Ministers
Looking Packet

Resources for ministers preparing for a transition to a new ministry

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SECTION A

The Interview Process
Hiring a Minister: Five Suggestions for Ministers
By Chris Benjamin

In my previous article, I shared five suggestions for churches hiring a minister. In this article, I will share five suggestions to ministers who are interviewing for a ministry position. Over the years I have accumulated advice from mentors and my own experience on both sides of this vital process.

Five Suggestions for Ministers:

1. **During your interview, you are a minister to that congregation.** Whenever I have spoken to a search committee or preached a sermon during an interview weekend, I have kept in mind that for the duration of that visit I am called to be a minister to that group of God’s children. This transcends the decision about employment. At the end of the interview, we may all decide that it we are not a good fit with one another or that someone else is a better fit for the role. Yet, I still have the responsibility to preach a sermon that is beneficial to the congregation. The conversations during the interview should help the church develop into better disciples. Some of my best interview experiences were for jobs I did not get. In one case I was blessed to know that my conversations helped a congregation know exactly who they did need to hire. I voiced my support for that decision despite the fact that, by worldly definitions, I lost the competition.

2. **Keep a kingdom perspective.** This is how we avoid the bitterness and resentment of “competition.” If we attach our self-worth to being hired by a “popular and influential” church, then we will be disappointed whether we get the job or not. Not only is this the wrong way to seek affirmation, it judges a church on false criteria that has nothing to do with the reality of the minister-church relationship. A true kingdom perspective finds contentment in serving Christ alongside other believers and in a fellowship of multiple congregations that reflect various gifts and temperaments. Remember also that churches are people, not institutions. The people on the search committee talk to other people they know in other churches. An interview at one congregation may be the path by which you are introduced to another congregation. Keep that in mind.

3. **Do not be anxious.** This is not the same as being nervous. Nervousness can be expected in some situations, especially if this is your first time to interview. Do your best to manage that, but nervousness is not what I mean by being anxious. Anxiety over getting a particular job is off-putting and faithless. If you find that you are often setting yourself up for disappointment by telling yourself that you absolutely must get a particular job, then you end up broadcasting a message to a search team (and just about everyone else) that they must affirm you and validate your plans for the future. This

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attitude is faithless because we demonstrate that we do not expect God to have a hand in forming communities and we disregard his role in our calling.

4. **Do your homework and be prepared to discuss both principles and practice in ministry.** Some of the questions you will be asked in an interview will examine your general principles and theology of ministry. But at some point those principles need some “landing gear” to get them out of the air and on the ground. Research the church and its community. Imagine what your work might look like with a particular ministry and a particular church. Can you articulate how you would do your work at that place? If the ministry demands a strategy for growth, development, or leadership, be prepared to describe how you would begin. You can acknowledge the Holy Spirit’s primacy and involvement in your ministry and still make it concrete. For instance, do you believe that a good strategy upon employment would be a season of prayer? Then share that as both a principle and practice. Be prepared to discuss the WHY and the HOW of ministry.

5. **Document the terms of employment.** I made a similar suggestion to churches in the previous article. If they do not offer a memorandum of understanding, then ask for one or put the terms in writing and ask them to review your understanding. If they are reluctant to commit to documentation, you may want to reconsider the offer. We do not live by the letter of the law, but written agreements will help everyone clarify expectations. Additionally, I encourage ministers and their families to work on their budgets and know what benefits and compensation you need. If financial planning or discussions about compensation are difficult or awkward for you, then seek help from reliable advisors. It may seem pious to say that earthly matters do not concern you, but it might be more spiritual and considerate to help the hiring committee by being prepared. After all, this is a job interview.
29 Questions for the Transition Team
From a Candidate for Preaching Minister

1. How would you describe your congregation?
2. Why was the congregation started?
3. What is its purpose of your congregation?
4. What is your unique role in your community?
5. How would a neighbor around the church portray your congregation?
6. What is the congregation’s theology (i.e., important biblical values and themes)?
7. How would you describe the atmosphere of the following:
   - Worship (i.e., style, activities, etc.)
   - Small Group Meetings
   - Elder’s / Leadership Meetings (if known)
   - Special Events.
8. What are the three areas you feel should be changed in this church? What three areas definitely should not be changed?
9. How many strong ministries does your congregation have? What are they?
10. What new ministry initiatives has the church launched in the last five years?
11. If you knew you couldn’t fail, what would your dreams be for this church?
12. What are the statistics on church membership for the last five years? Why do you think the most recent trend has occurred?
13. Do you have a plan for growth?
14. What is the single biggest obstacle to growth in your congregation?
15. What role do you feel the membership should play in the development of a strong, growing congregation?
16. When did your last new members come to the congregation?
17. Is there any conflict in the church now?
18. What is most likely to cause friction in your congregation?
19. What, if anything, sparks interest in me as a candidate?
20. What were the strengths and weaknesses of your previous preacher? What did you like best and least about his/her preaching?
21. What has been the tenure of previous preachers/staff members?
22. How does this church view its staff (e.g., paid professionals, called ministers, hired help, etc.)?
23. What is the structure for responsibility in staff positions?
24. Has the interim period been redemptive and healing?
25. What is the role of the Preaching Minister? What responsibilities does this role include?
26. How is the Preaching Minister’s position related to other staff positions? How, ideally, would those relationships function?
27. What are your expectations of my family?
28. Does the congregation have a policy of reviewing the salary packages each year?
29. Does the transition team represent a cross-section of the congregation?
Questions for a Church
From a Candidate for Preaching Minister

