Choosing the Nominee and Extending the Invitation to Call

As your PNC prays together, shares perceptions and insights, and listens to one another, it will, hopefully, become clear to you who God is calling to be your next pastor. The PNC should strive to make this decision both unanimously and enthusiastically.

The entire PNC will want to look again at the financial information on the MIF and come to a preliminary decision on the total effective salary you are willing to offer your nominee. Be sure that the terms of call meet presbytery minimum requirements. The PNC cannot negotiate a total effective salary beyond the amount allocated by the session. If there is a need to do so, session approval must be obtained.

Extending the Invitation

Contacting Your Chosen Nominee. When the PNC has reached a final decision and has received presbytery approval to call your chosen nominee, the PNC chairperson should phone the chosen nominee and invite him or her to be the nominee presented to the congregation. Be sure that you let the person know why he or she was chosen by the PNC, and tell him or her about the enthusiastic response of the committee. You should also be prepared to share the amount of the total effective salary that you will be offering.

The person whom you have chosen may be ready to respond immediately, or he or she may need time to talk with family, spiritual advisors, and/or mentors to consider all of the aspects of this call and to listen again for God’s voice. If he or she asks for this time, it is important to give it. If that is the case ask, “How soon can you let us know?” or “Would it be possible to hear from you by one week from today?” Except in unusual circumstances, one week should be sufficient time in which to expect a response.

When the Nominee Accepts the Invitation. When your chosen nominee accepts your invitation, notify your presbytery. Do not reveal your final decision to the session or congregation until the presbytery has given its final clearance. If presbytery has not already examined your selected nominee, they will need to do so before you present the nominee to the congregation. Confirm with presbytery your next steps so that they will be done “decently and in order.”

Discuss with your chosen nominee the terms of call, effective date of the call, and the tentative schedule for the next steps, which will include approval by the presbytery, a congregational meeting to call the pastor, dissolution of the nominee’s current position, and the installation service. Coordination with all the involved parties will be key. There are additional steps in the process if your chosen nominee is a candidate for ministry yet to be ordained. Your presbytery and stated clerk can help you work out a timeline in coordination with the nominee’s presbytery of candidacy.
PART SIX — Calling a New Pastor

Negotiating the Terms of Call

When a nominee has accepted your invitation, you will need to negotiate with the nominee the specific terms of call. Once you have agreed upon the total effective salary, the nominee may suggest how he or she would like it to be allocated. Be sure that the terms of call include all other applicable items such as vacation, continuing education, all reimbursable expenses, moving costs, sabbatical leave, military service leave, and any other presbytery requirements. If you have questions about compensation, your presbytery liaison should be able to advise you.

These agreed-upon terms of call are necessary before your presbytery can approve the call of your new pastor. The congregation will also need to approve these terms of call at the time it calls the new pastor. Usually a “Pastoral Call Form” is provided by your presbytery stated clerk.

Examination for Membership in the Presbytery

Presbyteries differ in their process of examining ministers for membership in the presbytery. Consult with your presbytery to understand their specific guidelines.

Presenting the Pastor Elect

Preparing to Present Your Nominee to the Congregation

There are a few final details that must be arranged before you present your nominee to the congregation:

Step 1
Obtaining Presbytery Approval
 Coordinate with Session

Step 2
Prepare Report for the Congregation
 Present the Nominee to the Congregation

Step 3
Sign the Call Papers
 Presbytery ordains and/or installs

Step 1
Obtaining Presbytery Approval

As one of the partners in the call, the presbytery has a responsibility to examine and approve your nominee for presbytery membership and to approve the terms of call. Make sure that you have presbytery approval to present your nominee to the congregation.

Coordinating with Session

It is important for the PNC to coordinate with the session in scheduling the congregational meeting to call a new pastor. Session has the responsibility to call the congregational meeting to hear the report of the PNC, to give adequate notice to the temporary pastor for his or her departure, and to arrange for any pastoral coverage between the temporary pastor’s departure and the arrival of the new pastor.

On Calling a Pastor
Step 2
Preparing a Report for the Congregation

The congregation needs to be informed about the nominee the PNC has selected. Your written report to the congregation might include something of the process the PNC followed including the number and kinds of PIFs reviewed. A brief biographical sketch of the nominee, taken from the PIF with revisions suggested by the nominee, will help the congregation to know the pastor elect more intimately. The terms of call should also be included. It is recommended that this report be mailed or e-mailed to members of the congregation a few days before the congregational meeting. Care should be taken to be sure that the identity of the proposed new pastor not be shared with the media and that the information is not used in a way that could compromise the pastor with his or her present congregation, which at this point will normally be unaware of the pastor’s plan to leave.

