PART FIVE — Searching for a Pastor

The Work of the Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC)

Getting Organized
As members of the elected committee, get organized and map out what you will need, what you will do, and the timetable you hope to follow.

Scheduling PNC Meetings
In consultation with your presbytery liaison, plan for your first meeting. The presbytery liaison often leads this orientation meeting, so it will be essential for all of your members to be present. The presbytery may also ask the session to be present for the first part of the meeting.

Suggestions for Your Work

| Key Icon | Plan to set regular meeting days, times, and places, making certain that all PNC members will be available and that your presbytery liaison will be able to attend. Many PNCs, wisely, decide to meet every week. Regular and frequent meetings are a major factor in helping to move the call process along. If you will be meeting at the church building, be sure the room in which you will be meeting is adequate for your confidentiality needs. Some PNCs choose to meet away from the church building due to the number of other church activities going on during their scheduled meeting time. |

Understanding Your Work
As your committee begins working together, a number of points should be discussed by your committee:

- Set regular meeting times.
- Include time for prayer and scripture.
- Build consensus and unity.
- Gather materials, Bibles, and other resources.
- Review the video on the call process.
- Establish a covenant of agreement among the PNC and hold one another accountable to the terms of your covenant.
Confidentiality

Maintaining confidentiality within the PNC is of the upmost importance. Maintaining confidentiality ensures that the identities of the prospective pastors your PNC is considering are protected. Maintaining confidentiality within the PNC is an issue of integrity, trusting God in the process, and spiritual leadership.

It is often noted that the news that a prospective pastor is seeking or considering a new call travels fast. To respect the discernment of prospective pastors, work to uphold within the PNC a covenant of confidentiality that honors the integrity of the call seeker and the committee. This means that information about prospective pastors and all conversations, deliberations, and perceptions should not go beyond the members of the PNC, your presbytery liaison, and the EP/GP. Therefore, only certain people and groups have the right to know information about the pastors under consideration at specific times in the call process. As you maintain confidentiality in your process, you will ensure the integrity of the work of the PNC, keeping it free from outside influence or interference.

Selecting Leadership

You may find it helpful to identify leaders with specific responsibilities to help facilitate the work of the PNC. These leaders may include a chairperson or co-chairs, secretary, and/or Internet communicator.

- The role of the chairperson or co-chairs might be to
  - encourage discussion of various viewpoints rather than discourage them;
  - delegate responsibility and see that tasks are carried out;
  - ensure that decisions reached are the consensus of the group;
  - communicate with the presbytery, CLC, candidates, and prospective pastors.

- The role of the secretary might be to
  - be responsible for correspondence to and from the committee;
  - keep the minutes of meetings;
  - perform other duties as determined by the PNC.

- The role of the Internet communicator might be to
  - enter your approved MIF online with CLC;
  - send and receive confidential communication to and from prospective pastors;
  - access and/or download from CLC all referred PIFs.

Ideally, the internet communicator would be your PNC chairperson or co-chair, but if she or he is not comfortable with the Internet, or if you just want to share the work of the PNC, another member of the committee could assume this role. Be sure that this person has access to the Internet on a regular basis and an e-mail account where confidentiality can be maintained. Access through a church office computer is not recommended unless complete confidentiality can be assured. All mailings and e-mails should go only to PNC members and not through others who are not PNC members. The church office address is not the best place to receive mail, so decide the primary mail and e-mail addresses your committee will be using for all communication.
Using the Church Leadership Connection (CLC)

CLC Mission Statement

To help search committees and call seekers with a high likelihood of “fit” to make an initial connection, relying on them to go deeper in exchange of information, conversation, and discernment.

Foundational Principles for CLC

- The call is a process of spiritual discernment that involves the call to an individual confirmed by a calling body
- CLC is a tool in this broader call process
- CLC is a web-based system that provides global access and visibility
- CLC policies are in compliance with the Book of Order
- CLC policies do not supersede the authority of mid councils but work in partnership to support presbytery mission
- CLC adheres to values of fairness and openness

Who Can Use the System

Who May Enter a Personal Information Form (PIF)?

- PC(USA) teaching elders in good standing
- PC(USA) candidates for ministry who have been certified “ready for examination for ordination, pending a call”
- Christian educators, deacons, ruling elders, and lay professionals who are members of a PC(USA) congregation
- Ministers of other denominations who are transferring their membership to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and have completed the requirements for transfer except for the call

Who May Enter a Ministry Information Form (MIF)?

