

PASTOR SEARCH COMMITTEE PROCEDURES – STEP BY STEP
(Always consult appropriate sections of THE BOOK OF ORDER &
THE PROCEDURE MANUAL)

STAGE TWO (2) - Organizing/Training of The Pastoral Search Committee (PSC)

A. Preliminary Action Required By The Session - It is important the PSC and Session understand their special relationship with each other and respect each other's specific function during the search process. **Prior to this training meeting**, the Session will **(a)** communicate to the PSC the parameters of the terms of call to be extended to the Pastor candidate. For example, **the Session should tell the PSC, "Here is a range of compensation we believe the congregation will support", factoring in required EPC items such as medical insurance, pension.** In establishing those parameters, the Session should be sensitive to offering a level of compensation influenced by the previous Pastor's package as well as a particular candidate's education, training, experience and other accomplishments. **(b)** At the time of Presbytery's training, the Session will have prepared the **Church Information Form (CIF)** and bring copies for the PSC and MC representative(s). The Session, PSC and MC Representative(s) shall review/discuss the CIF and make any necessary adjustments, corrections, etc. The PSC should be in complete support of the Session's mission and/or vision statement, and pledge to accurately represent Session's mission statement to candidates. **(c)** At this training meeting the PSC and Session should agree on a suitable timetable of reporting to both the Session and congregation, and announce the schedule to both bodies [**SEE item D, below**].

B. Presbytery's Ministerial Committee (MC) Training & Election Of PSC Officers - The MC will in a timely manner send representative(s) to train the Pastoral Search Committee (PSC) & the Session together. Upon completion of the training meeting, non-PSC Ruling Elders are excused. **The PSC will then elect a Chairman, Vice-Chairman**, & Secretary, provided at least five (5) of the seven (7) members are present. [**NOTE:** During holidays it is normally difficult to get all PSC and Session members together; therefore, scheduling two training classes may be necessitated so that ALL involved are informed and understand the process. **Note "As per Roberts Rules when moderating a meeting he/she must be impartial"**]

c. Announcement Of Pastor Vacancy - Upon election of the PSC Chairman, the PSC, with the cooperation of the Session, will announce the open position with the EPC GA Office, "Face-to-Face" at Presbytery meetings, and with other appropriate venues.

The Search Committee, in consultation with the Session, will announce the open position. Typical channels are the EPC Office of the General Assembly through the Ministry Staff Opportunities at www.epc.org/mso, Presbytery meetings, and General Assembly meetings. The Ministerial Committee should be actively involved in referring ministers to churches with vacancies. Search Committees also have posted positions through

placement offices at seminaries and through online services like ChurchStaffing.com. It is common for Search Committees to ask members of the congregation to submit names. If so, the congregation should also be informed of EPC qualifications for ordination. There is a growing trend to use pastoral search organizations. 2. C

- D. The PSC Chairman is named (along with contact information) as **the contact person**** for interested candidates to submit their PIF. The PSC should table any candidate's Personal Information Form (PIF) and not review any PIF until the MC training is completed and a Chairman is elected.
- E. PSC Reporting To Session, Congregation** - It is extremely important and necessary that the PSC give periodic updates/reports to the Session and congregation. The Session should be updated at least once a month even if no progress has been made (E.g., "The PSC continues to meet, pray, read PIFs, listen to CDs/DVDs of candidates' sermons. Please keep us in your prayers as we proceed." Same report may be given to the congregation). At the MC training meeting the PSC and Session should **agree on a suitable timetable** of reporting to both the Session and congregation, and announce the schedule to both bodies.
- F. Associate Pastors** – When a PSC is elected to call an Associate Pastor it is an absolute necessity that the Pastor's input be an integral part of the search process. Moreover, the Pastor should openly and enthusiastically support the candidate selected. **NOTE:** In many Associate Pastor Searches, a PSC is not used; rather a Minister is called as an Assistant Pastor for a period of time by the Session. If desired, the Session, by a three-fourths vote and approval of Presbytery's MC, may recommend to the congregation that an Assistant Pastor be called as an Associate Pastor *without* a PSC. (G.10-6B).

