

# Pastor Search Committee

## Step by Step Guidelines

A unique, step-by-step approach for identifying the right candidate and developing a mutually healthy church-pastor relationship.

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### **About This Manual**

Designed primarily for churches affiliated with the Louisiana Baptist Convention, the handbook is based on the experience and insight of pastors and church committee members.

The manual addresses four primary concerns surfaced by those involved in a pastor search:

- Helping the church identify its own mission and find a pastor whose gifts in ministry will help the church fulfill that mission.
- Conducting face-to-face dialogue to exchange adequate information and develop knowledge of the church and candidates. Encouraging discussion of dreams, leadership style, core beliefs, and needs, the process leads the committee and candidate toward prayerfully informed decisions.
- Securing background checks on candidates without questioning their personal integrity. The manual presents a new approach to this process, done with the full knowledge, permission, and signature of the candidate.
- Writing a pastor-church covenant to clarify expectations. A mutually supported covenant agreement, approved by the church congregation, creates the basis for a healthy relationship.

Gary Mitchell  
Pastoral Leadership Team  
Louisiana Baptist Convention  
Alexandria, Louisiana

Finding A New Pastor for Your Church

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P. O. Box 311, Alexandria, Louisiana 71309-0311

Telephone (800) 622-6549 ext. 293 or (318) 448-3420, Ext. 293

E-Mail: [gary.mitchell@lbc.org](mailto:gary.mitchell@lbc.org)

**Permission is granted for churches to reproduce this book in its entirety.**

Frequent reference is made in this manual to the book *Risky Business* by Lynn Buzzard and Susan Edwards. This church hiring and volunteer selection guide was published by the Church-State Resource Center, Norman A. Wiggins School of Law, Campbell University, Buies Creek, North Carolina

All references quoted are used by permission.

## Foreword

### **Why another manual on the pastor search committee process?**

As a director of missions and more recently as director of church - minister relations, and now director of the Pastoral Leadership Team, I have had the opportunity to work with numerous pastor search committees. The process outlined in this manual was developed using personal experience and the suggestions of many pastor search committees..

There are seven primary concepts the search committee should keep in mind:

***1. A process that affirms the autonomy of the local church.***

Providing a cafeteria of options but affirming the work of the pastor search committee as it follows the traditions, mandates, and Spirit-led decisions of the committee, the committee is encouraged to use the parts that work best for them.

***2. A process that involves the congregation.***

The congregation is asked to be a part of the process by completing self-studies, providing names of potential pastors, and prayerfully participating in the church's visioning process.

***3. A process that respects the relationship of the pastor with the current congregation.***

Tremendous harm can be done when a committee comes to hear the minister preach in his own pulpit. It sends a signal that the pastor is seeking to move; and if he does not leave, his congregation may conclude that their pastor may not be desired by others or by them. This process encourages the committee to focus attention on face-to-face dialogue around such topics as leadership style, core beliefs, and communication. Going to hear the minister in his own pulpit is a last step, not the first.

***4. A process that encourages the congregation seeking a pastor to own their vision first.***

The church must know who it is and what distinguishes it from other nearby churches. It does not work to expect the pastor to bring the vision to the people. Their real concern should be whether the pastor's gifts in ministry match their perceived needs as they seek to be the people of God.

**5. *A process that encourages the committee to work with only one candidate at a time.***

Unfortunately, committees are often tempted to consider several candidates at once and to choose the one that looks and sounds the best. However, this is not an employment process; it is a spiritual process. The goal of the committee is to bring before the congregation the person whom they believe God has uniquely prepared to serve as their next pastor. This can only be determined by emphasizing the spiritual dimensions of prayer and earnestly seeking God's will. Hopefully, a congregation will hesitate to terminate a pastor if they also believe that this is the person God prepared to serve their church.

**6. *A process that encourages the church to have a covenant agreement that clarifies the expectations of both the congregation and the minister.***

This is different from a job description in that it takes into account the uniqueness of the minister and the changing needs of the congregation. It should be negotiated with the new minister and reviewed annually.

**7. *A process that allows the committee to do background checks on the minister with his knowledge, permission, and signature.***

There are appropriate ways to perform background checks on the minister. These should be done only with the minister's knowledge and signature. Churches were searching for ways to do this, and frequently they were trusting hearsay information without having a way to determine the reality of a situation. The purpose of the background check is to assure the congregation that their new minister is worthy of trust and to protect the church's witness to the community. After the congregation is advised as to the level of background checks done, the people can easily affirm and demonstrate their trust with a minimum of risk. This will help the minister and congregation develop healthy relationships quicker.

***Is this manual really needed?***

I looked at materials currently available, and some excellent ideas were expressed in them. However, I found them to be too wordy or emphasizing that the committee should go to hear the minister as a first step..

