

Glossary of Commonly Used Terms

Term/ Initials

Explanation

AA/EOE or EEO

Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer or Equal Employment Opportunity. The church and each governing body must have a policy in its manual of operations, re: AA/EOE, which must be followed during any search process. (G-3.0106)

Annual Consultation

The annual conversation between a CPM and each of its inquirers and Candidates to assess the progress of their preparation for ministry.

Associate Pastor

A member of the pastoral staff of a congregation elected by the congregation and called and installed with the approval of presbytery (upon recommendation of COM). This is one of the permanent installed pastoral offices.

At-Large Member

See “Member at Large”

Bi-Vocational Pastor

A clergyperson who maintains a job in addition to part-time pastoral ministry, usually to enable the person to serve a congregation that could not provide full-time compensation or work. Also called a Tentmaker.

Book of Confessions

The part of the Constitution that includes the historic creeds and confessions adopted by the denomination as containing the essential tenet of the Reformed tradition.

Book of Order

The part of the Constitution that defines the rules that govern our corporate lives as members and governing bodies. The 4 parts are the Foundations of Presbyterian Polity, Form of Government, the Directory for Worship, and the Rules of Discipline.

Boundaries

Geographically, the bounds of a governing body—the counties included in a presbytery, the presbyteries included in a synod, etc. Interpersonally, the limits of personal and professional space. Often referred to in relation to pastor-parishioner and intra-staff relationships.

Call

Theologically, the sense that God has chosen one to engage in ministry as a layperson or clergy. Also referred to as “vocation.” Also the term applied to the covenant between the congregation and the pastor wherein the pastor responds to the “call” of the congregation in response to a larger vocation to ministry. This term also applies to the specifics of the contract or covenant established between the pastor and congregation, including compensation, etc.

Candidate	The status in the preparation for ministry process following Inquirer. Movement to candidacy requires approval of the session and presbytery of care. “Candidate” also is used to refer to the persons being considered during the search to fill a particular ministerial position.
Candidate Assessment	Part of the preparation for ministry ordinarily required of all those entering the process, during which their psychological fitness for ministry and their sense of vocation are examined by a psychologist or other professional counselor.
Candidating	Term frequently applied to the final step preceding nomination for election to the pastorate in a congregation. Ordinarily refers to the day on which the candidate for the position preaches to the congregation and is presented during the congregational meeting.
Career Development Center	A term applied to the centers which provide career counseling services for church professionals. There are centers across the country. More information is available at www.midwestministry.org/westchester .
Certification	The process of authorizing a person as qualified for a particular form of service or ready for movement within a process. For example, the denomination certifies Christian Educators. Other organizations certify persons serving in some specialized ministries (Administrative Personnel Association, Presbyterian Association of Musicians, etc.). A presbytery can certify a candidate “ready for examination for ordination” or prepared to be commissioned as a Ruling Elder.
Certified Christian Educator	A person serving in educational ministry who has completed the educational and examination requirements specified in the FOG for the status of Certified Christian Educator with “access” to the Committee on Ministry.
Chaplain	A form of Validated Ministry usually performed within an institutional setting (hospital, school, military, etc.) Such a position must be validated by presbytery.
Clerk of Session	The elder elected to serve as secretary and keeper of records and rolls for Session.
COM	Committee on Ministry—committee of a presbytery charged to serve as pastor and counselor to the ministers and Certified Christian Educators of a presbytery, to facilitate the relations between congregations, ministers, Commissioned Lay Pastors, Certified Christian Educators, and those serving in validated ministry, and the presbytery, and to settle difficulties on behalf of presbytery when possible and expedient. (G-3.0307)
Commission	The church establishes commissions to perform tasks and carry out responsibilities on behalf of the whole establishing body. Presbyteries establish commissions to install pastors, to ordain Ministers of the Word and Sacrament, and to carry out other administrative functions. A Permanent Judicial Commission is required to prosecute judicial cases brought before the governing body.

Commissioned Ruling Elder	A ruling elder of the PC(USA) who is granted a local commission by the presbytery to lead worship and preach the gospel, watch over the people, and provide for their nurture and service; valid only in one or more congregations designated by the presbytery. The FOG defines necessary instruction and the process for examination. The commission to a particular Ruling Elder should include the specific functions that the person is authorized to perform.
Continuing Education	The purpose of Continuing Education is to provide for spiritual and academic growth of the pastor, plus opportunities for them to participate in ongoing professional studies and renewal. Some examples include: pursuing advanced degrees, spiritual retreats, Transitional training, conferences, workshops, pilgrimages, or denominational events that aid the pastor in pastoral growth or development.
Continuing Members	All Minister of Word and Sacrament members of presbytery who serve in parish ministry or another “validated” ministry or are honorably retired or are members-at-large. (G-2.0503)
Cooperative Committee	Presbyteries’ Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates. This committee prepares the required ordination examinations and facilitates their grading.
Co-Pastor	Pastors who are called and installed with shared responsibility for pastoral ministry in a particular church.
Covenant Relationship	The relationship established between the CPM and Inquirers and Candidates which defines their mutual responsibilities.
CPE	Clinical Pastoral Education. A special in-service opportunity, ordinarily for candidates, spent in an institutional setting under supervision. The purpose is to practice and hone one’s pastoral counseling skills.
CPM	Committee on Preparation for Ministry charged with guiding the preparation of those to be ordained as Ministers of the Word and Sacrament.
CPM of Call	The CPM of the presbytery to which a candidate is being called to a first ministry position.
CPM of Care	The CPM of the presbytery under whose care a particular candidate or inquirer is enrolled.
Developmental Counseling	The program of a career development center that provides pastors with an opportunity to assess their ministries, examine their sense of vocation, and plan for their future ministry. The pastor is considered to be the “client.” See also Evaluating Counseling.

Directory for Worship	The part of the Book of Order that provides the guidelines for worship within the Reformed tradition and the liturgical and sacramental requirements for appropriate worship.
Dissolution	The process of concluding a relationship. A pastor's relationship to a congregation is dissolved when they leave the position. A church is dissolved when it is closed. "When a Ruling Elder or deacon, because of change of residence or disability, is unable for a period of one year to perform the duties of the ministry to which he or she was installed, the active relationship shall be dissolved by the session unless there is good reason not to do so, which shall be recorded." (G-2.0405)
Ecumenical Shared Ministry	Term applied to any one of several forms of pastoral ministries involving more than one denomination. This may be an ecumenical yoke or other form of cooperative ministry.
Fit Interview and Theological Exam	The process a presbytery uses to determine whether a Minister of Word and Sacrament will be accepted for membership in that presbytery. These are often conducted by the COM; the theological exam may (also) be conducted on the floor of presbytery.
EP	Executive Presbyter. The chief administrative staff person for a presbytery. Similar to General Presbyter.
Evaluating Counseling	The program of a career development center which provides a COM with feedback regarding the emotional and psychological health of a pastor and their current fitness for ministry. In this case, the "client" is the COM. The COM covers the cost of the evaluating counseling, and the Executive Presbyter and COM moderator receive the report.
Examination Services	The office in the Office of the General Assembly which resources the Cooperative Committee and CPMs related to ordination examinations.
Exemption	When a candidate is given permission to meet an ordination requirement through some means other than completion of the normal process and/or passage of the standard examinations. (G-2.0505a(2); G-2.0610)
Extraordinary	The term applied to circumstances during which the normal requirements for ordination are exempted or waived. This may include educational requirements, examinations, time. (G-2.0505a(2); G-2.0610)
Federated Church	A formal ecumenical relationship established between a Presbyterian congregation and one or more congregations of another denomination in which the merged membership functions as one congregation but members ordinarily maintain their separate denominational identity and separate rolls may be kept. In all cases, there shall be a plan of agreement which defines the nature of the federation.

Field Education	That part of the preparation for ministry process in which candidates participate as a student in ministry under the supervision of a pastor or other staff leader and ordinarily as part of their seminary education. This is sometimes called Supervised Practice of Ministry. The placement of students in field positions is normally the responsibility of the seminary, but should be done in consultation with the CPM, and, where appropriate, the COM of the presbytery where the placement will occur.
Final Assessment	The examination of a candidate during the final year of theological education or when all other requirements for preparation are completed to determine the person's readiness to begin ministry. A successful final assessment results in the CPM certifying a candidate "ready for examination for ordination pending a call."
Electronic Minister Form	The form which a Stated Clerk must fill out in order to complete the transfer of a Minister of Word and Sacrament from one presbytery to another, to record reception of a newly ordained minister, or add/remove a Commissioned Lay Pastor in ministry within the presbytery.
FOG	Form of Government, a section of the Book of Order
GP	General Presbyter. The chief administrative staff person for a presbytery. Also called EP or executive presbyter.
Head of Staff	The pastor or executive of a congregation or mid-council who is the supervisor of other staff.
Honorably Retired (HR)	The status which may be granted to a minister in good standing at the time of their retirement from active ministry.
Immigrant Fellowship Bible Study Group	An international group of Christian people who are accepted by a Presbytery as part of the presbytery's evangelistic outreach ministry. The Fellowship maintains appropriate language and cultural expressions in worshipping experiences. Usually, membership is not yet PC(USA).
In Correspondence	The status of formal relationship with and recognition of another denomination and the PC(USA). We are "in correspondence" with another denomination if we have had historical relations with it outside the US, are members of the ecumenical bodies in which the PC(USA) holds membership, or if we are in full communion with them by ecumenical agreements approved by the General Assembly. "When calling a minister from another denomination, many theological and pastoral questions should be explored before extending a call. While relationships or correspondence mean that the PC(USA) recognizes these churches and their denomination, there is a wide range of issues that may be implicated in ministry, such as the ordination of women as elders and deacons and the baptism of infants." (G-5.02)
Inquirer	A person enrolled in the Inquiry phase of preparation for ministry.

Inquiry	The initial phase of preparation for ministry, the purpose of which is to provide an opportunity for the church and for those who believe themselves called to ministry as a Minister of Word and Sacrament to explore that call together to determine together one's suitability for that ministry.
Installation	The act of the governing body which completes the call of a person to service in the church. Ruling Elders and Deacons are installed by the congregation. Ministers of Word and Sacrament are installed by the presbytery. A call is not complete until the installation. (W-4.4006)
Intern	A candidate for ministry may choose to extend their formal educational preparation by seeking a placement in a congregation or other ministry setting as an intern. Such positions vary from a few months (e.g., summer intern) to year-long. They are ordinarily compensated and are often arranged through the seminary. This is an optional component to the preparation for ministry process.
Investigating Committee	The first phase of a disciplinary procedure whose task is to determine whether or not there is justification for a charge to be formally made and a disciplinary procedure to be initiated.
Larger Parish	Two or more churches who wish to cooperate in ministry may be established as a larger parish. They may call a pastor (or pastors) together, coordinate ministry through a parish council, coordinate finances, etc. See also Yoke.
Ministry Partner	One who connects one group or person with another. COM assigns a member as ministry partner to a PNC. CPM may assign a member as ministry partner to the session of an inquirer or candidate under care or to a particular inquirer or candidate.
Member at Large	A Minister of Word and Sacrament who has previously been admitted to the presbytery or another presbytery as an active member, and who now, without intentional abandonment of the exercise of ministry, is no longer engaged in a ministry that complies with G-2.0503a. A Member at Large may serve as a Parish Associate to maintain a relationship to a particular church.
Mentor	One who teaches or serves as a role model and confidant. COM often will assign a mentor to newly ordained clergypersons to help them transition from seminary to the parish, and must assign a mentor to a Commissioned Lay Pastor.
MIF	Ministry Information Form. The "dossier" or resume prepared by a congregation that is seeking a new pastor.
Minister of Word and Sacrament	The official title of the ordained office for clergy in the PC(USA). Can also be called "Teaching Elders."

Mission Study	Carried out during the transitional period to evaluate a congregation's present and assess its future mission goals.
Moderator	One of the two required offices of a governing body, the moderator convenes and adjourns the meetings of the body.
Neutral Pulpit	The church in which a pastor being considered by a PNC preaches prior to candidating as one of the final steps in the selection process. Some PNCs elect to use digital sermons in place of this step.
NCD	New Church Developments
OGA	Office of the General Assembly (Stated Clerk's office)
Ordination	Ordination is the act by which the church sets apart persons to be presbyters (Ministers of Word and Sacrament or Ruling Elders) or Deacons and is accompanied with prayer and the laying on of hands. Ordination to the office of Minister of Word and Sacrament is an act of presbytery on behalf of the whole Church.
Ords	See Ordination Exams
Ordination Exams	Standardized examinations required of all candidates in the areas of Bible Content, Biblical Exegesis, Polity, Theology, and Worship and Sacraments.
Organizing Pastor	An organizing pastor is a Minister of Word and Sacrament or Commissioned Lay Pastor appointed by the presbytery to serve as a pastor to a group of people who are in the process of organizing a new Presbyterian church.
Parish	A congregation or group of congregations involved in a cooperative ministry.
Parish Associate	A minister who serves in some validated ministry other than the local parish, or is a member at large, or is retired, who wishes to be a parish associate will be accountable to the session of a particular church.
Parish Council	The coordinating body of a larger or cooperative parish, usually composed of representatives of each congregation in the parish. The council may have responsibility for calling the pastor(s) and carrying out personnel functions.
Pastor	Pastors "are to be responsible for a quality of life and relationships that commends the gospel to all persons and that communicates its joy and justice." (G-2.0504)
Pastor Emerita or Emeritus	An honorary status which may be rewarded to someone honorably retired from a particular position by election of the congregation and upon approval of the presbytery. This status may include an honorarium but assumes no pastoral authority or duty.

Pastor Nominating Committee	The term applied to the search committee for a pastor or associate pastor. Known as the PNC.
Personnel Committee	The committee of a council (session, presbytery, synod, GA) with responsibility for the oversight of its staff and implementation of its personnel policies.
PIF	Personal Information Form. The dossier or resume of a pastor or other church professional.
PNC	Pastor Nominating Committee
Polity	Term applied to the government of the church.
Pulpit Supply	The person who preaches for a church on a one-time or short-term basis. A list of qualified persons is to be maintained by the presbytery and provided to churches with vacant pulpits to ensure the quality of proclamation.
Reformed Tradition	The theological tradition of the Presbyterian and other Reformed churches.
Release from Exercise of Ordained Office	An ordained officer of the church (Ruling Elder, Deacon, Minister of Word and Sacrament) in good standing may request to be released from the exercise of ordered ministry. That person may seek to be restored to office by applying to the governing body from which they were released. (G-2.0406; G-2.0507)
Renunciation of Jurisdiction	When a church officer communicates in writing their intention to renounce the jurisdiction of this church. In other words, they leave the church and refuse to be bound by its authority.
Rules of Discipline	The part of the Book of Order which outlines the procedures and processes by which the church exercises "...authority given by Christ, both in the direction of guidance, control, and nurture of its members and in the direction of constructive criticism of offenders." (D-1.0101)
Ruling Elder	The ordained office of the church with responsibility for the spiritual oversight and governance of a congregation. Ruling Elders in active service are currently serving on the session of a church.
Second Career	A term applied to inquirers and candidates who have pursued one or more careers, other than being a student prior to coming under care.
Session	"The session is the council for the congregation. It shall be composed of those persons elected by the congregation to active service as Ruling Elders, together with all installed pastors and associate pastors." (G-3.0201)
Sexual Misconduct	When a person in a pastoral role violates the appropriate professional, interpersonal boundaries with a subordinate or parishioner. Definition and disciplinary procedures are delineated in a governing body's Sexual Misconduct policy.

Solo Pastor	A person in a pastoral role serving a pastorate without associates.
SPM	Supervised practice of ministry. See also “Field Education.”
Stated Clerk	One of the required officers of a Council, the clerk is responsible for maintaining the minutes, records, and rolls of the Council.
Temporary Pastoral Relationship	“Temporary pastoral relationships are approved by the presbytery and do not carry a formal call or installation.” (G-2.0504b)
Tentmaker	See bi-vocational pastor
Terms of Call	The specifics of the installed pastoral relationship extended by the congregation and approved by the presbytery which include the nature of the ministry to be carried out and terms of compensation. A presbytery must approve any changes in the terms of call and may determine minimum levels of compensation.
Transitional	Applies to the time between the dissolution of the pastoral relationship of one pastor and the installation of the next. May also refer to the pastor during that time.
Transitional Pastor	A Minister of Word and Sacrament invited by the session of a church and the presbytery to fulfill pastoral duties for a specified period not to exceed 12 months at a time, while the church is seeking a pastor. There are pastors who have been trained and are certified as Transitional Pastors.
Transfer	The process of transferring the membership of the Minister of Word and Sacrament or the care of a candidate or inquirer from one presbytery to another.
Triennial Visit	COM is required to visit each session at least once every three years.
Union Church	When a Presbyterian church unites with one or more particular churches which are members of other Reformed churches or other Christian bodies.
Validated Ministry	Validated ministry shall conform to G-2.0503a.
Vocation	See “call.”
Waiver	When a presbytery, on recommendation of the CPM, decides not to require a candidate to complete one or more of the ordinary requirements for ordination, except for those in G-2.0607d.
Yoke	When two or more churches are served by one pastor they are said to be yoked. See also, “Greater Parish.”

Preface

The Abingdon Presbytery Committee on Ministry handbook is to assist the Committee on Ministry (COM) as they nurture healthy ministries in this presbytery, bringing pastoral sensitivity, hopeful faith, and openness to the surprises of God's transforming power at work.

The Committee on Ministry handbook is an advisory handbook, a guide for COM work to be used alongside the *Book of Order*. This handbook is a continual work in progress, being reformed and changed as the Holy Spirit continues to move and work within Abingdon Presbytery.

The following handbook has been adapted from the *Advisory Handbook for Committees on Ministry*, a document created originally in 2007 by the Office of Vocation, a shared ministry of the Office of the General Assembly and the General Assembly Council, PC(USA).

Section One: An Orientation to the Committee on Ministry

A. Healthy Ministries: the goal of COM work

The Committee on Ministry's primary responsibility is to serve as pastor and counselor to the ministers, certified Christian educators, and commissioned lay pastors of the presbytery, to facilitate the relations between congregations, ministers, Christian educators, and commissioned lay pastors and the presbytery, and to settle difficulties on behalf of presbytery when possible and expedient. The responsibilities of the COM are best fulfilled by fostering healthy ministries in the congregations of the presbytery.

Health, wellness, wholeness, well-being: all these English words come from a common root word that connects to the Hebrew word *shalom*. Shalom is variously translated as a greeting akin to "hello," as peace, and as wholeness, health, and well-being. God's will for the shalom, the peace and health, of God's people is a theme found in every part of the Bible.

Yet, health in congregational life is not so easily defined as health in a human body. The shape of congregational life varies from one place to another. Not every church can or should engage in precisely the same forms of worship, Christian education, congregational fellowship, or service to the world beyond the church building. We might be tempted to say that healthy congregations, like beauty, are in the eye of the beholder. The marvelous diversity of healthy congregations might even encourage us to conclude that healthy congregations can only be known when we see them. However, there are some shared characteristics that are discernable in most healthy congregations.

Characteristics of healthy ministry

Healthy congregations can be found in any geographical setting. Yet in all the variety of healthy expressions of ministry, healthy congregations often share many of these norms and behaviors:

- Vibrant faith in God is expressed in lively, faithful worship and in a commitment to engage in ministries of justice and compassion.
- Caring response to the needs of people outside the church is as important as fostering relationships of friendship and caring within the congregation.
- Following God's intentions for the congregation is more important than maintaining the buildings or balancing the budget.
- Respect for tradition and the past is balanced by flexibility and creativity.
- People of all ages are growing in wisdom and knowledge.
- Relationships of friendship and mutual accountability provide the context for inclusive hospitality and respectful evangelism.
- Respect, accountability, and trust, rather than control, individualism, and secrecy, characterize relationships within the congregation.

- Clear structures of authority and decision-making are coupled with open access to those structures by the entire congregation.
- Transparency and openness in regard to communication, information sharing, and decision-making are balanced by appropriate and respectful treatment of confidential information.
- Respect for the authority of called and elected leaders is coupled with the awareness that leaders are only part of a very complex organism.
- Congregational self-confidence is balanced by appropriate humility.

In the language found within the Foundations of Presbytery Polity tells us what the church is called to do, and the COM is called to live out and encourage these Great Ends of the Church in its work.

The great ends of the Church are:

- *the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind;*
- *the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God;*
- *the maintenance of divine worship;*
- *the preservation of the truth;*
- *the promotion of social righteousness; and*
- *the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world. (F-1.0304)*

Congregations, like the people who are part of them, are gifted and flawed, faulty and faithful, often messy, and always thoroughly human. No congregation will ever fully live up to the ideal of the great ends of the church. However, when congregations are healthy, they are able to devote their best energies to fulfilling God’s call to them, as each congregation finds its way to respond to the claims of God on the people of God.

A healthy COM will devote their best energies to helping the ministries of the presbytery to be healthy. As they do, they partner with God in bringing to reality the Great Ends of the Church.

B. What is the COM?

According to the Book of Order, the presbytery has a responsibility as “pastor, counselor, and advisor to its ministers of the Word and Sacrament and congregations.” It continues:

Each presbytery shall develop and maintain mechanisms and processes to serve as pastor and counselor to its ministers of the Word and Sacrament, commissioned pastors, and certified Christian educators of the presbytery; to facilitate the relations between the presbytery and its congregations, ministers of the Word and Sacrament, commissioned pastors, and certified Christian educators; and to settle difficulties on behalf of the presbytery where possible and expedient...

To facilitate the presbytery’s...reception and oversight of minister of the Word and Sacrament members, approval of calls for pastoral services and invitations for temporary pastoral services, oversight of congregations

without pastors, dissolution of relationships, dismissal of members, and its close relationship with both member congregations and ministers of the Word and Sacrament, it may delegate its authority to designated entities within the presbytery. (G-3.0307)

The Committee on Ministry is responsible for the health of ministry in the presbytery, attending to the well-being of congregations and their faithfulness in responding to God's call to them as well as the nurture, support, and continued education and development of church professionals, including ministers of the Word and Sacrament, certified Christian educators, and commissioned lay pastors.

C. What are the responsibilities of the COM?

The Committee on Ministry of Abingdon presbytery has these areas of responsibility:

- a. It shall visit regularly and consult with each minister in the presbytery; report to presbytery they type of work in which each minister of the presbytery is engaged; require an annual report of each minister performing work which is not under the jurisdiction of the presbytery or a higher governing body of the church.
- b. Make recommendations to presbytery regarding calls for the services of its ministers.
- c. Visit with each session of the presbytery at least once every three years [see also: Triennial Visits].
- d. Counsel with churches and their Pastor Nominating Committees regarding calls for permanent pastoral relations.
- e. Counsel with churches regarding the advisability of calling a designated pastor.
- f. Counsel with churches regarding stated supplies, interim pastors, and temporary supplies, providing lists of available pastors, commissioned lay pastors, and qualified lay persons who have been trained and commissioned by presbytery to supply vacant pulpits.
- g. Provide for the implementation of equal employment opportunities for ministers and candidates, and report to presbytery the steps taken by each calling group to implement equal employment opportunity.
- h. Find in order calls issued by churches, approve and present calls, approve examination of ministers transferring from other presbyteries, dissolve pastoral relationships in certain situations, grant permission to labor within or outside the bounds of the presbytery, and dismiss ministers to other presbyteries.
- i. Promote the peace and harmony of the churches.
- j. Counsel with sessions regarding difficulties in the congregation, act as mediator in conflict situations, and/or act to correct difficulties in a conflict situation when asked to do so by the parties involved or when authorized by the presbytery to do so.
- k. Work with ministers joining another denomination, ministers transferring to the PC(USA) from other denominations, or ministers seeking release from the exercise of ordained office.
- l. Work with the CPM for the education and oversight of the commissioned lay pastors.

