

FINAL REPORT OF THE WORK GROUP ON THE ENTRANCE INTO PASTORAL MINISTRY

1. Collaborative Guidance

In its mandate, the work group was asked to consider the following: “How seminaries and presbytery committees might work together more effectively so that those whose promise for ministry is clear are more effectively supported and those who have serious limitations are challenged to consider other vocational paths.” In response the work group makes the following recommendations:

22.118

a. The General Assembly Council upon recommendation of the National Ministry Division recommends that Churchwide Personnel Services (CPS), in consultation with the Committee on Theological Education (COTE), convene a major consultation to include representatives from presbytery Committees on Ministries (COMs), Committees on Preparation for Ministry (CPMs), and related staff; seminary presidents and/or deans; supervised practice of ministry faculty; other appropriate seminary staff; current candidates; appropriate staff from the offices of CPS, COTE, Higher Education; General Assembly Council (GAC) members and appropriate local congregation representation. The purpose of this consultation is to address critical issues in the recruitment, nurture and support of those preparing for ordained ministry. These issues include

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(1) recruitment of those who show high promise for ministry

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(2) criteria for admission that can help discern suitability for ministry

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(3) annual consultations that support vocational discernment

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(4) increased communication between seminaries and presbytery CPMs

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(5) clarification of roles and interrelationships among seminaries, presbyteries, and inquirers/candidates

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(6) development of strategies for recruitment, support, and retention of racial/ethnic candidates

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(7) the nature of ordination exams, their effectiveness and appropriateness

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(8) development of strategies of engaging congregations in the recruitment and support of candidates with high promise for ministry

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The results of this consultation should include training modules to

help theological institutions and CPMs understand the preparation for ministry process and their roles in it.

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b. The General Assembly Council upon recommendation of the National Ministry Division recommends that CPS and COTE be encouraged to gather and share models of healthy and effective relationships among candidates, sessions, seminaries, and presbytery CPMs.

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c. The General Assembly Council upon recommendation of the National Ministry Division recommends that CPS and COTE make seed grants available to encourage development of partnerships between seminaries related to COTE and presbyteries to provide for ongoing regional consultation and development of partnership programs.

2. First Call Support

In its mandate, the work group was asked to consider: “How better educational resources for the first years in ministry might be provided.” In response the work group makes the following recommendations:

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a. The General Assembly Council upon recommendation of the National Ministry Division recommends that each seminary related to COTE review its M.Div. program in relationship to student readiness for ministry with specific attention to the following “first-call issues”:

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(1) self-understanding in relation to the role of pastor;

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(2) ability to understand and associate themselves with a congregation’s history, ethos, programs, status in the community, and relation to the denomination;

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(3) understanding the dynamics of pastoral leadership in a particular congregation;

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(4) capacity for managing conflicts within the congregation.

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b. The General Assembly Council upon recommendation of the National Ministry Division that CPS encourage presbyteries singularly or in clusters to make available to all ministers in their first call a program which includes the following:

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(1) self-understanding related to their role as pastor;

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(2) help for understanding the congregation served in terms of history, ethos, programs, status in the community, and the relation to the denomination;

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(3) assistance in establishing an appropriate pastoral relationship style for their situation;

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(4) support in dealing with conflicts that may emerge in the congregation.

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c. The General Assembly Council upon recommendation of the National Ministry Division recommends that CPS develop resources to assist COMs, sessions, and congregations in the entry of pastors into their first call with particular attention to first call issues.

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d. The General Assembly Council upon recommendation of the National Ministry Division recommends that CPS, in consultation with COTE seek funding from foundations and other partners, to finance a coordinated effort to assist synods and presbyteries in planning and administering programs designed to help newly ordained ministers become effective leaders of the congregations to which they have been called.

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e. The General Assembly Council upon recommendation of the National Ministry Division recommends that CPS urge CPMs to incorporate into their counsel of candidates first-call issues and that concerns about first-call issues be included in the final assessment of candidates.

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f. The General Assembly Council upon recommendation of the National Ministry Division recommends that CPS urge of the calling presbyteries to request the final assessment from the presbytery of care of the newly ordained ministers in order to help their COMs address particular concerns during the first call.

3. *Licensure*

In its mandate, the work group was asked to consider: “The advisability of revisiting earlier proposals for a period of licensure after seminary graduation and before ordination (a period in which ministry might be intensively supervised);” In response the work group makes the following recommendations:

22.144

a. The General Assembly Council upon recommendation of the National Ministry Division recommends that the current *Book of Order* requirements be continued and that a period of licensure prior to ordination not be inserted, primarily because CPMs already have adequate means to determine readiness for ministry.

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b. The General Assembly Council upon recommendation of the National Ministry Division recommends that the General Assembly reaffirm and CPS encourage) CPMs in their essential role in the support,

nurture, and oversight of persons preparing for ministry so that CPMs devote attention to discernment of call and formation for pastoral ministry, as well as opportunities for practical training, as early as possible in the process.

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c. The General Assembly Council upon recommendation of the National Ministry Division recommends that CPS encourage CPMs to assist local congregations in their responsibility to support and nurture their members throughout the inquiry/ candidacy process.

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d. The General Assembly Council upon recommendation of the National Ministry Division recommends that sessions work with CPMs in the initial vocational discernment of potential inquirers and that session liaisons participate actively in the continuing support and oversight of persons under care.

