

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR CALLING A PASTOR**

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There are some churches which seldom call a pastor. The tendency among Baptist churches is to favor long pastorates. Most of the "splits," and the dissensions which are so frequent in local churches grow out of the results of "Calling a Pastor," and could be avoided by the attention to these essentials:

1. It is presupposed that our churches in their efforts to hold the young people and to interest the more intelligent will extend a call only to the best prepared man available, other things being equal.
2. The Pastoral Search Committee should secure the record of some good man whose private life and public reputation are of the best as laid down by the Scriptures, and invite him to preach before the church on a given Sunday. There is absolutely no need of having six or seven candidates for a "vacancy."
3. He should be given to understand in the beginning that if his record and qualities are satisfactory to the church, his services may be engaged as a pastor. An unknown candidate should be required to present letters of recommendation from sources satisfactory to the church.
4. Whatever course of procedure is decided upon by the officers of the church and the Pastoral Search Committee, the matter should be submitted to the church and passed upon by it.
5. When the day is set for action for the calling of a pastor, a public notice stating the fact should be read~ at least three weeks before the date of the church ~Meeting at which the minister is to be called.
6. While a majority vote is sufficient to elect in all cases, it is nevertheless advisable that at least three-fourths of the votes of the active members of the church present should be in favor of the candidate.
7. When arrangements have been made as to the time of beginning the new pastorate, arrangements for his installation should also be made.

## FINDING THE RIGHT PASTOR

How should a Church go about finding the "right" pastor? At the outset, the congregation must be prepared. Wise lay leaders will analyze the attitude of the church and deal with it appropriately. Outside denominational help may be needed. At least five undesirable attitudes can hinder the process if they are not corrected.

### AVOID THESE ATTITUDES

1. A mood of discouragement is often evident: a feeling that no one as competent as the former pastor can ever be secured.
2. A second troublesome attitude is that of either panic or impatience. The vacant pulpit seems to be a major calamity which must be solved with haste. If this attitude captures the congregation, they may call the first available preacher with disastrous results.
3. Sometimes a critical spirit prevails because of a feeling that the former pastor was inadequate. This may cause a congregation to judge all pastors harshly, especially if they have the same denominational or seminary background as the former pastor.
4. Closely akin to the critical spirit is the pride which insists that no one but a well-known and popular pastor should be considered. This, too, can lead to disappointment and even chastening by the Lord.
5. The fifth possible negative attitude is the pervading spirit which imagines that the financial situation of the church can be strengthened by postponing the calling of a pastor. Money normally used to pay the pastor can now be used to pay bills, finance overdue repairs, or build a reserve in the treasury. This attitude is, of course, self-defeating.

### HAVE AN EXPECTANT ATTITUDE

All of these attitudes must be replaced with an expectant spirit. The church must consistently remind itself that the sovereign Lord has chosen some special person to fill the vacancy. With this assurance the church can launch out and accept the challenge to discover God's will. The key to this discovery is the practice of **believing prayer by the whole congregation**. Every member of the church, every family, and every group should assign top priority to this prayer effort. By doing so, they will not only facilitate the pastoral selection process but will also generate a richer spiritual unity within the church.

## DIRECT INITIATIVE

Before activating a pastoral search committee, however, the church should appoint a task force to conduct **self-study**. This task force may or may not be identical with the search committee. If it is not the same, then the search committee must have substantial input from the task force. The basic purpose of this self-study is to identify the needs of the church. How else can a church intelligently seek a pastor to meet its needs? The results of this self-study will assist the search committee in finding a person whose particular gifts and abilities parallel the needs of the church. Seldom can a church adequately and objectively conduct this study without either denominational or professional assistance.

## APPOINT A PASTORAL SEARCH COMMITTEE

During the time the self-study is being made, the search committee should begin its preliminary work. The use of the term "*search committee*" rather than "*pulpit committee*" is important. The older term "pulpit committee" implies that the main concern is to *fill the pulpit*. The designation "search committee," on the other hand, embraces the committee's total responsibility, which is to locate an all-around pastor. An existing board should not act as the search committee. Instead, the congregation should carefully select a fresh representative committee.

Members of the committee should be selected primarily for their spiritual maturity, knowledge of the Word of God, and practical understanding both of the church generally and the local church in particular. A **five**-member committee constitutes a good working size. **Three** may be enough, while **seven or nine** should be adequate for even the largest church. A committee should never have an even number of members.

No search committee should agree to serve unless they are given:

1. A written description of their responsibilities.
2. A careful delineation of their authority.
3. A statement of the length of their appointment.

A working budget for the committee must be determined. Less confusion results if the search committee is also responsible for providing pulpit supply and/or interim pastoral selection.

## APPOINTMENT OF AN INTERIM PASTOR

**If** an interim pastor is procured he should be appointed for a stated period of time, usually six months. The congregation should be notified that the interim pastor **will not** be considered as a candidate.