Presenting the Nominee to the Congregation

Depending on the tradition and preferences of the congregation and/or presbytery, the PNC nominee may preach and conduct all or part of the worship service prior to the congregational vote, or the PNC may simply report and the congregational vote be taken with results being communicated to the nominee.

The PNC has the responsibility to share with the congregation what it has learned about the nominee. Generally speaking, the more you can do to facilitate these introductions the more enthusiastic will be the support of the congregation for the PNC’s work, and the easier it will be for the pastor’s transition as he or she begins ministry with you.

The PNC chairperson should prepare, in advance, the formal motion on the PNC recommendation for the congregational meeting, checking with the moderator and clerk of session to be certain it conforms to the presbytery processes and guidelines. During the congregational meeting, the PNC chairperson should make the motion and then be ready to speak to the motion by presenting personally or through members of the PNC the reasons for selecting this nominee. This should include something of the nominee’s background, experience, and abilities. On occasion questions will be raised by members of the congregation. A PNC that has done its work well will be able to answer these questions with ease. After the PNC report and congregational discussion, the congregation should be ready to vote on whether to concur with the report of the PNC to call the pastor and to vote on the terms of call.

Step 3
Signing the Call

Following the election of the pastor, the call papers are signed by designated persons. The next steps in the process include the ordination and/or installation of the new pastor—a task of the presbytery—and the PNC’s completion of its work.

Finishing Your Work

Following the election of the new pastor by the congregation, the PNC has a few last details to finish:

Notifying CLC of a “Call Pending”

The PNC chairperson needs to notify CLC of the call of your new pastor. This can be done through the CLC online system using the PNC chairperson’s password and entering the information under “Admin. Notify of New Call.” Please provide the MIF number, the PIF number (if there is one), the pastor’s full name, and the effective date of the call. The PNC chairperson can also notify CLC by phone, e-mail, or fax.
Notifying Remaining Prospective Pastors

If you have any other prospective pastors that have not yet been notified that they are no longer being considered, each one needs to be contacted, thanked for their consideration, and informed that a nominee has been chosen. This communication should be written with compassion and grace. If you are notifying prospective pastors electronically, remember to correspond with them individually rather than by mass e-mail messages. It is important to continue to honor confidentiality and good process.

Disposing of PNC Materials

Information and references regarding your pastor-elect should be sealed and kept in the church’s personnel files. All remaining PIFs and supplemental material should be destroyed or returned to each prospective pastor. Any notes and references should be destroyed. These materials cannot be reused and should not be passed on to other PNCs.

Sharing Agreements with Session

The PNC chairperson should inform the session of any agreements the PNC may have made with the pastor-elect, such as starting date, moving details, financial arrangements, time away for prior commitments, travel expenses for house-hunting, or planning for renovation of the manse. Once this information is passed along, the session assumes the responsibility for the ongoing work with the pastor-elect.

Understanding Your New Role

Once the PNC has completed its work and has been dissolved by vote of the congregation, the PNC is no longer a committee. However, PNC members often find that the relationships forged during the pastoral search process turn into lifelong friendships. While you are no longer an official committee required to meet, you may wish to spend some time together to reflect on the journey you have been through and to celebrate and give thanks to God for the successful completion of your work.

With the dissolution of the PNC, there is no longer an official connection between you and the new pastor. Certainly, each member of the PNC will want to pray for the new pastor as he or she begins ministry with you. You will want to extend hospitality and provide for a ready welcome as he or she arrives in town. However, the new pastor’s official relationship is now with the congregation and session.

The installation of your new pastor will complete the call process that has brought a new pastor to your congregation. Plan to attend this service of worship as your final act as a committee. Your presence will not only be a show of support for your new pastor, it can also be an opportunity to worship God, who faithfully guided your committee through the pastoral call process.

As all the tasks above are completed, the PNC’s work concludes. Your good work will greatly impact the future of the congregation as it continues to fulfill God’s call for its mission and ministry. With grace and joy the Church Leadership Connection office celebrates with you as you enter a new phase in your congregation’s history. May God richly bless you and your new pastor!