

## **Detailed Explanation of the Call Process**

This is a detailed explanation of the process between the time when a pastor notifies the General Presbyter or Moderator of the Committee on Ministry (COM) that he or she is leaving a particular church and the new pastor and congregation begin working on implementing the mission study.

In our Presbyterian system the leaving and calling of pastors is understood to be led by God's Holy Spirit. We trust that God's Holy Spirit guides us through councils rather than specifically through individuals. There are always connectional relationships between the various councils of the church, so that a congregation is connected to the presbytery as well as its pastor. This understanding permeates the pastoral call process.

### **Phase One: Getting Started**

This is "Phase One" of the process, and involves the presbytery's Committee on Ministry (COM) and the Session of the church, and covers the period between when the Pastor announces his/her departure to when the Transitional Plan/Pastor is in place (either a Transitional Pastor or other form of pastoral leadership).

When the General Presbyter or Committee on Ministry (COM) Moderator learns that a pastor is leaving his or her call, COM representatives will be appointed to work with the Session, PNC, and congregation.

#### **Responsibilities of the COM and/or its Representatives:**

- The representatives make arrangements to conduct an exit interview with the pastor prior to the pastor leaving for the new call.
- One of the representatives, or their designee, attends the last worship service of the pastor and "declares the pulpit vacant."
- The Moderator of the COM appoints a Moderator for the Session until such time as a Transitional Pastor or other pastoral leadership is obtained.
- The representatives meet with the Session to explain the roles of the Session, the PNC, and the COM in the call process, including: the possibility of hiring a Transitional Pastor, the need for a mission study, issues concerning confidentiality, and the need to budget for the Pastor Nominating Committee's (PNC) search process, and to address salary ranges for the PNC.

#### **Responsibilities of the Session:**

- Call a congregational meeting to vote on the dissolution of call.
- Encourage and plan for a celebration of the pastor's ministry.
- Meet with the representatives of the COM.
- Arrange for the budget for the expenses of the call process, and prayerfully deliberate the salary ranges for the PNC.

- Hire a Transitional Pastor or arrange for other pastoral leadership, ordinarily chosen through a subcommittee of the Session/congregation.

**Documents available on-line for this phase of the call process may include, but not be limited to:**

- Dissolution of a Pastoral Call Service
- Pulpit Supply List
- Former Pastor Policies
- Pastoral Relationship Types
- Entities Involved in the Pastoral Call Process
- Role of the Session in the Search for a Pastor
- Guidelines for Transitional Pastors
- Policy for Pastors of Other Denominations
- Sample Covenant with a Transitional Pastor
- Transitional Pastor's Quarterly Report
- Minimum Terms of Call 2014

## **Phase Two: Taking Stock and Making a Plan**

During this stage the Session does the hard work of leading the congregation through a prayerful discernment of who they are and where God is leading them so that they will be prepared to search for a new pastor. This is the phase in which the congregation answers the question, "Who is God calling us to be?" This phase begins with the hiring of a Transitional Pastor or other pastoral leadership through the conclusion of the mission study and the commitment to a plan to follow in preparation for a Ministry Information Form (MIF).

A Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC) may be elected during this phase of the call process, or the Session/Congregation could wait until the mission study is complete before the election. There is value in having the PNC work alongside the Session in the mission study in that there is "buy-in" by the PNC and the transition into their work as a PNC working on the Ministry Information Form (MIF) could be smoother. But there is also value in keeping the two phases of the process separate in case the PNC would prematurely begin work on the MIF. The congregation must know who God is calling it to be before beginning a search for the next called pastor.

### **Responsibilities of the COM and/or its Representatives:**

- Give counsel to the Session as needed in their conduction of a mission study, providing them with presbytery resources.
- When appropriate, the COM representatives convey permission to the Session that the congregation may elect a PNC (nominated by the Nominating Committee at a congregational meeting) and explain that the representatives must meet with the PNC at their first meeting.

**Responsibilities of the Session:**

- Strengthening the relationship between Presbytery/COM representatives and the leadership of the congregation (Session, Moderator/Pastoral Leadership, and PNC)
- The Session leading the congregation in a prayerful self-study (mission study)
- If desired, schedule a congregational meeting for the purpose of electing a Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC) to work with the Session in the congregational self-study (the PNC may be elected after the self-study has been completed).
- Answering the question of “Who is God calling us to be?”

