

Inquiry, candidacy, and beyond

The preparation for ministry process involves two phases: inquiry and candidacy. These two phases are designed to explore the call, evaluate the gifts, and support the preparation

Nature and Purpose of Preparation

It is important that those who are to be ordained as teaching elders receive full preparation for their task under the direction of the presbytery. For this purpose, a presbytery shall enter into covenant relationship with those preparing to become teaching elders and with their sessions and congregations. This relationship shall be divided into the two phases of inquiry and candidacy.

G-2.0601

of men and women who either are personally exploring their sense of a call to ordered ministry as a teaching elder or have been encouraged by the faith community to consider the possibility that God is calling them to that particular ministry. The model for the ministry of the teaching elder is the ministry of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the church's responsibility—acting primarily through the session of the person's congregation and the presbytery of which that congregation is a part—is to help these individuals grow toward maturity in Christ and a deeper understanding of their place in Christ's ongoing ministry through the church.

To do this effectively, each presbytery will need to develop procedures “to guide, nurture, and oversee” those in the process of discerning a call to and preparing for ministry as

[Presbytery as] Pastor, Counselor and Advisor to Teaching Elders and Congregations

... Each presbytery shall develop and maintain mechanisms and processes to guide, nurture and oversee the process of preparing to become a teaching elder.

To facilitate the presbytery's oversight of inquirers and candidates, ... it may delegate its authority to designated entities within the presbytery. Such entities shall be composed of ruling elders and teaching elders in approximately equal numbers, bearing in mind the principles of unity in diversity in F-1.0403. All actions carried out as a result of delegated authority must be reported to the presbytery at its next regular meeting.

G-3.0307

teaching elders (G-3.0307). A presbytery must include all the constitutionally mandated requirements and procedures, but is also free to develop its own “mechanisms and processes” appropriate to its particular ministry context (see the discussion of “Customization” at the close of the first section of this *Advisory Handbook*). Ordinarily a presbytery will facilitate its work through ruling and teaching elders selected to serve on a committee or some other entity of the presbytery. If these representatives are given authority to act on the presbytery's behalf in some portions of the process, they must be constituted as a commission (see G-3.0109b). For the sake of convenience, throughout this *Advisory Handbook* we will refer to those representatives of the presbytery who have been delegated these responsibilities as “the presbytery committee overseeing preparation for ministry” (or simply, “the presbytery's committee”).

While both the inquiry and candidacy phases of the process have their particular purposes defined by the *Book of Order* (G-2.0603 and 2.0604), they accomplish those purposes by promotion and assessment of the individual's development in five key areas:

1. *Education for Ministry*, including evaluation of the individual's academic potential and progress, and reflection on their educational experiences in relation to their preparation for ordered ministry as a teaching elder.
2. *Spiritual Development*, providing a framework in which individuals can reflect on their personal faith journey and their spiritual practices to discern the will of God in their lives.
3. *Interpersonal Relations*, providing opportunities to reflect on how one relates to others, one's leadership style, and what they mean in terms of the functions and responsibilities of the ministry of the Word and Sacrament.
4. *Personal Growth*, through which persons reflect on who they are, what areas they need to develop, how to understand their call, and how to develop personal stewardship.
5. *Professional Development*, to help persons develop specific skills that will enhance their effectiveness as teaching elders and as presbyters, especially in the areas of understanding one's ministry context and the ability to deal with conflict that may emerge in ministry settings where one serves.

During both inquiry and candidacy, the individual's progress is measured through formulation of covenant agreements (G-2.0601) that set out specific expected outcomes formulated in light of these five growth areas. It is important that the expected outcomes be understood as essential goals rather than simply as minimum requirements to be met or papers to be written. These expected outcomes serve as the focus of ongoing consultations between the inquirer or candidate, the session, and the presbytery's committee as they discern the person's suitability for this form of ministry and evaluate readiness to be examined and ordained as a teaching elder.

Although not a separate "phase" of the process defined by the *Book of Order*, it is important to recognize that the special relationship between a candidate, the session, and the presbytery's committee does not end with the decision that the person is "certified ... ready for examination for ordination, pending a call" (G-2.0607). Even after the candidate is "certified," there is a need to maintain the relationship through a covenant laying out new goals for how the candidate will seek a call and maintain ministry skills as the search progresses. Candidates are "under care" of the presbytery until they leave the process either by ordination, withdrawal, or removal.



If there are broad areas of development common to all phases of the preparation process, what might be some specific goals within them that are particular to those at inquiry, candidacy, and negotiation for service?

How might covenant goals be shaped so that they both develop the inquirer/candidate and the relationship between the partners in the process?