

## Finding a Pastor

*This information is to help you to find God's man for your church.*

Of course, we are to be in prayer. The church should be in prayer. People should pray personally and corporately as a congregation. We do not need to mention this every time someone prays publicly, but it should be included where people know it is a major prayer request. It is not unusual for a church to be without a pastor for a year or more. The focus of the congregation should not be finding a pastor. The church needs to be about regular activities, evangelism, missions, etc. However, mentioning the search in prayer is good to keep the church going in the same direction.

Now, as a member of a Pastor Search Committee, I suggest that you pray over every resume you receive. It is very easy to put half of the mountain of resumes over to the 'not interested' pile. Yet, you need to be cautious. Pray over each resume. Let God speak to you, as you scan the stack of resumes.

As you peruse the resume, look for blanks of time through the chronological lists. It would seem to be unusual to have a candidate in his 60's that has two young children in elementary school. That is not say it is wrong, but that should raise a question to ask the candidate if you get that far in the process. Look at the church track record. Why would he move every 2 – 3 years? Why is there a 10 year period that is unaccounted for? These are things to mark or 'flag' for further questions.

What is God speaking to you about as you scan these resumes? What comes to your mind? What is the Holy Spirit revealing to you? What is on your heart? God has given you the opportunity to represent your church in finding the person God is calling. That means He is going to speak to your heart as you read over the resumes. There may be more than one resume that stand out to you. Why? Perhaps, 10% of the resumes will surface as to you and your interests. But there is a reason that God is placing on your heart that a particular resume comes to mind.

Take your top 5 resumes. You can take 3, 10 or whatever surfaces to the top. Compare your list and see if you find a common thread through that group. Maybe you can write down the two or three things that really stand out. You will be sharing your find with the others on the committee. See what you have in common. It may surprise you how God is leading your committee together in seeking God's man for the position of pastor in your church.

Refer to the list of questions that you have wanted to ask a pastor. There should be new questions that rise up after looking at more resumes. Be sure to write down those questions. In the course of time, looking at so many resumes, you will forget the questions that come to mind now, early in the process.

As the committee comes together, you can place the prospective lists into 2 or 3 groups. The first group could be your first choice. The second and third group is for the next

selections. You could also use the groups for education, geographical, or other reasons. The rule of thumb is that 50% of your candidates are not interested in your position. It is not that they don't like you, but by the time you get their name, they have already moved, or for some reason they are not available. You could quickly move through your first group without getting a response. If you mail a questionnaire to prospective pastors, half of them will not respond either. But once they return a questionnaire to you, then you are committed to completing the process with every individual in the course of action.

We get resumes from many places. You are not obligated to contacting every person you get a resume. However, once you make contact with a candidate, then you need to follow through with correspondence to him. If you quickly discard the candidate, no matter what the reason, please let them know where they stand. You should have the decency to respond in writing to that candidate. Thank them for their interest. Ask them to pray for the committee as this is a difficult task you are undertaking. But if they are not going to be considered, then let them know. Share with them that God is leading you in another direction. But if you do not tell them, no one else will. The pastoral candidate may be waiting months or more than a year for a response until he finds out. You need to let him know as soon as you know whether he is not being considered. If he is still in the selection process, then tell him that too. Write to him, and let him know he is one of 4 or 5 or whatever the number is to be considered. But when your job is complete, and you really have found the man that God has led you to then write to every candidate that is waiting for a response.

Back to the list of a few candidates: When your list is down to about 3 men, be sure to take your time. This is not the time to speed things up. God can show you His will in prayer. Let the church know that you are praying over these 3 candidates. Call the candidates. Be honest, and tell them you are talking to two other people. Tell them that you are seriously praying for God's direction. Ask them to pray for the committee and the other candidates as you are all seeking God's will in this matter.

Once you have contacted the candidate on the phone, give him your personal telephone information. Let them have the opening to call you too. They will have questions in this process as you have developed questions. You are now into the intimate details of the process. This group of candidates needs to be small – no more than 5 at the maximum. By this time, they have responded to your questionnaire. Now, put this group into a priority list. If you have three men in which you are interested then place them in order of interest 1, 2, 3.

