Searching for the Called

A Guide for Congregations in Ministerial Transitions

Laura Stephens-Reed

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To the faithful people of a congregation in transition

This is a unique season in the life of your church. The departure of a pastoral leader affects each person differently, but for everyone there is uncertainty around what to do now and what the future holds. In this ambiguity, though, there is immeasurable opportunity – for celebrating and reconnecting with the congregation's roots, for listening deeply to and growing closer with God, and for stoking the church's imagination about who it can be and what it can do. This season, while it might be uncomfortable at times, is not one to rush through.

The search for a great-fit, long-tenured minister is a primary task of the transition time, and it is worthy of all the focus and resources the church can allot. But the potential positives of a search team's work extend beyond the calling of one clergyperson. A ministerial search can deepen both the bonds between and the spiritual maturity of the search team members, with spillover into the congregation as a whole. It can help the church strengthen relationships with its denominational partners and geographical context. It can set the minister up for a fast start, allowing the minister to develop bonds quickly and introduce focus and energy into the system. It can bless the many candidates who come into contact with the search team, prompting them to develop a deeper understanding of their gifts and growing edges and preparing them to infuse health into the churches they will eventually serve.

A framework of hospitality enables a search team to hit all of these marks. The search approach detailed in this guide is designed to help a search team welcome the voices of the Holy Spirit, one another, the congregation, the larger community, and candidates for the ministry position. It provides search stage explanations, questions, best practices, and tools so that you might be blessed and, through your faithfulness, be a blessing to others.

Thank you for your commitment to Christ and your care for your congregation. May God bless you – and bless *through* you – during this season of opportunity.

Grace and peace,

Laura Stephens-Reed

Introductory materials

The story behind Searching for the Called

I love the local church.

I believe the world *needs* the local church to share and embody the good news of Christ's love for all people.

But in fifteen years of ordained ministry, I have too often seen congregations diverted from their essential purpose by low-level anxiety, if not outright conflict. Two primary sources of these distractions – minister-ministry setting mismatches and rocky starts in new pastorates – have roots in the search and call process.

As a candidate for settled ministry positions, an intentional interim minister, a coach, and a colleague to pastors all along the ecumenical spectrum, I have observed that search teams are generally comprised of enthusiastic, committed, and capable people. Search teams are often under-resourced to design and implement a process that is tailored to the peculiarities of calling a clergyperson, however, and many do not know where to turn for help.

Two years ago I began to consider whether I had a perspective on the search process worth offering to my beloved Church. I applied for a Pastoral Study Project grant through the Louisville Institute, and I consider myself very fortunate to have received generous financial support for researching, writing, and sharing the approach to ministerial searches that I now offer to you. This project has been a labor of love, and I have felt energized and inspired through each stage of it. I hope and trust this means I have been as faithful as humanly possible to the task.

Who should consider using Searching for the Called?

If you're wondering if there is a great-fit pastor out there for your church, Searching for the Called is for you.

If you're concerned that your search team doesn't have the process or resources to locate that great-fit pastor, Searching for the Called is for you.

If you're eager to tune in more deeply to the Holy Spirit's movements in your search process, Searching for the Called is for you.

If you're hoping to make the search process as hospitable as possible toward all the parties involved, Searching for the Called is for you.

Note that this framework aims to be easily customizable, because no congregation is exactly like another. If you belong to a denomination that recommends a particular search process, this approach is not meant to replace it but to layer over it. If, however, you are starting your search from scratch, this approach should offer ample structure to guide your work. The materials are written with solo/senior pastor searches in mind, but they can be tweaked for any ministerial search.

Is your church ready for Searching for the Called?

Searching for the Called is best suited for congregations that resonate with the statements below:

- There is high trust and good communication among the congregation and its leaders.
- While eager to call a new minister, the congregation and its leaders are ready to take the time needed to search well.
- The congregation and its leaders understand the search as a spiritual process, one in which God is at work and through which people can grow in relationship with God and one another.
- The congregation and its leaders are willing to be curious about what God is up to, to wrestle with hard questions about the church's past, present, and future, and to be open to the unexpected.
- The congregation and its leaders want to encourage all candidates they encounter and bless the larger church through the search process.
- The congregation and its leaders view the pastor-parish relationship as one of mutual ministry and care.
- The judicatory affirms all of the above and supports the congregation in utilizing Searching for the Called.

Note that the term "congregational leaders" includes the search team (once formed) as well as such standing decision-making bodies as deacons, elders, vestry, session, board, council, etc.

Research methodology

You might be wondering how Searching for the Called was created. Great question! It started with a lot of listening to the following populations: ministers in search processes, settled ministers who had been in their positions less than five years, leaders of recent and in-process searches, middle judicatory and denominational leaders, lay members of middle judicatory bodies who support ministers and congregations in transition, and interim ministers.

Surveys, phone and Skype interviews, and focus groups were used for this information-gathering. Participants came from sixteen denominations in North America.

Research also included working through an extensive bibliography of books, articles, and websites about the nuts and bolts of search processes, interviewing and hiring best practices, congregational self-studies, team-building, discernment, coaching, and starting new ministry positions well in addition to denominationally-specific search and call materials from across the ecumenical spectrum.

Listening and reading laid the groundwork for discernment, and a course on discernment at Columbia Theological Seminary filtered all the research through the lens of spiritual practices. Two mentor coaches aided in synthesizing and applying all of the gleanings.

Once there was a draft of the framework and tools, interim ministers beta-tested it in their settings, and denominational leaders identified aspects of the approach that needed strengthening. (Craig Janney, Reference and Referral Manager for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, was particularly thorough, insightful, and encouraging with his comments.)

As congregations apply the elements of this approach to their search processes, feedback is welcome on what does and doesn’t work well in each context. The details of each stage are intended to be dynamic, and periodic updates will be made based on input from search teams, ministers, and judicatory and denominational leaders.

The language of welcome

Searching for the Called is built on the scriptural mandate of hospitality. Since language shapes our understanding, a vocabulary that establishes an atmosphere of welcome is a key component of this approach.

Journey rather than marriage. Often congregations and search teams talk in terms of finding "Rev. Right." The marriage metaphor breaks down, however, when the pastor-parish relationship is dissolved. The parting of ways feels like a divorce, with all the accompanying strong feelings. Calling a minister is more akin to inviting someone to journey with the church for a while. At some point in the journey, paths will diverge, and clergy and congregation will bless one another on their separate ways.

Settled/installed minister rather than permanent minister. "Permanent" carries the same linguistic baggage as the marriage metaphor. Minister-ministry setting matches are not permanent, but the hope is that they will last for a significant period of time.

Team rather than committee. Committees often function as collections of individuals. "Team," however, denotes a deeper level of trust, a willingness to engage healthy conflict, and a commitment to mutual accountability around agreed-upon outcomes.

Discernment rather than decision. Humans make decisions. When people make space for and heed the counsel of the Holy Spirit, they are engaging in the spiritual exercise of discernment. Choices as important as calling a minister invite discernment.

Faithful rather than successful. Faithfulness asks, "God, what would you have me/us be and do?" Success asks, "What do I/we want?"

Need rather than want. Faithful searches follow up the question, "God, what would you have me/us be and do?" with "God, what kind of leader will help us inhabit that vision?" The question "What do we want in a minister?" tends to open the door to personal preference.

Worshipful work rather than business. There are important tasks to complete during a search process, but they are inseparable from praise, petition, and our formation as disciples of Christ.

Abundance rather than scarcity. Start with the assumption that your church has everything it needs – or can get access to requisite resources – to live toward God's purpose for it.

Gender-neutral/inclusive rather than gender-specific terms. If your congregation is open to a range of candidates, reflect that willingness in written and oral communication. It's an important signal to candidates, and it helps the imaginations of the search team members remain pliable.

Confidentiality rather than secrecy. Be as transparent as is appropriate with candidates and the congregation. The purpose of confidentiality is to protect candidates and the integrity of the process. Secrecy is about maintaining power.

Values rather than stances. Focus on theological and political hot buttons breeds division. Exploration of shared values promotes unity without uniformity.

Call rather than hire. Though a minister receives a W-2 from the church, the minister is not an employee. By IRS standards, clergy are self-employed. By theological standards, pastors are partners with the congregation. Church is not just the source for a paycheck for a minister; it is the minister's faith community. Your pastor is not just there because your church offered a position; God drew your pastor there.

Covenant rather than contract. Covenants acknowledge the mutuality of the pastor-parish relationship. They outline the expectations each has of the other while recognizing that each party will, at times, need to extend grace to the other.

Glossary of terms

Here are explanations of umbrella terms you will see often throughout this guide.

