

SESSION INTERVIEW WITH APPLICANTS

Commission on Preparation for Ministry
Pittsburgh Presbytery

FOR THE INQUIRY PHASE

Some issues for attention and evaluation by the Session when examining the gifts and motivations of a prospective Inquirer:

1. What personal qualities are evidence of a healthy and vital faith in God through Jesus Christ?
2. How is that faith currently being expressed through the individual's participation in the worship, life and mission of this congregation?
3. What various motivations impel the sense of call (e.g. service to God and the world, compassion for God's children, guilt, the need for power and status)?
4. What real and potential talents for ministry are evident in this individual (e.g. the ability to communicate, interpersonal skills, leadership or administrative abilities)?
5. What is the level and adequacy of the individual's academic interest, ability and motivation?
6. What is the evidence of his/her physical health and stamina?
7. What is the evidence of his/her emotional well being?
8. What is the evidence of his/her self-discipline?

FOR THE CANDIDACY PHASE

Background: The Session has the awesome responsibility of deciding whether or not to commend to Presbytery members of the congregation who seek to be ordained to the ministry of the Word and Sacrament. While the Session needs to remember that these people are in the first steps of preparation and not the "finished products," it is important to determine whether they seem to have the potential to fulfill this occupational pursuit. Quickly it will come to mind that this puts the Session in the position of being judgmental. And that is true. We are called to be judges in this instance.

But let us remember that judgment isn't all bad. When we say that someone is a really nice person, we have made a profound judgment. In fact, we judge people all of the time – and that is one of the callings of a Christian (see I Corinthians 5:9-13). Judgment occurs within the community of believers, and it can be a grand affirmation. Jesus said, *"Do not judge unless you want to be judged."* (Matthew 7:1-2). That can be understood to be an encouragement for responsible judgment, not as a command to suspend judgment.

So, judges we shall be. But how do we do it responsibly? That is the question. And here are some suggestions:

1. Does the person's faith enlighten life or obscure it?
(Does his/her faith build bridges or walls?)
2. Does the inner sense of call seem real to you, and healthy?

(Is it a call to care for God's people, as opposed to a sense of guilt or a magical mission that sets the person above all other people?)

3. Does the person have the talents to be a teaching elder?
(For instance, a good speaking voice, a bright mind, a compassionate presence, a searching intellect, a genuine affection for people, a love for the church?)
4. Would you be pleased to have this person be your pastor?
(Granted, there is a big journey ahead for the applicant before ordination, but you ought to be able to assume that when that journey is completed, you would accept, with enthusiasm, this person as your pastor.)

I hope that this commentary will assist you, as a Session, in making the decisions that you are called upon either to commend or not commend the prospective candidates who come before the Commission on Preparation for Ministry.