

*(In this document, whenever the term 'Region' is used, it is assumed this is in partnership with the Classis.)*

As soon as a pastor is seriously considering a transition – call or retirement – he/she is strongly encouraged to contact the Classis and Regional Synod. Resources will be made available help all those involved. The earliest inclusion of higher bodies is to provide a steadying and guiding presence for the church and pastor. Most churches go through very few searches. The broader experience of the Classis and Region can provide valuable counsel and support. Here is a brief summary of the journey.

In an initial conversation with the Region and Classis, the pastor shares his/her thoughts regarding timing of an anticipated departure. From this departure date, a process will be set in place to give the church maximum continuity. A retirement would likely have a longer transition time; a call a shorter period. While a retirement transition may be in discussion with leaders for a longer period of time, the public transition is recommended to be about 6 to 9 months. Following this conversation, a meeting would be scheduled with the Elders. It is critical that an outside representative be present to establish a solid partnership from the outset. The shared journey begins with the awareness that the Classis also needs to give its formal approval before a candidate is called. Inclusion at the beginning helps to avoid confusion in the end.

At the Elders' meeting, the pastor would share his/her plans. The representative would share the steps involved in a Guided Search process. The key is for everyone to be on the same page to provide consistent communication to the congregation. Elders would be asked to read the Guided Search manual in preparation for the next meeting. Two letters would be prepared – one from the Pastor and one from the Elders. These would be sent together and scheduled to arrive late in the week before the Sunday announcement of the transition.

At the next meeting, the whole Consistory is present. The representative will help to clarify the role of key groups – Transition team, Search team, Staff, and Consistory. Since the Transition and Search Teams will only serve for this special period of time, the qualities of people who will comprise these unique roles will be discussed. A Transition team (2 to 4 well respected leaders) will be appointed by the Consistory. A list of possible Search Team names will be developed. The Transition Team oversees the operation of the church in the process. They are not expected to run the church, but to ascertain that all important work is carried out by the responsible persons. The Search Team will develop a church profile, a position description for the next pastor, conduct the necessary contact and interview work, arrange the details for the candidate visit and help introduce the new pastor to the congregation. The Region can also help the church determine if an interim pastor is appropriate and available to assist.

As the Consistory reflects on the list of potential Search Team members, it considers the necessary skills and maturity for the task. The Elders will appoint the Search Team. Ideally, two elders will contact potential Search Team members to make the ask. The Search Team will be comprised of 5 to 7 people. It should not be a committee representing the various groups within the church, but a spiritually mature group of people who have demonstrated a high level of commitment to the church. As much as possible, the team will reflect the diversity of the congregation.

The Region will help the Search Team begin their journey by engaging in some basic team building work. All members of the Search Team will take the Leadership Assessment Profile. This provides valuable insight into the styles and experiences each member brings to the task. With a deeper understanding of each one's skills and passions, the team better understands and respects the input of each individual.

The Search Team first develops a church profile which will be distributed to potential candidates. This is done through community demographic and church data. Focus groups are conducted to bring the voice of the Congregation into the process. This profile is approved by the Consistory. The Search Team then develops a position description with input from the Consistory and consideration for the context of the ministry. This is also approved by the Consistory.

When everyone is in agreement, the position is distributed to key leaders and people in the Region to seek to identify possible leaders to fill the role. A well-prepared packet helps not only to promote the church, but also to pique the interest of strong candidates for the position. The list of potential candidates may be somewhat shorter with this process, but the likelihood of viable candidates is much higher.

The Search Team is coached in screening profiles of candidates and conducting various levels of interviews. Initial Skype calls explore initial impressions and clarify information submitted by the candidates. Subsequent contacts either determine a candidate not to be a good match, or a person the team desires to interview more at length. When a short list of three candidates is developed, the team will engage other assessment tools such as the Leadership Profile Assessment and the Strengths Finder Assessment to further discover qualities and character desired for the new pastor.

The team comes to a consensus around the final candidate. This person is recommended to the Consistory. Arrangements are then made for the candidate to visit. The team will be coached on how to set up a meaningful candidate visit to the church and community. When the candidate arrives, the Consistory needs to be prepared for a conversation related to the proposed compensation package.

When the candidate accepts the call, a date is set for the installation in the church. The Classis officially oversees this service with input and participation from the local church. The Region will help the church put steps in place for six month and one year follow up sessions with the new pastor to be sure everyone is adjusting well and the experience is as it was promoted.