- **Search team.** Search committees, call committees, pastor nominating committees, and the like.
- **Judicatory.** Mid-level associations such as state conventions, conferences, synods, dioceses, presbyteries, and regions to which a congregation is connected for the sharing of resources.
- **Judicatory leader.** The point person in your judicatory, whether a state coordinator, regional minister, conference minister, executive presbyter, or bishop.
- **Minister/pastor.** An ordained clergyperson who serves either as a solo/senior minister *or* as a staff minister.

Essential elements of this search framework

This approach is meant to be adaptable, but there are seven key tasks around which this framework is constructed. However you use these materials, you are strongly encouraged to spend time:

- exploring congregational identity and mission,
- bursting assumptions about the church and its ministerial needs,
- building trust within the search team and between the search team and congregation,
- grounding the process spiritually,
- agreeing on a timeline and a process within the search team,
- communicating well with candidates about process, timeline, status, and expectations, and
- resourcing the new minister for a fast start.

General search timeline

Search timelines vary according to factors such as how much closure is needed with previous minister, what ministry position is open (senior minister searches can take longer than associate minister searches), how recently your church conducted a search (some of the self-study aspects may carry over from another search, if done in the last couple of years), how involved your judicatory expects to be, and how big the pool of good-fit candidates is. Here are the typical ranges for well-conducted searches.

- *Engaging in congregation-wide pre-search self-examination and discernment:* up to a year.
- *Laying the groundwork for a high-functioning search team and process***:** 1-3 months.
- *Inviting ministers to consider your open position and gathering profiles/resumes:* 2-4 months.
- *Reading through profiles/resumes and determining whom to interview:* 1-3 months.
- *Interviewing and doing due diligence with ministers:* 3-6 months.
- *Extending a call and finalizing details of the covenant:* 2 weeks - 1 month.
- *Assisting incoming minister with transition:* up to 1 year.

Headings under each stage

Here's what you can expect from the approach in each phase of the search.

- *Overview of this search phase:* An encapsulation of what happens during this part of the search.
- *Essential tasks and why they matter:* What the search team must do to progress to the next stage and why.
- *Key reflection questions:* Open-ended queries to help get all ideas on the table for thorough discussion.
- *Best practices:* What carrying out this stage of the search well looks like.
- *Tools:* Ready-to-use helps for accomplishing the essential tasks.
- *From the candidate's perspective:* A peek inside what your potential pastor might be experiencing at this point in your search.
- *Are we ready for the next phase?* Yes/no questions to help the search team assess whether to move on to the next stage.
- *If you want to read more:* Resources for a deep dive into the tasks and dynamics at play in this phase.

Questions worth reflecting on throughout the process

Each search stage will offer reflection questions geared toward that point in the process. The following questions are recommended for discussion throughout the search.

- How might we create more room for the Holy Spirit to speak?
- What is possible?
- How might we be a blessing to our candidates?
- How might we strengthen every option before we commit to a direction?
- How are we willing to be flexible and/or surprised?
- What is the most faithful action we could undertake right now?
- In what ways do we need to exercise courage? Humility?
- What is God up to?

Questions to break open stuckness or tension

Most search teams get stuck at one point or another. These questions are designed to help the team move ahead in those instances.

- What can we celebrate?
- What assumptions are we making, and how are they holding us back?
- What realities do we need to acknowledge?
- What is the reason we are spending time on this line of discussion?
- What is distracting us from our work, and how do we get back on track?
- What are we *not* talking about that we really must talk about?
- What would it take for us to get on the same page?
- What is one question that might move us forward in this process?
- What is going on inside of me? What is going on within our search team and/or congregation?
- What is God prompting in me/us?

Framework

Waiting on readiness: identifying the right time to start a search

Overview of this search phase

In this phase the church has the chance to remember who it is apart from the identity of the former minister, thus loosening the grips of anxiety and reactivity on the search process. The to-be-named search team will then be better prepared to invite appropriate candidates to consider journeying with the congregation, and the called minister will be able to connect more quickly and deeply with members and mission upon arrival.

Essential tasks & why they matter

- *Finding closure with departing minister.* It is difficult for a church to embrace a new minister when there are unresolved matters with the previous minister.
- *Connecting with the judicatory/denomination.* The judicatory and/or denomination can offer resources and support to congregations in transition, but the judicatory and/or denomination first must know that a transition is occurring.
- *Making a plan for leadership during the interim time.* When a minister departs, others must claim ownership of the minister's essential tasks so that the church can continue to live toward God's purpose.
- *Exploring the opportunity in the interim time.* The interim period provides space for the congregation to understand itself, its context, and its call to ministry anew.

Key reflection questions

- What do we need to lay down and what do we need to pick up as leadership changes?
- What are our hopes and fears in this time of transition?
- How might we learn and grow as a congregation during this unique season?
- What must our congregation do to be ready for a new minister?

Best practices

- Conducting an exit interview with the departing minister
- Covenanting with the departing minister around limits on contact with church members
- Celebrating the departing minister
- Working toward resolution of sticky situations
- Researching congregational and judicatory/denominational protocols for search processes
- Asking the judicatory for search resources and/or involvement as appropriate
- Acknowledging the lay and staff leadership that is in place
- Covenanting with a traditional or intentional interim minister

Tools

- Considerations and questions for making the exit interview as fruitful as possible from the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Document can be downloaded from here (scroll to "other available ministry resources"): https://www.discipleshomemissions.org/clergy/search-call/downloadable-and-online-ministry-resources/
- Explanation of various types of interim ministry - https://healthychurch.org/interim-ministry/ (Center for Congregational Health) and http://imnedu.org/ (Interim Ministry Network):
    - Note that intentional interim ministry is not just for congregations in conflict. It can also greatly benefit churches:
        - with long-tenured departing ministers,
        - in changing neighborhoods,
        - experiencing a decline in membership, and/or
        - looking to do a new thing, but unsure what that thing is or how to go about it.
- Sources of interim ministry candidates, in addition to denominational sources: https://healthychurch.org/interim-ministry/find-an-interim-minister/ (Center

for Congregational Health) and http://imnedu.org/professional-transition-specialist/pts-directory/ (Interim Ministry Network)

From the candidate's perspective

- Could be serving elsewhere with no thought of seeking a new position.
- Could be seeking a new call and keeping ears perked for opportunities. Might begin tracking your congregation's progress through the transition time and looking for a position announcement.

Are we ready for the next phase?

- ✓ We have made peace with the departure of our minister.
- ✓ We have mulled whether an interim minister would help us make best use of the transition time, and if so, we have covenanted with one.
- ✓ We have named essential responsibilities and tasks that must be covered during the time between settled ministers, and staff and/or laity have taken ownership of those pieces.
- ✓ We understand what our denomination/judicatory/congregational by-laws require in a search process.
- ✓ We have checked into the helps available to congregations in transition from the denomination, judicatory, and/or other sources.

If you want to read more

- ➢ *Pastoral Transitions: From Endings to New Beginnings* by William Bud Phillips
- ➢ *Temporary Shepherds: A Congregational Handbook for Interim Ministry* by Roger S. Nicholson

Befriending the past and anticipating the future: answering key questions about identity and direction

Note: This work usually occurs here when led by a transition expert (e.g., intentional interim minister, transition facilitator/consultant, judicatory representative). If the search team conducts this piece of the process, it will take place before the congregational profile and position description are created.

Overview of this search phase

Before the search can begin, your church must celebrate its past and contemplate its future, listening deeply for God-given direction. In this phase congregation-wide work rekindles hope and fosters deeper connections among weary and wary members. These conversations also provide the basis for describing the minister best suited to accompany your church on the next part of its journey.

Essential tasks & why they matter

- *Naming who the church has been and is*. A congregation cannot discern what God is calling it to be and do without first examining its long-running patterns and its current gifts and challenges.
- *Discerning the church's purpose within its context*. Mission and location are closely tied, and listening for God's call involves attending to the challenges and opportunities in the community.
- *Beginning to identify the leadership skills, qualities, and experience needed to help church live toward its mission*. The competencies required in a pastoral leader grow out of the congregation's God-given vision.

Key reflection questions

- How have our history and location shaped us?
- What are our church's lived values?
- How is God at work in our neighborhood?
- What is God's dream for our congregation?

- Given that dream, what skills do we need in a pastoral leader?

Best practices

- Creating a safe, open environment for frank conversation
- Encouraging the congregation to befriend its ghosts
- Engaging the surrounding community, listening for its gifts and needs
- Thinking about ways the congregation's size and life stage affect the pastoral leadership it needs
- Bursting assumptions about who the church is and what the church needs in a minister
- Learning to tell the church's story in a way that is honest and compelling
- Beginning the process of updating the church's constitution and by-laws and revising/implementing child protection and clergy sexual abuse prevention policies to facilitate the congregation's mission in this next season

Tools

- Tips for creating an effective survey (p. 23)
- Ways of examining and celebrating your congregation's past (p. 25)
- Congregational self-study discussion guide (p. 27)
- Dynamics of different church sizes (p. 29)
- Pastoral tasks and congregational needs across the church life cycle (p. 31)
- *Building Bridges During the Interim: A Workbook for Congregational Leaders* by John Lepper
- Statistics and guidance on crafting safe church policies and procedures from Baptist Women in Ministry (https://bwim.info/safechurches) and the FaithTrust Institute (www.faithtrustinstitute.org)

From the candidate's perspective

- Could be serving elsewhere with no thought of seeking a new position.

