

**REGIONAL SYNOD OF ALBANY CHURCH SUPERVISION HANDBOOK**

2020 EDITION

Regional synod of albany

1790 Grand Blvd, Schenectady, NY 12309

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# **Document Revision Log**

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# **INTRODUCTION**

This handbook is produced by the Regional Synod of Albany for churches and classes that are facing a challenging event: the departure of an installed pastor, which begins a period of time when the church will continue to minister without a pastor. During this time, the consistory can count on the classis to provide a supervisor who will help with some of those needs.

This can be a stressful time for both the congregation and the classis which serves that church, as both will extend themselves to perform the roles that the departed pastor had fulfilled. This handbook will assist both consistory and classis to understand the process, as defined by the denomination’s constitution, by which the classis supports the consistory and the consistory continues its ministry with the congregation. With clear expectations, this temporary period between installed pastors can be the occasion for discoveries that prepare a church for its next chapter while recognizing the classis as a trusted partner.

When a pastor leaves, the consistory remains the church’s governing body. But often the elders and deacons realize that the pastor as presiding officer of the consistory performed a subtle but significant role for the church. The pastor, trained in church order and procedure, had guided their work and guarded them from procedural errors. In fact, the classis had depended on the installed pastor to provide much of the supervision that a classis owes a congregation. But, now that the church is without an installed pastor, the classis assigns a pastor (and perhaps also an elder) to serve that congregation by “guiding and guarding” the consistory until a new pastor is installed.

A consistory is defined in the RCA church order as all the elders, deacons and pastors currently installed in those offices. All three offices are necessary for a consistory to do its work; a meeting without one of those offices present is not a legal meeting of the consistory. The pastor who is assigned by the classis as the church’s supervisor allows the church’s consistory to properly function between installed pastors. With the classis supervisor, the consistory legitimately can fulfill its role as the congregation’s governing body.

While without an installed pastor, the consistory continues its regular functions, but adds the responsibility to provide ministry (worship leadership, pastoral care, etc.). The classis-assigned supervisor does not perform those ministries but may assist the consistory with suggestions as to persons who might be available to provide ministry. The supervisor assists the consistory by providing “guardrails” so that the consistory meets its responsibilities without exceeding church order, while guiding the consistory toward resources they might request. Throughout the process, the consistory remains the governing body of the church but will appreciate the support and assistance offered by the classis supervisor.

The first section of this handbook focuses on the opportunity that this period without an installed pastor provides the congregation and consistory to review and revise the church’s ministry and vision. Changes in the church, its community and its opportunities are constant, but often become more recognizable during the time between installed pastors.

The second section provides a detailed explanation of the guidelines for the supervision of churches expecting to form a search committee and install a full or part time pastor.

thirdprovides guidelines for church’s under long term supervision that are not in a position to install a full or part time pastor.

The fourth section addresses the new possibility in the RCA’s “Book of Church Order” that supervisors may be used from other classes. New guidelines for securing a supervising pastor from beyond the church’s own classis are defined and explained.

# **PART 1: SUPERVISION OPPORTUNITIES**

## Introduction

Whenever a church enters a period without an installed pastor, challenges and opportunities arise. Many worry the church will suffer without a pastor and wonder whether the ministry of their congregation will be significantly hindered.

No matter whether the outgoing pastor is considered a beloved leader, a rascal, or anything in between, the fact remains that a change in pastoral leadership entails significant loss for a congregation. The choices a congregation makes in responding to this loss can deeply impact their future.

Sometimes a church without an installed pastor is described as a “vacant church,” or as having a “vacant pulpit.” We have assiduously avoided this sort of language in this Supervision Handbook. We prefer to use the language of “church in transition,” or “church under supervision” because these terms more accurately describe the reality these churches are experiencing. A church without an installed pastor is not vacant! It is still filled with people, purpose, activities and dreams. The Word is still preached, songs are still sung, prayers are still prayed, and sacraments are still celebrated.  The church is still the church.

## Opportunities that Arise During a Period of Supervision

### Opportunity for Church Leaders to Learn and Grow

In the Reformed tradition, we value not only the ministry of Word and sacrament--we also bless the ministry of elders, deacons, and other church leaders. During a period without an installed pastor, church leaders have the opportunity to grow and learn, and to take on responsibilities that were once delegated to the pastor.

Talk with your classis appointed supervisor about developing plans to:

* Provide pastoral care for the sick, grieving and homebound
* Attend to congregational grief issues related to pastoral transition
* Train church members to lead worship, including the provision of sacraments and preaching the Word
* Create agendas and chair meetings
* Provide Christian education for all ages
* Participate in community activities, and ecumenical and interfaith organizations
* Provide resources and advocacy for those in need
* Ensure good communication between consistory and congregation
* Ensure office responsibilities and financial obligations of the church are covered

These and many other activities are often assumed to be the domain of the installed pastor. However, they are vital work of the church, and ought not stop during a period of transition! In fact, a transition creates opportunities for people to discover they have gifts in these areas.

We encourage you to take on this work with energy, courage and curiosity. Churches with “can-do,” creative leadership often emerge from a period of transition stronger than they were before.

Resources to churches seeking to grow in the above areas, such as preaching elder training classes, worship symposiums, and Christian Educator gatherings, are available through the classis and regional synod. Ask your supervisor for more information.

### Opportunity to Examine Our Mental Models about Church

A “mental model” is a term that describes our unconscious thinking and meaning-making about a thing or an idea. So, for example, we all have mental models about how to drive a car, which we developed through years of driving. When we get in the driver’s seat, we don’t have to figure out how to drive the car all over again--we know there’s a way to start the car, accelerate it, turn it and stop it--our “mental model of driving” helps us figure this out almost instantaneously. Mental models are extremely useful for helping us get through the day. We have mental models about every aspect of our lives, and we do not tend to question them unless some new unfamiliar situation arises. Your mental model of driving works just fine...until you need to drive a motorcycle! Then you need to redevelop your existing mental model.