***Who will use this manual?***

The manual is meant for use by pastor search committees in churches affiliated with the Louisiana Baptist Convention. It has been kept in loose-leaf form so the local director of missions may include additional materials reflecting their local association or other ideas on their process. I have also observed that most committees use a three-ring binder to hold this material and subsequent resumes. This manual suggests steps a committee should consider as it does its process.

No one is expected to follow this manual to the letter. The committee must first be true to their local traditions and guided by their church's constitution and bylaws. It is most important that the committee be sensitive to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. The manual is designed in a simple ten-step process that fits into a twelve-month timetable.

***Does this manual support and encourage both ministers and churches?***

I believe it does. Ministers tell me it's written to protect the congregation, and committees tell me it's written to protect the minister. Both are right. For example, the suggested process engages the congregation in getting in touch with its identity. Whenever a church expects the minister to bring identity to a church, it seems to fail. At some point, some church members may accuse the minister of not really knowing and not really loving them. Likewise, the covenant agreement encourages clarity about the minister's role and the congregation's expectations of the minister. It is a two-way street in that the minister should also have expectations of the church. The goal is healthy congregations who know who and whose they are as well as healthy ministers who are empowered to serve their Lord through His church. Efforts are made to treat those in the search process with integrity and respect. The committee and the minister are together seeking the leadership of the Holy Spirit. While some may have problems with the legal issues raised, the cause of Christ and the integrity of His church will be well served by ministers and churches making informed decisions.

***Does this imply that ministers are persons of character or the opposite?***

I believe from experience and observation that Baptist ministers have the highest sense of integrity and Christian commitment. They sacrificially work long hours as they seek to serve their Lord through obedience to His calling to ministry. However, it is also true that a small number of ministers have malevolent motivations or have been guilty of improprieties that should disqualify them for ministry. No congregation or its witness to the community should suffer because their minister has an unwholesome agenda.

***What are your hopes for this manual?***

It has been written to foster healthy relationships between congregations and ministers. Healthy congregations know their identity, and healthy ministers exercise their gifts and calling in leading God's people. This manual will help committees, churches, and ministers to come together in a shared vision of serving our Lord through His church.

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## The Search Committee Should:

1. Concentrate on face-to-face conversation with the pastor and make hearing a sermon preached a last criteria. To hear the pastor earlier, ask for an audiotape.
2. Lead church members to clarify the church's reason for existence and to sense what God wishes to do through their church.
3. Help build trust between the new pastor and the people. Determine ways the minister's experiences, lifestyle, and current situation make the pastor a trustworthy candidate.
4. Have the new pastor and the search committee write an agreement to explain what each expects of the other. This could be made even more significant by stating that the pastor is being called under the guidelines of the printed covenant.

Months 1 . . . . . 2 . . . . . 3 . . . . . 4 . . . . . 5 . . . . . 6

**1. Gathering Information**

- Collect introductory materials.
- Detail presentation materials.
- Update congregation on process.

**2. Conducting Congregational Self-Studies**

- Study congregational demographics.
- Create a pastor search profile.
- Process church study and vision.

**3. Gathering Prospective Names**

- Get names from other sources.
- Get names from within the congregation.

**4. Prioritizing Contacts**

- Determine order to contact prospects.
- Structure process.

**5. Setting Up Files**

- Document contacts with pastor.
- Set up permanent paperwork files.

**6. Contacting the Pastor**

- Request permission to check references.
- Explain background check process to pastor.
- Conduct initial and subsequent contacts.
- Plan possible questions to ask.
- Begin to write covenant agreement.

Months 7 . . . . . 8 . . . . . 9 . . . . . 10 . . . . . 11 . . . . . 12

**7. Doing Final Background Checks**

- Decide which background checks to do.
- Receive pastoral questionnaire from candidate.

**8. Visiting the Pastor's Church Field**

- Discuss salary, housing, ministry expenses.

**9. Calling the Pastor**

- Plan for pastor to visit church family.
- Vote to call pastor under guidelines of the covenant agreement.

**10. Following Up After the Call**

- Inform pastor of call.
- Notify the Louisiana Baptist Convention and the local Baptist association.
- Plan installation service.

# Initial Concepts and Acknowledgments

1. The information contained in this booklet comes from a variety of sources. It has been compiled from personal experience and the experiences of numerous pastor search committees. The guidelines presented are suggestions only. Your committee needs to make its own decisions in light of your church's traditions, written documents, and instructions.
2. Your search committee has the responsibility of deciding through what process you will bring the name of a potential pastor before your congregation. Your church is autonomous, and no one has a right to dictate the type of process you must follow. The information in this booklet provides a cafeteria of options your committee may wish to consider. For example, should your committee choose to do a complete background check, a process to accomplish that is included. However, this is your decision and your decision only.
3. Most ministers operate out of a deep sense of God's call. They are also highly committed and diligent in working long hours in obedience to that calling.
4. No minister is perfect. While most are conscientious, a few demonstrate unacceptable behavior or have been guilty of decisions that may disqualify them as ministers.
5. How can this happen? Baptist ministers have no educational requirements, and no hierarchical body above the local church exercises authority over the suitability of a particular person for ministry. The local congregation can "set aside" (ordain) any person, as it wishes, for ministry.
6. Names of potential ministers may come to the committee from various sources such as your associational director of missions or your Baptist state convention. These do not come to you as recommendations; they are merely the names of persons who sense that God is leading them into a new area of ministry.
7. Your committee is responsible for discovering the suitability of any person to serve as pastor of your congregation. Your committee is encouraged to spend much time in prayer, in open discussion, and in detailed study.

