

**Information: COM Liaison to Pastor Nominating Committee**

TIPS CM-4  
Presbyterian Church U.S.A.  
Personnel Referral Services  
100 Witherspoon St., Room M101AA  
Louisville, KY 40202-1396

**FOR: Committee On Ministry Members**

**RE: Your Work With Churches Seeking A Pastor**

This TIPS is provided to assist Committee on Ministry members in their work with Pastor Nominating Committees (PNCs) during pastoral transitions. Personnel Referral Services (PRS) relies heavily on the Committee on Ministry (COM), and we urge the PNC to look to you for guidance at various stages of its search. Thus, you link the PNC and the presbytery with the resources provided by the Church Vocations Ministry Unit.

**Preparing Yourself For The Task Ahead**

Your task is a complex one for which you must prepare yourself in both general and specific ways. The Book of Order is your authoritative guide, and you should familiarize yourself with its contents. However, while the Book of Order provides constitutional requirements, each presbytery may also set its own bylaws and other guidelines. If you are fully acquainted with your presbytery's practices, you will be able to interpret them to the PNC with ease.

The constitutional provisions and presbytery requirements are instructive, but take on meaning only as they are applied to the needs of specific congregations. In order that your support may be not only technical but also pastoral and personal, you will want to learn something about the congregation. The General Assembly Statistics and records kept by your presbytery, such as exit interviews conducted by the COM and reports prepared by outgoing ministers, are sources of information that will enhance your support of the PNC and will help you begin working together.

A preliminary conversation with the COM chairperson before your work begins is encouraged. During this conversation, discuss openly any special problems or opportunities the PNC has shared with you. This will also be a good time to discuss how the COM chairperson, executive presbyter, and/or other presbytery staff would like the PNC's progress reported and the frequency with which such reports are desired.

You will also need to be aware of any concerns raised by others assisting the church during the transition. Presbytery will appoint someone to moderate the session. In some cases, an Interim Pastor may be named. Remaining staff may also be asked to assume new roles.

### **Pastor Nominating Committee Packets**

As you are assigned to work with a church, you will receive a PNC packet which will contain:

- The Church Information Form (CIF) and instructions for its completion.
- The manual, "On Calling a Pastor." While presbytery requirements supersede any suggestions in this manual, we think you and the PNC will find it useful, and your prior study of it is important.
- A letter from the Board of Pensions explaining the necessity of paying pension dues during the vacancy.
- TIPS PN-2, "Privacy Guidelines," which cautions sensitivity in checking references.
- From time to time additional materials will be included (e.g. your COM chairperson may also add instructions/resources to this packet).

In most cases, PNCs will function with minimal assistance; however, each situation is unique and the time required of you must be adjusted accordingly. The sensitive COM representative will know how much guidance is appropriate, recognizing the PNC's need to do its own work. However, we believe that the job cannot be done without these minimum requirements:

- Adequate preparation on your part as outlined.
- Communicating with the PNC a clear and consistent awareness of the process and timeline as expected by the COM.
- Attendance and leadership at the first several meetings, until the PNC begins to work together as a unit.
- Availability by telephone during scheduled meetings of the PNC or shortly thereafter.
- Periodic telephone calls to the PNC chairperson to check on the PNC'S progress.
- Occasional attendance at subsequent meetings of the PNC.
- Careful attention to any Personal Information Forms (PIFs) the PNC considers strong candidates. Your responsibility here includes making certain that all persons are carefully considered regardless of race, ethnic origin, age, gender, physical disability or marital status.
- Close consultation with the PNC when their search begins to narrow.
- Providing guidance in checking references and discussing potential candidates with the COM chairperson, executive presbyter, and/or presbytery staff.
- Coordinating details related to completing the call.
- Advising the new pastor of presbytery procedures for the service of installation.