We all have mental models about church--what it is, where it is, what happens in church, who runs the church, etc. It is a good idea for churches in supervision to have long conversations about their mental models of church. People should be prepared to hear that not everybody shares the same mental model! They may also discover ways in which their mental model of church is not sufficient any longer, and that new mental models need to be developed.

Churches around the world had the opportunity to re-examine their mental models of church in 2020 when the Coronavirus pandemic forced us all to shut down in-person worship and other gatherings. We all tried new ways of worship, new ways of doing Christian Education, new ways of doing mission. When a church goes through a transition in pastoral leadership, they have the opportunity to do a similar sort of re-evaluation.

A time of transition is an opportunity for the members of the church to ask some fundamental questions, to help get clearer on everybody’s mental models:

* What do we love about our church?
* What is our mission?
* What is God calling us to do, in this new era?
* How might God be calling us to change?
* Who are our neighbors, and how can we serve them?
* How has our neighborhood changed?
* What history, and particularly history of trauma, might be holding us back?

If a church under supervision is searching for a new pastor, they must create a church profile as part of the search process. Churches are encouraged to see this task as an opportunity to study their community and dream about a new mission and vision for their ministry together under new pastoral leadership.

A period of supervision may also provide an opportunity to experiment with other types of pastoral leadership, such as hiring a seminary student, calling a part-time minister, contracting with a preaching elder, or sharing a minister with another congregation.

Exploring new mental models may also open possibilities for working more closely with neighboring churches in the classis, or even from other denominations. This may be an opportunity to experiment with sharing some programs or resources for a limited time. Maybe you will discover that it works better to share Bible Study, or Youth Group, or Wednesday night suppers with the Lutheran church down the street.

### Opportunity to engage the services of a Specialized Transition Minister (STM)

During a period of supervision, consistories may decide to contract with an STM to serve as pastor while the church is in the search process. An STM is not necessary in every circumstance. A church may decide to hire an interim minister or pulpit supply to provide for worship, and this decision allows the leadership to focus on the search process and the future plans for the church.

Here are some circumstances when a consistory might want to give extra consideration to the possibility of hiring an STM:

* After a long-tenured pastorate
* After a period of conflict
* After a traumatic pastoral ending
* After a series of very short pastorates
* If the community at large has experienced a traumatic event
* If there is uncertainty about the future of the congregation
* If the congregation is considering a major change in its mental model (i.e. going from full-time ministry to a yoked ministry)
* If the church has a history of misconduct or abuse on the part of the pastor or other leadership

For more information about the work of STMs, see Appendix E, “What is the Work of the Specialized Transition Minister?” by Art Wiers (Regional Synod of the Great Lakes).

### Challenges of Being in Transition

Any church leader who has been through a pastoral transition before knows that many challenges will be encountered during this time.

Challenges include:

* Addressing the temptation to succumb to anxiety and make decisions too quickly
* Finding a proper match with a new pastoral leader is difficult and takes time
* Getting clear on the current reality, and not just fixating on what worked in the past
* Identifying those things that need to be fixed and/or worked on before the new pastor is hired, and then getting those things done
* Avoiding the temptation to put off developing a congregational vision and mission until the new pastor arrives
* Finding consistency between what a search committee desires for the new pastoral leadership, and what a congregation is willing to live out
* Maintaining cohesion and stability, and providing for the continuance of worship, pastoral care and mission in the congregation
* Discovering that the process of finding pastoral leadership that worked in the past won’t necessarily work again!

Early on in the transition, we encourage all congregations to spend time uncovering their mental models of church and sharing with one another and their classis supervisors about their fears for the future.

We also encourage congregations to ask for help! Here are some resources that can help:

* Your classis supervisor(s)
* Your classis committee that oversees churches without installed pastors. Ask your supervisor how to get in touch with this committee.  It also approves contracts with Specialized Transition Ministers, seminary students, preaching elders and commissioned pastors.
* RCA Ministry Services Office--maintains a website listing churches in the search process, and also distributes profiles of potential minister candidates to congregations
* New Brunswick Theological Seminary Career Services and Western Theological Seminary Placement Office.
* RSA Staff and RCA Staff can support consistories and search teams with retreats, training and resources
* Albany Synod Ministries Board can provide grants for new ministries, networking opportunities with other congregations, and training events for church leaders
* RSA Mediation Team can train people in healthy communication skills, facilitate difficult conversations and also provide the framework of mediation when necessary, to help people slow down and listen more carefully to one another, towards the end of developing solutions agreeable to everybody

# **PART 2: GUIDELINES FOR CONVENTIONAL SUPERVISED CHURCHES**

*These guidelines pertain to those situations where a church’s intended goal is to hire a full-time or part-time Minister of Word and Sacrament*

*or Commissioned Pastor.*

*This document is intended to supplement directives listed in the RCA Book of Church Order.*

