

HERE I AM: HOLDING NEW PASTORS IN OUR HEARTS

An Overview

A Presbytery of Great Rivers Program for New Pastors

*Adapted from a document prepared for the General Assembly Council and its
entities for use by the Presbytery of Great Rivers, Spring, 2009*



Presbytery of Great Rivers
1230 W Candletree Dr, Suite D
Peoria, IL 61614
800-537-8592 / www.greatriverspby.org



CASE STATEMENT

Small, under-served churches need adept pastors. Data shows that congregations around 100 members are struggling to find pastors to serve in these settings, often due to financial and/or geographical restrictions. Though there are many recent seminary graduates seeking a first-ordained call, often these candidates are hesitant to pursue positions in small, under-served congregations due to a perceived lack of resources and/or potential for a fulfilling first call experience.

This program seeks to pair struggling congregations with recent seminary graduates in a two-year designated pastor relationship. Through the ongoing nurture and support of congregations understanding themselves to be “teaching churches” for new pastors, mentoring relationships with seasoned pastors, and a disciplined program of practice-oriented spiritual and professional development, pastors will be able to build upon their seminary education and cultivate pastoral skills for a life in ministry. By serving as “teaching churches”, small congregations will provide a service to both individuals and the greater church, while simultaneously benefiting from the pastors’ leadership.

The following design delineates the concepts forming the foundation for this program and the components key to the fulfillment of the program’s goals.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

- I. **Needs** - The proposed Program of Post-Master of Divinity Pastoral Residencies is a response to the following perceived needs within the Presbyterian Church (USA)
 - A. Small rural and urban congregations seeking pastoral leadership and experiencing difficulty in attracting applicants.

III. Funding the Program

A. Congregation will provide the following:

- Salary
- Housing
- Pension and Major Medical
- Expense reimbursements (auto, meals, supplies, etc.)
- Continuing Education allowance
- Plus: 4 weeks paid vacation
- 2 weeks study leave and 1-2 weeks Supplemental Education

B. Board of Pensions will provide

- Seminary Debt Reduction Assistance from Board of Pensions

C. Presbytery will provide

- Expense reimbursement: Supervisors; Peer Group Facilitators; Orientation for congregations; Mid-Point Retreat; Closing Retreat (estimated cost \$5,000 per year.
- \$5000 per year per pastor reduction in educational debt. This is a grant/loan to be repaid if the pastor does not stay in pastoral ministry for five years after completing this program.
- An extra \$1000 per year per pastor for continuing education expenses.



- Ensure placement of a cadre of pastors in this program.
- Collaborate with other presbyter/clusters as part of “community of practice” in orientation, mid-point retreat and closing retreat.

D. Program Advisory Group

Oversight, resourcing and assurance of accountability will be assigned to a Program Advisory Group, accountable to the Committee on Ministry and composed of:

- Two members of Committee on Ministry.
- Two pastors in the first five years of pastoral experience.
- Two experienced small church pastors.
- Presbytery staff.

This group will be charged with responsibilities for:

- overseeing promotion of the program in seminaries and congregations.
- referring interested students to participating congregations.
- reviewing applications and selecting congregations and participants based upon the criteria listed in preceding sections.
- planning and securing leadership for the initial orientations, mid-point retreats, and closing retreats.
- monitoring and refining the program.

B. Candidates for ordination to the Ministry of the Word and Sacrament needing opportunities for exposure to and development of leadership skills attentive to the context and culture of congregations—especially small congregations.

C. Presbyteries seeking more effective ways to secure, support, and sustain pastoral leadership for underserved congregations.

D. Seminaries seeking to provide pastoral candidates for small congregations.

II. Assets - In responding to the needs outlined above, the proposed program seeks to make use of the following assets and resources:

A. Small rural and urban congregations with experience and wisdom enabling them to be enriching “teaching churches”.

B. Candidates for ordination to the Ministry of the Word and Sacrament who have completed the MDiv degree and who exhibit passion for proclaiming the Gospel, energy for ministry, and openness to life-long learning.

C. Presbyteries able to provide guidance in and resources for pastoral leadership development, and to encourage and enable collaboration/partnership among congregations.

D. Seminaries with experience and resources for supervised ministry, theological reflection, spiritual formation of pastors.

III. The Proposal

A. A program which:

1. Provides leadership for small congregations in underserved rural and urban contexts.
2. Engages post-Master of Divinity degree students in 2-year designated pastorates and supplemental experiences of supervised practice-centered pastoral formation for effective and sustained ministry in small congregations.

B. Incentives for Participation

1. For the congregation, an opportunity for:

- Securing contextually and culturally-attentive pastoral leadership.
- Transforming congregational self-perception from ‘needy and under-served’ to experience- and wisdom-sharing “teaching church”.
- Via “community of practice” participation, being in a system of support (strategic as well as financial) and partnership in the teaching and learning of ministry.