1. What is the “image” of the church that you are trying to convey to the community?
2. Do you have specific goals with regard to evangelism in the local community?
3. In what ways is the church trying to serve the spiritual needs of people who live in the community?
4. What are the goals and methods used by the elders to shepherd the church?
5. Can you tell me five subjects most important for your preacher to address in the first six months of work at the church?
6. In what ways are you trying to meet the spiritual needs of the differing groups within the church (male/female, age, families, singles, etc.)?
7. In what ways do you encourage the church to help meet the physical needs of people in the community?
8. Can you tell me the three most important things a preacher would need to do for this congregation, other than preaching sermons?
9. Given the fact that you will interview a number of candidates, can you tell me how you will know when you think you’ve found the right person for the job?
10. In what ways will you encourage and support your preacher in an effort to maintain a healthy balance with regard to religious issues?
11. Will you impose any restrictions, or provide any recommendations, on educational material, books, tapes, lectureships, etc., that your preacher may desire to use/attend? What are some of the materials that you find spiritually nurturing?
12. In what ways have you supported continuing education for staff members, for key people, for deacons, and for yourselves as elders?
13. How do you handle the problem when your preacher evidently believes something with which you disagree?
14. Do you involve the membership in important decision-making processes? How do you do that?
15. Are there powerful family groups that form sub-units of this congregation? How do they function to shape the church’s direction?
16. How do you involve the members of the church in new or additional activities?
17. How do the elders relate to one another, and what kind of things do you do to build and maintain a close relationship with one another?
18. How often do you meet to pray for people?
19. In what ways do you serve the elderly, shut-ins, or others who are unable to attend the assemblies?
20. How are the elders actively involved in teaching or evangelism?
21. Would you characterize the church leadership as non-anxious about the financial concerns of the congregation? Please elaborate.
Questions for the Elders

1. What do you see as the primary purpose(s) of the church in general?
2. What is your vision for the church?
3. What are the two or three most pressing needs at the church and what will be your role and the minister’s role in addressing them?
4. How would you envision your minister allocating his or her time for the four primary tasks you have envisioned: (a) preaching, (b) church administration and leadership, (c) congregational care, (d) community outreach. Please rank in order of priority and indicate percentage of time minister should devote to each.
5. Is this church a place to which you would bring or invite your neighbors or friends? If yes, when was the last time you invited a friend or neighbor to church?
6. Is this a place to which your kids would bring or invite their friends? Why or why not?
7. Where is your walk with Christ currently most vibrant? Where is it most in need of revitalization and spiritual growth?
8. Why do I interest you as a potential minister? What concerns do you have about me?
Proposed Interview Questions for Minister Selection

An important part of the discussion on the interview process will be determining the procedures to be followed as well as the questions to be asked. It is suggested that each interview begin with a brief introduction of each committee member and should include a prayer. The following are possible categories and questions that may be used in the interview.

**Self-Awareness**

1. We have read your resume; tell us a little more about yourself.
2. Tell us what first got you interested in serving the Lord and the church in full-time ministry?
3. Where do you go for the spiritual, emotional support needed to do your work?
4. What would you say are 2-3 of your greatest strengths as a minister? How do you maximize their effectiveness in working with others?
5. What are 2-3 areas of weakness or struggle that you have identified in your ministry? How do you deal with them?
6. How would you describe your personal, spiritual life? How would you describe your spiritual story? How has God’s story (the gospel) changed your story? How has your spiritual pilgrimage shaped the way you do ministry?

**Family Issues**

1. How does your work as a minister impact the spiritual life of your family?
2. How would your neighbors describe your family?
3. What would you say are the particular needs of your family at this particular stage of life?

**Authenticity**

1. The job description uses many serving verbs (often the kind that are “behind the scenes” yet critical to the life of the church). They include: coordinate, facilitate, promote, serve, structure, expedite, assert, assist, oversee, collaborate, and function. How do you see yourself best fitting the job description that has been outlined by the elders for the position of Executive Minister?
2. Looking back at the strengths and weakness you mentioned earlier, what connections or concerns do you think you, this committee, and the eldership might want to pay closest attention to?
3. How would you describe your management style? Are you a person who takes charge and helps others follow? Or one who walks alongside others as you share the work? Or one who stands back and helps others get the job done?
4. Tell us how you see yourself typically handling conflict. How effective do you think you have been in handling it in the past?
5. How have you learned to handle criticism in your ministry? What strategies have been particularly helpful to you and your family in dealing with it?

**Theology**
1. Give us an idea of your own theology of ministry.
2. How do you think the nature of the church grows out of who God is? What would your role be in helping the church know God better and reflect God’s character?
3. How can we as a body strive for unity when we are such diverse people? In what ways could you help the congregation achieve/maintain unity?
4. Tell us how you think leadership can be developed that is both loving and serving like Christ?
5. How do you see the Holy Spirit working in God's people to gift and empower them for the work of ministry? What role does prayer play? How important is Bible study?

**History**
1. In your most recent position, how do you think your peers would describe your work relationship with them? What about those that you supervise? Those who are your immediate supervisors?
2. Tell us why you are interested in coming to this church and why you are leaving your present position.
3. Looking at those you have listed as references, tell us why you chose them. What if we called the elder with whom you have experienced the greatest difficulty? How different a picture do you think that elder would paint of you and your ministry?
4. Describe some of the high points in your years of service to the Lord. What were the situations that brought about your low points?
5. If you could put together your “ideal ministry staff,” what would it look like? Who would be on it? Explain your answer.

**Leadership Style/Work Schedule**
1. How do you see administration as ministry? How do you go about setting a vision for it?
2. What attributes are going to be essential for “getting this job done?” Are these qualities you feel you possess or would need to work on?
3. How would you set priorities for this position? What strategies would you utilize to begin this important ministry? How would you spend your first six months? How would you plan for the next 5-10 years?
4. Who are the people who will be central in helping you be effective in this ministry? What specific roles will they play?
5. How will you balance your work schedule with family time, leisure activities, and personal spiritual growth?
Nature of Community

1. The mission of this congregation is [omitted]. How well do you see yourself working under this purpose statement, fitting the job description, and becoming part of this congregation’s community?

2. Every church functions as a system. How would you go about discovering how this church works? How would this understanding help you in serving as the Executive Minister?

3. What excites you and your family about living in this city? What are the potential drawbacks? How could this congregation help you if you are asked to make this important transition?

4. How do you see this ministry position serving the congregation as a whole? What about the larger surrounding community? How do you feel about the church involvement with groups like Habitat for Humanity, United Way, Boys and Girls Club, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Emmaus, Promise Keepers, Weigh Down, Alcoholics Anonymous?

5. What do you see the role of the church towards people with HIV, divorced Christians, non-churched local community, and disenfranchised people?

The interview should allow time for any miscellaneous questions that need to be addressed and conclude with a prayer.
Interview Questions

Telephone Interview Questions
1. In your career, what have you done that you are the most proud of?
2. What are the specific skill sets that you would bring to this job?
3. What do you think is the biggest challenge facing ministers today?
4. What must a church provide in order for you to do your best?
5. If you could change one thing in your last job (or present job), what would it be?
6. If I were to speak to your coworkers, what would they say about you?
7. Why should I consider you for this position?

