

# Procedures for Calling A Pastor

## **Common Acronyms:**

PNC – Pastor Nominating Committee

CPC – Congregational and Pastoral Care

CLC – Church Leadership Connection (website for calling pastors)

MIF – Ministry Information Form

PIF – Personal Information Form

POSD – Presbytery of South Dakota

## **Election of a Pastor Nominating Committee**<sup>1</sup>

In the PC(USA) call process, the congregation gives authority to search for a pastor to a pastor nominating committee (PNC). The PNC, representative of the whole congregation and elected by the congregation (not by session), has the responsibility for nominating a pastor to the congregation for election.

The presbytery has a responsibility to work with the PNC and to advise them on the merits, suitability, and availability of those considered for the call. The presbytery is authorized by the Book of Order to be one of the decision-making partners in all pastoral calls.

The presbytery has a responsibility to work with a session to determine when and in what manner the election of a PNC will take place and to give a congregation permission to elect a PNC. Election of a PNC can happen as soon as presbytery approves the effective date of dissolution of the current pastoral relationship.<sup>2</sup> (G-2.0801)

Congregational and Pastoral Care (CPC) may want to take into consideration several factors in working with the session to determine whether and when to elect a PNC:

- the congregation's ability to meet pastoral terms of call responsibilities,
- whether a congregational mission study is necessary before calling a pastor,
- the type of pastoral relationship a congregation will be seeking,
- the length of time the call process may take, and
- whether there will be an intentional interim time with a Transitional pastor in place.

## **Planning Pastoral Services for Transitional Period**

*(1st meeting with CPC liaison—see Session Workshop)*

1. CPC liaison meets with Session to discuss findings from the Exit interview, decide upon appropriate temporary pastoral relationship, and discuss process for Mission Study. Dates and times are set for Mission Study, if needed.
2. The Congregation is engaged in Mission Study.
3. Session submits Mission Study to CPC.

*(2nd meeting with CPC liaison).*

4. CPC liaison meets with Session to discuss options/plans for the future.

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<sup>1</sup> Discussion is from the 2011 Advisory Handbook.

<sup>2</sup> Approved by COM February 10, 2015 and by POSD on June 26, 2015.

## **Electing the PNC**

1. Session sets date and time for congregational meeting to elect PNC.
2. Session suggests size of PNC, based upon size of congregation. Five to nine members is recommended.
3. Church nominating committee prepares a slate of nominees who are representative of the congregation as a whole and *who can be counted upon to be present and participating in the PNC process*.
4. Congregational meeting is held to elect the PNC. (CPC liaison is present to attest to the action and may moderate if requested by CPC appointed moderator). CPC may appoint a moderator (G-1.0504).

## **Orienting and Organizing the PNC**

1. PNC meets immediately following the congregational meeting to elect its chair or moderator and set a date for its first meeting. The first PNC training session (about 30 minutes) should be held at this time since (usually) this is immediately following the congregational meeting and all parties are present. (See the PNC Workshop.)
2. The CPC liaison will meet with PNC to explain the entire process, and particularly go over how to complete the MIF.
3. The PNC and Session develop timeline, including dates and times for Congregational Mission Study (if needed), and a Target Date for a draft Ministry Information Form (MIF) to come to session.
4. PNC works alone to prepare a draft the MIF.
5. PNC arranges to meet with the Liaison for its second (or third) training session, which includes how to file MIF online and how to conduct a search.
6. When PNC is ready and is receiving PIFs from pastors, another training session may include how to narrow the selection.

## **Developing and Completing Ministry Information Form (MIF)**

1. PNC chair downloads the MIF from <http://oga.pcusa.org/section/mid-council-ministries/clc/>
2. The PNC meets as often and as many times as it needs to prepare a draft of the MIF.
3. PNC submits a copy of the MIF based on the Mission Study to session for approval.
4. After approval by session, CPC moderator reviews the MIF. If it is in proper form (CPC does not approve content), the CPC moderator will give the PNC moderator the password to upload the MIF to CLC.
5. The PNC chair uploads the approved MIF to Church Leadership Connection (CLC).
6. CPC moderator gives security code to Clerk of Session to certify MIF.
7. CPC moderator and Clerk of Session certify the MIF.

