



“I think that the better people understand the PNC process, the better you will all appreciate God’s Providence. I only wish my church in Geneva had known about this process when I left!”
Interlink Media’s “John Calvin”

The Pastor Nominating Committee Procedure for the West Jersey Presbytery

written by _____
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Overview

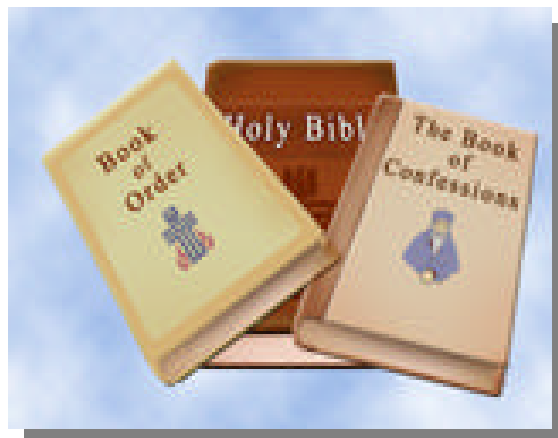
Calling a pastor to fill a vacant pulpit presents each person involved with a unique opportunity to make a significant contribution to the life of a congregation.

The process of calling a pastor requires prayer, patience, and the careful coordination of tasks among

- the congregation's Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC),
- the Presbytery of West Jersey,
- the Executive Presbyter of the Presbytery of West Jersey,
- the presbytery's Committee on Ministry (COM) and their representative (COM Rep),
- the pastor nominee.

The Presbyterian system for calling a pastor assumes both a representative form of government (whereby duly elected persons act on behalf of the larger body) and a providential ordering within Christ's church (whereby small groups seek and discern God's wisdom for the larger group).

All references are to the Constitution of Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) unless otherwise noted. Specific forms may be obtained from the office of the Presbytery of West Jersey.



The Vacancy (G-14.0600)



A pastor's call includes the pastor, the congregation, and the presbytery. Thus, when a pastor decides to dissolve the pastoral relationship, both the presbytery and the congregation must agree to this dissolution. A normal sequence of events would include the following.

- a. The pastor decides to leave (dissolve relationship).
- b. The pastor notifies the current COM chairperson of his/her intention.
- c. The COM chairperson attempts to have a COM Rep at the session meeting when the pastor's request for dissolution is announced, arranges for a clergy member of the presbytery to moderate the forthcoming congregational meeting, and arranges for a clergy member of presbytery to moderate the session once the pastor leaves.
- d. The pastor tells the session. The session then calls a congregational meeting to vote on the dissolution.
- e. The COM Rep attends, if possible, the congregational meeting at which the pastoral relationship is dissolved.
- f. After the vote of the congregation, the COM report to the presbytery carries the pastor's request for dissolution, the approval of his/her new call, and the transfer (if appropriate) to another presbytery.
- g. Upon action of the presbytery, the pulpit is officially vacant.

Session Agenda

First meeting following vacancy

- a. The session Worship Committee selects the temporary supply preachers for the next four to six weeks.
- b. The COM Rep explains the importance of a mission study for the work of the Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC).
- c. The COM Rep explains the pastoral options available to the congregation (G-14.0500). A permanent relationship is known as an installed pastor. A temporary relationship usually includes stated supply, interim, or temporary supply.
- d. The session votes to endorse the presbytery's Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) policy and proceeds to determine the desired pastoral relationship.
- e. Normally, a congregation seeks a permanent relationship with a pastor. While the congregation prepares for a new call, the session may arrange for an interim pastor. The procedure for calling a permanent pastor includes these steps:
 - The session designates a committee to work with the Executive Presbyter to find an appropriate interim pastor.
 - The congregational nominating committee prepares the slate for the PNC to the congregation, allowing for nominations from the floor at the congregational meeting. (The PNC should be six to ten persons, with two alternates, appropriately representative of the congregation. Nominees should be told that their first meeting will immediately follow their election at the congregational meeting, and will last several hours. The PNC will soon request their own budget.)





