

# COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY MANUAL

## PART IV: PROCESS

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## **FastTrac – Pastor or Associate Pastor To a Spirit-Led and Effective Ministry**

Required by the Committee on Ministry Presbytery of New Covenant

### ***to strengthen the start-up of new ministries***

#### **Participants:**

For Pastor (P): “new” Pastor, Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC), and Session.

For Associate Pastor (AP): “new” Associate Pastor, Associate Pastor Nominating Committee, the Head of Staff, two to three representatives of those ministries the AP serves, including the elders serving those ministries, and at least three Session members not serving in any of the areas to which the associate pastor is assigned.

**When:** Ideally, within the first three months of the new Pastor/Associate Pastor coming onto the field, but no longer than six months out.

**Purpose:** To provide an opportunity for the new Pastor/Associate Pastor, session and other key leaders to develop **shared expectations** for the conduct of the ministry of the church, informed by the discussions between the PNC/APNC and the Pastor/Associate Pastor during the search process. This process will provide a foundation for further conversations between the Pastor/Associate Pastor, the session and other key leaders as the ministry of the church grows and a need to modify roles and expectations arises.

#### **Workshop to Include:**

- ❖ Begin with The Word.
- ❖ Explanation of purpose (*may include examples of bad matches – resulting from conflicted expectations*).
- ❖ Small groups for charting needs and expectations.
- ❖ De-briefing on needs and expectations.
- ❖ Clarify meanings, and identify priorities or next steps.
- ❖ Identify what (if anything) cannot be accommodated.
- ❖ Shared learnings from this event.
- ❖ Commitment by Facilitators to prepare written report/summary from data gathered, to send to clerk and moderator of session, and to Care of Congregations subcommittee of COM (see “Follow-up” below).
- ❖ Closing Blessing.

**Facilitators:** Conducted by two representatives from the Committee on Ministry, ordinarily an elder and a minister.

**Time:** Two to three hours, depending on the size of the group assembled.

**Space:** A room large enough for everyone, plus two smaller meeting rooms (or at least one).

**Equipment:** Easels with paper, markers, name-tags, and masking tape.

**Follow-up:** The Facilitators will provide a written summary of the event the week following, and forward that summary to the Committee on Ministry (Care of Congregations sub-committee).

**Contact Persons:** **Vice-Chair of Committee on Ministry  
or Sharon Darden**

## Sample FastTrac Agenda

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, \_\_\_\_\_, TEXAS

and

PASTOR/ASSOCIATE PASTOR \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

First Hour THE WORD

WHY WE'RE HERE (Introductions and Purpose of Workshop)

SESSION (FOR PASTOR) OR MINISTRY GROUP (FOR ASSOCIATE PASTOR:  
*Session members, key leaders, and Head of Staff*)

### QUESTIONS:

What are the most important skills and leadership style(s) you expected the Pastor/Associate Pastor to bring to your church and its ministry?

In what ways have these expectations been met?

Identify areas for growth/improvement.

What about your new ministry together excites you?

Have there been surprises in these beginning months?

What are the three most pressing challenges for your church's ministry?

PNC/Pastor or APNC/Associate Pastor

### QUESTIONS:

**PNC/APNC:** What was this person told were the most important skills and leadership style(s) s/he needed to bring to this church and its ministry?

**FOR PASTOR/ASSOCIATE PASTOR:** What did you hear from the PNC/APNC?

**BOTH:** How have these expectations been met?

Identify areas for growth/improvement.

**What about your new ministry excites you?**

**Have there been surprises in these beginning months?**

**What are the three most pressing challenges for your church's ministry?**

**Second/Third Hours**

**COMPARING AND INTEGRATING EXPECTATIONS AND NEEDS**

**Identify congruencies and gaps**

**Identify priorities for future work**

**Identify what cannot be accommodated**

**WHAT ARE WE TAKING AWAY FROM THIS CONVERSATION?**

**CLOSING BLESSING**

## Dissolution of Conflicted Ministry

### *Presbytery of New Covenant*

#### *Committee on Ministry*

*[Book of Order references are to the 2009-2011 edition.]*

**[At the outset of this document, it is understood that “separation for cause” is handled by a different process and is not addressed by the following guidelines.]**

