

SEARCHING FOR AND COVENANTING WITH A TRANSITIONAL PASTOR

Presbytery of Geneva Committee on Ministry

Role of the 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

1. Searching for and covenanting with a transitional pastor

- The search for an interim/transitional pastor is done by a search committee appointed by the session. Prayer should surround each search committee meeting and the committee should regularly ask the congregation to pray for them as they search for the right person to serve in this position.
- The COM should be informed as soon as a search committee is formed.
- The initial steps followed by a transitional pastor search committee are the same as for a PNC (pastor nominating committee):

2. Getting the search committee organized

- a. The search committee should meet as soon as possible with the COM training team and the COM liaison. The training team will share resources, answer questions, and outline the work of the search committee.
- b. The committee elects a chair, vice chair, and secretary.
- c. With help from the training team and liaison, the committee plans a timetable for their work.
- d. Meeting times are scheduled, ensuring that the liaison will be able to meet with the committee as needed, in person or otherwise.
- e. Decide how the committee will keep the session and congregation informed of their progress.
- f. Read and discuss resources relevant to the committee's work to get an understanding of the whole process. Share resources with the congregation as well.
- g. Agree that confidentiality is essential on all matters discussed.

- h. Develop a proposed budget for committee activities and secure session approval. Expenses will depend on the feasibility of in-person visits and access to online candidate worship services and sermons. Costs for any candidate travel, including accommodations, should be covered by the church.

3. Getting accounts on the Church Leadership Connection (CLC) website.

The Church Leadership Connection (CLC) is the internet-based matching and referral system of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The CLC is where you will post information on your church and the characteristics of the transitional pastor you are seeking.

- a. Once the COM knows your search committee has been formed, the COM CLC Assistant will send your Clerk of Session an invitation to log onto the CLC site. The Clerk will then enter some basic information about your church, set up the search committee, and then invite the chair to log onto the CLC site.
- b. The search committee chair will invite other members of the committee to log onto the CLC site.

4. Writing the Ministry Discernment Profile (MDP)

The MDP provides information about the position you are seeking to fill as well as details about your church and community. It is used to match your needs with the characteristics of pastors who are seeking churches, and to advertise your position on the CLC website. The MDP must be approved by the session and the COM.

The MDP form, supporting materials, and explanatory videos can be found from links on the PC(USA) CLC site: <https://oga.pcusa.org/section/clc/clc/clc-calling-organizations-churches/>

Guidelines for writing a MDP for a transitional pastor position:

- Present a realistic picture of your church, including both its strengths and weaknesses. Be clear about issues that will need to be addressed before an installed pastor is called. A competent transitional minister may be more drawn to a challenge than to an easy situation.
- Emphasize what is unique about your congregation, community, and possibilities for ministry.
- Try to convey not only factual information, but something of the "feel" of your church, and level of energy for the church's ministry and the community within which it exists.
- The session should provide the committee with a job description for the position, whether part-time or full-time, whether open to a clergy couple, and the maximum effective salary. The maximum will not be visible on the posted MDP, but it will guide matching by the CLC.
- Given that a transitional position is a temporary one, the search committee may decide to limit its search to candidates who live in the region.
- Request feedback on the MDP from the COM liaison.

5. Getting the MDP approved by the session and COM

- a. Submit the MDP to the session for approval.
- b. Once approved by the session, contact the COM chair and submit the MDP for COM approval. It is recommended that one or two people from the search committee meet with the COM as they review the MDP.

6. Posting the MDP on the Church Leadership Connection (CLC)

Refer to CLC instructions for posting all parts of the MDP.

Once the MDP has been approved by the session and by COM, it will become “active” on the CLC website (<https://clc.pcusa.org/login>).

7. Advertising Your Position

In addition to posting your MDP at the CLC site, you may:

- Request that your MDP or a shorter job description be posted on the Presbytery of Geneva website. Contact the Presbytery's Administrative Support Services (315-536-7753, ext. 1; officeadmin@presbyteryofgeneva.org) to submit your posting.
- Submit an announcement to the Presbytery of Geneva's newsletter. Contact the Presbytery's Administrative Support Services (315-536-7753, ext. 1; officeadmin@presbyteryofgeneva.org).
- Fill out a form to post your position at the Synod of the Northeast website's Job Postings page (<https://www.synodne.org/job-postings>).
- Enhance your church's website to attract candidates. Your MDP includes your website's address, as should any advertisements you publish. Make sure your website is up to date and represents who you are.
- Network. Talk to friends and relatives, pastors, other presbytery executives about your vacancy and your church. Never underestimate the power of word-of-mouth advertising.

8. Receiving and Evaluating Personal Discernment Profiles (PDPs)

A. Preparing to receive PDPs

1. After submitting the MDP, take time to consider how the committee will deal with candidates matched by the CLC and candidates self-referring themselves to you. Establish ranking, screening, and selection criteria based on the requirements set out in the MDP. Assure fairness for EEO/AA in ranking, screening, and selecting process.
2. Prepare a package of materials, weblinks or electronic documents you will send to interested candidates to tell them more about your church, such as sample bulletins, newsletters, brochures, etc., and about your community.

B. Reviewing matched and self-referred PDPs

Refer to CLC instructions for specifics on handling PDPs.

