



Everything You Need to Know As You Search for a Pastor

This guide is designed to provide resources after the Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC)/Pastor Search Team (PST) is elected/appointed and is beginning to work together. It is to be used as a complement to [“On Calling a Pastor”](#) published by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Office of the General Assembly.

The Commission on Ministry (COM) consistently hears that serving on a PNC/PST is one of the most significant ways Cherokee Presbytery congregants serve Christ’s church. Your service with this important group allows you a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to bond with your fellow PNC/PST members, experience a wide variety of pastoral candidates throughout the country, and to witness how the Holy Spirit orchestrates circumstances for good.

Everything we share here is in submission to our desire that your PNC/PST be faithful in *discerning* God’s will for your congregation! Our polity firmly understands that searching for your next Pastoral Leader, whether an Installed Pastor, Associate Pastor, Interim Pastor, or Stated Supply Pastor, is a process of discernment. Our colleagues in Olympia Presbytery have developed a wonderful definition.

Discernment is “. . . to sift through, to sort out, to distinguish the Spirit of God from all of the other spirits that may be influencing us: the spirit of the age, the spirit of the congregation, the spirit of excelling, the spirit of efficiency, the spirit of ourselves, the spirit of giving, the spirit of achievement . . .” (Olympia Presbytery, *On Discernment*)

Recommendations in this guide are generated from decades of experience in conducting pastoral searches. They are oriented toward helping your PNC/PST provide a unified nomination of a Pastoral Leader who is called by God, fits your congregation and Cherokee Presbytery, and who will work with you to equip the church and the world for Christ’s reign of justice, love, and peace.

Coming Together

As your PNC/PST comes together to begin this important work, you are what group communication scholars call a “zero history” team. That means you have no experience working together as a team toward a common purpose. This configuration of people

has never been assembled before and won't be again. Because you are a "zero-history" team, we encourage you to **pay special attention to forming positive group norms** that will aid you throughout the process. A commitment to prayer, speaking up while encouraging all voices to be heard equitably, fun and playfulness, working through disagreements for positive outcomes—all of these are very important! These norms will be set early on whether you intentionally nurture them or not so *be intentional*. During your first meetings please take time to get to know one another, and especially learn deeply about each person's history (this means listening to one another!) You will certainly gain a more full appreciation of each other and begin to value the unique contribution each person makes to discerning God's will for your congregation.

Your COM Liaison and the General Presbyter will attend your first meeting to orient you to this work. They are your constant champions, sounding boards, and coaches during the search process. You will hear them say every time you speak with them "We are with you every step of the way!" Please rely on them!

Choosing a Moderator and Clerk

These two primary roles will be filled at your first meeting. The Moderator or Chair is the person who will be responsible for agenda setting and moderating meetings of the PNC/PST. Moderators also frequently become a key person for candidates to interact with when setting up and preparing for interviews. Clerks are responsible for taking minutes/notes during PNC/PST meetings and distributing them. Often, the Clerk is also responsible for disseminating Ministry Information Forms (MIFs) and communicating with and arranging for opportunities to interview candidates.

Paying attention to simple decisions, so significant ones are easier

At the beginning of the PNC/PST's formation you will be making a number of "easy" decisions together: who will be Moderator and Clerk, what time and how frequently will we meet, what will we do when we come together, who will bring cookies, etc.? After these initial steps, decisions get a more tricky: what should we say is our church's mission on the MIF, what are the most important theological and social issues for our church to include in the MIF, who should we eliminate from consideration from the first round of PIFs. As you move into the final steps in this Spirit-led process, the decisions become really significant: of our 3 top candidates, who is the candidate that we believe God is calling to serve our congregation?

Your ability to make early, simple decisions together as a group with everybody's perspective and full participation will be *practice and prologue* for making more significant decisions later. So attending to the early decisions with care and intention

and develop a pattern of sharing perspectives and participation that will be healthy and strong and serve you as the decisions grow in significance and difficulty.

Communication with candidates

Choosing to be responsive to candidate inquiries, clear about your process and stages, quickly contacting candidates who are no longer being considered and those who are being considered further is essential. To ensure this happens with ease, tact, and care, the PNC/PST needs identify *one person* will be responsible for candidate communications, this role is ordinarily fulfilled by the Clerk. That said, as we mentioned before, candidates will often reach out to the Moderator in an attempt to learn more or ask questions that may have not been answered in group interview interactions. This is totally normal and expected.

Confidentiality is paramount! Confidentiality gives a gift to your pastoral candidates to engage in fruitful discernment without making their current place of service unfairly worried they will “lose their pastor.” It also protects the PNC/PST’s discernment process from unhelpful intrusion by members of the congregation seeking to lobby for one or another candidate who may or may not be under consideration. PNC/PSTs should ALWAYS be open to recommendations, hopes, and fears of the congregation, but do not need to be unduly pressured to pick one or another candidate from people who aren’t part of the discernment process.

Communicating with the congregation

A well-informed congregation is a confident congregation. Be in consistent communication with your congregation about where you are in the process. This should be done in a normalized way that can be discussed with your Pastoral Leader (Interim Pastor, session Moderator, etc.) Most PNCs/PSTs give periodic updates in worship or through church communications. When you are constructing the MIF you can be open and engaged about content *and* process remembering that the MIF is approved by the session before it is submitted and ultimately approved by the COM. *Once all the necessary MIF approvals occur and the document is posted, any information on candidates is strictly confidential for the PNC.*

Preparing an MDP

This topic is well addressed in “On Calling a Pastor” and through instruction and resource documents available from www.pcusa.org/clc.

