge doubles every five years. Though clearly the rate of increase is not the same across all areas of life, some researchers have estimated that the "half-life" of a professional education ranges between five and ten years. That means that roughly half of what one learned will be obsolete ten years after graduation, and three-quarters of it will be obsolete in another ten years. And it is not just professional or technical knowledge that is becoming obsolete. Societal influences and lifestyles are changing just as rapidly.

Nevertheless, we are still influenced by past practices and assumptions in ways that are often as imperceptible as they are out of step with current realities. We still refer to music "records" or "albums" even though most music is sold as downloaded digital files (not even digital files on compact discs). We still speak about "dialing" a phone number even though most of us cannot remember the last time we saw a phone with a physical dial. In fact, most of the youngest generation find the notion of "landline" phones physically wired to the network almost quaint, because for them being "wired" usually means being connected to a cellular phone network or to the Internet by a *wireless* connection.

By the time most of us reach a stage in life where we are likely to be sufficiently experienced as church leaders that we will be asked by our presbyteries to supervise others in the preparation for service as ministers of the Word and Sacrament, many of the assumptions we have as a result of our own preparation or that of our generational peers a decade or more before will be far out of step with current realities. Rather than assuming our experience provides a norm consistent with the experience of those under care, we need to begin by considering some emerging patterns that we find among those who discern a call to serve as ministers of the Word and Sacrament and the nature of the church to which they feel called to serve.

What changes are you seeing between inquirers and candidates currently under care and those entering ministry a generation ago?

What things remain consistent about ministry despite broader cultural and technological changes?

How can the process adapt to deal with both the continuity and the change?

An old and familiar road

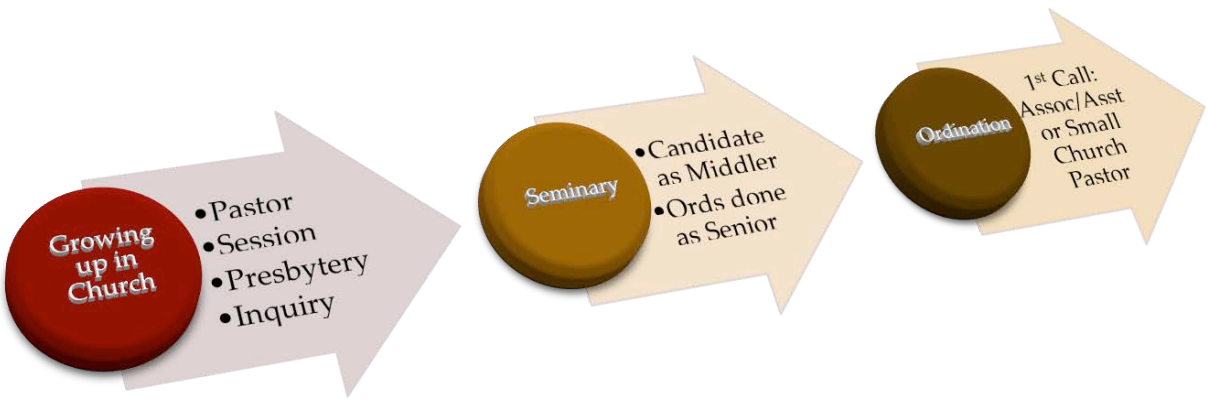
If we were to take what is generally thought of as the "usual" process of preparation to serve as a minister of the Word and Sacrament in the PC(USA) by a "typical" person and reduce it to a story, for many that story might go something like this:

- During their adolescence they had formative experiences within the Presbyterian Church. They were actively involved in their home congregation, and while they may have drifted a

bit from congregational life during college they still connected with some campus ministry, Presbyterian or otherwise. As they began to think about their vocational plans for the future they expressed an interest in seminary. Either their home pastor or their college chaplain encouraged them to contact their presbytery to begin the formal process of "inquiry." They discussed seminary options with their pastor and presbytery and moved from university life to full-time seminary study as seamlessly as many of their peers moved out of the dorms and onto graduate and professional schools in the fields of business, law, and medicine.

- The next three years moved smoothly along two parallel tracks. One rail was their academic training at the seminary that, like other professional programs, included a strong component of "field education." "Theory" was the focus of some courses, but it was continually related to the "practice" of congregational ministry through practical theology courses and formal internships supervised by experienced pastors trained as ministry supervisors. The other rail was the ecclesial process with their presbytery of care. There were consultations at least once a year with representatives from the presbytery. They worked out a course of study and supervised practice of ministry that would meet both graduation requirements and the PC(USA)'s expectations for educational preparation. By their third year of study, they were almost certainly academic seniors in the seminary process and had been advanced to candidacy by their presbytery with some or all of the standard ordination examinations completed.
- As they entered their final semester of studies they had been "certified ready for examination for ordination, pending a call," and were actively involved in seeking that first call. Through the seminary placement office, denominational placement assistance like "Face to Face" events, and more informal referral networks, they might be in touch with nominating committees from several congregations. As commencement arrived, the call to serve as a small church pastor or associate pastor of a larger congregation was in place. Examination by the presbytery of call and ordination soon followed, and the newly ordained pastor began a new phase of life in a new town or city ministering to and serving with a new faith community.

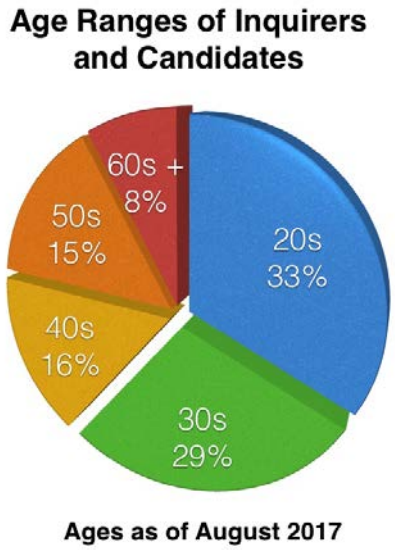
You could reduce that story to its barest essentials and represent it graphically as:



All the various stages of the process flowed smoothly from one into another, and in a majority of cases the work of preparation confirmed the discernment of call that had been shared by the individual and the community from the very beginning of the process.

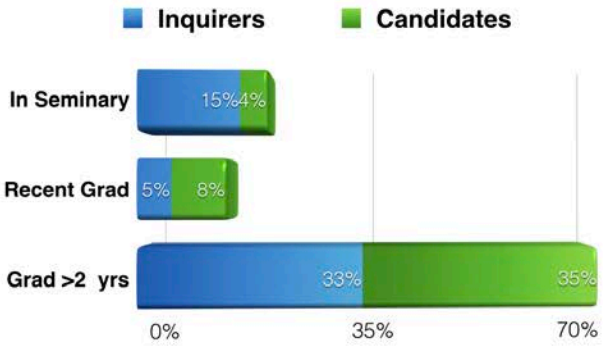
Changes in the scenery

There are several trends among those currently under care that would, however, suggest some different story lines. For example, the distribution of inquirers and candidates by age range shows that only for a minority is pastoral ministry a first career choice. Nor is consideration of a call to serve as a minister of the Word and Sacrament necessarily a "mid-career" option for thirty- and forty-somethings; roughly one out of every 10 inquirers and candidates active in the preparation for ministry process in August 2017 would be receiving their first calls at a stage in life that not too long ago would have been associated with retirement age.



Another significant change has been seen in the relationship between seminary education and the ecclesial process of preparation for ministry. It is increasingly the case that individuals have already begun seminary studies before they engage the presbytery in the discernment and preparation process. In some cases this pattern is a result of a decision to enroll in graduate theological study for reasons other than preparation for pastoral ministry. Sometimes it is seminary classes undertaken as a result of other personal interests that open the door to considering a call to professional service in the church or other ministry forms.

It can also be the case, however, that individuals who have not grown up in the Presbyterian Church or may not have mentoring pastors simply are unaware of the ecclesial process that leads to readiness to be ordained as a minister of the Word and Sacrament. This issue can also emerge if the seminary was chosen because it was in the community or "close to home," but is unrelated to the Reformed tradition and has few (if any) Presbyterian students. These individuals will not necessarily have mentors within the seminary community who can point out to them that there is an ecclesial process within the church as well as the academic process in the seminary.



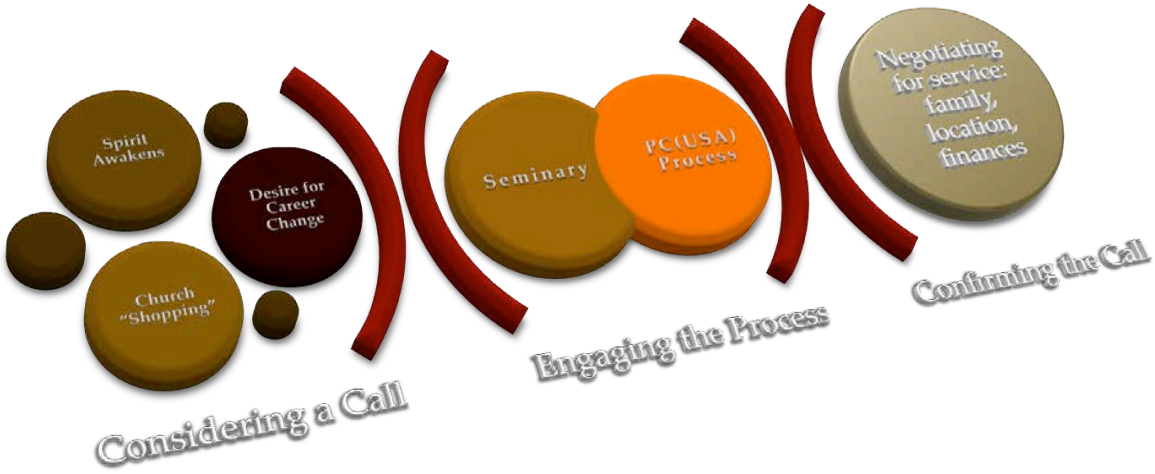
For these and other reasons, only about one fifth of all inquirers and candidates under care in August 2017 were currently still enrolled in seminary, and roughly two-thirds of those under care had been out of seminary for two years or more (as

reported by their presbyteries). Moreover, there were almost as many inquirers as candidates who had been out of seminary for at least two years, accounting for about three of every 10 persons under care in the process.

There are a number of implications created by this changed circumstance. How do we keep the skills developed in seminary in use and "sharp" while the individual and presbytery do the work of discernment regarding one's gifts and call to ministry? How do we take care that pressures to "get on with it" do not completely squeeze out the important questions about the person's fitness for ministry and readiness for specific forms of ministry within PC(USA) congregations or validated by our presbyteries? We will need to return to these questions (and related ones) as we consider the shared work between the individuals, the congregations, and the presbytery in the preparation process.

Many paths into ministry

For a majority of inquirers and candidates currently under care, the "old and familiar road" does not describe their journey into ministry. One of the new realities is that there are now many paths into service as ministers of the Word and Sacrament. If we were to try and represent this changed circumstance graphically, it might look something like this:



Many only became PC(USA) members as adults. A spiritual experience may have led them to enroll in a nearby seminary even before a call to vocational ministry emerged. Entry into the inquiry/candidacy process may not have occurred until the Middler year of seminary or even after graduation. The standard ordination examinations and final assessments could only be completed in the final semester of their studies at the earliest. The true assessment of their call and commitment to pastoral service only comes through negotiating for service—a negotiation not only with congregations but with members of their family as well as they find that the nature of the calls that are available to them do not necessarily match their expectations.

Changing face of ministry

There is one other trend among inquirers and candidates that warrants particular attention because it also relates to changes within the broader context of congregational ministry: the size of the congregations from which those under care come does not align with the distribution of congregational size across the denomination. To appreciate the impact of this development, we can consider one approach to comparing congregational sizes that seeks to take into consideration the differing role of pastors and how the size of the congregation affects the nature of the pastoral relationship.

Briefly stated, this research divides congregations into four groups.

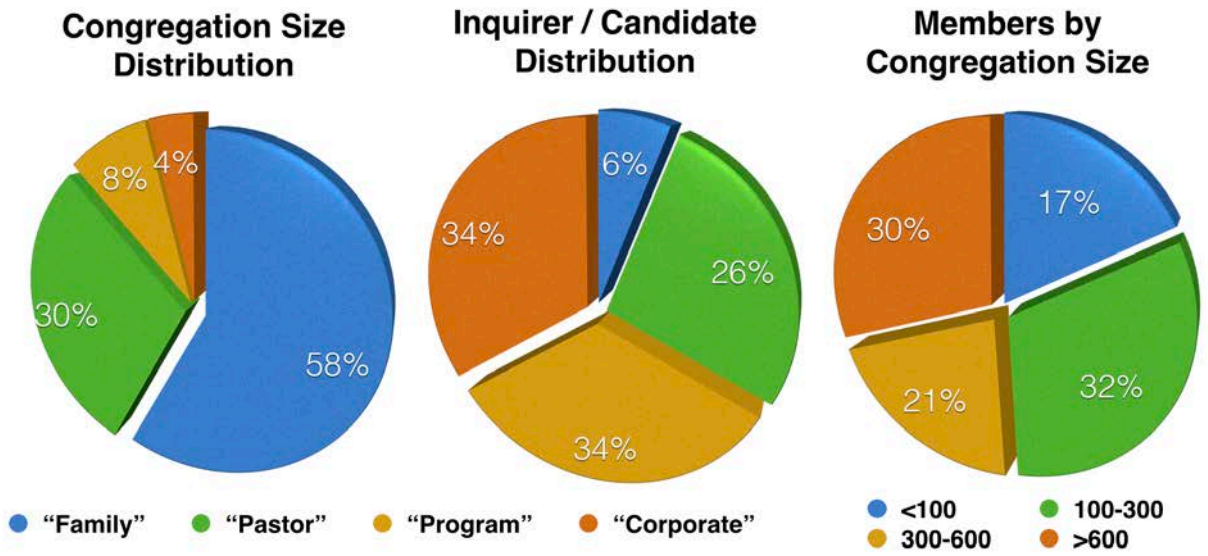
- "Family-Size" churches have up to 75 members and typically average less than 50 in weekly attendance. The pastor's role in such congregations is often likened to that of a chaplain, because the direction and leadership of the congregation is largely controlled by one or two prominent families with long history in it.

- "Pastor-Size" churches can have from 75 to 250 members and average up to 150-175 in worship. In these congregations, the pastor's role is shaped by personal relationship with the members and the upper limit is set by the number of people with whom it is possible for one individual to truly engage in personal relationship.

- "Program-Size" churches with 250 to 750 members and average attendance of around 500 would be the next grouping. Congregations in this range generally begin to have one or two other staff persons ministering to the congregation, though they may serve in non-ordained positions such as Director of Christian Education or Youth Director. The pastor's role and duties begin to define most members relationship with the pastor more than a personal relationship leading to requests to assume certain roles.

- "Corporate-Size" congregations make up the final group. These churches have the broadest range in membership, from say 800-900 members to "megachurches" with several thousand members. They will have large staffs of ordained and non-ordained persons, each with rather specialized areas of ministry and focus. While members will likely form relationships with staff persons with whom they have regular contact, the ultimate basis for that relationship will form around shared concern related to the area of the particular pastor's or associate pastor's responsibilities within the congregation.

Now, in terms of issues related to those who are discerning a possible call to pastoral ministry, what is perhaps more important than the different sizes of these congregations is the difference in the role of the pastor and the basis for the pastoral relationship. If an inquirer or candidate has experience only in congregations of a particular size, then they will likely identify "*the* role of a pastor"—what it in effect means to be a pastor—with the ways pastors function in congregations in that group.



So, how does the congregational experience of our inquirers and candidates relate to the distribution of congregations within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)? Well, as the charts above indicate, they are almost exactly opposite. To begin, note that the Office of the General Assembly reports congregational membership sizes in blocks slightly different than the groupings in "Family" to "Corporate" (see the legend to the charts), but the size correlations are close enough for our purposes. While almost nine-out-of-ten of our congregations at year end-2016 were in the "Family" and "Pastor" size categories, two-out-of-three of our candidates come from "Program" and "Corporate" size churches. This distribution of inquirers and candidates really should not be that surprising. As the "Members by Congregation Size" chart shows, the members of the PC(USA) are about evenly distributed between our "Family"/"Pastor" and our "Program"/"Corporate" size congregations. So, our inquirers and candidates are even more likely to come from our largest churches than our overall membership of the PC(USA) in general.

Consequently, our inquirers and candidates for the most part do not often bring with them into the process of preparation for ministry experience in congregations like those that make up the vast majority of our churches. To fully understand their gifts and callings for ministry, it will be helpful for all inquirers and candidates to have experiences in congregations unlike their home church. Some may be opened to broader ministry possibilities. Some may be confirmed in what they know. All will gain a wider understanding of what the Spirit is doing in the very different kinds of churches and fellowships today.

Congregational size is only one factor that distinguishes congregations from one another. What other characteristics might be used to describe different types of churches?

How do those characteristics relate to expectations regarding pastoral roles?

What experiences or personal qualities should be looked for in those who would provide pastoral ministry in those types of congregations?

Of course, there are also contexts of ministry of Word and Sacrament that are not congregation-based—at least in the ways congregations have been understood up until recently. Often when we think about these other ministry contexts, the ones that come readily to mind are where ministers engaged in service to others on behalf of some institution. Perhaps they were chaplains working in hospitals, correctional institutions, or schools and colleges. Maybe they were directors of community ministry organizations, or partners in a professional pastoral counseling center. They might be spiritual directors or other program support staff at Christian conference and retreat centers. Look at almost any listing of "specialized ministers" on a presbytery's records from a decade or so ago in you can easily expand these possibilities. Certainly these institutional-based ministries will continue for some time, but these institutions are facing many of the same stresses as congregations.

There are indications that the growing edge of non-congregational-based ministry may be in "emergent" or "missional" fellowships developing in forms that some researchers refer to as "micro-communities." Characteristics of these communities include that they are self-selecting groups where it is engagement in an activity simultaneously with others, often through digital media forms, that determines "who belongs" more than a membership list. They are not so much led by teachers or experts as created through interactive experiences contributed to and shared by all the participants. The group's identity cannot be associated with a particular location, because the usual place for connecting with others may be in cyberspace rather than physical space. When gatherings do occur at physical locations, the choice of location is likely to be determined by the experience (fellowship at a local eatery, service projects along a hiking trail, advocating for a cause at a rally), not by a property owned and maintained by the community.

The challenge both for those discerning a call to minister to such micro-communities and for those who engage in that discernment with them while guiding their overall preparation for ministry is to think seriously about how the specific functions of ministry of the Word and Sacrament fit in. Since our Reformed theology stresses that all the baptized are gifted and called to ministry, then the highly interactive sharing of experiences and calls to mutual accountability within such groups is not a problem. Indeed, it may be a model for longstanding Christian communities to emulate. But how does one distinguish the functions of ordered ministry by those gifted as deacons, ruling elders, or ministers of the Word and Sacrament? Do we need expanded theological understandings of ministry beyond these forms of ordered ministry?

What benefits might there be to having inquirers and candidates work in ministry contexts very different from their home congregations?

Are there benefits to having them serve in both congregational and non-congregational ministry contexts?

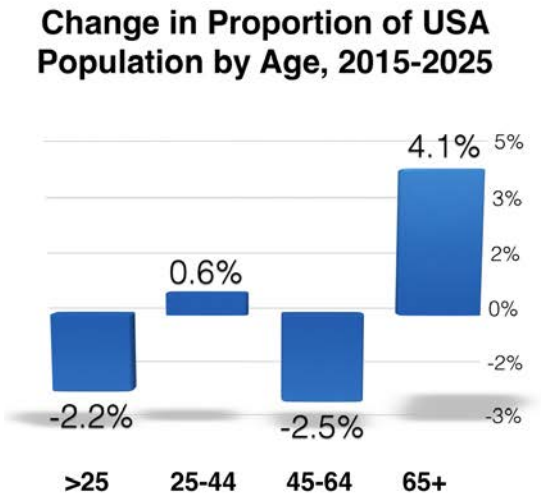
What new and emerging forms of ministry might they be encouraged to explore?

How do both those exploring ministry and those in discernment with them think about the functions of ministry of Word and Sacrament that define the role of a teaching elder in "emergent" contexts?

Changing cultural landscape

The challenging questions surrounding the changes specifically in ministry contexts lead us to consider how changes in the broader society will shape ministry. For our purposes, we will look at just three areas: the "graying" of America, the trend toward an absence of any racial-ethnic majority, and the gender shift in higher education.

Many people have commented on the rise in the average age among members of PC (USA) congregations. Certainly not maintaining church participation among those baptized as children and confirmed as adolescents is a significant factor in this trend. Often overlooked, however, is the impact of the rising median age across American society generally, which is projected to increase from 37.8 in 2015, to 39.3 in 2025.[1] Consider the information in this chart on the projected change in percentage of the population by age group for the decade between 2015 and 2025. The most rapid growth, certainly as no surprise at this point, will be caused by the "baby boomers" moving into traditional retirement age (65 and older). But notice as well that there will be a slight increase among those in what have become the "childrearing years" of 25-44, many of whom are children of "boomers." Yet because they will typically follow the pattern of delaying having children begun by their parents, the percentage of the population that is under 25 will decrease.[2] What is most notable, however, is the decrease among those 45 to 64, the only cohort projected to decline both as percentage of the overall population and in real numbers (by 1.75 million). Over recent decades that age range of the population has provided the bulk of leadership in all ordered ministries of the church, and certainly among ministers of the Word and Sacrament serving in pastoral leadership.



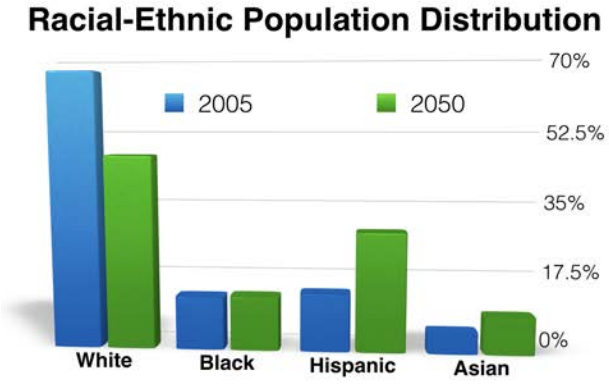
There are three likely implications from these trends. In terms of those who will seek to prepare for ministry, there will probably be a decrease in the number of "mid-career" inquirers and candidates (as their numbers in society drop) paired with increases in both younger inquirers (whose overall numbers in society will rise) and older inquirers (who may explore ministry options for longer life expectancies beyond what have been customary retirement ages). Enrollment trends in seminaries are already beginning to move in these directions. Secondly, in terms of those who will be ministered to, we should expect increasing needs to minister to those at either end of the age spectrum. We will need church leaders skilled at ministering to both the oldest and the youngest among us as they become the largest groups within the society. Finally,

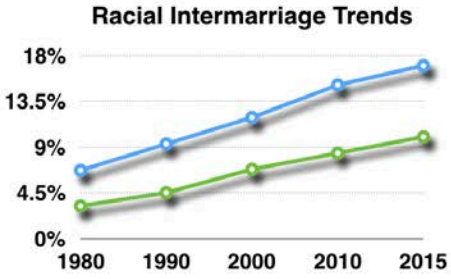
[1] All statistics drawn from United States Census Bureau data, "Table 9. Projections of the Population by Sex and Age for the United States: 2015 to 2060," downloaded from http://www.census.gov/population/projections/data/national/2014/summarytables.html (accessed May 15, 2015).

[2] The total number will be essentially the same, increasing by slightly less than 1 million, but because the overall population will increase they will comprise a smaller proportion of the total.

the current trend of more call-seekers than available pastoral calls is likely to reverse at some point in this period. However, other factors such as declines in both congregational size and the number of congregations because of aging and other demographic factors make it difficult to project when a possible "pastor shortage" might occur.

A longer-term demographic trend that will reshape both society and the church is that before the middle of this century America will become a nation with no racial-ethnic majority. Again, that overall trend is not particularly surprising news at this point (since some communities and regions are already there), but the combination of factors that are driving it may be. Immigration that is primarily from regions other than Europe coupled with the already mentioned generally higher birth rates among recent immigrant families are the major forces reshaping the racial distribution in American society. But another force changing the overall distribution that will have perhaps even more impact on the perception of racial-ethnic identity and the relations between racial ethnic groups is a steady increase in inter-racial marriages and the bi- and indeed multi-racial children who will be born into these families. These children and young people are much less willing to "choose between" their racial heritages by identifying with one particular racial-ethnic group. They see themselves not as simply White, Black, Hispanic, or Asian; they are multi-racial. And, just as importantly, since not only their communities but even their families are multi-racial gatherings, they tend to feel out of place in groups that are racially homogenous.



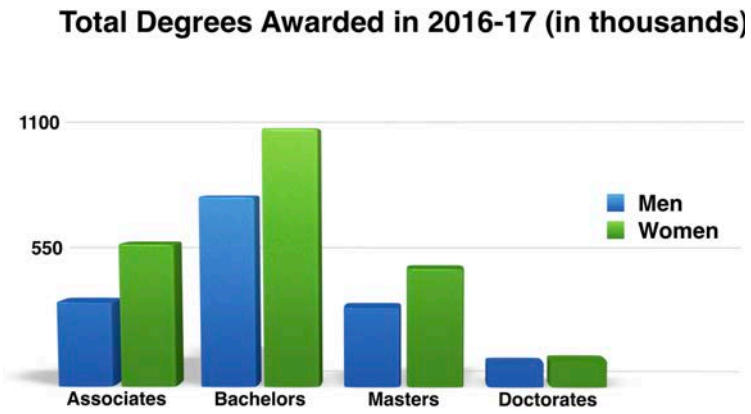


As with age, these trends in racial-ethnic distribution and identification will impact both congregations and inquirers and candidates in the preparation process. Over the next several decades, congregations may be pulled in two competing directions. As immigration continues to increase, new immigrant communities—like so many previous immigrant groups—will at least initially form fellowships and congregations with others who share their identity and experiences. The PC(USA) is seeing some of the fruit of our foreign mission efforts over the decades come home to us as Presbyterians from Africa, Central and South America, Asia, and the Middle East immigrate to the United States. But the multicultural experiences of their children and (eventually) intermarriage rates among second and third generations could mean that such immigrant churches will only sustain their ethnic homogeneity if supported by a continuing influx of new immigrants.

Being pulled in these two different directions will have tremendous influence on the preparation of ministers of the Word and Sacrament to serve with these communities. First, we will need to

identify those within these immigrant communities who have the gifts and calling that creates a willingness to prepare to serve as ministers of the Word and Sacrament —and also ruling elders and deacons—within them. But we will also have to recognize that many persons whose ancestry places them within these racial-ethnic groups are going to desire to serve in the multiracial and multicultural communities in which they live. Their sense of call to create what some would call "post-racial" communities will be just as important to the future of the PC(USA) over the long term as the need to provide leadership for new immigrant fellowships and congregations is in the near term.