Once you have found that top 1 candidate, stick with him until you are completely satisfied. Either this is the person, or you know for sure it is not the person God is calling to your church. If he is not the man you are looking for then write to him and let him know. Move on to the next person. Stick with that person until you know for sure. Notify them, and move on to the next. Of course, you are praying for God to guide you. Your church is praying for you and the committee as well. Don't be discouraged. In fact, it would be very unusual if the first person you contacted ended up the person you were looking for. When you first get started, you are not sure who you are looking for. It

actually takes some time to sort through resumes, and pray for the direction that God has for your church. You will continue to get new names as you go along. But once you have made contact with a candidate it is important to follow that person to the completion.

When you contact a pastoral candidate, you have entered his personal space in an intimate manner. He will be praying and seeking God's will just as you have been. He may get excited, and share with his wife and close friends. He should do his part by checking you out, just like you want to check him out. His life and concentration will be disrupted. When committees do not follow up with a candidate they leave that person hanging without ever knowing what happened. Be honest. Tell him the truth. He can handle the truth. But not following-up is the part that will distract him the most.

If there are expenses incurred in the process of interviewing from the candidate, be sure to reimburse him for those expenses. You may need to pay for travel, phone expenses, or some other type of costs.

Of course you know that in all the committee's work, you must maintain strict confidentiality. This means that you need to protect your church and the ministries of your church. You need to shield the candidate and his ministries, and that church's ministries as well. People will try to squeeze information from you. It is fine to say we are excited about a couple of candidates. You can give information in that you request their prayers as you close in on a specific individual. But for the sake of all involved, it is better to make general statements rather than give details.

When you are ready to extend a call to a pastor, you need to go a little deeper in your confidential search. It is appropriate to have a financial or credit report. Find out the candidate's marital background. We now have a sizable percentage of pastors who have been previously married. You need to deal with that issue for the church before you deal with an individual on that issue. It is a good idea to find out about his family anyway. Where a person is situated in his family life makes a lot of difference in his pastoral responsibilities. A pastor in his 40's will be a little different if he is raising preschoolers, compared to a pastor in his 40's who has adult children out of the house.

We have mentioned prayer throughout this report. Prayer is the key throughout the entire process of calling a pastor. You will be praying, perhaps, more than ever before as you serve in this capacity. You may fall in love with an individual as you interview them. However, as a committee, you need to be unanimous. We must remain open to the will of God. If your favorite potential pastor is not accepted by the group, trust that God is at work in a different way than you thought. Maybe, now is not the time. Maybe they see something that you have not seen. God is at work in every person's life. He is at work in every committee member, every candidate, and every church. He is at work beyond what you see. So, even though you have made up your mind, you need to open to the total group and that if it is God's will, He will speak to each person's heart.

Sometimes, a candidate will withdraw his name, and you will never know why. Sometimes, you will find out information that is outrageous, and you will not understand. There are times when you are caught off by guard by statements or remarks that are shocking. It is not unusual to uncover very unusual information. Trust God. He is in control. He is leading the Search Committee. Remember. God wants His man to be the pastor for your church more than you do. He is at work beyond the things you visibly see. So, trust Him.

As the official Pastor Search Committee, you will have many meetings. You will be on the phone, sending and receiving e-mails and quick meetings after church. All of this is outside the regular Search Committee meetings. You will get to know the committee members more than you can comprehend. You will be analyzing information and sermons more than you probably have ever done before. You have this responsibility. Most people have never served in this capacity. It is a privilege, and an awesome opportunity to do something for the Lord that will last many years. Your work will influence many lives in the years to come.

Your committee needs to be in agreement at each step of the way. If you cannot come to a unanimous place, then realize that your church would not be unanimous either. You really represent a group of people that comprise your congregation. When you see something in this process, you represent others that would see it too. You may be the only one on the committee that has something stand out concerning a candidate. Do not keep quiet. God has placed you on the committee to see and say what you may have an insight upon.

