

Presbytery of Coastal Carolina  
Commission on Ministry

## Approval Process for Pastoral Relationships

Our Presbyterian understanding of the call to ministry – including a particular ministry in a particular place – is founded on the principle of three overlapping calls:

1. An interior sense of call felt by the person (pastor) being called either to ministry in general or to a particular ministry setting (a congregation or other ministry),
2. A call from the people of God (the congregation) with whom the person (pastor) will exercise her or his call,
3. The confirming call of the larger community of faith (presbytery).

The intent of the Presbytery's examination of the suitability of a call is not to add an obstacle in the way of Pastor Nominating Committee in recommending a candidate to the congregation but rather to offer the gathered wisdom of the Presbytery to the process and to assure that everything that needs to be done or checked has been done and checked before the pastoral relationship comes into being.

Here is how this process proceeds in our Presbytery.

1. **Orientation:** When the Commission on Ministry (COM) gives permission to a congregation to elect a Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC) it arranges for an orientation of the PNC to introduce them to the process and to offer suggestions about how to proceed.
2. **Executive Reference Checks:** When the PNC has a short list (no more than 3-4 candidates) and wants to begin to have more than a phone or Skype-type conversation with them, they should ask the General Presbyter to contact his colleague in the candidate's presbytery. Presbytery leaders (executives, general presbyters, presbytery pastors, etc.) are generally very helpful in their comments about the candidate being considered and usually get back to our General Presbytery in a matter of days if not hours after the first contact. The General Presbyter will call or email a summary of their conversation to the chair of the PNC. This is confidential information, but may be shared with all members of the PNC. In order for this system to continue to work, PNCs are asked to never divulge what is shared with them to the candidates. Getting a reference check through the General Presbyter should **never** replace the PNC's own checking of the references that the candidates give on their PIFs.
3. **Examination by Commission on Ministry:** When the PNC has chosen someone and that person has accepted the offer pending examination the chair of the PNC should contact the chair of the appropriate Community Commission on Ministry. The COM liaison will be helpful in this process, keeping the COM chair person informed of a potential call and making sure that the PNC is aware of the dates of the next COM meeting.

The examination may take several forms.

- If the person being considered is a Candidate for Ordination (not yet ordained) the examination will take about two hours and will cover a wide range of matters both academic and pastoral.

- If the person is moving from another Presbytery to ours, the exam will usually last only an hour and will explore the person's beliefs and motives for seeking this call in this Presbytery.
- If the person is a member of this Presbytery and is known to the members of the COM, the exam will reflect that relationship.

In all of these cases, the person being considered will need to provide to the chair of the COM at least one week before the meeting (two weeks is preferred) the documents outlined in the document *Documents Required for New Pastoral Relationships* found on the website under COM Forms. With the exception of the Terms of Call form which the PNC prepares, these documents are the responsibility of the pastoral candidate being considered.

After the person being considered has been examined by the COM or its Exam Team then the members of the PNC who can attend the meeting will be asked to meet with the full COM to explain the process that they followed in selecting this candidate and why they feel that this particular person has been chosen by God for this congregation at this time.

**Congregational Meeting:** Only after the COM has given its approval to this call will the PNC ask the Session of the Church to call a congregational meeting to hear and act on a report of the PNC. The meeting needs to be moderated by a teaching elder minister (minister) of this Presbytery. The PNC may prepare documents or other materials (video, pictures, etc.) to present the candidate to the congregation. The Terms of Call (salary and benefits package) need to be shared as well. The vote to call the pastor should be by secret ballot. When the candidate has been called the PNC Chair should inform the Stated Clerk as soon as possible so that plans for an installation service can be made. The COM **must** approve the membership of the commission ahead of time so plan accordingly!

**Final Details:** When the congregation has issued the call and the candidate has accepted, please take down the church's MIF from the CLC website so that potential candidates do not continue to submit their PIFs to the church. Gather up any remaining PIFs and shred them.

Normally the PNC will continue to meet with the new pastor to provide support and encouragement to her/him and to provide insights into the life and norms of the congregation as the new pastor settles in. This process normally lasts for at least a year.