

II. The Session

A. Role of Session

The pastor and session are responsible for communicating to all church members what is meant by "the ministry of all believers" and for helping members discern and fulfill their Christian vocation.

1. Developing Vocational Awareness

To ensure that committed, knowledgeable persons continue to be involved in the life and mission of the church and the world it is essential that the session take seriously its responsibility for developing vocational awareness among members of the congregation. A biblically-grounded, theologically sound understanding of Christian vocation integrated into the church's program will help members recognize opportunities to fulfill their Christian vocation within the context of their secular occupations. Sessions should consider using *This Call's For You*, a workbook that has programs and workshops on Christian vocation for members of all ages, and includes six "conversations" for persons who want to test their call to ministry of the Word and Sacrament.

2. Developing Awareness of the Call to Ministry of the Word and Sacrament

Members of congregations should also be aware of the ministry of the Word and Sacrament as an occupation through which many dimensions of Christian service can be realized. This opportunity should be emphasized in all church programs, from Christian education classes and youth and young adult groups, to men's and women's programs.

It is therefore essential that pastors, sessions and local congregations:

- challenge all members to become aware of their Christian vocation;
- develop and implement thoughtful and creative means by which highly qualified persons may be challenged to consider a vocation in the ordained ministry of Word and Sacrament;
- help potential inquirers get in touch with the presbytery's Committee on Preparation for Ministry as early as possible;
- give high priority to developing and maintaining vital, theologically sound youth programs which are in harmony with the Presbyterian and Reformed traditions; and
- assure that youth ministry leaders are carefully selected and trained, theologically competent and appropriate role models.

3. Exploring the Call to Ministry of the Word and Sacrament

When a member of the congregation approaches the pastor and session to express the possibility that she or he has been called to the ministry of the Word and Sacrament, the local church is provided with a challenge and an opportunity. It is the session's responsibility to provide a supportive relationship through which it can explore with the individual the personal implications and suitability of a church occupation.

According to the Constitution, the relationship between the session and the individual Inquirer is part of the Inquiry Phase of the preparation for ministry process. As defined in the *Book of Order* (G-14.0302), its purpose is "to provide an opportunity for the church and for those who believe themselves called to ministry of the Word and Sacrament to explore that call together in such a way that a decision regarding the Inquirer's suitability for ministry of the Word and Sacrament will be based on knowledge and experience of one another."

Such knowledge and experience emerge through prayerful examination of the Inquirer's motivation, personal faith and experience in the congregation, through examination of his or her knowledge of the responsibilities of a minister of the Word and Sacrament, and through a serious assessment of the gifts needed by ministers of the Word and Sacrament. These are the first important steps in discerning that the individual has indeed been called by the Holy Spirit, through the church, to the ministry of the Word and Sacrament. Studies indicate that the lives and work of dedicated pastors and effective congregations have a significant impact on the lives of Inquirers and Candidates.

4. Supporting Inquirers and Candidates

The pastor, session and congregation communicate with and support Inquirers and Candidates throughout the entire period of preparation. This can be a most meaningful experience for those involved. To facilitate this continuing relationship, the *Book of Order* (G-14.0306b) provides for the appointment of an elder from the church to act as a liaison with the Inquirer or Candidate and with the presbytery's Committee on Preparation for Ministry. The Session Liaison is encouraged to accompany the Inquirer/Candidate to each annual consultation, participating as an observer.

Along with its specifically prescribed responsibilities, it is important that the session continue to express its concern and support by contacting the individual and his or her family at important times, such as annual consultations with the Committee on Preparation for Ministry, appearances before presbytery, academic examination periods, Presbyteries' Cooperative Examination periods, when presbytery makes its final assessment of the Candidate, when a call is being negotiated, on holidays, anniversaries, etc. Providing financial support, as suggested in the *Book of Order* (14.0306b), is another very tangible expression of support.

It should be noted that although the *Book of Order* encourages a supportive relationship between the individual and the session, it clearly states that, "In matters relating to preparation for the ministry, the individual is under the oversight of the presbytery ..." (G-14.0306a(2)).

B. Responsibilities of the Session

- To develop among church members an awareness of their Christian vocation and challenge them with responsible Christian stewardship of their talents (G-1O.0102d and G-1O.0102g).
- To encourage persons with appropriate motivation and abilities to consider preparation for the ministry of the Word and Sacrament or other church occupations.

1. Phase I: Inquiry

Admission to Inquiry (G-14.0303a-e) begins when a person who has been a church member for at least six months indicates to that church's pastor and session his or her sense of call to the ministry of the Word and Sacrament. This is the first step toward establishing an ongoing relationship with the session and presbytery's Committee for the purpose of exploring and testing the sense of call.

Ask the applicant to complete Form 1, "Application for Inquiry."

