

## **Working with a Pastor Nominating Committee -- COM Liaison**

Congratulations! The Committee on Ministry has asked you to serve as the “official liaison” to a congregation’s Pastoral Nominating Committee (PNC). Please take this responsibility seriously to assist the Pastoral Nominating Committee to be well-equipped for their role of calling a new pastor who is a strong fit for their current context.

### ***What does this role require?***

**First and foremost, this role requires your commitment to developing a relationship of trust and care with the PNC.** Every PNC has a different character or “flavor”. Communication styles and decision-making may range in formality and transparency. Follow their lead, recognizing that support requires fluidity and flexibility!

### **PHASE ONE**

Whenever possible, attend the first meeting for the PNC along with our Executive Presbyter. At this meeting, you will be introduced and given opportunity to make initial connections with the PNC. You will also hear detailed information about denominational resources available to help the PNC learn about the established process. Continue, *whenever appropriate and possible*, to attend meetings in-person or via ZOOM. Pay attention to your context and have a frank conversation with the PNC about their needs and expectations. Be sure that you are included in their e-mail list so you can receive regular updates and minutes.

**When the first phase of the process is finished**, the PNC will complete its Ministry Information Form (MIF). **Encourage** the PNC to write their MIF in Word so that it can be easily uploaded on the PCUA’s “Church Leadership Connection” website, [clc.pcusa.org](http://clc.pcusa.org). **Assist** the PNC by reviewing their MIF. **Review** it for clear communication and be sure it gives an honest assessment of the church, its history, unique qualities, and needs. Encourage them to be realistic about necessary experience level, cultural context, and financial capacity. Next, **remind** the PNC that the salary package needs to be approved by the Session. Following that approval, and a final review of the MIF, it is ready to go online.

**Remind the PNC to communicate with the Presbytery to let them know the MIF is complete.** **Connect** the PNC with the COM Moderator so that they may secure their PIN and ID (for the PNC Moderator to begin the online matching process). **Remind** the PNC to contact our Executive Presbytery so an initial matching may be completed, and the review of candidates may begin! More detailed instructions for entering a MIF online can be found online at

[https://www.pcusa.org/site\\_media/media/uploads/clc/pdfs/instructions\\_for\\_entering\\_a\\_new\\_ministry\\_information\\_form\\_1015.pdf](https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/clc/pdfs/instructions_for_entering_a_new_ministry_information_form_1015.pdf)

### **PHASE TWO**

Once the initial matching process has been complete and the Personal Information Forms (PIFs) begin landing in the inbox for the PNC, **the second phase begins.** **Remind** the PNC that they must function as an “Equal Opportunity “ Employer. Provide **wise guidelines** as the committee reviews PIFs. (For example: “red flags” *may* include a non-PCUSA seminary, frequent job hopping, gaps in employment history, and the indications of extreme theological views). Ask open-ended and clarifying questions so that they can come to grips with kind of congregation they really are and what kind of leader they truly need. Work hard to keep your personal preferences and opinions to yourself!

**Remind the PNC moderator** to ask the Executive Presbytery to do the check-in with the EP in the current presbytery of any candidate they are interested in interviewing. This needs to occur prior to any in-person interviews. The PNC also needs to ask the Presbytery when they will schedule a background check.

**Assist** the committee in developing questions for reference checks as well as questions for the face-to-face interview process. Sample questions from Presbytery staff can be found as Attachment A at the end of this document. The committee might also find Attachment B to be useful. That document is “Questions a Candidate might ask the PNC”. Answering those questions as a committee could be very enlightening.

**Coach** the PNC during the interview process, reminding them that they are sharing the good news of their mission and ministry while also learning more about the potential candidate.

**Encourage integrity and authenticity in conversations so that difficult moments in the life of the church are not avoided or minimized but reflected upon in ways which add theological depth and spiritual insight.**

### **PHASE THREE**

**The third phase begins** when the final candidate is selected. Whenever possible, attend the final face-to-face interview (*as an observer only*): Give the “Welcome Packet” for our presbytery to the candidate and encourage him/her to review it and be in touch with our Executive Presbyter with questions. Hit the highpoints with the candidate (*which means you need to be familiar with this document too!*).

When the final candidate has been selected, assist the PNC, the COM Moderator, and presbytery staff in ensuring that ALL documents are prepared and signed for the COM examination. Prior to the COM examination, the candidate should provide our Executive Presbyter with a “Statement of Faith” and a “Biographical Statement” at least 10 days prior to the meeting date.

The candidate should come to the meeting with all forms in the “Welcome Packet” completed and signed. The PNC should come with the Terms of Call (TOC) fully outlined on the provided form within the “Welcome Packet”.

After the successful completion of the COM examination, you may work with the candidate to secure a commission to ordain and/or install. This work to secure a commission would happen AFTER the congregation has voted to call the individual and (s)he has begun work on Plan to attend the installation of site. Plan to attend the installation of the called pastor, if possible.

**As a final wrap-up:** Assist the PNC and candidate to schedule **3, 6, and 12 month support conferences. Mark those conferences so you might also attend** Check in with the candidate personally as well. Share your observations with COM for the sake of mutual prayer and support as well as pro-active trouble-shooting.

**Guide** the PNC and Session in the development of a context-specific job description of the called pastor, which includes clear expectations (rather than unspoken ones!).

