

How Does One Become a Presbyterian Minister?

Presbyterians believe that all persons are called to ministry in their communities, however particular forms of leadership are needed for the work of the church. Presbyterians understand a call to ministry to have three parts: 1) an inner sense of call; 2) a community that tests this sense of call; and 3) a call from a community to serve in a particular place.

A person who feels called by God to be a Presbyterian minister, known as a Minister of the Word and Sacrament, begins by expressing that desire to a church's Session (governing board). The person must be an active member of the church for at least six months before this can happen. If the Session agrees, the request proceeds to the Committee on Preparation for Ministry of the church's presbytery (regional governing body). There follows an "inquiry" period, during which the person explores the implications of becoming a minister together with the Session and the presbytery committee. The inquiry phase normally lasts two years. Its purpose is to determine the person's suitability for ordination as a Minister of the Word and Sacrament.

At the end of this phase, the inquirer must demonstrate personal faith, a sense of self-understanding, an understanding of the Reformed tradition, what it means to be Presbyterian, and an understanding of the task of being a minister. If the presbytery is satisfied, the person becomes a "candidate" for ministry. During this phase, full and intensive preparation occurs under scrutiny of the Session and the Committee on Preparation for Ministry.

Routinely, candidates have a college undergraduate degree (usually four years) and complete a seminary degree (usually three years). In addition, candidates must pass national exams that demonstrate their competence in the fields of theology, Bible (including content and a working knowledge of Greek and Hebrew), church polity, and worship and Sacraments.

The candidate is examined by the Committee on Preparation for Ministry and, after presenting a personal statement of faith and preaching a sermon, by the presbytery itself. If the examination is sustained and the candidate receives a valid call to ministry, the presbytery ordains him or her to the office of Minister of the Word and Sacrament. Only a presbytery may ordain a minister, not a congregation.

For more information, contact the your local Presbyterian Church.

If you have questions, call PresbyTel at 1-800-872-3283

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