- Could be seeking a new call and keeping ears perked for opportunities. Might begin tracking your congregation's progress through the transition time and looking for a position announcement.

Are we ready for the next phase?

- ✓ We have celebrated the fullness of our church's history.
- ✓ We have spent time listening to scripture, one another, and our community.
- ✓ We can articulate what God is calling our church to be and do going forward.
- ✓ We have identified in a general sense the qualifications of a minister who can help us live toward that vision.

If you want to read more

- ➢ *The Hidden Lives of Congregations: Discerning Church Dynamics* by Israel Galindo
- ➢ *Finding Our Story: Narrative Leadership and Congregational Change* edited by Larry A. Goleman

Tips for creating an effective survey

When discussions about calling a minister gear up, often the first thought is to distribute a congregational survey about the essential competencies and priorities of a pastoral leader. Surveys can help clarify the church's needs because they ask the same questions of everyone, yield responses from a range of congregants, and collect a lot of written information. Surveys can also muddy the waters if they are not executed well. Here are some tips for making your survey as useful as possible.

Identify the goal(s) of the survey. What do the survey distributors hope to gain from this exercise?

Ask questions that elicit the most helpful responses. How will the questions focus respondents on the church's needs rather than the survey-taker's preferences? What information will be most useful to the search team? What kinds of survey questions will draw out that information?

Decide on the right number of questions. What survey length will be comprehensive enough to get needed information but not so long as to discourage people from taking it? What is the proper balance between multiple choice/rating questions and free-response questions?

Provide multiple means for taking the survey. Utilizing electronic and hard copy options will allow church members to complete the survey no matter what their comfort level with/access to technology and attendance patterns are.

Determine the best window for survey distribution. *Don't* send out the survey so soon after the previous minister's departure that responses are merely reactions to the minister's successes and shortcomings. *Do* send it out before the creation of key search documents such as the congregational profile and position description. Ensure that the survey is available for a long enough time that everyone will see it and have a chance to respond, but not so long that people will put off filling it out.

Be clear about who will see the survey responses and how the responses will be used. Transparency about the handling of the survey will build trust around the search process and send the message that the congregation's input is important.

Use the survey in tandem with – not in place of – congregational conversations. Surveys can be conducted before churchwide discussions, and the survey responses can help shape those events. Surveys can also be used as follow-up after congregational conversations.

Ways of examining and celebrating your congregation's past

Your church has a history that directly impacts its present and future. Transition times provide opportunities for looking back in ways that honor the good and acknowledge the difficult. This reflection space is necessary for living fully toward God's vision for the congregation. Here are a few examples of ways to approach the church's heritage.

Draw out information about the past from various sources such as:

- Church members
- Written history of the congregation (if available)
- Photos
- Archived documents (e.g., newsletters, sermons, newspaper clippings, stewardship/capital campaign reports, meeting notes, budgets)
- Lay leaders or clergy in the judicatory and/or surrounding area
- Mission partners

Look for and acknowledge past patterns around:

- Budgeting (e.g., income/expenses, giving patterns, pay scale, distribution of funds to various ministries inside and outside the church)
- Membership demographics
- Demographics of surrounding community
- Demographics of denomination
- Changes to the physical plant (e.g., construction, renovations, accessibility)
- Stated protocols vs. lived protocols
- Clergy tenures and the circumstances around their endings
- Mission and ministry partnerships
- Lay leadership patterns (e.g., amount of leader turnover, leader demographics, influence of informal leaders)

Celebrate the past by:

- Creating and displaying a timeline, which could include personal and community milestones as well as congregational benchmarks

- Asking members to create or bring items symbolizing their journey with the church to contribute to an altar arrangement
- Crafting an Ebenezer (a “stone of help” that recognizes God’s constant presence with the congregation) that remains in a prominent place
- Making a photo collage
- Focusing a worship service around the theme of God’s unfailing help throughout the church’s history
- Hosting a congregational storytelling event
- Commissioning a hymn that locates the church’s history and hopes in the larger story of God

In all of these conversations and activities, be sure to involve a range of voices and have fun.

Congregational self-study discussion guide

Ministerial transitions give churches the chance to remember who they are and what they're about apart from the personality and passions of a settled pastor. Below are some questions that congregations can consider to unearth compelling stories, core values, hopes, fears, and dynamics or situations that need resolution. As these conversations take place, they have the equally important effects of creating understanding and building relationships among the participants.

Looking backward

- When have you been most confident that God was moving in and through our congregation?
- What was the most difficult time in the church's history? What did we learn, and how did we change? What healing work remains to be done?
- Over our church's history, what have we lost?
- What has changed since the last time our church searched for a minister? How does that affect what we're looking for in a minister?

Looking inward

- What are the stories we tell about our church? How do they affect engagement, spiritual growth, and service to others?
- What ministry, ritual, symbol, or event best captures the spirit of our church?
- What scripture(s) or hymn(s) come(s) to mind when you think about our congregation?
- What are the gifts and challenges of who we are and where we are?
- What polarities (tensions that can only be managed, not eliminated) exist in our congregation?
- What do we expect of church members?
- What are we afraid of?
- What are the reasons a minister would want to become *our* minister?

Looking outward

- What do our neighbors say about our church? Who are we to our larger community?
- Who are our congregation's partners in ministry?
- What are the gifts and needs of our larger community? Where might our congregation come alongside those already doing great ministry and/or meet unaddressed needs of our neighbors?

Looking forward

- What are the things we cannot imagine ever doing or not doing?
- Who are we becoming as a congregation? What is yet possible?
- What is God's dream for our church?
- What in our church needs to die so that our church can live more fully?

The questions above are a sampling of conversation starters. Choose a few that work best for your context, or create your own. The questions can be used in a variety of ways. For example:

- Ask one discussion prompt at the end of worship each week. Invite worshippers to stay in their seats for 15 minutes to respond in the whole group or in smaller clusters.
- Hold small group gatherings and pose a selection of questions.
- Host one or more congregational potlucks and have participants consider the questions around their tables.
- Have a day-long retreat that weaves worship and/or recreation elements through the discussion pieces.

Whatever format you choose, a best practice is to mix up discussion groups so that participants can hear from people they don't associate with on a regular basis.

Dynamics of different church sizes

The size of your congregation affects how members and visitors interact with each other and with the minister(s). It's important to be aware of the dynamics described below before searching for a pastoral leader so that congregation and clergy are on the same page about expectations of one another.

Family size church

- This church has fewer than 50 people, and most of them are related to one another.
- This congregation experiences little numerical growth because it is difficult for visitors to enter a system that feels like (and usually is) a family.
- The pastor functions primarily as a chaplain. The pastor preaches weekly and provides pastoral care, but decision-making is the purview of the members.

Pastoral size church

- This church has 50-150 people. Often there is a solo minister, though sometimes there is an associate minister or part-time specialized minister (e.g., youth minister).
- New people primarily come into church through the minister. Either the minister has cultivated relationships with them or visitors are drawn to the minister's sermons or worship leadership.
- The minister is involved in (and likely drives) all facets of ministry, including providing most or all of the pastoral care and attending most or all committee meetings. Safeguards must be put into place to prevent burnout.

Program size church

- This church has 150-350 people. There are multiple ministers on staff.
- New people primarily come into church through small groups. Without a foothold in a small group, visitors get lost in the congregation and usually stop attending.
- The senior minister casts a vision and equips other staff members to implement the vision in their respective ministry areas.

Resource size church

- This church has 350+ people and a large staff of ordained and lay people.
- New people primarily come into church through ministries and/or activities (e.g., Upward basketball, recovery ministries, quilting groups).
- The senior minister manages the staff and tends to the institution's development, functioning like a CEO.

[Information summarized from *Interim Ministry for Today's Church (2008 edition)*, published by the Center for Congregational Health in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.]

Pastoral tasks and congregational needs across the church life cycle

Similarly to church size, a congregation's life stage directly impacts the competencies needed in a pastoral leader. Awareness of life stage is important for finding a good-fit minister and for understanding how quickly hoped-for shifts are likely to occur. Below are descriptions of the stages all congregations move through.

Establishing stage: the new church starts

- The minister's primary tasks are vision-casting and creating a sense of connectedness among participants. The minister's biggest challenge is taking the long view.
- The congregants' biggest growing edges are learning how to articulate shared beliefs and how to become lay leaders.
- At this stage, the minister's charisma is the glue. There's also an urgent need to grow for the church start to be viable.

