

COM Policy for Those Serving in Temporary Pastoral Relationships In the Presbytery of New Covenant

The Committee on Ministry (COM) recognizes the unique and valuable role of those who serve in temporary pastoral relationships (Interim Pastors, Stated Supply Pastors, Commissioned Ruling Elders, Parish Associates and other temporary pastoral ministry positions). These individuals must effectively deal with a variety of issues, including dealing with historical matters, facilitating needed changes in leadership and maintaining/strengthening denominational relationships. Like all pastors, temporary pastors offer to the congregations they serve:

- Worship leadership and preaching
- Pastoral care
- Work with the session to provide for the life and ministry of the congregation
- Administrative work including supervision of other staff persons
- Staff support for programs and committees of the congregation

As a teaching elder working within the PC (USA), a temporary pastor is accountable to the Presbytery for performance within any given congregation. The expectation of all teaching elders is spelled out in the Book of Order:

“Teaching elders...shall in all things be committed to teaching the faith and equipping the saints for the work of ministry (Eph. 4:12)....When they serve as preachers and teachers of the Word, they shall preach and teach the faith of the church, so that the people are shaped by the pattern of the gospel and strengthened for witness and service....When they serve as pastors, they shall support the people in the disciplines of the faith amid the struggles of daily life. When they serve as presbyters, they shall participate in the responsibilities of governance, seeking always to discern the mind of Christ and to build up Christ’s body through devotion, debate, and decision.”^[1]

Temporary pastors are accountable to the Presbytery through the Committee on Ministry and are responsible to the congregation through the Session. The position of temporary pastor should be one which strengthens the bonds of denominational affiliation, including those with Presbytery. To do otherwise would be unfaithful to the vows taken upon ordination ^[2] and to the organization charged with overseeing the temporary pastor’s situation. Accordingly, a temporary pastor is not to be involved in an action of the congregation to leave the PCUSA either by initiating the action, supporting the action, otherwise encouraging the action or becoming part of the discernment team for the congregation served by the temporary pastor. If a session enters into official discussions regarding denominational affiliation during the tenure of a Temporary Pastor who serves as moderator, the COM will appoint an alternate moderator for the purpose of facilitating all discussions related to denominational affiliation.

Specific Expectations of Interim Pastors

- An interim pastor leads a congregation during the transition time after an installed pastor has departed, helping the congregation prepare to welcome the leadership of a new installed pastor. Interim Pastors understand the dynamics of a congregation in transition, including feelings of grief, loss, and, sometimes, relief or anger.
- Interim pastors help the Session provide for continuity of essential programs, and may assist the Session in assessing needs for changes in programs and ministries of the congregation.
- Some interim pastors have special skills and experience that can help a congregation recover from a time of conflict or after the disclosure of clergy sexual misconduct or other trauma.
- Ordinarily, an interim pastor is not eligible to serve as the next installed pastor, or co-pastor, or associate pastor of the congregation (G-2.0504c).
- The interim pastor may, if the Session and the Committee on Ministry approve, work with the Session in a mission study or assist the Pastor Nominating Committee in gathering data for the writing of the Ministry Information Form (MIF). With those possible exceptions, the interim pastor may not be involved in the work and discernment of the PNC.
- A good interim pastor will “hit the ground running,” beginning his/her time with the congregation with intensity and energy, and will leave with intentionality, engaging in a “good goodbye” with the congregation and its staff. A good interim pastor is fully present with the congregation from the beginning, and really leaves when she/he leaves.^[3]

[1] Book of Order 2013-2015. G-2.0501 Teaching Elder Defined

[2] Book of Order 2013-2015. W-4.4003 Constitutional Questions for Ordination

[3] <http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/ministers/interim-pastors/>

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