
Introduction

This handbook is designed to guide the Pastor Nominating Committee as you begin your work together.

We consistently hear that serving on a PNC is the most significant service to Christ's church that many people ever do. They bond with their fellow PNC members, get to experience a wide variety of pastor candidates throughout the country, and experience up close how the Holy Spirit orchestrates circumstances for good.

Everything we share here is in submission to our desire that your PNC be faithful in *discerning* God's will for your congregation! 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 provide a unified nomination of a pastor-candidate who is called by God, fits your congregation and NWC Presbytery, who will help equip you for next steps in Christ's ministry!

Getting Started

Forming Positive Group Norms

In the first meeting, take time to get to know one another, learn about each person's history, motivations, perspectives. You will gain a fuller appreciation of each other and begin to value the unique contribution each person makes to discerning God's will for your congregation.

A commitment to prayer, to speaking up and encouraging all voices to be heard, to fun and playfulness, to working through disagreements for positive outcomes, are really important! These norms will be set early on whether you intentionally nurture them or not—so *be intentional*.

Select a Moderator and Clerk

The Moderator or Chair is the person who will be responsible for agenda setting and moderating meetings of the PNC. Moderators are typically the main person the candidates interact with when setting up and preparing for interviews. Clerks are responsible for taking notes/minutes during PNC meetings and distributing them.

Communication with Candidates

Be responsive to candidate inquiries, clear about your process and stages, and timely in communication with candidates who are no longer being considered and those who are being considered further is essential. Identify who will be responsible for candidate communications and by when.

Maintain Confidentiality

Confidentiality protects your candidates to engage in fruitful discernment without making their current context of service worried they will “lose their pastor.” It also protects the PNC’s discernment process from unhelpful intrusion by congregants seeking to lobby for one or another candidate who may or may not be under consideration. PNCs should ALWAYS be open to recommendations, hopes, and fears of congregants, 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 consistent in communication with your congregation about where you are in the process. When you are constructing the MDP, you can be open and engaged about content and process. Once the MDP is approved and you begin engaging candidates, information on candidates is completely confidential for the PNC.

Stay in Contact with the Presbytery

As you go about your process, do not hesitate to give you COM liaison and/or presbytery staff updates about your progress. All parties will need to work closely together towards the final stages including background and EP checks, approving terms of call, COM examinations of candidates, calling congregational meetings. If you are struggling along the way, do not hesitate to reach out for support. We are here to help!

Preparing a Ministry Discernment Profile (MDP)

The Church Leadership Connection (CLC) is the online matching and referral system for pastor candidates seeking a call. You can find several helpful CLC resources here:

<https://oga.pcusa.org/section/clc/clc/> and on our website at <https://www.northwestcoast.org/com>.

You will complete a Ministry Discernment Profile (MDP) which is the job description that candidates will see describing your congregation and what sort of pastoral leadership you are seeking.

Your COM liaison or presbytery staff will provide you with the MDP form and be available to assist you as you complete the form. Once the MDP is completed, we recommend you present it to the Session to ensure you are all on the same page, and then on to COM for formal approval before publishing it on the nationwide [Church Leadership Connection](#) (CLC).

Advertising the Position

The Church Leadership Connection (CLC) will be the primary way you advertise your position. However, there are other places you may post to help spread the word, including:

- The NWCP website and social media
- Seminary websites
- Magazine classifieds such as Presbyterian’s Today, Presbyterian Outlook, Christian Century, and more.
- LinkedIn, Indeed, Idealist and other national job search websites

Interview and Hiring Process

The search process begins with casting a wide net to attract the best possible candidates. It ends with nominating one person or co-pastors to the congregation for election and with the candidates being accepted into membership of the Northwest Coast Presbytery. The following is the standard journey for hiring a pastor in the PCUSA:

Step 1: Cast the Net

The PNC evaluates PDPs to determine which candidates are the best fit for your MDP. Look for experience, potential, fit with MDP, and more. The PNC evaluates PDPs and narrows results down to the priority list of candidates you would like to invite for a first interview.

Step 2: First Interview

PNC conducts short first interviews with top candidates. PNC may listen to sermon recordings or watch other media provided by candidates. PNC also checks the candidates' online presence.

Step 3: Second Interview

PNC conducts a more in-depth secondary interview with top few candidates and then discerns who the top 1-2 candidates are that they would like to invite for a finalist weekend.

Step 4: Background Checks

The Executive Presbyter conducts an "EP Check" with the top 1-2 candidates before an in-person finalist weekend is scheduled. The PNC also asks permission of the candidates to conduct reference checks.

Step 5: Finalist Weekend

PNC conducts in-person interviews on site, neutral pulpits, session interviews, and congregation/community tours for the top 1-2 candidates. A interview and examination with representatives from COM is conducted with each finalist.

Step 6: Extending the Call

PNC discerns the final candidate and makes an offer. The PNC negotiates "terms of call" which also is approved by COM. The candidate completes any final membership steps with the presbytery.

Step 7: Candidating Weekend and Congregational Meeting

The PNC announces their nominee. The PNC and candidate set up a "candidating weekend" for their nominee to get to know the congregation, preach, and then hold a congregational meeting to elect the candidate. At its next meeting, the presbytery conducts a final membership exam, votes to accept the pastor into presbytery membership, and approves a commission for installation.