

**JOHN KNOX PRESBYTERY
WHEN A PASTORAL VACANCY DEVELOPS
GUIDELINES FOR SESSIONS**

When your minister leaves, a great deal of additional responsibility needs to be immediately assumed by members of the session. The information presented here will provide answers to the most immediate and significant questions which almost always develop. These specific guidelines and general information are intended to help you meet your new challenge in a way that will assure you and your congregation a successful and rewarding interim experience.

For your initial information

1. A current directory of the presbytery is available in your church office or from the John Knox Presbytery website (www.jknox.org). This directory lists all committees of the presbytery and the chairperson of each. Contact the chair of the Committee on Ministry (COM). The COM has direct responsibility for vacant churches in the presbytery, and will assign a committee member to work directly with you. This person is called the COM representative to your congregation.
2. In consultation with your session, the COM will see that a qualified minister of the presbytery is appointed as moderator and approved by the presbytery.
3. Consult with your COM representative in arranging temporary pastoral services while you are without a pastor. This may include the hiring of an interim minister in order to provide continuity in pastoral services for your church.
4. The COM, mainly through your COM representative, will assist your PNC in its extensive work in seeking your new pastor. This representative will instruct the committee in the requirements and procedures to be followed in the search and nomination process.

For your further information

1. The Role of the Moderator

The moderator must be an ordained minister who is recommended by COM and approved by the John Knox Presbytery. You may be asked to suggest a pastor who is known in your congregation for this position. The moderator will discuss with you the essential arrangements for his or her services. This will include your estimate of needs for his/her time, as well as appropriate reimbursement for time and travel. The moderator will necessarily preside over all called meetings of the session and congregation. In the event of unavoidable absence, the moderator will arrange for a qualified replacement to preside. The moderator's duties and responsibilities are outlined in the Book of Order. However, the moderator shall in no way dictate selections for committee assignments, nor attempt to make decisions which remain the definite responsibility of the session.

As an experienced minister, the moderator can be of invaluable counsel and assistance to the session while your congregation is without a pastor.

2. The Role of the Committee on Ministry Representative

The COM representative serves an essential function with the Session. This role is advisory to assist, counsel and guide. The search for well qualified and promising candidates for future pastoral leadership can be a time consuming and demanding assignment. The COM representative and the PNC can, by working effectively with the Session or Search Committee, expedite the search process and assure the proper and acceptable handling of all procedures.

The COM representative shall be present at the initial meeting of the Search Committee and at as many subsequent meetings as possible. Communication by phone is essential at all stages in the search.

3. Supplying the Pulpit

In the absence of a pastor, or before the interim pastor arrives, many responsibilities must now be assigned to others. Temporary pulpit supply needs advance planning of several weeks. Consult your COM representative for aid and advice as you plan to supply the pulpit. When an active and effective worship committee exists, this function is usually assigned to that committee, under the general guidance of the session. Where no such committee is operating, it is necessary for the session to appoint or designate someone or a small group to handle this immediate and on-going responsibility. The following suggestions will indicate essential factors to consider.

Plan Early – Many churches rely upon guest ministers to supply the pulpit during part of the interim. Plan at least two months in advance. This is especially necessary at peak vacation seasons when pulpit supplies are in demand. Refer to the list of approved supply ministers available from the Presbytery Office or the COM. If your session wishes to invite other persons please check first with the COM representative.

Inviting the Pulpit Supply – Use the telephone whenever possible. This saves time, energy, and misunderstanding. If the person you are inviting is unavailable on a particular date, try for an alternative time. Be clear about what information you want for the bulletin, whether you or the minister will select hymns, kind of hymnbook, and when you need the information. Send a sample copy of your bulletin and a letter confirming arrangements that same week. Indicate what time the church will be open and who will meet the person you are inviting. Don't let your guest minister guess about the honorarium and travel arrangements. Presbytery has recommended an honorarium of \$125.00 for a worship service, plus IRS allowable rate for mileage. For a larger parish (yoked churches or two services) a fair figure needs to be agreed upon. (See "WHEN A GUEST PREACHER IS COMING TO YOUR CHURCH" in the John Knox Presbytery COM Handbook. Another source for pulpit supply is your own congregation. Two or three youth might work together to prepare the sermon or lead in worship. Lay persons who speak from their own experience and convictions are a rich resource. Examine your roll of members carefully, decide whom you would like to invite and do it. In all of the above remember to confer with your COM representative.

