

PASTORAL TRANSITIONS

Procedures of Committee on Ministry

The purpose of this document is to provide the core information for the many steps of Pastors and Associates receiving a call and concluding a call in a local Congregation. Pastors, Sessions and Pastor Nominating Committees will need this document as well as the PCUSA's document called "On Calling a Pastor" which can be downloaded at <http://www.pcusa.org/ocap>.

Committee on Ministry (COM) of the Presbytery of Los Ranchos looks forward to partnering with the Session and the Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC) or Associate Pastor Nominating Committee (APNC) to be a guide through the process.

Contact the Office of Stated Clerk in the Presbytery office as early as possible to begin any of the steps. Committee on Ministry will provide a person to serve as LIAISON with your PNC or APNC. The liaison will be the link to Committee on Ministry and Presbytery staff and will serve to facilitate the process.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE PROCESS AND CHAPTER TITLES:

- I. CONGREGATION** votes to dissolve the Pastoral relation.
- II. SESSION** works with COM to obtain an Interim Pastor/Transitional Pastor
- III. SESSION** conducts a Congregational study, after the departure of the installed Pastor.
- IV. CONGREGATION** elects a Pastor Nominating Committee or Associate PNC.
- V. PNC or APNC** searches for new Pastor or Associate Pastor.
- VI. PNC or APNC** identifies a candidate and obtains COM approval.
- VII. CONGREGATION** elects the Pastor or Associate Pastor.
- VIII. PASTOR OR ASSOCIATE PASTOR** begins the call and is installed by Presbytery.
- IX. APPENDIX**

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CHAPTER I

CONGREGATION VOTES TO CONCLUDE/DISSOLVE THE PASTORAL RELATION

The power to establish and dissolve Pastoral relationships (Pastor, co-Pastor, Associate Pastor, designated Pastor) belongs to the Presbytery. Just as the establishment of a Pastoral relationship requires the vote of the Congregation and Presbytery on the call and the terms of call, the dissolution of the Pastoral relationship requires the vote of the Congregation and Presbytery on the dissolution and its terms. Presbytery's vote is the action which dissolves the relationship.

A. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

1. The Committee on Ministry (COM) is Presbytery's instrument for working with Pastors and Congregations concerning the ending of Pastoral relationships as well as establishing and maintaining them.
2. Both Pastors and Congregations have the right to request that Pastoral relationships be dissolved, remembering that Presbytery has the final authority.
3. The effective date of the dissolution ends all responsibilities of the Pastor to the church and the church to the Pastor. Therefore, the dissolution date should be set for the end of any accrued vacation. Presbytery may allow exceptions to this with specifically stated detail in the approved terms of dissolution.
4. Study leave time, expense allowances, and unused sabbatical time and funds are intended to benefit the church as well as the Pastor, and, therefore, are not considered earned benefits requiring compensation at the end of a Pastoral relationship.
5. Terms of dissolutions include, but are not limited to, all financial agreements (salary and benefits, loan repayment, shared equity, expense reimbursement, medical reimbursement), manse usage, use of office and equipment, etc. COM requires the use of the model DISSOLUTION OF PASTORAL RELATIONSHIP, ENHANCED SEVERANCE AGREEMENT AND GENERAL RELEASE. See Appendix I-A.
6. Salary and benefit continuation provisions will ordinarily include the understanding that the church's obligation ends, or is reduced on a one for one basis, when the departing Pastor secures alternate employment. (Salary continuation reduced by amount of alternate employment.)

B. CATEGORIES OF DISSOLUTION OF THE PASTORAL RELATIONSHIP

1. Resignation: The Pastor requests that the relationship be dissolved in order to accept another position, retire, or for some other personal reason. There are no special terms of dissolution other than the fulfillment of the contractual agreement, i.e., unused vacation, repayment of housing loans, etc.
2. Negotiated Termination: Either the Pastor or the Session may request that COM assist in negotiating a peaceful and appropriate end to a relationship which they feel is no longer workable. This may be the result of funding limitations, changing ministry environment, poor performance, or any other situation that brings into question the viability of the Pastoral relationship. In determining the specific terms of the dissolution, consideration must be given to the reason for separation, the financial situation and overall health of the Congregation, and the specific circumstances of the Pastor. Salary and benefit continuation will be negotiated but will not normally exceed six months and the cash equivalent of unused earned vacation.

