

PRESBYTERY OF THE MIAMI VALLEY
Committee on Ministry
Liaison Guidelines

Preamble

The mission of the Presbytery of the Miami Valley is to **prepare, equip, nurture, and connect congregations** in their ministries for God's mission. The Committee on Ministry, as the primary point of contact between the presbytery and its minister members and congregations, is key to the success of this mission.

Overview

Each member of the Committee on Ministry of the Presbytery of the Miami Valley is assigned several congregations with which to work, to encourage their health and vibrant ministries, in ordinary times and in times of transition through:

- Relationship nurturing (in ordinary times)
- Regular visits (in ordinary times)
- Support in times of transition.

Relationship Nurturing

The Committee on Ministry has an important responsibility to *serve as pastor and counselor to its ministers of the Word and Sacrament, commissioned pastors [also known as commissioned ruling elders], and certified Christian educators of the presbytery; to facilitate the relations between the presbytery and its congregations, ministers of the Word and Sacrament, commissioned pastors, and certified Christian educators; and to settle difficulties on behalf of the presbytery where possible and expedient (Book of Order: G-3.0307)*. When significant time, energy, and wisdom is invested in building and nurturing relationships, the liaison's presence during times of a congregation's transition, crisis, or conflict will be more quickly welcomed. Resources can more effectively be used and results are typically more positive when the liaison is actively engaged in the life of his/her assigned congregations. From the *Committee on Ministry Advisory Handbook*, published by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.): ***Nothing that the COM does is more important than nurturing good relationships with congregations and church professionals.***

As soon as a liaison assignment is received, it is important for the liaison to begin to familiarize themselves with the congregation, its pastoral leadership and its

ministry and mission. Suggestions for accomplishing this include (see Appendix A for additional hints):

1. Check out the church website and explore the resources there to learn more about the church's mission, ministries, structure, and more. (Bookmark the site, and visit it monthly.)
2. Check out the church's five-year statistical profile on the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) website at <https://church-trends.pcusa.org>. Detailed demographic information can be obtained from the EP or COM chair.
3. Contact the pastoral leader/s to begin the process of developing, building, and nurturing a supportive relationship. Practical ideas for initiating this engagement include the following:
 - Make an introductory phone call to the pastor and set a time for coffee away from the church.
 - Worship at the church and ask to bring greetings from the COM or provide a video greeting for use in online worship.
 - Provide an article for the church newsletter introducing yourself and your role as liaison.
 - Attend a church fellowship event to get acquainted.
4. Follow through with any invitations, such as to meet with the session—or “make an invitation happen” by suggesting the following, as appropriate: sitting in on a session meeting, meeting key staff members, attending a session retreat, participating in a special worship service or learning event, etc.
5. In ordinary times, it is expected that liaisons will make direct contact with the church **at least once per quarter** and provide a *brief* written update to the COM chair on each church at least quarterly.

The key is to keep one's “ear to the ground” to effectively support the congregation and its leadership by building on successes and by intervening early—together—when issues arise.

Visits

Liaisons are expected to make **at least one visit per year** to the churches assigned to their care. The style and form of the visit will be dependent on both the personality of the liaison and the culture of the congregation. The most important goal of any visit is to assure the congregation that it is a valued member of the Body of Christ as it is expressed in the Presbytery of the Miami Valley. You are there to represent the Presbytery and to **connect** each congregation to the presbytery so that we may **prepare, equip, and nurture them** in their ministries for God's mission.

Annual visits can be as simple as attending a worship service or fellowship event and mingling with the attendees while clearly sharing your relationship to them. Before visiting, it is recommended that you speak with the pastor to determine when might be a good time to visit and to allow the pastor to introduce you and provide you an opportunity to address the gathering.

Frequent visits with the pastor/s and session are also highly encouraged. The more frequent and informal the visit, the more likely you are to be viewed as a resource and partner in ministry. As always, the goal of the visit is to build relationship but also to gather information about the congregation and its needs and to provide resources as appropriate. Regular notes, calls and visits with the pastoral leaders will help them to feel supported and allow you to build trust. This will go a long way should the pastor, session or congregation encounter difficulties in their ministries.