# Step 1: Gathering Information

**1.1** Allow time for the committee to become a “community.” This can be accomplished by spending time in prayer and by talking about each committee member’s spiritual journey and history with the church. Building a strong trust level is extremely important.

**1.2** The church should have an interim pastor committee. If the church has had the same pastor for ten or more years or if there has been a history of conflict, the congregation should consider calling an intentional interim minister, who has had pastoral experience and additional church systems training..

**1.3** The church may wish to consider making two basic agreements with the new interim pastor.

- That the interim pastor will not become a candidate for the position of pastor.
- That the interim pastor will not use his trust relationship with the congregation to present resumes of potential pastors.

**1.4** Be prepared to present basic information about your church to any prospective candidate including information about size of the church, location, facilities, and housing for the minister. Provide this information by telephone or by mail to determine whether the minister wishes to be considered as a candidate for the pastoral position. If so, ask the candidate for a current resume (if needed).

**1.5** Be prepared to present detailed information about your church to your prioritized, serious, pastor candidates. (See Step 4.) This information includes:

- Brief history of the church.
- Description of church and community, facilities, membership, and special ministries.
- Adopted church goals.
- Plans for future construction.
- Organizational enrollment and current attendance.
- Names, addresses, and telephone numbers of all former pastors.
- Paid staff members’ names, titles, and duties.
- Job description for the pastor, if one exists.
- Overview of finances—receipts, expenditures, total debt, average weekly receipts.
- Results of any self-studies.
- Three-mile demographic and psychographic study of your church community (secured by calling the missions division of the state convention).

**1.6** Share your search information with the Baptist State Convention on the on-line sharing system, “Finding A New Minister . . . A New Ministry” and receive biographical information about available ministers. See page 56.

**1.7** Complete the “Customized Salary Compensation Study” (see page 57 for a mail in request form) or go on-line to [www.lbc.org](http://www.lbc.org) for the SBC Compensation Study.

**1.8** Interpret to the congregation the process the committee will follow.

- Report on findings from the church’s internal demographic and search committee surveys.
- Explain the approach the committee is taking, and clarify how the committee will keep the congregation informed through reports and written updates.
- Do not disclose confidential resume information. The names of persons under consideration or those no longer being considered should not be disclosed by the committee. Take care not to do anything that might hurt the minister’s work in the current place of service.

### **Sample Comments**

1. Our committee is suggesting that the congregation join us in a time of prayerful self-study in preparation for seeking a new pastor.
  2. The committee will talk with ministers during the week and interview those who are serious candidates. We will go on Sunday to hear only the minister with whom we share a strong sense of calling to serve our church.
  3. We will ask the congregation to provide resumes of persons they think should be considered, but we will not report back whether a particular candidate is under consideration. We will, however, notify the minister if the committee is looking elsewhere.
  4. Please pray for our committee as we seek God's will for our church.
- 1.9** As individual members of the search committee, you may choose to visit several churches to observe their worship format and style of proclamation. This may help you clarify in your own mind the attributes you will seek in a minister.

## Step 2: Conducting Congregational Self Studies

**2.1** Churches with a strong sense of mission and vision generally make the most progress. An important question for a church to ask is, “Who will own the church’s vision?” The church’s vision will be owned by either the pastor or the congregation.

The new pastor will come to the church with training, experience, and sense of call to ministry. However, what worked in another congregation may not work at all in your situation.

The new pastor is in a poor position to own your church’s vision because of:

- No prior knowledge of what has been tried—what failed and what succeeded.
- Little personal knowledge of the makeup and dynamics of your church community.
- Not knowing who in the congregation really has a finger on the pulse of the church and who just has an opinion. To whom should the pastor listen?

For the pastor to “own the vision” does not work well. At first, the congregation may like the new ideas presented. However, congregations frequently conclude after a couple of years that the pastor is leading the church in a direction they do not want to go, so an effort begins to remove the current pastor.

The congregation’s goal is to “own” its vision based on its unique history and understanding of its founding dream.

For the pastor and the congregation to have a shared vision for ministry is ideal. This often happens when the pastor’s gifts in ministry match the recognized needs of the congregation as it remains true to its vision.

**2.2** Do self-studies of the church membership. (See Appendix 1: Church Membership Questionnaire and Appendix 2: Survey from the Pastor Selection Committee, pp. 35, 36.)

