

Called to Serve

*A Guide Book for Inquirers & Candidates
in the
Presbytery of North Central Iowa*



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INTRODUCTION

These guidelines were written to serve as an aide to inquirers and candidates as they begin the process of preparing for ordination in the Presbytery of North Central Iowa. Through the years there have been many questions and situations arise that this booklet attempts to address. Each person going through the process of ordination is a unique person with unique circumstances, and the Committee on Preparation for ministry (CPM) has not set out to homogenize the process, only to help you, the new inquirer, to be aware of some of the requirements, the expectations, and the pitfalls as you begin this life-changing journey through seminary.

You will find information on the call process in this booklet. There is also some information on what you may or may not expect from your session besides their endorsement. There is a section on what to expect from us as a committee and from your liaison to this committee. There is a section on what we expect from you as you come under care and move through this time. You'll find some requirements set out in the Book of Order that are non-negotiable and you will find some requirements that we, as a committee are asking of you. This last section is a compilation of circumstances of the journeys made before you; through many years and many different experiences, many different seminaries, and many different age groups. It is our hope with the expectations laid out from the beginning, your particular journey will be easier and less stressful as those of some who have preceded you.

It is our hope that your experience is a good experience, full of new discoveries and with new awareness in the areas of your personal life and your call from God. Often times an inquirer will be aware of a call to seminary, but not have any understanding of what comes next. Perhaps they begin with a strong sense of call to parish ministry and find the area of chaplaincy is where God is really calling them. Often times an inquirer does not feel called to parish ministry and after an internship suddenly knows that is where he/she is being called. The requirements that we, as a presbytery, have set before you will allow for some fluctuation in your sense of call, while equipping you for whichever path God is calling you to follow.

The journey to ordained ministry is often a grueling one; it can be filled with frustrations, questions, and some dark times. Know that God is in the midst of it all, and you are being shaped into who God created and called you to be through this process. We, the CPM, are here to help interpret the journey, to help you overcome obstacles that may appear, and to support you through the process. It is your journey, but in a sense, it is ours also. As you come under our care, we are called to help you become the best pastor, chaplain, or whatever it is that God is calling you to, that you can be. It is a pleasure to be included in this process, and while it may not always feel as if we are in it with you, we do take your call seriously, and we are chartered to help you and care for you during your discernment and learning process.

“Christ calls the Church into being, giving it all that is necessary for its mission to the world, for its building up, and for its service to God. Christ is present with the Church in both Spirit and Word. It belongs to Christ alone to rule, to teach, to call, and to use the Church as he wills, exercising his authority by the ministry of women and men for the establishment and extension of his Kingdom” (G 1.0100).

As part of the Reformed Faith, we believe in the priesthood of all believers. That means that each of us is called to a life of Christian service. That call may be to serve the church in some way, or it may be to serve outside of the church in the workplace. Wherever we are, our mission is to carry out The Great Ends of the Church.

“The great ends of the church are the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind; the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; the maintenance of divine worship; the preservation of the truth; the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world” (G-1.0200).

We can proclaim the gospel by word and by deed in our everyday lives. As Christians, we are all called to do that. Some are called to care and nurture, some are called to teach, and some are called to work for social justice, to care for the poor and hungry, the homeless and hopeless. Some are called to ministries of welcome and hospitality, to ministries of health and wholeness, and some are called to special service in the church.

There are many ways to serve in the church. All are important to the life of any one congregation and to the life of our denomination. “All ministry in the Church is a gift from Jesus Christ. Members and officers alike serve mutually under the mandate of Christ who is the chief minister of all. His ministry is the basis of all ministries; the standard for all offices is the pattern of the one who came “not to be served but to serve.” (Matt. 20:28)” (G-6.0100). All ministry is equally important to the life of any congregation and to the life of our denomination.

“To those called to exercise special functions in the church —deacons, elders, and ministers of the Word and Sacrament—God gives suitable gifts for their various duties. In addition to possessing the necessary gifts and abilities, natural and acquired, those who undertake particular ministries should be persons of strong faith, dedicated discipleship, and love of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Their manner of life should be a demonstration of the Christian gospel in the church and in the world. They must have the approval of God’s people and the concurring judgment of a governing body of the church” (G-6.0106).

These excerpts from the Book of Order are a reminder that God calls every one of us to ministry; some specifically to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament. This committee will work closely with you to discern your own sense of call. At times we may ask hard questions, or seem to require more from you than what you find in these pages, or what you feel is necessary, maybe to challenge you, but that is all part of the discernment process. Our goal is to help you define for yourself what specific kind of ministry God is calling you to. The more we work together through this process, the more prepared you will be when you finish and begin the next stage of your journey.

CONSIDERING YOUR CALL AND VOCATION

A call to CHRISTIAN VOCATION includes both a summons from God... the response by the one being called...and affirmation from the Christian community in which the person belongs. Some never hear the call and others may turn their back on their call. Often society's demands for success have been a louder voice than the call from God for vocational faithfulness.

