

# Pastoral Relationships

## Pastoral Relationships are:

- Established by three partners - the presbytery, the congregation or session (for temporary relationships), and the individual serving in the pastoral role.
- Either installed or temporary

## Installed pastoral relationships:

- Are “pastor”, “co-pastor”, “associate pastor”
- May be for a designated term or indefinite.
- Have no requirement to be “full-time”.

## Temporary pastoral relationships:

- Session invites for service
- May be teaching elder (PC(USA) or other), PC(USA) candidate, or ruling elder
- Titles determined by presbytery
- Term may be up to 12 months, renewable
- Ordinarily not eligible to become installed

## Questions for consideration:

1. What positions are appropriate to be installed positions?
2. Which are better suited to temporary pastoral relations?
3. When might it enhance mission possibilities to install a pastor for a designated term?
4. How will you work with sessions to understand and consider the options for pastoral relationships?
5. How will you review term pastoral relationships?
6. Will you consider exceptions (**G.0504**). If so, what exceptions and under what circumstances?
7. What positions are suitable for a first call?

## Resources:

- See [New Times, New Call](#)
- [Resources are available online as you explore models for ministry.](#)

*G-2.0502 Teaching elders have membership in the presbytery by action of the presbytery itself, and no pastoral relationship may be established, changed, or dissolved without the approval of the presbytery.*

### *G-2.0504 Pastoral Relationships*

#### *a. Installed Pastoral Relationships*

*The installed pastoral relationships are pastor, co-pastor, and associate pastor. A teaching elder may be installed in a pastoral relationship for an indefinite period or for a designated term determined by the presbytery in consultation with the congregation and specified in the call.*

#### *b. Temporary Pastoral Relationships*

*Temporary pastoral relationships are approved by the presbytery and do not carry a formal call or installation. When a congregation does not have a pastor, or while the pastor is unable to perform her or his duties, the session, with the approval of presbytery, may obtain the services of a teaching elder, candidate, or ruling elder in a temporary pastoral relationship. No formal call shall be issued and no formal installation shall take place.*

*Titles and terms of service for temporary relationships shall be determined by the presbytery. A person serving in a temporary pastoral relationship is invited for a specified period not to exceed twelve months in length, which is renewable with the approval of the presbytery. 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.*

#### *G-2.0504 c. Exceptions*

*A presbytery may determine that its mission strategy permits a teaching elder currently called as an Associate Pastor to be eligible to serve as the next installed pastor or co-pastor, or a teaching elder employed in a temporary pastoral relationship to be eligible to serve as the next installed pastor, co-pastor, or associate pastor. Presbyteries that permit this eligibility shall establish such relationships only by a three-fourths vote of the members of presbytery present and voting.*

## Temporary Pastoral Relationships

- When the pastor is unable to function, or when there is no pastor in position, presbytery and session have the opportunity to carefully describe a position which meets their very particular needs. Clearly no two situations are identical or have the same resources or expectations. This section of the Form of Government (**G-2.0504b**) provides the opportunity to both define the work and title the position in ways that are most appropriate to the setting.
- A temporary pastor is often secured by a session to serve as pastor, carrying on the ministry of the church, while the search for an installed pastor goes on. However, there is no requirement that pastoral vacancies must have a temporary pastoral relationship.
- Temporary relationships are established by the presbytery, do not last more than twelve months, and are renewable with presbytery's approval.
- Pastors who have had training to be an interim or transitional pastor may be available to serve as a temporary pastor. Often these teaching elders have had special training for the unique ministry of serving churches in the midst of pastoral transition. Some have special skills and experience in helping congregations recover from a time of conflict or after the disclosure of clergy sexual misconduct or other trauma.
- On occasion presbyteries may consider contracting with ministers of other Christian churches to serve as temporary pastors within the presbytery. A presbytery may temporarily enroll a minister of another Christian church to do so under **G-2.0506**.
- Temporary pastors are not, ordinarily, eligible to serve as the next installed pastor of the congregation they are serving.