#### **I. Theological and Reformed Statement of a Ministerial Call**

*“All ministry in the church is a gift from Jesus Christ” (BO G.6.0100). “When women and men, by God’s providence and gracious gifts, are called by the church to undertake particular forms of ministry, the church shall help them interpret their call and to be sensitive to the judgments and needs of others” (BO G-6.0105). “The call extended to a pastor or an associate pastor shall be approved by the Presbytery and cannot be changed except by consent of the Presbytery, at the request of the pastor or associate pastor, or by request of the church by action of the congregation” (BO G-14.0501).*

These guidelines from the Book of Order remind us that the call to a minister is a four-way covenant between God, the minister, the congregation and the presbytery. It is different from the hiring of a corporate executive or a football coach or a superintendent of a public school system. A call is when the congregation and minister individually discern, and the presbytery corporately confirms, that God is calling them to be together in ministry at a certain time and place *“to tell the good news of salvation by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ as the only Savior and Lord, proclaiming in Word and Sacrament that a new age has dawned”* (BO G-3.0300, *“The Church’s Calling”*). The measure of ministry for a minister and a congregation is faithfulness to the gospel (BO, Chapt.1-4).

Change is part of what it is to be a minister and a congregation in the Reformed Tradition: *“Reformed always reforming according to God’s word.”* Therefore conflict will be part of the church today just as it was part of the church from the beginning of Paul’s and Peter’s conversations about who and what the church should be. It is imperative that people yearning to be faithful to God’s common calling to ministry be able to deal with conflict in ways that are productive. The Biblical model for dealing with conflict is found in Matthew 18:15-16: *“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens you have gained a brother. If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses.”* The biblical goal in dealing with conflict is the learning, reconciliation and growth that happen through communication. The minister, congregation and presbytery are **all partners with God in the mission of the church**. Therefore, it is incumbent that all work through the conflict together, faithfully fulfilling God’s call to ministry in Jesus Christ.

*"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ" (1 Cor. 12:12). "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (1 Cor. 12:26).*

## **II. MIS-MATCHED EXPECTATIONS IN MINISTRY**

Unfortunately, there will be times when all efforts to resolve a conflict will fail. The goal of the Committee on Ministry (COM) is to provide a fair and just process for those situations. In all cases, COM cannot be a neutral party when it enters a congregation because of difficulties, because COM represents the presbytery in these situations and has a stake in how the situation is resolved. COM represents the third part of the three-way partnership in a pastoral relationship. A triangle exists the moment COM agrees to enter the situation and it must be a healthy partner in the triangle. It is important to remember that COM representatives cannot change the people involved in the difficulty or control how they will act. COM representatives can be a non-anxious presence that coaches the other partners in the triangle, giving them an opportunity to change and, in doing so, reduce the strain in the relationship and heal its brokenness. COM representatives must be able to manage their own reactions to conflict and criticism. These are the only behaviors they will be able to control.

## **III. IRRECONCILABLE DIFFERENCES**

When all efforts toward resolution are exhausted, and it appears impossible to resolve the differences:

- COM will make certain there is provision for pastoral care for the pastor if an involuntary or pressured dissolution is evident.
- The whole community (i.e., congregation, pastor, and the presbytery) and the process become the COM's focus. Representatives of COM are not a neutral party but have a stake in how the situation is resolved.
- COM will recommend persons who have requisite skills to facilitate discussions/mediation. Pastor may have advocate present.
- Dissolution will be negotiated, using COM document "Agreement Form for Dissolution of Pastoral Relationship." (This document follows minimum terms below.)
- Continued benefits shall include: (See minimum terms below)
- Once session, pastor and COM representative have agreed on the terms of dissolution, including appropriate continued benefits, the "Agreement Form for Dissolution of Pastoral Relationship" is sent to COM for their approval and presented to the congregation for their approval. COM approval is final, pending congregational approval; congregational approval is final, pending COM approval.

