

Commission on Preparation for Ministry
 Ordination Process Overview
 (June, 2012)

In addition to earning a degree from a theological institution accredited by the Association of Theological Schools, those who wish to be ordained as Teaching Elders/Ministers of the Word and Sacrament in the PC(USA) must also fulfill other requirements. The path to ministry includes not only your academic work, but also the encouragement, discernment and collaboration of your church's session, and the Commission on Preparation for Ministry (CPM) of your presbytery. This document is meant to answer the practical question "What do I do now?" during the current NCP Preparation for Ministry process. Every process is a little different, but this is an outline of the typical path. It does not include everything you need to know –there is plenty of specific information available on the PC (USA) website about preparation for ministry. There is also information available on the National Capital Presbytery website at www.thepresbytery.org and in the packet of information you'll receive (see Step 1).

BEFORE ENTERING THE PROCESS TO BECOME A TEACHING ELDER IN THE PCUSA

1. You must be an active member of a PC (USA) congregation for at least 6 months.
2. You must discuss your sense of call with your pastor, chaplain or persons whose opinion you trust.

ENTERING THE PROCESS

1. Indicate to the session of your church your desire to explore your sense of call to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament by filling out a **Form 1A-C** (www.pcusa.org/prep4min/cpmform.htm), making a copy for yourself, and bringing the form to the clerk of your church's session. Sessions are obligated to take their endorsement of a call seriously and may assign a small discernment committee to explore a seeker's sense of call. Your session will have an orientation session with a member of the CPM, you and at that time an information packet about the preparation for ministry process will be given to both and your session. Your session will meet with you, with your **Form 1** in hand. Providing all is in order, the session will endorse you to be enrolled by the presbytery as an Inquirer; the Session will complete **Form 1D**. The session will appoint an elder to act as your liaison with the Commission on Preparation for Ministry. All of these things take place at about the same time.

2. You will also need to send transcripts from all colleges and graduate schools attended to the presbytery office in care of Jan Moody (National Capital Presbytery, 11300 Rockville Pike – Suite 1009, Rockville, MD 20852). She is currently the CPM staff member for our presbytery. Once she has received **Form 1A-D**, she will notify the CPM chair with your contact information, and send a copy of **Form 1** to the Center for Pastoral Counseling (see step # 3). Letters to your listed references will also be sent at this time. As these materials are being collected, please be proactive in checking with Jan Moody if you feel like there has been a prolonged period between the time you sent in your materials and the time you heard from CPM. Sometimes, transcripts which arrive late and missing letters of reference are reasons for the delay.

3. Before you meet with the CPM, you must participate in a psychological assessment or career development evaluation. In our presbytery that assessment is conducted by the Center for Pastoral Counseling of Virginia (CPC), McLean, VA. The CPC will already have a copy of your **Form 1**, which they will receive from the presbytery office. The CPC will try to work around your schedule in setting up interview times. The evaluation consists of three segments:

- An initial appointment of approximately 3-5 hours. This includes an interview and several written assessments
- A follow-up interview lasting about one hour. CPC will compile a report and schedule
- A final appointment lasting approximately ½ to 1 hour to discuss the written report that CPC will send to presbytery. The evaluation's total cost is about \$1500 – approximately 40% of that cost is paid for by the presbytery, your church will be billed for 30% and 30% is your responsibility. The presbytery

initially pays the full fee and then you and your church will receive invoices. (Your church may be willing to pay more than 30% of the fee.)

4. Once your file is complete at presbytery with your transcripts, **Form 1A-D**, all references and the report from CPC, two sets of the completed file will be forwarded to CPM. At this time, you will be contacted by CPM, assigned to a CPM Liaison Group (LG) and to a single CPM member who will act as your liaison during the process. Your LG's convener will contact you to schedule an interview. Bring your **Forms 2A and 2B** to the interview. If the interview is satisfactory, the LG will recommend to the CPM that you be enrolled as an Inquirer. You'll also sign the covenant **Form 2B**. The CPM as a whole will vote on the LG's recommendation and then forward that information to the presbytery office. Your enrollment as an Inquirer, effective the date of CPM's approval, will be included in the reports to presbytery at their next meeting.

5. At the initial interview with CPM, you will be asked to sign and Authorization for Disclosure of Protected Health Information.

6. If you have not yet enrolled in a seminary by the time you are enrolled as an Inquirer, your LG can help advise you on seminary education. A list of seminaries is available at www.pcusa.org/pre4min/seminaries.htm

If you decide to take any class for a pass/fail grade you should inform you LG liaison prior to making this decision and prior to taking the class. You should be able to explain this decision to your LG liaison with reasonable justification for this decision. This is especially true for the required language and exegetical classes. The reason you should consider letter grades is to enhance your chances of being able to take a higher level degree such as a Ph.D. or D. Min. Not taking letter grades for classes may hinder your ability to compete for chaplaincy positions with the Department of Veteran Affairs, Federal Bureau of Prisons, or to serve as a military chaplain due to the competitive nature of these positions. All things being equal in a competitive job market or education program a good GPA will stand out better than a pass/fail based performance in education.

