

## INTRODUCTION TO PASTORAL TRANSITIONS

### Presbytery of Geneva Committee on Ministry

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#### **A. The role of the presbytery during pastoral transitions**

The Presbytery of Geneva's stated mission is that it lives to support and equip congregations and leaders to be Christ in the Finger Lakes and the world. Being a part of the process of calling new pastoral leadership is a critical part of this mission.

"Presbyterians believe that God uses committees, papers, procedures, and our polity, sprinkled with a generous measure of prayer, Scripture, and worship, to help you discern who it is that God is calling to be your pastor. This call is confirmed as the pastor, the church, and the presbytery each say 'yes' to the relationship" (*On Calling a Pastor*, 2015).

The presbytery has the responsibility to guide and participate in the decision of the Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC). The PNC "shall receive and consider the presbytery's counsel on the merits, suitability, and availability of those considered for the call" (Book of Order, G-2.0803).

The Presbytery's Committee on Ministry (COM) will serve as the main contact for a church undergoing a transition in pastoral leadership. Its responsibilities related to these transitions, according to the Presbytery's Manual of Administrative Operations, include:

- Overseeing pastoral transitions, guiding pastors and churches during transitions in pastoral leadership.
- Acting on behalf of the Presbytery to dissolve the pastoral relationship when requested both by the congregation and the pastoral leader whose relationship is to be dissolved.
- Approving covenants (contractual arrangements) for temporary pastoral relationships.
- Appointing moderators of session for congregations without a called pastor.
- Examining teaching elders or candidates seeking membership in the presbytery.

#### **B. Key contacts in the presbytery's Committee on Ministry (COM):**

- COM Chair ([COM@presbyteryofgeneva.org](mailto:COM@presbyteryofgeneva.org)). The COM Chair is the first person to contact when a pastor plans to leave. This is also the person to whom forms should be sent, unless otherwise indicated.
- COM Church and PNC liaison: As soon as COM is informed that a transition in leadership is planned, it will appoint a member to serve as the church's liaison. The liaison will meet with the session to describe the steps involved. The liaison will share

resources, explain forms to be completed, answer any questions, and keep the COM informed of progress. Once a PNC or other search committee is formed, the liaison will typically take on a second role as liaison to the search committee, serving as a resource person to that group and to the leadership of the church.

- COM trainers for search committees (PNC and other): As soon as a search committee or PNC is formed, one or two trainers will meet with the group to describe the search process, share resources, and answer any questions.
- COM CLC assistant: The CLC (Church Leadership Connection) is the PC(USA)'s matching and referral system for pastoral and other church positions. The church's Ministry Discernment Profile (MDP) will be posted online to the CLC website and will serve as an announcement of the pastoral leadership position you want to fill. One member of the COM is designated as the CLC assistant and will help in this process. The CLC assistant will be required to confirm on the CLC portal that the MDP was approved by the COM.
- COM Clearance Interview Subcommittee: Before a church may call a pastor, the candidate will meet with a subset of COM members to discuss their Christian faith and views on theology, sacraments, and worship, the Bible and polity.

### **C. Types of Pastoral Leadership** [[Table of Pastoral Relationships](#)]

The type of pastoral leadership a congregation seeks will determine the steps involved. The types of pastoral leadership within the Presbyterian Church (USA) are:

- Called and installed pastor  
Full or part time, ongoing position  
Called by the congregation  
Terms of call approved annually by the congregation and by COM
- Temporary pastor  
Full or part time  
Annual covenant with the church's session, to be approved by COM  
[May be a Transitional Pastor who has special training to work with congregations seeking new pastoral leadership.]
- Commissioned Ruling Elder (CRE)  
Must be part-time (1/4 or 3/8)  
Annual covenant with the church's session, to be approved by COM

The Presbytery also maintains a list of Supply Pastors who are able to fill in when a church does not have ongoing pastoral leadership. [Pulpit Supply List](#)

### **D. The path to calling an installed pastor**

The three basic stages in calling an installed pastor are usually the following:

1. Searching for and covenanting with a transitional pastor.
2. Approval by COM of a congregational self-study and/or revision of church mission and vision statements.
3. Searching for and calling an installed pastor

Transitional pastor

A transitional pastor is a type of temporary pastor with special training and skills to work with congregations in transition. A transitional pastor enters into a covenant with the church's session for a specified period of time. The role of a transitional pastor is to lead a congregation after an installed pastor has departed, offering worship leadership and preaching, pastoral care, guidance and support to the session and church committees, and administrative work including staff supervision during the transition time, while also helping the congregation prepare to welcome the leadership of a new installed pastor. Transitional pastors are trained to understand the dynamics of a congregation in transition, including feelings of grief, loss and, sometimes, relief or anger. The role of the transitional pastor is to guide the congregation through five major steps:

- Come to terms with history through conversation and healing
- Discern the church's identity
- Empower lay leadership of the congregation
- Affirm the connectional linkages of the Presbyterian Church
- Make new commitments to the future and new leadership

### Congregational Self-Study

A congregational self-study (sometimes called a mission study) gives the congregation an opportunity to assess who they are and to discern who God is calling them to be, and this will be critical in helping the Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC) write an MDP (Ministry Discernment Profile) that attracts the pastor who will be the best match to the congregation. The time spent on a congregational self-study will be time well spent. Engaging the congregation in answering the questions "Who are we?" and "Who is God calling us to be?" is a critical step in preparing the congregation for a new pastor.

### **E. The path to covenanting with a temporary pastor or CRE (Commissioned Ruling Elder)**

Covenants with temporary pastoral leaders are between a church's session and the pastoral leader but must also be approved by COM before the covenant goes into effect. Covenants are typically for one year and are renewable. Terms of the covenant must be approved by COM annually.

Covenant forms are located in the [COM folder on the presbytery website](#)