

POLICY ON THOSE SERVING AS INTERIM PASTORS BECOMING THE NEXT INSTALLED PASTOR OF A CONGREGATION

BACKGROUND

We believe that ministerial relationships are called into being by God. Furthermore, it is the desire of the Ministry Committee of the Presbytery of West Virginia to enable every congregation that can afford to call an ordained Teaching Elder to be installed as its Pastor, to do so.

During the time of transition between an installed Pastor, Co-Pastor, or Associate Pastor and the installed successor in a vacated position, it is usually appropriate for an Interim Pastor to fill the vacancy temporarily and minister to the congregation as they prepare for their next installed Pastor.

In 2011, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) approved a revision to the Book of Order, Part II of the Constitution of the Church that permits those serving in temporary relationships to be called as the next installed pastor of a particular congregation.

The Book of Order states, “a teaching elder employed in a temporary pastoral relationship is ordinarily not eligible to serve as the next installed pastor, co-pastor, or associate pastor.” However, the Book of Order now allows presbyteries to permit an “exception” to the “ordinary” policy of ineligibility if the presbytery’s mission strategy is best served by granting such an exception. The granting of an exception must be approved by a 3/4 majority of the members present and voting at a Stated Meeting of the presbytery.

This Policy Statement is intended to provide guidance to Pastor Nominating Committees (PNCs), Teaching Elders (especially those serving in temporary Interim Pastor positions), and the Ministry Committee.

KEY ASSUMPTIONS

1. Calling a pastor is a congregation initiated process, carried out by the elected PNC, guided by the Holy Spirit.
2. During the time of transition, the developmental tasks of interim ministry are vital to the next installed pastoral relationship. These tasks must not be neglected or short-changed.
3. The integrity of the search process must be maintained. The search should proceed on the assumption of ineligibility of the interim pastor so that all candidates are considered fairly and without undue bias toward an ‘inside’ candidate.
4. We must maintain an openness to the Spirit’s leading without creating an arbitrary barrier.
5. As outlined in the Book of Order, a ‘high hurdle’ is not a ‘barrier’.
6. If it is God’s will that the interim pastor be installed, the circumstances of the search will produce a clear and compelling case for a policy exception.
7. A detailed presentation of these circumstances may result in support and approval by the Ministry Committee and the Presbytery at large.

POLICY

1. Interim pastors serving congregations within the Presbytery of West Virginia are ordinarily not eligible to serve as the next installed pastor in that same congregation.
2. An exception to the ordinary policy of ineligibility may be granted upon the presentation of a compelling case that demonstrates that the mission and ministry of the Presbytery is best served by allowing the exception.
3. The case, along with supporting data, must include a report by the PNC of the results of the search process over an extended period of time. The case must clearly demonstrate that no suitable candidates have been found.
4. The case must be presented to, and reviewed by, the Presbytery's Ministry Committee, which must determine that there is no evidence of significant conflict/disagreement within the congregation and the PNC regarding the request for exception.
5. The request of Presbytery for an exception to the ordinary policy of ineligibility, along with the recommendation and findings of the Ministry Committee, must be presented and approved by a 3/4 majority of the members of the Presbytery present and voting.

Based on these provisions, the Presbytery's policy on Interim Pastor eligibility is both consistent with the directives of the Book of Order and open to the leading of the Holy Spirit as each congregation, through its PNC, faithfully searches for its next installed pastor. While no Interim Pastor is initially eligible to fill the next installed position, each Interim Pastor may become eligible if, after a reasonable search process, the leading of the Holy Spirit makes clear that the mission of the presbytery and the ministry of the congregation would best be served by making an exception to our ordinary policy. Through the application of this policy, we expect that requests for exceptions will be possible, rare, and truly exceptional to the norm.

I. MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS OF A REQUEST FOR EXCEPTION

Steps 3 and 4 of the policy statement require the presentation of a compelling case to justify the request for an exception. It is incumbent on the PNC to document their work and to collect relevant data on their search process. This effort should begin immediately upon formation of the PNC. The following outline provides a roadmap to the type of information that should be gathered and that will be required should a request for exception become desired.

