

The Process of Calling a Pastor Phase One

This explanation is to be used by Committee on Ministry (COM) liaisons and the Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC). This is “Phase One” of the process: beginning when a pastor notifies the General Presbyter or COM Moderator that he or she is leaving a church, through the time when a PNC extends a call to a pastor/candidate and that person accepts. The next phase of the process is outlined in the document “Last Phase of the Call Process” and includes the documents needed and steps to go through to finalize the call between the pastor and congregation, including the roles of the COM, PNC, pastor, Session, congregation, Presbytery of Arkansas, Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of Arkansas, and the pastor’s Presbytery.

- When the General Presbyter or COM Moderator learns that a pastor is leaving his or her call, COM liaisons are appointed by the Moderator to work with the Session, PNC, and congregation.
- The liaisons make arrangements to conduct an exit interview with the pastor prior to the pastor leaving for the new call. (See “Questions for an Exit Interview”)
- One of the liaisons, or their designee, attends the last worship service of the pastor and “declares the pulpit vacant.” (See “Dissolution of Pastoral Call”)
- The liaisons meet with the Session to explain the roles of the Session, the PNC, and the COM in the call process, including: issues concerning confidentiality, the possibility of hiring an Interim, the need to pay vacancy dues, the possibility of the need for a mission study, and the need to address salary ranges for the PNC.
- When appropriate, the COM liaisons 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 liaisons must meet with the PNC at their first meeting.
- At the first meeting of the PNC, the liaisons give them a copy of “On Calling a Pastor” (or “El Llamado a un Nuevo Pastor”), this form and other forms related to the Pastor Nominating process (included in a packet), and explain how to access information and forms on the GA and Presbytery’s websites. As with the Session, the liaisons 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 liaisons assist the PNC in writing the CIF. The PNC and liaisons should go over the CIF carefully. The liaisons approve the CIF when acceptable and obtain passwords for the PNC and Clerk of Session from the COM Moderator.
- The PNC should let the COM liaisons know when the form is online. The liaisons notify the COM Moderator that the form is on-line, and the PNC contacts the General Presbyter to schedule a time to meet with him/her to make initial matches of the CIF with PIFs online.
- The General Presbyter meets with the PNC, makes initial matches, and instructs the PNC in reading and prioritizing PIFs. (see “How I Read a PIF”)
- 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 (see “PNC Reference Calls”).

- 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 is advised 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.
- 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 liaisons to initiate the clearance process. The pastor/candidate under consideration must be cleared by the COM before he or she may visit the PNCs home church/community. The clearance process is lengthy, and it is the responsibility of the PNC to initiate this process, understanding that it will take a number of weeks to clear a candidate, with initial clearance dependent on the COM's monthly meeting the first Tuesday of each month.
- The COM liaisons are responsible for sharing the PIF with the General Presbyter so that he/she may also conduct reference checks.
- The COM liaisons contact the COM Moderator of the pastor/candidate's Presbytery and/or others in their Presbytery. The General Presbyter contacts the General Presbyter or Presbytery Exec of the pastor/candidate's Presbytery. If the person the PNC is interested in is a candidate under care, the Preparation for Ministry Committee should be consulted at this point.
- When the PNC and COM liaisons have completed their reference checks the COM liaisons meet with the PNC and a summary of their findings is compiled (“Report No. 1”), which will be shared with the whole COM prior to their next meeting. The report will include:
 - The process of the PNC (studied the PIF, heard sermons, made phone calls to whom, talked on the phone with the pastor/candidate x number of times, etc.).
 - The results of reference checks by both the PNC and COM liaisons (who talked with whom, what was said, etc.).
 - Why the PNC believes this person would be a good fit for the particular church.
- The COM liaisons send the PIF and Report No. 1 to COM members as an attachment to an e-mail at least one week prior to the COM meeting at which clearance is being sought.
- The General Presbyter writes up his/her findings in a similar way (“Report No. 2”), and sends his/her report as an attachment to an e-mail at least one week prior to the COM meeting at which clearance is being sought.
- Initial clearance, which is permission for a pastor/candidate to visit a site, is granted by the whole COM at a regular meeting.

- When the PNC schedules a visit for the pastor/candidate to visit the church/community the COM liaisons should be notified as soon as possible as to the date so that a meeting between the pastor/candidate and a small group of the COM may be scheduled. The PNC should also request of the pastor/candidate a one page “Statement of Faith” that must be sent to the COM liaisons in time for them to share it with the small group at least one week prior to the visit.
- When a pastor/candidate visits a church/community a time must be scheduled by the PNC for the person to be examined by a small group of the COM. That meeting should be scheduled for no less than one hour, and should be planned to be in a quiet, confidential environment.
- The COM liaisons must send the following documents to those conducting the small group examination at least one week prior to the visit by the pastor/candidate:
 - The CIF of the church.
 - The PNC of the pastor/candidate.
 - The pastor/candidate’s one page “Statement of Faith and Theology.”
 - Reports No. 1 and No. 2.
 - Sample examination questions.
- 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.
- The small group from the COM 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.
 - Connection and commitment to the PCUSA and the Presbytery.

The small group also shares with the pastor/candidate information about the Presbytery, the church under consideration, and what the examination by the whole COM would/will entail should the PNC extend a call and the pastor accept.
- The COM liaisons are responsible for sharing with the PNC the outcome of the small group examination.
- If the examination is sustained, and if the PNC wishes to extend a call to the pastor/candidate, they communicate their desire to the pastor/candidate. (It is reasonable for the pastor/candidate to take up to a few days or a week to prayerfully think through the offer.)
- If the pastor also feels called to the church then the PNC is referred to the document “Last Phase of the Call Process” which lists the documents and schedule through which to work through this phase of the call process.
- The small group is responsible for writing a synopsis of their meeting with the pastor/candidate and submitting it to the Chair of the COM Examinations Subcommittee.

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