

PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES

THE VOCATIONS COMMITTEE PRESBYTERY OF WEST VIRGINIA

I. **The Process of Inquiry** (G-2.06 and Advisory Handbook of the PCUSA)

A. Procedures Prior to the Interview with the Committee:

1. Individuals who have an interest in exploring the possibility of ordered ministry of Teaching Elder in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) initiate the process of inquiry by expressing their interest to their pastor or session moderator of the congregation to which they belong. To be eligible to become an Inquirer, an “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.” (G-2.0602) The applicant's pastor or session moderator shall notify the chair of the Vocations Committee of the applicant's interest.

2. The Vocations Committee Chair contacts the applicant and directs him/her to the appropriate website to download the application forms (Forms 1A, 1B, 1C). The Vocations Committee Chair also contacts the pastor/moderator and directs him/her to the appropriate website to download the Session Evaluation and Recommendation Form (1D).

3. A representative of the Vocations Committee will then meet with the Session, at a stated Session meeting or a mutually agreed upon time, and explain the process of Inquiry and Candidacy, including the requirements for the Session, those under care of the Presbytery and the Vocations Committee.

4. The session then meets with the applicant to interview the applicant and to complete its evaluation and recommendation to the Vocations Committee. (Form 1D) In advance of this meeting, copies of the applicant’s forms (1A, 1B and 1C) should be distributed to members of the Session.

5. After the Session meets with the applicant, the Session moderator/clerk submits the Session’s recommendation to the Vocations Committee Chair by sending Forms 1A, 1B, 1C and 1D. Sessional action includes appointing a liaison to the applicant from the Session and reporting that individual's name on Form 1D; a copy of these forms should be kept on file by the Session Liaison. The Session Moderator also needs to complete the appropriate portion of Form 2B.

6. Upon receipt of these forms, the Vocations Committee Chair sends copies to committee members and sends the originals to the the presbytery staff resource person, who creates a “master file” for the applicant.

7. The Vocations Committee Chair contacts the applicant about a date to meet with the full Vocations Committee. The purpose of this meeting is to consult with the applicant about becoming an inquirer. The Session liason will be invited to this meeting to introduce the applicant and the reasons for the Session’s endorsement.

8. The committee will then interview the applicant based on the forms submitted and other items related to the process.

B. The Interview and the Initial Meeting with the Vocations Committee

1. The applicant meets with the Committee in order for the Committee to become acquainted with the applicant and to share with him or her the expectations the Committee has of its Inquirers. The purpose of this initial meeting is 1) to clarify the roles, expectations and responsibilities of the inquirer, session and presbytery, including Book of Order description of the Preparation for Ministry process; and 2) to make a preliminary assessment of the applicant's motives, seriousness of intent, and general suitability for the ordered ministry of teaching elder. At the conclusion of the interview, the applicant and the Session liaison will be asked to leave while the Vocations Committee discusses whether to recommend or not to recommend to Presbytery that the applicant be enrolled as an Inquirer.

2. If the decision is to recommend to Presbytery that the applicant be enrolled as an Inquirer, the Committee, in conversation with the applicant will complete Form 2A, including Growth Objectives. In addition to discussing growth objectives, a tentative schedule for vocational testing; taking the Bible Content Examination; sending transcripts and any field education reports to the Presbytery Office; and annual consultations with the Vocations Committee will be developed. This is also the appropriate time to discuss the need for permission by the Inquirer to engage in work in the Church, suggestions for course work, and any questions that the inquirer may have of the process and/or the committee.

3. Before the conclusion of the meeting, a Vocations Committee Liaison shall be assigned to the Inquirer. The Inquirer and the Vocations Committee liaison shall complete and sign Form 2B (which would have been signed by the Clerk of Session earlier). Form 2B then shall be copied and distributed to the Vocations Committee Liaison, Clerk of Session, Session Liaison and Inquirer, and the original shall be placed in the inquirer's master file.