***Again, on behalf of our shared mission and ministry,  
thank you for your part in assisting our congregations  
so they may call effective pastoral leaders for the 21<sup>st</sup> century!***

## **Attachment A**

### **Sample Interview and Reference Questions**

Why are you choosing to be open to this position? Why might the timing be right for you to take this position? What do you consider your primary personal attributes, aside from education and experience, that makes you a match for this position?

What kinds of activities, responsibilities and issues do you like best about your present or most recent position and what do you like least? Why?

Please share your personal spiritual journey? When did it begin and how did you come to find the Lord, commit to follow Christ? Where do you believe your journey is leading?

Describe yourself in terms of where you are on the religious and political spectrum from super conservative to super liberal. What has led you to be where you are on that spectrum?

Our church could be characterized as (liberal, conservative, moderate, people of all perspectives), how well can you relate to and pastor a community like this?

In your current and past churches where you served, how many adults came to faith? How many adult baptisms did you administer? How do you account for that?

How do you work with persons without a church background or spiritually immature when attempting to engage them in a deeper understanding of or relationship with God?

How do you follow Jesus Christ, including a description of your prayer life?

What are your ideas to make worship a meaningful encounter with God for those involved? Do you have any special ideas for various age groups?

What have you learned about pastoring a congregation through introducing and leading intentional change in the congregation?

Tell us about a time when you were working with a congregant who has a project they've championed for years. You and others see the project has lost its relevance and it's just time for it to be different and you've had to engage the person to change or end their favorite project. How did you/or others engage that congregant and what was the outcome?

Describe how you handle conflict in general and especially in your interactions with session elders and/or congregants? Please give some examples.

How do you work at being healthy and fit for ministry? What kinds of activities and interests do you engage outside of ministry?

For Interims/Temporary: Share with us how you work (or would work) with us to help lead us through the interim tasks we've outlined for our congregation?

For Interims/Temporary: Let's say it's the end of your time with us as an interim pastor. What signs in the life of our church would let you know you've been effective as an interim minister?

Given what you know now, how well do you rate yourself as a match for what we are searching for in a pastor/interim/stated supply?

Make sure you design questions about specific issues that the church knows it will be facing (personnel, finance, stewardship, worship changes, facility improvements, evaluating its mission and direction, etc.). For example . . . We need to evaluate our staffing—do we have appropriate staff positions for our mission, do we have the right people in those positions? Can you share with us how you have dealt with staffing evaluations and adjustments? If not, can you share how you think you'd approach this project?

What questions do you have for us?

## SAMPLE REFERENCE CHECK QUESTIONS

Always introduce yourself and explain the characteristics of the *church* and the *position* for which you are considering the candidate.

**No matter what, always ask this question of references toward the end of the reference check: “Are you aware of anything in his/her background of a controversial nature that if brought to light would be embarrassing to the church or interfere with the candidate’s ability to perform this job?”**

In what capacity or relationship have you known the candidate and how long?

What do you consider the candidates most noteworthy accomplishments?

How would you describe the candidate’s most common leadership style(s) with the congregation? Are they able to use different leadership styles for different situations and groups as the circumstances warrant? Can you give me examples?

How well organized is the candidate? How well do they respond to the demands of ministry?

How effective is the candidate at designing and moderating session or team meetings?

How does the candidate live out their Christian spirituality in their ministry and interactions with congregants and others?

Our church could be characterized as (liberal, conservative, moderate, people of all perspectives), how well can this candidate pastor and lead a community like this?

Have you had any life changing experiences associated with this person’s leadership? Please share what you can about that.

What do you consider this person’s greatest attributes and abilities?

Since none of us are perfect, what would you consider this person’s weakness or area in need of growth and development?

How does this person deal with conflict? Please share an example.

Do you feel comfortable recommending this person?

Is there anything else we should know about the candidate?

## Attachment B

### Questions a candidate might ask the PNC

- Where do you see God at work in your church right now? What excites you most?
- After a long-term pastorate, the interim time is important in preparing for the next pastor. What work have you done during this interim time to prepare for the next season of ministry?
- What work does the Session need to do over the next 3 to 5 years to live into God's future at 1<sup>st</sup> Pres? Or, what are the one or two big challenges you face in the short term? Long term?
- You identified leadership competencies that you desire for your next pastor. Which ones are at the top of your desired skills, and why? Which ones are toward the bottom?
- Two items in your brief church mission statement stood out to me: #4—we will promote spiritual growth; and #5 we shall equip and empower our community of faith for ministry.
  - With regard to #4, how are you promoting spiritual growth?
  - With regard to #5, how are you equipping and empowering your people?
  - How do you see your next pastor fitting in with those objectives?
- Tell me about your support for at-risk children in your community? (mentioned in PIF)
- What do you hope would be the first thing (or two) that your new pastor does within their first 6 months with you?
- If I am called as your next pastor:
  - what will I love about 1<sup>st</sup> PC?
  - what will give me a headache?
- What is the working relationship like between Session and staff? How is that going?
- How is the church doing financially? How does financial stewardship fit in with a larger understanding of stewardship at 1<sup>st</sup> Pres? Do you have debt on your facility? Could you please share with me the last 2 years of financials at First PC after our interview?
- What does your budget tell me about your mission?
- What new & innovative projects or changes have you undertaken in the last 5 years? How have those gone?
- Tell me about [City/Town] and the greater area...