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e. The General Assembly Council upon recommendation of the National Ministry Division recommends that CPS encourage CPMs in their responsibility and existing authority in guiding candidates' practical training and field education and urge their use of the existing provisions for adequate experiences of supervised practice of ministry (e.g., full-time, full-year internship during seminary, full-time externship following completion of Master of Divinity degree studies, or other additional experiences).

4. Ordination Examinations

In its mandate, the work group was asked to consider: "The timing and nature of the ordination exams;" In response the work group makes the following recommendations:

22.149

a. The General Assembly Council upon recommendation of the National Ministry Division recommends that ordination examinations continue to be taken ordinarily while completing the Master of Divinity program.

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b. The General Assembly Council upon recommendation of the National Ministry Division recommends that GAC, through CPS, communicate to Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates (PCC) the need to prepare and distribute as broadly as possible two interpretive resources:

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(1) A brief educational piece summarizing the role and significance of ordination examinations in our denomination.

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(2) A bulletin insert with similar content to that described in statement a) for use in worship services related to ordination and installation.

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c. The General Assembly Council upon recommendation of the National Ministry Division recommends that CPS encourage presbyteries of care and local congregations to offer nurture and support of those taking ordination examinations.

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d. The General Assembly Council upon recommendation of the National Ministry Division recommends that the GAC through CPS request PCC to provide guidance to proctors and seminaries so that they make available to Presbyterian seminarians appropriate worship opportunities around the writing of ordination examinations and the posting of results.

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e. The General Assembly Council upon recommendation of the National Ministry Division recommends that That PCCEC, in consultation with CPS and COTE and the seminaries it represents, work to make ordination exams more effective tools for evaluating readiness for ministry.

RATIONALE

At its meeting September 23-26, 1998, the General Assembly Council (GAC) approved the formation of the Work Group on the Entrance into Pastoral Ministry, on the recommendation of the Congregational Ministries and National Ministries Divisions. This action was the result of a proposal approved by the Committee on Theological Education (COTE) at its February, 1998, meeting.

The proposal asked the work group to address four specific issues:

- “How seminaries and presbytery committees might work together more effectively so that those whose promise for ministry is clear are more effectively supported and those who have serious limitations are challenged to consider other vocational paths;”
- “How better educational resources for the first years in ministry might be provided;”
- “The advisability of revisiting earlier proposals for a period of licensure after seminary graduation and before ordination (a period in which ministry might be intensively supervised);”
- “The timing and nature of the ordination exams;

The proposal from COTE also indicated a configuration for the twelve-person group. Institutions of theological education would provide a seminary president, a dean, a faculty member, and a person engaged in research in theological education. Others to be appointed by the two GAC divisions would be two pastors, one candidate/seminary student, one executive presbyter, one other middle governing body staff person, one member of the GAC, and two others selected from the church-at-large to provide particular expertise and/or perspectives related to issues to be addressed.

The following persons were appointed to the work group: Jeffrey Bullock, President of Dubuque Seminary, who was unable to serve and was subsequently replaced by Cynthia Campbell, president of McCormick Seminary; Phil Gehman, dean of students at Columbia

Seminary, who served as Chair; Virstan Choy, director of field education and integrated studies at San Francisco Seminary; Barbara Wheeler, president of Auburn Seminary and a researcher in the field; C. Ellis Nelson, Austin Theological Seminary research professor; candidate/seminarian Julia Carlson; pastors Fred Beck and Cindy Cushman; Barbara Campbell-Davis, executive presbyter of New Hope Presbytery; Gary Torrens, executive of East Iowa Presbytery (until he was called to a GAC-GA position relating to governing body relationships); Cynthia Diaz de Leon, at-large; and GAC member William E. Chapman; Dottie Hedgepeth, Associate Director for Theological Education; Robert Johnson, Associate for Theology; H. William Peterson, Associate Director for Churchwide Personnel Services (Sept. 98 – April 00); Marcia C. Myers, Associate Director for Churchwide Personnel Services (April 00 – present); and Dosie Powell, Administrative Assistant for Churchwide Personnel Services.

The work group met five times: January 15-16, 1999; April 17-19, 1999; November 1999, March 17-19, 2000, and October 5-7, 2000.

During the work group's study of the issues, we became aware that governing bodies feel the pressure of vacant pulpits, lengthy searches, overload in Committee on Preparation for Ministry (CPM) responsibilities and processes, and pastoral leadership problems. Seminaries also experience tensions in the following areas:

- between academic responsibilities and denominational expectations
- between obligations to students vs. obligations to the denomination
- overload in fulfilling denominational expectations of M.Div. curriculum

In addition, students preparing for ministry feel more alienation than affirmation in the "care and oversight" process, first experience PCUSA governance as more regulatory than resourcing, and experience a disconnect between polity they read about and polity they experience.

It is thus our hope that this report and our recommendations will encourage and enable 1) common direction and creative flexibility in preparing for and sustaining ministry; 2) the ability to live with tensions and develop cooperative relationships and processes within those tensions; and 3) continuing denomination-wide attentiveness to resourcing as well as to regulatory roles and responsibilities.

The work group was brought together in response to the concerns of many across the church—seminaries, governing bodies, congregations, candidates, and pastors. We explored our Presbyterian history, traditions, and constitution around the assigned issues. In-depth papers were prepared and studied. We interviewed representatives from effective programs in process. During our life together, the work group consulted with and listened attentively to many knowledgeable persons, including authorities from the PCUSA, leaders from other denominations, and focus groups of Executive Presbyters, COM and CPM members, seminary personnel, and seminary students.

