

## INTRODUCTION TO THE PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY PROCESS

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The preparation for ministry process was adopted by the 198<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in 1986 and sent to presbyteries for their affirmative or negative vote. Following the affirmative vote of the presbyteries, the new process was initiated throughout the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in 1987.

The purpose of the Preparation for Ministry Process of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is:

To help all church members, whatever their occupation, discern and fulfill their Christian vocation; and

To provide the best possible leadership for the Church by assuring that persons who feel called to be ministers of the Word and Sacrament receive the fullest personal and professional preparation for this office (G-14.0400).

### **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. 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-14.0400).

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 officers and ordinance; and Christ is its head in all things (G-1.0100).

Presbyterians believe in the priesthood of all believers--that is, that all church members regardless of their occupational choice, are engaged in ministry. That is their Christian vocation (G-5.0102). Some among them may be called by the Holy Spirit, through the Church, to the ministry of the Word and Sacrament. Thus the ministry of the Word and Sacrament 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 carried on 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 which have been proved valid by the Church’s experience through the years are the following:

1. Ordained ministry is a gift of God to the Church;

2. Ordained ministers equip church members for their ministry by proclaiming the good news in Word and Sacrament, teaching faith, caring for people and, along with elders, ensuring that the life of the congregation is governed in an orderly way;
3. The Church actively seeks and ordains persons whose gifts and abilities equip them for the ministry of the Word and Sacrament: 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.
4. One 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.

The relationship between the Church and those who feel called to be ministers of the 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 seeking to discern their call to the ministry of the Word and Sacrament.

**For Inquirers and Candidates**, who enter into the process, 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 she or he is called 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. In order to ensure that this important work is effectively carried out, those chosen to serve on Committees on Preparation for Ministry need particular gifts, skills, and commitment.

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

**For all participants**, involved in the process of 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. (The complete background for the Preparation for Ministry Process can be found in

“Report of the Joint Task Force on Candidacy to the 198<sup>th</sup> General Assembly PC (U.S.A.)”.)

### **Process Summary**

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 those who feel themselves called to the ministers of the Word and Sacrament (G-14.0400). To do this effectively, each presbytery charges a Committee on Preparation for Ministry to work closely with those persons within its congregations who wish to prepare themselves for this ordained office. Since the model for the ministry of the Word and Sacrament is the ministry of Jesus Christ, it is the committee’s particular responsibility to help these individuals grow toward maturity in Christ.

### **Steps in the Preparation Process**

#### **INQUIRY PHASE**

##### **Steps**

1. Applicant is an active member of a sponsoring congregation (for at least six months).
2. Session notifies CPM of applicant.
3. CPM representative(s) meet with Session for Session orientation.
4. Session interviews applicant; makes recommendation to CPM/Presbytery; appoints a liaison.
5. CPM interviews applicant and makes recommendation on enrollment as a Inquirer. CPM liaison appointed.
6. Presbytery enrollment of Inquirer.
7. Review of preparation process and progress. Develop Covenant Agreement for spiritual development, guidance, goals, consultations, and reports.

#### **CANDIDACY PHASE**

8. Inquirer applies to become Candidate through Session.

9. Session confers with Inquirer, reviews evidence of Inquiry Phase and makes recommendation to CPM/Presbytery.
10. CPM confers with Inquirer, reviews evidence of Inquiry Phase and makes recommendation regarding candidacy.
11. Presbytery receives CPM recommendation and examines Inquirer. Presbytery receives and enrolls Inquirer as Candidate.
12. Review of Preparation process and progress. Develop Covenant Agreement for spiritual development, guidance, goals, consultations and reports.
13. Presbyteries Cooperative Examinations.
14. CPM conducts the final assessment of Candidate's readiness to receive a call.
15. CPM certifies Candidate ready to receive a call and reports to Presbytery.
16. CPM approves circulation of Personal Information Form to explore obtaining a call.
17. Negotiation for service/call.
18. Examination and Ordination.