



The Presbytery of
DONEGAL

Vacancy Handbook

ALPHABET SOUP

- ❖ PNC: Pastor Nominating Committee (APNC: Associate Pastor Nominating Committee; DPNC: Designated Pastor Nominating Committee; IPNC: Interim Pastor Nominating Committee)
- ❖ PIF: Personal Information Form
- ❖ MIF: Mission Information Form
- ❖ COM: Connecting Our Ministry Commission
- ❖ EP: Executive Presbyter
- ❖ GA: General Assembly of the PC(USA)
- ❖ PC(USA): Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.
- ❖ Teaching Elder: PC(USA) term for an ordained minister. This is a name change from Minister of Word and Sacrament. Teaching Elders serve in a variety of positions, including as pastors of congregations.

INTRODUCTION

This is the Vacancy Handbook of the Presbytery of Donegal. It covers the information that Pastor Nominating Committees (PNCs) need in order to search for a new pastor. This handbook is most useful when used alongside the handbook ***On Calling a Pastor*** from the PC(USA). Both of these resources will be covered in the PNC Orientation.

The **PC(USA) *On Calling a Pastor*** handbook is an excellent resource to cover all the elements that are included a search for a new pastor. This handbook includes links to the sections in the PC(USA) handbook that provide more information and advice at every stage of the process.

Every presbytery has its own set of procedures for the order and specific process as the search goes forward. The purpose of this Donegal Presbytery Vacancy Handbook is to cover how the vacancy and search process are conducted in the presbytery.

It is recommended that this handbook be accessed in the online version which includes links to other documents and forms that are needed at various stages.

If this handbook is being read as a print document, an underline indicates that document or form may be obtained from the presbytery or on the presbytery website.

Do not hesitate to contact the Presbytery Vacancy Coordinator or the Executive Presbyter with any questions.

May your search be filled with adventure, hope, and blessing!

FIRST STEPS: WHEN A PASTORAL VACANCY IS ANNOUNCED

Pastors leave congregations for many reasons. Sometimes God calls them someplace else. Sometimes they retire. Sometimes health reasons may cause a departure. Sometimes a pastoral call ends precipitously due to misconduct by the pastor. Sometimes conflict ruptures the relationship between the congregation and that pastor, and a departure is negotiated with the help of the Connecting Our Ministry Commission (COM). Sometimes the model of pastoral leadership changes from full to part-time or the other way around.

When the departure of the pastor is announced, COM will be involved as partners in the departure process.

And, when the departure of a pastor is announced, COM will also be engaged with the Session in all the steps related to the calling of a new pastor.

1. As soon as ending of a pastoral relationship is made known to the Session, the Executive Presbyter (EP) and COM representatives will contact the Clerk of Session to schedule a meeting with the Session.
2. At this meeting, the following areas will be considered:
 - a. Plans for the departure of the pastor. This includes timing, an exit interview process for both pastor and Session, plans for a closing celebration, and adopting a covenant for departing pastor and congregation after the end date of the ministry.
 - ❖ Guidelines for Ending Pastoral Relationships
 - b. Options for transitional pastoral leadership immediately after the departure of the pastor.
 - ❖ Pastoral Options for the Period after the Departure of the Pastor
 - c. Consideration of what kind of Mission Study will be needed in order to be ready to search for the next pastor.
 - ❖ Mission Study Planning Guide
 - ❖ Planning for Transition Section of the PC(USA) Manual
 - d. Plans for a Financial History and Financial Projection Review. This shows whether the congregation is likely to be able to afford to call a new pastor.
 - ❖ Financial History and Projection spreadsheet
 - ❖ Financial History and Projection instructions
 - e. Timelines for the departure of the current pastor and the start of a search for a transitional or regular pastor.
 - f. Electing a Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC), if there will be an installed pastor, installed designated pastor, or an Interim Pastor selected by a PNC.
 - g. Plans for advertising for a Covenant or Temporary Pastor, if there will not be a search for an Installed Pastor by a PNC.

- h. Communication plan to the congregation.
- 3. In many cases, the Session will need to consider the information and options available. In that case, a follow up meeting/s will be scheduled to make decisions.
- 4. When the Session is ready (either at the first meeting or a subsequent meeting) the Executive Presbyter and COM Representatives meet with the Session to adopt the Vacancy Plan. This plan is submitted to the COM for approval.