## Collecting and Screening PIFs

(CPC liaison advises PNC as they develop criteria for screening PIFs, answers to Supplemental Questions, questions to ask references, and interview questions for candidates. Liaison outlines process of matching, selecting, interviewing, etc.

1. CLC matches MIFs and PIFs according to several criteria.
2. PNC Chair reviews matches and PIFs online; downloads desired PIFs.
3. PNC sends selected candidates Supplemental Questions (*optional*), Secondary References Release, and form for Background Check.
4. Candidates return Supplemental Questions (*if sent*), Secondary References Release and form for Background Check.
5. PNC selects candidates to pursue based on previously developed criteria.
6. PNC contacts selected candidates to assure they are still interested and available.
7. PNC sends copy of MIF to selected candidates who are still interested and available.
8. PNC selects 1-3 individuals to interview.
9. PNC contacts CPC Moderator to check with candidate's CPC Chair and EP.
10. Presbytery performs a background check.
11. CPC Moderator replies to PNC Chair regarding reference checks.
12. PNC calls Primary References and, if release is signed, the Secondary References.  
(Form in Chapter 8)

## Checking references

### CPC's or PNC's basis to screen out candidates

Employment as a Presbyterian teaching elder is not a right. Courts have established that the ministries of the Church of Jesus Christ belong to the Church and tasks are assigned to particular persons for the service of its members and the world. The Church must make such assignment responsibly.

The Committee on Ministry serves the presbytery in the following ways:

- It counsels with churches regarding calls for permanent pastoral relations, visiting and counseling with every committee elected to nominate a pastor or associate pastor.
- It advises the committee regarding the merits, availability, and suitability of any candidate or teaching elder whose name is contemplated for nomination to the congregation, and has the privilege of suggesting names to the committee.

No call to a permanent pastoral relationship shall be in order for consideration by the presbytery unless the congregation has received and considered the committee's counsel before action is taken to issue a call. (G-3.0307)

### Are there prohibited questions?

Neither civil nor church law mandates prohibited questions. Many Presbyterians who serve on PNCs are familiar with secular employment practices where it is illegal to ask certain questions of a prospective employee. Because the ministries of the Church belong to the Church, the rules are different for search committees considering church professionals.

However, as Paul wrote, while all things are possible, not all things are wise. Interview and reference questions should focus on ministry effectiveness only. The PNC wants to know if the person

would be appropriate for the position being filled. The CPC wants to know if this person would be acceptable in the presbytery. Remember that the person being questioned is forming an opinion about you, the questioner. Think about the impression you want the person to have about your congregation and the presbytery as you decide which questions to ask. It is not unusual for a pastor to close conversation with a congregation as a result of inappropriate questions about non-ministry subjects.

### **What questions should a pastor nominating committee ask of a reference?**

It is appropriate and important to ask questions related to the candidate's skills and experience that relate to the position being filled. Such questions might be:

- Tell me about \_\_\_\_\_'s worship leadership.
- How does \_\_\_\_\_ deal with conflict?
- What are some of \_\_\_\_\_'s strengths and weaknesses?
- Would you go to \_\_\_\_\_ seeking pastoral care?
- Is there anything else about \_\_\_\_\_ that you would like to share?

It is important to ask references to respond only on the basis of first-hand knowledge. It is usually helpful to tell the reference a bit about the congregation, community, and position for which the candidate is being considered. *On Calling a Pastor* (free -- [www.pcusa.org/clc](http://www.pcusa.org/clc), Search *On Calling a Pastor*. Word and other versions are available.) contains additional information about interviewing prospective pastors.

### **Are there other questions that CPC should ask?**

This reference check is about membership in presbytery (if the prospective pastor is not already a member) and about ministry capabilities in the specific location. The CPC might ask:

- Why is \_\_\_\_\_ leaving her/his present position?
- Is there anything about \_\_\_\_\_ that negatively affects his/her ability to do ministry?
- Would you welcome \_\_\_\_\_ to serve in a similar position in your presbytery?
- Do you know anything about \_\_\_\_\_ that would be embarrassing to the congregation and presbytery if it became public knowledge?