These include doing a demographic self-study by family units, a pastor selection study by individual members and, a third study within the search committee.

- Personalize questionnaires by deleting or adding information as appropriate. Ask one person from each family to complete the first study. To ensure that all members have opportunity to participate, the committee may choose to mail the survey and request its return. Make copies of the results to share with the congregation and with any serious candidate.
- All active church members should complete the second study. It should be distributed for at least two Sundays in order to involve the greatest number of participants. Provide time during Bible study and worship for persons to complete the form. Try not to let the survey out of the building.
- 

Use the compiled information from these other studies as a guideline in deciding on the type of pastor the church needs at this time. The third study will lead you to develop a code for the ministry priorities of your new pastor. This will be used by the Office of Pastoral Ministries as a search criteria in sharing names with your committee.

**2.3** To clarify expectations, conduct congregational Bible studies as appropriate. The studies may be led by the interim pastor, a gifted layperson, or an outside presenter.

The areas of study might include:

- A study of Baptist history and doctrines such as Hershel Hobbs' book and video on The Baptist Faith and Message. (Copies are available at Baptist Book Stores or from the LifeWay Christian Resources.)
- A biblically based study on the role and purpose of the church.
- A biblically based study on the role and responsibilities of clergy, church leaders, and laity.

**2.4** Encourage the congregation to go through a process to recover their founding dream. They should also seek to verbalize what they believe to be God's will for their church in the future. The ultimate goal is to determine where God is at work in the church. It should provide them the opportunity to explore where the church is in terms of worship, discipleship development, outreach, personal evangelism, mission, and ministry. Assistance with this process may be obtained from your local associational director of missions or from the Louisiana Baptist Convention Missions Division.

**2.5** Consider developing your own process. It should involve a significant number of your people in seeking a shared vision for your church.

The process might include:

- Looking at the past ten years in the life of the church.
- 

Reviewing current community demographics.

- Identifying currently held opinions about the church and its future.
- Studying the Bible extensively. Clarify the role and purpose of your church. This is a great time to emphasize praying together and for one another.
- Identifying several shared dreams for the future.

**2.6** Understand that the potential minister will also have a vision for the church being pastored. *Your goal is for the visions to be mutually supportive.*

**2.7** Consider encouraging the church to form a council on caregiving. The purpose of this council is to offer encouragement to the pastor/staff plus provide a means for clear, open communication within the church family. (See Appendix 13: Council on Caregiving, p. 54.)

# Step 3: Gathering Names of Prospects

**3.1** Gather names of prospective pastors from available resource people.

- Contact your local Associational director of missions.
- Contact the Office of Pastoral Ministries, Louisiana Baptist Convention
- Contact accredited seminaries and divinity schools. (See listing on p. 14.)
- Receive biographical sketches from other pastors, congregational members, or from potential candidates.

**3.2** Decide under what conditions you will accept resumes. If only a name is provided, ask the person giving it to secure a resume for the committee.

**3.3** Contact each candidate in order to determine if the individual is indeed a candidate for your position.

The minister may be currently talking with another committee or may have just relocated. Also, the pastor may not be open to relocating to your area. This is a great time, also, to request a current resume.

**3.4** Give the congregation an opportunity to submit names for consideration. Set a six- to eight-week cut-off date for receiving resumes in order to give any church member ample time to secure one from any candidate.

**3.5** Following are schools that frequently appear on ministers' resumes. Listed are Southern Baptist seminaries and divinity schools connected to the Southern Baptist Convention and/or state conventions. Also listed are regional schools recognized by the Association of Theological Schools.

## Southern Baptist Seminaries Phone Numbers

- Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary 415 380-1300
- Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary 816 414-3700
- New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary 504 282-4455
- Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary 800 284-6317
- Southern Baptist Theological Seminary 800 626-5525
- Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary 817 923-1921

## Baptist Divinity Schools and Bible Colleges

- Baptist Theological Seminary Richmond, VA 804 355-8135
- Beeson Divinity School, Samford University, AL 205 870-2718
- Campbell University Divinity School, NC 910 893-1830
- Florida Baptist Theological College, FL 904 263-3261
- Fruitland Baptist Bible Institute, NC 704 685-8886
- M. Christopher White School of Divinity, NC 704 406-4400
- McAfee University School of Theology, GA 770 986-3474
- George Truett Divinity School, Baylor University, TX 254 710-3755
- Wake Forest University Divinity School, NC 336 758-5121

### **Selected Schools Accredited by ATS**

(These schools have also met the high academic standards of the Association of Theological Schools.)

