

# Exploring the call to ministry as a teaching elder

Provide a supportive relationship through which to explore with the individual the personal implications of and suitability for a church occupation.

Before a person can enter inquiry with the presbytery, the session of the sponsoring congregation must provide its endorsement. This decision should be based on direct knowledge that emerge through:

- Prayerful examination of the applicant's motivation, personal faith and experience in the congregation.
- Through examination of his or her knowledge of the responsibilities of a teaching elder and personal willingness and ability to accept them.
- Through a serious assessment of the gifts needed by teaching elders and whether there is evidence of such gifts in the applicant's personal life and service to the church.

The session's endorsement should include a statement that the applicant is "a member of the sponsoring congregation" and has been "active in the work and worship of [the] congregation for at least six months" (G-2.0602).

If the session decides not to endorse the person for enrollment as an inquirer at this time, it continues to provide support, counsel and guidance as she or he seeks to discern an appropriate expression of his or her Christian vocation.

## Follow Through:

- ✓ What "outcomes of candidacy" does your presbytery require of every candidate?
- ✓ Will you use the same application forms as your presbytery or develop your own?
- ✓ How will your session determine if an applicant has been "active in the worship and work of [the] congregation" at the time of endorsement?
- ✓ Does your presbytery require a formal orientation to its process with both the session and the applicant?
- ✓ Does your presbytery require submission of the session's report form available from the General Assembly in support of the endorsement action?

## FAQ

*What are some possible questions that we, as a session, might explore with a member of our congregation when determining whether to endorse an application to enter the preparation for ministry process as an inquirer?*

As a session prepares to conduct an interview with a potential inquirer, it is important that its familiarity with the applicant not preclude exploring some serious questions about the person's gifts for ministry. Sessions have in the past found questions like the following to be very helpful:

- What personal qualities are evidence of a healthy and vital faith in God through Jesus Christ?
- How is that faith currently being expressed through the individual's participation in the worship, life and mission of this congregation?
- What motivations, whether positive or negative, impel the person's sense of call? Service to God and the world? Compassion for God's children? Guilt? A need for power and status?
- What real and potential talents for ministry are evident in this individual? (e.g., the ability to communicate, interpersonal skills, leadership or administrative abilities)
- What is the level and adequacy of the individual's academic interest, leadership skills, cross-cultural competencies, emotional intelligence, and motivations?
- What is the evidence of his or her physical health and stamina?
- What is the evidence of his or her emotional well-being?
- What is the evidence of his or her self-discipline?
- How does the individual plan to finance his or her education?

## Questions for Reflection:

- How can you discuss the person's gifts and call to ministry in your changing mission context in ways that do not impose preconceived notions of ministry?
- What new and different ministry skills should you be looking for in those discerning ordered ministry in the years ahead?