## General Guidelines

1. Dissolution of the pastoral relationship with the departing pastor is the responsibility of the classis and will occur prior to the appointment of a supervisor.
2. Supervisor(s) to churches without an installed minister will be appointed by the classis. At a minimum, there should be one minister supervisor. It is recommended, however, that a team of two people be assigned inclusive of a minister and an elder. The elder supervisor must be a member of the congregation’s classis.
3. It is suggested that classis place a term limit (e.g. two years) for supervisors where, at the end of which, supervisors are given the option to continue as a church’s supervisor or be replaced.
4. The role of the supervisor is:
   1. To guide consistory in its provision of pastoral leadership for the congregation including deciding whether that position will be full-or part-time. This means that even in small congregations, without a full-time installed minister, the consistory will be moving towards a pastoral leadership position that is right for the church.
   2. To assist the consistory in determining the need for a specialized transition minister.
   3. To ensure that consistory meetings are run decently and in good order and presided over by a minister under contract or a member of consistory.
   4. To provide resources such as the RCA Pastoral Search Handbook, Classis Minimum Salary Guide, and pulpit supply list.
   5. To ensure that the preaching of the Word and the celebration of the sacraments have been provided for as prescribed by the Book of Church Order.
5. The role of the supervisor is not:
   1. To provide pastoral services such as weddings, funerals, visitations, etc.
   2. To provide leadership of worship services and/or secure pulpit supply for worship services.
   3. To be the designated chair of any church committees.
   4. To impose his or her opinion, preferences, or solutions on the congregation, but rather to help them discover their own.
6. For the first consistory meeting of a church under supervision, an assigned representative(s) from classis will:
   1. Introduce the classis assigned supervisor(s). (See general guidelines, section B)
   2. Review with the consistory the role of supervisor(s).
   3. Instruct the consistory on compensation guidelines for supervisor(s).
   4. Instruct the supervised church to schedule meetings that require the supervisor’s presence with sensitivity to the supervisor’s schedule.
7. Supervisors will encourage consistories to consider a diverse range of candidates for pastoral leadership.

## Specific Considerations

*The following provides guidelines for the various configurations a church supervisory situation might require.*

### Supervision of churches with specialized transition ministers, intending to call a full-time pastor

1. Supervisor(s) should resource any non-RCA specialized transition minister in areas of polity, liturgy, theology, and standards.
2. Supervisor(s) should oversee the contract between the consistory and the specialized transition minister including doing the following:
   1. Consult with the consistory to be sure the contract is in accordance with classis salary and benefit guidelines.
   2. Submit the contract to classis for approval.
   3. Maintain at least monthly contact with the specialized transition minister concerning issues for the consistory or the church as a whole.
   4. Assist in developing a plan for the specialized transition minister’s focus throughout his/her contract.
3. Minister supervisor(s) must attend all consistory meetings or arrange for another minister to attend in their place.
4. Minister supervisor(s) must attend any meeting of the board of elders or arrange for another minister to attend in their place.
5. Supervisor(s) should attend congregational meetings if deemed appropriate and needed in consultation with the consistory.
6. Supervisor(s) will ensure that a thorough self-study is completed prior to the formation of a search committee.
7. Supervisor(s) will guide the consistory in the formation of a search committee.
8. Supervisor(s) need not attend all meetings of the search committee but will supply resources, support, and direction and will be available to consult with the chair of the search committee as needed.
9. Supervisor(s) will ensure that the results of the self-study are translated into a congregational profile form.
10. Supervisor(s) will ensure that a completed profile form is forwarded to the Office of Ministry Services.
11. Supervisor(s) should ensure search committee minimally reports to and receives approval of consistory at each of the following benchmarks:
    1. Completion of profile form before it is submitted to the Office of Ministry Services.
    2. Completion of process for interviewing candidates before interviewing begins.
12. Supervisor(s) must attend search committee meetings when they are interviewing candidates.
13. Supervisor(s) will assist the consistory in calling or contracting with the new minister, including the potential sharing of ministerial resources with another church.

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### Supervision of churches without specialized transition ministers, intending to call a full-time pastor

1. Minister supervisor(s) must attend all consistory meetings or arrange for another minister to attend in their place.
2. Minister supervisor(s) must attend any meeting of the board of elders or arrange for another minister to attend in their place.
3. Supervisor(s) should attend congregational meetings if deemed appropriate and needed in consultation with the consistory.
4. Supervisor(s) may assist the church in recommending suitable pulpit supply. Supervisor(s) may also assist the church in finding the pastoral services they may need during this time.
5. Supervisor(s) will ensure that a thorough self-study is completed prior to the formation of a search committee.
6. Supervisor(s) will guide the consistory in the formation of a search committee.
7. Supervisor(s) need not attend all meetings of the search committee but will supply resources, support, and direction and will be available to consult with the chair of the search committee as needed.
8. Supervisor(s) will ensure that the results of the self-study are translated into a congregational profile form.
9. Supervisor(s) will ensure that a completed profile form is forwarded to the Office of Ministry Services.
10. Supervisor(s) should ensure search committee minimally reports to and receives approval of consistory at each of the following benchmarks:
    1. Completion of profile form before it is submitted to the Office of Ministry Services.
    2. Completion of process for interviewing candidates before interviewing begins.
11. Supervisor(s) will assist the consistory in calling or contracting with the new pastor, including the potential sharing of a pastor with another church.

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### Supervision of congregations not Intending to call a full-time pastor

1. Minister supervisor(s) must attend all consistory meetings or arrange for another minister to attend in their place.
2. Minister supervisor(s) must attend any meeting of the board of elders or arrange for another minister to attend in their place.
3. Supervisor(s) should attend congregational meetings if deemed appropriate and needed in consultation with the consistory.
4. Supervisor(s) will ensure a thorough self-study is completed, a church profile is filled out, and a search process is undertaken which will result in the hiring of new ministerial staff. (This process may or may not include the formation of a search committee.)
5. Supervisor(s) will provide guidance and leadership to the consistory during this process, especially in regards to procuring temporary, competent pastoral services.
6. If a search committee is formed, supervisor(s) should ensure search committee minimally reports to and receives approval of consistory at each of the following benchmarks:
   1. Completion of profile form before it is submitted to the Office of Ministry Services.
   2. Completion of process for interviewing candidates before interviewing begins.
7. Supervisor(s) will assist the consistory in calling or contracting with the new pastor, including the potential sharing of a pastor with another church.

