

Supporting Sessions in Seasons of Transition

A current challenge is helping Clerks & Sessions understand the steps **before** a search can begin. These focus on:

Transition planning for who & what needs to happen to *maintain worship and mission when the pastor leaves*,
and

Implementing a Mission Study as a basis for the eventual PNC to develop a strong Mission Discernment Profile for posting to the Church Leadership Connection for matches.

Transition planning means discussion about

- Will there be an Interim?
 - If so, designate a 3–5-member group to search.
 - If not, reshaping tasks of others on the current ministry team.
 - Costs/benefits to the Mission & Ministry if this choice is taken.

Implementing a Mission Study means taking time for discernment with the congregation to focus on the life and mission ahead. When entering the actual search process the PNC will have a clearer vision of the current congregation--strengths and challenges--and who will be most likely to be a good fit. Some Sessions wait until an experienced Interim is in place to help guide the study and some have hired outside services to conduct the study and share results with the Session & Congregation.

There is often a real desire on the part of Sessions to rush ahead. I know it can be frustrating for highly competent people serving on sessions to walk this process. I have come to appreciate that these processes allow the Spirit to enter in and work alongside each of them.

About Transitional Pastors

Transitional pastors, also known as interim pastors, receive special training and have experience in helping congregations prepare for their next called and installed pastor. Some transitional pastors have special skills and experience that can help a congregation recover from a time of conflict, clergy misconduct, or other trauma in the congregation.

Transitional pastors, along with the church's session, provide for the continuation of the church's programs and ministries during the time of preparation and search for the next pastor. This usually includes:

Worship leadership and preaching

- Pastoral care.
- Moderating the session.
- Administrative work including supervision of staff.
- Support of programs and committees of the congregation.
- Maintaining connections in the community
- Active participation in the life of the presbytery

The duties of a *transitional associate pastor* are defined by the church and outlined in the covenant for a transitional associate pastor. A transitional pastor also works with the congregation to prepare for the next chapter of the church's ministry under the leadership of a new pastor. This work includes:

- Exploring the church's heritage both in times of challenge and in times of accomplishment.
- Discerning the mission of the church – how and where is God calling us in this time and place.
- Strengthening the leadership of the church for ministry and mission
- Building connections to the community and to the presbytery.
- Preparing for new pastoral leadership with renewed energy and commitment.

In other words, the transitional pastor helps a congregation discover their identity apart from their last pastor and prepares them to embrace their ministry and mission with a new pastor.

Transitional pastors are not called and installed pastors, and their terms of call are not voted on by the congregation. They are contracted by the session and a covenant for their ministry is negotiated by the pastor and the session, and then approved by the Commission for Church Professionals. The term of the contract is usually for one year but can be terminated by either party with appropriate notice. It can also be renewed as needed.

A transitional pastor is not eligible to be called as the next installed pastor except in rare instances and only by following the presbytery's policy for calling a transitional pastor. The transitional pastor may assist the session or

a special committee with completing the mission study and the Mission Information Form. The transitional pastor may not be involved in any of the discernment of the Pastor Nominating Committee. An assigned liaison from the Commission for Congregational Life is responsible for training the PNC and providing assistance to the committee as needed.

You should expect a good transitional pastor to begin their time with you with intensity and energy, and to leave with intentionality, being fully present with the congregation from the beginning and really leaving when it is time for them to say good-bye.

**Sections adapted from the PC(USA),
Office of the General Assembly website.*

How to find Transitional Pastors

Your Presbytery Liaison and Executive Presbyter are your team members in finding Transitional Pastoral leadership.

1. Contact you Liaison from the Commission on Congregational Life. This person is your direct link to the larger Presbytery and is your advocate and often your guide through details.
2. Before you begin, your Session will need to create a 3–5-member search committee to implement a search for an Interim.
3. Your Liaison and the Executive Presbyter will help to identify any trained Interim Pastors who are available within the Presbytery of Scioto Valley for your consideration.
4. If there is need to look further, the search committee may choose to create a Ministry Discernment Profile (MDP) and post it on the Church Leadership Connection (CLC) for matching.
 - a. CLC has instructions and downloadable forms
<https://clc.pcusa.org/login>
 - b. When completing the MDP there are a few differences in the narrative section between the MDP that will be written by a Pastor Nominating Committee for a call after your pastor leaves and this MDP looking for an Interim.

PART 1 QUESTIONS

These questions are demographic information about the church. They will include questions about membership, community, type of search required, etc. When the search committee is ready, the session will approve the MDP and the clerk of session will enter this portion into the database, and “invite” the chair and members to CLC for access.

PART 2 NARRATIVE QUESTIONS

This section is the responsibility of the search committee chair to enter in to the MDP.

(For each narrative question, please limit your responses to no more than 1500 characters including spaces and punctuation.)

For questions 1-3: This is a report of the current mission and ministries.

1. How would you describe the congregation's/organization's specific vision for ministry? How will his vision impact the community? Is the congregation part of a ministry vision or program?
2. What is the nature and context of the community in which your congregation lives out its mission/vision? How will you address the emerging needs that are impacting your community?
3. How will this call/position help complement the responsibilities of other staff/volunteer positions, and the life of the congregation/organization, so that you may accomplish your short and long-term goals for ministry?

These questions are shaped to focus on the unique tasks of the Interim Transitional role.

4. Provide a description of the skills, gifts and training the person you hope will become a part of your ministry must have, to lead the congregation towards the vision and mission established.

When thinking of the characteristics it is appropriate to include hoped for certifications related to conflict or grief. Or if there are no urgent challenges it may be more general in terms of skills to support a congregation redefining mission.

5. What areas of ministry do you expect be person called to be responsible for? Share specific tasks, assignments, and programs.

Often this description begins “do regular pastoral duties including...” Be as specific as possible, noting anything that requires special attention, such as helping to resolve conflicts, dealing with grief, or major shifts in and around the community.

6. List any links that support the answers to your narratives or highlights ministries within your church/organization.

Often these will link to more information on the church website, or any shared ministry work within the community. Remember this is the face and voice of the congregation. It is appropriate to celebrate the life and ministry of your congregation.