The Inquirer and Candidate

Responding to God’s call to ministry is an exhilarating and demanding experience. The ministry of the Word and Sacrament is particularly challenging to prepare for and to fulfill. It stretches every human capacity and touches every dimension of life.

As a person discerns his or her call and begins the process of preparation for ministry, the counsel and guidance of the pastor and session of the home church are available, along with that of presbytery and the graduate theological institution.

The denomination has designed the process of preparation for ministry to enable one to participate fully in discerning the type of ministry for which a person is best suited and to plan and evaluate one’s own preparation and development in consultation with the presbytery’s committee overseeing preparation for ministry. Although demanding, the process is not intended to be simply a series of imposed requirements; its focus is, rather, on the covenant relationships between persons who are deeply committed to the church and those who are preparing for ministry. As an individual enters into these relationships and assumes responsibility for moving through the process according to the guidelines provided, and maintains regular and open contact with the persons and committees involved, he or she can expect a rich and rewarding experience.

Before the process begins

- Participate actively in the worship and work of a congregation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to determine how your understanding of Christian faith and life generally and of vocational ministry particularly relate to this expression of the Reformed tradition.
- Initiate discussions about your sense of call with your pastor, college chaplain or other spiritual advisor, or persons whose opinions you respect—especially those who may themselves serve in ordered ministry as deacons and ruling elders or ministers of the Word and Sacrament within the PC(USA).
- With the assistance of your pastor or another person designated by your congregation or presbytery, begin to familiarize yourself not only with the constitutional requirements for preparation found in the Book of Order’s Form of Government but also your presbytery’s own processes.
- Before you can formally enter the preparation for ministry process with a presbytery in the PC(USA), you must be a member of one of its congregations and have been active in the worship and work of that particular congregation for at least six months (G-2.0602).

How would you describe your emerging sense of call?

What entity in your presbytery facilitates its oversight of those under care in preparation for service as a minister of the Word and Sacrament?
What if the faith community within the PC(USA) of which I am a part is not an “organized congregation” but is instead a “fellowship” or another officially recognized ministry of the presbytery (G-1.0103)?

Oversight and care in the preparation for ministry process is a shared responsibility of both a congregation’s session and its presbytery’s committee overseeing preparation for ministry (G-2.0602). If your faith community within the PC(USA) is not an “organized congregation” with a session, it may be that it is in some way related to a congregation within the presbytery that its partnering with or otherwise supporting its ministry. In such cases, you might hold membership in that congregation and accept the oversight and care of its session. You will need to give special attention to keeping that session informed about your continuing involvement with your faith community’s worship and work so that they will be able to fulfill their responsibilities as covenant partners in the discernment of your call and development of your ministry gifts during the preparation process.

I am not currently involved with a PC(USA) congregation, but from what I have learned about the denomination from colleagues at seminary I would like to pursue ministry within the denomination. Is there a way to get started with the process right away?

The way to get started is to find a PC(USA) congregation “right away.” The only way to truly know whether your understanding of Christian faith and life fits with the PC(USA) is to become active in the worship and work of one of our congregations. Through your involvement in that community, you will be able to determine together if there is a “fit” between who God is calling you to be as a disciple and servant of Christ and what the Spirit is doing in the PC(USA).