



Mennonite
Church
USA

Mennonite
Church
Canada

Search Committee Candidate Interview Candidate Version

General Guidelines

- The overarching goal is to discern whether a congregation and a pastoral candidate have sufficiently common expectations, commitment, values and theologies, etc., so that a pastor- congregational healthy relationship can be established and covenants with each other can be made.
- Courtship is a helpful model to keep in mind through this process. The goal is to discover the truth about each other. To do that mutual self-disclosure to each other is the most effective means to move that process forward. How can you discover the truth about each other?
- Goals and questions. The interview goals that follow indicate what it is you are seeking to learn. The interview questions may help you find out the truth you need to know about each other.
- Questions which can be answered by *yes* or *no* are not the most helpful. Design questions that will encourage thoughtful responses. Invite personal stories. Ask experience-based questions: not "what would you do if..." but "what have you done when..."
- Be aware of overreacting to past disappointments or previous weaknesses in a pastor or congregation.
- Prepare yourself well enough in advance so that you don't have these questions in front of you during the interview. Don't worry if not every question is asked; in fact that would be too much. And you will certainly create your own questions as you go.
- It is often helpful to have a representative of the larger church present for the formal interview. This might be the area conference minister or a representative of an area conference pastoral leadership committee. The role is to assist both the search committee and the candidate in making certain that vital interests are covered. However, this person should not lead the interview; that is the local congregation's responsibility.
- The interview process is best begun in an informal manner. Remember that you are seeking to learn to know each other. How you go about the process tells the congregation something about you! Remember that this is not an interrogation, though the questions that follow may make it seem so. You might begin by asking if each person present would introduce themselves: name, family, vocation, how they came to faith, responsibilities in the church, etc. Remember to be brief.
- After the candidating interview, each party will want to process what they have observed and heard. This is a point at which it is difficult to maintain objectivity, as each party to the interview brings strong hopes and best intentions. The Assessment Questions may help you consider the most important issues.

Permission is given to congregational search committees to copy this document for search committee members only.

Interview Goal No. 1

Congregational History and Identity

The goal is to gain awareness of the story of this congregation and how that story has shaped their self-understanding and their collective self-esteem.

Candidate's Assessment Questions following the interview

Is this essentially a healthy congregation or will considerable work need to be done to create a more wholesome self-understanding?

Do the people know their history and what feelings arise when they speak about it?

What is the theological identity present here? And how do they claim their Anabaptist/Mennonite heritage?

Interview Questions

On a time line identify the key events and transitions in the life of this congregation. What has been the average tenure of pastors?

When was the last revision of the constitution and bylaws of the congregation? Is it current or are changes needed now?

What colleges are the youth of this congregation presently attending? Is any financial assistance offered by the church?

Who have been the key persons who have set the tone and direction of this congregation? What did they do? What was the heart of their theology?

What does being Mennonite mean in this congregation? Tell about any specific learning experiences relating to Anabaptist- Mennonite history and theology which have occurred in your congregation in the last five years.

What is the congregation's attitude toward the support of area conferences; both area conferences and denomination? MCC? Is the pastor supported and encouraged, allowed or discouraged from accepting area conference assignments?

What hymnbooks does the congregation use regularly? Tell about the music which is most appreciated by members. Who are the organists-pianists? Describe the choir(s) and their role in worship.

What is the congregation legitimately proud of about itself and its program?

Other questions you wish to ask and need to remember:

Interview Goal No. 2

Pastoral Expectations

The goal is to ascertain the readiness of the congregation to accept clarified pastoral leadership that is both representational and servanthood in style.

Candidate's Assessment Questions following the Interview

Will the congregation give permission for the pastor to be a leader or are they calling me to only do certain tasks?

Is there tolerance for the pastor to be a human being, also needing understanding and grace?

What evidence is there that they have provided qualified supporting persons and structures to pastors?

Interview Questions

Describe the preferred worship style of the congregation. What is expected of the pastor? Of others?

Most congregations have high expectations of a new minister. They expect what the previous pastor did well to be continued, plus what the previous pastor did marginally or poorly should also now be done well. How does this congregation recognize that pastors are human and sometimes fail?

Pastors yearn for persons in the congregation who give evidence of their sincere commitment to the Christian faith, to becoming disciples of Jesus Christ, and to significant study of the Scriptures. What evidence is there of these in this congregation?

Describe the major leadership boards, councils, commissions, or committees in the church. How do they relate to each other? What are their relative strengths and what is their influence in the congregation? What is the expected pastor's role in relation to these groups?

Who recruits Sunday school teachers?

Is there a group in the church who is designated to provide feedback and ongoing evaluation to the pastor?

What are the average number of weddings and funerals in a year?

What is the congregation's expectation regarding the pastor's spouse and family?

Is there a pastoral job description? Who wrote it? Does the whole congregation know and own it? What are the priorities in the "Twenty Pastoral Areas"?

What is the pastor's role in selecting any additional staff to serve the congregation?

Other questions you wish to ask and need to remember:

Interview Goal No. 3

Congregational Program, Mission and Outreach

The goal is to identify whether the congregation is stuck in its tradition or whether it uses its traditions to think creatively about its ministry and mission.

Candidate's Assessment Questions following the interview

Will this congregation be resistant or receptive to changes?

Is there a sense of something good (gospel) which they are willing to share?

Are the members proud of or embarrassed by their church?

Interview Questions

What has this congregation done to demonstrate that it is open to new people and wants to grow?

What programs of the church are sufficiently attractive and inviting that you have little problem gaining voluntary participation? Do you know why?

Are people on time or is there a tendency to come late?