❖ Vacancy Plan Form

ELECTING THE PASTOR NOMINATING COMMITTEE

1. A Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC) may be elected when:
 - a. The Vacancy Plan is approved by COM for the Session to begin its work.
 - b. The Financial Review/Projection demonstrating sufficient resources to sustain the pastoral call package is approved by COM.
 - c. The Mission Study is completed and approved by Session and COM, if a Mission Study is in the Vacancy Plan
2. The congregation's Nominating Committee presents the slate for the PNC at a called meeting of the congregation for election.
3. The PNC should be an appropriate size for the congregation, with no fewer than 5 members. More than 9 members are not advised. Attention should be paid to representation and diversity, including representation by youth and young adult members. Proposed members of the PNC should agree to serve, including availability for a rigorous meeting schedule. Ability to use email and to access the online pastoral search site of the PC(USA) is advised.

THE PNC BEGINS WORK

The Executive Presbyter and the COM Vacancy Coordinator or other COM representative will orient the PNC to its work. This orientation will be in two parts. The first part will cover writing the Mission Information Form and understanding the entire process. The second part will cover receiving Personal Information Forms (PIFs) from pastors, evaluating them, sending supplemental questions, conducting interviews, visiting potential candidates in their home ministry environment and/or inviting them to visit the community and preach in a neutral pulpit, scheduling the COM Fit Between Person and Position Conversation, Negotiating the Call, Scheduling the Congregational Meeting to Call the Pastor, and Plans for Installation/Ordination.

- ❖ PNC Orientation PPT, PT 1 (PDF)
- ❖ PNC Orientation PPT, PT 2 (PDF)
- ❖ Searching for a Pastor Section of the PC(USA) Manual

The Vacancy Coordinator and COM Liaison will be partners with the PNC through the entire process.

WRITING THE MISSION INFORMATION FORM

1. Read the section on writing the MIF from the PC(USA) Manual On Calling a Pastor
2. Review the PNC Orientation Handout (Slides X – XX)
3. The Session provides direction on Mission and Vision (possibly through some form of a Mission Study).
4. The Session provides the position description, including salary range. The salary range should include all other package options the PNC is authorized to offer, including benefits, professional expense and travel allowances, and provisions for technology devices and service.
5. The PNC writes the MIF. It may receive input and suggestions from the Session, or even a draft. It is still the PNC that presents the final draft, not the Session.
6. It is recommended that one person serve as the “wordsmith” editor to check spelling and grammar, and craft a finished product that accurately represents the congregation and is coherent in tone and approach.
7. It is important to remember that the purpose of the MIF is to spark interest in the congregation from potential matches. The MIF should be memorable, rather than generic, and give the best reasons to get to know the congregation further.
8. The PNC sends the MIF to the Session for approval.
9. The PNC Chair or Clerk of Session sends the MIF to the COM Position Coordinator for approval.
10. COM notifies the PNC Chair and Clerk of Session of COM suggestions or approvals.
11. The EP or Stated Clerk generates the Church Leadership Connection (CLC) logins.
12. The MIF is uploaded to CLC.
 - ❖ PNC Orientation: see CLC portion
 - ❖ CLC instructions for posting the MIF
 - ❖ PCUSA On Calling A Pastor Handbook CLC Portion

RECEIVING PIFS

Once the MIF is posted, the PNC will start to receive Personal Information Forms (PIFs).

PNC Orientation 2 should be scheduled at this time, if the full orientation was not completed in the first orientation. Before starting to review PIFs, the PNC should determine:

1. The login and password for PNC members to review PIFs referred through CLC (either by computer matching or self-referral)
2. Provisions for any PNC members who do not have access to or facility with computers to obtain PIFs
3. Establishment of a shared PNC email address. (Gmail is a very good option)

4. Process for the PNC to individually review and evaluate PIFs. The COM recommends Smartsheet, an online tracking management tool as a very good way to establish individual and shared trackers.
 - ❖ Individual Rating Tracker Example 1
 - ❖ Individual Rating Tracker Example 2
 - ❖ Presbytery PNC Orientation on Evaluating PIFs
 - ❖ PCUSA Handbook on evaluating PIFs
5. Method for sharing for PIFs that are referred via email. How do they reach the rest of the PNC, including making sure the PNC sees the email that goes with them.
6. Process for rating PIFs as a group
 - ❖ How to bring together individual ratings
 - ❖ Any external qualifications, such as years of experience or needed skills
 - ❖ Group Tracker Example 1
 - ❖ Group Tracker Example 2

ACKNOWLEDGING PIFS

The PNC decides how to acknowledge received PIFs. A general rule of thumb is:

1. If it is a computer match by CLC no acknowledgement is needed.
2. If it is a self-referral through CLC, no acknowledgement is needed, but acknowledgements are always appreciated.
3. If it is a self-referral is via email, whether or not also through CLC, then it is appropriate for the church to send a brief email back acknowledging receipt, and offering prayers and good wishes. This can be a boilerplate response.
4. If the PNC makes contact back for further steps in the process, then the PNC needs to keep applicants apprised of the progression of the process, and either let them know they are moving on to the next stage or send the “thank you, but not a match” email.

