

**MINISTRY**

**PARTNERSHIP**

**TEAM MANUAL**

**Great Lakes Presbytery**

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# MPT AUTHORIZATION AND RESPONSIBILITES

Each Presbytery shall elect a Ministry Partnership Team (MPT) according to its rules, which shall have broad responsibility for the Presbytery’s pastoral and ecclesiastical relationships. The committee shall have at least eight members, elected by the Presbytery according to its own rule, with membership comprising an equal number of elders and pastors. Ordinarily, no more than two members may be from the same congregation.

The MPT shall be available to any session or pastor of the Presbytery. By its own rule, the Presbytery shall delegate and determine the MPT’s authority and functions. Within this delegated authority is the ability to approve ordination of candidates, transfer of pastors to and from its jurisdiction, and commissions for installation and ordination (*ECO Polity* 3.0105).

Specific MPT Responsibilities:

* “Charter and receive new congregations into the presbytery” (*ECO Polity*

3.0103b).

* “Exercise special care and oversight of congregations that do not have an installed pastor and appoint the moderator of such sessions” (*ECO Polity* 3.0103d).
* “Authorize the celebration of the Lord’s Supper beyond particular congregations” (*ECO Polity* 3.0103f).
* Receive, dismiss, examine, install, and provide pastoral care for pastors as well as make recommendations for discipline (*ECO Polity* 3.0103g).
* “Validate the call of pastors to service beyond a congregation” (*ECO Polity*

3.0103i).

* Complete annual reviews of all CLP2 pastors and pastors in Validated Ministry within the presbytery.
* Maintain regular communication with all pastors and each congregation in the Presbytery. Visitation of an MPT representative(s) to each congregation on an annual basis is recommended.
* “Settle differences between congregations and pastors” (*ECO Polity* 3.0103j).
* Hold pastors and sessions accountable in meeting *ECO Polity* covenantal requirements to be active in a Pastoral Covenant Group (PCG) and Missional Affinity Group (MAG) (*ECO Polity* 2.0402 and 1.0104).
* Utilize the *MPT Forms* and *ECO & Flourish Resources List* to engage in the ECO

process.

Additional Shared Responsibilities:

* “Promote the health of the covenant community to the end that its congregations and members may bear fruit for the Kingdom of God” (*ECO Polity* 3.0103a).
* “Dismiss congregations to other presbyteries or denominations” (*ECO Polity*

3.0103c).

* “Dissolve congregations when their mission work has ceased” (*ECO Polity*

3.0103e).

* “Enroll, dismiss, and examine candidates and ordain them to called service” (*ECO Polity* 3.0103h).

# COVENANT ORDER

In order for an ECO Presbytery to “promote the health of the covenant community to the end that its congregations and members (pastors) may bear fruit for the Kingdom of God” (*ECO Polity* 3.0103a), ongoing and frequent contact and counsel with each congregation in the Presbytery is critical to the MPT’s function.

It is an essential part of our “connectedness” as a denomination.

To maintain this connection, each MPT will create systems to connect with congregations and to support churches in the following ways:

* Assist churches as they evaluate their needs for new pastoral positions or new ministries.
* Annually attend worship for encouragement and fellowship.
* Annually meet with pastors and sessions for encouragement and fellowship.

*MAGs may meet some of these annual responsibilities. Presbyteries may consider organizing the MPTs around MAG groups, so that MPT members in a particular MAG may build stronger relationships with specific churches. If this is done, then implementing some aspects of the six-fold rhythm when meeting might be used (e.g., Prepare, Reflect, Share, Pray).*

Additional ways the MPT can create systems to support and connect with congregations:

* Support both the session and a Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC) during times of transition in pastoral leadership.
* Support pastors in newly called positions, pastors leaving called positions, and

pastors moving into retirement.

* Settle conflicts that may arise among a congregation, the session, and a Pastor/Head of Staff.
* Assess a congregation’s commitment to MAGs and its adherence to *ECO Polity*

(*ECO Polity* 1.0104)—and if needed, help a church create a MAG.

* Assess a pastor’s commitment to PCGs and personal adherence to *ECO Polity* (*ECO Polity* 2.0402)—and if needed, help a pastor connect or create a PCG.

# ASSIMILIATING CONGREGATIONS

One of the MPT’s responsibilities is to make sure that congregations and pastors applying for transfer to ECO are a good fit for the mission and vision of ECO and the Presbytery (*ECO Polity* 3.0103b).

## Assimilating Congregations Within the Reformed Tradition

When assimilating congregations that already adhere to the Reformed tradition, the process for receiving them is as follows:

Step 1. The Synod office sends a congregation’s completed ECO membership application to the Moderator, Stated Clerk, and the MPT chair.

Step 2. The MPT arranges an interview with the session or congregational leadership, which may occur either by conference call or in person (see the interview guide below). Pastors are interviewed by the MPT separately.

Step 3. After the interview, MPT members notify the MPT chair, Moderator, and Stated Clerk of Presbytery of their recommendation.

Step 4. The Stated Clerk of Presbytery sends a letter to the session detailing the MPT’s recommendation.

Step 5. After release from their denomination or another ecclesiastical body, the congregation notifies MPT that it is free to join ECO. In the case of an independent church or church plant, the church will be received into the Presbytery immediately.

Step 6. MPT receives the congregation and notifies the session that it is empowered to examine congregational officers (elders and deacons) and transfer their ordination into ECO, if they meet ECO’s requirements for elders and/or deacons.

Step 7. The Stated Clerk sends a copy of the approval letter to the ECO Synod office (office@eco-pres.org).

## Interview Guide: Session

Below is a suggested format for interviews with session. It is meant to be a guide, not prescriptive.

Introduction

* Open with prayer.
* Introduce ECO representatives and interviewers.
* Invite session members to introduce themselves.
* Inquire how long each elder has been with the congregation, ask about specific areas of ministry, and add any other questions that may help elders feel comfortable and allow the MPT to get to know them better.
* Offer a brief explanation of why ECO does these interviews and assure the session that they are designed to build a relationship between both parties.

Theology Questions

1. Can you provide an overview of the congregation's history/journey in making the decision to join ECO?
2. Why do you feel called to join ECO?
3. Has each member of session read *ECO Essential Tenets* and *ECO Polity*?
4. Do you all agree with the *ECO Essential Tenets* and *ECO Polity*?
5. Do you have any questions or concerns about *ECO Essential Tenets* and *ECO Polity*?
6. What is the understanding within your session (and the church at large) regarding the authority of Scripture?
7. What role does the Bible play in the life of your congregation?
8. What is your understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ? Is Christ the only way to salvation?
9. In *ECO Essential Tenets*’ section E, number 6, there is a call to “honor the image of God in every human being from conception to natural death.” What is your understanding of the sanctity of human life?
10. In *ECO Essential Tenets*’ section E, number 7, there is also the call to “maintain

chastity in thought and deed, being faithful within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman as established by God at the creation or embracing a celibate life as established by Jesus in the new covenant.” What is your understanding of human sexuality and Christian marriage?

