**Ordination**

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is firmly grounded in the Reformed tradition in its relationships with men and women who feel themselves called by God to be ministers of the Word and Sacrament. As discussed in the first section of this Advisory Handbook, foundational to a Reformed theological understanding of call is that the inner call of the Spirit to a person will always be affirmed by the community of God’s people. In a sense, then, the final and decisive assessment of a person’s suitability, fitness, and readiness for service as a minister of the Word and Sacrament will be the acceptance of the call from a community to provide for them the functions of the ministry of the Word and Sacrament.

Yet even that call from a faith community to an individual is still not quite enough. Because ordination “is an act of the whole church,” the broader community still has a role to play through the affirmation of the call and the examination of the candidate by the presbytery responsible for that community. This presbytery of call, even if it has also been the presbytery of care, must act to confirm its discernment that God is indeed calling and has prepared this person to serve within that particular ministry context at this particular moment.

Especially when the first call is in a different presbytery than the presbytery of care, it is likely that the candidate will not know all the processes for establishing a first call. Since the presbytery of call “shall ordinarily examine, ordain, and install the candidate” (G-2.0702), members of that presbytery’s committee or commission responsible for pastoral transitions and oversight of ministers of the Word and Sacrament should meet with the candidate to discuss the process for conducting the presbytery’s examination for ordination and approval of plans for services of ordination and installation. They can further assist the candidate by:

- Helping her or him to prepare for the examination by posing sample questions to see how she or he responds and provide feedback on the responses’ content and style.
- Consider rehearsing the examination process with the candidate in the setting where the examination will be conducted to provide a better feel for the reality of the process.
Over time the practice within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has varied on whether the calling presbytery should ordain a candidate who will serve in their midst, or whether the presbytery of care should conclude its work with the candidate by conducting the ordination based upon the call in another presbytery and then dismiss the newly ordained minister of the Word and Sacrament to the presbytery of call. The current language of G-2.0702 provides that ordination by the presbytery of call should be the usual practice, although exceptions to that practice may be granted. An authoritative interpretation of G-2.0702 by the 220th General Assembly (2012) states:

Examination, ordination, and installation are “ordinarily” acts of the presbytery having jurisdiction over the ministry of a teaching elder or candidate. The acts of examination and ordination are not optional in becoming a teaching elder (G-2.0104b; G-3.0306). A presbytery having jurisdiction over the ministry may, at its discretion, invite the presbytery of care to conduct the ordination of a candidate on its behalf; in such cases the presbytery of care may, at its discretion, conduct its own examination of the candidate prior to ordination. (Minutes, 2012, Part 1, pages 52, 55)

When might a presbytery of call request the presbytery of care to conduct the examination and ordination on its behalf? Perhaps a congregation calls the candidate a week or two after a presbytery meeting, and that presbytery will not be meeting for a number of months. It might benefit the ministry of both the congregation and the presbytery of call if the presbytery of care could facilitate the examination and ordination at an earlier date and then transfer that person to membership in the presbytery of call. The presbytery of call would then follow its usual procedures for pastoral transitions and permitting ministers of the Word and Sacrament to begin service between presbytery meetings. The authoritative interpretation of G-2.0702 makes it clear, however, that such an action does not remove the responsibility of the presbytery of call to conduct its own examination: “The act of examination by the presbytery having jurisdiction over the ministry is not optional in transferring the membership of a teaching elder from one presbytery to another.”

For these and other reasons, it is possible that both presbyteries would, within a very brief period of time, examine a candidate who will be ordained by the presbytery of care for service in response to a call in another presbytery, as each presbytery fulfills its respective constitutional responsibilities. The Advisory Committee on the Constitution (ACC) in its “Findings” for the 2012 authoritative interpretation of G-2.0702 suggests that an “examination for ordination and membership” by the presbytery of call (G-3.0306) “may be accepted by the presbytery of care as sufficient to substitute for its own examination for ordination,” but it is not obligated to do so. In all cases where a presbytery of call may invite the presbytery of care to ordain and dismiss the candidate based on a call in its jurisdiction, discussions about timing and arrangements should be conducted between the appropriate leaders of the respective presbyteries in consultation with the candidate to be ordained, and not at the initiative or direction of the candidate.
What are some other circumstances in which a presbytery of call might request that another presbytery examine and/or ordain a candidate?

Why might a presbytery of care choose to make its own examination for ordination prior to approving plans for the ordination of one of its candidates at the request of another calling presbytery?

With regard to the responsibility to install candidates in their first calls, the authoritative interpretation is clear that only the presbytery of call may conduct an installation service:

The presbytery having jurisdiction over the ministry shall install a teaching elder in a pastoral position. Installations are optional in validated ministries, and are at the discretion of the presbytery having jurisdiction over the ministry. (Minutes, 2012, Part 1, pages 52, 55)

Both the services of ordination and installation, if separate, are services of the presbytery (not of the congregations that may host them) and are to be conducted according to the provisions in the Directory for Worship. If the presbytery responsible for the service has particular policies regarding the conduct of the service beyond those in the Directory for Worship (for example, who is to be invited to participate in the administrative commission responsible for the service; G-3.0109b(2)), it needs to assure the candidate is aware of these requirements at the very beginning of the planning process.

Once the ordination and installation have been completed, the stated clerk in the presbytery of call notifies the Office of the General Assembly, the presbytery of care, and the candidate’s home congregation that she or he is now a member of the presbytery of call. Upon receipt of that notification, the session of the congregation is to remove the person from its roll of active members, and the presbytery of care will remove her or him from active status on its roll of inquirers and candidates (reporting that action to Mid Council Ministries of the Office of the General Assembly by updating the candidate’s profile in the online reporting system).

Coordinating first calls and the ordination of candidates for the ministry of the Word and Service of Ordination

The order for that service of worship in the Directory for Worship (W-4.04) shall be followed.

G-2.0703

Record of Ordination

The presbytery of call shall record the ordination and installation, along with written affirmation of the new minister of the Word and Sacrament to the obligations undertaken in the ordination questions, and enroll the minister of Word and Sacrament as a member of the presbytery. The stated clerk of the presbytery shall report these actions to the General Assembly, the presbytery of care, and to the congregation of which the candidate was formerly a member.

G-2.0704
Sacrament, especially when they involve two different presbyteries, require careful coordination. The chart on the following page that illustrates the process for a candidate called to a pastoral position through a Church Leadership Connection referral can help both presbyteries and candidates to understand the decisions that will need to be made and the proper sequence for making them.

**Example of a First Call Process**