Given the concerns about pastoral leadership in our times and in our church, it is clear that there are many issues to tackle and there is much to be done. We affirm the efforts of all those who see the challenge and are working to meet it. We encourage future opportunities for concerned partners to come to a common table where such vital issues can be discussed and further action planned. We have attempted to respond to the four issues presented to us in our mandate, understanding from the outset that our work is only one part of a much greater endeavor.

A. Collaborative Guidance

The issue of relationship between seminaries and presbytery Committees on Preparation for Ministry (CPMs) has been under discussion for a number of years. Concern about this issue has persisted because there is no common understanding of the reciprocal and complementary responsibilities that CPMs and seminaries have in providing support to those with promise for ministry and in seeking worthy and realistic alternatives for those without it. Until there is such a common understanding, mutually beneficial communication between them will remain stymied, and realistic means of cooperation will remain elusive.

The *Book of Order* (G-14.0300) is clear that CPMs and seminaries are not equal partners in matters of formation and discernment of readiness for ministry. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of presbyteries and their CPMs to determine on behalf of the whole people of God who should be ministers of the Word and Sacrament. However, CPMs sometimes feel that they do not have at their disposal all the resources necessary to carry out these responsibilities. Often they do not have adequate opportunities to get to know their inquirers and candidates well. Some seminarians become inquirers after they have begun their theological studies and, as a result, are not well known to CPMs when critical issues of discernment must be confronted.

Seminaries, by contrast, are in a position to know a great deal about their students: the suitability of their gifts for ministry; their spiritual and mental health; and their Christian experience, practice and witness. Presbyteries expect that seminaries should be a willing and readily available source of information needed by CPMs as they seek to care for and supervise their inquirers and candidates. However, many argue that seminaries do not provide adequate data to CPMs. Often CPMs feel they must discover crucial information on their own.

What hinders communication and cooperation? Because presbyteries, not seminaries, are charged with assessing readiness for ministry and ordination, seminaries often feel that they should not be rendering judgments beyond completion of degree requirements. There is also significant concern about the legal implications of sharing information that may constitute a violation of student privacy. In addition, not all seminary personnel have a complete understanding of the requirements of the inquiry and candidacy process.

A more helpful approach seems to be to encourage seminaries and presbyteries to have more open communication as they seek to support those whose promise for ministry is clear and to encourage those with serious limitations to consider other vocational paths.

A common understanding among CPMs, seminaries, and students needs to be established and nourished. In order for this to become a reality, several issues need to be addressed. First, the tension between the church's right to know who its leaders are and a student's right to privacy and confidentiality must be negotiated. An underlying assumption of CPMs is that knowledge of students is essential in discernment of suitability for ministry. However, seminaries are accredited educational institutions and subject to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) that protects a student's right to privacy.

A resolution is possible by recognizing that both the church and FERPA are right. There are necessary limitations to an inquirer's or candidate's right to privacy that lie at the heart of the preparation for ministry process, while at the same time students should be protected from the unauthorized dissemination of information about them.

Secondly, since the primary responsibility for determining the readiness for ministry of an inquirer or candidate lies with CPMs, committees must take the initiative in gaining the information they need to make informed decisions regarding readiness for ministry. Evidence suggests that CPMs seldom contact a student's seminary to request information on the interaction between students and their theological institutions. In most instances

reports from the seminary simply consist of transcripts and reports from supervised practice of ministry.

The *Book of Order* (G-14.0308) requires that an inquirer or candidate will submit annually a written report to the CPM, and also that there shall be an annual consultation between the student and the committee. Unfortunately, there is now no comparable guidance for contacts between the seminaries and CPMs. On-campus consultations, whenever possible and at least once during a student's time in seminary, should bring together the student, a representative of the student's CPM, and the faculty advisor. Such a consultation, initiated by the student's CPM, along with the annual reports, would greatly facilitate this communication.

It would be helpful to establish a training module that can be used with seminary personnel and CPMs to provide a common understanding of the respective roles of seminaries and presbyteries in the preparation for ministry process.

Therefore, the work group made Recommendations E.1 a-c (paragraphs 22.118-.129).

B. First Call Support

This issue in COTE's original proposal deals with what is widely considered to be a major gap between seminary education and the actual practice of leading a congregation. Some newly ordained ministers learn in a brief period of time how to be a pastor and lead a congregation. But for many other ministers, difficulty in bridging this gap is obvious enough to elicit attention from numerous sources.

Many seminary graduates complain that although they thought they understood congregations because they grew up in one, they find that leading one requires knowledge and skills they did not acquire in seminary. Experienced ministers, remembering their first years as a pastor, often express thanks for the counsel of a senior minister or the forbearance of members of their first pastorate.

Fifty-one percent of the calls to the Board of Pensions telephone consultation service are from new pastors who report loneliness, alienation, conflicts in the congregations and financial problems. This discovery has led the Board of Pensions to conduct pilot projects with new ministers dealing with these concerns.

Denominational leaders, aware that congregations with newly ordained ministers often experience difficulties, have tried various plans. The United Presbyterian Church conducted "young pastors" seminars that were well received. More recently, presbyteries and synods have sponsored programs ranging from providing mentors for each novice minister to a carefully worked out program with an abundance of resources such as the "Transition and Survival Skills Training Experience" (TAS²TE) program.¹

Why is there a gap?

