

## Pastoral Transition Q&A Document

Because of the long tenure of our current pastor (29 years this fall), AVPC doesn't have much experience with pastoral transitions. But with Brad's decision to retire in the fall of 2024, we will be facing our first pastoral transition in over 30 years. The Session recognizes the importance of communicating with the congregation about this process, and we want to begin that with some Questions and Answers we feel are relevant.

**Latest Changes will always be marked in red (Earlier answers may be super ceded by later updates)**  
**Updated from May 2023 Session Meeting**

**Question 1:** When Brad's retirement was announced, it was stated that the Session had appointed a Transition Subcommittee of the Session to lead in this transition process. What is the purpose of such a committee? Will this committee have a role in selecting a new pastor?

**Answer:** This committee will not have a role in selecting the new pastor, because our Book of Church Order (BCO) makes it clear that such a role is reserved for the congregation (see next question). Rather, the role of this committee is to lead the Session in preparing the church for a successful transition. The sad reality is that many transitions following a long-tenured pastor fail not because of any shortcoming in the successor pastor, but because the church was not well-prepared to set that pastor up to succeed. The job of the Session is to govern this church in such a way that the church is ready for the flourishing of the pastor God has already appointed for AVPC. For example, if we just presumed that the new pastor would be ready to assume Brad's current job description, we would be placing on him an undue burden. Even if his gifts are largely identical to Brad's, it will take time for him to get to know the church and learn its people and procedures. During such a steep learning curve, it would be unrealistic to expect him to just seamlessly plug in to Brad's current role. So job descriptions may have to be shifted somewhat among current staff, and this is an issue only the Session can address.

**Question 2:** What, then, is the role of the pulpit committee?

**Answer:** According to our Book of Church Order, which has constitutional authority for us, it is the right of every congregation (and not the Session) to elect its own pastors, subject to the approval by presbytery of his credentials. The BCO lays out the process for that in the election of a pulpit committee. It is the congregation that elects its own pulpit committee, and not the Session who does so. The Session can make recommendations regarding the individuals to be members of this committee, but the congregation can choose whether or not to accept those recommendations. And then it is by congregational vote alone that a pastor is elected, as the congregation votes on the candidate recommended by the search committee. To summarize, then, the Session is to prepare the church for a successful transition, while the pulpit committee is to find the candidate called of God and best suited to serve the church so prepared by the governance of the Session.

**Question 3:** When will the Session call for a congregational meeting to elect our Pulpit Committee?

**Answer:** At the February Session meeting, the following changes to the timeline were approved:

October 2023 -	Session asks congregation for committee nominations
November 2023 –	Session provides draft ballot for committee selection
December 2023 –	Congregational Meeting to elect committee
January 2024 –	Committee training and formation
March 2024 –	Committee fully engaged in search

**Question 4:** What can we as a congregation do now to help this process?

**Answer:** We would ask two things of you. First, and most importantly, be praying. No matter how well we manage this process, it is God's hand of blessing that will supply AVPC with the pastor we need. To help encourage us in this area of prayer, keep an eye out for some prayer meetings and prayer updates that we plan to have in the future. Second, if you have questions or concerns about anything the Session is doing in leading this, please share that with us, so we can provide the answers/explanations for the benefit of the entire congregation. Pastoral transitions can be a vulnerable time for a church. With God's help, though, they can also be great times of building our trust in God.

**Question 5:** What are we going to change about the ministry of AVPC during these next 2 years prior to Brad's retirement?

**Answer:** The Session has determined that we do not want or need to make any changes to our vision and mission as it is currently defined. Almost all of the ministry of AVPC is led by ministry teams that plan and execute the ministry of each ministry area, and each of those ministry teams have a pastor and elder as part of their leadership. These ministry teams operate under the oversight of the Session, and we fully expect each ministry team to continue to strive to find new and effective ways to carry out the mission of the church. We believe one of the most impactful things we can do during these next two years is to continue to work for the strengthening of the existing ministries of the church.

**Question 6:** How many people will be on the pulpit committee?

**Answer:** That will be decided by the congregation. The Session does plan to provide a recommendation for the makeup of the committee, but that will ultimately be a decision for the congregation. An **example** of what the Session may recommend would be: Two Elders, One Deacon, One male and One female age 20-40, One male and One female age 40-60, and One male and One female age 60+, for a total of 9 members.

**Question 7:** How do we get candidates for the committee to review?

**Answer:** There are resources from our denomination (PCA) that can provide candidates who may be interested in a move. Candidates may contact the church requesting to be considered. We hope the

committee will also accept recommendations from the congregation. Brad came to us as a recommendation.

**Question 8:** Are we following the denomination (PCA) Book of Church Order with this plan/timeline?

**Answer:** We have verified with the PCA Administrative Committee that our process does not violate or circumvent the Book of Church Order. They did recommend that we make it clear that any recommendations the Session provides related to the Pulpit committee makeup and committee resources are recommendations, and the Session has no veto power over the congregation or committee. The Session “non-negotiables” are things the Session believes are vital, but are also recommendations. The only absolute non-negotiables are things that would disqualify a candidate from being approved by the presbytery.

