

# Temporary Pastor Eligibility Policy for Serving as the Next Installed Pastor, Co-Pastor, or Associate Pastor

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## I. BACKGROUND

We believe that ministerial relationships are called into being by God. Furthermore, it is the desire of the Commission on Ministry of Salem Presbytery to enable every congregation that can afford to call an ordained Minister of Word and Sacrament to be installed as its Pastor, to do so. During the time of transition between an installed Pastor, Co-Pastor, or Associate Pastor and the installed successor in a vacated position, it is usually appropriate for a Transitional Pastor to fill the vacancy temporarily and minister to the congregation as they prepare for their next installed Pastor.

In 2011, the General Assembly of the PC(USA) approved a revision to the Book of Order, Part II of the Constitution of the Church. In the new language describing “Pastoral Relationships” (G-2.0504), two broad categories are defined – “Installed” and “Temporary” pastoral relationships. The Book of Order, in G-2.0504b states, “A minister of the Word and Sacrament employed in a temporary pastoral relationship is ordinarily not eligible to serve as the next installed pastor, co-pastor, or associate pastor.” However, unlike in previous versions, the current Book of Order now allows presbyteries to permit an “exception” to the “ordinary” policy of ineligibility if the presbytery’s mission strategy is best served by granting such an exception. The granting of an exception and issuing such a call must be approved by a 3/4 majority of the members present and voting at a stated meeting of the presbytery.

## II. PURPOSE OF SALEM PRESBYTERY’S POLICY

Given the 2011 revision to the Book of Order, Salem Presbytery’s Commission on Ministry felt that a policy statement and associated implementation procedures were needed to clarify the application of the new Constitutional provisions for the Presbytery. This Policy Statement is intended to provide guidance to Pastor Nominating Committees (PNCs), Ministers of the Word and Sacrament (especially those serving in temporary Transitional Pastor positions), and the Commission on Ministry.

## III. KEY ASSUMPTIONS THAT GUIDE POLICY AND PROCEDURES

1. Calling a pastor is a congregation initiated process, carried out by the elected PNC, guided by the Holy Spirit.
2. During the time of transition, the developmental tasks of transitional ministry are vital to the next installed pastoral relationship. These tasks must not be neglected or short-changed.
3. The integrity of the search process must be maintained. The search should proceed on the assumption of ineligibility of the temporary pastor so that all candidates are considered fairly and without undue bias toward an ‘inside’ candidate.
4. We must maintain an openness to the Spirit’s leading without creating an arbitrary barrier.
5. As outlined in the Book of Order, a ‘high hurdle’ is not a ‘barrier’.
6. If it is God’s will that the temporary pastor be installed, the circumstances of the search will produce a clear and compelling case for a policy exception.
7. A detailed presentation of these circumstances will result in support and approval by the COM and the Presbytery at large.

#### IV. POLICY ON TRANSITIONAL PASTOR ELIGIBILITY

1. Temporary pastors serving congregations within Salem Presbytery are ordinarily not eligible to serve as the next installed pastor in that same congregation.
2. An exception to the ordinary policy of ineligibility may be granted upon the presentation of a compelling case that demonstrates that the mission and ministry of the Presbytery is best served by allowing the exception.
3. The case, along with supporting data, must include a report by the PNC of the results of the search process over an extended period of time. The case must clearly demonstrate that no suitable candidates have been found.
4. The case must be presented to, and reviewed by, the Commission on Ministry for Salem Presbytery. The COM must determine that there is no evidence of significant conflict / disagreement within the congregation and the PNC regarding the request for exception. Any exemption request must be presented to and approved by the COM prior to any conversation with the Temporary Pastor as to his/her candidacy.
5. Should the PNC then determine that it is God's will that their Temporary Pastor become their chosen candidate for the position of next installed pastor, that exemption request and call must be presented to, and approved by, a  $\frac{3}{4}$  majority of the members of the Presbytery present and voting.