D. How does the COM deal with confidentiality?

Confidentiality about the work of the COM is crucial to the integrity of the committee and the level of trust the members of a presbytery will place in it. Matters before the COM are sensitive and should be held in confidence unless the welfare of a congregation or the safety of an individual is in question. Even then, the COM must be extremely cautious about sharing information except with those who have a clearly identified need to know. Information learned through the COM should never, under any circumstances, be the subject of casual conversation, especially not with persons unaffiliated with the COM.

The COM of Abingdon Presbytery shall maintain a policy which requires members of the COM to excuse themselves from any discussion of the congregation with which they work or of which they are members. A similar policy of excusing oneself when a discussion concerns a church professional who is a close friend will help avoid any appearance of favoritism.

Members of the COM hold an important position of trust and responsibility in the presbytery, a position that carries with it a significant degree of power, although sometimes the COM may be perceived as having more power than it actually does. Members of the COM must be mindful of both their actual power and their perceived power and strive to be above reproach in their dealing with confidential matters.

E. Ethical considerations in the work of COM

Since the COM is charged with the responsibility to provide pastoral care for church professionals and nurture and counsel for congregations, it is critical that the COM exhibit high ethical standards.

Recognizing the position of trust given to them by the presbytery, every member of the Abingdon Presbytery COM shall covenant to the following:

- a. I will maintain confidentiality, except in cases of imminent harm that need to be reported for the safety and well-being of all parties.
- b. I will excuse myself from any conversations that deal with my own congregation or with church professionals with whom I share a close relationship.
- c. I will always seek to be above reproach and maintain a committee built on mutual trust and respect.
- d. I will practice respectful communication with my fellow committee members and with those outside of the COM, recognizing that my words and my tone have the ability to either build or fracture relationships.
- e. I will offer fair and equal treatment of all ministers and congregations, providing a balanced system of listening and responding to questions and concerns. I will strive not to “play favorites,” but to give all voices a place at the table.
- f. I will support and honor the wisdom of the majority, with dignity and grace, even when decisions are made that are contrary to my personal, individual judgment.
- g. I will be a faithful member of the COM, attending committee meetings as often as I am able, and keeping in regular contact with the congregations under my care.

F. What are the significant relationships for the COM?

The Committee on Ministry's responsibility to provide for healthy ministry means that members focus on building relationships of mutual trust and care within the committee, with congregations, and with ministry professionals. Those relationships become the foundation on which all the other work of the committee is built.

The committee members rely on each other as colleagues and partners in ministry. Their relationships with one another are characterized by the same mutual trust and care that is the goal of their work with congregations and church professionals.

The Committee on Ministry will work closely with a number of other people and committees in the presbytery and in the larger church. Those relationships include:

- The Presbytery Leader/Stated Clerk to coordinate the work of the COM and to respond to emerging needs, and to advise and assist the COM
- The moderator of the Committee on Preparation for Ministry, especially in matters related to the ordination of candidates for ministry and in the ongoing education and work of the Commissioned Lay Pastors
- The Nominating Committee of the presbytery in finding new members of COM
- The Committee on Representation of the presbyter
- All committees of the presbytery as they relate to congregations
- Committees on Ministry and Committees on Preparation for Ministry in other presbyteries, especially in accepting or dismissing clergy and candidates, and offering training opportunities for the COM
- Synod and General Assembly staff who relate to the COM and provide resources and support for the COM

G. What resources are available for the COM?

- The Bible
- The Book of Order
- This COM Handbook
- The Church Leadership Connection website (pcusa.org/clc)
- The Board of Pensions website (pensions.org)
- The Abingdon Presbytery Sexual Misconduct Policy
- The Abingdon Presbytery directory

Section Two: Reflections on the Work of COM

A. Some theological reflections on the work of COM

The “Greater” Church

Abingdon Presbytery has given the COM the responsibility for the ministry of the congregations and church professionals serving within its bounds. However, that care can never be limited merely to issues of wages, hours, and work rules or to consideration of the needs of the individual person or congregation unrelated to the needs and mission of the Church as a whole. It involves concern for personal and corporate integrity, for matching personal leadership skills and commitments with the needs of the Church of Jesus Christ, and for applying the values and norms of the PC(USA) to particular persons and situations. This is the heart of Presbyterian connectionalism.

The governing bodies of the PC(USA) are listed in F-3.0203 as the session, presbytery, synod, and General Assembly, and:

All councils of the church are united by the nature of the church and share with one another responsibilities, rights, and powers as provided in this Constitution. The councils are distinct, but have such mutual relations that the act of one of them is the act of the whole church performed by it through the appropriate council. The larger part of the church, or a representation thereof, shall govern the smaller. (F-3.0203)

Thus, the responsibilities given to the COM are all “theological” responsibilities in the most basic and practical sense: they require our COM to engage constantly in reflection, judgment, and discernment of how God is present and what God’s will is for ministers and churches not only in particular situations but also in light of the work and will of the greater church.

The particular church

The Task Force on the Theology and Practice of Ordination to Office presented to the 208th General Assembly (1996) a report titled “A Ministry of Service,” which it identified as a guide to theological understanding of the church and its leadership. In what follows, elements are drawn from the guide which provide a checklist of the theological issues that are present, acknowledged or not, in the issues and situations that present themselves to a COM every time it meets.

1. *The Church as Divine Gift and Human Institution*

The church is a covenant community called into being by God, with Christ as its head, and is appropriately called the “body of Christ.” Just as Jesus Christ is human as well as divine, so is Christ’s body—the Church—both a divine gift from God and also a human institution. Thus the church seeks to order its life not only by Scripture, but also by the best understandings of human institutions.

2. *The Church as a Fellowship of Believers and as a Missionary Community*

The Church exists not only for the growth and maturity in Christ of its members, but also

has a mission to bear witness to the gospel and to God's reign through its proclamation and through its deeds of compassion and reconciliation.

3. *The Church as Being and Doing*

The Church must be clear first about what it is over and against the demands of the culture, but it must also be clear about its responsibilities to engage in service to and for God.

4. *The Church as Local Congregation and as Presence of the Church Universal*

The congregation is the primary form of the Church, where members worship, are nurtured, and receive pastoral care; however, the church in a particular congregation is also part of the Church universal. Similarly, those ordained are ordained in the "Church of Jesus Christ," even though they function within the context of a particular congregation.

5. *The Church as a Present Reality and as a Foretaste and Sign of the Kingdom*

We may be conscious of the church's past, and we are most often occupied by the Church in the present, but the Church is also the present sign of the coming rule of God.

Call and Leadership

The "Final Report of the Advisory Group for the Call System" presented to the 209th General Assembly (1997) provides the church with theological convictions about both the call to serve in positions of leadership and about the nature of leadership itself.

In Regard to the Call

...God calls the Church into being. God calls certain people to leadership roles within the Church...Calls result in leadership within particular contexts. Calls to church professions are calls to leadership in calling bodies...Calls demand high expectations and accountability...

In Regard to Leadership

...God gives specific leadership facilities and styles to particular individuals...Leadership in the church is a particular kind of relating and communicating. Leaders of the church find their model for leading in the person of Jesus, who came 'not to be served but to serve' (Matthew 20:38).

B. The spiritual dimensions of the work of the COM

The COM is charged with a long list of very important responsibilities on behalf of the presbytery and for the sake of Christ's Church. The COM does not and cannot work in isolation from other groups and persons in the presbytery or in the church at large. This means that COM members, no matter how wise, talented, faithful, experienced, or energetic they may be, are called to be partners. They partner with one another, with the church professionals, and congregations they serve, with presbytery staff and with other committees of the presbytery, with the Synod of the Mid-Atlantic and General Assembly, and, most especially, with God.

The work of the COM will be done at best, most faithfully, and most creatively when it is done in a context of prayer, discernment, and worship. The most important preparation for any encounter between a member of the COM and a church professional or a congregation is prayer for the individual, the congregation, the relationship, and the coming meeting.

As partners in ministry, COM members enter into relationships with an attitude of respect and appreciation for the congregations and individuals they encounter. COM members bring significant authority and substantial resources to meetings with those people. Their authority and their assistance are most likely to be accepted if they are offered in a spirit of collegiality and in a context of ongoing relationships of trust and care.

Section Three: The COM and Congregations

A. Nurturing relationships with congregations

The COM is so often caught up in responding to the urgent needs of congregations and ministry professionals in transition, in crisis, or in conflict that it can be easy to lose sight of the important responsibilities to serve as pastor and counselor to church professionals and to facilitate relations between them, congregations, and the presbytery. But the COM that devotes a significant portion of its time, energy, and wisdom to building and nurturing relationships will find that when there is a transition, a crisis, or a conflict, its presence will be more quickly welcomed and its offers of help will be more readily accepted.

Nothing that the COM does is more important than nurturing good relationships with congregations and church professionals.

B. Resources for understanding congregations

Thinking systemically about congregational life

Since the publication of Edwin Friedman's book, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (Guilford Press, 1985), church leaders have increasingly used the insights of systems theory to help them understand congregations more fully. Systems theory encourages church leaders to let go of their Lone Ranger notions and Superman/Superwoman fantasies and recognize that congregations (and presbyteries!) are complex, interlocking webs of connections.

Systems theory knows that there is no such thing as an isolated cause or agent for anything in a congregation's life. Praising the pastor when things go well may unhelpfully inflate the pastor's ego. Blaming the pastor when things go badly will be likely to make the pastor either defensive or depressed. Neither tactic is useful, and neither is based on accurate assumptions. When things go well, as they do more often than not, it is because many different groups within the congregation are functioning together as a (more or less) healthy system. When things don't go well or when conflict erupts it is usually because the congregation as a whole needs to find its way or be helped to rediscover a point of new balance where God's creative power can be unleashed. In neither case is any single individual solely responsible or solely able to "fix things."

Systems theory is useful in individual lives and in church life at every level. It is extremely helpful in dealing with congregational conflict (see section 6).

Ronald W. Richardson's book, *Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership, and Congregational Life* (Fortress, 1996) and the companion volume, *Becoming a Healthier Pastor: Family Systems Theory and the Pastor's Own Family* (Augsburg Fortress, 2004), are among a number of helpful introductions to systems theory and congregational life and leadership.

The COM and congregations in transition

Like individuals, congregations tend to be more open to assistance at transition times. At such times, the COM has an opportunity to be helpful in ways that nurture relationship and build capital for the future. The departure of a pastor is an obvious time when the COM's help is essential. The COM shepherds a congregation through the complex process of saying goodbye to one pastor, securing temporary pastoral leadership, and preparing to welcome a new pastor (see section 4).

But there are other occasions of transition when timely assistance from the COM and/or other presbytery committees can be welcome and extremely valuable. Among those occasions are:

- When the congregation considers adding a fulltime staff person or cutting back on staff support
- When the pastor or a close family member is seriously ill
- When a new building or addition is planned or completed
- When a significant new program of community outreach is begun
- When a factory that once employed many works in a community is closed
- When the congregation has suffered trauma connected with sexual misconduct, violence, or the destruction of a building by fire or natural disaster

Special care needs to be taken for congregations that are living with the aftermath of accusations of pastoral misconduct, especially when sexual misconduct has been alleged. While the COM is not involved in any way in the disciplinary process, the COM has a continuing responsibility to provide pastoral care for other church professionals, if any, in the congregation, and for the congregation as a whole. If such a situation arises, the COM moderator will need to work closely with the presbytery leader to provide assistance to the congregation.

Appreciative Inquiry

Developed for use in business leadership and increasingly a tool that is used in congregational life, the basic ideas of Appreciative Inquiry are deceptively simple. Appreciative Inquiry begins by creating interview questions that:

- Encourage participants to remember the best of the past,
- Encourage participants to hope for the future,
- Nurture community spirit,
- And encourage expression of feelings as well as recital of facts.

Appreciative Inquiry methodology could appropriately be used in a variety of settings, with groups of various sizes, for varying purposes. It is, however, especially helpful in the context of:

- Congregational mission studies
- Congregations recovering from conflict or other trauma
- A newly called pastor getting acquainted with a congregation

The great value of Appreciative Inquiry is that it focuses on what is good and right and healthy, rather than on what is difficult, painful, or broken in congregational life. By focusing on the positive aspects of congregational life, Appreciative Inquiry strengthens what is healthy and whole.

Appreciative Inquiry is not a substitute for clear-eyed evaluation of conflict or of the challenges a congregation faces. A congregation whose membership has declined from 500 in the 1950s to 50 in 2022 will still be dealing with the challenges posed by limited financial resources, a building that was intended for a much larger congregation, and, in all probability, a membership that includes a sizeable percentage of members past the age of 80. Appreciative Inquiry can, however, help the members be more creative in the use of their present resources and more hopeful in seeking God's call to them as a congregation.

Mark Lau Branson's book, *Memories, Hopes, and Dreams: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change* (Alban, 2004) is a useful resource for those wishing to read further.

Life cycle issues

Just as human beings tend to behave differently at different stages in their lives, so congregations are likely to have different characteristics according to the stage of their lives. Like size-related characteristics, these are not sufficient by themselves to fully understand a congregation. But familiarity with the generalities of life cycle issues will be of significant help to a COM in working with a congregation and making initial hypotheses about what is likely to be of the most help.

Martin Saarinen's book *The Life Cycle of a Congregation* was published in 1986. He described the life cycle of a congregation as moving from birth to formation through stability and often, on to decline, and sometimes to death.

What may be most important for COM members is to recognize that once at or beyond the point of stability, congregations will need encouragement to engage in the processes of ongoing renewal and renegotiation of mission. If a congregation enters into the process of decline, revitalization or redevelopment (also called transformation) is certainly possible, but will require a greater investment of time, energy, and resources of all kinds than does ongoing renewal. Prevention is easier and often more effective than intervention!

An excellent description of life cycle issues is the first chapter of Alice Mann's book *Can Our Church Live?* (Alban, 1999).

The COM and new worshipping communities

The primary responsibility for new worshipping communities is not lodged with the COM. However, the COM should provide support and care for the pastoral leadership serving in NWC work, just as they do for other church professionals.

Some NWC congregations may need extra support in moving through the very significant transitions times of chartering and the end of financial support from the denomination.

The COM and small congregations

Small congregations (usually defined as those with fewer than 100 members) have significant strengths. They are specialists in relationship: with each other, with God, with their pastor, with their community. Members refer with pride to the “family feeling” of their churches. Small churches are also places of high commitment. “You can’t hide here,” one member of a small church said proudly. “Everybody has to pitch in.” In a small congregation everyone has—or can have—an important role to play. In this era when bigger is often assumed to be better, small congregations offer an important reminder of the value of each one of God’s beloved children.

This is not to say that there are no problems! Small membership congregations that have a pastor often must devote the largest percentage of their budget to the costs related to compensation for a pastoral leader. Many of them worship in buildings that are rich in memory and tradition—and in need of maintenance. Because of their financial limitations, small congregations sometimes assume that they are unable to participate in mission and so turn inward, focusing their energy and their resources exclusively on meeting the needs of their own members.

Small churches make up a large percentage of all congregations in the PC(USA). In 2021, 41% of congregations had a membership of 50 or fewer persons, and 20% of congregations have 25 or fewer members. Overall, 65% of churches in our denomination have less than 100 members. Many of them are without pastoral leadership. Some of those congregations do not have the financial resources to support a full-time, or even a part-time, minister of the Word and Sacrament. Others are so geographically isolated that it is difficult for them to attract a pastor.

And yet, small congregations bring a unique form of congregational life with both strengths and weaknesses. “Small congregations,” writes Carl Dudley, “are not organizational errors to be corrected, but intentional choices of members who put a priority on human relationship” (*Effective Small Churches in the Twenty-First Century*, Abingdon, 2002, p.11). All too often, church leaders focus so much attention on the problems and challenges facing small congregations that their strengths are overlooked.

The COM can be helpful to small congregations in several significant ways:

- By helping them as they seek caring, competent pastoral leadership. Sometimes, smaller congregations will need to be encouraged to consider new or unfamiliar possibilities: a pastor of a different cultural background, a woman pastor where one has never served before, a commissioned lay pastor, or a tentmaking pastor.
- By working with small church pastors to stay with small church ministry, despite the pressures of debts incurred in seminary education and the expenses of family life. The PC(USA) has several debt relief programs that may help pastors stay for a longer tenure.
- By recruiting a pool of people in the presbytery who have special skills they are willing to share with congregations other than their own. For example, accounting skills to assist small congregations with the annual financial audit is one way to help.
- By lifting up their strengths and celebrating their successes and recognizing the variety of forms of ministry in small congregations. COMs are especially encouraged to focus not only

on anniversaries and tradition, but also on innovative, creative, healthy ministry in small congregations.

Congregational size and ministry style

Congregations come in all sizes, although the majority of all congregations in the PC(USA) are small. As of 2021, about 65% of congregations in the PC(USA) have fewer than 100 members.

Ministers and COMs can waste considerable energy and sometimes increase animosity by trying to make congregations of one size behave like congregations of another. While there are no absolutely certain predictors about congregational behavior, it will be helpful for COM members to have a working knowledge of the characteristics of congregations of different sizes.

Arlin Rothauge's book *Sizing Up a Congregation for New Member Ministry* began the discussion of the characteristics of congregations of different sizes. Since the publication of his book, many other church observers have used and modified his ideas. One way to describe the four size groupings follows:

- *Family size congregations* have up to 50 adults and children at worship. They operate like an extended family, organized around one or two key leaders, who are often not elected to the session. Relationships are more important than anything else in the family size congregation, and the pastor often serves part-time, leading worship and offering pastoral care. Decisions are likely to be made informally by consensus so long as the key leaders of the congregation are involved.
- *Pastoral size congregations* have between 50 and 150 in worship. They are made up of several family and friendship groups, unified around the pastor, who plays a key role in the decisions and ministry of the congregation. Decisions are likely to be made based on the pastor's interests and skills.
- *Program size churches* have 151-350 in worship. They are organized around programs serving the needs of the members for nurture, involvement, and mission outreach. Decisions are made by the session with involvement by the pastor and other staff persons. Committees are likely to play a key role in program-size congregations.
- *Corporate churches* have 350-1000+ in worship. They are organizationally complex and the pastor in this size church often functions as a CEO. Staffing reflects the complexity of the organization, with a cadre of specialists providing excellent quality programs and services to a number of different constituencies. In order to provide opportunities for greater intimacy, corporate size churches often offer a variety of small group experiences focused on particular needs or stages of life. Decisions are likely to be made by the senior staff with the blessing of the session.

The COM and shared ministry and larger parishes (yoked congregations)

A larger parish (sometimes referred to as yoked churches) is one that shares a pastoral leader with one or more other congregations. The most common reason for forming larger parishes is that one

or all of the churches can no longer afford to pay a full-time pastor. In some situations, the yoke has a historic tie. In others, the churches choose to work together, not only to share leadership, but also to share in the ministry to their communities and to share in programs such as a join youth group or Bible study.

Sometimes the presbytery approaches one or several churches to suggest a larger parish as an option for obtaining pastoral leadership. In other situations, members of one church initiate discussions with another and then invite presbytery to help them work out the details. Before seeking a pastor, the sessions of the churches work out a formal partnership agreement as to how they will share in ministry. A written covenant signed by the two or more clerks of session, the shared pastor, and the presbytery COM moderator is required so that the agreements are clear.

In considering the formation of a larger parish, the following issues need to be considered:

- What are the needs of each church for the time and talents of a pastor? What will the pastor be expected to do with each congregation in a normal week or month?
- What proportion of full-time service will be expected by each church?
- Where will the pastor live?
- What assumptions are there about involvement of the pastor in the churches and communities? (For example, it is not fair to expect pastors to attend football games in both communities each weekend.)
- When will worship services be held in each congregation? Is this a set schedule, or will worship times be set on a rotation? (This decision must take into account not only the preferences of each congregation, but also the need for the pastor to build significant relationships with the people of each congregation as well as practicalities such as the amount of time needed to travel from one church building to another.)
- How will planning be coordinated?
 - Three or four joint session meetings per year can be very valuable—one before Lent, one in late summer, one before Advent, one at annual review and budget time
 - This keeps communication strong and allows the sessions to share ideas and concerns without relying on the pastor as the go-between
- What will the total cost of shared ministry be?
 - Cash salary
 - Housing allowance or manse maintenance
 - Utilities
 - Medical and pension dues
 - Continuing education allowance
 - Reimbursed professional expenses (travel, etc.)
 - Pastor search expenses (travel, lodging, meals, etc.)
 - Moving expenses
 - Pulpit supply for six weeks per year (vacation and continuing education)
 - Shared administrative expenses
 - Costs of joint programming
- Will the costs be shared in the same proportion as the time-sharing?

- How much funding will each church provide each year or month?

In addition, congregations planning for a larger parish or for shared ministry should consider these questions:

- How will expenses be handled? Will there be a parish treasurer?
- What are our commitments to each other as partners in ministry?
- How will our shared ministry be evaluated?
- How will we proceed if one church is dissatisfied with the arrangement?
- How will we proceed if the minister wants to leave one congregation but not the other?

It is helpful to discuss all of these matters in a joint session gathering with the moderator of session and Committee on Ministry representatives to help process the discussion and share information that may be constructive. An initial draft “covenant for shared ministry” might be drawn up from this discussion, then shared with all participants for review, amendment, and adoption. It is very wise to share the document with the congregations (for information) as well and have a well-informed elder respond to respond to questions so that the relationship gets off to a good start.

Joint fellowship and worship celebrations should be encouraged among partner churches. Some good moments for combined celebrations are VBS, special services such as Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, and really anytime that the churches can come together.

****include sample covenant draft here (searching for the one I wrote, which goes beyond compensation and includes answers to most of the questions above)****

The COM and racial ethnic and multicultural congregations

As the Committee on Ministry may work with racial ethnic and multicultural congregations, it is important to understand the history and cultures that have formed the congregations and their members. It is also important to remember that every congregation has its own unique identity and that racial ethnic and multicultural congregations may well differ from one another in significant ways.

Building mutual trust between the congregation and the presbytery will be enhanced when members of the COM:

- Participate in the worship life of racial ethnic and multicultural congregations;
- Elicit stories from the life of the congregation and listen carefully and respectfully;
- Remember that English is the native language of some members of immigrant or racial ethnic groups;
- Recognize that socio-economic issues may have a different impact in some non-majority communities than in the dominant culture;
- Support models of congregational structure, evangelism, mission, and worship that are appropriate to the congregation and in their living out of the reformed tradition;

- Encourage and foster participation by racial ethnic elders and pastors on presbytery committees;
- Include racial ethnic ministers on the presbytery’s pulpit supply list;
- Appoint racial ethnic ministers as moderators of sessions in majority European-American congregations as well as racial ethnic congregations.

Additional resources for working cross-culturally can be found in Section Seven of this handbook.

The COM and immigrant ministries

Suggestions for the COM in dealing with new immigrant ministries

The Committee on Ministry must be sensitive to the cultural differences related to ethnicity, nationality, and native language. This will include an awareness that even their own best efforts to be inclusive may not be as effective as they wish them to be. Working with members and leaders of immigrant fellowships requires care, attention, and sensitivity.

The COM may find it helpful to:

- Take cultural proficiency training. Sensitivity to welcoming strangers is a matter of attitude and intentional deeds.
- Be in contact with and look for advice from the denomination when issues related to racial-ethnic constituents are being considered.
- Help the presbytery to add materials supporting this specialized ministry

If the presbytery is considering a new immigrant fellowship or congregation, the following information will be helpful:

G-2.0505(a.1)—In the case of ministers for immigrant fellowships and congregations, a presbytery may, if it determines that its strategy for mission with that group requires it, recognize the ordination and receive as a member of presbytery a new immigrant minister who furnishes evidence of good standing in a denomination, even though at the time of enrollment that minister lacks the educational history required of candidates, and provide such educational opportunities as seem necessary and prudent for that minister’s successful ministry in the presbytery.