You will know what God is doing. Don't forget that He is in this with you. Now, you may have one committee member that seems to refuse to cooperate. Make sure this member wants to be on the committee. Maybe you need to go back to the church, and elect a new committee. If this person resigns, do you have an alternate member ready to stand-in? Ask the un-cooperating member what it will take to have them cooperate. Don't be discouraged. Remember, God is at work, even though some people may be difficult to join-in.

The Search Committee will only be as effective as the members of the committee walk with the Lord. When we walk with the Lord, we will walk in unity. You are dependent to act as a team, and not as individuals. Be committed to take steps as a team. It is better to take your time than to rush this process. Take extra time. It is better to delay the process for a few weeks, than to be stuck with someone that you really are not excited about. The man you are looking for is also seeking God's will in His life.

#### Pastor Search Committee Guidelines

1. Pray – Don't under estimate the power of prayer. You want the church praying for you. You want the committee praying for each other. You want sister churches praying for you as well. Perhaps, the committee will be able to take a week-end retreat just to pray for your work. There can be extra prayer time during the worship services. Have different people pray, publicly for

your efforts. Have special nights of prayer in your congregation. Prayer is part of everything you do. However, there will need to be extra effort to make prayer stand out more than just opening the meetings with prayer.

2. Good Beginning – Discuss what you are looking for. You need to know what you want to find so that you will find the person that is needed. To know what you need, you need to find out from the congregation the real needs of the church. The deacons should know the spiritual temperature of the church. The church council or other leaders should have important insight to the needs of the church. The ministerial staff should be included in the process of searching for a pastor. At the beginning, before you even look at resumes, be sure to have an idea of the kind of pastor you feel is needed by the church. This information may change over the course of time. Yet, this information will act as a filter of sorts in the sifting of resumes. Just because you get a resume of a good friend, does not mean that he is the one God is leading to your church.
3. Interim Pastor – Quite a few churches choose to have an interim pastor serve during the time of the search process. You may need to see if this is needed for your church. This is good to give stability for your congregation during the transition. Also, this can take pressure off the committee to allow them to take their time. There are some retired pastors who are even trained how to help a congregation walk through the changeover of leadership. However, many congregations cherish the opportunity to have a variety of preachers visit during the interim period of time. Usually, the interim preachers do not act as the senior pastor and lead committees, deacons, and staff. Yet, the interim pastor could be available if needed. He is usually a great source of experience and wisdom.
4. Narrow the Field – It is not difficult to get resumes for any kind of job, including a pastor. You will get more resumes than you imagine. There are many places to look for resumes too. The Internet has many ministerial search placements. You have your denomination that usually supplies committees with name they have on file. They will probably only give you a few at a time. They may not know exactly what you need, and you may have to ask for more names. Once again, as you receive these resumes, keep the names confidential. You may come across the name of a neighboring pastor. That does not mean he is looking to move from this sister congregation. His name might have been on file for years in the denominational office. Your congregation will have friends or relatives that will submit resumes too. These are all good, and should be considered along with the others.

What kind of questions will you need to ask the candidate? This is good to put together before you get into the interview time. It might go with out saying that you want to know their full testimony. You want to know about heir spiritual journey. This takes time, but it is worth the time it takes. You are responsible to find out about this candidate. Find out about his family. Find out about his upbringing. What are his joys, his hobbies, his life

experiences? How did he meet his wife? What was his call to ministry? How does he relate to his children? What are his spiritual gifts? He should freely tell you anything you ask. He should be excited to share his life story with you. He will tell you about his accomplishments. Let him tell you what he has learned through his personal struggles in life. These are important as he will lead your church from those experiences.