Face-to-Face Interview Questions
1. Describe how you first became interested in serving the Lord and the church in ministry.
2. Give me an example of some goals you’ve had and how you achieved them.
3. Tell me about one of the toughest groups with which you’ve had to work. What made the group tough? What did you do?
4. What are the biggest decisions you’ve made in the past year on the job? Tell me how you made them.
5. Give me an example of a time you disagreed with a directive given by your supervisor or elders. What happened?
6. What gives you greatest joy in your work and why?
7. Describe a risk you took in a job. What was the result?
8. Tell me about a time in which your ministry was criticized. What happened? How did you respond?
9. What has been your greatest frustration or disappointment in your present job? Why?
10. What approaches do you use in talking with people who have very different personalities or work styles than your own?
11. What makes you angry in the workplace?
12. How would you set priorities for this position? How would you spend your first six months?
13. What do you expect from _________________ as your employer?
Dos and Don’ts during the Interview Process

Employers should provide training and support to supervisors so they know how to interview effectively, what questions can and can’t be asked, and how to avoid discrimination claims in the selection process. To hire effectively, supervisors must be able to “read between the lines” on an applicant’s resume to try and recognize potential problems. Supervisors should be trained to look for red flags such as an erratic work history, desperation to be hired, and inappropriate comments or expressions of hostility about former bosses, job loss, and working conditions. Following are examples of some good questions that can be asked to help read between the lines.

- What do you feel is a satisfactory attendance record?
- Why did you leave your last position?
- Tell me how you and your former supervisor got along.
- Do you feel you were fairly treated in your job with your last company? Why or why not?
- How often were you absent or tardy at your previous job?
- Describe the type of criticism most frequently made of your work by former employers.
- What kinds of people do you enjoy working with most? Least?
- What motivates you?
- What is important to you in a job?
- Where do you see yourself in five years?

Federal employment laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, ethnic group, marital status, religion, sex, disability, national origin, and numerous other factors. Some allowances and exceptions do exist, however. Employers may make hiring decisions based on religion, age, sex, or national origin if it is reasonably necessary for that particular business.2

Obviously, a direct inquiry into an improper area is insensitive and damaging. However, indirect inquiries—even if unintentional—can be harmful as well. Interview “small talk” outside prepared questions should not even border on impermissible topics, even if they appear on the candidate’s resume. Additionally, even if an applicant initiates conversation on these topics, interviewers may not ask follow-up questions.

The chart3 on the following page provides an overview of interview questions that are permissible vs. questions that are illegal due to their potentially discriminatory nature.

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3 Adapted from a chart prepared in March 2010 by ACU’s Human Resources Department.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>May Ask</th>
<th>May Not Ask (Potentially Discriminating)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marital status, family, and sex</td>
<td>• Whether applicant may adhere to specified work schedules.</td>
<td>• Number of children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Whether applicant has anticipated absences from work.</td>
<td>• Ages of children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Anticipated children</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Marital status</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Spouse’s occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Child care arrangements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Health care coverage through spouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>No questions may be asked.</td>
<td>Applicant’s race or color of skin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National origin or ancestry</td>
<td>• Whether applicant has a legal right to be employed in the U.S.</td>
<td>• Ethnic association of surname</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Ability to speak/write English fluently (if job-related)</td>
<td>• Birthplace of applicant or applicant’s parents</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Other languages spoken (if job-related)</td>
<td>• Nationality, lineage, national origin</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Nationality of applicant’s spouse</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Whether applicant is a citizen of another country</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Applicant’s native tongue</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Maiden name (of married woman)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Churches may ask questions about religious affiliation, if the questions are job related.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>• If applicant is over age 18.</td>
<td>Date of birth</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Date of high school or college graduation</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability and/or medical</td>
<td>• Whether applicant can perform the essential functions of the job.</td>
<td>If applicant has a disability</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nature or severity of disability</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Whether applicant has ever filed workers’ compensation claim</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Recent or past surgeries and dates</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Past medical problems</td>
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</table>
Looking for a New Pastor? For a New Call?

Dean E. Foose

I think it is safe to assume that when churches search for new pastoral leadership, they want to find the right person, someone who will be effective, and when pastors set out to find a new call or a first call they want to find the right church, a place to flourish. I believe key parts in getting a happy fit between churches and pastors and satisfying their wants are the interviews between search teams or pastor nominating committees and candidates.

The Art and Science of Interviewing

Art: a skill or power of performing certain actions as acquired by experience, study, or observation. Science: something that can be learned as a systematized body of knowledge.

I serve in a seminary setting as Director of Placement and spend a considerable amount of time looking at the interview process from what might be called the “entry level,” namely from the outlook of seminary seniors preparing and interviewing for their first positions in pastoral ministry. I also occasionally assist churches seeking experienced pastors. I have seen mismatches in the call process that are directly attributable to poor interviewing, sometimes by one party or the other, and sometimes by both parties. The results are congregations that didn’t get what they thought they were going to get in the new pastor and pastors who didn’t find what they thought they were going to find in their new congregations. We in the church ought to work to avoid such mismatches, if for no other reason than good financial stewardship. The process of calling and relocating a pastor costs money. But there are much more important reasons such as the general well-being of congregations and pastors. Dissolved relationships because of mismatches leave wounds that can take a long time to heal.

I think it is time for a manual on the art and science of interviewing that would both address ingredients and issues in the interview process and suggest questions for dealing with them. I envision a guide that would have broad use by pastors and search committees. Good questions and answers thought out in advance will help candidates and committees get inside each other’s heads and hearts and gather the information they each need to consider. The bottom line is building trust. There will always be surprises after the new pastor or staff person arrives and some will be painful, but good interviewing will cut down on the unnecessary painful surprises.

The Argument

All of us participate in some form of interviewing every day; it is the way we gather and give information. Moreover, there is far more involved in interviewing than most of us realize. There are a vast number of variables in our information exchanges. Over the past four years I have examined the matchmaking work of churches looking for pastoral leadership and

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candidates looking for the right place, and discovered that given all its theological underpinnings, the venture resembles courtship and marriage. At first committees and candidates engage in flirting through letters and phone conversations. Once “the spark is struck” real courtship begins. The final stages of the romancing narrows down the number of dating relationships and finally a marriage proposal is offered.