The gap exists because of the difference between the seminary as a school and the congregation as a church.

The seminary is obligated to four agencies in addition to the requirements of the denomination of which it is a part:

- (1) the state, which charters the seminary as a legal corporation, empowers it to grant degrees;
- (2) the federal government enforces rules and laws about discrimination, employment, academic records and other matters;

- (3) the regional accrediting association inspects the seminary regarding whether it is maintaining secular educational standards; and
- (4) the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) requires the seminary to adhere to certain religious and professional standards for each degree offered.

In contrast to the above, a congregation is largely a self-regulating voluntary association of people unhampered by any external rules except laws about public safety, zoning, and denominational affiliation.

As illustrated by the following comparisons, the relationship of a student to the ethos of a seminary is quite different from the relationship of a minister to a congregation:

What counts? In a seminary a student is judged on the basis of academic ability, participation in the life of the seminary, and lifestyle. The latter two traits cannot be factored into the student's grades and may not be known by all the professors. In a congregation a pastor is judged on the basis of leadership of worship and preaching, religious lifestyle, personality, ability to plan and administer a program, management of conflicts, and attractiveness to new members.

Learning. In a seminary one learns as one did in college—according to what the course requires. The rest of what one learns in seminary comes from groups, associations with friends, participation in chapel, and other seminary activities—all of which are elective. In a congregation one learns from interaction with members. Moreover, what one learns this way has to be interpreted according to the member's personality and relation to the church, and such learning is necessary rather than being an elective activity. Academic learning is respected in a congregation but is given authority only to the extent that it relates to life situations.

Responsibility. In a seminary students are responsible for their grades and character. Many other elements in students' lives are ordered by the institution and are outlined in a student handbook. Students are in a dependent relationship to faculty and administrators. Once a student graduates and accepts a pastorate, s/he is immediately thrust into a leadership role. While the session is officially in charge, as a practical matter officers and church members expect the minister to plan and direct a program. This is a sudden shift from an institution where life was ordered by others to an institution where responsibility for almost everything that has to be done is up to the pastor.

Although in seminary there is a lot of mutual caring and concern for each other, a student also realizes s/he is in competition with others for grades and favorable references. Then, suddenly, as a pastor, s/he becomes aware of the importance of cultivating a culture in which members are to care for each other and to cooperate in the church's program. How can one acquire that ability quickly?

Leadership. Many candidates for the ministry come to seminary today with leadership experience in the military, various professions, and, in most cases, active participation in congregational life. In seminary there are opportunities for gaining leadership experience in campus projects and in congregations where they are interns. Previous experience may be helpful, but it may also be a hindrance to the leadership of a congregation for two reasons. First, the novice minister may not be aware of his or her leadership style. A pilot project in Texas consisted of two groups, each with nine recent seminary graduates. Each group was involved in an intense two-year program. These eighteen ministers in their first pastorate came from evangelical, university-related, and Presbyterian seminaries. All had experience in a wide variety of secular vocations. One of the unanticipated findings from the evaluator was that many of these ministers did not know their leadership style nor were they sensitive to the way their style affected the congregation.²

Second, leadership is probably as much an art as it is a skill. But whatever it is, congregations expect ministers to lead in a certain style. A pastor, therefore, must ferret out the leadership expectation of the congregation and then make adjustments in his or her style in order to have an effective beginning.

What can the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) do about the gap?

This work group was appointed because there was a need to explore how to give denominational encouragement for expanding what is already being done, and to consider emerging possibilities for dealing with the gap between seminary and first call.

A relatively new and carefully designed approach to dealing with this concern is the national program of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), which is named “First Call,” a presentation in which some members of the work group were involved several years ago. The question before our group was whether this might provide guidance for Presbyterians.

In addition to reviewing the literature about the ELCA project, the work group consulted with two representatives from the ELCA about its new “First Call” program during our April 17-19, 1999 meeting. We were instructed and encouraged by the Lutheran program for post-seminary training. A major discovery was that its three goals are similar to what emerged in the Texas pilot project and in one part of the TAS²TE curriculum.

The ELCA “First Call” is an excellent national program that unites seminaries, synods, and congregations in post-seminary training. It requires a unified denominational ethos, a national staff, and a commitment to its goals and methods from all its component parts. Although the years of preparation were foundation-funded, the administrative expense for maintaining it continue to be considerable. This “First Call” program is possible because the Lutheran denominations that make up the ELCA have had a history of requiring internships for all pastors. The new program is considered an outgrowth and improvement of what the denomination was already doing. Also, there is a close connection between the denomination and its seminaries. The ELCA provides about 60 percent of the funding of its seminaries and requires that every candidate for ordination attend a Lutheran seminary for at least one year.

We believe, however, that the agencies of the General Assembly cannot at this time plan and administer a national program similar to “First Call.” Almost none of the conditions that made the ELCA program possible exist in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

What the Presbyterian Church has is ten theological institutions that want their graduates to be effective pastors and presbyteries which have fashioned programs to help inexperienced ministers. We believe the appropriate way to narrow the gap at this time is to urge the seminaries and presbyteries to give this matter more attention and to seek additional ways to coordinate their work.