### **G-2.0504 Pastoral Relationships**

#### *b. Temporary Pastoral Relationships*

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#### *c. Exceptions*

*A presbytery may determine that its mission strategy permits ... a teaching elder employed in a temporary pastoral relationship to be eligible to serve as the next installed pastor, co-pastor, or associate pastor. Presbyteries that permit this eligibility shall establish such relationships only by a three-fourths vote of the members of presbytery present and voting.*

### **G-2.0506 Temporary Membership in Presbytery for a Period of Service**

*A presbytery may enroll a minister of another Christian church who is serving temporarily in a validated ministry in this church, or in an installed relationship under the provisions of the Formula of Agreement (Book of Order, Appendix C; G-5.0202), when the minister has satisfied the requirements of preparation for such service established by the presbytery's own rule.*



## Dissolving the Installed Pastoral Relationship

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There are three different ways that the dissolution of an installed pastoral relationship may be initiated:

- **At the request of the pastor, co-pastor or associate pastor.** Teaching elders often make the request for dissolution of the pastoral relationship because they have accepted another call for service or wish to retire. A teaching elder makes his or her request for dissolution to presbytery and informs the session so that session may call a meeting of the congregation for the purpose of considering the teaching elder's request for dissolution of the pastoral relationship. (G-2.0902)
- **At the request of the congregation.** The congregation may also request the dissolution of the pastoral relationship. Such a request is often due to difficulties between the congregation and the teaching elder and the teaching elder may or may not be in agreement with the request of the congregation. At the request of the congregation, the session shall call the meeting and request the presbytery to appoint a moderator for the meeting. (G-2.0903)
- **By presbytery action.** The presbytery may, on occasion, look into reported difficulties within a congregation. In the course of such an inquiry and after consultation with the minister, the session, and the congregation, the presbytery may find that the church's mission under the Word "imperatively demands" the dissolution of the pastoral relationship and take steps toward dissolution. (G-2.0904)

As soon as a request for dissolution of an installed pastoral relationship comes to the attention of the presbytery, presbytery should be prepared to assist the pastor and congregation through the process of pastoral transitions according to the Book of Order and presbytery policies and procedures.

### **G-2.0902 Pastor, Co-Pastor or Associate Pastor Requests**

*A pastor, co-pastor, or associate pastor may request the presbytery to dissolve the pastoral relationship. The minister must also state her or his intention to the session. The session shall call a congregational meeting to act upon the request and to make recommendations to the presbytery.*

### **G-2.0903 Congregation Requests**

*If any congregation desires the pastoral relationship to be dissolved, a procedure similar to G-2.0902, above, shall be followed. When a congregation requests the session to call a congregational meeting to dissolve its relationship with its pastor, the session shall call the meeting and request the presbytery to appoint a moderator for the meeting.*

### **G-2.0904 Presbytery Action**

*The presbytery may inquire into reported difficulties in a congregation and may dissolve the pastoral relationship if, after consultation with the minister, the session, and the congregation, it finds the church's mission under the Word imperatively demands it.*

# Dissolving the Installed Pastoral Relationship

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## The Congregational Meeting

No matter who initiates proceedings for dissolution of the pastoral relationship, there shall always be a meeting of the congregation to consider the matter. At that meeting the congregation may act to consent, or decline to consent, to the dissolution. (**G-2.0901**)

Action at the meeting of the congregation should be sure to include the effective date of dissolution and any agreed upon final terms of compensation or severance.

Presbytery will want to ensure that an appropriate moderator has been appointed to moderate the meeting of the congregation, especially if the request for dissolution was initiated due to difficulties or conflict.

## Presbytery Action

While a congregation may consent or decline to consent to the dissolution of the pastoral relationship, an installed pastoral relationship is dissolved only by the presbytery. (**G-2.0901**)

As with the congregation, presbytery action on the dissolution of the pastoral relationship should also include the effective date of dissolution and any agreed upon final terms of compensation or severance. Presbytery should also be sure that appropriate action regarding the teaching elder's presbytery membership be taken. This might include:

- ☐ Any change in presbytery membership (validated ministry, member-at-large, honorably retired),
- ☐ Transfer to another presbytery,
- ☐ Exclusion or release from ordered ministry, or
- ☐ Any other appropriate actions.

