

Candidacy Phase

A presbytery's decision to move an individual from inquiry to the candidacy phase indicates a communal discernment of that person's suitability for ordered ministry as a

Purpose of Candidacy

The purpose of the candidacy phase is to provide for the full preparation of persons to serve the church as teaching elders. This shall be accomplished through the presbytery's support, guidance, and evaluation of a candidate's fitness and readiness for a call to ministry requiring ordination.

G-2.0604

teaching elder. So in the candidacy phase the primary focus shifts to providing for the candidate's "full preparation" and conducting a formal assessment of her or his "fitness and readiness for a call to ministry requiring ordination" as a teaching elder (G-2.0604).

The covenanting process of setting goals through genuine consultation between the presbytery and the person under care that was begun in inquiry continues in the candidacy phase. However, the *Book of Order* makes it clear that particularly in the candidacy phase it is the presbytery's responsibility to provide "support, *guidance*, and *evaluation*" (G-2.0604, emphases added) to the candidate. The candidates' responsibility, then, is not just to keep their presbyteries informed about their progress through theological education, supervised practice of ministry, and so forth, but to follow their presbytery's *guidance* as to how they should be preparing for a potential call as a teaching elder through developing their gifts for ministry and evaluating the progress of their development. The presbytery's responsibility also includes the *evaluation* of when the candidate has made "full preparation" and is ready to be considered for a call to service as a teaching elder.

Entering the candidacy phase

An inquirer becomes a candidate by an action of presbytery. In accord with its responsibilities in the *Book of Order*, each presbytery "shall develop and maintain mechanisms and processes" (G-3.0307) for when and how a decision is to be made about an inquirer's "suitability for ministry" and whether to move that person to candidacy. Some presbyteries may establish formal application procedures initiated by inquirers and requiring submission of specific materials (such as an endorsement from the session recommending transitioning to candidacy). Others may choose a less structured process where the decision to either proceed to candidacy or conclude inquiry emerges more organically from the ongoing consultation process. In such models, the move to candidacy is more an invitation by the community than a request by the inquirer.

Since the Form of Government requires that ordinarily the total time under care shall include "at least one year as a candidate" (G-2.0602), the presbytery's procedures should establish a specific date on which it approved the action to transition the inquirer to the candidacy phase. Additionally, the presbytery's procedures should indicate whether the decision to move an inquirer to the candidacy phase is a "delegated authority" given to its commission overseeing preparation for ministry as teaching elders (G-3.0307 and G-3.0109b(3)), or whether it is reserved to the presbytery itself.



What would be the advantages and disadvantages of processes for candidacy initiated by inquirers or at the invitation of presbyteries?

What would be some reasons why a presbytery would delegate decisions about moving inquirers to candidacy to its commission?

Why might a presbytery want to reserve that decision for itself?

Which approach would work best in your presbytery?

Because of the significance of the communal decision that an inquirer is considered “suitable for ministry as a teaching elder,” some presbyteries may decide to conduct a special service for “Receiving a Candidate under Care.” (For an example, see *Book of Occasional Services* [Louisville: Geneva Press, 1990], pp. 270-271; note that while the order of service presented there includes a section headed, “Constitutional Questions,” those affirmations have not been mandated by the *Book of Order* since 2007.) Such services focus on new candidates’ public declarations that they believe themselves called to this ministry and that they will accept the presbytery’s supervision and determination of their “full preparation” for the ministry of Word and Sacrament. In part depending on whether the procedures require a vote by the whole presbytery or an action by its commission to move someone to candidacy, presbyteries may wish to consider the relative benefits of conducting such services in the context of a presbytery’s worship or that of the new candidate’s congregation of membership.