Enabling conditions

1. Existence of a New Immigrant Fellowship and/or congregation
2. Presbytery strategy for mission with the fellowship and/or congregation
3. The minister must be in good standing in a denomination in correspondence with the General Assembly
4. Presbytery shall evaluate the minister’s understanding of and proficiency in:
 - a. Bible,
 - b. Reformed theology,
 - c. Sacraments,

- d. Presbyterian polity,
 - e. Preaching,
 - f. Leading worship,
 - g. Pastoral care, and,
 - h. Teaching
5. Presbytery should determine the pastor's immigration status. If the pastor is a citizen, an appropriate document to determine status is a US birth certificate, US passport, or naturalization certificate. If the pastor is a permanent resident, a resident alien card ("green card") should be available. If the pastor is a non-immigrant, a copy of an I-94 arrival/departure record should show which non-immigrant category the pastor had upon entering the US.

Enabling actions

1. The receiving presbytery confirms membership status of the minister via communication with the denomination of membership
2. The minister furnishes transcripts and other requested information to the receiving presbytery
3. The receiving presbytery does background and reference checks on the minister
4. The presbytery approves the *recognition* of the minister's ordination by $\frac{3}{4}$ majority of those present at this meeting
5. If the immigrant pastor does not have an enabling work document, efforts can be made by the church or presbytery to sponsor the pastor for an immigration benefit allowing the pastor to work and receive a salary

NOTES:

- Recognition of ordination ties the action to the time and location of service in that particular fellowship or congregation
- The minister may be enrolled as a member of presbytery and temporarily may be given the rights and privileges of membership for that period of service
- Recognition of ordination in a corresponding denomination is not equivalent to transfer into the PC(USA) as Minister of Word and Sacrament

The presbytery is committing to provide that minister with educational opportunities that are necessary and prudent for that minister's successful ministry within the bounds of that presbytery. To fulfill that responsibility, the presbytery may use the following strategies:

- Assign mentor(s)
- Use the services of tutors in areas of deficiency (such as language or polity, e.g.)
- Require participation in CLP training courses or in seminary lay education programs
- Use experiential learning, such as attending session meetings in nearby congregations and presbytery committee meetings

D. The Triennial visit

Among the best opportunities for building relationship with congregations is the triennial visit. This is essentially a pastoral visit by the presbytery to its churches.

When triennial visits are most helpful to everyone involved, it is likely to be because the COM goes to them with prayerful preparation, and a respectful, appreciative attitude to the mission and ministry of each congregation. Visitors to congregations who expect to find evidences of faithful ministry and mission are more likely to find them than those who go with a predisposition to be disappointed. Every congregation is doing something that is important and valuable to its members and pleasing to God!

If the triennial visit is to be received by sessions as more than an unpleasant intrusion by the presbytery, it will be because the COM takes the initiative to make the visit an occasion for pastoral affirmation and appreciation. When there are issues to be addressed or concerns to be responded to, it will be in a context in which some trust has been built.

If these visits are truly to strengthen connections, then the conversation must flow two ways. Church leaders will want an opportunity to say what they need from presbytery and offer suggestions for strengthening the ministry of presbytery. Visitors must be good listeners!

The tools of appreciative inquiry found in this section are particularly useful for triennial visits.

The purposes of a triennial visit are:

- To affirm and support the good ministry being accomplished in the name of Christ,
- To connect the session with the resources of the presbytery, the synod, and the General Assembly,
- To ask questions and share information that will raise the vision of church leaders,
- To encourage them as they seek to respond to God's call,
- To help them deal with any problems which may exist.

Triennial visits can serve to strengthen the connection between the congregation and other governing bodies in the denomination, while helping the congregation to consider its ministry and mission not only within the local community but also throughout the world.

Three specific areas to be considered by the COM in triennial visits are:

- The mission and ministry of the particular church
- Full participation in the life and work of the presbytery
- The quality of and standards for worship, and the fruit it is bearing in the life of God's people

Planning for triennial visits

The visit will be most constructive when the visitors and the church leaders are clear about the purpose of the visit. This should be communicated in writing to the pastor and session prior to the

visit so that the church leaders are invited to prepare in an appropriate way for the visit. Rather than telling the church, “The COM says we have to visit you every three years” (which sets up a feeling that no one wants to do this), it may be helpful to communicate one or more of the following purposes for your time together:

- Celebration of the ministry of this congregation
- Faith sharing
- Two-way information sharing: presbytery learning about the church, its ministry, challenges, and concerns, and the church hearing about presbytery, its activities, resources, and challenges
- Dealing with special issues of concern
- Mutual ministry assessment process
- Invitation to participate more fully in the life and ministry of presbytery
- Inspiration and encouragement to reach out to changing community
- Interpretation of the mission of the larger Church
- Information gathering for presbytery planning
- Invitation to strategic planning for future ministry in their area
- Strengthening the pastoral relationship
- Follow-up interventions at significant points in a pastorate

Ethical issues

It is essential that everyone involved in triennial visits is clear about expectations regarding confidentiality, to whom will reports go, and how referrals will be handled. In addition, the session and the pastor will need to know what will happen if a visitation team uncovers serious problems. In such cases, the COM must state clearly who will be notified and how the information will be handled. In the case of triennial visits, as in all the work of the COM it is important to consider ahead of time how conflicts of interest will be avoided.

Who will be visited?

- Will churches which have had other significant COM intervention (in vacancy or conflict) be visited again?
- Who will be included in the visit?
 - Only the session and pastor?
 - The session with other church members who wish to attend?
 - Other church staff?
 - The treasurer?
 - The pastor’s spouse?

Scheduling

- What will the basic format and timeframe be for the visit?
- Will a meal or refreshments be part of the visit?
- Will there be a worship component of the visit? If so, who will do this?
- Will sessions be asked to schedule a special meeting for this visit?
- Will a separate time with the pastor be included?
- How will the COM involve the congregations in determining the schedule?

Personnel

- Will visits be scheduled during seasons set aside for this purpose or continually throughout the year?
- Who will conduct the visits?
- How many persons will be required for each visit? At least two people should be assigned to each team. No one should make a visit alone. Both people can actively listen to the session, the minister, and others.
- Will all COM members be expected to do triennial visits or will certain people within the COM be assigned this responsibility?

What paperwork needs to be created?

- Letters of notification of the proposed date of the visit with an invitation to negotiate the date if necessary
- A document to explain the triennial visit to the congregation and pastor
- A suggested agenda
- A preliminary list of questions for the session and pastor to use for reflection
- General information about presbytery activities and resources
- Standardized report and feedback forms
- A follow-up letter to the pastor and the session
- An evaluation form for the pastor and session to assess the visit

The COM must also decide who will be responsible for mailings, tracking completed visits, and following up on referrals.

Training

How will the people making triennial visits be trained? Who will conduct the training, and what topics will be covered?

- COM will start training in January and include training during COM meetings throughout the year
- The following topics may be covered in training throughout the year:
 - Listening skills
 - Basics of appreciative inquiry
 - Programs and resources of our presbytery
 - Basic consultation skills
 - Healthy communication and avoiding triangulation
 - Ministry assessment
 - Basic conflict management
 - Small church and corporate church dynamics
 - Life cycles of pastoral relationships and congregational life

Preparing for the visit

The teams must make preliminary contact with the sessions of the presbytery. Each team will make its first contact, contracting for a date and alternate date (in case of emergency), the amount of time needed for the visit, any preliminary requirements of the session.

It is important to obtain some information about the particular church that will be visited:

- A look at annual statistical reports for the last few years, which can be obtained with the help of the stated clerk
- Some information about the community in which the church is located
- Any important information about the life of the church—recent celebrations and important anniversaries, etc.

The most important preparation the visitation team can make is to prepare spiritually for the visit:

- Pray for the congregation and its leaders
- Pray for the visitation team
- Consider scripture about visitation, such as Romans 1:7-12

Encountering resistance

It is not unusual for some sessions or pastors to be reluctant to have the Committee on Ministry visit. They may feel such visits are a waste of time or they may resent or be fearful of the possibility of outside intervention. Usually a competent, caring visitation team can dispel such feelings and build trust. If churches have had bad experiences with presbytery intervention in the past, it may be helpful to acknowledge their feelings about that experience (without judging previous encounters) and move on with a good experience.

Some visiting teams have been met with stony silence. Wise teams will not rush in to fill the silence with small talk, nor will they leave early. They may ask, “what’s going on here? We feel like you don’t

want to talk about something? Is there something you want to say to us that you are reluctant to say or have difficulty expressing?”

Sometimes a member of a visitation team will receive a phone call after the visit when an elder wants to share that which was left unsaid in the meeting. Information gathered this way should be considered carefully. There may be inappropriate secret-keeping or it may be that one unhealthy person wishes to cause trouble. COM visitors should encourage open conversation among individuals in disagreement rather than reward triangular conversation among parties, using the COM to get at each other.

After the visit

- **Report:** a team might meet for coffee immediately after the triennial visit to collect their thoughts and to put together the report that will be made to the COM
- **Refer:** referrals must be handled faithfully. If a session, for example, asks for presbytery’s help with their stewardship efforts, it is essential that the referral is made promptly and help is given.
- **Review:** completing the feedback loop is also important. Correspond with the pastor and session after a visit and include a copy of the report that is given to COM.

Triennial Visit
Ministry and Mission Reflection
For Session

Please be ready to reflect on these questions with the COM triennial visit team.

1. The church is called to be the Body of Christ in the world. When has the church best resembled the Body of Christ for you?
2. When, in this church, was prayer most important and effectual for you?
3. What do you see as Christ's dream for the future of your ministry here?
4. What concrete steps have you taken to translate Christ's dream into reality in this church and in the community?
5. What concrete steps will you continue to take to translate Christ's dream into reality?
6. In what ways is your congregation engaged in the presbytery?
7. Has there been a happening in the life of your congregation that you would like the presbytery to celebrate with you?
8. How could the presbytery be more helpful to your congregation?
9. Do you have any comments or concerns that you would like to share?

Triennial Visit
Ministry and Mission Reflection
For Pastor

Please be ready to reflect on these questions with the COM triennial visit team.

1. When has the church or the presbytery best resembled the Body of Christ for you?
2. Describe the time when you felt the most spiritually fulfilled/excited during your time with this congregation?
3. What do you see as Christ's dream for the future of your ministry here?
4. How can the presbytery, session, COM, etc. help you to fulfill this dream?
5. Taking care of self...
 - a. Do you think you are adequately compensated and how do you feel about your financial stability?
 - b. Describe the quality of your relationship to the staff, the session, and to the congregation.
 - c. Do you take all of your vacation time? How have you been using your study leave?
 - d. How many hours a week are you working?
6. What would you like to see happen in your congregation in the next 3-5 years?
7. Do you have any comments or concerns to share?
8. How could the COM support you and your ministry better?

E. Congregational Mission studies

Mission studies are especially appropriate:

- When the congregation does not reflect community changes
- When there has been a congregational power shift or conflict
- When membership has grown or declined significantly
- When the congregation needs to consider a new strategy for pastoral leadership (such as a cooperative ministry)
- When a church is seeking a new pastor or when a new pastor has recently been called
- When a pastor and church want a new direction
- ***Every church, regardless of pastoral leadership, should look to complete a mission study every five to seven years, to reevaluate ministry goals***

The best mission studies involve everyone who wishes to be involved and ask these or similar questions:

- What are we doing as a congregation? What is God calling us to do in the next phase of our ministry?
- What are the needs of our community? What is God calling us to do to meet those needs?
- What specifically will we do to strengthen our congregational and community ministry in the next year? In the next five years?
- What must the pastor and lay leaders do to help accomplish our goals?

Tips about mission studies:

- Anxious or conflicted churches don't produce good mission studies. Deal with the problem first.
- Focus on what the congregation is doing well and faithfully. Use the techniques of appreciative inquiry (see appreciative inquiry in this section).
- Get participation and ownership by key leaders.
- Design and lead the study with lay leaders, adapting resource material to be appropriate for the particular conversation.
- Be respectful of the time of congregational members. Allow enough time to complete a mission study without making the process too long.
- Involve the whole congregation including children and youth (with an age-appropriate line of questions and ways to engage the process).
- Make it fun! Include music, Bible study, and food.
- Display a public timeline and share highlights at worship.
- Share results with session for approval. Keep the congregation informed of action.
- Keep the study for future use and pass it on to the next pastor.

Section Four: Relationships with Congregations Searching for Pastoral Leadership

General Comments

Congregations entering the transition time when one pastor has left and before another has been called are likely to be experiencing grief, anger, relief, confusion, anxiety, or a combination of some or all of those feelings. A COM liaison will be most effective in working with the congregation when she or he is:

- Knowledgeable about the process of moving from the dissolution of one pastoral relationship to the initiation of a new one
- Able to be a “calm, non-anxious presence” (Edwin Friedman’s phrase)
- Spiritually mature and respectful of the congregation with which he or she is working

COM liaisons are a key part of the connection between congregation and presbytery and an important part of creating healthy ministry in a congregation and in the presbytery as a whole.

A Healthy Goodbye

A good beginning with a new pastor begins with a healthy goodbye to the departing one. A celebration of the pastor’s time with the congregation helps both pastor and congregation to say goodbye. Appreciative sharing of good memories as well as honest recognition of difficulties will contribute to the significance of the closing weeks they share. It is helpful to create public opportunities for such sharing and recognition in board and committee meetings, worship services, wherever the faith community is gathered. Whatever the circumstances of the pastor’s departure, she or he, his or her family, other staff persons, and the congregation as a whole will benefit in very significant ways from opportunities to say honest and respectful thanks and goodbye.

The pastor’s farewell messages to the congregation should include clear statements of the ethical standards to which he or she adheres. Such messages must include recognition that the pastoral relationship is ending and that, as a former pastor, she or he will no longer perform pastoral services for members of the congregation.

If the departure of the pastor comes at the end of a time of difficulty and conflict, it is even more important for pastor and congregation to honestly, fairly, and lovingly assess the relationship that is ending. It may be necessary in such cases for the COM liaison and/or presbytery staff to work with the pastor and the session to set guidelines for “telling the truth in love.”

Statement of ethics and separation for departing pastors

When a pastor leaves a charge there are bonds of affection between the minister and members of the church that continue to be cherished. Relations of friendship continue, but the pastoral relationship does not. In order to spare ministers and church members from embarrassment, and to encourage the new pastoral relationship that will be established, the COM directs that the church be reminded of these requirements:

When any minister resigns from a pastorate or retires from service, or becomes a pastor emeritus, the minister should cease to perform such functions of a pastor as funerals, baptisms, and weddings, unless invited to officiate in such capacity by the pastor or by the moderator of vacant churches.

The spirit of this action applies to all ministers of the church, whether retired or not, and whether they have ever served as pastors of particular churches.

In short, church members should not request a former pastor to perform pastoral duties. If requested, the pastor should tactfully decline.

With the session and the COM liaison, the pastor should prepare a carefully worded announcement for the congregation. The statement should draw a clear distinction between honoring the friendships that will continue beyond the end of the pastoral relationship, and performing official pastoral functions or being involved in the future ministerial life of the congregation.

The departing pastor bears the primary responsibility for helping members of the congregation he or she formerly served understand that it is no longer appropriate for the former pastor to officiate at services for them. It is especially important and helpful for the departing pastor to take the responsibility for saying a clear and loving “no” to such invitations without putting the responsibility for the decision on the interim pastor or the new pastor serving the congregation.

A former pastor and his or her family should seek a new congregation in which to worship, even if they are staying in the same community in retirement or as the pastor begins another kind of service. This is essential during the transition time between installed pastors. However, former pastors should be cautious about assuming that they can return to the former congregation as soon as the new pastor is called. In order to support the formation of a strong bond between the new pastor and the congregation, a former pastor should continue to stay separated from his or her previous congregation and find a new community of faith.

A former pastor of a congregation should avoid conversations about what has happened in the church after his or her departure. Under no circumstances should the former pastor indicate to church members disapproval or disappointment about the decisions or leadership of the interim pastor or the new installed pastor. The former pastor will inevitably have only partial information about any event or decision within the congregation he or she used to serve. In any case, for the former pastor to comment negatively about the current leadership of the church is unhelpful and inappropriate. The greatest tribute to the leadership of the former pastor is a congregation that continues to thrive with a new pastor.

Social Media Policy for Abingdon Presbytery¹

Abingdon Presbytery recognizes the importance of social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, as a tool for contemporary ministry. However, with any tool, there is the possibility for misuse or abuse, therefore Abingdon Presbytery offers the following social media policy guidelines:

1. Churches are encouraged to develop their own Facebook pages or groups for the sake of connectional ministry, with laypeople helping to share in the posting and management of page and content.
Rationale: This helps the church in its communication and witness in the virtual mission field and helps ensure that its virtual ministry will not end at the termination of the pastorate.
2. Pastors (including CLPs) should refrain from initiating personal friend requests with congregational members from current congregations and from past congregations, unless a period of five years has elapsed since departure. Note: it's okay for pastors to accept "friend requests" from current church members if they desire to do so.
Rationale: A member might not want to be a pastor's "Facebook friend" but might feel awkward about denying such a request. By allowing the member to initiate the request, it respects the boundary of that member.
3. Upon the conclusion of a pastor's ministry, it is encouraged that pastors "unfriend" congregational members of the church they are departing from. If former church members choose to reinitiate a friend request, it is okay to accept provided that the relationship is not of a pastoral nature and at least one year has passed since departure.
Rationale: This allows the congregation to have a cleaner break from the ministry of the pastor and is in keeping with respecting traditional ministerial boundaries.
4. Pastors should respect traditional ministerial boundaries with previous church members, including refraining from offering pastoral care by phone, text, or through social media.
5. All ordained individuals (pastors, elders, and deacons) should refrain from:
 - a. Posting anything one would not say to another in person.
 - b. Posting anything that might reflect poorly on his or her capacity to lead, ability to express sound judgment, or overall maturity as an ordained leader in the PC(USA).
Rationale: Some comments individuals make on social media tend to be reactionary and akin to "a rant." These can be embarrassing and reflect poorly on the individual posting them and the organizations they represent. Comments like these can be divisive and tear apart the Body of Christ. Often reactive comments are made without all the facts or information showing poor judgment on the part of the poster. Finally, spreading false assumptions can be akin to gossip. These behaviors are in contradiction to scripture and violate one's ordination vows.
 - c. All ordained individuals (pastors, elders, and deacons) should refrain from:
 - i. Making inappropriate postings that may include discriminatory remarks, harassment, and threats of violence or similar inappropriate or unlawful conduct
 - ii. Divulging confidential information

¹ Adapted from the social media policy of Great Rivers Presbytery

- iii. Posting any derogatory statements relating to another’s character or ministry
Rationale: Some of these behaviors are unethical and others are out-right illegal

Please note that violations of these social media guidelines may subject the individual to civil, criminal, and/or ecclesiastical charges or discipline.

Exit interviews

Exit interviews with the departing church professional and with the session are extremely helpful. These interviews help all parties begin to disengage and begin the process of moving forward into the future. This is true whether the person leaving the congregation is an interim pastor who has served the church for a year or so, or a long-term installed pastor who is leaving after many years of service.

Sometimes, sessions or pastors, or even COM members, might feel that an exit interview “isn’t really necessary” or that “we know what the departing pastor will say.” However, exit interviews are almost always helpful for the departing church professional, the congregation, and the COM. In fact, the COM may encourage a session to have an exit interview with any departing staff person.

Exit interview models

Exit interview with the departing pastor or departing interim pastor

The liaison or team of persons from the COM should conduct an exit interview with the departing pastor soon after the pastor announces his/her departure. The exit interview helps provide closure for the pastor and family. It also provides information that may be helpful to the COM as it works with the congregation during its search.

1. Ask the pastor to talk about things she/he feels good about their work with the congregation.
2. Ask about barriers to effective ministry. These barriers might be in the congregation, or community, or the pastor’s personal situation.
3. Ask about the relationship between the pastor and session.
4. Ask about advice they might give to the next pastor.
5. Talk about appropriate and inappropriate contact with the congregation after the pastor has left. This is important. It is especially important if the pastor is staying in town or moving to a nearby location. The *Book of Order* says, “After the dissolution of the pastoral relationship, former pastors and associate pastors shall not provide their pastoral services to members of their former congregations without the invitation of the moderator of session.” (G-2.0905)

Exit interview with the session

It is best to conduct the exit interview with the session after the pastoral relationship has been dissolved. The interview helps the congregation to begin to disengage from the pastor. The moderator of session appointed by presbytery should be present for this interview.

1. Discuss positive growth in the life of the congregation during the pastor's time with the congregation.
2. Discuss any difficulties there might have been in the relationship between the pastor and session/congregation.
3. Discuss ways the session might build a strong relationship with the next pastor.
4. Discuss appropriate and inappropriate contact with the congregation after the pastor has left. This is important. See (5) above.
5. Plan ways the session might lead the congregation to disengage with the former pastor, associate, or other staff person.
6. Give a brief overview of the call process.
7. Begin discussion about maintaining regular worship and congregational life during the transition and search for new pastoral leadership.
8. Discuss the benefits of the session appointing a transition team consisting of session members and significant members of the congregation.

Finding temporary leadership

The session is responsible for providing regular worship and other services for the congregation. During the time between the departure of the installed or contracted pastor and the arrival of the interim pastor, if one is used, the session will take a much more active part in every aspect of the leadership of the congregation. Among other responsibilities, the session finds guest preachers and pastors able to provide emergency pastoral care. The presbytery maintains a pulpit supply list of ministers and commissioned lay pastors willing to conduct worship services and provide pastoral care on a temporary basis.

The COM will encourage congregations to consider women and/or racial-ethnic pastors as preachers or for a temporary pastoral relationship. Congregations that have not experienced the gifts of clergywomen or racial ethnic ministers may discover that they have a greater spirit of inclusiveness and openness than they have previously known. The COM may also want to appoint women and racial ethnic ministers to serve as moderators of sessions, and add the names of women and racial ethnic ministers and candidates to the pulpit supply list for the presbytery.

Options for pastoral leadership

Congregations, with the advice and consent of the COM, have a variety of options that they may consider for pastoral leadership. Their decisions will be based upon their needs and resources as well as their vision for future mission and ministry.

Some sessions will want to move directly into the process to call a minister of the Word and Sacrament. Those congregations should be urged by the COM to covenant with an intentional

interim pastor who can provide pastoral services and specialized leadership for the transition time between called pastors.

Other congregations may not be ready to proceed toward a full search. They may, with the assistance of the COM, opt to seek a designated pastor. During the time of the search for the designated pastor, they would benefit from the services of an interim pastor.

When a congregation is unable to provide the compensation for a full-time minister of the Word and Sacrament, a bi-vocational pastor or a commissioned lay pastor may provide pastoral leadership.

With the advice of the COM, still other congregations may opt for a stated supply pastor, temporary supply pastor, or student pastor. In some circumstances, with the consent of the COM, a session may choose to covenant with a minister of another denomination for temporary services.

Sessions in congregations that have an installed pastor may invite a minister of the Word and Sacrament who is not serving a congregation to become a parish associate, with or without remuneration.

A common calling between denominations

The PC(USA) is in full communion and partnership with three other denominations: The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), the Reformed Church in America (RCA), and the United Church of Christ (UCC).

Through adoption of *A Formula of Agreement* (found in *Book of Order* appendix B), our four churches have been able to provide for the exchange of ordained ministers so that our common ministry and mission are enhanced and strengthened. Within each of our churches, congregations have been able to utilize the gifts of ordained ministers from other full communion partner churches.

