Organizing to provide for “full preparation” of ministers of the Word and Sacrament

- Each presbytery has the responsibility to “develop and maintain mechanisms and processes to guide, nurture and oversee the process of preparing to become a minister of the Word and Sacrament” (G-3.0307). It may decide whether the presbytery as a whole or a commission to which it has delegated authority must approve these “mechanisms and processes” and create, maintain, and update its manual. It should make this manual readily available to its congregations and their members who may wish to discern a call to serve as a minister of the Word and Sacrament. This manual should include such things as:
  - Explicitly identify those responsibilities assigned to any entities of the presbytery. Any responsibilities and authorities not so designated are reserved to the presbytery itself.
  - Clearly state the expectations the presbytery has of all those under its care in the preparation for ministry process, especially any requirements not contained within the Book of Order. A presbytery has authority to require whatever it believes necessary to fulfill its responsibilities relative to the purposes of inquiry (G-2.0603), candidacy (G-2.0604), and final assessment (G-2.0607). While neither the Book of Order nor such manuals can limit a presbytery’s authority to establish individualized requirements within its covenant agreements with those under care, making clear what the presbytery believes essential to the preparation of everyone under its care can facilitate the negotiation of such covenants.
  - The manual should also layout how any presbytery policies regarding mandatory criminal record and financial background checks will be applied to inquirers and candidates.

What experiences in the preparation of inquirers and candidates within your mission context have proven so beneficial that they should be required of everyone under your care?

- As part of an overall records maintenance and retention policy, the presbytery should establish what documents are to be included in each inquirer/candidate’s file. It is critically important that a presbytery be able to document that it exercised “due diligence” in case issues of “negligent supervision/preparation” should arise either during the preparation for ministry process or after the person may be ordained as a minister of the Word and Sacrament. It is recommended that such policies clearly state that such records are the property of the presbytery and that provisions be made for retaining the file even after the individual is no longer under care.
What practice does your presbytery usually follow for the approval of policies and procedures manuals used by its committees and commissions?

Be sure to utilize your resources in the broader church, such as the Office of Constitutional Services and the Historical Society, as you work out your records retention policy.