The final demographic trend we will consider is the amazingly rapid change in the proportions of higher education degrees awarded to men and women respectively. In 1960, women earned only 38.4% of all bachelor's degrees in the United States. Fifty-seven years later, as the accompanying chart illustrates, significantly more undergraduate degrees were being awarded to women than to men (55.6% compared to 44.4%, respectively). Although overall doctoral/professional degrees are now roughly evenly divided between men and women, that will likely change over time as more women than men will have completed the undergraduate education required to enter these advanced degree programs. Already in 2009 and for every year since, more women than men have earned doctorates in the United States. These trends are also being felt in both seminaries and presbyteries, where women currently make up growing majorities of both students and those under care in the preparation for ministry process. Each year since 2011, the PC(USA) has ordained more women as ministers of the Word and Sacrament than men.



What demographic changes are you seeing in your communities, your congregations, and among inquirers and candidates?

What characteristics will be needed in church leaders to be able to minister to homogenous and very diverse communities over the coming years and decades?

How can the process of preparation itself adapt to the changes that will result from these trends?

Leadership for the church in this changing landscape

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has worked to give specific attention to exploring the changing cultural landscape in which the Spirit is calling the church to minister. A joint

commission of the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly, the General Assembly Mission Council, and the Committee on Theological Education prepared a report on "Future Leadership Needs" for the church that reaffirmed the important roles not only of ministers of the Word and Sacrament, but also the other ordered ministries of ruling elders and deacons and indeed of "all the baptized." A similar gathering was sponsored by all six agencies of the church in the "Leadership Initiative Consultation." The 221st General Assembly (2012) created a special committee to prepare a report and bring recommendations to the Assembly in 2014 on how these changes might impact the preparation for ministry process as a whole and the role of the ordination exams within the process in particular. These full reports are included among the resources in the final section of this *Advisory Handbook*. Other efforts are ongoing, such as the General Assembly study committee on the "Nature of the Church for the 21st Century."

No one knows exactly what the final impacts of the continuing cultural and demographic changes will be upon our society in general or the church in particular. There certainly will be need for transformational leaders who can help congregations to minister to transformed communities around them. There will also be need for leaders who can manage congregations and institutions that will continue to minister to the needs of constituencies that may themselves be gradually fading away. And there will be a need for leaders who can handle the delicate balancing act of both managing the current congregation while simultaneously leading it through transformation into what it will become in the future. All of that is just from the institutional side; the same needs for dealing with both management and transformation will apply to the individual leaders themselves. This time will be one in which both congregations and their leaders will have to be able to bring forth from the storehouse of our Reformed tradition treasures both old and new to share with our changing world (Matthew 13:52).

What indications are you seeing in your local context regarding the types of ministry leaders you will need?

How might you use tools such as congregational mission studies in Church Information Forms and presbytery mission plans to explore emerging trends in ministry needs with inquirers and candidates?

What other tools may already be at hand that would be useful in this aspect of your joint discernment?

Current impacts upon those seeking calls

All of these factors influencing both those discerning calls to service as ministers of the Word and Sacrament and the communities in which they might serve in pastoral ministry—along with many others—come together when inquirers and candidates conclude their preparation and begin seeking calls to ministry requiring ordination. Perhaps because in many professions placement is closely connected with completion of graduate degree programs, there is a tendency to think about placement in terms of proximity to graduation. Since within our church eligibility for ordination is not primarily determined by seminary graduation but rather by having been

"certified ready to be examined for ordination, pending a call," it is the certification date that provides the proper starting point for considering first call placement times. Nevertheless, there are several issues that complicate answering the question, "How long does it take candidates to find a call?"

First, Mid Council Ministries has only recently begun asking presbyteries to report to the Office of the General Assembly when candidates are "certified ready." That information only became part of the regular reporting process in January 2014, and so many presbyteries are not yet into the habit of including it in candidate's profiles. Second, not everyone who is "certified ready" is actively seeking a call, and so delays associated with their particular candidacies can artificially inflate the pattern across all candidates. Finally, while it is a rather straightforward process to determine the time needed for persons for have received calls (assuming both data points were reported), it is more difficult to devise a method that takes into account those who are currently seeking a call. With those cautions in mind, here is what can be learned about those who were seeking calls during a recent period.

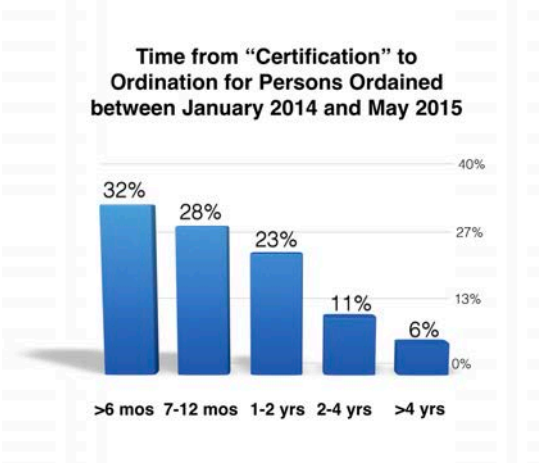
In mid-March 2017 presbyteries were reporting that 307 persons were both actively "under care" and "certified ready to be examined for ordination, pending a call." Of the 307 persons reported by the presbyteries as "under care" and "certified ready," 89 had dates of certification less than one year previous (March 15, 2016). There were 66 additional persons whose certification was two years earlier (between March 15, 2015 and March 15, 2016), and 77 others for whom it had been two to four years earlier (between March 15, 2013 and March 15, 2015). Finally, there were 75 persons for whom it had been more than four years (prior to March 15, 2013). It is probable, however, that some of these people—especially at the higher end—had either stopped looking (withdrawn from the process or simply were not actively searching) or found calls and the presbytery had not yet updated their profiles. For example, while presbyteries reported 292 ordinations in 2014 to the OGA Records Manager, presbyteries had only reported ordination dates in 2014 for 166 candidates on their online rolls. Nevertheless, of the candidates looking for a call in March 2017, about 30% of them had been searching for less than a year, about 45% had been searching for between one and four years, and roughly a quarter (24%) had been searching for more than four years.

How do those trends among those still seeking compare to their colleagues who had found calls? Since presbyteries began reporting "certification of readiness" dates online in January 2014, there had been 356 persons by mid-March 2017 for whom presbyteries had provided both ordination and certification dates. There were actually 464 persons with ordinations reported to Mid Council Ministries during this period, but presbyteries did not provide the date(s) for just over 100 of them. Nevertheless, that 356 total for whom both ordination and certification dates were available were a sufficiently random and high enough proportion that it likely was close to the overall pattern.

For those 356 persons, the time elapsed between certification to ordination ranged from less than a month to 21 years and 1 month. With a sample that small and a range that wide averages are essentially meaningless. The median, which may be somewhat more useful, was 9 months. But

probably the best insight is actually gained from considering how many persons were reported as falling within certain time ranges:

- 32% were ordained within 6 months
- 28% were ordained between 7 and 12 months of certification, so about 3 out of 5 (60%) were ordained within 1 year of certification
- 23% were ordained between 1-2 years, so in aggregate more than 4 out of 5 (83%) were ordained within less than 2 years
- 11% were ordained between 2-4 years of certification, bringing the aggregate to 94% within less than 4 years
- 6% were ordained more than 4 years after certification



All these figures underscore the importance of inquirers and candidates keeping their progress in the preparation process with their presbyteries on track with the educational progress in seminary if they are going to be in a position to receive a call at or near the time of graduation.

Paving the Way

Theological background

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is firmly grounded in the Reformed tradition in its relationships with men and women who feel themselves called by God to be ministers of the Word and Sacrament serving in the ministries of the Word and Sacrament. Both in exploring with these persons their sense of vocation and in all subsequent procedures leading to ordination, the Reformed understanding of the church underlies what the *Book of Order* calls "full preparation" for ministry (G-2.0601).

As Reformed Christians, Presbyterians understand the church as a community called into being by Jesus Christ. It is Christ who gives the church its faith and life, its unity and mission, its offices and ordinances, and Christ is its head in all things (F-1.02).

Presbyterians believe in "the ministry of all the baptized"—that all church members, regardless of their occupational choice, are engaged in ministry. That is their Christian vocation (G-1.0304). Some among them may be called by the Holy Spirit, through the church, to serve as ministers of the Word and Sacrament. That ministry, then, is one among many occupations through which men and women express their God-given interests and abilities in life and daily work. Response to this calling, as to every other, is approached through a careful process of exploration and testing within the community of faith during which gifts and motivations are evaluated in light of the needs of the church and the world.

The essential role of ministers of the Word and Sacrament is set forth in both the Bible and in the church's constitutional documents. Among its key concepts are the following:

- Ordered ministries are a gift of God to the church so that all God's people may be equipped for ministry (Ephesians 4:11-13).
- Ministers of the Word and Sacrament (also referred to as teaching elders) in particular equip all the baptized for their ministry by proclaiming the good news, teaching faith/modeling faithfulness, joining with deacons in care for people, and together with ruling elders ensuring that the church's life is governed in an orderly way (cf. G-2.0501).
- The church actively seeks and ordains persons whose gifts and abilities equip them for the ministry of the Word and Sacrament (G-2.0104); if a person ordained to this ministry is later called by God to other work, the church can release him or her from ordained office (G-2.0507).
- A person experiences God's call to ministry privately as an inner urgency. The church, however, experiences that call publicly as it affirms that individual's gifts for ministry and confirms God's call through the acts of ordination and installation (G-2.0103).

Seen from this theological vantage point, the preparation for ministry process is an intentional engagement between the individual and the church for the purposes of discerning a person's calling and developing her or his gifts for ministry. Since we believe that God calls and gifts every Christian in their baptism not only to relationship with God but to ministry with and for God's people, we are never trying to discern *"if"* a person in the process "has a call to ministry." That is a given. Their baptism itself is "a call to ministry." What this process is about is discerning whether a particular person has both the call and the gifts to perform the functions of ministry of Word and Sacrament on behalf of the church. So let's look at each of those two concepts—call and gifts—in turn.

Hearing the call

What is a "call to ministry"? Some of the most treasured stories in scripture are what we have come to refer to as "call stories." There is Moses' encounter with God in the burning bush. Isaiah's vision of God enthroned and surrounded by the seraphs in the temple. Jesus' challenge to Peter, James, John and others to lay down their nets, "Follow me and … fish for people." Paul's dramatic encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus. All these stories relate times when people in different ways "heard God's voice" calling them to do certain things.

But there are other stories in scripture where the call seems to originate in the community of God's people. Mordecai confronts Esther at a moment of crisis with the question, "Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this." The communal needs in the early days of the church in Jerusalem led both the people and the disciples to call forward persons recognized as "full of the Spirit and of wisdom" to serve specific needs. Yet even though

these calls begin with the community, we have long heard the rustling breezes of God's Spirit moving through these stories.

Reformed theology has considered these and other stories in scripture and concluded that there are always three components to every call to ministry. First, and most importantly, there is God's call experienced as the leading—and sometimes the active pulling—of the Spirit. On some occasions it is the individual who first feels the Spirit's leading (think Moses, Isaiah and Paul), and sometimes it is recognized first by others (consider Esther and those first deacons). But ultimately both individual and community are convinced of God's leading.

In what other stories in Scripture do you find examples of individuals responding to the Spirit's call?

What other Bible stories provide examples of the community calling forth people to serve?

Other than in stories, where else in Scripture or the Reformed theological tradition do you find the most helpful discussions of the relation between gifts and call?

Is it any wonder, then, that we speak of "discernment" when the ultimate goal is to find agreement between an individual and a community about God's direction? The lead definition of the word "discern" in one dictionary is "to perceive (something hidden or obscure)." In many faith traditions "discernment" is a spiritual practice rooted fundamentally in prayer. Paul goes so far as to include discernment among a list of spiritual gifts that includes such other gifts as healing and the working of miracles. But that same list of spiritual gifts includes the sharing of wisdom and knowledge—things we most often consider abilities or maybe talents rather than supernatural interventions like miracles.

Developing the gifts

Paul's list of spiritual gifts, then, leads us directly back to the other thing that our process should be helping us to discern. We want to discern not only the call on the person's life but also the gifts evident in their lives. That too is a basic principle in our Reformed theology: God's call is to use the gifts God has placed or will develop within us. God overcomes Moses' objections by strengthening his weaknesses. God purifies Isaiah's lips to speak God's message. Esther does use her "royal dignity" to intervene on behalf of God's people. Over the course of his ministry, Jesus "makes" Peter, James and John into ones "who fish for people." Stephen, Philip and the other deacons apply their faith, wisdom and spiritual maturity in new ways on behalf the community. Paul is first ministered to in Damascus and then takes time away in study and preparation before he becomes the 'apostle to the Gentiles.'

Preparing for ministry of Word and Sacrament is a process of discernment. Sometimes individuals seek the confirmation of the community that they have heard God's call clearly. Other times the community calls forward those who have the gifts it needs. Either way,

discernment involves utilizing both spiritual disciplines and gifts to find consensus regarding whom God is calling to use their gifts in specific ministries centered in the Word and Sacraments on behalf of God's people. The process succeeds whenever individuals are placed where their gifts meet with the call of the community and most fundamentally with God's call to serve the needs of others, even if that place of ministry does not entail the functions of ministry of Word and Sacrament as understood within the Presbyterian Church.

What distinction, if any, would you make between spiritual gifts, talents, and abilities?

What are some ways we might "rekindle the gift of God that is within" us (1 Timothy 1:6-7), or encourage others to do the same?

Milestones on the journey

The relationship between the church and those who feel called to engage in the ministry of Word and Sacrament carries important responsibilities for all involved.

- *For congregations,* it means educating all members in the biblical and Reformed understanding of Christian vocation and helping believers understand that the call of discipleship includes making responsible occupational choices. It also means nurturing and encouraging persons discerning a call to the ministry of the Word and Sacrament.

- *For inquirers and candidates*, it involves a sense of solemn obligation to God and to the church. In some cases this means that it is the individual's responsibility to recognize and accept the fact that her or his gifts and calling are to a ministry other than the ministry of the Word and Sacrament.

- *For presbyteries,* it means developing effective means of testing and validating the calls of those seeking to become ministers of the Word and Sacrament providing them with guidance and oversight, and bringing to active candidacy those with appropriate abilities and motivation. To ensure that this important work is effectively carried out, those chosen to serve on behalf of the presbytery as covenant partners in the discernment and preparation process need particular gifts, skills and commitment.

- *For theological institutions,* it means upholding the Reformed standards of an educated ministry by providing Scriptural, historical, doctrinal and ecclesiastical disciplines, as well as opportunities for students to develop personal and professional skills.

- *For all participants involved in preparation for ministry,* it means relating to one another in continuing openness to God's grace, with mutual trust and respect based upon the assurance that God has given everyone gifts to use in the church's ministry. Integrity demands that each partner in the preparation process speak the truth with love to other

partners at all times. It is important for partners to function in a way that reflects mutual accountability and honesty in all dealings with one another.

What gifts, skills, and experiences are most key when deciding who on sessions and from presbyteries should engage inquirers in discerning their gifts and calling for ministry?

Granting that both are important, would you rank knowledge of the process or experience in congregational leadership and other forms of ministry higher in selecting the presbyters who will work with those under care? Why?

Key concepts

The preparation for ministry process is grounded in an understanding of Christian vocation as a response to God's preeminent grace that calls all Christians to ministry, whatever their occupations. Some among them are called by the Holy Spirit, through the church, to ministry of the Word and Sacrament. The process through which this call of the individual by Spirit through the church is confirmed is built upon four key concepts.

COVENANT

Covenant relationships acknowledge that the Christian community's primary commitment is to God. In the context of this commitment to and covenant relationship with God, the inquirer or candidate and the representatives of the session and the presbytery negotiate between themselves additional covenant agreements. These agreements affirm their mutual responsibility and provide the means for planning and evaluating the inquirer's or candidate's progress in more clearly discerning their call and in preparing and developing their gifts for the ministry of the Word and Sacrament.

The resulting ongoing relationships take seriously the unique background, experience and personal attributes that each person brings to the process. They enable the sharing of deep convictions, an enhanced understanding of the demands of ministry, and the self-evaluation that are essential to the process. Professional and spiritual guidance and personal support develop naturally within the context of such relationships.

CONSULTATIONS

Consultations between the inquirer or candidate and the representatives of the session and the presbytery are based on specific goals in five areas of growth and on specific "expected outcomes" for both the inquiry and candidacy phases (see the material under the heading, "Inquiry, candidacy and beyond" in the next section of this *Advisory Handbook*). The purpose of consultations is to help a presbytery work with the individual at her or his current level of achievement and, through guided conversations and the mutual negotiation of new learning covenants, to stimulate further development in specific areas.

What do you think would be an optimum frequency for consultations? Does the former "annual consultations" work in your context?

What opportunities for the form of consultations are opened by new technologies?

CONNECTIONALISM

Shared mutual accountability characterizes the preparation for ministry process.

The pastor and session are responsible for helping members of the congregation understand what Christian vocation means. They are expected to provide the context within which individuals can discern the call to the ministry of the Word and Sacrament and understand the nature of this ministry. They help inquirers evaluate the suitability of their gifts and provide pastoral care and support during the preparation for ministry process. Acting as advocate for the inquirer or candidate, the session, through its moderator and presbytery commissioner(s), can call the presbytery to accountability in fulfilling its responsibilities.

The inquirer or candidate shares responsibility for her or his movement through the process and for planning for evaluating her or his growth.

The presbytery, through its representatives assigned the responsibility to care for those in the preparation for ministry process, provides pastoral care, guidance, support and evaluation of inquirers and candidates.

Theological institutions provide academic, field education and professional resources in the guidance and educational development and evaluation of inquirers and candidates.

At the conclusion of the preparation process, the responsibilities of examination and ordination are shared by both the inquirer's or candidate's presbytery of care and the presbytery of call. Having guided and evaluated the candidate's progress through the cumulative series of consultations, the presbytery of care meets with the candidate in a "final assessment" of her or his readiness to receive a call (G-2.0607). When a call is extended by a church either within that presbytery or another, the presbytery of call ordinarily has the responsibility of examining the candidate for ordination and then ordaining and installing him or her in that ministry (G-2.0702).

The preparation for ministry process is one of continuing development. By providing a supportive community in which the inquirer or candidate assumes increasing responsibility for decisions made throughout the process, it introduces him or her to skills for self-development, goal setting and self-evaluation. The individual is encouraged to develop these skills into conscious, disciplined planning for personal and professional growth that should continue throughout his or her ministry.

If connectionalism is a key concept in the process, would there be good reasons for consultations to include more than just the inquirer/candidate and the presbytery's representative?

Ordination to service as a minister of the Word and Sacrament is an act on behalf of the full church. How does the connectionalism expressed in that statement inform the work of presbyteries that may be overseeing inquirers and candidates who will receive first calls to serve in other presbyteries?

CUSTOMIZATION

Anyone who compares the listed requirements in the *Book of Order* today to those in the 2005-2007 *Book of Order* will be immediately struck by the difference. That earlier edition presented a very detailed process spelled out over ten pages of the Form of Government. It set out instructions down to the level of specific areas of concern and discussion during annual consultations for each year of the traditional three-year Master of Divinity program. By contrast, the current *Book of Order* treats the full process in two pages. It focuses almost exclusively on purposes and outcomes rather than process.

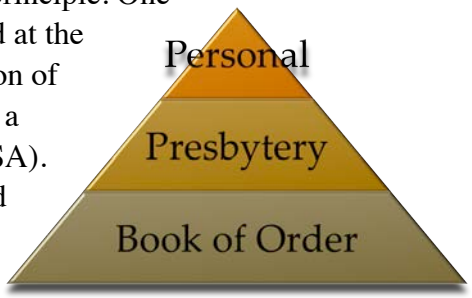
At one level the streamlining of the constitutional requirements in the preparation for ministry process is simply one example of the overall pattern in the current *Book of Order*. More significant, however, are the ultimately theological reasons for this approach—most importantly for the preparation for ministry process a recognition of the diversity of God's people and gifts. That diversity means that while it is possible to state denomination-wide purposes and outcomes, it really is not possible to have a single, denomination-wide process. The need for a variety of processes works itself out at both institutional and individual levels.

Presbyteries differ on a broad variety of measures. They vary in size both in terms of membership (whether gauged by congregations or church members) and geographical size. Some presbyteries have large membership concentrated geographically in a specific urban area. Others have small memberships spread across large areas with predominately rural communities. Still others combine both features, with a concentration of members in a large urban center but extended out a considerable distance to draw in smaller cities and rural communities. These differences in size can also be reflected in the number of persons under care in the preparation for ministry process. Taken together it is easy to see that a process that works well to provide support, guidance, and oversight to more than 75 persons in a presbytery located in single metropolitan area is not likely to work as well in a presbytery with two or three such persons scattered across a vastly larger area. But there are also differences between presbyteries in what they believe are essential skills, educational and professional experiences, and even theological positions among those who would serve in the ministry contexts they know well.

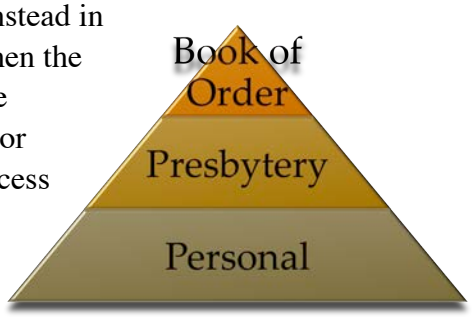
As we have seen inquirers and candidates also differ in many ways. Some have lifelong affiliations with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.); others have their first contact with our church

through attending one of our seminaries, which they chose because it was in their local community. Some have a clear and specific sense of call to pastoral ministry; others only begin to think about the possibilities of ministry of the Word and Sacrament after seminary graduation, having made the decision to pursue graduate theological education for personal rather than professional reasons. Some have already been ordained as ruling elders or deacons; others begin the process not even knowing enough about PC(USA) polity to know that Reformed churches ordain to ministries other than pastoral service. Some will be beginning their adult vocational lives; others have extensive vocational experience, with some of them having gained skills that transfer directly to pastoral or specialized ministries and others with experience in fields without apparent connections to ministry of Word and Sacrament.

The preparation for ministry process will never be "one-size-fits-all," or even as some manufacturers now somewhat diplomatically phrase it, "one-size-fits-most." The process must not only permit customization, but indeed have it as a core principle. One way to visualize the relationship is presented by the pyramid at the right. The *Book of Order* requirements provide the foundation of requirements expected of everyone who is to be ordained as a minister of the Word and Sacrament in service to the PC(USA). To those, each presbytery may add its own requirements and expectations of every inquirer and candidate under its care. Some of those will be process related (how often and in what ways will consultations be conducted, how are progress reports to be provided, etc.), and others may be specific preparation requirements (is a psychological profile required and what must it include, must field education include a certified clinical pastoral education [CPE} program, etc.). And finally, the covenant agreements between inquirers and candidates and their presbyteries may include requirements that are specific to the individual. Maybe a presbytery will require CPE of a particular candidate because they are discerning a call to chaplaincy even though it does not require CPE of everyone under care in that presbytery.



If one were to visualize this same structure of requirements not in terms of the "foundations" or numbers of persons who must fulfill the requirements, but instead in terms of the requirements a specific individual must meet, then the pyramid might look more like the one at the left. Most of the requirements are likely to be custom tailored to the inquirer or candidate through the covenant agreements. Everyone's process is going to be different because the issues that will require discernment and the ways in which gifts and talents still need to be developed will be different for each inquirer and candidate.



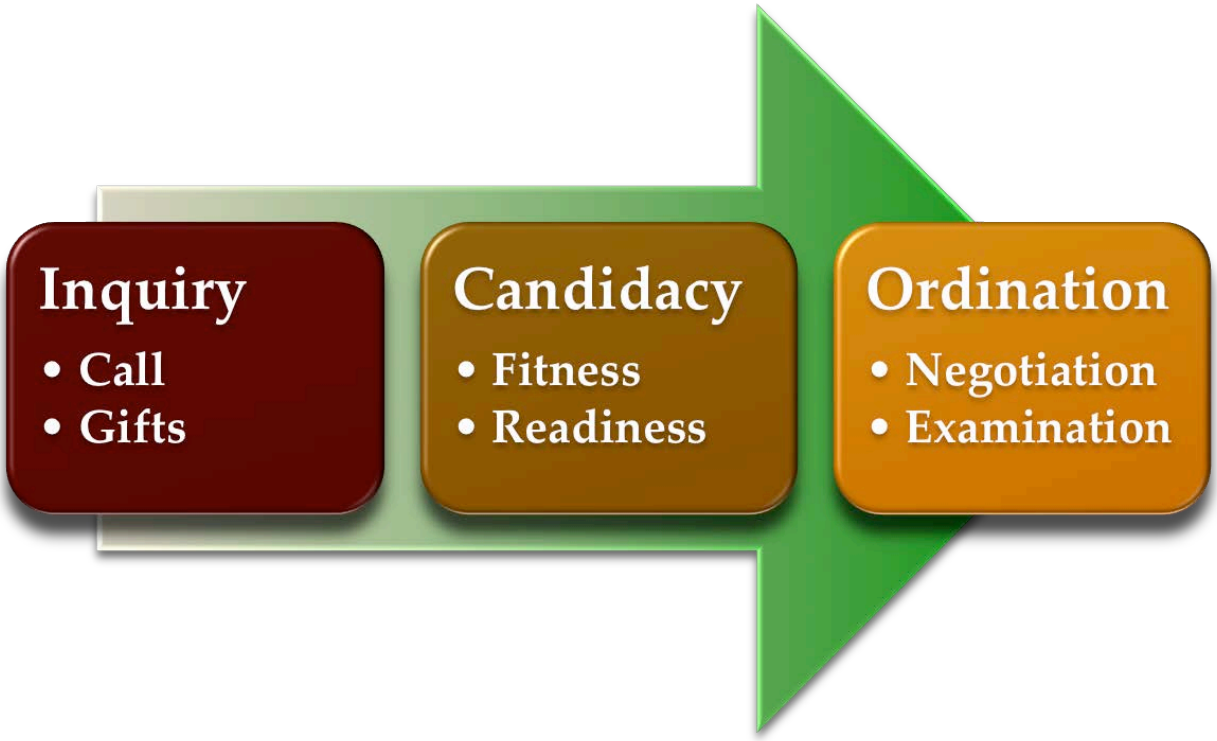
One understanding of "fairness" is that the same things must be expected of everyone. How would you respond to someone who says, "A customizable process is by definition an unfair process"?

What safeguards might be needed to reduce the chances that individualized requirements might become cover for prejudices or discrimination?

Looking ahead

What follows, then, in this *Advisory Handbook* is truly meant to be advisory. It presents both wisdom gathered from the past and new ideas that might be tried. It is not an instruction manual for assembling pastors, or a flow-chart decision tree where the final outcome is determined by which boxes are checked and which remain unchecked. Even the use of this handbook will require discernment as presbyteries, sessions, inquirers and candidates consult it and decide what is useful in their particular contexts and relationships, what might need to be tweaked, and where different paths entirely will need to be explored.