Orderly exchange of ordained ministers is for the sake of participation by the four churches in the mission of God, and can be an important sign of our unity in Christ. This particular provision of full communion seeks to allow and encourage the more effective use and deployment of our churches' ordained leaders in order to enhance our shared ministry mission. It encourages those in our churches who are responsible for the deployment of ordained ministers to draw on the available ministers of the other participating churches to meet mission needs.

Highlights of the agreement and orderly exchange process:

- The orderly exchange process begins with the identification of a ministry need by the appropriate regional body of the “inviting” church and the identification of an ordained minister from a Formula of Agreement partner church who may serve in that ministry setting
- The judicatory of the “inviting” church initiates the process of the orderly exchange between the congregation to be served and the ordained minister. The ordained minister does not initiate the process of exchange.

- The “inviting” church then should consult with the appropriate regional body of the ordained minister to determine the suitability of the potential service and to receive the concurrence of the “sending” body—presbytery, classis, conference, association, or synod. The ordained minister remains accountable to the sending church for continuation of ministerial status.
- A ministry in a congregation of another church is not intended for a “first call” candidate; experience in and knowledge of one’s own tradition is seen as necessary before serving in a different tradition.
- This agreement applies only to persons who are ordained ministers of Word and Sacrament and does not apply to persons who are locally trained and authorized ministers—commissioned pastors (RCA), commissioned lay pastors (PCUSA), licensed ministers (UCC), synodically authorized ministers (ELCA).
- These ministers are intended for a designated extended period of time. Should an ordained minister of one church intend to serve permanently in another church then the process of the transfer of ministerial status should be followed.
- Should a disciplinary process be necessary, the ordained minister remains under the jurisdiction of the sending body, but the inviting body may be asked to participate as necessary.

Ministers ordained by other denomination

Ministers ordained by other denominations may, at the discretion of the presbytery, serve in temporary pastoral relationships with congregations. Except for ministers of Formula Partner churches, ministers of other denominations may not be installed in PC(USA) congregations. Presbyteries have no obligation to allow ministers of other denominations to serve in their congregations. Thorough reference checking, examination, and mentoring are essential before beginning a relationship between a congregation and a minister ordained in another denomination.

An Outline for Calling a New Pastor

1. Dissolving the pastoral relationship

- Pastor notifies COM and presbytery leader of his/her intention to accept another call or retire and discusses necessary steps and timeline in relocation or retirement process
- Presbytery leader or a member of COM is present in worship on the Sunday when the pastor's departure is announced.
- COM representatives meet with the departing pastor for an exit interview.
- COM liaison consults with the clerk of session when the pastor's intention to leave is known to the congregation, regarding the process for dissolution of the pastoral relationship (G-2.0901).
- Session calls a congregational meeting to concur with the pastor's request to dissolve pastoral relationship with the congregation. Clerk of session informs COM liaison of the congregation's action.
- Presbytery acts to dissolve the pastoral relationship.

2. Planning the transition

COM liaison meets with the session and moderator (not the departing pastor) for the purpose of:

- A pastoral visit to the session early in the transition time
- An exit interview with the session to share perspectives and feelings about the church's ministry during the departed pastor's tenure, and to assess church's present situation
- Sharing information and answering questions about the transition process
- Consulting about leadership for the transition:
 - Moderator of session
 - Immediate pulpit supply and pastoral care
- Sharing information about interim minister or other temporary pastoral leadership
- Discussion of types of pastoral leadership: called and temporary
- Planning for the work of a transition team and/or an interim pastor search committee
- Discussing a congregational mission study

3. Engaging the congregation in a mission study

Abingdon Presbytery requires a full mission study at the beginning of the search process, with full congregational participation. This mission study may be done as part of the interim work, alongside a pastor trained in transitional ministry.

4. Assessing the congregation's finances

- Session considers the congregation's financial situation to determine whether there will be sufficient funds to support the pastor the church might call.

- The cost of housing in the community will be an important consideration for any potential candidates to be called as pastor. It may be helpful for a session to consider shared equity in the pastor's purchase of a home.
- Pastoral search expenses, as well as moving expenses for the new pastor, must also be considered.
- Session reviews the options for pastoral leadership and decides whether to proceed to the election of a Pastor Nominating Committee to seek a called pastor.
- Session asks the COM for assistance in finding temporary pastoral leadership.

5. Electing the pastor nominating committee

- After the departure of the pastor and the completion of the mission study, the session may determine that the congregation is ready and able to proceed to seek a new pastor and request authorization from COM to begin the search process. The session first calls a congregational meeting to elect a PNC.
- The session recommends to the congregation the number of people to serve on the PNC, and ordinarily asks the congregational nominating committee to nominate members of the congregation to serve on the PNC.
- The PNC must be representative of the whole congregation. Public notice of the time, place, and purpose of the meeting must be given with adequate notice as determined by the session (G-1.0502).
- At the time of the congregational meeting to elect a PNC, nominations from the floor of the meeting are in order, provided that members so nominated have given their consent in advance.

6. Orienting and organizing the pastor nominating committee

Ordinarily the liaison meets with session, moderator, and PNC for the purpose of:

- Reviewing the theology of call
- Reviewing the search process with the session present, after which session members not serving on the PNC leave and the liaison meets with the PNC for the purpose of orienting the PNC to their work
- Organization of the PNC
 - Election of chairperson, secretary of the PNC
 - Planning communication and resources
 - Scheduling PNC meetings
- Review of process

7. Writing and submitting the Ministry Information Form (MIF)

- PNC plans how it will develop the following and makes assignments:
 - Goals and mission statement (grows out of mission study and requires consultation with the session)
 - Selecting and contacting references who know the congregation well
 - Narrative section (composed by PNC)

- Position description, qualifications, and pastoral skills (developed in consultation with the session and personnel committee)
- Compensation package for new pastor (developed in consultation with session)
- PNC plans to ensure equal opportunity for service
The COM is responsible to assist the PNC to understand its role in implementing the PC(USA)'s commitment to equal opportunity employment. All candidates should be considered based on the gifts they bring to ministry and not on cultural factors such as gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnic background, age, disability, or marital status. The church of Jesus Christ is enriched when we welcome diversity in our leadership.
- PNC shares draft of MIF with COM liaison and presbytery leader for helpful suggestions
- PNC completes MIF and presents to session for approval
- COM approves the MIF
- PNC sends a copy of the MIF to presbytery office
- PNC submits MIF at clc.pcusa.org (Stated Clerk can assist with initial password and log-on information)

8. Collecting and screening Personal Information Forms (PIF)

COM liaison meets with PNC for the purpose of:

- Learning how to evaluate potential candidates from PIFs
- Planning for communications with prospective pastors
- Considering the use of supplemental questions
- Learning how to do effective reference checking
- Learning how to do productive interviewing
- Planning for communication with potential pastors, keeping those in whom the PNC is interested informed of the committee's anticipated timeline and process, and informing those no longer under consideration of the committee's decision

Following the meeting:

- PNC develops procedures and criteria for evaluating PIFs
- PNC develops supplemental questions to be sent to candidates in whom they have serious interest, if desired
- PNC receives PIFs from matching process by Church Leadership Connection, recommendations of others, and self-referrals by interested ministers and candidates
- PNC screens PIFs to determine those it wants to consider further
- PNC communicates with potential pastors by telephone or email to determine which are interested in consideration
- PNC sends supplemental questions to potential pastors and sets a firm date by which all must be received.
- PNC screens the responses to supplemental questions and determines which potential pastors they wish to interview.

- The names of those who remain on the list are submitted to the presbytery leader for an initial reference check before the first interview. Then the PNC is cleared to proceed with conversation with the candidates.

9. Interviewing potential pastors

- Initial interview process
 - Conduct interviews via telephone or zoom
 - Hear candidates preach through videos and online worship services
- After initial interviews, rank the candidates in order of preference
- Check references
- Arrange for one or more candidate to visit with the PNC in your community

10. Choosing the nominee

- PNC makes final choice of candidate including finalizing terms of call and consults with COM liaison
- PNC determines candidate's willingness to accept call if extended
- The nominee meets with the COM for their approval

11. Formally extending the call

- PNC asks session to call a congregational meeting
- The PNC presents the selected pastor to the congregation for its approval. Suggestions for the congregational meeting to call a pastor:
Once the PNC has decided on its candidate of choice and the nominee and the COM have agreed, the PNC should notify the session to call a congregational meeting. The moderator of the session or some other minister will preside. The church may ask the candidate to preach a sermon during the worship service before the congregational meeting. At the meeting the PNC will present its nominee and the terms of call; these usually come in two separate motions. It is recommended that the vote for calling the pastor be by written ballot. A majority of the voters who are present and voting is required to elect. Occasionally there is a minority voting against the motion to call the pastor. The nominee should be informed by the moderator of the nature and circumstances of the decision in order to make an informed decision of whether or not to accept the call.
- The nominee accepts or declines the call.
- The PNC works with the session to assist the new pastor and the congregation in the transition to new leadership.
- The PNC participates in presenting the new pastor to the presbytery for approval.

12. Installing the new pastor

The presbytery installs the new pastor during a worship service in the congregation (see W-4.0402). Traditionally, the congregation hosts a welcoming reception following the service of installation.

13. Follow up with support after installation

Both the congregation and the presbytery have the responsibility to build relationships of trust and care with the new pastor and his/her family. Often, the PNC acts in an informal capacity after the call begins to provide helpful feedback, answer questions, and introduce the new pastor to the community.

Coordinating with CPM for first call candidates

The preparation for ministry process

The process of preparation for the office of Minister of the Word and Sacrament is found in G-2.06 and is further detailed in the policies of Abingdon presbytery. In addition to having earned a degree from a theological institution accredited by the Association of Theological Schools, those who wish to be ordained as ministers of Word and Sacrament in the PC(USA) must also fulfill other requirements. Those who are ready to receive a call must complete the following:

- **Time requirements**
A person must have been under care for a minimum of two years, that time beginning on the date when she or he was enrolled by the presbytery as an inquirer. The person must have been a candidate for at least one year, that time beginning on the date when he or she was enrolled by the presbytery as a candidate.
- **Process requirements**
The person must have progressed properly from church member to inquirer to candidate. The candidate must have had a final assessment by the CPM and certified by the presbytery as ready for examination for ordination, pending a call.
- **Educational requirements**
The person must have completed both college and seminary education with satisfactory grades, including the study of Greek and Hebrew and their use in exegesis.
- **Ordination examinations**
The five standard ordination examinations must have been successfully completed, or an alternative examination process has been agreed to and voted upon by the presbytery for the particular candidate.
- **Other requirements of the presbytery or CPM**
Abingdon presbytery requires candidates to complete at least one unit of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE).
- **Final assessment**
The CPM must have completed the final assessment and certified that the candidate has permission to circulate their PIF.

Only after all the requirements have been fulfilled may a candidate proceed to use the services of the Church Leadership Connection and seek a call.

When a PNC indicates their wish to extend a call to a candidate for ministry who has been certified ready to receive a call, the COM and CPM will coordinate the interviewing process.

If the candidate is from another presbytery, the Book of Order (G-2.0702) states that:

- It is ordinarily the responsibility of the presbytery of call to conduct the examination for ordination.
- Ordinarily, it is the presbytery of call that ordains a candidate. However, the candidate may request his/her presbytery of call to permit the ordination service to take place within the presbytery of care, and the presbytery may grant such permission when requested by the presbytery of call. In these matters, coordination between presbyteries is critical. If ordination takes place in the presbytery of care, the presbytery of call is still required to have a service of installation.

These are the steps when a candidate under care of another presbytery is seeking a call in Abingdon:

- You will need to have conversations with the candidate, the CMP in the candidate's presbytery, and the calling congregation.
- Review the policies of your presbytery and make certain he or she meets all the requirements of Abingdon presbytery.
- Review key time schedules.
- Before any commitments are made to the PNC or the candidate, initiate a conversation with the CPM of care to ensure the candidate's suitability for the call for which she or he is under consideration.
- The COM then interviews the candidate.

Checking References

On what grounds do COMs or PNCs have the right to screen out candidates?

1. Employment as a Presbyterian minister is not a right. Courts have established that the ministries of the Church of Jesus Christ belong to the Church and tasks are assigned to particular persons for the service of its members and the world. The Church must make such assignment responsibly.
2. The Committee on Ministry serves Abingdon Presbytery by counseling with churches regarding calls for permanent pastoral relations and visiting and counseling with every PNC elected to nominate a pastor. It also advises with the PNC regarding the merits, availability, and suitability of any candidate or minister whose name is considered for nomination to the congregation and shall have the privilege of suggesting names to the PNC.
3. No call to a permanent pastoral relationship shall be in order for consideration by the presbytery unless the church has received and considered the committee's counsel before action is taken to issue a call.

Are there prohibited questions?

Neither civil nor church law mandate prohibited questions. Many Presbyterians who serve on PNCs are familiar with secular employment practices where it is illegal to ask certain questions of a prospective employee. Because the ministries of the Church belong to the Church, the rules are different for search committees considering church professionals.

However, as the apostle Paul wrote, while all things are possible, not all things are wise. Interview and reference questions should focus on ministry effectiveness **only**. The PNC wants to know if the person would be appropriate for the position being filled. The COM and the Presbytery Leader want to know if this person would be acceptable in the presbytery. Remember that the person being questioned is also forming an opinion about you, the questioner. Think about the impression you want the person to have about you congregation and the presbytery as you decide which questions to ask. **It is not unusual for a pastor to close conversation with a congregation as a result of inappropriate questions about non-ministry subjects.**

What questions should a pastor nominating committee ask of a reference?

It is appropriate and important to ask questions related to the candidate's skills and experience that relate to the position being filled. Such questions might be:

1. Tell me about _____'s worship leadership.
2. How does _____ deal with conflict?
3. What are some of _____'s strengths and weaknesses?
4. Would you go to _____ seeking pastoral care?
5. Is there anything else about _____ that you would like to share?

It is important to ask references to respond only on the basis of first-hand knowledge. It is usually helpful to tell the reference a bit about the congregation, community, and position for which the candidate is being considered.

Under no circumstances should a PNC contact members of a pastor's present congregation without his or her permission to do so.

Are there other questions that a COM member or the Presbytery Leader should ask?

This reference check is about membership in presbytery and about ministry capabilities in the specific location. The COM or presbytery leader might ask:

1. Why is _____ leaving his/her current position?
2. Are there any things about _____ that negatively affect his/her ability to do ministry?
3. Would you welcome _____ to serve a similar position in your presbytery?
4. Do you know anything about _____ that would be hurtful or embarrassing to the congregation and presbytery if it became public knowledge?

When a presbytery check reveals negative information, what should COM or staff share with a PNC about a negative reference?

1. If the information leads the COM moderator or presbytery leader to have serious doubts about the candidate's ability to do effective ministry in the particular calling church, they

should share those concerns as a consultant, giving specific areas of ministry where they see potential difficulty.

2. If reliable information is of such a serious nature that the candidate should not be considered further, the COM must determine whether they are willing to permit the PNC to continue consideration of the candidate. The COM should inform the PNC of its decision quickly.
3. The presbytery leader will offer PNCs reference checks based on a red light, yellow light, green light system. Green lights mean proceed with the interview process; there are no red flags about this candidate. Yellow lights mean that there may be some further questions or concerns that need to be addressed, and the presbytery leader will recommend particular questions and conversations that should take place between the PNC and the candidate. Red lights mean that this candidate will not be a good fit, and there are serious issues; PNCs should move on and interview other candidates.

Background Checks

Background checks are additional assessments of a candidate's character and fitness for employment. Abingdon presbytery requires every pastor have a background check on file. Pastors are also required to sign the presbytery's sexual misconduct and child/youth protection policies.

Additional information for working with congregations seeking pastors

The importance of interim ministry

A skilled interim pastor not only serves in all pastoral capacities during the transition time, but also helps the congregation deal with the feelings that accompany the departure of a pastor, such as grief, relief, confusion, and anxiety. An interim pastor helps the congregation think carefully about its ministry in the past, present, and future. An interim pastor helps a congregation deal with problems before a new pastor is called so that the new pastor can have as happy and healthy a start as possible. Most important, an interim pastor understands that her or his most important responsibility is to help the congregation prepare to welcome the new pastor so that both the congregation and the new pastor can thrive as they serve together in ministry.

Some sessions may see the transition time as an opportunity to save money by not using an interim pastor. There may be occasions when it is impossible for a congregation to afford to pay an interim pastor. However, those are congregations that should be encouraged to examine their finances very carefully to be certain that they have the financial resources to call a pastor.

There are congregations who cannot find a suitable interim pastor. In such cases, the COM will need to provide extra assistance to the congregation as they move through the transition time toward calling a new pastor.

Section Five: The COM and Church Professionals

Ordination

written by Joseph D. Small, Office of Theology and Worship

The church's ministry and mission are the calling of the whole people of God. In the Reformed tradition, ministry is not the domain of a particular group of people called "clergy," who lead a larger group called "laity." This un-Reformed clergy/lay distinction obscures the reality that all specific ministries of the church are particular expressions of the ministry of the whole body of Christ. All Christians are gifted for ministry, and there is a real sense in which all are ordained to ministry in their baptisms.

Within the ministry of the whole people of God, persons may be called to perform specific functions that are important to the life of particular communities of faith. However, some functions are considered to be necessary to the spiritual health and faithful life of every Christian community. The church gives order to these necessary functions by regularizing their shape, their duties, their qualifications, and their approval. These "ordered ministries," and the persons who are called to them, are established in ordination—the whole church's act of setting apart for particular service.

The Presbyterian Church (USA), following the development of Reformed ecclesiology, ordains persons to three ordered ministries: ministers, elders, and deacons. These three ministries represent two ecclesial functions: ministries of the Word performed by presbyters (pastors and elders) and ministries of service performed by deacons.

Ministers of Word and Sacrament, traditionally called "teaching elders," and elders, traditionally called "ruling elders," are both presbyters. Identifying ministers by their teaching role emphasizes the primacy of the Word and the centrality of the "teaching church." The designation *ruling* elder is easily misunderstood, however. The historic understanding of the "ruling" exercised by elders has less to do with managerial governance than with *ruling out* or *measuring* the work of ministry, the fidelity of communal and personal lives, and the progress of the gospel in the church. The service of deacons is to lead the church in its ministries of compassion (distributing aid, caring directly for the poor, the sick, refugees, and prisoners), and justice (working for equity in society).

Ordination to one of the church's ordered ministries is not the simple recognition that a person possesses "gifts for ministry," or that an office suits a person's abilities. It does not follow naturally from a person's "sense of call." Ordination is certainly not about access to position, influence, or power in the church. Ordination is the church's act of recognizing the movement of the Holy Spirit in the interactions among the whole church's ordering of ministries, its standards for these ministries, and its current needs, together with prayerful discernment by persons, congregations, and presbyteries.

Ordination is a gift, not a right. The "spiritual welfare of the church" depends, in large measure, upon its recovery of an understanding of the ministry of the whole people of God, the ordered ministries of the church, and the gift of ordination.

Ordination to other than installed positions

Probably most candidates are ordained as minister of the Word and Sacrament to an installed position as a pastor in a congregation. But a presbytery may choose to ordain a person to a temporary pastoral position or to another type of validated ministry. Ultimately, the decision should be based on what will advance the presbytery's mission and ministry. The call should be for service to a church or other work in the mission of the church that is acceptable to the candidate and the presbytery.

Membership in presbytery and validated ministries

G-2.0503 Categories of Membership

A minister of the Word and Sacrament is a member of a presbytery and shall be engaged in a ministry validated by that presbytery, a member-at-large as determined by the presbytery, or honorably retired.

a. Engaged in a Validated Ministry

A validated ministry shall:

1. Demonstrate conformity with the mission of God's people in the world as set forth in Holy Scripture, the *Book of Confessions*, and the *Book of Order* of this church;
2. Serve and aid others, and enable the ministry of others;
3. Give evidence of theologically informed fidelity to God's Word;
4. Be carried on in accountability for its character and conduct to the presbytery in addition to any organizations, agencies, and institutions served; and
5. Include responsible participation in the deliberations, worship, and work of the presbytery and in the life of a congregation of this church or a church in correspondence with the PC(USA) (G-5.0201).

b. Member-at-large

A member-at-large is a minister of the Word and Sacrament who has previously been engaged in a validated ministry, and who now, without intentional abandonment of the exercise of ministry, is no longer engaged in a ministry that complies with all the criteria in G-2.0503a. A minister of the Word and Sacrament may be designated as a member-at-large because he or she is limited in his or her ability to engage in a ministry fulfilling all of the criteria for a validated ministry due to family responsibilities or other individual circumstances recognized by the presbytery. A member-at-large shall comply with as many of the criteria in G-2.0503a as possible and shall actively participate in the life of a congregation. A member-at-large is entitled to take part in the meetings of the presbytery and to speak, vote, and hold office. The status of the member-at-large shall be reviewed annually.

c. Honorably Retired

Upon request of a member of presbytery, the presbytery may designate the member honorably retired because of age or physical or mental disability.

Abingdon Presbytery shall determine the ministers of Word and Sacrament who are in an approved validated ministry. The presbytery, through the COM, shall be guided by the following criteria to determine if a ministry is considered validated.

- a. *The ministry of validated ministers shall be in demonstrable conformity with the mission of God's people in the world as set forth in Holy Scripture, the Book of Confessions, and the Book of Order.*

A presbytery mission statement is needed to determine if a particular ministry is in “conformity with the mission of God’s people.” This statement should be as comprehensive as possible, flexible, dynamic, periodically assessed and modified as new concerns emerge or new human resources become available. It should include:

- Ministry within its congregations;
- Mission projects and other forms of ministry that the presbytery believes it should address, for example, schools, day-care projects, chaplaincies and pastoral care, pastoral counseling and pastoral education services, and health care facilities and services;
- Ministries in other service of this church that are related by organization, accountability, or structure to governing bodies, agencies, mission and ministry units or seminaries, and to interdenominational organizations such as councils of churches, CROP, and the Heifer Project;
- Ministries beyond the jurisdiction of this church, such as nondenominational or other service, for instance organizations dealing with housing programs, the farm crisis, drug and alcohol addition, or marriage and family problems.

- b. *A validated ministry shall be one that serves others, aids others, and enables the ministries of others.*

This criterion implies that the work being validated is oriented toward serving people and enabling them to serve other people. Conversely, it implies that a validated ministry is not primarily concerned with profit-making activities. This does not suggest that a person in a profit-making position cannot perform ministry; many laypersons do. Nor does it imply that the minister cannot be employed in a profit-making enterprise. The primary functions of one’s work, however, should relate to the service of people rather than to the production of goods or of profits. In this way the special gifts and training of a minister of Word and Sacrament provide a theological perspective.

A distinction should be made between validated ministry and the secular work that a bi-vocational minister might do. In the case of many bi-vocational pastors, a part-time ministry is validated, but secular work (such as being a farmer or teacher) is not.

- c. *The ministry shall give evidence of theologically informed fidelity to God's Word. This will normally require the Master of Divinity degree, or its equivalent, and the completion of all the requirements for ordination set forth in G-2.0607.*

Abingdon Presbytery has the authority to determine where theologically informed skills are needed to carry out its mission. This implies that work to which a validated minister is called makes active and effective use of the biblical and theological training that is required for ordination. Normally, this means that such work should provide opportunities to articulate the Christian faith. If a proposed calling does not provide such opportunity, questions should be raised as to whether it can be a validated ministry.

d. The ministry shall be carried on in accountability for its character and conduct to the presbytery and to organizations, agencies, and institutions.

Accountability here implies that a member of presbytery is answerable to the presbytery for agreed-upon end results. It is clearly inadequate for a presbytery to exercise its accountability relationship solely by collecting and reviewing annual report forms. At the very least, accountability to presbytery should involve a face-to-face review of the ministry of every validated minister not less than once every three years.