## When Parties Do Not Agree on Dissolution

When all parties are in agreement, action to dissolve a pastoral relationship is not usually controversial. However, there may be times when certain parties do not agree with the request to dissolve the pastoral relationship, requiring the presbytery to hear from the disagreeing parties.

### **G-2.0901 Congregational Meeting**

*Whether the teaching elder, the congregation, or the presbytery initiates proceedings for dissolution of the relationship, there shall always be a meeting of the congregation to consider the matter and to consent, or decline to consent, to dissolution.*

### **G-2.0901 Congregational Meeting**

*An installed pastoral relationship may be dissolved only by the presbytery.*



## Dissolving the Installed Pastoral Relationship

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If the congregation does not concur with the request to dissolve the relationship, the presbytery shall hear from the congregation, through its elected commissioners, the reasons why the presbytery should not dissolve the pastoral relationship. If the congregation fails to appear, or if its reasons for retaining the relationship are judged insufficient, the request may be granted and the pastoral relationship dissolved. (G-2.0902)

If the pastor does not concur with the request to dissolve the relationship, the presbytery shall hear from him or her the reasons why the presbytery should not dissolve the relationship. If the pastor fails to appear, or if the reasons for maintaining the relationship are judged insufficient, the relationship may be dissolved. (G-2.0903)

Presbyteries are encouraged to consider and plan for particular ways to be pastor and counselor to affected parties and to facilitate relationships during and following any contested dissolution.

### The Pastoral Transition

During this time of pastoral change in the life of the congregation, the presbytery has the responsibility to oversee this transition by serving as pastor, counselor, and advisor to teaching elders and congregations. (G-3.0301 & G-3.0307)

There are a number of issues a presbytery may wish to address and plan for to assist in a smooth transition for congregations and teaching elders. These may include:

- Ethics for departing pastors
- Exit interviews
- Temporary pastoral leadership, including pulpit supply and session moderator
- Calling of the next installed pastor

#### **G-2.0902 Pastor, Co-Pastor or Associate Pastor Requests**

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#### **G-2.0903 Congregation Requests**

*If the pastor does not concur with the request to dissolve the relationship, the presbytery shall hear from him or her the reasons why the presbytery should not dissolve the relationship. If the pastor fails to appear, or if the reasons for maintaining the relationship are judged insufficient, the relationship may be dissolved.*

#### **G-3.0301 Composition and Responsibilities**

*...the presbytery has responsibility and power to:*  
*a. provide that the Word of God may be truly preached and heard. This responsibility shall include...*  
*overseeing congregations without pastors...*

#### **G-3.0307 Pastor, Counselor, and Advisor to Teaching Elders and Congregations**

*...oversight of congregations without pastors...*

## Exit Interviews

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Exit interviews, while not required at the dissolution of a pastoral relationship, may be a helpful tool for presbyteries to consider as a regular step in the departure of a pastor. This is true whether the person leaving the congregation is a temporary pastor who has served the church for a few months or an installed pastor who is leaving after a number of years.

Exit interviews can be an opportunity to reflect on the ministry the pastor and congregation had together, its strengths and weaknesses, and be one step in the process of closure in the relationship between congregation and pastor. Information gathered through an exit interview may also be helpful in informing the congregation's future direction for ministry, especially as they call their next pastor.

A presbytery that uses exit interviews will want to find and implement a process that is most effective for their particular ministry context.