If you receive a PIF that does not contain the sexual misconduct sign-off section or Stated Clerk's attestation, ask the candidate for a complete PIF or do not consider them further.

### **What are secondary references?**

These are persons who are not listed by the candidate, but are suggested by others or contacted because they are thought to have knowledge of the candidate. Executive Presbyters, Stated Clerks, CPC Moderators, and CPM Moderators do NOT fall in this category. They are automatically used as references because of their roles and no authorization is needed from the candidate to consult with them.

### **Under what circumstances is it appropriate for PNC members to contact secondary references?**

Secondary references should only be contacted when the candidate has given permission. Under no circumstances should a PNC contact members of a pastor's present congregation without her or his permission to do so.

When a presbytery check reveals negative information, what should CPC or staff share with a PNC about a negative reference? If the information leads the CPC Moderator or staff to have serious doubts about the candidate's ability to do effective ministry in the particular calling church, they should share those concerns as a consultant, giving specific areas of ministry where they see potential difficulty.

If reliable information is of such a serious nature that the candidate should not be considered further, the CPC must determine whether they are willing to permit the PNC to continue consideration of the candidate. The CPC should inform the PNC of its decision quickly.

## **Background checks**

Background checks are additional assessments of a candidate's character and fitness for employment. *If this position will involve work with children*, your state may require you or your presbytery to do a background check on the person you call. Check your state law.

POSD requires a background check of all incoming teaching elders. Churches often do background checks of all persons working with children. Now seminaries are considering background checks of persons entering seminary and CPMs are considering it as a step in the process of coming under care.

POSD does these background checks: criminal, financial, motor vehicle, and credit. Criminal is the most common, but the others produce information that church organizations may find helpful. This information is confidential and only the CPC moderator or POSD staff will have access to it.

A background check **MUST** be completed before a potential pastor has a face-to-face interview with a PNC.

## **Sexual Misconduct Statement**

The PIF contains the following choice for the candidate:

\_\_\_\_\_ I certify by the signature below that no civil, criminal, ecclesiastical complaint has ever been sustained\* or is pending\* against me for sexual misconduct; and that I have never resigned or been terminated from a position for reasons related to sexual misconduct.

\_\_\_\_\_ I am unable to make the above certification. I offer, instead, the following description of the complaint, termination, or the outcome of the situation with explanatory comments.

If the candidate is unable to affirm the first statement,

***For PNCs*** - Turn this matter over to your CPC Moderator and trust their advice.

***For EPs and CPC Moderators***, talk to the Executive Presbyter, the Stated Clerk, and/or the CPC Chair in the presbyteries where the person has served. If the person has undergone counseling related to this issue, ask for a release and obtain a copy of a report from the counselor. Weigh all of this information carefully and prayerfully before responding to the PNC.

## Interviewing Potential Pastors

The interview process is outlined as follows:

1. PNC decides whether to interview face-to-face or by telephone.
2. Interview date established.
3. PNC finalizes interview questions.
4. PNC conducts interviews.
5. PNC selects final nominee and contacts CPC.
6. PNC sends “Summary of Pastoral Search Process” to CPC Moderator.
7. CPC interviews nominee (at least 2 CPC members, others co-opted as deemed necessary)
8. CPC approves nominee.
9. PNC may arrange for neutral pulpit, if thought necessary.

Some Questions You Might Ask During an Interview:

- Tell us about your faith journey.
- What are the things you feel best about in your present ministry?
- What have been the challenges there?
- What makes you think you may be called to leave there now?
- What interests you about this position?
- What do you bring to our ministry?
- What are your greatest strengths in ministry? ...your greatest weaknesses?
- One of our goals is to strengthen our \_\_\_\_\_. How would you envision doing that?
- Describe a typical week in your ministry.
- Share your perspective on the Presbyterian Church (USA).
- One of the issues our session has debated in the past few years is \_\_\_\_\_. Tell us how you might address that topic.
- If we selected you as our pastor (or other role), when could you start and what would be your start-up plan?
- How do you balance your personal/family life with your ministry?
- What will you need from us, the members of this congregation, in order to be effective as our pastor?
- What questions or concerns do you have?