Two pitfalls in courtship and interviewing are the attempt to balance the subjective and objective dimensions of discovery and recognizing the difference between superficial and substantial information. Candidates and search committees—like potential marriage partners—sometimes base their love for each other on appearances or on emotional effect. “He has the looks and voice of a preacher.” I have seen committees spend a year or more studying the needs of their congregation and preparing a profile for the kind of pastor to meet those needs and then in one interview be dazzled by someone who is “all glitter and no substance” and does not match the profile at all. A stage persona is substituted by some pastors for some more fundamental and authentic identity. Usually one party or the other files for divorce in less than two years. I have had seniors fall in love with a search committee and congregation but express strong reservations about working with the head of staff and then go ahead and accept the call with parting words to me: “There may be some rough sledding at first but I think I can get him to see things my way.” Guess who is asked to look for a new call within the year?

**Particulars We Need to Look At**

Essential elements the interview process ought to address: Self-awareness, Authenticity, Theology, History, Leadership Style/Work Schedule, Money, Nature of the Community.

I tell graduating seniors the interview process includes a lot of people, a lot of paper, and a lot of prayer. But there are other ingredients combined in that mix.

After informal surveys of recent graduates and some other research, I identified what I believe are some essential elements the interview process ought to address: **Self-Awareness, Authenticity, Theology, History, Leadership Style/Work Schedule, Money, and Nature of the Community**. These categories can serve as a framework for questions that will help candidates and committees assess information germane to deciding if there is a good fit, if this is the right person and the right place. Some elements apply to candidates, some to search teams, and some to both.

The following descriptions are brief summaries. I have occasionally included some questions as examples.

**Self-Awareness.** Since interviewing is a data gathering/giving task, the work should be preceded by a realistic self-assessment by both congregations and candidates. The product of that self-assessment becomes a dossier or personal information form for the candidate and a church profile or church information form for the search committee. Some hard work ought to go into the development of those forms. I highly recommend for candidates two Alan Publications.¹ *Your Next Pastorate: Starting the Search* by Richard N. Bolles, Russell C. Ayers, Arthur F. Miller, and Loren B. Mead is written for experienced pastors but is applicable to seminary seniors. *Personality Type and Religious Leadership* by Roy M. Oswald and Otto Kroeger will give insight to candidates regarding the Myers-Briggs personality profiles and how they
relate to pastoral ministry. An additional assessment instrument for candidates is the PACE leadership profile.²

A church profile or information form ought to reflect similar self-assessment by a congregation. This task is hard and time consuming and unfortunately sometimes done poorly and in a rush because everybody wants to “hurry up and find a new preacher.” Added to the hard work is the difficult task of bringing together a diverse group of people to serve as a search team (the operating word being team). Often a congregation will elect someone from each organization within the church to a committee and each person in turn becomes a lobbyist for their constituency. Consensus building is crucial to establishing an effective search panel.

Team members should have some rigorous discussions and debates early on in their work so that differences of opinion will not later be taken personally.

Sample interview question: A good starter for search committees to ask is the classic “tell us a little about yourself.” No matter how a candidate answers that question, a committee will have obtained information to assess. Glimpses of self-awareness, authenticity, leadership style, and perhaps other ingredients will be offered up for evaluation. A committee may get more information than it wanted, but an excessive answer to any question is data to be appraised. Long answers may mean there is more self-deception than self-awareness in a candidate. (Hint to candidates: Give between forty-five seconds to a minute and a half to your answer. If you think through and prepare an answer for this question, you will be amazed at how much you can say in that brief span of time.)

**Authenticity.** This issue underlies all the other ingredients in the interview process for it is the yeast that makes the dough rise, and it contains two additional components, integrity and honesty. It is my firm conviction that if these ingredients are not in the search process the final match or call will fall flat. Integrity has to do with a set of values that are sound and transparent and remain consistent throughout the process beginning with the paper work. Honesty has to do with the candor and forthright give-and-take that are necessary in the process. Authenticity is related to both parties but it primarily has to do with what John Fletcher calls pastoral credibility. Candidates and committees would do well to familiarize themselves with Fletcher’s work, *Religious Authenticity in the Clergy*, in which he raises the questions: What causes congregations to look to and accept their pastors as religious leaders and caregivers? and How do pastors obtain authentication (pastoral credibility) in the eyes of the congregation? Based on his research he concludes, “It is observable that persons do not become authenticated as clergy in a ‘once and for all’ sense, but that each clergyperson goes through the experiences, or avoids them, that lead to authentication in each congregation he or she serves.”³ I would contend that the interview process can and should test pastoral credibility. Candidates can obtain a measure of authentication with a search committee. I thoroughly agree with Fletcher that there will be other tests as a called pastor becomes an installed pastor.

**Interview questions:** Committees may want to prepare some questions around the concerns Edward White raises in his article “What Kind of Pastor Will Most Likely Empower Laity?” in the May-June 1994 issue of CONGREGATIONS.⁴ How grounded is this pastor in the midst of ambiguity and conflict? How clear is this pastor about his/her own possibilities and
limitations? Must someone else lose in order for this pastor to win? How free is this pastor from the constraints of careerism and consumerism?

**Theology.** The issue here is whether there is sufficient overlap in the theological perspectives and convictions of both the candidate and the congregation that will allow for the development of trust and pastoral credibility. Questions and conversations around this issue should identify and clarify critical theological terminology for both parties. However, labels such as conservative, moderate, liberal, and evangelical are not particularly helpful in interpreting theological views. Questions candidates ask about a church’s approach to Bible study and education materials will draw out theological convictions.

**History.** History includes everything that has happened in the past both in the life of a candidate and in the life of a congregation. A look at the past is important for what it may indicate about the future. However, past problems need not indicate future ones, but should have some exploration and assessment. Candidates and search committees should both go behind the historical material presented on paper. A colleague of mine refers to the “hidden past” and the “owned” past.

*Interview question:* Candidates will gather a wealth of information if they ask committees, “Tell me about your previous pastors.” If you listen carefully and get as many committee members to respond as you can, you will more than likely discover information not only on history, but theology, leadership style/job expectations, and perhaps other ingredients. An additional question along the same lines would be, “What made the ministries of some of those pastors effective? . . . less than effective?”

A recent graduate responded to my informal survey with these comments. “No one on an average committee will give you the dirt you need to be aware of to make a good decision. That takes some homework on the part of the candidate. . . . When I later interviewed with the committee I was able to understand how they were leading their questions. . . . Even with the information that I held, I still gave honest answers to the committee’s concerns. The point is that I could speak to real concerns without spending most of my energy trying to understand why somebody asked a particular question and what it had to do with me. Having historical information going into an interview is invaluable.”

