



## Guide for the Search Committee

### Introduction

Meet with your area conference minister so that the whole committee may receive orientation to the pastoral search process. The area conference minister will also introduce you to the Ministerial Leadership Information (MLI) form, which is the formal application all potential pastoral candidates complete.

Select a chair and secretary, if they have not already been designated by the leadership board of your congregation. Communication with the church leadership board and congregation is tantamount to this process. Consider and develop a plan for how the search committee will communicate with both groups.

Clarify the task the committee needs to complete and list the expectations for each committee member. Set a regular meeting time, and stick to it. Many search committees meet once or twice each month.

Gather the following information:

- Pastoral job description.
- Congregational Information Form (CIF) PDF | Word | Español
- [Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective. Español](#)
- [Shared Understanding of Ministerial Leadership. Español](#)

For more information, visit the [Ministry Transition webpage](#) on the MC USA website.

### Discovering protentional candidates

All people interested in applying for a ministry position in MC USA are required to fill out an MLI, even if they are members of the congregation. This provides an equal and consistent starting point for the search committee, congregation and candidates. Your conference minister will act as the intermediary between the search committee and potential candidates.

Be sure the ministry opening is listed on the [Pastoral Openings webpage on the MC USA website](#). The congregation is welcome to offer names of potential candidates to the search committee. The search committee should refer all candidates to the conference minister.

Request candidate profiles from your area conference minister. These profiles include the Ministerial Leadership Information (MLI) form, which provides information about a potential candidate's background, education, employment and/or ministry history, their rating of themselves on 34 skills and gifts, a brief introduction to their theology, their spiritual life, and their understanding of ministry. The committee will also receive a summary of four of their references and the results of a background check on criminal history and sex offender history.

The MLI and Reference Summary should be the conversation starter for the search committee and the candidate. The MLI won't tell you everything you need to know. Please pay special attention to the "Reference Summary Notes" at the bottom of the Reference Summary. These notes are compiled by MC USA denominational staff after reading the candidate's MLI and their four references. There are four possible recommendations: recommend without reservations, recommend, recommend with reservations and do not recommend. While each of the four references will give their individual recommendations, the recommendation by denominational staff indicates the candidate's final recommendation.

Identify the primary candidates you wish to consider as a search committee, after reading the candidate profiles. The search committee or your area conference minister can contact the protentional candidate(s) to determine their interest and availability. If you haven't already made your CIF available — some search committees post their CIF on their website and/or MC USA's website — please send the CIF to each candidate. Review and contact each candidate's references. You may want to begin by contacting each candidate's current conference minister. Their conference minister should have a unique understanding of the candidate, given their position. Phone calls and video calls are best practice when consulting each candidate's references.

### **Interviewing candidates**

There are three interviewing stages. Remember congregational ministry is a calling. The fit between your congregation and the candidate is paramount. This part of the process takes time and requires mutuality between the search committee and candidate.

Continue to stay in touch with your area conference minister as you proceed, requesting help, counsel and suggestions. Keep the congregation informed of the committee's activity, remembering that the names of candidates during the first two stages of interviews need to remain confidential.

#### **First interview**

- An in-person or video-call interview is recommended.
- Prepare your questions and define the roles each committee member will play during the interview ahead of time
- The purpose of the first interview is to discuss job expectations and to assess the personal qualities the candidate would bring to the role of pastor at your church.
- You can interview as many candidates as the search committee determines.
- This stage is confidential. Candidates' names are not to be shared with the congregation.

- After the interview, prayerfully discern which candidates the search committee would like to invite for a second interview. Limit the number of candidates you invite to a second interview to 2-3 people.
- Follow up with each candidate via phone call or email after the interview to let them know if you are interested in a second interview or not.
- Remember the candidate may or may not accept a second interview, depending on their experience during the first interview.

