

## **GUIDELINES FOR A PASTOR SEARCH COMMITTEE**

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### **Design for an Interim Ministry**

#### ***Purpose & Philosophy of an Interim Ministry***

The interim between pastors in a church is a time for affirming the church staff and elected leaders, for reviewing the biblical role of pastoral leadership and for renewing congregational fellowship and responsibility. It is a time for celebrating the mercies of God upon His people in the past, for focusing on the future with faith and hope, and for reflecting upon the core values and mission of the church. It is a time for honoring the role of the pastor and for putting into place a spiritually minded and responsible Search Committee to review the biblical role of the New Testament pastor and to seek out and bring to the church, through much prayer and waiting upon the Lord, a man they believe He has chosen to fill this vital role in their church.

An interim period between pastors is not a time for reshaping the church's long term vision and ministry commitments. The responsibility for visionary leadership belongs to the incoming pastor as the shepherd leader. A congregation should focus on spiritual renewal and give itself to much prayer for its Search Committee that God may prosper them in locating the man whom He has chosen to become their shepherd. A lengthy interim period is rarely ever best for a church. A church without a pastor is in a holding pattern until the new shepherd arrives to lead the flock of God into the future.

Under the leadership of a wise interim pastor, the church's future is best served during the interim by his leading the congregation to focus on celebrating the grace and goodness of God through worship and thanksgiving, and by leading them to become as deeply engaged as he can in evangelism and ministry. The interim period is not the best time for attempting to uproot and deal with wrong attitudes and old rivalries. These conditions are best dealt with in the long term through the faithful preaching and teaching of a Godly pastor who leads his people to focus their hearts on God's Word and draws them after him into a life of prayer and loving service of Christ.

Churches which have experienced a unique crisis and breach of fellowship, such as having terminated a former pastor due to moral or theological default, will be well advised to seek out a mature and spiritually wise minister as interim pastor who is available and equipped to lead the congregation through a time of spiritual renewal. The loving care and thoughtful preaching of God's Word of Grace by an experienced interim minister will meet the immediate need of a church in such a circumstance and will help prepare the hearts of the congregation to love and respect their new pastor.

#### ***Role of the Interim Pastor***

- The first duty of an interim pastor is to encourage the congregation and its pastor search committee in their effort to find and call the minister of God's choosing and to seek to prepare the church to receive him well.

- He should encourage expedition in the work of the search committee in their search for the new pastor and should provide counsel upon request of the Committee.
- The interim pastor should expect to end his tenure when the new pastor is called and scheduled to begin his ministry. He should not be contracted for a stated tenure without this stipulation.
- The interim will provide leadership, as agreed on with the church, for the programs that are in progress, but he should not attempt to influence the congregation to undertake any long term ministry or programs, or to change any constitutional documents of the church. An interim pastor should seek to impress upon the church that it is the role of the future pastor to be the shepherd and visionary leader of that church.
- Either of two levels of interim responsibility is usually negotiated with the interim pastor:

*Level 1:* The interim pastor shall have full responsibility for pastoral leadership at all services, including Sunday worship, midweek services, funerals, weddings, revivals and seasonal services. He shall assume responsibility for visiting members of the congregation who are in the hospital or who are terminally ill at home. It should be his responsibility to meet with the deacons and certain committees as requested to do so. He should commit himself to be available for consultation with the church staff and for counseling members.

*Level 2:* The interim pastor would have less responsibility under Level 2. His major responsibilities would be to provide pastoral leadership at the regular church services on Sunday morning and evening and at the midweek services and to be on call to conduct funerals and weddings when requested by the families involved. He should not be expected to be involved in pastoral visitation and counseling except as it relates to the crisis ministries for which he is responsible. Administrative duties and general office hours would not be expected of him.

### ***Compensation for the Interim Pastor***

Compensation for the interim should be based on the level of responsibility undertaken and should include a set salary plus an expense reimbursement.

- Under Level 1, the church should provide for the interim pastor a salary equal to 50% to 60% of the last pastor's salary plus reimbursement for travel.
- Under Level 2, the salary should be equal to 25-35% of the last pastor's salary plus reimbursement for travel.

Note: Under either Level, special arrangements should be negotiated with the Interim Pastor for disbursing compensation in a way in which it will be in the best interest of the Interim Pastor and of the church. Any travel expense incurred by the potential interim during interview process should be covered by the church at the end of each interview meeting.

## **General Procedures for Search Committee**

### **Purpose and Responsibility**

A church-appointed Search Committee is generally chosen by a congregation to seek out a minister who can appropriately fill the position and who through that process comes to share a mutual assurance with the Search Committee that God is calling him to that ministry.

The Committee should understand that it has been given the responsibility to pray and search out a minister on behalf of the congregation. The congregation should be kept informed of the committee's work but the congregation at large should not become engaged in the process of seeking the minister to be recommended but only in responding to the committee's recommendation. This is to avoid confusion among the people.

The use of a questionnaire or congregational survey to obtain opinions and preferences from the people may be helpful but it can complicate the Committee's work. It should be assumed when a committee is named that they will proceed prayerfully and responsibly to find and recommend the minister they feel led of God to be the right person for the position. In order for a search committee to perform its task responsibly, the members of the committee need to be assured of the prayers and confidence of the congregation.

### **Getting Started**

The Search Committee should seek to develop a bond of confidence and oneness as a group and should agree on the procedures to be followed in their work. Following are some basic things on which they might agree.