G. EPC Opportunity List - **It is important to note that the individual PSC must contact EPC (GA office) about their opening if they want it advertised on the EPC website. This is not done by the local Presbytery, Stated Clerk, or the MC.** The PSC can have their open position posted on the "EPC OPPORTUNITY LIST". Not only is the opening listed on the website, but the listing is distributed monthly to the stated clerks and ministerial committee chairmen of each presbytery and is circulated to the ministers and candidates under care. www.epc.org/mso

STAGE THREE (3) - Preliminary Screening/Interviewing

A. Communication With Candidates - After the MC training meeting, the PSC Chairman and Secretary will develop at least two form letters for use on church/PSC letterhead, as follows:

- (1) **Acknowledge receipt of candidate's PIF.** As a courtesy, to be sent upon receiving a PIF
to advise the candidate you received it;

(2) **Advising A Candidate of Current Status.** It is just a good Christian practice and witness

to inform a candidate of their current status with the PSC. Send a letter sent to thank

The candidate for their interest, but to informing him the PSC has no further interest in

pursuing their application (once the PSC has decided this). Again—as a courtesy—it is

important to inform a candidate to avoid raising false hopes and/or their wondering/ inquiring if they are still under consideration.

B. The Secretary (with PSC's knowledge, consent) must be diligent that the above letters are

Sent immediately as appropriate.

C. Personal Information Forms (PIFs) – You should receive many of these, both from EPC, non-EPC, non-Reformed Ministers, applicants. Review, study, and most importantly **PRAY** over the PIFs! At some point, **at least three or four** candidates should constitute your “short list” of candidates. The PSC should then **very prayerfully** agree to listing these as “First preference”, “Second preference” and so on, and with the first name begin to check references (if not done previously).

D. References - When checking references, a wise PSC will seek out references in addition to the ones listed in the PIF. It is unlikely anyone would list someone who would give a bad reference! **Other possible references** include the Minister's Presbytery Stated Clerk; their MC Chairman; your Presbytery's Stated Clerk (Administrative Director: TE Rob Westlund); GA Assistant Stated Clerk; family, friends from the candidate's church and/or place of residence who might know them. [NOTE: If a preliminary background check is desired, Presbytery of Coastal Mid-Atlantic provides that service, at a nominal cost, from an independent, third-party investigative service. Please contact: Ministerial Committee Chairman TE Walter Taylor

E. Candidates Eliminated From Consideration - During the search process some candidates will obviously be eliminated from further consideration. These persons must be notified as soon as the PSC agrees it is no longer interested in them [**SEE B, above**].

F. Sample Sermons - Those remaining on the “**short list**” should provide the PSC with sample sermon(s) via CD, DVD, or web-source (if not previously provided, the PSC Chairman may request one or more). Once all members of the PSC have heard/seen the candidate's sermon, the PSC may decide to proceed to arrange an interview.

G. Teleconferencing Is Available - When long distance travel is a factor, teleconferencing is a very desirable methodology, particularly for an initial interview. Otherwise, the PSC Chairman and the candidate(s) must arrange a suitable time and place to meet face to face. The PSC should decide which course is better use of time, energy and finances before conducting its first interview. The PSC should also decide whether to pursue one candidate at a time from this point forward, or to conduct

preliminary interviews with all those on the “short list” first, and then review/re-arrange that list before the next step. (**NOTE:** Teleconference calls may be arranged with the AD/SC Office at a nominal cost if any). Contact Dr. Shockley for details.

H. The Preliminary Interview(s) - Once the PSC has identified its “short list” it may proceed with a preliminary interview. It is best to select one member of the PSC to act as the M.C. or to lead the interview. The leader should announce at the beginning that time will be provided for questions from the PSC members and from the candidate. A preliminary interview usually consists of the following (but is not limited to):

- 1- The candidate’s testimony, call to ministry, brief description about himself /family.
- 2- What led the candidate to be interested in your church?
- 3- The candidate’s initial vision/impression of ministry for your church based on the CIF.
- 4- Ask about his particular ministry strengths, weaknesses. In other words, what part of the ministry does he have a passion for and feels he is best suited for (and vice versa for weaknesses).
- 5- Probe to discover if the candidate seems prone to enlist help from others in his admitted weak areas and how he would go about that.
- 6- Make sure you understand what the candidate is saying. If a statement is unclear, vague, be sure to ask for clarification (e.g., “What did you mean when you said . . .?”).
- 7- Preliminary interviews should not last beyond two (2) hours (you may return to a particular candidate in a future interview).

