So you’re a session liaison…

As session liaison to an inquirer or candidate, you have the privilege of keeping the inquirer or candidate connected to his/her home church, conveying their support and care. The process of preparing for the ministry of the teaching elder is thorough, taking at least three years for the inquirer / candidate to complete seminary, field education, clinical pastoral education (CPE), and ordination examinations. A liaison who is aware of the process adds to the support network so important for all inquirers and candidates. Below are some suggestions to guide *you* as a liaison.

* Learn the background of your inquirer or candidate, if you do not already know it: parents, siblings, school, college, vocational interests and abilities, birthday, name of spouse (if married) or significant other, name(s) of child(ren) (if any), (proposed) seminary, progress toward ordination, financial needs, etc.
* Visit, write or phone to introduce yourself.
* Become acquainted in ways that seem natural to you and the inquirer or candidate.
* Take an interest in his/her academic, field education, annual consultation and other activities related to the preparation for the ministry of the teaching elder.
* Share with the Committee on Preparation for Ministry, especially at the time of the annual consultation, any areas of particular need for the inquirer or candidate - whether financial or personal.
* Become aware of when the inquirer or candidate will be home and try to make some contact, even if only a phone call.
* Identify ways to keep the congregation aware of the names of its inquirers or candidates (away at seminary or at home) who have entered a covenant relationship with the presbytery and are preparing for the ministry of the teaching elder.
* Initiate conversation with your session on the possibility of providing financial assistance or other tangible support to your inquirers or candidates.
* Consider, with your session, the possibility of assisting in the payment of necessary expenses incurred in the relation to visits for annual consultation with the Committee on Preparation for Ministry.
* At the presbytery meeting at which the inquirer is examined to move to candidacy, make sure someone has been appointed (check with your pastor or the Committee on Preparation for Ministry) to go outside the meeting to be with the inquirer and his/her family when presbytery is making its decision.
* And, at the presbytery meeting at which the candidate is examined for ordination, make sure someone has been appointed (check with your pastor or the Committee on Preparation for Ministry) to go outside the meeting to be with the candidate and his/her family when presbytery is making its decision.
* Be present if at all possible at the service of ordination and/or installation.
* Remember your inquirer or candidate in prayer.
* Write your inquirer or candidate on special occasions (e.g. birthdays or anniversaries).
* Become acquainted with the “Preparation for Ministry” manual so that you are aware of requirements and procedures and can provide timely support (e.g. appearances before presbytery, annual consultations, presbyteries’ cooperative examinations, final assessment, etc.).
* Discuss with your session the progress the inquirer or candidate is making, as reflected in the Summary Report of Annual Consultation, prepared by the presbytery’s Committee on Preparation for Ministry, and sent to the sponsoring session.
* The role of the spouse or significant other of the inquirer or candidate is particularly important. Try to be as supportive, sensitive and understanding as you can of the spouse / significant other. Let the Committee know if there are ways the Committee can better assist the spouses /significant others of an inquirer or candidate in training for ministry.
* In a word, be a friend and lend to your inquirer or candidate a sense of your personal, moral and spiritual interest in and support of him/her in training for the ministry of the teaching elder.

In your capacity as liaison, it is also appropriate to stay in communication with the Session with updates at least quarterly. 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. Should you rotate off of the Session in the midst of the process, consider continuing in the role of liaison or plan how you might helpfully transition the relationship of care to another ruling elder.