4. A decision to recommend an applicant become an Inquirer will be presented by the Vocations Committee to the next stated meeting of the Presbytery. If the Presbytery approves enrolling the as an Inquirer, the Stated Clerk will send Form 2 B to the appropriate office of the PCUSA, and file a copy in the Inquirer's master file.

C. Content of the Inquiry Phase

1. During the Inquiry Phase the inquirer is responsible for providing the necessary data for her or his file (college and seminary transcripts, field education reports, and other information requested by the Vocations Committee). Inquirers are also responsible to coordinate with their Committee Liaison for making arrangements for career testing through an approved career testing center or provider; the cost of testing will be divided among the inquirer, the Session and the presbytery.

2. An annual consultation will be held with each inquirer. The date of this consultation will be communicated through the Vocations Committee Liaison. Inquirers shall be directed to the denomination's preparation for ministry website to complete Form 3, which should be completed and submitted to the Vocation Committee Liaison 3 weeks prior to the annual consultation. The Liaison will then distribute it to all committee members and presbytery staff resource person, and have a copy placed in the inquirer's master file.

3. At the time of the annual consultation, the Vocations Committee will discuss with the inquirer whether to continue the process of inquiry, and, if so, together will complete the agreement and goals for work areas and growth objectives for the inquirer, using Form 4.

4. The decision to continue or terminate the inquiry phase will be reported to the presbytery at its next stated meeting. Form 4 will be copied and distributed to the inquirer, the Session Liaison, the seminary, and the Vocation Committee Liaison; the original being placed in the inquirer's master file.

5. During the inquiry phase, the inquirer must successfully complete a unit of Clinical Pastoral Educations (CPE) at a site approved by the Vocations Committee in conversation with the seminary.

II. Moving from Inquiry to Candidacy

When the Inquirer, the Vocations Committee liaison and the Session liaison are agreed that the Inquirer has demonstrated suitability for ordered ministry, and all completed forms are in the inquirer's master file, the Inquirer may request to move to candidacy. The process for doing so is outlined below.

1. The Inquirer shall demonstrate readiness to move to candidacy by preparing a response for each of the following "outcomes of inquiry":

- articulate an understanding of Christian vocation in the Reformed tradition and how it relates to his or her sense of call;
- an expression of personal faith in a manner that demonstrates an understanding of the Reformed tradition;
- expound upon at least one concept from that personal faith statement at greater depth, explaining what it suggests about God, humanity, and their interrelationships;
- explain what it means for him or her to be Presbyterian, indicating how that awareness grows out of participation in the life of a particular church;
- discuss his or her personal and cultural background as it relates to the ministry of Word and Sacrament, including a concern for maintaining personal, spiritual, physical and mental health; and relate his or her own personal cultural location to changes in American society and its increasingly multicultural character;
- express his or her understanding of the tasks teaching elders perform, including expression of both of his or her specific gifts for this particular ministry and of areas in which further growth is needed.

These responses do not have to be lengthy and are not limited to written responses.

2. The Inquirer shall ask to meet with the Session and shall provide the Session Moderator with responses to the above. The Session will meet with the Inquirer to discuss the progress that has been made and the Inquirer's responses to the items in #1 above, and shall take action on whether to concur with the Inquirer's request to become a Candidate. The Session shall complete Form 5B and the appropriate sections of Form D and submit them to the Vocations Committee Chair who will share it with the committee and place the original in the person's master file.

3. The Inquirer shall complete Form 5A and submit it with responses to the "outcomes of inquiry" to the Vocations Committee Liaison and ask to meet with the Vocations Committee. The

Vocations Committee Liaison informs the Chair of this request so that it can be placed on the committee docket on the appropriate date. The Liaison shall see that copies are distributed to committee members in a timely fashion.

4. To become a Candidate, an Inquirer must appear before the Vocations Committee. Inquirers will be introduced by the Vocations Committee liaison to the committee. The Session liaison shall be expected to attend this meeting.