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## Additional Consideration – Renumeration of Supervisor(s)

1. Mileage, tolls, and other special transportation expenses at the rate provided by the IRS for all trips by the supervisor(s) to meetings and services of the congregation.
2. Compensation will be per visit at a rate determined by classis.  Visits include but are not limited to:
   1. Consistory meetings
   2. Board meetings
   3. Congregational meetings
   4. Special training and/or consulting services,
   5. Additional services as negotiated between the supervisor(s) and the consistory.
3. Supervisors will submit expense vouchers and a written account of all meetings they attend, to their classes, on a monthly basis.
4. Classes will reimburse supervisors for their expenses and provide compensation for visits.
5. Classes may choose:
   1. To bill churches under supervision for expenses covered and compensation provided to supervisors.
   2. To provide financial support to churches that cannot afford to reimburse expenses and provide compensation to their supervisors. Options include:
      1. Establishing a fund to provide financial support.
      2. Raising assessments so that all churches in the classis may share the burden of supervision.
      3. Applying for grants to cover the classis’ financial need.
      4. Utilizing congregational and/or classis reserves.
   3. To consider a church’s inability to reimburse expenses and provide compensation to their supervisors as a reason to explore supercession of the church’s consistory.

# **PART 3: GUIDELINES FOR CHURCHES UNDER LONG-TERM SUPERVISION**

**Definition:** This section pertains to those situations where long-term classis supervision is required due to a congregation’s intentional decision to not call an installed minister of Word and sacrament.

## Challenges of Long-Term Supervision

While these situations might aid a congregation that finds it difficult to procure installed pastoral leadership, there are inherent concerns that should be considered. These include:

1. The long-term commitment required by classis supervisor(s). Keeping in mind that a minister supervisor already has an extensive commitment with their own congregation, every possible courtesy should be extended to such a supervisor including:
2. Scheduling meetings conducive to the minister supervisor’s schedule.
3. Congregational awareness that a minister supervisor is not their church’s pastor.
4. Review with supervisor(s) what types of meetings require a minister supervisor’s attendance and what types of meetings do not. Refer to Appendix C.
5. As much as possible, minimize the number of meetings requiring a minister supervisor’s attendance. (i.e. consistory meetings verses committee meetings)
6. Adequate remuneration for supervisor(s) services.
7. Set classis term limits for supervisor(s), which allow supervisor(s) to choose whether they will continue as the church’s supervisor or rotate off at regular intervals.
8. Stability of pastoral leadership. Situations such as these might not provide the kind of long-term pastoral relationship that is necessary for the development and implementation of a long-term plan for ministry.
9. Depending on the situation, additional considerations might need to be taken into account for pastoral care, administrative duties, and other day to day responsibilities.

## Recommendations & Guidelines for Long-Term Supervision

### Where there is an RCA minister under contract or commissioned pastor

1. The minister under contract or commissioned pastor may become supervisor of the congregation, if:
   * 1. The consistory requests this action.
     2. The classis grants approval.
2. Minister supervisor(s) must attend all consistory meetings or arrange for another minister to attend in their place.
3. Minister supervisor(s) must attend any meeting of the board of elders or arrange for another minister to attend in their place.
4. Supervisor(s) should attend congregational meetings if deemed appropriate and needed in consultation with the consistory.
5. Supervisor(s) will ensure that an evaluation of the contract is conducted toward the end of the contract period resulting in:
   * 1. Renewal of the contract; or
     2. Revision of the contract; or
     3. Termination of the contract.

### When pastoral leadership is in place with a minister from another denomination who is not a member of classis

* 1. Minister supervisor(s) must attend all consistory meetings or arrange for another minister to attend in their place.
  2. Minister supervisor(s) must attend any meeting of the board of elders or arrange for another minister to attend in their place.
  3. Supervisor(s) should attend congregational meetings as deemed appropriate and needed in consultation with the consistory.
  4. Supervisor(s) will ensure that an evaluation of the contract by the appropriate classis committee is conducted toward the end of the contract period resulting in classis approval of one of the following:
     1. Renewal of the contract; or
     2. Revision of the contract; or
     3. Termination of the contract.

### Where a contract is made with a preaching elder

* 1. Minister supervisor(s) must attend all consistory meetings or arrange for another minister to attend in their place.
  2. Minister supervisor(s) must attend any meeting of the board of elders or arrange for another minister to attend in their place.
  3. Supervisor(s) should attend congregational meetings if deemed appropriate and needed in consultation with the consistory.
  4. Supervisor(s) will ensure that the contract meets the requirements of the BCO.
  5. Supervisor(s) will ensure that an evaluation of the contract by the appropriate classis committee is conducted toward the end of the contract period resulting in classis approval of one of the following:
     1. Renewal of the contract; or
     2. Revision of the contract; or
     3. Termination of the contract.

### Where a contract is made with a seminary student

* 1. Supervisor(s) will ensure that the seminary student has received approval to serve a congregation as prescribed by the BCO.
  2. Minister supervisor(s) must attend all consistory meetings or arrange for another minister to attend in their place.
  3. Minister supervisor(s) must attend any meeting of the board of elders or arrange for another minister to attend in their place.
  4. Supervisor(s) should attend congregational meetings if deemed appropriate and needed in consultation with the consistory.
  5. Supervisor(s) will ensure that an evaluation of the contract by the appropriate classis committee is conducted toward the end of the contract period resulting in classis approval of one of the following:
     1. Renewal of the contract; or
     2. Revision of the contract; or
     3. Termination of the contract.

Supervisor should be in regular contact with the student’s classis oversight committee.