Ministry Questions

1. *ECO Polity* says the church is to prepare “disciples to be the sent people of God in the world,” and the mission of ECO is “building flourishing churches that make disciples of Jesus Christ.” What are you doing as a church to be the “sent people of God” in your part of the world? What are you doing as a church to make disciples of Jesus Christ? In what ways are you hoping that membership in ECO will enable you to be more effective in fulfilling this mission?
2. Has the congregation ever planted a new church or worshipping community? Is it interested in doing so?
3. Covenantal accountability is a key distinctive of ECO life for both individuals and congregations. Describe how a life of accountability either is or may be carried out in your congregation. What types of congregations would you consider partnering with? What are their characteristics?
4. What can ECO do for you?
5. What talents and abilities would you bring to ECO?

Conclusion

1. List and explain the next steps in the process of seeking membership in the

Presbytery.

1. Ask for final thoughts or any questions the church representatives may have.
2. Conclude with asking each member of the session to affirm *ECO Essential Tenets*.
3. Pray with session.

# DISMISSAL OF CONGREGATION FROM ECO

An ECO congregation may request dismissal from ECO to another Reformed body. When this request is received by an ECO Presbytery, the MPT will send representatives to meet with the congregation. The MPT will assess the reasons why a congregation is requesting to leave and attempt to determine if the congregation is united in its decision.

The MPT will ask the session to call a congregational meeting to discuss the departure and determine if there is unity in the decision. After the congregational meeting, the MPT will work with the session to address whatever concerns there may be.

Possible Outcomes:

* The MPT authorizes the session to apply to another Reformed body and then to organize another congregational meeting to vote on leaving ECO in favor of a new Reformed body. MPT representatives should be present at the vote and offer a prayer of blessing on the congregation, should they vote to leave.
* If at any point the MPT determines the congregation is not unified or that this

effort is primarily being led by the pastor, the MPT may choose a number of options: the removal of the pastor, the creation of a new church plant, or the dismissal of a minority group of covenant partners.

* + In these types of cases, the MPT may call upon the resources ECO has

with Biblical Peacemakers and the ICC (Christian Conciliation) to work through this type of complexity.

The Synod staff remains available to consult with any MPT working through this level of complexity, in order to coach and support throughout the process.

# ASSIMILATING PASTORS (Head or Associate Pastors)

## Assimilating Pastors Within the Reformed Tradition

When assimilating congregations that already adhere to the Reformed tradition, the process for receiving them is as follows:

Step 1. The Synod office sends a congregation’s completed ECO membership application to the Moderator, Stated Clerk, and the MPT chair. This information will also include the pastor’s Statement of Faith.

Step 2. The MPT arranges an interview with the pastor; a sub-team (minimum 2 MPT members preferred) will manage the interview.

Step 3. After the interview, the sub-team notifies the MPT chair of the results of their interviews.

Step 4. The MPT will prayerfully consider the pastor’s application, Statement of Faith and Interview results; the team will discuss and vote on the pastor’s suitability for the specific call.

Step 5. The MPT Chair will send the pastor, the Presbytery Moderator and Stated Clerk of Presbytery their recommendation; if approval, the format will be an official approval letter.

Step 6. The Stated Clerk sends a copy of the approval letter to the ECO Synod office ([office@eco-pres.org](mailto:office@eco-pres.org)).

Interview Guide: Assimilating Pastors (*ECO Polity* 3.0103g)

Below is a suggested format for interviewing pastors from other denominations, ordination candidates from other Presbyteries, Affiliate Pastors, Transitional Pastors coming into the Presbytery, Honorably Retired Pastors, and Commissioned Lay Pastors serving in a Pastor/Head of Staff position.

Introduction

1. Introduce ECO representatives and interviewers.
2. Open in prayer.
3. Explain the process of the interview. Theology and Church Ministry

Ask the pastor if he/she has read *ECO Essential Tenets*. If the pastor has not read this,

conclude the interview and reschedule once the pastor has had an opportunity to read through and digest the material.

If the pastor indicates a positive answer to the above question, then ask, “Is there anything in *ECO Essential Tenets* with which you would disagree or feel could have been worded better for you?”

Theology Questions *(Augmented for GLP by MPT Guide for Interviewing/Laura Smit)*

1. What does it mean to you to be called or chosen by God to be a member of His body?
   * In your preaching, teaching, and evangelism, how do you proclaim the good news of God’s sovereign election?
   * How would you explain the doctrine of predestination to a newcomer in your church?
2. Talk to us about your understanding of the authority of Scripture. It’s easy to say that Scripture is our authority, but in practice figuring out what the Bible has to say about the day-to-day questions of our lives can be difficult. When you need answers from the Bible, what’s your process?
   * When you prepare to teach or preach the Word of God, how do you do that?
   * How does your process reflect your commitment to the Bible’s authority?
3. What is your understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ? Is He the only way to salvation?
   * In your relationship with Jesus, which is more difficult for you: to remember and believe that He is fully God or to remember and believe that He is fully human?
   * In your preaching and teaching, are you more inclined to emphasize His divinity or His humanity?
   * What difference do you think it makes in the life of the church that the incarnation continues now that Jesus is ascended?
4. Talk to us about your practice of sharing the gospel. Most people in our culture – even those in the church – resist claims to exclusive, authoritative truth.
   * How do you deal with that when you present Jesus to members of your church? To people outside your church?
   * How do you respond to the objection that if Jesus is the only way of salvation, then God is being unfair to people of other religions?
   * What are your biggest challenges here, and how could ECO help you in meeting them?
5. In *ECO Essential Tenets*’ section E, number 6, there is a call to “honor the image of God in every human being from conception to natural death.” What is your understanding of the sanctity of human life?
6. Also, in *ECO Essential Tenets*’ section E, number 7, there is the call to “maintain chastity in thought and deed, being faithful within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman as established by God at the creation or embracing a celibate life as established by Jesus in the new covenant.” What is your understanding of human sexuality and Christian marriage?

The Ministry of Your Church Questions

1. *ECO Polity* says the church is to prepare “disciples to be the sent people of God in the world,” and the ECO Mission is “building flourishing churches that make disciples of Jesus Christ.” What are you doing as a church to be the “sent people of God” in your part of the world? What are you doing as a church to make disciples of Jesus Christ? In what ways are you hoping that membership in ECO will enable you to be more effective in fulfilling this mission?
2. Why do you want to be a member of ECO?
   * How can being a part of ECO more fully enable you to accomplish God’s call?
3. What can ECO do for you?
4. What can you do for ECO?

Conclusion

1. List and explain the next steps in the process of seeking membership in the Presbytery.
2. Ask for final thoughts or any questions the pastor may have.
3. Conclude with asking the pastor to affirm *ECO Essential Tenets*.

Two yes or no questions:

* + Will you receive, adopt, and be bound by the Essential Tenets of ECO in all your ministry?
  + Are you or have you ever been under ecclesiastical discipline? If yes, please explain.