Based on these provisions, Salem Presbytery's policy on Transitional Pastor eligibility is both consistent with the directives of the Book of Order and open to the leading of the Holy Spirit as each congregation, through its PNC, faithfully searches for its next installed pastor. While no Transitional Pastor is initially eligible to fill the next installed position, each Transitional Pastor may become eligible if, after a reasonable search process, the leading of the Holy Spirit makes clear that the mission of the presbytery and the ministry of the congregation would be best served by making an exception to our ordinary policy. Through the application of this policy, we expect that requests for exceptions will be possible, rare, and truly exceptional to the norm.

#### V. MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS OF A REQUEST FOR EXCEPTION

Steps 3 and 4 of the policy statement require the presentation of a compelling case to justify the request for an exception. It is incumbent on the PNC to document their work and to collect relevant data on their search process. This effort should begin immediately upon formation of the PNC. The following outline provides a roadmap to the type of information that should be gathered, and that will be required should a request for exception become desired.

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1. Evidence of a fair and open search process
  - a. Search of at least 6 months after the approval and posting of the Ministry Information Form (MIF). **Note:** *This will typically be 15 months after the vacancy occurs and 9-12 months after the Temporary Pastor is on the job.*
  - b. A detailed review with appropriate COM Task Force of all candidates, including but not limited to:
    - i. number of PIFs / resumes received
    - ii. those not considered and why
    - iii. candidates interviewed and reasons for 'no match' decision
    - iv. other relevant information requested by the COM
  - c. Review of written communication with all candidates not selected
  - d. Assessment of the search process by the PNC liaison

2. Evidence of completion of the developmental tasks of interim ministry
  - a. Review of periodic reports by the Transitional Pastor Detailed report by the Session and/or Transition Team on the progress on each developmental task
  - b. Assessment of progress by Salem Presbytery's COM Task Force on Transitions in Ministry.
3. Evidence of a mutual sense of call between the Transitional Pastor and the PNC
  - a. Results of separate, confidential interviews with a representative team of the COM Task Force on Transitions in Ministry
    - i. with the PNC – discussion of the status of the search and the sense of call to the Transitional Pastor
    - ii. with the Transitional Pastor – confidential expression of interest on behalf of the PNC and exploration of the Transitional Pastor's interest / willingness to be considered for the installed position
  - b. Assessment of the search process by the PNC liaison
4. COM finding of no significant conflict / disagreement within the PNC and (to the extent possible) within the congregation regarding the request for a policy exception.

## VI. PROCEDURE FOR REQUESTING AN EXCEPTION

1. Following an unfruitful search process of at least 6 months after the approval and posting of the MIF, and after prayerful discernment that they may be led to the current Transitional Pastor, the PNC and the COM liaison ...
  - a. Schedule a meeting to discuss the status of the search with the COM Task Force on Transitions in Ministry
  - b. Begin to assemble the documentation of the search process that would meet the requirements of a compelling case for an exception
2. The PNC will meet with the Transitional Pastor to discuss the PNC's interest and the pastor's willingness to consider a call to the church. (Based on the pastor's interest, the COM authorizes ...
  - a. The PNC to consider the Transitional Pastor as a candidate
  - b. The Transitional Pastor to submit his/her PIF to the PNC
  - c. The PNC to resume the search process with the additional new candidate
  - d. The PNC to assemble the documentation necessary to support a request for an exception to the policy of ineligibility, assuming a mutual sense of call exists between the PNC and the Transitional Pastor
3. The PNC prepares the case to support a request for an exception
4. The PNC presents the case to the COM Task Force on Transitions in Ministry
5. The Task Force either endorses, or fails to endorse, the request for an exception
6. The Chair of the COM Task Force on Transitions in Ministry, together with the Chair of the PNC informs the Transitional Pastor of the COM's position on the request for exception

- a. If the request is NOT pursued ... PNC continues the search process
- b. If the request is pursued, and it is determined that it is God's will that the Temporary Pastor become the next installed pastor, the PNC prepares the call to the Interim Pastor and, upon COM approval of the Terms of Call, presents the call with the request for the exemption to the Presbytery for an affirmative vote of  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the members of the presbytery present and voting
- c. If the request is pursued and not approved by Presbytery ... PNC resumes the search process with the Interim Pastor remaining ineligible