**Leadership Style/Work Schedule.** There should be some ranking of the pastoral activities that would indicate how a candidate and search team view the priorities of pastoral responsibilities. Who sets the work schedule? Who monitors it? Is the search committee seeking an organizer, motivator, catalyzer? What model of ministry does the candidate use? What model is the search committee seeking Counselor/Healer/Caretaker, Minister of the Word, Prophet/Social Activist, Spiritual Guide, Administrator/Manager of an Organization?

**Money.** This ingredient has broad and far-ranging implications, for it includes how a congregation views, raises, and uses money as well as the subject of pastor compensation and all of its parts. Some information is usually available as hard data in annual reports, but a
candidate should explore in some depth a congregation’s concept and theology of financial stewardship.

Compensation packages for pastors are just that—packages. They are composed of a variety of pieces: salary, housing, travel, professional expenses, health coverage—to name a few. Packages are not a recent invention of the church for, if one reads the terms of call of pastors two hundred years ago, congregations would provide a place to live, two sides of beef, one pig, a barrel of flour, and an agreement for time off—and yes, even a keg of whiskey. (Presbyterians in colonial America received kegs of whiskey “for medicinal purposes.”) Times have changed and so have the components of the packages. Knowing about such items as health insurance, social security, and an adequate utility allowance is good practical theology. The issue is not how to get rich as a servant of the Lordship of Christ. It is how to be a good steward of the local church’s money in relation to both Christ and “Caesar.” There are a rare few pastors who are overly concerned with money. More often, without good counsel or study, many pastors do not give enough thought to a fair and adequate compensation package for themselves and, if applicable, their families.

**Nature of the Community.** This category includes two types of information: the sociological information pertaining to the geographical area surrounding a church and the information regarding the congregation itself as a community or system. The data is important to both candidates and committees. Some of the sociological data will be available in church information forms and profiles, but sometimes that information is colored by a congregation’s subjective perceptions rather than being actual objective hard data. Search committees can misrepresent their community unintentionally if they don’t make the effort to review census material and reflect on any transitions that have taken place. A plant closing and the departure of a manufacturing company can have a profound impact on a local community and its churches.

Understanding the church as a system is a relatively recent way of interpreting what’s happening in a parish or congregation having its roots in the group relations and organization management work. Edwin Friedman’s book: *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*, published in 1985, has made a substantial contribution to this interpretive work, and The Alban Institute has published a manual by George Parsons and Speed Leas titled as *Understanding Your Congregation as a System*.

Systems analysis takes seriously that there is insight to be gained from group behavior as well as individual behavior.

**Looking at the Connections.** The various parts of the interview process often interrelate. For example, a candidate may discover that money has historically been a problem for a congregation, but she can’t get a pastor nominating committee to honestly talk about what the problem is. She ultimately learns that the congregation annually anticipates that a wealthy member bales them out of debt at the end of the year. A candidate may discover that a segment of the congregation was once so angered by a pastor’s leadership style and model of ministry that they withdrew from active participation and drift in and out of the life of the church depending on the style and model of each succeeding pastor. The two aspects of the nature of
the community may have historically been affected by a racial transition in a community. The community changed, but the congregation did not.

Where is God in all this? Search committees have written me with requests such as this: “We would appreciate any help you could give us in this matter. We also ask your prayers as we search for the person God has for us.” Or in a Church Information Form will be a statement like this: “Trinity Presbyterian Church is seeking a pastor whom God has called to be our leader and to whom we have been led by God.”

If we understand God as the “Great Matchmaker,” how do we understand God’s mind or will in matters such as who will be the new pastor or where will be my new call? Where is God and the movement of the Holy Spirit to be found in all the interplay of people, paper, and prayer? In my judgment God is right in the middle of the whole mix. A recent report of a Call System Task Force in the Presbyterian Church (USA) uses the following words: “The underlying principle of the interview process is what can be termed ‘The Divine-Human Encounter.’ The process enables candidates and search committees to open themselves to the guidance of God’s Spirit through many opportunities for encounter-profiles/dossiers, committees, face-to-face interview events, computer technology, self-referrals, assessment, believing that through such encounters individuals and committees recognize God’s leading and respond appropriately.

To be sure, search committees and pastoral candidates can and do distort the movement and work of the Holy Spirit. They sometimes fail to recognize God’s leading and respond inappropriately. But I believe if attention is given to key ingredients in the search process by everyone, the distortion can be diminished and the matches a better fit. The underlying theological task for everyone in the interview process is the work of discernment: “identifying what spirit is at work in a situation, the Spirit of God or some other spirit.”

Endnotes
1. A suggested reading list appears at the end of this article.
2. This Profile is produced by George D. Parsons, formerly a Senior Consultant for The Alban Institute. PACE is an acronym for the four styles used by Parsons for the study of leadership: predicting, attending, conducting, and excelling. Information on the Profile may be obtained by writing George Parsons at P.O. Box 50445, Eugene, OR 97405.
Suggested Reading


Dean Foose is Director of Alumni/ae Relations and Placement at Princeton Theological Seminary, P.O. Box 821, Princeton, NJ 08542-0803. He has served as pastor in PCUSA churches in Wilmington, New York City, and Philadelphia.

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3 At the time of this transition packet update, Foose was listed as Director of Alumni/ae Relations and Placement Emeritus.
Ministers’ Salary Survey

Each year, the Siburt Institute for Church Ministry conducts a nationwide survey to gather information about current levels of compensation for ministers in Churches of Christ. The survey compares minister compensation packages, including allowances and benefits, as well as comparing longevity in ministry, educational background and experience, and various other factors.

Visit siburtinstitute.org/salarysurvey to access the results from the last several years.

Survey Uses
These surveys serve church leaders in a variety of ways:

- Church leaders learn about how other churches are structuring the compensation of their ministers.
- The surveys provide data for comparing the current levels of compensation for ministers in churches of various sizes and in different states.
- Church leaders, who may be searching for new ministers, will be able to negotiate more consistently in keeping with current salary ranges.

Survey History
In 2004, Charles Siburt administered ACU’s first Ministers’ Salary Survey, collecting responses from over 500 ministers serving in various roles. The survey is an ongoing service of the Siburt Institute for Church Ministry.
Preparing for a Negotiation

Before entering into a negotiation, it is wise to take some time for intentional preparation. The negotiator should carefully consider the projected moves and information of the negotiation in order to reduce surprises during the negotiation and bring confidence to the negotiator.

