

The Process of Finding A Pastor "Search Etiquette"

The Pastor Search Committee's conduct and practice is the first impression many candidates and their families will have regarding your church. As in all areas of life and work of the church, the highest standard should be followed. The process to locate, interview, evaluate, and pursue a potential pastoral candidate effects his current ministry field regardless if the candidate eventually serves as your pastor. A set procedure gives confidence to your committee members, to your church, and to the prospective candidate.

The following should be considered:

- 1. Determine a process to secure someone to “fill the pulpit” and secure a committee to assume responsibility for this process.** *During the absence of a pastor, everyone wonders who might be preaching in his place. (See “Who Will Preach For Us?)*
- 2. Use the Pastor Search Committee Questionnaire to get an idea of the congregation’s expectations of the pastor.** *(See Appendix 2: Church Questionnaire).*
- 3. Draft an updated Pastor’s Job Description (a statement of a pastor's tasks and expectations) and Pastor’s Compensation Package, and have them approved by the appropriate committee(s) and then the congregation** *(See Appendix 3: Sample: Pastor 's Job Description and see Appendix 4: Compensation Worksheet for Personnel Costs). These are formal expectations any candidate should understand before serving as your pastor. Develop a pastoral profile to be used by the committee in its search. State the obvious, leave no assumptions. Develop a written information piece to be used with each candidate, giving as full and succinct description of the church and its community as possible.*
- 4. Make assignments to committee members to put together a packet of information on the church and community to give to prospective candidates.** *Assemble several packets and keep them as current as possible. (See “Putting Together a Church Information Packet”)*
- 5. Discuss and approve a Code of Ethics that your Search Committee will use in their conduct through the entire search process.** *Deal with matters such as confidentiality, honesty, and relationships with other committee members, and common courtesy among members.*
- 6. Conduct the search for a pastor.**
*The Pastor Search Committee should agree upon the process of the search. A variety of methods are used in the process of the search:
The committee travels to visit with prospective pastors.
Prospective pastors are asked to travel to a neighboring church arranged previously, in which he will preach as a demonstration of his preaching style, focus and demeanor.*

More recently, pastor search committees have made use of videotapes or audiotapes of preaching from various candidates prior to either 1 or 2 above. The Pastor Search Committee should agree with and gain approval from the congregation in advance of expenditures regarding any use of congregational funds necessary to the expected search. (See "Pastor Search Committee Expenses")

The Pastor Search Committee should develop its own sense of confidentiality and schedule regarding their responsible search. Meetings of the committee should be held regularly, with all members fully informed of the expected agenda. The Chairman (elected by the congregational secret ballot as having received the most votes) should lead in a careful sharing of all concerns among the committee. The committee should agree upon the report to be shared periodically with the congregation, being careful not to divulge individual names or current pastorates of possible candidates, but equally calling for the fervent prayer of the congregation toward the committee's efforts in the search.

IMPORTANT: The chairman should be the primary spokesperson of the committee in all matters (with the congregation, with the potential candidates, and with any outside influences).

7. **Develop a list of names of prospective pastors.** Several candidates will be shared with you from a variety of sources. Each should be graciously accepted. One of the very best FREE resources to find resumes specific to your church is the www.CPIS.org website (Church Personnel Information Services from the Baptist General Convention of Texas). You will need the BGCT Church ID number from your monthly Cooperative Program giving form to log onto the website and complete a church profile that will help you to find resumes matching your church profile. Resumes may also be received from the association office, seminaries, colleges, other pastors or friends of candidates, etc.
8. **Preferably, such recommendations would include a written reference from the source and accompanied by a resume of the candidate.** In receiving recommendations of potential pastors, those providing such suggestions or recommendations should be informed that each suggestion would be treated in the same procedure as all others.
9. **A letter of acknowledgement should be sent to each candidate,** briefly stating receipt of the information and verification of any interest by the candidate. (see Appendix 5: Acknowledgement of Resume Received)
10. **By use of the pastoral profile, develop a list of prospective pastors.** Send a brief note to those whose information do not fit the profile developed, letting them cordially know at this time your search will take you in a different direction (see Appendix 6: Letter: Does Not Fit Profile). Send a letter to those who do fit the profile and ask them to complete an evaluation for further information (see Appendix 7: Letter: Continued Consideration; and see Appendix 8: Personal Evaluation).
11. **By committee assignment, thoroughly investigate available information on the most likely candidates by contact to their references.** Respect the

prospect's current ministry field. In every contact made, please be sensitive as not to disturb the church currently served. Making random inquiries to those other than references could be disruptive to the fellowship of fellow believers. Caution. Develop a standardized, written means of inquiry to be used with each reference and with the candidate directly (see Appendix 9: Letter: Candidate's References; and Appendix 10: Personal Reference Information Form). Check all references. Ask each reference if he knows one other person who might know the candidate that could give a good objective report. **Make sure you obtain at least one weakness of each candidate.**

12. **In evaluation of the written responses, narrow the list of candidates again.** (Careful to be inclusive of those candidates being suggested at subsequent times.)
13. **Notify by brief acknowledgement, those no longer under consideration.** A statement of their obvious gifts and an explanation that at present, your search takes you another direction (see Appendix 11: Second Level Notice of no Further Consideration).
14. **Prioritize your short-list of candidates.** At this point, deal with one person at a time. Follow the process to its conclusion. Never consider bringing more than one candidate at a time before your church for consideration as a pastor for the congregation.
15. **Contact each viable candidate directly for an initial visit.** Keenly respect the present ministry of the candidate. **Do not speak to the church secretary** about an initial visit or any other subject. Speak to the pastor personally and arrange an appointment for the committee to visit at length with him (prior to hearing him preach, if possible). A drop-in committee is more likely to have expended tremendous effort in arranging their own schedules, using travel resources, building up expectations; only to discover the absence of the pastor or a very busy pastor who does not have time to give the attention deserved. Make appointments directly with the candidate and be sensitive about the meeting place so as not to arouse suspicion.
16. **Keep the appointment.** If emergencies require changes, communicate the problems and reschedule. Try to schedule the meeting away from the office for privacy sake.
17. **Be honest, even if it is humbling.** Be descriptive of all things: faults and successes of the church. Do not obscure the bad with an over emphasis of the good.
18. **Try not to be conspicuous while visiting in services.** After making sure the pastor will be preaching, arrive as friends, making a visit among brothers and sisters in Christ. Sit in various places among the congregation, not as a board of inquiry. Take good notes on the sermon and worship experience. It is hard to recall your evaluation from memory (see Appendix 12: Prospective Minister's Sermon Evaluation Form). Do not linger, but make a point before leaving to share privately with the pastor that you will be back in touch. Information and

details can be shared by phone earlier or later, but not at the dismissal handshake.

- 19. Make an immediate follow-up phone call that afternoon to relieve the candidate's anxiety about your conclusions of the visit with him.** *Even if the news is "no news," it is more caring to communicate with honesty than to be silent.*
- 20. Make arrangements for a second visit to the candidate's church.** *Use good judgment as to whether or not the entire committee should attend the worship service. However, for the second visit, all committee members should attend the interview with the pastor and his wife. (See "Making a Second Visit With a Viable Candidate")*
- 21. Determine how the Search Committee will present the candidate to the congregation.** *This is a very important step in the process and should not be overlooked because first impressions are always critical. (See "How to Present the Candidate to the Congregation")*
- 22. Determine how the Search Committee will make the official recommendation to the congregation.** *Refer to your Church Constitution for official guidelines. (See "How to Make a Recommendation and Vote on the Pastoral Candidate")*