

So You're Thinking About Becoming a Pastor?
A Primer for the Ordination Process

Does your congregation recognize your gifts and talents for ministry? Do you feel a sense of call to preach, teach, and shepherd the flock of the Church? If so, then you might be called to ordained Ministry of Word and Sacrament.

In the Presbyterian Church, God's call to ministry must be both experienced by the believer and confirmed by the larger Church community. Therefore, every step of discerning this call involves both the individual and a group representing the larger Church. The Session of one's home congregation is the first group to commit to one's discernment process. Once that has happened, the Committee on Preparation for Ministry from the local Presbytery takes the person under care and ushers him or her through the entirety of the process.

In the Presbyterian Church (USA), a prospective pastor goes through two phases of discernment, called "Inquiry" and "Candidacy." Inquiry represents just that: a time of inquiring into whether the ministry is one's true calling. Candidacy is the phase in which the Presbytery affirms one's call and completes his or her preparation for ministry. Each phase lasts at least one year. Given that preparation for ordination in the PC(USA) requires graduation from seminary with an Master of Divinity degree, most pastors spend at least three years in the ordination process.

All Candidates must pass five standard ordination exams and take courses in biblical Greek and Hebrew. Many presbyteries, including the Presbytery of the Susquehanna Valley, require not only a seminary degree but also career and psychological assessments and one unit of Clinical Pastoral Education. Depending on the gifts and needs of an individual Candidate, presbyteries may also ask a Candidate to fulfill other requirements to aid in discernment.

Ultimately, however, the decision to confirm or deny an Inquirer or Candidate's call to ministry does not boil down to a bulleted list of concrete requirements. The Committee on Preparation for Ministry must prayerfully discern whether sending a person into ordained ministry would be a blessing both for the individual and the Church. If you decide to begin the process, then clarifying the answer to this question will be the central task for you and the Committee.

Sounds good! What Do I Do First?

Your first step is to have a conversation with the pastor and elders of your congregation about seeking God's call in your life. In order for the official process to begin, the Session must endorse the beginning of your Inquiry phase.

If you are interested in more details about the process before approaching your Session, then your pastor or elder commissioner to Presbytery can put you in touch with someone on the Committee on Preparation for Ministry. That committee would be happy to discuss with you the details of the discernment process.

For More Information:

Check out the Preparation for Ministry pages on the PC(USA) website:

<http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/prep4min/>

"It was Christ who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

~ Ephesians 4:11-13