- Andover Newton Theological School, MA 617 964-1100
- Asbury Theological Seminary, KY 606 858-3581
- Bethel Theological Seminary, MN 612 638-6180
- Candler School of Theology, Emory University, GA 404 727-6326
- Central Baptist Theological Seminary, KS 913 371-5313
- Colgate Rochester Divinity School, NY 716 271-1320
- Columbia Biblical Seminary, SC 803 754-4100
- Columbia Theological Seminary, GA 404 378-8821
- Crozer Theological Seminary, NY 716 271-1320
- Dallas Theological Seminary, TX 214 824-3094
- Denver Conservative Theological Seminary, CO 303 761-2482
- Drew University Theological School, NJ 201 408-3258
- Duke University Divinity School (Baptist House), NC 919 660-3401
- Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, PA 610 896-5000
- Erskine Theological Seminary, SC 803 379-8885
- Fuller Theological Seminary, CA 626 584-5200
- Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, MA 978 468-7111
- Hartford Seminary, CT 860 509-9500
- Harvard University Divinity School, MA 617 495-5761
- Lexington Theological Seminary, KY 859 252-0361
- Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, IL 630 620-2100
- Oral Roberts University School of Theology, OK 918 495-6096
- Princeton Theological Seminary, NJ 609 921-8300
- Reformed Theological Seminary, MS 601 923-1600
- Regent University School of Divinity, VA 804 523-7063
- Shaw Divinity School, NC 919 832-1701
- Talbot School of Theology, CA 310 903-4816
- Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, IL 847 945-8800
- Union Theological Seminary, NY 212 662-7100
- Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, VA 804 355-0671
- University of Chicago Divinity School, IL 312 702-8200
- Vanderbilt University Divinity School, TN 615 322-2776
- Virginian Union Univ. School of Theology, VA 804 257-5715
- Wesley Theological Seminary, DC 202 885-8600
- Westminster Theological Seminary, PA 215 887-5511
- Yale University Divinity School, CT 203 432-5303

### **Associate Schools with ATS**

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- Conservative Baptist Seminary of the East, PA 215 646-3322
- Hood Theological Seminary, NC 704 638-5644

### **Other Schools with local or regional accreditation**

- Bob Jones University 800 252-6363
- Grace Seminary, IN 219 372-5100
- Louisiana College, LA. 318-487-7011
- Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, VA 804 582-2000
- Luther Rice Seminary, GA 770 484-1204
- Masters Seminary, CA 661 259-3540
- Mid-America Seminary, TN 901 751-8453
- Moody Bible Institute, IL 312 329-4000

**3.6** You may check out all schools accredited by The Association of Theological Schools over the Internet at: [www.ats.edu](http://www.ats.edu)

**3.7** Other schools are accredited by regional accrediting agencies. Some schools have aligned with one another to accredit themselves. Your committee may want to determine the integrity of the accrediting process and by whom.

**3.8** The following information will assist your committee in understanding more about the educational degrees most often held by ministers.

### **Degrees Related to Pastoral Ministry**

All degree programs offered by Southern Baptist seminaries are not included here. However, those that normally appear on resumes of Baptist pastors and other staff ministries are included.

The best known degrees are bachelor of arts (**B.A.**), bachelor of science (**B.S.**), master of arts (**M.A.**), master of science (**M.S.**), and doctor of philosophy (**Ph.D.**) **A.Div. or DipTh.**

Associate of divinity or diploma in theology. Requires two full years of study for the student who is over 30 years of age and without a college degree.

**B.D. or M.Div.** Bachelor of divinity or master of divinity. Requires college degree plus three years of seminary training.

**Th.M. or S.T.M.** Master of theology or master of systematic theology. Requires college degree, master of divinity, and one more year of graduate work.

**D.Min.** Doctor of ministry. Requires college degree, master of divinity, and one more year of graduate work.

**M.A.R.E. or M.R.E.** Master of arts in religious education or master of religious education. Requires college degree and two years of seminary work.

**Ed.D.** Doctor of education. Requires college degree, master of arts, master of religious education, or master of divinity and two more years of graduate work.

**M.C.M. or M.M.** Master of church music or master of music. Requires college degree and two years of graduate work.

**S.M.D. or D.C.M.** Doctor of sacred music or doctor of church music. Requires college degree, master of sacred music or master of church music, and two more years of graduate work.

**D.D.** Doctor of divinity. This honorary degree is conferred to recognize outstanding service rather than academic achievement.

## Step 4: Prioritizing Contacts

**4.1** The committee receives resumes until an established cutoff date. Using the information from your church's self-studies and findings of future needs, establish a priority order in which ministers will be considered.

**4.2** Work with only one person at a time. Why is it important to work with only one candidate at a time?

- This is not a popularity contest. Your goal is to discover the person you sense the Holy Spirit has prepared to serve your church.
- Considering several candidates at the same time creates the possibility of your committee members' supporting different candidates and dividing the committee.
- Emphasize that the minister is being "called" not "hired."
- Expect the minister to work with only one prospective church. Extend the candidate the same courtesy.