**Documents which may be helpful for this phase of the process may include, but not be limited to:**

- Components of a Mission Study

### **Phase Three: Finding God’s Person**

This phase is primarily the work of the PNC, with the COM representatives offering guidance and support. The Session also plays a supportive role, praying for the PNC, providing appropriate opportunities for the PNC to report to the congregation, and signing the Ministry Information Form (MIF).

This phase of the call process requires good communication between the PNC and the representatives of the Church and the Committee on Ministry (COM), which means that trust must either be established or strengthened. The following are some of the ways in which the Session, PNC, and COM representatives will work together, as well as the individual tasks that each may do:

**Responsibilities of the Session:**

- Address any current needs of the congregation revealed in the mission study.
- Update the website if needed, and work with the PNC if information is needed for the search process.
- Give the PNC a salary range for the Ministry Information Form (MIF).
- Approve the Ministry Information Form (MIF) when it is completed and have the Clerk of Session sign it electronically, with passwords from the COM Moderator.

## **Responsibilities of the COM and/or its Representatives:**

- At the first meeting of the PNC, the COM representatives outline the process of calling a pastor, emphasizing the relational role between councils and trust in the Holy Spirit. They may share information and forms on the General Assembly and Presbytery's websites. As with the Session, the representatives explain to the PNC the roles of the Session, the PNC, and the COM in the call process, emphasizing the importance of confidentiality, including not sharing information with spouses or other family members.
- The representatives encourage the PNC in writing the Ministry Information Form (MIF), which is found on-line on the Church Leadership Connection (CLC) page of the denomination's website. The PNC and representatives should go over the MIF carefully. The representatives approve the MIF when the PNC and representatives are both comfortable with it. The representatives may share the MIF with the whole COM, asking for advice as needed, but the representatives have the authority to approve it themselves. The Session will then also approve it.
- When the Session has approved the MIF the Moderator of the COM obtains passwords for the PNC and Clerk of Session to put it on the CLC website and electronically sign the document.
- The COM representatives are responsible for keeping up to date with where the PNC is in their process, and if not hearing from the Chair/Moderator regularly to check on their progress. Visits with the PNC may be warranted to encourage and support their process.
- When a PNC is very interested in a proposed pastor it is the responsibility of the COM representatives to assist in discerning whether that person is God's choice for the congregation. They do this by developing a relationship with the pastoral candidate (a phone conversation or two), and by assisting the PNC by doing a more in-depth check of the pastor's background. COM representatives receive the PIF of that pastor and insure that reference checks are conducted by the representatives, the Moderator of the COM, and/or the General Presbyter.
- The in-depth reference checks are conducted by contacting the COM Moderator, or moderator of the committee responsible for the oversight of candidates if the person is a candidate of the pastor/candidate's Presbytery, the General Presbyter, and/or others in their Presbytery.
- When a potential pastor visits the community the Examinations Subcommittee of the COM meets with the pastor or candidate. COM representatives are responsible for contacting the Chair of this subcommittee and establishing the connection with the Chair/Moderator of the PNC.
- The COM Examinations Subcommittee shares with the pastor or candidate the Sexual Misconduct Policy and Background Check Policy and has the pastor/candidate fill them out, and the PNC pay the fee for the background check, prior to considering that person for membership in the Presbytery of Arkansas.

- The COM Examinations Subcommittee may examine the potential pastor either once, just for theological “fit” with the congregation, and later for membership in the presbytery and approval of the call, or both examinations may be conducted at once if the potential pastor and PNC are further along in their process. In all, the COM Examinations Subcommittee examines the pastor/candidate and visits about:
  - Their faith journey (review “Statement of Faith and Theology”)
  - “Fit” and sense of call (review PIF and CIF)
  - Worship and leadership
  - Theology
  - Polity
  - Connection and commitment to the PCUSA and the Presbytery.

The Examinations Subcommittee also shares with the pastor/candidate information about the Presbytery and the church under consideration. If there are two examinations one could take place via conference call or video conference.