2. For the designated pastor, an opportunity for:

- Ministry context and culture-oriented development of pastoral wisdom and skills.
- Via “community of practice” participation, establishment of relationships of “holy friendship” with mentors and peers in ministry.

- opportunities for supplemental training and networking through regional or national denominational and ecumenical events and gatherings.

B. Congregational Commitments and Activities

- Preparing members of congregation for “teaching church” roles and activities.
- Developing program of activities for nurturing pastoral resident and providing feedback.
- Collaborating with presbytery and other residency congregations as part of “community of practice” in orientation, mid-point retreat and closing retreat.
- Providing extra time for Continuing Education.

C. Presbytery/Presbytery Cluster Commitments and Activities

Given the “communities of practice” orientation of this program, presbyteries or synods sponsoring designated pastor programs will need to:

- (depending upon the ordination exams status of the pastoral residents), Work with resident’s seminary, CPM of care, and COM of residency.
- Engage in preparation and selection of sites for commitment to “teaching church” and “community of practice” participation, local mission service and learning experience.
- Engage in intentional process of recruitment, selection, training, and support of supervisors, and peer group facilitators.

- willing to contribute to practice-centered residency programs their resources for supervision in ministry, mentoring, theological reflection upon the practice of ministry, spiritual formation, congregational leadership, anti-racism training, cross-cultural ministry, and feedback on practice from laity. This contribution will be carried out both on the seminary campus and through technology at a distance.

II. Elements of the program

A. Core Experiences and Activities

Based upon learnings from existing residency programs, Entrance into Ministry/First Call Pastors Support programs, Transition into Ministry projects, the Small Church Pastors Summer Collegium, and the Report of the “Hard to Call” Project Team, all projects within the Pastoral Residency Program will involve participants in the following activities and experiences:

- the practice of ministry in a small congregation under the supervision/guidance of a pastor or retired pastor approved by the presbytery in consultation with the congregation.
- regular times of nurture (at least monthly) and feedback from parishioners (at least quarterly).
- regular gatherings (at least quarterly) with peers (other pastoral residents in the presbytery/region) for fellowship, reflection, and prayer facilitated by an experienced pastor approved by the presbytery.
- an opening orientation and annual retreat with all residents sponsored by appropriate General Assembly offices.
- (for those who have not completed ordination examinations) time and assistance with preparation for exams.

- (for those who have completed ordination examinations) Placement in a validated ministry (for possible ordination).
- (for those who have not completed their ordination examinations) Placement in a practice of ministry setting while completing exams.
- (for those who qualify) Assistance with seminary debt reduction.
- additional time and money for continuing education.
- 3. For the presbytery, an opportunity for:
 - Reorienting care and oversight efforts from solving difficult placement problems to nurturing missional pastors and missional congregations.
 - Reconceiving relationships with congregations and pastors to include the “community of practice” dimension.

COMPONENTS OF THE PROGRAM DESIGN

The following sections set forth expectations for the Presbytery, Congregations, and Designated Pastors in this program. These will serve as criteria to be used by the Program Advisory Group charged with selecting participants.

I. Program Partners: Eligibility and Expectations of Participants.

A. Small Congregations:

- in rural or urban settings.

- at least 35 regularly in worship; membership less than around 150.
- not seeking least costly (“cheap labor”) form of pastoral leadership.
- engaged in presbytery-approved pastoral search.
- committed to being/learning to be “teaching congregations” for designated pastors.
- committed to participating in a “community of practice” focused on the mission and ministry of the local church in partnership relationships with other congregations, their presbytery, and selected General Assembly offices. This community of practice will include three meetings for elders and pastors each year.
- each congregation will be required to have a Spiritual Life group which will reflect regularly with the pastor about the experience.

B. Designated Pastor applicants who:

- are under care of a presbytery within the PC(USA) and who have completed a Master of Divinity degree program.
- have completed ordination examinations or are in the process of completing them.
- have received approval from their CPM to engage in this work.
- express interest in small church ministry and seek further preparation, or desire to discern fitness for small church ministry.

- committed to supplementing their seminary learnings by developing contextually-attentive leadership skills in relationship with a “community of practice” in the form of mentors, peers, lay leaders, and denominational resource persons.

C. Presbyteries/Clusters of Presbyteries which are:

- committed to conceiving themselves as and participating in “communities of practice” in their care and oversight roles.
- committed to offering a critical mass of residency sites or collaborating with neighboring presbyteries to offer a cluster of congregations.
- committed to working collaboratively and practicing polity creatively to stimulate, support, and sustain small congregations and their pastors.
- committed to providing a Program Advisory Group to assist in development of the Residency Program, offer advice in selection of residency congregations, resourcing pilot projects/groups, monitoring progress toward program goals and outcomes, and recommending refinements and revisions as needed.

D. Seminaries which are:

- open to expanding the ways they serve as “communities of practice” beyond degree-related and continuing education teaching.