WALKING THE ROAD TOGETHER



Preparation for Ordination as a Minister of the Word and Sacrament

Inquiry, candidacy, and beyond

The preparation for ministry process involves two phases: inquiry and candidacy. These two phases are designed to explore the call, evaluate the gifts, and support the preparation of men and women who either are personally exploring their sense of a call to ordered ministry as a minister of the Word and Sacrament or have been encouraged by the faith community to consider the possibility that God is calling them to that particular ministry. The model for ministers of the Word and Sacrament is the ministry of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the church's responsibility—acting primarily through the session of the person's congregation and the presbytery of which that congregation is a part—is to help these individuals grow toward maturity in Christ and a deeper understanding of their place in Christ's ongoing ministry through the church.

Nature and Purpose of Preparation

It is important that those who are to be ordained as ministers of the Word and Sacrament receive full preparation for their task under the direction of the presbytery. For this purpose, a presbytery shall enter into covenant relationship with those preparing to become ministers of the Word and Sacrament and with their sessions and congregations. This relationship shall be divided into the two phases of inquiry and candidacy.

G-2.0601

To do this effectively, each presbytery will need to develop procedures "to guide, nurture, and oversee" those in the process of discerning a call to and preparing for the ministry of the Word and Sacrament (G-3.0307). A presbytery must include all the constitutionally mandated requirements and procedures, but is also free develop its own "mechanisms and processes" appropriate to its particular ministry context (see the discussion of "Customization" at the close of the first section of this *Advisory Handbook)*. Ordinarily a presbytery will facilitate its work through ruling elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament selected to serve on a committee or some other entity of the presbytery. If these representatives are given authority to act on the presbytery's behalf in some portions of the process, they must

[Presbytery as] Pastor, Counselor and Advisor to Its Pastors and Congregations

... Each presbytery shall develop and maintain mechanisms and processes to guide, nurture and oversee the process of preparing to become a minister of the Word and Sacrament.

To facilitate the presbytery's oversight of inquirers and candidates, ... it may delegate its authority to designated entities within the presbytery. Such entities shall be composed of ruling elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament in approximately equal numbers, bearing in mind the principles of unity in diversity in F-1.0403. All actions carried out as a result of delegated authority must be reported to the presbytery at its next regular meeting.

G-3.0307

be constituted as a commission (see G-3.0109b). For the sake of convenience, throughout this *Advisory Handbook* we will refer to those representatives of the presbytery who have been delegated these responsibilities as "the presbytery committee overseeing preparation for ministry" (or simply, "the presbytery's committee").

While both the inquiry and candidacy phases of the process have their particular purposes defined by the *Book of Order* (G-2.0603 and 2.0604), they accomplish those purposes by promotion and assessment of the individual's development in five key areas:

1) *Education for Ministry,* including evaluation of the individual's academic potential and progress, and reflection on their educational experiences in relation to their preparation for service as a minister of the Word and Sacrament.

2) *Spiritual Development,* providing a framework in which individuals can reflect on their personal faith journey and their spiritual practices to discern the will of God in their lives.

3) *Interpersonal Relations,* providing opportunities to reflect on how one relates to others, one's leadership style, and what they mean in terms of the functions and responsibilities of the ministry of the Word and Sacrament.

4) *Personal Growth,* through which persons reflect on who they are, what areas they need to develop, how to understand their call, and how to develop personal stewardship.

5) *Professional Development,* to help persons develop specific skills that will enhance their effectiveness as ministers of the Word and Sacrament and as presbyters, especially in the areas of understanding one's ministry context and the ability to deal with conflict that may emerge in ministry settings where one serves.

During both inquiry and candidacy, the individual's progress is measured through formulation of covenant agreements (G-2.0601) that set out specific expected outcomes formulated in light of these five growth areas. It is important that the expected outcomes be understood as essential goals rather than simply as minimum requirements to be met or papers to be written. These expected outcomes serve as the focus of ongoing consultations between the inquirer or candidate, the session, and the presbytery's committee as they discern the person's suitability for this form of ministry and evaluate readiness to be examined and ordained as a minister of the Word and Sacrament.

Although not a separate "phase" of the process defined by the *Book of Order,* it is important to recognize that the special relationship between a candidate, the session, and the presbytery's committee does not end with the decision that the person is "certified ... ready for examination for ordination, pending a call" (G-2.0607). Even after the candidate is "certified," there is a need to maintain the relationship through a covenant laying out new goals for how the candidate will seek a call and maintain ministry skills as the search progresses. Candidates are "under care" of the presbytery until they leave the process either by ordination, withdrawal, or removal.

If there are broad areas of development common to all phases of the preparation process, what might be some specific goals within them that are particular to those at inquiry, candidacy, and negotiation for service?

How might covenant goals be shaped so that they both develop the inquirer/candidate and the relationship between the partners in the process?

Shared responsibilities for care

The process of inquiry and candidacy is built upon the biblical concept of covenant relationship. That is, it is both a response to God's faithfulness and an expression of the concern people have for one another. The process further affirms that all aspects of the church's life are based upon God's gracious promises and on the belief that God's self-giving love undergirds all that the church is and does. Throughout the entire process, all who are involved in the covenant relationship need to approach their tasks with seriousness and diligence, communicating openly and intentionally with each other.

The three partners in this covenant are the person under care, the session of the congregation where that person is a member, and the presbytery of which that congregation is a part.

Oversight

During the phases of inquiry and candidacy the individual continues to be an active member of his or her congregation and subject to the concern and discipline of the session. In matters relating to preparation for ministry, the individual is subject to the oversight of the presbytery within the context of their covenant relationship.

G-2.0605

Presbyteries will usually assign most of the particular responsibilities for its relationship with the person to a committee or ministry team. That committee may work exclusively with those in the preparation for ministry process, or complete these tasks along with other areas of responsibility. There are some actions that may be taken with regard to the preparation for ministry process, however, that will require formal action of the presbytery itself (for example, the granting of any exceptions to the usual requirements; G-2.0610).

The *Book of Order* is clear that the final responsibility for the preparation process resides with the presbytery. The session will make recommendations about whether the person should be enrolled as an inquirer, and may be asked to share what it is discerning about the individual's sense of call and developing ministry gifts during the process. It will continue to provide pastoral care and support to the person as it does to all its congregational members. But it is the presbytery that has the responsibilities for oversight of the person's preparation, to make a decision about suitability for ministry, and finally to assess readiness to seek a call to ministry that would require ordination as a minister of the Word and Sacrament.

Beyond granting its endorsement to the presbytery, what other supports should a session consider providing to members who are under care in the preparation for ministry process?

Oversight and immigration issues

The Book of Order embraces diversity and encourages all to participate in ordered ministry regardless of human condition. It is important, however, to discuss the immigration status of a person under care. As partners in the covenant, the individual under care, the session and the presbytery hold a responsibility to one another to know a non-resident inquirer or candidate's immigration status and resulting ability to work in the United States. Neglecting to consider this important fact can place the non-resident individual at risk.

Persons who work or accept "scholarships" for activity that looks like work without proper authorization are at risk of losing their immigration status and harming their ability to gain a more permanent immigration status in the future. It is inquirers or candidates, as the partner in the covenant most likely to know their own immigration status, who are responsible for understanding the limitations they have under their immigration status.

While the responsibility lies with the inquirer or candidate, immigration law is confusing and often non-residents do not understand all of the limitations of their immigration status. For this reason, the denomination provides the Office of Immigration Issues in Mid Council Ministries of the Office of the General Assembly to give advice and counsel to presbyteries and congregations with members who have immigration issues. Before working for a church community or engaging in any activity that looks like work for a church community, non-resident inquirers or candidates should contact the Office of Immigration Issues to ensure that their legal immigration status allows this kind of work.

Changing the partners to the covenant

There may be times when it makes sense for inquirers and candidates to move their membership to a different congregation. Perhaps a family member has taken a job in a different region so following relocation they no longer have any communal ties to the city where the church is located. Whatever the reason, they need to remember presbyteries have primary responsibility for the preparation for ministry. When new congregation membership also means a new presbytery of care, there must be careful coordination between

Transfer of Covenant Relationship

At the request of the inquirer or candidate and with the approval of the sessions and presbyteries involved, a presbytery may transfer the covenant relationship of an inquirer or candidate.

G-2.0608

the congregations and presbyteries involved. Both the new session and the new presbytery need to agree to assume the responsibilities of care before congregational membership is changed. Keep in mind that because each presbytery controls its own rolls, there is no requirement that a presbytery accept an inquirer or candidate onto its rolls just because the person is currently under care of another presbytery.

What steps would your presbytery take in either transferring a person to or receiving them from another presbytery?

It is also possible that changes in the circumstance of the congregation of membership rather than life changes for the inquirer or candidate may necessitate a change in the partners to the covenant of preparation for ministry. These changes might include a presbytery's decision to dissolve a congregation or to dismiss it to another presbytery or other Reformed body. Because the covenant relationship is always three-fold—involving the individual, the session of the congregation of membership, and the presbytery of which that congregation is a part—the inability of the congregation through its session to continue in this covenant will necessitate a change in the partners to it.

The process to be followed in these situations is most easily seen by considering the case of inquirers or candidates who are members of a congregation that has been dissolved by the presbytery. The Book of Order directs that if a congregation has members at the time of its dissolution then the presbytery itself will assume jurisdiction over the members until such time as it may grant a transfer of membership to another congregation (G-3.0301c). For members who are also inquirers or candidates, they would also remain under care of the presbytery in the preparation process until such time as they are received by the new congregation.

- If the congregation which the inquirer or candidate desires to join is within the same presbytery and its session is willing to assume its responsibilities for someone under care in the preparation process, then the presbytery would grant the congregational membership transfer and the preparation process would continue uninterrupted.
- If the congregation the inquirer or candidate desires to join is outside the presbytery's bounds, it should confer with both that congregation's session and its presbytery to determine whether they are agreeable to a transfer of the care relationship under the terms of G-2.0608.

Although the decision about the new congregation the inquirer will join should not be made hastily, it also should not be unnecessarily delayed.

When inquirers or candidates are members of a congregation that is being dismissed, the presbytery should first ascertain their desire regarding whether to remain in the process of preparation for possible service as a minister of the Word and Sacrament within the PC(USA).

- If the individual wishes to maintain membership in the PC(USA) and continue in the preparation process, then as with a dissolved congregation the presbytery itself would take jurisdiction over the member until such time as it may grant a transfer of membership to another congregation (following the process outlined above).
- If the individual wishes to maintain membership in the congregation being dismissed from the PC(USA):
    - The presbytery should invite the inquirer or candidate to "withdraw" from the preparation process.
    - Should he or she decline to "withdraw," the presbytery may act to "remove" her or him from the process on the grounds that she or he is no longer a member and subject to the discipline of a PC(USA) congregation (see G-2.0609; G-2.0605).

Take the time necessary

The first items identified by the *Book of Order* as "evidence of readiness to begin ordered ministry as a minister of the Word and Sacrament" are a candidate's personal qualities of "wisdom and maturity of faith, leadership skills, compassionate spirit, honest repute, and sound judgment" (G-2.0607). If you are going to assess those kinds of qualities, then the center of the preparation for ministry process is going to have to be the building of a relationship. Now, when we identify relationship building as the core of the work between an individual, a congregation, and a presbytery in discerning one's call to ministry, we are not talking about just getting to know one another. We are talking about building the kind of relationship where both affirming and challenging truths can be spoken and heard. It takes time to build those kinds of relationships, and it takes work to gather the information about the person and the current needs of the church and the world to make decisions about "suitability" and "readiness" for ministry.

The two years required by the *Book of Order* for inquiry and candidacy (G-2.0602), then, show just how seriously the church takes this responsibility to devote the time necessary to build relationships where all the partners truly know each other. There will certainly be practical considerations and other factors that will pressure both those under care and those responsible for their care to rush to a conclusion. But the stakes are high for the individuals, their families, and the broader church. Time taken at the beginning to clearly discern the person's call and to develop their gifts can both stave off problems and increase effectiveness for years to come.

Time Requirements

To be enrolled as an inquirer, the applicant shall be a member of the sponsoring congregation, shall have been active in the work and worship of that congregation for at least six months, and shall have received the endorsement of the session of the sponsoring congregation. The inquiry and candidacy phases shall continue for a period of no less than two years, including at least one year as a candidate.

G-2.0602

For those familiar with past practice relative to the congregational membership time requirement in order to be enrolled as an inquirer and formally enter the preparation process with the presbytery, attention needs to be given to the specific language in the current constitutional standards of G-2.0602. The Form of Government continues to require that every person "enrolled as an inquirer ... shall be a member of the sponsoring congregation." However, no specific time requirement is attached to that membership; rather, the time requirement has been shifted to the period in which the person has been "active in the worship and work of the congregation." Before the session can issue its "endorsement," the individual must "have been active in the worship and work of that congregation for at least six months."

What does this language mean as a practical matter? Well, for one thing it means that it is not enough for the person to simply be on the congregation's roll as an "active member" (G-1.0402). The person must have been regularly engaged in the worship life and ministry of the congregation. The members of the session, at least collectively if perhaps not individually, should know the person well enough within the context of congregational life to form an at least preliminary opinion that they can envision this person as a minister of the Word and Sacrament. It also means that a person who has been actively engaged in the congregation's "worship and work" for six months or more but only officially joins the congregation for the purpose of entering the preparation process may receive the session's endorsement without additional time passing following reception into membership. To put it simply, while being a member is important (to assure proper oversight, G-2.0605), what is even more important is the person's relationship with the congregation and session and how well the session knows through direct experience the person's gifts and callings for ministry.

The *Book of Order* requires both that at least two years be spent in the preparation for ministry process overall, and that "at least one year [of the total time be] as a candidate" (G-2.0602). Notice, then, that there is no specific time set for the inquiry phase. It can be less than a year, but in such cases candidacy for that individual would need to be longer than one year to fulfill the minimum two-years total. Inquiry could also last more than a year, and in those cases the total time will be more than two years since there must still be "at least one year as a candidate." In either case, there should be no reason to advance individuals to candidacy simply because they have been inquirers for a year. Advancement to candidacy should only be considered once both the session and the presbytery are convinced of the person's "suitability for ordered ministry" (G-2.0603) in general, and likely "fitness" for ministry as a minister of the Word and Sacrament (G-2.0604).

Like other requirements, this distribution of the time between inquiry and candidacy as well as the requirement of an overall period of two years under care may be waived by a three-quarters vote of the presbytery (G-2.0610). But again, no one's interests are truly served by rushing people through the process before there is a clear understanding of their suitability, fitness and readiness for a call to ministry requiring ordination as a minister of the Word and Sacrament.

Just how caring is it really for either the individual or the broader church to rush through those who may not have had time to develop their gifts for ministry to a point of readiness?

Beyond inclusion on the roll, what specific evidence might a session look for in deciding whether an applicant has been "active in the work and worship of that congregation"?

What questions might a presbytery ask a session in this regard in order to understand how the session reached a decision about endorsing an applicant?

Preparing for ministry through ministry practice

The presbytery's committee overseeing preparation for ministry is responsible for monitoring the covenant among presbytery, inquirers/candidates, and the session. Inquirers and candidates are required to engage in some form of supervised service to the church. Such ministry practice needs to be done under the guidance of supervisors who will provide reports evaluating the service and ministry performed.

Service in Covenant Relationship

Inquirers and candidates shall, with the permission of the presbytery of care, engage in some form of supervised service to the church. No inquirer or candidate who has not been previously ordained as a ruling elder may serve as moderator of a session, administer the Sacraments, or perform a marriage service. An inquirer or candidate previously ordained as a ruling elder may be authorized by the presbytery to preside at the Lord's Supper when invited by a session.

G-2.0606

Field education assignments that are under the supervision of a theological institution do not require presbytery approval; however, field education assignments that place an inquirer or candidate as the student intern having sole pastoral responsibility for the life of a church require the counsel and oversight of the presbytery having jurisdiction over the church. An inquirer or candidate should not undertake to serve a church, even as a temporary supply, without the approval of the presbytery having jurisdiction over the church as well as the approval of the presbytery's committee overseeing the inquirer's or candidate's preparation for ministry.

An inquirer or candidate previously ordained as a ruling elder who has been invited by a session to administer the Lord's Supper may do so only when authorized by the presbytery of which the congregation is a member (and by the inquirer or candidate's presbytery of care if the congregation is in another presbytery), but such authorization is not a usual or customary component of preparation for ministry. No inquirer or candidate who has not previously been ordained a ruling elder may serve as moderator of a session, administer the Sacraments, or perform a marriage service.

A ruling elder currently "commissioned to limited pastoral service" (G-2.10) who enters the preparation for ministry process as an inquirer may continue to be authorized to administer sacraments or perform marriage services in accordance with the presbytery's continuing commission. However, authority to exercise those responsibilities of ministry is limited to the setting identified in the commission; it does not extended to other ministry contexts (such as seminary field education placements) without a specific act of the presbytery revising the commission. It is also possible that an inquirer or candidate previously ordained as a ruling elder and having fulfilled the presbytery's training and examination requirements (G-2.1002) may likewise be "commissioned to limited pastoral service." In either case, it will be very important for the entities charged with overseeing these areas of the presbytery's work to maintain clear lines of communication with one another and carefully establish their respective relationships with any individuals simultaneously in these distinct roles.

How might presbytery entities responsible for overseeing ruling elders commissioned for particular pastoral service and for overseeing preparation for ministry coordinate when such elders are also discerning and preparing for a possible call as teaching elders?

Inquiry Phase

The purpose of the inquiry phase is to provide opportunities for the church and for those who believe they may be called to serve as ministers of the Word and Sacrament to explore and test that call together. To make this exploration as effective as possible, a network of caring, supportive relationships is initiated—first, between the inquirer and the church session, then with the presbytery through its committee overseeing preparation for ministry, and also with the theological institution they may be attending. In regular consultation with the presbytery's committee, inquirers evaluate the personal implications of and their suitability for a vocation as a minister of the Word and Sacrament; are guided in prayerful examination of their motivations, personal faith and experience in congregational and other ministry settings; and make a serious assessment of the gifts needed by ministers of the Word and Sacrament comparing them with their own gifts. This phase also provides the church with opportunities to respond directly to the inquirer's questions and concerns about the role and responsibilities of a minister of the Word and Sacrament.

Purpose of Inquiry

The purpose of the inquiry phase is to provide an opportunity for the church and those who believe themselves called to ordered ministry as ministers of the Word and Sacrament to explore that call together so that the presbytery can make an informed decision about the inquirer's suitability for ordered ministry.

G-2.0603

Admission to inquiry

A member of a congregation may be considered for enrollment as an inquirer by approaching the session about her or his desire to engage with the church in a process of discernment regarding the possibility of becoming a minister of the Word and Sacrament. If the session agrees that such a joint discernment is warranted, it will assist that individual in beginning a formal process with the presbytery's committee overseeing preparation for ministry. Official enrollment as an inquirer is an action by the presbytery (possibly by authority delegated to its commission responsible for preparation for ministry, G-3.0307), and is intended to be a thoughtful and deliberate step. Individuals are encouraged to take this formal action soon after they have made their personal decision to explore this ministry so that the presbytery's committee can provide them with support and counsel as early as possible.

Unless the presbytery has waived the usual requirement (see G-2.0610 and "Accommodations to particular circumstances" below), the individual must have been "active in the work and worship of [the] congregation for at least six months" and be a member of the congregation before the session presents its endorsement to the presbytery's committee (G-2.0602). In making the decision about whether to endorse the individual for the inquiry phase, it is advisable for the session to consult with the person not only about his or her personal sense of call but also about what gifts and abilities for ministry the session has observed during the person's involvement with the congregation. It can be helpful to both session members and the individual in deciding whether to recommend formal enrollment as an inquirer to include in this consultation discussion about God's call to ministry of all who have been baptized and the Reformed understanding of the distinct functions and responsibilities of each of the ordered ministries (minister of the Word and Sacrament, ruling elder, and deacon).

When a session decides to endorse a congregation member's request to be enrolled as an inquirer, it will forward that endorsement to presbytery through the presbyteries established process. Presbyteries variously receive these endorsements through their stated clerk, the moderator of the presbytery's committee overseeing preparation for ministry, or another designated person.

With Baptism, sessions are to encourage "parents (or those exercising parental authority) to present their children ... without undue haste or undue delay" (W-3.0403). How might that advice inform sessions in their responsibility toward members considering ordered ministry?

What materials (such as transcripts, references, etc.) might a session want to have before meeting with a member about possibly entering into formal inquiry?

What are some specific questions or areas of questioning a session would want to ask during such interviews?

Upon receipt of the session's endorsement, the presbytery will need to make a decision regarding

whether to enroll the person as an inquirer. Usually the presbytery's committee will want to conduct its own interview with the person, but it may require additional materials beyond the session endorsement before conducting this interview. These might include submission of application packets including recommendations from references, standard criminal and financial record background checks, reports from psychological assessments of mental health wholeness and leadership potential in ministry, and so forth. (Presbyteries may alternatively require some of these items and others during the inquiry phase rather than before beginning it.) The presbytery may also desire to hear directly from a member of the session about its endorsement. The point of these application materials is not to prejudge a decision about the person's "suitability for ordered ministry" (the constitutionally defined purpose of inquiry, G-2.0603), but to determine whether there are sound reasons for engaging in the considerable work and expense required of both the individual and the presbytery in undertaking the formal preparation for ministry process.

During inquiry

The date of the presbytery's action to enroll the person as an inquirer marks the beginning of the covenant relationship for the purposes of the constitutional time requirements (G-2.0602). The inquiry phase should be of sufficient length for the inquirer, the session, and the presbytery's committee to formulate a decision regarding the inquirer's "suitability for ordered ministry."

In order to make that decision on an informed basis, it is useful for all parties to have specific information beyond just a general sense of how things are going. Presbyteries over the years have found it advisable to have formal, written covenant agreements that lay out specific activities and goals related to the five key developmental areas (see above under "Inquiry, candidacy, and beyond," p. 30). These covenant agreements should be carefully and prayerfully developed. They need to be more than just "busy work" or "hurdles to be cleared" if they are going to contribute to the preparation for ministry process. Each goal should be designed to produce outcomes that further an inquirer's understanding of call and develop her or his gifts for ministry. More important than whether each goal is completed is what has been learned by the inquirer and the presbytery through the effort and attention committed to the agreed upon goals.

In the past the Form of Government required an "annual consultation" between the inquirer (and also candidates at that phase of the process) and the presbytery's committee to assess her or his progress toward previously established goals in each of the five growth areas and to negotiate together appropriate new goals. While references to "annual consultations" no longer appear in the *Book of Order,* the need for consultation certainly has not gone away. If anything, there is probably a need for more consultations and on more frequent intervals than just once a year. More frequent contact is especially important to build the relationship and trust that are essential to this discernment process. Some presbyteries are exploring the use of Internet technologies like email and video conferencing (available for free through services like Skype and FaceTime) to encourage more regular check-ins. Others are using these in conjunction with more extensive face-to-face meetings through retreats that bring together those under care and those responsible for overseeing their preparation. Such retreats can provide excellent opportunities for both

inquirers (and candidates) to explore broader trends in the church and ministry with the members of the presbytery's committee.

Are there certain goals that, as a presbytery, you would want all inquirers to meet? If so, what would they be?

What goals would be especially useful in assessing "suitability for ministry" as compared to simply developing ministry skills?

Given the number and location of inquirers and candidates under care in your presbytery, what would be the most effective types of consultation to develop a relationship where mutual discernment can take place?

The inquiry phase is a period of asking questions openly and honestly.

- What are the gifts for ministry that others recognize in the person's life?
- Where might those gifts fit in response to the needs of the church and God's people broadly in the world?
- What are the functions that, within the Reformed tradition, distinguish the ministry of Word and Sacrament from other forms of ministry such as the ordained service of deacons and ruling elders? Does the inquirer have the gifts, temperament, and interests that would enable her or him to fulfill those functions of ministry of Word and Sacrament?
- How willing and able is the person to follow the call of God's Spirit to serve in this ministry wherever that may lead?

What other questions have you found useful in working with inquirers?

Are there questions you think would be especially helpful in determining an inquirer's ability to work in your changing ministry context?

Presbyteries are also encouraged to widen the consultations beyond just conversations between the inquirer and committee members. The seminary or institution of theological education possibly being attended by the inquirer will likely have important insights into his or her aptitudes and developing gifts for ministry. Receiving reports from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Theological Institution Contact person at these schools can provide information that goes well beyond what may be found in a transcript. Similarly, reports from those who are supervising an inquirer's field education assignments or other supervised practice of ministry programs will be invaluable.

Deciding about "suitability for ordered ministry"

Over the years, many presbytery committees and inquirers have found it helpful when making a

determination about whether or not there is the potential to be a candidate for ministry of Word and Sacrament to review six specific areas. These particular areas have been referred to in the past as "outcomes of inquiry."

1. The inquirer should be able to articulate an understanding of Christian vocation in the Reformed tradition and how it relates to his or her personal sense of call.
2. She or he should be able to express their personal faith in a manner that demonstrates an understanding of the Reformed tradition.
3. He or she should be able to expound upon at least one concept from that personal faith statement at greater depth explaining what it suggests about God, humanity, and their interrelationships.
4. The inquirer should be able to explain what it means for them to be Presbyterian, indicating how that awareness grows out of participation in the life of a particular church.
5. She or he should be able to discuss their personal and cultural background as it relates to the ministry of Word and Sacrament, including a concern for maintaining personal spiritual, physical, and mental health. Inquirers should also be able to relate their own personal cultural location to changes in American society and its increasingly multicultural character.
6. He or she should be able to express their understanding of the tasks ministers of the Word and Sacrament perform, including expression both of his or her specific gifts for this particular ministry and of areas in which further growth is needed.

"Denominational identity" among church members is generally viewed as declining rapidly. How important is it in that general cultural context for inquirers to be proficient in and committed to Presbyterian distinctives?

Beyond these traditional "outcomes of inquiry," what other areas are important given the cultural changes in both society and church?

What tasks might be assigned to assess inquirers' sense of their own approaches to leadership and how they relate to needs for leaders in the church of today and tomorrow?

Consultations throughout the inquiry phase provide opportunities for the inquirer to demonstrate these abilities and others that a presbytery believes are indications of suitability for ordered ministry. These consultations may also suggest other specific tasks that might be relevant in the determining a particular inquirer's suitability for ministry. It can be helpful to have inquirers prepare written responses to at least some of these tasks. The very act of writing tends to focus their thinking, and written statements have the added advantage that they can be read by members of the session and the presbytery's committee in advance of a conversation about them where they can be explored more deeply.

