



PREPARATION FOR ORDAINED MINISTRY

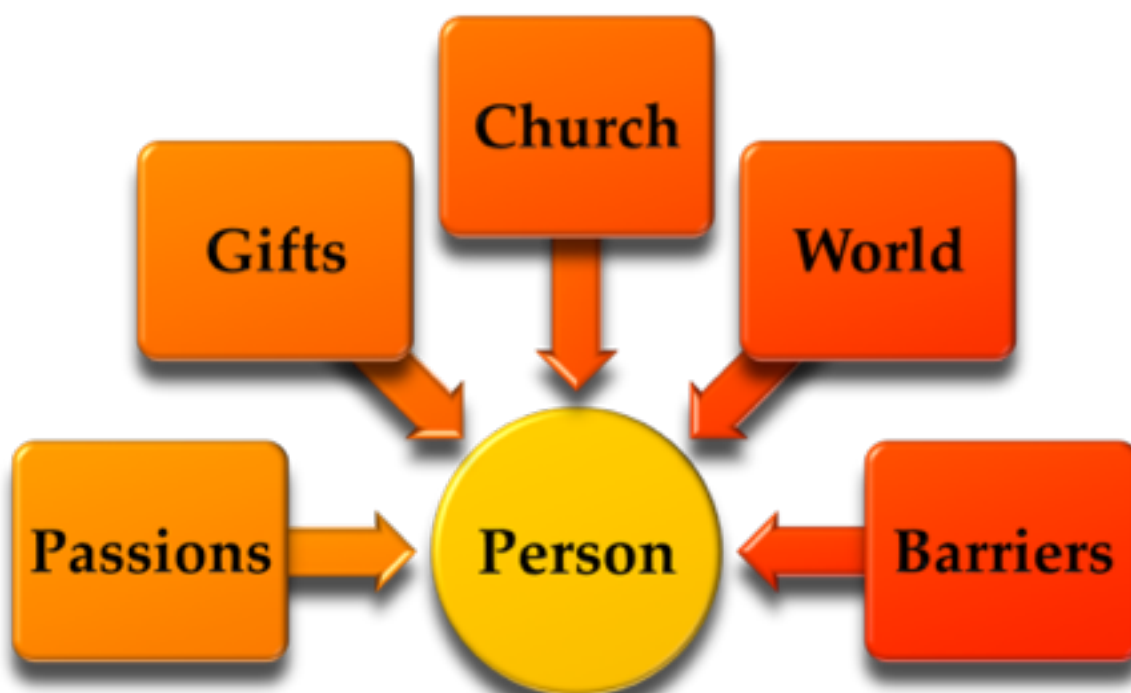
Becoming a Minister of Word and Sacrament (*Teaching Elder*)



Introduction

“God gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers. God’s purpose was to equip God’s people for the work of serving and building up the body of Christ.” Ephesians 4:11-13 (CEB)

Hearing and following God’s call on a person’s life can take many forms. The call for ordained ministry, in particular the process to become a Teaching Elder -- a Minister of Word and Sacrament -- is unique. Preparation to become a TE can be an exciting, challenging, growing and daunting process for an individual. It is a process in which a relationship is begun between God, the individual discerning a call, the Session and the Presbytery. The Committee on Preparation for Ministry (CPM) functions for the presbytery through the call process. Throughout this preparation time, the Presbytery makes a commitment to walk alongside the individual, supporting them with prayer, guidance, and honest insight, speaking truth in love through the power of the Holy Spirit. This handbook attempts to provide clear information to all parties on each step of this journey to ordained ministry.





It Begins with a sense of Call...

Presbyterians believe that all persons are called to ministry in their communities, however particular forms of leadership are needed for the work of the church.

Presbyterians understand a call to ministry to have three parts:

- 1) An inner sense of call
- 2) A community that tests this sense of call
- 3) A call from a community to serve in a particular place

Resources: Download the free PC(USA) *Advisory Handbook for the Preparation for Ministry* ([pcusa.org](http://pcusa.org/resources); resources, search for Preparation for Ministry).

First Steps

A person who feels called by God to be a Presbyterian minister, known as a Minister of the Word and Sacrament (Teaching Elder), begins by first filling out *Forms 1a*, and *Form 1b*, after expressing their desire to their church's Session. The person must have been an active member of the church for at least six months before they can apply. If the Session agrees with the person's sense of call, they agree to endorse the person and will appoint an Elder to be their Liaison as a mentor and an advocate. The Clerk of Session then fills out *Form 1d* and mails it along with *Forms 1a and b* to the Stated Clerk of Presbytery who reviews the application for completeness and forwards it to the Chair of the Committee on Preparation for Ministry (CPM).^{*} The CPM then meets with the applicant and votes to recommend to Presbytery that the person be enrolled with PC(USA) as an Inquirer and appoints a CPM Liaison to mentor that person and advocate for them at the Presbytery level.

