

Commission on Preparation for Ministry of Lake Huron Presbytery

Handbook

2014-2015

Part One: PC(USA) Preparation for Ministry Handbook

Part Two: Presbytery Requirements

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Introduction

Welcome to the Care process for Lake Huron Presbytery's Commission on Preparation for Ministry. We are delighted to learn of your interest in the ordination process for Teaching Elders and, whether you are a potential Inquirer or local Session, we hope that the information we provide will be useful for your purpose.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) greatly values the call to ministry and believes 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." (G-2.0601)

The way that such direction is managed in our Presbytery is through our Commission on Preparation for Ministry (CPM). Alongside the Committee on Ministry, this group has the responsibility for oversight of those preparing to be teaching elders, Commissioned Ruling Elders, and Certified Christian Educators. The Committee meets on the third Wednesday morning in most months. Our goal is to develop a shepherding relationship with those under our care, as well as their local Sessions, as they make their way through the process from discernment to either Ordination, Commissioning or Certification.

Time Requirements

As per the Book of Order (G-2.0602), in order to be enrolled as an inquirer, "the applicant shall be a member of the sponsoring congregation, shall have been active in the work and worship of that congregation for at least six months, and shall have received the endorsement of the session of the sponsoring congregation. The inquiry and candidacy phases shall continue for a period of no less than two years, including at least one year as a candidate."

In addition, in order to be brought under care of Lake Huron Presbytery, an applicant must be at least college age and either accepted to or enrolled at a seminary, divinity school or other such theological institution. (Note to the local Session: If you have High School or younger College students interested in eventually pursuing ordination as a Teaching Elder, it is better that these students be nurtured through a process of spiritual practice and discernment than to take the official action of moving them under care of your Session and this Presbytery.)

Ordinarily, a member of the CPM will visit with the Session of the applicant's home church when that member comes forward seeking to be enrolled under the care of the Presbytery. The discussion at this meeting of the Session might include such topics as:

- The call to ministry;
- The discernment process;
- The role of the Session in both discerning the call and nurturing the call of the applicant;
- The role of the Session in giving financial support to the applicant;
- The endorsement of the Session of the one seeking enrollment.
 - We would want the Session to be able to say that we have seen the action of the Holy Spirit in this person, and the response of this person toward that action.
- The role of the Presbytery's CPM in this process of preparation for ordered ministry.

Note to Sessions

In interviewing applicants who request to be enrolled as Inquirers, members of Session should give primary attention to evaluating: natural gifts, quality of commitment, strength of motivation, and potential for growth. They might also consider the following questions:

- What personal qualities of the applicant 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, etc.)
- 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 motivation?
- What is the evidence of his/her physical health and stamina?
- What is the evidence of his/her emotional well-being?
- What is the evidence of his/her self-discipline?
- How does the individual plan to finance his/her education?

If an applicant is received under care, the Session should appoint a liaison to serve an advocate for the inquirer.

Purpose of Inquiry

“The purpose of the inquiry phase is to provide an opportunity for the church and those who believe themselves called to ordered ministry as teaching elders to explore that call together so that the presbytery can make an informed decision about the inquirer’s suitability for ordered ministry.” (G-2.0603)

Each inquirer under care of our Presbytery will receive a liaison to our CPM, who will serve as a spiritual mentor and an administrative guide through the process to ordered ministry. It is vital that those under care stay in touch with their liaisons, informing them of their progress. Some things that are helpful to share with the liaison include:

- Plans for classes to be taken (at least once per year).
- Progress toward graduation.
- Any concerns regarding academic standing.
- Upcoming decisions regarding Field Education placement and/or Internships.
- Any financial concerns regarding the cost of a seminary education.
- Any illnesses or challenges in the household that might affect one’s ability to maintain both academic standards and spiritual practice.