Whether or not written statements are required, the conversation about these areas of self-understanding is far more important than simply the ability to produce responses. It is what is *learned* about the inquirer that matters, *not* that these exercises in self-exploration were

completed. Does the inquirer's self-understanding of her or his gifts for ministry fit with the personal experience of the inquirer's ministry by the pastor, elders on session, and the ministers and elders on the presbytery's committee or reports they have received from seminary field education and others? Does the understanding and experience of the ministry of the Word and Sacrament by these pastors and elders suggest to them that the inquirer has the potential to be a strong colleague in this ministry?

But these questions about self-understanding in the context of ministry need to be paired with frank and honest conversations about the current realities of pastoral ministry within the Presbyterian Church. For example, a sizable majority of most Presbyterians—and so, not surprisingly, most inquirers—belong to congregations with more than 250 members. However, a majority of our churches have fewer than 100 members, and many are in rural areas or inner-city neighborhoods. Such congregations often do not have budgets that can support salary and compensation packages in keeping with presbytery-set minimums for full-time pastoral positions. Additionally, one current trend within the church is the formation of smaller faith communities that may be intentionally smaller than 100 members as a means for maintaining mutual accountability in their discipleship. Is the inquirer willing and able to consider ministry with churches quite different from the congregations where they may belong? Is the inquirer willing and able to accept a call that may require both relocation to another area and pairing pastoral ministry with other forms of work to make the arrangement economically viable?

Ultimately, all these questions come down to this: Does the overall experience of the inquiry phase point toward a future in the ministry of Word and Sacrament for the inquirer, or do his or her gifts and passions suggest a better fit with other ministries of the church? Our Reformed theology stresses we are all called to ministry in our baptism. The purpose of inquiry is for a *communal* discernment of whether the inquirer is gifted and called to the ministry of Word and Sacrament or to another form of service—perhaps even another form of ordered ministry as a ruling elder or deacon. A successful outcome of inquiry is finding that area of ministry whether or not it means continuing further in preparation as a candidate for service as a minister of the Word and Sacrament.

Both inquirers and those who work with them need to recognize that the presbytery's decision to enter the candidacy phase with an individual involves hard questions that go to the very core of a person's self-understanding. It will not always be the case that inquirers, their sessions, and presbytery's committees will simultaneously reach the same conclusions. But it does not benefit the inquirer to continue into candidacy if a presbytery has made a determination that his or her gifts are better suited to other areas of service. Everyone in the process must recognize that when a presbytery enters into the candidacy phase with an individual, the expectation is established that once preparation is completed that person will find a call to this ministry. If the presbytery is still uncertain about whether an inquirer's gifts are suitable for the ministry of Word and Sacrament, the individual needs to continue in the inquiry phase rather than establish false expectations by prematurely transitioning to candidacy.

How might a discussion of how an inquirer's vision of themselves in future ministry fits with the types of pastoral leaders the church needs inform a decision about the inquirer's "suitability for ministry"?

What are some practical ways a presbytery can help an inquirer to hear "no" or "not yet" to serve as a minister of the Word and Sacrament as "yes" to other ministries for which they are gifted and to which God is calling them through the community?

Candidacy Phase

A presbytery's decision to move an individual from inquiry to the candidacy phase indicates a communal discernment of that person's suitability for service as a minister of the Word and Sacrament. So in the candidacy phase the primary focus shifts to providing for the candidate's "full preparation" and conducting a formal assessment of her or his "fitness and readiness for a call to ministry requiring ordination" as a minister of the Word and Sacrament (G-2.0604).

Purpose of Candidacy

The purpose of the candidacy phase is to provide for the full preparation of persons to serve the church as ministers of the Word and Sacrament. This shall be accomplished through the presbytery's support, guidance, and evaluation of a candidate's fitness and readiness for a call to ministry requiring ordination.

G-2.0604

The covenanting process of setting goals through genuine consultation between the presbytery and the person under care that was begun in inquiry continues in the candidacy phase. However, the *Book of Order* makes it clear that particularly in the candidacy phase it is the presbytery's responsibility to provide "support, *guidance*, and *evaluation*" (G-2.0604, emphases added) to the candidate. The candidates' responsibility, then, is not just to keep their presbyteries informed about their progress through theological education, supervised practice of ministry, and so forth, but to follow their presbytery's *guidance* as to how they should be preparing for a potential call as a minister of the Word and Sacrament through developing their gifts for ministry and evaluating the progress of their development. The presbytery's responsibility also includes the *evaluation* of when the candidate has made "full preparation" and is ready to be considered for a call to service as a minister of the Word and Sacrament.

Entering the candidacy phase

An inquirer becomes a candidate by an action of presbytery. In accord with its responsibilities in the *Book of Order*, each presbytery "shall develop and maintain mechanisms and processes" (G-3.0307) for when and how a decision is to be made about an inquirer's "suitability for ministry" and whether to move that person to candidacy. Some presbyteries may establish formal application procedures initiated by inquirers and requiring submission of specific materials (such as an endorsement from the session recommending transitioning to candidacy). Others may

choose a less structured process where the decision to either proceed to candidacy or conclude inquiry emerges more organically from the ongoing consultation process. In such models, the move to candidacy is more an invitation by the community than a request by the inquirer.

Since the Form of Government requires that ordinarily the total time under care shall include "at least one year as a candidate" (G-2.0602), the presbytery's procedures should establish a specific date on which it approved the action to transition the inquirer to the candidacy phase. Additionally, the presbytery's procedures should indicate whether the decision to move an inquirer to the candidacy phase is a "delegated authority" given to its commission overseeing preparation for ministry as ministers of the Word and Sacrament (G-3.0307 and G-3.0109b(3)), or whether it is reserved to the presbytery itself.

What would be the advantages and disadvantages of processes for candidacy initiated by inquirers or at the invitation of presbyteries?

What would be some reasons why a presbytery would delegate decisions about moving inquirers to candidacy to its commission?

Why might a presbytery want to reserve that decision for itself?

Which approach would work best in your presbytery?

Because of the significance of the communal decision that an inquirer is considered "suitable for ministry as a minister of the Word and Sacrament," some presbyteries may decide to conduct a special service for "Receiving a Candidate under Care." (For an example, see *Book of Occasional Services* [Louisville: Geneva Press, 1990], pp. 270-271; note that while the order of service presented there includes a section headed, "Constitutional Questions," those affirmations have not been mandated by the *Book of Order* since 2007.) Such services focus on new candidates' public declarations that they believe themselves called to this ministry and that they will accept the presbytery's supervision and determination of their "full preparation" for the ministry of Word and Sacrament. In part depending on whether the procedures require a vote by the whole presbytery or an action by its commission to move someone to candidacy, presbyteries may wish to consider the relative benefits of conducting such services in the context of a presbytery's worship or that of the new candidate's congregation of membership.

During candidacy

The covenant relationship between the candidate and the presbytery continues to be expressed through the regular pattern of consultations begun during inquiry, but with specific attention given to the "support, guidance, and evaluation" of the candidate's progress in the developmental areas of preparation for ministry (see above under "Inquiry, candidacy, and beyond," p. 30). During these consultations, previously established goals will be assessed and appropriate new goals negotiated. The presbytery will likely include in these consultations reports from the

candidate's session, seminary or institution of theological education, and any persons involved in overseeing the candidate in supervised practice of ministry. Such reports might be submitted in writing, but are especially helpful when presented personally so that follow-up questions may be considered. As during inquiry, the presbytery may ask that candidates also prepare written reports for distribution in advance of consultations as part of the candidate's own and the presbytery committee's preparation. Presbyteries may wish to use a mixture of consultations conducted in person or by means of telephone or video conferencing in order to keep the relationship fresh. During each consultation an explicit decision should be made regarding whether to continue the candidacy, especially if it becomes clear that adequate growth is not taking place.

Notice that the *Book of Order* specifically states that presbyteries are to provide "support, guidance, and evaluation" of candidates under their care (G-2.0604). Evaluation tends to come easy through determinations about candidates' "fitness and readiness," but how about "support" and "guidance"? Some ways that a presbytery might support candidates could include:

- Continue relationship building through regular and frequent consultations
- Financial assistance with expenses related to educational requirements (seminary, clinical pastoral education programs, etc.) and standard ordination exams
- Mentoring through the presbytery, field education supervisors, or home congregation

Specific examples of guidance might be:

- Academic advising and course selection from the presbytery as well as the seminary
- Field education site selections that both test and stretch the candidate's sense of call
- Extra-curricular requirements such as clinical pastoral education, personal counseling, spiritual direction, etc.

The point is that candidates are much more likely to be open to receiving the presbytery's evaluation if they believe they have been supported and guided throughout the process.

What practical ways have your presbytery found to support and guide candidates under care?

How can support and guidance also be "customized" to the needs of particular candidates?

Deciding about "fitness and readiness"

The constitutional requirements for determining a candidate's "fitness and readiness" to be considered for a call requiring ordination as a minister of the Word and Sacrament are laid out in G-2.0607, "Final Assessment and Negotiation for Service" (see below, p. 50). But a presbytery will also need to establish "mechanisms and processes" (G-3.0307) whereby it will decide with its candidates when it is appropriate for them to undertake "final assessment." Just as there have been some traditional "outcomes of inquiry" (see "Deciding about 'suitability for ordered

ministry,'" p. 41), there have also been some customary "outcomes of candidacy." Those that are not listed in G-2.0607 as specifically belonging to "final assessment" may provide some guidance to presbyteries and candidates in thinking about indications that the formal "final assessment" is warranted.

The traditional "outcomes of candidacy" have included:

- Presenting evidence of competence in the fields of Reformed theology, Bible, the polity of the PC(USA), and worship and Sacraments, and evidence of ministerial skill attested through the supervised practice of ministry
- Expressing theological views that are compatible, in the opinion of the presbytery, with the confessional documents of the church
- Expressing understanding of the meaning of the questions required for ordination (W-4.0404) informed by knowledge of the church in diverse settings
- Revealing commitment to service as a minister of the Word and Sacrament within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) with personal maturity, spiritual depth, and a capacity to respond to the needs of others, including colleagues in ministry
- Presenting a written sermon, together with a description of the contemporary need to which it was addressed and an exegetical interpretation of the biblical material out of which the sermon arose (Some presbyteries may require that such a sermon be preached before the presbytery or a committee thereof as a part of the appearance of the candidate for consideration for a specific call or as a component of the examination for ordination.)

A presbytery may include these and/or other tasks either in its processes for overseeing the preparation of all its candidates, or may form requirements specific to particular candidates based on reports and consultations with them. Either way, it is advisable that whatever requirements are set be included in the covenant agreements so that expectations are clear among all parties.

How would you decide which tasks best indicate when a candidate should receive "final assessment"?

What tasks might be assigned for reporting at "final assessment" as evidence of the qualities listed in G-2.0607a?

Examining Inquirers and Candidates

The overall preparation for ministry process is a means by which councils of the church (in this case sessions through their endorsements and presbyteries through control of their roll of inquirers and candidates [G-2.0609] and determinations regarding "readiness to begin ordered ministry as a minister of the Word and Sacrament" [G-2.0607]) fulfill their responsibility to "examine each candidate's calling, gifts, preparation, and suitability for the responsibilities of ordered ministry" (G-2.0104b; cf. G-2.0603 and 2.0604). Within that overall process, there will also be specific periods of examination related to being enrolled as an inquirer, advancement to

candidacy, and final assessment of the person's "fitness and readiness" for "examination for ordination, pending a call" to a ministry requiring ordination as a minister of the Word and Sacrament.

Following the presbyteries' approval in 2011 of G-2.0104b, questions have been raised concerning whether issues regarding a person's sexual relationships or other aspects of his or her "manner of life" may be considered in determining the outcomes of these examinations of applicants, inquirers, and candidates. It should be emphasized that to this point there have been no interpretations of G-2.0104b either by the General Assembly or via General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission (GAPJC) cases. Consequently, there is no certainty regarding how that constitutional provision will be applied in cases where there is disagreement. However, Mid Council Ministries of the Office of the General Assembly, in its responsibility to assist the church in constitutional interpretation, has issued two "advisory opinions" on ordination standards under the current Form of Government (see "The Call to Ordered Ministry: Ordination Standards and Procedures" [http://oga.pcusa.org/media/uploads/oga/pdf/advisory-opinion-ordination-standards.pdf] and "Ordination Standards and the new Form of Government" [http://oga.pcusa.org/media/uploads/oga/pdf/advisory-opinion24.pdf]).

Gifts and Qualifications

a. To those called to exercise special functions in the church—deacons, ruling elders, and ministers of the Word and Sacrament—God gives suitable gifts for their various duties. In addition to possessing the necessary gifts and abilities, those who undertake particular ministries should be persons of strong faith, dedicated discipleship, and love of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Their manner of life should be a demonstration of the Christian gospel in the church and in the world. They must have the approval of God's people and the concurring judgment of a council of the church.

b. Standards for ordained service reflect the church's desire to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life (F-1.02). The council responsible for ordination and/or installation (G.2.0402; G-2.0607; G-3.0306) shall examine each candidate's calling, gifts, preparation, and suitability for the responsibilities of ordered ministry. The examination shall include, but not be limited to, a determination of the candidate's ability and commitment to fulfill all requirements as expressed in the constitutional questions for ordination and installation (W-4.0404). Councils shall be guided by Scripture and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates.

G-2.0104

One portion of the advisory opinion on "Ordination Standards and the new Form of Government" looks specifically at the question of when the ordination standards of G-2.0104b may be "used and by whom" (pp. 1-2). That advisory opinion states:

> **Candidates** will have to discern during their candidacy whether they are willing and able to fulfill all the requirements found in the constitutional questions for ordination and installation found in the Directory for Worship (W-[4.0404]).
>
> **Ordaining councils** will have to discern at the time of examination of the candidate, guided by Scripture and the confessions, whether the candidate is able and willing to

> fulfill all the requirements found in the constitutional questions for ordination and installation found in the Directory for Worship (W-[4.0404]). This is in addition to the discernment by the ordaining council whether the candidate is called, prepared, and has gifts suitable for the responsibilities of ordered ministry.

The provisions for "final assessment" in G-2.0607 are explicitly identified in G-2.0104b, and so the presbytery or its commission has responsibilities in this area during the period of preparation for ministry. Previous PJC cases have established that with regard to inquirers and candidates presbyteries may defer the time for consideration of the question whether the person can affirm the standards set for forth in the ordination questions (W-4.0404) until the point when a call to ministry requiring ordination as a minister of the Word and Sacrament is actually pending. There have also been cases that supported presbyteries' right not to advance a person to candidacy because it was clear in a presbytery's judgment the person would not be "eligible" for ordination in the future.

In light of these actions the advisory opinion on "The Call to Ordered Ministry" provides the following guidance to presbyteries (p. 6):

> The proper time to determine whether a candidate has expressed a departure from the essentials of the Reformed faith and polity is at the time of the council's examination of the candidate for ordination, not determination of readiness for examination. However, a presbytery has the responsibility to assess a candidate's or inquirer's suitability, fitness and readiness for ordered ministry throughout the preparation for ministry process. Therefore, a presbytery may, for sufficient reasons, remove a candidate or inquirer at any point in the process, as long as the candidate or inquirer has been given the opportunity to be heard on the removal.

Consequently several different courses of action are potentially open to presbyteries and their committees overseeing the preparation process. They may consider whether or not the individual's "manner of life" would make him or her unsuitable for ordination, or they may defer that decision along with determination of any possible "departure from the essentials of the Reformed faith and polity" to a council of the church that at some future point may consider the individual in relation to a specific call requiring ordination. They may determine that the person is already ineligible for ordination or that in the view of the presbytery or committee there are no hindrances, while also recognizing that another council of the church may reach a different conclusion.

What the committee/presbytery must do is consider "manner of life" issues in the light of the whole person (and not a preset rule applied without consideration of the individual). It is also appropriate during the preparation period for the committee to consider whether the person has gifts suitable for ordered ministry within the church broadly and not with regard to a specific place (since as yet there is no specific call).

How will you be "guided by the Scripture and the confessions in a applying standards to individuals?

Recognizing the PC(USA) represents a wide diversity of views, what would be "outside the bounds" for an inquirer or candidate under care of your presbytery?

Final assessment and negotiation for service

The *Book of Order* is clear that candidates "may not enter into negotiation for ... service as a minister of the Word and Sacrament without approval of the presbytery of care" (G-2.0607). An "authoritative interpretation" issued by the 219th General Assembly (2010), and reaffirmed by action of the 220th General Assembly (2012), clarified that under specific conditions a presbytery could approve a candidate to "negotiate for service" even before it had "certified [that] candidate ready for examination for ordination, pending a call." The full text of that authoritative interpretation, edited to reference the current paragraphs in the *Book of Order*, is as follows:

Final Assessment and Negotiation for Service

A candidate may not enter into negotiation for his or her service as a minister of the Word and Sacrament without approval of the presbytery of care. ...

G-2.0607

> Section [G-2.0607] allows a candidate to enter into negotiation for his or her ministerial service, even if the candidate has not had his or her final assessment from the presbytery's committee on preparation for ministry, provided the candidate
>
> - has completed two full years of theological education (or the equivalent thereof),
> - has had an annual consultation within the last year,
> - has satisfactorily completed all the standard ordination exams or received certification of readiness under [G-2.0610],
> - has received the approval of the candidate's committee on preparation for ministry.
>
> If the committee on preparation for ministry has approved a particular candidate who meets all the aforementioned requirements to enter into negotiation for his or her ministerial service, that candidate may circulate a Personal Information Form or other biographical information. (Minutes, 2010, Part 1, page 60)

Because the Assembly in 2012 reaffirmed the full text of its authoritative interpretation in applying it to the current language of G-2.0607, each of the provisions set forth in the bulleted list remains binding upon presbyteries in making decisions as to whether or not to approve a particular candidate to enter into "negotiation for his or her service as a minister of the Word and Sacrament" prior to "certification [of that candidate's] readiness for examination for ordination, pending a call."

Presbyteries may well want to consider including in their "mechanisms and processes" (G-3.0307) any other specific requirements they will consider when approving a candidate to "negotiate for service" prior to "certification of readiness for examination." The key principles

would include that such approvals should not be a usual practice of presbyteries and should be reserved for those who are clearly nearing the time for their "final assessment" and are fully expected to be "certified ready for examination" when the assessment is conducted. Neither candidates nor the congregations or agencies that may wish to call them will be well served by extended delays caused by failure to meet requirements of "final assessment."

What would be reasonable expectations for a presbytery to set in order to consider a candidate's request to negotiate for service prior to final assessment?

"Final assessment" is a formal review by the presbytery's committee to make a determination as to whether a candidate is "ready for examination for ordination, pending a call" and so is to be approved to "negotiate for service" so that a call might be pending. It is usually scheduled when a candidate has satisfied the requirements listed in G-2.0607b-d that are easily verifiable. Although these particular requirements are quite straightforward, a few comments about each of them may be helpful to both candidates and presbytery representatives who work with them.

Final Assessment and Negotiation for Service

... The presbytery shall record when it has certified a candidate ready for examination for ordination, pending a call. Evidence of readiness to begin ordered ministry as a minister of the Word and Sacrament shall include:

a. a candidate's wisdom and maturity of faith, leadership skills, compassionate spirit, honest repute, and sound judgment; …

G-2.0607

Certainly the most important part of a candidate's final assessment will be exploring the evidence for the personal qualities identified in G-2.0607a: "wisdom and maturity of faith, leadership skills, compassionate spirit, honest repute, and sound judgment." In a very real sense, everything that has transpired in the relationship between the candidate, the session, and the presbytery during the preparation process is evidence for, or against, the person possessing these essential qualities of ministers of the Word and Sacrament. As the saying goes, "It's all information." "Final assessment," then, is an opportunity to step back and look at the forest which is the person being considered as a potential minister of the Word and Sacrament rather than focusing on all the individual trees represented by the specific goals in the covenant agreements developed over the years. The role of the presbytery is to weigh this evidence in evaluating the person's "fitness and readiness" for this particular ministry, not to count up how many goals have been met and how many remain unmet.

Where are some specific places in a person's record of inquiry and candidacy that you would look for evidence of the qualities listed in G-2.0607a?

How can a presbytery offer a critical assessment of these qualities without being judgmental of the person?

Association of Theological Schools (ATS) guidelines permit seminaries and theological institutions to provisionally admit some students to their graduate level programs even without a regionally accredited undergraduate degree. In such cases and when the candidate's academic performance in seminary meets expectations, the presbytery's committee may seek a waiver to this requirement under the provisions of G-2.0610 (see "Accommodations to particular circumstances," p. 55). Such requests may also be warranted when a candidate's undergraduate education was completed outside the United States and so the degree was not awarded by an institution accredited by one of the regional associations recognized by the United States Department of Education.

Final Assessment and Negotiation for Service

b. a transcript showing graduation, with satisfactory grades, at a regionally accredited college or university;
c. a transcript from a theological institution accredited by the Association of Theological Schools acceptable to the presbytery, showing a course of study including Hebrew and Greek, exegesis of the Old and New Testaments using Hebrew and Greek, satisfactory grades in all areas of study, and graduation or proximity to graduation; and …

G-2.0607

Not all ATS accredited schools have Greek and Hebrew as standard requirements for the Master of Divinity degree, and as a consequence they may have limited course offerings in "exegesis of the Old and New Testaments using Hebrew and Greek" (G-2.0607c), or even none at all. For this reason, presbytery committees should carefully review class descriptions in seminary catalogs and/or course syllabi to determine whether a particular entry on a transcript is evidence of having fulfilled this requirement. Candidates may need to be directed to request either independent study opportunities with faculty members or additional tutoring in these areas in conjunction with standard course offerings.

The graduate theological transcript presented at "final assessment" must show either graduation or "proximity to graduation" (G-2.0607c). "Proximity" is obviously not a precise term and will require some judgment from the presbytery's committee—especially at a time when many candidates are pursuing their theological education on a part-time basis. Generally this requirement has been understood as relating to the last or next to the last semester of studies (whether full-time or part-time). As previously stated, no one is served by having both a candidate and a congregation become excited about the prospects of ministry together only to have the possibility of ordination delayed because graduation lies many months or even a year off in the future.

Beyond clarification about the language requirements for a candidate's courses in biblical studies, what other questions should a presbytery ask about classes taken as part of seminary training?

How would a presbytery go about deciding if the seminary itself is "acceptable" for educating a person to serve as a minister of the Word and Sacrament in the PC(USA)?

The Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates (PCC) is "the body created by the presbyteries" to administer the "standard ordination examination[s] approved by the General Assembly" (G-2.0607d). It encourages inquirers or candidates to take the Bible Content Examination during or immediately after the equivalent of the first full-time year of seminary so that the results of the test may be used to guide course selection during theological education. The PCC further recommends that the other exams (on Biblical Exegesis, Theological Competence, Worship and Sacraments, and Church Polity) be taken only after completion of the equivalent of two full-time years of theological education. These four examinations can only be taken with the approval of the inquirer or candidate's presbytery. The *Book of Order* requires not only documentation that these exam requirements have been satisfied, but also the presentation of the examination materials and their evaluations themselves. These exams can only truly fulfill their purpose of advising the presbytery's committee about a candidate's "fitness and readiness" if the presbyteries' committee reviews the exam responses and the evaluative comments are reviewed in full.

Final Assessment and Negotiation for Service

d. examination materials, together with evaluations that declare those materials satisfactory in the areas covered by any standard ordination examination approved by the General Assembly. Such examinations shall be prepared and administered by a body created by the presbyteries.

G-2.0607

The PCC in conjunction with Mid Council Ministries of the Office of the General Assembly produces a separate handbook covering all aspects of the standard ordination examination program. Both committee members and inquirers and candidates are encouraged to be sure they have the most recent addition to assure they have access to current policies and procedures.

Certified ready for examination, pending a call

The committee's decision to certify a candidate "ready for examination for ordination, pending a call" is based on prayerful reflection, review of the covenanted goals negotiated with the candidate, and on their mutual discernment that God has called that person and that he or she has adequately prepared by developing personal gifts for ministry in response to that call.

When conducting final assessment and certifying candidates ready to seek a call, it is important for the presbytery's committee to give attention to, and prepare the candidates for, some common issues faced in one's first-call:

- Continuing development of one's self-understanding in the role of pastor
- Understanding the congregation they will serve in terms of its history, ethos, programs, and status in the community, and in relation to the denomination
- Establishing an appropriate pastoral relationship style for the specific ministry context
- Dealing with conflict that may emerge in the congregation or ministry setting

The candidates should be reminded of resources and programs available to them as newly ordained pastors, including new pastors seminars, seminary debt assistance programs, presbytery mentor programs, and pastor support groups.

The presbytery's committee needs to take a formal action to grant this "certification of readiness" and to report this action to the presbytery. This certification (or another formal action approving the candidate to negotiate for service) will need to be attested both in order for the candidate to be referred for possible ministry opportunities through the Church Leadership Connection and to any presbyteries reviewing whether to recommend approval of a particular call to ministry requiring ordination as a minister of the Word and Sacrament.

It should be remembered that "certification of readiness" does not end the covenant relationship between the candidate, the session, and the presbytery. The session remains responsible to provide "concern and discipline" for the candidate, and the presbytery continues to provide "support, guidance, and evaluation" as the candidate seeks a first call (G-2.0605). It is important, then, that "certification" be accompanied by a renewed covenant outlining steps that the candidate will take to find the place of ministry to which the Spirit is leading and to maintain the skills for ministry developed during the preparation process, and the ways the session and presbytery can remain partners in discerning God's call for the person still under their care.

Finally, both presbyteries and candidates should think of "certification of readiness" less in terms of a diploma received at the end of an academic course of study and more as a form of licensure. Once a person has received an academic degree, they have "all the rights and privileges pertaining thereto" (as many diplomas state) from then on, forever. However, most licenses—and especially professional licenses—are only good for specific periods of time. A person will not have their bachelor's degree in biology revoked if they do not keep abreast of the latest developments in the field, but nurses and doctors can have their licenses suspended if they do not stay engaged in their field and complete continuing education to stay current on developments since their academic training. Some professions may even require a person to go back and update some academic courses if they first seek licensure some years after graduation.

Professional skills and readiness in other fields can atrophy over time if not kept in practice, and the same is true of theological education and the practice of ministry. This fact has been recognized by the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates (PCC), which now advises that presbyteries' should not consider standard ordination exams as providing

useful information regarding a person's "readiness to begin ministry" for more than five years. Just as a presbytery has the ability to remove a person from its roll of inquirers and candidates "for sufficient reasons" (G-2.0609; see "Removal from Covenant Relationship," p. 55), it can also remove a candidate's "certification of readiness" if it has reasons to believe that the person is in fact no longer ready to assume the responsibilities of ministry of the Word and Sacrament.

What are some specific goals that would be appropriate for a candidate who has been "certified ready for examination for ordination, pending a call"?

Should a candidate spend more than a year or two seeking a call, how can you support and guide them so that they maintain readiness to accept a call?

How might presbyteries evaluate and inquirers and candidates demonstrate continuing readiness for ministry if the search for a call requiring ordination as a minister of the Word and Sacrament should extend for several years?

