

Suitability and Fit Process Salem Presbytery

Purpose of Interview

- To be extra “set of eyes” looking to affirm the candidate’s suitability and fit with a church and Salem Presbytery.

Salem’s Mission

We as Salem Presbytery strive:

- to be a visible witness to Jesus Christ (REACH);
- to equip and strengthen our congregations and leaders for ministry in the world (EQUIP);
- and to inspire and model local and global mission (SEND).

Theology of the Suitability and Fit Interview

The presbytery is responsible for the government of the church throughout its district, and 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. As it leads and guides the witness of its congregations, the presbytery shall keep before it the marks of the Church (F-1.0302), the notes by which Presbyterian and Reformed communities have identified themselves through history (F-1.0303) and the six Great Ends of the Church (F-1.0304) (G-3.03).

“In light of this charge, the presbytery has responsibility and power to... nurture the covenant community of disciples of Christ. This responsibility shall include ordaining, receiving, dismissing, installing, removing, and disciplining its members who are teaching elders; commissioning ruling elders to limited pastoral service; promoting the peace and harmony of congregations and inquiring into the sources of congregational discord; supporting congregations in developing the graces of generosity, stewardship, and service; assisting congregations in developing mission and participating in the mission of the whole church; taking jurisdiction over the members of dissolved congregations and granting transfers of their membership to other congregations; warning and bearing witness against error in doctrine and immorality in practice within its bounds; and serving in judicial matters in accordance with the Rules of Discipline. (G-3.03c)

The Marks of the Church

“With all Christians of the Church catholic, we affirm that the Church is ‘one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.’” (F-1.0302)

The Notes of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches

“Where Christ is, there is the true Church. Since the earliest days of the Reformation, Reformed Christians have marked the presence of the true Church wherever: the Word of God is truly

preached and heard, the Sacraments are rightly administered, and ecclesiastical discipline is uprightly ministered.” (F-1.0303)

The Great Ends of the Church

“The great ends of the Church are:

- the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind;
- the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God;”
- the maintenance of divine worship;
- the preservation of the truth;
- the promotion of social righteousness; and
- the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.” (F-1.0304)

Suitability and Fit Process

1. When the top 2-3 candidates have been identified by the PNC (or the Session/Transition Team in the case of Temporary positions), and before they are invited for on-site interviews, their names and Presbytery affiliation are given to the General Presbyter (GP) who will contact the candidates’ presbytery to perform a Presbyter-Presbyter executive check. Assuming the way be clear, the GP will give the PNC permission to invite top candidates for in-person interviews. Under no circumstances should there be further conversation with candidates until the Presbyter-Presbyter check is complete.
2. When the PNC has narrowed its search and plans to bring its final candidates to the field for an on-site interview, they contact the COM Task Force on Transitions in Ministry at least ten days before the scheduled visit. This will allow the Task Force Moderator to confirm that there will be adequate representation of the Task Force at the interview. The PNC should allow up to an hour for the COM Task Force on Transitions in Ministry to interview the candidate(s) for suitability and fit. The Liaison will arrange for this to take place, inviting all members of the Task Force, making sure that they have a copy of the candidate’s PIF, the candidate’s Journey of Faith and Faith Statement, and the church’s MIF in advance of the meeting. The General Presbyter may attend. The COM Task Force on Transitions in Ministry may interview the candidate and PNC separately. Please note that this is a highly confidential process.
3. The Members of the COM Task Force shall have reviewed (a.) the Five-Year Financial Projection supplied to the COM by the church and (b.) the church’s Mission Study (or summary). The reports Exit Interviews and/or Transitional Pastor may be reviewed.
4. The interview – which may take place in person at a mutually agreeable location, or via Zoom - will
 - a. See to ensure that the competencies of the candidate (in the PIF) and the leadership qualities required of the church (in the MIF) are compatible.

