

Choosing a Pastor

Helps for the Pastor Search Committee

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1: Pray, Pray, Pray, Pray, Pray, and don't stop praying.

Seeking a pastor is much more than finding the most qualified candidate. While qualifications are important, seeking God's will is the most vital. You are looking for more than a preacher; you are looking for God's man to lead your congregation now and in the years ahead. The most important thing you can do is pray. Pray for God to lead you to the man whom you will bring before the church. A man may have the exact qualifications you are looking for but not be God's choice. Remember, you're searching for God's will, not just someone to fill the pulpit.

Prayer is also an area to involve the congregation. Encourage the congregation to pray for God's will in seeking a pastor. They should be praying for the next pastor as God works with them. They should pray for you as a committee that you seek God in every step.

I encourage you as a committee to read "Seeking God To Seek A Pastor" by Dr. Gregory Frizzell. Ask the association office how you can get copies of this book. If possible someone could lead the church in a study of this valuable book.

2: Choosing and Organizing the Pastor Search Committee

Selection of the Committee

Your church may have a procedure for selecting a pastor search committee written into its bylaws. If not, consider the following. The committee can be nominated by the church nominating committee or by the congregation in a business meeting. Have them nominated in some form before they are elected so that you can check with the nominees to be sure they will serve. In either case, care should be taken to observe the following points:

1. Remember that choosing a pastor is a spiritual decision; therefore, those being considered for the committee should be spiritually minded.
2. The church body elects the committee.
3. The committee should represent the church membership in terms of age, special commitments or interests, and length of membership in the church. It is always better to have diversity if the congregation is, in fact, diverse than to have a committee in which everyone is alike.
4. The committee is made aware of the church's guidelines of the process for selecting and calling a pastor and is assured that the church will help them do their job. While there's no "right" size for a pastor search committee, there are some considerations relative to size. Generally, a committee of five to seven is best.
5. To do its best work, pastor search committee members will need some understanding of the limits and responsibilities of their work. The committee should understand the following:
 - 1) Funds available for the committee's expenses. The church should pay all expenses incurred in the committee's work.
 - 2) Responsibility for reporting to the congregation.

Committee Organization

Chairperson: Convenes the meetings and gives general leadership.

Vice-Chairperson: Assists the chairperson and functions as chairperson in the absence of the chairperson.

Secretary: Keeps records of meetings, handles correspondence and maintains committee files.

General Guidelines

1. Keep the committee's work confidential, especially meeting content. This is not to say that members should work in secret. But they must use caution to protect the church and prospective candidates. For example, if church members hear that the committee is considering a particular candidate they may in their excitement spread the word that this person is going to be their next pastor. If the committee concludes that he is not the right person, disappointment and discouragement can be expected. On the other hand, if word gets back to a prospective candidate's church that he is being considered; the news could hurt his ministry there.
2. Respect a pastor's present ministry by asking permission if you want to contact someone in his current church or to visit his church to hear him preach.
3. Once you have determined your top candidates, work with only one at a time.
4. It is generally better to work by appointment, especially when you expect to interview the candidate. It is also important to get the pastor's approval before visiting his church. Do not visit without his knowledge.
5. Be totally honest with the candidate in your appraisal of the strengths and weaknesses of your church.
6. The committee should be unanimous in its recommendation of a candidate to the church.
7. Notify candidates who are no longer being considered.

3: Preparation

A mistake that many pastor search committees make is to begin looking at resumes too early. Much preparatory work is required before you move to that step. It is a good idea very early in the process to invite the Director of Missions to meet with the committee for an orientation about your work. This can save time and heartache later.

The preparation time is a time to involve the whole church in the process. Involve the church in identifying itself. Involve church leaders as you examine church documents. Involve everyone as you survey the church. The writing of the Church Covenant or Job Description should involve all. It at least should be agreed upon by the whole church. The finance team will need to be involved as you determine the perimeters of a salary package. The more you can involve the church in this phase the more confidence the church will have in the committee as the work progresses.