Accommodations to Particular Circumstances

The Book of Order permits a presbytery, by a three-fourths vote of those present, to waive any of the constitutional requirements for ordination as a minister of the Word and Sacrament except for any standard ordination examinations approved by the General Assembly.

Accommodations to Particular Circumstances

When a presbytery concludes there are good and sufficient reasons for accommodations to the particular circumstances of an individual seeking ordination, it may, by a three-fourths vote, waive any requirements for ordination in G-2.06, except those of G-2.0607d. …

G-2.0610

When considering such waivers, presbyteries are required to specifically state "good and sufficient reasons for accommodations to the particular circumstances of the individual seeking ordination" (G-2.0610). Guidance for assessing whether the stated "reasons" are "good and sufficient" has been provided by an authoritative interpretation by the 206th General Assembly (1994) that affirmed that waivers should be granted when "the candidate is exceptionally well qualified, but through a different route than is usually followed." In a sense, then, what is being waived is the *process* for achieving or demonstrating the mandated standards. Such waivers are "not to be acted upon lightly, as evidenced by the requirements of a three-quarters affirmative vote of presbyters present" (Minutes, 1994, Part 1, page 201).

This paragraph of the Book of Order was the focus of particular attention of a special committee created by the 220th General Assembly to study the overall preparation for ministry process, whose report was approved by the 221st General Assembly (2014). Among its recommendations was a call for

> presbyteries, through whatever structure they have in place to guide the preparation of persons for ordered ministry as a teaching elder, [to] make full use of the flexibility

> provided by the Form of Government in G-2.06, particularly 2.0610, to respond to the unique needs of individual inquirers and candidates, especially those from immigrant and underserved communities.

Within the special committee's rationale for the recommendation was a concern that presbyteries had not yet adjusted to and so taken advantage of flexibility in the Book of Order "to shape the preparation process in ways that would accommodate their unique contexts and circumstances" since the Form of Government revisions adopted in 2011.

Thus presbyteries are encouraged to be *flexible in terms of processes* for developing and demonstrating "suitability" (G-2.0603), "fitness and readiness for … ministry requiring ordination" as a minister of the Word and Sacrament (G-2.0604) while at the same time *holding firm to the standards* of the "qualifications of character and scholarship required of candidates of this church" (in the language of G-2.0505). The limits of a presbytery's flexibility in granting waivers is the requirement that any waivers must obtain approval "by a three-fourths vote" of the presbytery, and outright waivers may not be granted for the standard ordination exams ("except for those [requirements] of G-2.0607d"; see G-2.0610). In its deliberation of whether to approve a requested waiver, the presbytery should be reminded that an authoritative interpretation by the General Assembly set the standard for assessing the constitutionally required "good and sufficient reasons" as that "the candidate is exceptionally well qualified, but through a different route than is usually followed." Again, what is being waived is the process, not the standards of "character and scholarship."

While the *Book of Order* does not allow a presbytery to "waive" the standard ordination exam requirements of G-2.0607d, that restriction does not mean every candidate must receive "satisfactory" evaluations on all those examinations. By the same process required for other accommodations, a presbytery may approve an "alternate means by which to ascertain the readiness of the candidate for ministry in the areas covered by the standard ordination examinations" (G-2.0610). This provision recognizes written examinations are not appropriate means by which to assess some individuals' ministry competence. But that the exam requirements may not be "waived" also recognizes the important role the exams play in the assessment of a candidate's readiness to begin ministry precisely because they are not judgments (whether positive or negative) shaped by previous experience during the preparation for ministry process and they provide input from the broader church through readers from other presbyteries.

Accommodations to Particular Circumstances

…If a presbytery judges that there are good and sufficient reasons why a candidate should not be required to satisfy the requirements of G-2.0607d, it shall approve by three-quarters vote some alternate means by which to ascertain the readiness of the candidate for ministry in the areas covered by the standard ordination exams. …

G-2.0610

There are many issues to consider surrounding "alternate means" assessments of competency in the areas of the standard examinations (ranging from what accommodations can be granted

within the structure of the standard exams themselves to possible models for alternative assessment). The Assistant Stated Clerk for Preparation for Ministry has worked with the examinations committee, disabilities advocates, and other advocacy groups within the denomination to develop a separate training resource to advise presbyteries and candidates about these possibilities. It is available on the Preparation for Ministry section of the Office of the General Assembly website as an online presentation entitled, "Alternative Assessment of Competency." (You may access it by clicking here in digital versions of this Advisory Handbook.) A written version of this guidance is included in the "Resources" section at the end of this Handbook (where you will also find the Internet address for the online presentation).

Accommodations to Particular Circumstances

> *… A full account of the reasons for any waiver or alternate means to ascertain readiness shall be included in the minutes of the presbytery and communicated to the presbytery to which the inquirer or candidate may be transferred.*
>
> *G-2.0610*

When a presbytery does approve any accommodations to the usual requirements, "[a] full account of the reasons for any waiver or alternate means to ascertain readiness shall be included in the minutes of the presbytery and communicated to the presbytery to which the inquirer or candidate may be transferred" (G-2.0610) either within the preparation process or in relation to receiving a call to ministry requiring ordination as a minister of the Word and Sacrament.

What specific circumstances do you believe might warrant exceptions to the constitutional requirements for the preparation for ministry process?

Should a presbytery apply this same process to requests for exceptions to its own requirements for all those under its care?

Removal from Covenant Relationship

Inquiry and candidacy continue until a presbytery acts in one of three ways to end the covenant relationship and remove the person's name from its roll of inquirers and candidates.

1. Once a candidate who has been "certified ready for examination for ordination" receives a call approved by a presbytery and has been examined, ordained and installed, the presbytery of call notifies both the session and presbytery of care to remove the person from the membership roll of the congregation and the roll of inquirers and candidates of the presbytery of care (G-2.0704; see the section on "Ordination," p. 60).

2. Persons under care as either an inquirer or a candidate may withdraw from the process by notifying their session and the presbytery's committee. Such decisions may be arrived at mutually through the consultations and covenant reviews that are the core of the preparation for ministry process.

3. The presbytery or its commission (acting on "delegated authority" on behalf of the presbytery, G-3.0307) may act on its own to end the covenant relationship because it has determined that an inquirer is not "suitable" for ordered ministry as a minister of the Word and Sacrament (G-2.0603) or that a candidate's continuing preparation would not result in a determination of "fitness" and "readiness" (G-2.0604). If a person is removed from the process by a presbytery's commission, it must report its action to both the session and the presbytery at their next respective meetings. For inquirers and candidates currently enrolled in theological studies, notification of this action should be sent to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Theological Institution Contact person at that seminary or theological school as well.

Removal from Relationship

An inquirer or candidate may, after consultation with the session and the presbytery, withdraw from covenant relationship. A presbytery may also, for sufficient reasons, remove an individual's name from the roll of inquirers and candidates, reporting this action and the reasons to the session, to the individual, and, if appropriate, to the educational institution in which the individual is enrolled. Prior to taking such action, the presbytery or its designated entity shall make a reasonable attempt to give the candidate or inquirer an opportunity to be heard concerning the proposed removal.

G-2.0609

When a presbytery's committee decides to recommend removing a person from covenant relationship, some basic principles of Christian charity and due process are warranted.

- As the committee reviews the presbytery's policies and procedures for this action with the person, it should make every effort to be supportive and caring during what is sure to be a difficult time.
- Explain as clearly as possible why the decision has been made, emphasizing the person's strengths well as indicating the weaknesses that led to the decision.
- Offer suggestions through a group discernment process for alternative occupations or forms of ministry and service that the person may wish to consider, including persons to contact, resources, and so forth.
- Contact the pastor of the person's home church and the session liaison as soon as possible to explain the action to be recommended to the presbytery, since it may be unexpected if the congregation has become disconnected from the covenant process. Tell them the reasons for the committee's action, give them the alternatives that were suggested, and offer any other suggestions the presbytery may have about how the congregation can be most supportive of the person as he or she seeks a new direction.
- Provide opportunity for the person and any of her or his advocates to be heard by the presbyteries' committee before any final action is taken.

Presbyteries may wish to establish a set process for handling situations where an inquirer or candidate may wish to contest a recommendation to remove him or her from the process. It will be important to remember that these really are not like "judicial proceedings" that would seek to safeguard a presumption that the person has a right to be ordained or should always eventually be

"certified ready" for ordination barring extreme mitigating circumstances. The goal should be to create a fair and open to hearing from those persons who may disagree with the recommendation and want to argue for a different course of action, but presbyteries will also want to avoid establishing an adversarial process.

As decisions are made regarding who should hear the request not to terminate the covenant relationship, keep an eye toward what will be the circumstances should the recommendation to end the relationship be overturned. If this individual is not removed from the process, she or he will continue to be under the care, direction, and supervision of the presbytery's committee. The goal, then, should be a process that has the possibility to persuade that body to come to a different conclusion about whether the individual should continue in the process. If the committee is told it must keep the person under care but has not been persuaded as to the wisdom of that course of action, it is unlikely the relationship between the committee and the individual going forward will be conducive to healthy discernment. Given this concern, it is probably beneficial (rather than a detriment or conflict of interest) to have the committee be the body that hears any request for reconsideration.

Finally, in those presbyteries that have not specifically delegated that responsibility for the roll of inquirers and candidates to a commission overseeing preparation for ministry, the formal action to remove someone from the roll will require a plenary vote of the presbytery. There can be legitimate concerns about whether such "personnel issues" belong on the floor of a presbytery meeting, but if these decisions are placed before that body it will need the relevant information. Concerns for confidentiality relate to sharing information only with those who have a "need to know," and someone who presses a request for reconsideration to the full presbytery has by that action created the "need to know" among all the commissioners. That being said, provisions can be included in the process requiring such matters to only be addressed in "executive session." Also, in cases where the presbytery committee's decision to remove the person is not being challenged or appealed it is probably sufficient to report in the motion for removal that "based on the committee's discernment with [the individual], the committee recommends [the individual] be removed from the roll of inquirers and candidates." If the presbytery commissioners accept that the committee's judgment would be well-founded or it would not have brought such a request, then that is probably all that needs be disclosed in the plenary meeting of the presbytery.

What "mechanisms and processes" will a presbytery need to have in place to address the need to remove persons from the process?

Should a presbytery provide a formal appeal process for such decisions, and if so, what procedures would it need to include? For example, who would hear and rule on the appeal?

Ordination

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is firmly grounded in the Reformed tradition in its relationships with men and women who feel themselves called by God to be ministers of the Word and Sacrament. As discussed in the first section of this Advisory Handbook, foundational to a Reformed theological understanding of call is that the inner call of the Spirit to a person will always be affirmed by the community of God's people. In a sense, then, the final and decisive assessment of a person's suitability, fitness, and readiness for service as a minister of the Word and Sacrament will be the acceptance of the call from a community to provide for them the functions of the ministry of the Word and Sacrament.

Ordination

Ordination to the ordered ministry of minister of the Word and Sacrament is an act of the whole church carried out by the presbytery, setting apart a person to ordered ministry. Such a person shall have fulfilled the ordination requirements of the presbytery of care and received the call of God to service to a congregation or other work in the mission of the church that is acceptable to the candidate and to the presbytery of call.

G-2.0701

Yet even that call from a faith community to an individual is still not quite enough. Because ordination "is an act of the whole church," the broader community still has a role to play through the affirmation of the call and the examination of the candidate by the presbytery responsible for that community. This presbytery of call, even if it has also been the presbytery of care, must act to confirm its discernment that God is indeed calling and has prepared this person to serve within that particular ministry context at this particular moment.

Especially when the first call is in a different presbytery than the presbytery of care, it is likely that the candidate will not know all the processes for establishing a first call. Since the presbytery of call "shall ordinarily examine, ordain, and install the candidate" (G-2.0702), members of that presbytery's committee or commission responsible for pastoral transitions and oversight of ministers of the Word and Sacrament should meet with the candidate to discuss the process for conducting the presbytery's examination for ordination and approval of plans for services of ordination and installation. They can further assist the candidate by:

Place of Ordination

The presbytery placing the call to the candidate for ministry shall ordinarily examine, ordain, and install the candidate.

G-2.0702

- Helping her or him to prepare for the examination by posing sample questions to see how she or he responds and provide feedback on the responses' content and style.
- Consider rehearsing the examination process with the candidate in the setting where the examination will be conducted to provide a better feel for the reality of the process.

Over time the practice within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has varied on whether the calling presbytery should ordain a candidate who will serve in their midst, or whether the presbytery of

care should conclude its work with the candidate by conducting the ordination based upon the call in another presbytery and then dismiss the newly ordained minister of the Word and Sacrament to the presbytery of call. The current language of G-2.0702 provides that ordination by the presbytery of call should be the usual practice, although exceptions to that practice may be granted. An authoritative interpretation of G-2.0702 by the 220th General Assembly (2012) states:

> Examination, ordination, and installation are "ordinarily" acts of the presbytery having jurisdiction over the ministry of a teaching elder or candidate. The acts of examination and ordination are not optional in becoming a teaching elder (G-2.0104b; G-3.0306). A presbytery having jurisdiction over the ministry may, at its discretion, invite the presbytery of care to conduct the ordination of a candidate on its behalf; in such cases the presbytery of care may, at its discretion, conduct its own examination of the candidate prior to ordination. (Minutes, 2012, Part 1, pages 52, 55)

When might a presbytery of call request the presbytery of care to conduct the examination and ordination on its behalf? Perhaps a congregation calls the candidate a week or two after a presbytery meeting, and that presbytery will not be meeting for a number of months. It might benefit the ministry of both the congregation and the presbytery of call if the presbytery of care could facilitate the examination and ordination at an earlier date and then transfer that person to membership in the presbytery of call. The presbytery of call would then follow its usual procedures for pastoral transitions and permitting ministers of the Word and Sacrament to begin service between presbytery meetings. The authoritative interpretation of G-2.0702 makes it clear, however, that such an action does not remove the responsibility of the presbytery of call to conduct its own examination: "The act of examination by the presbytery having jurisdiction over the ministry is not optional in transferring the membership of a teaching elder from one presbytery to another."

For these and other reasons, it is possible that both presbyteries would, within a very brief period of time, examine a candidate who will be ordained by the presbytery of care for service in response to a call in another presbytery, as each presbytery fulfills its respective constitutional responsibilities. The Advisory Committee on the Constitution (ACC) in its "Findings" for the 2012 authoritative interpretation of G-2.0702 suggests that an "examination for ordination and membership" by the presbytery of call (G-3.0306) "may be accepted by the presbytery of care as sufficient to substitute for its own examination for ordination," but it is not obligated to do so. In all cases where a presbytery of call may invite the presbytery of care to ordain and dismiss the candidate based on a call in its jurisdiction, discussions about timing and arrangements should be conducted between the appropriate leaders of the respective presbyteries in consultation with the candidate to be ordained, and not at the initiative or direction of the candidate.

What are some other circumstances in which a presbytery of call might request that another presbytery examine and/or ordain a candidate?

Why might a presbytery of care choose to make its own examination for ordination prior to approving plans for the ordination of one of its candidates at the request of another calling presbytery?

With regard to the responsibility to install candidates in their first calls, the authoritative interpretation is clear that only the presbytery of call may conduct an installation service:

> The presbytery having jurisdiction over the ministry shall install a teaching elder in a pastoral position. Installations are optional in validated ministries, and are at the discretion of the presbytery having jurisdiction over the ministry. (Minutes, 2012, Part 1, pages 52, 55)

Both the services of ordination and installation, if separate, are services of the presbytery (not of the congregations that may host them) and are to be conducted according to the provisions in the Directory for Worship. If the presbytery responsible for the service has particular policies regarding the conduct of the service beyond those in the Directory for Worship (for example, who is to be invited to participate in the administrative commission responsible for the service; G-3.0109b(2)), it needs to assure the candidate is aware of these requirements at the very beginning of the planning process.

Service of Ordination

The order for that service of worship in the Directory for Worship (W-4.04) shall be followed.

G-2.0703

Once the ordination and installation have been completed, the stated clerk in the presbytery of call notifies the Office of the General Assembly, the presbytery of care, and the candidate's home congregation that she or he is now a member of the presbytery of call. Upon receipt of that notification, the session of the congregation is to remove the person from its roll of active members, and the presbytery of care will remove her or him from active status on its roll of inquirers and candidates (reporting that action to Mid Council Ministries of the Office of the General Assembly by updating the candidate's profile in the online reporting system).

Record of Ordination

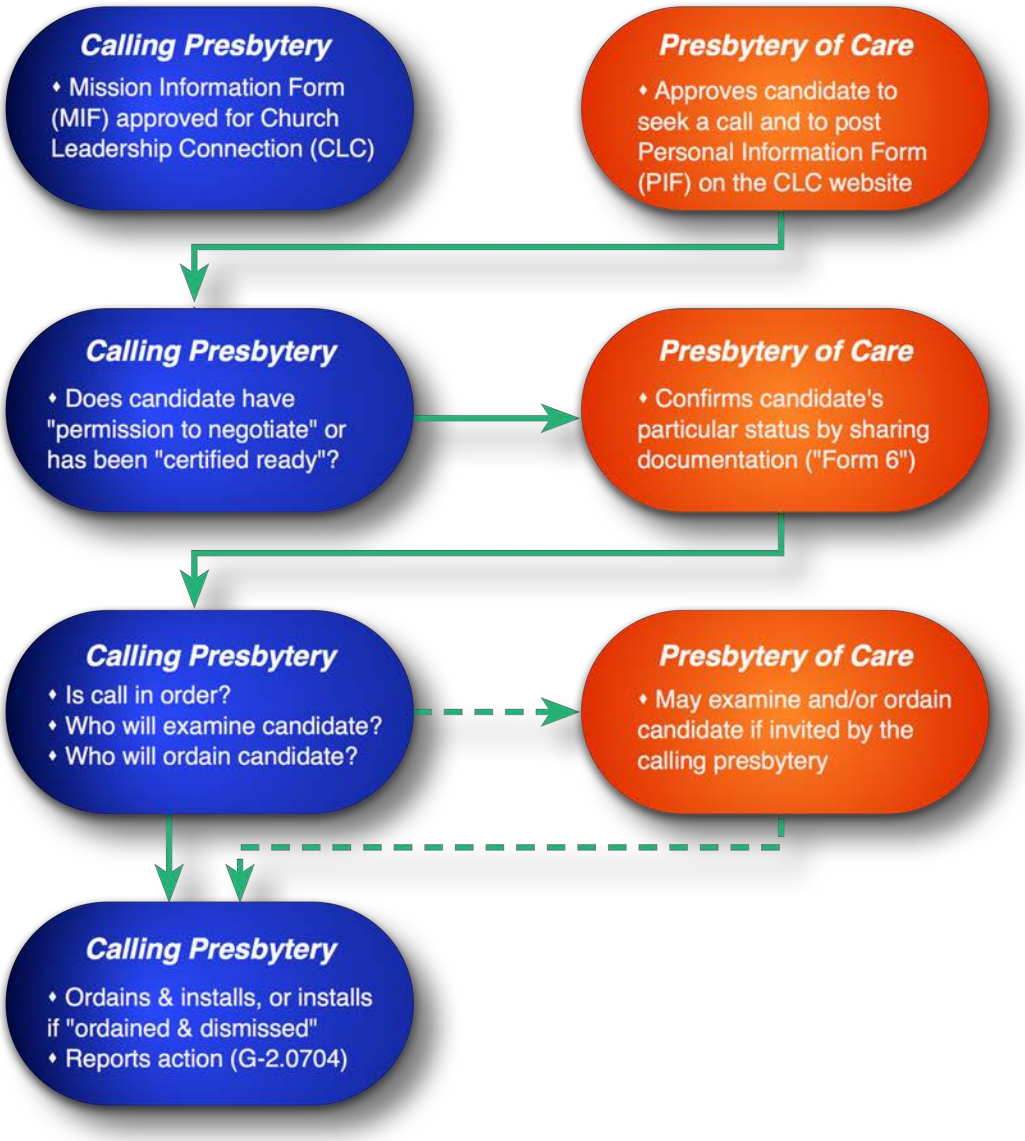
The presbytery of call shall record the ordination and installation, along with written affirmation of the new minister of the Word and Sacrament to the obligations undertaken in the ordination questions, and enroll the minister of Word and Sacrament as a member of the presbytery. The stated clerk of the presbytery shall report these actions to the General Assembly, the presbytery of care, and to the congregation of which the candidate was formerly a member.

G-2.0704

Coordinating first calls and the ordination of candidates for the ministry of the Word and Sacrament, especially when they involve two different presbyteries, require careful coordination.

The chart on the following page that illustrates the process for a candidate called to a pastoral position through a Church Leadership Connection referral can help both presbyteries and candidates to understand the decisions that will need to be made and the proper sequence for making them.

Example of a First Call Process



ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Putting the "Hand" in "Handbook"

The purpose of this section of the *Advisory Handbook* is to provide some "quick reference" materials that will be easily accessible by those who have different roles and responsibilities in the preparation for ministry process. It will present quick points for attention together with frequently asked questions ("FAQ") and suggested questions one ought to be asking directly of one's covenant partners in the preparation process because they are not things that a denomination-wide resource can answer ("Next Steps"). It will not provide explanations for all the "whys" and "wherefores"; such explanations are generally covered in the preceding two sections of this *Handbook*. For each partner in the process, the points will be arranged basically in a timeline format, but it will not present "checklists" to be completed. After all, most requirements will be found in presbyteries' own policies and procedures manuals and the specific covenant agreements formed with each individual under care.

All partners in the preparation for ministry process are reminded that this section should be read with continual reference to G-2.06 and G-2.07 in the *Book of Order,* the second section of this *Handbook,* and the policies and procedures manual the respective presbytery has adopted to facilitate this work.

The Inquirer and Candidate

Responding to God's call to ministry is an exhilarating and demanding experience. The ministry of the Word and Sacrament is particularly challenging to prepare for and to fulfill. It stretches every human capacity and touches every dimension of life.

As a person discerns his or her call and begins the process of preparation for ministry, the counsel and guidance of the pastor and session of the home church are available, along with that of presbytery and the graduate theological institution.

The denomination has designed the process of preparation for ministry to enable one to participate fully in discerning the type of ministry for which a person is best suited and to plan and evaluate one's own preparation and development in consultation with the presbytery's committee overseeing preparation for ministry. Although demanding, the process is not intended to be simply a series of imposed requirements; its focus is, rather, on the covenant relationships between persons who are deeply committed to the church and those who are preparing for ministry. As an individual enters into these relationships and assumes responsibility for moving through the process according to the guidelines provided, and maintains regular and open contact with the persons and committees involved, he or she can expect a rich and rewarding experience.

Before the process begins

- Participate actively in the worship and work of a congregation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to determine how your understanding of Christian faith and life generally and of vocational ministry particularly relate to this expression of the Reformed tradition.

- Initiate discussions about your sense of call with your pastor, college chaplain or other spiritual advisor, or persons whose opinions you respect—especially those who may themselves serve in ordered ministry as deacons and ruling elders or ministers of the Word and Sacrament within the PC(USA).
- With the assistance of your pastor or another person designated by your congregation or presbytery, begin to familiarize yourself not only with the constitutional requirements for preparation found in the *Book of Order*'s Form of Government but also your presbytery's own processes.
- Before you can formally enter the preparation for ministry process with a presbytery in the PC(USA), you must be a member of one of its congregations and have been active in the worship and work of that particular congregation for at least six months (G-2.0602).

How would you describe your emerging sense of call?

What entity in your presbytery facilitates its oversight of those under care in preparation for service as a minister of the Word and Sacrament?

What if the faith community within the PC(USA) of which I am a part is not an "organized congregation" but is instead a "fellowship" or another officially recognized ministry of the presbytery (G-1.0103)?

Oversight and care in the preparation for ministry process is a shared responsibility of both a congregation's session and its presbytery's committee overseeing preparation for ministry (G-2.0602). If your faith community within the PC(USA) is not an "organized congregation" with a session, it may be that it is in some way related to a congregation within the presbytery that its partnering with or otherwise supporting its ministry. In such cases, you might hold membership in that congregation and accept the oversight and care of its session. You will need to give special attention to keeping that session informed about your continuing involvement with your faith community's worship and work so that they will be able to fulfill their responsibilities as covenant partners in the discernment of your call and development of your ministry gifts during the preparation process.

I am not currently involved with a PC(USA) congregation, but from what I have learned about the denomination from colleagues at seminary I would like to pursue ministry within the denomination. Is there a way to get started with the process right away?

The way to get started is to find a PC(USA) congregation "right away." The only way to truly know whether your understanding of Christian faith and life fits with the PC(USA) is to become active in the worship and work of one of our congregations. Through your involvement in that community, you will be able to determine together if there is a "fit"

between who God is calling you to be as a disciple and servant of Christ and what the Spirit is doing in the PC(USA).

Initiating the process with your session

- Express your desire to formally enter the preparation for ministry process to the pastor or session moderator of the congregation to which you belong.
- Find out about the application process to be considered for enrollment as an inquirer in your presbytery.
- Obtain an application packet, if required, and begin to complete it.
  - Arrange for any background checks or psychological profiles required by your presbytery as part of the initial consideration phase.
  - Your session may have its own application materials, or it may ask to review your materials required by the presbytery.
- Once these materials have been completed, request that the pastor or moderator schedule a time for you to meet with the session.
- Meet with the session (or its designees), and receive its formal decision on whether to endorse your request to the presbytery to become an inquirer.

Does your presbytery use the preparation for ministry process forms offered by the General Assembly (see the "Resources" section), or does it have its own customized forms?

Keep in mind that whether or not the session endorses your request to become an inquirer with the presbytery, you are just beginning a process of discernment regarding your future in sharing the gifts God has given you in service to God's people. If the session endorses your request, the partners in this process will be expanded to include others from the presbytery. If it decides not to endorse your request, they will continue to encourage you to find those places of ministry and service where your gifts can be used within the faith community.

Is there any process to appeal a session's (or a presbytery's) decision not to accept an applicant into the preparation for ministry process?

At the core of a Reformed theology of vocation is the conviction that God's call to ministry will be discerned by both the individual and the community. Sometimes the individual will have to be willing to accept the community's "no" or "not yet," just as sometimes the community has to accept an individual's "no" or "not yet" as the Spirit continues actively working in our lives. There is no "right to be ordained," and so there is no appeal process designed to preserve such a right. The processes of both the session and presbytery should be fair and equitable, but part of entering the process is agreeing to accept the community's discernment as well as your own.