- PC(USA) congregations
- PC(USA) Joint Congregational Witness (Union Churches)
- PC(USA) educational and theological institutions
- PC(USA) conference centers
- PC(USA) General Assembly agencies
- Other entities, such as hospitals, nursing homes, and retirement facilities with official ties to the PC(USA)
Writing the Ministry Information Form (MIF)

Your Ministry Narrative Through the MIF

The congregation’s Ministry Information Form provides a narrative picture of the mission and ministry of the congregation and its sense of call. Prospective pastors will use the form to help them discern whether God is calling them to serve your church. The MIF should be used to express your ministry context, demographics, history, theology, values, leadership needs, and expectations. Well written MIFs clearly communicate the above and will ensure the best referrals. Use the matching features of the forms to specify your requirements for the position. We highly recommend that you fully review the Calling Organization Tutorial at (http://oga.pcusa.org/section/mid-council-ministries/clc/ministry-information-form2/) as a part of your PNC training.

The MIF consists of Part I and Part II. Part I asks for general information about your congregation. Each church is assigned a login and password. Your login will begin with a letter, followed by two numbers, then followed by your five-digit PC(USA) church PIN number (e.g., P0150639). Other information on Part I asks church size, racial ethnic composition, average worship attendance, church school attendance, curriculum, presbytery, community type, clerk of session contact information, and whether the congregation qualifies to participate in the Seminary Debt Assistance Program.

Part II of the MIF asks for more in-depth information about your congregation and includes narrative questions. Responses to each narrative question are limited to 1,500 characters, including spaces and punctuation.

In Part II you will need to select the following:

- Position type and experience requirements (no experience, first ordained call, up to 2 years, 2–5 years, 5–10 years, or above 10 years). Your MIF will be matched with all persons who have this level of experience and above.
- Employment status (full-time, part-time, open to both, or bi-vocational)
- Language requirements
- Statement of Faith (this is an optional requirement that will provide a written statement of a person’s theology)
- Training/Certification (Interim/Transitional Ministry Training, Interim Executive Presbyter Training, Certified Christian Educator, Certified Business Administrator, Conflict Mediator, Clinical Pastoral Education Training, or Other)
- Deadline date (CLC does not recommend entering a deadline date unless you believe it to be absolutely necessary. If you enter a deadline date, know that ten days after that date your MIF will be purged from the CLC system. To continue your search process once your form is purged you will have to reenter your MIF)

The following information explains matching criteria, leadership competencies, call and fit, and other information that will help you in the search process. The following pages walk you through the MIF form and provide information on matching criteria, leadership competencies, call and fit, effective salary, narrative questions, and other information that is included on the MIF form.
Establishing Matching Criteria
The CLC system matches for positions and not individuals. Matches are made based upon position type, experience level, salary, language, geographical choice, and leadership competencies. Optional matching criteria include statements of faith, being open to call seekers in your presbytery, and optional links (sermons, blogs, and education samples). The matching criteria you establish will be used to match the congregation with prospective pastors with compatible leadership competencies, theology, and gifts.

Additional Matching Criteria
Illustrated below is an example of the basic matching criteria you will establish in the MIF Part II. Your MIF will be matched with prospective pastors that have selected similar matching criteria.

---

Example of the online MIF selecting the position title.
PART FIVE – Searching for a Pastor

Example of the online MIF selecting the experience requirements.

Optional Matching Criteria Example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Need to Match?</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Value To Match</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[ ] YES  [ ] NO</td>
<td>Employment Status</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ] YES  [ ] NO</td>
<td>Experience Level</td>
<td>2–5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ] YES  [ ] NO</td>
<td>Maximum Salary</td>
<td>$65,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ] YES  [ ] NO</td>
<td>Language:</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ] YES  [ ] NO</td>
<td>Statement Of Faith:</td>
<td>Statement of Faith is required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ] YES  [ ] NO</td>
<td>Narrative Search:</td>
<td>(enter phrase)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ] YES  [ ] NO</td>
<td>Optional Links: (i.e. sermons, lesson plans, articles, blogs, assessment results available, etc.)</td>
<td>Optional Links are required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ] YES  [ ] NO</td>
<td>Actively Seeking:</td>
<td>Actively Seeking is required</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is a screen shot from CLC matcher’s page showing matching possible criteria.
Leadership Competencies

A competency is defined as a behavior or set of behaviors that describes performance in a particular working context. Competencies offer, make up, comprise a leadership blueprint that includes demonstrated ability, training, experience, measurable wisdom, and gifts and talents.