The Ministry Discernment Profile (MIF) is the single most important document you will prepare to search for your next Pastoral Leader. There are a variety of ways to describe this unique document, but the best comparison is that of a front porch. The MDP is the

first way a Pastoral Leader will learn about your congregation and the position you are hoping to fill. To continue the metaphor, like a front porch, it is not the whole house but it tells you a lot about the character of what is inside. COM encourages you to give your MDP "character" and "voice." This is the first document your candidates will study. What is unique about your congregation? What is your signature mission or ministry within your walls and in the community?

Some of the things Pastoral Leaders will be looking for as they read your MIF:

- Do you have clarity about who you are, your mission, and where you think God is leading you?
- Does you know and talk openly about the church's history?
- Do you know your congregation's strengths and resources?
- Are you generous or stingy?
- Are you venturesome or do you stick with the tried and true?
- Are you internally or externally focused?
- Are you connected to the presbytery and the work of the General Assembly?
- Are people rewarded for growth or staying the same? All these and more are the types of questions candidates will ask of a MIF.
- What is the essence of your congregation?

All of this and more are the types of questions candidates will ask you as they read your MDP.

Your liaison can provide you with MDPs that have unique character and voice and some that are void of these important characteristics. Your discernment will be aided if you can capture the essence of your congregation's unique contribution to the Body of Christ and how you live it out.

Promoting the church and position

Once you have completed the MDP and published the MIF on the Church Leadership Connection (CLC), you will want to be proactive in promoting your congregation and this position through your congregation's publicity channels, Cherokee Presbytery, and all the interpersonal networks available to you. Also consider posting an advertisement in the Presbyterian Outlook! We ask that you do not post the position on job sites like LinkedIn, Indeed, Glass Door, etc. Our denominational channels are sufficient and it is the policy of the COM that your candidates are ordinarily Ministers of Word and Sacrament of the PC(USA) or are ministers in denominations with which we are in Full Communion. Our Full Communion partners are the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA), the United Church of Christ (UCC), and the Reformed Church of America (RCA).

From a big net to extending a call

The search process begins with casting a wide net to cultivate the best possible candidates and ends with nominating one person or co-Pastoral Leaders to the congregation for election (PNCs) or to the session for their approval (PSTs) and to Cherokee Presbytery for membership or permission to move within the presbytery. The following is a rough guide to discernment processes that aid the PNC/PST along this path.

STAGE 1: Cast the Net

PNC/PST evaluates PIFs cultivated from searches on the Church Leadership Connection (CLC), recommendations, and self-referrals to determine which candidates read like the best fit for your MDP. This will usually result in approximately 15 candidates you are willing to consider further. At this stage you are looking particularly at experience, potential and fit with MDP.

STAGE 2: Tighten up the sides of the net

PNC/PST evaluates written responses to questions sent to candidates or other forms of evaluation determined by the PNC/PST (e.g. listening to sermons, brief introductory phone calls with one PNC member, etc.) who made it through Stage 1. This generally results in 6-8 candidates.

STAGE 3: Becoming more personal

PNC/PST conducts Zoom interviews with top 6-8 candidates. Your liaison will provide sample questions for all rounds of interviews.

STAGE 4: Finalist Candidates

PNC/PST conducts in-person interviews, time with selected ministry partners/interim pastor, committee/team time, and congregation/community tours for the top 2-4 candidates. General Presbyter conducts executive check.

STAGE 5: Extending the Call

PNC/PST invites top candidate(s) to be the next Pastoral Leader. PNC negotiates Terms of Call within the parameters set by the Session.

STAGE 6: Final Steps

PNC/PST agree to Terms of Call with the new Pastoral Leader. Your liaison will communicate with the COM Examinations subcommittee to schedule an interview to consider admitting the Pastoral Leader into the membership of Cherokee Presbytery or give them permission to move within the presbytery. After a successful interview, a PNC will ask the session to call a congregational meeting to nominate their candidate to the congregation for its vote. A PST will ask the session to call a meeting of the session to hear their recommendation and vote on the recommended Pastoral Leader.

Candidates are Interviewing You

The best candidates for your congregation are evaluating you and your ministry as much or more than you are evaluating them. They are discerning God's call on their life and ministry in conversation with you. The COM heartily encourages PNC/PSTs to attend to the following issues so that you can interview well with the candidates:

-Are the congregation's website, social media presence (Facebook/Instagram), signage, facilities, grounds, and other observable markers of the congregation's identity updated, active, and reflective of the congregation's identity and character?

-Does the PNC/PST engage in professional, responsive, informed communication with all potential pastoral candidates. Are you keeping them informed of the process and notifying them promptly when they are no longer being considered or moving on to the next stage?

-Are the PNC/PST and session on the same page about the mission and ministry of the congregation, your priorities and focus? Do you have shared stories/meaning about the congregation and key episodes/issues of its history?

-Do you know your trends? Every congregation has publicly available 10-year trends (attendance, membership, involvement in education, financial data) from www.pcusa.org/research. You should study your congregation's trends and come up with questions candidates may ask you about those trends and ways to respond to those questions.

-Is the PNC/PST prepared to respond to other anticipated questions from candidates? Your liaison and the General Presbyter will provide the PNC/PST with questions you should be ready to answer from candidates by the time you get to Stage 3 and start interviewing candidates by Zoom and in-person. If your candidates DON'T have good probing questions for you by this stage you should take that into account in their candidacy. Candidates who aren't inquisitive and aren't prepared to ask helpful questions are rarely effective candidates for ministry.