Pastoral Transitions: COM Process

**Although general processes will be outlined, with various points of multiples possibilities, it is important to remember that each church is unique and that COM liaisons/representatives will need to be flexible, supportive, and open to different options as the process moves along. It is always wise and appropriate to seek the guidance of the General Presbyter as well as the Transition Team as a whole in determining which options to recommend to a particular congregation.

1. **Churches with long-term pastorates**
   a. It is hoped that the first meeting of the COM liaison/representative will occur prior to the departure of the pastor. The items in Phase 1 will be discussed.
   b. Depending upon the amount of time between the announcement of the departure and the actual departure, part of Phase 2 (information about pulpit supply and interims) may be shared at this first meeting or may be shared at a second meeting.
   c. Interims options are given to the Session; the COM liaison/rep and the COM Transitions team are consulted, and a plan for an interim process is agreed.
   d. The Interim is called by Session. COM rep, Session and Interim (with input from General Presbyter and COM) determine assessment and adjustment process. In some cases a different longer process of assessment may be needed. In some cases, the expedited process will be used. Occasionally it may be appropriate for the New Beginnings program to be used at this time.
   e. When the Transitions Team and the Session (including the Interim) decide it is appropriate, the Ministry Assessment is conducted. If expedited process is appropriate, see the timeline under Churches with shorter pastorates and without conflict situations.
   f. Part of the assessment process may be to consider what is the most appropriate form of pastorate for this congregation in the immediate future.
   g. After the Ministry Assessment is completed, the PNC is elected (the nominating committee may be asked by Session to begin working on the slate for the PNC prior to the completion of the Ministry Assessment, but the election and beginning of the work should be after the studies are completed and after COM has given its approval to proceed to elect a PNC).
   h. PNC works on the CIF
   i. Search process begins as described in Phase 3 and Phase 4
   j. Once the new installed pastor arrives, there should be a major joint visioning/planning process which includes the Ruling Elders, the Teaching Elder, and other church leadership (generally staring a year to eighteen months after the new pastor is installed). New Beginnings may be such a process, but may not be for every congregation. In some cases, there may be an explicit understanding between the congregation and the new pastor that the pastor will see the congregation through this study and then both the pastor and the congregation will re-evaluate the relationship, especially if the process yields a radically new direction for the congregation.
2. **Churches with conflict situations involving the departing pastor**
   a. Conflict situations seldom allow for much time Phase 1 to be handled by the Transitions team. The Ministerial Parish relations team will more likely handle this phase.
   b. COM Transitions liaison/rep goes in to talk about pulpit supply and interim possibilities, when appropriate as indicated by the Ministerial Parish Relations team.
   c. Once the Interim is selected, the Session (Ruling Elders and Interim) and the COM liaison/rep and the Transitions team develop a process for addressing the conflict and helping the congregation to move forward.
   d. When the Transitions Team and the Session (including the Interim) decide it is appropriate, Ministry Assessment is conducted.
   e. Part of this process may be to consider what is the most appropriate form of pastorate for this congregation in the immediate future.
   f. After the Ministry Assessment is completed, the PNC is elected (the nominating committee may be asked by Session to begin working on the slate for the PNC prior to the completion of the Ministry Assessment, but the election and beginning of the work should be after the studies are completed and after COM has given its approval to proceed to elect a PNC).
   g. PNC works on the CIF
   h. Search process begins as described in Phase 3 and Phase 4

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3. **Churches where there is conflict that, while it may or may not have resulted in the departure of the pastor, is not directly related to the departing pastor**
   a. The Ministerial Parish Relations Team may or may not have been working with congregations of this situation. If not, then Transitions will handle Phase 1, and may need to do a lot of listening in that initial meeting.
   b. Early Phase 2 (Session responsibilities and Interim selection) may need a separate meeting
   c. Once the Interim is selected, the Session (Ruling Elders and Interim) and the COM liaison/rep and the Transitions team develop a process for addressing the conflict and helping the congregation to move forward.
   d. When the Transitions Team and the Session (including the Interim) decide it is appropriate, Ministry Assessment is conducted.
   e. Part of this process may be to consider what is the most appropriate form of pastorate for this congregation in the immediate future.
   f. After the Ministry Assessment is completed, the PNC is elected (the nominating committee may be asked by Session to begin working on the slate for the PNC prior to the completion of the Ministry Assessment, but the election and beginning of the work should be after the studies are completed, and after COM has given its approval to proceed to elect a PNC).
g. PNC works on the CIF
h. Search process begins as described in Phase 3 and Phase 4
i. Once the new installed pastor arrives, there should be a major joint visioning/planning process which includes the Ruling Elders, the Teaching Elder, and other church leadership (generally staring a year to eighteen months after the new pastor is installed). New Beginnings may be such a process, but may not be for every congregation. In some cases, there may be an explicit understanding between the congregation and the new pastor that the pastor will see the congregation through this study and then both the pastor and the congregation will re-evaluate the relationship, especially if the process yields a radically new direction for the congregation.

4. Churches of a shorter term pastorate (less than 12 years), without conflict situations
   a. COM Transitions team liaison/rep meets with Session and departing pastor to present Phase 1 and some of Phase 2 (Session responsibilities including pulpit supply).
   b. COM Transitions team liaison/rep meets with Session to discuss Phase 2, especially interim selection, and the decision is made between shorter vs. longer interim process; with shorter being the preferred path.
   c. If the longer process is determined to be preferable, church follows process as outlined above.
   d. Interim is called.
 e. If the shorter process is selected, the Session (Ruling elders and Interim) will determine dates for the Ministry Assessment to occur (will require 3 Saturdays and should be completed within three months of the completion of step d.).
   f. Ordinarily the Session will ask the Nominating Committee to begin to form a Pastor Nominating Committee in the second month after step d is completed and to set a date for its election following the third session of the Mini Mission Study.
   g. PNC elected
   h. PNC works on the CIF
   i. Search process begins as described in Phase 3 and Phase 4
   j. Once the new installed pastor arrives, there should be a major joint visioning/planning process which includes the Ruling Elders, the Teaching Elder, and other church leadership (generally staring a year to eighteen months after the new pastor is installed). New Beginnings may be such a process, but may not be for every congregation. In some cases, there may be an explicit understanding between the congregation and the new pastor that the pastor will see the congregation through this study and then both the pastor and the congregation will re-evaluate the relationship, especially if the process yields a radically new direction for the congregation.

5. Churches facing financial or membership difficulties
   a. COM Transitions team liaison/rep meets with Session and departing pastor to present Phase 1 and some of Phase 2 (Session responsibilities including pulpit supply).
   b. COM Transition team liaison/rep consults with General Presbyter and Transitions team regarding options to recommend to Session. These options may include Temporary Supply, Part time interim, as well as interim.
   c. COM Transition team liaison/rep presents options as recommended by General Presbytery and COM Transitions team (sometimes also involving COM as whole), to Session, and listens carefully to their discussion.
   d. Process proceeds according to one or several of the above processes.