- Contact the appropriate presbytery committee (usually the Committee on Preparation for Ministry) requesting orientation to the preparation for ministry process used in that presbytery.
- Meet with representatives of the presbytery's Committee on Preparation for Ministry to receive orientation in the preparation for ministry process.

At this meeting distribute the applicant's completed Form 1 to session members for review prior to session 's meeting with the applicant.

- Consult with the person requesting enrollment as an Inquirer and make a decision whether or not to endorse the applicant as an Inquirer.

See "Some Issues for Attention and Evaluation by the Session When Examining the Gifts and Motivations of a Prospective Inquirer, " at the end of this section, page 24.

- Appoint an elder (or a group of persons including at least one elder) to act as liaison with the Inquirer and with the presbytery's Committee on Preparation for Ministry and to participate with the Inquirer and the Committee as they explore and evaluate his or her progress (G-14.0306b).
- Make a recommendation to presbytery, through the Committee on Preparation for Ministry, regarding the applicant's request to be enrolled as an Inquirer.

Indicate session's endorsement or non-endorsement on Form 2A, "Application to be Enrolled by presbytery as an Inquirer" and submit Forms 1 and 2 A to the presbytery.

- If the session, the committee or presbytery decides not to accept the individual's name for enrollment as an Inquirer, at this time, the session continues to provide support, counsel and guidance to the individual as she or he seeks to discover an appropriate occupational expression of his or her Christian vocation.
- During the Inquiry Phase (G-14.0303f, G-14.0306b), the session participates with the Inquirer and presbytery's committee in evaluating the Inquirer's growth and progress.
- For completion of the Inquiry Phase (G-14.0305b), the session meets with the Inquirer to review evidence indicating his or her readiness to proceed to Candidacy. This evidence includes personal interviews with the Inquirer, all consultation reports, the Inquirer's demonstration of adequate promise for ministry according to the expected outcomes of Inquiry set forth in G-14.0303g(1)-(6).
- The session makes a decision regarding whether to recommend to presbytery that the Inquirer proceed to Candidacy Phase (G-14.0305b).

Indicate Session's endorsement or non-endorsement on the Inquirer's completed Form 5A, "Application To Be Received as a Candidate" and submit to presbytery.

2. Phase 2: Candidacy

- When the Inquirer is ready for admission to Candidacy the session provides support and makes a statement, if requested, when she or he is examined by presbytery.
- If the Inquirer is not received by presbytery as a Candidate, at this time, the session continues to support, counsel and guide the individual as she or he seeks to discover an appropriate occupational expression of her or his Christian vocation.
- When an Inquirer has been approved for Candidacy and has been examined (G-14.0305e) and approved by presbytery, he or she shall answer the Constitutional Questions listed in the *Book of Order*, G-14.0305f(1)-(4).

The Candidate and her or his session may request that a commission of presbytery conduct a service of reception in the presence of the Candidate's congregation (G-14. 0305h).

- During Candidacy the session provides support and pastoral care to the Candidate and her or his family, maintaining the liaison relationship with both the Candidate and the presbytery Committee.
- The session receives and reviews reports of each annual consultation (G-14.0309b).
- The session removes the Candidate's name from the church roll when notice is received of her or his ordination.

It is important to recall that the session acts as an advocate for both Inquirers and Candidates and through its moderator and presbytery commissioner(s), can call the presbytery's Committee on Preparation for Ministry to accountability in fulfilling its responsibilities.

3. Some Issues for Attention and Evaluation by the Session When Examining the Gifts and Motivations of a Prospective Inquirer

- What personal qualities are evidence of a healthy and vital faith in God through Jesus Christ?
- How is that faith currently being expressed through the individual's participation in the worship, life and mission of this congregation?
- What various motivations impel the sense of call? (e.g., service to God and the world, compassion for God's children, guilt, the need for power and status)
- What real and potential talents for ministry are evident in this individual? (e.g., the ability to communicate, interpersonal skills, leadership or administrative abilities)
- What is the level and adequacy of the individual's academic interest, ability and motivations?
- What is the evidence of his or her physical health and stamina?
- What is the evidence of his or her emotional well-being?
- What is the evidence of his or her self-discipline?
- How does the individual plan to finance his or her education?

NOTE: For the following Constitutional provisions, see pages 11-13.

- Enrollment of Inquirer by Presbytery
- Exceptions and Waivers
- Annual Consultation
- Negotiation for Service
- When Exams May Be Taken
- Transfer of Covenant Relationship
- Removal from Covenant Relationship
- Location of Ordination
- Examination and Ordination
- Call Through Own Presbytery
- Inquirer or Candidate as Temporary Supply

For constitutional procedures relating to presenting and receiving a call, see Book of Order, G-14.0507.