If the pastor is a *Stated Supply* (Interim, Transitional Pastor or any pastor serving on a term-limited contract) or *Commissioned Ruling Elder*, it is recommended that the liaison meet with the pastor and the session, alone and together, on an annual basis. Ideally, this visit should occur 2 – 3 months before the end of the current contract so that the session, pastor and COM can evaluate the effectiveness of the ministry and make an informed recommendation for the renewal of the contract.

Appendix B offers some suggestions of areas that might be appropriate for dialog with the session. It is not a prescriptive checklist of topics to be covered! The more relaxed and open the conversation is, the more likely you are to build trust and gain insights into the congregation and its hopes, dreams and challenges.

In Times of Transition

When the liaison is notified of the advent of a time of transition, it is time to quickly become familiar with the *Pastoral Transition Manual*. (For the current version, go to the Presbytery website [www.miamipresbytery.org] and select *Committees*, then *COM*.) [NOTE: This document also needs to be revised.]

The liaison and typically the Executive Presbyter (or another member of the Committee on Ministry) will attend the session meeting at the time the departing pastor announces his/her plans and, after the announcement, will moderate the meeting, which typically includes the following tasks:

- Acknowledge the range of emotions among session members. Allow time to share feelings.
- Allow time to remember: *Trust an unknown future to a known God*. Outline the strengths of the congregation that have been exhibited in times past.

- Outline the tasks which will be accomplished during this meeting; work through these tasks:
 1. Distribute the *Pastoral Transition Manual* to each member. Highlight key information of the initial process.
 2. If the departing pastor has been installed, a congregational meeting is needed to dissolve the call. Propose a motion to call a congregational meeting for the purpose of acting on the motion of the session: *The congregation of xxx Presbyterian Church requests the Presbytery of the Miami Valley dissolve the pastoral relationship with the Reverend xxx, effective xxx, at his/her request.*
 3. If the departing pastor has been serving as a Stated Supply, no congregational meeting is required. After reviewing that the proper notice has been given, the session should act to: *Terminate the Stated Supply agreement between the Reverend xxx, and the xxx Presbyterian Church, effective xxx.*
 4. Propose a motion to appoint an Interim or Transitional Pastor Search Committee. This should consist of three to five people, with preferably one member from the Personnel/Human Resources Committee. Note that the sooner the Committee is functioning, the sooner the Executive Presbyter can forward vetted names for consideration.
 5. Propose a motion to appoint a Farewell Celebration Team.
 6. Propose a motion to authorize the Worship Committee to engage worship leaders, as needed. (See *Pulpit Supply List* on the Presbytery website [www.miamipresbytery.org]; select *Committees*, then *COM*.)
 7. Send a letter from the session to the congregation the following day, in the same envelope as a letter from the teaching elder. Appendices C and D provide templates for Installed and Stated Supply Pastors, respectively.
- Conclude the meeting with prayer.

Continue to closely support the session and search committees through the transition process, per the *Pastoral Transition Manual*.

Approved by the Committee on Ministry: April 27, 2021

APPENDIX A

Liaison Hints

1. Look at the websites of your assigned churches. Do they have a website? YouTube channel? What is their social media footprint?
2. Obtain contact information (email addresses, phone numbers/cells and addresses) from the pastor/s, clerk, and session members. Confirm that this matches the information in the PMV directory. If not, please correct.
3. Make sure that they have all of your contact information including email address, cell and home phone number. Give them “permission” to call you.
4. Ask to be put on their email list including the newsletter list. Obtain an annual report.
5. What Session members are responsible for specific jobs within the church? (Finance, Mission, Member Care, etc.)
6. Ask what their most pressing needs are, areas where they may need help. What is good, what is worrisome? What can they celebrate? What do they need from the presbytery that you can provide?
7. Are they worshiping in-person, streaming or both.
8. Do they know how to access the Presbytery and PCUSA websites? Do they have up-to-date directory information? Do they have the password to access documents?
9. What Mission and Outreach do they do?
10. Where do folks who are members or attendees live? Obtain detailed demographic information from EP or COM chair.
11. Ask about their financial situation. Do they have any endowments or special funds to draw from if giving becomes an issue. Do they conduct a Stewardship campaign? Do folks tithe? Do they support *per capita* and Connectional Support giving?
12. Be on time for meetings.
13. Respond to any emails in 24-48 hours so that they know that you have read and received it. This goes a long way in letting them know that they are connected and supported.
14. The first time that you meet with them, bring greetings from COM and the Presbytery. Prepare a newsletter introduction or greeting video.

