



A Guide to the Pastor Search Process

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INTRODUCTION

This guide is a compilation of various tested and proven pastor search resources. It is designed to assist our church leaders and congregations in developing a search process that will lead to successfully filling your pulpit vacancy. It is not intended to be a “how-to” manual or a “one-size-fits-all” approach to filling the pulpit vacancy. Your church constitution and by-laws may include a process for filling the pulpit vacancy. If a process for filling the pulpit vacancy is not included in the by-laws, this guide can be helpful in establishing your search process. In many instances, when a pastor vacancy occurs, congregations are at a loss for what to do. This guide intends to serve as a “bridge over troubled waters” approach as your congregation steps out into the winds and tempests of pastoral transition, commonly referred to as the interim period between a former pastor's departure and a new pastor's calling.

This resource is a guide to a process that recognizes prayer's priority and the Holy Spirit's indispensable leadership. The guide operates under the premise that ministers are divinely called to the ministry and are called to serve in specific congregations. It further presupposes that the Holy Spirit, working in the minister's and committee members' hearts, facilitates the call to the new pastor. At least six distinct periods of time are involved in the process of calling a pastor. Each of these periods is discussed in this guide.

Feel free to make adjustments to the process. Use what is helpful and disregard what does not feel right for your situation. The Moderator and Union Missionary Baptist Association officers are available to assist you during your time of leadership transition.

THE INTERIM PERIOD

It has been said that the pastor will please all the people in the church at least once in his service; he will please some when he becomes the pastor and others when he resigns as pastor.

At some point in the church's life, the pastor will ultimately retire, resign, accept a call from another church, be terminated, or die in office. The circumstances leading up to the pastor's departure will significantly determine the congregations' attitudes concerning how and when to call a new pastor.

When a permanent pastor vacates the pulpit, regardless of the reason for leaving, the church membership is thrown into a tailspin of shock and raw emotions. Anger, confusion, fear, and other negative emotional responses can disrupt the unity and harmony of the congregation and cloud the way forward for the sustainability of the membership and the church's ministries. In most instances where a pastor has left the church, the membership has not been without a pastor for years, even decades. Planning for the day they will be without a pastor (known as succession planning) is typically not one of the many time-honored Baptist church traditions. In fact, most African American Baptist churches do not practice succession planning. Additionally, there is usually no recorded history filed in church archives of the actions taken when a previous pastor left the church. In most cases, the available records reflect only that the pastor resigned or

retired and provided no reason for the departure. Interestingly, the more problematic the reason for the pastor's departure, the less detailed information was recorded or made available concerning why the pastor left.

There are usually no written procedures or policies, nor is there a step-by-step guide or manual on this issue, nor does the church's constitution and by-laws address what to do when the pastor severs ties with the church. Church congregations tend to overreact by handing off the church's leadership to unprepared and untrained individuals who are in shock and disbelief about the pastor's expected or unexpected departure to manage the church's day-to-day affairs in transition. To keep everyone on board and provide leadership during this critical time, a senior leader, usually the chairman of deacons or the most senior deacon or church trustee, assumes the leadership role in the church and becomes a quasi-pastor. The new leader in the quasi-pastor role appoints people to perform certain duties and functions and does what else it takes to keep the church going.

Unfortunately, one of the quasi-pastor's first significant actions is immediately establishing a pastoral search committee. There are usually significant disagreements and consternation concerning who is selected to serve on this committee and who is not selected. This often leads to chaos and the departure of dissatisfied members. The congregation soon discovers that the road ahead for the church transitioning between pastors is uncharted territory and could be messy and divisive, mainly because "we have never done this before."

The pastor's permanent departure causes the membership to go through a process much like that at the death of a loved one. For some, this may not end until well

into the ministry of the next pastor. It is important for congregations to recognize the “grief” they experience because of the pastor’s departure. At least five stages of grief can be identified:

- Denial – some church members may deny the pastor is really leaving. They expect him/her to change his/her mind at any time.
- Anger – some members may become angry with the pastor for leaving them.
- Bargaining – some may try to persuade the pastor not to leave the church.
- Depression – still others may enter a period of emotional or spiritual depression and will need spiritual encouragement during this time.
- Acceptance—Finally, other members will accept the pastor's decision as God's will, congratulate the pastor, and begin to prepare for the new pastor's arrival.