Before moving from the inquiry phase to the candidacy phase, the CPM will look forward to the following steps being achieved:

- The thoughtful, continuing support of the Session of the Inquirer’s sponsoring congregation.
- The presentation to the CPM by the Inquirer of a personal statement upon one’s faith journey to this point, which will be shared with the Presbytery of Lake Huron.
- Evidence of the Inquirer’s potential to be a good Teaching Elder and a strong colleague in ministry, using the “Outcomes of Inquiry” outlined in the denominational handbook on pp. 41 and 42.
- A frank discussion about the current realities of pastoral ministry within the PC(USA) and an assessment of the Inquirer’s willingness and ability to be flexible in consider ministry with churches potentially quite unlike their sponsoring congregation.
- An examination by the Presbytery, with questions raised about the individual’s spiritual journey.
- Career Counseling, which shall ordinarily be done at the Midwest Ministry Development Service.

An annual consultation with the CPM is anticipated throughout the duration of Care. Ideally, this annual consultation will be done face-to-face, and the CPM will work around the schedules of those under our care. However, for those at a distant Seminary who will not be returning to Michigan during a given calendar year, provisions will be made for another sort of interview: telephone interview, Skype interview, or an on-campus interview by a member of the CPM travelling near the student’s seminary.

It is the plan of this CPM to arrange for a regularly-scheduled retreat for inquirers, candidates and CPM members to invite conversation and learning in growth areas for those under care. Some of the topics that might be covered include: spirituality, leadership, polity, worship planning, stewardship, an exploration of Myers Briggs Type

Indicators, and ministry in the church today. This retreat might also incorporate the annual consultation with inquirers and candidates.

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)

As our decision to move an individual from the inquiry phase to the candidacy phase for ordered ministry indicates a communal discernment of the person’s suitability for service as a Teaching Elder, a shift is made in the primary focus of the Candidates’ preparation for ministry—including a formal assessment of her or his “fitness and readiness” for ordination. The covenant of care continues unabated. However, the emphasis is no longer primarily on support and guidance, but also on evaluation for “fitness and readiness” to receive a call.

Since the covenant relationship established during the inquiry phase continues forward, it is anticipated that the Candidate will stay in regular contact with the CPM through their assigned Liaison. And annual consultations with the Candidate shall proceed, for the purpose of “support, guidance, and evaluation.” During these consultations, the discussion might include such topics as:

- The Candidate’s progress in developmental areas of ministry.
- A review of previously established goals for assessment, and appropriate new goals negotiated.
- Reports from the Candidate’s Session, Seminary, and a person involved in overseeing the candidate in a supervised practice of ministry.
- Review of a recent transcript, showing satisfactory grades and a course of study including Hebrew and Greek as well as exegesis of the Old and New Testaments using Hebrew and Greek.
- Spiritual development and possibilities for mentoring.
- Financial management and assistance.
- Extra-curricular requirements, which may include any (or none) of the following: Clinical Pastoral Education, Personal Counseling, and Spiritual Direction.

Oversight

“During the phases of inquiry and candidacy the individual continues to be an active member of his or her congregation and subject to the concern and discipline of the session. In matters relating to preparation for ministry, the individual is subject to the oversight of the presbytery within the context of their covenant relationship.” (G-2.0605)

Service in Covenant Relationship

“Inquirers and candidates shall, with the permission of the presbytery of care, engage in some form of supervised service to the church. No inquirer or candidate who has not been previously ordained as a ruling elder may serve as a moderator of a session, administer the Sacraments, or perform a marriage service. An inquirer or candidate previously ordained as a ruling elder may be authorized by the presbytery to preside at the Lord’s Table when invited by a Session.” (G-2.0606)

Final Assessment and Negotiation for Service

“A candidate may not enter into negotiation for his or her service as a teaching elder without approval of the presbytery. The presbytery shall record when it has certified a candidate ready for examination for ordination, pending a call. Evidence of readiness to begin ordered ministry as a teaching elder shall include:

