

Overview of the Process for becoming a Minister of Word and Sacrament (Teaching Elder)

The best synopsis of the process for becoming a minister in the Presbyterian Church, USA can be found in the ***Advisory Handbook for Preparation for Ministry in the Presbyterian Church., USA***. The Presbytery of Carlisle's Committee on Preparation for Ministry (CPM) created a brochure, which is a synopsis of the process covered by the Advisory Handbook, and, also, an overview of the process is available as a chart. Another good source of information can be found on the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) website (www.pcusa.org). The ***Book of Order*** contains a description of the process on becoming a Minister of Word and Sacrament (Teaching Elder) in section G 2.06. Links to all these resources and more are located on this webpage.

The reformed tradition believes God calls people to serve as leaders for God's people. The call is twofold. The person needs to feel a sense of call to this role of leadership. Then the church (congregation and Presbytery) needs to validate that call. The public recognition of receiving, answering and preparing for the call is acknowledged in a worship service of ordination. Laity can be ordained to Elder and clergy are ordained to Teaching Elder. These titles are new. The old ones were Ruling Elder and Minister of Word and Sacrament. The change is to reflect the belief that ordination to leadership in the church is equal for both laity and clergy, only their roles differ.

Once a person feels a call they start a conversation with their pastor and Session members. These conversations and relationships are to help the person get clarity on what God is asking them to do. It is called discernment. It also allows feedback to the person being called to take into account others' perceptions on how suitable they might be for becoming a Teaching Elder. After these conversations are underway and some clarity has been reached, the process is usually formalized by having the person become an Inquirer. (See pages 36-42 in the Advisory Handbook)

If the Inquirer stage further encourages the person toward ordination as a Teaching Elder, they can request becoming a Candidate. This is done with the person, the Session and the Presbytery's Committee on Preparation for Ministry. (Different Presbyteries may have different committees serve this function). In this phase, the person called explores all that might need to be done to meet the qualifications for Teaching Elder. This path, created in agreement with the CPM, becomes the Covenant between the Candidate and the CPM. It usually covers spiritual growth and maturity, social skills, academic skills and leadership abilities. (See pages 42-46 in the Advisory Handbook)

Interwoven in the Candidacy phase is Assessment which covers evaluation and readiness. It includes selecting and graduation from an accredited seminary, successfully passing the Bible and Ordination Examinations, and being seen by the Session and Committee and Presbytery as “ready” for ministry as a Teaching Elder. (See pages 46-49 in the Advisory Handbook)

When all of these phases are successfully completed the Candidate meets with the Presbytery to be examined for ordination. If approved they can complete their Personal Information Form (PIF) and circulate their name as eligible for a call to a parish or other approved ministry.