The MIF form includes competencies in four areas: Theological/Spiritual interpreter, Communication, Organizational Leadership, and Interpersonal Engagement. On the MIF form you are asked to select up to ten competencies as a part of your matching criteria. Definitions for the competencies can be accessed by clicking on the word as it is listed on the form.

In preparation for completing your MIF, we recommend that the committee use the case studies below to understand how leadership competencies contribute to the search process.

Case Study Exercise
This exercise should be done in small groups. Each group should read the case study and decide, based upon the mission needs of the congregation, what leadership competencies are needed in the next pastor. Each group should choose up to ten competencies to be listed on the MIF. The exercise will provide practice in selecting competencies that are compatible with the values of the congregation and its mission for ministry. Choose a reporter to briefly explain the case study and your selected competencies to the larger group. You will have thirty minutes for this exercise.

Case Study One — Twenty-First Century Presbyterian Church

Mission Statement: “Living out the love of Christ by embracing people where they are!”

You are a member of the Twenty-First Century Presbyterian Church PNC. The committee was elected three weeks ago with nine members—four women and five men. The congregation is in a gentrified neighborhood in San Francisco. On average the congregation has 600 people in worship. Currently the congregation has three worship services on Sunday. Twenty-First Century Presbyterian Church is a forty-year-old congregation with a history of activism, justice-making, community witness, strong stewardship, and multiculturalism. The new head-of-staff pastor will supervise two other teaching elders, a Christian educator, and three musicians. The budget of the congregation is $1,500,000. The former pastor was heavily involved in local politics, community development, and mentoring in underserved communities. Additionally, the congregation’s officers are actively involved in the ministry of the presbytery. The new pastor is expected to follow in the previous pastor’s footsteps. The Reverend Did Everything Right resigned after twelve years of service for medical reasons. Who should they call?
Case Study Two — Transitioning Presbyterian Church

Mission Statement: “Committed to Christ, Diversity, and Mission. Preparing people for a relationship with God, one another, and the community, sharing the word through scripture, worship, and fellowship.”

Transitioning Presbyterian Church is a congregation that is moving from a pastoral-size church to a program-size church. Over the last three years, the congregation has had a burst of new energy. The average worship attendance rose to 250 people. Last year thirty-five adults were baptized. Recently, the officers attended an Evangelism and Church Growth Conference and have been implementing a monthly “sharing your faith event” in the community. If the truth is told, it is the laity of the church that has inspired this grass-root change in the congregation. Unfortunately, the present pastor of twenty-five years could not keep up with the enthusiasm of the congregation. He announced last Sunday that he was resigning and moving on. With mixed feelings of excitement and grief, the congregation is ready to look for a new pastor. Members are hoping for a person who can share their vision and help them make the leap from a pastoral-size church to a program-size church. Who will God send? What gifts would they need to be effective in this call?

Case Study Three — Faithful Presbyterian Church

Mission Statement: “We are a community loving Christ, building disciples, serving all.”

Faithful Presbyterian Church is a congregation in a rural area. The congregation is 100 years old with many of the charter members’ families currently serving as officers. Ten years ago, the town almost died when the mill left the area. The residents that remained stayed because they could not leave. The congregation has some financial challenges, but they are able to sustain a pastor paying the minimum terms of call. Their last pastor left during the economic downturn in the area. The pastor’s family was a two-income household. However, finding full-time employment in the town is almost impossible. A couple of years ago two factories opened in a neighboring town, employing 2,500 people. The growth is just what the town needed. However, with the growth came different people: Spanish and African immigrants. Faithful Presbyterian Church is fifteen miles from this improving town. As they look for a new pastor, language fluency is important as well as a person who is comfortable working with different cultures. Who should they call?

Questions to consider:
- What leadership competencies did you choose?
- How do the chosen competencies address the leadership needs of the congregation in the study?
- How has this exercise helped you to think about your congregation’s leadership needs?
Effective Salary
On the MIF you will need to enter the minimum and maximum effective salary for this position. Effective salary includes salary and housing allowance/manse value combined (for pastoral positions). The minimum salary will be displayed on your MIF. The maximum salary is not displayed but is used for matching purposes only. For a full definition of Effective Salary see the reference below.