Formation/formatting stage: the church moves toward stability

- The minister's primary tasks are establishing processes and structures that will lead to and accommodate growth, fostering a sense of corporate identity, and creating ministries that embody the vision. The minister's biggest challenges are the temptation to water down the vision to keep everyone happy and the increasing demands on time for equipping members for ministry.
- The congregants' biggest growing edge is learning how to become lay leaders.
- This is the stage at which a church's DNA is formed.

Adolescence stage: programs proliferate

- The minister's primary tasks are focusing congregational energy on programs and discerning whether to stay or go due to the change in needed competencies. The minister's biggest challenges are the temptation to water down vision to keep everyone happy and avoiding burnout due to the fast spread of programs.

- The congregants' biggest growing edges are the accurate assessment of current programs and the formation of new Christians.
- At this stage more services may be needed for (or expected by) members.

Prime stage: the church hits its stride

- The minister's primary tasks are teaching church how to do conflict well, helping members stay connected, and continually communicating the vision. The minister's biggest challenges are navigating the conflicts that pop up around being a settled church and dealing with complacency around vision.
- The congregants' biggest growing edge is learning to innovate.

Maturity: the status quo develops

- The minister's primary tasks are leading the congregation in (honestly) celebrating its heritage and facilitating conversations about what and how the church does ministry. The minister's biggest challenge is fighting the church's tendency to focus inward.
- The congregants' biggest growing edge is creating formation opportunities for newer members and the larger community.

Aristocracy: an appreciation of professionalism and "the way we've always done it" guide ministry

- The minister's primary tasks are restoring vitality in the congregation and leading re-visioning. The minister's biggest challenge is urging change in the face of the church's comfort.
- The congregants' biggest growing edge is becoming willing to adjust.

Bureaucracy: structure and anxiety keep the church stagnant

- The minister's primary tasks are managing anxious and controlling members and leveraging the resources in the congregation well. The minister's biggest challenge is helping members separate personal from corporate anxiety.
- The congregants' biggest growing edge is focusing on the members most willing and able to change.

- Congregations at this stage need a pastor with lowered expectations of the short term who is able to stay long enough to see slow changes through.

Dissolution: the church closes

- The minister's primary task is to help the church die with dignity. The minister's biggest challenge is the commitment of members to keeping the church open.

[Information summarized from chapter 4 of *The Hidden Lives of Congregations: Discerning Church Dynamics*, written by Israel Galindo and published by Rowman & Littlefield in 2011.]

Gathering the open-hearted: selecting search team members

Overview of this search phase

In this phase your congregation commissions a few representatives to bring the whole of the church – its stories, values, hopes, and challenges – into search conversations and considerations. When the right people are in the room, the congregation trusts that the search is being conducted faithfully, the search team members collaborate well, and the candidates are fully welcomed by and informed about the church.

Essential tasks & why they matter

- *Assembling the search team*. The search team does more than carry out the work of the search. Its members listen to and weave together all the voices involved and embody the spirit of the church to candidates.
- *Selecting the search team leader*. In order for the search team to do its work well, there must be a process facilitator who empowers, encourages, and attends to details.

Key reflection questions

- What must each search team member be willing to commit to?
- Who feels called by God to carry out the work of this search?
- Who has the spiritual maturity and process facilitation skills needed to lead the search team?

Best practices

- Following denominational/judicatory/congregational protocols for selecting or electing a search team and search team leader
- Pinpointing the optimal number of search team members
- Looking for search team members that are:
    - Not lobbying to be on the search team (indicates an agenda)

    - Respected by the congregation
    - Engaged with the congregation
    - Spiritually mature
    - Able to work well with others
    - Able to balance personal loyalties with the needs of the whole congregation
    - Willing to be candid and confidential
    - Enthusiastic
    - Available to attend meetings and complete team assignments
    - Representative of different gifts and demographics
    - Unrelated to one another (exception for family size churches)
- Considering the appointment of a search team chaplain or spiritual guide (non-voting member who helps team stay grounded in spiritual practices)

Tools

- Search team composition checklist (p. 37)
- Search team leader tasks and desired qualities (p. 40)

From the candidate's perspective

- Could be serving elsewhere with no thought of seeking a new position.
- Could be seeking a new call and keeping ears perked for opportunities. Might begin tracking your congregation's progress through the transition time and looking for a position announcement.

Are we ready for the next phase?

✓ We have selected a well-balanced search team that is excited, committed to the work, and respected by the congregation.
✓ A leader for the search team has been named.
✓ The names (and in larger churches, bios) of the search team members and point of contact (usually the search team leader) have been communicated to the congregation as a whole.

If you want to read more

- *Selecting Church Leaders: A Practice in Spiritual Discernment* by Charles M. Olsen and Ellen Morseth

Search team composition checklist

Here are some considerations when gathering the members of the search team.

Who is eligible to serve on the search team?

Check your congregational and (if applicable) judicatory and/or denominational protocols to determine who can be on the team. In most churches, for example, the people on the search team must be members of the church. (You might be surprised at how many faithful participants in your congregation have never made their membership official.)

What kinds of personalities will the search benefit from?

- Big picture *and* detail people
- Imaginative *and* pragmatic types
- Internal *and* external processors

What skills or gifts are needed on a search team?

- Technology savvy (Note that some tech can be farmed out, such as updating the church's web presence, but that it might be very helpful to have a search team member who is familiar with such web applications as video conferencing.)
- Record-keeping and organization
- Correspondence composition
- Deep listening
- Meeting and process facilitation
- Spiritual intuitiveness
- Conflict management
- Budgeting
- Insightful question-asking

What size should the search team be?

- How big does the team need to be in order to represent all the voices in the congregation and to manage the workload of the search?
- How small does the team need to be in order to make schedule coordination possible for regular meetings?

Can our church have one search team that calls both the interim minister and the settled minister?

The interim minister search team and settled minister search team are typically two different bodies. Here are some of the reasons.

- Each team is looking for a different skill set.
- The two search processes are very different in length and intensity.
- The interim minister search team might become attached to the interim minister, making it difficult to consider other candidates objectively for the settled minister position.
- The workload and length of service would be overly burdensome if the same people led both processes.

How will people come to be on the search team?

Will members of the search team be selected or elected?

- If selected, what body is authorized by congregational/judicatory/denominational protocols to do the selecting?
- If elected, when and how will the election be conducted so that the greatest number of people can vote? And are there any exceptions to the "X top vote-getters are on the team"? (For example, is there a caveat that two members of the same immediate family cannot serve? Are there certain constituencies that must be represented on the team, no matter the vote totals?)
- Whether selecting or electing, how can those choosing tune into what God is doing and whom God is calling to serve on the team?

Who selects/elects the search team leader?

- Sometimes the body that selects/elects the team also names the team leader.
- Sometimes the search team itself chooses its leader.
- With either approach, it is important that the leader be someone who is prepared for the tasks and embodies the qualities named on the search team leader task list (p. 40).

What set roles are important to have on a search team?

- Leader – someone who facilitates the overall process
- Communications manager/recorder/secretary - someone who maintains careful notes about what happens in meetings, what contacts have been made, and what the nature of those contacts was
- Candidate liaison – point of contact for candidates (could be the team leader or someone else)
- Congregational liaison – point of contact for church members who have ideas, questions, or concerns (could be the team leader or someone else)
- Spiritual guide – someone who helps keep the search process rooted in God (could be an ex officio team member or a fully participating team member)

Search team leader tasks and desired qualities

The search team chair manages the search process as a whole. This person does the following.

- Keeps the team focused on the end *and* the means.
- Sets the tone for a process rooted in hospitality.
- Leads the way in honesty and trust.
- Invites feedback and imagination.
- Challenges assumptions as needed.
- Makes sure that all the voices are heard.
- Encourages and empowers the team members to carry out the work of the search.
- Ensures that the congregation and judicatory are kept in the loop.

Great chairs are:

- Spiritually mature
- Willing to set aside personal agendas
- Less anxious
- Curious
- Sensitive to the dynamics in the room
- Secure in themselves yet humble
- Invested in the congregation and its mission
- Able to see the big picture

Growing in trust: becoming a search team

Overview of this search phase

In perhaps the most overlooked – yet crucial – phase of the search process, team members deepen their relationships with one another. As a result team members feel comfortable offering and strengthening divergent proposals, know how to help one another bring their best to the work at hand, and come to authentic agreement on essential actions. When the process is complete, the team and the congregation will be able to trust that every effort was made and every idea was put on the table for full consideration.

Essential tasks & why they matter

- *Getting to know one another on a more profound level.* Sharing within the team beyond surface details and opinions lays the foundation for trust.
- *Building second-level trust within the search team.* This deeper layer of trust makes it possible for the search team to have difficult but important conversations.
- *Naming whether unanimity (everyone agrees), consensus (not everyone agrees, but those who don't will not stand in the way), or majority (most agree) opinion will be the basis for taking action.* Before any major actions are undertaken, the team must identify what level of agreement there must be prior to moving forward.

