

Presbytery of Detroit
Committee on Ministry

June 16, 2020

Report on "Recommendations to the Presbytery of Detroit"
from the Administrative Commission for First Presbyterian Church, Ann Arbor, MI.

At the January 28, 2020 meeting of the Presbytery of Detroit (POD), Presbytery referred the "Recommendations to the Presbytery of Detroit" from the "Report of the Administrative Commission at the First Presbyterian Church of Ann Arbor, MI" to POD's Committee on Ministry. As directed, the Committee on Ministry (COM) reports the status of these recommendations to the Presbytery of Detroit at its June 16, 2020 meeting.

Recommendations from the Administrative Commission for the First Presbyterian Church of Ann Arbor were not numbered. For the purposes of this report, the Administrative Commission recommendations have been copied and pasted into this report and numbered 1 to 5. The number following each Recommendation is the line number in "Recommendations to the Presbytery of Detroit" report.

Recommendation 1: Presbytery to Presbytery Reference Checks (703)

Recommendation: *We recommend that information gained in all Presbytery to Presbytery reference checks on potential pastoral candidates, including reference checks between Executive Presbyters as well as between members of Committees on Ministry in particular Presbyteries, be fully available to Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC) members as they conduct their work. As we learned about the process used for these reference checks in First Presbyterian, Ann Arbor, we became aware that information shared "confidentially" about a pastoral candidate during one of these reference checks was not made available to the PNC. We recommend that all Presbytery to Presbytery reference checks be conducted with the prior understanding and agreement between the parties involved in the reference check that any information shared in those reference checks will be available to the PNC for their review.*

The Committee on Ministry agrees with this recommendation and will proceed to implement it in consultation with the Stated Clerk, General Assembly, and perhaps others. We have several questions and concerns:

1. Do Executives and others incur liability when they speak candidly about potential candidates? The common practice in the business community seems to be to not provide specific comments for people seeking employment.

2. Executives and others must be trained to begin all such conversations seeking references are not confidential.
3. We must ensure that Pastor Search Committee's and others will follow the guidelines in the document provided by PCUSA entitled *On Calling a Pastor* will NOT contact members or staff colleagues at a candidate's current call?
4. Are candidates entitled to be informed who has been contacted for a reference and what was said?

Recommendation 2: The Important of Secondary References (756)

Recommendation: *that the Committee on Ministry of Detroit Presbytery and all liaisons from COM working with PNCs at particular congregations be strongly encouraged to direct all PNCs to seek out and pursue secondary personal references as well as primary personal references provided by the candidate. This would be most important for all pastoral candidates under serious consideration by a PNC. We believe this practice will increase PNCs' awareness of both the strength and growth areas of any potential pastoral candidates and equip them more thoroughly in their final decision-making process. This should always be done with respect to the candidate's concern for confidentiality in the search process, but also with the understanding that securing such references will serve the congregation best in the long run, minimizing chances for future issues to arise after the pastoral call has been completed.*

The Committee on Ministry is in favor of Recommendation 2 and will seek to implement it with the following considerations:

1. We believe candidates should be invited to sign a release form granting specific permission to contact secondary references. This release form will also state that Nominating Committees will follow guidelines articulated in *On Calling a Pastor* that affirm Pastor Nominating Committees may not contact members or staff at a candidate's current position without his or her permission. The Pastoral Search Subcommittee will develop the necessary form.
2. The Committee on Ministry's Pastoral Search Subcommittee will also provide complete training and specific procedures as to how to conduct secondary reference checks, including who to contact, what to ask, and what not to ask.

Recommendation 3: Encourage Early Presbytery Intervention (807)

Recommendation: *The Presbytery should regularly and consistently remind churches and sessions of the necessity to seek assistance from the Presbytery when faced with difficulties.*

We support Recommendation 3 and will develop ways to communicate that COM is ready and willing to act as pastor, counselor, advisor, consultant, mediator and arbitrator for congregations within the bounds of the Presbytery of Detroit as outlined in the Book of Order, G-30301b and G-3.0307. COM's role within the Presbytery will be further explained in an upcoming report entitled, "What COM Can Do."

Recommendation 4: Require and Facilitate Elder Training (817)

Recommendation: *Presbytery should help facilitate and require stronger elder training programs both at the congregation and presbytery levels.*

We support Recommendation 4 and refer it to those planning the annual Leadership Summit

Recommendation 5: Build Intentional Bridges to Congregations (850)

Recommendation: *The Presbytery must commit itself to building stronger bridges between the Presbytery and individual congregations.*

We are much in support Recommendation 5 and will develop strategies to implement it.