



Mennonite Church
USA

Mennonite Church
Canada

Search Committee Candidate Interview Congregational Search Committee 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 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 helpful to have 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 having each person present 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

Basic Christian Commitment

The goal is to identify the basic theological stance, and also to measure the intensity of commitment to that faith.

Search Committee Assessment. Questions following the interview.

What are the most energizing affirmations about the Christian faith made by the candidate?

Is there sufficient common ground in theology between the candidate and our congregations?

Will this candidate unite the church in our common mission, while working cooperatively with other Christians?

Interview Questions

Who have been the most significant influences upon your life and your faith? What was important in these relationships?

Describe how you came to commitment to the Christian faith.

What theological label or a combination of the same which would come close to describe who you see yourself to be? Explain what that means to you.

How did you choose the schools you have attended? Describe how they have shaped your thinking and your values.

What are the religious and professional journals do you subscribe? What books have you read in the last year?

How have you tried to summarize the most important elements of your faith or your theology? What did you learn from that experience?

With what other Christian groups have you had meaningful relationships or experiences?

Other questions you wish to ask and need to remember:

Interview Goal No. 2
Anabaptist/Mennonite Faith and
Commitments

Does the candidate find their true spiritual home within this faith heritage of Anabaptist-Mennonite?

Search Committee Assessment.
Questions following the interview

Is there a clear indication that the candidate is committed to the Anabaptist/Mennonite faith?

How will the candidate balance issues of faith and ethics, salvation and peace, spiritual and social concerns?

Can you anticipate the level of support the candidate will give to area conferences and institutions of the church?

Interview Questions

Tell us about how and when you discovered the significance of Anabaptism as a unique form of Christianity.

Mennonites are one of the three historic peace churches; where does this emphasis on peace, love and nonviolence fit into your theology? Is it at the center or on the fringe?

What actions have you engaged in or statements have you made to express your commitment to justice for all peoples and/or peace on earth? Have you had any anti-racism training?

Being a Mennonite pastor calls for connectedness to area conferences and church related institutions/colleges. Tell us how you have experienced this in the past.

While we experience the Christian faith in this local congregation, we also desire to be part of the global church and to share in the worldwide mission of the church. Tell us how you might help us to realize this vision and move us toward action.

A young person came to you for counsel concerning life direction; how did you proceed in counseling this person and what options did you present to him/her?

Which are the most recent church wide or area conferences you have attended?

Other questions you wish to ask and need to remember:

Interview Goal No. 3

Authority and Interpretation of the Scriptures

The goal is to determine how the candidate sees and uses the Bible.

Search Committee Assessment. Questions following the interview.

How will the candidate combine the use of scripture with the wisdom learned from history and personal experience?

Will the candidate use the Bible in a way that narrows or expands our understandings?

Is there evidence of significant spiritual depth and insight in the way the scriptures nourish the soul of the candidate?

Interview Questions

Share with us the three scriptural passages which have most shaped your faith. What within these passages has given energy to your faith?

Pastors often have a preference for the Old Testament or the New Testament; how have you used each of these in your preaching?

The Bible appears to give mixed messages concerning the role of women within the church; describe how you interpret such passages which speak to this issue.

Describe how you have taught others to read and interpret the scriptures for themselves.

There are several words which are used in reference to the Bible: i.e. inspiration, authority, infallible, trustworthy, reliable, etc. Which of these do you embrace and which of them present problems?

Other questions you wish to ask and need to remember:

Interview Goal No. 4

Basic Competence

The goal is to determine whether the candidate brings to the church both sufficient skills and energy to work toward excellence.

Search Committee Assessment. Questions following the interview.

What do the candidates' stories about prior ministry and relationships tell us about potential success or failure?

What evidence does the candidate demonstrate that they will bring sufficient energy to the tasks of ministry so as to inspire others to join them?

Will the candidate be teachable, able to listen to others and receive counsel? Will they take initiative to learn and grow?

Interview Questions

What in your prior work in the church has brought you the highest level of satisfaction?

What projects/programs have you initiated and seen through to completion? This could be either within a congregation or in the community.

Who have been your mentors/models for ministry and what have you learned from them?

When you have been in a leadership role, what have been your biggest disappointments?

No pain; no gain. Describe what you have learned about yourself in situations that have not gone well. Are there aspects of ministerial responsibility which you tend to either delay or avoid?

The three major areas calling for pastoral competence are:

- 1) Public ministries □ preaching, teaching;
- 2) Person to person ministries □ visitation, counseling, pastoral care; and
- 3) Administrative ministries □ visioning, organizing.