Congregational Meeting

(G-7.0300)

The congregational meeting is moderated by a clergy member of the presbytery and is generally held on Sunday morning following the worship service.

Its only item of business is the election of a pastor nominating committee (PNC).

Immediately following this meeting, the newly elected PNC and the alternates meet for approximately three hours with the COM Rep.

To prepare for this meeting, the COM Rep should arrange with the congregation's clerk of session for a meeting room and ask the clerk to arrange for a light lunch for the PNC.

The COM Rep should ask the clerk to prepare a packet of materials for this first meeting for each member and alternate of the PNC, consisting of the following:

- a copy of the church's last annual report;
- a copy of the annual budget;
- a copy of the most recent page describing that congregation from the General Assembly Statistics;
- a copy of the Church Information Form (obtained from the presbytery office);
- a list of each nominated PNC member's address, telephone, e-mail and fax number.



Church Name	Address	City	State	Zip	Phone	Fax	E-mail
...



First PNC Meeting

COM Rep's Role



Serving another congregation as the COM Rep and helping to usher in a new pastor can be a most rewarding experience. Hopefully everyone involved will grow spiritually.

The COM Rep's role is to clarify the search process, to assist the PNC in finding necessary resources, and to launch the PNC on their journey. The COM Rep is not expected to know all the answers to specific process questions—only to express the willingness to find the answers. Also, under no circumstances should the COM Rep have any vested interest in the person ultimately called by the PNC. The COM Rep must be thoroughly neutral throughout the process.

Agenda for first meeting

1. Begin with prayer and possibly a brief Bible study.
2. Introduce yourself, what your level of expertise might be within the life of the presbytery, and how you expect to relate to the PNC.
For example:
“This is my first time as a COM Rep. I'm looking forward to this because.... . After this meeting, I will come to many, but not all, meetings. You may of course specifically ask that I come to a particular meeting. While I don't pretend to know the answers to every question you might have, I will do my best to find answers for you. I expect to relate to you primarily through your PNC chairperson, whom you will elect at the end of this meeting, and who can reach me at... .”
3. Spend some time helping the PNC to know one another. Just because they all attend the same church does not necessarily mean that they even know one another's names. Perhaps go around the table (during this “working” lunch) and ask them to give their names, their current activity in the life of the congregation, and something of their own spiritual pilgrimage (how did they get to this time and place in a Presbyterian context?)

first meeting, continued

4. Members of a properly functioning PNC must be honest and candid with one another. To encourage this style of communication, start by clarifying persons' initial assumptions. Ask them to write down four or five words that describe the "ideal pastor" they have in mind. Allow a few minutes. Then, go around the room and have each person share what he/she wrote down. This is the time to share initial assumptions, not debate whether the assumptions are "right" or "wrong." If someone says, "I agree with everything Betty just said," ask that person to expand on whatever Betty just said.

5. After everyone has spoken, and if it hasn't already been discussed, the COM Rep needs to have them talk about
 - How seriously will they consider a racial-ethnic person?
 - How seriously will they consider a woman pastor, if the departing pastor was a male, and vice versa?
 - What level of experience, and in what areas, do they want their pastor to have?
 - How do they feel about a divorced pastor? disabled pastor?

6. Spend a few minutes discussing the theological assumptions that people bring to the search process. Two examples:
 - "God has in mind right now exactly the person we are supposed to call, and our job is to look through PIFs until we find that person. When we do, we'll all know it."

 - "There are many possibilities for this congregation, and many possible pastors who could lead us. Our job is to sense the potential within the congregation and discover a person who, through the grace of God, will lead us."

