



Introduction to the Pastoral Search Process

Your pastor has resigned or anticipates retirement. Now your congregation faces the experience of transition and a pastoral search. How do you begin this process? Be assured that your area conference minister and the Denominational Office of Ministerial Leadership are ready to work with you.

Pastoral search processes can cause anxiety in congregational members. This anxiety then creates a desire to simply find a pastor to fill the pulpit. As a result, the search committee is pressured to find someone as quickly as possible. And if too much time elapses (in their opinion) members may begin to wonder if there is something wrong with them as a congregation. So the goal becomes filling a position rather than finding the right match for the congregation. The congregation may luck out in spite of the rush job, but more often than not, the decision is detrimental to the congregation as well as to the new pastor.

Why? For starters, in their rush, God has often been left out of the equation—or at best not given time to work. Congregations settle for who is available rather than who has the gifts needed for the health of the congregation. And finally, the candidate chosen may not have been more discerning about the choice than the congregation. The congregation is likely to end up with someone who was simply looking for a pastoral position and gave little thought about who the congregation is.

First, take the time to say a proper good bye to the former pastor. Give yourself time to grieve that loss and to let go of the former pastor so that you can fully embrace a new pastor. If the pastor is leaving on a bad note, take time to reflect on what went wrong and own up to the congregation's part in the situation. Be willing to ask forgiveness of the former pastor.

Take the time to assess the health of the congregation. What does the congregation need to work on to prepare for a new pastor? Your area conference minister can be an excellent resource for walking with you through this time. Putting the weight on the new pastor to make things better is not healthy for the congregation or for the new pastor.

Consider the benefits of an interim pastor to give your congregation time to work at issues and time to prepare for a sound process for the pastoral search. Work with your conference to assess whether you simply need an interim arrangement or whether you need an intentional transitional pastor to help you work on deeper issues that may interfere with the health of your congregation.

Reclaim or create a new vision that gives the congregation energy and excitement to move into the next chapter of the congregation's life. Your new pastor will impact that, but it's a bad sign when a congregation must count on a new pastor for their vision.

See the search process as an excellent opportunity to strengthen the spirituality of the congregation. It quiets the fears and allows the Spirit of God to speak to and lead the congregation in the process. Believe that God is looking after your congregation and will make clear in due time as to who your congregation is to call as your next pastor. Pray daily for the congregation and for the search committee you have entrusted the process in finding a pastor.

Rely on your conference minister to walk with you during this special time in your congregation's life. Their experience in working with numerous pastoral searches can greatly benefit your process and save you some headaches later. The integrity of the pastoral search process is the number one event that impacts the health of a congregation and the conference.

This packet contains a step by step outline for looking for a new pastor, a possible timeline for keeping the congregation informed, pastoral salary guidelines, an interview guide for the search committee (as well as the candidate version of the interview guideline) and the Transitional Pastor Policy document.

Blessings to you and your congregation.