

WINNEBAGO PRESBYTERY
COM-PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY MANUAL
Approved February 2015

Official steps for the process of inquiry and candidacy may be found in the *Book of Order*, G-2.06 – G-2.08, or in the *Advisory Handbook on Preparation for Ministry in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*, which is available at <http://www.pcusa.org/resource/preparation-ministry-handbook>. The most recent online resource is available at <http://fourpresbyteries.org>. This site explains the standardized process for the four presbyteries in Wisconsin.

The Commission on Ministry (COM) of Winnebago Presbytery welcomes your application to be enrolled as an inquirer. The role of the COM in this process is to build a relationship with you to nurture, affirm and challenge you in discerning God's call and your suitability and readiness for ministry. Together we will assess your "evidence of readiness to begin ordered ministry as a teaching elder" by determining your personal qualities of:

- **Wisdom and maturity of faith**
- **Leadership skills**
- **Compassionate spirit**
- **Honest repute**
- **Sound judgment** (G-2.0607)

We are excited that you have experienced an inner call from God to undergo this period of inquiry that may lead to a call as a teaching elder. We work with the conviction that the inner call does not guarantee ordination, but does help us to discern a person's future contributions to the church and world. We know that this is a serious and important step in your life and we are serious about our relationship with you during these important years.

We want you to be a valuable addition to the PC (USA); in fact we insist that you will be well qualified before we will recommend you to Presbytery for ordination. Our basic motto is: "Everyone is called to ministry, but not everyone is called to the ministry of Teaching Elder." Therefore we will help you discern where the best ministry is for you. "The inquiry and candidacy phases shall continue for a period of no less than two years, including at least one year as a candidate." (G-2.0602)

Preparation for ordination as a teaching elder in the PC(USA) is not like certification programs where, after completing all the requirements, you are guaranteed to reach the goal at the end. Inquiry/Candidacy is a process of personal, communal, and spiritual discernment and growth—not an assembly line for mechanistically producing new pastors. This manual is a guide for working with your Session, COM, and Winnebago Presbytery. Please do not hesitate to contact us with your questions.

Note: Presbyterian language has the potential for creating minor confusion in this process, in that a person in the final phase of preparation for ministry is called a Candidate, and a person presented to a congregation by its pastoral nominating committee is also called a Candidate. A person may be both kinds of Candidate at once, but the word applies to two different processes. Throughout this manual, except as noted, the former meaning is intended.

GETTING STARTED

To be considered for enrollment as an inquirer under care of the Presbytery, you must be a member of a congregation and be actively engaged in the worship life and ministry of that congregation for at least six months prior to submitting your inquirer application. The session of your congregation must also endorse your application.

- Your very first step is to talk to your pastor and ask her/him to contact either the Commission on Ministry Moderator or the General Presbyter.
- COM will then set up a meeting with the session of your church to provide orientation to the session's role when a member is considering ministry.
- As the applicant, you complete Forms 1-A – 1-C in preparation for a meeting with your session, where you are seeking their endorsement of your application.
- Upon voting to endorse your application, the session completes Form 1-D and then all four parts (1-A – 1-D) are forwarded to COM via the presbytery office.

The four separate inquirer application forms, described below, may be downloaded from <http://fourpresbyteries.org/denominational-resources/> or directly from the denomination office at <http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/prep4min/forms-used-preparation-ministry-process>.

Form 1A “Application to be enrolled by Presbytery as an Inquirer”

To be completed initially by the applicant seeking to be enrolled. Both the commission overseeing preparation for ministry and the presbytery's actions regarding the application are recorded on this form. It provides basic information regarding the applicant's background, identity, and interests. This form includes a list of personal references.

Form 1B “Questions for Reflection”

These questions are to be completed by the applicant as a basis for direct discussion first with the session of the applicant's home church and later with the presbytery's commission overseeing preparation for ministry.