^{*} Information and forms are available on the Riverside Presbytery website

This process is a 3-way Covenant of support, care and guidance.



Goals of the process leading to ordination as a Minister of the Word and Sacrament include growth in:

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

1. Inquiry Phase

The purpose of the steps taken during Inquiry phase is to determine the person's suitability for ordination as a Minister of the Word and Sacrament.

During the Inquiry Phase, (usually two years), the person explores the implications of becoming a minister together with the Session and the CPM (*Forms 2a and 2b*). They usually enter seminary and begin their coursework while they continue to discern their call to ministry with help of their Liaison. This includes filling out an annual review form (*Form 3*) and meeting with CPM.

- a. **Background Check:** Early within the Inquiry Phase, the Inquirer will undergo an official background check conducted through an accredited and approved agency. This background check will be completed at the expense of the Session of the Church of Care.
- b. **Psychological Assessment:** Within this phase, the Inquirer will undergo a Psychological Assessment as a standard practice and requirement of our process under the PC(USA) to proceed to the Candidacy Phase. Recommended evaluation centers will be provided to the Inquirer. The evaluation will be completed with the expense shared in equal thirds by the Inquirer, Church of Care, and the Presbytery, with results of the evaluation shared with CPM.
- c. **Boundary Training:** During the Inquiry Phase, the Inquirer will undergo Boundary Training through an accredited and approved Boundary Training facility or site, at the Inquirer's expense. At the conclusion of the training, the *Certificate of Completion* will be shared with CPM for official records.
- d. **Bible Content Exam:** Prior to advancing to the Candidacy Phase, the Inquirer will successfully pass the Bible Content Exam. CPM recommends that the Inquirer not take the Bible Content Exam before completing their first year of seminary.
- e. **Process towards advancement:** Upon completion of this phase, the Inquirer applies to the Presbytery to become a Candidate (*Form 5a*) and meets with their Session. Should Session agree, they forward the application, along with *Form 5b*, to CPM who schedules a meeting with the Inquirer to review their status. Upon CPM's concurrence, they recommend to Presbytery that the Inquirer come before Presbytery at the next scheduled meeting to be advanced to Candidacy.
- f. **Criteria for advancement:** To proceed to candidacy the Inquirer must demonstrate personal faith, a sense of self-understanding, an understanding of the Reformed tradition, what it means to be Presbyterian, and an understanding of the task of being a minister.

2. Candidacy Phase

If the Presbytery is satisfied, the person becomes a Candidate for Ministry. During this phase, full and intensive preparation occurs under scrutiny of the Session and the CPM, including continued discernment, two internships and the Ordination Exams.

- a. **Ordination Exams:** Candidates must pass the five PC(USA) national exams in Bible Content (completed in Inquiry Phase), Theology, Bible Exegesis; Church Polity, and Worship and Sacraments. They must have completed 36 units of seminary coursework, and submit to CPM a request to take the Ordination Exams. Routinely, candidates have a college undergraduate degree (usually four years) and complete a graduate level seminary degree (usually three years, if attending full-time).
- b. **Accommodations to Particular Circumstances** (*the Book of Order, 2025 - 2027*): 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 of the requirements for ordination in G-2.06, except for those of G-2.0607d. 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-fourths vote some alternate means by which to ascertain the readiness of the candidate for ministry in the areas covered by the standard Ordination Examinations. The existence of any waiver or alternate means to ascertain readiness, with confidential details omitted, shall be communicated to the Presbytery to which an Inquirer or Candidate may be transferred (G-2.0610).
- c. **Required Internships:** Riverside Presbytery requires two separate, supervised internships from Candidates:
 - a. **Supervised Practice of Ministry (SPM):** working in a church setting that is supervised by an ordained pastor, usually overseen by a professor at the Candidate's seminary, for one year, with a minimum of 12 hours/week. SPM may not take place in the home church or Church of Care. Criteria include a wide array of involvement in the life of the church planning, leading and participating in: worship (including preaching, funerals, and other important occasions), Christian education, pastoral visitation, administration, special projects, events, or assignments that would expose the Candidate to the responsibilities and realities of parish ministry.
 - b. **Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE):** One Unit of CPE, overseen by a Certified CPE Supervisor in an accredited ACPE Program is required. It can be done in a hospital setting, through a hospice care agency, or in a prison, and involves additional classroom time and written assignments. Candidates apply for a program with guidance from their seminary and will usually receive academic credit. A written final assessment from their CPE Supervisor is forwarded to CPM as part of their application to be certified ready for examination for ordination, pending a call.