**4.3** Your committee should agree on a way to sort through the resumes received. The goal is for everyone to have a sense of involvement in the process. Committee members should prayerfully seek and be sensitive to the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

Here are three suggestions for how to sort and prioritize:

- Ask each committee member to rate each resume for suitability from one to ten with ten being the highest. Total your scores on each candidate and place resumes in priority order.
- Divide the resumes among subgroups of committee members. Ask each subgroup to choose three resumes warranting consideration by the entire group. When the resumes from the subgroups are compiled, ask each member to rate as suggested in the previous section. Place names in priority order.

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The committee may study the resumes together and reach consensus on the order in which they will be considered. While a committee can consider resumes in the order received, a better use of time is prayerfully to give priority to persons most matching the church's perceived needs.

**4.4** Once a priority listing has been accomplished, contact the candidate of first choice. Initially, determine if this minister is still available and interested in considering the church.

**4.5** If the minister agrees, schedule your first personal contact. This would also be an appropriate time to request an audiotape of a typical worship celebration. (Some ministers may be able to provide the committee with a videotape.)

**4.6** If you request a tape, please consider the expense incurred and return the tape when the committee is through listening to it. This is especially true if you received a videotape.

## Step 5: Setting Up Files

**5.1** Only a small minority of ministers behave unethically or inappropriately in ministry. However, the search committee is responsible for protecting the church and the integrity of the committee. This is best done by doing adequate background checks and by documenting the committee's actions. This will protect the committee, the church, and the minister.

**5.2** Set up a personnel file on each serious candidate considered by your committee. This file should include copies of all written correspondence, signed authorization forms, evaluations, and personal reference forms. Also include any written findings that result from your information search.

**5.3** You may consider several ministers before you extend a call to a particular one. All personnel files on candidates who are considered but not called should be destroyed.

**5.4** The file on the minister you call should be retained indefinitely in order to document that the committee followed a fair but thorough process in determining the suitability of the person to serve as pastor.

**5.5** (Because the files may contain sensitive information, the search committee chairperson may want to review file contents to see if it contains anything which should not be available to the pastor. If so, retain the file outside the church office, as a sealed file with the clerk or in the church's bank security box.)<sup>3</sup>

**5.6** The following warning notice (See Appendix 4: Warning Notice, p. 38.) should be placed in the closed and sealed file of the minister who is called to serve your church.

*The contents of this file are confidential personnel information. This information was gathered for the sole purpose of helping the search committee make informed decisions about recommending this person to a position of ministry.*

*It is a violation of confidentiality and personal privacy to use this information for any other purpose. Violation of this purpose may result in significant legal repercussions.*

*The information in this file is for use only by the search committee in determining a person's suitability to serve as a minister and cannot be used for any other reason.*

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3. Lynn Robert Buzzard and Susan Edwards, *Risky Business*, 13.

# Step 6: Contacting the Prospective Pastor

**6.1 *First contact.***—Ask the minister and spouse to meet with you for a friendly, get acquainted session. This should be in neutral territory. You may want to gather at a restaurant for a meal. Cover the minister's travel and meal expenses.

Ask the minister for permission to check references given on the resume. Get the permission form for reference checks signed. (See Appendix 5: Reference Release Form, p. 39.)

**6.2** Check references provided. Also ask the references for names of other persons who can give you additional information.

**6.3** You might wonder why it is important to check references on a minister. Most ministers are trustworthy and committed to their calling. At the same time no minister is perfect. The goal for your committee is to make informed decisions based on all the information available. By completing the suggested background checks, you will learn more about the minister.

This should help you ask more informed questions as appropriate.

- You are doing this because you see the minister as a person of integrity. If you did not, there would be no reason to pursue this information. Please assure the candidate that your purpose is affirmation of the minister's calling and example.
- Other professionals in your congregation go through this kind of personal scrutiny every time they relocate.
- The media reports the misdeeds of ministers. Therefore, a background check will remove any concerns of the congregation. This will result in the pastor and people beginning their relationship with a much higher relationship of trust.

**6.4** The intent of your background checks may be tempered by the direct knowledge you have of the candidate's history. Also, you may have other credible contacts who can verify the information you have been given. In absence of this, it is best to do all of the recommended background checks.

**6.5** Check references by mail and follow up with a telephone interview. Send a copy of the minister's release form (See Appendix 5: Reference Release Form, p. 39.) and the reference letter (See Appendix 6: Reference Letter, p. 40.) to each reference.

- The letter states that the person named is being considered as a potential minister.
- The letter informs the recipient that a member of your committee will call for a telephone interview.
- Assure that this is being done with the knowledge and approval of the minister.
- The telephone call should be made as planned.
- The caller should complete the reference form (See Appendix 5: Reference Release Form, p. 39.) and ask additional questions, as appropriate.
- Extensive notes should be taken of the phone interview on the form indicated. The notes should be placed in the minister's permanent file.
- The person(s) making the reference calls should sign the reference questionnaire.

**6.6 Subsequent contacts.**—Contact and ask the prospective pastor and spouse to meet with the committee additional times. One of these visits should be to the church community. Each time, pay all of the expenses incurred in coming to visit with the committee. Have a meal together as possible and appropriate.