Be sure to check out all the references that he has given to you. You expect those to be positive. Contact each person on his list. Then you need to do a little more research. Call his previous churches he served. Ask the secretary about this candidate. Probably, they were not present when he was. However, they can give you insight into the stories he left behind. They can give you the name and phone number of someone who would have worked with him while he was there. These are good steps to find out more than the known good references. It is important to check the colleges and seminaries that he has listed on his resume. We must be diligent in our research. Unfortunately, not all candidates will have correct information on their resumes. You don't expect to find anything, and you don't want to find anything unusual. However, if you don't do the complete background check, no one else will. You want to be able to present a candidate to your congregation that you can stand behind. Ask God to help you in your research. Call his associational office or the local denominational rung on the ladder. You will feel confident when you know you have done a thorough check into his background. You may have to read between the lines as you make unsolicited calls. However, you want to be able to say to your church that you did all you could to make sure your research was complete.

See if there is a pattern in the candidate's history. Just because one person was negative when you asked about him, does not mean that everyone was negative. If you still have a question about one of the responses, it is okay to ask your potential pastor to clear up an answer. If a candidate does not have anything to hide, he will be transparent in his reply. He understands that you need to do your job. He will appreciate a thorough background check. Keep praying. Keep asking. Expect God to bless you through the procedure.

Do you see God's blessing on a potential pastor through the references? Do you see God at work in his life, and in his ministry? Do you see the anointing of the Holy Spirit through the experiences and testimonies of his life? You need to see this. If you do not see this, then perhaps you should look for another candidate. The presence and blessing of God should be visible. And if God has been blessing this person in the past, then you would expect that He would continue that blessing if God is calling him to your church.

Get a philosophy of ministry from your candidate. Perhaps, they have never written down their idea of this. But it is important to know how they will approach ministry if they are serving in your area. It would be good for the candidate to write out his ideas anyway. Each of us, as pastors, has a philosophy of why we do what we do. Have him write it out. This is good for discussion later in the interview as well.

Each candidate will have a view of prayer too. Whether you call it a philosophy of prayer, he will certainly have a practice of prayer. What is his daily routine for prayer?

How does he lead his church to prayer? Some men enjoy public praying, but do not practice private praying much. There are others that are personal prayer warriors, but do not lead their congregations in corporate prayer. Find out.

It is important to know what view your candidate has toward scripture. All the candidates will say they believe the Bible is the Word of God. But what does that mean? Your church has a view, whether you know it or not. But each candidate needs to share with you his theology. That means you may need to study a little to know whether or not this man is on the right track. Your staff can help you. Your denominational leaders can help you. But this is extremely important. Many congregations get a new pastor, but then they are surprised to find out that he has a little different approach to passages of scripture. All pastors believe in creation. But what are they talking about? Are Adam and Eve real people?

It is difficult to know how a candidate will handle humility, but this is important to find out. You may ask if he is humble, but you probably would not get a good answer. It is important to know this because humility is part of ministry. Can he apologize easily? Can he apologize for things he does not do? Must he always be right? Perhaps, this is a good question for his wife.

His administration abilities can be found out when you discuss managing the church office. Check to see if his organizational skills are reliable. How does he handle people in the office? How does he handle controversy? Has he handled church discipline? It is good to ask questions concerning deacon ministry. Discipleship is a topic for him to discuss. Ask your candidate his views on tithing. But be sure to ask if he tithes. Don't leave any stone unturned. Your church members are counting on you.

Ask your potential pastor why he feels God is calling him to change ministries. Ask him why he feels that God is calling him to your ministry. He should be able to give you a straight answer. Maybe, the Lord has not revealed an answer to him, yet. That is okay. But find out where he is in his process of this huge life change for him and his family.

It is appropriate to ask him theological questions. He should like those questions. Plus, it is important to find out what type of worship style he likes. He may actually like a different style than the one you experienced at his church. What is his view on Tongues, Healings, and Miracles? Does he lead the Sunday School? Is he involved in the denomination? How does he take days off to be with his family? What does his wife say about that? What books is he reading now? Who are the authors that he likes to read? What are his goals in life and ministry? What are his dreams or wishes? Is he easy to get along with? Does he impress you? Is his humor tasteful? Hopefully he has a sense of humor.

