

Pastor Search Committee Information

We call the time between pastors the *interim time*. Some have referred to this time as the Wilderness Journey. Wilderness journeys can provide many benefits for an individual or a church.

The people of God, the Israelites, had forty years of wandering in the wilderness. Hopefully your church won't take that long in calling a new pastor! Biblical characters such as Abraham, Moses and Paul experienced wilderness journeys. Jesus also had a wilderness experience. The point is that times in the wilderness can be used by God to prepare an individual or a church for what He wants to do in their lives. A church should not fear the time between pastors. A better approach involves working your way through the journey to see what God has in store for you.

A church will go through several stages during the interim time including getting direction for the interim, determining what kind of pastor is needed for the church, the search and call process, and the beginning of ministry for a new pastor.

One of the most significant tasks of a church in an interim period or wilderness journey involves the calling of a new pastor. This involves the election of a **Pastor Search Committee** and the effective functioning of that committee.

Perhaps the most crucial elements in the search for a new pastor involve the selection and election of the Pastor Search Committee. The relationship between the search committee and the potential pastor makes this process very critical. A search committee working with the prospective pastor has much at stake and sometimes becomes very delicate. The relationship between the candidate and the committee foreshadows and determines the nature of the relationship between the pastor and the church.

Before looking at a process for selecting a search committee, let's examine some basic concepts that the church needs to consider before electing a search committee:

First, the committee should accurately reflect the congregation.

Any attempt to artificially represent the church should be avoided. The future pastor is not always well served by an attempt to make the committee represent the different groups in the church rather than the whole church.

For example, a church that is predominantly elderly might attempt to have a representative committee that included a youth Sunday School teacher, a member of the Single Adult department, a member of the Senior Adults, a member of the WMU, and a member of the median adults. In so doing, one would think the church was well represented but in reality, it is not.

However, the most important dimension of the church's make-up has been "covered up" by this approach: the church is predominantly elderly. Some pastoral candidates would immediately recognize that the committee was "artificial" and some would not. In the best case, the candidate would have to work harder to determine the true nature of the church. In the worst case, he would never know until after he became pastor.

Second, the committee needs to be able to assess the gifts, abilities and personalities of prospective candidates that qualify them for effective ministry to the whole church.

The godliest people, the most discerning, those most involved in the life of the church compose the best search committee. They have spiritual maturity that enables them to look beyond whether or not they “like” the candidate and accurately appraise his impact on the church.

Third, the committee needs to be able to exercise its God given influence in the church.

The best committee will be the one that is most influential with the entire church. The members of the committee should be people who are widely trusted, and whom the congregation believes will follow God’s leading. The most important question a candidate will have is this: “If you recommend me to the church, will they vote to call me?” The more influence the committee has among the congregation, the more likely it can answer “yes.”

Sometimes a candidate will want to know if the church can make some changes related to the job description, housing, salary, or some other area of ministry. The committee should be made up of people who can influence the congregation to make such changes.

Fourth, the committee needs to insure the best possible beginning of the new pastor’s ministry. This could mean that the committee should also serve as a pastor relations committee or transition committee for a period of time after the new pastor begins his ministry. Again, in this role, the pastor needs the most influential people in the congregation. The committee’s ability to understand the congregation and to deal with the initial problems of transition is critical.

In order to select and elect the best possible committee, a church would do well to consider the following suggestions:

Set a date for nominating the pastor search committee. This should be several Sundays in the future in order to give time to prepare the church for the nomination process.

Determine the number to serve on the pastor search committee. If this is not specified in the church’s constitution and bylaws, a leadership group in the church (deacons, church council, etc.), should recommend the number to serve on the committee to the congregation. Generally speaking, a search committee should have no less than five and no more than seven members, male and female. You may want to determine the desired number of males and females on the committee. (Example: committee of 5 will be made up of 3 males and 2 females / committee of 7 will be made up of at least 4 males and at least 2 females / committee of 6 will be made up of 3 males and 3 females).

Determine the qualifications for serving on the committee. Again, if these qualifications are not already established, the leadership group should determine what qualifications will be used in the selection process. These qualifications may include some of the following:

- ✓ An active church member, having been in this capacity for at least the last 6 months.
- ✓ 18 years of age or older.
- ✓ Regular in attendance.
- ✓ Regular contributor to the church’s financial needs. *Make sure to communicate to the church that no one will know how much a person gives but just that he/she gives regularly.*

- ✓ Husband and wife should not serve on the team. *The spouse with the most votes will be the one elected to serve on the committee.*
- ✓ Paid employees or ministerial staff members should not be on this committee. *They will report to the new pastor eventually and should not influence the committee. Usually considered unethical.*

Each church should spend some quality time in discussing and finalizing these qualifications. These should be published in advance of the date for nominating committee members.