Life goes on regardless of emotions. The church must face the future. A couple of things need to happen, the sooner, the better.

First, the church should consider who will step up to lead the congregation. The pastor's departure may result in a scramble among church members who want to “take over the reigns.” If the pastor has left in response to conflict, the problem is exacerbated. Which “side” will fill the void of leadership? The potential for loss is great. It is hoped that mature lay leaders in the congregation will recognize the critical need for a balanced decision leading to interim leadership.

In most traditional Baptist churches, the chair of the Deacon Ministry is usually the church leader who is expected to fill the leadership void until the new pastor is selected

and favorably voted upon. Although the Chair is not the pastor, he/she is expected to initially guide the church during the immediate interim period until decisions for moving forward have been made by vote of the membership or based on provisions in the church's by-laws or policies.

Second, the church should elect a Pastor Search Committee. Care should be taken to ensure that the steps followed in this process follow the church's Constitution and Bylaws. Much preparation goes into getting the Search Committee ready to do its work. Much prayer and more prayer are the keys to a successful search process. This guide's section on the Pastor Search Committee further discusses the pastor search process.

While these two things are essential to the congregation in transition, the most important exercise is for the congregation to join in daily effectual, fervent prayer.

CONSIDER AN INTENTIONAL INTERIM PASTOR

A congregation without a pastor, regardless of the reason for the severance, needs someone in the initial and during the interim period to remind and reassure them that they are children of God, and that God promises never to leave them nor forsake them. The manifestation of his promise is revealed in intentional interim ministry.

Interim ministry, by and large, is not a household term recognized or even used in most church congregations. When discussing and considering interim ministry, most congregations typically rely on the traditional version of its meaning, which has a steady supply of preachers available to preach on any given Sunday during the transition period.

The need for the preached word is essential to the congregation's spiritual growth. The preaching moment is the most highly anticipated aspect of the Sunday morning worship experience. Therefore, a church in transition desperately wants to ensure that the preaching moment is uninterrupted, but the preachers called in to preach are only temporary until the search process is completed and a call is extended to the new pastor. So then, the term interim is viewed by most congregations as a means to an end, the end being the calling of a new pastor. In this interim ministry model, nothing more is expected of the supply of interim ministers, who simply fill in to preach. Other church leaders and laypersons typically hold themselves accountable for carrying on the church's work. Another interim consideration is to designate a selected preacher as the "interim" for a limited time to minimize the need to secure preachers every week. For the most part, congregations view interim ministry as a temporary bridge allowing a flow of ministers or a single designated minister to fill the pulpit each Sunday to lead the worship service and deliver the Sunday sermon. This interim approach tends to mislead or confuse members if an explanation of providing preachers for the Sunday sermon is not fully explained. Lowe (2020) suggests that when using this model, "One of the dangers during the interim period is that church members sometimes make the false assumption that everyone who preaches during the interim period is a candidate for the position. If everyone who preached during the interim period were candidates for the position, it would inevitably cause division among the congregation. Some would prefer one preacher, others would favor someone else, and still others would not want any of them (Lowe, 2020, *The Church During the Search*, pp. 8-9). On the other hand, Gripe (1997) suggests that interim ministry has an intentionality to it that greatly benefits the church in transition.

Congregations are not always aware of the dynamics playing out within the congregation during the transitional period. The former pastor's skill set was on hand to deal with the dynamics, and now, during the interim period, no one is equipped to perform in the same manner as the former pastor. The enhanced model of interim ministry being considered in this research offers congregations a seasoned spiritual leader to care for the congregation during the transitional period as a temporary shepherd, helping them to adjust to a new season in the church's life while preparing them for receiving a new pastor, then depart at the calling of the new pastor. The temporary shepherd performs as a permanent pastor would, but the intention of the ministry is for the congregation to make use of the experience and guidance of a seasoned spiritual leader during the interim period until a call is extended to a new pastor (Gripe, 1997, *The Interim Pastor's Manual*).

Interim ministry could also be an emerging interim model because congregations are beginning to realize the value of having a steady and reliable interim leader who is not interested in securing the vacancy. Congregations using a retired pastor stand to gain and benefit from the retired pastor's shepherding expertise, which the congregation probably did not realize it needed. Comparably, supply and itinerant preachers are susceptible to being goaded into making a pitch for themselves to become the new pastor, even after agreeing that they would not be considered pastoral candidates. Members or groups in favor of the supply preacher may feel left out of the process if their preferences are not considered for the vacancy. This dynamic can be unproductive and lead to division and strife.

