

**A GUIDE FOR PASTORAL SEARCH COMMITTEES**  
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**INTRODUCTION**

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) holds to a tradition of congregational autonomy. While bound in a *covenant* relationship with the regional and general manifestations of the church, congregations remain free to manage their own affairs with respect to recommendations of the regions and general church.

In our tradition, each congregation maintains the right and responsibility to choose its own pastor. It is generally assumed that a primary responsibility of the larger church is to *advise and assist* in this process. A member of the Regional staff serves as consultant, while the general church Division of Homeland Ministries provides information about ministers in the “Search and Call Process”. Thus the partnership among manifestations of the church is expressed.

It is strongly suggested that your search committee carefully follow the procedures outlined in this document. While no procedure for the placement of pastors is perfect, following this process will substantially increase your chances of obtaining the best match possible between congregation and pastor. Our experience tells us that each step that is circumvented, each shortcut taken, will reduce the effectiveness of your search. This process is simply too important to do haphazardly!

Sequence is especially important. Skipping or rearranging steps often leads to frustration and setbacks. A committee needs to work steadily. Do not rush the process, yet seek to keep moving ahead with each step.

*The time between installed pastors can be exciting for a congregation. Herein lies an opportunity for renewal and growth in the life of the congregation. We hope and pray that this Guide will assist you in organizing to discern God’s will for the future pastoral leadership of your congregation.*

**CHOOSING THE PASTORAL SEARCH COMMITTEE**

In most congregations, the church constitution gives direction to choosing a search committee. If not, the Board Chairperson or Chair of the elders generally appoints the committee in consultation with the church board and/or congregation.

The committee needs to be representative of the congregation yet not so large as to be unwieldy. Five to nine members seem to work best. The key to success for the committee is that the members be willing to work together for the common good of the church. The ability to compromise is essential.

Candidates will evaluate your congregation and make decisions about whether or not to come to your church based upon the people they meet from your search committee. They are the faces of the congregation to candidates. Choose your committee wisely!

## **SELECTING AN INTERIM MINISTER**

The first task for most search committees is selecting an “interim” pastor, a person who will serve the congregation while the committee seeks an “installed” pastor. A member of the regional staff will meet with the committee and provide names of potential interim pastors. Frequently the staff member will have called the interim candidates in advance to ensure that they are available.

With regard to compensation, the interim pastor should be paid the same salary and benefits package that the former pastor was receiving *if full-time service is expected*. If part-time service is chosen, the interim pastor should be paid a proportionate percentage of the former pastor’s package (for example: half the package for half-time service). The time in between installed pastors should not be considered a time to “save money” by paying less to a part-time pastor!

The search committee, the interim pastor and the congregation need to acknowledge at the beginning that the interim pastor is not a candidate for the installed pastor position. If this clarity is not established up front, confusion and hard feelings can result. The task of the interim pastor is to help the congregation with pastoral duties as well as prepare them for their next installed pastor. Sometimes search committees are tempted to cut short the process and just hire the interim “because everything is going so well under his/her leadership.” In the end this direction is fair neither to the interim pastor nor to the congregation, which may later feel like a thorough search process was not undertaken.

It should also be noted that the interim pastor should NOT be involved in the search process, either as a member of or consultant to the committee. Opinions about candidates should come from references, not from the interim pastor.

The focus of interim ministry is for the congregation to be involved in the “Five Developmental Tasks of Interim Ministry, as defined by Loren Mead and the Interim Ministry Network. The are:

1. Coming to Terms with History. Getting in touch with the identity of the congregation and celebrating it, but also freeing the people not to be in bondage to it.
2. Renewing Denominational Linkages. Coming out of the interim time recommitted to that heritage and ready to follow a pastor loyal to that heritage.
3. Allowing Needed Leadership Change. Allow people to move out of roles they assumed with the old pastor. Can also give people a chance to search out new roles, or to get involved in ways that were not appealing with the previous pastor. *Are there staff changes that need to take place before the new pastor arrives?*
4. Discovering a New Identity. Activities can help a congregation trade in an old image of what they are and what their community is like for a new understanding of who they are and what God is calling them to become.
5. Commitment to New Directions in Ministry. “Our goal is not a warm body in a new job, but a people committed to ministry and ready to move on it, a people eager to enter into relationship with a new leader who will help them in that new ministry.”

## **COMMUNICATION**

Communication is an absolutely essential aspect of the search process. A search committee needs to make clear to the congregation that until the committee has a candidate to recommend, much of its work must be **confidential**. The committee cannot report on which prospects are being considered. However, the congregation must be kept *generally* informed of the work of the committee with regular reports about which steps in the process have been completed.

Communication with the congregation should take several forms.