1. Pray with the pastor.

Additional Questions

Below are some questions you may want to consider asking, depending on the

interview:

1. Do you find it more natural to think about God as One or to think about God as Three?
   * + In your own life of prayer, which person of the Trinity do you most often address? Or do you consistently pray to all three persons at once?
     + In your preaching and teaching, which person of the Trinity do you talk about the most?
     + What difference do you think it makes in the life of the church that God is both One and Three?
2. People sometimes accuse Presbyterians of over-emphasizing sin.
   * What advantages and challenges do you find in our understanding of sin when it comes to your own spiritual growth?
   * What advantages and challenges do you find when it comes to evangelism?
   * How do you incorporate the practice of confession of sin into the life of your congregation, and what are the ways in which people in your congregation come to know the good news of God’s forgiveness?
3. Presbyterians place a strong emphasis on salvation by grace.
   * How does your understanding of grace influence your ministry?
   * How does/should the doctrine of grace influence the way you and your congregation determine whether something you have attempted has been a success or a failure?
4. How do you experience the union of the body of Christ in your life?
   * What are the greatest challenges in living into the reality of that union? What is your experience of men and women working together as equal partners in the church?
   * How do you understand the Holy Spirit’s work of gifting and equipping Christians for life together?
   * What gifts has the Holy Spirit given you, and what is the call that has come with those gifts?
5. How central for your own spiritual life is your own identity as one who has been baptized?
   * What is your understanding of the sacrament of Baptism, including adults, children, and infants?
   * How do you reconcile the promises of infant baptism with the reality that some baptized people grow up with no interest in Jesus Christ?
6. How central for your own spiritual life is the regular celebration of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper?
   * What do you understand is being offered to you in that sacrament?
   * How do both sacraments contribute to our covenant life together?
7. How does God’s Law continue to function in your life as a guide for grateful living?
   * Which of the positive restatements of the ten commandments found in our Essential Tenets and in our confessions do you find the most challenging?
   * Which do you find especially precious and life-giving?
8. Describe the nature and mission of the Church. What are its primary tasks today?
9. Describe your call to ministry and why you feel being a local pastor is the best way for you to respond to God’s claim upon your life.
10. What habits do you practice to keep yourself healthy physically, mentally,

spiritually, emotionally, and relationally?

# ASSISTANT PASTORS

Assistant Pastors are called by a congregation through its session or Pastor/Head of Staff by a session’s own rule. A candidate called to serve as an Assistant Pastor in a local congregation shall not receive this title or privileges, until the candidate is welcomed into membership in the Presbytery. The candidate shall meet all the requirements of an ECO pastor.

An Assistant Pastor may be hired and/or terminated by the local congregation’s session in conversation with the Presbytery MPT, prior to such actions occurring. The MPT will resource the church in working through hiring or dismissal procedures as well as provide care and nurture for the Assistant Pastor coming into or departing from a local congregation.

An Assistant Pastor does not have voice and vote on the local congregation’s session, unless given approval from the congregation at a duly called congregational meeting. However, an Assistant Pastor is a full member of the Presbytery and has voice and vote in Presbytery and as a Synod commissioner at the Synod business meeting.

# AFFILIATE PASTORS

Affiliate Pastors may be called into service of a local congregation (*ECO Polity* 2.0401f). Essentially, they are a pastor who is a member in good standing of another denomination, is being called to a local ECO congregation, and desires to keep ordination in their current denomination. The process to approve an Affiliate Pastor is the same as calling a pastor, with a few additions.

The MPT ordinarily approves an Affiliate Pastor whose denominational ordination process is similar to ECO’s process. This usually includes ordination exams, background checks, psychological exams, evaluations by an outside committee/board from the pastor’s local congregation, verification of seminary education/degrees, and the like. It is not necessary for the MPT to review these documents, but the MPT should verify that such a process took place.

The Process

The process for a pastor to affiliate and serve within ECO shall be as follows:

Step 1. Affiliate Pastors request and receive permission from their ordaining body to affiliate with ECO.

Step 2. The MPT receives written permission (if available) from the ordaining body.

Step 3. The ordaining body stipulates that the pastor in question is not in a disciplinary case nor does the pastor have any accusations made against them. If this step is unavailable, the MPT shall request references from the candidate that have the authority to speak to these questions and then complete a reference check.

There may be pastors called to serve who have been ordained through a local congregation and not a denominational or network process. If this is the case, then the MPT shall determine if the ordination requirements are sufficient, if supplemental documentation or exams are needed, or if it is advisable for the candidate not to be allowed to affiliate with ECO as an ordained pastor. A local congregation may request to have such an individual serve as a Commissioned Lay Pastor (CLP) for the congregation as long as the candidate meets the requirements for an officer in ECO. The MPT then would assess the candidate based on the CLP2 criteria.

Affiliate Pastor: Relationship with Presbytery

Affiliate Pastors serving in the role of Pastor/Head of Staff shall have voice and vote. Any other position filled by an Affiliate Pastor shall have voice only (*ECO Polity* 2.0401f). Affiliate Pastors remain members of the Presbytery during their contracted time with the congregation they have been called and approved to serve. Their membership in the Presbytery ends simultaneously when their contract ends with the congregation.

Affiliate Pastors are submitting to the authority of the Presbytery that they are serving and therefore are held to the same standards as all ECO Pastors.

Should an Affiliate Pastor be charged in a discipline case, the Affiliate Pastor shall be given the same rights as ECO pastors as prescribed in the *ECO Rules of Discipline*. If an Affiliate Pastor “renounces jurisdiction” or leaves a position in ECO before a disciplinary case is concluded, the Presbytery shall report these actions to the Affiliate Pastor's ordaining body along with the evidence that precipitated the charge. The Presbytery shall report the actions also to the ECO Synod, who will block the pastor from working in ECO until the discipline case is resolved. If an Affiliate Pastor is compelled by their ordaining body to complete a discipline case in ECO, the Presbytery shall receive the Affiliate Pastor back for the purpose of completing the discipline case. If the Affiliate Pastor is found guilty of the charges, the Affiliate Pastor's ordaining body shall be given the full record of the disciplinary case and appropriate discipline given to the Affiliate Pastor.

Official actions of a disciplinary case for an Affiliate Pastor shall be reported to the Synod office and noted in the pastor’s file. An Affiliate Pastor who is found guilty through an ECO Permanent Judicial Commission (PJC) case shall not serve in ECO in any of the positions listed as “Categories and Responsibilities of Pastors” in *ECO Polity* 2.0401.

# HONORABLY RETIRED PASTORS

A Presbytery may move a pastor to the designation of “Honorably Retired,” when requested by the individual and approved by the MPT. An Honorably Retired Pastor (HRP) may serve in many capacities in the Presbytery and in ECO. The HRP may serve as an Assistant Pastor or a Transitional Pastor of a local ECO congregation and/or serve in a Validated Ministry.

Ordinarily, an HRP does not need permission to work in a ministry outside ECO, unless the ministry is deemed to be inconsistent with *ECO Essential Tenets.* In this case, the MPT would schedule a meeting with the HRP to assess the ministry and address any concerns with the HRP. If the MPT and the HRP cannot reconcile these concerns, the MPT would refer the matter to the Presbytery’s PJC for investigation.