### Where pulpit supply is employed

* 1. Minister supervisor(s) must attend all consistory meetings or arrange for another minister to attend in their place.
  2. Minister supervisor(s) must attend any meeting of the board of elders or arrange for another minister to attend in their place.
  3. Supervisor(s) should attend congregational meetings as deemed appropriate and needed in consultation with the consistory.
  4. Supervisor(s) will ensure that appropriate care is taken by a Consistory or governing body when choosing a worship leader. Ordinarily, the preaching of the Word shall be performed by a Minister of the Word and Sacrament, a commissioned pastor under contract with the congregation, a preaching elder under contract with the congregation, or an appointed candidate for ministry. This includes the following considerations:

a. Only issuing an invitation to a minister of another denomination whose character and standard is known and is consistent with RCA standards.

b. Only issuing an invitation to a minister that has furnished proof they are a minister in good ministerial standing, and they are authorized to preach the Word.

c. Only issuing an invitation to other persons to preach occasionally or in special circumstances.

# **PART 4: CROSS-CLASSIS SUPERVISON GUIDELINES**

The 2018 General Synod ratified the following section of the Book of Church Order as approved by the vote of the classes:

Sec. 3. The classis shall appoint a minister as supervisor of all proceedings of the consistory of a church without an installed minister. If the minister to be appointed as supervisor is a member of another classis, then the classis shall consult with the minister’s classis of membership prior to making such appointment. The classis shall determine the appropriate responsibilities for the supervisor.

In consideration of this change, the Regional Synod of Albany offers the following guidelines for utilizing supervisors from other classes:

1. The Classis shall initiate conversation with another classis about the need for and the desire to utilize supervisors from outside their bounds.
   1. Conversation can begin when a congregation asks their classis committee for assistance in securing supervision not within their own classis.
   2. Congregations shall not initiate conversations directly with ministers about supervision.
   3. The stated clerk shall share such information with neighboring clerks.
2. Minister Supervisor remains amenable to classis he/she is member of.
3. The consistory to be supervised, the supervisor(s), and both classes shall enter into a contract of supervision which shall be for a term of not more than one year. It shall be reviewed on an annual basis and may be renewed upon the approval of all parties.
4. The contract shall include at least the following:
   1. The start and end date not exceeding one year.
   2. A date identifying when the annual review shall be completed.
   3. A listing of all the expectations of the consistory and the supervisor(s).
   4. A description of all remuneration to be paid the supervisor(s).
   5. Signatures of the consistory officers, supervisor(s).

# **APPENDIX A: DEFINITIONS**

*This document is intended to provide a clear and helpful understanding of the terms used in these guidelines.*

Book of Church Order – The order by which the Reformed Church in America operates. Part of the denomination’s Constitution, the BCO provides the practical answers to the many questions about how congregations operate.

Call – The invitation extended by a church’s consistory to a qualified minister. A call must be approved by the classis and, when accepted by the minister, the classis installs the minister to serve in that congregation.

Classis – A governing body of the church composed of all the enrolled ministers, the commissioned pastors currently serving, and the elder delegate(s) of each congregation within its bounds.

Commissioned Pastor– An elder who is trained, commissioned for pastoral ministry, and supervised by the classis for a specific ministry within that classis. For additional information see Appendix B.

Consistory– The governing body of a congregation composed of the installed Ministers of Word and Sacrament, the elders and deacons currently installed in office and, if applicable, commissioned pastors authorized by the classis. The consistory combines the ministerial functions and governmental powers of the offices of the minister, elder and deacon. Unless all three offices are present, the consistory is not officially constituted. For additional information, see Appendix C.

Conventional churches– For the purpose of these guidelines, conventional churches are those churches which intend to hire either full-time or part-time pastoral leadership.

Elders-- Members of a church who have been ordained into that office, who may or may not currently serve on Consistory and the Board of Elders. Together with the pastoral leaders, they are charged with the pastoral care of all who are connected to the church, for the welfare and good order of the church. Elders are specifically authorized to assist the pastoral leader with visitation. Elders are not remunerated for the ministry at the church where they serve.

RCA Office of Ministry Services– The denominational office that helps pastors, search teams, and classis supervisors navigate pastoral transitions with guidance and information on possible candidates.

Minister of Word and Sacrament – Men and women who have been ordained into this office by an RCA classis. They are authorized to preach the Word and to celebrate the Sacraments by their ordination and are able to serve throughout the denomination. They provide ministerial services to a congregation, representing Christ through the action of the Holy Spirit. See Appendix B.

Ministerial services – The functions within a church that are generally performed by those authorized as either Ministers of Word and Sacrament or Commissioned Pastor. See Appendix B.

Pastoral leadership– Providing ministerial services, preaching the Word and celebrating the Sacraments, and serving together with the congregation. The two categories of pastoral leadership are Ministers of Word and Sacrament, and Commissioned Pastors.

Preaching Elder– An ordained RCA elder with gifts and training for preaching, who is commissioned by the classis for preaching in a specific place designated by the classis, under the supervision of the classis and the local consistory. A classis may commission a Preaching Elder to serve a church long term only after the consistory demonstrates to the Classis that the calling of an ordained Minister is impossible. See Appendix B.

Search Committee– A group of congregational participants, selected and authorized by the consistory, to identify possible pastoral leadership candidates, to interview and present a commended candidate to the consistory for the consideration of a call or a contract. The search committee will function with the insights of the church’s self-study provided by the consistory and assist the consistory in its responsibility to issue a call or a contract to a candidate.

Specialized Transition Minister – A Minister of Word and Sacrament who serves under short-term contracts in congregations that intend to hire pastoral leadership. The STM has received specialized training to assist churches with the specific challenges and opportunities that are experienced by a church during the period between pastors.

Supervisor– Appointed by the classis to a church between pastoral leaders, the classis will appoint either a Minister of Word and Sacrament as supervisor or a minister and an elder to serve together as a supervisory team. Because a consistory requires the attendance of all three offices (minister, elder and deacon) all meetings of the consistory must include the attendance of a supervising minister or his or her designee. The role of the supervisor or supervisory team is delineated in “The Guidelines for Supervised Churches.”