5. The focus of the conversation with the Inquirer and the committee will be the responses to the “outcomes of inquiry,” and steps in the candidacy process. If the Inquirer anticipates that any requirements will need to be waived by the presbytery, this should be made known as part of this conversation. At the conclusion of the conversation, the Inquirer and the Session liaison will be asked to leave, and the committee will vote to recommend or not to recommend to the Presbytery that the Inquirer be enrolled as a Candidate.

6. Following the conversation, the Vocations Committee and Inquirer will complete Form 5 C. A copy of this will be given to the inquirer, the Session Liaison, the Vocations Committee Liaison, and the original will be placed in the person’s master file.

6. If the Vocations Committee recommends the Inquirer be moved to Candidate, the Inquirer will appear before the presbytery and asked to share his or her Christian experience, forms of service to the Church, and motivation for seeking ordination as a Teaching Elder in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

III. The Candidacy Phase

1. During the Candidacy Phase, which shall last at least one year, the candidate is responsible for providing the necessary data for her or his file (seminary transcripts, field education reports, and other information requested by the Vocations Committee).

2. An annual consultation will be held with each candidate. The date of this consultation will be communicated through the Vocations Committee Liaison. Candidates shall be directed to the denomination’s preparation for ministry website to complete Form 3, which should be completed and submitted to the Vocation Committee Liaison 3 weeks prior to the annual consultation. The Liaison will then distribute it to all committee members and presbytery staff resource person, and have a copy placed in the inquirer’s master file.

3. At the time of the annual consultation, the Vocations Committee will discuss with the candidate how he or she should be preparing for a potential call as a teaching elder through developing his or her gifts for ministry and evaluating the progress of his or her development, including steps needed for ordered ministry. In order for a candidate (or an inquirer) to take the standard ordination exams in Biblical Exegesis, Theological Competence, Church Polity, and Worship and Sacraments, she or he must have the Vocations Committee’s approval. This approval is based on the belief that the person has reached the point in academic training and supervised practice of ministry where it is appropriate to seek the concurrence of other presbyteries that the person is ready to begin service in ordered ministry as a teaching elder. (Ordinarily, ordination exams will be taken during the last year of seminary.)

4. At the end of the consultation, the committee and candidate will decide on whether to continue the candidacy process and, if so, together will complete the agreement and goals for work areas and growth objectives for the candidate, using Form 4.

5. The decision to continue or terminate the candidacy phase will be reported to the presbytery at its next stated meeting. Form 4 will be copied and distributed to the inquirer, the Session Liaison, the seminary, and the Vocation Committee Liaison; the original being placed in the candidate's master file.

IV. Final Assessment and Negotiation for Service

Candidates must be certified by the Vocations Committee as being ready for examination for ordination, pending a call. Evidence of readiness to begin ordered ministry as a teaching elder shall include (G-2.0607):

- 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 Old and New Testaments using Hebrew and Greek, satisfactory grades in all areas of study, and graduation or promixity to graduation; and
- d. satisfactory grades, together with the examination papers in the areas covered by any standard ordination exams approved by the General Assembly.

1. In preparation for the final assement, the candidate shall prepare a one page statement of faith; and 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 the sermon arose.

2. The candidate shall communicate his or her desire for his or her final assement with the Vocations Committee Liaison. The Vocations Committee Liaison informs the Chair of this request so that it can be placed on the committee docket at the appropriate date and time, and then ensures that the candidate knows of this date and time. At least two weeks in advance of the meeting, the above mentioned documents shall be given to the Committee Liaison who shall then be responsible for seeing that copies are made and distributed at the committee meeting.

3. When the committee meets, the candidate will preach the prepared sermon, which will be discussed with the committee. Follow up conversation will focus on the candidate's fitness and readiness for ministry requiring ordination. Topics of conversation will include: ordination exams and readers' responses; the candidate's statement of faith; supervised practice of ministry reports and within them instances when the candidate initiated change or helped a community follow the leading of the Spirit into new ministries through group discernment; ministries of care candidates have participated in and their motivations and attitudes regarding such; the candidate's integrity, openness, accountability and keeping commitments; and the candidate's ability to set and meet goals. If needed, consideration will be given to asking the presbytery to grant needed exceptions at the next presbytery meeting.