(From the Brief Statement of Faith)

Each Christian is called to be a servant of God in all of life, so that we must seek God's will for the work we do and for the manner in which we do it. Christian vocation may be found in any work where our own abilities and interests best meet the legitimate needs of God's world. The Church is charged under God with the obligation to seek out the most responsible and effective Christian leadership. It is the special role of the ordained ministry, including elders and deacons, to perform particular services in the life of the Church and to strengthen every Christian in the discharge of the responsibilities of the priesthood of all believers in the Church and the world. For [each] Christian, all life becomes significant as [we do our] daily work with dedication and diligence out of love for God and for [our] neighbor. (A Brief Statement of Faith, 1962, Presbyterian Church, U.S.)

This statement includes all forms of CHRISTIAN VOCATION; in the Church, in the ordained ministry (ministers, elders, deacons) and for individual Christians.

The Reformed tradition has long held that God's call is neither limited to those who become Ministers of Word and Sacrament... nor restricted to occupational issues. All of God's people are called... and all of life is subject to that call. Thus, any person sensing a call from God needs to be open to the variety of ministries for which she/he has been gifted. The breadth of Christian vocation, including areas often overlooked, is declared in "The Directory for Worship" of the Book of Order (Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.):

PROCESS SUMMARY

The Preparation for Ministry Process involves **two phases: Inquiry and Candidacy**. These two phases are designed to explore the call, evaluate the gifts, and support the preparation of those who feel themselves called to the ministers of the Word and Sacrament (G-14.0301). To do this effectively, each presbytery charges a Committee on Preparation for Ministry to work closely with those persons within its congregations who wish to prepare themselves for this ordained office. Since the model for the ministry of the Word and Sacrament is the ministry of Jesus Christ, it is the committee's particular responsibility to help these individuals grow toward maturity in Christ.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM YOUR SESSION

The session shall function in a supportive role during the phases of inquiry and candidacy to assure that care is provided on a continuous basis. The session shall appoint an elder from the church to be a liaison person with the inquirer or candidate and the appropriate presbytery committee. The session should consider the provision of financial support for the inquirer or candidate (G-14.0306 b)

Church sessions take a variety of roles in the process. Some are very good about supporting you, including financial support. Others do not have the resources to do so as a body, but there may be individuals within a congregation that will provide some financial support. Be honest and open with your session about your needs and the type of support you might like from them. It is a case by case scenario for financial support.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM YOUR PRESBYTERY

The duties of presbytery and sessions shall be as follows:

(1) The committee on preparation for ministry shall seek to instruct sessions on their role in the inquiry and candidacy process. Particular direction shall be given a session which has endorsed an inquirer or candidate. This work could best be done by the committee on preparation for ministry.

(2) During the phases of inquiry and candidacy the individual continues to be an active member of his or her particular church and subject to the concern and discipline of the session. In matters relating to preparation for the ministry, the individual is under the oversight of the presbytery through the committee on preparation for ministry. It shall be the duty of the presbytery to exercise responsibility for the spiritual growth of inquirers and candidates, to support them with an understanding and sympathetic interest, and to give guidance in regard to courses of study, familiarity with the Bible and with the confessions, practical training and plans for education, including the choice of institutions, field education, and the inquirer's or candidate's financial need. The presbytery shall also seek to give guidance and instruction to the inquirer or candidate in the faith and polity of the church. (G-6.0108a)

You can expect the CPM of North Central Iowa to listen to you in all matters you may want to share about your journey. You can expect the CPM to weigh all requests with prayerful consideration before responding. You can expect the CPM to keep you in prayer and to support you in matters of discernment. You can expect the CPM to get to know you personally through your interactions with your liaison. You can also expect this committee to keep your ultimate goal in mind even when you may lose sight of it yourself.

We are here to support you in whatever way we can; to journey with you through this process. We expect you to keep the lines of communication open with your liaison, and we will respond as timely as we can to all of your questions and concerns.

BOOK OF ORDER REQUIREMENTS and THE CALL PROCESS

The following are the Book of Order requirements for the process; these include requirements for all parties involved, for you, for your session, and for us, the CPM.

THE INQUIRY PHASE (Book of Order 14.0302-.0303)

1. Applicant is an active member of a sponsoring congregation (for at least six months).
2. Session notifies CPM of applicant.
3. CPM representative(s) meet with Session for Session orientation.
4. Session interviews applicant; makes recommendation to CPM/Presbytery; appoints a liaison.
5. CPM interviews applicant and makes recommendation on enrollment as an Inquirer. A CPM liaison appointed.
6. Presbytery enrollment of Inquirer.
7. Review of preparation process and progress. Develop Covenant Agreement for spiritual development, guidance, goals, consultations, and reports.