Form 1C “Financial Planning for Theological Education”

Using basic information provided by the applicant, this spreadsheet automatically generates a projection of the applicant's financial resources and needs relative to the required seminary training.

Form 1D “Session Evaluation and Recommendation”

This form is completed by the applicant's session and forwarded along with the other application forms to the presbytery's commission overseeing preparation for ministry. The form includes questions that may guide the session's discussion with the applicant and provide support for its recommendation to the committee/commission overseeing preparation for ministry.

Upon receipt of the application, the applicant will be contacted to determine a time to meet with the full Commission on Ministry to discuss the sense of call, plans for career evaluation, financial readiness, and plans for seminary. COM meets each month except August and December. The applicant will be provided an overview of the process, a “So you're considering ministry...” check list and the Winnebago COM Preparation for Ministry manual.

BACKGROUND CHECK / PSYCHOLOGICAL EVALUATION

All applicants are required to undergo a background check, which reviews criminal, financial and driving records. Applicants will receive instructions on how to authorize an electronic consent to initiate the process. The cost of the background check is covered by COM.

Applicants are also required to participate in a psychological evaluation / career counseling session at a regional agency affiliated with Winnebago Presbytery and approved by COM. The cost of this evaluation will normally be shared equally by the applicant, session and presbytery. The General Presbyter will receive a written report of the evaluation, which the commission will discuss prior to recommending an applicant for inquiry status. Sensitive information in the report will be handled very discreetly; the GP may choose to discuss it with the applicant privately before deciding what the full commission should hear or read.

The financial status of ministers is a very significant issue for the church, so accumulated debt exceeding the church-wide median salary, other than a mortgage on a principle residence, may be grounds for COM to refuse your application or to require a plan for immediate significant debt reduction. Winnebago Presbytery also requires all inquirers and candidates and their families to have health insurance, so prior to your enrollment and throughout the process, you must present proof of coverage.

COM RESPONSE

After review of the necessary information (background check results, psychological evaluation, denominational forms), COM will make a decision regarding a recommendation to presbytery to enroll the applicant as an inquirer. Attendance by the applicant at this COM meeting may or may not be necessary. An affirmative decision by COM will result in a recommendation presented at the next meeting of Winnebago Presbytery, which gathers in February, May, September, and November. The applicant shall be present and introduced at the Presbytery meeting. Following an affirmative vote by the Presbytery, Forms 2A and 2B, described below and available at the previously mentioned websites, shall be completed.

Form 2A “Report of Consultation regarding application”

In addition to formulating its recommendation to the presbytery to enroll the applicant as an inquirer, the committee/commission overseeing preparation for ministry should also establish goals for the first year the new inquirer will be under care. This form records the growth objectives agreed to by the new Inquirer and the committee/commission overseeing preparation for ministry. The completed report is sent to the enrollee, the theological institution, and the sponsoring session.

Form 2B “Covenant Agreement and Inquirer Release”

A signed acknowledgement of the new covenant relationship entered into by the inquirer, the session and the committee/commission overseeing preparation for ministry. The inquirer release sets in motion an understanding that permits the committee/commission overseeing preparation for ministry to secure information necessary to make responsible decisions and recommendations.

LIAISONS

Each inquirer shall establish relationships with two liaisons: one from the inquirer's local congregation /session and one assigned from the COM. The purpose of these relationships is to maintain close and effective communication between the inquirer/candidate and session and COM. The session liaison has a special responsibility to keep the inquirer/candidate's name before the session and congregation for prayer, advocacy and support, including the possibility of financial support.

ANNUAL CONSULTATIONS

In addition to periodic communication throughout seminary training, COM will conduct annual consultations with each inquirer and candidate. The basic purpose for these consultations is to remain in good conversation with the COM to nurture a relationship of mutual trust and respect between the inquirer/candidate and COM. Part of the meeting will be to review academic achievements and developmental progress in the five key areas, which are wisdom and maturity of faith, leadership skills, compassionate spirit, honest repute, and sound judgment. Likewise, COM has an opportunity to provide support and guidance with the inquirer. In preparation for the annual consultation, the inquirer or candidate shall complete Form 3, available on the websites previously mentioned.