**Approved by COM 11/3/09**

## WHEN TO INITIATE CONVERSATIONS ABOUT CLOSING A CHURCH

### *"For Everything There Is A Season..."*

One of the most solemn responsibilities of a presbytery is to assist a congregation in their discernment of whether the time has come to close the church. This responsibility lies with the session of the church, the Committee on Ministry and General Council, with the primary leadership coming from General Council (responsible for the mission/vision of the presbytery.) Another partner in these conversations may be representatives from Evangelism and Renewal.

Knowing when the time has come to initiate these conversations is difficult. Below are listed some indicators that would alert all parties that the time to initiate consultation is imminent:

- active membership roll falls below 25
- no members under the age of 70
- inability or failure to submit session records for review
- inability or failure to file annual statistical report
- no regular pastoral leadership
- expenses consistently exceed income
- inability or failure to maintain church facility
- inability or failure to send a commissioner to presbytery meetings
- inability or failure to elect and/or install elders

The above list is not meant to be exhaustive. Other significant signs may be added at later dates.

The presence of one or more of the above indicators may initiate the consultation. It is hoped that the session of the church would take the lead and seek counsel from the presbytery. And, just because these conversations have begun does not mean that closure is a mandate. That conclusion will only be reached after all other avenues for renewal are exhausted.

In the event that the decision to close is reached and is to be recommended to the presbytery, the expectation is that the congregation will find creative ways to celebrate the ministry of the church – its history and mission – with the presbytery. The presbytery will work with the church's leadership in all ways possible to be sure that the affairs of the church are handled with dignity and respect as the life-cycle of the church's ministry comes to conclusion.

**June, 2007**

**Office of Stated Clerk, PNC**

**PROCESS FOR DISSOLUTION OF A PARTICULAR CHURCH**

*Adapted for use by the Presbytery of New Covenant (April, 2007) from a document published by the Office of Constitutional Services (CM-Note 1-Dec. '96).*

[Book of Order citations from 2009-2011 version]

**One of the painful responsibilities of a presbytery is the closure of a congregation.**

After the leaders of a congregation (pastor/session) have counseled with representatives of the presbytery about the future of their church, a motion to request dissolution may be proposed in a duly called meeting of the congregation. If the vote is in the affirmative, the presbytery will be asked to take action to concur with this decision and to support it in the following ways.

**I. It is normally best for a presbytery to create an Administrative Commission** to aid with the process. This approach is suggested since many of the legal consequences and processes will require action by the presbytery and it is best for all if the same group can stay with the process from beginning to end.

It is most often helpful if an elder from the dissolving congregation can be made a member of this commission to assure input from the remaining members throughout the process. If there is a minister of the presbytery who is in some way related, include her/him as well.

**II. A careful, specific motion creating such a Commission is essential to a "successful" dissolution.**

- A. Any such motion should include at least the following provisions:
  1. Presbytery approves the dissolution of the \_\_\_\_\_ Presbyterian Church, effective \_\_/\_\_/\_\_.
  2. Assign Commission to assist the pastor and/or session to wind up the affairs of the church, transfer of remaining members, plan worship, giving thanks to God for the ministry of the congregation.
  3. Authorize the Stated Clerk to receive Session Records (list all the records), retain records to wind up affairs, deposit with the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery, who will then forward to Presbyterian Historical Society.
  4. Authorize the Stated Clerk to grant letters of dismissal to members whose names are still on the roll. Ordinarily the time limit recommended for this is one year, to encourage movement in finding new church homes.
  5. RECITE: Under Form of Government, Chapter VIII, Section 2 and Section 4 (G-8.0200, and G-8.0400) all property of the \_\_\_\_\_ Presbyterian Church is held in trust for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The Administrative Commission of \_\_\_\_\_

presbytery, elected \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_, is authorized to take possession of all real and personal property, financial records, inventories of equipment, (list other assets if there are others) and arrange for transfer of title to the Presbytery of all accounts and real property known to be in the possession of \_\_\_\_\_ Presbyterian Church.