Nor is interim ministry a much sought-after desire for most licensed and ordained ministers. Many ministers of the Gospel desire to become full-time pastors eventually

because clergy tradition and culture, particularly within the Missionary Baptist denomination, would suggest that serving as a full-time pastor is the ultimate destination for ordained ministers. The prevailing groupthink among Missionary Baptist ministers is “a call to preach is a call to pastor.” In other words, ordained Missionary Baptist ministers are expected to prepare themselves for increased responsibilities in ministry through education and training, preaching, and prayer to prepare themselves for full-time or bi-vocational ministry. In doing so, the minister stands to gain the attention of congregations involved in pastoral searches when this preparation is included in their resumes and submitted for consideration. The reasons for the lack of interest in interim ministry vary. Still, a core reason for the lack of interest may be the overarching desire for ministers to become full-time or bi-vocational pastors. When that is a factor, some ministers do not necessarily recognize or regard interim ministry as a calling to pursue. *The Interim Pastor’s Manual* (1997) provides insight into how effective interim ministry is. “Most Protestant denominations with call systems, in which the congregation elects its own pastor, such as the Baptists, the United Church of Christ, the Disciples of Christ, and the Reformed Church, are now using some kind of interim pastor program to guide congregations through the search period and are finding that the use of interim pastors during the time between installed pastors is a healthy, gratifying experience for the congregation in transition. The prospects are good that interims will continue to grow in all churches, whatever their system for finding new pastors” (Gripe, 1997, *The Interim Pastor’s Manual*, p.14). This reasoning suggests that interim ministry is not how it used to be practiced in Grandma’s church anymore. Interim ministry has shifted its focus over the years to address the need for a spiritual leader to “shepherd” the congregation during

the interim period. It is evident through Gripe's summation that interim ministry, as once understood and practiced, has transformed into a viable ministry model that can significantly benefit church congregations during the time between pastors.

It is important to note that while the pastoral search process is underway, the interim period is also underway. The ongoing operating ministries underway during the former pastors' tenure are expected to continue. The church needs a transitional leader who can emulate the former pastor's ministerial skill sets and, at the same time, assist in establishing a pastoral search process and serve as a consultant to the search committee and the general congregation. A great way to transition between the former pastor and the new pastor is to use the service and skills of someone seasoned, skilled, and strategic in ministering to the needs of a church congregation. Seasoned because interim ministry is not for the novice. Retired or semi-retired pastors or ordained ministers who have served under the tutelage of a senior pastor and were careful to "learn the ropes" of shepherding are qualified candidates. Skilled because a church in transition needs someone experienced in dealing with church issues, processes, and people. The interim must possess various skill sets to manage and supervise the daily rigor of church life. Strategic because a church in transition needs a leader who can develop and apply plans of action to guide the congregation toward desired outcomes. A church in transition focusing primarily on filling the vacant pulpit is blind to the need for ongoing shepherding ministry and spiritual leadership during the transitional period. An intentional interim pastor's pastoral experiences, level of leadership prowess, and his/her ability to be an effective change agent will influence the interim pastor's chances of successfully keeping a congregation on one accord and focused on the discernment of God's divine plan for

the church during the transitional or interim period between the departing pastor and the calling of the new pastor.

THE PASTOR SEARCH COMMITTEE

Importance of the Committee

In many congregations, there is a movement away from committees and toward teams. The critical issue is that the church recognizes the importance of being organized to maximize effectiveness in doing Kingdom work. The Pastor Search Committee is a strategic link in moving the congregation forward. The congregation at large has entrusted the Search Committee to search for and identify the individual who will be the next pastor/leader of the church.

The Title of the Committee

The title of this committee should be “The Pastor Search Committee” instead of “The Pulpit Committee.” The new pastor will be doing far more than filling the pulpit. The committee's duty is to “search” for the new pastor but not to “select” the pastor. The church members select the pastor by voting for the candidate(s).

The Number of Members of the Committee

The number of members will vary according to the size of the church. However, the number should be proportional to the number of members regularly attending Sunday services and not the total membership according to the church's roster. The Sunday service's number of attendees may include non-members and or visitors who do not have a vested interest in the church's affairs. A total church membership will include persons who do not attend regularly or may not live within commuting distance of the church.