The pastor's family should be supportive of his work and calling. It is important to see how he does as a father. The pastor will shepherd his flock like he shepherds his family. The style of fathering he uses will be the style of leadership for the congregation. Try to observe how he gets along with his wife. How are they communicating? Does the

marriage seem to be a solid partnership? The way a person is in his home, is the way the person really is. Sometimes, we can hide ourselves, but the real 'you' eventually surfaces. The family is God's way of molding us to be the people He wants us to be.

We need an understanding of the types of personalities people have. Not all pastors are extroverted. Some are naturally detailed oriented where others might see a bigger picture. There is a tendency for the search committee to find a person who is the opposite of the last pastor. That may be fine, but the last pastor would have strengths missing in a person with the opposite personality profile. It is just good to have an understanding of people.

The Lord will have to give a vision for the new pastor. That takes time to develop after a new pastor is on the field. It is probably not a good idea to find a pastor with a pre-packaged dream or vision. Whatever his plan is, might not work in your city or your church. A pastor must be in tune with the Lord in such a way that he will get the direction from God as he follows Him. But the prospective pastor should be able to tell you how he would lead the congregation. That goes back to his leadership style. It includes more than that. Will he be teaching in his preaching? How does he prepare his messages? Does he preach mostly expository messages, or does he stick to topical type of series? Where is he taking us in his preaching? Is he only interested in evangelism, or is doctrinal studies his main theme?

### **Selecting a Pastor Search Committee**

Each church will handle this in a different manner. Even churches in the same denomination will put together a committee differently. There may not be the perfect way, or even a right versus wrong way. But there are some important ingredients to make sure are included. For instance, the congregation needs to be included. The search for a new pastor is for the entire church. If a committee is presented to the church by the staff, the deacons, or some other nominating group, the church still needs to approve of the selection. Whether intentional or not, by forcing the congregation to accept a committee they did not approve only creates tension. Even if you have the best committee selected, the congregation needs to have an input to give everyone assurance that they are represented by this group.

Another component that needs to be included is a format for this committee to hear from the congregation. This committee is a liaison between the church and the search process. The church wants to know what is going on. They want to have input into the development too. So, just make sure in the selection that there is a way to receive participation from the entire church.

As best as possible, the entire church needs to have a connection to the Search Committee. You may not want a teenager on the committee, but you need someone who will speak-up for the needs of teenagers. It is also, important for that person to have opportunities throughout the process to report to the church how they see the process. An

example is to mention that one candidate was removed because he did not really speak to the youth very well. This lets the church know that you are thinking of them. Of course, you really are, but they need to hear it too.

Not only do the different age groups represented on the Search Committee, but think about others to be included. Is the mission element represented? Do you have someone that will speak up for evangelism? Do you have people of different races included on the committee? If your church is comprised of several races, then be sure to include them. And racism needs to be addressed by the committee when interviewing a candidate. If a potential candidate is prejudiced, then God will use you to be the buffer to protect your church. If everyone is of the same race, you may overlook this area. But that is a subject that should be addressed. You might just ask the question how the Bible speaks to racism.

As you can tell, this committee needs to be able to handle difficult questions, and hear thorny answers. This committee will work many hours together. They may travel together. They will certainly pray together. They need to be able to communicate to the congregation, on a regular basis what they are doing, and where they are in the process. Please keep in mind these important features when you select your committee.

### **When is the job completed?**

Your job on the Pastor Search Committee is not finished just by finding a pastor to come to your church. God has placed you in this group to complete the task of finding a pastor, and assimilating him into the congregation. That means you need to be part of the process of moving him to his new city. Link him to people that will help him move. Connect him to a trusted realtor. Get him on the right track with schools or even utilities. It is not right to dump a pastor into a new city where he does not know anyone. Assimilation may include finding an insurance agent, locating doctors, hospitals, schools, or other agencies for the future. It may surprise you, but in some cases, the search committee stays together for one year after the new pastor arrives on the field. However, at least 3 months is a good start to help the new pastor. Eventually, he will find his way, and make his own path for the journey.

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