

CANDIDATE HOSTING GUIDELINES

Background

Clearly, hosting is a commitment of time and money therefore the importance of the following steps should not be overlooked. By the time you get to the point of a face-to-face visit and “neutral pulpit”, you have come to a decision as a committee that the interviewee may well be the person who you would present to the congregation as the candidate for the position.

Completion of the following steps are assumed:

1. Complete review of the PIF
2. Reference checks with all references
3. Presbytery reference check by General Presbyter/Stated Clerk
4. Criminal and credit background checks by the General Presbyter/Stated Clerk
5. All committee members have listened to the sermon tape(s)
6. A telephone interview has been conducted, preferably more than once.
7. The candidate’s faith statement is in the hands of the COM

The purpose of hosting a potential candidate is to help both the potential candidate and the PNC present them in the best possible light. If you have major questions about a potential candidate, these should have been resolved before you invite them to visit with you in your community.

A visit is usually scheduled over a weekend in order to find a neutral pulpit nearby where the potential candidate can preach and where a face-to-face interview can take place. Ideally, the person arrives on Thursday evening and leaves Monday morning. The person should be provided a comfortable place to stay, which generally should not be in someone’s home. A hotel or motel is preferable. People need and deserve privacy for processing their reflections about the visit.

Offer to assist in such things as purchasing plane tickets or to reimburse the potential candidate. Be sure to offer to bring the spouse, if applicable. (In no case does the spouse sit in on a formal interview, but is invited to informal, social part of the weekend.) Is a rental car appropriate? A map of the community? What other provisions would show hospitality?

Basic components of a face-to-face visit/neutral pulpit:

1. A tour of the community, particularly the area from which you draw church members.
2. A tour of the church building, including the church office, and manse, if applicable.
3. A visit with a Committee on Ministry sub-committee. This will be arranged with your liaison. Because the time is often limited, please schedule this part well in advance, as other parts of the interview weekend may have to be built around it.
4. A formal interview of the candidate and the PNC. See the resource titled, “Conducting A Face to Face Interview With A Potential Candidate,” for general information and suggested questions.

5. A neutral pulpit where the PNC has the opportunity to see and hear the candidate lead worship and preach. The liaison will work with you to find a neutral pulpit. Be sure that the church providing the neutral pulpit is instructed (especially support staff) to list it only as a “guest preacher.” Worst-case scenarios are ones in which newspaper articles indicate “someone candidating for the Church in the Woods will be preaching next Sunday.” In a “neutral pulpit”, the potential candidate is asked only to read scripture and preach. Occasionally, s/he is asked to tell the children’s sermon.
6. Some social time so that you have the opportunity to be informal with the potential candidate to discover if you feel at ease with this person and could imagine him/her as your pastor. This is normally not a time when spouses of PNK members are included.
7. Ample opportunity, if the position is for associate pastor, for the head of staff and the candidate to talk to one another—at least 90 minutes.
8. Activities for the candidate’s spouse during the times when the candidate is busy with scheduled interviews. If the spouse will be looking for employment, it would be considerate to arrange opportunities to see facilities and perhaps have conversations with persons related to his/her field.
9. Opportunity, if desired, to converse with realtors about potential housing, unless a manse is provided. If a manse is provided, a tour of the manse would be substituted.

A possible schedule

Note: Have one person in charge of schedule and communication with the candidate. Usually this is NOT the moderator, but a different member of the committee assigned to one candidate.

The potential candidate will have given you some clues about what environmental or community issues are important. Weave these into the weekend. Some examples are:

- My spouse is employed as a teacher. What opportunities exist? Can an interview be set up with a school system representative?
- My child has critical learning needs. What’s the school situation?
- I have these medical needs. What’s available?
- I have certain recreational interests. What’s available?

THURSDAY NIGHT – arrival in town.

FRIDAY-

- Breakfast with one or two members of the committee
- Morning: Tour of the community and/or conversation with realtor or tour of the manse
- Lunch with one or two members of the committee
- Afternoon: Tour of the church and other visits as needed (head of staff)
- Evening; Informal dinner with members of the committee at someone’s home, or in a private area of a restaurant. (PNC spouses are not normally included.)

SATURDAY

Breakfast on own

10:00 interview with committee (a formal setting)

Lunch with committee

Afternoon: 90 minute meeting with COM sub-committee

Some “down time”

Dinner with committee in someone’s home or in a restaurant, ending early so that there is plenty of time for a rest

SUNDAY

Breakfast on own

Offer to pick candidate up for worship, arriving at least 30 minutes before worship.

