During the inquiry phase

- The core responsibility of the presbytery during the inquiry phase is conduct regular and serious consultations in order to “make an informed decision about the inquirer’s suitability for ordered ministry” (G-2.0603). During each consultation the presbytery’s committee and the inquirer assess what progress has been made toward fulfilling previously established goals in each of the five areas and together negotiate appropriate new goals. The committee, of course, must decide for itself what “growth” in each of these five areas might mean and how an inquirer might show evidence of such growth. Creativity should be used in thinking through these areas and goals with the individual inquirer so that this experience is a genuine experience of personal and communal discernment of one’s gifts and calling for ministry.

- Other particular areas for discussion during consultations might include:
  - Deepening insight about ministry within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) gained from continuing worship and work within one of our churches.
  - Choosing a seminary that is both “acceptable to the presbytery” (G-2.0607c) and appropriate to the needs of the particular inquirer. Beyond choosing the seminary itself, making curricular decisions that meet requirements for graduation, fulfill presbytery expectations, and further the particular educational needs of the inquirer. Establishing a plan for taking the Bible Content Exam and using its results in planning biblical studies coursework would be an appropriate part of these discussions.
  - Insights gained about the inquirer’s gifts and understanding of call gained through field education assignments or other supervised practice of ministry in service to the church.

Be clear with your inquirers (and candidates) about what evidence of completion of covenant goals you will expect.

Will you require written reports and reflections about preparation experiences?

Will you require written reports from supervisors and others working with the inquirer on specific goals?

The online training piece “Understanding the Bible Content Exam” provides suggestions on how to get the most benefit from the results of that test.

- Presbyteries often engage three specific types of outside resources to provide essential information about an inquirer’s potential suitability for ministry:
  - **Career counseling**: Comprehensive, in-depth career counseling is offered by the centers affiliated with the Ministry Development Council and other service providers. This process can help the participant understand how her or his values, interests, and potential and acquired capabilities, as well as her or his own personality and sense of call, fit into an occupational choice. By previous agreement with the participant and the center, the presbytery should be designated as the recipient of written reports on this experience. Career counseling is most valuable if the inquirer has volunteered to participate and when
the nature and purpose of the process are carefully interpreted to the inquirer in advance.

- **Psychological evaluation:** This process involves consultation(s) with a clinical or counseling psychologist. The primary purpose of such an evaluation is to determine the inquirer/candidate’s psychological health and fitness for ministry and to screen for pathology. Greatest value is achieved if the inquirer participates voluntarily and receives careful prior orientation as to the consultation’s nature and purpose. Because of current laws surrounding privacy of medical records (including mental health records), it should be part of the contract for service that the presbytery is the client of record for such evaluations. Situations where the applicant can assert “doctor-patient confidentiality” to prevent disclosure of information to the presbytery can nullify the benefit of such work. The presbytery should establish a working relationship with the psychologist so that her or his reports can be accurately interpreted to its committee. The psychologist’s familiarity with religious values and with the requirements of professional ministry will greatly enhance the results of such an evaluation. Psychological evaluation is usually combined with career counseling when the service is provided by a Ministry Development Council accredited counseling center.

- **Educational institutions:** If the inquirer is enrolled in a college or university, reports should center on academic progress and potential for graduate level theological studies. If the inquirer is presently enrolled in a theological institution, reports should extend beyond academic progress to include field education and clinical pastoral education experiences, and the theological institution’s assessment of her or his gifts for ministry.

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Discuss with any outside service providers your particular needs in evaluation reports on inquirers.

Assessments of attitudes about and aptitude for leadership may be more useful than a comparison of personality factors with those who entered ministry a generation ago.

What can they tell you about how the inquirer deals with conflict personally or when encountering conflict between others?
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**FAQ**

*The Form of Government sets the time requirements for the preparation for ministry process as “a period of no less than two years, including at least one year as candidate” (G-2.0602). Does that mean the inquiry phase should last one year?*

The purpose of the inquiry phase is for the presbytery to “make an informed decision about the inquirer’s suitability of ordered ministry” (G-2.0603). There is no set time for the inquiry phase, nor any set expectation that the elements of the initial covenant agreement will provide all the information the presbytery will need to reach that decision. Take the time necessary even if it is more than a year.