Taking the session endorsement to the presbytery

- Upon the session's action to endorse the applicant's request to be enrolled by presbytery as an inquirer, the report of that action is sent to the appropriate person at the presbytery along with the required supporting materials.
- The presbytery's committee will review the materials with the applicant, probably requiring an interview either in person or through video or other teleconferencing means.
- If the presbytery's committee acts to recommend enrollment as an inquirer (or acts on behalf of the presbytery to take that action through a "delegated authority" granted by the presbytery), the committee and the applicant/inquirer will establish a covenant outlining expectations for the joint work of discernment. Such covenants are likely to include:
  - A release allowing the presbytery's representatives to freely explore any information bearing on the inquirer's "suitability for ministry" with the session, graduate theological education institution representatives, supervisors in the practice of ministry, mental health professionals, spiritual directors, or others engaged with the inquirer in tasks listed in the covenant agreement or otherwise related to the preparation for ministry process.
  - A formal listing of specific goals or responsibilities related to the five key developmental areas in the preparation for ministry process.
  - Agreed upon expectations regarding when the next formal consultation will take place, what materials are to be submitted in advance of that consultation, and what communications will be expected to continue building the relationship between formal consultations.
- The presbytery may require you to appear in person before a plenary session of the presbytery to answer questions related to your sense of call before the presbytery votes on whether to enroll you as an inquirer.

Who in your presbytery is responsible for making recommendations about enrolling inquirers?

Do they have a set schedule for meetings?

How much lead time do they require for receiving materials to be added to their docket?

My presbytery's application requires some very personal information about my background and financial situation. Is it necessary for me to provide this information, and will it be treated confidentially?

Discernment of an individual's call and suitability for ministry is an intensely personal process. There is no way around that. Presbyteries ask for information they have found by experience to be essential to the decisions they must make. Financial information helps them to understand what assistance you may need with funding seminary education, some insight into your expectations about standards of living, etc. Psychological

assessments provide information not only about personal wholeness but also approaches and attitudes about leadership. Background checks are an essential aspect of presbyteries' oversight responsibilities for all those who engage in ministry under their supervision. Presbyteries understand the sensitive nature of this information and will treat it with the confidentiality it requires, sharing it only with those persons who have a need to know in order to fulfill their responsibilities within the process.

What specific personal and background information does your presbytery require, and how does it use that information?

How can thinking about why a presbytery would need this information help you to deepen your own understanding of ministry and yourself as a potential minister of the Word and Sacrament?

Can I refuse to have certain items included in my covenant agreement?

The presbytery's committee will work with you in formulating goals with clear benefit in helping both you and them to discern your "suitability for ordered ministry." However, presbyteries have broad discretion in what they require of inquirers and candidates. Asking to come under care includes with it the responsibility to accept the presbytery's guidance in your particular preparation. If you cannot accept a requirement they believe is necessary, you are free to withdraw from the preparation for ministry process.

During the inquiry phase

- Continue your active membership and participation in a Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) congregation. If you are away from the community where your home congregation is located because of your theological education, find a PC(USA) congregation in that community and keep your home congregation informed about your involvement there.
- Fulfill any requirements your presbytery has for all inquirers along with any specific requirements in your covenant agreement, including possible career counseling, psychological evaluation, and beginning (or continuing) graduate theological education.
- Discuss with your session and presbytery's committee the seminary options available to you. If you have already begun seminary, discuss with them your course options so that you not only meet your graduation requirements but also maximize your preparation and development of your gifts for ministry specifically within the PC(USA).
- Obtain a copy of the handbook on ordination examinations to familiarize yourself with the Bible Content Exam (BCE) and the exams to be taken during candidacy. Discuss with your presbytery at what point in your inquiry phase you should take the BCE.
- With the approval and under the guidance of the presbytery, engage in some form of service to the church or field education through your seminary. To the degree possible, work to assure that your supervised practice of ministry placements are with PC(USA) congregations or their affiliated ministries.

What factors should shape your choice of seminary beyond being sure it is properly accredited and acceptable to your presbytery (G-2.0607c)?

How might you, your seminary advisor, and your presbytery's committee use the results of the BCE in thinking about what biblical studies courses to take during your graduate studies?

The Form of Government sets the time requirements for the preparation for ministry process as "a period of no less than two years, including at least one year as candidate" (G-2.0602). So should I expect the inquiry phase to last one year?

The purpose of the inquiry phase is for the presbytery to "make an informed decision about the inquirer's suitability for ordered ministry" (G-2.0603). There is no set time for the inquiry phase, nor any set expectation that the elements of the initial covenant agreement will provide all the information and insight needed to reach that decision. Be prepared to discuss with your presbytery additional goals for the inquiry phase based upon consultations about what has been learned by working through your initial covenant agreement. It is possible your presbytery will be ready to consider you for candidacy in less than 12 months, but take the time necessary even if it is more than a year.

Considering transition to the candidacy phase

- Check your presbytery's preparation for ministry processes to determine whether you will be expected to initiate an application for candidacy or whether its committee will invite to you to a review for candidacy.
- Review and prepare any specific materials your presbytery may require as "outcomes of inquiry," including whether you will need to obtain an endorsement from your session specific to being enrolled as a candidate.
- Consult with the presbytery's committee regarding whether you should continue into the candidacy phase or conclude the inquiry phase with a discernment that your gifts and callings are to service in an area other than as a minister of the Word and Sacrament. Depending on the presbytery's procedures, the committee may have "delegated authority" to act on the presbytery's behalf in this decision, or it may formulate a recommendation that will receive action by the presbytery in plenary session.

What "outcomes of inquiry" does your presbytery require of everyone?

Does your inquiry covenant include "outcomes" for you specifically?

How will you reach your own personal discernment about whether you are suited for service as a minister of the Word and Sacrament or whether God is calling you to another form of service?

- Your presbytery may require that you appear before a plenary session of the presbytery to be examined prior to its action to transition you to candidacy. Traditionally such examinations have included questions about the individual's Christian faith, forms of Christian service undertaken, and motives for seeking the ministry.

- The presbytery may conduct a brief service marking the transition to candidacy either as part of one of its gatherings for worship or during a service of your home congregation. It may also be possible for the candidate and her or his session to request that a commission of presbytery conduct such a service of reception in the presence of the candidate's congregation even if it is not a usual practice within the presbytery.

If the presbytery's committee decides to conclude my inquiry rather than recommend that I continue on to the candidacy phase, is it possible for me to appeal that decision?

The *Book of Order* directs that "prior to taking such action" presbyteries are to "make a reasonable attempt to give the ... inquirer an opportunity to be heard concerning the proposed removal" (G-2.0609). Each presbytery establishes its own procedures for such hearings, including who may be heard during the meeting and who is charged with determining whether the hearing brings to light information that might suggest a different recommendation. Inquirers may not, however, forestall such actions by failing or refusing to participate in consultations or hearings; such failures of cooperation could themselves be "sufficient reasons" for removing a person from the roll of inquirers.

During the candidacy phase

- Continue your active membership and participation in a Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) congregation. If you are away from the community where your home congregation is located because of your theological education, find a PC(USA) congregation in that community and keep your home congregation informed about your involvement there.
- Maintain regular communications and consultations with the presbytery's committee, including new covenant agreements and goals as you work toward "full preparation ... to serve the church as ministers of the Word and Sacrament" (G-2.0604).
- Fulfill any requirements your presbytery has for all candidates along with any specific requirements in your covenant agreement, including possible mandatory supervised practice of ministry experiences such as clinical pastoral education (CPE).
- With the approval and under the guidance of the presbytery, engage in some form of service to the church or field education through your seminary. To the degree possible, work to assure that your supervised practice of ministry placements are with PC(USA) congregations or their affiliated ministries.
- Complete your graduate theological education, being sure your course selections not only meet your graduation requirements but also fulfill the *Book of Order* requirements for

courses in Hebrew and Greek and in exegesis of the Old and New Testaments using Hebrew and Greek texts (G-2.0607c) and any courses required by your presbytery or within your covenant agreement.

- Discuss with your presbytery at what point in your candidacy phase you should take the standard ordination examinations in Biblical Exegesis, Theological Competence, Church Polity, and Worship and Sacraments.
- Discuss with your presbytery's committee its processes and requirements for "final assessment" in order to be "certified ready for examination for ordination, pending a call" (G-2.0607).

What "outcomes of candidacy" does your presbytery require of every candidate?

If your seminary does not offer courses specifically in Hebrew or Greek exegesis, what options can you explore with the school and the presbytery to fulfill that constitutional requirement?

If you have an "individualized education program" with your seminary, what process has your presbytery established for approving "special accommodations" when taking the standard ordination examinations?

If I have a documented learning difference or other disability, do I still have to take the standard written ordination examinations?

While a presbytery cannot "waive" the exam requirements, it may "by a three-fourths vote [approve] some alternate means by which to ascertain the readiness of the candidate for ministry in the areas covered by the standard ordination examinations" (G-2.0610). There is no "right" to such "alternate means" since the presbytery also needs to determine whether or not accommodations such as those requested would negatively impact "a candidate's fitness and readiness for a call to ministry requiring ordination" (see G-2.0604). For more information, see the "Alternative Assessment of Competency" materials referenced in the "Resource" section of this *Advisory Handbook*.

Final assessment and negotiation for service

- Discuss with your presbytery how it makes decisions regarding when to schedule "final assessment" and what materials beyond those identified in G-2.0607 it requires prior to the assessment consultation.
- Do not begin negotiation with any congregation or agency for service that would require ordination as a minister of the Word and Sacrament without prior approval from your presbytery. You may explore with your presbytery whether and under what conditions its policies may permit "negotiation for service" prior to a candidate having been "certified ready for examination for ordination, pending a call," but realize such approvals are not a regular practice.

- Once you have been "certified ready for examination" or otherwise been approved to "negotiate for service," you may complete a Personal Information Form (PIF) with the Church Leadership Connection of Mid Council Ministries in the Office of the General Assembly. An approved PIF is the basis for participating in the denomination's process for exploring a call to service.
- Candidacy continues until ordination, withdrawal, or removal. So even once you have completed "final assessment," been "certified ready for examination," and begun "negotiating for service," you should have a covenant agreement with your presbytery about how you will not only maintain but continue to develop your ministry skills as you seek your first call.

How does your presbytery determine "proximity to graduation" in making decisions to schedule "final assessment" and to "certify a candidate ready for examination for ordination, pending a call"?

What documentation or other "evidence" can you provide your presbytery that you possess the qualities listed in G-2.0607a?

Does your presbytery require that you preach a sermon or prepare specific documents, like a statement of faith, for final assessment?

Receiving a call and ordination

Every presbytery has its own processes for reviewing offers of calls to either congregational or specialized ministries, and very often the entity of the presbytery that oversees this work will not be the same as the one that oversees preparation for ministry. It is important, then, that candidates not assume that practices will be the same in both their presbytery of care and a calling presbytery, or even that those who have overseen their preparation will know all the details for moving into a call within the same presbytery. Take to heart this sage advice: "There is no such thing as a dumb question, and often the only way to avoid doing something dumb is by asking lots of questions."

What resources can you use to find out about a calling presbytery's processes for approving first calls?

Who among the covenant partners in your preparation is able to assist you in considering and negotiating a first call?

How would you go about "checking the references" on a church looking to call you, just as they are checking your references in making their decision?

- No call to ministry requiring ordination as a minister of the Word and Sacrament, whether in a congregation or another agency, is official until approved by the presbytery responsible for Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) mission in the region to be served by the call.

- Once a "first call" has been approved by the appropriate presbytery, the candidate still must be "examined for ordination." It is the calling presbytery's responsibility to "examine, ordain, and install the candidate," although it may request or authorize another presbytery (usually the presbytery of care) to fulfill one or another of these responsibilities on its behalf (G-2.0702).
- Examination for ordination and membership in a presbytery shall cover the candidate's "Christian faith and views in theology, the Sacraments, and the government of this church" (G-3.0306).
- Upon ordination, one becomes a minister member of the presbytery where the call is served and ceases to be a member of a congregation. That presbytery assumes the responsibilities of pastoral care and support for the minister of the Word and Sacrament (G-3.0307).

If I have already passed the ordination examinations in exegesis, theology, polity, and worship and sacraments, why is the calling presbytery examining me in these areas?

A presbytery's examination for ordination and membership serves a different purpose than the written examinations required prior to final assessment. The "standard ords" are blind review assessments by other ruling elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament of a candidate's basic competencies in applying academic and practical preparation as evidence of readiness to begin ministry. A presbytery's examination for ordination and membership is anything but a "blind review." It will be making a very specific decision about the fit between you and the context in which you would be fulfilling the functions of ministry of Word and Sacrament. It will be examining not only your theological competence, but also the appropriateness of your theological views within the particular presbytery and congregation. A person's gifts for ministry and theological understanding may easily fit within the broad scope of the Reformed tradition (what is assessed by the "standard ords"), but not fit at all within a particular PC(USA) congregation. The examination for ordination is all about the specific, not the general.

Is it possible for me to be ordained in my home congregation?

The Form of Government states that "ordinarily" it is the presbytery placing the call that will conduct the ordination service. That presbytery may, for reasons it deems appropriate, ask another presbytery to fulfill that responsibility. Keep in mind, however, that the primary purpose of the ordination service is not to celebrate what God has done in your life to bring you to this point. Its purpose is to ordain and commission you for service as a minister of the Word and Sacrament within the community that has called you. The service is much more about future ministry that will be shared by you and the congregation or agency than about your past accomplishments. In all cases, presbyteries conduct services of ordination to service as a minister of the Word and Sacrament, not local congregations.

What person or entity of the presbytery responsible for the ordination service will you need to work with to be sure that the service complies with its requirements for participants, time, and other aspects?

The Session

The pastor and session are responsible for communicating to all church members what is meant by "the ministry of all the baptized" and helping them discern and fulfill their Christian vocation. A biblically-grounded, theologically sound understanding of Christian vocation integrated into the church's program will help members recognize opportunities to fulfill their Christian vocation within the context of their secular occupations. Beyond this more general responsibility, it is essential that the session take seriously its role in developing vocational awareness among members of the congregation so as to ensure that committed, knowledgeable persons continue to be involved in the life and mission of the church and the world. They should encourage both individuals exploring a personal sense of call and those persons in whom they see evidence of gifts for service as ministers of the Word and Sacrament to enter into a discernment process.

How can a session intentionally give attention to "calling forth" leaders to serve in the diverse and rapidly changing American culture?

Developing awareness of the call to ministry of the Word and Sacrament

- Challenge all members to become aware of their Christian vocation.
- Develop and implement thoughtful and creative means by which highly qualified persons may be challenged to consider a vocation in ordered ministry.
- Help potential inquirers get in touch with the presbytery's committee overseeing preparation for ministry early in their discernment.
- Give high priority to developing and maintaining vital, theologically sound youth programs in harmony with the Presbyterian and Reformed traditions.
- Assure that youth ministry leaders are carefully selected and trained, theologically competent and appropriate role models.

Exploring the call to ministry of the Word and Sacrament

- Provide a supportive relationship through which to explore with the individual the personal implications of and suitability for a church occupation.

- Before a person can enter inquiry with the presbytery, the session of the sponsoring congregation must provide its endorsement. This decision should be based on direct knowledge that emerge through:
  - Prayerful examination of the applicant's motivation, personal faith and experience in the congregation.
  - Through examination of his or her knowledge of the responsibilities of a minister of the Word and Sacrament and personal willingness and ability to accept them.
  - Through a serious assessment of the gifts needed by ministers of the Word and Sacrament and whether there is evidence of such gifts in the applicant's personal life and service to the church.
- The session's endorsement should include a statement that the applicant is "a member of the sponsoring congregation" and has been "active in the work and worship of [the] congregation for at least six months" (G-2.0602).

Will you use the same application forms as your presbytery or develop your own?

How will your session determine if an applicant has been "active in the worship and work of [the] congregation" at the time of endorsement?

Does your presbytery require a formal orientation to its process with both the session and the applicant?

Does your presbytery require submission of the session's report form available from the General Assembly in support of the endorsement action?

- If the session decides not to endorse the person for enrollment as an inquirer at this time, it continues to provide support, counsel and guidance as she or he seeks to discern an appropriate expression of his or her Christian vocation.

What are some possible questions that we, as a session, might explore with a member of our congregation when determining whether to endorse an application to enter the preparation for ministry process as an inquirer?

As a session prepares to conduct an interview with a potential inquirer, it is important that its familiarity with the applicant not preclude exploring some serious questions about the person's gifts for ministry. Sessions have in the past found questions like the following to be very helpful:

- What personal qualities are evidence of a healthy, vital faith in God through Christ?
- How is that faith currently being expressed through the individual's participation in the worship, life and mission of this congregation?

- What motivations, whether positive or negative, impel the person's sense of call? Service to God and the world? Compassion for God's children? Guilt? A need for power and status?
- What real and potential talents for ministry are evident in this individual? (e.g., the ability to communicate, interpersonal skills, leadership or administrative abilities)
- What is the level and adequacy of the individual's academic interest, leadership skills, cross-cultural competencies, emotional intelligence, and motivations?
- What is the evidence of his or her physical health and stamina?
- What is the evidence of his or her emotional well-being?
- What is the evidence of his or her self-discipline?
- How does the individual plan to finance his or her education?

How can you discuss the person's gifts and call to ministry in your changing mission context in ways that do not impose preconceived notions of ministry?

What new and different ministry skills should you be looking for in those discerning ordered ministry in the years ahead?

Supporting Inquirers and candidates

- The pastor, session and congregation communicate with and support inquirers and candidates throughout the entire period of preparation. It is important to express concern and support by contacting the individual and his or her family at important times, such as formal consultations with the presbytery's committee, appearances before presbytery, academic and standard ordination exam periods, at the time of a candidate's "final assessment," when a call is being negotiated, on holidays, anniversaries, etc.
- Providing financial support is a very tangible expression of support. Some presbytery policies will require the congregation to contribute to some expenses related to the preparation process, such as fees related to psychological assessment.
- Although inquirers and candidates are "subject to the oversight of the presbytery within the context of their covenant relationship" for preparing for ordered ministry (G-2.0605), a session may act as an advocate to call the presbytery's committee to accountability in fulfilling its responsibilities.

Does your presbytery require the designation of a "session liaison" for each inquirer and candidate?

If so, what are the requirements and responsibilities of these liaisons?

- The session participates with inquirers/candidates and the presbytery's committee as a covenant partner evaluating growth and progress throughout the full preparation for ministry process. It may be required to provide a formal recommendation as to whether the presbytery should transition an inquirer to the candidacy phase. Such recommendations should be based on personal interviews with inquirers and a review of consultation reports so as to make an informed decision about their "suitability" for ministry as ministers of the Word and Sacrament (G-2.0603).
    - If the presbytery acts to move the inquirer to candidacy, the new candidate and her or his session may request that a commission of presbytery conduct a service of reception in the congregation's worship service.
    - If the inquirer is not received by presbytery as a candidate, the session continues to support, counsel and guide the individual as she or he seeks to discover an appropriate expression of her or his Christian vocation.
- Upon notice that a candidate has been ordained as a minister of the Word and Sacrament (G-2.0704), the session will remove him or her from the congregation's membership roll.

The Presbytery

The presbytery's ministry to the church is at the heart of the preparation for ministry process. The presbytery provides representatives to work with inquirers and candidates (G-3.0307), elects readers to evaluate the ordination examinations approved by the General Assembly (G-3.0302b), and ultimately approves the first calls for and examines candidates for ordination as ministers of the Word and Sacrament (G-2.0702).

The presbytery's ministry with individual inquirers and candidates ordinarily is facilitated through a committee or commission (G-3.0307, and G-3.0109b(3)). As ruling elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament take on these demanding responsibilities, they share the rich satisfaction of helping men and women discern their calls and grow toward readiness for the ministry of the Word and Sacrament. Their time, energy and commitment offer a significant contribution to the church's future ministry.

In planning its preparation for ministry "mechanisms and processes" (G-3.0307), the presbytery may consult the material described in the "Resources" section of this *Advisory Handbook* and contact appropriate General Assembly offices for additional support and counsel. This *Handbook* seeks to provide some of the basic information a presbytery will need while also raising questions for it to consider in light of its particular mission context. The material presented in this section should be read with continual reference to G-2.06 and G-2.07 in the *Book of Order,* the second section of this *Handbook,* and the presbytery's own policies and procedures adopted to facilitate this work.

Responsibilities of the presbytery as a whole

- Designate which committee or commission will facilitate the presbytery's work with inquirers and candidates (G-3.0307 and G-3.0109b(3)) and ensure that this entity has adequate support and resources. (For the sake of convenience, this *Advisory Handbook* uses "presbytery's committee" or similar terms to refer to the entity of the presbytery—whether formally a committee or a commission—that facilitates its oversight of inquirers and candidates.)
- If the presbytery acts to empower a commission for aspects of this work, it must explicitly delegate specific actions for which the commission may act on the presbytery's behalf (e.g., approving policies and procedures; enrolling, transferring, removing inquirers and candidates; transitioning inquirers to candidacy, etc.). Any actions not explicitly delegated to the commission will continue to require approval by the presbytery in plenary session.
- The members of the committee or commission should be carefully selected, with planned tenure to assure continuity. While new members should receive careful orientation, regular training events or retreats should be provided for all members. Such training will enable them to develop procedures for relationships with inquirers and candidates and help them establish criteria by which to measure individuals' development for ordered ministry.
- Receive reports or recommendations regarding each person considered for inquiry, candidacy, certification of readiness to be examined for ordination, and approval to negotiate for service in a ministry that would require ordination as a minister of the Word and Sacrament.
- Maintain a roll of inquirers and candidates (G-2.0609), and report actions related to this roll to the Office of the General Assembly through the online preparation for ministry management system.
- Provide for the election of standard ordination exam readers as requested by the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates (PCC) through Mid Council Ministries of the Office of the General Assembly (G-3.0302b), and report their names and terms of service through the online preparation for ministry management system.

Has your presbytery "delegated authority" to its preparation for ministry entity to act on its behalf in certain areas?

If so, what decisions are the commission authorized to make for the presbytery, and what actions must the presbytery take in plenary session?

Who may work with your inquirers and candidates on the presbytery's behalf in light of the decision to form a committee or a commission?

Is it required that every presbytery have a committee or commission specifically for the purpose of overseeing the preparation for ministry process?

There is no constitutional requirement that a presbytery have a candidates'

committee or a commission on preparation for ministry. Most presbyteries, however, will find it very impractical to oversee even one or two persons under care if every matter, down to the negotiating of covenant agreements, must be accomplished by the presbytery in plenary session. For that reason, the *Book of Order* suggests presbyteries create an "entity" to facilitate this work (G-3.0307). Each presbytery—taking into consideration its size, the number of persons under care, and its overall mission plan and context—will make decisions about the type of entity it requires and its overall scope of responsibilities. For example, a presbytery might decide to form a single commission to facilitate all aspects of its responsibilities for preparing, receiving, and overseeing the work of ministers of the Word and Sacrament within its bounds.

How can your presbytery within its particular mission context organize itself to best facilitate its work with inquirers and candidates?

Organizing to provide for "full preparation" of ministers of the Word and Sacrament

- Each presbytery has the responsibility to "develop and maintain mechanisms and processes to guide, nurture and oversee the process of preparing to become a minister of the Word and Sacrament" (G-3.0307). It may decide whether the presbytery as a whole or a commission to which it has delegated authority must approve these "mechanisms and processes" and create, maintain, and update its manual. It should make this manual readily available to its congregations and their members who may wish to discern a call to serve as a minister of the Word and Sacrament. This manual should include such things as:
  - Explicitly identify those responsibilities assigned to any entities of the presbytery. Any responsibilities and authorities not so designated are reserved to the presbytery itself.
  - Clearly state the expectations the presbytery has of all those under its care in the preparation for ministry process, especially any requirements not contained within the *Book of Order*. A presbytery has authority to require whatever it believes necessary to fulfill its responsibilities relative to the purposes of inquiry (G-2.0603), candidacy (G-2.0604), and final assessment (G-2.0607). While neither the *Book of Order* nor such manuals can limit a presbytery's authority to establish individualized requirements within its covenant agreements with those under care, making clear what the presbytery believes essential to the preparation of everyone under its care can facilitate the negotiation of such covenants.
  - The manual should also layout how any presbytery policies regarding mandatory criminal record and financial background checks will be applied to inquirers and candidates.

What experiences in the preparation of inquirers and candidates within your mission context have proven so beneficial that they should be required of everyone under your care?

- As part of an overall records maintenance and retention policy, the presbytery should establish what documents are to be included in each inquirer/candidate's file. It is critically important that a presbytery be able to document that it exercised "due diligence" in case issues of "negligent supervision/preparation" should arise either during the preparation for ministry process or after the person may be ordained as a minister of the Word and Sacrament. It is recommended that such policies clearly state that such records are the property of the presbytery and that provisions be made for retaining the file even after the individual is no longer under care.

What practice does your presbytery usually follow for the approval of policies and procedures manuals used by its committees and commissions?

Be sure to utilize your resources in the broader church, such as the Office of Constitutional Services and the Historical Society, as you work out your records retention policy.

Responsibilities of the entity overseeing preparation for ministry

In providing pastoral care, guidance and support to inquirers and candidates it is imperative that the presbytery's committee show sensitivity to each individual's unique background, experience, level of maturity and personal attributes. If growth is to be effectively nurtured, members of the committee must understand and accept the individual where he or she is at each stage of the process. With the committee's help and encouragement the inquirer or candidate will take increasing responsibility for moving through the process and in planning for and evaluating his or her own development.

The preparation for ministry process demands that the roles, expectations and responsibilities of inquirers or candidates and other covenant partners representing the congregation and the presbytery be made clear from the beginning. The negotiation and regular review and renewal of a formal covenant relationship is an important step toward mutual understanding.

Presbyteries should also identify particular services, resources and experiences that can enhance the growth and development of inquirers and candidates under their guidance. These include may vocational development counseling, psychological evaluations, clinical pastoral education opportunities, internships in churches, cross-cultural experiences, specialized ministries and other opportunities for personal and spiritual growth. Such services and experiences may be recommended as individuals' needs are identified during the evaluation process.

Establish clear lines of communication for how your presbytery's work with inquirers and candidates will relate to other presbytery staff and entities as well as with counterparts in other presbyteries.

Deciding whether to enroll an inquirer

- When notified by a session that a member of their church has indicated a desire to explore the personal implications of becoming a minister of the Word and Sacrament, members of the presbytery's committee may conduct an orientation with that member and the session to review the various roles and responsibilities during the preparation for ministry process. Orientations help to familiarize everyone with the particular procedures used in that presbytery and ways the session and the presbytery can work together most effectively (G-2.0601 and G-2.0605).
- As presbyteries prepare to meet with applicants, they will probably want to have some basic information about their personal backgrounds and their reasons for desiring to enter the discernment and preparation process. Standard application forms, whether those provided on the Preparation for Ministry website (see the "Resources" section) or developed by the presbytery to meet its particular needs, can be very helpful in this regard.
- After the applicant has received the session's endorsement for enrollment as an inquirer, the presbytery's committee should interview him or her. The purpose of this initial interview is to make a preliminary assessment of the applicant's motives, seriousness of intent, and general suitability for service as a minister of the Word and Sacrament before deciding to recommend to presbytery that he or she be enrolled as an inquirer.
- If the presbytery's committee acts to recommend enrollment as an inquirer (or acts on behalf of the presbytery to take that action through a "delegated authority"), it is critically important that the roles, expectations and responsibilities of the inquirer, session, and presbytery representatives be clarified and a covenant relationship be negotiated at the first interview or consultation. This covenant relationship should focus on goals for growth in each of the five key developmental areas: education for ministry, spiritual development, interpersonal relationships, personal growth, and professional development. (See "Inquiry, candidacy, and beyond," p. 30, for a fuller description of these areas and their goals.)