Ensuring that the committee comprises members with a vested interest in the church is wise. Your church's by-laws and membership policies may define your church's membership, so review these documents before making committee selections. Ideally, regardless of the number of participants on the committee, the committee should have an uneven number of participants.

Experience has shown that the larger the committee, the more potential there is for problems. Conversely, too few on a committee may mean the church is poorly represented. The ideal Search Committee should probably be composed of five to nine people, depending on the size of the congregation. A word of caution. Hopefully, the people selected to serve on the Committee will be characterized by emotional and spiritual maturity. Nothing impedes a committee's work more than a member's presence with a personal agenda. The Committee should be, as far as possible, a small-scale version of the congregation. All members in the church need to feel they have someone on the Committee who will represent their interests. Experience with committees leads to the following cautions:

- A staff member or the spouse of a staff member should not be elected to the Committee.
- Husbands and wives should not be elected to serve together on the Committee; caution should even be taken when placing more than one immediate family member on the Committee.
- A known troublemaker should not be elected to the Committee
- Someone unfaithful to the church should not be elected to the Committee

- Someone who has never been satisfied with any of the previous pastors should not be elected to the Committee.
- Non-members and out-of-town members should not be selected to serve on the Committee.

The Makeup of the Membership of the Committee

Male and female members, single adults, senior adults, and older youths should be considered for participation. Members elected to serve on the Committee should have a proven track record of faithfulness to the church. They should be spiritually mature and able to work cooperatively with others. The committee must be representative of the entire congregation. Therefore, the Committee should be balanced in gender and age.

Consider the following:

- Chair of Deacons and Chair of Trustees (or representative of the two ministries).
- Christian Education personnel
- An Associate Minister who is uninterested in the position and will not submit a resume.
- Youth Personnel
- Musical Ministry (President or representative).
- Two (2) At-Large members from the congregation.
- An odd number of committee members.

The Commissioning of the Committee

The establishment, or how the committee is formed and commissioned, is an important decision the membership must make. The Committee members should not be appointed unilaterally or by any group of members who feel responsible for taking charge. This method of establishing the committee will surely lead to chaos and confusion, hurt feelings, and members leaving the church out of frustration about the process of establishing the Committee.

The members should consider electing or voting on the members who will serve on the Committee. The members could be asked to nominate the number of persons specified and the makeup previously determined. Written ballots can be used. The church could select a nominating committee to nominate potential members. Whatever method is used, no person or group should decide on the makeup of the Committee. When the members of the Committee are finally established, the Committee is authorized to begin searching for the next pastor.

Most Search Committees elect a Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, Recorder, and Prayer Coordinator. Below are brief descriptions of each:

- Chairperson—The chairperson is responsible for presiding at meetings and leading the Committee. She/he will call the meetings, prepare the agendas, preside over them, and facilitate the process.
- Vice Chairperson—The vice chairperson works closely with the chairperson and acts for the Committee in the chairperson's absence.
- Recorder—The recorder will keep good notes of all the meetings. The notes should be complete and neatly prepared so that if/when questions are raised about previous discussions or decisions, it will be relatively easy to

find answers in the minutes of the meetings. The recorder will also be responsible for all correspondence from the committee, whether to the church or the candidate/s being considered.

- Prayer Coordinator—The prayer coordinator should be someone known by the congregation as someone who takes seriously the discipline of prayer. This person will act intentionally to keep prayer before the church and the Committee.

The church may want to consider a commissioning service for the Pastor Search Committee. Such a service accomplishes a couple of things. For one, the importance of the responsibility assigned to the Committee is underscored by a commissioning service. A commissioning service also provides a worship context in which a covenant is made between the Committee and the congregation. A commissioning service can be a very meaningful act of dedication. The congregation covenants to pray for the Committee. The Committee covenants to represent the congregation by being faithful under God, to find His calling for the pastor of the church.

BEGINNING THE SEARCH PROCESS

Surveying the Congregation

The Search Committee would be wise to welcome input from the congregation. Every church member can complete a Pastor Search Survey and return it to the search Committee for analysis. Announcements from the pulpit and in the church bulletin should be made well in advance so that members know a survey will be used, when and how the

survey will be dispersed, how long the members have to complete it, and how it will be returned.