Be a Considerate Host – Have the building open and ready for the service well in advance of the service time. Each Sunday a designated person or couple should be assigned to meet the guest speaker and orient the guest to the church and its service.

4. Fiscal Responsibilities

A Buildup - Not a Letdown – The fact that a pastor's salary is not being paid while the pulpit is vacant provides an opportunity for putting your financial house in order. This should be a challenge to every member of the congregation. The session should give particular attention to recurring obligations as well as planning promptly for new ones.

Pulpit Supply – This will be at least \$125 plus mileage each week, covering honorarium and travel expense. This is a very important item that should never be underfinanced.

Moderator Expense – Your moderator assumes additional responsibilities during the interim. An appropriate allowance for her/his time and commuting expense should be budgeted. Presbytery has established a minimum of \$25 per meeting plus mileage at the IRS allowable reimbursement rate.

Ongoing Expenses – All bills should continue to be paid on a current basis. The session assumes additional responsibility now in reviewing the monthly receipts and expenditures, including the newly acquired costs of pulpit supply, moderator reimbursement, budgeted expenses of the PNC and related obligations.

Pension Dues - Vacant churches continue to pay dues into the Board of Pensions at the special vacancy rate of 12% of the salary paid the last pastor. The church treasurer must notify the Board of Pensions when the pulpit was declared vacant by presbytery. It is suggested that you request further information from the Board of Pensions, 2000 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA, 19103-3298.

Additional Obligations - As indicated above, the PNC must be given a budget allowance to cover phone calls, their travel costs and/or travel costs of prospective candidates to your area for consideration, interviews, etc. There will eventually be moving expenses for the new pastor, an increasingly sizable amount due to cost increases each year. Although the distance involved will not be known for some time, the budget should be adjusted to cover a substantial amount for planning purposes.

The interim period is the time to make a thorough appraisal of the physical condition of the manse. Generally, new pastors and their families like to have some choice as to any redecorating plans; however, all major maintenance work and essential and desirable repairs should be accomplished well in advance of the selection of a new minister. The condition of the manse is a definite factor considered by prospective pastors and their families. The condition of the manse is a clear indication of the extent to which the congregation cares about the welfare and home environment of both the pastor and the pastor's family.

5. The Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC)

If the decision is to proceed immediately to search for a new pastor, the election of a PNC is called for. This committee, elected by and representative of the congregation, may be established after the effective date of the dissolution of the previous pastoral relationship and after approval by the COM. In some situations, a delay in electing the committee may be recommended.

When the PNC is to be elected, the session or the church nominating committee suggests names to the congregation, taking into consideration the size and representative composition of the committee. It should be large enough to adequately represent the congregation but small enough to travel as needed and function effectively. It is highly desirable, though not a requirement, that a member of the session be included on the PNC in order to insure continuing and effective communication between the two groups. Experience indicates that the pastoral search, properly and thoroughly accomplished, will require at least nine months of work. For this reason it is most important that the session be kept currently informed as to the progress of the PNC and the status of its important work.

6. The Pastoral Call

The PNC will need to determine, in consultation with the session, the terms of the call for a new pastor. While the official Church Information Form identifies the basic effective salary, there are other items that need to be considered and fully understood by all concerned. These should be stated in the Church Information Form, since this information is made available to and is of natural interest to prospective candidates. For example, the John Knox Presbytery has determined that two weeks of leave for Continuing Education plus a minimum of \$600 shall be provided each pastor annually; this is to be stipulated in the call to a new pastor. In addition, a vacation period of one month is to be established for each minister. Congregations should provide allowances to reimburse pastors for out-of-pocket expenses related to the work of the church. The terms should be well thought out, properly identified and approved by the session. They are, of course, adjustable in the final stages of negotiation with a probable new pastor.

*See Forms: "Report on Congregational Action to Dissolve Pastoral Relationship"