Presbytery should provide support that enables the person to carry out the ministry with maximum effectiveness. (For ministers in congregations, this support is provided in part through triennial visits to sessions and regular visits with ministers by the COM.) Persons serving in validated ministries might be given periodic opportunity to interpret their ministries to the presbytery so as to enlarge the presbytery's horizons. They should be included in the COM's pastoral care for all ministers of the Word and Sacrament.

The presbytery should also decide whether it would validate ministries for which there is no compensation. While neither the amount of time spent in the particular ministry nor the amount of compensation should be prime considerations in applying the criteria for validation, it must be noted that a lack of compensation and large time demands can be a means of misusing people and abusing the system of validation.

e. The ministry shall include responsible participation in the deliberations and work of the presbytery and in the worship and service of a congregation.

This criterion suggests that the presbytery minimum standards for attendance at presbytery meetings should be followed by those in validated ministry. One who is never present at meetings can hardly be described as an "active" member. Attending a committee meeting or working on a task force of the presbytery can sometimes count as an adequate substitute for attending a stated meeting of the presbytery itself. The working hours of some specialized ministers do not permit them to attend presbytery meetings. Some may lose money when they are not at work. These factors must be considered when requirements for presbytery attendance are decided.

Worship and service in a congregation also needs to be considered. Does this mean a congregation of this presbytery? Would work and worship in a church of another denomination qualify? Most presbyteries assume that a Presbyterian minister's participation should be in a PC(USA) congregation. Fair judgments about a minister's accountability and participation in the life of the church and in Abingdon presbytery are at the discretion of the COM of Abingdon Presbytery.

If one or more of the above criteria for validated ministry cannot be met, the minister should ask to be designated as a member-at-large.

In addition, G-2.0508 states that:

A minister of the Word and Sacrament whom the presbytery determines to no longer be engaged in a validated ministry (G-2.0503a) or to fulfill the criteria for membership at large (G-2.0305b), and who is not honorably retired (G-2.0503c), shall not have voice or vote in meetings of the presbytery, except when the matter under consideration pertains to his or her relationship to the presbytery. Names of such persons shall be reported annually to the presbytery by the stated clerk. If after three years the Minister of the Word and Sacrament does not meet the criteria for validated ministry or membership-at-large, the presbytery may delete that person's name from the roll of membership and, upon request of a session, dismiss that person to a congregation.

Examining ministers for membership

The *Book of Order* in G-3.0306 states:

Each presbytery determines the ministers of the Word and Sacrament who are its members and validates the ministries in which they are to be engaged. It shall be guided in this determination by written criteria developed by the presbytery for validating ministries within its bounds (G-2.0503a).

The presbytery shall examine each minister of the Word and Sacrament or candidate who seeks membership in it on his or her Christian faith and views in theology, the Sacraments, and the government of this church.

The presbytery may designate ministers of the Word and Sacrament to work as teachers, evangelists, administrators, chaplains, and in other forms of ministry recognized as appropriate by the presbytery. Those so designated may administer the Sacraments at times and places authorized by the presbytery.

Who does the examination?

The Abingdon Presbytery COM does the examination.

What different types of interviews are possible?

- The most common type of interview COMs face is **ministers from other presbyteries** who have or expect to have a call to a church within the bounds of the presbytery.
- A second common type of examination is that of **a candidate** who has or expects to have a call from a church within the bounds of the presbytery.
- **Ministers from other denominations**
- **Honorably retired** pastors may seek membership in Abingdon presbytery. The examination should be consistent with examinations of other ministers since the honorably retired may later seek to serve as an interim, parish associate, or other position within a church of the presbytery.
- **At-large members of presbytery**
- **Persons who have previously laide aside ordination** are required to re-enter through the same presbytery that granted release (G-2.0507). It is wise for the COM or other appropriate committee to hold a preliminary interview with the person, diligently search the record to

objectively ascertain the circumstances leading up to the minister's release from office, and having satisfied itself that everything is in order, give that permission to circulate that form in search of a call.

When does the examination occur?

The examination should take place after the PNC has chosen a candidate who has expressed interest in pursuing a call with the particular congregation. A congregational meeting cannot be called to vote on a candidate until after COM meets with and approves said candidate. The call is not complete until the COM has approved the minister for membership in the presbytery.

How shall we determine what questions to ask?

The general categories are Christian faith, views of theology, sacraments, and the government of the church. To consider more specific issues, the COM may wish to discuss among themselves ahead of time, to reach agreement about what specific questions will be asked and how to proceed.

Think together about the interview process

Consider a core group of questions that may be asked of every minister. Consider some optional questions that may be asked in certain circumstances but not in all circumstances (such as of validated ministers). The purpose of all questions should be to foster greater conversation.

In no case should members of the COM or other examining committee allow their egos to get in the way. Heated debate with an applicant is not called for. For the interview on the floor of presbytery, counsel the applicant if you believe there are omissions in their statement of faith or phrases that may trigger high intensity reactions from members of presbytery. The applicant may choose to do nothing about your warning, but at least you have shown them that you are concerned and helpful.

A postscript about care in the examination process

Some ministers share "war stories" about bad personal experiences. Sometimes these experiences happen because of racism, sexism, theological exclusivity, and numerous other reasons. Some people have misused the examination process as a means of advancing their own theological or social views or by asking some persons to prove their qualifications beyond what would be expected of others.

Be courteous, kind, thoughtful, and fair in your dealings with examinations for presbytery membership, remembering that the person you are talking to is likely to become a presbytery colleague.

Ministers of other denominations

See section 4 for more information about formula partners

Transfer of membership to the PC(USA)

Ministers of other denominations who are interested in becoming a minister of the Word and Sacrament in the PC(USA) should begin the process of inquiry by consulting with the Abingdon presbytery COM to determine whether or not there might be the possibility of a call for them in a PC(USA) congregation within the presbytery. In order to become a PC(USA) minister, a minister of another denomination (including Formula Partners) must:

- Be an ordained minister and provide evidence of being in good standing;
- Have a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university;
- Have a theological degree from an institution acceptable to the presbytery of call; and,
- Pass PC(USA) standard ordination exams (see G-2.0610).

It is only at this point that the minister of another denomination may enter a PIF in the CLC. If a call to appropriate work within the PC(USA) is extended, the minister of another denomination then must:

- Be examined and approved by the presbytery of call on their Christian faith, their knowledge of theology, and the system of government of the PC(USA);
- Answer the ordination questions in the affirmative;
- Furnish evidence that they have been officially removed from the rolls of the other denomination.

Under certain circumstances, the requirements listed above may be waived, but only the presbytery of call can grant waivers to the requirements listed in the Book of Order.

Remember:

1. Each presbytery decides the circumstances for receiving ministers of other denominations.
2. Abingdon presbytery is under no obligation to permit ministers of other denominations to serve within its bounds
3. The information above refers **ONLY** to ministers ordained in other denominations.
4. Recognizing the previous ordination of a minister of another Christian denomination is referenced in G-2.0505.

Pastoral care of church professionals

The COM is well aware of the stresses of ministry and the ways those stresses are visible in church professionals and in the congregations they serve. Board of Pensions statistics about clergy who suffer from stress-related illnesses are one proof of a reality that the COM knows because of their work with individual ministers and congregations. Stress in ministry has multiple causes, some the

result of changes in the larger culture, some stemming from an individual's own unique life experiences. The COM will not be able to address all causes of stress!

However, the COM has the power and the responsibility to address one of the commonest causes of stress: a sense of isolation. Providing pastoral care for church professionals is not a luxury to be enjoyed if there is time when everything else is done; it is an essential component of the COM's goal of nurturing and supporting healthy ministry in the presbytery.

Regular visitation

Ministers are not members of a congregation but of the presbytery itself. They therefore look to presbytery for pastoral care. The Committee on Ministry needs to be visibly and explicitly concerned for the care and support of these ministers and their families, as well as all other church professionals within its bounds and their families.

The presbytery leader and the COM take this regular pastoral contact with ministers very seriously, but other pressing responsibilities often push to the forefront. The COM must plan for a systemic way to provide regular contact with all minister members of the presbytery and special support for those who are new in ministry or under special stress. Key questions that must be asked in developing a strategy for visitation are:

- What has been our practice to date?
- How do we define a regular visit? Do all visits have to be face to face? Can some be made via phone or zoom?
- Who and how many persons will be involved with each visit?
- Who will develop the assignment schedule? Will a report be made? If so, what form will this report take and to whom will it go?
- If there is no written report made, what means do we have of ensuring accountability?
- How will we protect confidentiality?

Models for pastoral care in the presbytery

Pastor for pastors

Abingdon presbytery has given the official role of pastor to pastors to the presbytery leader. The pastor to pastors is provided with a reimbursable travel and expense account. Typical expenses may be to take a minister of the presbytery out to lunch or for coffee while they talk things over, to send a greeting card, to travel to the hospital to visit a sick minister, etc.

Colleague-consultant

For all new ministers coming into the presbytery, as well as newly ordained ministers, the COM will provide a colleague-consultant. This person should be experienced, know the area thoroughly, and be able to help the newcomer to find his/her way around the area and the presbytery. This person may become a friend to the newcomer.

COM liaison

Each member of the COM is assigned responsibilities with certain particular churches. The liaison becomes a source of care for the parish minister and session. By repeated visits and check-ins to the particular church, the liaison becomes known to the congregation and a trust relationship is formed. Occasions such as the triennial visit may provide a framework through which needs of the parish minister and congregation may be discovered and met.

Friendship/ministers group

This is an ad hoc group, which works under the direction of the COM. Their responsibility is to meet with all new members of presbytery, to be a friend to ministers on the fringe of presbytery or who are going through a conflict or malfeasance situation. Confidentiality is maintained and only general statistics and new project ideas are shared with the COM.

Newly ordained pastors

Newly ordained pastors can especially benefit from the pastoral care of the COM and of experienced ministers in the presbytery. Seminary education provides many essential skills and a body of knowledge that is invaluable as a foundation for pastoral ministry. However, seminary education cannot prepare every graduate for every eventuality in every congregation. Becoming a pastor is the result of the holy relationship between God, the congregation, and the newly ordained pastor. The transition from seminary to pastoral leadership can be stressful. Extra attention to the needs of a new pastor can be an important part of the COM's pastoral ministry, and a way to avoid longer-term problems for the new pastor and for the congregation she or he serves.

The Board of Pensions of the Presbyterian Church (USA)

A supportive resource to committees on ministry

Because the Board's mission is to provide benefits and financial assistance to the PC(USA) pastors, employees, and their families, it can help the COM in its role as the steward of pastoral relationships. Both the Board and the COM are among those called to serve in times of transition or crisis when sickness, disability, or death alters life's pattern for church workers.

The COM can help the Board by being sure that the Board receives appropriate information on time and that people know the services available to them. For example, you can:

- Assure that new pastors and their families are enrolled in the benefits plan, and help family members receive death benefits when they need them;
- Remind pastors in need that mental health counseling resources are available;
- Alert church treasurers to the resources available to them on the Board website (pensions.org).

The Board of Pensions administers pension, medical, disability, and death benefits as well as optional benefits such as dental, additional death benefits, 403(b)(9) investment opportunities, long-term care insurance, and more. Members may use the employee assistance program, enroll in health

and wellness programs, and attend educational programs including seminars on financial issues and planning for younger members, and pre-retirement planning for members and spouses 50 years and older. In addition, the Board's assistance grants help individuals cope with financial difficulties and pastors better serve their ministry. This program is funded entirely by gifts, legacies, endowment income, and half of the Christmas Joy Offering.

Compensation for Ministers

A theological and polity reference framework

“So our faith is robustly material, profoundly spiritual. It urges that enough of this world's goods be granted for the dignity of every human creature. It urges that we be weaned from the goods of this world to fix our life solely on the will of God. And however the Church settles the issue of ‘compensation,’ it must attend to those matters which must always be resolved in tension with each other. TO glorify God is not a heavenly, spiritual, or religious activity, as those the glory of God could be compartmentalized.”

--report of the General Assembly advisory committee on Churchwide Compensation to the 213th GA (2000)

The Book of Order enumerates the provision of equitable compensation as a responsibility of the session, and directs the presbytery to “*establish minimum compensation standards for pastoral calls and Certified Christian Educators and Certified Associate Christian Educators within the presbytery*” (G-3.0303(c)).

Compensation Review

Each session is required to review the adequacy of a pastor's personal compensation and to establish full reimbursement of their professional business related expenses each year.

Factors to consider in compensation:

- Presbyterian churches promise to pay their pastors fairly and to provide for their welfare as they work among the people of the congregation during the pastor's installation service. Geographic location plays a large part in determining fair compensation.
- Each session, upon the guidance and direction of the COM, should make regular, annual cost of living increases to the pastor's salary to keep up with inflation trends.
- Each session should consider merit increases in salary to reflect the increased level of competence demonstrated in the pastor's job performance, years of experience in the ministry, years served in the current pastorate, advanced degrees, special skills, and exceptional service.

In its concern and advocacy for adequate compensation for ministers, the COM should also consider the adequacy of compensation for other staff as well. The ministry of Christ's church is not well served when serious inequities exist.

Housing arrangements

Ministers of the Word and Sacrament are one of the few groups for whom the IRS allows a housing exclusion. This means that the portion of the minister's income that is used for housing expenses and/or a manse is not taxable income, but it is not exempt from social security (SECA) tax. The amount of money allocated as housing allowance may not exceed the fair rental value of the housing, including furnishings and utilities. The manse allowance must be at least 30% of the total effective salary.

Compensation Components

Compensation for pastors should ordinarily include:

- Cash salary
- Manse value, if provided [must be at least 30% of effective salary]
- Housing and/or utility allowance
- Full medical, pension, disability, and death benefits through the BoP
- Professional reimbursable expenses
 - Travel expenses/mileage
 - Continuing education expenses
 - Other expenses for pastoral ministry (e.g., office supplies, pastoral care, etc.)
- Paid continuing education leave of 2 weeks annually, cumulative to 6 weeks
- Minimum of 4 weeks paid vacation annually, non-cumulative
- Moving expenses, if the pastor is newly called to a position

Compensation for pastors may also include:

- Deferred compensation (403b)
- Social security offset
- Other benefits, if any (e.g., optional dental, additional death benefits, etc.)

Professional development

Helping ministers continue to grow

Presbyterians have always placed a high value on having a well-educated clergy. Ministers have a responsibility to continue to learn and grow after seminary graduation—intellectually, spiritually, and professionally. Committees on ministry will want to be especially attentive to the first five years of ministry, to pastors at mid-life, and to pastors in transition to retirement.

The COM can help ministers grow by:

- Ensuring that all calls contain both time and funds for professional development.

- Emphasizing the need and expectation for all ministers to engage in regular professional development.
- Monitoring the use of time and funds for professional development. The COM might consider asking ministers to report as to their use of professional development time and funds.
- Promoting the use of sabbatical leaves. As pastorates grow longer, it is more and more important to have sabbatical leave built into calls. Abingdon presbytery strongly encourages that ministers receive a three-month sabbatical leave after seven years of service. These sabbatical leaves are important for the health of long pastorates. Among the issues that congregational leaders need to address are:
 - Financing a sabbatical, including funding temporary leadership for the congregation. Some calls include a provision for a certain amount of money to be set aside yearly and saved for this purpose.
 - Developing a plan for the use of the sabbatical by both the ministry professional and the congregation. Two years ahead is about the right time to plan a sabbatical.
 - Securing pastoral leadership for the congregation(s) during the sabbatical.
 - Planning for re-entry following the sabbatical.
 - Developing a plan and a timeline for reports to the session and the congregation by the ministry professional on the use of the sabbatical.
- Providing professional development events, to meet the needs of ministers as they move through the developmental continuum.
- Encouraging ministers to attend seminars sponsored by the Board of Pensions.

Sabbatical Policy²

The Committee on Ministry recommends to churches and other ministries that Ministers of Word and Sacrament be granted a compensated sabbatical leave of no less than two months after the completion of six continuous years in one ministry within Abingdon Presbytery.

Sabbatical leave is an extension of the Biblical concept of renewal through the Sabbath day and Sabbath year. In the Sabbath year, the land was allowed to lie fallow to replenish itself. Scripture also abounds with illustrations of God’s leaders (Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist, Paul, and Jesus) spending significant time in rest, solitude, and reflection for continuation of ministry. Jesus spent 40 days in preparation for his ministry and other times away in prayer and rest. Ministers bear the burdens, the anguish, the pain, and the hurt of their parishioners on a continual basis. As a result, many, if not all, experience symptoms of emotional distress, stress related illnesses, and burnout which adversely affect the minister’s personal, family, and parish life, and greatly diminish effectiveness and personal well-being. Sabbatical leave is a time for the minister to refresh, nourish, and replenish body, mind, and soul for ministry. It is a time of rest, travel, study, and re-creation—a time away from the responsibilities of pastoral ministry. A renewed and refreshed pastor would then have the capacity to bring new energy and insight into the life of the congregation.

² This sabbatical policy is adapted from Presbytery of the Peaks.

Sabbatical leave is also for the congregation. It is an opportunity for the congregation to reflect on the whole nature and meaning of ministry and the place of the congregation in that ministry, to renew and strengthen congregational lay leadership, and to continue to grow in faith.

A minister on sabbatical leave would receive compensation, including salary and benefits. While it is not vacation, vacation time and study leave may be attached to the sabbatical, as agreed. It is not a time for a minister to seek a new call. The minister would be expected to stay in the present position for at least a year after the sabbatical. The session and the minister should work together to plan for the leave time, including:

- Purposes of the leave
- Interim arrangements, in consultation with the COM
- Division of responsibilities during the leave
- Grant proposals and applications
- Planning for re-entry, which may include sharing of learnings and benefits to future ministry together.

Congregations are encouraged to set aside funds each year and to apply for Sabbatical grants so that resources are available during the time of Sabbatical leave.

The COM strongly encourages that a Sabbatical leave be part of the initial terms of call for a minister beginning a new ministry within Abingdon Presbytery. In the event that a Sabbatical leave was not part of the initial terms of call, the minister is urged to work with the COM on a proposal for Sabbatical leave, which would be part of the subsequent terms of call to be approved by the congregation. The congregation should have a minimum of six months' notice prior to the beginning of Sabbatical leave.

Annual reviews of ministry

In order to support healthy ministry, COM can very helpfully encourage sessions and personnel committees to schedule regular reviews of ministry. These are not only an analysis of the work and accomplishments of the pastor and other staff. Rather, a ministry review includes the work of the entire congregation and its leadership.

Ministry is not a one-person show! No pastor, no matter how gifted, no matter how hard-working, no matter how spiritual, is able to do ministry all alone. Ministry is a collaborative effort in which a pastor plays an important role, but not the only important role. Therefore, it is important for a periodic ministry review of the work done by all parties, with the pastor, other staff, session, and congregation to be considered apart from annual performance reviews, which should also be considered apart from annual compensation reviews.

Ministry review

An important component of a health pastor-congregation relationship is the willingness to periodically assess the effectiveness of ministry with the recognition that ministry is a shared function of minister and members. Each year the pastor and session need to evaluate how they have

worked together to achieve their mutual goals for ministry during the preceding year. This facilitates a positive climate where the pastor and all church officers can make adjustments in allocating their energy and time as effectively as possible. Every three to five years, a session retreat or congregational mission study should be considered as a way to discern God's call to the congregation and the pastor for the next phase of their ministry together.

Performance review

An annual performance review of the pastor's service in the light of the ministry goals of the congregation should be conducted by the personnel committee of the session. This is an opportunity for the pastor to get constructive feedback about his or her practice of ministry, to discuss growing edges or new competencies needed, and to develop a plan for the minister's continuing education for the coming year that will address those issues. Ministry and performance reviews should take place before the compensation review, or the unique purpose of each is lost. Too often money becomes the focus or the weapon, and other issues are not dealt with in a constructive manner.

Compensation review

Each year the session and the congregation are expected to review the adequacy of a pastor's personal compensation and to establish full reimbursement of their professional business related expenses. Both the congregation and the COM must approve any changes in the terms of call before it is official.

Interim/Transitional Pastors

The COM of Abingdon Presbytery is responsible for developing policies as well as guidelines in relation to various aspects of support for interim ministry. These guidelines and policies should address the expectations of the presbytery, for example, in terms of:

- The process for securing the services of an interim/transitional pastor;
- Goals and objectives, particularly in light of developmental vs maintenance tasks during the interim;
- The interim pastor's relationship to the session and the staff, the PNC process, or the congregational mission study; and,
- General expectations in terms of specific contractual arrangements such as base salary, professional expenses, moving expenses, vacation, study leave, contract termination or extension, and salary benefits when unemployed or in transition to a new interim assignment.

Assessment and evaluation:

The COM will want to consult on a regular basis with the interim pastor and the session. The goals and objectives for the interim period will need to be monitored on some continuing basis and attention given to a mid-term assignment. If any modifications or an extension in an interim

contract are needed, the COM would play an integral role in negotiating any changes that might be appropriate. An exit interview is also suggested to provide a basis for the session's and committee's continued working relationship with the new pastor and the session.

Support systems and networking:

Given the level of stress that often accompanies interim ministry, personal support for interim pastors becomes even more important on a group and/or individual basis. It is helpful for the COM or related staff to facilitate both formal and informal support systems for interim pastors; this could apply to their families as well.

Leadership connections:

One of the complaints often heard from interim pastors is that they “feel cut off” from the presbytery or other governing bodies. Such a feeling may often be generated simply by the mobility involved in interim ministry. Presbyteries can assist in alleviating some of this concern by utilizing interim pastors as

- Members of presbytery committees,
- Consultants in their particular area of specialty such as grief work or conflict management,
- Or representatives to specialized conferences or events for sharing back with various presbytery leaders or program units.

Some interim pastors might appropriately be used in other interim situations within a presbytery, thus benefiting the presbytery and providing some stability to the pastors' lives.

Continuing Education

It is important for interim pastors to continue their skill development. In addition to the two weeks of interim training, transitional ministers might also consider training in conflict management, organizational dynamics, systems theory, nourishing spirituality, stress management, grief therapy, and leadership styles.

Designated Pastors

A designated pastor is a minister elected for a term of not fewer than one nor more than four years by the vote of the congregation. A designated pastor is chosen by the congregation's pastor nominating committee only from among those designated by the COM. A designated pastor is installed by the presbytery for the agreed term and then, if the congregation and pastor both desire, may be eligible to be installed as pastor after one or more years have elapsed.

Churches that might benefit from having a designated pastor

Congregations go through life-cycles and critical events much as people do. When a congregation is experiencing a significant opportunity for new direction, a major trauma, or unusually difficult transition, a designated pastor may be able to provide the kind of leadership needed. Among the times when the COM might suggest a designated pastor are:

- When a congregation is engaged in transformation.
- When a congregation has been wounded by conflict or by a “revolving door” in the pastor’s office through which a number of pastors have come and gone in a relatively few years.
- When congregations are considering engaging in shared ministry.
- When a congregation can benefit from a different pastoral leadership style.
- During a transition time, as when a founding pastor has left a new church development.

Pastors who might consider becoming a designated pastor

The work of a designated pastor is often quite challenging. Those who would appropriately consider such a call are:

- Persons who enjoy a difficult challenge.
- Persons who have skills and interest in congregational transformation.
- Persons who need to live within a certain area.

Pastors that a COM would choose to recommend to a congregation as a designated pastor should be able to serve effectively when properly matched to a position, and should place high priority in the care of their spiritual and mental wellbeing.

