

COVENANTING WITH INQUIRERS AND CANDIDATES

A Background Paper

Establishing and maintaining a relationship between an inquirer/candidate and a Committee on Preparation for Ministry through the use of covenants depends on two basic assumptions about the preparation for ministry process. The first is that inquirer/candidates grow and develop as persons with skills for ministry during the period of inquiry/candidacy. The second is that it is the business of the Committee on Preparation for Ministry to be deliberately and creatively involved in fostering that growth. Several questions arise from these assumptions:

- 1) What kinds of growth occur during inquiry/candidacy and how can the committee foster it?
- 2) What is meant by the term covenant as applied to the inquirer/candidate and committee relationship?
- 3) How do inquirers/candidates and committees go about covenanting as part of fostering growth and development of competence for ministry?

This paper will address each of these questions in turn, not with the intent of being definitive but with the hope of pointing to a direction and raising some question for each committee's consideration.

I. WHAT KINDS OF GROWTH OCCUR DURING INQUIRY I CANDIDACY AND HOW CAN THE COMMITTEE FOSTER IT?

Preparation for ministry is more than learning academic materials. It is the integration of information and skills gained in the course of academic and field work into the personality of the individual. It involves growth of the whole person. It expands the inquirer/candidate's visions of self, others, . and of life; tests values, commitment, and faith; develops intellectual and personal competence in skills necessary for ministry; and provides opportunities for the person to reflect upon and claim his or her own emerging pastoral identity.

People come to inquiry/candidacy from diverse backgrounds. They differ in sex, age, racial and ethnic background and other factors. Their growth occurs at individual rates and in different ways. This diversity enriches the church's understanding of ministry and makes possible a more effective spreading of the Gospel in all the world. Because of the diversity of inquirers/candidates and of their individual rates and ways of growth, the planning and monitoring of each inquirer/candidate's development is crucial. Growth is not automatic in any dimension of human life. It does not happen at a steady rate in a straight line, but in cycles of growth spurts. It cannot be forced but can be fostered by modifying the environment or applying other , controls. The outcome of growth cannot be predicted with certainty. but it can be monitored. The growth which occurs during inquiry/candidacy and the skills which are developed, form the basis for continued growth and development throughout the inquirer/candidate's future ministry. whatever form that ministry takes.

The Committee on Preparation for Ministry has the opportunity to create an environment which fosters growth and encourages the inquirer/candidate increasingly to take responsibility for his or her own learning and development. Such an environment includes a sense of each inquirer/candidate's uniqueness as a person, an ongoing concern for each inquirer/candidate. and expectation that the preparation for ministry process is a partnership between inquirer/candidate's growth toward readiness for ministry.

While the process involves mutuality and partnership, the committee needs to bear in mind its responsibility to make decisions about whether it can validate the inner call of each inquirer to candidacy using the outcomes for inquiry as a guide (G-14.0303g.) and likewise whether it can validate the inner call of each candidate to ordination. Once the decisions are made, the committee must determine how it can be of help and support both to those whom it can and to those for whom it cannot validate that call. The committee is charged to assist its presbytery in providing the church with the most able and effective leaders possible. In each case, the committee must determine whether it can recommend an inquirer for candidacy and a candidate as ready for a particular ministry. To make that determination in ways affirmative of the gifts and growth of the person, wherever those gifts may lead, is a vital part of the responsibility and ministry of the Committee on Preparation for Ministry.

II. WHAT IS MEANT BY THE TERM COVENANT AS APPLIED TO THE INQUIRER/CANDIDATE AND COMMITTEE RELATIONSHIP

A covenant is a solemn promise usually made binding by an oath or a written contract. One way of understanding our heritage as Christians is to look at the history of God's covenant relationship with people as recorded in Scripture. The ministry of the church - including that of Committees on Preparation for Ministry, is based on the Gospel itself. The model for that ministry is the ministry of Jesus. Through his redemptive relationships with people in the context of community, he helped them to grow to their full potential of personhood and to discover and develop their gifts for ministry. Inquirers/candidates and committees do well to follow this model in carrying out their responsibilities to each other, to the church, and to God.

The concept of covenant affirms that the church's life in all its aspects is based on the gracious promise that God offers and keeps. Applying the term to the relationship between inquirers/candidates and committees implies that

their way of being with each other is rooted in and based on the relationship of God and the church. As God assures us of presence in all circumstances, so responsible participants in the preparation for ministry process are called upon to be faithful to their task in all situations. As God is initiator and promiser, so each person in the ministry process makes beginnings and pledges to carry them through.

Inquirers, candidates and committees need to be open to the grace of God in their relationships. Care needs to be taken to establish relationships of mutual trust and respect based on the assurance that each has been given gifts by God for use in some way in the church's ministry. Through establishing covenants the committee can offer to each inquirer or candidate opportunity to grow and develop based on that individual's recognized strengths and needs.