- Ask the person doing prayers in worship to include the work of the search committee in regular weekly prayers.
- Invite all church members to add the work of the committee to their prayer list.
- Wall Chart: The regional staff person will provide a large wall chart which lists the tasks of the search committee. Display the chart in a prominent place and update it at appropriate times, calling attention to it as steps are completed.
- Newsletter: Include regular updates in the church's newsletter each time it is published, offering general statements about the progress of the committee. **NEVER PUBLISH NAMES OF CANDIDATES WITHOUT PERMISSION OF THE CANDIDATE**, or until you are certain the candidate has resigned from the present ministry position.

Also, communicating with your Regional staff consultant is crucial. PLEASE call or email on a regular basis to keep your consultant informed of your progress, interviews, etc. Don't wait for your staff person to contact you!

## **FINANCING THE SEARCH PROCESS**

The search committee will need to prepare a budget to present to the Board or other committee for approval. This budget should cover all costs of the search process. These include paying expenses related to a candidate traveling to your community for interviews, committee members traveling to hear candidates preach in their present location, telephone calls, mailings, dinners with committee members and candidates, photocopying Ministerial Profiles, etc.

It is the congregation's responsibility to reimburse candidates for ALL travel expenses related to interviews with your congregation.

Some congregations will have a special offering to cover all or a portion of the expenses related to the search process.

## **DISCERNMENT OF GOD'S LEADING**

A vital step in the process of finding a new pastor is to seek God's leadership and wisdom. This involves information gathering, prayer and discernment.

Information gathering. It is wise to give the whole congregation the opportunity to have input in the beginning of the search process. It helps to gain acceptance for the newly called pastor if church members feel they have been consulted and have had the opportunity to express their hopes and desires to the committee. This can most easily be done through the use of a questionnaire that will be supplied by the regional staff person. If the committee feels a need to be more thorough, cottage meetings or group listening sessions could be held. The results of this information gathering will be useful to the committee, but the committee still needs to discern by prayer and discussion what it believes to be the most significant leadership needs of the congregation.

Another potential source of information for the committee is to hold an exit interview with the departing pastor, who will have opinions about what sort of leadership the congregation needs for the future. The attached document, "Closing a Pastoral Ministry" could be used for such an interview.

A third source of information should be the regional staff person working with your committee. She/he will have some sense of the larger picture of churches and leadership needs, and will have insights about the needs of your congregation. Ask for input from this person about the leadership needs of your congregation!

Written description. The result of the committee's discernment process should be a written narrative description of the desired leadership skills and personal characteristics of the next pastor. This description will be used to screen candidates and to prepare interview questions. It is essential that the committee be clear about what it is looking for before it begins to interview candidates.

## **CONSIDERING POTENTIAL CANDIDATES**

When the committee has completed the congregational self-study process, the Congregational Profile (furnished by the regional staff person) should be carefully filled out and returned, along with the written narrative description of the next pastor, to the regional staff person. This form and the written narrative of the next pastor will guide the search process.

Once the Profile and narrative are received, the regional staff person will provide the committee with "Ministerial Profile" forms (resumes) of candidates. The committee will receive one copy of each Ministerial Profile and is responsible for producing multiple copies.

INITIAL CONTACTS. The **first duty** of the search committee chairperson after receiving Ministerial Profiles, is to clarify, by phone or email contact, whether or not each candidate is interested in considering your pastor position. Even at this initial contact, treat the candidates with respect and hospitality. Be brief. Tell the prospective candidates that you have only just received their Profiles. Give a thumbnail sketch of your congregation and community, then ask if he/she is willing to give serious consideration to your congregation.

DISTRIBUTE PROFILES. Report to the committee the results of these initial contacts. The committee should then receive copies of the Profiles of all candidates wishing to be considered. One person should NOT yet screen out potential candidates! The committee should take a few days to read and reflect on the Profiles of those wishing to be considered.

PRIORITIZE. The committee should then meet to discuss and rank the candidates based on the Profiles. The goal is to pursue further contact with at least three candidates. Occasionally there will be NO desirable candidates among the Profiles received. If this is the case, please contact the regional staff person as soon as possible to request additional sets of Ministerial Profiles.

CANDIDATES FROM OTHER SOURCES. If members of the congregation bring the names of other potential candidates to your attention, or if other pastors hear of your vacancy and request through direct contact that you consider them for the position, *proceed with caution.* Some clergy may circumvent the Search and Call process system to hide misconduct or incompetence. Ask for references, including one from a regional staff person from Ohio or another region of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Ask them to provide the same information that the Ministerial Profile forms provide. Before interviewing any such prospects, speak to your regional staff person about how to proceed with candidates outside the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Search and Call system. Committees who fail to clear prospects through established channels run a high risk of making a disastrous choice.