How have you demonstrated these in balance in your previous ministry experience?

Other questions you wish to ask and need to remember:

Interview Goal No. 5

The Person of the Pastor

The goal is to determine the quality of the person, who they are in their inner self as to self-esteem, care for others, humility and relationship to God.

Search Committee Assessment. Questions following the interview.

If one of the basic tasks of the pastor is to set a tone for the church, will positive or negative attitudes predominate?

Are there any evidences of significant past injury to the "self" of the candidate? How has this been dealt with?

Are there any hints as to the accuracy with which the candidate perceives how other people see them or as to the accuracy of how the candidate hears others?

Interview Questions

Tell us about your family of origin. Your relationships with parents, siblings, extended family, etc. Where are they now and what is your relationship to them? Tell us about your children, assuming you have children.

Spouses of clergy today relate in many different ways to the congregation; tell us about your spouse and what we can expect of him or her.

Aside from your interest in things of religion, theology and church, what other issues, concerns, interests do you have that occupy some portion of your time and attention? Avocations?

Tell us about any formal or informal peer relationships which you have had, what needs did such relationships satisfy? From whom have you received the most support for your ministry and how was that support expressed?

Let's talk about motivations; why do you want to be a pastor? What in the tasks of ministry bring energy and joy in your life? What helps you begin again when things have been difficult?

Have you ever taken the Myers Briggs Type indicator or other personality type tests? What did you learn about yourself in the process?

Tell us about the church and community in which you have most recently participated. What issues, concerns and attitudes were dominant?

Other questions you wish to ask and need to remember:

Interview Goal No. 6

Ministerial Tasks and Roles

The office of ministry involves a highly complex set of functions and roles. The goal is to determine how well the candidate understands these and is able to embrace them.

Search Committee Assessment. Questions following the interview.

Does the candidate give evidence of being able to do the multiple tasks or functions we expect of the pastor and to do them acceptably if not with excellence?

Will this person thrive within the paradox of servant-leadership with equal emphasis on both aspects?

What does this candidate bring that causes the search committee to be interested in him/her? Will this be a good match?

Interview Questions

Let's talk about the way in which each of us has marked the form called "Twenty Pastoral Areas." It is most interesting to look at how you and our congregation have identified the highest and lowest priorities; do you see striking similarities or differences?

What ways have you given leadership to the church in the areas of evangelism and church growth?

We talk about the priesthood of all believers, but when someone is critically ill we think of the pastor as one who fills a priestly role, and we expect the pastor to respond quickly and compassionately; how have you done that?

How have you dealt with multiple accountabilities□to elders, church councils, pastor congregation relations committees and area conference ministers?

For which of the tasks of ministry have you been most affirmed by either colleagues or parishioners?

The church is a visible, structured expression of community calling for order and discipline along with vision and mission. It is made up of diverse people with sometimes competing values. How can any pastor lead such a body of persons or at least hold it together?

Minister's schedules are subject to accidents, illnesses and family crises within the church. How have you defined the boundaries between your responsibility to the church and your responsibility to yourself and your family?

Other questions you wish to ask and need to remember:

Specialized Issues

Multiple staff congregations: Can you help us identify some of the unique advantages as well as some of the complexities which come from working relationships in multiple staff congregations?

Couples in ministry: How have you been able to create a life for yourselves outside the concerns of the church?

Handicapped with disabilities: Tell us how your disabilities have been turned into an asset rather than a liability.

Youth ministry: How does this tie into the total life of the congregation? Can you help us identify how youth ministry is best designed?

Questions the Candidate May Ask the Search Committee

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 candidate should also expect to learn important information concerning the congregation during this interview. Questions which the search committee should be prepared to answer might include the following:

- Most congregations have high expectations for 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?
- Salary and benefits? Sabbatical possibilities? Housing? Office equipment?
- What are the accepted procedures for the congregation to make decisions, especially regarding a pastoral term?
- What is the current state of the congregation's financial stewardship? How is that reported to the congregation?
- When was the last major church conflict? What were the issues? Who were the protagonists? How was it resolved?
- Is there a group in the church who is designated to provide feedback and ongoing evaluation to the pastor?
- What has this church done to demonstrate that it is open to new people and wants to grow?
- What is the congregation's attitude toward the support of area conferences, both area conferences and denomination? Is the pastor supported and encouraged, allowed or discouraged from accepting area conference assignments?

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