Because there are many studies of ministers, ministry, and churches from a theological, psychological, sociological, and historical perspective, we suggest that a further development of existing programs focus on the four major elements of entry into ministry:

- (1) the minister—with hopes, fears, ambitions, hobbies, family, church background, spiritual disciplines, beliefs, lifestyle, moral standards, and image of self as leader;
- (2) the congregation—with its history, ethos, programs, status in the community, relation to the denomination, and expectations of its pastor;
- (3) the dynamic interaction of people within the congregation and with the pastor, which makes each church situation unique;

(4) the conflicts that arise as part of church life.

By focusing on these four elements, seminaries and presbyteries can specialize in the aspects of each element that fit its interests and resources. Seminaries are probably the most efficient teachers of *generalizations* about each of the elements. Such generalizations will arise in many courses and especially in courses in “practical theology” or “church and ministry.” Units of supervised practice of ministry or internships also provide experiences about which generalizations can be made.

Congregations are the only places where everything related to ministry comes together and where the minister must respond. How to respond to an existential situation can be learned only when a person has become the officially installed leader. Generalizations learned in seminary and textbooks provide guidance, but making judgments about how to act or what to say about problems, events, or future plans for a congregation are directly connected to the thoughts, feelings, and faith of members of a particular congregation. A minister coming from the relatively protected environment of a seminary can most effectively learn how to lead a particular congregation if s/he is given some support and suggestions from presbytery. This is in part because presbyteries have a direct relationship to and responsibility for congregations. It is in part because presbytery officials know the pastors and lay professionals in the area who can work with new pastors.

How can the gap be narrowed?

Limitations. This review of the entry into a pastoral ministry situation is encouraging because our seminaries and presbyteries are working on ways to make the entry easier. There are, however, limitations on what these two agencies can do. Our seminaries are unable to do much more in the three-year M.Div. degree program. Many seminary students are in their mid-30s, have come from vocations that did not prepare them for theological studies, have families, and want to complete ordination requirements as soon as possible. Given the rapid expansion of knowledge in every field related to ministry and the complexity of the pastor’s work, seminaries find it increasingly difficult to do all they would like to do to educate pastors.

Presbyteries also have limitations. One limitation is funding. Even a simple mentoring program requires some time and money. Perhaps the lack of time is the greater limitation. Leadership for a presbytery program must come from interested laypersons and experienced pastors who are already over-committed to good and necessary projects. Effective programs require considerable time for planning and for adjustments in the programs in order to meet the needs the new ministers bring to the surface. It is difficult for qualified presbytery leaders to devote enough time to such a demanding project.

Method. It would be helpful if our work group had conclusive evidence for recommending what method of training was most effective for entry into ministry. We have found that almost any effort to help newly ordained pastors works, at least for some pastors. Perhaps this is because if someone or some group takes *their* church situation seriously, novice ministers *feel* that their specific problems are solvable.

Our review of existing programs reveals three major approaches for helping ministers in their first call. The first is subject- or topic-centered. This approach lends itself to a conference or seminar method where leaders deal with fairly specific topics such as stress, evangelism, conflict resolution, budget and finance issues, and so on. Continuing education events sponsored by seminaries and governing bodies exemplify this type. It should be noted that several other General Assembly entities have recently established programs for new pastors such as the Board of Pensions’s “Moving From Survival to Living Well in the Ministry” and “Excellence From The Start” by the Office of Theology.

The second is congregation- or case-centered. One strategy is where an experienced minister serves as a mentor by meeting regularly with a novice minister and dealing with issues this minister must manage in the congregation. Another approach uses a group-process method where a leader deals with the feelings and the specific problems a group of first-call ministers is having. The Methodist “Young Pastors” pilot project was of this type.³

The third method is to combine the first two. The new ELCA’s “First Call,” the TAS²TE program, and the Lilly Endowment-funded Texas project combine the first two methods in various ways. Since this third method is the one that has evolved in our denomination, we encourage our seminaries and presbyteries to develop this method to its next stage. To do so we believe the areas that should be given special attention are as follows: (1) the pastor as a person, (2) the congregation with its problems and possibilities, (3) the pastor/congregation relationship, and (4) conflict management.

Therefore, the work group made Recommendations E.2.a. - f (paragraphs 22.130-.143) above.

Seminaries already provide a wide variety of courses and experiences in the practice of ministry. A review, however, may open up other ways to help graduates move more smoothly into the practice of ministry. The following items may indicate possibilities for further development.

- The pastor as a person with habits, traits, and issues that concern him or her has proven to be a major factor in the success or failure in a first pastorate. This aspect of a seminary student’s life can be, and often is, “parked” because academic achievement and ability to appear ready for a pastorate are what count. Seminaries could probably do more to help students understand themselves and how they interact with others. Some form of personality inventory plus consultation with a psychologist for all students at the beginning of seminary training would alert students to the critical importance of this facet of their vocation and, in unusual cases, provide the beginning of working on their self-understanding. ATS’s new Accrediting Standards require seminaries to show that this aspect of students’ preparation is attended to in some form.⁴
- Supervised practice of ministry programs or courses on ministry should include case studies of congregations. Growing up in a congregation does not prepare a person to understand the complexity of a congregation, much less to lead one. The Texas pilot project noted that newly ordained ministers were often like many older ministers who were in trouble, in that they did not understand the congregation they served or the importance of identifying with its history and aspirations.
- The pastor/congregational relationship is tenuous. Each congregation has a corporate personality, a way of being a church, a process of decision making that may not follow the official form of church government, and a role it expects the pastor to play. The pastor has a leadership style even if s/he is not aware of it. If the congregation’s role expectations and the leadership style of the pastor are not in harmony, “feelings” may be hurt. The seminary cannot prepare a student for the particular church to which s/he will be called, but it can help him or her to identify his or her leadership style and to understand to what extent s/he can or should adjust to the expectations of the congregation.
- Conflicts arise as a part of the church life. In congregations there are a variety of dreams and expectations that sometimes clash. A pastor needs to be able to

understand conflict, avoid triangles, and manage their own behavior appropriately so as to be responsible and not reactive when faced with conflict.