- b. Ask probing questions that PNC's sometime don't ask, and
- c. Determine whether this person intends to be a faithful presbyter fulfilling God's mission in Salem Presbytery and the Presbyterian Church (USA).

Format of the Interview

1. Open with prayer
2. Introductions –
 - a. COM Task Force members state name, church they serve and in what capacity (elder/minister)
 - b. PNC members state name, and role on committee
 - c. Candidate shares name
3. Purpose of meeting – meeting facilitator (usually the COM Task Force on Transitions in Ministry Moderator) states purpose of meeting is to be extra 'set of eyes' looking to affirm the candidate's suitability with church and Presbytery. The interview will focus only on the candidate present. The COM Task Force is interested in ensuring a successful call for both the congregation and the candidate. The Task Force will ask a series of questions of the PNC and the candidate, some of them may duplicate what PNC and candidate have already talked about with each other. The Task Force will answer any questions posed by the candidate or the PNC.
4. Suggested questions are listed below. There is no particular order to the questions; the first two questions below provide a good starting point. All Task Force members present should participate in the interview.
5. When there no more questions from the COM Task Force, PNC, or candidate, close interview with prayer so that COM members may meet separately and vote.
6. The COM Task Force on Transitions in Ministry will communicate to the PNC its assessment of the current candidate's suitability and fit. No comparisons will be made with other candidates. If the COM finds the match suitable, the PNC may proceed with their process, considering this and other candidates.

If the candidate has not been approved by the appropriate COM Task Force, but the PNC still thinks the candidate is appropriate, the PNC may appeal the decision to the COM Leadership Team as a whole. The COM Task Force will be allowed to address the COM Leadership Team first, sharing its concerns and conclusion, then the PNC will be allowed to address the COM Leadership Team to make their case for the candidate.

If the entire COM approves the candidate, then the process will go forward. If the COM Leadership Team sustains the decision of the COM Task Force, then the PNC will have to decide whether it wants to start over or present the call to Presbytery with the negative recommendation about the call from the COM.

7. When the PNC has identified its final candidate, the Liaison will arrange for the candidate to meet with the COM Task Force on Examinations. This meeting is usually the morning of the 4th Thursday of the month.
8. If the candidate has been approved by the COM Task Force on Examinations, and the PNC is ready to present their final candidate a call, the Liaison will present the terms of call to the full COM Task Force on Transitions in Ministry prior to their monthly meeting.
9. Staff will do a criminal background check on the candidate during the time between the delivery of the terms of call and the meeting of the COM Task Force.
10. The COM Task Force on Transitions in Ministry will approve the terms of call and give the PNC permission to ask the Session to call a congregational meeting to issue the call. If there is need for permission to move on the field and begin work before a Presbytery meeting, the Task Force will do that at the same time that it approves the call.
11. The COM has the authority to receive a previously ordained pastor transferring to Salem between presbytery meetings. The newly-elected pastor will be welcomed at the next meeting of Salem Presbytery.
12. If the candidate has not been ordained, that person will be received into membership of Salem Presbytery at the next presbytery meeting upon successful examination on the floor of presbytery.

Suggested Questions

1. For the candidate: Tell us about your sense of call to this particular congregation.
2. For the PNC: Tell us about your process and your sense of call for this candidate; what is it about this candidate that particularly speaks to you?
3. For the candidate: What do you see as your 'growing edges' with this call?
4. For the PNC: What do you see as the congregation's 'growing edges' with this call?
5. For the candidate: How do you take care of yourself, maintaining the balance between your personal and professional life?
6. For the PNC: If called, how will you support this candidate in their new call?
7. For the PNC: Will a sabbatical be included in the call?
8. For the candidate: How will you participate in Presbytery?
9. In what ways will you strengthen the covenant relationship between this church and Salem Presbytery?
10. How will you strengthen the covenantal relation between this church and the Presbyterian Church (USA)?
11. What are some of the aspects of the latest Book of Order that inform your ministry?
12. Where do you see the Spirit of God alive in the Presbyterian Church (USA)?