### **Responsibilities of the Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC)**

- The PNC uses the Mission Study as the foundation for writing the Ministry Information Form (MIF).
- The PNC prayerfully writes the MIF.
- The PNC works closely with the COM representatives in the approval process, editing as suggested.
- Communicate with the Moderator of the COM in receiving passwords to put the MIF on-line.
- The PNC should let the COM representatives know when the form is online. The representatives notify the COM Moderator that the form is on-line, and the General Presbyter makes initial matches of the MIF with PIFs online.
- The General Presbyter may recommend editing the MIF to match more PIFs.
- The PNC reads PIFs, narrows down PIFs/pastors through a prioritization process, contacts pastors that they are interested in to see if they are still seeking a call, and calls references on those pastors that they are interested in.
- After the PNC checks references, the PNC may communicate with the pastor in a number of ways, including telephone conversations or conference calls, e-mails, and the exchange of information between the PNC and pastor. Sermon tapes or DVDs of the pastor may be desired by the PNC, and the pastor may want more information on the church or community.
- The PNC continues conversations with a number of pastors, narrowing down those with whom they are interested. It often works best to have one person at the top of the list and to work toward discerning whether God is calling that pastor/candidate rather than keeping a number of persons at the same level in the process.

- During this conversational period it is very important for there to be communication between the PNC and the representatives of the COM.
- When the PNC has completed reference checks, if the PNC is very serious about a candidate, they are responsible for sending the PIF of the pastor/candidate to the COM representatives so that the COM and/or the General Presbyter can more thoroughly vet the potential pastor.
- The General Presbyter and/or the COM representatives must conduct reference checks prior to a pastor/candidate visiting the PNCs home church/community.
- The PNC may visit candidate's congregations to worship, ordinarily with permission of the Pastor. The PNC may look at videos of sermons, or the Pastor may preach in a neutral pulpit in a church near the congregation. If this form of hearing a pastor preach is chosen it must be very confidential with the assistance of COM representatives.
- When a pastor visits the church they will also meet with members of the COM's Examinations Subcommittee. This visit with the subcommittee is generally for the subcommittee to get to know the pastor and discern whether the pastor would be a good fit" for the congregation, meaning that they have the appropriate gifts and talents and theological perspective given the needs of the congregation. If the PNC and proposed pastor are far along in their conversations they may have already discussed a salary package (terms of call), and it could be that the subcommittee could also examine them for membership in the presbytery and approve the terms of call. At this point there may need to be flexibility in the process. More and more often these conversations are conducted on-line through Zoom or another format. In-person meetings are not required.
- The PNC meets with the pastor/candidate, shows that person around the community (including showing them schools, homes, and other pertinent places and information about the community), and has in-depth conversations with the pastor/candidate in discerning whether the PNC and pastor/candidate feel a sense of call. The spouse of the pastor/candidate may be invited to visit the community but is not to be examined.
- As the PNC and pastor come to a belief that God is calling this person as the called pastor the PNC, pastor, and COM representatives complete any examinations needed. These can be by Zoom or another on-line format.
- Our Presbyterian belief that God's Holy Spirit works through our process leads us to a three-way relationship between the congregation (through the PNC), the pastor, and the presbytery through the Committee on Ministry. If any one of the three partners in the relationship believe that this is not the pastor for the church then the PNC continues the search.

**Documents for this phase of the process may include, but not be limited to:**

- Ministry Information Form (MIF) from PC(USA) CLC
- Bible Studies for a PNC
- "On Calling a Pastor" from PC(USA) CLC

- Privacy Guidelines
- Tips on Ways to Look at a PIF
- Suggested Questions for Reference Calls
- Pastoral Call Form
- Minimum Terms of Call
- Sabbatical Leave Policy
- Parental Leave Policy

## **Phase Four: Wrapping It Up**

Completing the processes and paperwork needed through the Presbytery, which differs if the pastoral candidate is not ordained. This phase may include, but not be limited to:

### **Responsibilities of the Congregation**

- To approve the terms of call and vote to call the proposed Pastor.
- For members to travel to the presbytery meeting at which the Pastor is presented in support of his or her call.
- To attend the installation/ordination service.

### **Responsibilities of the Session:**

- The Session calls a congregational meeting to approve the call of the Pastor when the PNC and proposed Pastor have reached an agreement and the Examinations Subcommittee, or the whole Committee on Ministry, approves the terms of call.

