

Regional Pastors

Regional pastors are active or retired pastors who provide support to active clergy in the classis. Regional pastors build relationships with pastors, commissioned pastors, and their spouses through regular contact and conversation, assist in arranging mentors for new pastors, and seek to be available during times of particular challenge or opportunity.

History

In 1982 the synod of the CRCNA approved the development of the office of Pastor-Church Relations (PCR). This was the product of a two-year study in which a committee sought to find ways of responding effectively to growing concerns about the increased incidence of ministry compromising challenges in the relationships of pastors, church councils, and congregations. The program centered on the development of pastor relations committees in each congregation. These committees were made up of couples in the congregation, who were to meet with the pastor and spouse, providing feedback and support. Regional pastors were designated in each classis and their tasks were to encourage the development of the pastor relations committees as well as providing advice and consultation regarding their efforts on behalf of pastors and congregations. In addition to this work in congregations, the regional pastors were also expected to assist in the selection, training, and monitoring of mentors for newly ordained pastors.

Since the beginning of this program, the role of the regional pastor has evolved in several different directions. This change is the result of experience, time available, and feedback from regional pastors. There continues to be pastor relations committees in many congregations. Mentoring of new pastors is a continually developing program in PCR. But the focus of the regional pastor is primarily on being a “pastor to pastors.” Every classis in the CRCNA has at least one regional pastor and many have more, depending on the geography and number of churches/pastors in that region. The purpose of this change is to be sure that regional pastors are able to respond to the needs of their colleagues.

In this document, the goal of the Pastor-Church Relations office is to clarify the role of the regional pastor and encourage ministry effectiveness, thus improving the health of both pastors and congregations as they seek to be a witness to Christ in both the church and broader community.

Role and Tasks

1. The primary focus of the regional pastor is to support fellow pastors. Some ways in which this can be accomplished are:
 - Taking initiative in becoming acquainted with the pastors in the classis. This can be accomplished through interactions at classis meetings, group meetings, telephone calls, e-mails, visits (coffee, meals, etc.), input from others. The concern is to stay in contact with each other.
 - Reaching out in crisis situations. Maintaining contact in normal circumstances makes it more acceptable to reach out in crises. It is also helpful to watch for signs of need such as isolation, stress, reactivity, and transitions (e.g. changes in family, health, ministry).
 - Responding strategically to identified needs by coaching toward collegial relationships, self-care, and developing support structures such as personnel committees, pastor relations committees, connections with key lay persons.
 - Encouraging participation in continuing education and other growth opportunities.
2. In situations where the congregation has more than one ordained pastor, it is important to maintain contact with all of them. In cases where there are some tensions, it may be wise to ask another

pastor in the classis to serve as a resource/support to one of the others so that there is not a conflict of interest.

3. The pastor's spouse and family also need support and recognition. Especially when there are conflicts, the spouse is at an extreme disadvantage in that he/she is most often an observer on the sidelines, thus not being able to process the pain and frustration through face-to-face involvement. The regional pastor can provide a vital and safe presence.
4. Some other groups of church staff in the classis:
 - **Specialized ministry staff** should be recognized and encouraged to seek supportive relationships.
 - **Church planters and commissioned pastors** are included in the regional pastor's circle of concern.
5. The regional pastor is a liaison between the classis and PCR in facilitating mentee/mentor relationships.
 - Each new candidate for ministry is required to have a mentor for the first five years of his/her ministry in the CRCNA. The regional pastor assists the candidate in choosing an experienced pastor from the classis to serve as mentor.
 - The regional pastor will communicate this choice to Pastor-Church Relations for final approval.
 - PCR recommends that the regional pastor actively support the mentoring relationships and if they are not helpful, facilitate a possible change which will be more beneficial.
 - The mentoring initiative encourages creativity. Changing mentors along the way, multiple mentors, group mentoring, or finding a mentor from a non-CRC context are all possible options in a given situation.
 - Synod has also recommended that pastors coming into the CRCNA from other denominations, and pastors who have had some difficulties, may be helped by being encouraged to have a mentor. The regional pastor is encouraged to assist them in establishing a mentoring relationship.
6. It is helpful for the regional pastor to maintain the role of **gatekeeper** in working with pastors and their councils. In this capacity, the regional pastor may be the first person contacted about a personal or relationship concern, but is encouraged to refer to others who may be specialized in dealing with the issues raised. Some possible referral resources are:
 - A clergy colleague who may be a support or have a specialization in an area of concern – note: this can be a variant of the mentoring relationship.
 - Classis resources such as church visitors or a designated committee of clergy and laypersons who can assist a council at the request of the classis.
 - The staff of PCR may be a resource for intervention, consultation, or education.
 - A therapist or other specialized person in the community (It is wise to explore options in your community so that you can make timely and appropriate referrals when the need arises).

Qualifications

Effective regional pastors will be individuals with:

- Relational warmth
- Strong interpersonal skills
- Pastoral sensitivity and ability
- A genuine concern for their colleagues in ministry
- A willingness to pray for their colleagues in ministry

- A solid sense of relational/organizational boundaries
- An ability to strategically “resource” on behalf of pastors and their families.

Relationship to Classis and Other Ecclesiastical Functionaries

The regional pastor’s role is to serve as a pastor to fellow pastors. In this role, the regional pastor also serves in relationship to other ecclesiastical functionaries:

1. Classis

- Regional pastors should not serve in classical positions that affect their relationships to the pastors of the classis.
- Normally regional pastors should not serve as **church visitors**, but they are encouraged to work with the church visitors informing them when they ascertain difficulties with a pastor and council.
- Regional pastors maintain contact with the **mentors and mentees**, monitoring progress and concerns.
- It is helpful for the regional pastor to give a brief presentation at each classis meeting. This serves as a reminder of your availability to pastors, as well as encouraging collegial interaction.
- Regional pastors are appointed by Pastor-Church Relations with the advice of the **classical interim committee**.

2. Councils

- Regional pastors should not provide ministry to **consistories/councils** of churches in the classis where they are serving because that can easily compromise the relationship with the pastor. They may, however, interact with the council out of concern for the pastor or his/her family.

3. Ministry Team Leaders of CRC Home Missions

- The various ministry directors of Home Missions are actively involved with pastors and congregations in their assigned regions. Make acquaintance with them and let them know your interest in hearing about pastors in the classis who are in need of some attention. They can be a resource for your work and awareness.

Relationship to Pastor-Church Relations

1. The regional pastor is appointed by Pastor-Church Relations based on recommendation from the classical interim committee.

2. Pastor-Church Relations provides:

- Biennial training conferences.
- Ad hoc consultation relative to specific situations.
- Support of the regional pastor with the classis by communicating that other time consuming or relationship compromising tasks should not be assigned.
- Communication with councils of regional pastors as to the nature and importance of the regional pastor’s work.
- Information relative to specifics of the mentoring initiative.

3. Accountability

- A brief **semi-annual report** to Pastor-Church Relations will be asked of all regional pastors. This report will be an opportunity to update Pastor-Church Relations on activities, needs, changes, and concerns in each classis. Obviously, urgent items can be communicated to us at appropriate times, but the other reports are a way of keeping the office updated on events in classis and with pastors. (A draft copy of the form is attached.)

- **Terms of service** will not be reinstated. However, we encourage the regional pastor and the classical interim committee to maintain dialogue about needs of the pastors and effectiveness of current responses. This may include determination of whether there are enough regional pastors for easy availability by pastors, or whether it is time for another pastor to take over regional pastor responsibilities. At least every three years there should be some conversation and reevaluation of the regional pastor services in the classis.