Preparing students for ministerial leadership is now a rubric in the ATS Accreditation Standards. Each seminary is obliged to show how it provides experiences that support this role.⁵

The survey by David Danner of the Vocation Agency in 1985 produced data from 37 presbyteries with 17 different “Pastorate Start-Up” programs.⁶ We assume that, with the development of the TAS²TE program in 1983, the work of the Alban Institute, and pilot projects such as the one in Texas, more presbyteries have programs.

It is of critical importance that presbyteries take responsibility for pastoral start-up programs, as required in G-14.0506f and G-11.0103n. (1) Certain learnings in the four major areas can happen *only* when a minister is ordained and installed as a pastor. (2) Presbyteries have a direct vested interest in the welfare of the minister/congregation relationship. (3) About 25% of newly ordained ministers come from non-Presbyterian seminaries. Young pastors with this background may be greatly helped by association with peers and presbytery leaders as they adjust to their first pastorate.

Sessions, as well as COMs, are of critical importance in helping pastors become effective leaders of the first congregations to which they are called. Other recommendations in this report suggest ways the pastor’s first call can become a creative experience that will shape his/her future in pastoral ministry. The purpose of this particular recommendation is to provide one or more resources, such as a brief booklet and/or video, that would explain the importance of the first-call issues identified in preceding recommendations.

To launch a coordinated effort noted above it may be necessary to form a supervisory committee with representatives from (1) the General Assembly staff, such as the associate director of Middle Body Relationships; the associate director of Churchwide Personnel Services; the associate for Resourcing the Committee on Ministry; the associate director for Theological Education; (2) synods and presbyteries; and (3) interested lay persons.

The supervisory committee should plan on five years to develop and implement the program. Since this program is to be funded independently, it should be incorporated as a non-profit corporation; or, it could be connected to a church college or a Presbyterian seminary where office space, parking, bookkeeping services, and other necessities for such a program would be available for a fee.

The program’s purpose would include the following activities:

- To focus the attention of all governing bodies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) on the importance of helping newly ordained ministers move from their roles as seminary students to their new roles as leaders of congregations;
- To sponsor conferences designed to help presbyteries and synods share their experience with programs they have sponsored;
- To provide resources, including consultants, for presbytery and synod programs;
- To encourage presbyteries to assume a “research and development” attitude toward the entry into pastoral ministry situation. Such experimental and

evaluation activity should lead to the most effective way to help ministers in their first call to become leaders of congregations.

At the end of four years, the supervisory committee will decide whether the program is to continue or whether its purpose is being achieved and will therefore conclude the program at the end of the fifth year.

It is important that attention to the first-call issues (listed in preceding recommendations) begin as the individual moves through the inquirer/candidate process under the care of the CPM. It is equally important that the COM of the calling presbytery be aware of issues and attributes relevant to the individual's transition into the first-call situation. Attention to provision of continuity related to the presbytery care process as the individual moves from candidate to installed pastor is particularly important when more than one presbytery is involved.

C. Licensure

This part of the Work Group's mandate emerged from a 1992 General Assembly study of the Theology and Practice of Ordination. In its discussion of "Preparation of Ministers of the Gospel for Office," the report noted the following: "Throughout most of its early history in this country, the Presbyterian church required a period of licensure prior to ordination, during which persons who had finished their formal course of study for the ministry were examined by the presbytery and then placed in congregations where they could 'test their gifts'" (p. 77).

The 1992 report further noted that:

38.397

Licensure or some other form of post-seminary "testing of one's gifts among the people of God" appears to be needed as the church moves toward the twenty-first century.....

38.398

Some denominations attempt to meet this need for a period of testing one's gifts by requiring at least one year of full-time, supervised practice of ministry.....

38.402

A flexible period of licensure lasting from one to three years depending on the state of the licensee's preparation for ministry, would invite everyone involved to take the supervised practice of ministry component of preparation as seriously as the course of study in seminary.....(Ibid., p.1058)

While the General Assembly did not adopt these proposals in 1992, some Presbyterians feel that the needs identified in that report have increased and that the reasons for adding a licensure period and process are even more compelling today.

The work group's exploration and assessment of licensure included the following:

- Review of current provisions in the *Book of Order* governing preparation for Ministry of the Word and Sacrament.
- Study of the 1997 action by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland to cease the practice of licensure.
- Conversations with the Presbyterian Theological Field Educators responsible for overseeing the field education programs in our denomination's theological

institutions.

- Review of “Licensure: Polity and History”, by William Chapman.
- Review of the “Racial Ethnic Leadership Pool Task Group Report.”

Therefore, the work group made Recommendations E.3.a-e. (paragraphs 22.144-148).