# ASSIMILATING CONGREGATIONS, PASTORS FROM OUTSIDE THE REFORMED TRADITION

When assimilating congregations or pastors from outside the Reformed tradition, the MPT will follow the same procedures as assimilating those within the tradition but will spend more time assessing their doctrinal commitment to Reformed theology. The *MPT Forms* contains a helpful tool to support the MPT in its assessment, so those serving on the MPT will know what questions to ask as part of their discernment process.

# COMMISSIONED LAY PASTORS

*ECO Polity* 2.05 delineates the roles and responsibilities of Lay Pastors. These are women and men, who already are ordained as a deacon or elder and may serve in a pastoral role to carry out the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ through ECO. When a Lay Pastor is called to serve as the Pastor/Head of Staff of a congregation or independent church plant (with its own session/board of elders), the MPT will supervise the CLP. In addition to what is written in *ECO Polity*, the following practical guidelines have been deemed essential by the MPT:

CLP1

* Commissioned Lay Pastors serve in local congregations under the authority of the session and supervised by a pastor.
* They shepherd and lead a micro-expression of church or church plant.
* The ECO Synod has created a training and equipping program for CLP1.
* CLP1s serve under an assigned mentor, preferably an experienced pastor, and actively participate in a Pastoral Covenant Group.
* Specific content for mentor meetings can be found in the *Commissioned Lay*

*Pastor Training: Handbook and Syllabus (see “Mentors” chapter).*

CLP2

* Commissioned Lay Pastors serve in local congregations under the authority of Presbytery.
* They pastor a congregation or church plant and may serve as Pastor/Head of Staff.
* The ECO Synod has created a training and equipping program, in conjunction

with seminary classes, for CLP2.

* CLP2s serve under an assigned mentor, preferably an experienced pastor, and actively participate in a Pastoral Covenant Group.
  + The assignment shall be made by the MPT, unless the CLP2 is in ECO’s CLP Training Certification, in which case a mentor is provided.
  + The MPT may choose to allow a CLP2 to serve as Pastor/Head of Staff of a local congregation while in the process of completing such training.
  + The CLP2 and mentor shall set an annual schedule for meetings, preferably quarterly, and shall make such meetings a priority.
* The mentor reports to the MPT once each year, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and clarifying methods to improve performance—except when the CLP2’s training requires more contact.
* Specific content for mentor meetings can be found in the *Commissioned*

*Lay Pastor Training: Handbook and Syllabus* (see “Mentors” chapter). General areas of discussion include:

* + How is the CLP2 doing spiritually, emotionally, physically, and relationally?
  + Does the CLP2 take time for personal devotions?
  + Is the CLP2 participating in accountable relationships, such as a Pastor Covenant Group?
  + What books and/or reading materials is the CLP2 reading?
  + How has the CLP2’s congregation grown through ministry efforts?
  + What has the CLP2 learned by serving as a CLP?
  + How can the MPT serve as a bridge to help support the covenant relationship between Presbytery and the CLP2? Are there any current challenges the CLP2 is experiencing?
  + Any other questions about the following areas:
    - Ministry administration
    - Pastor/Congregational care
    - Planning, procedures, and church governance
    - Reflection on personal issues
    - Missional ministry
* Both CLP2 and mentor should expand from time to time on the topics of their meetings to assure all areas of ministry are being considered.
* CLP2s receive an annual performance evaluation by the church’s session. A copy shall be reviewed with his/her mentor.
* A CLP2 who has completed training and/or completed five years of successful supervised ministry may forego the mentorship and annual review, *if* serving the same congregation after five years.
  + If the CLP2 takes a new call, the MPT of the calling Presbytery will assess

what support and supervision the CLP2 may need in this new call.

## Pastoral candidates as CLP2/pastor serving an ECO congregation.

In some cases, a pastoral candidate may be called to serve a local congregation before a PMOT has certified the candidate “ready to receive a call.” The MPT may approve the candidate as a CLP2 until the candidate finishes the candidacy process.

* The MPT will interview the candidate to verify their commitment to ECO Tenets and theology; this is especially important if the candidate has a non-Reformed background and/or training.
  + The MPT may require a candidate with a non-Reformed background to have additional mentoring and/or supervision before they are approved to act as the solo pastor for a congregation.
* Pastoral candidates do not need to be enrolled or complete a CLP2 certification process if the candidacy process is completed in less than twelve months of starting service.

The Process:

* The session of the calling congregation accepts the candidate as a Covenant Partner of the church, examines the candidate, and the congregation elects him/her as an officer (elder or deacon) of the congregation.
  + Ordinarily, making the incoming CLP2 a deacon is preferable to an elder. This is because the deacon is a servant leader caring for the people and does not have governing authority.
  + If the CLP2 pastor successfully completes the ordination process within twelve months, they may request the MPT to modify their assignment from CLP2/pastor to ECO ordained pastor. CLP2 requirements such as assigned mentorship and annual session reviews will be relaxed.
  + If the CLP2 pastor is unable to complete the ordination process within twelve months, a review by the MPT will be required.
    - MPT will collect updates/reports from the session and the candidate’s assigned mentor.
    - The MPT will interview the candidate to determine:
      * Status of their ordination process
      * Goals of the candidate
      * How the candidate plans to proceed in the coming year
    - The MPT will make a recommendation on how the candidate should proceed. Recommendation options may include:
      * Continue for another twelve months without changes (assuming ordination is forthcoming).
      * Enroll in and complete the CLP2 curriculum (assuming the candidate is not expecting to complete ordination within the next year).
      * Consider a different vocation.

# PASTORAL DISCIPLINE

The disciplining of a pastor shall follow the procedures as laid out in *ECO Rules of Discipline.* A pastor can be referred for discipline for the following reasons:

* Committing a crime.
* Unrepentant and consistent personal issue that is inconsistent for a Christian and a leader in the church. This might include an addiction, any abuse, or a lifestyle inconsistent with Scripture and *ECO Essential Tenets*.
* Destructive and/or dictatorial behavior towards colleagues, staff, officers, and

covenant pastors—especially if this has led to or is leading towards disunity within a congregation.

When the MPT believes a pastor may require an official disciplinary action, it shall refer the pastor to the PJC and request an official investigation. The MPT shall follow every required step as written in *ECO Rules of Discipline*. Pastors who have charges filed against them or pending charges shall not receive a “cleared background check” from the Moderator of the Presbytery, should the pastor attempt to transfer to another Presbytery during the process.

# TRANSFERRING/RECEIVING ECO PASTORS

When an ECO pastor is moving from one ECO Presbytery to another ECO Presbytery, this transfer ordinarily may be executed by the MPT on behalf of the Presbytery, if the

pastor has received a release from the previous Presbytery indicating that the pastor is in good standing.

MPT Reference Check

The MPT shall complete a reference check from the pastor’s former Presbytery prior to authorizing their new call. This shall include:

* Verification that the pastor is in good standing with no formal or pending

discipline charges against him/her.

