



# **The Calling of a New Pastor: A Guide for the Pastoral Search Committees**

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## I. THE PASTOR AND THE LOCAL CHURCH

The idea of pastoral ministry is rooted in the Scriptures. The author of Ephesians writes: “The gifts (Christ) gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (4:11-13).

Although it is true that ministry is the responsibility of every Christian, in the New Testament there is a recognition that God has called some to the office of pastor. The pastor’s ministry is to equip, strengthen and encourage the rest of the church for its ministry in the world. The pastoral office is a gift that Christ has given to the church.

Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the local church calls its pastor. It is important to recognize that the pastor is **called** rather than hired. The distinction is important. The idea of a **call** is grounded in the biblical understanding of divine call. The pastoral ministry is more than a profession; it is a call of God. The idea of **calling** rather than simply hiring a pastor also lifts up the role of prayer and the leadership of God through the Holy Spirit in the process of selecting a new minister. It is not just reading resumes and interviewing a potential candidate that is important. There is a waiting upon the Holy Spirit through prayer for direction that is significant.

When a church calls a pastor and the pastor accepts that call, a covenant relationship is established between the pastor and the congregation. It is a relationship in which there are mutual tasks and obligations. In the **Pastor-Parish Handbook: The Church in Mutual Ministry** (a manual developed by the Ministerial Care Committee of the Central Conference for Pastor-Parish Committees), there is a responsive reading that may be used at installation services that affirms this mutual ministry and responsibility.

## II. CALLING A PASTOR

1) The process begins with the appointment or election of a Pastoral Search Committee. Guidelines for selection of committee members are often outlined in the bylaws of the church; so consulting your church constitution and bylaws is necessary. The church should also take care to select persons who can serve faithfully, keep confidences and represent the diversity of the local church.

2) It would be extremely helpful to invite the Superintendent or Associate Superintendent to the organizational meeting of the Pastoral Search Committee. At that meeting the Superintendent or Associate will assist the committee in its

organization and in outlining the process for the committee's important task. Much of what follows will be discussed at that meeting.

3) The committee should elect a chair and secretary at its initial meeting. The chair will be in regular contact with the Superintendent or Associate, especially when the committee is ready to look at resumes and make contacts with potential candidates.

4) At its initial meeting the committee should deal, at least, with the two following matters:

A **Confidentiality.** The committee should record a vote on this matter for inclusion in its minutes. Confidentiality should include the following.

- All matters discussed should be kept confidential within the committee. This may well mean that the committee will decide to exclude even their spouses from matters on the table.
- At the same time, the church should be kept apprised of the committee's work without revealing the confidential details of its functioning. The chair of the committee might make a verbal report on a Sunday morning, simply stating, "The Search Committee has met with the Conference Superintendent," or "The Search Committee is in the process of reviewing resumes," etc. A written report could be included in a church newsletter. The membership needs to be regularly assured that the Pastoral Search Committee is at work.
- No member of the committee should go out on his/her own to make contacts with potential candidates. Any contacts made should have the prior consent of the entire committee

B **Committee Vote.** You will need to determine what kind of a vote will be required by the committee to recommend a candidate to the congregation: a unanimous vote, a two-thirds vote, etc. The committee should deal with this question at its initial meeting. We strongly recommend a unanimous vote.

5) It is strongly suggested that the Search Committee develop a survey questionnaire to be completed by its members of the congregation early in the process. Ideally, the survey should result in both a composite picture of the church with its strengths and weaknesses and also a composite picture of the kind of pastor the church is seeking. Questions dealing with the kind of preaching that is important, the kind of administrator the church is looking for, the relative importance of pastoral care, etc., should be included in the survey. Also questions dealing with current strengths and weaknesses in the church should be included (a sample survey is included in this booklet). A copy of the results of the survey should be sent to the Conference office as soon as it is completed.