You will also want to develop questions related to the specific candidate. These will come out of things you read in the PIF and things you hear from references.

Is there anything else you need to know that will impact this person’s performance of ministry?

## **Interview Process**

Pastor Nominating Committees can use interviews in several ways to get to know the semifinalists or finalists in the selection process:

- Telephone interviews by individuals on the Pastor Nominating Committee
- Telephone interviews by the entire Pastor Nominating Committee--using a speaker telephone or a conference telephone call.
- Face-to-face interviews before or after hearing a pastor preach at a neutral site.
- Face-to-face interviews in the community.

Interviews should help the Pastor Nominating Committee and pastors (also spouses and families when they are included) communicate clearly and openly with one another their expectations, their understandings of priorities, and their mutual visions for the ministry of the church.

The following sections are designed to assist the PNC in planning, conducting and evaluating interviews. They have been prepared primarily for face-to-face interviews so they will need to be modified for telephone interviews.

### **I. Planning the Interview**

- A. Decide who will be certain that all members of the Pastor Nominating Committee are clear about/reminded of the time and place of the interview.
- B. Decide who will communicate plans for the interview to the Committee on Ministry representative.
- C. Decide about physical arrangements for the interview.
  - a. If the interviewee is coming to the community, who is going to greet him/her?
  - b. Is a meal appropriate prior to the interview? Would snacks at the meeting be preferable?
  - c. What will be the seating arrangement? The interviewee should be seated by plan in a position among the interviewers so he/she can see everyone close-up. This can be done effectively around a table.
- D. Decide who will moderate the interview.
- E. Decide what questions or subjects are to be raised. Individual members may be designated to ask particular questions. (See possible interview subjects/questions above.)

### **II. During the Interview**

The interview process must be flexible to allow for unanticipated situations to develop.

- A. The moderator welcomes the interviewee warmly and introduces her/him to the committee.
- B. The moderator may invite the committee members to shake hands and have a brief, informal chat with the interviewee.
- C. The moderator invites the interviewee to be seated in the prearranged location.
- D. The moderator may ask the committee members to briefly tell the interviewee something about themselves, such as the work they have done in the church.
- E. The moderator may brief the interviewee on the procedure to be followed. This may be merely that the committee has selected certain questions and subjects for discussion and that time will be saved for the interviewee to raise any questions that he/she may have.
- F. The moderator should mention the method of recording that has been decided upon and point out the person who will be doing the recording. Others may take notes for their own purposes.

- G. The moderator may ask for questions or comments about the procedure.
- H. The moderator may offer prayer or ask anyone else, including the interviewee.
- I. The moderator may lead off with the first interview subject or questions to be raised.

During the interview there is some guarantee of thoroughness when a well-planned checklist of interview topics is followed. However, any committee member should break in whenever needed to ask for further elaboration or more clarity on a point of interest. Do not let debate develop among committee members or, normally, between members and the interviewee.

### III. Closing the Interview

- A. The moderator may ask if the interviewee and family, if present, are comfortable in the arrangements made for them and if there is anything that can be done to make their stay more helpful.
- B. The moderator may rise, express appreciation, shake hands and give the other committee members opportunity to do the same.

### IV. Evaluating the Interview

- A. After the interviewee has departed, and perhaps after a short break, the moderator reconvenes the committee.
- B. Go over the major questions of the interview, comparing reactions to each response and recording them in the minutes of the interview.
  - Consider how the congregation's and the candidate's expectations compare.
  - What is the primary appeal of this candidate?
  - What, if any concerns do you have about her/his ministry?

*(If this has been an interview conducted by one member or a subcommittee, plan for reporting to the entire committee.)*

- C. Seek a consensus about the candidacy of the interviewee – whether to continue or discontinue consideration.
- D. Determine what the next steps of the committee will be and plan for them. (These will differ according to where the Pastor Nominating Committee is in the search process.)

## Housing Considerations

The following is a list of issues related to housing for pastors, specifically for congregations that provide a manse for their pastor. These are issues that PNCs may want to consider as they negotiate with candidates and that sessions may want to consider as they do their Annual Reviews.