Key reflection questions

- What does each search team member bring to the process?
    - Loyalties
    - Hopes
    - Concerns
    - Skills/talents
    - Personality/participation style
- What does each team member need in order to participate fully in the process?

- What do we expect of one another in terms of engagement, confidentiality, accountability, and handling disagreement?

Best practices

- Sharing faith stories
- Taking a personality and/or conflict style assessment as a team so that members can better understand themselves and one another
- Creating a search team covenant
- Letting one another know the most effective means of being reached, such as a cell phone number and/or a personal (i.e., not shared) email address

Tools

- Building a high-functioning search team (p. 44)
- Exercises for building trust within the search team (p. 46)
- Assessments for helping search team members get to know each other (p. 48)
- Search team covenant checklist (p. 49)

From the candidate's perspective

- Could be serving elsewhere with no thought of seeking a new position.
- Could be seeking a new call and keeping ears perked for opportunities. Might begin tracking your congregation's progress through the transition time and looking for a position announcement.

Are we ready for the next phase?

✓ Search team members understand one another's stories and personalities better than before team-building.

✓ Search team members have committed to concrete ways of helping one another bring their best to the search process.

✓ The search team has named and agreed on members' expectations of each other.

✓ The search team has settled on a means for approving actions.

- ✓ The search team has communicated to the church what it has been doing and how this work benefits the process.

If you want to read more

- ➢ *Harvard Business Review* article by Judith D. Glaser and Patrick E. Glaser on the science behind the importance of trust: https://hbr.org/2014/06/the-neurochemistry-of-positive-conversations
- ➢ *Overcoming the Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Field Guide for Leaders, Managers, and Facilitators* by Patrick Lencioni
- ➢ *Discover Your Conflict Management Style* by Speed B. Leas
- ➢ *Conversational Intelligence: How Great Leaders Build Trust and Get Extraordinary Results* by Judith E. Glaser
- ➢ Two different outlines for taking the temperature of a group as it moves toward a decision can be downloaded here ("Consensus Levels"), from the American Baptist Churches USA: http://www.abc-usa.org/resources/for-leaders/clergy-leader-development-resources/

Building a high-functioning search team

First of all, why a search *team*? Team members work together toward a common goal. They hold a shared understanding of how to reach that outcome, and each team member contributes in defined ways such that the whole of the team is more than the sum of its parts. Given the importance of the team's purpose, the members' collaboration is very intentional and regular and there is a point person who guides the process. Committees and/or groups do not meet all of these criteria, or they do so to a lesser degree.

What, then, makes for the most effective teams? Let's start with what doesn't. In the groundbreaking work *Overcoming the Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Field Guide* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), Patrick Lencioni lists the biggest pitfalls for teams:

- Absence of trust
- Fear of conflict
- Lack of commitment
- Avoidance of accountability
- Inattention to results

The highest-functioning teams reverse these dysfunctions.

- **Building trust.** Team members are willing to risk vulnerability to know and be known by one another so that they can bring their whole selves to the process at hand.
- **Engaging in healthy conflict.** Conflict is simply a difference of opinion. In healthy conflict, team members are able to separate ideas from the people who hold them so that the full range of options can be considered.
- **Committing to the team and its actions.** There is agreement up front about how the team will work together and regular checking in to ensure all team members are on the same page. Every team member has input into and thus ownership of actions.
- **Holding one another accountable.** Team members assume the best about one another's intentions and capabilities, making it possible for them to hold each

other to high standards. There is clarity around responsibilities and progress checkpoints.

- **Keeping team goals at the fore.** The team is clear about its goal and subgoals as well as the milestones that will indicate progress toward them.

Each step builds on the preceding ones, so there is no skipping.

Exercises for building trust within the search team

There are two levels of trust. Often what we take as "trust" is actually predictability: we expect that those around us will follow the rules and/or act in ways that are consistent with our understanding of who they are. This is the kind of trust that most search teams have when they begin their work.

Real trust goes deeper, however. It is a willingness to show up as our whole selves, knowing our vulnerability will lead to *un*predictability. This risk-taking can lead to much richer relationships and more imaginative work. In order to build strong teams, it's important to create this second-level trust. It is the root of the most thorough and faithful processes and the starting point for the most widely-owned outcomes.

Here, then, are a few suggestions for developing this second-level trust, which will continue to grow throughout the search process. Since deeply knowing and being known is difficult work, start with the lowest-risk exercises.

Everyone shares:

- **Faith journey.** Provides context for theological commitments.
- **Reasons for agreeing to serve on the search team.** Prompts honesty about personal agendas.
- **Passions and skills to offer to the process.** Puts all the team's assets on the table.

Everyone explores:

- **Learning styles.** Enables search process development that meets all team members' processing needs. (See list of helpful assessments on p. 49.)
- **Generational perspectives.** Allows team members to grasp how perspectives differ by age cohort. (*Reaching People under 30 While Keeping People over 60: Creating Community Across Generations* by Edward H. Hammett is a good source of generational lenses, as is this video: http://boingboing.net/2017/04/06/the-evolution-of-americas-s.html/amp.)

- **Communication styles.** Helps team members understand how they tend to convey and receive information so that everyone can hear and be heard well. (See list of helpful assessments on p. 49.)
- **Conflict styles.** Normalizes conflict and lets team members know how their peers usually approach it. (See list of helpful assessments on p. 49.)

Questions to discuss:

- When have you experienced positive conflict? What made it positive?
- What prompts you to disengage from conversations, processes, and/or groups?
- What might keep us from gelling as a team?
- What gifts do we see in each other?
- Based on what we have learned about each other, how will we help one another participate in this team and this process?

Assessments for helping search team members get to know each other

The following assessments are a few of the tools available to help search team members get to know each other on a deeper level. Some of the assessments are free, and others require a fee.

- **Learning Styles Inventory:** http://www.educationplanner.org/students/self-assessments/learning-styles.shtml. Reveals whether taker is primarily a visual, auditory, or tactile learner.
- **Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI):** http://www.myersbriggs.org/my-mbti-personality-type/mbti-basics/. Helps taker discover and understand personality type (16 types).
- **Riso-Hudson Enneagram Type Indicator (Enneagram):** https://www.enneagraminstitute.com/. Helps taker discover and understand personality type (9 types).
- **Strengths Finder 2.0:** http://strengths.gallup.com/110440/About-StrengthsFinder-20.aspx. Pinpoints what taker's strengths are in order to work from them.
- **Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI):** http://www.kilmanndiagnostics.com/catalog/thomas-kilmann-conflict-mode-instrument. Assesses how taker handles conflict.

Search team covenant checklist

A covenant is a list of norms created and agreed upon by everyone on the team. It acts as a touchstone when distractions threaten to derail the search process. Here are some discussion questions that can help your search team create its covenant.

- What are our shared values?
- What are our responsibilities to our congregation, judicatory, and denomination through this search process?
- How will we encourage openness and full participation in each other?
    - What types of behaviors do we want to utilize? What types of behaviors do we want to avoid?
    - About what do we need to hold one another accountable, and how will we do that?
    - How will we come to agreement about actions? What will we do if we cannot agree?
    - What does confidentiality look like for us? What kinds of information fall under this agreement? If a team member breaks trust, how will we handle this breach as a team?
- How will we encourage openness and full engagement in our candidates?

A best practice is to keep the finalized covenant visible and to refer back to it as needed.

Creating space for the Spirit to move: grounding the search process in God

Overview of this search phase

For a search team to be led by God in its work, the search process must create space for the Spirit to be heard. In this phase the team crafts a structure for its worshipful work, building in intentional times and means of listening for God's guidance. The search process then becomes not just functional but also formational for team members, whose new spiritual disciplines and sensitivities spill over into the whole congregation.

Essential tasks & why they matter

- *Getting clear on the difference between deciding and discerning*. Decisions are made by humans alone. In discernment humans invite the wisdom of the Holy Spirit as they formulate actions.
- *Establishing the key movements of team meetings*. When there are good bones for search meetings, the search team develops spiritual muscle memory so that it defaults to seeking God's wisdom when challenges arise.

Key reflection questions

- What reservations do we have about committing to discernment? How might we turn these over to God?
- How might we create a worshipful context within which to complete the tasks of the search?
- What agendas must we shed so that we can fully welcome the wisdom of the Holy Spirit?
- What is the role of dissent in discernment?
- What regular practices will keep us in discernment mode?