### **An Exit Interview Model**

With the Departing Pastor. The presbytery conducts the exit interview with the departing pastor soon after the pastor announces his or her departure. Questions to be asked and topics to be covered may include:

1. Ask the pastor to talk about things she/he feels good about in ministry with the congregation.
2. Ask about barriers to effective ministry. These barriers might be in the congregation, or community, or with the pastor.
3. Ask about the relationship between the pastor, the session and the congregation, including any difficulties or conflict.
4. Ask about advice the pastor might want give to the next pastor.
5. Review with the pastor the presbytery's expectations regarding appropriate and inappropriate contact between the pastor and congregation after the pastor's departure. This is especially important if the pastor is staying in town or moving to a nearby location.

#### ***G-2.0905 Officiate by Invitation Only***

*After the dissolution of the pastoral relationship, former pastors and associate pastors shall not provide their pastoral services to members of their former congregations without the invitation of the moderator of session.*

## Exit Interviews

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With the Session. The presbytery conducts the exit interview with the session after the pastoral relationship has departed. It is helpful for the moderator of session appointed by presbytery to be present for this interview. Questions to be asked and topics to be covered may include:

1. Ask about the positive growth in the life of the congregation during the pastor's time with the congregation.
2. Ask about barriers to effective ministry. These barriers might be in the congregation, or community, or the pastor.
3. Ask about the relationship between the pastor, the session and the congregation, including any difficulties or conflict.
4. Review with the session, the presbytery's expectations regarding appropriate and inappropriate contact with between the pastor and congregation after the pastor's departure. This is especially important if the pastor is staying in town or moving to a nearby location.
5. Begin discussion about maintaining regular worship and congregational life during the transition and search for new pastoral leadership.

**Resource:**

- Ethics for Departing Pastors



## Presbytery as Pastor, Counselor and Advisor

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- One of the ways a presbytery leads and guides the witness of its congregations, "...so that all congregations become communities of faith, hope, love, and witness," is through its role as pastor, counselor, and advisor.
- In this role a presbytery keeps the lines of communication open with its congregations and church leaders, enabling presbytery to better understand their lives and ministries and, in turn, to respond appropriately and in a timely manner when called for.
- In this role the presbytery is to:
  - serve as pastor and counselor to teaching elders, ruling elders commissioned to pastoral service, and certified Christian educators of the presbytery;
  - facilitate the relations between the presbytery and its congregations, teaching elders, ruling elders commissioned to pastoral service, and certified Christian educators;
  - settle difficulties on behalf of the presbytery where possible and expedient.
- There are particular responsibilities listed in **G-3.0301** and **G-3.037** which a presbytery will want to refer to as it determines how to fulfill its role as pastor, counselor and advisor.

Each presbytery is encouraged to determine how its role as pastor, counselor and advisor will be fulfilled within its unique ministry context and, then, to develop and maintain mechanisms and processes that will allow the presbytery to effectively fulfill this role.

### **Book of Order:**

#### **G-1.0101 The Mission of the Congregation**

*...The congregation is the basic form of the church, but it is not of itself a sufficient form of the church. Thus congregations are bound together in communion with one another, united in relationships of accountability and responsibility...*

#### **G-3.0301 Composition and Responsibilities**

*...The presbytery is responsible ... for assisting and supporting the witness of congregations to the sovereign activity of God in the world, so that all congregations become communities of faith, hope, love, and witness...*

*...the presbytery has responsibility and power to:*

- a. provide that the Word of God may be truly preached and heard.*
- b. provide that the Sacraments may be rightly administered and received.*
- c. nurture the covenant community of disciples of Christ.*

#### **G-3.0307 Pastor, Counselor, and Advisor to Teaching Elders and Congregations**

*Presbyteries shall be open at all times to communication regarding the life and ministry of their congregations.*

*Each presbytery shall develop and maintain mechanisms and processes to serve as pastor and counselor to teaching elders, ruling elders commissioned to pastoral service, and certified Christian educators of the presbytery; to facilitate the relations between the presbytery and its congregations, teaching elders, ruling elders commissioned to pastoral service, and certified Christian educators; and to settle difficulties on behalf of the presbytery where possible and expedient.*

*To facilitate the presbytery's oversight of...it may delegate its authority to designated entities within the presbytery.*