Nominate the persons to serve on the Pastor Search Committee. On assigned Sunday, congregation will nominate a number of persons equal to the number to serve on the committee.

Count the nominations. A leader or leadership group of the church will count the nominations and make the selections of those who will serve on the Pastor Search Committee. Those receiving the highest number of votes should be considered first. If one or more doesn't fit the qualifications established, the counting committee goes to the next person with highest number of votes.

Contact and secure a commitment from those selected to serve.

Announce, affirm, and dedicate the Pastor Search Committee.

The work of the Pastor Search Committee:

1. Pray.
2. Read and review the biblical qualifications of a pastor. Study 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. If necessary, invite a guest Bible teacher, Associational Missionary, or preacher to lead this study.
3. Review the church's Constitution and By-Laws.
4. Determine the standards of conduct that will guide the committee in its work. Some standards might be confidentiality, how the committee will make decisions, unanimous recommendation or a certain percentage vote by the committee, reporting to the congregation, and no meetings by just a few members together rather than the whole.
5. Establish open communication with other church groups. The Search Committee will want to talk with the Finance Committee and Personnel Committee about salary package and personnel policies. The committee should not share names of prospective candidates.
6. Develop some key documents and instruments to be used in the search process. Consider preparing the following or use what is provided by the Association Office:
 - Pastor Profile Survey
 - Pastor – Congregation Covenant
 - Letter to Prospective Pastor Candidate
 - Pastor Candidate Inquiry
 - Pastor's Financial Support Worksheet
 - Letter and Inquiry Form to be used in contacting references
 - Church and community information packet to be sent to candidates
7. Use the Pastor Profile Survey, to be completed by the congregation, to assist in the evaluation of resumes.

8. Secure/Receive and read resumes. Set a deadline for receiving resumes. There are a number of ways to post this position to receive resumes, a few being the church website, Association newsletter and website, the Arkansas Baptist Convention website, and the SBC website.
9. Prioritize resumes. Reduce resumes to an agreed upon number, say 3, 5, or other. These prospective candidates should receive a letter and the Pastor Candidate Inquiry. At the same time, a letter and inquiry form should be sent to the references on the resume. Allow 2 or more weeks for the candidates and references to complete the forms. You might want to suggest a deadline.
10. Pray some more over these forms received!
11. Narrow the search down (2-3) and contact these for a phone interview or personal interview about the position. Share the salary and benefits package with them and see if they have questions.
12. Search Committee needs to decide on the number one candidate to focus on, and just deal with one candidate at a time. They could ask the candidate to send a video or audio of a sermon, or they can go to a website where this person's sermons are available. They could share the community information packet with the candidate.
13. The Search Committee needs to conduct a background check. The candidate needs to sign a form that allows this. The Association Office can assist with this if necessary.
14. If Committee feels good about this candidate, schedule a visit to go hear him preach at his church or another church. Take the candidate and his family out for a meal, using this time to get to know his family and to clarify any question the candidate, spouse, or committee may have. Schedule another meeting if Committee feels they need one. Allow the candidate to come visit the church facilities and see the community on a day other than Sunday.
15. If Committee still feels good about this candidate, invite him and his family to visit the church where he can preach a Sunday morning service, also sharing his testimony and call to ministry. The Committee does not have to be 100% in order to invite a candidate to the church, but should be a good majority. In fact, if only one vote is "No," Committee should invite the candidate in, one vote should not control the Committee.
16. Give the church information about the candidate and let them know the schedule for the Sunday or weekend he will come for a visit.
17. The vote should be taken as quickly as possible after he preaches, preferably following the service in a special called business meeting or on the following Sunday.
18. The committee should inform the church as soon as possible if the candidate has accepted a call. If the answer is "no," the committee would begin working with the candidate ranked number two and start again.
19. Plan and conduct an installation service. This may be as simple as giving the keys of the church to the pastor. It may include a special message of challenge by the Associational Missionary or other leader. It should include a time for the congregation to express its willingness to follow the leadership of the pastor. One church had a public signing of the "Pastor – Congregation Covenant" as part of this service.
20. Help the pastor and family get acquainted with the local community (doctors, banks, schools, associational missionary and office, etc.).
21. Meet regularly with the pastor for the first year (no more than quarterly). This helps to orientate the pastor to the church, allowing opportunity for feedback both ways and discuss any problems.