1. Identify the Church

Before you begin to seek resumes or do interviews, determine your church's identity. You should be able to identify your church's direction, its strengths and weakness, and its core values. Knowing the congregation's identity will help you determine the type of pastor for which you should be searching. Following are some suggestions to help determine your church's identity:

- Examine church constitution and by-laws.
- Look at strategy plans the church may have made. These may contain material such as purpose statement, mission statements, and core values.
- Survey the church. Surveys can help determine church identity and give you an idea of the type pastor the congregation is expecting. The committee should take care not to try to meet everybody's expectations. Don't build a profile of the pastor out of these surveys. One committee attempted this and determined the ideal pastor for their church would be 25 years old and have 30 years of experience. (Sample surveys can be found in Appendix 1 pages 16-26.)

2. Write a Pastor – Church Covenant

It is only right that a pastor know what the church expects of him and what he can expect from the church. Do not assume that a pastor will know what the church expects because every church expects something different. If your church does not have a written job description, one should be written and approved. Write a job description that reflects the biblical qualifications of a pastor, the church's expectations, and the normal functions of a pastor. The pastor's role in ministry basically falls into three major categories: proclamation, pastoral care, and leadership. The key to being a successful search committee is in matching the expectations of the church with the strengths of the pastor.

I encourage the church to write the document as a covenant between the church and the pastor. The difference in a covenant and a job description is that the expectations of both the church and the pastor are included in a covenant.

As you seek God's will for a pastor for your congregation, you need to remember that the pastors you are dealing with are also seeking God's will for their lives. It is only fair to them that you present them a clear description of what is expected. Do not assume that all perspective pastors have the same concept of pastoral ministry. Each has different gifts, talents, and leadership skills. An honest job description will aid you and the pastoral candidate to determine his fit for the church. (Sample Pastor – Church Covenant and Job Descriptions can be found in Appendix 2 pages 26-39)

3. Determine the Pastor's Compensation

Another important consideration that the pastor search committee must have is an approved pastor's compensation package. While you will wait until you focus on just one candidate before you share salary information, it is best for the church to deal with the matter before the time arises. The so-called "salary package" can give church members a false impression of how much salary a pastor actually makes. Remember, most employers do not include benefits and business expenses as part of an employee's salary. Neither should churches. It should also be remembered that a pastor normally is considered self-employed and is required to pay Social Security at the higher self-employment tax rate. The church should approve the compensation in a business session.

Most churches ask, "What is a fair salary package?" Of course, many factors play into this question. You must determine if he will be a full-time pastor or if he will be bi-vocational. Will a house or a housing allowance be given? I recommend two resources in determining a salary package: (1) yourselves. In other words, what does it take for a person to live in your community? A pastor should be able to maintain a lifestyle similar to that of the congregation. (2) Use the SBC Compensation Planning Guide (Appendix 7) and the Church Compensation Study. The Compensation Study can be found online at www.guidestone.org/budgetresources. About halfway down the page you will find "Review the SBC Church Compensation Survey." You will be asked to input certain information about your church, such as size and location. The study will then show you what similar churches pay. If no one on the committee has a computer, the associational office can print this material out for you.

4. Develop a Church Information Packet

Prepare a Church Information Packet that introduces your church and community to the candidate. Just as you will be looking at the candidates, they will be looking you over. Neither party should hide anything from the other. Include the following in the packet:

1. A brief church history — how and when it was founded, major accomplishments, etc.
2. Any printed information about the church, such as visitor's leaflet, worship bulletin, newsletter, etc.
3. Your community characteristics — the nature of the immediate community, population characteristics and trends, demographic material, The Association office can produce a demographic study of your area upon request.

4. Your church membership records such as a 5- to 10-year profile of baptisms, program organizations, finances, mission gifts. This information can be obtained from your association office if church records are not available.
5. Church program plans for the future, major emphases or long-range plans.
6. Information on your church facilities and future plans.
7. List of church staff and program leadership.

4: SCREENING PASTOR CANDIDATES

1. Beginning the Screening Process

Now you are ready to gather and review resumes of prospective pastors. Some possible sources for resumes are church members, director of missions, state convention, seminaries, and local pastors. You may also consider advertising for resumes in the local association newsletter and the state Baptist paper. Set a deadline for receiving resumes and make the church aware of the date. Usually thirty days from this point is sufficient.