Ministers serving in specialized ministries

The COM has responsibility to work with and provide pastoral care for all church professionals, including those who are serving as chaplains or in other specialized ministries. Chaplains in hospitals and care centers, in the military, and pastoral counselors, as well as ministers serving in other validated ministries need and deserve pastoral care and expressions of interest in and appreciation for the important services they provide.

Most chaplains and pastoral counselors go through an extensive process of training and professional preparation in order to become certified. Military chaplains have a separate process for ecclesiastical endorsement. What follows is information for the COM in the process of ecclesiastical endorsement that is a required part of the certification process.

Ecclesiastical endorsement of ministers serving in specialized ministries

This information will assist the COM in working with persons seeking ecclesiastical endorsement. Ecclesiastical endorsement is an official declaration by the presbytery of membership/care that a person seeking certification as a chaplain or pastoral counselor has the gifts of ministry for this special calling. It is not a statement of competency. Endorsement is the responsibility of the religious body, while certification is the work of the professional organization. The following information is intended as a resource. Additional information is available from the professional organizations.

Ordained ministers and others serving in specialized pastoral ministries are required to provide to their respective professional organizations the evidence of endorsement and validation of their ministries by their faith group. Endorsement and validation of the ministry by the faith group is a requirement for certification and for continuing membership in the professional organization.

Terminology

Endorsement—An official declaration by the presbytery of care/membership, that a person has met its criteria to serve in a ministry of chaplaincy, pastoral counseling, or clinical education

Certification—The process whereby professional certifying agencies such as APC (Association of Professional Chaplains), AAPC (American Association of Pastoral Counselors), ACPE (Association for Clinical Pastoral Education, Inc), CPSP (College of Pastoral Supervision and Psychotherapy), declare a person to be in compliance with professional standards as delineated by that professional organization

Validation—An official declaration by the presbytery of care/membership, that a ministry complies with all the criteria enumerated in G-2.0502(a), without exception

Description of processes

Endorsement is the work of the faith group; therefore, the professional certifying organizations encourage presbyteries to establish a process for endorsement of persons seeking to enter, and/or persons serving in ministries of chaplaincy, pastoral counseling, or clinical education seeking certification. The professional organizations also encourage these persons to initiate a relationship with their presbytery early in their training so that the presbytery, through its committees, can provide guidance, discernment, and support. The declaration of endorsement addresses the following criteria through a process that might include written papers, interviews, and mutual discernment:

- Personal history
- Statement of faith
- Theological and clinical training
- Letters of reference
- Requirements for ministry
- Good standing and accountability within the faith community
- Ability to work collegially in diverse and pluralistic environments
- Willingness to adhere to a code of ethics prescribed by the institutions served, and by the certifying bodies

A letter of endorsement from the presbytery to the certifying body is continuous unless:

- The applicant has failed to successfully complete the membership or certification process
- There is a change in membership status or level in the professional organization
- There is a change in faith group affiliation, jurisdiction, or standing
- The certifying body requests a new letter

Certification is the process whereby professional certifying agencies such as APC, AAPC, ACPE, and CPSP declare a person to be in compliance with the professional standards as delineated by that professional organization.

Certification is the work of the professional organizations. Certification ordinarily addresses core standards such as:

- Clearly articulated professional standards
- Defined admission standards
- Articulated training standards
- Clinical supervisory responsibility and accountability
- Articulated certification steps and standards
- Code of ethics
- Clearly published fees
- Sustained training and ongoing certification
- Defined disciplinary process
- Continuing professional formation and peer review

Best practices

Ideas for supporting persons in specialized pastoral ministries

- Recognize persons in specialized ministries at presbytery meetings and in presbytery minutes
- Provide an annual review of ministry
- Visit the place of ministry by presbytery leader and/or COM liaison
- Encourage persons with pastoral gifts to serve on presbytery committees
- Encourage specialized ministers to serve as parish associates in local congregations
- Install persons in specialized ministries as is done with ministers in congregational settings
- Provide friendship/support/peer-group for persons in specialized pastoral ministries
- Provide retreats and educational events for persons in specialized pastoral ministries
- Nominate certified professionals to sit on COM and CPM

Ministers serving as military or Veterans Administration chaplains

Abingdon Presbytery coordinates with the Presbyterian Council for Chaplains and Military Personnel (PCCMP) to provide endorsement for clergy seeking chaplaincies in the military and VA. The endorsements are sent to the Department of Defense (DoD) or Veterans Affairs (VA) after the PCCMP endorsement process is successfully completed. Part of that process is approval from the clergy's presbytery.

Military chaplain endorsement provided by the PCCMP

The chaplain to the military is an ordained minister in uniform, "on loan" by the Church to the Army, Air Force, or Navy (which also provides chaplains for the Marine Corps and Coast Guard). Endorsement for military chaplains is provided by the PCCMP with the assistance of the presbytery of membership.

Military chaplains may be:

- An officer in the Reserve of National Guard with a commitment of two days each month, and two weeks of annual training;
- An officer with an initial three years of active service. Chaplains on active duty may later apply for an indefinite extension serving up to 30 years if promoted;
- A chaplain candidate—this program allows individuals to explore the military ministry option while attending seminary;
- A volunteer Civil Air Patrol chaplain.

PCCMP endorsement for Veterans Affairs chaplaincy

Veterans Affairs chaplains (serving as spiritual counselors in moral and religious problems) are concerned primarily with providing for the religious needs of hospitalized veterans. The chaplain provides a pastoral, sacramental, and instructional ministry to patients and, when necessary, to their families.

Appointments to the VA chaplain service are made under the authority of the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs in accordance with Civil Service regulations. VA chaplain ministry is normally within the bounds of a presbytery.

Process of endorsement

Applicants for endorsement by the PCCMP can find application forms at presfedchap.org. When those applications, with transcripts and other required attachments are received, the staff sends out letter of reference requests and seeks presbytery approval. When these are returned, the individuals are scheduled for interviews.

The focus of PCCMP interviews is not on theological competence but on aptitude and adaptability for ministry in a military or VA setting. Presbyteries are the only organizations that can set theological requirements and ordain.

When a presbytery votes to allow a minister to serve as a military chaplain, it normally also approves labor outside of the bounds of presbytery.

Some applicants look toward military chaplaincy as an ordaining call. When that is the case, the PCCMP can endorse them pending ordination. The PCCMP seeks to work closely with presbyteries in such cases. The PCCMP is most concerned in these cases to have the individual demonstrate a history of ministry before ordination.

When an endorsement is made by the PCCMP, copies go to the military branch or VA chaplains' office, to the presbytery, and to the individual.

The COM can support the endorsement process and chaplains by:

- Encouraging minister members to apply for endorsement with the PCCMP while applying for reserve or active duty chaplaincy in the service.

- Supporting only applications for military and VA chaplaincy of well trained and prepared ministers. Under normal circumstances, the minister should serve at least two years in an installed position after ordination before being considered for chaplaincy.
- Sending regular communications to chaplains serving outside of your bounds. Chaplains often feel abandoned by their presbyteries.
- Being aware that chaplains are also asked by the PCCMP to provide quarterly updates to the presbytery and PCCMP on their ministry.
- Considering chaplains as commissioners to synod and GA.
- Asking chaplains what special training they have. Many have extensive training in working with adolescents, suicide prevention, critical incident stress debriefing, and conflict resolution.
- Being in touch with chaplains as they approach military retirement. They may be willing to serve congregations in the presbytery. Most military chaplains retire from the military with 10-20 years of pastoral service still available.
- Noting that military chaplains serve in leadership of congregations and have administrative skills and the ability to work cooperatively with other faith groups.

The PCCMP can support COMs by:

- Keeping in touch with military and VA chaplain recruiters and discussing with the COM the standards they expect of the chaplains.
- Letting you know what pay and benefits come to military and VA chaplains so you can assess whether their terms of call are sufficient.
- Helping you contact your military members or those from any of your churches.
- Informing the presbytery if the chaplain faces military discipline. This helps the COM in the oversight of their ministries.
- Making visits to military chaplains at least every second year, and to most chaplains every year. The PCCMP can carry your concern to them.
- Assisting your churches and presbyteries in understanding military life, the strains of deployment and separation, and support of military families. This may be especially important as we currently have reserve and National Guard military members deploying from most of our presbyteries.
- Assisting you in locating your member chaplains and in identifying chaplains of other presbyteries who may be laboring in your bounds. You can then utilize such chaplains in supply preaching, moderating sessions, and the like.
- Assisting your pastors with military funeral honors.

Chaplains and the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA)

Through the Board of Pensions, the PC(USA) has agreed to the terms of USERRA. They include, when the individual returns to service in a PC(USA) entity (not necessarily the one they departed):

- The continued accrual of seniority and the pay thereof for PC(USA) clergy (or laity) serving in the military for up to five years,
- The accrual of pension benefits for the same service,
- The guarantee of reemployment upon release from military service. Payments to the BoP are due after the individual's return from military service. The liability falls upon the sending church. This places a burden upon churches and presbyteries to find appropriate clergy employment after return from the military.

Pensions for chaplains who do not earn military or VA pensions

PC(USA) active duty military and full-time VA chaplains are protected by the Chaplains Deposit Fund. The fund is commingled with the BoP investments and guarantees payment of pension dues at the median salary level for PC(USA) clergy who do not vest in the military or VA pension plans. This benefit has been provided since the Vietnam War to minimize the risk to a chaplain's pension from an acts or words which cause them to be forced from the military.

Tentmaking/Bi-vocational ministers

There are times when a particular church may wish to call a minister who is able to find sources of support other than the particular church. The Apostle Paul, for example, made tents for a living so that he would not have to burden the small, struggling fellowships of believers during the first century AD. From his example, we have adopted the term 'tentmaking' to describe a situation in which a minister of the Word and Sacrament works in a usually secular occupation and serves a particular church on a less than full time basis.

The Tentmakers Manual defines tentmaking in the following way:

A tentmaker-minister is one who divides the week's working hours between two or more positions, one in service as a Minister of the Word and Sacrament in a congregation (or in a ministry defined by the presbytery as valid) and the other in a secular position.

It is important to remember that while usually the secular position is done for remuneration, there are a number of instances in which the secular position is a vocation for which a person does not receive monetary compensation. For example, both women and men have chosen to do child-raising and home-making as their tentmaking vocation.

Why consider a tentmaker?

Often congregations will first consider a tentmaker because of the financial difficulties in supporting a full-time minister, and thus may consider this alternative out of desparations and a sense that they do not quite "measure up." Yet congregations and ministers who have chosen the tentmaking path have found in many cases it is a very healthy and rewarding ministry for both pastor and congregation. Studies done by the PC(USA) and other groups have shown high levels of satisfaction among tentmaking ministers and the congregations they serve.

The presbytery's role

The presbytery, upon recommendation of the COM, must first validate the position that makes the minister a member of presbytery. Because of time constraints, calls for tentmaking ministers should be carefully worked out by the COM, the church, and the minister who will fill the position. The time constraints will also affect how a minister participates in presbytery life, and this should be worked out carefully, too.

In addition, the COM should be sure that the following matters have been considered before approving a tentmaking call:

- That the tentmaker is not over-extended.
- That there will be satisfaction in each position the tentmaker holds.
- That the congregation will find the secular position acceptable.
- That the needs of the church can be met by this ministry.
- That there is a plan for the regular review of the ministry.

Abingdon presbytery can also consider using tentmakers as designated (term) and temporary, stated supply pastors.

Terms of call for tentmaker pastors

The combined compensation, that is, the compensation from both the ministry and the other position should be adequate to meet the minimum salary requirements of the presbytery and the needs of the tentmaker. A carefully written covenant (contract) is important. At least one member of the COM should assist in the covenant-making.

This covenant should include:

- The number of hours or work units that will be expected of the pastor for the church
- The pastoral activities that must have priority
- The commitments of lay leaders in the ministry of the church
- The length of service, if it's not an installed position
- The financial terms of call
- Vacation and study leave time

Such matters as the number of hours, the financial terms, and benefits should be clearly spelled out. There are tax and benefit issues that are unique for tentmaking ministers. The Board of Pensions regional representative can offer helpful guidance in these matters. Every minister of the Word and Sacrament must be given at least one month vacation, whether full or less-than-full time. It's not fair to expect a part-time minister to lead worship more Sundays than one who serves full-time.

Parish Associates

A parish associate is a minister who serves in some validated ministry other than the local parish, or is a member-at-large, or is retired, but who wishes to maintain a relationship with a particular church or churches in keeping with ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacrament.

A parish associate:

- Shall already be qualified as a continuing member of presbytery;
- Shall be nominated by the pastor with agreement of the session and presbytery, as well as the parish associate;
- Shall be responsible to the pastor on an “as needed, as available” basis with or without remuneration;
- Shall be under the supervision of the COM;
- Shall not involve a formal call;
- Shall be terminated upon due notice by the session when the call to the pastor is dissolved;
- May not be called to be the next installed pastor or associate pastor unless at least six months have elapsed;
- Shall be reviewed annually with changed in the relationship approved by presbytery.

Retired Ministers

According to the statistical information provided by the Research Services of the PC(USA), almost half of all pastors ordained in the PC(USA) are retired. Therefore, it becomes an important stewardship concern that the creative use of the skills and experience of retired ministers be facilitated in the church.

Services of retired ministers

The call to the ministry is a life-long one and does not cease with retirement. Ways of fulfilling the call will probably vary in the retirement years. Some of the best interim pastors and governing body staff in the church are honorably retired ministers. Retirees may also choose to serve as parish associates or teach in a variety of places. More creativity needs to be used in determining how the accumulated talents and skills of retired ministers may be used by the congregations with which they worship, the presbytery in which they reside, and in the church as a whole.

Respecting the need for well-deserved rest and freedom

While retired ministers are valuable assets to any congregation and presbytery, after serving the church for many years, many retirees and their spouses cherish the freedom to travel, to visit grandchildren, and not to be “tied down” to regular Sunday commitments. Abingdon Presbytery has a number of churches that are not being served by a minister of Word and Sacrament, and too few interim pastors, so it is tempting to pressure retirees into serving “just one more time.” While this may meet the need of the COM and a church, it is not always fair to the retiree and his or her family. Post-retirement service opportunities should be offered and retirees contacted regularly to see about their welfare and their interest in service with the clear covenant to accept “no” graciously.

If a retired minister chooses to continue in some sort of ministry, that ministry will need presbytery approval. If the service is with a congregation, the COM must be a partner in the conversation and must give its authorization for the relationship to be initiated.

Ministry of support and nurture

Retirees need consistent support by their presbytery. They need special care at the time just prior to retirement, during the first year of adjustment to retirement, and during critical life changes (such as the death of a spouse, serious decline in health and mobility, or move to retirement or nursing facility). The Board of Pensions provides excellent resources to assist Abingdon Presbytery with both the emotional and financial support of retirees. Sometimes retired ministers move to a different presbytery following retirement, but retain membership in Abingdon Presbytery, and so are unknown to the presbytery in which they live. The Board of Pensions can provide the presbytery with a list of retirees living within its bounds.

Services of retirement—at a presbytery meeting and in the local congregation or other place of service—are as significant as services of installation and should receive careful attention from presbytery. Many presbyteries have annual recognition events for retirees and their spouses. Some have regular gatherings for retirees to help them remain connected with other ministers and remain active in the life of the presbytery. This is especially important for retirees who have relocated upon retirement.

Boundaries and etiquette

In the church we frequently talk about the relationship between pastor and people as one of “family” and, especially when pastoral relationships are long, the bonds of affection run deep between a congregation and the pastor who has been with them during times of crisis and of joy. It is especially difficult for church members to understand that the relationship must change significantly when a pastor retires and that they must share their faith journey with another pastor whom God has called to fill that role. It is also difficult for the retiring pastor who has devoted so much of his or her life to ministry. As retirement is a challenging transition for all working people, it is more so in a profession where work and identity are so closely bound.

As pastors and congregations struggle with this adjustment, sometimes problems of boundaries arise and the COM is asked for help (often by the new pastor). Significant sensitivity is required in handling this matter. As the COM works with the retired pastor, the congregation, and the interim or newly called pastor the following suggestions may be helpful:

- Assume good intentions unless evidence shows otherwise.
- Affirm both the retiree and the new pastor.
- Offer support and guidance to the new pastor as he or she takes the initiative to establish a mutually supportive relationship.
- Help the retiree find new, appropriate uses for his/her gifts and energy.
- Establish a presbytery understanding about boundaries.
- Educate congregations about appropriate boundaries *before* the retirement occurs (section 4).
- Affirm the legacy of the past and the leadership of the present in congregational celebrations in which the retired pastor is included.

Commissioned Lay Pastors

What is a commissioned lay pastor/commissioned ruling elder?

The particular of Commissioned Lay Pastor is an extension of the office of ruling elder, which is an ordained office of the church. The CLP role was created in the mid-1980s in response to the mission needs of presbyteries which did not have enough ministers of the Word and Sacrament to adequately serve their churches. At first, it was “commissioned lay preacher.” A decade later, the role was expanded to give presbyteries the option for authorizing a CLP to administer the sacraments and other pastoral functions, and the name was changed to Commissioned Lay Pastor.

Planning the Abingdon Presbytery CLP Program

As we consider the mission needs of Abingdon Presbytery, we have found that CLPs are necessary to serve churches that are in isolated rural communities and churches that cannot meet the minimum compensation for a minister.

Many Presbyterians are excited about the educational program offered to CLPs and want to find new avenues of service. The PC(USA) and Abingdon Presbytery are enriched by the individuals who take up the call to be CLPs.

It is essential that Abingdon Presbytery communicates our requirements for becoming a CLP so that individuals are not disappointed when they complete coursework and find that they have not met all the requirements. The current requirements checklist for Abingdon Presbytery is below.

Abingdon Presbytery CLP Checklist

- Get a letter of support from the Session of your home church that says you’re in good standing and a good candidate to be a CLP
- Schedule an interview with the CLP Subcommittee to talk about your sense of call
- Complete the training modules from Theocademy [theocademy.com]. Please be prepared to discuss what you have learned with us.
 - Reformed Theology series
 - Reformed Worship series
 - Biblical Interpretation series
 - Old Testament and New Testament (optional)
- You may also check out our Abingdon Presbytery YouTube channel for a 4 part Bible class
- Complete an in-person seminar on polity and Sacraments
- Write and present a statement of faith to the CLP subcommittee
- At the request of the committee, meet with the COM as a whole for evaluation
- Go before Presbytery for examination and be officially commissioned as a CLP

Application and Screening of Potential CLPs

To be eligible to become a CLP, a person must be a PC(USA) elder in good standing with gifts and graces for pastoral ministry. Since CLPs will be serving congregations in the pastoral role, it is as important to screen CLPs as it is pastors, youth workers, or others who have access to persons in vulnerable life situations. Information should be sought from a pastor and others who know the CLP applicant well, and background checks are required. It is important to examine the motives of the applicant. If the person is seeking personal status from the new role or full-time employment, that is not the intent of the program.

CLP Education

CLP education shall include Bible, Reformed Theology and Sacraments, Presbyterian polity, preaching and worship leadership, and pastoral care. Abingdon Presbytery offers initial online education opportunities, and we seek to offer regular continuing education opportunities, both in person and online, for all CLPs in the program. The CLP subcommittee is tasked with organizing such learning opportunities and retreats.

Examination and commissioning

After the educational program is completed, the CLP subcommittee, and the COM as requested, examine the CLP candidate. The presbytery commissions a CLP on an annual basis for service in a particular church. Based on the needs of that church, the presbytery may authorize the CLP to administer one or both of the sacraments, moderate the session, and vote at presbytery. These authorizations are not automatic, and they may be granted to some CLPs in the presbytery and not to others based on the ministry context.

It is advisable to have a written covenant of expectations between the CLP, the congregation served, and the presbytery. The service of commissioning takes place within the presbytery meeting. This is a joyous occasion that gives visibility to the presbytery and starts the ministry off well.

Supervision and Support

Each CLP will be assigned a teaching elder as a mentor and companion for ministry. Since CLPs are often expected to carry out pastoral functions without the benefit of a full theological education, they often benefit from ministers who have had the added education and experience. CLPs often are knowledgeable about the culture of the region and are able to share wisdom with the ministers with whom they work. Some of the most exciting ministries include CLPs and ministers working together as a team, sharing their gifts.

Just as minister pastors are strongly encouraged to be involved in lifelong learning, so it is important for CLPs to continue their education. The presbytery should also provide support for the CLP, to help with life balance, care, and nurture.

What if a CLP moves?

It should be noted that the commissioning of a lay pastor is “local,” that is, for service in one or more congregations, and is valid for a set term. If the lay pastor ceases to serve a particular congregation, the commission is no longer valid. Because the use, training, supervision, and nurture of CLPs is determined individually by each presbytery, lay pastors are not eligible to use the PC(USA) call system. The commission they have been granted is by one presbytery and is not transferable to another presbytery. If a CLP relocates outside the presbytery and joins a PC(USA) congregation in their new area, they must contact the presbytery to see if there is a need for CLP services. If so, reference checks should be done, and the new presbytery would determine whether the previous training meets their requirements.

Section Six: Preventing and Responding to Difficulties

Emphasizing Congregational Health

The Committee on Ministry is given the responsibility for promoting the peace and harmony of the church and to assist congregations in the prevention or utilization of destructive conflict.

People who are trained, skilled, and experienced in dealing with church conflict should always be the ones chosen to lead conflict interventions. Some COMs recruit a team of conflict interventionists who are accountable to the COM but are not necessarily all members of the COM. This frees the COM to focus on building healthy ministry rather than expending much of its time and energy on dealing with conflict. If Abingdon COM chooses to deal directly with conflicts in congregations, an understanding of systems theory applied to congregational life and thorough training in conflict intervention are essential. **COM members who become involved in working to resolve a conflict in a church must do so only with the knowledge and consent of the COM, as part of an intervention team, and after training in conflict intervention.**

Although church members and leaders are often disturbed by conflict, especially in churches, conflict is a universal experience and can be both normal and healthy. In fact, the ability to disagree openly and engage in creative conflict is one of the indicators of a healthy organization. Whenever there are disagreements, wherever opinions are divided, wherever a church wrestles with alternatives in mission, conflict will be present. It is healthy as long as its energy is focused on issues rather than personalities, on equitable solutions rather than “winning”, on seeking what God is calling the church to be and do rather than what is desired for an individual, organization, or program.

Work on prevention rather than intervention

As in healthcare for individuals and communities, prevention of problems is far preferable to intervention, requiring less energy in the long run and freeing churches and the presbytery to focus on mission and ministry.

Abingdon Presbytery COM, wishing to focus on fostering healthy ministry, should:

- Assist both pastor and congregation to a “good goodbye” when a pastoral relationship is dissolved.
- Assist both departing pastors and the congregations they are leaving to be clear about the new boundaries in their relationships.
- Encourage and support the use of well-qualified intentional interim ministers, especially with congregations that have experienced conflict or are saying goodbye to a long-term pastor.
- Provide excellent support to Pastor Nominating Committees through the deployment of well-trained COM liaisons to the PNC.
- Be attentive to the need for reference checking in the pastoral search process and assist PNCs to be effective in their own reference checking.

- Offer the same services to pastors seeking calls, especially candidates seeking their first call.
- Establish and support healthy pastoral relationships.
- Assist congregations and pastors to be clear about role and task expectations.
- Provide good pastoral care for all ministry professionals.
- Encourage pastors to take their full vacation time and study leave annually.
- Support the provision of sabbaticals for ministry professionals.
- Use the opportunity of the triennial visit to create a climate of trust and pick up early warning signs of conflict.
- Be alert to the times when congregations and pastors are likely to be open to assistance from the COM.
- Be intentional in following up with pastors and congregations at key points in the life of a pastoral relationship, at least every five years.