3. Final Assessment

Working with their CPM Liaison, the Candidate completes an application to be Certified Ready for Examination for Ordination (*Form 6a*) and sends it with their Ordination Exam results, seminary transcripts, and CPE Assessment to the CPM. The candidate then meets with CPM and, after presenting a written personal statement of faith and preaching a prepared sermon to them is recommended to Presbytery to be certified ready for examination for ordination, pending a call. The Candidate appears before Presbytery at its next scheduled meeting and is verbally examined to be Certified Ready to Receive a Call.

Characteristics needed to become a Minister of Word and Sacrament (Teaching Elder) are: wisdom and maturity of faith, leadership skills, compassionate spirit, honest reputation, and sound judgment (*Book of Order, G-2.0607a*).

1. Certified Ready to Receive a Call

When the Candidate is approved to be Certified Ready to Receive a Call, they will then, with the help of their CPM Liaison, prepare their PDP (Personal Discernment Profile) and upload it on the PC(USA) website in order to be matched up with churches that are looking for a minister. The content of the PDP and the method of preparing it will be explained by CPM at the appropriate time. Then it will be put on the PC(USA) website and interested church search committees will contact the Candidate directly and arrange interviews, meetings, etc. It is important for the Candidate to continue to work with their CPM Liaison during this time to further discern where they feel called, get feedback, and give updates on their search. This phase can take anywhere from 1 month to 1 year.

2. Becoming Ordained as a Minister of Word and Sacrament.

When the Candidate receives a validated call to ministry, and the Terms of Call are approved by the Committee on Ministry (COM), the Presbytery then ordains that person to the office of Minister of the Word and Sacrament in the PC(USA). Only a Presbytery may ordain a minister, not a Congregation. After ordination, they are installed (if a permanent position) to their position in that specific church body.

It is a long and winding road to become ordained as a Minister of Word and Sacrament in the PC(USA), but God and many supportive people will walk with you on your journey and you will be helped by lots of prayer and caring from others.

God's blessings to you if you are feeling led to step onto the path to become a Presbyterian minister. It is a challenging, but rewarding journey to serve Jesus Christ and his Church.

Your gifts are greatly needed.

Appendix: Forms

From the Advisory Handbook on Preparation for Ministry

Forms are available at riversidepresbytery.com.

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 CPM 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 CPM.

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 CPM. The form includes questions that may guide the session’s discussion with the applicant and provide support for its recommendation to the CPM.

Forms for enrolling an inquirer

These forms are used by applicants and their CPM 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 CPM 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 CPM. The completed report is sent to the enrollee and the sponsoring Session.

Form 2B “Covenant Agreement and Inquirer Release”

A signed acknowledgment of the new covenant relationship entered into by the Inquirer, the Session and the CPM. The Inquirer release sets in motion an understanding that permits the CPM 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 CPM 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 and sponsoring Session.

Forms for advancing to candidacy

Inquirers and their CPM may use these forms when a decision has been made to recommend that 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 CPM 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 CPM. The form includes questions that may guide the Session’s discussion with the Inquirer and provide support for its recommendation to the CPM. Attach a letter explaining the rationale for the Session’s action in light of the Inquirer’s suitability for ordered ministry.

Form 5C “Report of Consultation to become a Candidate”

A signed acknowledgment of the new covenant relationship entered into by the Candidate and the CPM. This form also establishes growth areas for Candidate. The completed report is sent to the Inquirer/Candidate and sponsoring Session.

Form 5D “Covenant Agreement and Candidate Release”

A signed acknowledgment of the new covenant relationship entered into by the Candidate, the Session and the CPM. The Candidate release sets in motion an understanding that permits the CPM 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, *Form 6b* 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 CPM, 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 5e “Application to be Certified Ready for Examination for Ordination”

To be completed initially by the Candidate seeking to be certified ready to receive a call. Any required documentation not already given to the CPM should be added. The recommendations of the session and the CPM are recorded on this form.

Form 6 “Summary Report of Final Assessment”

This form, completed by the CPM, acknowledges that the CPM of Riverside 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 CPM 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.)