Board of Pensions Definition:

Special Programs to Support Pastors with Educational Debt and Those Serving Smaller Congregations
There are special programs to support pastors with educational debt and those who are serving smaller congregations. On the MIF the COM should indicate when approving your form if your congregation is eligible to participate in the educational debt and special programs for those serving smaller congregations. For more information see the links below:

- Seminary Debt Assistance and the BOP http://www.pensions.org/plansandprograms/assistanceprogram/pages/pastors-vocational-leadership-needs.aspx#seminary

Ministry Information Form Narrative Questions
1. What is the congregation’s or organization’s vision for ministry? Additionally, describe how this vision is lived out.
2. How do you feel called to reach out to address the emerging needs of your community or constituency?
3. How will this position help you to reach your vision and mission goals?
4. Provide a description of the characteristics needed by the person who is open to being called to this congregation and/or organization.
5. For what specific tasks, assignments, and program areas will this person have responsibility?

Resources for writing and submitting the MIF can be found at http://www.pcusa.org/clc under Calling Organizations.

Instructions for completing the MIF
Users Guides for the PNC chair and clerk of session
Download forms in PDF and Microsoft Word formats
Choosing a Pastor

Call and Fit

The phrase call and fit refers to the person with the right experience, gifts, and credentials for the position. To say a person has the right fit for a position means that the person also has compatible theology, values, ministry goals, economic needs, and chemistry, as well as the right disposition to serve a particular congregation.

Choosing the right person to serve as pastor is the ultimate goal for the PNC. Making this choice will take patience, good process, and spiritual discernment. The person you might assume is the right person for the call could well be the wrong person to serve the congregation at this time. Understanding where the congregation is in its life cycle will help you discern the type of leader you need. Additionally, having a good understanding of the congregation’s history, cultural context, demographics, finances, mission, and vision for the future is important in choosing new leadership. We strongly encourage you to be open to God’s call as you make your choices among prospective pastors.

As you discern who God might be calling to serve the congregation, please keep in mind the biblical understanding of call. It is Christ who heads the church and calls women and men of various ages, backgrounds, and experiences to serve as pastor. For more information see the video Call and Fit at http://www.pcusa.org/ocap.

Twenty-First Century Leaders

Twenty-first century leaders are often thought of as those who have prepared for doing ministry in this day and age. It means that leaders are adaptive, flexible, and prepared to lead the modern-era church into a postmodern ministry. Strong interpersonal skills, emotional and spiritual fitness, and the ability to communicate a vision, lead change, empower others for leading, and serve in the midst of ambiguity are some of the characteristics needed for twenty-first-century pastors.

Calling Candidates for Ministry

For information on calling a candidate for ministry as your pastor, see Book of Order requirements in G-2.0607. In summary, the Book of Order requires that the presbytery of care grant permission for candidates to begin negotiating for service. It is important to make sure that all requirements have been met and that the presbytery of care has certified a candidate ready for examination for ordination as a teaching elder pending a call. Evidence of readiness to begin ordered ministry as a teaching elder shall include: a candidate’s wisdom and maturity of faith, leadership skills, compassion, spirit, honest repute, and sound judgment; a transcript showing graduation, with satisfactory grades, at a regionally accredited college or university; a transcript from a theological institution accredited by the Association of Theological Schools acceptable to the presbytery, showing a course of study including Hebrew and Greek, exegesis of the Old and New Testaments using Hebrew and Greek, satisfactory grades in all areas of study, and graduation or proximity to graduation; and satisfactory grades, together with the examination papers in the areas covered by any standard ordination examination approved by the General Assembly. Such examinations shall be prepared and administered by a body created by the presbyteries.

For more information see the video “Calling First Call Pastors” at http://www.pcusa.org/ocap.
Receiving Referrals
Within the CLC system you can specify how you would like referrals to be received through the system and who receives the referrals. Some presbyteries require that referral reports are received by the executive presbyter (EP) and the committee on ministry (COM) moderator in addition to the pastor nominating committee (PNC) chair. Consult with your presbytery liaison concerning the protocol for your presbytery.