* Assessment of the ministry of the pastor in his/her call, which may include successes, challenges, and how the pastor navigated through these events.
* Involvement in the Presbytery and in working to accomplish our common

mission in ECO to make disciples.

The Process:

The process for a pastor to serve within ECO shall be as follows:

* The Meeting: The MPT meets with the incoming pastor to welcome him/her to the new Presbytery. The MPT members shall ask any questions they deem necessary.
  + While the MPT may create an interview guide for transferring ECO

pastors from one presbytery to another, the pastor interview guide for a “new pastor” or “one transferring into ECO from another denomination” would not be appropriate.

* + This meeting should be cordial, welcoming, and honoring of the pastor's good standing in the previous ECO Presbytery.
* After the Meeting: The MPT shall make a recommendation to receive the

transferring pastor into the Presbytery. The MPT upon approval will introduce the new pastor at the next Presbytery meeting with no additional examination by the Presbytery.

* + If the MPT does not approve of an ECO pastor transfer, the pastor may request that the Presbytery or Presbytery Governing Council (by a Presbytery’s own rule) have an opportunity to consider his/her transfer request. Each Presbytery shall create a process by which this would occur. The decision of the MPT shall be reported to the Presbytery or Council along with its rationale to the reviewing body.

# PASTOR COMPENSATION

Minimum Terms of Call

A Presbytery may determine the needs for minimum terms of call within its boundaries. The *MPT Forms* contains examples of terms of calls that may be adapted to the specific needs of the Presbytery. The MPT shall not approve calls that are below established Presbytery minimums without the Presbytery's approval. The MPT shall not establish minimum terms of call without the approval of the Presbytery.

Contract Call Forms

All pastors shall have a signed contract/call form. If the Presbytery sets minimum terms of call, the MPT shall evaluate each contract/call form to make sure each pastor meets the minimum. The Presbytery, by its own rule, may determine if and how this information is shared with the whole body. Sample contract forms are available in the *MPT Forms*.

# UNDERSTANDING PASTORS IN VALIDATED MINISTRIES

Pastors in Validated Ministries (*ECO Polity* 2.0401e)

If a pastor in the Presbytery wishes to labor outside the bounds (e.g., a military chaplain, missionary, etc.) of the Presbytery (other than for individual events), he or she shall submit a request to the MPT before doing so.

The MPT shall assess whether or not to “validate the ministry” in which the pastor wishes to serve. If the MPT validates the ministry, the pastor is free to serve in the ministry as an ECO pastor, and the MPT shall interview and review the ministry annually (*ECO Polity* 2.0401e). If the MPT does not validate the ministry, the pastor shall not serve as an ECO pastor in the particular ministry and shall be dismissed from ECO's membership, should they pursue service in that ministry.

Validated Ministries

ECO provides the following for pastors in a Validated Ministry:

“Pastors may be authorized to serve in validated ministries outside a local congregation. Validated ministries might include service in a Presbytery, educational institution, hospital, or a variety of mission fields. The Presbytery shall validate and annually review the pastor’s ministry. Ordinarily, pastors in validated ministry will also be expected to take part in the life and ministry of a local ECO congregation. Pastors in validated ministries have voice and may be granted the right to vote if serving as a part-time assistant pastor” (*ECO Polity* 2.0401e).

An Honorably Retired Pastor engaged in ministry beyond the jurisdiction of a congregation does not require validation of that ministry. However, if an Honorably Retired Pastor is engaged in ministry work that is inconsistent with the *ECO Constitution*, the MPT has the authority to address these concerns with the HRP and submit a request for a formal inquiry under the *ECO Rules of Discipline*.

Criteria of a Validated Ministry

All validated ministries shall meet all of the following criteria:

* Demonstrable conformity with the mission of God’s people in the world as set forth in Scripture, *ECO Essential Tenets*, and the mission and vision of ECO.
* The ministry shall be one that serves others, aids others, and enables others’

ministries.

* The ministry shall give evidence of theologically informed fidelity to God’s Word.
  + ECO encourages pastors in validated ministries to establish accountability standards for conduct and character with the employing agency, if there are none in place.

The ministry shall ordinarily include responsible participation in the deliberations and work of the Presbytery and/or in worship and service of one or more congregations. This means that a Pastor in Validated Ministry should do the following:

* Participate in at least one Presbytery meetings(s) per year.
* Participate in a Pastoral Covenant Group.
* Ordinarily, take part in the life and ministry of a local ECO congregation by regular attendance and participation.
* Submit an annual report to the MPT that details the following:
  + Participation in the life of an ECO congregation and the Presbytery.
  + Any and all changes in the description of the Validated Ministry.
  + How the ministry has fulfilled the requirements of a Validated Ministry.
  + Other items as requested.

Validated Ministry Process

A pastor who wishes to be engaged in a Validated Ministry must request approval from the MPT and provide a statement that includes:

* A complete description of the ministry, including a description of how the ministry meets Validated Ministry criteria, as defined above.
* A narrative articulating the nature of how the pastor feels called to the ministry.
* A narrative that explains his or her intent to participate in a Presbytery and the life of a local congregation.

The MPT may request an interview with the pastor.

The MPT may remove a ministry’s validation if the pastor fails to submit an annual report as requested by MPT. In these cases, the pastor shall begin a probationary period for up to one year; during this time, MPT representatives shall encourage the pastor to seek ministry validation or seek to serve an ECO congregation as a pastor.

After a period of inactivity in ministry the MPT shall recommend the pastor be removed as a member of Presbytery by a vote of the MPT. The Presbytery also reserves the right not to renew the validation of any Pastor in a Validated Ministry, who is laboring within the bounds of the Presbytery.

Validated Ministry / Synod Staff

In some cases, a Presbytery may have in its membership pastors who serve ECO through its Synod. In these cases, the pastors work with and are guided and held accountable by the Synod Executive Council and its committees, much like a pastor with session.

The MPT should receive these pastors as “Transfer Pastors in Good Standing,” as provided in this manual. If a pastor, hired by ECO’s Synod, is transferring from another denomination, the MPT shall follow its process for evaluating pastoral transfers.

MPT chairs shall assign liaisons or personally keep in contact with Synod Pastoral Staff in their Presbytery for regular connection, support, and accountability if/when needed.

# PASTORS NOT CURRENTLY SERVING

ECO does not have an “At Large” category for pastors without a call. Therefore, pastors who have left their congregation or Validated Ministry may request to remain active on the ECO roll for up to 12 months. They will be classified as a pastor in Validated Ministry in the life of the Presbytery during that time. As with others in active Validated Ministry, they will be expected to responsibly participate in the deliberations and work of the Presbytery and/or in worship and service of one or more ECO congregations.

This time provides the pastor with the space to discern the next call, while still being able to serve in the Presbytery. The pastor will not have a vote at Presbytery meetings but may have voice and serve on ministry teams.