6. Authorize the Commission to consult with the session regarding requests the congregation may have relating to the disposition of equipment and memorials and other property of the \_\_\_\_\_ Presbyterian Church, and from the date of the action to approve the disposition of property or to arrange for its retention and storage for future use at the direction of the presbytery.
7. Authorize the Commission (and/or officers of the presbytery corporation) to assert claim of the presbytery to any property of the \_\_\_\_\_ Presbyterian Church not known at this time or property which may come to the \_\_\_\_\_ Presbyterian Church as the beneficiary of a will or trust not known at this time.

The claim of authority over the property of a dissolved church is based on the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) *Constitution* and this must be understood by those who make these decisions.

**III. Once formed, the Commission tends to pastoral issues first.**

- A. Normally, the session retains control over as much of the day-to- day responsibilities as they are willing and able to do.
  1. Commissions should normally defer to the session on deciding on a workable time-line for closure.
  2. The Commission should encourage the session to continue to have responsibility for worship for as much of this period as the session is willing.
  3. As noted above, the Commission ordinarily defers to the session as to where particular pieces of personal property should go.
  4. The Commission, as one of its first acts if no pastor is present, should help the session provide for pastoral care of the remaining members (Funerals, Weddings, Baptisms, Hospital Visits, Counseling)
  5. The Commission should encourage the session to transfer members to other area churches. (In the best of all possible worlds this can be done before session dissolves.)

6. The session should be primarily responsible for deciding on the type of closure service that will be most meaningful for the remaining members. The Commission should provide assistance and presbytery support in this. The Commission should encourage the session to plan a service of celebration, if at all appropriate. The Commission needs to balance the remaining members' need to have some private time "for us" with participation from the at-large presbytery such services.

- B. In all the above steps, the Commission should work WITH the session, helping when requested or necessary.

**IV. Once the pastoral issues are dealt with, then the Commission needs to work on the legal issues surrounding a dissolution.**

A. The Commission will confirm the final church roll (those who have not found new congregations by dissolution date), transferring it to the Stated Clerk, who keeps this roll, and who will be the responsible party if such members are still on the roll when the Commission is dissolved.

B. Dissolving the Corporation. This is normally done by filing Articles of Dissolution with the State Secretary of State or comparable state official. (Commission will consult a local attorney to determine process for dissolving not-for-profit corporations in the state of Texas.) Recommended alternative is described in D.1 below.

C. Deciding what to do with the Real Estate.

1. If sold to third party, it is the Commission that normally signs the deed and handles the sale (including hiring professionals - Attorney, Real Estate Persons, Appraisers, etc)
2. If the real estate is going to be retained by the presbytery (i.e. NCD folks think may someday be good site to start a new congregation, the commission needs to see that the title to the property is put in the presbytery's name. It is probably better to have the session do this as one of its final acts. However if that doesn't happen, the Commission can do it, so long as it has been given the power.

D. The Commission will need to make sure that all the congregation's personal Property not distributed by the session is transferred to the presbytery's name. (Bank Accounts, Stocks, Trusts, etc)

1. The Commission needs to take care that some asset (most often a trust) might lapse if the corporation is ended. If a congregation has such an asset (used to be common in trusts arising out of wills), the Commission may then want to transfer the Corporation into the presbytery, naming presbytery corporate officers as the Corporate officers.

E.     The Commission needs to make sure that the presbytery is the successor in interest to any and all present and future assets. The clause described in II.A.7. above should be executed.

F.     The Commission should make sure that the presbytery's insurance policy will cover the assets of the dissolving church. The Commission needs to beware of any possible lapse in coverage from the congregation's policy to the presbytery's policy, and ensure that does not happen.

**V.    As its final act the Commission needs to draw up a final report on the dissolution.**

A.     It is helpful for the Commission to recite briefly the congregation's history, lifting up the highlights and giving Thanks to God and the generations of the congregation for the ministry.

B.     Next the report needs to describe the process and actions the Commission has taken (including the action making the presbytery the "successor in interest" to the congregation).

C.     Finally the report needs to give a full accounting of the transfer of members (and listing those remaining on the roll so Stated Clerk can thereafter keep the roll) and of the distribution of the assets.

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[end] June, 2007

**APPROVED BY GENERAL COUNCIL FOR USE BY NEW COVENANT:**

**June, 2007**