- 6) The Superintendent or Associate will bring resumes for the committee's consideration. The committee is urged to spend time prayerfully looking at the resumes. The Superintendent or Associate will make suggestions of other resources for information on prospective candidates. The committee should prioritize the candidates, and then begin the process of making contacts with prospective candidates.
- 7) The committee may want to make contacts with their top three candidates. The chair of the committee should make the contacts by telephone to ascertain if the candidate would be interested in further conversation. The candidate may be asked for additional information such as a tape of a recent sermon and service, and expansion on certain areas of the current resume, etc.
- 8) When the committee has made a decision as to a priority list of potential candidates, it is time for a personal interview. It is strongly urged that the committee interview only one candidate at a time. From experience, when a committee begins to interview more than one candidate, there is the potential for many problems in the process. The suggestion is to interview one candidate, and following the interview, the committee should vote whether or not to recommend him/her to the entire church. It is assumed that preaching is not part of the interview process.
- 9) The process of the interview should include:
- A meeting date convenient to both candidate and committee.
  - The church should pay for all costs relative to bringing in the candidate for such a meeting.
  - The candidate should have received a packet of information relative to the church and the community. The packet could include: sample bulletins, annual reports, anniversary brochures, material from the local chamber of commerce, etc. It should be attractively assembled.
  - The interview should cover all areas relative to the church's life and ministry. The candidate should be given opportunity to share his or her own goals for ministry, for the mission of the church, etc. Though questions of theology might be raised, it is important to remember that this interview is not another ordination interview to determine the orthodoxy of the candidate. A list of possible questions for this interview is included at the conclusion of this booklet.
- 10) It is important that, early in the process, the committee make contact with the Trustees (or Church Council) to determine parameters regarding salary and benefits for the new pastor. The matter of salary needs to be addressed as soon as the committee has a viable candidate. The Superintendent or Associate can be very helpful here, providing salary guidelines and figures as they are needed.
- 11) Once the committee has voted to recommend a candidate to the congregation, there is the need to set up a "candidating experience." Most

churches still prefer to bring the candidate in to “proof preach.” Many churches are utilizing other methods in the candidating experience in addition to, and sometimes in place of, the preaching on a Sunday morning. Some kind of gathering of the congregation together in a more informal setting where the candidate can speak of his or her own spiritual and ministerial pilgrimage followed by a question and answer time is very helpful.

It is important to be prompt in notifying any other candidates that have been contacted that the committee is moving in the direction of calling someone else. There is no more painful thing for a pastor than to be left waiting and wondering what a search committee is doing.

12) Throughout the whole search and call process, please know that the resources of the Superintendent and Associate are always available. Do not hesitate to call at any time. Your task is a significant one both in the life of the church and in the life of the potential candidate. Also, kindly keep the superintendents informed of your progress.

13) Once the congregation has voted to call a pastor, inform the pastor of the decision by phone and send him a completed “Letter of Call” as soon as possible. The Covenant has a standardized “Letter of Call” that you only need to complete and send. Copies are available from the Superintendent. Be sure to inform the Superintendent or Associate of the church’s decision so arrangements can be made for an installation service soon after the arrival of the new minister.

God bless you in your work!

## QUESTIONS OF PASTORAL SEARCH COMMITTEE FOR POTENTIAL PASTORAL CANDIDATES

Occasionally, Search Committees wonder what kind of questions are appropriate to ask a potential candidate during an interview. Here are some suggestions. Perhaps they will be helpful in getting you started. Please bear in mind that the list is only suggestive and not exhaustive.

1. Tell us something about your spiritual journey. How did you come to faith in Christ? How did you sense God's call to the pastoral ministry?
2. Tell us something about your family: your spouse and children. What do you enjoy doing together? How do you as a pastor care for them in the midst of your busy schedule in the church?
3. Tell us something about your church experiences. What influences have shaped your idea of the local church and its ministry and the role of the pastor?
4. Tell us something about your spiritual disciplines. How do you maintain and encourage your relationship with God? Do you have someone who can be a pastor to you?
5. We realize that every pastor has areas of strength and weakness. No minister is gifted in every area. What do you perceive to be your strengths (gifts)? In what ways have those strengths (gifts) been affirmed? What are your areas of weakness? How do you compensate for those in your work?
6. What is your philosophy of ministry? What are your ministry priorities? What is your vision of the work of the local church? What is the pastor's role in carrying out that vision?
7. Tell us about your approach to preaching. How do you prepare? What is your preferred style of preaching? Where does preaching fit into your sense of your overall task?
8. What is your philosophy of worship? What should happen in worship? How do you accomplish that? Tell us of your approach to leading a church in worship.
9. Tell us about your leadership style.

10. How important, in your view, is the calling/visitation ministry of the church? What is the role of the pastor in this ministry? Tell us something about your priorities in calling and the way you work this in to your weekly schedule.
11. Share with us some of your views on Christian education. What do you see as your role in developing a strong program of Christian education in the local church?
12. How would you give leadership to assist a church in reaching young people for Christ?
13. We recognize that for a pastor to be whole, he/she must have time for recreation. How do you relax? What do you do for recreation? For intellectual stimulation?