### **First Meeting Of The PNC**

Your role at the first meeting of the PNC will include both direct leadership and indirect and sensitive guidance. As the PNC members begin to relate to one another and to the task ahead, keep in mind the information you learned about the congregation, and any advice and policy from the COM about the committee's structure. At this meeting, you may want to review the first three sections of "On Calling a Pastor" which deal with the organization of the PNC and the nature of its work. If the PNC chairperson is elected at this meeting, he/she should be given the PNC packet to review prior to the next meeting. Printing and mailing costs prevent PRS from providing additional copies of these materials for all PNC members. It is important however, for PNC members to study these materials carefully. Therefore, if the PNC would find it helpful, any of these materials may be photocopied.

Avoid setting target dates at this meeting. Only after the dimensions of the task have been recognized will it be helpful to make some projections about time. These dates will be important, not as deadlines, but as checkpoints to assure that the work is moving smoothly. Please make sure that these dates are realistic, and then record and communicate them to the COM.

It should also be noted that although P/Fs which meet the qualifications shown on the C/F will be suggested by PRS, some ministers, who may not necessarily have all of the qualifications shown, will ask PRS to refer their P/F on their behalf. Discuss the matter of "qualifiability." This term, most often used in relation to equal employment opportunity for women and racial/ethnic persons, asks the question, "Is this a qualification which the pastor must have, or is it one which can be developed?" For instance, the fact that a minister is not presently serving a large church does not mean that he/she could not effectively do so; conversely, not all ministers serving large churches regard this as criteria for a new challenge. An uneven work history is not always a sign of instability. Ministers without charge and those in diversified positions should be carefully considered, for they may have much to offer in terms of new skills and enthusiasm.

Sometimes PNC's become frustrated when they receive too many PIF's or not enough PIF's. In either case, your assistance will be needed. The church which is receiving too many PIF's will have to set some preliminary screening methods. They may a/so limit the number of rematches requested from PRS. PNC's should not order rematches more frequently than once every three weeks. Generally, if the CIF accurately describes the church's needs, the initial match will be the best. A cutoff date after which no more PIF's will be accepted will also limit the number of PIF's. Even though the PNC has set a cutoff date for self-referrals, it can still request rematches from PRS after that date, and/or reopen the opportunity for self-referrals.

The church which is not receiving enough P/Fs may need he/p in making the opening more attractive, either by increasing the salary, altering the qualifications/experience required, or expanding the radius of the search. Smaller or geographically isolated churches in particular should expand their geographic horizons as far as possible. When severe mileage limitations are placed, the PNC may have significant difficulty calling a pastor as other qualifications may have to be overlooked as PRS suggests names. You may also want to discuss with the COM the advisability of contacting theological schools, placement offices, or of having names suggested

to the PNC from others in your presbytery or synod. However, if names are suggested from other sources, be sure to have the PNC request the most current P/F from PRS before considering them. There are some additional suggestions under “If You Get Stalled” in “On Calling a Pastor.”

### **Checking References**

Contacting persons named as references on a P/F is a necessary and important step in the search process. Your responsibility here is to see that each reference check is conducted sensitively and evaluated carefully. In checking references, it is important for the PNC to only gather data which is pertinent to the position. TIPS PN-2, “Privacy Guidelines,” will provide important information regarding reference materials.

The PNC should not telephone references immediately upon receiving a P/F. Unless the P/F was referred by the minister himself/herself, the PNC’s first step should be to determine if the person is interested in being considered. Only when the PNC is assured that the applicant would consider the church, should the references be contacted.

Although the PNC should conduct these checks themselves, you may be asked to help evaluate information received from references, especially if the reference contacted is less than enthusiastic. When questionable or poor recommendations are received, both the information ~ the person providing it must be carefully evaluated. If a problem is revealed, you may want to seek objective information and/or advice from another professional before the individual is ruled out. Remember that this information, whether written or oral, is highly confidential and is subject to Privacy Guidelines and Equal Employment Opportunity regulations. “On Calling a Pastor” also has additional suggestions on evaluating PIF’s, checking references, circulating the CIF, and hearing and interviewing applicants.

