

## **SESSION VISIT GUIDELINES**

Commission on Preparation for Ministry  
Pittsburgh Presbytery

1. Introduce yourself, what church you are from and how long you have been a member of the commission.
2. Distribute the outline of the Care Process (“A Caring Process” on the Presbytery website.) Check to find out how many copies you need to make. If you don’t have easy way to make copies, you may ask the church to download the form and make the copies for their session.
3. You are welcome to use the PowerPoint presentation that outlines the care process for talking points available online at [http://www.pghpresbytery.org/committees\\_commissions/comm\\_files/cpm.htm](http://www.pghpresbytery.org/committees_commissions/comm_files/cpm.htm)
4. Emphasize the session should know the applicant the best and therefore also need to sense the call to the ministry for this person. If they don’t think the person will make a good minister, they should speak up and ask questions.
5. Emphasize session expenses for psychological and vocational testing.
6. Continue to stress chastity in singleness and fidelity in marriage as an ethical guide for those under care seeking ordination.
7. Answer any questions that they may have about the process. If you don’t know the answer, tell them that you can find out and call the church the next day.

Following is a detailed script provided as a guide:

Congratulations!

I Timothy 3:1-7

I am going to speak to you tonight about two subjects – one is the process by which someone is ordained in the Presbyterian Church, the other is the great responsibility you, as the Session of this church, have regarding (name of applicant).

First, let’s talk about the process. The preparation for ministry process involves two phases: Inquiry and Candidacy. These two phases are designed to explore the call, evaluate the gifts and support the preparation of men and women who feel themselves called to be ministers. The Inquiry phase focuses primarily on exploring and testing the individual’s call; the Candidacy phase is primarily concerned with the preparation for ministry.

A church member, who must be a member of this church for at least six months, is encouraged to formally become an Inquirer soon after they have made their personal decision to explore the ministry so that the Commission on Preparation for Ministry (CPM) can provide them with support and counsel as early as possible. Our meeting with you tonight is the second step in this process.

Following this you will interview (applicant) to determine his/her readiness to prepare for the ministry. The Session is very important at this point in the process. A man or woman experiences God’s call to ministry privately. The church, however, should be able to affirm that individual’s gifts for ministry. We Presbyterians have always believed that the call of the Holy Spirit must also be a call of the church. The church is given the responsibility of helping the person determine if this is a valid working of the Spirit in his or her life. It is sometimes difficult for a Session to determine the validity of a person’s call to the ministry. The person may be a good friend, an active church worker, and yet the Session has reservations about whether he or she is called to the ministry.

It is our custom to call the actions of the Session and the CPM by the colorful term “gate keeping.” Somebody has to decide whether or not a person is really ready to prepare for the ministry. It is important to stop a person as early as possible if they are not called to the pastorate. It is our position that the local Session is in the best place to make that judgment. It may be very difficult to say no, but it is often the kindest thing to do. The process, from beginning to end, is not an easy one. You, the Session, as the “gatekeeper,” tend the entrance into the care process. Thus, you, to a large extent, determine the caliber of our church’s professional leadership.

Following this meeting tonight, you will interview (applicant) to determine his/her readiness to prepare for the ministry. We suggest that he/she be examined in three areas:

1. Personal relationship to Jesus Christ;
2. Involvement in the church;
3. Motivation and sense of call.

Questions you may want to ask:

1. How would you describe your faith journey?
2. Why do you think you are called to ministry?
3. How is your faith currently being expressed through participation in worship, the life and mission of this congregation? In the past?
4. What talents for ministry do you possess? i.e., ability to communicate, interpersonal skills, leadership and administrative abilities.
5. What plans have you made for your education?

Should you decide to recommend that (applicant) be enrolled as an Inquirer, you will appoint an Elder to be a liaison with the Inquirer and the CPM. That person will accompany (applicant) to the interviews with the CPM and the Presbytery. The liaison will be asked to state briefly why the Session is endorsing the Inquirer. This process will be repeated when the Inquirer moves to the Candidate phase of the process.

It is important that you continue to show your support (including financial) and concern throughout the Inquiry and Candidate process.

Before four months is completed in the Inquiry phase, the Inquirer is required to undergo psychological testing at an approved career center. The Presbytery pays 40% of the cost with the home church paying 40% and the individual paying the remaining 20%. The approximate amount is \$900.

When the individual is ready to end the Inquiry phase of the process, he/she will, again, meet first with the Session and then the CPM for a review of evidence indicating readiness to proceed with Candidacy. To be eligible for ordination, a Candidate must be in the Candidacy phase for one year.