Once an interim pastor has been appointed and the self-study is completed, a pastoral job description must be written. Based on the primary needs of the Church as learned from the self-study, the qualifications for the new pastor can be outlined. A job

description should accompany every request for the names of possible candidates and be made available to the congregation so that members can make suitable recommendations.

### **THE PASTORAL SEARCH COMMITTEE**

The primary purpose of the pastor search committee is to find and recommend someone to serve as pastor. This committee, naturally, should seek God's leadership through the Holy Spirit to direct them in this responsibility. Some of the suggested duties are listed below:

1. *Establish guidelines for the work of the committee.* The guidelines for this committee should be established before the committee begins looking for a pastor. Several important considerations include:
  - *What kind of pastor does the church need?* Consider the following qualifications: age, health, education, special talents, experience in other churches, background.
  - *What is the candidate's attitude about church members, staff members, volunteer leaders, the denomination, worship design, Missions, Education, and Stewardship?*
  - *What are the person's qualifications as a preacher?* The committee should consider the candidate's: call; knowledge of the Bible; ability to communicate; feelings about the Bible's place in preaching, and responsible freedom from the pulpit.
  - *What does a church expect of its pastor?* The committee should agree on what the church expects from its pastor. Discover church members' expectations on such areas as preaching, funerals, weddings, visitation, ministry to the sick and needy, special events, administration, evangelism, leadership, and being a visionary.
  - *What will the church do for the pastor?* The committee should determine in advance what the church will do in terms of salary, benefits, continuing education, expenses for conventions, and retirement package.
  - *Where does the committee look for a pastor?* The committee should discuss at this point where it will go for recommendations. The Moderator from their association or neighboring associations, denominational or state convention staff, other pastors, laypersons, and college and seminary professors are a few examples of sources that committee members can contact for recommendations.
  - *How will the committee consider recommendations?* The committee must decide how it will consider recommendations for persons. In most cases, resumes are submitted for prospective

pastors. To maintain equality each person recommended should be asked to complete an application. The application should be the same for each applicant so all candidates answer the same questions and can be evaluated on the same criteria.

2. *Gather information about prospective pastors.* When the committee has established its guidelines, it should begin to interview potential candidates. The application information and references should provide adequate information in making a choice.
3. *Visit a prospective pastor who is available.* When the committee agrees that one person meets the qualifications, they should meet and visit that person's church or in a neutral site arranged prior to the time of the visit. The committee should decide as soon as possible whether to invite this prospective candidate to visit their church. If they are no longer interested in a candidate, they should notify him of this decision. When arranging for a prospective pastor to visit the church, the committee should decide the purpose of the visit. Is the candidate coming for an informational (further interviewing) visit or a visit to preach in view of a call?
4. *Recommend a pastor to the church.* If the committee has decided on a pastor, they should recommend the prospective pastor to the church. This recommendation should be made to the church in writing and should state all the facts concerning the pastor: qualifications, experience, the church's expectations of the prospective pastor, the church's commitment to the prospective pastor, and the salary and benefits package. The committee should notify the church when and where the recommendation will be made and when the prospective pastor is to preach for the church. In presenting the pastor to the church, the moderator should call for the vote in whatever manner the church agrees. The count of these votes should be reported to the prospective pastor.
5. *Notify the pastor of the church's decision.* As soon as the church makes a decision, the prospective pastor should be notified. After the prospective pastor has been notified, other prospective candidates who have been involved in the process should be notified that they are no longer being considered by the church.

When the new pastor arrives, the pastor search committee, the personnel committee, and deacons should help orient the pastor to the new congregation. Such a meeting can help make the new pastor's initial days effective, thus ensuring a long-term relationship.

## **RECOMMENDED CONTACTS**

Sources for possible candidates include denominational leaders, seminary placement bureaus, friends and members of the church, and ministers who know the church well. Every person submitting a recommendation should complete a brief form stating, in terms of the job description, his/her reason for recommending the minister. This procedure eliminates much useless work. The best sources and references for candidates are people who know the church, have a concern for the church, and know well the person they are recommending.

As recommendations arrive, the search committee takes up the difficult task of reducing the list of potential candidates to four or five. Prayer is the key ingredient at this point, too, coupled with careful discussion of all data.

## **FOLLOW-UP RECOMMENDATIONS**

Those who seem most promising should be mailed a simple typed letter of inquiry. The letter should indicate plainly that a response does not place either the church or the prospect under any obligation. The following items may be included with this letter:

1. Pastor ' s job description.
2. Copy of the church self-study.
3. Brief history of the church.
4. A description of the church's current ministries.
5. The average attendance figures for the past five years.
6. An abbreviated copy of the current budget.
7. A copy of the church constitution and doctrinal statement.
8. A brochure or packet describing the city or community where the church is located.
9. An information request form and an addressed postage-paid return envelope for the pastor's use in responding.