The committee secretary should log each name received and record the source (see sample in Appendix 3 page 41 and instructions under “First Screening” below). The information will be helpful if follow-up is needed. It is suggested that you work through the source if you need a resume from the candidate. This helps prevent false expectations on the candidate’s part that might arise if he is contacted by a search committee. A letter should be sent to acknowledging each resume received (see sample in Appendix 3 page 42).

First Screening

After the deadline has expired, you are ready to screen the candidates. Again, it cannot be overemphasized that this is a spiritual journey for your committee, church, and next pastor. You should always remember this is a sacred task and that prayer, Bible study, and committee discussion must be led by the Holy Spirit at all times.

Church Member Survey has provided direction regarding the type of pastor the congregation feels it needs at the present time. The Search Committee should complete the same survey. Keep the committee’s results separate from the church so that you can evaluate your ideas and compare them to the rest of the church. With this pastoral profile in mind go through the resumes and separate them into three categories:

- (A) Most fits church expectations
- (B) Somewhat fits church expectations
- (C) Does not fit church expectations

The “A” group (“most fits church expectations”) now becomes the focus of the committee's work. You are now ready for your first contact with the prospective candidates on your “A” list. Do not discard the other resumes, especially those in the “B” category, in case you need them later.

A Letter of Inquiry should be sent to all persons in the “A” group (see sample Appendix 3 page 43). The letter should seek to determine if they are interested in pursuing the matter further.

There are many possible reasons they may no longer be interested. Set a deadline for their response (very important).

2. Obtaining Reference Information

After the deadline for responses from prospective pastors has passed and the committee feels they are satisfied with the number of responses, you are ready for the next step.

Some candidates may have eliminated themselves from consideration with their response to the inquiry letter. Note these as not interested on the prospect list.

The next step in the process is contacting personal references on interested candidates. Most resumes will have references listed. These are a good starting point. It is strongly suggested that you also contact key persons who worked with or knew the candidate from previous churches. Some suggestions include former staff members, former chairmen of deacons, director of missions, and state convention personnel. It is also a good idea to ask those you contact for other persons who know the candidate.

Checking references can be done by telephone interview and/or by letter. Both methods are valuable, but you should consider that some people will give you more information in a personal interview and others prefer a letter (See Appendix 4, page 45). I suggest that the first reference check be by letter. You can always follow up with a telephone call to clarify any questions. Once you settle on one candidate, personal telephone interviews would be wise. (See Appendix 4, page 47).

3. Completing the Screening Process

After the committee has completed reference gathering, you are ready for a second screening of the candidates. The committee should thoroughly discuss the reference information gathered on each candidate. After praying for God's leadership, the committee should go through the resumes and prioritize the top five candidates.

A second letter should be sent to these candidates, along with a Pastor Information Form (see Appendix 5, page 49) and the church information packet. It is strongly recommended that you do background checks. It is unfortunate that such checks are necessary these days, but there are several examples across the country when such a check would have avoided later problems in the church. Signed permission must be obtained from the candidate in order to do such a check. You can obtain help with the checks through local police, an attorney, and most financial institutions. Concord Baptist Association is equipped and certified through Safe Church a division of LexisNexis to do nationwide background checks. Contact the association office if you desire this help (See Background Check information in Appendix 5, pages 52-54).

Second Reference Check

You are now ready to make a second reference check on the top five candidates. This is a very important point in the process. The correspondence method was OK for your first references, but it is too impersonal at this crucial stage of your work. Telephone calls should be made to key

references for each candidate. Sometimes people are more open over the telephone than by letter. Since the committee will make several calls, a form would be helpful to secure common information on each candidate (Appendix 4, page 47). Ask each person you call to suggest someone else who knows the candidate well whom you might call.

4. Prioritizing

Once all references have been contacted, the committee reaches the most critical time in the process. Now you must seek God's leadership to prioritize candidate choice from first to fifth. This may be very difficult or the order may be very obvious to everyone. One method is to allow each committee member to prioritize the list, and then to compare your findings. I am always amazed to see that most often one candidate will rise to the top of everyone's list. The committee should be unanimous in its first choice candidate, if at all possible. **Begin work with your number one choice only.** It is tempting at this point to bring more than one candidate before the church in order to see who the church likes best. **DO NOT DO THIS!** You end up with a popularity contest and not a Spiritual decision. While the intent is good it using such a strategy has caused problems in many churches.