### Second Interview

- An in-person is ideal. Be prepared to cover their travel and lodging, if they are coming from a distance.
- Review each MLI and Reference Summary again.
- Prepare your questions and define the roles of each committee member ahead of time.
- In this interview, ask questions that are specific to your congregation and context. Be honest about your hopes and dreams for your congregation.
- Provide time for the candidate to explore the community at large, schools for their children or spouse, possible employment opportunities for their spouse, housing, etc.
- This stage is confidential.
- Prayerfully determine which candidate the search committee recommends as the candidate of choice.
- Inform the candidates of the search committee's decision. Allow time for the candidate of choice to make their decision as to whether they wish to accept your invitation.

### Third Interview

This interviewing stage is often referred to as the "Candidating Stage." The search committee should not be reviewing any more MLIs at this point. Likewise, the candidate of choice should no longer accept interviews with other congregations. There are two parts of the third interview.

#### Part 1: Search committee and congregational leadership

- The search committee meets with the leadership board and offers their recommendation of the candidate of choice. The search committee provides a written document to the leadership board as to why they are recommending this particular candidate.
- The leadership board accepts or rejects the search committee's candidate of choice. The best practice is to take a formal vote and record the minutes of the meeting, along with the vote outcome.
- Once the candidate of choice recommendation has been accepted by the leadership board, inform your area conference minister that you have settled on your primary candidate.

- The search committee and leadership board then publicly announces the name of the candidate of choice to the congregation, both by a letter to all the members and as a public announcement. The announcement should include the date(s) that the candidate will visit, a schedule of events, and the time and date of the congregational meeting in which the congregation will discern whether to call the candidate of choice as pastor.

#### Part 2: Candidating weekend

The search committee and church leadership board will jointly arrange for the candidate — and family — to visit and meet the congregation. Continue to keep the area conference minister informed of your progress and anticipated action.

During this stage, the search committee must enter into specific negotiations regarding salary, using the Pastoral Salary guidelines, benefits, reimbursements, housing, sabbatical policy, beginning date, length of initial term, moving expenses and anticipated procedures for decision — it might help to follow the suggested covenant of understanding. It may be helpful to have the area conference minister present. This is also the time for further clarification about the job description and role expectations.

Over the course of the final interviewing stage the following is expected to occur:

- The candidate meets with the leadership board of the congregation and other key groups in the congregation.
- The candidate is given an opportunity to make a public presentation, such as a sermon.
- All members of the congregation are given an opportunity to personally meet the candidate informally.
- The candidate is given an opportunity to raise questions regarding the church and any other concerns the candidate may have.
- The candidate is given an opportunity to assess the larger community and its assets.
- The process concludes with a congregational vote to accept or reject the recommendation for pastoral leadership, following congregational bylaws and procedures.

The search committee will promptly inform the candidate concerning the outcome of the vote. If the vote is positive, besides an immediate call, a formal written call to ministry will be sent to the candidate with specific details about the negotiated agreement or the proposed covenant of understanding.

The candidate responds in writing with a decision, accepting or rejecting the call of the congregation.

If the candidate rejects the call of the congregation, then the search committee returns to the work of discerning another candidate. If the candidate accepts the call you can move to stage of welcoming your new pastor.

## **Welcoming your new pastor**

The leadership board will notify the congregation that the pastor-elect has accepted the call. The search committee disbands upon the candidate's acceptance of the call. Be sure the congregation is given an opportunity to thank the search committee for their work.

Welcome the pastor by doing the following:

- Offer appropriate assistance to the candidate-elect and family in the moving process.
- Prepare the church office. If there is a parsonage, prepare it for the arrival of the new pastor and family, checking with them regarding decorating preferences.
- Notify the area conference minister that the call has been accepted
- Plan a joyful welcoming event for pastor and family.
- Introduce the new pastor to your community and its community leadership.
- Form a pastor-congregation relations committee to maintain ongoing and regular communication between the pastor and the congregation.
- Make plans for a formal installation event, in consultation with the new pastor and the area conference minister.
- Pray for the pastor, their family and the congregation, as you embark on this journey together.