Best practices

- Ensuring the search team gathering space is conducive to discernment
  - Quiet
  - Comfortable
  - Confidential
  - Bibles and other materials (e.g., candle, journals, art supplies) handy
- Identifying or creating spiritual touchstones
  - Focal point in the team's gathering space that serves as a visual reminder of the need not just to be faithful to a process but also to the person of Christ
  - Photos, timeline, notes on newsprint and/or other visuals utilized in congregational identity and direction discussions
  - Reminders of the liturgical season
  - Key scriptures
  - Images
- Developing a meeting outline that weaves together spiritual disciplines and search tasks
- Committing to individual spiritual disciplines in addition to corporate ones

Tools

- Definition of discernment (p. 53)
- Discernment outline (p. 54)
- Tools for discernment (p. 56)
- Criteria for discerning "is this God speaking?" (p. 57)
- Worshipful work meeting outline (p. 58)

From the candidate's perspective

- Could be serving elsewhere with no thought of seeking a new position.
- Could be seeking a new call and keeping ears perked for opportunities. Might begin tracking your congregation's progress through the transition time and looking for a position announcement.

Are we ready for the next phase?

- ✓ The search team grasps the basics of discernment.
- ✓ The search team has named and committed to specific means by which individuals and the team will listen for the Spirit's guidance.
- ✓ The search team has encouraged every church member to be in conversation with God about the search process.

If you want to read more

- Discernment travelogue – brief overview of discernment guidelines/practices, from the United Church of Christ: http://uccfiles.com/pdf/Discernment-Travelogue.pdf
- Brief description of the movements in a discernment process, from the American Baptist Churches, USA: http://www.abc-usa.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/OrgDevWorshipWork.pdf
- *Pursuing God's Will Together: A Discernment Practice for Leadership Groups* by Ruth Haley Barton
- *The Way of Discernment: Spiritual Practices for Decision Making* by Elizabeth Liebert

Definition of discernment

Decisions are intellectual exercises. People gather information from a number of sources, evaluate it, and create actions and a timetable based on the outcomes of their analysis. When people make decisions, they generally seek to control the outcome.

Discernment is an attentiveness – cultivated in the head, heart, and gut – to God's work in the world so that we might join God in those efforts. Wisdom about the matter for discernment unfolds in God's time and through many of the same sources upon which decisions are made, plus some that might be discounted when acting purely on logic. Those in discernment continually turn over their own agendas in order to embrace the greater good to which God calls.

Discernment is an end in itself, not just the means to an end. It is a pathway to a deeper relationship with God (and often, with others) and a way of understanding ourselves on a more profound level.

That said, decisions are sometimes warranted. Not every action requires a full-blown discernment process. Search teams can ask themselves, "What is the significance of the question before us? How might God wish to weigh in?" to determine whether the situation calls for decision or discernment.

Discernment outline

Discernment as concept might seem overwhelming: *I understand what it is, but how do I do it?* Here is one way of breaking it down into bite-sized chunks.

Create an atmosphere for discernment. Consider the location, room arrangement, and touchstones that would make your gathering space most conducive to listening for the wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

Set aside distractions. Name and turn over agendas and worries that could keep you from focusing on God's yearnings for your congregation.

Worship together in your gathering space. Read scripture. Pray. Sing a well-known, much-loved hymn. Join together in a litany. Remember and acknowledge that God wants good for you and your church.

Refine the question for discernment. You are more likely to get a clear response if your question for God is finely-tuned.

Pray for indifference. Indifference means that, because you trust God's intentions, you will refrain from nudging the outcome in one direction or another. (This is very hard!)

Gather relevant data. Use every resource at your disposal, including but not limited to hard data, conversations with others, scripture, individual and collective memories, pro/con lists, imagination, intuition, feelings, and your senses. No data source is off limits in discernment, because God speaks to us in a number of ways.

Discuss the data. Name what the team has discovered through gathering the data – especially the surprises. Make sure everyone has the opportunity to share.

Pray for wisdom. Ask God to weave the data together and to help the team step back and view the interwoven whole.

Make friends with silence. We are so unaccustomed to silence that when we do experience it, we often feel uncomfortable with it. Start with short spans of silence (30 seconds or so) and build capacity from there. In doing so, you give God a bigger opening. Wait on God to speak.

Identify the resolution that seems (resolutions that seem) to be emerging. What is the team hearing? Is everyone hearing the same thing? Remember that dissent can be another data source for discernment.

Work toward agreement. Identify a way forward that honors the movements of the Holy Spirit in each person and the team as a whole. Don't rush this process.

Test the agreement. Ask God for confirmation that you have discerned correctly. (See criteria for identifying "is this God speaking?" on p. 58.) Tweak the plan as needed.

Take action. Honor the faithfulness of God by moving forward boldly with the action you have discerned.

This process is not linear! Double-back to steps in the discernment process as needed.

Tools for discernment

Here are a few tools for discernment with very brief descriptions. Note that this list is not exhaustive.

Breath prayer. Taking deep breaths in of God's presence, then breathing out distractions.

Journaling. Writing honest reflections about joys, challenges, and questions.

Examen. Asking at the end of each day, "When did I feel closest to God today? When did I feel most removed from God?" http://prayer-center.upperroom.org/resources/resources-articles/53

Centering prayer. Sitting quietly with eyes closed, choosing an anchoring thought or image, and returning to that image anytime a distracting thought pops into your mind.

Table grace. Giving thanks before meals.

Lectio divina. Praying the scriptures, listening for a word or phrase that catches you and reflecting on what God might be saying to you through it. http://prayer-center.upperroom.org/resources/resources-articles/49

Visio divina. Looking at an image, focusing on what catches your eye and reflecting on what God might be saying to you through it.
http://alivenow.upperroom.org/2012/08/15/visio-divina/

Praying the hours. Offering prayers connected to the time of day, often incorporating the psalms.

Colloquy. Imagining a prayerful give-and-take conversation with God, Jesus, or another scriptural figure.

Open-ended questions:

- Where have we seen God at work?
- How do we feel in or out of sync with God?
- Where are we encountering resistance? What might God be telling us through it?
- What is God inviting us to do or consider?

Criteria for discerning "is this God speaking?"

Ask these questions to test resolutions.

- Does the resolution we're sensing line up with what we know to be our purpose?
- Does the resolution bring us a sense of lasting peace, not just temporary relief?
- Is the resolution a good way forward or the *best* way forward?
- What do we imagine the long-term fruits of this resolution will be?
- How does the resolution align with what we understand about scripture? About the person of Christ?
- Is the resolution a loving approach to everyone involved?
- Will the resolution build a sense of community?
- Is the resolution we're sensing persistent, not just a fleeting thought?

[Information summarized from presentation made by Marjorie J. Thompson at Columbia Theological Seminary as part of the class "Growing in Discernment: Attuning Our Spiritual Senses," November 7-11, 2016.]

Worshipful work meeting outline

Weaving together the elements of discernment and the business of the search process, here is a sample guide for each search team meeting.

Preparing to perceive God's guidance

- *Create an atmosphere for discernment.* Prepare the gathering space in a way that is conducive to worshipful work.
- *Set aside distractions.* Ask, "What does each of us need to turn over to God before we can focus on the search?"
- *Worship together in your gathering space.* Invite everyone to name where they have seen God at work this week.
- *Refine the question for discernment.*
    - Ask each team member to give an overview of progress that has been made on agreed-upon actions.
    - Celebrate this progress and build in support for actions that are incomplete.
    - Identify what the team needs to focus on in this meeting. Parse which pieces are matters for discernment and which can appropriately be accomplished through decisions.
    - Clarify the question(s) for discernment that is/are now before the team.
- *Pray for indifference.* Pray as Jesus did: "Not my will but Thine be done."

Listening for the wisdom of God

- *Gather relevant data.* Invite team members to share the details of search work done since the last meeting.
- *Discuss the data.* Encourage each team member to share what they notice from the data presented. Ask clarifying questions. Name what the team doesn't yet know but needs to know. Listen deeply to one another.
- *Pray for wisdom.* Acknowledge that the team has done what it can in terms of collecting and evaluating the data. Ask God to move in that new awareness.
- *Make friends with silence.* Wait on the Lord. Use spiritual disciplines to tune into what God might be saying.

Considering and committing to what God is inviting the team to do

- *Identify the resolution that seems (resolutions that seem) to be emerging*. Get every concern on the table. Refine every idea that bubbles up.
- *Work toward agreement*. Start from points of commonality: "What is it that we all seem to be hearing clearly?" Dig deeper on points of resistance: "Tell me more about your hesitation." Use your team's previously agreed-upon means of coming to agreement.
- *Test the agreement*. Let the resolution rest. If your team isn't able to sleep on it, take a meal break and then discuss how team members are feeling in their heads, hearts, and guts about the proposed way forward.
- *Take action*. Make detailed plans for action steps. Who will do what? How, and by when? What support and/or accountability is needed?

Reflecting on how God is at work in the process as a whole

- Before adjourning, check in on how the team felt it worked together today and what adjustments to process need to be made.
- Wonder aloud, "What is God up to?"