- a. a candidate’s wisdom and maturity of faith, leadership skills, compassionate spirit, honest repute, and sound judgment.
- b. a transcript showing graduation, with satisfactory grades, at a regionally accredited college or university.
- c. a transcript from a theological institution accredited by the Association of Theological Schools acceptable to the presbytery, showing a course of study including Hebrew and Greek, exegesis of the Old and New Testaments using Hebrew and Greek, satisfactory grades in all areas of study, and graduation or proximity to graduation; and
- d. satisfactory grades, together with the examination papers in the areas covered by any standard ordination examination approved by the General Assembly. Such examinations shall be prepared and administered by a body created by the presbyteries.” (G-2.0607)

Just as there were “outcomes of inquiry” that led to a decision regarding the progress forward from the inquiry phase to the candidacy phase so, too, are there “outcomes of candidacy” that will help provide guidance in considering a candidate’s “fitness and readiness” for a call to ordered ministry as a Teaching Elder. The traditional “outcomes of candidacy,” as outlined on page 47 of the denominational handbook, will apply in Lake Huron Presbytery. These include:

- Presenting evidence of competence in the fields of Reformed theology, Bible, the polity of the PC(USA), and worship and Sacraments, as well as evidence of ministerial skill attested through the supervised practice of ministry.
- Expressing theological views that are compatible, in the opinion of the presbytery, with the confessional documents of the church.
- Expressing an understanding of the meaning of the questions required for ordination, informed by the candidate’s knowledge of the church in diverse settings.
- Presenting a written sermon, together with a description of the contemporary need to which it was addressed and an exegetical interpretation of the biblical material out of which it arose.

A “final assessment” is a formal review by the CPM to determine whether or not a candidate is “ready for examination for ordination, pending a call.” If an assessment is made that the candidate is “ready,” they may be approved to “negotiate for service,” so that a call might be pending. Such a review is generally scheduled once a candidate has satisfied the requirements of Book of Order provisions G-2.0607b-d. (See above.)

Transfer of Relationship

“At the request of the inquirer or candidate and with the approval of the sessions and presbyteries involved, a presbytery may transfer the covenant relationship of an inquirer or candidate.” (G-2.0608)

Removal from Relationship

“An inquirer or candidate may, after consultation with the session and the presbytery, withdraw from covenant relationship. A presbytery may also, for sufficient reasons, remove an individual’s name from the roll of inquirers and candidates, reporting this action and the reasons to the session, to the individual, and, if appropriate, to the educational institution in which the individual is enrolled. Prior to taking such action, the presbytery or its designated entity shall make a reasonable attempt to give the candidate or inquirer an opportunity to be heard concerning the proposed removal.” (G-2.0609)

As per the denominational handbook on preparation for ministry, “inquiry and candidacy continue until a presbytery acts in one of three ways to end the covenant relationship and remove the person’s name from its roll of inquirers and candidates”:

1. Once a candidate who has been “certified ready for examination for ordination” receives a call approved by a presbytery and has been examined, ordained and installed, the presbytery of call notifies both the session and the presbytery of care to remove the person from the membership roll of the congregation and the roll of inquirers and candidates of the presbytery of care.
2. Persons under care may withdraw from the process by notifying their session and the CPM of their decision. Such decisions may also be arrived at mutually through the consultations and covenant reviews that are the core of this preparation for ministry process.
3. The presbytery or CPM may end the covenant relationship because it has determined that an inquirer is not “suitable” for ordered ministry as a Teaching Elder or that a candidates’ continuing preparation would not result in a determination of “fitness” and “readiness” for ordered ministry. If a person is removed from this covenant relationship by the CPM, it must report its action both to the session and to the presbytery at their next respective meetings. If the inquirer or candidate is enrolled in theological studies, the CPM must report its action to the seminary, divinity school or theological school as well.

Exceptions

“By a three-fourths vote, a presbytery may waive any of the requirements for ordination in G-2.06, except for those of G02.0607d. If a presbytery judges that there are good and sufficient reasons why a candidate should not be required to satisfy the requirements of G-2.0607d, it shall approve by three-quarters vote some alternate means by which to ascertain the readiness of the candidate for ministry in the areas covered by the standard ordination examinations. A full account of the reasons for exception shall be included in the minutes of the presbytery and communicated to the presbytery to which an inquirer or candidate may be transferred.” (G-2.0610)