

CHURCH WITH A VACANT PULPIT
Summary of Procedures
as outlined by Committee on Ministry

FOR: THE SESSION AND CONTINUING PASTORAL STAFF

(to be used by the Committee on Ministry representatives in meeting with the Session after the pastor has announced his/her resignation)

I. PRAYER AND INTRODUCTION

II. MEETING WITH THE SESSION OF A CHURCH WITH A VACANT (or soon to be vacant) PULPIT

As soon as practicable, after a pastor has announced his/her resignation, he/she shall arrange with the Moderator of the Committee on Ministry (COM) for a meeting with the session of the church, to be conducted by representative(s) of the COM or appropriate presbytery staff. (Normally, moderated by the presbytery-appointed session moderator.) The purpose of this meeting is to share the steps to be followed as outlined by the COM. The presbytery *“has the responsibility and power: To take special oversight of churches without pastors.”* [G-11.0103.k]

III. FUNCTION OF THE COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY

“It shall make recommendations to presbytery regarding calls for the services of its ministers. Every call for the services of a minister or candidate in a pastoral relationship shall be placed in its hands and presented by it to the presbytery...and recommendation as to whether the called shall be placed in the hands of the minister or candidate.” [G-11.0502.b)

The function of the COM is to be of assistance to the session of the church which is currently without a pastor.

The session has direct access to the COM through the moderator appointed by the presbytery, or through the COM liaison assigned to the church.

IV. PULPIT SUPPLIES - CHURCH WITHOUT AN INSTALLED PASTOR

A. The COM *“shall counsel with session regarding stated supplies, interim pastors, interim associate pastors, and temporary supplies when a church is without a pastor, and it shall provide lists of pastors and qualified laypersons to supply vacant pulpits.”* [G-11.0502.f]

The ordinary process for supplying the pulpit is for a committee of the session, or a person named for that purpose, to secure pulpit supplies, in consultation with the COM.

B. Temporary Pastoral Relations

1. Stated Supply [G-14.0513.a]
A stated supply is a minister appointed by the presbytery, after consultation with the session, to perform the functions of a pastor in a church **which is not seeking an installed pastor**. The relation shall be established only by the presbytery and shall extend for a period not to exceed twelve months at a time. A stated supply shall not be reappointed until the presbytery, through its COM, has reviewed his/her effectiveness. A stated supply who is a member of the presbytery may, with presbytery's approval, serve as moderator of the session.
2. An Interim Pastor [G-14.0513.b]
An interim pastor is a minister invited by the session of a church without an installed pastor to preach the Word, administer the Sacraments, and fulfill pastoral duties for a specified period not to exceed twelve months at a time, **while the church is seeking a pastor**. The session may not secure or dissolve a relationship with an interim pastor without seeking the concurrence of presbytery through its COM. A minister may not be called to be the next installed pastor or associate pastor of a church served as an interim pastor.
3. A Temporary Supply [G-14-0513.d]
A temporary supply may be a minister, a candidate, commissioned lay person or an elder secured by the session to conduct services when there is no pastor or the pastor is unable to perform pastoral duties. The session shall seek the counsel of presbytery through its COM before securing a temporary supply. **Because of the strictures of the Form of Government cited above, no one should preach in the pulpit of a church without an installed pastor who is, or could be persuaded to become, a candidate as pastor of that church.**
4. A retired minister on pension, in conformity with the policy of the Board of Pension, normally shall serve a vacant church for no longer than 12 months. The Board of Pensions allows an extension upon the recommendation of the COM that "*circumstances are exceptional and no other minister is available who would provide the appropriate or necessary service.*" If pension is being paid on former pastor's salary, pension is not paid on retired minister's salary.

V. ASSOCIATE PASTOR(S)

If your church now has an associate pastor on its staff, it is quite in order for the session to re-align his/her duties during the interim you are without a pastor. The status as associate pastor does not change, but he/she may be asked to perform all or part of the preaching, or in general be relieved of some previous duties to assume additional pastoral duties. This may also involve a temporary adjustment in compensation.

The official relationship of an associate pastor to a church is not dependent upon that of a pastor, but **an associate pastor is not eligible to succeed immediately the pastor in a church which they have served together.** [G-14-0501.f]

VI. THE CONGREGATIONAL STUDY PROCESS

It is the policy of the presbytery, whenever a church is without an installed pastor, that the session shall engage in a Congregational Study with the assistance and guidance of the Congregational Study Sub-Committee of the Presbytery and Congregational Development Committee of Presbytery.

The congregational study process is designed to help the pastor nominating committee and the session understand their church and the community it serves and help them determine the qualifications and experience they desire in the pastor they will call. The material from the congregational study report helps the pastor nominating committee prepare the Church Information Form (CIF). The CIF is used by the general assembly agency in “matching” ministers who might be interested in a call with the particular church.

The presbytery urges the session to appoint a Congregational Study Committee to work on the study process and make the final report to session. This committee of 10 to 15 people needs to be a representative group of the congregation. It takes 3-6 months to complete the process and the Presbytery provides a facilitator for the process.

It is to be understood that the relationship and responsibility of a church without a pastor continues to be through the COM.

VII. ELECTION OF A PASTOR NOMINATING COMMITTEE [G-14.0502]

Upon completion (or near completion) of the Congregational Study, the congregation shall elect a Pastor Nominating Committee. At this point, the COM should be invited to attend a Session meeting to explain the process of electing the PNC.

VIII. LEADERSHIP OF THE CHURCH DURING THE INTERIM

During the period when your church is without an installed pastor, the session must assume additional, full leadership responsibility for the life of the church. This need not be a period to “mark time”. Rather, it can be a time for honest evaluation of your church and a time of spiritual renewal.

IX. REVIEW AAEEEO POLICIES AND GUIDELINES (Procedure No. 3b)

X. PROVIDE INFORMATION ON TIME LINE

Emphasis should be first to complete the congregational study, then to elect a PNC when the study is complete (or nearly complete).