“Christ calls the Church into being, giving it all that is necessary for its mission in the world, for its sanctification, and for its service to God. Christ is present with the Church in both Spirit and Word. Christ alone rules, calls, teaches, and uses the Church as he wills.” (Book of Order, F-1.0202).

Presbyterians believe that God uses committees, papers, procedures, and our polity, sprinkled with a generous measure of prayer, Scripture, and worship, to help you discern who it is that God is calling to be your pastor. This call is confirmed as the pastor, the church, and the presbytery each say “yes” to the relationship.

This three-way partnership is acted out throughout the pastoral call process, with the presbytery having the primary responsibility for oversight of the process. “... No pastoral relationship may be established, changed, or dissolved without the approval of the presbytery” (Book of Order, G-2.0502).
PART THREE – The Call Process

During the time of transition between pastors, a congregation is invited to engage in a spiritual discernment process to discover or reconfirm its call to ministry—what God wants the church to be and do in the next phase of the congregation’s life. Your presbytery may ask your congregation to engage in a mission study that involves Bible study, prayer, and an honest and thoughtful look at your congregation and community, as a way to discern the ministry direction in which God is leading you.

Once this becomes clear, the pastor nominating committee (PNC), in consultation with the presbytery, begins the discernment process of discovering who God is calling to be the pastor in this next chapter of your congregation’s life and ministry.

Polity and the Call Process

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) call process reflects the way our ministry is governed today. Our church polity is representative, and this form of government is seen throughout the call process. To understand how our polity is distinct from that of other denominations, see this short video on Denominational Polities at http://www.pcusa.org/ocap.

Below is a suggested call process. It describes the role of each partner in the process: the presbytery, COM, session, PNC, pastor, and congregation. For additional information, view the video, The Call Process, at http://www.pcusa.org/ocap.
Presbytery as a Participant in the Pastoral Call Process

Presbytery’s Role

The presbytery will be your companion in the search process, often through someone who will serve as your liaison. Your presbytery liaison will provide you with guidance, resources, and other services as you go through the pastoral search process. In many presbyteries, the liaison will help you to assess your leadership needs, financial health, and the type of pastoral leadership you need such as full-time, part-time, bi-vocational, installed, or temporary. It is wise to consult regularly with your presbytery liaison not only for advice and guidance but to keep him or her informed, especially at key times in your pastoral search process.

The presbytery will work closely with the pastor nominating committee (PNC), which has been elected to present a pastor or associate pastor nominee to the congregation. The presbytery has the responsibility to guide and participate in the decision of the PNC. The presbytery will provide the PNC “counsel on the merits, suitability, and availability of those considered for the call” (Book of Order, G-2.0803).

Each presbytery is unique and will have its own procedures and policies regarding the search process, which supersede any procedures found in this manual. Therefore, it is important for a congregation seeking a new pastor to be in regular contact with the presbytery.

Key Times for Presbytery Involvement

There are several key times in the call process when it is particularly important for presbytery to be involved with your congregation.

When Your Pastor Announces His or Her Departure. As your current pastor prepares to leave, presbytery has the responsibility to dissolve the pastoral relationship, appoint a moderator for your session, and provide you with guidance about pulpit supply.

During the Pastoral Vacancy. Presbytery has the responsibility to assist the session with issues related to pastoral vacancies, including securing temporary pastoral leadership; assessing congregational finances, including costs associated with a pastoral search and pastoral compensation; engaging in a congregational mission study (if required); approval of the Ministry Information Form (MIF); and nominating and electing a PNC.

Working with the Pastor Nominating Committee. Presbytery has the responsibility to guide the PNC through the pastoral call process, providing training, oversight, and assistance. Presbytery will also have a role in reference and background checks for the finalists being considered. Presbytery must examine the PNC’s finalist for presbytery membership and concur with the PNC’s final decision before a call can be issued.
PART THREE – The Call Process

When the New Pastor Is Called. Presbytery has the responsibility to ensure that the call to your new pastor is in order and that the appropriate actions are taken by the congregation and presbytery.

When Your Pastor Is Ordained and/or Installed. The call process for your new pastor is completed at a service of ordination and/or installation that is organized and conducted by the presbytery, often through the work of a presbytery-appointed administrative commission.

As Your Pastor Ministers with You. The presbytery remains your partner in this pastoral relationship. Some presbyteries assign a permanent liaison to each congregation in the presbytery who will visit often and participate in special occasions, while other presbyteries assign representatives to visit with you periodically. Don’t hesitate to call your presbytery if you need extra support or guidance.

