Changing the partners to the covenant

There may be times when it makes sense for inquirers and candidates to move their membership to a different congregation. Perhaps a family member has taken a job in a different region so following relocation they no longer have any communal ties to the city where the church is located. Whatever the reason, they need to remember presbyteries have primary responsibility for the preparation for ministry. When new congregation membership also means a new presbytery of care, there must be careful coordination between the congregations and presbyteries involved. Both the new session and the new presbytery need to agree to assume the responsibilities of care before congregational membership is changed. Keep in mind that because each presbytery controls its own rolls, there is no requirement that a presbytery accept an inquirer or candidate onto its rolls just because the person is currently under care of another presbytery.

Transfer of Covenant Relationship

At the request of the inquirer or candidate and with the approval of the sessions and presbyteries involved, a presbytery may transfer the covenant relationship of an inquirer or candidate.

What steps would your presbytery take in either transferring a person to or receiving them from another presbytery?

It is also possible that changes in the circumstance of the congregation of membership rather than life changes for the inquirer or candidate may necessitate a change in the partners to the covenant of preparation for ministry. These changes might include a presbytery’s decision to dissolve a congregation or to dismiss it to another presbytery or other Reformed body. Because the covenant relationship is always three-fold—involving the individual, the session of the congregation of membership, and the presbytery of which that congregation is a part—the inability of the congregation through its session to continue in this covenant will necessitate a change in the partners to it.

The process to be followed in these situations is most easily seen by considering the case of inquirers or candidates who are members of a congregation that has been dissolved by the presbytery. The Book of Order directs that if a congregation has members at the time of its dissolution then the presbytery itself will assume jurisdiction over the members until such time as it may grant a transfer of membership to another congregation (G-3.0301c). For members who are also inquirers or candidates, they would also remain under care of the presbytery in the preparation process until such time as they are received by the new congregation.

- If the congregation which the inquirer or candidate desires to join is within the same presbytery and its session is willing to assume its responsibilities for someone under care
in the preparation process, then the presbytery would grant the congregational membership transfer and the preparation process would continue uninterrupted.

- If the congregation the inquirer or candidate desires to join is outside the presbytery’s bounds, it should confer with both that congregation’s session and its presbytery to determine whether they are agreeable to a transfer of the care relationship under the terms of G-2.0608.

Although the decision about the new congregation the inquirer will join should not be made hastily, it also should not be unnecessarily delayed.

When inquirers or candidates are members of a congregation that is being dismissed, the presbytery should first ascertain their desire regarding whether to remain in the process of preparation for possible service as a minister of the Word and Sacrament within the PC(USA).

- If the individual wishes to maintain membership in the PC(USA) and continue in the preparation process, then as with a dissolved congregation the presbytery itself would take jurisdiction over the member until such time as it may grant a transfer of membership to another congregation (following the process outlined above).

- If the individual wishes to maintain membership in the congregation being dismissed from the PC(USA):
  - The presbytery should invite the inquirer or candidate to “withdraw” from the preparation process.
  - Should he or she decline to “withdraw,” the presbytery may act to “remove” her or him from the process on the grounds that she or he is no longer a member and subject to the discipline of a PC(USA) congregation (see G-2.0609; G-2.0605).