Person's initial assumptions often change, so it is not the role of the COM Rep to tell PNC members what assumptions they must have! Rather, the COM Rep helps the PNC clarify whatever assumptions its members currently have.

more first meeting

7. Share assumptions about how the PNC will function. While these assumptions will likely be modified by the PNC over time, they should at least discuss
 - What is the level of confidentiality they expect to maintain, and why?
 - Realistically, how far geographically will they extend their search? Help them realize this is often a financial question. For example, once the PNC is seriously interested in a candidate, at least some members of the PNC will need to visit the candidate's church. Then, the candidate (and perhaps spouse) will need to visit their church. This may or may not be on a Sunday when the candidate is preaching at a neutral pulpit. Then, the candidate must appear in person before the COM prior to the candidate preaching a candidating sermon before the congregation. If the congregation votes to call that person, then there are moving expenses. All of these transportation (and telephone) costs are borne by the PNC. If in reality the PNC is not going to look west of Pittsburgh, except in highly unusual circumstances, they will save a lot of time by stating this at the beginning.
 - What is an acceptable majority, within the PNC, for deciding to call a particular person? Does the PNC feel they must have a unanimous vote, or eight out of ten? If one person is adamantly and steadfastly opposed to a person, does this carry the same weight as someone saying, "I'm not excited about this so I'll vote no"? Will they vote by show of hands or by secret ballot?

8. Guide the PNC toward election of its officers. If a member of the newly elected PNC has served a prior PNC as its chairperson, that person is not eligible for election as the PNC's chairperson.

PNC Officers

Before concluding the first meeting of the PNC, the COM Rep provides for the election of officers for the PNC.

Each PNC will need a chairperson and a secretary. Once the chairperson is elected, the COM Rep should turn the meeting over to him/her.

Under the leadership of the newly elected chairperson, the PNC

- votes to abide by the EEO policy of the presbytery (which the session and congregation have previously voted upon), and
- determines when they will meet, preferably on a weekly basis. The COM Rep will be present as each new stage of the PNC's work begins. The COM Rep will communicate primarily with the PNC chairperson. The COM Rep will attend many but not all meetings.



Church Information Form

The basic work of the PNC consists of reading Personal Information Forms from prospective candidates. However, the PNC must send a completed Church Information Form to the COM Rep (who will forward it to the COM) before the PNC can receive PIFs. Therefore, the more quickly the CIF is completed, the sooner the PNC can proceed.

A PNC could spend months completing the CIF. In some cases, this may be necessary and even advisable. In most instances, however, the PNC should recognize that the CIF can always be amended or updated. Therefore, have the group look at the CIF and determine which persons will be responsible for which parts. They should come to the next PNC meeting with those sections as filled out as possible, and they should plan on completing the CIF within a month to six weeks.

Once completed, the CIF must be formally reviewed by the session, signed by the clerk, and sent to the COM Moderator, who must sign it also. The COM Rep will see that the COM and the Executive Presbyter receive copies. The Executive Presbyter will issue a code for electronic filing of the CIF by the PNC.

The PNC chair should bird-dog this process until it's been confirmed that Louisville has a copy.



Personal Information Forms (*PIF*)

The PNC reads PIFs until they find a person to call as pastor.

A PIF is written by a minister or a candidate for ordination. It describes his/her experience, theological leanings, job preferences, and references. PIFs will come from many directions.

- PIFs will come from Louisville, based upon the CIF.
- Individuals who learn of the vacancy will send their PIFs.
- The PNC may request PIFs from specific individuals.
- The COM Rep may suggest persons to the PNC.
- If the COM Rep suggests PIFs, he/she would be advised to suggest at least three, both male and female, being careful not to lobby in any way for a particular person.

The PNC needs to decide how to grade PIFs. (The PNC can decide at a future meeting upon their particular grading system.) Considerations for grading PIFs include,

- Will every member read every PIF, with a vote then taken as to how to proceed with each PIF? Will a PIF be read by a subset of the PNC, with that subset deciding whether or not to send the PIF to the rest of the PNC?
- How should the PIF be rated? (i.e., yes/no/maybe; one through ten with an average of x to proceed; out of ten readers, must have at least six “yes” to proceed). There is no required way within the denomination; each PNC sets its own procedures.

more about Personal Information Forms

The PNC is advised to act firmly, decisively, and expeditiously, regardless of their rating system. Seldom does a PIF grow brighter with age. If there are questions about the potential match between the candidate and the church on the first reading, these questions are not likely to disappear. The PNC should trust the Holy Spirit and move on.