3. Dissolution for cause: The Pastoral relationship may be dissolved as a result of judicial action or Presbytery determining that “the church’s mission under the Word imperatively demands it.” There are no special terms of dissolution other than the fulfillment of the contractual agreement, i.e., salary and benefits paid up to the date the relationship is dissolved, cash equivalent of unused earned vacation, etc.

C. STEPS FOR PASTOR AND SESSION

1. The Pastor communicates the intention to resign to the Committee on Ministry before making the announcement public. An Associate Pastor should also inform the Pastor/Head of Staff.
2. The Pastor works with the Session to reach agreement on dissolution date and plans for the fulfillment of all obligations, taking into account accrued vacation, salary and other contractual agreements.
3. As soon as practicable, after the Pastor has announced his/her resignation, he/she shall arrange with the Moderator of the COM for a meeting with Session to be conducted by representative(s) of COM or appropriate Presbytery staff. The purpose of this meeting is to share the steps to be followed as outlined by the COM. The Presbytery has the responsibility and power to guide through Pastoral transitions.

Included in this first meeting is a review of the Presbytery’s “Separation Ethics Policy” and the boundaries Presbytery expects the former Pastor, Session, and Congregation to observe and respect. It may include negotiating a “Covenant” with the “former Pastor” and arranging for a Pastoral letter to be sent to the Congregation. See Appendix I-B and I-C.

4. **The Session calls a Congregational meeting and notifies** the Congregation in writing of the pending change in the Pastoral relationship and any special terms or conditions. The notice of the called meeting should indicate the purpose:

The Session calls a Called Meeting of the Congregation of _____ church _____ to act on the request of our Pastor (Associate Pastor) to dissolve the Pastoral relationship effective _____ date _____ and to forward this recommendation to Presbytery.

See next page for outline of Congregational meeting.

5. In preparation for the Congregational meeting COM encourages the appointment of an **alternate** moderator for the meeting. **Arrangements for this shall be made with the COM’s Moderator.**
6. The COM and the Presbytery Stated Clerk shall be notified of the action of the Congregation. Presbytery action is necessary to complete the dissolution.
7. The Session, through its proper committee, will immediately make advance arrangements for the supply of the pulpit, at least for a few Sundays following the vacancy.
8. The Board of Pensions shall be notified of the changes being made.
9. Each church shall pay the 12% portion of pension during the vacancy, based on the former Pastor’s salary. This is not for the benefit of the former Pastor, but is part of the overall actuarial plan of the Board of Pensions, approved by the General Assembly.
10. All contractual obligations and responsibilities shall be completed.
11. Both the Pastor and the church should move to the next steps after appropriate farewells.

12. A small group of elders appointed by Session will work with COM to secure the services of an Interim Pastor or Stated Supply Pastor. See Chapter II.

D. OUTLINE FOR CONGREGATIONAL MEETING TO DISSOLVE PASTOR RELATIONSHIP

1. Moderator opens meeting with prayer
2. Moderator reads the call for the meeting. Clerk of Session is asked if a quorum is present. (Clerk of Session serves as Clerk of Congregational Meeting. If not present, Moderator appoints a Clerk.) Only the purpose named in the call can be considered at a special meeting. If consideration is to be at annual meeting, proper notice must be given.
3. Pastor (or Associate) presents the request for dissolution. He/She may, but need not, be excused by the Moderator.
4. Motion is made and seconded that the Congregation concur with the Rev. _____ in requesting the Presbytery to dissolve the Pastoral relationship now existing between the Pastor and this church, effective _____. The pulpit to be declared vacant on _____. (Financial terms of dissolution are to be shared with the Congregation and approved).
5. Remarks from Pastor and questions from the Congregation.
6. Vote on the motion
7. Will all financial obligations have been met by the termination date?
8. Explanation of the Boundaries Covenant. Clerk of Session and Pastor sign the covenant.
9. Session should explain the next steps in moving forward.
10. Adjourn with prayer.

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