4. Following the assessment, the candidate will be excused, and the Vocations Committee will vote to approve the candidate as ready to receive a call or to not approve this request. The candidate will then be invited back to discuss next steps with the committee.

5. Upon approval of a candidate's final assessment, he or she will be certified as ready to receive a call and may be given permission to circulate his or her personal information form. The candidate should work with his or her Vocations Committee Liaison in completing his or her personal information form. *The Committee encourages all seminary seniors to take advantage of whatever help their seminaries may provide in preparing their Personal Information Forms.* Once the form is completed with the Committee Liaison's review, it must be signed by the Vocations Committee Chair before being submitted to denominational offices. A copy shall be placed in the candidate's master file.

V. Further Requirements: The Vocations Committee, throughout the preparation process, will assure that all persons engaged in preparation for ministry be informed of the Committee's expectations and requirements not explicitly contained in the *Form of Government*. Those expectations include:

1.. Supervised Field Education in a Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) congregation with placement to be approved by the Vocations Committee in consultation with the seminary.

2. A course in Presbyterian polity. The Vocations Committee will not normally consider candidates for ordination in this Presbytery who have not successfully completed, with a passing grade, a course in the polity of the PC(USA).

VI. A Final Word

Candidates will remain under care of the Presbytery of WV until ordination, withdrawal by the candidate or removal by the Vocations Committee. Even after a candidate has been certified ready for examination for ordered ministry and begun negotiating for service, there shall be renewed covenant agreements with the Vocations Committee and regular annual consultations as long as the candidate is under care of the presbytery. If a person is removed from the process, this information must be reported to the candidate's session and to the presbytery at their next respective meetings, and, for those currently attending seminary, to the theological institution.

VII. Examination for Ordination Process and Procedure

1. When a Candidate has been certified as ready to receive a call and has been given permission to circulate his or her Personal Information Form by the Vocations Committee, he or she may enter into negotiation with a Pastor Nominating Committee for a call to ordered ministry as a Teaching Elder. Vocations Committee liaisons should be kept informed by candidates as to their progress in searching for a call. When a call is being extended, the Candidate should inform his or her Vocations Committee liaison, who will report to the full Vocations Committee.

2. As per the Book of Order, “the presbytery placing the call to the candidate for ministry shall ordinarily examine, ordain and install the candidate.”(G-2.0702) Thus, The Vocations Committee expects that the calling Presbytery will conduct the final examination for ordination of candidates under care of the Presbytery of West Virginia. The Presbytery of West Virginia shall ordinarily conduct examinations for all candidates called to ordered ministry as teaching elders in the presbytery.

3. When a candidate is called to a church within the Presbytery of West Virginia, the Chair of the Pastor Nominating Committee will notify the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery and provide contact information on the candidate, and the Stated Clerk will notify the Chair of the Vocations Committee and provide contact information. The Vocations Committee Chair will assign a liaison from the committee to the candidate. If the candidate is under care of this presbytery, the committee liaison will continue in this relationship.

4. The Vocations Committee Liaison will contact the candidate and talk with him or her regarding the results of the candidate’s Standard Ordination Exams and the candidate’s final assessment with the presbytery of care. The liaison will request that the candidate provide a one-page autobiographical statement, a copy of his or her statement of faith, a sermon and exegesis to be distributed to members of the committee. The liaison will make clear that the statement of faith shall be no longer than one side of one page in length, typed, and include an understanding of: the nature of the triune God, meaning of salvation in Christ, and the life and mission of the Church, including the authority of Scripture and the role of the sacraments.