THE CANDIDACY PHASE (Book of Order 14.0305a-j)

8. Inquirer applies to become Candidate through Session.
9. Session confers with Inquirer, reviews evidence of Inquiry Phase and makes recommendation to CPM/Presbytery.
10. CPM confers with Inquirer, reviews evidence of Inquiry Phase and makes
 - i. recommendations regarding candidacy.
11. Presbytery receives CPM recommendation and examines Inquirer. Presbytery
 - ii. receives and enrolls Inquirer as Candidate.
12. Review of Preparation process and progress. Develop Covenant Agreement for spiritual development, guidance, goals, consultations and reports.
13. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Cooperative Ordination Examinations passed.
14. CPM conducts the final assessment of Candidate's readiness to receive a call.
15. CPM certifies Candidate ready to receive a call and reports to Presbytery.
16. CPM approves circulation of Personal Information Form to explore obtaining a call.
17. Negotiation for service/call.
18. Examination and Ordination
19. Installation (if called to an installed position)
20. Phase of candidacy shall continue until candidate receives a call and is ordained, or until the candidate is removed from the roll of candidates in accord with G- 14.0312

ANNUAL CONSULTATIONS with presbytery's Committee on Preparation for Ministry are held at least once a year throughout the Inquirer and Candidacy Phases.

(Book of Order 14.0309a)

IN NO CASE SHALL AN INQUIRER OR CANDIDATE BE EXCUSED FROM THESE ANNUAL CONSULTATIONS (G-14.0309).

Currently the annual consultation date changes, your liaison will notify you in time to make plans to be present.

PRESBYTERY REQUIREMENTS

The Presbytery of North Central Iowa requires and endorses all of the requirements of the Book of Order as well as a few requirements of our own.

The Presbytery of North Central Iowa requires the following classes:

Languages:

- Greek
- Greek Exegesis
- Hebrew
- Hebrew Exegesis

Bible:

- Old Testament Overview
- New Testament Overview

(These requirements may be met with one class.)

Theology:

- Reformed Theology

Worship:

- Reformed Worship
- Preaching

Church History:

Polity:

Additional requirements:

- Internship or other practical field experience
- CPE

You must submit your plans for your Internship and your CPE to the committee for approval. We want to make sure your experiences are well rounded and will prepare you for ministry after seminary. You can meet this requirement by emailing or phoning your liaison and going over the details. If it is an experience which falls into the norm, your liaison can approve it for the committee. If your plans are outside the norm (a nontraditional setting for an Internship, or a setting other than a hospital for CPE) the committee will address it at the next called meeting and make its determination. This again is not designed to stifle your process, but to ensure you are eligible and well equipped to receive a call upon your completion of seminary.

AN INQUIRER OR CANDIDATE MAY REQUEST AN EXCEPTION FROM THE ABOVE REQUIREMENTS IN WRITING. THE REQUEST WILL BE REVIEWED BY THE CPM. CONVENIENCE IS NOT JUSTIFICATION FOR AN EXCEPTION.

Final Assessment Requirements before a Candidate may be released ready to receive a call:

At least 30 days prior to your final assessment consultation with the Committee on Preparation for Ministry, the Candidate must forward to the Presbytery office the following documents which will be used during their consultation which includes the preaching of a sermon within a 30 minute worship service to the committee:

An outline of the worship service or bulletin

The sermon outline

The fully typed sermon hardcopy

Scripture exegesis

Current Statement of Faith

Following the candidate's final assessment and preaching, the committee may ask questions of the candidate. The candidate will be excused. The committee convenes to discuss and determine whether to recommend the candidate to come before a Stated Presbytery Meeting. The candidate will return to the committee room and be advised of the decision of the committee and the DATE will be determined for their appearance before a Stated Presbytery Meeting, if that is the decision of the Committee on Preparation for Ministry.

The candidate may receive permission from CPM at their assessment to circulate their PIF with the understanding that they MUST advise employing body they still have to go before Presbytery where they will be presented on the floor of Presbytery as ready to receive a call.

CALLED TO SERVE

We look forward to partnering with you in this exciting journey you are embarking upon. It is exciting to discern a call from God to serve in some capacity, regardless of what that capacity may be. We pray your journey is an exciting one, filled with new experiences, new ideas, and new friends. Your liaison will be your lifeline to the committee, use that lifeline whenever you feel overwhelmed, extremely excited about your journey, or just need a link to reality.

We are called by God to serve on this committee. Our goal is to walk with you through this process from beginning to end, getting to know you, celebrating with you, gnashing our teeth with you, tearing our clothes and putting on ashes with you. Our relationship is a covenantal one. To serve you, we need to know you and to hear from you. Here are some important phone numbers to keep close at hand, use them to help us to be good partners with you.

Your Committee Liaison	_____	_____
Committee Moderator	Rev. Kerry Carson presby2@prairieinet.net	641-366-2342
Presbytery Office	Vicki Thordsen vthordsen@presbynciowa.org	319-233-1747
Presbytery Stated Clerk	Blake Wood bwood@presbynciowa.org	319-233-1747

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