

**NATIONAL CAPITAL PRESBYTERY
COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY
CLEARANCE PROCESS**

June 24, 2007

Revised July 23, 2008

Revised September 11, 2008

In light of the action at the 217th General Assembly (2006), placing greater responsibility and power in presbyteries for examining persons seeking membership or new calls within the presbytery, the Committee on Ministry has taken steps to strengthen the process by which to recommend clearing persons for membership in National Capital Presbytery and for exercising appropriate oversight of clergy and congregations involved in moves within the presbytery.

The Committee on Ministry has been working on this process since August 2006. Through its Coordinating Team, the Committee began researching and drafting a Committee on Ministry Clearance Process. This process was adopted on November 1, 2006 and amended on February 2, 2007. Members of the Clearance Team were recruited, and met February 2-3, February 23, March 23, April 27 and June 22. A draft report was shared with the Coordinating Council on May 2 and June 6. Some suggestions were incorporated resulting in a document presented for information and feedback to the presbytery at an informational meeting May 12. Input from these meetings resulted in the current document, which was finalized by the Clearance Team on June 22 and approved by COM via email June 22-24. This new process will take effect July 1, 2007.

This process serves to clear clergy for membership and/or newly installed ministry within National Capital Presbytery. The following categories of clergy go through this process:

- Candidates for the ministry seeking ordination and membership in NCP
- Ordained clergy in all membership categories seeking to transfer membership to NCP
- Interim pastors who are seeking to labor within the bounds of NCP without becoming minister members of NCP.
- Clergy members of NCP seeking to move to a new installed position within NCP.

In accordance with existing presbytery policy, the presbytery votes on the first two categories, while the COM votes on the third and fourth categories. In accordance with actions of the 217th General Assembly and constitutional advice from the Office of Constitutional Services, the presbytery votes on all three categories when there is a declared scruple or perceived departure. The clearance process as outlined is the same for all four categories.

Part I:

COM Grants Permission for a Congregation to Begin Search.

Party Primarily Responsible: Transitions Team of COM

Permission to elect a Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC) or Associate Pastor Nominating Committee (APNC) granted by COM based on congregation's readiness to begin a search.

Part II:
Executive-to-Executive Clearance
Party Primarily Responsible: General Presbyter and COM moderator

The Clearance Process begins once PNC's are ready to interview candidates "face to face."

At this point the General Presbyter of National Capital Presbytery does a "presbytery to presbytery" check of the candidates. If the General Presbyter has a concern he/she will consult with the COM moderator and they may consult with trained counselors in deciding whether or not a particular candidate is emotionally healthy or suitable for the particular congregation.

Part III
Practical Theology/ Operational Match
Party Primarily Responsible: PNC/APNC

The PNC's are primarily responsible, along with liaisons, for determining the practical theological and "operational" match with the congregation, and may involve the PNC or liaison consulting with the General Presbyter, the Transitions Chair, or other appropriate arms of the presbytery.

Part IV:
Documentation
Party Primarily Responsible: Office Manager

Once the PNC has reached a decision on a particular candidate, and that candidate has agreed to be nominated, documentation must be completed through the Office Manager in the presbytery office. At the present time, this list includes the following documents:

Documents provided to the PNC liaison and the PNC when elected

Terms of Call Packet
Equity Sharing templates and samples
EEO/AA Policies, including Form #1 and Form #2
PNC Handbook for Liaisons
PNC Handbook for PNCs

Documents provided to the PNC when candidate has been chosen by PNC:

Terms of Call Packet
EEO/AA Form #2
Proposed Dates Form
Procedure for the Congregational Meeting (provided after the interview)

Documents provided to the Candidate (* before the interview, ** after the interview)

*Clearance Process
*Clergy Sexual Misconduct Policy
*Signature form agreeing to Sexual Misconduct Policy
*Code of Ethics for Clergy and Other Church Professionals
*Signature form agreeing to Code of Ethics
*Release for Criminal Background Check
**PACE Brochure
**Ministry Crisis Fund Leaflet