# **APPENDIX B: COMPARISON OF COMMMISSIONED PASTOR, PREACHING ELDER, MINISTER OF WORD AND SACRAMENT IN THE RCA (\*Denotes Albany Synod Recommendation, not a BCO requirement)**

| ALBANY SYNOD | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Status/  Function | Commissioned Pastor | Preaching Elder | Minister of Word and Sacrament |
| **Ordained Office** | Elder. | Elder. | Minister. |
| **Authorization for Ministry** | Commissioning. | Commissioning. | Ordination. |
| **Limits of Ministry** | Limited to specific classis. | Limited to specific classis. | Not limited to specific classis. |
| **Length of Ministry** | Reviewed annually during period of assigned service; commission expires automatically when service ends. | May be commissioned for up to two years; may be renewed after evaluation by the consistory and the classis. | Indefinite when installed by classis;  One year, if ministering under a contract instead of a call; may be renewed by after evaluation by the consistory and the classis. |
| **Candidacy Begins** | With consistory recommendation. | With self-application and \*with consistory recommendation. | With consistory recommendation. |
| **Psychological Assessment** | *\**Recommended | *\**Recommended | *\**Recommended |
| **Training Plan / Evaluation** | Training approved and supervised by classis.  **Preliminary Educational Requirements -** B.A. degree or the equivalent, or with a special dispensation from the appropriate classis committee.  **List of Required Competencies -**   * Assessed by interview/spiritual biography/exam   + Maturity of faith   + Personal integrity   + Capability to minister within the church * \*Assessed as part of CPE and by Mentor   + Understanding of & adherence to pastoral ethics and practices * Assessed by exam   + Understanding of Old and New Testaments & Biblical Interpretation   + Reformed Theology   + Church History   + Knowledge of & Adherence to the Constitution of the RCA   + Nature and Administration of the Sacraments   + Ability to Preach/ Sermon Composition | Training approved and supervised by classis.  **Preliminary Educational Requirements -** B.A. degree or the equivalent (including life experience) or receive a special dispensation from the appropriate classis committee  **List of Required Competencies –**   * Assessed by exam * New Testament Introduction and History, * Old Testament Introduction and History, * Biblical Exegesis and Interpretation, * Sermon Composition and Delivery, * Systematic Theology, * RCA Doctrinal Standards | Seminary degree and supervised by classis.  **Preliminary Educational Requirements –** B.A. degree or equivalent  **List of Competencies – Refer to BCO**   * \*Assessed by exam * Hebrew * Greek * Preaching and Worship Leadership * Biblical Introduction (Old and New Testaments) * Church History * Church Government/Standards/Polity * Christian Education * Views of the Ministry * Personal Piety and Fitness for the Ministry I * Personal Piety and Fitness for the Ministry II * Theology I (Systematic) * Theology II (Reformed) * Theology III * The Nature and Administration of the Sacraments * History/Program of RCA World Mission * Teaching Church Evaluations   + Preaching   + Teaching   + Pastoral Care and Visitation |
| **Call or Contract?** | Contract for specific service, approved by classis. | \*Depending on circumstances, contract for specific service, approved by classis. | Contract or call, approved by classis. |
| **Beginning of Ministry** | Upon invitation by any church, classis commissions commissioned pastors as classis deems appropriate. | Upon invitation by any church, classis commissions preaching elder as classis deems appropriate. | Consistory initiates a call or contract, classis approves; if minister accepts, classis installs under a call, or ministry begins under contract. |
| **Classis Mentor** | Assigned to all commissioned pastors during candidacy and for entire period of service. | \*Assigned to all preaching elders during candidacy and for entire period of service. | BCO requires that a mentor be assigned for newly ordained ministers.  \*Albany Synod recommends a mentor be assigned to all ministers entering the classis. |
| **Classis Membership?** | Member of classis during commissioned service but shall not serve as an elder delegate; classis membership ends when service ends. | May serve as regular voting elder delegate if appointed by the consistory, or as a nonvoting delegate at classis’ discretion. | Member of classis during installed or contracted service. |
| **Evaluation** | Annually by the classis. | Every two years by consistory and classis. | \*Annual evaluation of the minister and/or the church’s ministry. Third-party facilitators are encouraged. |
| **Ending of Ministry** | Upon completion of the authorized ministry. | Service ends after two years but may be renewed by the classis. | Installed minister: upon minister’s decision or classis’ termination. Minister under contract: expiration of contracted term. |
| **Discipline** | Amenable solely to the classis. | Amenable to the classis for preaching; in all other areas, mutual oversight with the local consistory in the same manner that all elders have oversight of one another. | Amenable solely to the classis. |
| **Scope of Ministry** | Same as ordained minister (if authority to preside at meetings, to marry, and to ordain elders and deacons are approved by the classis). | Limited to preaching at church specified by classis; \*additional responsibilities require separate contract. | Pastor/teacher to build up the church for ministry. (Refer to BCO for more complete description). |
| **Perform weddings?** | Yes, if approved by consistory and classis, subject to state law. | No. | Yes, subject to state law. |
| **Ordain elders and deacons?** | Yes, if approved by classis | No. | Yes. |
| **Celebrate baptism?** | Yes. | No, unless they are a member of that church and have been authorized by the board of elders. | Yes. |
| **Perform funerals?** | Yes. | Yes. | Yes. |
| **Celebrate Communion?** | Yes. | No, unless they are a member of that church and have been authorized by the board of elders. | Yes. |
| **Preside at Consistory?** | Yes, at the request of consistory and if approved by classis. | No, but must regularly meet with the consistory during the period of service. | Installed minister: yes; minister under contract: yes, if requested by the consistory. |
| **Serve as classis delegate at higher assemblies?** | Yes, as elder delegate. | Yes, in the same way that all elders do. | Yes. |
| **Supervise the church they are serving?** | Yes, if approved by the classis. | No. | Installed: not applicable; minister under contract: yes if approved by the classis. |

# **APPENDIX C: DO WE NEED A MINISTER SUPERVISOR PRESENT?**

1. **Our church doesn’t have an installed minister of Word and sacrament. Must the classis appoint a minister supervisor?**

Yes. Our church order requires all three offices to be represented at each consistory meeting, so your classis-appointed supervisor will fill the role of minister in lieu of an installed minister.