5: Choosing The Candidate

The Interview:

The Pastor Search Committee chairperson should call the prospective pastor to arrange to interview him. His wife should be encouraged to attend as well. Appointments are important to ensure the candidate's availability. It is also helpful to attend a worship service where the candidate is leading to get a feel for his worship and preaching style. If the candidate currently serves as a pastor arrange with him to visit a service. If the candidate is not currently serving as pastor work with him to arrange to hear him at another church.

Begin and end the interview time with prayer. The interview should be long enough so that both parties can get over the awkwardness of the first meeting (generally an hour and a half to two hours is adequate). Sufficient time should be spent getting acquainted and for "small talk" before more serious discussion takes place.

A good beginning point for more serious discussion could be the Church Member Survey and Church Information Packet that was sent to him. This will help him feel less "on the hot seat" as the discussion begins by focusing on your church rather than on him. Share with him information about your church and community and answer any questions he may have.

An "Interview Questionnaire" will serve as a guide in developing questions you would like answered in the interview (Appendix 6, page 57). There are at least two values to this approach: (1) You are less likely to forget important questions, and (2) members will listen for the answers to specific questions that can be discussed at the next committee meeting. Committee members should fill-in a questionnaire after the interview to record what they heard from the candidate. No commitment is made to the candidate at this time.

A FOLLOW-UP COMMITTEE MEETING

Schedule a follow-up committee meeting as soon as possible to make a decision regarding the candidate. Each committee member should share and explain his/her feelings about the prospective pastor. A prayerful decision must then be made as to whether the committee feels led to continue working with this candidate, if it needs more information, or if it should consider the second man on the list. (Remember, only work with one candidate at a time.)

SECOND MEETING with the CANDIDATE:

If the committee decides to continue working with this candidate, another meeting should be scheduled with him and his wife. If you have not already done so, the committee should ask permission to do a background check (Appendix 5). To prepare for this meeting, make sure you have completed interviews with all references and have received a background check report. Make a list of follow-up questions that have arisen. The committee should also be prepared to discuss the compensation package and the pastor – church covenant.

Before the meeting ends, make sure all committee members, the prospective pastor and his wife have had all their questions answered. The committee and the candidate may be on an emotional high as you get to know each other and discuss the possibility of his becoming your next pastor. However, it would be best to make no commitments at this time. Set a date for contacting the candidate about the committee's decision. A few days to a week will give everyone time to pray, think, and come to a conclusion. Remember, this is a spiritual decision so make sure you are hearing from God rather than your emotions.

How to Decide to Recommend a Candidate as Pastor Check List:

1. Is the committee unanimous in sensing God's will about the candidate?
2. Does the man meet the church's agreed-upon qualifications?
3. Have you checked all his references thoroughly?
4. Is there any concern over information obtained from references?
5. Has the salary package been discussed thoroughly with the candidate?
6. Have the job description and pastoral evaluation procedure been thoroughly discussed and agreed upon by the candidate?
7. Has the pastor/church covenant been discussed and agreed upon?
8. Are you satisfied with his doctrinal, ministry, and leadership views?
9. Are you satisfied with his relationship to the association, state convention, and SBC?
10. Have you done a background check?

6: The Call

Presenting Your Candidate to the Church

If the committee decides to present the candidate to the church, careful preparation must be made to ensure everyone has an opportunity to meet the candidate and select groups have some personal time to meet with him. The Pastor Search Committee should arrange these meetings. Suggested groups to meet with the pastor include the deacons, church council, and church staff. A church-wide fellowship with some time for informal questions would also be helpful.

The Pastor Search Committee should plan a meeting with the prospective pastor to discuss specific details of the call. These items should be spelled out in writing:

Pastor's Compensation
Pastor – Church Covenant
Church Personnel Policies (vacation, sick leave,
time away for revivals, conventions, etc.)
Moving arrangements
Church By-Laws

Decide if the church will vote the day the pastor comes “in view of a call” or at a later time. Some churches have him preach both services with a fellowship in the afternoon, and then vote after the evening service. Some vote after the morning service, and others wait until Wednesday to vote. Whatever is decided should be made clear both to the church and to the candidate. It is also recommended that the minimum affirmative vote for extending a call be determined before the candidate is presented. This is usually by two-thirds or higher. Most churches vote by secret ballot. (Check your church bylaws to see if these procedures are already determined.)

