

Guidelines and Suggestions For Search Committees and Candidates

THE INTERVIEW

The interview is an event of paramount importance in the search and call process. It is critically important that the committee and candidate be well prepared for this event. Search Committees are advised to prepare a standard list of questions in advance of the interview and to consider conducting a "practice" interview before speaking with actual candidates. The Association Minister can help arrange a practice interview with a pastor who is not a candidate for the position and can then comment on ways to improve the committee's performance.

The questions asked by the committee (and candidate) need to be constructed in a way that invite the answerer to provide the kind of information and insight by which discernment can be made about the potential fit between this candidate and this church. Do not ask questions which can be answered with a simple "yes" or "no." Do not ask questions which imply the desired answer. For example, ask, "What are your views on having children receive communion?" rather than, "You wouldn't deny a child communion, would you?"

Don't be reluctant to ask questions about matters you feel you need to know in order to make a wise and spiritually informed decision. Your church has entrusted you with a serious responsibility. You will need adequate information to fulfill that responsibility competently. Remember that questions which are "out of bounds" in other employment contexts (that is, questions which might enable an employer to discriminate on the basis of age, family situation, etc.) are not necessarily illegal or even inappropriate in the context of the church. **HOWEVER**, rules of common sense, respect, and courtesy should always be observed. Just because you "could" ask a particular question, doesn't mean you "should." Use a test like this: Will the answer to this question help us make an informed and spiritually sensitive decision for the welfare of our church? If the answer is "yes," then ask the questions. If it won't, then don't ask.

Here are a list of suggested questions to be asked by the different participants in this process. Please note that these questions are only intended to be illustrative; they are intended to "prime your pump." Your committee should and must think of many more. The committee must also be sure to ask the same questions of all candidates it interviews, so that at decision time you will have the same information from all candidates, and will be comparing "apples to apples."

SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED OF CANDIDATES

Please tell us some of your strengths for ministry. Explain how they make you a better pastor.

Please tell us about one or more of your weaknesses. Help us understand how you compensate for that weakness.

Tell us about some significant achievements you have had in past ministry.

Why are you interested in leaving your present position and considering a change?

What is it about our church and/or community that seems potentially attractive to you?

If I were the most ornery, cantankerous member of your present church, what would I say about you? How do you attempt to relate with that person?

If someone asked you to officiate at a wedding on the same day as the Association Annual Meeting, what would you say?

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What concerns do you have about this church that might prevent you from taking this position if it were offered?

Given your present knowledge of our church, what possibilities do you see for a strong future?

How do you tend to your own spiritual, emotional and physical health?

SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED OF REFERENCES

How well and in what capacity do you know this person, and for how long have you known them?

Please give examples of this person's personal and pastoral strengths, and how you have observed those strengths used in ministry by this person.

What weaknesses are evident in this person, and is the person aware of his/her weaknesses? If she/he is aware of them, how does the candidate compensate for those weaknesses?

To your knowledge, has this person ever been terminated from a position?

Has this person ever faced disciplinary procedures, or have you ever heard anyone suggest that he/she ought to face discipline?

Would you want this person as your own pastor? Why or why not?

Is there any question I should have asked about this candidate, but didn't?

SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES TO ASK OF COMMITTEES

What would you want me to accomplish in my first six months?

What concerns do you have about calling me to this position?

How will you go about your decision-making process? How will things go from here?