DECIDE THE ORDER FOR NEXT STEPS IN THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

The PNC has many options for continuing to go deeper with potential candidates. The following opportunities are often included in the PNC process. See the PNC Orientation and the PCUSA Handbook for more specifics on developing questions and interviewing.

1. Written Supplemental Questions
 - a. Often this is the next step after the first ranking and discovery of a potential match. The return of the questions by an applicant shows they are interested, and gives a way to see how they communicate.

- b. The questions usually have a few questions that are asked of everyone, and a few questions that are specific to their PIF.
2. Phone or Skype Interview. For phone interviews, will the entire PNC be together? Or will the PNC use a conference call method? If using a speakerphone or skype, test it beforehand for technical difficulties and audio quality.
3. Visit to the potential pastor's congregation – with caution for confidentiality.

REFERENCE CHECKING

An important part of the search is checking references. See the PNC Orientation and the PCUSA Handbook for more specifics.

1. Decide how the PNC will check references supplied by the potential teaching elder. Sometimes one person checks all the references of an applicant. Sometimes two people make reference check phone calls. Sometimes PNC members each check one reference of a potential applicant and compare results.
2. Secondary reference checks may only be conducted with the written permission of the applicant. (See the PNC Orientation for more specifics.)
3. The Executive Presbyter or Stated Clerk will conduct the Presbytery to Presbytery Reference Check. They do not mind making phone calls. As soon as an applicant has moved on from the second step – either supplemental questions or phone/skype interview, send the name and PIF to the EP for this check.
 - ❖ PNC Orientation on conducting Reference Checks
 - ❖ Presbytery to Presbytery Reference Check Script
 - ❖ Process for reporting Presbytery to Presbytery Reference Check results to the PNC and COM
 - ❖ PCUSA Handbook on Reference Checking

BRINGING APPLICANTS TO THE LOCAL SITE FOR AN INTERVIEW

If the potential applicant lives in a driving distance, then the following activities might be scheduled at different times. If they are coming from a further distance, a weekend visit is usually arranged. If this is one of the final candidates, then the visit often includes the spouse, if there is one. See the PNC Orientation for specifics on each activity.

1. Schedule a tour of your church facility
2. Arrange for interviews and social times with the PNC
3. Allow for ample time to explore the area and to rest

4. Arrange for a neutral pulpit site, if the PNC wishes to experience how the applicant leads worship. If there is notice of at least one month, the COM Pastoral Position Coordinator can arrange an appropriate site. If the visit is scheduled for less than one month, the Coordinator can assist as possible. With quickly scheduled or mid-week visits, a neighboring sanctuary might be used for the applicant to preach to the PNC during the visit.
5. With notice of at least one month, the COM FIT BETWEEN PERSON AND POSITION CONVERSATION can be scheduled during this visit. If the notice is for less than one month, COM will schedule the Fit Conversation if calendars permit. Otherwise, there will need to be a return visit for this conversation.
6. Obtain fingerprinting for mandatory FBI Clearance.
 - a. See the Presbytery Advisory On Background Clearances for the procedure for the 3 required clearances.
 - b. No Teaching Elder may begin service in the Presbytery of Donegal until copies of all 3 clearances are provided to the Presbytery Office.

COM FIT BETWEEN PERSON AND POSITION CONVERSATION

The COM Fit Between Person and Position Conversation is scheduled when a PNC brings a finalist applicant for a site visit. This visit is often held in conjunction with scheduling a “Neutral Pulpit” for the applicant to demonstrate how they preach and lead worship.

The Purpose of the COM Fit Conversation is to talk with the applicant about the ways their gifts and skills and the potential congregation seem to be a good match, and also to talk about where areas that raise questions about whether this is a suitable call.

When the position is for a multiple staff position with other teaching elders (Co-Pastor, Associate Pastor, Head of Staff), the other Teaching Elders on the staff will be included for part of the conversation in order to talk with the COM about their approaches to staff relationships.

The Fit Conversation typically lasts an hour. If other staff members are included, then that may expand the time as needed.