15. Thank them for their ministry and the work they are doing. There will be one or two persons that you may develop a rapport with and this is a valuable connection. It is important to build relationships.
16. Be aware of certain areas of giftedness in session members that could be a match for ministry opportunities at the presbytery level and share those names with the presbytery Nomination Committee.

APPENDIX B

Suggestions for Visit Conversation

The goal of any COM visit is to **prepare, equip, nurture, and connect congregations** in their ministries for God's mission. Specific purposes include:

- to affirm and support the good ministry being accomplished in the name of Christ by this congregation;
- to **connect** the session with the resources of the Presbytery, the Synod, and the General Assembly;
- to encourage and **nurture** them as they seek to respond to God's call;
- to **equip** them to identify and address any opportunities and challenges that may exist.

Specific topics that may be addressed in conversation with the pastor/s and session include:

- celebration of the ministry of the congregation;
- faith sharing;
- two-way information sharing, with COM representatives learning more about the congregation — its ministry, opportunities, challenges, and concerns — and with the congregation hearing from COM representatives about the Presbytery and its activities, resources, and challenges;
- addressing special issues of concern;
- invitation to participate more fully in the life and ministry of the Presbytery;
- inspiring and encouraging the congregation to reach out to a changing community;
- understanding the role of the COM at significant points of the congregation's life;
- finding ways to strengthen the congregation's relationship with the pastor/s and with the educator (if appropriate);
- issuing an invitation to strategic planning for future ministry.

Obviously, you won't get to all of these in depth; but these are the kinds of reflections the session should be prepared to consider. Members of session may have additional reflections. This is more than a "check-off-the-boxes" visit!

Other specific questions to address include the following:

- In individual meetings with the pastor/s and educator:
 - What is going well in your relationship with the congregation?
 - What opportunities for ministry — either new or re-envisioned — are before you?
 - What challenges are you facing?
 - In what ways can the COM equip you for your ministry context?
 - What are you doing to take care of yourself?

- With the session alone:
 - What is going well in your relationship with your pastor/s [and with your educator]?
 - What opportunities for growth and change do you see in your relationship with your pastor/s [and with your educator]?
 - How are you providing care and support to your pastor/s [and educator]?

- With the pastor/s [and educator] and the session together:
 - What are you celebrating as a congregation?
 - What opportunities for ministry – either new or re-envisioned - are before you?
 - What challenges are you facing?
 - What can the Committee on Ministry do to equip you as a session and as a congregation?

Remind the pastor/s [and educator] that you serve under the confidentiality guidelines of the Committee on Ministry and seek to be partners in building up the body of Christ in the community of faith.

APPENDIX C
Transition Announcement Letter
from the Session to the Congregation
when an Installed Pastor requests dissolution

Below is a template for possible use by the session in announcing a transition to the congregation where the departing pastor has been installed. It is not prescriptive and should be adapted to meet the situation.

[Date]

Dear Members of [Church]:

At the session meeting last evening, the Reverend [Full name] announced his/her personal response to God's call to ministry at [Church] in [City], [State] [or his/her intention to retire]. His/Her letter, requesting that his/her service at [Church] conclude on [Month and day], is enclosed.

With deep appreciation for his/her [number of] years of dedicated and faithful leadership, we have called a special congregational meeting for [Month and day] at [time] to act on the following motion:

The congregation of xxx Presbyterian Church requests the Presbytery of the Miami Valley dissolve the pastoral relationship with the Reverend xxx, effective xxx, at his/her request.