The Survey Analysis

The Search Committee needs to think strategically about the next person who will serve as pastor. Using the data from the congregational/leadership survey is helpful in developing a profile for the next pastor. However, that data alone is incomplete. The Committee should spend significant time thinking together about the qualities, skills, and strengths the next pastor needs to be an effective leader in that congregation. That determination can only be made if the Committee knows the congregation and community. Questions such as “Where does our congregation want to go in the next three to five years?” “What are the specific gifts and skills¹⁰ our next pastor should possess?” “What roadblocks will the next pastor need to overcome?” “Do we need someone whose gifts are administration, or pastoral, preaching, etc.?” are all matters that need to be considered in creating a profile for your next pastor.

Sources for Resumes

There are several sources from which resumes may be obtained. The Committee can request resumes from surrounding churches. The Committee may wish to contact respected pastors to request recommendations/resumes. This approach should not be viewed as an attempt to lure away a sitting pastor from another church. There could be licensed and ordained ministers in surrounding churches interested in applying for the pastoral vacancy. The pastor search announcement could be sent to the Union Missionary Baptist Association (UMBA) and other Associations affiliated with the General Baptist State Convention (GBSC) to be advertised on their websites and Facebook

accounts. The GBSC “Baptist Informer” publication invites churches to post their pastoral vacancies in this publication. For more information on this, email communications@gbsconline.org or at 919-821-7466. Advertising in publications like the Baptist Informer attracts candidates from across the country and even beyond. The Committee and the church should decide on the extent to which they want to consider candidates, considering the costs and expenses associated with such candidates.

Ranking the Resumes

The Pastor Search Committee will need to establish an adequate amount of time for receiving resumes. The Committee should select a date to begin working with the resumes. This does not mean that resumes will not be received after that date. It simply gives the Committee a set time to begin working with the resumes they have received. Depending on the size of the church, the sheer number of resumes can be overwhelming. The question becomes how to reduce the volume of resumes to a manageable number. One method is to make copies of every resume for each member of the Search Committee. Using the profile the Committee has created, the entire Committee will work through the resumes and eliminate those that do not align with the profile. Many resumes will be easily eliminated using this method to filter the resumes received.

Once the resumes have been reduced to a manageable number, each committee member will work independently with those resumes, separating the resumes into three stacks: “YES,” “NO,” and “MAYBE.”. At this point, the Committee aims to move the process toward a consensus list of viable candidates. This will not be an easy task. Study and prayer will be required. This step should not be rushed. Once this has been completed, the Committee will come together and share their choices. The five to ten

resumes with the most frequency will comprise the “short list” or the “first cut.” The Committee should decide on how many candidates of the total number of resumes submitted will make the first cut.

Each member should order and rank the shortlist according to whom he/she judges as the best fit for the church’s next pastor so that the first choice is number five; the second is number four, and right on down the line. When the committee members come back together to compare their work, the next step will be to develop a consensus shortlist that the committee will use to move forward in the process. The Chairman of the Committee may go around the table and let the members of the Committee identify their number 1 choice and assign it a number value, say five, if your goal is to arrive at a short list of five. After each member has identified her/his number 1 choice, go to number 2 and assign it a value, in this case 4. Continue that process until every resume has been assigned a value. Add the numbers, and the resume with the highest number becomes your number 1 candidate; the one who receives the second highest number becomes your number 2 candidate, etc.

Once the first-cut list has been developed, each person on the first-cut list will be contacted by phone. The phone conversation should include:

1. Introduction to the church.
2. Invitation to the individual to become a candidate in the search process.
3. Response to the individual’s initial questions.
4. Invitation to the individual to be interviewed by the Committee.

The interviews should be scheduled according to the candidate's availability and the availability of the committee members. Friday evenings and Saturday mornings have

shown to work well for candidates. The committee and the candidates should work towards a convenient interview time.