Intervene effectively when trouble arises

When conflict becomes destructive, enormous energy is expended that is taken away from the goals and mission of the church. Then conflict becomes divisive and injurious to the peace and harmony of the church. The COM needs to be prepared and equipped to intervene effectively so that conflict does not become destructive. The Lombard Mennonite Peace Center has excellent resources and consultants available.

There are many potential sources of conflict in a congregation. Conflicts often arise within ministerial staff, among members of a session, between individuals with positions of responsibility and between the pastor and member(s) of a church. The changing role of the church in mission, changes in the community in which the congregation is located, disagreements over the life and witness of the church, or the presence of disruptive personalities may also trigger conflict. Almost any situation where choice and decision are involved has the potential of escalating into destructive conflict.

Four changes that can lead to conflict in congregations

from Edwin Friedman: *Generation to Generation*

1. Changes in the family of the spiritual leaders, such as a birth, death, illness, divorce, change of address, marital problems, acting out of a child, or problems in the extended family of the pastor or the pastor's spouse.
2. Changes in the professional life of the clergy or lay leaders such as personal advancement, achievement of a degree or involvement in a civic project.
3. Changes in the long-term constituency of the parish or the size of the congregation.
4. Changes in the staff of the congregation, such as the hiring, firing, or resignation of key staff leaders.

The COM may become aware of a conflict or potential conflict in a congregation through one or more sources. The pastor, a member of session, or a presbytery staff person may alert the COM. The COM shall exercise wise discretion in determining when to take action toward information concerning difficulties within a church, proceeding with the following steps:

- It may take the initiative to bring the information which has come to it to the attention of the session of the church involved, counseling with the session as to the appropriate actions to be taken in correcting the reported difficulties.
- It may offer its help as a mediator in case the session either finds itself unable to settle the problems peaceably or takes no steps toward settlement.
- It may act to correct the difficulties if requested to do so by the parties concerned. When so doing, the COM will always hold hearings which invite as many voices to the table as applicable and appropriate.
- The COM may take the initiative in bringing to the attention of the session of the church involved any information that has come to it regarding difficulties and may offer its help as mediator where appropriate. In all conflict interventions by the COM, there should be at least two members of the COM or the intervention team participating. **Conflict interventions should never be undertaken by one person working alone.**

Steps for conflict utilization

1. Becoming aware of conflict

The COM may hear about difficulties in a congregation through any of several channels.

- a. From annual consultations with minister members of the presbytery
- b. From triennial visits with congregations
- c. From communication from any ministers, sessions, elders who are members of the sessions.
- d. From other presbytery staff members or committees that are working with congregations.

The COM discerns when and whether to gather more information based on its understanding of the needs and resources of a congregation, taking care not to act to hastily while also avoiding undue delay. When the COM decides to become involved in a conflicted situation, a team is assigned to the task and the authority and accountability of that team is reviewed.

2. Initial assessment

An initial assessment is necessary in order to identify both the presenting issues in the conflict and possible deeper systemic concerns behind the conflict. The initial assessment also identifies the extent to which the parties to the conflict are able and willing to enter into constructive conversations. Conversations with the key identified parties in the conflict are important in this initial assessment to avoid skewed perceptions. The COM has particular responsibility toward the ministers involved and the sessions of congregations.

NOTE: The COM must take special care to avoid unhealthy “triangling” in this initial assessment.

3. Communication

Prior to any intervention, the parties involved should be notified in writing of the response of the COM to the request or complaint and meetings with the parties involved confirmed with date, time, and place clearly designated. Agreements regarding initial interventions

should be spelled out, but need not be publicized beyond those immediately affected by the intervention, e.g., the session, the pastor, the session member.

4. Looking, listening, and learning

The conflict team next engages in careful observation and collection of information about the church's situation with particular attention to the systemic nature of the congregation.

- The team will assume a posture of partnership and learning with the parties in the conflict, assuring fairness and even-handedness, and also holding a clear sense of its role as representing the COM as counselors, mediators, and/or interveners
- The team will lay out a plan for meeting with pastors, educators, elders, a personnel committee, and the session to look at the way the church has organized itself around the conflict, to listen to the stories people tell about the church's situation, and to learn from the symptoms that are evident.
- If the team deems them helpful, meetings or interviews with other groups or individuals may proceed after the initial meetings with the core leadership of the congregation.
- Often the observation period can also serve as a "cooling off" period for the congregation. If the conflict escalates during this time, that becomes another piece of information about the reasons for the difficulty.

5. Provisional hypothesis

With information about the congregation and the parties in the conflict, the team creates a provisional hypothesis about the nature of the conflict. The hypothesis frames the conflict in terms of the way the congregation as a system functions and the role the conflict plays in the changes it is experiencing. The hypothesis also raises the question of the presence of God in the situation.

6. Action plan and report

Based on the hypothesis, the team devises an action plan designed to strengthen the healthy functioning of the congregation and channel the energy from the conflict to a constructive response to the difficulties and changes in the congregation's life. The action plan may offer specific resources, suggestions for action by the church's leaders to move toward constructive and healthy functioning, or interventions by the team, by outside resource persons, or by an administrative commission.

Depending on the original mandate for the team, a report is made to the COM and another report is made to the session, either for information, for approval, or for action.

Action by the COM might take one of two forms:

- ***Advisory interventions***

The COM may respond to a request by a session member, pastor, session, or church educator to be a resource for a potentially destructive conflict. The purpose of an advisory

intervention is to assist the session or governing body to reduce the intensity and destructive effects of conflict. An advisory intervention assumes a voluntary relationship between COM and the session and is ordinarily applied where the hypothesis is relatively simple and there is good cooperation from the parties involved.

- ***Authoritative interventions***

The action may require work by the team given authority by the session or the presbytery for specific interventions. The team may act as negotiator, mediator, or arbitrator in a conflict when invited to do so by the parties involved. Provisions of the Rule of Church Discipline for due process shall be followed wherever appropriate in all cases of authoritative intervention and appropriate records will be kept of all actions and recommendations arising from the intervention.

7. Evaluation and follow-up:

An evaluation of the process followed, along with recommendations for further work should be included as part of the COM's continuing responsibility. This evaluation, along with recommendations for future action(s) should be included in the permanent record of the COM with the responsibility for follow-up assigned to a person or sub-committee of COM.

Review of conflict utilization techniques

This handbook does not include simple how-to-do-it steps for initiating the conflict utilization method. It assumes an acquaintance with the roles of leadership on the part of the reader. Of course, in a conflict situation, a leader sometimes gets pulled into the emotions and has temporary amnesia about good processes of interpersonal and group life. The following list is a review for the leader in a difficult conflict situation.

1. Leaders need to make a choice on whether to intervene in a formal or informal way.
2. Before acting, however, leaders reflect and pray about their own motivation in taking a lead. They ask if they feel responsible to fix or to save the church from its conflict. If so, further prayer is needed. On the other hand, if leaders are willing to guide and assist a group or a church in finding its inner wisdom, without taking responsibility for what is truly the church's own responsibility as a whole, then one has the right heart for the work.
3. An early strategy is to invite people to a conversation about the difficulties in their church with the hope that everyone can learn more about what the conflict is about and what it means. If the conflict partners are not willing to have a conversation, either separately or together, there will be little a leader can do to directly manage the conflict.
4. Leaders seeking to find hope in the midst of a congregational conflict need to follow basic good communication methods such as using "I messages" and active listening.
5. It will be important for the conflict utilization leader to encourage everyone involved in the situation to commit to giving each other a fair chance to give their thoughts and feelings in a safe environment.
6. Refusing to take sides in the conflict is, of course, essential. However, in cases of clear injustice or oppression, leaders may be helped by remembering Desmond Tutu's comment that if the elephant has its foot on the tail of the mouse, the mouse will not particularly

appreciate a friendly observer's neutrality. But fairness and carefulness are always appreciated, even in the toughest of conflict situations.

7. Some initial ground rules are important to the task of finding hope in an apparently hopeless situation. It may be helpful to adopt rules for keeping the conflict "clean" and fair, such as those below from Sawyer, *Work of the Church*.
 - a. *Listen to each other and "say it back."* Before parties can rebut an opponent's statements, they must first repeat the statement in their own words.
 - b. *Stick to the issues and stay away from personalities.*
 - c. *Stick to the present; do not bring up past conflicts.*
 - d. *The best offense is a good defense.* State clearly your own position rather than attack an opposing position.
 - e. *If your position prevails, thank God. If your position is defeated, accept the majority decision and be patient.*
 - f. *Remember that it is Christ's church, not yours or mine, and we are seeking God's will first.*
8. One way of helping a group move to a constructive look at their congregation is to talk about finite and infinite games. This concept comes from the work of philosopher James Carse in his book, *Finite and Infinite Games*. Games are played to either win or lose. In the most serious of finite games, the winners have final power over the lives of the losers. Frequently church members take on the competitiveness of finite games strategy, assuming that it is all-important for them to win and for their opponents to lose. Carse teaches that infinite games are played for the purpose of continuing a relationship. Openness, fairness, and diminishing competition are ways to play at church difficulties in infinite ways, in order to maintain the relationships among the people on every side of an issue or argument.

Pastoral care during a conflict

When there is conflict in a congregation, the COM is encouraged to remember its charge to provide pastoral care for congregations and church professionals, and to approach their work with a pastoral attitude. Care for all parties in the conflict is essential: the session, the pastor and other church staff, and church members.

If the pastor has a family, they may well be among those who suffer most acutely from the conflict, but with little ability to affect the outcome. Attention to the needs of the family of the church professional or other church staff is always appropriate. It is especially important if there is a conflict in the congregation. The COM might call on members of the presbytery who are not serving on the COM to provide that pastoral care.

Ministerial misconduct issues

When ministers engage in misconduct, it is extremely damaging to everyone involved. It is far preferable for the COM to work at preventing misconduct by promoting and supporting healthy behaviors by church professionals and in congregations. Dealing with the aftermath of ministerial misconduct is inevitably difficult, painful, and time-consuming.

Misconduct is behavior that is unethical and damaging to the ministry and the congregation. It usually falls into one or more of these categories:

- Sexual misconduct
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Misuse or misappropriation of church funds
- Misuse of power, role, or position

Misconduct issues are not new. It may seem that there is more malfeasance today, but there are no statistics that bear this out. What is known, however, is that sexual misconduct and other malfeasance issues are being reported more often today than ever before. Since 1985 churches have suffered numerous lawsuits related to various types of misconduct and numerous ministers have been removed or furloughed from their positions. While sexual misconduct gets the most attention, abuse of office related to financial matters also does great damage to Christ's church.

If Church Discipline must be invoked, everyone involved will do well to remember the purpose of church discipline. A harsh, punitive attitude is not appropriate. Care for those who have been harmed is essential, as is a commitment to achieve justice and compassion for all participants involved. It is helpful to recall that:

The power that Jesus Christ has vested in his Church, a power manifested in the exercise of church discipline, is one for building up the body of Christ, not for destroying it, for redeeming, not for punishing. It should be exercised as a dispensation of mercy and not of wrath, so that the great ends of the Church may be achieved, that all children of God may be presented faultless in the day of Christ. (D-1.01)

Understanding misconduct

Most church professionals have very significant role power. Some people see them as interpreters of right and wrong and of God's will. The trust of other people is a sacred responsibility given to church professionals who are subject to temptations and self-centered behavior just as are all human beings. These temptations may become harder for some church professionals to resist if they have not been attentive to appropriate self-care, including taking time for vacations and study leave, as well as a regular time off from work every week.

When misconduct occurs, COMs and others find themselves in the position of having responsibility both for the congregation that is deeply wounded as a result of the misconduct and for the church professional suffering shame and loss, and for her or his family as well.

What is sexual misconduct?

Sexual misconduct is the comprehensive term used to include:

- Child sexual abuse, which includes but is not limited to, any contact or interaction between a child and an adult when the child is being used for the sexual stimulation of the adult person or of a third person. The behavior may or may not involve touching. Sexual behavior between a child and an adult is always considered forced, whether or not consented to by the child.

- Sexual harassment is defined as unwelcome sexual advances, request for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when
 - Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or a condition of an individual's employment or their continued status in an institution;
 - Submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such individual; or
 - Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance by creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working or worshipping environment.
- Rape or sexual contact by force, threat, or intimidation.
- Sexual conduct, such as obscene or suggestive language or behavior, unacceptable visual contact, unwelcome touching or fondling, that is injurious to the physical or emotional health of another.
- Sexual malfeasance defined as sexual conduct within a ministerial or professional relationship. Sexual conduct includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. This definition is not meant to cover relationships between spouses, nor is it meant to restrict church professionals from having normal, social, intimate, or marital relationships.
- Sexual abuse of another person is any offense involving sexual conduct in relation to
 - Any person under the age of eighteen years or anyone over the age of eighteen years without the mental capacity to consent; or
 - Any person when the conduct includes force, thereat, coercion, intimidation, or misuse of office or position.

The Role of the COM in dealing with misconduct

When there has been misconduct or malfeasance, the COM has two responsibilities:

- To deal with immediate situations of misconduct as they arise, and
- To help church professionals and congregations develop as healthy individuals in healthy relationships.

Some recommendations to help the COM deal with ministerial misconduct

- Become familiar with the sexual misconduct policy and the child and youth protection policy of Abingdon presbytery.
- Recognize that Christian Discipline provides a system for dealing with this outside the work of the COM.
- Once formal allegations are made, the COM has no choice about the response that must be made. The COM has no formal role at this point in the judicial process.
- Work out agreements ahead of time with the Permanent Judicial Commission of the presbytery about the COM's role—particularly when it will re-enter a church or work with the pastor. When permissible, keep open lines of communication between the two bodies.

- Check the presbytery’s insurance coverage to make sure that it includes adequate liability insurance that covers officers and volunteers.
- When an outside attorney is going to be present in discussion, be certain that an attorney representing Abingdon presbytery is present.

Caring for the congregation after misconduct

For years, many COMs would wonder why some churches acted so strangely. They witnessed the termination of one minister after another for minor or inconsequential reasons. They saw churches with a long history of conflict. The sides in the conflicts seemed to remain fixed even when the issues changed.

Research done by Nancy Myer Hopkins and the Parish Consultation Service and published in an Alban Institute Research Report sheds light on some of this observed behavior. Here is a list of behaviors that emerged frequently in churches where there had been malfeasance (sexual or other) on the part of a previous pastor.

- Some group members isolating and withdrawing from the group. (It is usually the healthy members who withdraw.)
- Blaming and distortions of responsibility for the event.
- Seeking a quick fix without thoughtful reflection.
- Division within the group.
- Anger displaced onto unrelated issues or out of proportion.
- A loss of energy, a feeling of paralysis.
- Despair about the group’s future.
- Distrust of leadership often projected on future leadership.
- A conspiracy of silence about the traumatic event.
- Difficulty in making the decisions that are normal and necessary.

Although these symptoms may have their origins in situations other than malfeasance, when seen, they should elicit concern and response from the COM. Ministering to congregations following the removal of a pastor for reasons of malfeasance must be a high priority.

Wherever possible the congregation should be informed about the nature of the perpetrator’s misconduct (especially in cases of pedophilia) and the legal and ecclesiastical ramifications. Members should be given the opportunity to ask questions and expect the presbytery to help by providing opportunities for promoting healing. Someone representing the presbytery should meet with them and listen to their concerns and questions. This will aid the healing process.

Working with “afterpastors”

Because of damage done to congregations when a pastor or a key staff person is guilty of sexual misconduct or other malfeasance, and because sometimes congregations have patterns of pastoral

misconduct that extend back several generations, the reality of the congregation's life after the pastor leaves is likely to be complex, difficult, and chaotic.

“Afterpastor” is a term often used to describe pastors who are called following pastors found guilty of malfeasance. About fifty percent of these “afterpastors” seem to be able to cope with the extra stresses that come with the experience. Others resign the call or are involuntarily terminated. Many leave with their self-esteem badly damaged. For these pastors, therapy, pastoral counseling, a support network, and even clergy coaching may be helpful options.

For those whose call to the congregation did not survive the experience of being an afterpastor, it is wise to provide as many of these resources as possible *before* they transfer to another presbytery.

For those whose call appears to have survived, some of these same options or resources may be advisable, if they have not already been utilized. In any case, the COM should continue to monitor the situation and keep lines of communication open with the pastor as well as the congregation.

Interim ministers who are intentional “afterpastors”

A second group of ministers who call themselves “afterpastors” are experienced, intentional interim pastors who have specialized training in dealing with congregations after misconduct or malfeasance. They can be very helpful to congregations recovering from significant trauma, including the trauma of pastoral sexual misconduct.

What can the COM do when it realizes that they have passed on without comment a pastor who has been guilty of malfeasance in a church or other pastoral setting?

If years have passed, there may be little the COM can do. There may no longer be any members of presbytery who know all of the facts of the situation. You may only be able to deal with the symptoms. *There are no easy answers.*

The legal issues have become very clear as a result of court cases. Any governing body that passes along an individual who has been guilty of malfeasance in their employ and fails to comment may have to face charges in a court of law. Any governing body that accepts an employee without proper reference checking may have to answer for their negligence in a court of law at some future time. In addition, that negligence may be costly to other governing bodies as well.

Caring for the minister

An intervention with a minister caught in the spiral of malfeasance is essential. In the case of someone new to ministry, involved in misconduct for the first time, or one who is confused about the issues and ethics involved, competent counseling and an explanation of the professional ethics involved may be sufficient. In some cases, however, by the time the situation comes to light, an addictive process has taken control of the individual. Then specialized counseling and participation in a twelve-step group are the minimum of what will be necessary for healing to occur.

Until there has been healing and repentance, the person found guilty of misconduct must not be passed along to another situation where the person may continue to engage in misconduct, abuse of

others, or malfeasance. When the presbytery's Permanent Judicial Commission has become involved, their decisions on how to deal with the person accused and/or found guilty of misconduct will determine when or if the person may return to the exercise of ordained office.

About prevention

Helping church professionals have healthy personal lives

Misconduct usually, although not inevitably, occurs when church professionals neglect self-care. Misconduct is more likely to occur when family relationships are unhealthy, when stress in ministry is overwhelming, when spiritual connections are neglected, when self-esteem is low, and when overwork is a pattern. Most church professionals see themselves as ethical people and believe "It won't happen to me." The Bible tells us that even Jesus was tempted. Clergy malfeasance is a reality. It does happen with tragic consequences for the minister, the minister's family, and for the congregation.

Awareness is part of the prevention. Many presbyteries offer orientation seminars for pastors new to the presbytery. This is an opportune time to talk about self-care. The COM can help create a presbytery climate where self-care is encouraged and expected.

Dealing with stress and burnout

Regular contact with church professionals is critical. COM members can be on the alert, watching for early signs of neglected self-care and connect the church professional with resources to help.

Workshops on boundaries and ethical issues

Such workshops are required in Abingdon Presbytery a minimum of every three years. They are helpful in raising consciousness and presenting clear expectations of ethical behavior. They will not eradicate clergy misconduct.

Dissolution of Church Employment

Under the best of conditions it is difficult to end a relationship, a ministry, or a mission. Dissolution of the pastoral relationship is an occasion when COM members and presbytery staff may experience the most pain, hurt, and potential for destructive behavior. In the PC(USA) we have experienced a growing number of terminations of pastoral and support staff relationships. Terminations involve separation and severance agreements that often are the result of intense conflicts, a change in ministry, or direction of mission. It is important for your presbytery to have a procedure for dealing with such terminations and separations.

"An installed pastoral relationship may be dissolved only by the presbytery. Whether the minister of the Word and Sacrament, the congregation, or the presbytery initiates proceedings for dissolution of the relationship, there shall always be a meeting of the congregation to consider the matter and to consent, or decline to consent, to dissolution." (G-2.0901)

Prevention

The presbytery should have a program for developing the health and well-being of pastoral relationships. It should include:

- ***Solid financial support*** for new pastoral positions. Too many positions are created on the optimistic assumption that “the right pastor will bring in new people who will help to pay the bills.” A careful and realistic evaluation of financial resources of a congregation must be done during the vacancy process before a MIF is developed.
- ***Clarity of role and task expectations*** are essential at all points in the relationship between pastor and congregation, but are particularly important as a potential pastor and a PNC are in conversation. Every congregation has a number of informal and usually unspoken and unexamined expectations of their pastor. To the extent possible, those expectations should be surfaced, explored, and acknowledged. Some will need to be challenged; others simply need to be made clear to all parties. The personnel committee, the session, and the pastor must agree on role and task expectations. They should be clearly communicated, preferably in writing, to the congregation.
- ***Intentional interventions*** in the life of a pastoral relationship at key points can be very helpful. Alban Institute research about pastoral authentication would suggest that key points are entry, 1 year-18 months, then again at 3rd, 5th, and 10th years.

When a relationship must be dissolved

It is helpful if at the beginning of negotiations that there is a clear understanding of the part that each player has in the process. COM is responsible for making sure that the conditions for separation are compatible with the *Book of Order* and the termination policy of Abingdon Presbytery. COM may play a variety of roles during this process. COM needs to pay special attention to the care of the pastor, the pastor’s family, and the congregation while being a voice for justice, fairness, and healing for all parties.

There are at least three parties in each severance agreement: the presbytery, the pastor, and the session/congregation. The COM assists the pastor and the session as a severance agreement is negotiated. The congregation and the presbytery must approve the severance agreement.

Principles for dissolution

The following are some principles for Abingdon Presbytery:

- All conditions for separation shall be compatible with the provisions of the *Book of Order* and the termination policy of the presbytery.
- All matters regarding the separation of a pastor shall be documented in writing by the session with copies to the COM. In addition, all costs (including benefits) need to be cited.
- The separation process shall be considered incomplete until the congregation and the presbytery vote on the dissolution of the call and any severance terms.

- All separation agreements will be preceded by an appropriate process of review, evaluation, or conflict resolution. The process of review can be initiated in writing to the moderator of COM, stated clerk, or presbytery leader by either the pastor or the session.
- All costs related to termination are the responsibility of the session. Abingdon Presbytery sets severance as one month salary, plus BoP dues, for each year served, with a minimum severance of three months' salary.
- Once the presbytery has taken its action, all agreements are final. The presbytery will be responsible for monitoring the completion of the agreements made. No further negotiations, changes in the agreement, or alterations may be made after the vote of the presbytery unless the presbytery approves them.
- The termination policy and agreement are to be written so that the parties involved will waive any further right to sue or take legal action related to the severance agreement unless the agreement is not fulfilled, and then such action shall take place only before the appropriate judicial commission.

Care for the individuals, congregation, and presbytery needs to be expressed not only in the technical sense but also in ways that will demonstrate mutual respect and trust for each other.

“A pastor, co-pastor, or associate pastor may request the presbytery to dissolve the pastoral relationship. The minister of the Word and Sacrament must also state his or her intention to the session. The session shall call a congregational meeting to act upon the request and to make recommendations to the presbytery. If the congregation does not concur, the presbytery shall hear from the congregation, through its elected commissioners, the reasons why the presbytery should not dissolve the pastoral relationship. If the congregation fails to appear, or if its reasons for retaining the relationship are judged insufficient, the request may be granted and the pastoral relationship dissolved.” (G-2.0902)

Parameters for separation

Separations are either voluntary or nonvoluntary (forced).

Voluntary Dissolution

Resignation

Voluntary separation may take place after written notice to the session, the vote of the congregation, and the vote of the presbytery. Resigning clergy will be paid the cash equivalent of their unused earned annual vacation at the official date of separation. No severance allowance will be paid. After giving notice of resignation, the pastor should make arrangements to leave the position as soon as possible. As a general rule, the pastor should leave the situation within 30-60 days (an exception to this may be in cases of retirement, which needs to be negotiated with COM).

