

GUIDELINES FOR SESSION INTERVIEW WITH APPLICANT

Background

The Session has the awesome responsibility of deciding whether or not to command 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 “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. Judges we are called to be, in this instance.

But let us remember that judgment isn't all that 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 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 minister of the Word and Sacrament? 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 long journey ahead for the applicant before ordination, but you ought to be able to assume that when the journey is completed, you could accept, with enthusiasm, this person as your pastor.

Additional questions for use by the Session, when meeting with an applicant, are found on page 8 of Preparation for Ministry Form 1. These questions are designed to assist the Session both to dialogue with an applicant and to evaluate the person's natural gifts for ministry, quality of commitment, strength of motivation and potential for growth.

Since an applicant (potential Inquirer) is a member of the church and known by the Session there may be a tendency to approach the initial interview with a “déjà vu” mindset. This attitude and approach should be avoided at all cost. The Session interview is the most important first step in the denomination’s process for determining who is to enter into covenant relationship with God and the Church to prepare to become a minister of the Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The Session must decide whether to endorse or not endorse an applicant for enrolment as an Inquirer. Elders must keep in mind the serious implications of their assessments and recommendations regarding enrollment as they are ultimately determining future Presbyterian Church leadership to serve the whole denomination. Such assessments and recommendations should be undertaken with prayer, compassion, intelligence, faith and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Note: This paper was originally prepared by the Rev. William King of
Covenant Presbyterian Church, Madison, Wisconsin in 1989.

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Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Rev. Jan. 2002