- Use the day on your church field to acquaint the prospective minister with your church facilities, the community, the school system, the parsonage or prices of homes, etc.
- Use these meetings as an opportunity to build relationships as well as to gather more information.
- Give attention to personality traits, personal demeanor, and behavioral tendencies. Both congregations and ministers have personality distinctives. Consider now how well these mesh.

**6.7** As the relationship develops, seek to ask appropriate questions in order to increase your understanding of each other. Ask questions at the appropriate time in the relationship. Here are a few examples:

### Sample Questions

- Please tell us about your early years—birthplace, place among siblings, parents, family history, etc.
- Please tell us about your conversion experience.
- Please tell us about your sense of call to the ministry.
- What three things do you enjoy the most about being a minister?
- What three things do you like least about being a minister?
- How would you describe the ideal church situation?
- What gifts do you sense God has given you for ministry?
- For what three things will you be remembered where you now serve?
- Tell us about your most meaningful pastorate.
- How do you define and understand *pastoral authority*?
- How do your spouse and children feel about being part of a minister's family?
- What do you consider to be the role of women in the church? What is your opinion of the WMU?
- (Ask the committee) What are the traditions that we would want the pastor to continue in the life of the church? (Share these with the candidate.)
- What traditions of the minister would be introduced to the congregation?
- Ask the minister about resolving various scenarios. The goal is to determine the leadership style of preference.
- The minister's core beliefs and personal distinctives should match well with the congregation.
- What is your thinking about the church's ordinances of Baptism and The Lord's Supper?
- What do you believe about stewardship and tithing?

**6.8 Other contacts.**—Seek multiple opportunities to meet with the potential minister and spouse. Use this time to discuss matters of mutual concern and to secure answers to questions similar to those listed above.

**6.9** After the potential minister returns home, give the pastor adequate time to pray about the potential relationship. Ask the candidate and the committee if they are willing to continue the process.

**6.10** If all agree, begin work on a pastor-church covenant (See Appendix 12: Sample Pastor-Church Covenant, p. 51.) The purpose of this document is to clarify expectations in the relationship between the minister and the congregation.

The covenant should include the congregation's expectations of the minister and the minister's expectations of the congregation. Other matters of mutual interest should be included. Appropriate concerns include working guidelines, employment and financial agreements. The goal is to clarify as many areas as possible in order to reduce the likelihood of major conflict erupting later. The covenant should be mutually agreeable to the church and to the minister. It should take into account the minister's unique gifts in ministry and reflect the congregation's primary concerns. It should *not* be written ahead of time and merely handed to the minister.

The covenant process is putting into print many of the decisions and commitments made in the previous step. By doing so, the possibility of misunderstanding or misrepresentation is limited. The goal is clear, appropriate, and concise communication that inspires the development of trust for a long-term relationship.

# Step 7: Completing Background Checks

**7.1** After completing all interviews and as a final selection criteria, do several pertinent checks.

Ask the minister to sign a release form (See Appendix 8A: Credit and Legal Information Release Form, p. 43.), allowing the committee to secure the needed information. (See 7.4 for additional assistance.) If the committee desires, they may choose to ask the minister's spouse to sign a similar form (See Appendix 8B, Credit and Legal Information Release Form, p. 44.) PLEASE NOTE: If you elect to use one of the credit reporting agencies, they will require use of their own release forms.

**7.2** The intent of your background checks may be tempered by the direct knowledge you have of the candidate's history. Also, you may have other credible contacts who can verify the information you have been given. In absence of this, it is best to do all of the recommended background checks.

Background check should include:

- A credit search through a credit bureau.
- A check for any police record.
- A driver's permit check.
- A check of educational and/or specialized training credentials based on the institutions listed on the minister's resume.

**7.3** Provide the minister with the letter and questionnaire (See Appendix 9: Letter to Minister Regarding Questionnaire and Appendix 10: Pastoral Candidate Questionnaire, pp. 45-46.) This form, answered and signed by the pastor, becomes a part of the minister's permanent record. (Answering the questions in print should be less threatening than being asked the questions directly.)

All of these background checks and questions asked are for the protection of the church. If any answers concern the committee, they should discuss these directly with the candidate. There may be acceptable reasons for the given report. Either way, the committee can make informed decisions about its recommendation to the congregation.

**7.4** Consider these suggestions on ways to do background checks:

- Persons on your committee may have access to this information. Confidentiality is essential.
- The committee may contract with an employee screening agency which will make the appropriate checks for a fee.
- If you decide not to consider a potential pastor because of information received, you should inform the minister of the information and its source. The outside agency itself will work with the minister to correct any data that is untrue. If you gather your own data, you must accept responsibility to verify that your data is correct.

**7.5** Listed below is an agency that does background checks for a nominal fee. They are not listed as recommendations of the Baptist State Convention, or Pastoral Leadership Team.