The participants are between 2-4 COM representatives, and the Executive Presbyter. The conversation is with the applicant alone, spouses are not included. It is typically scheduled at the Presbytery Office on the Monday morning following a weekend visit. Applicant flight arrangements should be made accordingly. If the Monday morning timing is not possible, then COM will attempt to schedule sufficient representation for other times over the visit.

❖ COM Fit Between Person and Position Conversation Discussion Topics

EXTENDING THE CALL

When the PNC is ready to extend the Call to their finalist applicant, the following steps are followed.

1. The PNC invites the candidate to accept the call.
2. Salary Negotiations are completed, using the [Presbytery Call Form](#)
3. If any part of the negotiated package is outside the boundaries set by the Session, a meeting with the Session must be scheduled to approve the package before the nominee accepts the position. If such a meeting is necessary, the PNC may reveal the package details but not the name of the candidate until the candidate has been examined for membership in the presbytery.
4. When the salary package negotiation is complete, the Call Form should be sent to the COM for review and approval.
5. The PNC schedules the meeting with the Examination Commission.
6. The PNC notifies the Session that a nominee will be examined for membership in the presbytery and works with the Session for the date of the congregational meeting to elect the nominee.
7. The name of the nominee cannot be disclosed to the session and the call to the meeting of the Congregation cannot be issued until the candidate has met with the Examination Commission, if they are not already a member of the Presbytery of Donegal.

MEETING WITH THE EXAMINATION COMMISSION

The Examination Commission is empowered by the Presbytery of Donegal to conduct on behalf of the presbytery any and all parts of examinations for presbytery membership and/or installation for all teaching elders seeking admission to the presbytery. The Commission conducts examinations for ordination for candidates from within the presbytery or from another presbytery who have been invited to candidate for a call from a congregation in Donegal Presbytery.

The Examination Commission meets on the second Thursday of each month. This date should be communicated to potential candidates to arrange their schedules, and should be included in the timing of PNC planning for the start date of the new position.

The Examination Commission will report the results of the examination to the PNC on the day of the examination. Once the results from the Examination Commission are received, the Session may issue the call to the meeting of the congregation to call the new Teaching Elder.

- ❖ [Examination Commission Process](#)
- ❖ [Topics for Examination for Membership in the Presbytery of Donegal](#)

PRESENTING THE NOMINEE AT THE MEETING OF THE CONGREGATION

See the PC(USA) Manual *On Calling a New Pastor* for excellent advice on preparing for the congregational meeting.

The PNC should develop a plan to:

1. Present the nominee through a letter and other promotional materials like a brochure, website and social media announcements and word-of-mouth enthusiasm.
2. Arrange hospitality for the nominee and family on the candidating weekend. See the PNC Orientation and the PC(USA) Handbook for more suggestions.
3. Plan the Service of Worship with the Candidate and others who typically plan worship in the congregation. Arrange to test the sound system and adjust levels before worship begins.
4. Assign a guide for the nominee and another for the family on the day the nominee candidates.
5. Work with the Presbytery Vacancy Coordinator to secure a moderator for the meeting of the congregation. (In multiple staff churches in some cases, another pastor may moderate the meeting. This option will be discussed with the Vacancy Coordinator.
6. Develop the report of the PNC and motion to present the nominee at the meeting, in consultation with the Clerk of Session and the presbytery-assigned moderator of the meeting. This will include the process for the vote will be taken by written ballot, with the results reported to the congregation.
7. Bring the motion to dissolve the PNC with the gratitude of the congregation.
8. Host a reception or other way for the congregation to greet the family after the Service of Worship and the meeting to elect the nominee.

FINISHING THE WORK OF THE PNC

Once the new pastor is elected, the PNC has a few more duties to wrap up their work.

1. **The PNC Chair notifies CLC of a Call Pending.** This removes the church from the Opportunity List.
2. **Notify other prospective candidates that the position has been filled.**
3. **Dispose 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. (from the PC(USA) Handbook)
4. **Celebrate the Work of the PNC!**

5. **Some sessions appoint a Transition Team to support the work of the new teaching elder.**
In many cases, members of the PNC are invited to serve on this transitions team.

SESSION RESPONSIBILITIES FOR PREPARING FOR THE NEW PASTOR

1. The Session gives notice to the Temporary or Interim Pastor as specified in the pastoral contract.
2. The Session arranges for any pastoral coverage between the temporary pastor's departure and the arrival of the new pastor.
3. Works with the new pastor and the Executive Presbyter and Presbytery Moderator to set the date, time and plans for the Installation (and Ordination if appropriate) of the pastor.
 - ❖ Planning Ordinations and Installations in the Presbytery of Donegal
4. 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. (from the PC(USA) Handbook)