

So, Session, your church has someone considering ministry …

There are four major events of the process for someone interested in ministry, and his/her home church.

1. Establish a relationship with presbytery- consider applicant’s application and make recommendation to the Committee on Preparation for Ministry
2. Inquiry phase
3. Candidacy phase
4. Annual consultations

What follows are details of the initial steps for a session.

* Contact the Moderator of the presbytery’s Committee on Preparation for Ministry (CPM) or the presbytery office when a church member indicates a desire to pursue his/her sense of call to ministry.
* Meet for orientation on the preparation process with representative(s) from the Committee on Preparation for Ministry.

Before a person can enter inquiry with the presbytery, the session of the sponsoring congregation must provide its endorsement. This decision should be based on direct knowledge that emerges through:

* Prayerful examination of the applicant’s motivation, personal faith and experience in the congregation.
* Examination of his/her knowledge of the responsibilities of a teaching elder and personal willingness and ability to accept them.
* A serious assessment of the gifts needed by teaching elders and whether there is evidence of such gifts in the applicant’s personal life and service to the church

Once an applicant, who requests to be enrolled as an inquirer, has been interviewed by the session and a recommendation has been made to the presbytery’s Committee on Preparation for Ministry:

* Appoint an elder to be a session liaison with the applicant and the CPM if he/she is enrolled as an inquirer by the presbytery.
* Providing financial support is a very tangible expression of support. Some presbytery policies will require the congregation to contribute to some expenses related to the preparation process, such as fees related to psychological assessment. Direct ongoing support and care of the inquirer / candidate can include, but is not limited to, the provision of financial support.
  + Financial support can come in many forms, whether it be offering a book stipend, covering the full fees of the required career assessment, providing a tuition scholarship, or picking up the cost of the ordination exam registrations. These funds can be raised among the congregation at a pancake breakfast, talent show, or any other way your congregation is comfortable inviting free-will offerings.
  + Other non-financial ways to show you care could be as simple as care packages, Starbucks gift cards, or knitted items.
* Participate with the inquirer and presbytery’s Committee in evaluating the inquirer’s growth and progress, receiving a copy of the inquirer’s Summary Report of Annual Consultation from the Committee.
* Meet with the inquirer to review evidence indicating his/her readiness to proceed to candidacy. This evidence includes a personal interview with the inquirer, all consultation reports, and the inquirer’s demonstrations of adequate promise for ministry according to the expected outcomes of the inquiry phase.
* Make a decision regarding whether to recommend to presbytery that the inquirer proceed to candidacy phase when the time is right.

Some things to consider as you select a Session liaison for the inquirer / candidate:

* The length of the process from the first step of seeking a call to the day of ordination is now longer than ever because of the shrinking number of available positions in ministry. The process takes, on average, five years - greater than the typical ruling elder term of three years.
* Each church is welcome to handle this “changing of the guard” in whatever way it sees fit. We offer two options.
  + One option is to develop a transition plan between ruling elders, which allows the outgoing elder time and opportunity to introduce the incoming ruling elder to the inquirer / candidate.
  + Another option is to appoint a ruling elder as a designated liaison for the duration of the process.
* However you determine to arrange the liaison relationship, please be sure to guide him or her to the informational document for Session liaisions.

And if you don’t yet have anyone considering ministry:

* Develop among church members an awareness of the Christian vocation and challenging them with responsible Christian stewardship of their talents.
* Encourage persons with appropriate motivation and abilities to consider preparation for the ministry of teaching elder or other church occupations.

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 Session.”