**Question 9:** How will nominations for the pulpit committee be handled?

**Answer:** The Session will request nominations for the pulpit committee in advance of a congregational meeting to elect the committee. We will ask that nominations be agreed upon by the nominee. All names that are nominated will appear on the ballot for election. Nominations can be made from the floor at the congregational meeting, and will have to be added to the ballot. We will also publish the ballot prior to the congregational meeting.

**Question 10:** What changes will be made as part of the church preparation phase?

**Answer:** The Session has been reviewing Brad’s administrative responsibilities to identify areas where it would be a challenge for a new pastor to handle immediately, and which may create a risk to the operation/ministry of the church. At the February meeting, the Session approved to following responsibilities performed by Brad, to be shifted to other staff members:

- a) Supervise Church Administrator – Steve Whitner beginning March 2023
- b) Adult Sunday School Management as pastoral staff member of Adult Discipleship Ministry Team – Blake Harris beginning 2024
- c) Attend GHK Board Meetings – Clint Cvacho beginning March 2024
- d) Supervise Women’s Ministry Coordinator – Michael MacCaughelty beginning 2024
- e) Attend monthly finance meetings – Michael MacCaughelty beginning 2024
- f) Serve as staff finance oversight - Michael MacCaughelty beginning 2024

**Question 11:** It was recently announced the church will be contracting with McGowan Global to assist us in our search process. Can't we do this ourselves?

**Answer:** Yes, we could do this ourselves. Our Pastor Search Committee will be made up of exclusively of congregation members, with no Teaching Elders being allowed to serve. And the reality is that there are very few people in our congregation who have gone through this process recently, if ever, or have ever served in a pastoral role in a church. Therefore, we want to give those elected to the Pastor Search Committee the greatest opportunity to succeed in that role by giving them a partner that does this kind of work every day.

**Question 12:** How did the Session come to this decision?

**Answer:** When the Session began discussing this option in February, most everyone was pretty lukewarm to cold to the idea. Several session members have connections with churches that have used a coach with positive results, so we decided we should explore further. After a couple of months of prayer and consideration, the Session unanimously approved pursuing this arrangement with McGowan Global.

**Question 13:** Why are we using McGowan Global?

**Answer:** We interviewed several organizations/people that provide this kind of service, and McGowan stood out as the one with the largest track record of helping churches and with the greatest breadth of expertise. They have helped around 175 churches, and in 170 of those the pastor called remained for at least 5 years and the church experienced increased giving.

McGowan also assists churches with organizational formation and effectiveness, so they have a good understanding of how churches work, and the dynamics of having the right fit for a pastor. Part of their process is a "Discovery Phase" where they seek to understand our church, its culture, and aspirations in order to help us determine what we should be looking for in a Senior Pastor. Having this independent 3<sup>rd</sup> party helping to determine who we are should be a very healthy thing. McGowan has a lot of experience in the PCA and a deep understanding and commitment to the PCA Book of Church Order. McGowan also has relationships with other ministry organizations which will be a great source for identifying candidates for input to the Pastor Search Committee. You can read more at [mcgowanglobal.com](http://mcgowanglobal.com).

**Question 14:** How much will this cost, and how do we justify the expense?

**Answer:** We are paying McGowan \$40,000, plus up to \$5,000 in expenses. Yes, this is a lot of money. The Session looked at the cost in the following ways:

- We are getting a partner that will come along side of our Pastor Search Committee until a Senior Pastor is hired. The cost will not change no matter how long it takes.
- With over 170 churches helped, McGowan has developed best practices based on their experience, so we are getting a lot of expertise which should make the Pastor Search Committee more effective.

- We also took into account what would happen if we made a bad hire. There are significant costs to the church in that scenario. We believe having an experienced partner lessens that risk.

**Question 15:** Is McGowan Global a “headhunter”? What is their role and how does that relate to the Pastor Search Committee?

**Answer:** No, McGowan is not a head hunter. The Pastor Search Committee is in charge of every aspect of the process. McGowan will partner with the Pastor Search Committee and use their expertise to tailor the following functions to fit the desires and needs of AVPC:

- Discovery Phase to understand AVPC culture and aspirations which will help in developing a church profile for candidates, and initial description of what kind of candidate we may be interested in.
- Pastor Search Committee Training and Formation
- Pastor Search Committee Candidate Collection
- Pastor Search Committee Candidate Evaluation
- Pastor Search Committee Candidate Selection
- Pastor Search Committee Candidate Presentation

**Question 16:** Does partnering with McGowan Global change our transition timeline?

**Answer:** In initial discussions with McGowan Global, we have agreed to the following revised schedule:

July/August 2023	— Church Discovery (i.e. Leadership Interviews and Discovery Weekend)
October 2023	— Congregational meeting to elect Pastor Search Committee
October/November 2023	— Pastor Search Committee Orientation and Training
January 2024	— Pastor Search Committee begins search

**Question 17:** Who will McGowan provide to work with us?

**Answer:** McGowan has assigned Chuck Frost as our primary coach. He will utilize other resources at McGowan as needed, but Chuck will serve as our partner for the whole process. Chuck has more than 40 years of pastoral experience. You can read more about Chuck on the McGowan website ([mcgowanglobal.com](http://mcgowanglobal.com)) under the “Who We Are” section.

**Question 18:** What will happen if we have internal candidates?

**Answer:** This is always a complicated and sensitive situation. McGowan has experience in this scenario and will help the Pastor Search Committee as needed.