Following the 12 months (or less, if the MPT deems this necessary), the MPT will assess the relationship of the pastor with the Presbytery. Ordinarily, a pastor who has not received a call and is not working in Validated Ministry is dismissed from ECO’s active rolls. After assessment, and if dismissal is the decision, the MPT will take this action on behalf of the Presbytery, inform the former ECO pastor, and asks the Stated Clerk to fill out the change form for the ECO Office.

The MPT may also offer an extension of the Validated Ministry status to ECO pastors who are unable to serve due to longer-term but temporary life issues. These may include raising young children or a personal or family illness or disability.

Once dismissed from the active ECO Roll, a pastor shall reapply to ECO if they are called back into vocational ministry. The MPT of the calling Presbytery will assess what may be required of the pastor to validate their previous ordination. The former pastor shall have a new background check, possibly a new psychological profile, and that MPT will consider the need for the former pastor to take any or all of ECO’s ordination exams. The MPT may also determine that the PMOT of the Presbytery should meet with the former pastor to do part or all of this assessment.

# MODERATORS OF CHURCHES WITHOUT A PASTOR

Moderators shall be appointed by the MPT for churches without a pastor. Presbytery- appointed Moderators of vacant churches (without Transitional Pastors) ordinarily shall be compensated by the church or Presbytery, unless they are part of the congregation.

An assigned Moderator should be paid an honorarium (except for the above reason or if they choose to waive this), plus the standard IRS mileage per monthly stated meeting. Along with this, compensation for any additional meetings shall be negotiated between the Moderator, MPT, and the session.

# BECOMING A CHURCH PLANT OR CHARTERED CONGREGATION

Church Plants

Church Planting in ECO is guided by the latest edition of the *ECO Church Planting* Manual. When a church plant is ready to become an ECO congregation, the MPT will follow the same interview process as with a church transferring into ECO, with some exceptions:

* The MPT will ask questions about the congregation’s leadership development and ministry finances.
* If the Presbytery has an active Church Planting Team, that team shall deal with

any previously raised questions before their interview with the MPT.

Charters

* When a church is approved to charter, arrangements should be made for the Presbytery to conduct a service with the new congregation to celebrate God birthing a new church through the willing hearts of God’s children.
* During the worship service, an offering should be incorporated, with the funds

being dedicated for the birth of new congregations in the Presbytery and/or ECO.

# ECO PASTORS: SUCCESSION PLANNING

While at times ECO pastors may sense their call ending in one congregation and beginning at a new one, many pastors will leave their calls when they retire. In ECO we now have a tool to help a congregation prepare for a pastor’s retirement. In large and complex congregational ECO systems, this process could take place five years before the pastor retires. In small congregational ECO systems, succession planning may be started 18-24 months in advance of the pastor’s retirement.

ECO’s Succession Planning Tool considers the whole church, all of its ministries and systems, and helps a congregation and its session learn how to support and nurture their pastor well as the time of retirement comes near. Congregations who use this tool will plan on what type of transition period they will have, when the pastoral search will begin, and what systems and structures will need to be updated, modified, and enhanced in preparation for the new season into which the congregation will be entering.

The MPT is encouraged to make this tool known in the Presbytery and to share specifically about this tool with pastors who are within five years of retirement.

# DISSOLUTION OF PASTORAL RELATIONSHIP

Ordinarily (and ideally) a pastoral relationship between a pastor and congregation will be dissolved amicably and with celebration (as well as a measure of grief), as the pastor moves into a new call or retirement. On occasion, however, the relationship is dissolved under less than ideal circumstances. When this happens, the Presbytery has established a policy that will ensure some degree of care for both pastor and congregation.

Principles

* Pastoral calls are established and dissolved by the Presbytery (*ECO Polity*

3.0103g).

* Every call in ECO is an agreement between the Presbytery, the pastor, and the congregation or session.
  + All three parties are involved in every decision regarding the establishment of and dissolution of a pastoral relationship.
  + All official matters regarding separation/termination of a pastor shall be documented in writing and shared with all three parties.
* The MPT shall be involved in the entire process of dissolving a pastoral relationship.
* When the congregation or session and the pastor agree upon terms of dissolution, the MPT is empowered to act with the power of the Presbytery and reports all such actions to the Presbytery.
* If the congregation or session and pastor cannot reach an agreement, the process for establishing terms of dissolution is the Presbytery through its MPT, as specified in *ECO Polity* 3.0103g and 3.0103j.
* All conditions for separation shall be compatible with *ECO Polity*.
* The congregation and the Presbytery shall approve the dissolution of the call of a Pastor/Head of Staff or Associate Pastor and any severance terms.
* The session shall approve the dissolution of the call of an Assistant Pastor and

any severance terms. The session shall inform the MPT of their action.

Voluntary Dissolution

Voluntary dissolution occurs when the pastor announces to the session, and then to the congregation, that he/she will request that the Presbytery dissolve the relationship between them on a specific date. Ordinarily, such a request would come because the pastor has received another call or intends to retire.

When pastoral relationships are dissolved voluntarily, the fellowship policies will be observed:

* The church will pay the effective salary and benefits through the date the dissolution becomes effective.
* The church will provide compensation for any unused vacation leave earned

through the date of dissolution.

* The church will reimburse all professional expenses incurred prior to the dissolution of the pastoral relationship, in accordance with the pastor’s most recently approved terms of call.
* All financial compensation and reimbursements due to the pastor will be paid in

full by the date of the dissolution of the relationship.

* Any termination package that exceeds compensation earned through the date the dissolution becomes effective must be approved by the MPT and by a vote of the congregation or session depending on the bylaws of the congregation.
* In determining severance compensation, the church shall be guided by ECO’s

“Dissolution of Pastoral Relationships Policy”.

* The pastor's property will be removed from the church office and other church property (except for the manse) within 15 days of the dissolution date. The session must submit any request for an extension of this time to the MPT.
* The departing pastor may use the manse for 30 days after the dissolution of the relationship.

Involuntary Dissolution

When the session feels that the peace and harmony of the church are at risk, and the relationship with a pastor needs to be dissolved—either by the congregation or by the session—the session shall first consult with the MPT.

The MPT shall counsel the pastor involved.

While the session calls the meeting and makes a recommendation, the right to vote on this matter belongs to the congregation for a Pastor/Head of Staff and Associate Pastor. The session shall vote to terminate all other pastoral categories. The final authority on the matter, however, belongs to the Presbytery. Its decision is definitive.

If a church is in conflict, and the MPT decides after a full investigation that dissolution would be in the best interest of either the congregation or the pastor (or both), the MPT shall initiate the above process.

In rare cases, the MPT may recommend to the Presbytery (or its Council depending on its structure) that the relationship be dissolved even if neither the congregation nor the pastor requests it.

The MPT may authorize the session to call a special session meeting or a congregational meeting to request that the Presbytery dissolve the pastoral relationship.

At the meeting, the session will present the reasons for requesting the dissolution, the proposed dissolution date, and the compensation terms required by the dissolution. Any portion of the meeting that concerns the dissolution shall be conducted by a Moderator appointed by the MPT.