III. HOW DO INQUIRERS, CANDIDATES AND COMMITTEES COVENANT?

One way of expressing the mutuality in the covenant relationship is to provide structure and purpose to the annual consultations required in G-14.0309 through establishing growth goals. At each consultation the inquirer's or candidate's progress toward competence for ministry is reviewed, and new learning goals are established for each area of competence (education for ministry, spiritual development, interpersonal relations, personal growth, professional development) as specified in Form 6. The new goals reflect the inquirer's or candidate's progress and offer a challenge for the next step in developing competence. The process consists of the five steps outlined below:

A. Establishing and maintaining a relationship of trust and mutuality.

The relationship between inquirer and committee begins with the first contact. Often the per-

son is referred to the committee by a pastor or seminary staff member. Pastors and seminary folk can be of great help to the committee in establishing initial positive regard for the Preparation for Ministry Process. To this end, they need to know how the committee envisions the process and how they are invited to participate. Clear communication in advance is key here.

The inquirer relationship is one of mutual exploration. Both the inquirer and the committee are seeking to discern the appropriateness of ministry of the Word as a vocational choice for this individual.. Further, they are trying to discover the particular gifts and talents the individual brings to be developed for ministry. whatever form that ministry may take. The committee has the responsibility to help each inquirer grow toward more responsible participation in the church's ministry. As the inquirer is assisted in identifying talents and skills and in examining how these talents and skills might best be put to use for the church's ministry. the ground work is being laid for establishing a relationship of trust. In the context of that relationship, the inquirer and the committee can in the future negotiate openly with mutual respect concerning the inquirer's readiness to move to candidacy or to seek. their Christian vocation in another field. This relationship of mutual respect also facilitates openness in negotiating the specific learning goals and tasks intended to facilitate the inquirer's development.

B. Gathering the information necessary for a covenant relationship

The Form of Government (G-14.0303g.) identifies areas of concern to be reviewed prior to recommending candidacy and in annual consultations during seminary. The committee will decide what information it needs from whom so that it can exercise responsible judgment and oversight. There will be standard information which the committee will want all inquirers to provide. As the relationship develops, the committee will identify particular kinds of objective data it wants about each inquirer individually. In every instance, the data wanted, together with the reasons it is wanted, needs to be clearly identified and interpreted to the inquirer.

The committee may want a broad base of information from several sources. The ways of surfacing information can include requests for the completion of application and consultation forms, interviews with the inquirer. talks with the inquirer's session and others who know him or her well. or written references from these individual's. vocational counseling assessments. psychological assessments, conversations with faculty advisors, and copies of reports of field education supervisors. and others involved in the inquirers academic preparation. The number style and content of reports received will: depend on the identified needs of the committee for information and on the abilities to respond to those from whom information is requested. Again clarity and specificity in requesting information is vitally important..

C. Assessing the information through dialogue between the inquirer/candidate and the committee

Dialogue is at the heart of the relationship between inquirer/candidate and committee. The committee will have reviewed the data received before meeting with an inquirer/candidate. The focus of each review will be identifying the issues that need to be discussed in order to determine next steps in the process. In its review. the committee would be premature in making decisions regarding these next steps.

In the interview. the committee will elicit further information from the' inquirer/candidate including the inquirer/candidate's perspective on the data. The inquirer/candidate is an active

partner in the assessment process. The goal here is to enable inquirer/candidates to learn to assess themselves realistically as they prepare for ministry. It assumes that shared evaluation is more helpful than one party evaluation and encourages the inquirer/candidate to participate in that experience. This style can become a part of the future professional life of the inquirer/candidate enabling him or her to use self assessment as the basis for continue growth and development throughout life. The ability to use positive and negative evaluative information creatively will be an asset. It is on the basis of this dialogue and information gathered at annual consultation rather than rules. that a committee makes its decision about when an inquirer is ready to move from inquiry to candidacy. and candidacy to ordination.

D. Negotiating appropriate written goals with the inquirer/candidate

This step is necessary to provide a permanent record of the specific steps agreed upon as the mutual expectations of inquirer/candidate and committee for the inquirer/candidate's development. This step is itself a learning experience as the inquirer/candidate makes use of accurately perceived information for future action and negotiates with others whose expectations may be different from his or her own. The committee's ability to respect the inquirer/candidate's integrity and autonomy in the negotiating process will facilitate this growth. The committee's challenge here will be to be aware of both the inquirer/candidate's need increasingly to take charge of his or her own learning and the church's need for the best equipped ministry possible. The learning contracts which form the skeletal structure of the covenanting relationship need to be specific and verifiable. The contracts in each area need to spell out through learning objectives what will be done. and when and how it will be evaluated. They should clearly specify activities .to be done, evidence of the conclusion of those activities. and when the evidence is due and to whom. The inquirer/candidate and the committee will want to negotiate activities which both agree will contribute meaningfully to the preparation of that individual for ministry. Demonstrating the completion of activities can be an opportunity for creative learning experiences as well. Written and spoken communication are and will continue to be important in the practice of ministry. Encouraging the inquirer/candidate to expand communication skills . by suggesting reports using media such as videotape. film. plastic arts or . others which the inquirer/candidate may develop provides an additional way in which the inquirer/candidate is challenged to grow and develop individual gifts and talents.