The 1992 proposal presented licensure as a post-M.Div. period of probationary status requiring additional work in the supervised practice of ministry (e.g., externship) in preparation for ordination to Ministry of the Word and Sacrament. While the Work Group found the concerns and needs for improving cultivation of ministry skills through licensure to be well-founded, members also found the following concerns and factors informative and compelling.

The Chapman review of the history of licensure points out that licensure involved granting a candidate permission “to preach and teach publicly” (Minutes, Presbytery of Philadelphia, 1710). It was a recognition of progress in preparation for ministry. It was not a distinct step in the process of ordination.

In calling for licensure, the 1992 proposal emphasized the need for more than “the part-time or short-term patterns of ministry education now chosen by most Presbyterian seminary students.” Instead, what was perceived as needed by today’s ministers was knowledge and skills “more appropriately learned in intensive, full-time, long-term, supervised ministry contexts” (p. 77). As noted by seminary field education faculty, the *Book of Order* currently allows presbyteries to require candidates to engage in such supervised ministry before, during, and after seminary as part of their guidance responsibility (G-14.0306(a)(2)). Also, every Presbyterian seminary continues to allow students to opt for such full-time internships as part of their work toward the Master of Divinity degree. In effect, the concerns raised in the 1992 proposal for licensure can be addressed within *existing* provisions of the *Book of Order* without addition of a new step in the preparation for ministry process.

In addition, both Presbyterian field educators and the Racial Ethnic Leadership Pool Task Group have cautioned against a “one size fits all” approach to recruiting, supporting, guiding, nurturing, and retaining an increasingly diverse pool of persons preparing for increasingly diverse contexts of ministry. To require licensure for all candidates would be to adopt a “one size fits all” approach to working with persons from different racial ethnic groups, second-career persons, persons with varying degrees of church experience, etc.) More rather than less flexibility is needed in the preparation for ministry process.

The same sources also emphasize the potential financial hardship caused by licensure. Student loan repayments are required to begin six months after completion of the highest degree. Proposals for licensure do not include clear guidelines that assure a level of compensation sufficient to cover living expenses and debt reduction during completion of this requirement.

Field education faculty also expressed concern that licentiates be perceived as a source of “cheap labor” - persons with Master of Divinity education available for ministry who did not have to be paid within presbytery minimum-salary guidelines.

Finally, the work group received multiple expressions of concern regarding CPM workload. Since licensure would be a post-seminary program of supervised ministry, it is assumed that CPMs would have even more responsibilities, such as selecting congregations, shaping ministry experiences, insuring funding, training supervisors, monitoring quality, and evaluating accomplishments. Given the stress and overload felt by many CPMs, their capacity to initiate and sustain a licensure program is questionable.

Increasing the number of regulations governing candidates through addition of a licensure step does not appear to be a helpful response to the need for improved preparation for ministry.

The *Book of Order* characterizes the nature of the presbytery-candidate relationship as covenantal. The roles and responsibilities of the presbytery involve both nurturing (support) and gatekeeping (evaluation) tasks as specified in the following:

“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 committee on preparation for ministry.” (G-9.0902)

“For this purpose, presbyteries shall enter into covenant relationship with those preparing to become ministers of the Word and Sacrament. This relationship shall be divided into the two phases of inquiry and candidacy.” (G-14.0301)

“The purpose of the inquiry phase is to provide an opportunity for the church and for those who believe themselves called to ministry of the Word and Sacrament to explore that call together in such a way that a decision regarding the inquirer’s suitability for ministry of the Word and Sacrament will be based on knowledge and experience of one another.” (G-14.0302)

“In matters related to preparation for the ministry, the individual is under the oversight of the presbytery through the CPM. It shall be the duty of the presbytery to exercise responsibility of the spiritual growth of inquirers and candidates, to support them with an understanding and sympathetic interest, and to give guidance in regard to courses of study, familiarity with the Bible and with the confessions, practical training and plans for education, including the choice of institutions, field education, and the inquirer’s or candidate’s financial need.” (G-14.0306(a)(2))

“The committee on preparation for ministry shall provide for an annual consultation with each person on the rolls of inquirers and candidates. The purpose of the consultation shall be for the evaluation and nurture of inquirers and candidates.” (G-14.0309 a.)

Therefore, a holistic approach to improved preparation and oversight of preparation calls for work in these areas: attention to discernment of call and formation of the person (character, attitudes) in ministry as well as development of ministerial skills.

Rather than add requirements for entrance into Ministry of the Word and Sacrament, what is needed by the inquirer and candidate is earlier and more focused attention to the discernment of call, spiritual formation, and the cultivation of pastoral skills. The temptation to postpone attention to discernment and formation issues until a post-seminary licensure period must be resisted.

While emphasizing the importance of a post-seminary externship, the 1992 proposal for licensure acknowledged that full-time internships taken between the second and third years of seminary also constituted adequate tests of readiness for ministry. As previously noted, opportunities already exist for presbyteries to call for such increased work in supervised ministry during seminary. The guidance provisions in the *Book of Order* allow for such counsel (G-14.0307). The concerns raised in the 1992 proposal for licensure can still be addressed without insertion of a licensure step in the process of preparation for ministry.

In addition, the work group’s disinclination toward licensure was reinforced by the 1997 action of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland to discontinue its centuries-old

practice of licensure and to replace it with increased time in supervised ministry as part of the Bachelor of Divinity degree program.