INTERVIEWING and INVESTIGATING THE CANDIDATES

Some search committees invite the pastoral candidate to deliver a sermon to the membership during a regular Sunday morning worship service before interviewing the candidate. Usually, this is the first time the committee meets the candidate. This approach puts the committee and the membership at a disadvantage of not knowing much or anything about the candidate's background (other than what is included in the resume), motivation for applying, conversion experience, call to ministry, theology, doctrine, etc. In this model, the candidate's preaching style is the committee's and the members' focus. Knowing this, the candidate realizes that in most cases, you do not get a second chance to make a first impression and will intentionally preach his/her best sermon and display his/her best-preaching theatrics during this first encounter with the membership. Members often compare the candidate's preaching style to the former pastor. Others will focus on the other components, such as the length of the sermon, singing ability, and "whooping" techniques. And depending on how many candidates are presented to the membership using this model, this parade of unvetted preachers could continue for weeks and even months. This can lead to members preferring one candidate over another or wanting to decide on a particular candidate. Yet, the committee has not interviewed the candidate to determine whether he/she is the best-fit candidate for the church's needs.

The prowess of the pulpit has often been the peril of the search committee. Based on the "preacher's" performance in the pulpit, the Committee moves forward to discover,

only after the preacher has been on the job for six months, that he doesn't pay his bills, or he doesn't really care about people or he is a dictator, or maybe he just does not fit the congregation. Such sloppy work among search committees is an affront to God and a betrayal of the congregation, which has entrusted the Committee to find God's chosen under-shepherd. The sad thing is that, in most cases, this scenario could have been avoided if the Committee had carefully interviewed the candidate using questions to discover his/her fit for the membership and then investigated the candidate's background and references. Interview questions should be designed to get to the heart of what the members indicated they are looking for from the pastor and to reveal the candidate's spiritual formation and calling for this pastoral assignment.

THE INTERVIEW

Before the interview, the committee members should have studied the questions they want to ask the candidate and decided how to divide them among themselves. The Committee wants to avoid the impression that they are working from a checklist. Therefore, it will be much easier if each member of the Committee accepts responsibility for three or four of the questions. At this meeting, it is appropriate for the Committee Chair to take the lead. The first item will be a time of prayer, seeking God's will and leadership. Introductions will follow. The chair may want to invite the members of the Committee to introduce themselves more fully by sharing a little about their family, work, and involvement in the church. After the committee members have introduced themselves, the Chairperson could invite the candidate to introduce himself and discuss his Christian pilgrimage. From that point, the committee members will ask their questions. The

committee members must understand the answers to each question. It is perfectly acceptable to ask the candidate or his spouse to amplify an answer that may be incomplete. The chairperson needs to be sensitive to the time and allow ample time for the candidate and his spouse to ask the questions they have brought to the meeting. The committee members should have done their homework and be able to respond intelligently to the candidate's questions.

After the interview, the committee members should come back together to debrief as soon as possible. Each member of the Committee should be prepared to share his/her impressions. It is essential to hear from each member. The Chairperson is responsible for encouraging and engaging each member to express her/his feelings. What did you like; what did you not like? Were there any red flags? Did the meeting raise other questions that need to be addressed? Does the committee feel good enough about the meeting to proceed to the next step? All concerns should be resolved before moving to the next step.

SCHEDULE THE CANDIDATE TO PREACH

The Committee and candidate will decide together on a mutually acceptable Sunday service to introduce the candidate to the church and for the candidate to preach. The congregation should be informed about who and when the candidates will be presented to preach. Evaluation forms should be given to each member to critique the candidates' sermon presentation and other general characteristics. The evaluation forms will be collected and given to the committee chair after each presentation. The evaluation form is a tool for the committee to obtain the membership's voice regarding the candidate's presentation.

When the final candidate has been presented and has preached, the committee will reconvene to discuss their presentations, review the evaluation forms submitted by the membership, and determine if there is a consensus among the committee and the membership concerning the discernment of a calling on any of the candidates. This should not be rushed. Prayerful consideration must be applied to this step. The candidate pool can be narrowed during this step, and candidates asked to return for another preaching opportunity or to teach Bible Study or Sunday School. The committee can consider inviting the candidates to teach Sunday School on the Sunday scheduled to preach and to return on evening designated for Bible Study.

There are at least three areas in the background of any candidate that should be carefully explored by the search committee, and which must remain at the forefront when references are consulted:

1. The Ministry Question – This relates to the candidate’s track record. Of course, if the candidate is a young minister, there will not be much history of ministry for the Committee to look at. However, as far as possible, the Committee should raise questions about the candidate’s ministry experience. Does he possess the ministry skills, experience, and strengths that the next pastor should have to be effective (based on the profile that the Committee created)?
2. The Moral Question – This question should not have to be asked. Ideally, all ministers would be godly, honest, decent, faithful, and committed. The sad fact is that we do not live in an ideal world. In the real world, ministers are sometimes corrupt and immoral. Ministers have skeletons in their

closets. It is the Search Committee's responsibility, as far as possible, to look in the candidate's closets. This is another way of saying that the Committee must thoroughly investigate the candidate's past to avoid the pitfall of calling a man who is not a man of God.