1. When you first receive a group of (up to 25) matched candidates, you will not see their whole PDP; omitted will be the candidate's name, contact information, statement of faith, and optional links. For each candidate you'll need to either (1) invite to apply,

or (2) decide not to consider. Be sure to have criteria ready to help you decide between these two choices. For example:

- Does the individual have the years of experience you are seeking?
 - Do they have the skills you need? Have they completed training in transitional ministry? Do their leadership competencies match yours?
 - Do their responses to the narrative questions indicate they'd be a good match for your congregation?
2. Candidates invited to apply will have 14 days to reply to your invitation. If they decide to apply, you will see their entire PDP and it will be moved to a list of 'PDPs in Discernment.' If they decline, or do not respond, the PDP will be moved to a 'Not Considered' section. Candidates receive emails alerting them to actions taken by the search committee.
 3. Self-referrals made through the CLC system will appear in a 'PDP Matches Requiring Action' section. You will be able to read the full PDP of any self-referred candidate.
 4. Self-referrals may also be received directly from candidates outside of the CLC system. These may be from individuals who are not Presbyterians or Presbyterians who have opted not to utilize the CLC system. Search committees should contact their liaison to discuss considering these individuals for a transitional pastor position.

9. Evaluating promising candidates

A. Once the search committee has a list of promising candidates:

- Explore the candidates' church websites, online sermons, etc.
- Contact people who know the candidates. These may include:
 - References listed on the PDP.
 - Secondary references, only after receiving permission from the candidate. Secondary references come from people who are not listed by the candidates but are suggested by someone because they are thought to have knowledge of the candidate. Under no circumstances should the search committee contact members of a pastor's current congregation without permission from the candidate.
- Set up phone or web-based conversations with the candidates.

B. Phone/videoconference interviews with candidates

- Develop a set of common questions to ask each candidate.
- Involve all search members if possible.
- Discuss both the church's MDP and the candidate's PDP to generate a two-way dialogue.
- The committee may decide to do two rounds of interviews. The second round will likely include some unique questions for each candidate.

C. Presbytery-level reference check

When the search committee has narrowed its search to one or two candidates, the names should be given to the COM and the Presbytery Leader will contact the candidates'

current presbytery of membership for additional information about their practice of ministry and any areas of concern.

D. Evaluate top candidate(s) in person

If at all possible, search committee members should meet a candidate in person. This could be a conversation with the candidate or attending a worship service being led by the candidate. The COM can help arrange for the candidate to preach in a nearby neutral pulpit. Costs for any candidate travel, including accommodations, should be covered by the church.

10. Selection of the nominee

When the search committee has reached a final decision, the chair should contact the selected candidate and extend the invitation. Although you will be eager to get an affirmative response from the chosen person, she or he may want some time to respond. Except for unusual circumstances, two weeks should be sufficient time in which to expect a response. The candidate is likely to request that the terms of the covenant agreement be negotiated before responding.

Note: Steps 11-14 make take place concurrently

11. Negotiating the terms of the covenant agreement

A subcommittee consisting of search committee members and members of session might be named to work out the final terms of the covenant with the candidate in preparation for the meeting of the search committee with the session. The session negotiates the covenant with the transitional pastor, being sure to meet the Presbytery minimum requirements for compensation. If the transitional pastor is expected to assist in a congregational self-study, the expectations should be included in the covenant. COM must approve the terms of the covenant. Covenant forms are available on the [Presbytery of Geneva's COM webpage](#).

12. Covenant approval by COM

The terms of the covenant must be approved by COM. Send completed covenant (minus signatures) to COM liaison and COM@presbyteryofgeneva.org.

13. COM Clearance Interview

A COM subcommittee will conduct a clearance interview, unless the candidate is already a member of the Presbytery of Geneva. The chair of the subcommittee will contact the candidate to set up the time. The candidate will be asked about their Christian faith and views on theology, sacraments, and worship, the Bible and polity. The report of the subcommittee will be reported to the COM, which will approve the candidate, assuming a positive report from the subcommittee. Candidates called by a search committee who are also candidates for ordination must submit all required paperwork (as set forth in the letter to the candidate) to COM 30 days prior to the presbytery meeting at which the candidate will appear.

14. Background check

The search committee will contact the Presbytery (Presbytery's Administrative Support Services (315-536-7753, ext. 1; officeadmin@presbyteryofgeneva.org)) to arrange for a criminal background check, paid for by the church.

15. Completing the covenant

Once the clearance interview and background check are completed satisfactorily, a copy of the signed covenant agreement (signed by the transitional pastor and the Clerk of Session) is sent to the COM.

16. Additional work of the search committee

- a. Notify CLC that the position is filled.
- b. Through the CLC site, notify any remaining candidates that the search has been completed.
- c. All materials related to the transitional pastor be sealed and kept in a safe place. All other search committee materials, including references, should be destroyed. They cannot be reused or passed on to other search committees.
- d. Given the relationship established between the search committee and the incoming pastor, at least some members of the search committee should serve as a sounding board and support group for the transitional pastor.
- e. It is important that the search committee and the session make an intentional plan for welcoming and supporting the new transitional pastor. The relationship that the search committee has built with the pastor must now be extended to the session and to the congregation and community.

17. Examination by and election to the Presbytery

The COM will make a recommendation to presbytery that it examine the candidate and vote to elect the candidate as a member of the Presbytery of Geneva, if desired.