### Utilities

- Who will pay for utilities?
- What will be included with utilities -- telephone? Cable TV? Internet?
- How will utilities be paid? If reimbursed, will there be a maximum amount allowable for reimbursement?
- Will the bills be sent to the pastor? To the church?



**Maintenance** This should all be in a policy developed by the session and approved by congregation and applicable every time a pastor is called.

- Will there be an annual budget for routine maintenance?
- If repairs are necessary, who should be contacted? Who will complete minor repairs?
- Who is responsible for lawn care and snow removal?
- Will there be a special deposit if there are pets?
- Will there be a damage deposit?
- Will there be routine carbon monoxide/radon checks?
- Is there a fire extinguisher and smoke alarms? If not, who will add?
- What are the provisions for updating decor? Who will choose how decor is updated?

### **Insurance**

- What kind of liability insurance will be available?
- What about tenant's insurance and/or personal property insurance?
- Is there an allowance for furnishings or appurtenances?
- Would the congregation consider providing an annuity in lieu of home equity?
- Would the congregation consider setting up a pre-tax cafeteria-type plan, e.g. medical escrow, social security offset, etc.

## **Choosing the Nominee**

1. PNC invites final nominee to candidate for position.
2. Nominee preaches and/or is examined by congregation at a special congregational meeting.
3. Congregation votes (with CPC Liaison present to attest to the action and moderated by a Presbytery appointed moderator).
4. Nominee agrees.
5. PNC submits results of vote, Terms of Call, and Equal Employment Opportunity (at end of this document) report on Search Process to CPC.
6. CPC/Presbytery approves Terms of Call and appoints Installation Commission.

### **Suggestions for the congregational meeting to call a pastor**

Once the PNC has decided on its candidate of choice and the nominee and the CPC have agreed, the PNC should notify the session to call a congregational meeting. Public notice of the meeting must be given on two successive Sundays. The moderator of the session or some other minister will preside. In some presbyteries the candidate will preach during the worship service before the congregational meeting.

At the meeting the PNC will present its nominee and the terms of call; these usually come in one motion. It is recommended that the vote for calling the pastor be by written ballot.

Occasionally there is a minority voting against the motion to call this pastor. The moderator may ask if the minority will concur in the call (this is not the same as asking for a unanimous consent). If the vote is nearly unanimous or if the majority insists on moving forward with the call, the moderator should send the call to the presbytery with the number voting for and against and any other facts of importance. The nominee should also be informed by the moderator or the PNC of the nature and circumstances of the decision. Normally, the number of negative votes is less than 5% of the total. When the number of negative votes exceeds 10%, the call should not be pursued.

## **Tools to assist the search**

- The Office of Vocation (1-888-728-7228 ext 8550) offers two helpful resources for use by PNCs and CPCs as they assist congregations during the search for new leadership.
- On Calling A Pastor (PDS# OGA-07-090 contains specific directions and information for a PNC during the process. It also contains step-by-step instructions and information about the new computer system and how to use it effectively. Obtain a copy for each member of the PNC you are assisting. It is available for purchase or download at [www.pcusa.org/clc](http://www.pcusa.org/clc)
- On Calling a Pastor Video. This ten-minute video is a companion piece to “On Calling a Pastor.” Order from Presbyterian Distribution Services.(1-800-524-2612)
- Research Services can provide statistics about the church in transition and its community. Membership trends and other information, based on the Stated Clerk’s annual report are available on the PCUSA web site at <http://www.pcusa.org/research/index.htm>.

**EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY IN MINISTRY**

**Report on Pastoral Search Process**

To: Presbytery of \_\_\_\_\_

From: \_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Church, City, State

Title of Position Filled: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Person Called: \_\_\_\_\_

Check all that apply:

Racial/Ethnic: \_\_\_\_\_

Woman: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_ Specify: \_\_\_\_\_

	<b>Total Number</b>	<b>Racial/Ethnic</b>	<b>Women</b>
PIFs received			
Phone interviews			
Heard preach			
Face to face Interviews			
Offered the position			

\_\_\_\_\_  
PNC Chairperson

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*Complete at the end of your search process and return to your presbytery.*