7. It should be noted that the two phases of preparation for ministry process is the inquirer and candidacy phase. These phases shall continue for a period of not less than two years, including as least one year as a candidate. The process commonly takes longer than two years. During the process, you will meet with your LG at least once a year for an annual consultation until you become a certified candidate ready to receive a call. At these Annual Consultations, you will need to prepare and submit **Form 3**.

8. The Bible Content exam will be the first of five ordination exams that you will take. The Bible Content exam is usually taken during the first year of seminary. Copies of the registration form for this exam may be downloaded at www.pcusa.org/exams. Inquirers and candidates do not need written CPM permission to take this exam.

9. Following the Inquiry phase is the Candidacy phase. As you prepare to enter the Candidacy phase, you should contact your church's session. At the same time, you should let your CPM liaison group know that you are meeting with your session in preparation of moving to candidacy. Submit a **Form 5A** to your clerk of session, and schedule a meeting with your session. There are also six Questions for Outcomes of Inquiry which must be completed and reviewed by your session prior to your CPM interview for move to candidacy. Copies of these questions are on the National Capital Presbytery website under Preparation for Ministry. The session must endorse your candidacy, and show its endorsement by completing **Form 5B and D**. After you meet with your session, schedule a meeting with your LG. Your LG convener will ask for copies of some of the forms before the meeting and the answers to the Outcomes of Inquiry questions so that LG members may read them. If the interview is satisfactory, the LG will complete with you **Form 5C** and their portion of **Form 5D** and recommend to the CPM that you be enrolled as a candidate. The CPM will vote on this recommendation, usually at their monthly meeting, and the information will be sent to the presbytery office and reported at the next presbytery meeting.

10. As a Candidate, you will continue to fulfill your education requirements and your supervised practice of ministry.

11. You should also prepare to take the other 4 ordination exams. These exams are offered twice a year, in August and January. CPM must grant written permission for you to take the exams. Prior to registering for the ordination exams, you must request approval through your Liaison Group to take the exams. You must have completed at least 2 years of theological education and have had the opportunity to serve as a student in a supervised ministry. You will need to fill out and mail the completed and signed registration forms which can be found on line at <http://www.pcusa.org>. There is an ordination exam fee which may be reduced with early registration submittal. The CPM encourages candidates to take all 4 exams at once. You will need permission to take them separately.

12. You are urged and may be required to take at least one unit of Clinical Pastoral Education as part of your supervised ministry. In most instances CPE will be required. Your seminary field education office should be able to help you identify potential CPE sites.

13. When you have completed at least a year as a candidate, passed all the ordination exams, graduated from seminary (or will soon), and finished any field work, the next step is Final Assessment (FA). Your LG will meet with you to review all materials required prior to Final Assessment. The Final Assessment Team is made up of CPM members who were not on your LG. The Book of Order requirements for final assessment are listed in G-2.0606 and G-2.0607. To evaluate these criteria listed in the Book of Order the CPM has the following requirements for final assessment. Materials related to these must be submitted to your LG for review:

- Date of graduation or pending graduation from seminary, and date of completion of all ordination exams
- Written description of your supervised practice of ministry and submission of any supervisor's reports
- Written statement of your personal faith (no longer than one page)
- Submission to your LG of your exegesis exam along with comments from readers
- Sermon and the contemporary need it addresses based on the scripture text used for your ordination examination. You are not required to preach from the same sermon outline you submitted for your exam, but are required to use your exegesis as a basis for your sermon. The sermon will be preached in front of your LG and in front of the Final Assessment Team and should be no longer than 15 minutes.
- Affirmation of an understanding of the ordination questions (W-4.4003) by preparing one paragraph of reflection for each question. While your answers will not be exhaustive, you might consider the following: *What is their meaning? How have you lived them out in your preparation for ministry? How might they be lived out in your ministry to come?* Your responses will provide the basis for more in-depth conversation at your Final Assessment.

These requirements are further listed on the National Capital Presbytery website under Preparation for Ministry under **OUTCOMES OF CANDIDACY FOR FINAL ASSESSMENT**.

If the Final Assessment Team agrees that you have satisfactorily completed all requirements, you will be certified ready to receive a call. Once that information reaches the PCUSA you will be able to circulate your PIF (Personal Information Form) electronically through the Church Leadership Connection.

13. Once you are certified ready to receive a call, you will be moved to a new Liaison Group whose responsibility is for oversight and support during the time you are seeking a call. You will receive a letter once you have been certified ready to receive a call explaining this new phase in the ordination process, and how you will continue to report to your new LG until a call is received.