Negotiating encourages responsibility in inquirers/candidates. Failure to get material to the committee on time would itself become an area for assessment and negotiation. The committee will want to decide its policy with regard to the consequences of failing to submit materials or failing to notify the committee in advance with reasons for late submission should such occur. In this area the committee can be of help to the inquirer/candidate in learning planning skills and in negotiating alternatives when it becomes obvious that plans cannot be fulfilled.

E. Evaluating growth and continuing the cycle

Inquiry and candidacy are a process. It can contribute to the inquirer's/candidate's developing a sense of how one's past informs planning for the future. The files of reports and agreements between inquirer/candidate and committee will be valuable to the candidate in" developing this awareness. As the committee and inquirer/candidate negotiate and plan together, the inquirer/candidate can develop insight and begin to integrate skills into a sense of personal pastoral identity.

As the cycle is repeated with each consultation, a sense of progress should be evident. With this sense of progress or lack of it comes the clarity to help a committee decide whether an inquirer is ready to move to candidacy, or a candidate is ready to move to ordination. The inquirer/candidate will not be asked simply to repeat tasks for the sake of having something to report, but will be involved with the committee in discovering where and to what extent growth has occurred and how best to further that growth. One resource for evaluating where the inquirer/candidate is with regard to the church's expectations is G-14.0310. Another resource is the competency criteria which the committee will establish (see resource "Developing Competency Criteria: A Design for Committees on Preparation for Ministry"). In every case the decisions about whether to continue inquiry or candidacy and about the specific learning tasks to be performed in the next cycle will be informed by the Constitutional requirements and the committee's competency criteria. In the final analysis, however, these decisions will be based on the committee's sense of what is best for this inquirer or candidate and the church.

Prepared by the Task Force for Joint Candidacy Process Presbyterian Church (USA)
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SOME SUGGESTED COVENANTS AND GROWTH CRITERIA

(Numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 indicate criteria for one pre-care and three additional successive consultations. The final consultation might well be the Final Assessment interview.) .

Following are illustrations of some covenants and growth criteria which might be used in monitoring the growth of inquirers/candidates towards competence in ministry. They illustrate some of the characteristics which may give evidence of the candidates continuing growth in the five areas indicated. They are offered as models to be utilized creatively by each committee as it develops covenants and growth criteria in sensitive relationship with each inquirer/candidate.

The primary issue is not, "How does the inquirer/candidate measure up in", check-list fashion to a series of absolute criteria?" but rather, "Is growth taking place and who is the emerging person seen as a whole" Thus evaluation of potential for and evidence of growth is a central factor at each stage in the covenanting process. It is the committee's responsibility initially to decide whether to receive an applicant as an inquirer, then in consultation with the inquirer to decide whether to recommend that the inquirer be received or not received as a candidate, and subsequently that the candidate be continued or not continued as a candidate. The essential concern is the blend of faith, commitments, temperament, abilities, interests, personality attributes, coping styles, values, motivation and capacity for continuing growth which suggest suitability to begin the ministry of the Lord.

In using these criteria it is imperative that committees bear in mind the uniqueness of each inquirer/candidate. Each has different characteristics, interests, and capabilities; different experiences and background; a different combination of strengths and weaknesses. As indicated in The Report of the Joint Task Force on Candidacy, candidates of different sexes, racial or ethnic groups, ages, or human groupings will likely grow at highly individualized rates and in divergent personal ways." So also, no one absolute image of the ministry is possible.

REVIEW OF THE COVENANT

between

_____ and _____

(Inquirer/Candidate)

(Presbytery)

In the space below record the results of the Covenant Review. Describe the progress made on the specific goals established in the most recent covenant with this candidate. Indicate how the candidate has grown in each of the following areas:

EDUCATION FOR MINISTRY through the seminary experience;
SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT and the personal faith journey;
INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS, including group process skills and conflict management;
PERSONAL GROWTH including self-identity and one's sense of call;
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, including skills for ministry and being a presbyter.

Inquirer/Candidate

Committee Representative

Date

This report must be signed by both parties

488L 0987

A COVENANT

between

_____ and _____

(Inquirer/Candidate)

(Presbytery)

In the space below record the results of the Covenant Review. Describe the progress made on the specific goals established in the most recent covenant with this candidate. Indicate how the candidate has grown in each of the following areas:

EDUCATION FOR MINISTRY through the seminary experience;
SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT and the personal faith journey;
INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS, including group process skills and conflict management;
PERSONAL GROWTH including self-identity and one's sense of call;
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, including skills for ministry and being a presbyter.

Be sure to state the growth objectives for each area and the specific plans to achieve them. Be as concrete as possible, setting dates where appropriate.

Inquirer/Candidate

Committee Representative

Date

This report must be signed by both parties

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