As the Liturgy for Ordination and Installation of Elders and Deacons states,

the three offices of deacon, elder, and minister of Word and sacrament are united in Christ, so also in the church, one office is not separate from the others. The minister of Word and sacrament does not serve without the elder and neither without the deacon. Together they enable the whole mission of the church.

**2. How often must our minister supervisor attend meetings of our consistory?**

The minister supervisor must attend ALL meetings of your consistory.

If there is no minister of Word and sacrament present, the meeting cannot properly be called a consistory meeting. When your congregation’s elders and deacons meet with no minister supervisor, it is, strictly speaking, a meeting of your congregation’s elders and deacons. Its decisions are not official and do not have the authority of consistory.

When your church absolutely needs a consistory meeting to act upon a time-sensitive matter, and the minister supervisor cannot be present at the meeting due to an emergency or unavoidable schedule conflict, two options are available:

* Another minister from classis may be invited to attend in their place
* Your minister supervisor may join the meeting by phone or videoconference

These are less than ideal solutions but still preferred to meeting without a minister entirely.

**3. How often must our consistory meet?**

The *Book of Church Order* does not specify how often a consistory must meet. Each consistory should discuss this question and decide how often it needs to meet.

We propose that consistories and supervisors need to get creative together, and plan ahead. They should develop a schedule of meetings and identify clearly which meetings require the presence of the minister supervisor.

Some congregations are under long-term supervision, not actively seeking a called, installed minister. Under these “new normal” circumstances, it may be appropriate for consistories to plan to meet less often than monthly.

Our recommendation is that consistories ought to meet at least quarterly, though they could certainly meet more frequently than that. On the months in-between, meetings that do not require the presence of the minister supervisor can be held.

**4. When is it appropriate for our church’s elders and deacons to meet without our minister supervisor?**

You might call a meeting of your elders and deacons:

* To discuss what you’ve been doing
* To pray, study, learn or relax together
* To move forward projects that have already been agreed upon by the consistory

You would not call such a gathering a “consistory meeting.” You would not make formal consistory decisions. Such gatherings, though beneficial for your church, would not require the presence of a minister supervisor.

However, there are times when a consistory meeting is needed, when it must take formal action or make formal decisions that only the consistory can. In these cases, it needs the minister supervisor present with your elders and deacons. That is when you are gathering *as a consistory*.

The chart at the end of Appendix C can help consistories identify what business requires the whole consistory, and which business can be conducted by a gathering of elders and deacons.

**5. Our classis has also appointed an elder supervisor for us. What are their responsibilities?**

Some classes in Albany Synod maintain the admirable practice of appointing an elder supervisor in addition to a minister supervisor. An elder supervisor cannot substitute for a minister supervisor. However, they provide profoundly helpful and important support to congregations under supervision. This support includes:

* Offering the perspective and wisdom of an experienced elder. Some elder supervisors have previously served on supervised consistories and search committees, and that experience can be helpful when shared.
* Consulting and reflecting with the supervising minister, providing feedback and insight regarding progress and process.
* Being a conduit of information and communication between classis and congregation.
* Providing support and resources to consistory, search committee and other church committees.
* Bringing a spiritual, prayerful presence and representing the support of a fellow congregation in the classis.

**6. Does our minister supervisor need to attend our search committee meetings?**

Supervisors are not required to attend all search committee meetings. However, search committees often benefit from the support and guidance of minister and elder supervisors, as well as other help available from the classis, Albany Synod, and the Reformed Church in America.

Supervisors are encouraged to provide intentional support at key moments in the search process:

* Providing guidance as the search committee is developing their plan of action
* Providing feedback as the church’s profile is being developed and finalized
* Assisting in distributing the finished profile as widely as possible through a variety of channels
* Ensuring search committees are trained on good interview practices
* Ensuring representation of the classis is present for interviews of prospective pastoral candidates
* Assisting the search committee in its discernment process in choosing their next pastor and calling them
* Supporting the new pastor as they begin their new ministry

**7. Must our minister supervisor attend our board of elders’ meetings?**

Yes, the BCO requires a minister to be present for all meetings of your congregation’s board of elders, and they must meet at least four times a year. Their responsibilities are described in the BCO.

Perhaps you’re starting to realize the classis has many expectations of your minister supervisor. Let this realization move you to be kind to them, and schedule your elders’ meetings at a time that is mutually convenient (perhaps adjacent to your consistory meetings).

**8. Does our minister supervisor need to attend our congregational meetings?**

Maybe, if their attendance is deemed appropriate and needed in consultation with the consistory. If election of officers is on the agenda, a minister supervisor must be present. If you are discussing a call or contract with a new minister, the presence of the minister supervisor may be desired.

Congregational meetings are opportunities for the whole congregation to grow in their relationship with your classis. Even if their presence isn’t strictly necessary, the minister supervisor may still consider attending.