**ScreenNow.com**

ScreenNow provides fast, legally compliant screening services.

(The cost will average approximately one hundred dollars per minister checked.)

**7.6** At the next scheduled meeting, prayerfully determine if this person might become pastor of your church. If all agree, continue the process. If anyone on the committee concludes otherwise, write the candidate saying that the committee is still looking.

## Step 8: Visiting the Pastor's Church Field

**8.1** If the committee and the candidate are still in agreement, the committee may then arrange a visit to the candidate's church to observe a worship service.

**8.2** Remember that the pastor is still the pastor of that congregation. Do not do anything to hurt the continuing ministry there.

**8.3** Talk with the pastor again in a formal interview. At this point, no question relative to personal faith and practice is off-limits.

Questions for Reflection After the Visit

- If you visited the minister's home, what does it suggest about the pastoral family?
- What did the personal appearance of the pastor and family suggest to you?
- Was the sermon appropriate, understandable, and meaningful?
- Would this minister and family fit into your community?
- Is the current pastorate theologically in line with your congregation?

**8.4** Already you may have realized that ministers and churches have individual personalities. Recognizable behavioral tendencies will assist you in matching the right church to the right minister. There is not a preferred style of minister or church that is better than another. The important concern is that the tendencies of each match. For example:

### **Type D**

**Pastor** is assertive and leads by telling the people what they should do. This would be called "strong" leadership by some.

**Church** is aggressive and responds to goals, challenges.

### **Type I**

**Pastor** is people oriented and inspires people to follow leadership.

**Church** prefers services that express feelings and emotions; places strong emphasis on fellowship.

### **Type S**

**Pastor** is reserved, leads by example, and is an excellent listener.

**Church** emphasizes caregiving, compassion, sensitivity. Church protects status quo; is slow to change.

### **Type C**

**Pastor** emphasizes quality and proper organizational structure; is reserved.

**Church** focuses on maintaining excellent organizational structure with emphasis on doing what is right.<sup>4</sup>

**8.5** Come to an agreement on matters relative to employment such as salary package, vacation, sick leave, and moving and housing arrangements.

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These brief summaries indicate the reality of differences in churches and ministers even though each example is appropriate. Information is based on terminology from "DISC: Personal Profile System," Carlson Learning Company, Minneapolis, MN. Contact M. Wayne Oakes for more information.

# Step 9: Calling the Pastor

**9.1** Complete work on the Pastor-Church Covenant. (See Appendix 12: Sample Pastor-Church Covenant, p. 51.)

**9.2** Decide on the weekend the minister will come and lead the church in worship.

**9.3** Develop a brochure on the pastor, including highlights from resume.

**9.4** Mail and/or provide a copy of the covenant and brochure mentioned above to each resident church family two weeks before the weekend.

**9.5** During the weekend visit:

- Be responsible for all expenses, including travel, that are incurred.
- If the pastoral family includes small children, plan for child care.
- Consider having a time for the pastor to meet on Saturday morning with full- and part-time staff.
- Consider a meeting of the candidate with the deacons, Church Council, and other appropriate groups.
- Plan for the pastor to preach for the morning worship service.

**9.6** Vote on extending a call for the candidate to serve as pastor of your congregation.

- Seek to follow fully the requirements for calling a minister as spelled out in the church's constitution/bylaws or as understood by the church's tradition.
- Recommend that the pastor be called by your church based on the terms spelled out in the newly written covenant agreement.
- Consider voting by secret ballot unless your bylaws or traditions suggest differently.

# Step 10: Following Up After the Call

**10.1** As soon as possible, inform the prospective pastor of the vote. Give the pastor adequate time to respond to the call of the church.

**10.2** Notify your local Baptist association of the call.

- Provide them with brief biographical information on the new pastor.
- Make sure the director of missions knows the minister's arrival date and first Sunday.

**10.3** Notify the information services of the Louisiana Baptist Convention, ext. 210, of the new pastor.

- If possible, give them the pastor's old church and new church addresses.
- You may also contact by mail:

Information Services

P. O. Box 311

Alexandria, La. 71309-0311

**10.4** Make the pastoral family's arrival a matter of celebration.

- Fill the minister's pantry with food.
- Ask children to draw "welcoming" pictures.
- Ask members to write "welcoming" letters.
- Provide first day's meals while the family is busy unpacking and getting oriented.

**10.5** Be sensitive to the family's pain over leaving another place of service. They left behind friends and many memories. Give them time to make the transition to their new friends and church family.

**10.6** Plan an installation service. (See Appendix 14: Installation Service, p. 55.)

**10.7** Ask the pastor selection committee to meet with the pastor quarterly the first year. Initially, you will be the best persons to affirm and encourage the pastor. These meetings also give you an opportunity to interpret to the pastor how the ministry there is progressing. (If the church has a council on caregiving in place, this may not be necessary.)

**10.8** Rejoice!