The Internet contains numerous samples and variations of negotiation planning worksheets. The following is a narrative description of the sections on many of these instruments. Even without filling in a worksheet, considering each of these items can offer several benefits to the negotiator:

- deliberate and thoughtful consideration of the negotiation;
- methodical consideration of key points in the negotiation including reservation point, opening move, creative options, and alternatives to a negotiated agreement;
- methodical consideration of the other party’s perspective and the influence of that consideration on establishing positions to be taken;
- greater confidence in the negotiation which results from the ability to anticipate the dynamics and expressions of the other party; and,
- deliberate and insightful responses to the other party because the other party’s moves can, when made, be immediately put in perspective.

The negotiator should consider their own issues, alternatives, etc., as well as try to predict the other party’s issues, alternatives, etc.

1. **Parties.** A party to a negotiation is anyone who will be affected by the outcome and who has the power to affect the outcome or its implementation. While many negotiations are conducted without all of the individuals who might meet that definition, consideration should be given to the impact of each potential party on the negotiation. Parties should be identified prior to the initiation of the actual negotiation. Who are the parties in this negotiation?

2. **Issues.** Issues are the concrete, definable items that set the agenda for negotiation. They usually are very clear to the parties who know that such matters must be resolved before the negotiation is concluded. Typically issues are matters “on the table” about which there may be disagreement. Obviously, there may be many issues in a single negotiation. Issues should be defined prior to or early in the negotiation so the parties know the subject of bargaining. What are the issues in this negotiation?

3. **Alternatives.** Alternatives in negotiation refer to the options that can and/or will be pursued if the negotiation is not successful. Alternatives are outside the bargaining range of the negotiation. They may be very attractive and thus result in fewer or smaller concessions during the negotiation; or they may be very undesirable, resulting in more and larger concessions during the bargaining process. Alternatives provide negotiators something with which a final offer can be compared. If the alternative is more attractive
than the result offered in negotiation, the alternative will be taken. If an alternative is less attractive than the result offered in negotiation, the negotiation offer will be taken. Alternatives become the reference points for evaluation of offers made by a negotiation party. In preparing for the negotiation, consider all possible alternatives.

4. **Most Likely Alternative.** Of the alternatives determined above, which one is most likely to actually occur? Determining this most likely alternative will require as honest an assessment as possible. The more accurate the negotiator can be in predicting the outcome of the negotiation, the better they will be prepared to decide whether to accept the outcome or use an alternative to a negotiated agreement.

5. **Bottom Line/Reservation Point.** The bottom line/reservation point in negotiation is the point beyond which a negotiator will not go. It is the stopping point—the point at which a negotiator will take the alternative. To the extent that it is announced to the other party, and circumstances then change, it may be violated in a subsequent move causing the negotiator to lose credibility. To the extent it is announced, and honored through commitment and preparation in developing an alternative, it increases credibility. For planning purposes, the bottom line/reservation point should be perceived as that final point to which one would go in order to avoid the perceived alternative. If used this way, obviously the alternative must be developed first. What is the bottom line/reservation point for each party in this negotiation?

6. **Initial Position/Opening Offer.** The process of negotiation involves a series of moves that constitute the negotiation “dance.” If one began by revealing a bottom line/reservation point, there would be no dance. Either it would be accepted or an alternative would be taken. In order to create the field for the negotiation dance, an opening move must be made that achieves not only the purpose of establishing the field of negotiation, but ideally should affect the aspirations or expectations of the other party. After establishing a reservation point, an opening move can be defined to accomplish the above. It may be the same as the initial position.

7. **Fallback Position(s).** The fallback position(s) define a series of moves that might be moved in a negotiation, all of which are between the opening move and the reservation point. Typically they would be acceptable outcomes to the party proposing them. Each would be progressively less desirable as they move further from the opening offer and closer to the bottom line.

8. **Interests.** Interests in negotiation are analogous to needs. They may be abstract and difficult to define, but they are very real to the parties in negotiation. Many times interests drive the negotiation even though they may not be discussed. While issues must be resolved for successful negotiation, interests must be satisfied for successful negotiation. The focus on interests helps the negotiation to include valuable information on concerns, motives, needs, and goals of the negotiator. The discovery of interests may allow for the expansion of the negotiation, the inclusion of more information, as well as
the achievement of more creative and satisfying outcomes. What are each party’s interests?

9. **Creative Options.** Once interests are defined, negotiators can use them as the basis for a creative process that will invent, develop and evaluate potential solutions to satisfy the needs of all parties. What creative options could be considered in this negotiation?
Negotiation Process Map

Minister’s Negotiation Range

Church’s Negotiation Range

Insult Zone

Reasonable Zone

Agreement Zone

Reasonable Zone

Insult Zone

Church’s Reservation Figure

Minister’s Reservation Figure

Zone of Agreement

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Adapted from the Negotiation and Settlement Advocacy Notebook, Straus Institute for Dispute Resolution, Pepperdine University School of Law.
### Minister Compensation Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Congregation's Size</th>
<th>Congregation's Socio-Economic Level</th>
<th>Role Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>0-50</em>_</td>
<td><em>Lower class</em></td>
<td><em>Specialist (one primary area)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>50-150</em></td>
<td><em>Lower-middle class</em></td>
<td><em>Generalist (multiple areas)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>150-350/500</em></td>
<td><em>Middle class</em></td>
<td><em>Ministry staff leader</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>500 +</em></td>
<td><em>Middle-upper class</em></td>
<td><em>Office staff leader</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Upper class</em></td>
<td><em>Special expectations</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Level of Education/Training</th>
<th>Current Staff Salary Slotting (positioning)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>0-5</em></td>
<td><em>High School</em></td>
<td><em>Number of staff</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>5-10</em></td>
<td><em>School of Preaching</em></td>
<td><em>Position on salary ladder</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>10-20</em></td>
<td><em>Bachelor’s degree</em></td>
<td><em>Impact on staff morale</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>20-35</em></td>
<td><em>Master’s degree</em></td>
<td><em>Relation to other staff salaries/benefits</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>35 +</em></td>
<td><em>Doctoral degree</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal and Professional Strengths</th>
<th>Salary and Benefits</th>
<th>Special Considerations:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Spiritual/theological maturity</em></td>
<td><em>Salary only</em></td>
<td><em>Region of the U.S.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Experience</em></td>
<td><em>Salary plus health insurance</em></td>
<td><em>Rural, suburban, urban</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Education/training</em></td>
<td><em>Salary, health ins., retirement</em></td>
<td><em>Tenure at previous church</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Leadership strength</em></td>
<td><em>Salary, health ins., retirement, IRS reimbursement acct.</em></td>
<td><em>Availability of other candidates</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Administrative skill</em></td>
<td><em>House provided by church?</em></td>
<td><em>Desirability of this candidate</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Compatibility with church/community</em></td>
<td><em>Moving expenses included?</em></td>
<td><em>Competition with other offers?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Interpersonal effectiveness</em></td>
<td><em>Help with Social Security</em></td>
<td><em>Local cost of living</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Teaching ability</em></td>
<td><em>Help with continuing education, books, conferences?</em></td>
<td><em>School loans to pay off</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Team compatibility</em></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Assistance with more formal schooling?</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Some Guiding Principles:

1. Consider all the above variables as they relate to your specific negotiation.
2. Think in terms of a range from minimum to maximum. This is your comfort zone.
3. The church should initiate the first specific offer (dollar amount or package).
4. Pressing beyond the “comfort zone” results in entering the “insult zone.”
5. Don’t forget to include any non-financial perks (e.g., study leave, extra vacation).
Components of a Total Compensation Package

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct</th>
<th>Indirect</th>
<th>The Job</th>
<th>Job Environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wages</td>
<td>Insurance Plans:</td>
<td>Interesting Duties</td>
<td>Sound Policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salaries</td>
<td>o Life, health, surgical, dental, casualty</td>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>Competent Supervision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commissions</td>
<td>o Social Assistance Benefits:</td>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>Congenial Coworkers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonuses</td>
<td>o Retirement plans</td>
<td>Opportunity for Recognition</td>
<td>Appropriate Status Symbols</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Social Security</td>
<td>Feeling of Achievement</td>
<td>Comfortable Working Conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Workers’ comp</td>
<td>Advancement Opportunity</td>
<td>Flextime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paid Absences:</td>
<td></td>
<td>Compressed Workweek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Vacations, holidays, sick leave</td>
<td></td>
<td>Job Sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployment Insurance, Severance Pay,</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cafeteria Compensation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supplemental Unemployment Benefits</td>
<td></td>
<td>Telecommuting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Financial
- Non-Financial
Primary Determinants of Individual Financial Compensation

**The Organization**
- Compensation policies
- Ability to pay

**The Employee**
- Performance
- Seniority
- Skills
- Experience
- Organized membership
- Potential
- Political influence
- Luck

**The Job**
- Job analysis
- Job evaluation

**The Labor Market**
- Compensation surveys
- Cost of living
- Labor unions
- Society
- The economy
- Legislation

**Job**

**Individual financial compensation**

**Pricing**
Salary Negotiation Suggestions for Ministers

1. Think in terms of the interests that underlie the church’s position and your position.
2. Refrain from slipping into talk about a certain amount of money.
3. Instead, talk in terms of wanting to understand the church’s situation, needs, or concerns.
4. Seek to identify what would be an ideal outcome for the church.
5. Try to be as informed as possible about the church’s past track record and present policy.
6. Be prepared to outline your personal and professional situation and concerns.
7. Visit with previous and present staff members about the overall structure and slotting boundaries.
8. Assume that the church “owns the problem” and therefore “owns the solution.”
9. Do not expect the church to meet your (or your spouse’s) immature, unrealistic expectations.
10. Remember that if you push the church to go beyond its comfort zone, you will have to pay the consequences later.
“Use paper to remember and your mind to think!”

Use a Memo of Understanding or Letter of Agreement to document the agreement reached.

Note:
The minister is not an independent contractor if the church/elders exercise some or any control over the minister. A minister is a “statutory employee.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues Compensation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Church’s Position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Budget limitations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Staff slotting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fear of being had</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Maintaining control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fear of criticism of church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Professional expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Expectations of spouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Education, age, experience, skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutual Interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Short term vs. long term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• General working conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Total dollars vs. total package: benefits, reimbursement, structure for tax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Make it easy to account</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister’s Position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Family needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Short vs. long term view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sense of worth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fear of being had</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Some independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Spouse’s level of dependency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fear of criticism of church members or leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Professional performance level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Education, age, experience, skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SECTION C

Moving Forward
Sample Memo of Understanding

Dear [Minister],

The Elders of [Church], having concluded a long season of prayer and discernment, are now pleased to call you to serve as our Preaching Minister. We are convinced that you demonstrate the faith, maturity, and skills to serve [Church] as a gifted ministerial leader.

This Memo of Understanding includes three sections—Job Description, Compensation Package, and Terms of Employment.

**Job Description: Preaching and Teaching Minister (full time)**

The preaching and teaching ministry is under the oversight of the elders and the Teaching Committee of the elders; other functions are under the oversight of the Administrative Committee of the elders; this minister works in collaboration with the EIO (Elder in the Office) in the leadership of the staff, defined as ministers and support personnel.

1. **Preaching and Teaching Ministry**
   a. Maintain a consistent discipline of prayer, study, reflection on the word of God, and growth in the Holy Spirit as the Spirit equips, sanctifies, and bears fruit in the minister.
   b. Deliver quality biblical, theological, pastoral sermons at all worship assemblies except in those occasions of approved absence (normally four weeks of vacation and three additional Sundays for speaking commitments or study leave).
   c. Teach regularly in the educational program of the church.
   d. Collaborate with the worship planning process to help assure the quality and focus of congregational worship.
   e. Facilitate prudent management of worship transitions.
   f. Collaborate with elders to schedule appropriate guest preachers.
   g. Assist in the planning of adult spiritual formation.

2. **Pastoral Ministry**
   a. Offer pre-marital care and perform weddings as a service of the church.
   b. Visit in the hospitals, attend to the dying, and handle the responsibilities of funerals as needs arise.
   c. Provide pastoral guidance with members and others about their spiritual and mental well being. Pastoral guidance sessions should generally be brief and free of charge with difficult cases being referred to trained professionals.
   d. Collaborate with elders in managing pastoral or congregational crises.
   e. Be on call by cell phone for pastoral crisis ministry.
3. **Church Leadership Responsibilities**
   a. Work closely with the elders in an atmosphere of support and trust.
   b. Maintain a vision in coordination with the elders of where the church is going as it develops inner strength and greater outreach with the gospel.
   c. Team with elders in leading theological reflection in the church.
   d. Assist the various committees of the elders and the congregation as an ex officio member on call as needs arise.
   e. Share learning leadership insights with other key leaders.
   f. Model for the staff the process of increasing congregational involvement in ministry by recruiting, equipping, training, and empowering church members for various ministry tasks.