Members of your congregation and presbytery may suggest names of prospective pastors to the PNC. Communicate to the congregation the mechanism by which they can suggest names of prospective pastors to the PNC. Be sure to communicate to the congregation that while you appreciate their suggestions of prospective pastors, you will be unable to share with them the current status of any suggested prospective pastors in order to honor the confidentiality of the process.

Self-Referrals Through CLC — Individuals, through the CLC system, can self-refer their PIF to the PNC for consideration using the Opportunity Search List. These refers are from individuals who sense a call to your congregation. Some of the self-referrals will match your search criteria and others will not. The PNC should discern the merit of all refers and decide whether to engage in further conversation with call seekers.

Attestation Assurance — When a PIF of prospective pastors or candidates for ministry comes through the CLC system, you can be assured that the PIF has been attested to by a teaching elder’s presbytery stated clerk or a candidate’s presbytery of candidacy. If you receive a PIF apart from the CLC system, you will need to ascertain whether that PIF has been attested to by the appropriate person. You should not consider a PIF until proof of such attestation is provided. It is the prospective pastor’s responsibility to provide you with the attestation. Simply let the individual know that their PIF will not be considered until such attestation is provided and set the PIF aside. If you have any questions about whether a PIF you receive may be considered, check with your presbytery liaison or EP/GP.

A Word About Possible PIF Differences — PIFs entered in the CLC system have limitations that PIFs completed outside of the system and then sent directly to you may not have. Note that within the CLC system, PIFs have character limitations. A PIF sent to you outside of the CLC system may have longer answers to the narrative questions than found on PIFs entered with CLC. Your PNC may have to deal with the issue of “comparing apples to oranges” if you receive PIFs with more lengthy answers and different format than those received through the system.

Acknowledging Receipt of a PIF — Prospective pastors whose PIFs have been matched with your MIF and those who have self-referred their PIF to you would like to know that you have received their PIF. Please acknowledge receipt of all PIFs and keep prospective pastors informed of their status, including whether they are being considered.
PART FIVE – Searching for a Pastor

Ministers from Other Denominations — Ministers from other denominations, including ministers from our Formula of Agreement partner denominations, have been known to send PIFs or resumés directly to PC(USA) PNCs for their consideration. If you receive a PIF or resume from a minister from another denomination, consult with your presbytery before considering the application or engaging in conversation with ministers of other denominations.

Reading and Screening Personal Information Forms

PNC Access to PIFs

Every member of the PNC needs access to every PIF received by the PNC.

Evaluating PIFs

All PIFs should be prayerfully considered and thoroughly evaluated. As you read each PIF, give attention to the source of the referral (matched or self-referred, suggested name from someone, etc.), to the “fit” of the prospective pastor to the church, and to God’s “still, small voice” speaking to you.

Your PNC will need to determine how you will evaluate PIFs. Check to see whether your presbytery has any recommendations. If your presbytery does not have a recommended process, you are free to create your own, making it as complex or as simple as you choose.

A Suggested Process:

- Each PNC member reads all the information in a PIF and ranks the PIF 1, 2, or 3:
  1 for those in whom you are very interested
  2 for those in whom you have some interest
  3 for those you do not want to consider further

Keep in mind that PIFs referred through computer matching are selected based on the compatibility of the information your committee has submitted in the MIF and the statement of preferences, experience, leadership competencies, and financial needs of each person as submitted in their PIF. PNC members would be wise to keep notes to be shared with the rest of the committee about why they ranked a PIF a particular way.

- If your committee receives two copies of a PIF, take a closer look at this individual because these PIFs have come to you from two different sources: self-referral and computer matching. This means that from both the computer matching point of view and the prospective pastor’s point of view his or her skills, interests, and experience match those for which your church is looking.

- After all PNC members have had a chance to read and evaluate a PIF, carefully review and evaluate the PIF together as a committee. Allow each member to share reasons for the particular ranking and listen attentively to one another.

- Reach some kind of consensus on the PNC ranking for each PIF.

- If your PNC is interested in a prospective pastor who is unable to sign the PIF sexual misconduct statement in the affirmative, turn the matter over to your EP/GP (executive/general presbyter) or presbytery, who will provide you with guidance.