1. Evidence of a fair and open search process
 - a. Search of at least 6 months after the approval and posting of the Ministry Information Form (MIF). **Note:** *This will typically be 15 months after the vacancy occurs and 9-12 months after the Temporary Pastor is on the job.*
 - b. Completion of all appropriate executive and background checks on each candidate being officially interviewed
 - c. A detailed review with Ministry Committee (or designated sub-committee) of all candidates, including but not limited to:
 - i. number of Personal Information Forms (PIFs) or resumes received
 - ii. those not considered and why
 - iii. candidates interviewed and reasons for 'no match' decision

- iv. other relevant information requested by the Ministry Committee
 - d. Review of written communication with all candidates not selected
 - e. Assessment of the search process by the PNC liaison and Ministry Committee's Transition Team
- 2. Evidence of completion of the developmental tasks of interim ministry
 - a. Review of periodic reports by the Interim Pastor
 - b. Detailed report by the Session and/or Transition Team on the progress on each developmental task
 - c. Assessment of progress of the developmental tasks by the Transition Team and General Presbyter and/or Associate Presbyter for Ministry
- 3. Evidence of a mutual sense of call between the Interim Pastor and the PNC
 - a. Results of separate, confidential interviews with a representative team of the Ministry Committee with the PNC concerning the status of the search and the sense of call to the Interim Pastor and with the Interim Pastor and his or her confidential expression of interest and willingness to be considered for the installed position
 - b. Assessment and recommendation of the General Presbyter and/or Associate Presbyter for Ministry
 - c. Assessment of the search process by the PNC liaison
- 4. Ministry Committee finding of no significant conflict/disagreement within the PNC and (to the extent possible) within the congregation regarding the request for a policy exception.

II. PROCEDURE FOR REQUESTING AN EXCEPTION

- 1. Following a search process of at least 6 months after the approval and posting of the MIF, and after prayerful discernment that they may be led to the current Interim Pastor, the PNC and the Ministry Committee liaison ...
 - a. Schedule a meeting to discuss the status of the search with the General Presbyter and/or Associate Presbyter for Ministry and the Chair of the Ministry Committee or appropriate representative of the committee
 - b. Begin to assemble the documentation of the search process that would meet the requirements of a compelling case for an exception
- 2. The General Presbyter and/or Associate Presbyter for Ministry and the Ministry Committee Chair meet with the Interim Pastor to discuss the PNC's interest and the pastor's willingness to consider a call to the church. The PNC should not discuss their sense of call with the Interim Pastor. The pastor must not feel pressured to be open to their call. Based on the pastor's interest, the Ministry Committee authorizes ...
 - a. The PNC to consider the Interim Pastor as a candidate
 - b. The Interim Pastor to submit his/her PIF to the PNC
 - c. The PNC to resume the search process with the additional new candidate

- d. The PNC to assemble the documentation necessary to support a request for an exception to the policy of ineligibility, assuming a mutual sense of call exists between the PNC and the Interim Pastor
3. The PNC prepares the case to support a request for an exception
4. The PNC presents the case to the appropriate sub-committee of the Ministry Committee. Be aware of the Stated Meeting schedule of the Presbytery and the Ministry Committee. Exceptions can only be considered at Stated Meetings of the Presbytery
5. The Ministry Committee either endorses, or fails to endorse, the request for an exception
6. The Ministry Committee Chair (not the PNC) informs the Interim Pastor of the Ministry Committee's position on the request for exception
7. The PNC decides whether to present their request to the Presbytery at-large
 - a. If the request is NOT pursued ... PNC continues the search process
 - b. If the request is pursued and approved by the Presbytery with a ¾ vote of those present at a Stated Meeting of the Presbytery... PNC prepares the call to the Interim Pastor
 - c. If the request is pursued and not approved by the ¾ vote of the Presbytery at a Stated Meeting... PNC resumes the search process with the Interim Pastor remaining ineligible