So you’re considering ministry…

Wonderful! We, the Committee on Preparation for Ministry (or CPM), are excited that you have experienced an inner call from God to undergo this period of inquiry that could lead to your first call to ministry. We welcome your application to be enrolled as an inquirer.

The process toward ordination is not a quick one - the average length of time from inquiry to ordination is now between four and five years. Additionally, ministry in the 21st century is a rapidly changing vocation. Full-time calls for teaching elders are no longer a given, if they ever were. More and more pastors are finding themselves tent-making (generally serving part-time in a congregation and working part-time in a non-church capacity) in order to support themselves and their families. As you consider your call to ministry, it is important to be realistic about practical matters as well as spiritual ones. The preparation process, in addition to academic preparation, will require you to consider thoroughly your vocational goals, financial well-being, and spiritual health **in light of the changing nature of the church**.

We work with each inquirer to hear the call of the Church. We recognize that the inner call does not guarantee ordination, but does help to discern a person’s future contributions to church and world. We know that this is a serious and important step in your life and we are serious about our relationship with you during these important years. We aim for your experience of being an inquirer, and eventually a candidate, to be marked with nurture, care, and thoughtful guidance from the presbytery.

We want you to be a valuable, strong, and well-equipped addition to the PC(USA); in fact we insist that you will be well qualified before we will recommend you to presbytery for ordination. We take very seriously our responsibility to foster your preparation for ministry that you might be well qualified. Accordingly, there are many requirements to be fulfilled, which will be explained to you in detail once you formally begin the process. For now, what follows are tips for getting started.

Getting started

You must be an actively involved member of a congregation for six months prior to the application to be an inquirer. Your very first step should be to talk to your pastor. The next step will be to contact the presbytery office.

As your church’s session begins the relationship with the presbytery’s CPM, you will need to complete the application forms to be enrolled as an inquirer and your session must endorse and submit them. All necessary forms for this process are available through the presbytery office, and may be downloaded from the denominational website at <http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/prep4min/forms-used-preparation-ministry-process/>. Your journey begins with forms 1A, 1B, 1C, 2A, and 2B, found under “Application to the process” and “Forms for enrolling as an inquirer.” Check with your presbytery as to where these forms are to be submitted.

Once your session has endorsed your application, you will meet with the CPM to discuss your sense of call, plans for career evaluation, financial readiness, and your plans for seminary. The financial status of ministers is a very significant issue for the church, so it is important that your accumulated debt does not exceed the church-wide median salary. Additionally, health insurance is strongly encouraged for all inquirers and candidates, and their families. Be prepared for this discussion with form 1C.

Official enrollment as an inquirer is an action by the presbytery, on the recommendation of the CPM, and is intended to be a thoughtful and deliberate step. Individuals are encouraged to take this formal action soon after they have made their personal decision to explore this ministry so that the presbytery’s committee can provide them with support and counsel as early as possible.

The denomination has an excellent set of online resources which can be found at <http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/prep4min/advisory-handbook-preparing-ministry/>. Look for the documents under “Roles and Responsibilities of Participants: The Inquirer and Candidate.” Becoming familiar with these resources should answer many questions you might have about how the process to ordination proceeds.