4. **Office Responsibilities**
   a. Maintain reasonable office hours, notifying office staff of location when out of the office.
   b. Collaborate with the Elder in the Office to assure the proper function of the church office in a shared leadership style.
   c. Work as an effective member of the ministry staff team and promote a collaborative relationship with other team members.
   d. Maintain leadership credibility within the team.
   e. Facilitate a collaborative relationship between staff and elders.
   f. Share ongoing staff development and team building with EIO.

**Compensation Package**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount Omitted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salary*</td>
<td>$[amount omitted]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Stipend</td>
<td>$[amount omitted]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base Salary</td>
<td>$[amount omitted]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6% Retirement Match**</td>
<td>$[amount omitted]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>$[amount omitted]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Minister will structure housing allowance and salary as appropriate

**This is a 6% church match and assumes that you will contribute at least 6% from your paycheck each year to qualify for this match.

**Expense Account:** In addition to the above salary package, you will have a $[amount omitted] account that you can use for church business and professional development at your discretion, to be monitored by the finance committee.

You will be considered a minister under the Internal Revenue Code and, as such, will be responsible for the payment of your self-employment tax unless exempt from that tax.
Relocation Expenses:
1. The church will pay moving expenses (two estimates requested).
2. The church will assist with extra house payments for your house you are vacating, if needed, for six months. These extra house payments would be taxable income to you.
3. The church will provide loan (to be negotiated) for down payment on new house, if needed.

Terms of Employment
Start date: On or about [date]

Annual vacation weeks: 4

Additional Sundays away (speaking or study): 3

Teaching load at local university: 1 class per semester

Minister’s Signature: _________________________________ Date: ______________________

Elder’s Signature: _________________________________ Date: ______________________
Joining Church
By Jerry Neill

A few years ago a preacher searching for a ministry position called an elder at a church that had recently lost their pulpit minister. Before inquiring about the nature of the search process that would soon begin, the preacher offered sympathies, knowing that the recent loss of a very talented and accomplished speaker must have been a blow to the church and the leadership team. The elder responded, “Well, we will miss his sermons, but he was a stranger to us.”

Of all the skills and preparations involved in coming to serve with a church, how much attention, intention, and importance is given to the practice of first joining the church and becoming a vibrant part of a specific body of Christ? Ministers come to serve in churches with dreams, varied skill sets, and often with degrees. Sometimes both the minister and the church can view this arrangement as a negotiation, a job description where the minister enlists his or her training, skills, and passions in play to change the church.

Paul Stevens and Phil Collins talk about the importance of a minister first “joining” the church, becoming a genuine part of the church system, before he or she can conspire with the church to bring about any change. They emphasize that joining a church is a process that involves much more than working out a job description, moving to town, and beginning to exercise ministerial gifts. It is a purposed effort of belonging, of coming to know the system so that the people perceive that the minister is genuinely a caring and knowing part of their community. This is a process that, when done well, can actually take between two and three years. Unfortunately, it can also be a process that churches and ministers fail to complete.

I love this quote from Stevens on what is necessary for a minister to partner with a church in experiencing transformative change: “It requires taking the risk of joining the church and taking the risk of being changed by this particular church.”

I’ve heard ministers lament the fact that they struggle with enlisting and persuading the church to change or to follow their daring leadership. I wonder though, if sometimes what is needed is for the minister to show greater courage and boldness in giving his or her own life in covenantal commitment to the church he or she serves. Joining any system is difficult and scary, because to truly join means that I have to change.

Have we, as ministers in our congregations, opened up our lives in vulnerable ways so that God can change and mature us through his presence in our faith communities? Is the lack of involvement in our ministries tied to our failure to invest our own lives in loving participation in the breadth of the church’s life? Jesus understood that a good shepherd can only lead and

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serve a flock when the flock knows his voice and shares a common identity and belonging with that shepherd. They have become “his” sheep (John 10).

Joining a church requires paying attention to three areas:

1. Attending to the whole of the church, not just individual members. Churches have their own personalities, practices, symbols, and traditions. Joining a church requires an understanding of the unique life of the church we come to serve, and bending our own preferences and wills toward that life.

2. Participating widely in the “one another” life of the church. The importance of interacting and being present in congregational activities and assemblies, of greeting and blessing people as they enter and leave, of fully giving oneself at potlucks, of understanding the needs of the different groups that make up the church, of sitting in classes as a learner and not just attending classes for teaching—these all become important ways of joining the harmony of the church’s song.

3. Understanding the goals, worldviews, and ways the church has related to others in the community. Ministers must come holding their own agendas very lightly, in humility, and first be willing to join with the people of God and help them discover together God’s agenda for this people at this time and place.

As ministers we come to join a body, a living organism, a system that already has a head—Christ Jesus. We hopefully come with the understanding that we are called to join this body and that we can only have influence when we have renounced the desire to be the head and become a part of the system that together strives to grow up into Christ.9

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Recommended Reading


Oswald, Roy M. *Running through the Thistles: Terminating a Ministerial Relationship with a Parish.* Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 2000.


Additional Resources from the Siburt Institute for Church Ministry

MinistryLink
Through our web-based job board, churches can post job openings, view ministers’ resumes, and contact ministers directly. Similarly, ministers can upload resumes, browse church profiles and job postings, and apply for open job opportunities.

Learn more: siburtinstitute.org/transition

Looking Team
Comprised of several ACU staff and faculty, this team provides personalized, hands-on assistance for ministers and churches in transition, helping churches find potential candidates for open ministry positions.

Learn more: siburtinstitute.org/transition

Mosaic
Our blog curates reflections on Christian leadership, spiritual vitality, and cultural engagement. It features articles from small-church ministers, scholars, elders, and more.

Learn more: mosaicsite.org

More!
The Siburt Institute website includes a host of additional tools and resources for churches and church leaders—such as Bible class curricula, videos, consulting resources, a scholarly e-journal, and information on upcoming events all over the country.

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