Form 3 "Pre-consultation Report on Development Areas"

This report, completed by the inquirer/candidate before each consultation, evaluates progress in accomplishing previously agreed-upon goals and objectives. The form requests a listing of completed courses, and includes specific questions to be addressed in each of the five growth areas.

It is recommended that, if possible, your pastor and your session liaison be present with you for a portion of the consultation. At the conclusion of the consultation, Form 4 will be completed.

Form 4 "Report on Consultation"

A summary report of the consultation, completed by the committee/commission overseeing preparation for ministry and the inquirer/candidate, that indicates developmental progress in the five key areas along with growth objectives agreed to for the next year. The completed report is sent to the inquirer/candidate, theological institution, and sponsoring session.

Lastly, permission to register for one or more ordination exams may be given, if applicable.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

The annual consultation also provides the opportunity to discuss student debt and financial aid for the ensuing academic year. Financial aid from Winnebago Presbytery will only be made available to seminary students who are enrolled as inquirers or candidates and currently paying tuition. Scholarship application forms are made available following the annual consultation.

MOVING FROM INQUIRER TO CANDIDATE

After at least one year of inquiry, including two semesters of seminary, and at least one year before you expect to be ordained, you may apply to become a candidate. The decision to move you from inquiry to the candidacy phase requires a communal discernment by you, the session which endorsed you as an inquirer, and COM regarding your suitability for ordered ministry as a Teaching Elder.

Some ideas for consideration to determine if you, as an inquirer, have potential to be a candidate for ministry of Word and Sacrament are as follows:

- The inquirer should be able to articulate an understanding of Christian vocation in the Reformed tradition and how it relates to his or her personal sense of call.
- She or he should be able to express their personal faith in a manner that demonstrates an understanding of the Reformed tradition.
- He or she should be able to expound upon at least one concept from their personal faith statement at greater depth, explaining what it suggests about God, humanity and their interrelationships.
- The inquirer should be able to explain what it means for them to be Presbyterian, indicating how that awareness grows out of participation in the life of a particular church.
- She or he should be able to discuss their 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. Inquirers should also be able to relate their own personal cultural location to changes in American society and its increasingly multicultural character.
- He or she should be able to express their understanding of the tasks teaching elders perform, including expression both of his or her specific gifts for this particular ministry and of the areas in which further growth is needed.

These questions about exploration and self-understanding in the context of ministry will be paired with frank and honest conversation about the current realities of pastoral ministry with the PC(USA). Ultimately, the deciding question is: Does the overall experience of the inquiry phase point toward a future in the ministry of Word and Sacrament for you, or do your gifts and passions suggest a better fit with other ministries of the church?

If all agree that moving forward is appropriate, you will have a new application Form 5A and covenant agreement Form 5B to complete. (see descriptions below) These forms require endorsement by your session and then by COM.

Since the decision to move forward requires Presbytery approval, you will be required to appear at a Presbytery meeting to make a statement of your personal faith and sense of call. Presbytery does not examine your theology or academic preparation at this point, but may ask further questions about your faith and call and general progress and suitability for ministry.

Per G-2.0602, the time frame for candidacy shall be at least one year.

Form 5A “Application to be enrolled by Presbytery as a Candidate”

To be completed initially by the Inquirer seeking to be advanced to candidacy. The recommendations of the session and the committee/commission overseeing preparation for ministry along with the action taken by the presbytery are recorded on this form.

Form 5B “Session recommendation for Enrollment as Candidate”

This form is completed by the inquirer’s session and forwarded to the presbytery’s committee/commission overseeing preparation for ministry. Questions that may guide the session’s discussion with the inquirer and provide support for its recommendation to the committee/commission overseeing preparation for ministry may be found in the "Advisory Handbook" on pages 39 - 41. Attach a letter explaining rationale for the session’s action in light of inquirer’s suitability.