- Set aside those prospective pastors the PNC has rated 3. If you are sure that you will not be returning to these PIFs, notify them with an affirming letter that they are no longer being considered.
PART FIVE – Searching for a Pastor

- Contact your higher ranked individuals to determine whether they are interested and available to consider your position.
- Repeat the process until all PIFs have been read and evaluated and the interest of your higher ranked prospective pastors has been ascertained.
- Once a prospective pastor’s interest has been ascertained, you may want to move right into asking for a sermon and checking references. How many prospective pastors will this be? There is no magic number, although your presbytery liaison may have a suggestion. Much depends on your position, the prospective pastors, the consensus of your PNC, and the movement of the Holy Spirit.
- Share the names of those you are interested in with your presbytery liaison and EP/GP. Make sure you know and follow your presbytery’s screening process for those under consideration.

Requesting Additional Materials

You may want to request additional materials from prospective pastors to help you in your discernment process.

Sermon Videos. Most PNCs ask prospective pastors for a sermon video. For positions with primary responsibilities for preaching, viewing a sermon is a must. These may come to you in a variety of formats. In evaluating sermons, remember that you are evaluating the content of the sermon. Determine your process for viewing, circulating, and evaluating sermons.

Supplemental Questions. For positions in a unique ministry setting or situation, you may wish to make use of supplemental questions. Use supplemental questions if you need more in-depth and thoughtful answers to questions than can be adequately answered during a phone or face-to-face interview. If you use supplemental questions, ensure that all members of the PNC have access to a copy of each prospective pastor’s responses.

Other Material. You may choose not to get bogged down in requesting other supplemental material but prospective pastors have been known to send — unsolicited — supplemental material that may include church newsletters, bulletins, published articles, and newspaper clippings. Decide how you will handle this material.

Web Sites. Some individuals you are considering may direct you to church or personal web sites for additional information. While you can get information about a prospective pastor this way, be careful that your impressions of an individual are not formed simply from the impressiveness (or lack thereof) of the web site. Remember that you are searching for a pastor with the gifts and skills listed on your MIF, and web design and technology might not be one of those skills.
Establishing an Interview Process

The PNC’s interview process should be consistent to ensure fairness and due diligence. Interviews are an opportunity to learn more about the person to help you discern call, fit, and a shared vision for ministry. Questions used in the interview should be consistent for all candidates. Specific questions raised by the Personal Information Forms (PIF) should also be included in the interview process and may differ among candidates. Below is a list of potential questions you may want to use.

- Describe your passion for ministry.
- Tell us about your call to ministry.
- How do you achieve personal growth in ministry?
- How have you challenged the congregations you have served to be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ?
- What feeds your soul?
- How would you describe your leadership style?
- What ministry situations frustrate you most?
- When facing a problem, what questions do you naturally ask?
- Describe your greatest strengths and abilities.
- How do you work with diverse theological perspectives within the congregation?
- How do you see the denomination’s future? (Long-term and short-term.)
- Tell us about your family traditions as they relate to the faith.
- How do you prepare for weekly worship?
- What are your spiritual disciplines?

It is important to note that the purpose of interview questions is to gain the information needed to assess a person’s fitness to serve. While any question may be allowable, you are encouraged to think deeply about what information is most pertinent for your discernment. For more information, see the video on Appropriate Questions for Interviews at http://www.pcusa.org/ocap.

Reference Checks

Reference checks are a must in any pastoral search. Consult your presbytery for specific requirements before engaging in in-person interviews and moving too far along in your selection process. Below are the types of reference checks you will engage in during the search process. For more information, see the video resource, Reference Checks, at http://www.pcusa.org/ocap.

- Presbytery-to-Presbytery Reference Checks. Your presbytery checks with the prospective pastor’s presbytery of membership for additional information about his or her practice of ministry.
- Primary Reference Checks. Primary references are those references that a prospective pastor has listed on his or her PIF. There can be up to six references for each PIF.
- Secondary Reference Checks. Secondary references are persons who are not listed by the prospective pastor but are suggested by others or contacted because they are thought to have knowledge of the individual. Secondary references should only be contacted when the prospective pastor has given permission. Under no circumstances should a PNC contact members of a prospective pastor’s present congregation without her or his permission to do so. Discuss with your presbytery liaison the presbytery guidelines for contacting secondary references.
PART FIVE – Searching for a Pastor

- **Background Checks.** Background checks are assessments of a prospective pastor’s character and fitness for employment. They may include checks of employment, credit, criminal, and motor vehicle records. Many presbyteries require background checks at certain times in the call process for the protection of the congregation. Check with your presbytery liaison to learn your presbytery’s requirements. If this position will involve work with children, your state will probably require you or your presbytery to do a background check on the person you call. Check your state law.

