

Guidelines for the Examination of Candidates for Minister of the Word and Sacrament

Guiding Principles

The preparation for ministry process is one of mutual discernment between the local church, the Presbytery (largely through the CPM), and the candidate. Examination before the Presbytery of call is the final step in this process. When a candidate for the ministry of the Word and Sacrament reaches this part of the process their call to ministry has already been validated at several steps: when they moved from the inquiry phase to candidacy, when they were certified ready to receive a call by their CPM, and when a particular ministry extended the candidate a call.

It is in this same spirit of discernment, that we undertake our examination of candidates for ordination to the office of Minister of the Word and Sacrament. Candidates ordinarily appear before Presbytery and share a personal statement of faith as well as a biographical sketch. The presbytery may inquire about the candidate's Christian faith, theology, views of the Bible, the Sacraments, and the government of the church.

This final step, though an important one, in the process of ordination is just one step in the discernment process. It is the role of the Presbytery to assess the overall readiness of a Candidate on the basis of their entire process, written statements, and answers to questions from the floor.

Helpful guidelines for formulating questions

Candidates who come before the Presbytery for examination have ordinarily passed ordinations exams, completed theological study, received the endorsement of both their congregation of care and calling congregation, and been certified by a CPM. In light of that, questions at this point in the process should seek to give candidates an opportunity to demonstrate their sense of call, the ability to apply theological training to real world situations, and an understanding of Presbyterian faith.

Below are a few suggestions to help ask good questions:

- Come to the examination prepared. Carefully read the candidate's statement of faith and biographical information prior to the meeting and ask questions based on this material.
- Good questions are clear and concise, and invite a candidate to demonstrate their grasp of theology and their call to ministry.
- Questions should be limited to a singular subject so they can be understood and are not overly burdensome to answer.
- Questions may also pertain to the particular call, and why it is a good fit for the candidate.

Pitfalls to avoid:

- Don't ask overly complicated and detailed questions that serve only to confuse the candidate.
- Don't formulate questions to entrap the candidate in a tricky or divisive theological conundrum.
- Don't ask speculative questions with little or no theological or practical relevance ministry.

- Remember, this is not an opportunity for Presbyters to debate 'hot topics' or theological differences among themselves. This is about the candidate.

Possible Questions

- What is your understanding of mission?
- What is your understanding of the authority of scripture?
- What is your understanding of grace?
- What is your understanding of what it means to be "Reformed always reforming"?
- Tell us about your favorite theologian... why did you choose her?
- Share three ways the reformed tradition views atonement and share which one you prefer.
- What theological question have you found particularly difficult to answer in your studies and why?
- What do you value most in the reformed tradition?
- What does your understanding of _____ have to do with your day to day care for the people of God?
- What does baptism signify and share your understanding of the sacrament?
- What do Presbyterians mean when we say God is sovereign?
- If God is sovereign, why does evil take place in the world?
- What do you believe about predestination/election?
- Are human beings inherently good or inherently bad? Explain.
- Why do Presbyterians engage in social ministry?
- What does it mean that human beings are stewards of God's creation?
- What is your definition of the Church?
- If the chief end of God's people is to glorify and to enjoy God forever, how do we do that? How are you enjoying God today/recently?
- Tell us about your understanding of office and ordination in the Presbyterian Church?
- How is Christ present in the Lord's Supper and share your understanding of the sacrament?
- Why is the Trinity monotheistic?