Be sure that applicants and their sessions can easily locate any application forms or information about any assessments you require before an initial consultation.

Covenant agreements need to be written both for inclusion in the person's file and to be clear about expectations. You might consider the standard Forms 3 and 4 as one model for crafting and reporting progress in these covenants.

During the inquiry phase

- The core responsibility of the presbytery during the inquiry phase is conduct regular and serious consultations in order to "make an informed decision about the inquirer's suitability for ordered ministry" (G-2.0603). During each consultation the presbytery's committee and the inquirer assess what progress has been made toward fulfilling previously established goals in each of the five areas and together negotiate appropriate new goals. The committee, of course, must decide for itself what "growth" in each of these five areas might mean and how an inquirer might show evidence of such growth. Creativity should be used in thinking through these areas and goals with the individual inquirer so that this experience is a genuine experience of personal and communal discernment of one's gifts and calling for ministry.
- Other particular areas for discussion during consultations might include:
  - Deepening insight about ministry within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) gained from continuing worship and work within one of our churches.
  - Choosing a seminary that is both "acceptable to the presbytery" (G-2.0607c) and appropriate to the needs of the particular inquirer. Beyond choosing the seminary itself, making curricular decisions that meet requirements for graduation, fulfill presbytery expectations, and further the particular educational needs of the inquirer. Establishing a plan for taking the Bible Content Exam and using its results in planning biblical studies coursework would be an appropriate part of these discussions.
  - Insights gained about the inquirer's gifts and understanding of call gained through field education assignments or other supervised practice of ministry in service to the church.

Be clear with your inquirers (and candidates) about what evidence of completion of covenant goals you will expect.

Will you require written reports and reflections about preparation experiences?

Will you require written reports from supervisors and others working with the inquirer on specific goals?

The online training piece "Understanding the Bible Content Exam" provides suggestions on how to get the most benefit from the results of that test.

- Presbyteries often engage three specific types of outside resources to provide essential information about an inquirer's potential suitability for ministry:
  - *Career counseling:* Comprehensive, in-depth career counseling is offered by the centers affiliated with the Ministry Development Council and other service providers. This process can help the participant understand how her or his values, interests, and potential and acquired capabilities, as well as her or his own personality and sense of call, fit into an occupational choice. By previous agreement with the participant and the center, the presbytery should be designated as the recipient of written reports on this experience. Career counseling is most valuable if the inquirer has volunteered to participate and when the nature and purpose of the process are carefully interpreted to the inquirer in advance.

- *Psychological evaluation:* This process involves consultation(s) with a clinical or counseling psychologist. The primary purpose of such an evaluation is to determine the inquirer/candidate's psychological health and fitness for ministry and to screen for pathology. Greatest value is achieved if the inquirer participates voluntarily and receives careful prior orientation as to the consultation's nature and purpose. Because of current laws surrounding privacy of medical records (including mental health records), it should be part of the contract for service that the presbytery is the client of record for such evaluations. Situations where the applicant can assert "doctor-patient confidentiality" to prevent disclosure of information to the presbytery can nullify the benefit of such work. The presbytery should establish a working relationship with the psychologist so that her or his reports can be accurately interpreted to its committee. The psychologist's familiarity with religious values and with the requirements of professional ministry will greatly enhance the results of such an evaluation. Psychological evaluation is usually combined with career counseling when the service is provided by a Ministry Development Council accredited counseling center.
- *Educational institutions:* If the inquirer is enrolled in a college or university, reports should center on academic progress and potential for graduate level theological studies. If the inquirer is presently enrolled in a theological institution, reports should extend beyond academic progress to include field education and clinical pastoral education experiences, and the theological institution's assessment of her or his gifts for ministry.

Discuss with any outside service providers your particular needs in evaluation reports on inquirers.

Assessments of attitudes about and aptitude for leadership may be more useful than a comparison of personality factors with those who entered ministry a generation ago.

What can they tell you about how the inquirer deals with conflict personally or when encountering conflict between others?

The Form of Government sets the time requirements for the preparation for ministry process as "a period of no less than two years, including at least one year as candidate" (G-2.0602). Does that mean the inquiry phase should last one year?

The purpose of the inquiry phase is for the presbytery to "make an informed decision about the inquirer's suitability of ordered ministry" (G-2.0603). There is no set time for the inquiry phase, nor any set expectation that the elements of the initial covenant agreement will provide all the information the presbytery will need to reach that decision. Take the time necessary even if it is more than a year.

Considering transition to the candidacy phase

- A presbytery's process should clarify whether inquirers will be expected to initiate an application for candidacy or whether its committee will invite inquirers to a review for candidacy. The policies should state if the session must provide an endorsement specifically recommending whether or not the inquirer should be transitioned to the candidacy phase.

What are the advantages and disadvantages to having inquirers either be invited to be considered for candidacy or to have the responsibility to apply for candidacy?

- If the presbytery has not "delegated authority" to a commission to act on its behalf in making decisions regarding candidacy, it may require inquirers to appear before a plenary session of the presbytery for examination prior to taking action on the recommendation to transition them to candidacy. Traditionally such examinations have been restricted to questions about the individual's Christian faith, forms of Christian service undertaken, and motives for seeking the ministry.
- The presbytery may conduct a brief service marking the transition to candidacy either as part of its own worship or during a service of the candidate's home congregation. Suggestions for such services may be found in *Book of Occasional Services* (Louisville: Geneva Press [1990], pp. 270-271; note that while current editions include a section headed, "Constitutional Questions," those affirmations have not been mandated by the *Book of Order* since 2007).

What are the requirements an inquirer must meet to be transitioned to candidacy?

The only constitutional requirement for an inquirer to be advanced to candidacy is the presbytery's determination that the person is suitable for ordered ministry as a minister of the Word and Sacrament (G-2.0603). The presbytery will of course have created other requirements through policies established concerning all its inquirers or in the particular covenant agreements with the individual inquirer. In reaching that decision, presbyteries are reminded that becoming a candidate creates an expectation that the person will eventually be ordained. Consequently, the decision to transition an inquirer to candidacy can be considered one of the most important actions in the whole preparation for ministry process. It should not, then, be considered a *pro forma* or automatic action after a person has been under care for a certain period of time.

If the presbytery's committee decides to conclude an inquirer's involvement in the preparation for ministry process rather than recommend transition to the candidacy phase, is it possible for the inquirer to appeal that decision?

The *Book of Order* directs that "prior to taking such action" presbyteries are to "make a reasonable attempt to give the ... inquirer an opportunity to be heard concerning the proposed removal" (G-2.0609). Each presbytery will need to establish its own procedures for such hearings, including who may be heard during the meeting and who is charged with determining whether the inquirer should be removed from the process (G-2.0609), continued at inquiry, or transitioned on to candidacy.

When a presbytery decides to remove an inquirer or candidate from, special attention needs to be given to coordinating a response with the session. The goal for all concerned is to help these individuals hear a "no" to service in this ordered ministry as a "yes" to another ministry for which God has gifted and called them.

During the candidacy phase

- The presbytery is to maintain regular communications and consultations with the candidate, including establishing renewed covenant agreements and goals leading toward "full preparation ... to serve the church as ministers of the Word and Sacrament" (G-2.0604).
- In order for a candidate (or an inquirer) to take the standard ordination examinations in Biblical Exegesis, Theological Competence, Church Polity, and Worship and Sacraments, she or he must have the presbytery's approval. This approval is intended to be more than just a certification that the person is in good standing with the presbytery. It is the presbytery's statement that it believes the person has reached the point in academic training and supervised practice of ministry where it is appropriate to seek the concurrence of other presbyteries that the person is ready to begin service as a minister of the Word and Sacrament. The exams, then, are best considered capstone experiences rather than milestones to be passed at any point along the way.

If a candidate has a learning disability, is it necessary that he or she attempt and fail the standard written ordination examinations before "alternate means" are considered?

A presbytery may "by a three-fourths vote [approve] some alternate means by which to ascertain the readiness of the candidate for ministry in the areas covered by the standard ordination examinations" whenever it "judges that there are good and sufficient reasons" to do so (G-2.0610). There is no "right" to such "alternate means" since the presbytery also needs to consider whether or not accommodations such as those requested would negatively impact "a candidate's fitness and readiness for a call to ministry requiring ordination" (see G-2.0604). But there is also no requirement that candidates must first fail the standard exams either. For more information, see the "Alternative Assessment of Competency" materials referenced in the "Resource" section of this *Advisory Handbook*.

Final assessment and negotiation for service

- The easy part of "final assessment" is confirming that the educational and examination requirements of G-2.0607b-d have been fulfilled. The difficult—and most important—part is determining whether the candidate possesses the qualities listed in G-2.0607a:
  - "Wisdom and maturity of faith"—Carefully reviewing not only the "S"/"U" evaluations of the standard ordination exams but the responses themselves and the readers' evaluative comments can provide evidence in this area. Having the candidate write a summary statement of faith, often required by presbyteries as part of the examination for ordination and membership, can be another important tool.
  - "Leadership skills"—Do supervised practice of ministry reports indicate not only an open and receptive spirit to learning but also describe instances when the candidate initiated change or helped a community follow the lead of the Spirit into new ministries through group discernment processes?
  - "Compassionate spirit"— Look not only at what ministries of care the candidates have participated in, but also their personal motivations for engaging in these forms of service and their attitudes toward those whom they served. Did they show genuine concern, or condescension?
  - "Honest repute"—What have been the experiences of all covenant partners in working with the candidate? Has he consistently demonstrated integrity and openness? Has she kept commitments and freely accepted accountability when circumstances prevented meeting those commitments?
  - "Sound judgment"—The ministry of the Word and Sacrament requires high levels of critical self-awareness and also emotional intelligence in working with others. Has the candidate been an active participant in setting goals for her or his own development and preparation for ministry? Has he or she been realistic in expectations of others?

"Final assessment" should be about a comprehensive review of all that has been discerned throughout inquiry and candidacy and not just completion of assignments specifically for this consultation.

What "evidence" of core competencies for ministry have been provided through the reports from all those who have partnered with the person during both the inquiry and candidacy phases?

- It is at the stage of "final assessment" that presbyteries will most often need to consider the possibility of granting "waivers" to either the constitutional standards (G-2.0610) or their own requirements of all inquirers and candidates as "accommodations to the particular circumstances" of a candidate. If a presbytery has not reached a decision about the person's personal and professional competencies for service as a minister of the Word and Sacrament, it is likely premature to be considering waiving requirements. Why might it be necessary to grant waivers for a person who could not be "certified ready for examination for ordination, pending a call," on other grounds?

- It is the responsibility of the presbytery to decide when a candidate may begin negotiation with any congregation or agency for service that would require ordination as a minister of the Word and Sacrament. Though each candidate's situation should be considered on its own merits, you will probably want to set some guidelines to determine under what conditions you may permit "negotiation for service" prior to a candidate having been "certified ready for examination for ordination, pending a call."

Search committees will expect candidates to be able to provide clear expectations of when they would be eligible to begin service. What procedures for approving a candidate to "negotiate for service" prior to "certification of readiness" would address such concerns?

- Candidates approved to "negotiate for service" will require certification of that approval from their presbytery in order to circulate a Personal Information Form (PIF) with the Church Leadership Connection.
- Candidacy continues until ordination, withdrawal, or removal. So even after the candidate has been "certified ready for examination" and begun "negotiating for service," there should be a renewed covenant agreement with presbytery and continued regular consultations. Particular attention should be given to how the candidate will not only maintain but continue to develop ministry skills and a proactive plan for seeking a first call.

Receiving a call and ordination

- As presbyteries consider their responsibilities to one another regarding candidates who may be considering calls outside their presbytery of care, it may be wise to remember the "Golden Rule": "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you" (Matthew 7:12). If there was information you believe was essential in forming a decision about a person's "suitability for ordered ministry" (G-2.0603) and "fitness and readiness for a call to ministry requiring ordination" (G-2.0604), then you should share that information with your counterparts within the denomination who must make the same determination.
- Just as the presbytery will establish guidelines for who will provide references about ministers of the Word and Sacrament who may be considered for calls in other presbyteries, so it will need to establish procedures regarding who will provide references and release preparation file information to counterparts in presbyteries of call.
- Presbyteries will need to establish procedures for who is responsible to conduct the "examination for ordination" of candidates receiving calls within their bounds, and whether different procedures will be followed depending on whether or not the candidate was under care of the calling presbytery. The examination for ordination and membership in a presbytery shall cover the candidate's "Christian faith and views in theology, the Sacraments, and the government of this church" (G-3.0306).

- With ordination and installation one becomes a minister member of the presbytery where the call is served and ceases to be a member of a congregation. Upon receipt of notification that the person has been ordained, the presbytery will remove the individual from its roll of inquirers and candidates (G-2.0610).

Just as your presbytery will adjust its structures and practices to fit its mission context, so will other presbyteries. What questions will you need to ask in order to coordinate work with inquirers and candidates between presbyteries?

General responsibilities

- Presbyteries are responsible for "electing ruling elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament to be readers of standard ordination examinations" approved by the General Assembly (G-3.0302b). Guidelines for electing readers, the number allotted to each presbytery, and information about the reading process are available from the Coordinator for Preparation for Ministry and Exams.
- In order for the Mid Council Ministries of the Office of the General Assembly to provide information about trends in preparation for ministry across the church and the general relationship between those seeking calls to serve as ministers of the Word and Sacrament and opportunities for such service, it is important that presbyteries report their actions to enroll inquirers, transition them to candidacy, and approve them to negotiate for service. Simple forms that may be completed on computer and emailed to the Office of the General Assembly for this purpose are provided on the Preparation for Ministry website. Presbyteries occasionally receive reports showing those currently under care, and are encouraged to audit those reports against their official roll of inquirers and candidates and report any discrepancies to the Office of the General Assembly.

The Theological Institutions

Well-educated clergy are an integral part of the Presbyterian tradition. The increasing complexities of life and society demand that this tradition continue. The preparation for ministry process places significant emphasis on the role of the theological institution, recognizing its indispensable contribution to the growth and development of inquirers and candidates.

- The theological institution's primary responsibility, of course, is to provide an academic curriculum, resources and motivation that will assure students adequate intellectual and professional preparation for the ministry. Together with the session, the presbytery and other participants in the process, the theological institution provides counsel and guidance. It also supervises field education, internships, and other experiences that are crucial to the student's spiritual, personal, and professional development. In its day-to-day relationship with students

the theological institution provides a unique context where students can explore the meaning of Christian vocation and their sense of call to the ministry of the Word and Sacrament.

- The theological institution may also provide objective information about a student's gifts, abilities, and suitability for the ordered ministry of teaching elder when the presbytery requests such information. The Assistant Stated Clerk for Preparation for Ministry in the Office of the General Assembly works with many Association of Theological Schools accredited institutions to identify specific "Theological Institution Contact" persons to assist presbyteries in gaining information about their inquirers and candidates. Please contact the office if you need assistance in identifying the person in this role at a particular seminary.
- Because of privacy laws, most institutions will require that the presbytery have obtained a release from the student permitting the school to share information about their performance. Presbyteries may devise a standard release form for use with all those under care, or may in some instances have to obtain a specific form required by the particular school. An inquirer or candidate's unwillingness to provide such a signed release should be a seen as a serious breach of the covenant relationship with the presbytery.
- Many theological institutions provide support to the standard ordination examination process by serving as official Bible Content Examination (BCE) testing sites for their students. Some are also permit inquirers and candidates who live in their area to take the test on their campuses even if not currently enrolled at the school. If presbyteries have persons who wish take the BCE at institutions where they are not enrolled, it is strongly encouraged that they contact the exam proctor for the school in advance of registration for the exams to assure the site will be able to accommodate them.

As all seminaries—including denominationally affiliated schools—become more diverse in their student bodies and faculties, it is no longer possible to rely on a shared knowledge of practices about requirements leading to ordination

How can you be proactive with both inquirers/candidates and their schools about your particular expectations for their academic preparation?

The Synod

A synod can play an important role of resourcing participants in the preparation for ministry process by coordinating training opportunities for members of presbytery committees overseeing preparation for ministry.

The General Assembly

Primary support of the preparation for ministry process in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) at the national level is provided by Mid Council Ministries of the Office of the General Assembly.

- Preparation for Ministry Manager/Assistant Stated Clerk

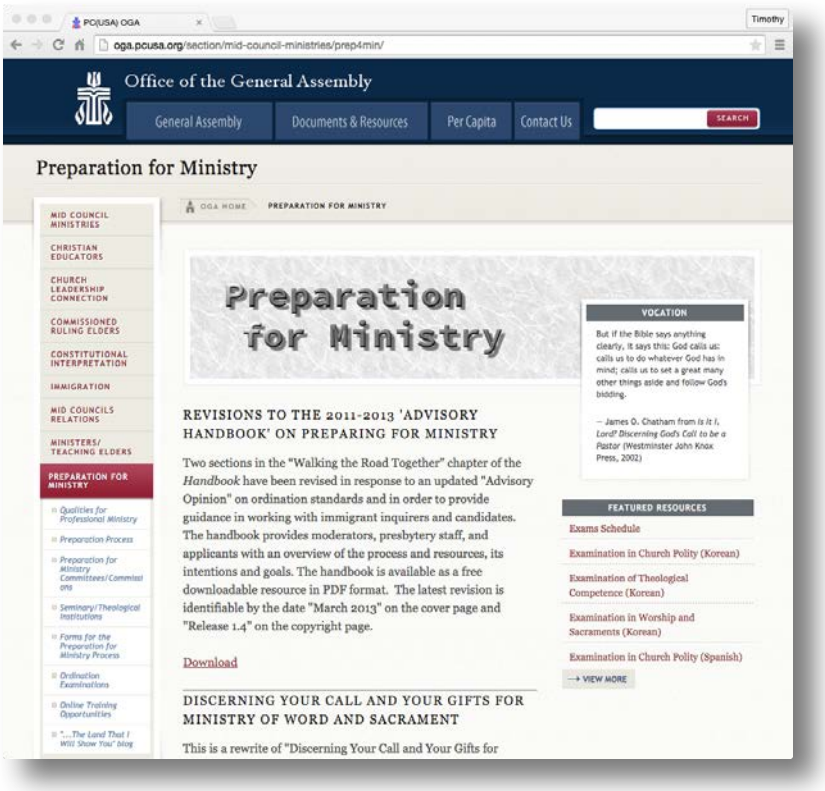
- Provides guidance, consultation, and resource materials to presbytery committees and commissions overseeing preparation for ministry to assist them with vocational discernment and preparation with inquirers and candidates.
- Provides appropriate vehicles to enable presbyteries to exchange resources, policies, and models for their work with inquirers and candidates.
- Participates in synod and presbytery training events for members of committees and commissions overseeing preparation for ministry, and develops a variety of online and print training materials for both those under care and those who partner with them.
- In conjunction with colleagues providing assistance in constitutional interpretation, provides guidance to presbyteries on particular sections of the *Book of Order* that deal with preparation for ministry.
- Encourages collaboration between presbyteries and seminaries as they work with inquirers and candidates.
- Works with seminary staff and inquirers and candidates providing guidance on the preparation for ministry and ordination exam processes.
- Serves as liaison with the Ministry Development Council and its centers in support of preparation for ministry.
- Maintains and makes available a list of seminary contact persons and moderators of presbytery committees and commissions overseeing preparation for ministry.
- With the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates (PCC), coordinates the development, administration, and evaluation of ordination examinations.

- Church Leadership Connection (CLC)
  - Provides support and training on using the CLC system.
  - Tracks and distributes information about broad trends in the call process.
  - Provides coaching to candidates seeking their first call.

Additional support is provided through the Presbyterian Mission Agency and its Theology, Worship and Education division.

- Financial Aid for Service
  - Administers scholarships and loans for those preparing for ministry.
  - Offers a program supporting educational debt assistance for those accepting calls to temporary and part-time pastoral relationships.

RESOURCES


PC(USA) OGA
Timothy
oga.pcusa.org/section/mid-council-ministries/prep4min/
Office of the General Assembly
General Assembly
Documents & Resources
Per Capita
Contact Us
SEARCH
Preparation for Ministry
OGA HOME
PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY
MID COUNCIL MINISTRIES
CHRISTIAN EDUCATORS
CHURCH LEADERSHIP CONNECTION
COMMISSIONED RULING ELDERS
CONSTITUTIONAL INTERPRETATION
IMMIGRATION
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MINISTERS/ TEACHING ELDERS
PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY
Qualities for Professional Ministry
Preparation Process
Preparation for Ministry Committees/Commissions
Seminary/Theological Institutions
Forms for the Preparation for Ministry Process
Ordination Examinations
Online Training Opportunities
"...The Land That I Will Show You" blog
Preparation for Ministry
VOCATION
But if the Bible says anything clearly, it says this: God calls us: calls us to do whatever God has in mind; calls us to set a great many other things aside and follow God's bidding.
– James O. Chatham from Is It I, Lord? Discerning God's Call to be a Pastor (Westminster John Knox Press, 2002)
REVISIONS TO THE 2011-2013 'ADVISORY HANDBOOK' ON PREPARING FOR MINISTRY
Two sections in the "Walking the Road Together" chapter of the Handbook have been revised in response to an updated "Advisory Opinion" on ordination standards and in order to provide guidance in working with immigrant inquirers and candidates. The handbook provides moderators, presbytery staff, and applicants with an overview of the process and resources, its intentions and goals. The handbook is available as a free downloadable resource in PDF format. The latest revision is identifiable by the date "March 2013" on the cover page and "Release 1.4" on the copyright page.
Download
FEATURED RESOURCES
Exams Schedule
Examination in Church Polity (Korean)
Examination of Theological Competence (Korean)
Examination in Worship and Sacraments (Korean)
Examination in Church Polity (Spanish)
→ VIEW MORE
DISCERNING YOUR CALL AND YOUR GIFTS FOR MINISTRY OF WORD AND SACRAMENT
This is a rewrite of "Discerning Your Call and Your Gifts for

Internet Resources

Mid Council Ministries of the Office of the General Assembly provides a variety of online video and print-format training materials for presbytery committees/commissions, inquirers and candidates, and sessions on a variety of topics. While these resources are updated periodically to take account of changes in the constitutional and General Assembly adopted requirements and recommendations, information in the current editions of the *Book of Order* and this *Advisory Handbook* or the companion *Handbook on Standard Ordination Examinations* should always take precedence. Release dates for resources are provided so that you will know if the handbooks provide more recent information.

Online training opportunities

Online video presentations may be accessed directly by clicking on their titles in digital versions of this *Advisory Handbook*, or by going to http://oga.pcusa.org/section/mid-council-ministries/prep4min/online-trainings/.

PROCESS OF PREPARING FOR MINISTRY:

"Cycles of Discernment." The process leading to ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church can sometimes seem a bewildering and endless sequence of disconnected tasks. This YouTube video will give you insight into essential rhythms of discernment and preparation that not only bring order to this process but underlie the life of ministry itself. (Updated December 2012)

"Journey into Ministry" covers the process that may lead to ordination to the ministry of word and sacrament or to alternate forms of ministry within the church. It introduces each stage of the formal preparation for ministry procedure with the PC(USA) and the specific purposes of each stage. (Released Fall 2010)

"A Critical Decision: The Transition from Inquiry to Candidacy" explores the different purposes of the inquiry and candidacy phases of the preparation for ministry process with the Presbyterian Church and will suggest issues that need to be explored by inquirers, their sessions and their presbytery committee when considering whether to recommend an inquirer be enrolled as a candidate. (Released January 2011)

"Alternative Assessment of Competency" reviews both the range of options available to provide special accommodations within the standard examination process and the possibilities and means for approving alternative means of demonstrating ministry competency in fulfillment of Book of Order requirements. (Updated December 2012)

EXAMINATION PREPARATION TOOLS:

"*Taking Online Ordination Exams*" is a YouTube video that demonstrates how to access the examinations website and to navigate through an online exam from beginning to end. It also

addresses some special considerations related to different operating system and browser configurations, and the use of mobile or tablet computing devices. (Updated July 2013)

"*Formatting Online Ords*" is a YouTube video that introduces a special practice area on the examinations website where those registered for exams can try out the system before the testing date. It reviews the basic word processing functions of the exam system, things to consider when deciding whether to work only in the system or to use a word processor in conjunction with it, and formatting style for online exams as compared with academic papers, and the use of non-Roman Alphabets such as Korean, Greek or Hebrew. (Updated January 2013)

"*Tips for Writing the Ords*" is a YouTube Video that presents a step-by-step method for analyzing the kinds of questions that appear in the senior ordination examinations in the areas of Theological Competence, Worship and Sacraments, Church Polity and Bible Exegesis. This method follows the same system used by the PCCEC to train the readers who evaluate the exams. (Updated December 2012)

"*Practicing the Tips*" provides access to practice exercises related to principles presented in the "Tips for Writing the Ords" video. This resource is an interactive review of how to analyze all the forms of questions found in each examination area. Users can select which exam area they wish to work on. (Released Spring 2010)

"*Understanding the Structure of the Ords* " is a companion video to "Tips for Writing the Ords." This training provides a brief overview of the organization and all the types of questions that appear in each subject area of the senior ordination exams. ***This resource covers the changes in the structure of the senior ordination exams that were made in conjunction with quarterly administration.*** The video includes a "table of contents" — feature that allows the viewer to skip to discussion of particular subject areas or specific sections within the respective exam areas. (Updated April 2014)

"*Understanding the Bible Content Examination*" provides a review of the role of the BCE in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s preparation for ministry process and some suggestions on the best ways to prepare for taking the test — ways that will not only assist you in fulfilling this requirement but also strengthen your ministry for years to come. (Released June 2017)

Downloadable print resources

HANDBOOK ON STANDARD ORDINATION EXAMINATIONS

The "Handbook on Standard Ordination Examinations in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)" is designed to serve as a resource for inquirers/candidates, presbytery committees, and ministers of other denominations who may be taking the PC(USA)'s ordination exams.

The Exams Handbook contains basic information about the ordination exams — the purpose of the five examinations, how to register for exams, dates of administration, testing sites for the Bible Content Exam, fees, etc. It also offers helpful materials for those preparing to take the ordination examinations, such as instructions for the exams, tips on preparing for and writing

exams, resources to be used, an outline of the evaluation standards, and the process for appealing the final evaluation of an exam.

