

Committees on Preparation for Ministry

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Identifying and Measuring Qualities for Effectiveness in Ministry

As the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) continues to seek highly-qualified inquirers and candidates for the ministry of the Word it is important to clarify what specific qualities a woman or man needs to be an effective minister. It is also important that the church specify the means it will use to perceive and measure these qualities.

Christian ministry has its roots in the gospel itself. As the people of God, the whole church is called to express through its life and faithfulness the reconciling ministry of Jesus Christ. Within the body of believers there are some who are also called to serve as ministers of the Word. The picture of a highly-qualified candidate emerges from a comprehensive, realistic understanding of the needs and demands of this ministry in a complex, rapidly-changing society.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the relationship between pastor and people was relatively simple and unchanging throughout the church. Today, ministry takes place in inner cities, in suburbs and small towns, in industrial plants and rural settings, within a variety of racial and ethnic communities, in hospitals, prisons, and universities, through national boards and agencies. Taken together, these ministries call for a wide variety of personalities, capacities and talents. Moreover, each type of ministry may require a number of very different qualifications. A parish minister, for example, is called to be preacher and teacher, pastor and counselor, administrator and organizer, priest and liturgist. Some pastorates demand energetic leaders; others require more reflective personalities. As with the church in times past, however, the deepest significance of ordained ministry continues to be revealed in the unique ways individuals show the presence of Christ in church and society.

Definition of a Highly-Qualified Candidate

It is not possible to provide a quick summary or an absolute checklist of the qualities a person must have to be effective as a minister of the Word. While some essential attributes such as intellectual academic or verbal ability are easily measured, spiritual and personal qualities are not.

The most essential quality, of course, is a vital, searching personal faith in God as revealed in Jesus Christ. Along with this, a person must have a strong commitment to Christ's church and a sense of call to the ordained ministry. This call should motivate the individual to a careful discernment of her or his gifts and abilities. She or he should be continually open to the direction of the Holy Spirit through the church. The candidate for ordained ministry should perceive herself or himself to be primarily a servant of the Lord of the church and should be willing to tolerate the tension that servanthood implies, including the misunderstanding and refection that may come from supporters and enemies alike. She or he should be able to live with the knowledge that to be in ministry in contemporary society is to be both respected as a prophet and disregarded as a fool.

Emotional health and strong self-awareness are of crucial importance to a candidate for the ministry of the Word. She or he must be able to relate to others at a deep level as well as understand the

need for healthy interdependence between people. Leadership ability, self-discipline and a talent for self-direction are essential.

Since ordained ministry is worked out in the context of community, a candidate **must** show understanding of a potential for growth in the kind of ministry Jesus lived out. She or he must show sensitivity to all persons regardless of culture or background; a commitment to work against racism, classism, sexism, and ageism; and the desire to nurture, equip and support a person in their unique ministries. She or he must also be able to share leadership responsibilities in the conviction that all people in the community of faith are equally called to God's service.

It is essential that the candidate understand the nature of the institutional church, demonstrating acquaintance with and commitment to the Reformed tradition. She or he should be knowledgeable and enthusiastic about the heritage, polity, practices and program of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and be an active member of a PCUSA congregation.

As an individual appraises her or his current potential qualifications to serve this church as a minister of the Word, she or he must be able to recognize how culturally-imposed needs and goals may affect the way she or he understands this occupation. Whatever personal resources or perceptions an individual may bring from her or his racial or ethnic background must not be overlooked or lost.

In the final analysis, a highly-qualified candidate is one whose blend of faith and commitments, temperament and personality, abilities and interests, coping style and resilience, values and motivation and capacity for continuing growth, development and change suggest that she or he is indeed suited for the ministry of the word. In the wonder of God's creation there are surely as many combinations of these qualities as there are candidates.

Process and Participants

The Preparation for Ministry Process is marked by a series of decisions regarding a person's suitability to begin and continue preparation for the ministry of the Word.

Among the initial participants in the process, in addition to the applicant, are the pastor of her or his home church (or a campus minister), the session and members of the congregation. These are the people who are frequently in the best position to observe and evaluate an individual's background, commitments, attitudes, capabilities and growth in faith and witness.

After an individual expresses to the session the feeling that she or he is called to the ministry of the Word it is the session's responsibility to formally begin the Preparation for Ministry Process by deciding whether or not that individual shows adequate promise for this occupation. After completing its evaluation the session forwards to the stated clerk of the presbytery its action and completed application form.

By constitutional provision this initial evaluation continues through the presbytery's Committee on Preparation for Ministry. As this committee ascertains whether the applicant is indeed suited to begin preparation for ministry, it also begins the personal relationship with that person that will be the basis for its ongoing counsel and guidance.

When the committee reports to presbytery its recommendation that the applicant be received as an inquirer and this recommendation is approved by presbytery, the individual enters into an extended process of consultations and evaluations with the session and presbytery's committee. At a later point in the process, the session and the committee will ascertain whether the inquirer should be formally enrolled as a candidate, and will recommend this decision in its report to presbytery.

The presbytery itself makes the final evaluation of the candidate's readiness for ordination upon recommendation from the Committee on Preparation for Ministry.

Measuring Qualities

At the heart of the Preparation for Ministry process are covenant relationships that have been established between the inquirer or candidate and her or his session and with the presbytery's Committee on Preparation for Ministry. These concerned, supportive guiding relationships form the basis for a series of regular consultations designed to measure the individual's spiritual, emotional, intellectual, educational and experiential growth. They provide the means through which the inquirer or candidate continues her or his self-evaluation, shares deep convictions and develops a clear understanding of the demands of ministry. It is important that all participants throughout the process show sensitivity to the inquirer's or candidate's unique background, personal attributes, abilities and experience.

Measuring an individual's qualities for the ministry of the Word is clearly a cumulative process that depends for its effectiveness on cooperation between its participants. While the primary relationships between the individual and the Committee on Preparation for Ministry, this committee's learnings and decisions are supplemented by information from the session, pastor, congregation, seminary, career center and others who know the person well. Those qualities she or he shows which are essential to ministry need to be recognized and nurtured each step of the way. If, on the other hand, a person clearly does not show essential qualities for ministry the committee is responsible for saying "no" or "not now" instead of letting her or him to invest years in preparation for an unsuitable occupation.

Throughout the selective and preparatory process the presbytery remains the key actor; however, the ultimate goal of highly-qualified candidates for the ministry of the Word can only be achieved through the informed, responsible participation of pastors, sessions, congregations and seminaries working through the coordinating efforts of the synod and the General Assembly. Such interrelationships profoundly demonstrate the effectiveness of the connectional nature of the church . . .

(The content of this article is drawn from a report to the 1981 General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church prepared by Jerome J. Leksa, 6/87)

For Additional Information...

For additional information regarding the Preparation for Ministry process or for additional resources, please contact the individuals listed below:

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