## **THE FIRST INTERVIEW**

### **TELEPHONE INTERVIEW**

A face to face interview is preferable but not always practical if the candidate that you are considering lives in another part of the country. A phone interview using a speakerphone so that all members of the committee can participate is a relatively inexpensive alternative. (Videoconferencing may also be a possibility in your community.) The committee should alert the candidate in advance and set up a time when the committee will call. While this method is clearly not as effective for either the candidate or the committee as an in person interview, it may allow the committee to consider a wider variety of choices.

Please remember that EVERY candidate with whom ANY contact is made should be contacted again, either to arrange an interview or to confirm that they are no longer under consideration by your committee. Communication with candidates is of vital importance.

### **PLANNING FOR THE FIRST INTERVIEW**

It is in the best interest of the search committee and the candidate that each be as prepared as possible for the first interview. In advance of the interview, the committee, if it has not already done so, should send a packet of information about the church and community to the candidate. Helpful items about the congregation may include newsletters, board minutes, worship bulletins, the church budget, the church constitution, picture directory, brochures, etc. The committee should also study the Ministerial Profiles of the candidates and plan interview questions in advance.

**All expenses relating to the candidate's travel to and from the first interview are the responsibility of the search committee.** The committee should ask the candidate for a record of his/her expenses and make sure that he/she is reimbursed.

As a preliminary to the interview, the candidate should be shown the community and given a tour of the church building and parsonage if there is one.

### CONDUCTING THE FIRST INTERVIEW

Be sure to have a committee member open the interview with prayer.

The key element of a successful first interview is open and honest sharing on the part of both the committee and the candidate. Share the challenges facing the congregation as well as the opportunities. Be positive about the congregation while also being realistic. The interview presents an opportunity for both parties to learn as much as possible about the other. Much of the important learning, however, won't be in facts or figures, but in the feel that the candidate and committee have for one another. The committee wants to encounter the person behind the forms, and the candidate wants to discover if there is a sense of call from God to this new place of ministry.

It is always better to ask questions with concrete answers such as, "How have you handled disagreements in the past?" rather than, "How would you handle disagreements if they would occur in our church?" The past behavior of the candidate will be a better predictor of future behavior than any answer to a hypothetical question.

There are many important topics to deal with in the interview. Be sure to ask about the candidate's style of worship leadership, pastoral counseling style, visiting habits, preaching preparation and style, spiritual life and study habits, and experience in leading change in churches along with other questions important to your congregation.

Some committees ask candidates whether they are predominately an "introvert" or an "extrovert", how that affects their ministry, and how they compensate in ministry for the weaker side of their personality.

The candidate should also be given an opportunity to ask questions of the committee.

Do not negotiate a financial package at this first interview. That step will occur at the next stage of the process if both the candidate and the committee are interested in making a further commitment.

After the interview has concluded and the candidate has left, the committee must decide whether or not there is a continuing interest in the candidate. Within a week, the committee should contact the candidate by phone or letter to communicate whether or not she/he is still under consideration by the committee. Likewise, the candidate should inform the committee immediately if he/she is no longer interested in the congregation. If the committee is still interested, you should ask if the candidate still has an interest in the congregation, then allow a brief period of time for a response. (The travel reimbursement check should also be sent if it has not been done already.) It is crucial that both the committee and the candidate inform the other as quickly as possible about future intentions regarding the ministry position.

*A decision to keep the candidate on your active list is not a decision to hire that person. The committee should conduct initial interviews with a number of candidates. Of course, the candidates are having initial interviews with other churches as well as yours.*

## VISITING TO OBSERVE CANDIDATE IN ACTION

After the initial interview, some committees like to make an onsite visit to observe the candidate in an actual ministry situation. This often includes hearing the person preach and lead worship if the candidate is serving a local congregation.

Since most clergy in the Search and Call process do not announce that they are leaving until they have a call to a new position, their congregations are usually unaware that they are looking for another ministry position. If church members know their pastor is searching for a new position, the pastor's effectiveness will be greatly diminished. Thus it is better for two or three members of the search committee to make a visit rather than the entire group. A candidate will be glad that you are interested enough in him/her to make a visit, but will not want you to inadvertently jeopardize the current ministry. Please make every effort to be as discreet as possible.

Always call ahead to confirm that the candidate is preaching the Sunday you hope to visit, and to verify the location of the church building and time of worship. Though it is not necessary to advise the candidate of your visit, many prefer to not be surprised and confused by the presence of "unusual" visitors on busy Sunday mornings.

## ALTERNATIVES

Many clergy in the Search and Call process also have either audio tapes or videotapes of sermons that they can send if the distance is too great for search committee members to visit. The committee may at any time request such tapes.

On some occasions, a neutral location can be arranged with the assistance of the regional staff person so that the candidate can preach in a location within a closer driving distance to your church.

