

Inquiry Phase

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G-2.0603

that call together. To make this exploration as effective as possible, a network of caring, supportive relationships is initiated—first, between the inquirer and the church session, then with the presbytery through its committee overseeing preparation for ministry, and also with the theological institution they may be attending. In regular consultation with the presbytery's committee, inquirers evaluate the personal implications of and their suitability for a vocation as a teaching elder; are guided in prayerful examination of their motivations, personal faith and experience in congregational and other ministry settings; and make a serious assessment of the gifts needed by teaching elders comparing them with their own gifts. This phase also provides the church with opportunities to respond directly to the inquirer's questions and concerns about the role and responsibilities of a teaching elder.

Admission to inquiry

A member of a congregation may be considered for enrollment as an inquirer by approaching the session about her or his desire to engage with the church in a process of discernment regarding the possibility of becoming a teaching elder. If the session agrees that such a joint discernment is warranted, it will assist that individual in beginning a formal process with the presbytery's committee overseeing preparation for ministry. Official enrollment as an inquirer is an action by the presbytery (possibly by authority delegated to its commission responsible for preparation for ministry, G-3.0307), 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.

Unless the presbytery has waived the usual requirement (see G-2.0610 and "Accommodations to particular circumstances" below), the individual must have been "active in the work and worship of [the] congregation for at least six months" and be a member of the congregation before the session presents its endorsement to the presbytery's committee (G-2.0602). In making the decision about whether to endorse the individual for the inquiry phase, it is advisable for the session to consult with the person not only about his or her personal sense of call but also about what gifts and abilities for ministry the session has observed during the person's involvement with the congregation. It can be helpful to both session members and the individual in deciding whether to

recommend formal enrollment as an inquirer to include in this consultation discussion about God's call to ministry of all who have been baptized and the Reformed understanding of the distinct functions and responsibilities of each of the ordered ministries (teaching elder, ruling elder, and deacon).

When a session decides to endorse a congregation member's request to be enrolled as an inquirer, it will forward that endorsement to presbytery through the presbyteries established process. Presbyteries variously receive these endorsements through their stated clerk, the moderator of the presbytery's committee overseeing preparation for ministry, or another designated person.



With Baptism, sessions are to encourage "parents to present their children ... without undue haste, but without undue delay" (W-2.3012). How might that advice inform sessions in their responsibility toward members considering ordered ministry?

What materials (such as transcripts, references, etc.) might a session want to have before meeting with a member about possibly entering into formal inquiry?

What are some specific questions or areas of questioning a session would want to ask during such interviews?

Upon receipt of the session's endorsement, the presbytery will need to make a decision regarding whether to enroll the person as an inquirer. Usually the presbytery's committee will want to conduct its own interview with the person, but it may require additional materials beyond the session endorsement before conducting this interview. These might include submission of application packets including recommendations from references, standard criminal and financial record background checks, reports from psychological assessments of mental health wholeness and leadership potential in ministry, and so forth. (Presbyteries may alternatively require some of these items and others during the inquiry phase rather than before beginning it.) The presbytery may also desire to hear directly from a member of the session about its endorsement. The point of these application materials is not to prejudge a decision about the person's "suitability for ordered ministry" (the constitutionally defined purpose of inquiry, G-2.0603), but to determine whether there are sound reasons for engaging in the considerable work and expense required of both the individual and the presbytery in undertaking the formal preparation for ministry process.