If the vote is taken while the prospective pastor is present, excuse him and his family. Communicate the vote percentage to the candidate if the vote is affirmative. If the vote is not high enough for a call, explained that to the candidate in private. If the vote is affirmative, the prospective pastor should be allowed to make a statement to the church. (Sometimes the candidate is allowed a week or more to make his final decision.)

More Details of Presenting a Pastor in View of a Call

1. The first step in bringing a prospective pastor in view of a call is to set a date. The date should preferably be at least two weeks in advance, allowing adequate time to inform the congregation. It will be helpful if the committee can provide biographical information on the prospective pastor. If possible, this information should be mailed to all members.
2. The committee will need to make travel and lodging provisions. If the church is within driving distance, the pastor will usually desire to drive to and from the church the same day. If lodging is necessary, arrangements can be made at a local motel or in a church member's home. A pulpit supply check plus travel expenses should be given to the prospective pastor.

3. If the prospective pastor is available on Saturday night, a fellowship might be scheduled in a home or at the church. This will provide an excellent time for members to meet the prospective pastor and his family. If the prospective pastor is not available on Saturday evening, a fellowship potluck meal might be planned for Sunday noon at the church. Even though the pastor is available for a Saturday evening fellowship, the church may desire to also have the potluck fellowship meal on Sunday.
4. The prospective pastor should be formally introduced to the congregation on Sunday morning, and he should preach in all worship services.
5. The Vote to Extend a Call
 - A. The time for the vote should be announced at the same time the committee announces the date the prospective pastor will come in view of a call.
 - B. Some churches list the procedure on voting in their written constitution and bylaws. If this is the case, the procedure must be followed unless the church changes it.
 - C. The vote should be by secret ballot unless the bylaws state differently.
 - D. It is advisable for a church to establish a minimum affirmative vote before extending a call. Most churches follow this procedure and the minimum affirmative vote varies from 66 to 80 percent. This will avoid the possibility of a pastor accepting a call on a 51 to 65 percent call, which is never in the best interest of the church or prospective pastor.
 - E. It is suggested that the vote be taken on the Sunday evening after the worship service for the following reasons:
 - 1) The congregation has prayed for the Lord to lead their Pastor Search Committee to find God's man.
 - 2) The Pastor Search Committee is recommending a man they feel is God's man after usually many months of prayer and searching.
 - 3) Most people, after meeting and hearing the prospective pastor on the designated Sunday, have formed their convictions on how they will vote.
 - 4) It possibly will permit a more favorable atmosphere for the congregation to express their convictions on a spiritual basis rather than human influence. It avoids any possibility of some members being influenced by the feelings of others during the upcoming week.
 - F. A Suggested Procedure for the Vote
 - 1) Have the prospective pastor and family leave the sanctuary.
 - 2) Ballots should be passed out to all members.

- 3) The chairman of the Pastor Search Committee should make a motion that the church extend a call to the prospective pastor. Someone will need to second the motion. Once the motion has a second the chairman of the Pastor Search Committee should instruct the members to write "yes" if they favor extending a call and "no" if they are not in favor.
- 4) Have special prayer for God's leadership.
- 5) Cast ballots.
- 6) Take up and tabulate ballots.
- 7) After the tabulation, a report should be made to the congregation.
- 8) If a call is extended, the pastor and his family should be invited back into the sanctuary for formal announcement. If the pastor is not extended a call, dismiss the congregation. The chairman of the Pastor Search Committee should explain the situation to the pastor. This procedure can avoid an embarrassing situation for the pastor and congregation.
- 9) Close in prayer. If the pastor accepts the call, have a prayer of thanksgiving. If he feels he should wait to make a decision, pray for God's continued leadership.

G. The Prospective Pastor's Decision

The congregation should understand if the pastor does not give his decision immediately after the call. Although he has prayed and shown interest in accepting a possible call, he has not had a decision to make until the church officially extends a call. Some pastors accept immediately, but many pastors prefer to take a few days to be sure of God's leadership. In most cases, a pastor will decide within a week to ten days.