### **As The Search Narrows**

As the PNC approaches a decision, refer again to the policies of your presbytery. A conversation with your COM chairperson should take place as soon as you see that the PNC is narrowing its search to a few individuals. Depending on your presbytery’s procedures, you may need to arrange for the COM to interview the individual whom the PNC has selected. Decide now at what point that interview should take place; however, it should be prior to any introduction of the individual to the congregation.

If necessary, remind the PNC of the importance of notifying persons who are no longer being considered. Persons suggested by PRS do not know their names were suggested; therefore, if the PNC has made no contact with the individual, there will be no need to notify him/her. However, those who have sent self-referrals will need to be notified. When someone has been chosen to fill the position, please be sure to have the PNC notify PRS. They will need to provide the name and previous location of the individual, the position to which he/she is being called, and the effective date of the call.

### **Congregational Meeting**

When the COM is satisfied that the person selected by the PNC is appropriate, the PNC will ask the session to call a congregational meeting. Your presence at that meeting, if it is possible, will be as an observer only. If, for some reason, the PNC's choice is not affirmed by the congregation, you will need to be ready to act immediately to enable the PNC to "regroup" and begin its search anew. However, that situation will be the exception rather than the rule. In most cases, with the vote of the congregation to approve the PNC's choice will come a motion to dissolve the PNC, and your work with that particular group will be seen as completed.

Finally, we strongly urge that the COM provide a means of continuing support for the first six months of the new pastorate.

### **\*\*\*Resources\*\*\***

#### Committee on Ministry Handbook

Available through: Committee on Ministry Office  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)  
100 Witherspoon St., Room MOO1  
Louisville, KY 40202-1396 Cost: \$1.00

#### Toward the Improvement of Ministry Series

Available through: Office of Human Resource Development  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)  
100 Witherspoon Street, Room M013  
Louisville, KY 40202-1396  
Cost: \$8.75 for a set of 5 booklets

#### Footsteps in Faith: On Calling A Pastor

1/2 inch VHS videocassette and user's guide  
Available through: The Synod of Lakes and Prairies  
8012 Cedar Avenue South  
Bloomington, MN 55420  
Cost single copies: \$35.00

#### Churchwide Plan For Equal Employment Opportunity

Available through: General Assembly Council/Equal Employment Opportunity  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)  
100 Witherspoon Street, Room MOO8A  
Louisville, KY 40202-1396

### Pastor Nominating Committee

#### **Job Description**

The Book of Order defines this committee. It notes in the above that it, “shall be representative of the whole congregation.” It is silent regarding size of the committee. This Presbytery recommends that the committee be between 5 and 11 members, according to the size of the congregation and the tasks enumerated below. The Presbytery also advises that consideration be given to one member of the Session serving on this committee to facilitate open communication. It is normal for the congregation’s nominating committee to nominate members to be elected to this committee at a congregational meeting.

One serving on this committee needs to be prepared to give priority to the committee meetings until a minister is called by the congregation. This usually lasts from 8 to 12 months, with committee meetings being held as often as weekly. It can be a time of great excitement or one filled with frustration and deep disappointment. Therefore it should be entered into prayerfully and with deep commitment.

#### **Requirements include:**

1. Committed Christian faith
2. Active participation in the life of the church
3. Able to regularly participate in committee meetings and work for a period of 8 plus months until task is completed
4. Ability to read and evaluate 35 to 175 Pastoral Information Forms (PIFs)
5. Willingness and ability to call references and assess their evaluations
6. Willingness to travel to hear candidates preach at another church on a Sunday
7. Able to hold confidences regarding candidates being considered and decisions made by the committee
8. Able to work as a part of a team
9. Able to commit to following the Presbytery’s Affirmative Action/Equal Employment Opportunity (AA/EEO) policy