STAGE FOUR (4) – IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS & CALLING

A- Confidentiality A Must Throughout the Process - Once the first round of interviews is concluded, the PSC may want to review its “short list” for modification or change(s). It is critical that all discussions about candidates be kept in the **highest confidentiality** and that names of persons under consideration are guarded and **not discussed with anyone outside of the PSC** [**NOTE:** Exceptions to this rule include Presbytery AD/SC, MC Chairman, other MC members, or references contacted under cloak of confidentiality]. After sincere, intensive prayer together (and separately), **one candidate may emerge** as the first preference and the first candidate to pursue for calling as Pastor.

B- In-Depth Interview(s) - An in-depth face-to-face interview with the first preference candidate should occur next. From this point on, this candidate is the only candidate the PSC will pursue until it is determined that a call is not to be issued (for whatever providential or other reasons which become apparent). It is highly important that no member of the PSC consciously compare one candidate to another during this part of the process, but take the **attitude by faith**, “This appears to be God’s choice as our Pastor” until it is obviously evident otherwise.

C- PSC Votes & Recommends The Call - Upon completing the in-depth interview phase and the PSC is convinced they are to extend a call to a particular candidate, the PSC Chairman calls for a vote of PSC members. If successful (A **unanimous** vote of the PSC is most desirable, but some committees may decide that **three-fourths** vote is

acceptable. The PSC may want to decide this point at a previous meeting). The PSC discusses, agrees to the **terms of call** to be offered to the new Pastor (if not previously), and the Chairman (or the PSC as a whole) calls/teleconferences the candidate to inform him of their intent to recommend him as the new Pastor with the terms of call stipulated. There may be some questions, discussion of the terms of call offered (which is appropriate), as the candidate may have special needs, concerns, circumstances the PSC may not be aware of. It is most desirable for the PSC and candidate to agree on terms of call prior to informing the Session.

[**NOTE:** If the PSC feels the candidate is requesting an inordinate or unworkable terms of call, he should be told of the PSC's concerns, and that the congregation and/or Session may or may not agree to them. The PSC should **not** inform the Session of its candidate choice if terms of call become a serious point of contention, as this revelation may be grounds for the PSC's reconsideration of a candidate.

D. Informing The Ministerial Committee – G.10-4C & F requires the PSC to secure the consent of the MC before the next step. Normally, the PSC Chairman contacts the MC liaison, MC Chairman and/or the AD/SC of Presbytery. The MC Chairman then notifies the MC and polls its members re their advice and/or consent re the Pastor-nominee. This requirement provides an “eleventh hour” accountability/safety net for the PSC, the church and Presbytery, requiring any member of the MC to give Biblical and/or reasonable grounds why the Pastor-nominee should not be called. Barring any such testimony, the PSC proceeds to notify the Session of its nominee.

G. Informing The Session - Following the PSC call to the candidate, the Chairman contacts the Clerk of Session to request an **executive (closed door) meeting** with the Session to inform them of their decision. An executive meeting is necessary to preserve **strict confidentiality** until public announcement is made. At this meeting the PSC shares its conviction that the particular candidate should be called as Pastor with the terms of call enumerated. Should the Session be in overall agreement, the PSC Chairman arranges for an informal—but confidential--face-to-face meeting between the candidate, Session and PSC as soon as practical.

F. (Note) It is the highest magnitude of importance that the Pastor-nominee spend sufficient time with the Session for personal interaction for **compatibility** of vision, goals, mission—or to identify any **“non-fit”** or irresolvable differences held by either party. This is not to suggest the Session has veto power over the PSC's selection; however, a wise PSC would not knowingly recommend calling a candidate knowing he would be incompatible with the Session. To pursue calling in such a case would probably lay a foundation for an abbreviated tenure and pastoral “train wreck,” leaving the church in a state of destructive turmoil. The need for a Session-candidate preliminary interface is **analogous** to boy-girl relationships in which there is dating and following that, perhaps marriage. While the candidate and PSC simply enjoy dating, the candidate and Session are expected to marry!