The handbook has been extensively revised in conjunction with the move to offering senior exams on a quarterly basis and the changes to the time limits for the exams. To be sure you have the latest release, look for "June 2017/2.4" on the front cover.

http://www.pcusa.org/resource/handbook-ordination-examinations/

DISCERNING YOUR CALL AND GIFTS FOR MINISTRY

A resource addressed specifically to seminarians, inquirers and candidates to help them discern their gifts and their call. Also useful to sessions and presbytery committees. Written by the late Roy M. Fairchild. (Released May 2009)

http://www.pcusa.org/resource/discerning-your-call-and-your-gifts-ministry-word-/

EDUCATOR CERTIFICATION HANDBOOK

A resource that explains the process of certification, including requirements, along with a step-by-step explanation of how to proceed. (2017 edition)

http://www.pcusa.org/resource/educator-certification-handbook/

GIFTED BY THE FLAME

A brochure for individuals who are called to work within the professional church arena, but are not called to be ministers of the Word and Sacrament. Includes brief descriptions for church educator, work in national and international mission, and in governing bodies and other agencies. (PDS #72218-99-003; released 2003)

http://www.pcusa.org/resource/gifted-flame/

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A CENTER ACCREDITED BY THE MINISTRY DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

Commitments established by the Accreditation Committee of the Ministry Development Council for centers providing vocational assessment and psychological evaluations for persons considering calls to ministry or currently serving as ministers of the Word and Sacrament. (Released May 2008)

http://www.pcusa.org/resource/what-it-means-be-center-accredited-ministry-develo/

PRESBYTERIAN COUNCIL FOR CHAPLAINS AND MILITARY PERSONNEL

This website provides information or persons interested in military chaplaincy service regarding required qualifications and endorsement procedures.

http://pccmp.org/contemplating-ministry/

Forms for Use in the Preparation for Ministry Process

Maintaining documentation of a presbytery's work with each of its inquirers and candidates has become increasingly important over the years as the legal principles of "due diligence" and "negligent supervision" have developed in the courts. In brief, "due diligence" refers to whether or not a supervisory body fully complied with its policies and procedures as well as any widely accepted "best practices" within its field. "Negligent supervision" can be alleged anytime a problem arises with a person under supervision and it can be claimed that the problem would not have occurred had the standards of "due diligence" been met or had the supervisory body properly responded to information gained through the exercise of "due diligence." Should a presbytery ever need to defend against allegations of either failure to exercise "due diligence" or "negligent supervision" in its oversight of an inquirer or candidate (G-2.0605), simply saying it followed its procedures and responded appropriately will not be sufficient; it will need to provide contemporary documentation of those actions.

A set of forms developed by Mid Council Ministries of the Office of the General Assembly that may be used by presbyteries in documenting the standard preparation process is provided on the Preparation for Ministry website (http://oga.pcusa.org/section/mid-council-ministries/prep4min/forms-used-preparation-ministry-process/). Because these forms take advantage of some more advanced features in Adobe Acrobat, you must use a recent version of the Adobe Acrobat Reader (version 9 or later); other programs and applications for working with PDF files may not support these features and may strip them from the files. You can download the newest version of Adobe Acrobat Reader for your particular computer or device by visiting http://get.adobe.com/reader.

Most of these forms are primarily for use with the internal procedures of presbytery committees or commissions overseeing preparation for ministry, and so may be customized to meet the particular needs of individual presbyteries. Applicants, inquirers and candidates downloading forms from the website should confirm with their respective presbytery's committee whether they may use the PDF files posted there or will need to request customized versions from their particular presbytery.

Presbyteries who wish to use Word and Excel versions of the files as the basis for creating customized forms for their presbytery may access those files from the Sample Preparation for Ministry Forms page. Because Form 6 is used to attest to calling presbyteries that a candidate has been "certified ready for examination for ordination, pending a call," that form should not be modified.

All reporting to Mid Council Ministries of the Office of the General Assembly is now done online, and so none of these forms are to be sent to the OGA for processing either electronically or in hardcopy. Presbyteries needing assistance using the online preparation for ministry management site (http://p4m.pcusa.org) should see the resources available in "Reporting actions to others" on page 100.

You may access the forms from digital versions of this *Advisory Handbook* by clicking on their short designations (for example, Form 1A) in the descriptive the descriptive list that follows.

Initial application forms

There are four separate forms that make up the application for enrollment as an inquirer.

Form 1A **"Application to be enrolled by Presbytery as an Inquirer"**

To be completed initially by the applicant seeking to be enrolled. Both the committee/commission overseeing preparation for ministry and the presbytery's actions regarding the application are recorded on this form. It provides basic information regarding the applicant's background, identity, and interests. This form includes a list of personal references.

Form 1B **"Questions for Reflection"**

These questions are to be completed by the applicant as a basis for direct discussion first with the session of the applicant's home church and later with the presbytery's committee/commission overseeing preparation for ministry.

Form 1C **"Financial Planning for Theological Education"**

Using basic information provided by the applicant, this spreadsheet generates a projection of the applicant's financial resources and needs relative to the required seminary training.

Form 1D **"Session Evaluation and Recommendation"**

This form is completed by the applicant's session and forwarded along with the other application forms to the presbytery's committee/commission overseeing preparation for ministry. The form includes questions that may guide the session's discussion with the applicant and provide support for its recommendation to the committee/commission overseeing preparation for ministry.

Forms for enrolling an inquirer

These forms are used by applicants and their committee/commission overseeing preparation for ministry when a decision has been made to recommend the applicant be enrolled by the presbytery as an inquirer.

Form 2A **"Report of Consultation regarding application"**

In addition to formulating its recommendation to the presbytery to enroll the applicant as an inquirer, the committee/commission overseeing preparation for ministry should also establish goals for the first year the new inquirer will be under care. This form records the growth objectives agreed to by the new Inquirer and the committee/commission overseeing preparation for ministry. The completed report is sent to the enrollee, the theological institution, and the sponsoring session.

Form 2B **"Covenant Agreement and Inquirer Release"**

A signed acknowledgement of the new covenant relationship entered into by the inquirer, the session and the committee/commission overseeing preparation for ministry. The inquirer release sets in motion an understanding that permits the committee/commission overseeing preparation for ministry to secure information necessary to make responsible decisions and recommendations.

Forms for consultations

These forms are used to prepare for and report the outcomes of a consultation. The same forms are used in the inquiry and candidacy phases as well as for consultations once a candidate has been "certified to ready to be examined for ordination, pending a call."

Form 3 **"Pre-consultation report on development areas"**

This report, completed by the inquirer/candidate before each consultation, evaluates progress in accomplishing previously agreed-upon goals and objectives. The form requests a listing of completed courses, and includes specific questions to be addressed in each of the five growth areas.

Form 4 **"Report on Consultation"**

A summary report of the consultation, completed by the committee/commission overseeing preparation for ministry and the inquirer/candidate, that indicates developmental progress in the five key areas along with growth objectives agreed to for the next year. The completed report is sent to the inquirer/candidate, theological institution, and sponsoring session.

Forms for advancing to candidacy

Inquirers and their committee/commission overseeing preparation for ministry may use these forms when a decision has been made to recommend the presbytery advance an inquirer to candidate status.

Form 5A **"Application to be enrolled by Presbytery as a Candidate"**

To be completed initially by the inquirer seeking to be advanced to candidacy. The recommendations of the session and the committee/commission overseeing preparation for ministry along with the action taken by the presbytery are recorded on this form.

Form 5B **"Session evaluation and recommendation for Candidate"**

This form is completed by the inquirer's session and forwarded to the presbytery's committee/commission overseeing preparation for ministry. The form includes questions that may guide the session's discussion with the inquirer and provide support for its recommendation to the committee/commission overseeing preparation for ministry. Attach a letter explaining rationale for the session's action in light of inquirer's suitability for ordered ministry.

Form 5C **"Report of Consultation to become a Candidate"**

A signed acknowledgement of the new covenant relationship entered into by the candidate and the committee/commission overseeing preparation for ministry. This form also establishes growth areas for candidate. The completed report is sent to the inquirer/candidate, theological institution, and sponsoring session.

Form 5D **"Covenant Agreement and Candidate Release"**

A signed acknowledgement of the new covenant relationship entered into by the candidate, the session and the committee/commission overseeing preparation for ministry. The candidate release sets in motion an understanding that permits the committee/commission overseeing preparation for ministry to secure information necessary to make responsible decisions and recommendations.

Reporting actions to others

Presbyteries will need to report certain actions to others across the church. When a candidate who has been "certified ready for examination for ordination, pending a call," is being considered by any presbytery, the Form 6 along with its supporting documentation should be sent to that presbytery's committee or commission responsible for its minister members. General reporting about a person's status with their supervising committee/commission overseeing preparation for ministry, transfer of care to another presbytery, withdrawal/removal from the process, certification of readiness to receive a call, and ordination to the role of minister of the Word and Sacrament are reported to Mid Council Ministries of the Office of the General Assembly through the preparation for ministry management portal (http://p4m.pcusa.org).

Form 6 **"Summary Report of Final Assessment"**

This form, completed by the committee/commission overseeing preparation for ministry, acknowledges that the committee/commission overseeing preparation for ministry of the candidate's presbytery has conducted a final assessment of the candidate's preparation and readiness to begin ministry. It certifies that she/he has successfully completed all the requirements of the denomination and the committee/commission overseeing preparation for ministry and so is ready to be examined for ordination. It should be accompanied by supporting documentation that is identified on the form. (Since this report may need to be shared with another calling presbytery, all presbyteries should use this form as issued.)

Online Reporting to Mid Council Ministries of the Office of the General Assembly

Since January 2014 the Office of the General Assembly has exclusively used online management systems for presbyteries to report actions related to their inquirers and candidates. The system also provides direct access to senior ordination exams and their evaluations as well as Bible Content Exam results, and is to be used by presbyteries to report their ordination exam readers to the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates (PCC). Both a

"User's Guide" and a "Quick Reference Sheet" have been prepared to assist presbyteries in the use of the system.

Download the "User's Guide" (with screen shots and full descriptions)

Download the "Quick Reference Sheet" (two page summary of main operations for creating and managing inquirer and candidate profiles)

Accommodations and Alternatives to the Standard Examinations

Among the requirements to be "certified ready to be examined for ordination" as a minister of the Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is the presentation of examination materials and evaluations showing satisfactory completion of tests in the areas of Bible Content, Biblical Exegesis, Theological Competence, Church Polity, and Worship and Sacraments (G-2.0607d). The *Book of Order,* however, also recognizes that while competence in these areas is necessary for those who exercise the responsibility for fulfilling the functions of a minister of the Word and Sacrament, the standard written examinations may not be appropriate means for demonstrating every individual's competencies in these areas. It is important, then, for presbytery committees to be familiar with both the range of accommodations permitted by the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates (PCC) within the standard examination process and the possibilities and means for approving alternative means of demonstrating ministry competency available through *Book of Order* provisions (G-2.0610).

Foundational principles of the standard exams

It is helpful to begin by considering the role of the standard examinations in the overall process of preparation for ministry in the PC(USA). During the 1960s and 70s, concerns were raised across the church that some candidates for ministry were being assessed inequitably by differing presbyteries. Some candidates were perceived as receiving preferential treatment, whereas other perhaps less-known or less-connected candidates were held to much stricter standards. The exams were developed in part as "blind review" by members of other presbyteries as to the candidates' competency in the areas of examination. A second key feature of the ordination exams was that they were to serve a different purpose than examinations in seminary courses. Rather than following the model of comprehensive exams required in some degree programs that test mastery of academic disciplines, these exams were intended to assess a person's "readiness to begin ministry." They generally accomplish this by use of a "case study" approach requiring the demonstration of what one study of clergy education called "pastoral imagination." That is to say, they were to assess the ability to apply academic training to situations such as occur in congregational ministry.

It is important, then, that the exams are evaluated by future peers in ministry—both ruling elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament. Straightforward academic assessments in these areas

were available in the grades by professors recorded in seminary transcripts. The ordination examinations provide assessment by ministry practitioners of readiness to begin ministry. Any assessment of competency considered by a presbytery, then, needs to seek to maintain these essential features: a review of readiness to begin ministry by future colleagues in that ministry not previously engaged in the candidate's preparation.

Special accommodations to the exams

For pragmatic reasons related to the fact that the exams are given to literally hundreds of candidates each year, they have been designed as written examinations that can be evaluated by readers. Nevertheless, there are a variety of special accommodations that can be authorized within this standard examination process. For example, all the examinations are offered in English, Korean and Spanish, and evaluated by ruling elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament fluent in those languages. Additionally, it is possible for a presbytery to request that a candidate be granted permission to write responses to the questions in other languages. For the request to be approved, the language must represent a sufficiently large community that ruling elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament fluent in the language can be identified while preserving the principle of "blind review." Policies for the standard exams, however, do not permit the translation of the questions into any other languages, nor can a candidate's responses be translated from another language into English. These requirements are necessary to assure the consistency of the exams and that the evaluations are based solely upon the candidate's own work.

Other accommodations can be made within the standard exams to address issues related to physical disability or learning disorders, so long as they are possible within the structural constraints of the examination. What are those "structural constraints"? In most instances this requires that the exam must result in a written response to the questions that can be evaluated without further comment or clarification by the candidate. However, beginning in July 2015 the PCC is also providing a structure to integrate an oral component into the Exegesis, Polity, Theology, and Worship exams as a special accommodation. The presbytery's committee may authorize these accommodations based on their knowledge of the candidate and without a formal action by the presbytery itself.

Here are some examples of such special accommodations:

- Candidates with reading or language processing difficulties may be provided with extended time beyond the two hours allowed for the Bible Content Examination, limited to no more than one extra hour for a total of three hours to complete the test. Extensions beyond that tend to be counterproductive as they increase test taker fatigue. Please be aware, however, that PCC policies do not permit extensions of time for the nine-hour examinations in Polity, Theology, and Worship and Sacraments or the multi-day Exegesis exam. The time limits for the Polity, Theology, and Worship exams are designed to provide time for breaks, reflection, and proofreading of responses over roughly the span of a typical workday. The structure of the Exegesis exam includes the need to balance other responsibilities over the five-day

examination period just as one must manage time and competing responsibilities when preparing sermons and Bible studies in the context of parish ministry.

- Some candidates with attention-deficit disorders have received permission to take the Bible Content Examination in a "distraction-reduced" setting. Working with testing site proctors or a special proctor if necessary, the exam would be administered in the best possible setting with the fewest distractions. In making these arrangements, care must be maintained to preserve the elements of a proctored testing environment. Consequently, candidates may not request taking the exams in isolation. Since the exams in the areas of Exegesis, Polity, Theology, and Worship are not taken under a proctor's supervision, candidates are free to choose whatever setting they find most conducive to their work.
- Less common but still possible accommodations include having a proctor read the test questions aloud for candidates with either extreme forms of dyslexia or visual impairment. The person reading the test questions can repeat all or part of the questions as often as the candidate desires, but is not permitted to interpret or define any of the words in the questions or to provide any other assistance in either understanding what the question requires or crafting a response.
- Similarly since handwritten exams are no longer accepted, a candidate who has difficulty keyboarding responses may use speech recognition software to transcribe verbal responses into written form. Again, this accommodation does not include the translation from one language to another, nor does it permit any editorial assistance or review by a writing specialist. The final written response must be exclusively the candidate's work. Candidates who use speech recognition software should take care to preserve sufficient time to review the transcription for accuracy.

As previously mentioned, in response to a referral from the General Assembly the PCC now also provides a means whereby presbyteries may request a special accommodation to integrate an oral component as part of the exams in the areas of Exegesis, Polity, Theology, and Worship. Presbyteries may authorize this accommodation when there are circumstances known in advance that make it clear that the test taker may need to comment or elaborate upon written responses. Such circumstances could include written language processing issues such as dyslexia or dysgraphia, individuals whose primary language is not among those in which the exams are offered (English, Korean, or Spanish), etc. In order to protect the integrity of the assessment process, the PCC requires specific administration processes to assure that any oral examination phase does not permit the candidate to correct errors in initial responses by redirecting them in fundamentally different ways based on comments from either the readers who evaluate the online submission or the oral component examiners, or create an opportunity for the test taker to be coached to a stronger answer through leading questions from the examiners. By authorizing this special accommodation, both the candidate and the presbytery entity overseeing the preparation process (CPM) would be committing to the following:

1. The CPM appoints a panel of at least three oral examiners who are either ruling elders or ministers of the Word and Sacrament, preferably with experience as readers of the standard examinations.

2. The candidate takes the standard examination(s), with any other special accommodations approved by the CPM, and those exams then undergo the usual evaluation process.

3. On the morning the exam results are released, the oral examiners meet to review together both the candidate's responses and the readers' evaluations, and to formulate their own questions based upon both the responses and the evaluations.

4. Following their review, the oral examiners meet with the candidate for the oral review phase (either the same morning or during the afternoon of the day the results are released, depending upon the number of exam areas for which the special accommodation was granted). This oral examination phase must be conducted regardless of whether the readers had found the exam "Satisfactory" or "Unsatisfactory."

5. Up to one (1) hour is permitted for oral review of each exam. Either responding directly to the readers' comments or to questions from the oral examiners, the candidate elaborates or comments on the responses provided. During this oral phase, a candidate is permitted to explain the reasons for particular citations from the *Book of Order, The Book of Confessions,* or other resources provided as part of required responses, but the test taker is not permitted to substitute alternative citations for them. A candidate may, however, suggest further citations that would serve to clarify or support lines of argument already provided in the written responses. A candidate may also elaborate on points in the written response that he or she believes were either overlooked or misunderstood by the reader(s). The candidate will also be required to respond to any questions from the oral examiners even if those questions are unrelated to issues or concerns raised in the reader evaluations.

6. At the conclusion of the hour, the oral examiners meet separately from the candidate to deliberate and then vote on whether to "sustain" the readers' evaluation. This action is, again, required regardless of whether the readers had found the exam "Satisfactory" or "Unsatisfactory." Thus, it would be within the oral examiners prerogative to recommend that an "Unsatisfactory" evaluation be set aside in favor of a "Satisfactory" one, or that a "Satisfactory" evaluation be set aside in favor of an "Unsatisfactory" one. A majority vote of the three oral examiners determines their recommendation.

7. The oral examiners will then notify the candidate, the CPM, and the PCC (through the Manager for Preparation for Ministry in the Office of the General Assembly) of their recommendation.

    a. If they sustain the readers' initial evaluation, then that result is finalized.

    b. If their recommendation is that the readers' evaluation should *not* be sustained, they must file with the PCC a written explanation of their rationale providing specific references to either the candidate's written or oral responses in support of their recommendation. This report must be filed within 48 hours of the close of the oral examination phase or phases (if there is more than one examination area).

The chair of the PCC task group for the examination area (or the chair's designated task group member) will review the candidate's written responses, the readers' evaluations, and the report from the oral examiners. The PCC member reviewing all these materials will determine whether or not to concur in the oral examiners' recommendation or to sustain the original evaluation of the readers. The decision by the PCC task group chair or designated member will determine the final result of each examination.

8. A task group chair's decision (or that of the task group member designated to review the materials) is subject to appeal only to the PCC Executive Committee, and must otherwise comply with all other requirements for the appeal of examination results.

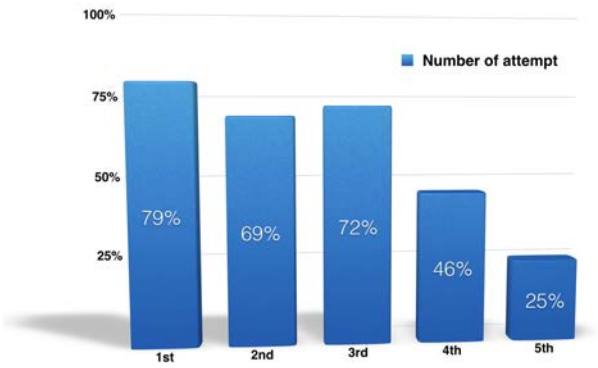
Because of the nature of the questions on the Bible Content Examination, a special accommodation for inclusion of an oral component to that test is not available.

Alternative means of assessing competencies

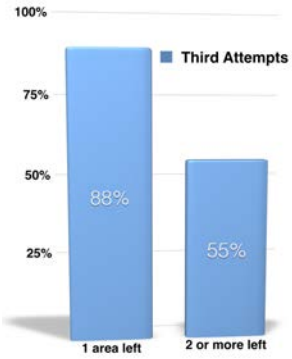
Even with these types of special accommodations, there will be some candidates for whom the standard examinations will not provide an appropriate opportunity to demonstrate their ministry competence and readiness. The *Book of Order* is clear that the examinations may not be waived (G-2.0610). They assess core competencies that we believe are essential to properly fulfill the responsibilities of a minister of the Word and Sacrament. But a presbytery may approve alternative means of demonstrating these competencies when they believe there are "good and sufficient reasons" for doing so. Such alternative means are best considered only once the candidate has fulfilled all other requirements to be certified ready for examination for ordination, pending a call, and the presbytery's committee believes the candidate would pass final assessment were it not for the standard exam requirements.

So when should a presbytery explore alternative means of assessment? As a general rule, presbyteries may want to investigate this possibility when an otherwise qualified candidate has failed to satisfactorily complete an examination area after two attempts.

But what is so special about "two attempts"? Well, for many years there has been a consistent pattern in the exam results. The percentage of candidates who satisfy an exam area steadily declines with each subsequent attempt. These statistics from a recent round of exams are fairly typical. As a whole, almost 80% of candidates writing an exam for the first time satisfied the requirement in that area. For those retaking an exam, the satisfactory rate dropped about 10%. While the rate increased slightly for those taking an exam a third time, we will want to look at that number a bit more closely. By the time one reaches the fourth attempt fewer than half of candidates satisfy the



requirement, and for fifth attempts and higher only a quarter of candidates satisfy the requirement.



Looking more closely at those third attempts, for candidates repeating one area a third time but having already satisfied the other three exam areas, their satisfactory rate was just below 90%. If they had satisfied no more than two other areas, their satisfactory rate was just over half. These statistics show that for properly prepared candidates who have not satisfied at least three exam areas after two attempts, the problem may reside in the standard examination process itself.

Yet for some candidates it will be clear even before the first exam is taken that a timed, essay examination will not provide them an appropriate means for demonstrating their ministry competencies to others, even if provided with the opportunity to expand upon their responses through a structured oral examination component. For that reason the *Book of Order* also permits consideration of "alternate means" when there is evidence that it is the examination structures themselves that are preventing the demonstration of the required competencies. How might a presbytery's committee make such a determination? Working with groups within the church who advocate for disability concerns, the following guidelines have been developed to help make such a determination.

- The candidate should submit documentation from a licensed professional who is qualified to make such assessments.
- The documentation should present a diagnosis that pertains directly to test-taking ability that is clear and specific about both the causes of the difficulty and what steps can be taken that would permit the candidate to demonstrate competency in the areas covered by the examinations.
- This assessment should have been recently completed so that it relates to the candidate's current status, and thus no more than five years old.
- The accommodations required for the examination must be reasonable within a ministry context; that is, the candidate would be able to follow the same practice in their ministry without diminishing its effectiveness.

The final decision regarding the appropriateness of such accommodations resides with the presbytery itself and not with the committee overseeing preparation of its candidates. Any alternative assessment to the standard examination process requires a three-fourths vote of the presbytery. In approving the exception, the presbytery must also approve the "alternate means" that will be used to demonstrate competence in the affected examination areas. Both the reasons for and the alternate means themselves must be recorded in the presbytery's minutes and communicated to any other presbytery considering either assuming the candidate's care or proceeding to examine the candidate for ordination once a call is pending (G-2.0610).

Some care must be exercised, then, in crafting the motion to be considered by the presbytery. It should clearly include each of the following points:

- The specific reason for requesting an alternate means of assessment.
- The proposed process for assessing the candidate's competency in the required areas.
- The source of any materials such as questions, case studies, etc., to be used in the assessment.
- An indication of who will administer and evaluate the results of the alternate means assessment.

When considering possible alternate means of assessment, the presbytery's committee will want to maintain integrity with the standard examinations. The point is to provide an opportunity to demonstrate the required competencies for ministry, not alternative competencies. The alternate means, then, should have the same purpose as the standard exams and have the same level of difficulty relative to the ministry competencies required of those beginning ministry.

In short, alternate means recommendations are about changing the method of assessment not the competencies being assessed. The presbytery's committee needs to be sure that the candidate is clear about what the alternative process will involve and what accommodations are—and are not—being provided. Any approved method of assessment must assure all work being evaluated is the candidate's own. Working with the candidate, the committee should assure the availability of any necessary equipment or setting required by the alternate means.

In keeping with the principle of "blind review," the nature of any disability should not be disclosed to those charged with evaluating the alternate means to the degree possible. Their evaluations need to be made in a context that simulates the conditions of ministry with those who will be unaware of such conditions when they first encounter the person in a ministry context. Remember: the purpose of alternate means of assessment is to make accommodations to provide for the demonstration of the candidate's level of competency, not to assure a satisfactory evaluation. Presbyteries are not to waive any requirements or lower any standards of competency required by the *Book of Order*.

Keeping these principles in mind, committees are encouraged to be as creative as required in designing alternative means. Once the decision is made that an alternative is necessary, don't just substitute an oral response to standard questions rather than written responses if something more is required. Here are some possible models for alternate means assessment to consider.

For the exegesis exam, prescribe a Bible study setting requiring treatment of a specific text. Give that information to both the candidate and the evaluators four to five days before the assessment. At the appointed time, have the candidate present the Bible study to the evaluators (playing the part of those who would hear the lesson in the prescribed setting), allowing them to raise questions both in response to what is in the lesson plan and based on their own preparatory study. That is, after all, what leading real Bible studies in a ministry context is like.

For the Polity exam, try a "mock session meeting." One of the evaluators is designated the "clerk of session" for the assessment. The candidate, who in the scenario is a pastor recently returned from study leave, is to meet with the clerk about 30 minutes before the session meeting. At that time the clerk presents two or three issues that have arisen while the "pastor" was away. The

candidate then uses that half hour to consult the *Book of Order* to prepare for these late additions to the agenda. Then have the candidate moderate the "session meeting" of evaluators as they deal with these issues. You might also require that the candidate open the meeting with a brief training for the evaluator "ruling elders" on the application of a principle of Presbyterian polity like those covered in the first question of the standard exam.

Role-playing assessments may also be used in alternate assessments in the areas of Theology and Worship as well. Begin with a "case study" that will also provide about 15 minutes for review of the Confessions before the candidate must respond—maybe a request from a worship committee for guidance on why a particular change in the service would be appropriate or not. Follow that "case study" with a couple more "role play" scenarios like those in the standard exams.

While the format of the standard ordination examinations may not be appropriate to everyone, they serve an important role within the overall preparation for ministry process. With careful work and cooperation between the presbytery's committee and the candidate, it is possible to fulfill that purpose through special arrangements in the administration of the standard exams or through alternate means of assessment.

Keep in mind the following key points.

- The goal is to permit candidates to demonstrate their level of readiness to begin the ministry of Word and Sacrament to potential future peers in that ministry who have not previously been involved in their preparation.
- Every candidate, regardless of personal circumstances, is expected to have core competencies in the areas of Biblical Exegesis, Theology, Polity, and Worship and Sacraments.
- Any accommodations are not about lowering standards, but rather changing the means of assessment so candidates may adequately demonstrate their competencies for ministry.