Finally, an even more helpful response to the concern for ensuring competence in ministry would be increased attention to what some denominations term “first call” needs of ministers. As identified by new pastors, these needs involve more than the basic ministry practices of preaching, teaching, pastoral care, etc. They extend to the pastors’ understanding of self in relation to their pastoral role, ability to relate to their congregations as congregations, ability to provide leadership appropriate to a particular congregation and community, and ability to manage conflicts in congregations. CPMs need to include such issues throughout their work with candidates, both in guiding their preparation for ministry as well as in the final assessment interview, since the *Book of Order* also requires CPMs to share such information with the presbyteries to which their candidates are called. In doing so, CPMs may help new ministers identify the issues and skills for ongoing development through the continuing education experiences in the first years of ministry.

D. Ordination Examinations

Ordination examinations provide one way for the presbytery of care to discern “readiness for ministry.” They are an opportunity for a candidate to demonstrate ability to fulfill pastoral roles. We offer the following responses to four questions which emerged in our work, together with our recommendations:

1. Why do we have ordination exams, often called “ords”?
2. When should “ords” be taken/given?
3. Where should “ords” be administered ?
4. What support might the church offer to those taking ordination exams?

Why do we have ordination exams, or “ords”?

Standard ordination examinations evolved as a way to remedy the disparity in presbytery floor exams. The challenge was to resolve the problem without taking from the presbytery its historic role of determining whether a candidate’s theological position is consistent with the *Constitution*. Consequently, ordination examinations are designed to assess knowledge in the areas of Biblical exegesis and content; theological competence; worship and sacraments and church polity; as well as basic competence for the practice of ministry (G-14.310d. (1-5).

Presbyteries must approve persons in their care to take examinations (G-14.0301c), and the examinations are graded by “representatives of presbyteries” (G-14.0301e). These structural arrangements signal that these examinations represent the transition of the person under care from a particular presbytery into the broader covenant community of the denomination.

When should “ords” be taken and given?

Seminaries are keenly aware that there has been from the beginning an issue of scheduling the ords. Ordinarily they are administered in February and September. Presbyteries’ Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates (PCC) has consistently been willing to negotiate schedule issues with the COTE-related seminaries. This has involved seminary deans and staff and members from PCC working on a proposal presented to COTE for final approval. The work group understands that this procedure can be reopened at any time.

There is also the matter of when a student takes the “ords,” which is determined by the presbytery of care. A student obtains the application to write the exams from the presbytery

of care. This introduces great diversity as to when in a student's seminary career they write the exams. Presbyteries differ greatly in how they make such decisions. PCC did provide information that persons writing all four examinations at one time have a higher pass rate. However, the increasing diversity of students as well as seminary programs necessitates flexibility.

Another trend which disturbs us is the continuing increase in the number of exams requiring a third reading when the first two readers disagree on whether the exam is passing or not. While there are no research studies of this, the experience of PCC is that these results indicate students' inability to write clearly regarding the complex issues that arise in the practice of ministry.

Where should ords be administered?

The administration of ords normally takes place in the seminaries. Seminary faculties provide support for students taking exams through preparatory seminars in the different areas. Students report that the opportunity to study for ords in groups is helpful. Supervised practice of ministry experience is a source of preparation for ords.

However, there are numerous "special proctors" who currently administer ordination examinations for those who are not currently enrolled in a seminary with an established proctor, or who for various reasons are distant from a seminary at the time the exams are given.

What support might the church offer to those taking ordination examinations?

One of the responsibilities of the presbytery is "to enter into covenant relationship with those preparing to become ministers of the Word and Sacrament by enrolling them as inquirers, and to receive inquirers as candidates" (G-11.0103). Therefore, our work group draws the attention of CPMs to this responsibility as it impacts students who are taking ordination exams.

Also, one of the duties of sessions in the candidacy process is that "the session shall function in a supportive role during the phases of inquiry and candidacy to assure that care is provided on a continuous basis" (G-14.0306b). Therefore, our work group reminds local congregations of this duty as it applies to students within their congregations taking ordination exams.

Writing ordination exams and receiving the results are times of anxiety, celebration, and lamentation. Therefore the work group encourages those responsible for administering ordination exams to provide appropriate opportunities for worship.

Therefore, the work group made Recommendations E. 4.a.-e . (paragraphs 22.149-.155).

ENDNOTES:

¹ Susan E. Fox and Kurtis C. Hess, *Here I Am, Lord. Now What?* (South Charleston, WV: TAS²TE of Ministry, Inc., 1995).

²Phineas A. Washer, ed., *Entry Into Ministry: Learning to Lead a Particular Congregation* (Final Report to the Lilly Endowment, 1999). This report of a five year project sponsored by Grace, New Covenant and Mission Presbyteries and Austin Presbyterian Seminary was printed in a limited edition. Inquiries should be addressed to Dr. Stewart Coffman, General Presbyter, New Covenant Presbytery, who directed the two groups of newly ordained ministers.

³Edgar W. Mills, *Peer Groups and Professional Development* (Nashville: Division of the Ordained Ministry, United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 1973).

⁴ATS Redeveloped Accrediting Standards, section 3.1.3 “Personal and Spiritual Formation” and 3.1.3.1.

⁵ATS Standards, 3.1.4 “Capacity for Ministerial and Public Leadership” and 3.1.4.3.

⁶David W. Danner, *After the Call* (New York: The Vocation Agency, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 1985).