Describe the most memorable highlight in the history of this congregation since you have been a member.

What events, programs, or activities has this congregation or members of it done to participate in and support the worldwide mission of the church?

What are special church traditions at Advent and Christmas? Lent, Easter and Pentecost? Thanksgiving? Other?

What is the average Sunday morning worship attendance? How does this compare to church membership? How does worship attendance compare to Sunday school attendance?

Who in this community would be the most likely to respond to an invitation to attend church? Has anyone invited them?

Other questions you wish to ask and need to remember:

Interview Goal No. 4

Stewardship and Facilities

The goal is to determine the level of commitment to the church and to its well-being.

Candidate's Assessment Questions following the interview

As you observe the upkeep and maintenance of the facilities and properties of the church, does it reflect a wholesome pride in these symbols of identity?

Are there sufficient financial resources to meet the goals of the congregation?

Is there an equal readiness to support people and programs compared to what is available to support buildings and equipment?

Interview Questions

What is the system of offerings and/or the collection of financial resources to support the work of this congregation and the wider church? Is it working well?

Does this congregation have an annual budget? How are financial goals determined for the year? Is there a method to determine approximate annual support? What is expected of the pastor in this?

Tell me the story of the church building. When was it built? Additions and improvements? How were they paid for? Needed or anticipated changes?

Who has keys to the church?

What is the current state of the congregation's financial stewardship? How is that being reported to the congregation?

What office equipment is available to the pastor and what is planned for purchase in the future?

What secretarial services are available within the church? How long has the present administrative assistant been employed by this church? Have there been any issues regarding confidentiality or concerns about the quality of the working relationship with the pastor? To whom is the administrative assistant responsible?

Other questions you wish to ask and need to remember:

Interview Goal No. 5

Diversity/Unity in the Congregation

The goal is to discern whether there is sufficient unity in the congregation for a pastor to function effectively.

Candidate's Assessment Questions following the interview

Is there evidence that conflicts have been acknowledged and responded to; or is conflict avoidance the dominant response?

Are conflicts over theology? Ideology? Personalities? Family systems?

Is the lay leadership sufficiently strong so that the pastor does not get drawn into the center of every conflict?

Interview Questions

Tell me about the termination of the previous three pastors; were there any unique or difficult circumstances?

What are the things you wish you wouldn't have to tell the candidates? What was the last major church conflict? What were the issues? Who were the protagonists? How was it resolved?

Describe the strongest theological and religious opinions held by differing members. What are the issues that cause persons to dig in their heels? When there are differences of deeply held beliefs, how do these persons or groups talk with each other? Or don't they?

What groups in the church call for special attention from the pastor?

What are the accepted procedures for the congregation to make decisions, especially regarding pastor's call and tenure?

How are other decisions made in this congregation? What issues need only board or council approval? What issues go to the entire congregation? Is the pastor trusted to make some decisions alone? Give examples for each of the above.

Every congregation contains within it a diversity of persons, ideas, theology, expectations. How has the congregation responded to persons who at times feel themselves to be in the minority?

In teaching or preaching, what topics or points of view would raise strong dissenting opinions?

Other questions you wish to ask and need to remember:

Interview Goal No. 6

Covenant of Understanding

The goal is to come to a mutually acceptable understanding of the terms of the relationship so that this can be put in writing.

Candidate's Assessment Questions following the interview

Is there either a tradition or at least a readiness to put terms of agreement into a written document?

Who will represent the congregation in this negotiation and do they have sufficient authority to act?

Will the spirit and attitude with which this process of negotiation is carried forward be one which is reluctant or supporting of the pastor?

Interview Questions

What housing options are possible for a new pastor?

How does the congregation go about determining salaries? Is there an annual adjustment for cost of living? Does the congregation use any area conference guidelines in setting salaries?

What does the congregation expect about the length of term? Is there a vote every three years? Other options?

In the U.S., health insurance coverage is a major issue; what are the congregation's commitments for this?

Any other issue related to the covenant of understanding: vacations, sabbaticals, etc.

Various forms of feedback and review are essential for the pastor's growth and confidence in ministry. What are ways in which this was provided to the previous pastor?

Someone or some office in the congregation must be designated to deal with issues like salaries, covenants of understanding, pastoral evaluations and tenure. Who carries these responsibilities in this congregation?

Other questions you wish to ask and need to remember:

Specialized Issues

Multiple staff congregations: How do you expect staff members to relate to each other? Who does what?

Couples in ministry: What can we do so as not to be viewed as competitors but as colleagues?

Handicapped with disabilities: Are there volunteer drivers in the church who would help me get around?

Youth ministry: How does this tie into the total life of the congregation? Who pastors the youth?

Questions the Search Committee May Ask the Candidate

Most of this document has been for the purpose of helping the congregational search committee to identify significant issues and concerns regarding a pastoral candidate. But if courtship is the model and mutual self-disclosure is the method, then the congregation should also expect to learn important information concerning the candidate during this interview. Questions which the candidate should be prepared to answer might include the following:

- Tell us about your family of origin. Your relationship to parents, siblings, extended family. Tell us about your family.
- For which tasks of ministry have you been most affirmed by either colleagues or parishioners?
- What projects/programs have you initiated and seen through to completion? This could be either within the congregation or community. What about any that failed; what did you learn from these?
- Share with us the three scriptural passages which have most shaped your faith. What within these passages has given energy to your faith?
- Who have been the most significant influences upon your life and your faith? What was important in these relationships?
- A young person comes to you for counsel concerning life direction. How did you proceed in counseling this person and what options did you present to him/her?
- Tell us about the church and community you have most recently been part of. What issues, concerns and attitudes were dominant?

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