If the pastor accepts the call, the Pastor Search Committee should assist with the transition of the pastor and his family into the church. You are encouraged, as individuals and as a group, to befriend, support, and aid them in adjusting to their new pastorate. Many churches build on the exciting momentum of calling a new pastor by making his first Sunday a High Attendance Day with a church-wide fellowship to greet him and his family. Community leaders can be invited. Sometimes the director of missions is called upon to welcome the new pastor to his church.

7: Having a Good Start

HELPING THE NEW PASTOR HAVE A GOOD START

The pastor search committee is tempted to think that its task is finished once a call is extended and accepted. However, it is important that the committee shift its task to making sure that the new pastor and his family have a good start. The pastor and his family know the committee members better than anyone else in the beginning. Therefore, you are the logical ones to make sure they get off to a good start. Following are suggestions for the committee and the church:

1. The church should create excitement and anticipation for the pastor's arrival. Few events in a church can equal the high emotional level of anticipating the arrival of a new pastor. If properly used by both pastor and congregation, this initial experience can be a springboard toward a harmonious and effective ministry.
2. The church should plan a welcome for the pastor and his family on the day of their arrival. Following are some suggestions:
 - A. Help locate housing by introducing them to local Realtors.
 - B. Make arrangements for temporary housing until a permanent home is found.
 - C. Help unload and arrange furniture.
 - D. Bring food to the pastor's home.
 - E. Place flowers from the church in the pastor's home.
 - F. The Sunday prior to the pastor's arrival, have members sign a welcome card. Present the card to the pastor and his family on their arrival.
3. The church should encourage high attendance on the pastor's first Sunday. High attendance can be promoted by announcements from the pulpit, through Sunday School classes, church newsletter, telephone, article in the local newspaper, etc. High attendance on this first Sunday will encourage both pastor and congregation.
4. The church should plan a church-wide fellowship of some sort on the pastor's first Sunday to welcome him and his family.
5. The Pastor's Orientation
 - A. Benefits of a pastor's orientation
 - (1) It will save the pastor valuable time, since it will take him many hours of inquiry and research to gather most of the information that could be given to him in an orientation.

- (2) It will help the pastor reach full production in ministry in a shorter time period. Studies show that it takes six months for a worker to attain full production on a new job. However, with good orientation, full production can be reached in about three months.
- (3) It can contribute to a close ministry relationship between the pastor and congregation.
- (4) It can be a confidence builder for a young pastor. It will familiarize him with some essentials to get started well in a pastorate. It will help him know the church has a personal interest in his ministry. And it will encourage him to have confidence in consulting church leaders for advice and help in his ministry.

B. Who should conduct the orientation?

- (1) The Pastor Search Committee could conduct the orientation. They will have the benefit of previous interviews with the pastor.
- (2) The deacons could conduct the orientation. This could help lay a foundation for an effective pastor-deacon relationship.
- (3) The church council could conduct the orientation. This could help establish a strong working relationship between the pastor and the church council.
- (4) A special committee could be formed from the above groups. This would draw expertise from all three.

C. Orientation purpose

The orientation should provide the new pastor with an overview of the internal nature and workings of the local church. This includes church membership, financial status, building facilities, programs, history, activities, policies, and immediate needs.

D. Items which should be included in the pastor's orientation:

- (1) Familiarize the pastor with the church facilities and equipment.
- (2) Give the pastor a copy of the church budget and financial reports for the past few months.
- (3) Give the pastor a list of the names, addresses, and phone numbers of all resident members.
- (4) Give the pastor a list of upcoming church activities and dates.
- (5) Give the pastor a list of workers in all organizations and committees.
- (6) Familiarize the pastor with the location of important church papers (deeds, contracts, titles, incorporation papers, annual church minutes, etc.).

- (7) Review the church constitution and bylaws. If the church does not have a written constitution and bylaws, the pastor should be informed of the organizational and business procedures of the church. For example:
 - (a) Time of the monthly business meeting
 - (b) When and how the church elects the church nominating committee.
 - (c) The church's procedure for recording and maintaining financial records.
- (8) Give the pastor information about the community (special school and community activities, etc.).
- (9) Review the pastor's salary and benefits.