Form 5C “Report of Consultation to become a Candidate”

A signed acknowledgement of the new covenant relationship entered into by the candidate and the committee/commission overseeing preparation for ministry. This form also establishes growth areas for candidate. The completed report is sent to the inquirer/candidate, theological institution, and sponsoring session.

Form 5D “Covenant Agreement and Candidate Release”

A signed acknowledgement of the new covenant relationship entered into by the candidate, the session and the committee/commission overseeing preparation for ministry. The candidate release sets in motion an understanding that permits the committee/commission overseeing preparation for ministry to secure information necessary to make responsible decisions and recommendations.

FINAL ASSESSMENT

You must already have been a Candidate for at least one semester, and generally two, before your final assessment. The final assessment normally is in place of an annual consultation during your last year of seminary or a related internship.

As listed in G-2.0607, the final assessment and 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;
- d. And 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.

The preparation for your final assessment is more rigorous than for annual consultations. Much of the work for this meeting may overlap with work for seminary requirements or preparation of your Personal Information Form (PIF). You are encouraged to integrate and “work smart” to be

a good steward of time. The following documents should be e-mailed or mailed to the COM Coordinator or General Presbyter one month prior to your meeting so that commission members have time to read your work:

1. One of your sermons, with the exegesis you did in preparing it, and a statement of the contemporary need to which it was addressed. You will be required to preach this sermon for the commission.
2. A statement of your personal faith. Try to show us how your faith is vital for you. You will want to cover your understanding of the Bible, the nature and role of the Church, and the sacraments. This statement should be no more than one single-spaced page. It will be distributed to Presbytery as part of your examination for ordination.
3. A biographical statement including a brief description of your spiritual and religious development, and other information you judge to be important for those assessing your personality and life situation as suitable for ministry. This statement also should be no more than one single spaced page, and also will be distributed to Presbytery as part of your examination for ordination.
4. A statement of your plans for continuing education. You may want to include study areas of interest, journals you might be subscribing to, and books currently on your reading list.
5. A draft of your PIF for review and advice by the commission.

COM will examine you about these documents and other matters of your faith and preparation, in order to determine whether to certify that you are ready to receive a call as a Teaching Elder. If so, COM will report this recommendation to Presbytery. Following an affirmative vote by Presbytery, COM will give you permission to begin circulating your PIF. You will not be able to circulate your PIF through the denomination's on-line system, Church Leadership Connection, until this certification is given and the COM Coordinator indicates this to the CLC.

EXAMINATION BY PRESBYTERY

Winnebago Presbytery has long regarded the examination of candidates for teaching elder as one of its most important duties. The process is both fair and thorough. The goal is to serve the whole church by ordaining fully prepared and promising candidates.

When you receive a call, the presbytery placing the call shall ordinarily examine you. The presbytery of call may also ordain and install you (G-2.0702). However, you may wish to be ordained in your home presbytery. Upon successful completion of the oral examination for ordination and all the requirements listed in G-2.0607, the examining presbytery notifies Winnebago Presbytery, and you may begin planning for your ordination.

If you receive a call to a position in Winnebago Presbytery, you will be presented for examination at an upcoming Presbytery meeting. Members of Presbytery will have copies of your faith statement and biographical statement. To initiate the oral examination, the COM Moderator will ask one question which you will have discussed in advance. The members of Presbytery then have the right to ask additional questions about your faith, doctrine,

understanding of polity, manner of life, and virtually anything else that has bearing on the decision about whether to ordain you as Minister of Word and Sacrament.