Other Participants in the Pastoral Call Process

The Session

The session’s responsibility is to set a positive and reassuring tone during the pastoral search process. This includes assisting the congregation in coping with the departure of the pastor, carrying on with the ministry of the congregation, and looking forward to the next stage of the congregation’s life together. During this process the session should meet regularly with the moderator appointed by the presbytery in order to continue to fulfill its responsibilities for the congregation’s worship life, Christian education, pastoral care, fellowship, mission, and administration. Session responsibilities, in consultation with presbytery, include:

- Securing guest preachers and providing for pastoral care during the immediate vacancy;
- With concurrence of presbytery, finding and contracting with temporary pastoral leadership for the longer vacancy period;
- Providing for and participating in a congregational mission study, if appropriate or required by the presbytery;
- Providing a process for the congregation to elect a PNC, including suggesting the number of PNC members;
- Calling a congregational meeting for the election of the PNC;
- Budgeting funds for the PNC to cover search expenses;
- Determining the financial compensation available for your new pastor, including moving costs;
- Reviewing and approving the completed MIF in order that the clerk of session may attest to it in CLC;
- Praying regularly for the PNC;
- Calling a congregational meeting when the PNC is ready to present its nominee to the congregation;
- Preparing for the new pastor’s arrival by attending to such details as manse renovation, moving, and welcoming;
- Arranging for the ordination and/or installation of your new pastor in consultation with the presbytery.
The Moderator of Session

During a pastoral vacancy, the presbytery will appoint someone to moderate the session and congregational meetings. In many instances, the temporary pastor working with the session will be appointed to serve as moderator. The moderator’s responsibilities include helping the session fulfill its responsibilities for the congregation’s life and ministries.

The Temporary Pastor

The temporary pastor provides pastoral leadership during the congregation’s search for the next pastor. The presbytery can help the session determine if the church needs a temporary pastor and what responsibilities the temporary pastor will have. An interim pastor is a temporary pastor who has special expertise and training in working with congregations in the midst of a pastoral transition. The temporary pastor’s responsibilities often include:

- Worship leadership, including preaching and administration of the sacraments;
- Providing pastoral care;
- Serving as moderator of session (when appointed by presbytery) and working with the session to provide for the life and ministry of the congregation;
- Administrative work, including supervision of other staff persons;
- Supporting the work of the PNC, but not being directly involved with their work;
- Assisting with the congregational mission study (with presbytery approval);
- Helping the congregation prepare to welcome the leadership of a new pastor.

The Pastor Nominating Committee

The pastor nominating committee (PNC), representative of the whole congregation and elected by the congregation, has the ultimate responsibility for nominating a minister to the congregation for election as the next pastor or associate pastor. Over a number of months, the PNC will journey through the pastoral search process, seeking to hear the call of Christ and “to participate in God’s own choice” for your next pastor. In the pastoral call process, the PNC’s responsibilities include:

- Completing the congregation’s MIF and submitting it to session and presbytery for approval;
- Entering the approved MIF online with Church Leadership Connection (CLC);
- Receiving, reading, and evaluating Personal Information Forms (PIF) in a spirit of prayerful openness to the movement of God’s Spirit;
- Regularly providing reports to the congregation on the pastoral search progress;
- Narrowing the field of prospective pastors through listening to sermons, reference checking (by both the PNC and the presbytery), and phone or video conference interviews—all while sharing, listening, and praying together;
- Interviewing face-to-face the “short list” of prospective pastors, providing for a welcoming and hospitable visit to your church community;
- Arranging with the presbytery for the necessary examinations and approvals of your finalists;
- Selecting one nominee to present to the congregation and negotiating the terms of call;
- Obtaining presbytery approval of the call;
- Presenting the nominee to the congregation for its vote;
- Following the affirmative vote of the congregation, signing the pastoral terms of call for the new pastor;
- Notifying Church Leadership Connection (CLC) when a call has been extended and accepted.
The Congregation

The responsibilities of the congregation, while few, are no less important than those of the other participants in the pastoral call process. The responsibilities of the congregation include:

- Continuing to support the ministry of the church through prayer, participation, and financial support during the time of pastoral transition;
- Electing the PNC;
- Praying regularly for the PNC;
- Electing the new pastor and approving the terms of call;
- Welcoming the new pastor as the ministry begins.