Lunch with committee following worship, and some informal questions/answers can be asked which may be left over

Be sure to talk about the timeline the committee plans to use in making a decision.

(Compensation should not be discussed until you are ready to offer a call.

The candidate is free to leave late Sunday or stay over until Monday

When making a decision

Presumably you have interviewed multiple candidates for the position. Do not make a decision to rule anyone out of consideration until all the interviews have been completed.

Provide an opportunity for all members of the PNC to discuss their impressions of all candidates. Establish a way of prioritizing first, second, third choice candidates which is agreeable to the entire committee.

Keep in regular contact with those you feel you could “live” with. If a candidate is not a good fit, let that person know so that s/he may keep looking elsewhere. Establish a system of keeping in regular contact with all candidates.

Decide if the committee should be unanimous in its decision (and a candidate may ask if this is a unanimous decision).

Decide what the compensation package is that you will offer to the candidate, assuming a range is listed in the CIF. Expect a candidate to take up to a week to make a decision. Also expect the possibility of negotiation on the compensation—either to raise the entire package or to renegotiate within the package.

Presenting the candidate

Some congregations prepare a brochure about the person (and family, if applicable). This would normally include a picture, some brief biographical information and experience in ministry. If you have some quotes from the candidate and/or material from his/her PIF those can also be included. It is customary to mail this with the letter calling the congregational meeting.

Find a time over the weekend when the candidate comes to create an informal environment for the candidate with the congregation. This could be a Saturday evening ice-cream social or soup

supper. It could be a long reception or sandwich lunch after church. It may be preferable to find some way to schedule this before the congregational vote.

It is important to let the candidate know ahead of time what to expect before s/he arrives.

The morning of the candidating, the candidate may lead the entire worship service or may be asked to do only selected sections, including scripture and preach. Make sure that particular ways the congregation handles worship are explained. These include: Are hymns announced? How is the offering received? From what position is the benediction given?

The congregation should be encouraged to stay in the pews as worship ends and the congregational meeting should proceed immediately.

In making the report, present the candidate by talking about how excited the committee is and why. Report that you received “x” number of PIFS and conducted “x” number of interviews. Out of all of those, you are most excited about this candidate because.....

It is permissible, although not required, to invite the candidate to say something about him/herself and to answer informal questions that may arise from the congregation. At that point the candidate (and any family) are excused from the room.

The terms of call are presented and clearly explained. The motion to elect Rev. “X” as the pastor/associate pastor is made and doesn’t require a second (because it come from a congregational committee). The motion may also include the terms of call, but terms could also be dealt within a separate motion. Ask if there is any discussion, which may be nothing more than questions. When the congregation is ready to vote, restate the motion. The vote MUST be by ballot, which is required by the constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). After two people, who each do the counting, have tallied the ballots, the report is made to the congregation and the minister is escorted back in to be greeted by applause. (Although it has not happened in PNK that a minister was NOT elected, if that were to occur, the moderator will address the situation immediately.)

At the presbytery meeting

Once the congregation elects the minister, s/he is required to be examined for membership in the Presbytery of Northern Kansas at a meeting of the Presbytery. At that time, the faith statement will have been printed in the presbytery papers and the minister will be asked questions on the floor of the presbytery meeting. Generally, these are friendly questions and pertain to background of the person or to the faith statement. When the examination ceases, the minister (and any family) is escorted from the meeting room and the presbytery discusses the motion to receive the minister and approve the call. Once the vote is taken, the minister returns to the room to be greeted by applause.

It is expected that the liaison will have worked with the PNC, session, minister, and presbytery moderator to propose an ordination and/or installation date, which is mutually agreed upon. Such services are services of the presbytery held in you congregation. They are scheduled at 4

p.m. on Sunday so that other members of the presbytery can participate. A model of a service is available from COM or the presbytery office.

Your COM liaison will be in touch with the minister about presbytery's order of service and requirement of an offering.

In conclusion

You've now completed the process. At the congregational meeting, you would normally have entertained a motion to have the PNC dismissed with appreciation. Continue your support of the minister as you work with him/her in the future; the PNC members are the ones the new minister is more familiar with so they should keep in touch until the minister becomes better acquainted with others in the congregation.