Mutual Decision for Dissolution

If in the case of conflict within a church, the session and the pastor and the congregation mutually agree and request that the Presbytery dissolve the pastoral relationship, they shall first consult with the MPT.

Following such consultation, the MPT may authorize the session to call a congregational meeting and request that the Presbytery dissolve the pastoral relationship at a mutually agreed termination date. The call to the meeting also shall include the date and compensation terms of the dissolution. A Moderator appointed by the MPT shall conduct the portion of the session meeting concerning the dissolution.

Preparation for Departure

When a pastor determines that he/she will be leaving a call, the pastor, session, and MPT shall engage in the following process:

Pastor

Step 1. Ponders and plans – A pastor who plans a move that will dissolve his/her call (e.g., circulating a pastor information form or profile, planning retirement, preparing to resign, or transitioning into a co-pastor model) should inform the MPT to share personal reflection and discuss the appropriate timeframe for sharing information.

Step 2. Involve the MPT – Pastors within one year of retirement are encouraged to involve representatives of the MPT in their planning and consider using ECO’s tool for Succession Planning.

Step 3. Invite MPT to meet – Pastors should invite the MPT representative(s) to the session meeting at which the resignation will be announced.

Step 4. Celebrate the ministry with the congregation.

Step 5. Decline to be involved in choosing a Transitional Pastor or forming a PNC.

Step 6. Adhere to the “Statement of Ethics for Departing Pastors”.

Step 7. Verify – If the pastor accepts a call in another Presbytery, verify that the

calling Presbytery requests a transfer of membership from his or her current Presbytery.

Step 8. Participate in an exit interview with the MPT.

Session

Step 1. Consult with the church’s MPT liaison regularly.

Step 2. Make plans to celebrate the ministry of the departing pastor.

Step 3. Call a congregational meeting to concur with the pastor's request to dissolve the pastoral relationship and invite the MPT liaison to attend this meeting.

Step 4. Consult with the MPT, the Moderator, and/or Stated Clerk about candidates for transitional pastoral staff. ECO has created a tool for congregations to look for Certified Transitional Pastors. Go to [www.ecotransitionalpastors.org](http://www.ecotransitionalpastors.org/) for more information and support from the Synod of ECO.

Step 5. Understand MPT’s role – MPT shall approve Transitional Pastors/Moderators.

Step 6. Support the congregation and the Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC) with prayer.

Step 7. Provide adequate funding for transitional leadership and the PNC search process.

Step 8. Communicate regularly with the congregation about the search process and how the life of the church is being sustained.

Step 9. Approve a Church Profile; once it’s complete, submit it to the MPT for its approval.

Step 10. Abide by the “Statement of Ethics for Departing Pastors”.

MPT Representatives

Step 1. Ordinarily attend or video conference into the session meeting during which the resignation will be announced, in order to do the following:

* + Assure the session of MPT availability.
  + Provide the congregation with ECO’s Pastoral Search Assistance tool, which can help a congregation through the whole search process.
  + Convey the importance of an orderly transition and the need for a congregational meeting to dissolve the call between the church and the pastor.
  + Encourage feedback from the elders.
  + Provide the session with the “Statement of Ethics for Departing Pastors”.
  + Give preliminary information about transitional pastoral staffing, the need for a transitional pastoral staffing, the need for a transitional search committee (if appropriate), and options if transitional staff is not in place when the pastor leaves.
    - The ECO Synod office has a number of resources that may be

helpful before, during, and after a pastoral transition, including preparing for a retirement up to five years in advance.

* + Explain the pastoral search process, including the importance of an assessment to determine the church’s readiness to undertake a search, forming a PNC, and creating a transition/search budget.
  + Discuss options for completing the Church Profile.

Step 2. Attend the congregational meeting at which the pastoral relationship is dissolved.

Step 3. Explain the importance of having the Moderator or Stated Clerk explain/launch the church into the transitional season and possibly preach the first Sunday after the pastor’s departure.

Step 4. Be in close touch with appropriate session members and provide concrete help in obtaining transitional pastoral staffing.

Step 5. If desired, attend the PNC’s first meeting, as well as significant meetings thereafter—such as review of the first round of pastoral candidates and development of interview questions.

Step 6. Review and discuss the Church Profile as it develops, to assure its approval by MPT.

Step 7. Stay in close contact with the PNC, offering information and training throughout the process as necessary.

Step 8. Interview all candidates chosen for face-to-face interviews. If a candidate is coming from outside ECO, assess the candidate’s viability for ECO membership.

Step 9. Ensure that all parties have appropriate documents when needed, such as terms of call, statements of faith, and autobiographical information.

Step 10. Schedule an exit interview with the departing pastor.

Termination Compensation

In some cases, it is appropriate to seek agreement on a time within which the departing pastor is expected to find a new call or other employment. If the pastor has a new call or employment before the agreed date, the relationship is dissolved and no additional severance compensation (beyond accrued vacation) is due. If the date arrives and the pastor has no new call or employment, it may be appropriate to reduce the amounts shown in the guidelines below in part, because churches are exempt from state unemployment programs.

However, if it is deemed wise to end the relationship sooner, severance compensation is in order.

The adequacy and appropriateness of a termination agreement with a departing pastor will be determined by the session and/or approved by the congregation (determined by the church's bylaws), subject to MPT approval. The terms may vary, depending on such factors as length of service, reasons for the dissolution, availability of funds, and the likelihood of other employment.

Termination compensation is intended to forestall hardship while the departing pastor actively seeks another position. At the same time, it should not impose an undue hardship on the church. The needs of both church and pastor must be weighed in each case.

Nothing in this section, however, should be construed as providing an entitlement to the pastor, nor should the record of comparable situations in the Presbytery be regarded as precedent-setting. Each situation is to be considered on its own.

Issues to be considered in determining appropriate termination compensation might include these items:

* How long might it take the departing pastor to secure another call?
* Are issues of cause involved?
* Are there relocation concerns to consider?
* Do health concerns limit the departing pastor’s ability to attain timely employment?
* Can the church pay severance and also provide for new pastoral leadership?
* Other pertinent issues may also be considered; this is not an exhaustive list.

The Presbytery, as a party to the original call, shares responsibility for seeing that the termination is both equitable and compassionate. The guidelines listed in Table 1 are suggested minimums, not fixed obligations or limits. They do not include accrued vacation, which should be added to any termination compensation.

Table 1: Suggested Termination Compensation

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Length of service | Suggested compensation |
| Up to 2 years | 2 months’ total compensation |
| 3 years | 1 month’s compensation per year of service or part thereof, with a suggested maximum of 10 months. |
| Any length of service | Unused study leave: No paid leave or cash compensation  Unused vacation: compensation is required for any accrued but unused vacation |

Other Arrangements

Working from these guidelines, a church and a pastor might also agree on other arrangements. For example:

* A longer period of compensation at a lower rate.
* A lump-sum payment.
* Extended use of the manse in lieu of cash.
* Extension of the compensation period, if needed.
* Immediate termination of all compensation (except accrued vacation), if the pastor begins a new ministry and/or comparable employment elsewhere.