If you receive a call to a position in another presbytery, that presbytery may make arrangements to examine you for ordination. This may require a preliminary meeting with the other presbytery's CPM or Committee on Ministry, or both.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

A number of financial obligations during this process are expected to be shared equally by the Inquirer/Candidate, Session, and Presbytery. These obligations include, but are not limited to: payment for your psychological evaluation / career counseling session at a regional agency affiliated with Winnebago Presbytery in either Chicago or Minneapolis, including travel; an initial evaluation of your financial health by a professional consultant or participation in a Fiscal Fitness workshop; and travel for annual consultations, final assessment, and other occasions required by Winnebago Presbytery.

We suggest that your session supply you with a copy of the current Book of Order. Other financial items to be considered specifically by the session are an annual book allowance, and health insurance while in college and/or seminary. Proof of health insurance for the inquirer/candidate and his/her family is required by Winnebago Presbytery.

ADDITIONAL MATTERS

1. Attendance at a Presbyterian seminary is the expected standard. Exceptions must be approved by COM in advance. Enrolling at another seminary prior to entering Inquiry/Candidacy does not build leverage for permission to continue there.
2. The COM does accept pass/fail grades during college and/or seminary as acceptable evaluations of academic work.
3. All personal records of Inquirers/Candidates are kept on file in the office of Winnebago Presbytery. At the completion of the relationship with the COM, all files are returned to the inquirer/candidate. Copies of the psychological assessment, evaluation of financial status, the annual consultations and the final assessment are kept on file at the Presbytery office. These files are maintained for the purpose of making references when the first call is extended, or when a person requests to enter the process again.
4. The total Inquiry and Candidacy period may not last longer than six years, and Candidacy not more than four, unless the COM and Winnebago Presbytery approve an extension.
5. An Inquirer/Candidate may be removed from the rolls of the Presbytery by recommendation of the COM and majority vote of the Presbytery.
6. Presbytery requires one unit of Clinical Pastoral Education prior to completion of the final year of seminary.

SEQUENCE AND APPROXIMATE TIMELINE

1. Be baptized (infant or adult, only needed once!)
2. Become a member of a Presbyterian Church (USA) congregation (at least six months prior to Inquiry)
3. Think and pray seriously about your growing sense of call; discuss it with your family, close friends, teachers and professors, church members, and pastor.
4. Decide to move forward, and ask your pastor to open communications with COM
5. At about the same time, start researching Presbyterian seminaries (if you have not done so already!)
6. Obtain appropriate forms from PC(USA) website; complete your sections. Ask your pastor to schedule time on Session agenda when a COM representative can meet with session and session can endorse your application to be an Inquirer.
7. Start seminary application process any time AFTER you have had conversation with COM coordinator.
8. Meet with COM to be interviewed for their recommendation to Presbytery that you be enrolled as an inquirer. (2 weeks to 2 months after Session meeting)
9. Be presented and make a brief presentation of yourself at next Presbytery meeting.
10. After acceptance to seminary, apply for Presbytery scholarship funds.
11. First annual consultation (after first or second semester of seminary); get permission from COM to take Bible content exam; consider moving to Candidate status; apply for scholarship funds again.
12. Take Bible content exam (during first or second year of seminary, but as early as possible)
13. Second annual consultation (one year after first consultation); get permission to take remaining ordination exams; move to Candidate status if not done already; apply for scholarship funds again.
14. Take (and pass!) ordination exams at start of final seminary year.
15. Ask for permission to retake exams if necessary.
16. Third annual consultation OR final assessment to be recommended for examination for ordination (one year after previous consultation); if this is final assessment, start preparing PIF for review by COM, and ask for permission to start circulating PIF
17. Receive a call.
18. Appear at Presbytery of call to be examined for ordination.
19. Schedule ordination service in Winnebago Presbytery (presbytery of care) at your home church (requires Presbytery approval)
20. Planning for the ordination service **MUST BE CONSIDERED TENTATIVE UNTIL THE ORDINATION EXAMINATION IS APPROVED!!!!**
21. Schedule installation service at church of call
22. Ordination service
23. Installation service
24. May God go with you!