### **Responsibilities of the Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC):**

- Work closely with the COM representatives in the examinations process of the proposed Pastor, and filling out the call forms.
- Work on finalizing the terms of call and filling out the forms. (Use “Pastoral Call Form”)
- Put together the names for the Administrative Commission to install (and possibly ordain). The Commission is made up of not fewer than seven (7) members, as nearly equal as possible divided among pastors and elders, with no two elders from the same congregation. The Moderator of Presbytery, or his/her designee, is ordinarily asked to Moderate. Others, such as ministers or elders outside the Presbytery, may be invited to “sit” with the commission, and may take a part in the worship service, but they are not included in the members necessary to make up an administrative commission, or to take part in the liturgy of the installation. (Download the “Administrative Commission Form” on the Presbytery’s website to fill-in-the-blanks.)
- Select a date for the Installation Worship Service
- Propose an offering recipient for the Installation Worship Service. This offering recipient must be approved by the presbytery, and there is a list of

approved recipients. If an offering recipient not on the approved list is desired the approval process will take additional time.

- Select a date for the initial date of the call, when the pastor begins work, which is generally prior to the Installation Service if the Pastor is already ordained. Pastors ordained may be given permission to move to the field as soon as the COM has approved the call.
- If the proposed Pastor is a candidate he or she may not move to the field until passing the ordination exam on the floor of presbytery. Ordinarily a candidate is ordained by the presbytery of the church that calls her or him. The Ordination must take place before he or she can celebrate the sacraments.
- The PNC may develop a brochure or some other means of sharing information about the proposed Pastor with the congregation. The proposed Pastor may not preach for the congregation prior to the congregational meeting to vote on the call.
- The PNC makes the motion to approve the terms of call of the proposed Pastor and presents information on the Pastor to the congregation prior to the vote.

#### **Responsibilities of the COM and/or its Representatives:**

- To direct the PNC and proposed Pastor to needed forms or other documents.
- To facilitate the examinations process by the Examinations Subcommittee.
- To work with the Pastor and PNC as they complete the Administrative Commission Form.
- To proceed as expeditiously as possible through the approval process.
- To insure that all necessary information and documents needed to complete the process of calling a pastor are to the COM and ready for approval.
- The COM will examine candidates under care on the floor of Presbytery and facilitate necessary approvals by the Presbytery.
- The CCM will introduce Pastors previously ordained to the Presbytery at the next meeting.

#### **Responsibilities of the Pastor Being Called:**

- Fill out the Background Check Form and the receipt of the Sexual Misconduct Policy
- Fill out other forms required by the Presbytery Office.
- Work with the PNC on filling out the Administrative Commission Form.
- Work with the Presbytery and appropriate persons within the congregation in planning the worship service of Installation and/or Ordination.

#### **Documents for this phase of the process may include, but not be limited to:**

- Pastoral Call Form
- Minimum Terms of Call

- Sabbatical Leave Policy
- Parental Leave Policy
- Ethical Conduct
- Certification of Call Form
- Administrative Commission Form
- Administrative Commission Form Instructions
- Commissions to Install or Ordain
- Form for Minutes of Commission to Install or Ordain
- Order of Worship to Install
- Background Check Policy and Form
- PC(USA) Standards of Ethical Conduct
- Presbytery of Arkansas Sexual Misconduct Policy

### **Phase Five: Starting Anew**

The process of calling a Pastor doesn't end after the Installation Service. It is always good for a congregation/Session to have in place a group of people who walk alongside a new pastor as he/she becomes acquainted with the congregation and community. Other important aspects of this phase include, but may not be limited to:

#### **Responsibilities of the Congregation:**

- Continued prayer among the congregation for the ministry of the new Pastor

#### **Responsibilities of the Session:**

- Prayerful consideration of the findings of the mission study as the congregation and Pastor enter the new phase of God's ministry

#### **Responsibilities of the Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC):**

- Ordinarily a PNC will remain intact and serve as an advisory group for the new pastor for at least one year.

#### **Responsibilities of the COM and/or its Representatives:**

- To remain in contact with the congregation through the Pastor and Session, worshipping occasionally.

#### **Responsibilities of All:**

- Continued strengthening of the relationship between the congregation and the Presbytery, and the Pastor and the Presbytery

*revised November 10, 2017  
revised March 2, 2021*