

## **Developing the Pastoral Search**

Presented here are some biblically based steps a congregation should take in praying for, identifying, and calling a pastor or associate pastor.

### **Spending Time in Prayer**

A search for a new pastor should begin with prayer. The church, after all, was instituted by Jesus Christ (Matthew 16). According to Paul, a local assembly of believers is to be "the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." While prayer should be an integral part of church life all the time, it is especially important for a church body to renew its commitment to God and submission to His authority at a time of transition.

### **Appointing a Search/Call Committee**

Baptist churches are typically autonomous and congregationally governed. While local autonomy is scriptural, there is a pitfall that needs to be avoided. Not everyone in the congregation is equally qualified to govern the church.

Within any church, you have a wide range in spiritual maturity and discernment, ranging from wise prayer warriors to new converts to many who are simply not in fellowship with God.

It's important that the church select spiritually mature members, who are grounded in Scripture and doctrine (see Acts 2:42) as well as knowledgeable and discerning (see Proverbs). For this reason, many churches turn to deacons or elders to fulfill this task.

### **Identifying Pastoral Criteria**

What criteria should the pastoral search committee utilize? Fortunately, Paul is abundantly clear on pastoral qualifications (see I Timothy 2:12-14 and 3:2-7; Titus 1:5-9). These criteria, however, are not what drive many pastoral search processes.

A review of pastoral openings listed at various ministry job sites shows that quite a few churches use job announcement models similar to corporate CEO job descriptions. While there are business aspects to a church (and these aspects should not be ignored or downplayed), **the church is not a business**. It is therefore a mistake to conduct a pastoral search with a business-driven mindset.

How do you know if you're driven by a business mindset? Two dead giveaways are requiring a certain seminary degree or number of year's experience. While you certainly want a pastor who is educated and wise, the Bible makes clear where a person is to find wisdom and knowledge.

What's more, when Samuel went to Jesse's house to anoint a new king, his focus was on appearance. God's focus was on the heart. Don't make the "credentials" mistake of assuming that the best pastor is the one with the best-looking resume.

Whether your church has 50 members or 5000 members, you want the pastor that God is leading to your pulpit. It's your task to discover *that* person, not necessarily to pick the person with the best credentials on paper.

## **Reviewing Candidates**

It is the job of the Call Committee to solicit, collect, and review information from prospective candidates. They should of course bathe the entire process in prayer. The Bible does provide some guidelines as to how this process should be conducted. Here are some suggestions based on those guidelines:

- Establish basic "screening" criteria to narrow down the candidates to a manageable number - these criteria should be based on Scripture (i.e., salvation, love for God and others, passion for the Word, doctrine, desire to serve as pastor, etc.) and not on surveys, business models, etc.
- Interview the candidate(s) to further "flesh out" salvation, testimony, doctrinal beliefs, education (not so much a specific degree, but rather a demonstrable commitment to greater knowledge), wisdom (how he makes decisions), etc.
- Determine candidate's testimony and leadership ability via references
- Get to know the candidate's family

Once the committee has narrowed down its list of candidates to a prioritized list of three or four (based on much prayer and labor), it's time to start recommending candidates to the overall church body.

### **Calling a Pastor**

When the search committee puts a candidate before the congregation, they are proposing this man to be the pastor/associate pastor. It's a serious step, and should not be taken without the proper prayer, examination, and confidence.

Once a candidate is confirmed by the congregation and accepts the call, the search committee's job is not done. They should pray with the new candidate, help introduce him to the congregation, encourage the congregation to embrace him, and intercede for him in prayer.

The Call Committee should also work closely with the Finance Team/Personnel Committee to ensure that the financial package for the new pastor is in place as discussed with him and that no anomalies exist after the pastor starts his tenure. Also ensure that an appropriate Covenant/Contract is drawn up for the new pastor to agree and sign off.

It is the Call Committee's responsibility to receive the pastor should he request clarity on certain issues once he has started his ministry. This should be done in an open meeting with the committee or representatives thereof. Do not have one on one discussions where questions and response could be misconstrued and lead to tensions at a later stage.

The Call Committee should be officially disbanded at a members meeting at least 2 months after the pastor has commenced his ministry in the church.

With careful attention to prayer and maintaining the right mindset through the process, your church should be on its way to discovering the man God has called to serve you.