Preparing for blessing:
discovering and setting the process for calling a minister

Overview of this search phase

In this phase the search team ensures it has the information it needs to conduct the search, then details how it will carry out its work. Intentionality around process undergirds the growing trust among search team members and between the search team and church as a whole, thus decreasing the anxiety that can lead to fatigue and quick decisions.

Essential tasks & why they matter

- *Learning how to complete the essential tasks of the search.* Before the search team can outline the search process, it must know what steps comprise a well-conducted search.
- *Identifying resources (as well as gaps) at the search team's disposal.* What information, funding, technology, skills, physical space, and other helps does the search team have? What does it need but not yet have?
- *Setting the stages and a tentative timeline for the search process.* A realistic search outline not only guides the team in its work, it also lets the congregation know that the process is on track.
- *Figuring out how to track candidates and actions*. Nothing derails a search – or makes candidates question whether to stay in a search process – faster than disorganization and confusion.
- *Planning for regular updates to congregation and staff (if applicable).* Search seasons are highly anxious for congregations and their staffs. Communication is a primary way to quell anxiety and allow people to focus on their ministries.

Key reflection questions

- What will it look like for us to be faithful in our work?
- How will we lay the groundwork for the new minister to get off to a good start by the way we conduct the process?

- What is it critical to do at each stage of the process? What is at stake if we don't do these things?
- How do we create a timeline that will allow for momentum without exhaustion?
- How will we build in regular reflection on and celebration of the process itself?

Best practices

- Seeking out search team and anti-bias training from judicatory, intentional interim minister, coach, or consultant
- Clarifying to whom the search team is ultimately responsible (e.g., governing body, congregation as a whole, or judicatory)
- Establishing goals and sub-goals for the search process
- Deciding how to involve other staff in the search appropriately (if applicable)
- Claiming roles within the search team
- Setting meeting times and frequency
- Identifying the points at which it is important to communicate with candidates

Tools

- Things to consider when the associate pastor is interested in the senior pastor position (p. 63)
- Candidate communications content (p. 65)
- Ways to bring the congregation along during the search (p. 69)
- Information to report to the congregation during the search (p. 71)

From the candidate's perspective

- Could be serving elsewhere with no thought of seeking a new position.
- Could be seeking a new call and keeping ears perked for opportunities. Might begin tracking your congregation's progress through the transition time and looking for a position announcement.

Are we ready for the next phase?

✓ The search team fully understands the work of the search.

- ✓ The search team has obtained the resources it needs for the search.
- ✓ The search team has established a flexible outline and timeline of the search process stages.
- ✓ The search team has created a means of tracking all interactions with candidates.
- ✓ The search team has a plan for communicating with the congregation, staff, judicatory, and candidates.
- ✓ The search team has shared with the church what it has been doing and how this work benefits the process.

If you want to read more

- *The Pastoral Search Journey: A Guide to Finding Your Next Pastor* by John Vonhof
- Commentary around how search committees can embody the gospel through their treatment of candidates, from the Episcopal Church: http://www.episcopalchurch.org/files/CDO_Caring_for_Clergy_in_the_Calling_Process_May2009.pdf

Things to consider when the associate pastor is interested in the open senior pastor position

When the senior pastor of a multi-minister congregation departs, it is natural for the associate pastor to consider applying for the open position and for the congregation to ask if the associate can shift into the senior ministry role. Here are some reflection points to mull when these questions arise.

What do denominational guidelines and congregational by-laws have to say? Sometimes churches are expressly forbidden by external or internal policies from considering the associate pastor for the senior pastor position. If that's the case, let the associate pastor know that the search team is aware of this rule and re-affirm the associate's gifts for ministry and importance to the congregation. Reiterate these messages as needed with people in the church. If it is permissible for the associate pastor to apply, however, read on.

What is the associate pastor's sense of call in this situation? Does the associate pastor feel tugged to change ministry roles, or is the associate living into the fullness of God's call in the current role? Ask before assuming.

About what would we need to be forthright with the associate pastor and with other candidates? When the associate pastor becomes a candidate for the senior pastor position, the applicant pool becomes unbalanced. The search team members know the associate pastor's work to a degree they could never know that of other candidates. The associate pastor has presumably ministered to them or their loved ones in a way that inspires strong feelings. These connections put the associate pastor at a distinct advantage (or sometimes disadvantage) as compared to other candidates.

How does the associate pastor's skill set align with the one needed for the senior pastor position? Sometimes associate ministry is practically an apprenticeship, preparing the associate well for a senior pastor role. In other settings associate ministry is very specialized, meaning a good-fit pastor for that role would not be a great match for a head of staff position.

What are the potential complications for all the parties involved?

- *For the associate pastor*. If the associate pastor is called as senior pastor, there will need to be intentional conversations around how expectations clergy and congregation have of one another should shift. Otherwise, confusion could lead to a breakdown of trust. If the associate pastor is not called as senior pastor, hurt feelings could result.
- *For other candidates*. As mentioned above, other candidates will likely be at a disadvantage in the search process. If they know the associate pastor is being considered, they might not invest as much of themselves in your search. If they don't know the associate pastor is being considered and find out late in the process, they might feel like the search team has not been honest with them.
- *For the search team's clarity and fairness*. It is difficult to consider fully other candidates when the search team believes there is a perfectly acceptable one – whether or not that person is the *best* fit – already in their midst.
- *For the congregation*. If the associate pastor is called as senior pastor, that person will already have detractors in the congregation. (No minister is universally loved.) If the associate pastor is not called, there might be hurt feelings among the associate's advocates in the church.

How best can we tune into the Holy Spirit's guidance in this situation? As much as discernment on all sides is necessary under normal search conditions, it is even more imperative when the associate pastor applies. Go slowly, listen deeply, and stay curious.

Candidate communications content

Clear, timely communication with candidates is essential to a well-conducted search. Below are suggestions for what to include in each type of contact. In creating a communications plan, name the maximum length of time the search team wants to go between contacts with candidates and what kinds of communication would best be done by email, postal letter, and live voice. Note that as the number of candidates under consideration decreases, the customization of communications to each individual should increase.

Search team acknowledges receipt of ministerial profile/resume

- Thanks for the candidate's interest
- Eagerness to read the candidate's materials
- Request for any missing or additional candidate information (if applicable)
- Inclusion of and/or links to additional information about the church
- Excitement about the search process
- Next step in the search process and general timeline for contact about that step
- Name, email, and phone number for search team point of contact in case the candidate has questions

Search team opts not to interview candidate

- Thanks for the candidate's interest
- Regrets that the candidate has not been selected to continue in the search process
- Brief explanation for opting not to interview the candidate (e.g., candidate's strengths are not the best fit with this congregation's needs in this season)
- Brief affirmation of the candidate's gifts and/or ministry (if feasible, based on size of applicant pool)
- Well wishes for the candidate's search and ministry

Search team invites candidate to phone/internet interview

- Enthusiasm about the information included in the candidate's profile/resume
- Desire to explore further the possibility of mutual ministry

- Inquiry whether candidate is still searching for a position
- Date and time options for an interview
- Length of interview
- Platform for interview
- General information about who will conduct the interview (e.g., the whole search team? a couple of representatives?)
- Preparation the search team would like the candidate to undertake in advance of the interview
- Inclusion of and/or links to additional information about the church
- Name, email, and phone number for search team point of contact in case the candidate has questions

Search team opts not to continue conversation with candidate after phone/internet interviews

- Thanks for the candidate's interest and time spent interviewing
- Gratitude for the opportunity to get to know the candidate
- Regrets that the candidate has not been selected to continue in the search process
- Brief explanation for opting not to continue conversation with the candidate (e.g., candidate's strengths not the best fit with this congregation's needs in this season)
- Specific, one-sentence affirmation of the candidate's gifts and/or ministry
- Well wishes for the candidate's search and ministry

Search team invites candidate to an in-person interview

- Enthusiasm about the exchange during the initial interview(s)
- Desire to explore further the possibility of mutual ministry
- Date and time options for an interview
- Details about:
    - How travel/meals/lodging arrangements and costs will be handled
    - What the schedule will be
    - Whom the candidate will interact with

    - What dress is expected
    - Whether family (if applicable) is invited to attend
    - Whether childcare (if applicable) will be available if candidate brings child(ren)
- Preparation the search team would like the candidate to undertake in advance of the interview
- Name, email, and phone number for search team point of contact in case the candidate has questions

Search team opts not to continue conversation after in-person interview(s)

- Thanks for the candidate's interest and time spent interviewing
- Gratitude for the opportunity to get to know the candidate
- Regrets that the candidate has not been selected to continue
- Brief explanation for opting not to continue conversation with the candidate (e.g., candidate's strengths not the best fit with this congregation's needs in this season)
- Specific, two-sentence affirmation of the candidate's gifts and/or ministry
- Well wishes for the candidate's search and ministry

Search team extends the call to a candidate (Note: Content for the formal letter of call/covenant is outlined on p. 111.)