## NARROWING THE FIELD

Once the search committee and the candidate have decided to continue conversations, then the committee begins the process of narrowing the field. Prior to narrowing the field, the congregation's governing board and/or entire congregation should approve the financial and benefits figures, granting the search committee permission to negotiate with the candidate.

Occasionally more than one interview will need to be held with one or two candidates before a decision to enter into final negotiations with only one candidate is made by the committee. If this is the case, the candidate and committee should be clear about the fact that a second "information gathering interview" is needed. This will prevent misunderstandings.

When the committee finally narrows the field to only one candidate, then the process of "negotiation" takes place. This includes starting date, moving times, and of course financial compensation for the new pastor. All such details should be confirmed in writing and approved before the congregation votes on the candidate.

Clergy compensation is both similar to and unlike the compensation of other employees. Therefore, many facts must be considered in compensation planning for clergy, including:

1. Vacation- 4 weeks, including Sundays, is standard for clergy. Remember that they are on call at all times.
2. Sabbatical. You should consider offering a 3-month sabbatical, in addition to vacation, every 5-7 years. This is a time away from the many weekly deadlines, to be used for rest, study and for “retooling” (reading that is not for teaching or sermon preparation.)
3. One day off with no expectation every week
4. Although clergy pay income taxes only on “cash salary,” they must pay social security taxes of 15.3% on both salary and housing allowance. Other employees pay social security taxes of 7.65% and the employer pays the other half. Some churches pay a “Social Security Offset” allowance to make up the employer difference.
5. Housing, whether a parsonage or a housing allowance, needs to reflect the fair housing market value. A separate allowance for utilities may be designated if a parsonage is provided. This is also income tax free, but is included in social security.
6. Pension Fund of the Christian Church 14% dues should be paid on salary, housing and social security offset allowance
7. Health Insurance should be provided unless the pastor has insurance through a spouse
8. An expense reimbursement account should be included to cover the cost of travel to conventions, continuing education events, and other out-of-town functions.
9. An expense reimbursement account may also be included to cover the cost of periodicals and books used in ministry.
10. Auto allowance should be included to reimburse the pastor monthly for miles driven on church business at the full amount allowed by the IRS. Some churches provide a leased or purchased car, insurance and auto credit card instead of auto reimbursement.
11. Other considerations include holiday, bereavement and sick leave, maternity/paternity leave, and Worker’s Compensation (required by law)
12. It is important for tax purposes to include the non-taxable reimbursement accounts. This allows clergy to keep more of their income rather than paying it out in taxes.

From experience, search committees sometimes consider the recommended benefits and salary package as one lump sum, and thus overestimate the true value of the compensation. This is dangerous because some church members might understand the total cost of ministry to be compensation and compare that figure to their own income. Many figures in the total compensation picture are “costs of doing ministry” and are not to be considered “take-home pay.” Clergy would consider their take-home pay or living expenses to be composed of salary, housing and social security offset only, and would compare those figures to the income of other persons.

Churches and search committees should also remember that if the previous pastor was long-term (more than ten years), the compensation may in fact need to be increased for the new pastor. During long-term ministries, churches tend to offer minimal increases and fall behind the “market” for pastors with similar experience and abilities.



When all parties have agreed to the compensation figures, and the agreement has been accepted based on requirements of the congregation's constitution, a "Letter of Call" (sample included) or other agreement document should be carefully composed and signed.

When all "negotiations" have been completed, arrangements should be made for the candidate to meet the congregation for final approval. This sometimes includes a "sample sermon," but also should include a less formal time for individuals to meet the candidate, ask questions, hear the candidate speak of a sense of "Call" to the congregation and a vision for the future, etc.

## **FINAL TASKS**

### **INSTALLATION**

*Arrange with the regional staff person for a service of installation for the new pastor.* It is best to have the installation service as soon as possible after the new pastor's arrival. The new pastor will typically preach on the installation Sunday. The committee chairperson or the new pastor should contact the regional staff person who worked with the committee to arrange an acceptable date.

### **LETTER OF CALL**

Send to the regional office a copy of the official "Letter of Call" or other agreement document between the congregation and new pastor. This is kept in the church's file.

### **WELCOMING THE NEW PASTOR**

The congregation should plan carefully to welcome the new pastor to the community and congregation. This may include assistance in moving details, providing food, receptions at the church, and other meetings to provide opportunities for the pastor and congregation to become acquainted. Often the search committee will plan for the welcoming activities and receptions as a gift to the new pastor. It is important to joyfully celebrate the new beginnings in the life of the congregation!

### **PASTORAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE**

If there is not already a Pastoral Relations Committee in the congregation's structure, the search committee should strongly recommend that such a group be established. The regional office has resources to assist in this process.

FINALLY, disband the Search Committee with much praise and thanks for a job well done!