The Liaison shall review the procedure to be followed by the Vocations Committee for its ordination examination, which will include asking the candidate to introduce himself or herself and to read the statement of faith, after which the committee will discuss the candidate’s statement with particular reference as to how the statement is informed by, or departs from, the confessional standards of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Ordinarily the candidate will be asked to preach a sermon in the context of worship, as determined by the Vocations Committee. The liaison will also indicate that other questions regarding the sermon and exegesis, the polity of our denomination, and readiness for ordered ministry may be discussed.

5. When a candidate is to appear at the Vocations Committee meeting to be examined, prior to the candidate’s entering the committee will discuss the process to be followed and identify particular issues in the statement of faith, sermon and exegesis to be reviewed with the candidate. The liaison will then meet briefly with the candidate to review the process and highlight potential areas of questioning before bringing the candidate into the committee and introducing him or her. The committee will then follow the process in #4 to examine the candidate.

6. When the Vocations Committee has completed the examination, the Candidate is excused. Following discussion, the committee will vote whether or not to sustain the examination and recommend the Candidate to the presbytery for ordination. If the committee vote is affirmative, the Candidate shall be examined for ordination by the presbytery as a whole, pending Ministry Committee approval. If the vote is negative, the committee will discuss with the candidate what work needs to be done and invite the candidate to return to the committee following completion of that work to be re-examined.

7. After the Vocations Committee has approved its examination for ordination of a Candidate, the approval is reported to the Committee on Ministry.

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8. After the candidate has been approved for ordination and ordained by the presbytery, this information will be communicated to the presbytery of care by the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery.

Transferring Information on Candidates Receiving Calls to Other Presbyteries.

When a Candidate under the care of the Presbytery of West Virginia is to be examined for ordination by another presbytery, upon receiving a request for transfer of documents from the calling presbytery, the stated clerk shall send copies of all paperwork in the Candidate's master file to the stated clerk of the calling presbytery, with a statement that the Vocations Committee has certified the Candidate's readiness to receive a call. The Candidate's Master File shall remain with the Presbytery of West Virginia. If the calling presbytery does not approve the candidate for ordination, the candidacy shall be continued under care of the Presbytery of West Virginia and annual consultations with the candidate will continue.

Ministers from Other Denominations

“When a minister of another Christian church is called to a work properly under the jurisdiction of a presbytery, the presbytery, after the constitutional conditions have been met, shall recognize the minister's previous ordination to ministry. Such ministers shall furnish credentials and evidence of good standing acceptable to the presbytery and shall submit satisfactory evidence of possessing the qualifications of character and scholarship required of candidates of this church.” (G-2.0505, 2011-2013)

When ministers of the Word and Sacrament/Teaching Elders ordained in denominations other than the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) desire to apply for membership in the Presbytery of West Virginia, they are to make their request through the stated clerk. They are responsible for requesting the denominational body of which they are members to send a copy of their credentials of good standing to the stated clerk. Upon receipt of such credentials, they shall be given to the Vocations Committee for evaluation. The basis of the evaluation shall be: 1) an official transcript showing graduation from an accredited college or university; 2) an official transcript from a theological institution accredited by the Association of Theological Schools acceptable to the presbytery; 3) satisfactory completion of PCUSA ordination exams; 4) articulation of Christian faith and demonstration of acceptable knowledge of Reformed theology and the government of this church. Consultation with the stated clerk of the Presbytery may be helpful in determining the status of those applying for membership.

Ministers of other Reformed churches ordained for five or more years may be granted an exemption for some or all of the standard ordination exams by two-thirds vote of the presbytery. (G-2.0505) If the exemption is granted, the minister must prepare a statement of faith using the guidelines for Candidates, and must pass a polity examination administered by the Vocations Committee.

Those seeking membership in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) will meet with the Vocations Committee to go over the credentials material, statement of faith, results of the standard examinations, and any other material deemed pertinent for the Committee's deliberations. Upon affirmative action by the Vocations Committee, the minister will be recommended to the Presbytery for membership and will be presented to read the statement of faith and answer questions from members of the Presbytery. The Vocations Committee reports its approval to the Ministry Committee, which meets with the minister and the pastor nominating committee to determine suitability and fit.