The reasons for voluntary separation include:

- Pastor accepts another call
- Pastor chooses to lay aside ordination/ask for release from ordained office

- Pastor may renounce jurisdiction because of theological or relational differences with our denomination
- Pastor joins another denomination
- Pastor may choose to become inactive and is removed from the role of presbytery
- Pastor retires
- “Personal reasons” rather than a specific reason may be cited by the pastor for leaving. This may be a polite way of covering a forced termination.

Involuntary dissolution

Reduction in work force

Separation because of the elimination of a position, budgetary distress, or for other circumstances arising out of no fault of the pastor, is at the discretion of the session and the congregation with the approval of presbytery. Written notice will come to the COM from the session after consultation with the pastor. Six months’ notice or pay in lieu of notice is usually given. The pastor will also be paid the cash equivalent of any unused earned annual leave.

In such cases the session and COM in consultation with the pastor need to be sensitive to the issues of placement, housing, and the physical needs of the minister and family. This may call for other items to be included in the settlement, such as the use of the manse.

Separation for cause

Separation for cause shall include, but is not limited to:

- Unsatisfactory performance
- Abuse or misconduct
- Insubordination
- Neglect in the care and use of church property or funds
- Conduct inconsistent with presbytery standards or ordination vows

Separation for cause must be clearly documented and thoroughly substantiated. It is extremely important that the presbytery have a clear policy for separation with cause and that the policy is followed in a consistent manner. All meetings, conversations, and agreements in this process need to be documented in a written form and kept as part of the pastor’s file in the presbytery office.

How the COM might deal with unsatisfactory performance:

- Issues regarding the performance of clergy and staff should be addressed by the personnel committee or the session in the annual performance review. This review is to be conducted each year at the same time, and the results are to be communicated in writing with the pastor or staff person.
- If the session needs assistance in developing and implementing a process for evaluation and review, they can contact the COM or the presbytery leader. COM is also available for consultation and counsel in conflict situations. Only after reasonable attempts at resolution have failed should termination negotiations begin.

Process and plan

The termination process needs to include the following steps:

- The session or pastor communicates in writing to the COM the need for assistance in resolving a conflict, dissatisfaction, or evaluating an unsatisfactory performance review.
- COM will respond with the appropriate resource persons and the liaison to meet with all parties to bring about resolution and inform all of the parties of the presbytery's policy on termination and separation.
- The session, pastor, and COM negotiate, approve, and sign a written severance agreement.
- COM approves the written severance agreement.
- Copies of the written severance agreement are made available to members of the congregation no later than the date of the first call for the congregational meeting at which the dissolution of the call and the written severance are to be considered.
- The congregation votes on the dissolution of the call and the written severance agreement. This is most easily done in two separate motions. This meeting of the congregation is to be moderated by a member of the presbytery appointed by the COM.
- The presbytery approves the dissolution and the written severance agreement. The agreement is not effective until the presbytery has voted to approve it.

The termination agreement should contain the following items (others may be added depending on the situation):

- Identification of the parties (name of pastor, church, and presbytery)
- The specific reason(s) for separation/termination
- The dates for:
 - End of ministry responsibilities
 - Termination of call
 - Final compensation and benefit payments
 - Vacating of office/manse
- All financial agreements including but not limited to:
 - Salary continuation
 - Benefits continuation
 - Loan repayment or shared equity arrangement (where applicable)
 - Manse use (where applicable)
 - Compensation for unused annual leave/vacation
 - Provision for use of office, equipment, etc.
 - Terms and time limits on physical presence
- The agreement shall specify that if a pastor finds full-time employment prior to the end of the term of the arrangement, the church's financial obligations end as of the date said full-time employment begins. Part-time employment will result in appropriate prorated adjustments in financial payments.

- A clause that releases each party from legal action unless the agreement is not fulfilled, and then only through the courts of the PC(USA)
- A statement regarding the limited liability of the presbytery—for example, whether the presbytery will participate in the agreement and to what extent.
- If it is wise to prevent unnecessary contact between the former pastor and the church, financial arrangements be conducted through the presbytery office after the pastor's departure from the church
- A statement of the specific amounts to be paid if a lump sum payment is to be made.
- Date and signature of all three parties: the session (on behalf of the congregation), the pastor, and the presbytery.
- The statement is to be put in the presbytery minutes, the pastor's file, and the church's file. The pastor also receives a copy.

Section Seven: Racial Ethnic/Multicultural Considerations

As of 2021, our denomination is 12% non-white. While there have been increasing efforts to be more inclusive, our processes still reflect our predominantly white denomination. This section raises questions and offers resources to the COM as you work with non-white pastors and congregations.

Working together cross-culturally

- *Know your own culture and cultural bias.*
What is your cultural background? What values, norms, and traditions have shaped and formed who you are? Have you taken cultural proficiency training?
- *Develop relationships with people from other cultures and learn more about them.*
How well do you know the people in your presbytery who come from cultural groups different from your own? Have there been attempts made to cultivate mutual trust between those of different cultural backgrounds and the presbytery? Racial ethnic persons don't need to surrender their identity to become Presbyterian. The presbytery must respect the culture of any group if they are interested in doing ministry with people of different races and cultures.
- *Have an understanding of our denominational decision-making process and the inherent cultural bias it has within it.*
How are decisions being made? Much of our business is completed through the use of direct, face-to-face communication. The advantage to clear, direct communication is that issues are handled quickly, decreasing the possibility of miscommunication. Some cultures use indirect communication. This is often misinterpreted as lack of courage to confront, unwillingness to deal with the issue, and lack of commitment to solve the problem. Our decisions are usually accomplished through voting and allowing majority to rule. Some cultures value consensus over majority rule, thus allowing all participants to feel included and not "lose face." The 217th General Assembly encouraged the church to explore new possibilities for decision-making that rely upon consensus and group discernment, rather than parliamentary procedures.
- *Support new models for reaching racial ethnic and multicultural communities.*
- *Encourage and empower leadership from diverse groups of people to be involved in decision-making processes.*
How are persons of color currently involved in your presbytery? If there is not enough involvement at the committee level, consider utilizing racial/ethnic persons as consultants for specific tasks. Review recruiting practices and training of new members.

Individual and congregational considerations

COM will be more helpful to racial ethnic individuals when they become more familiar with their distinctive cultures, traditions, and histories.

When working with an individual understand:

- How long as this person lived in the United States? A recent immigrant will be quite different than someone whose family has been in this country for several generations. It is also not unusual for someone who has been in this country for several generations to carry cultural values from their roots.
- What are normative assumptions for their culture? For example: gender roles, concept of time, traditions, physical proximity, decision making, conflict management, leadership style, communication style, etc.

When working with congregations understand:

- What is the history of the congregation? What are their roots? What has been their experience of oppression in this country or in their homelands? What has been their experience with this denomination?
 - What languages are spoken?
 - Are multiple generations present?
 - What are the people like? (age, socio-economic, etc.)
 - What are the identifiable units in the congregation? (a couple large families? All individual family units?)
 - Do they identify with the local community? Do they participate in activities in the larger community which reflect their ethnic heritage?
 - Who are the formal and informal leaders in the congregation?
- What is their theology?
 - What stage is their congregation? Newly formed or long established?
 - What is the congregation's relationship to the denomination?
 - How might their practices in the church be different from other churches? (for example: liturgical expressions during worship, ministerial dress codes, ministry centered in the family and the fellowship with a strong social service approach, etc.)

COM and racial ethnic pastors and congregations

Racial/ethnic pastors seeking calls

- Many racial ethnic pastors are open to serving a church that is different from their own cultural backgrounds. The presbytery needs to be supportive by enforcing EEO guidelines, use of racial/ethnic pastors in all types of positions

Churches seeking pastors

- While completing an MIF can be a wonderful tool, this form does not work well within our call system for some racial ethnic churches, particularly the non-English speaking congregations seeking pastors who speak a non-English language.
- There are few racial ethnic pastors in our call referral system. Churches seeking racial ethnic pastors may need to rely upon existing informal and formal networks outside the matching system.
- Racial ethnic pastors are sometimes interviewed by congregations who are only interested in fulfilling their EEO requirements. PNCs should only pursue racial ethnic candidates if they are serious about hiring them, not only to fulfill requirements.

Church conflict

- The COM will need to consider alternate ways of dealing with conflict in a racial ethnic church. Two thirds of the world does not place a high value on direct, face-to-face confrontation to solve a conflict. The preservation of smooth, interpersonal relationships, maintaining harmony, and minimizing conflict are important.
- In some racial ethnic churches, much of the conflict is not just between individuals, but involves whole family units.
- It is important to utilize resources and resource people who are familiar with that church's particular dynamics and history.

There are many resources available to help those who seek to enlarge and strengthen their multicultural awareness. The PC(USA) particularly places high emphasis on the Intercultural Development Inventory, or IDI.

Section Eight: Resources for the COM Moderator

Thank you!

Thank you for accepting the very important, very demanding, very difficult, and **very rewarding** role of moderator of the COM!

You are probably already familiar with the scope of the work of the COM. The resources compiled in this section are intended to help assist you as you build relationships of trust with your colleagues on the COM and in the presbytery, structure the COM for its work, do on-going training with the COM, and enhance sensitivity to cross-cultural issues. Your role as moderator is primarily to help the COM nurture and support healthy ministries in the presbytery.

Fostering healthy ministries begins with nurturing a healthy COM

Building a healthy COM happens as moderators and committee members depend upon God for their strength and direction. With a huge list of tasks to do, many committees fall into the trap of solving problems. A first step in engaging the mission of the COM is to center the work and energy in spiritual practices. Times of worship, reflection on scripture, prayer, and retreats build a foundation that allows us to address the question, “What does God want to have happen here?”

The actions of those who serve the church as members of the COM are prayerful and grow out of a desire to serve God. The traps and entanglements are many, but we need to understand we are not called to defend the presbytery or the church. *We are called to listen and tell the truth.* It is not our responsibility to solve problems; the best we can do is hold up a mirror that others may see themselves and their part in creating and continuing dysfunctional behavior. We bring to churches and pastors the resource of procedures and processes to enable them to do their ministry.

What matters most is keeping our focus on the larger purpose of “serving God with all our hearts and minds and strength and loving our neighbor.” When we lose this perspective, we may discover that we have become the enemy and not the resource for ministry. The reality is, “When people in leadership positions begin to serve a vision infused with a larger purpose, their work shifts naturally from producing results to encouraging the growth of people who produce results” (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers, *Presence, Human Purpose and the Field of the Future*, p.141).

A healthy COM does not happen because the right people are elected to serve, but because we have a vision which is compelling and inspiring and they take seriously their ministry of resourcing congregations and church leaders.

This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose you consider a mighty one, the being a force of nature, rather than a feverish, selfish clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy (George Bernard Shaw, “Dedicatory Epistle”)

Organizing for successful ministry within presbytery

Suggestions for the COM moderator

As a beginning point, consider the following:

- Familiarize yourself with the *Book of Order*.
- As the presbytery leader/stated clerk what authorities the presbytery has delegated to the COM.
- Plan an annual orientation and planning retreat for the entire COM.
- Develop a COM mission statement in consultation with the presbytery leader, the leadership council, and members of the COM. The mission statement will inform the structure of the COM and guide the organizational structure for accomplishing its mission. The mission statement will help the COM prioritize its work and know when to say “yes” and “no”. This is especially important in a climate of increased demands, external pressures, and limited time.
- Work with the members of the committee and presbytery leader to develop norms and standards for the committee’s work.
- Become cross-culturally proficient.
- Develop a COM leadership team.
- Work closely with other committee chairs and leaders within the presbytery, such as council.
- Seek out continuing education for yourself to enhance your skills and knowledge of COM-related topics.

Important relationships for the COM moderator

With the presbytery leader

1. Setting the meeting agenda. Decide together what issues must be discussed and what decisions must be made during the meeting. These may include:
 - a. Responding to correspondence or other communications received by either party that need COM attention.
 - b. Sharing information about congregations and church professionals.
 - c. Hearing reports from subcommittees or persons assigned to work with certain church professionals or congregations.
2. Responding to communications to the presbytery leader that relate to the COM’s work. Good communication between the presbytery leader and the COM moderator provides a unified message to congregations and helps both the presbytery leader and the COM avoid becoming involved in unhealthy indirect or three-way conversations.

With the stated clerk

1. Consulting regarding correspondence received for COM action that will require *Book of Order* interpretation.
2. Consulting for assistance in wording motions so that actions comply with the Constitution.

3. Seeking advice about whether an action being considered is constitutional or is questionable constitutionally—or when an action being considered might be possible but not wise (based on his/her experience).
4. Reporting actions that require the attention of the stated clerk, should the stated clerk not be at the COM meeting.
5. Coordinating with the stated clerk to provide pastoral care for congregations dealing with allegations or charges against the pastor or other professional staff. The COM has pastoral responsibility for the congregation and would be involved in the dissolution of a pastoral relationship. The COM is NOT involved in an investigative or judicial process.

With the chairpersons of the COM sub-committees

1. Before each meeting, inform each chairperson of new items their group will need to consider and provide available information that they will need.
2. Between meeting, check with each chairperson about the status of actions approved during the previous committee meeting.

With the CPM moderator

1. Coordinating of receiving first call candidates/pastors into the presbytery.
2. Determine which committee will examine the candidate.
3. Determine which committee will request the candidate's file from the presbytery of care when appropriate.
4. Determine which committee will examine candidates from Abingdon Presbytery who are being called to congregations within the presbytery.
5. Determine which committee will examine candidates from Abingdon Presbytery that are being called to congregations in other presbyteries.
6. Coordinating of ordaining first call pastors who will be installed in other presbyteries.

With the presbytery nominating committee

1. Building healthy committees begins with the nominating process.
2. Give the nominating committee information about what your committee does, when it meets, how often, and where.
3. Suggest the names of persons who may serve well on the COM.
4. Give this information to your nominating committee and staff.

What skills are needed by your committee?

- interpersonal skills
- conflict management
- spiritual discernment
- analysis and strategy
- counseling or chaplaincy experience
- human resource experience

- ability to nurture and mentor others
- collaborative leadership style

What other personal qualities are required?

- Strong faith and ability to articulate it
- Ability to maintain strict confidentiality
- Strong understanding of Reformed theology
- Ability to be a “less-anxious presence” under fire
- Willingness to devote time to the work of the COM

What diversity is needed?

The COM, like all committees in the presbytery, must be balanced in terms of:

- Gender
- Teaching elder or ruling elder
- Race/ethnicity

What other factors should also be considered?

- Age
- Geographical location
- Size of church
- Theological diversity that is reflective of the presbytery

Recruiting elders and pastors who reflect the diversity present in the presbytery to work on the COM is an important witness to our shared commitment to be a fully inclusive denomination and an opportunity for the gifts and skills of all the people of the presbytery to be used for the sake of Christ’s church.

What activities are expected outside of meetings?

- Travel as part of a team of two to consult with sessions, pastors, or candidates
- Keeping regular contact with assigned churches, pastors, and candidates
- Regular phone or email consultation about pending issues
- Attending annual training/committee retreat
- Participation in specialized training in mentoring, conflict management, etc.

How much time is expected per month?

When and where are meetings usually held? Is there enough flexibility to include new people on the committee?

Working laity, especially non-exempt employees and bi-vocational pastors and commissioned lay pastors cannot participate in daytime meetings without great sacrifice.

COMs often benefit greatly from the insights of psychologists and social workers. In order to include more diversity of age, ethnicity, experience, or skills, you may find it valuable to consider whether meetings can be held in the evenings or weekends or whether there are ways that persons who cannot serve on a standing committee could be involved in supporting your work.

Working with congregations seeking pastoral leadership

A 2001 survey of COM moderators indicated that, on average, a COM spends about 24% of its time assisting congregations during their search for new pastoral leadership. Close contact with congregations seeking new leadership is important. Helping congregations locate good leadership that matches well with a congregation not only helps congregations serve more effectively, it also reduces the time and energy that the COM spends responding to conflict in congregations. (In most presbyteries, at least one-fourth of COM time is spent later dealing with congregational conflict.)

Most COMs use a trained liaison who is assigned to a church seeking pastoral leadership. This person is the primary contact between the congregation and the COM and should be involved as soon as the COM knows that a pastoral relationship will be dissolved. The liaison begins work by conducting exit interviews with the person(s) leaving the session. They shepherd the congregation through the search process, and conduct a six to twelve month, and a three-year check-up of the new relationship that the presbytery has established.

Structuring the COM for healthy ministry

COM responsibilities

Many COMs spend so much time dealing with crises and conflicts that they have little time or energy left for nurturing relationships with church professionals and congregations. If COMs are going to support, nurture, and encourage healthy ministries, they will need to adjust the amount of time they spend on each of their responsibilities so that the COM can include a focus on knowing congregations and their leaders and caring for church professionals. When they do, the COM may begin to think of itself as a planning commission rather than a fire department. To do that it will be helpful to aim for one-quarter of COM resources going to each of these areas:

- Caring for pastors, minister members of presbytery, and certified Christian educators and congregations
- Assisting with finding pastoral leadership for congregations
- Managing conflicts in pastoral relationships
- Acquiring the skills to be successful with the first three tasks

Structuring the COM to care for pastors, minister members of the presbytery, and certified Christian educators

- Create a COM pastoral care team to:

- Provide welcome and hospitality when church professionals arrive in the presbytery
- Assign mentors from similar congregations and the same geographic area
- Encourage Bible study, book study, and social groups
- Encourage first-call pastors to participate in conferences offered to them
- Provide ongoing care for all church professionals
- Create opportunities for church professionals to gather at COM or presbytery sponsored lunches or dinners for people in the same area or with similar needs and interests or in similar work. You might consider offering:
 - Educational evenings, conferences, pre-presbytery events, continuing education events
 - Family picnics and gatherings
 - Annual clergy and spouse retreat
- Encourage all church professionals to be part of a covenanting peer group
- Establish an annual reports coordinator to:
 - Receive reports from clergy in validated ministries, members at large, and retired pastors
 - Monitor end of term dates for interim pastors, temporary pastors, designated pastors, and parish associates
- If possible, add a pastoral caregiver to the presbytery staff
- Create a training team to offer opportunities for training:
 - Ethics training in a three year cycle addressing sexual, money, and power issues
 - Sexual misconduct/boundary training mandated for all church professionals
- Create presbytery policies, such as:
 - Sabbatical leave policy
 - Family and medical leave policy
 - Ethical standards for ministry professionals
 - Policy for dealing with ministerial misconduct
 - Severance policy
 - Separation ethics for pastors and congregations they have served
 - Expectations after retirement for church professionals

Facilitating the relationships between congregations, ministers, certified Christian educators and the presbytery

- Recruit a triennial visits coordinator who will organize triennial visits in which all members of COM will participate. Focus the triennial visits on mission and consider using appreciative inquiry as a model for forming questions and topics for discussion.
- Establish a COM transition team that
 - Is knowledgeable about the process of dissolving a pastoral relationship, pulpit supply, interim ministry, AAEEEO requirements, and PNC resources.
 - Will conduct a follow-up review six to twelve months after the pastor is in the congregation, and another follow-up interview at the three-year point.

- Have a presbytery membership team to interview candidates and ministers regarding their suitability to serve in the positions to which they are being invited.
- Develop a mission studies team to coordinate mission studies for congregations in transition. Consider recruiting knowledgeable ministers and elders who are not currently serving on the COM for this responsibility.
- Ask each member of COM to become more knowledgeable about a certain number of congregations and to resource those sessions. Ask those people to be part of the records review for "their" churches and to receive and read the newsletters of those churches.

Settling difficulties on behalf of presbytery when possible and expedient

- Consider recruiting a conflict utilization team to deal with the more difficult and destructive conflicts. Use the skills of pastoral counselors, and wise, experienced elders and pastors in a team of specialists not serving on the COM. These people should be knowledgeable about systems theory as it applies to congregational life and should embody a calm, less-anxious presence.
- Have a cadre of COM members who have a working knowledge of systems theory and conflict management in a variety of cultural contexts, the ability to communicate clearly, and the capacity to remain calm in the midst of conflict. Deploy them for the less intense congregational conflicts.

Learning skills to do the first three

- Highlight examples of healthy ministries at each meeting
- Make training a priority
 - 20-30 minutes per meeting
 - All-day retreat once a year
 - Case studies
- Pair first-year members with more experienced members for on the job training.
- Provide conflict utilization training for a few members and interested others or provide scholarships for training events held by organizations such as the Lombard Mennonite Peace Institute.

Empowering the COM to say “no”

In the interests of building relationships with congregations and church professionals, members of COM are often reluctant to say no, especially to a PNC presenting its chosen candidate to be called as pastor. However, there are times when the COM may need to say no about:

- The suitability of a pastoral call because of concerns regarding “goodness of fit” or because of issues that have been uncovered in an executive reference check.
- Membership in the presbytery for a minister who has a record of difficulties in another presbytery or for other reasons.

- Validation of ministry. Not every possible form of employment of a minister can be considered a validated ministry.
- Ministers of other denominations may not be good members of presbytery because of theological convictions that are at odds with Reformed faith or because of lack of education and preparation for ministry.
- Potential commissioned lay pastors may not always have the necessary gifts for pastoral ministry. The presbytery may not include congregations enough for everyone who wishes to serve as a commissioned lay pastor.
- Terms of call must be sufficient to enable a potential pastor to live in dignity and reasonable comfort in a particular area. COMs are wise to inquire about educational debt as they consider the terms of call for newly ordained pastors.
- Congregational viability is sometimes not sufficient to permit a congregation to call a full-time pastor. Such congregations should be counseled early in the vacancy process, and when appropriate, encouraged to consider a bi-vocational pastor, a part-time pastor, or a commissioned lay pastor.

While saying no is seldom easy, and hearing no is rarely welcome, a “no” will be better received when the COM:

- Has a strong, positive relationship with the parties involved in order to make a sound decision and have credibility in that decision. Continuing connection after the “no” and a sense of being partners in ministry will mitigate the initial pain of the negative response.
- Makes a decision that is based on complete information, is fair and just, and grows out of Christian principles, including telling the truth in love.
- Can say “no” but then offer another option.
- Is consistent, treating decisions carefully and prayerfully for all congregations, no matter how large or how small, and for all ministers, even those perceived as being “difficult.”

Moderating meetings

It is important for the moderator to prepare and email the agenda and other information to COM members at least one week prior to the scheduled meeting. Agendas should include time for spiritual nurture, educational modules, and time for relationship building, as well as “action items.” It is wise to put issues that will require the COM’s best energy and attention early in the meeting rather than at the end when members are tired and attention may wander.

The agenda should include:

- Opening worship/devotional for which committee members rotate responsibility.
- Prayer for the congregations and church professionals in the presbytery and for members of the COM.
- A group-building exercise or time of personal sharing to help the committee members and staff know each other more deeply.

As you moderate meetings, be alert to opportunities to:

- Articulate the vision of supporting healthy ministries.
- Tend to relationships within the committee.
- Foster communication, discernment, and deliberation.
- Be alert to issues that require cross-cultural sensitivity.
 - Assure that all issues are fully discussed before a vote is taken. Be open to deferring a decision until members are satisfied that the decision is ready to be made.
 - Guide decision-making by keeping the discussion on task. Although a certain amount of free discussion is good for COM morale, continued detours into subjects not related to the matter before the committee will have a demoralizing effect on the members.

In addition, it is helpful for the moderator to:

- Exercise care in expressing her or his own opinion on a matter under discussion. Moderators can often choose to invite others to express their opinion on matters before inserting their own.
- Devote time at retreats and at every meeting to building relationships of trust and care among the members of COM. Make it a goal to ensure that all members feel that they are respected, invited to participate, and have important work to do for the sake of Christ's church.
- Monitor assignments and business between meetings.
 - Make certain that actions and people are connected.
 - Contact persons responsible for actions to discuss progress or difficulties and emerging needs for assistance.