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

**CHART: What actions require a full consistory meeting, inclusive of elders, deacons and minister of Word and sacrament? *(for more complete information, review Part 1 of the Book of Church Order: The Consistory)***

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Action or Activity** | **Full consistory?** |
| Oversight regarding the provision and conduct of services of worship, including providing for preaching and celebration of sacraments | yes |
| Significant decisions about the church’s property | yes |
| Big decisions about the church’s money | yes |
| Approving a budget | yes |
| Oversight of the election of elders and deacons | yes |
| Appointing a Vice President and a Clerk | yes |
| Completing the consistorial report and reporting to classis about the church’s ministry | yes |
| Hiring or firing church staff, or making other significant personnel decisions, such as approving housing allowance | yes |
| Appointing a search committee | yes |
| Calling or contracting with a new minister | yes |
| Addressing a conflict in the church | No. However, consistory may request assistance from either their minister or elder supervisor, or from another resource person in the classis or regional synod. |
| Receiving reports from committees | No. However, taking significant actions as recommended by committees would require the full consistory. |
| Developing and planning church events or programs | no |
| Praying and studying the Bible | no |
| Planning a funeral or wedding on church property | no |
| Training for consistory members | No. However, consistory may request assistance from either their minister or elder supervisor, or from another resource person in the classis or regional synod. |
| Moving ahead with projects already approved by consistory | no |

# **APPENDIX D: SAMPLE CONTRACT FOR SHARED SUPERVISION AMONG CLASSES**

***Contract for Shared Supervision among Classes***

The following agreement between the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Reformed Church, the Classis of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, the Classis of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and the Rev. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, is for the purpose of providing intentional classis supervision beginning \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for a period of 12 months, ending \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, extendable at the invitation of the consistory and with approval of the respective parties.

**Relationships and Responsibilities**

Rev. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ will be designated the minister supervisorof the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Reformed Church.

Responsibilities of the minister supervisor are those outlined in the Regional Synod of Albany Supervision Manual (see the specific section that applies).

Responsibilities of the Consistory

1. The consistory is the governing body of the local church and as such is the authority in leading the church and is responsible for discerning God’s future for the church. (See Consistory section in Book of Church Order for more details)
2. Leadership for consistory meetings is provided by the VP or a consistory designee.
3. Understanding that the minister supervisor is not the interim pastor.

Responsibilities of the Classis of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (name of classis the church is a member of)

1. Provide for ongoing support for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Reformed Church and Rev. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ through the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Committee.
2. Both classes will share written reports as requested.

**Details of Compensation**

The classis will provide Rev. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ with: (a) mileage at the current IRS rate; (b) tolls and other transportation expenses; (c) $\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ per visit; (d) and any other classis-authorized expenses.

Please refer to the Regional Synod of Albany Supervision Manual for guidelines on renumeration.

**Terms of Early Termination**

The contract may be terminated before its completion date at the initiation of either or both the minister supervisor or the consistory and upon approval of both classes. A 30-day written notice is required for this contract to be terminated.

**Limitations of Contract**

This contract must be reviewed annually and approved by all parties involved. The review must take place not less than 60 days prior to the completion date to allow sufficient time for the minister supervisor, the consistory, and the two classes to review and approve.

The following signatures constitute agreement of all parties.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Vice President of Consistory Date

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Classis of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Representative   Date

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Minister Supervisor Date

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Classis of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Representative   Date

*Revision Date: 10/4/19*

# **APPENDIX E: WHAT IS THE WORK OF THE SPECIALIZED TRANSITION MINISTER? – by Art Wiers (Regional Synod of the Great Lakes)**

The work that specialized transition ministers do brings significant value. There are many advantages to utilizing the resources of a specialized transitional minister when a church is going through a leadership transition, particularly when the transition involves the lead pastor. The common tendency during transitions is for consistories or church leaders to believe that, “we’ll just get some people to fill in, or we’ll just muddle through and then quickly look for a pastor.” Often times this approach ends up being less fruitful or advantageous than they had hoped for.

What follows are seven value-added aspects that transition ministers bring to churches in transition:

Although we are blessed to have excellent leaders in our churches, one of the things a specialized transition minister brings to a church in transition is **healthy objectivity** that no one else can. There can be really good leaders at the table in a board room, but the transition pastor has no bias and is able to see things with fresh eyes. The transition minister is able to ask questions and process difficult things in new and meaningful ways.

Another aspect that should not be underestimated is the importance of **preparing a path for the new pastor to come in and build on the ministry that is already in place.** This is key because oftentimes there are things in the way – things that obstruct meaningful ministry – and it can take that new pastor months or even years to get those obstacles cleared. A transition minister can be exceptionally helpful in preparing the runway for the next pastor.

**Stability** is an important factor to the church, which is why elders tend to be focused on maintaining stability. An advantage of an experienced, capable transition minister with strong leadership skills is that stability will be there on a daily basis, and the ministry will not suffer because of inconsistencies that might otherwise occur.

**Continuity** is another significant factor. While guest pastors can be helpful, when a church in transition has multiple different guest pastors over several months, it lacks the continuity necessary to hold a congregation together, or move a congregation forward. It is a blessing to a congregation to have the continuity of a capable preacher and communicator.

Another aspect that specialized ministers bring is **guidance and resourcing,** especially for the search process itself. Most people have little or no experience with understanding how best to seek a pastor who will be the right fit for a given church. The skills and experience of a specialized transition minister are very helpful as they provide counsel and facilitation, working alongside church leaders to help them sort through the process in a way that is meaningful and effective.

Another thing that typically happens to churches during a time of pastoral transition is the lack of **momentum.** Whether it’s people backing away from commitments or people wandering off to other churches, a specialized transition minister helps to minimize this issue. And sometimes, momentum will even pick up under their fresh leadership.

Last but not least is the matter of **health and vitality**. We want all of our churches healthy and growing and it is very difficult to grow and increase in health when you’re lacking a key leader in the church. Bringing in a specialized transition ministry helps to prevent momentum loss while opening up space that allows for growth in health and vitality.