**Meeting Prospective Pastors Face-to-Face**

It is in time spent with prospective pastors that PNCs recognize the experiential nature of the call process as they attend to “the chemistry between people” and the movement of the Holy Spirit.

In order for a PNC to evaluate prospective pastors fully, it is necessary to meet face-to-face, engage in conversation, and participate in worship together. It is in time spent with prospective pastors that PNCs recognize the experiential nature of the call process as they attend to the chemistry between people and the movement of the Holy Spirit. As PNCs meet prospective pastors face-to-face, they would be wise to remember the Presbyterian balance between “ardor and order” or “heart and head.”

By the time you are ready to meet face-to-face with prospective pastors, you should be able to convey a sense of clarity and harmony as a PNC. If you are not able to do this, you may want to take some time as a committee to get to such a place.

**Visiting Prospective Pastors in Their Ministry Setting**

Some PNCs, or a small delegation of the PNC, elect to visit prospective pastors in their current ministry setting, including attending worship. If your PNC decides to visit prospective pastors, do so only with the permission of the prospective pastor. If the prospective pastor feels it is unwise for you to visit the church he or she is currently serving, a face-to-face interview in your own area should be arranged.

When visiting the church of a prospective pastor, keep the following in mind:

- Before going, become thoroughly familiar with the prospective pastor’s PIF.
- Confirm the time of worship and that the prospective pastor will be preaching that particular Sunday.
- Visit discreetly. Especially in smaller congregations, it is difficult to conceal the identity of a PNC. Do what you can to arrive, sit, and leave separately or in pairs. Do not introduce yourselves to church members as members of a PNC!
- Arrange to meet the prospective pastor in the afternoon if you want to hold an interview or have informal conversation at the time of your visit. Do not expect to do so immediately following the service.
- If only a portion of the PNC is visiting, engage only in an informal conversation rather than a formal interview. Take notes on your visit so that on your return you will be able to give a full report to the other members of the PNC.
PART FIVE – Searching for a Pastor

Hosting Prospective Pastors in Your Community

Invite prospective pastors in whom the PNC is most interested to meet with you in or near your own community. This gives your committee extended time with prospective pastors so you can get to know them better and, continue to discern whom God is calling to be your next pastor.

If a prospective pastor should decline your committee’s invitation, understand that this is part of the discernment process. You may need to hear a “no” from several prospective pastors in order to hear the “yes” from the one of God’s own choosing.

When you extend an invitation to the prospective pastor to meet with you in your community, also extend the invitation to the pastor’s spouse, if there is one. Most married prospective pastors wish to include a spouse in visiting a community and meeting with a PNC, because their spouse’s impressions will be part of their own discernment process.

Always coordinate any prospective pastor’s visit with presbytery. Your presbytery can help arrange a “neutral pulpit” somewhere in your area that provides an opportunity for the prospective pastor to lead worship while you are present without sacrificing the important confidentiality of the search. Your presbytery may also want to interview the prospective pastor while he or she is in the presbytery. If so, make sure to schedule this time with the presbytery.

The PNC should make the arrangements for the visit, in consultation with the prospective pastor and the presbytery, including arranging for transportation, housing, and meals. It is expected that the congregation will cover the costs of hosting a prospective pastor meeting with you in your community.

If at all possible, host prospective pastors in your community only one or two weeks apart. If too much time passes, both the PNC’s memory of earlier interviews and the interest of an earlier interviewee may fade.

Practicing Hospitality

*Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.* (1 Peter 4:9-10)

PNC members, as “good stewards of the manifold grace of God,” will need to use their gifts and talents to provide hospitality to prospective pastors who will be your guests during their time in your community. Such hospitality, which includes an availability and openness to your guests’ needs, will need thoughtful and careful planning on the part of the PNC.

Hospitality is not about how lavish you are (first-class tickets and five-star hotels) but about all the ways you welcome and host a prospective pastor. The hospitality you show (or fail to show) will shape impressions of the kind of hospitality a pastor might expect from the congregation as a whole and will have a direct impact on a prospective pastor’s discernment process.

Hospitality in the biblical sense raises the expectation that God will play a role in the guest/host encounter. Knowing this, PNCs should be ever attentive to God’s presence in the midst of your time with your guests.

On Calling a Pastor