****Ordination/Installation Instructions and Worksheet**

Documents required from the Candidate (at least one week prior to Clearance Interview)

- *Signature form for Clergy Sexual Misconduct Policy (signed)
 - *Signature form for Code of Ethics for Clergy and Other Church Professionals (signed)
 - *Release for Criminal Background Check (signed)
 - Statement of Faith (not to exceed two pages)
 - Candidate's PIF
 - The three Clearance Interview Essays (see below)
- (*Note: these first three documents are not required of minister members of NCP.)**

Documents required from the PNC (at least one week prior to the Clearance Interview)

- Terms of Call Form (completed and signed)
- Any Equity Sharing or loan document or covenant¹
- EEO/AA form #2
- Proposed Dates Form (completed and signed)

Documents provided to the Clearance Team:

- Statement of Faith (not to exceed two pages)
- Candidate's PIF
- The three Clearance Interview Essays
- Church Information Form

Part V:

Clearance Interview

Party Primarily Responsible: Interview Teams

The Clearance Interview will be a conversation based around the candidate's written Statement of Faith, PIF, and responses to three of the following questions. The candidate chooses two questions from among Questions 1-4 on which to submit written responses. In addition, the candidate submits a written response to Question 5. The interview will last from 1½ to two hours. It will be conducted by one of the four-person Interview Teams. It will cover the Statement of Faith, the PIF, the three essays the candidate has written, as well the two questions on which the candidate has not written. The interview is intended to be a wide-ranging discussion, including follow up questions and points of clarification.² Its purpose is not only to determine a candidate's viewpoints, but theological thought process and quality as well.

¹ If such a document is planned but will not be negotiated by the time of the Clearance Interview, a general description of the anticipated agreement must be submitted along with Terms of Call Form; full documentation should be submitted to the Transitions Team of COM when the agreement is completed.

² Throughout its life, the Clearance Team will consult the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery, as well as the Office of Constitutional Services of the General Assembly, so that at each step the process falls within constitutional bounds of the denomination. At the present time, the Interview Teams will follow the current advice from the Clerk concerning follow-up questions concerning G-6:10106. That advice reads as follows: *If a person does not self-acknowledge a practice that the confessions call sin, then a governing body has a positive obligation to make further inquiry only if it has direct and specific knowledge that such person is in violation of the ordination and installation standards. A hunch, gossip, or stereotype is not a sufficient ground to compel a governing body to make further inquiry.* (2003, *Hart, Presbytery of San Joaquin v. Presbytery of the Redwoods*)

And, from another decision: *Since the ordaining and installing governing body best knows the life and character of the candidate, initial and further inquiry as to compliance with all the standards belongs to that governing body. If that governing body has reasonable cause for inquiry based on its knowledge of the life and character of the candidate, it has the positive obligation to make due inquiry and uphold all the standards for ordination and installation.* (2002, *Weir v. 2nd Presbyterian Church, Ft. Lauderdale*) The presbytery in 2002 adopted a document titled "Guidelines for Compliance with G-6.0106". *In part, it declares "a candidate can be disqualified pursuant to G-6.0106b only upon the candidate's own plain, palpable, and obvious self-acknowledgement of a practice which the confessions call sin. ...A candidate's disclosure of his/her sexual orientation does not, standing alone, warrant inquiry by the Committee on Ministry into the candidate's sexual practice."*

The questions are as follows:

1. Please reflect theologically on the meaning and practice of the Fourth Ordination Question (W-4.4003d) “Will you fulfill your office in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and be continually guided by our Confessions?”
2. Why are you in the Reformed tradition and a Presbyterian in the PC(USA)?³
3. What aspects of our Presbyterian polity do you consider most valuable? What aspects do you consider most in need of further development?
4. What do you understand to be your responsibility in furthering “the peace, unity and purity of the church” (W-4.4003g)?
5. Would you share with us your understanding of the Book of Order G-6.0106 a & b? How are you seeking to embody this understanding in your life and ministry?