The use of a **prospective pastor's information form** is proving to be of great value to search committees and saves time in these initial steps of procuring a pastor. The form provides the committee with pertinent information about the pastor's personal testimony, experience, family, education, philosophy of ministry, doctrinal beliefs, ordination, denominational preference, viewpoints on current ecclesiastical issues, names and addresses of three to five personal references, etc.

## PROMISING CANDIDATES

From these four or five contacts, one or two will likely emerge as promising candidates. The committee should choose one, and only one. They should seldom bring two candidates before the church at the same time. They should continue their investigation by sending a concise questionnaire, accompanied by the job description, to all references, to the seminary from which the pastor graduated, and to at least one denominational leader. Next, they should schedule an interview with the pastor. If distance is an issue, two or three members of the search committee may combine this initial interview with a weekend visit to the pastor's present church to see and hear him on his own turf.

## CANDIDATING

When affirmative references confirm favorable interview impressions, the search committee will recommend the man to the governing board of the church. With the board's approval the committee invites the minister to candidate. The candidate visit should extend over eight days, including two Sundays. It should never be restricted to less than five days, Wednesday through Sunday. Ample opportunity must be allowed for the pastor and his wife (children should not be expected to accompany them) to view as much of the church, its ministries, and the community as possible. The candidate should by all means meet with the Deacons of the church. Every aspect of the potential relationship should be openly discussed, including salary, housing, auto allowance, vacation, fringe benefits, etc. Interview with different leaders and groups are helpful, but the couple must have time to be alone, to talk, pray, and compare thoughts and insights. Hotel accommodations are a must. The candidate should conduct the mid-week service and as much of the Worship Services on Sunday as the church expects its pastor to conduct. The people should hear him **read** Scripture, **pray**, and **preach**!

## VOTING AND CALLING

The governing board must then duly notify the congregation of the special business meeting for voting on its recommendation. The church should never vote while the candidate is present nor on the same Sunday he candidates. The church should never make a decision on the basis of one or two sermons alone. Significant biographical information together with some rationale for the recommendation should be inserted in the worship bulletin and in the letter informing the members of the business meeting. After the meeting the committee chairman should inform the candidate by phone of the vote. He should report the actual count and percentage of the vote. No second vote should be taken in hope of achieving a unanimous decision. An official letter of call, containing all terms of the call and requesting a response within two weeks, should then be mailed to the candidate by certified mail.

## **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

A positive response leaves the search committee with still further work to do:

1. Moving arrangements.
2. Housing.
3. A welcoming reception.
4. Introductions to the community are their responsibility, too, however much of this can be delegated.
5. Installation Services.

Besides these many responsibilities, the search committee must be sure to keep accurate records of all proceedings, communicate regularly to the church, and notify all contacts and persons who recommended potential candidates once a pastor has been called. They should take special care to inform all other prospective candidates who have communicated with the committee that a call has been issued and accepted. Courtesy must be extended and letters of thanks sent to all who helped any way. A letter of prayerful concern to the church from which the new pastor has been called is also a most appropriate act of Christian love.

A search committee works hard. When their task is finished, the church should express thanks to them. An appreciation dinner at a restaurant is a commendable way of doing this. A special church service of thanksgiving and celebration would also continue the spirit of expectation in which the whole process began.



## **General Instructions for the Pastoral Search Committee**

The primary purpose of the pastor search committee is to find and recommend someone to serve as pastor. Remember, you are not simply searching for a Preacher, but for a Pastor who can preach!

### **A. Establish Guidelines for the Work**

1. Survey Church to ascertain it's needs regarding a Pastor.
2. Compilation of Church Information Packet.
3. Determine how the committee will consider recommendations.
4. Develop and distribute to each potential candidate, a "Pastoral Request for Information" form. This form will include the candidates personal testimony, experience, education, family, philosophy of ministry, doctrinal beliefs, ordination, denominational preferences, viewpoints on current theological issues, names & addresses of (5) personal references.
5. Develop Voting Procedures.

### **B. Evaluate Potential Candidates**

1. Receive all resumes and information responses.
2. Verify information supplied.
3. Conduct interviews of prospective candidates.
4. Reduce list of potential candidates.
5. Arrange for Church visit of serious candidates.

### **C. Recommend Possible Pastor**

1. Make recommendation to Church in writing. This recommendation should include the potential Pastor's qualifications, experience, Church expectations and Church commitment (salary and benefits package).
2. Ask Joint Board to call Church Meeting for purpose of voting.
3. Notify Pastor of Church's decision. This should be done by certified mail.

### **D. Orient the New Pastor**

1. Handle moving arrangements, if necessary.
2. Finalize housing issues.
3. Provide a welcoming reception.
4. Make introductions to the community.
5. Plan and implement Installation Services.