



National Capital  
PRESBYTERY  
MISSIONAL • PASTORAL • PROPHETIC

# When a Pastor Leaves:

## Planning a Pastor's Departure, Securing Pastoral Leadership During Transition, and Electing a PNC

### Part 1: Guidance for a Departing Pastor

#### 1. Discerning and Announcing a Departure

When a Pastor or Associate Pastor is sensing a call to another ministry setting or decides it is time to retire:

- Before announcing their departure to the Session or congregation, first notify the General Presbyter, or a Co-Chair of the Committee on Ministry (COM) if the GP is unavailable.
- Do not discuss their departure with church staff, the Clerk of Session, Elders, Chair of Personnel Committee, or anyone in the congregation until they have spoken with the General Presbyter.
- Work with the General Presbyter to develop a timeline for making the announcement to the Session and congregation.
- The meeting with the General Presbyter may also include a discussion of the church's future pastoral needs. For example: a full-time pastor, a part-time pastor, or a temporary pastor (stated supply or designated pastor). (See [Pastoral Relationships for Teaching Elders in NCP](#))
- Refer to presbytery policies, including:
  - [Dissolution of Installed Pastoral Relationships](#)
  - [Former Pastor Policy/Covenant of Closure](#)

#### 2. Steps for a Smooth Transition

At COM's discretion, a transition plan may allow a retiring Pastor to remain as Pastor for an extended period during which a PNC (Pastor Nominating Committee) conducts a search for the new Pastor. In that case, the congregational meeting to dissolve the relationship (#3-8 below) will be postponed until the time when the Pastor actually departs.

1. After consulting with the General Presbyter, the departing Pastor or Clerk of Session contacts the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery. The Stated Clerk notifies the Committee on Ministry (COM), which will work with the Pastor and Session on a transition plan.
2. The Committee on Ministry collaborates with the Session to determine the dissolution date and ensure all obligations are met, including accrued vacation, salary, and other contractual agreements. In the case that a severance is deemed appropriate by the COM, negotiations will be mediated by members of a designated COM team.

3. The Session calls a congregational meeting, following their rule for minimum notification requirements, to vote on dissolving the pastoral relationship.
  4. At the congregational meeting:
    - A COM-appointed moderator presides (the departing pastor may not moderate).
    - The Presbytery's Covenant of Closure is presented and signed by the Pastor, Clerk of Session, and COM representative.
  5. The moderator of the congregational meeting informs COM and the Stated Clerk of the congregation's decision. Presbytery action is required to finalize the dissolution.
  6. Once dissolution is approved, the Pastor and Clerk of Session notify the Board of Pensions of the changes.
  7. All contractual obligations and responsibilities must be completed by all parties.
  8. After an appropriate farewell, both the Pastor and the Congregation move to the next phase in their respective transitions.
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## **Part 2: Guidance for the Church in Transition**

### **1. Securing Pastoral Leadership for the Transition Period**

At this point in the process, the COM's Congregational Transitions Commission (CTC) begins to work with the Session. A church experiencing a transition in pastoral leadership has several options, including:

- Hiring an Interim or Temporary Pastor (Refer to [Intentional Interim Ministry Manual](#) and [Selecting a Temporary Pastor/Interim Pastor](#) for guidance.)
- If an Interim Pastor is not available, the Session may explore alternative transitional leadership models in consultation with the CTC, bringing them into the process as early as possible.
- An Associate Pastor or a Co-Pastor may serve as the acting Pastor during the transition period. (See [Policy on Changes in Pastoral Roles Within a Congregation](#))
- If the Session decides that a Temporary Pastor (Stated Supply or Designated Pastor, or a Certified Ruling Elder) meets the congregation's needs, the PNC search process described below may not be necessary because Temporary Pastors are not installed.

### **2. Steps for Beginning a Search for a Called/Installed Pastor**

1. The CTC approves a new position, creating a pastoral vacancy.
2. The CTC appoints a liaison to assist the congregation during the transition process.
3. The CTC Liaison meets with the Session to explain the transition period, discuss the former pastor policy, and help arrange for temporary leadership as needed.
4. The Session acquires a Moderator of Session (must be a minister member of National Capital Presbytery) to serve until a Temporary or called Pastor is in place. This moderator must be approved by the NCP Stated Clerk.

5. The Session selects temporary pastoral leadership and works with the temporary Pastor to determine the appropriate timing to elect a Pastoral Nominating Committee (PNC).

### 3. Electing a Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC)

1. The Session submits a written request to CTC to call a congregational meeting for electing a PNC.
2. CTC grants permission, and the church's Nominating Committee develops a slate of PNC candidates that broadly represent the congregation. This slate of PNC candidates should be publicized at least a week before the congregational meeting.
3. At the congregational meeting:
  - o The congregation elects the PNC.
  - o A CTC Liaison explains the search process and the denomination's EEO/AA policies.
  - o The Moderator of the meeting signs EEO/AA Form 1 to verify that the policy has been presented.

### 4. Selecting PNC Members: Key Considerations

- **Commitment Expectations:** Members must understand that the process may take 12-24 months (and sometimes longer). It is often necessary for PNCs to meet weekly, and even when they meet less frequently, there can be substantial independent work (reviewing candidates, checking references, listening to sermons, etc.).
- **Diversity:** The PNC should reflect the congregation's demographics, including long-term and newer members, members of various ages, and racial and ethnic diversity.
- **Skill Sets:** Ideally, members should be comfortable using computers since much of the search process is conducted online.
- **Church Involvement:** The PNC should include individuals with a range of interests in church ministries (worship, education, mission, pastoral care, outreach, finance, etc.).
- **Personal Qualities:** Members should be actively involved in the life of the church. Members should be people who are collaborative and open to the opinions of others in the group, possess good listening skills, maintain confidentiality, and are open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Members should not assume that they already know what the church needs for their next pastor. Instead, prayerful, collaborative discernment is needed.
- **Committee Size:** The ideal size for a PNC is 7-9 members. A cap of 9 members is strongly recommended. Larger committees (10 or more) tend to become unwieldy and have difficulty building consensus. An odd number of committee members is not required as they strive for consensus rather than majority rule.

The work of the PNC can be exciting, at times frustrating, and almost always rewarding. For a description of the PNC process, refer to the [NCP Guide to Calling a Pastor](#).

If you have any questions, you may contact the following people:

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