They should place their priority upon prayer. Let them agree to engage in intercessory prayer one for another and to begin and end each meeting in unhurried group intercessions, seeking the wisdom of God and the Holy Spirit's initiative and guidance in every step of their work. There should be a thorough review of scripture relating to a minister's calling and qualifications and a strong affirmation of the Lord's faithfulness in sending gifted servants to be shepherds of God's people. Indeed, let them affirm that God has appointed a minister to fill the vacant position and that their role is to find him. Dr. Akin has provided an excellent guide for committees to survey the scriptures. This guide can be accessed at <http://sebts.edu/president/resources/viewFile.cfm?DocumentID=658>

The committee should agree to be unanimous in the final choice of the minister they recommend to the congregation. To do so, each member of the committee must be willing to seek to know the mind of the Spirit. When a committee is of one heart in bringing its recommendation, unity in the response of the congregation is likely; otherwise, it is very unlikely. A Search Committee which after a reasonable period of time cannot bring a unanimous recommendation should report this fact to the church and request to be replaced. It should be noted that the healthier the church and the healthier the committee, the shorter the interim period should last.

There should be an understanding with whoever is responsible for interim and pulpit supply speakers, and with the speakers themselves, that the committee will not consider any person who is

brought in to preach to be a prospective minister for the church and that no prospective minister will be brought to the church or to its pulpit by the Search Committee until they are ready unanimously to recommend that person to the church.

### ***The Procedure to be Followed***

A plan for securing resumes of prospective ministers should be agreed on and a target date set for receiving them. Resumes may be requested from the seminaries, from associational and state convention offices, and from interested pastors, church members and friends of the church. The committee should be wary of applications submitted personally by ministers seeking the pastor's position. The Ministry Referral Office at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary exists to help you in the process of gathering resumes for consideration. You can initiate requests at  
[http://sebts.edu/churches\\_pastors/ministry\\_referral/index.cfm](http://sebts.edu/churches_pastors/ministry_referral/index.cfm)

Resumes should be collected and reviewed together if there are not too many to do so. Otherwise, they should be copied and distributed to the committee members for their private review and prayerful ranking for consideration. The higher ranking resumes should be identified and returned again to the committee for further ranking until the top resumes are selected. Through the committee's prayerful examination and discussion of these, resumes should be narrowed down to ten, five, three, two, and then to one prospective minister who arrests the attention of the entire group. The committee's procedure for contacting that minister should then be followed until there is either clear witness of the Spirit that this is God's man or that this is not God's man. If he proves not to be the one, then thoughtfully advise him that the committee will not consider him further and move on to the second name on the priority list and follow the same process.

It is more considerate of the candidate not to contact him and request video or audio tapes and lengthy written documents before there is a special interest in that person on the part of the committee as a whole. Comparing taped sermons is a confusing approach to finding a pastor. The committee should seek, through prayerful and careful consideration of resumes, to choose from among the candidate who is to be considered first before making the initial contact. A tape might be requested at that point unless arrangements can be made to hear the candidate in person. Any travel expense to the candidate incurs in order to meet with the committee should be covered by the church at the conclusion of the meeting.

When the committee has come to full agreement on a candidate, and has completed all references and investigations to their satisfaction, they should then advise the church of their decision and should take appropriate steps to present their candidate to the congregation. They should be responsible for making and following through with all plans and arrangements for this event and for communicating thoroughly with the congregation.

The Search Committee should be prepared to bring a positive recommendation to the congregation in writing, reviewing all the appropriate information and agreements and assuring the people of the unanimity of the committee. They should host the prospective minister and his family on an extended visit with the church and follow up the action of the church with considerate orientation for the new minister. The committee should not be dissolved until the minister is installed in the new ministry.

## **A Relationship of Mutual Trust and Commitment**

The Pastor-Church relationship should proceed on the basis of mutual trust and commitment on the part of the pastor and of the congregation. Some church leaders are advocating the formal signing of a “Pastor-Church Covenant” as part of the installation of a new pastor. This practice has merit so long as a covenant of mutual trust is used. However, the inclusion of any agreements requiring probationary reviews of the performance of the pastor injects distrust into the relationship and converts a Covenant of Mutual Trust into a Legalistic Contract.

For such a performance contract to be required to be signed at the installation of a new pastor brings into question the integrity of the pastor and the congregation. It would not be different from a bride requiring her groom, in addition to the wedding vows, to sign a contract in the presence of their wedding guests, putting the marriage relationship on probation pending the performance of certain duties by the husband in the home.

The search committee that has reached a unanimous decision to recommend a minister for pastor should already have become reasonably assured of his testimony and integrity, and of his gifts and abilities, and should have developed a relationship of mutual trust with him. For a search committee to have come through prayer and searching to this point of recommending that a call be extended, and then to present a contract to be signed by the pastor that is designed to evaluate and monitor his performance, would reveal a subtle, lingering distrust of the candidate. An affirming mutual trust between a pastor and his people is absolutely essential if there is to be a healthy covenant relationship.

The qualifications of character and quality of life required of a pastor in 1 Tim. 3:1-7, and an affirming relationship of mutual trust, supersede the need for probationary contracts and agreements. Indeed, it is more in context with the scriptures and with the ways of the Spirit to enter into a pastor-church relationship that is based upon Christian love and respect one for another and is under-girded by much prayer and obedience to Christ.

For clarification or more information contact the ministry referral office at SEBTS.