In the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), pastoral calls are a tri-part relationship, formed by the Presbytery between a congregation and a pastor. We, the session, will work closely with the Presbytery in the process of calling a new pastor. The Presbytery is represented through its Committee on Ministry. [Name of ruling elder or teaching elder], the COM liaison to [Church], will work closely with us.

With [Name's] departure, we begin a season of transition that will offer us an opportunity to explore, examine, and evaluate the journey we have taken together in order to discern God's path for our future. The process will begin after the congregation has acted on the motion outlined above.

Your session has formed two teams: (1) the Interim Pastor Search Committee that will work with the Presbytery to bring a specially trained interim ministry candidate for the session's approval; and (2) the Farewell Celebration Team that will work with [Name] and the congregation during the coming weeks to remember and celebrate our time together.

Here is a summary of the process and the schedule:

- [Date]: Formation of the Interim Pastor Search Committee
- [Date]: Formation of the Farewell Celebration Team
- [Date]: Congregational meeting in the Sanctuary at [time]
- [Date]: [Name's] last day in the pulpit.

Beginning this process now is important in order to continue good leadership for [Church]. These teams will be working behind the scenes to keep our process and ministry moving.

In this work, let us remember the wisdom from Ecclesiastes: *For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven (3:1)*. While it is important to prepare our hearts for [Name's] departure, we know that a “season” of exciting new beginnings is on the horizon.

May God, who is *our help in ages past and our hope for years to come*, be glorified as we honor one another in the light of our Lord's grace.

Grace and peace,

The Session
[Name], Clerk of Session

The Session:
[Names listed alphabetically]

APPENDIX D
Transition Announcement Letter
from the Session to the Congregation
when a Stated Supply Pastor requests to end a pastorate

Below is a template for possible use by the session in announcing a transition to the congregation where the departing pastor has been serving as a Stated Supply. It is not prescriptive and should be adapted to meet the situation.

[Date]

Dear Members of [Church]:

At the session meeting last evening, the Reverend [Full name] announced his/her personal response to God's call and has requested to conclude his/her ministry with us [or his/her intention to retire]. His/Her letter, requesting that his/her service at [Church] conclude on [Month and day], is enclosed.

With deep appreciation for his/her [number of] years of dedicated and faithful leadership, the Session has acted on the following motion:

Terminate the Stated Supply agreement between the Reverend [Name] and the [Name] Presbyterian Church, effective xxx.

In the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Stated Supply Pastors serve as part of a tripart relationship, formed by the Presbytery between the session of a congregation and a pastor. We, the session, will work closely with the Presbytery in the process of calling a new pastor. The Presbytery is represented through its Committee on Ministry. [Name of ruling elder or teaching elder], the COM liaison to [Church], will work closely with us. With [Name's] departure, we begin a season of transition that will offer us an opportunity to explore, examine, and evaluate the journey we have taken together in order to discern God's path for our future.

Your session has formed two teams: (1) the Stated Supply Pastor Search Committee that will work with the Presbytery to identify an appropriate pastoral candidate for the session's approval; and (2) the Farewell Celebration Team that will work with [Name] and the congregation during the coming weeks to remember and celebrate our time together.

Here is a summary of the process and the schedule:

- [Date]: Formation of the Stated Supply Pastor Search Committee
- [Date]: Formation of the Farewell Celebration Team

- [Date]: [Name's] last day in the pulpit.

Beginning this process now is important in order to continue good leadership for [Church]. These teams will be working behind the scenes to keep our process and ministry moving.

In this work, let us remember the wisdom from Ecclesiastes: *For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven* (3:1). While it is important to prepare our hearts for [Name's] departure, we know that a "season" of exciting new beginnings is on the horizon.

May God, who is *our help in ages past and our hope for years to come*, be glorified as we honor one another in the light of our Lord's grace.

Grace and peace,

The Session
[Name], Clerk of Session

The Session:
[Names listed alphabetically]