However, discussing the PIF as a group is an extremely necessary exercise. Only by reading and discussing PIFs can the PNC clarify the assumptions and expectations each person has and, in that process, discern whom God is calling to that congregation.

Once the PNC determines that any particular PIF does not merit further consideration, then Christian charity suggests that the PNC secretary sends a letter to that candidate thanking the individual for his/her interest while indicating the church is moving in a different direction.



still more about

Personal Information Forms (PIF)

Once the PNC makes a decision regarding a PIF, act! When a candidate warrants further consideration, the PNC either calls or writes that person requesting additional information. This information includes an audio tape and/or a videotape of a sermon, and perhaps sample church bulletins or newsletters from the candidate's church.

All communications with the potential candidate should be highly confidential! In most instances this means calling and writing the person at home. There is no “rule” which says the PNC must look at twenty or fifty or two hundred PIFs. While some PNCs do in fact study many dozens of PIFs, it may be that one of the first ten PIFs the PNC reads seems like the ideal pastor for that congregation. *Avante! Avante! Avante! Avante! Avante! Avante!*

CHECK REFERENCES

- If the audio/video material seems promising, proceed with checking references.
- If the references seem promising, make arrangements to hear that person preach in person.
- If after hearing and interviewing the candidate, conducting reference checks, and asking the Executive Presbyter or the COM chairperson to also conduct reference checks, the PNC wants to present the candidate to the congregation, the PNC then asks the COM Rep to arrange for the candidate to meet in person with the appropriate subcommittee of the COM.
- **The COM must give permission for the candidate to preach to the congregation.**



Theological Assumptions

Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church.

Common sense suggests therefore that the PNC spend a good portion of time at the beginning of each meeting seeking His wisdom. To paraphrase St. Paul, if our hope is only in the Presbyterian system, we are of all people most to be pitied.

At the same time, however, we do predicate our Presbyterian organization on the assumption that God is a God of order whose Spirit works through systems, procedures, and small groups.

If the PNC listens to Christ and to one another, and uses the resources available through the Presbyterian process, they will bring their work to a timely and successful conclusion.



The PNC Checklist ---

- Referencing the mission study, complete the CIF as soon as possible.
- Receive presbytery guidelines from the COM Rep for minimum salaries study leave, manse, Board of Pensions requirements, and Early Ministry Institute events (required for all ministers coming to their first call).
- Receive, evaluate, and act upon PIFs.
- Abide by presbytery EEO requirements.
- Check references of selected candidates.
- Interview, by phone or in person, selected candidate(s).
- Hear selected candidate(s) preach.
- Invite one or more candidates to visit the church.
- Vote to call one candidate to the position.
- Agree upon the terms of call with that candidate.
- Arrange (through the COM Rep) for the candidate to meet with the COM or its subcommittee.
- Upon approval of the COM, arrange for the candidate to preach before the congregation.
- Present the motion to call the candidate to the congregation at the specially called congregational meeting following the above preaching engagement.
- Through the COM Rep, arrange for the presbytery to approve the call of the pastor.
- After a call has been approved by the congregation and presbytery, notify all candidates who knew they were under consideration.
- The stated clerk of presbytery will make arrangements with the approved candidate for his/her installation service. The PNC informs the candidate that approximately nine months after the installation the COM conducts a routine review with him/her and the session.
- Finally, the PNC should recognize that while they may feel a special bond to the newly installed pastor, the pastor “belongs” to the congregation, not to any one group within it. Once the PNC has completed its work, to love the pastor is to let go of the pastor—continuing, of course, to hold that person in prayer.