G-6.0106 a. & b.

- a. To those called to exercise special functions in the church – deacons, elders, and ministers of the Word and Sacrament – God gives suitable gifts for their various duties. In addition to possessing the necessary gifts and abilities, natural and acquired, those who undertake particular ministries should be persons of strong faith, dedicated discipleship, and love for Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Their manner of life should be a demonstration of the Christian gospel in the church and in the world. They must have the approval of God’s people and the concurring judgment of a governing body of the church.
- b. Those who are called to office in the church are to lead a life in obedience to Scripture and in conformity to the historic confessional standards of the church. Among these standards is the requirement to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman (W-4.9001), or chastity in singleness. Persons refusing to repent of any self-acknowledged practice which the confessions call sin shall not be ordained and/or installed as deacons, elders, or ministers of the Word and Sacrament.

Part VI:

Approval Steps

Party Primarily Responsible: Interview Team, Clearance Team, COM, Presbytery

The Clearance Team will strive for a thorough and thoughtful recommendation on each candidate. It is the hope of the team that most recommendations will be supported by consensus by the team. In the case that such consensus is not reached, the rights of viewpoints of members of the Interview Team, Clearance Team, and/or Committee on Ministry not in the majority will be protected so that their voice is heard and considered by the next appropriate level of the process.

³ Substitute for non-PCUSA candidates: “How do your faith tradition and polity align with and/or depart from the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition and polity?”

The levels move from Interview Team to Clearance Team to full COM to floor of the presbytery.

In accordance with existing presbytery policy, the presbytery has final approval on membership in the presbytery, while the COM has final approval on calls. In accordance with actions of the 217th General Assembly and constitutional advice from the Office of Constitutional Services, the presbytery has final approval on persons the COM is recommending for membership and current members COM is recommending for installation when there is a declared scruple or perceived departure.

In cases where no scruple is declared or departure perceived:

- Whenever a vote is unanimously positive at any level (Interview Team, Clearance Team, full COM), that unanimously positive vote constitutes the final action or recommendation of COM; the PNC/APNC is free to call a congregational meeting and the candidate is free to move onto the field.
- Whenever a vote is unanimously negative at any level, the clearance is not approved and all action stops.*
- Whenever the vote is not unanimous, it moves to the next level if all three of the following conditions occur:
 - A member voting in the minority chooses to take it to the next level
 - The particular candidate/clergy agrees
 - The PNC/APNC agrees.
- Whenever a vote is negative but not unanimous and does not move to the next level because one of the above conditions does not occur, then the clearance is not approved and all action stops.
- Whenever a vote is positive but not unanimous and the members in the minority choose not to take it to the next level, then the clearance is approved.
- Whenever a vote is tied, the members voting *for* approval are considered “in the minority,” in which case it moves to the next level if a member voting for approval chooses to take it to the next level, the particular candidate/clergy agrees, and the PNC/APNC agrees.

In cases where a scruple is declared or departure perceived:

- Whenever a vote is positive at any level (Interview Team, Clearance Team, full COM), the matter moves to the next level (Clearance Team and full COM).
 - If the full COM vote is positive, the PNC/APNC is free to call a congregational meeting.
 - If the congregation votes to call the candidate, the COM then recommends the candidate for consideration by the presbytery.

- If the presbytery approves, the candidate is free to move onto the field and be installed.
- Whenever a vote is unanimously negative at any level, the clearance is not approved and all action stops.*
- Whenever the vote is negative but not unanimous, it moves to the next level if a member voting in the minority chooses to take it to the next level, the particular candidate/clergy agrees, and the PNC/APNC agrees.
- Whenever a vote is negative but not unanimous and does not move to the next level because one of the above conditions does not occur, then the clearance is not approved and all action stops.

** In cases where a decision moves to higher levels:*

- *A majority or minority report may be offered to the Clearance Team, Committee on Ministry and the floor of Presbytery by anyone involved in the clearance process.*