The interface is a safeguard for the Session and for the prospective Pastor also. A desirable Pastor would want to meet and get to know the Ruling Elders to whom he must relate and work with in a close, harmonious basis prior to making a final decision.

H. Informing The Congregation – If the way be clear, the next step is for the **Session to call a congregational meeting** for the purpose of hearing the PSC’s recommendation for a Pastor-nominee and to approve the candidate’s call and terms of call. It is helpful for the Session to announce to the congregation that both the **PSC and Session are in agreement** re the Pastor-nominee. **[NOTE:** In multi-staff churches, the Session may want the staff, key leaders and the Pastor-nominee to get acquainted informally over a few days. Should this be the case, the Session should allow a full two weeks notice to be given the congregation to accommodate these contacts. However, the downside of this approach is obvious—that some church members learn of the candidate’s identity ahead of time, hear other’s impression of him, or feel excluded from the process. Potentially negative issues like these could erupt at the congregational meeting and require Session’s response. Each Session should carefully weigh the merits, demerits of this practice and its potential impact upon its congregation. Another practice appears emerging in recent years among Reformed churches is that of having the Pastor-nominee preach and/or meet the congregation prior to the congregational meeting to vote (historically, known as **“Candidating.”** Historically, Reformed churches have avoided this and trusted the wisdom, faith of its PSC to hear from God and nominate the right person. There are two sides to this, and each Session must weigh the relative advantages/disadvantages, take a position and thus instruct its congregation.

I. Congregational Meeting To Vote - On the appointed date and time, the PSC presents the Pastor-nominee and terms of call in a congregational meeting called for that purpose. Some committees have demonstrated various creative ways to introduce the Pastor-nominee, his family biographical and professional information (e.g., through video clips, power point presentation, colorful printed brochures, leaflets and other media). It is appropriate for the PSC Chairman to move approval of the call and terms of call to the Pastor-nominee and seconded by a non-PSC Ruling Elder. Voting is done by either tallying a standing vote or written ballot, as the exact results of the vote must be reported to the candidate, the MC and Presbytery.

Assuming the motion is approved, the Chairman of the PSC should offer a motion to dissolve the PSC effective that date as the Committee’s work is done. The Clerk of the meeting shall send minutes of the meeting, including the exact vote, to the MC Chairman and also to Presbytery’s AD/SC.

I. CONGRATULATIONS! YOU’RE FINISHED! – While you may not receive any earthly rewards, hopefully your experience serving your church as part of the vital process of seeking a new Pastor has been enriching and rewarding. So, relax a bit and take comfort in the knowledge that you are now an experienced PSC person. And who knows—you may be called on again at some future date because of your valuable expertise!

General Comments

A. This document is an abbreviated step-by-step practical guide for PSCs with no intent to replace the in- depth details found in the **Procedure Manual For Ministerial and**

Candidates Committees and **The Book of Order**. Every PSC member should have a copy of both and be familiar with “The Search “Process” as outlined in the **Procedure Manual**. You may download both documents from EPC’s website, www.epc.org. and then click “resources”

- B.** If at any time a PSC needs to dialogue with the Session, this should be done without hesitation. If and when a meeting occurs between the PSC and the Session, it must be an executive meeting so as to maintain confidentiality.
- C.** Beginning with Stage Three (3) through Stage Four (4), section B, it is critical that the PSC not divulge any names beyond their committee other than MC personnel, Presbytery AD/SC and any other Presbytery/GA officials involved in the search process.
- D.** We want to thank Ruling Elder Phil Stump, current MC Chairman and member of the Myrtle Grove Presbyterian Church, for his time and tireless efforts devoted to compiling this document. We are grateful to you, Phil, for your beyond-the-extra-mile service to Presbytery’s churches and Pastor Search Committees.

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