3. The Mix Question – We all know that oil and water do not mix, and we should also be sophisticated enough to know that sometimes a pastor and a church do not mix. In other words, sometimes the fit is not comfortable. A good pastor and a good church can get together and have a bad experience. The Committee will want to consider the church's culture in considering a new pastor. Can a city boy do well in a country church? Can a man with nothing but “big church” experience succeed in a “small church?” There is no hard and fast formula to follow when making these decisions. Often, decisions are made based on intuition rather than hard facts. The important thing is to realize that the Search Committee is looking for someone who will be a good fit with the people he is being called to lead.

CHECKING REFERENCES

Thorough work checking references can produce positive results and save tremendous travail that follows the calling of the wrong pastor. Typically, most resumes will include references. In the rare cases when references are not included, the Committee will want to secure references from any candidate who makes the shortlist. Checking the references is key to understanding the candidate and will produce positive or negative results, depending on how well the Committee does its job. Granted, even

when a Committee has done a thorough and effective work in checking references, there is no guarantee of a healthy relationship between the new pastor and the congregation. However, careful attention to detail greatly enhances the likelihood of the relationship succeeding. Since you have the candidates' resumes, starting with the references listed on the resume is a good idea.

Some Search Committees chose to develop a letter to send to references. The references are cordially requested to respond in written form to the questions on the form and return the form in a stamped, self-addressed envelope. However, the phone conversation may provide opportunities to ask follow-up questions or ask for amplification of specific responses. Another item for consideration in making this decision is the simple fact that many people are reluctant to fill out a form, perhaps because of the time it takes or because they do not want their responses to be in written form. Regardless of which approach the Committee decides upon, it is advised that the Committee go beyond the references listed on the resumes. Anybody can find three or four people who will give them a good reference. That is exactly why the Committee needs to expand its investigation beyond the references listed on the resume. There are several ways to accomplish that.

One, when talking to the references listed on the resume, the committee member can ask the question, "Can you provide me with the name (and phone number, if possible) of someone else who knows _____'?" Generally, the Committee is discouraged from contacting people in the candidate's current church. However, contacting members in churches where the candidate has served is permissible. These are usually listed on the resumes under "experience." Realistically, the Committee should

understand the possibility of getting negative feedback from a reference. After all, it is impossible to please everyone! However, after contacting multiple references, the Committee should be aware if there are recurring patterns of destructive behavior or unhealthy issues that characterize the candidate's ministry experiences.

WHERE TO GO FROM HERE

At this point in the search process, the committee is well on its way to recommending at least one, preferably no more than two, candidates to the members for consideration to become the next pastor. The committee could ask the candidates to return for another visit to preach and spend more time with the congregation. The committee could invite the candidate(s) to serve a 2–4-week tenure with the church to preach and teach, allowing the membership to become more familiar with the candidates' personalities and leadership styles.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

This guide is developed to provide church leaders and congregations searching for a pastor with a resource to assist in establishing a process for conducting the pastor search. It contains ideas, best practices, and suggestions compiled from various pastoral search resources that can be used to help develop a search process that works for your congregation. Your church's by-laws or administrative policies may already address processes for conducting a pastoral search. This guide can be an additional resource; use what works and discard what does not work.

A church without a pastor is like a ship without a sail. It will drift endlessly into unchartered waters or shipwrecked on a deserted island. The Guide to the Pastor Search Process is an invaluable resource for church leaders and congregations to have on hand even before a pastoral vacancy occurs. It offers insight about what to possibly expect during the transitional period between the former and new pastor.

The Union Missionary Baptist Association has designated officials who can answer questions and offer suggestions for you. Contact the Executive Secretary or the Moderator to identify those officials.

Finally, this guide is not a substitute for PRAYER. A church without a pastor needs to join in prayer continuously. Seek the Lord's guidance and his will for your situation. Trust in the Lord's promises. Pray for the discernment of his will for the calling of your next pastor.