Termination Agreement

All termination agreements must be approved by the congregation and the Presbytery, through the MPT. The agreement should include the church's financial obligations to the departing pastor.

Compensation may be continued for a specific period or until the pastor finds employment, whichever comes first. Further guidance is below:

* Do not include an open-ended provision for compensation (“until [the pastor] receives a call”).
* For pastors who are retiring, the church should conclude its financial responsibilities by the dissolution date agreed upon by the congregation.

If the pastor is living in church-owned housing, the agreement should specify when the manse is to be vacated and what costs are to be paid by the church and the pastor.

* Before signing the agreement, the church should arrange for a team or committee designated by the session to inspect the manse, with the pastor present. Common law for landlord-tenant provision should be considered in determining responsibility for any damage found.
* In case of the pastor's death, surviving family members who reside in the manse

will be given 90 days’ use of the manse. For cases that require a longer transitional time, the session must submit an arrangement for approval by the MPT.

* If a dispute arises, the MPT will arrange for help with mediation.

The agreement should designate the specific date of dissolution and the date when the pastor's responsibility to the congregation will end. These dates often will be the same, unless there is an accrued vacation involved.

* The agreement should state whether the pastor is or is not entitled to accrued vacation and should spell out how such vacation, if any, is to be compensated.
* Accrued study leave is not payable to the pastor as severance.

If the pastor has possession of any church-owned equipment or if the pastor's property is in the church, these items should be returned prior to the effective date of the agreement, or the agreement should specify what is to be done with them.

If the pastor claims any outstanding reimbursements from the church (such as unpaid bills charged to the church), they should be settled or addressed in the agreement.

For the purposes of healthcare, healthcare coverage ends at the end of the month in which the call is dissolved. A church may approach the payout or leave or sabbatical in a lump sum payment. And, even if the church chooses to pay the vacation and sabbatical from payroll until completed, health insurance coverage ends at the end of the month the call is dissolved. These rules related to healthcare are industry standards and are also supported by continuation of care rules and/or transfer into Medicare.

Completing the Dissolution

When a pastor vacates a position with a church or other approved Ministry, the MPT shall do the following:

* Schedule an exit interview with the pastor.
  + Interview should offer appropriate elements of instruction, guidance, celebration, and pastoral care.
* Schedule a transitional meeting with the session.
  + This meeting should be held at a stated or called meeting of the session.
  + MPT representatives shall attend as well as the Moderator or Stated Clerk.
  + This meeting should offer appropriate elements of celebration and pastoral care, as the church faces the conclusion of a pastor’s ministry.
  + This meeting will cover the following, as appropriate for that situation:
    - Options for pastoral leadership
    - The process of electing a PNC
    - The process of searching for and calling a pastor

Statement of Ethics for Departing Pastors

When a pastor vacates a ministry in a church, it is important that he/she abide by these standards. A session may choose to read and/or publish as statement to help covenant partners understand the expectations of the outgoing pastor. Here is a suggested statement:

*When a pastor leaves a call, there are bonds of affection between the pastor and covenant partners of the congregation that continue to be cherished. Relations of friendship continue, but the pastoral relationship does not. In order for the work of the congregation to prosper, when any pastor resigns from a pastorate, retires from services, or becomes a pastor emeritus, that pastor should cease to perform pastoral functions at funerals, baptisms, and weddings—unless invited to officiate in such a capacity by the new pastor or by the Moderator of the session. Ordinarily, the pastor will not participate in the life and worship of the church he or she is leaving for at least one year. Therefore, the pastor is encouraged to find another worshipping community for spiritual nourishment during this period of time. Individual members are asked not to place former pastors in the awkward position of asking their “friend” to perform the duties of a pastor. Instead, congregants are to work through the Moderator of session, transitional pastor, or new pastor. During this season of transition, the space offered gives both the congregation and the pastor time to work through the grief that always exists in a pastoral transition.*

# TRANSITIONAL PASTORS

When a pastoral position becomes vacant, the session of that church may seek the services of a pastor during this transitional time to fill pastoral responsibilities while a search for a new pastor is being conducted. Exemption from this process shall require the approval of the MPT. In ECO, the Synod resources churches who are seeking the services of a Certified Transitional Pastor (CTP). A congregation may directly begin its search through this resource at [www.ecotransitionalpastors.org.](http://www.ecotransitionalpastors.org/)

Once the pastoral relationship has been terminated, or a date of certain departure has been set, the session may consult with the MPT regarding the process required to seek a Transitional Pastor.

It is the session’s responsibility, with the approval of the MPT, to contract with the Transitional Pastor. The MPT will ensure a minimum level of training. The departing pastor shall not be a part of this process. The Transitional Pastor shall not begin his or her service, until the current pastor has left the congregation.

There shall be a written contract for the services of Transitional Pastor that will clearly define the Transitional Pastor’s responsibilities, make clear the compensation for the terms of the agreement, set the time limits of the contract (1 year or less but renewable, if needed), and define the termination details.

An Associate Pastor or Assistant Pastor may serve in the role of Transitional Pastor should the session call them, but they ordinarily should not be considered or allowed to apply for the Pastor/Head of Staff position. If the Associate Pastor or Assistant Pastor is asked to serve as the Transitional Pastor, the MPT will meet with the session and the Associate Pastor or Assistant Pastor to address interest in the Pastor/Head of Staff position. If the Associate Pastor or Assistant Pastor is interested in the position, the MPT ordinarily will not approve this person to serve as the Transitional Pastor.

# CALLING A NEW PASTOR

The calling of a new pastor is an exciting, yet challenging time in the life of a church. The MPT shall provide assistance to the congregation throughout the search process. The ECO Synod has created a Pastoral Search Assistance tool that every congregation in ECO shall be made aware of that can help the session and any subsequent search committee best locate their next pastor. A separate guide for pastoral search is provided in the *MPT Forms* and should be used by the MPT and the congregation.

# FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE OR DISABILITY

Family and Medical Leave

In some states, it may be necessary for the Presbytery to establish a Family and Medical Leave Policy. Presbyteries may consider “best practice” to be for each member church to establish a family and medical leave policy or to have a common policy for the whole Presbytery. In the *MPT Forms* there is an example of what the Presbytery Family and Medical Leave Policy may look like.

Disability

In the event a pastor becomes disabled and is unable to perform the terms of call, the church shall contact ECO’s insurance provider to initiate short-term and long-term disability coverage. If pastors are not covered due to their status, the congregation shall work with the MPT and the pastor to care for the pastor and the pastor’s family and to evaluate the pastor’s ability to continue serving the church. The congregation and MPT also shall work with a pastor to address personal needs, including their use of a manse at the time of becoming disabled. The MPT will encourage congregations to be as generous as possible, while also helping the congregation to address its short- and long-term needs.

# SABBATICAL

Presbyteries may consider a sabbatical policy a “best practice” that each member church can consider for inclusion in a pastor’s terms of call. A Presbytery also may create a Sabbatical Policy for the whole Presbytery. There is an example of what a Sabbatical Policy may look like in the *MPT Forms*.