

OBSERVATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

The following suggestions are offered particularly to those who may be new to the process of interviewing.

1. Provide a comfortable and inviting setting for the interview, and begin with a pastoral prayer for the applicant/inquirer/candidate.
2. Have well in mind the goals of the particular interview. Mentally set a time limit and try to avoid interruptions.
3. Every participant in the interview should have studied and become familiar with the material submitted by the applicant/inquirer/candidate in advance. This is of utmost importance to the effectiveness of the interview, and will avoid wasting time gathering details during the interview.
4. One person (not necessarily the moderator) should conduct the initial phase of the discussion so that the applicant/inquirer/candidate need only relate to that single person. This allows the one conducting the discussion to be responsive and create a conversation with a natural flow. Several members raising questions at first tends to produce a question-and-answer situation that makes it difficult to get a feel for the person being interviewed.
5. The applicant/inquirer/candidate should be put at ease as much as possible. Experience has shown that apprehension impedes the flow of useful information. A few minutes devoted to the introductions and friendly small talk are a good investment.
6. In ways that are most comfortable and natural to them, group members will want to convey their interest in the individual as a person as well as giving their attention to the issues to be covered.
7. As the interview begins, capture the applicant/inquirer/candidate's attention and participation by asking a global, nonthreatening question, e.g. "What is it like to be a student in a theological seminary?"
8. Use factual information provided in the previously submitted materials as a basis to phrase questions so that they do not indicate desired responses.
9. Let the person tell his/her story. Help him/her to supplement. The applicant/inquirer/candidate should do most of the talking.

10. Learn about the spiritual life of the applicant/inquirer/candidate by listening to his/her answers to open-ended questions such as “Have you found it easy or difficult to attend to your spiritual life?”
11. Interview with an open mind. Let the applicant/inquirer/candidate lead within the perimeters of the interview.
12. Appropriate informality and light touches of humor usually help everyone in discussions like this. Don’t hesitate to use them.
13. When the discussion leader has talked with the applicant for a significant period of time, opportunity should be given to other members of the committee to pursue briefly areas or questions of special interest to them, which have not yet been covered.
14. Turnabout is fair play. It is very helpful to ask if the person has any questions he or she would like to ask the members of the committee. A final general question, e.g. “Is there anything else that you would like to talk about?” may permit expression of the deepest concern, or issue current in his/her life. This concluding, relaxed, confidence is often the catalyst for the most significant sharing.
15. The last issue of the interview should be a soothing concern that will afford the person some ease from anxiety that the interview may have provoked.
16. A genuine interest in the person and attention to matters raised in these suggestions will tend to help avoid a “third degree” atmosphere and produce a valuable and enjoyable discussion.
17. The group might find it helpful to role-play the situation before actually meeting with the person. One member of the group would play the part of the applicant/inquirer/candidate and another would play the part of the discussion leader. The other members would assume their own roles. The previously submitted material might be used as the guiding resource by the person playing that role or a form could be prepared for that purpose. The group would then discuss the role-play, identifying what was helpful and not so helpful and ways of improving the discussion process.

***Preparation for Ministry Office
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Rev. Jan. 2002***