- Invitation to become the church's [position title]
- Excitement among the search team and congregation about the candidate and fit
- Tentative effective date of call
- Initial compensation offer (cash and benefits)
- Initial offer to cover moving costs
- Requested response date
- Name, email, and phone number of the contact person for questions and negotiations

Search team notifies finalist that another candidate has been called

- Thanks for the candidate's interest and time spent interviewing
- Gratefulness for the opportunity to get to know the candidate
- Date when the call was extended to another candidate
- Brief information about the minister who has accepted the call
- Specific, two-sentence affirmation of the candidate's gifts and/or ministry
- Well wishes for the candidate's search and ministry

Ways to bring the congregation along during the search

Search teams, if they are not intentional about continuing conversation with the congregation, tend to cloister themselves during the search process. They are then caught off guard when the church acts out its search-related anxiety. The search team, after all, knows it is hard at work!

While there are plenty of specific details the search team cannot share with the church at large, it can engage the congregation in the following ways throughout the process.

Listen to the congregation.

- What questions does the search team need to ask the congregation along the way?
- How will the search team deal with anonymous feedback, rumors, and information leaks?
- How can the congregation be in prayer and discernment alongside the search team?
- What is the temperature of the congregation at various stages of the search? What does that mean for the search team?

Share with the congregation.

- Whom should church members contact if they have questions, concerns, comments, and/or suggestions for the search team? How can the search team advertise this information?
- How often will the search team report to the congregation, and by what means?
- What does the congregation need to understand about
    - The state of the congregation
    - The larger landscape of Church and/or clergy life (Consult judicatory or denominational leaders for demographic info if needed.)
    - The process as a whole
    - Particular meetings and/or stages of the search? (See “information to report to the congregation during the search” on p. 70.)
- How can we help the congregation embrace the minister we recommend?
- What potential objections must we address proactively?

Other means of including the church in the search include:

- Asking the congregation to participate in the commissioning of the search team.
- Creating a covenant between the search team and the church, detailing the responsibilities of each to the other.
- Displaying a communication map, letting the congregation know whom to contact about what search-related matters.
- Displaying a timeline of the search, filling it in as the search progresses.
- Celebrating the search team's efforts when the new minister is called.

Information to report to the congregation throughout the search

Churches can be anxious places during search processes. While the search team knows that much is happening and progress is being made, those outside the search team do not…unless you tell them!

There are certain kinds of information that must stay within the search team, such as any specifics that would allow people beyond the team to deduce the identity of candidates. That still leaves much that the search team can say, including the following.

- **Exercises or activities the team has been engaged in.** "We've been doing ___, and that action advances the search process by…"
- **Milestones.** "We've just started a new phase of the search."
- **Goals.** "We aim to finish phone interviews by [date]."
- **Numbers.** "We have considered ___ number of candidates, made ___ phone calls, and spent ___ hours in meetings."
- **Ways the judicatory and/or denomination is helping.** "Our judicatory leader came on [date] and trained the search team."
- **Support needed from congregation.** "Please pray that…"

Consider how often your congregation needs to hear from the search team to keep constituents appropriately informed and to dial back anxiety. Then utilize as many means as possible to share updates, since learning styles, attendance patterns, and preferred communication means vary:

- Newsletter
- Website
- Social media
- Oral worship announcements
- Written worship announcements
- Visits to small groups/committees
- Bulletin boards

Crafting the welcome: collating information and creating key documents

Overview of this search phase

Before the search team can invite potential candidates into a process of mutual discernment, it must first compose key documents by which ministers learn about the position. These documents are created for generating initial interest as well as for the search team's later use, since well-written documents lay the groundwork for establishing trust with candidates, provide tools for assessing fit, and streamline clarification and negotiation at the end of the process.

Essential tasks & why they matter

- *Establishing criteria that will enable the search team to assess candidates' fit with the church and the position.* Setting competencies allows search team members to broaden their imaginations about what the next minister might look like and to focus on the qualities that matter.
- *Composing a congregational profile or information packet.* Candidates look for the best-fit setting as much as for the best-fit position.
- *Writing a position description.* For candidates to know if they are interested in and qualified for your position, they must have a picture of what it entails.
- *Naming a salary range.* Getting clear on compensation at this phase allows candidates to self-eliminate and ensures that the package offered to the candidate of choice will be based on qualifications and responsibilities rather than other variables.

Key reflection questions

- What assumptions do we have about our next minister? Which ones will serve the candidates and us well, and which ones won't?
- What ministerial competencies would best enable our church to live toward God's dream for it, as discerned during congregational discussions on identity and direction? How do we distinguish between essential and desirable qualities?

- How do we translate the essentials into a position description that will inform and excite potential candidates?
- What do we want potential candidates to know first about our congregation and open position?
- What is a fair compensation range for the level of responsibility, skills, and experience we are looking for in a minister?

Best practices

- Incorporating the self-study work done by the whole church into the composition of the congregational profile/information
- Becoming familiar with what a minister's day-to-day schedule can include
- Leaving room in the position description for some tailoring of responsibilities to the called minister
- Researching the cost of living in the area
- Becoming well-versed in judicatory salary guidelines and/or requirements, typical salaries for congregations with similar characteristics, and the various components of a minister's compensation package

Tools

- Ways to broaden our imaginations about a "good fit" minister (p. 76)
- Definitions of particular competencies/characteristics that congregations might seek in ministerial candidates, from the Presbyterian Church USA: http://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/clc/pdfs/leadership_competencies_definitions.pdf
- Information to include in a congregational profile/community snapshot (p. 77)
- Reasons why a minister job description is needed and what types of information should be included, from the Mennonite Church USA: http://mennoniteusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/ThePastorsJobDescription.pdf
- Compensation considerations (p. 79)
- Compensation information from your judicatory and/or denomination

- Compensation information for more than 100 job titles from a wide range of churches, from http://ministrypay.com/
- *2016-2017 Compensation Handbook for Church Staff* by Richard R. Hammar: http://store.churchlawtodaystore.com/20cohaforchs.html
- Comprehensive information/recommendations regarding the varied aspects of a minister's compensation package, from the Mennonite Church USA: http://mennoniteusa.org/resource/pastor-salary-guidelines/

From the candidate's perspective

- Could be serving elsewhere with no thought of seeking a new position.
- Could be seeking a new call and keeping ears perked for opportunities. Might begin tracking your congregation's progress through the transition time and looking for a position announcement.

Are we ready for the next phase?

- ✓ The search team has distinguished between skills and experience it must have in a minister and qualities it would prefer.
- ✓ The search team has composed a congregational profile and/or information packet to send to the judicatory/denomination and/or candidates.
- ✓ The search team has created a position description that is both realistic and flexible.
- ✓ The search team has outlined the basics of a compensation package, with preliminary approval from the overseers of the church's finances.
- ✓ The search team has communicated to the church what it has been doing and how this work benefits the process.

If you want to read more

- ➢ Pros and cons (from pastor and parish perspectives) of parsonages/manses/rectories vs. clergy finding their own housing, from the Episcopal Church:

http://www.episcopalchurch.org/files/CDO_Caring_Thru_Housing_May2009.pdf

Ways to broaden our imagination about a "good fit" minister

Truth time: when we imagine "our" minister, we all have expectations, whether we're aware of them or not. It is important for the search team to spend some time unearthing and examining these norms.

Discuss the following:

- When we think of our next minister, what do we think of? When we picture our next minister, whom do we picture? Be honest. Explore assumptions around experience, education, birthplace, personality type, age, gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and family situation.
- What causes these qualities to come to mind for us?
- How are these traits important to the role? Which traits are irrelevant?
- How will we keep the essentials in mind when we are reading profiles/resumes and interviewing candidates?

Take a walk around the church. Stop in key locations (e.g., sanctuary, office, meeting rooms, classrooms) and pray for the minister's leadership in each of these areas. Ask God to open your search team to the candidate who will best enable the congregation to live into its purpose.

Information to include in a congregational profile/ community snapshot

Many denominations require churches in ministerial searches to compose a congregational profile. If yours does not, here are some of the essential pieces of information to share with candidates.

- Overview of your church's history, including date of charter and milestones
- Mission and vision statements
- Theological commitments
- Signature ministries
- Nature of relationship with judicatory and denomination(s)
- Community partners
- Staff/lay leadership structure (including shape of leadership during this transition time and date of last settled minister's departure)
- Average attendance
- Annual budget total
- Position description
- Qualifications sought
- Salary range and benefits
- Contact information for search team
- Contact information for church references (2-4 people who are not members of your congregation but know it well)
- Physical and web addresses for congregation
- High-quality photographs of the physical plant and of people engaged in worship, ministry, and fellowship

In addition to learning about your congregation, candidates will want to find out about the surrounding area. When compiling a community snapshot, ask yourselves, "If I were considering a move to a new city or town, what would I like to know?" Here is a starter list of information points.

- Population and growth trends

- Average home price, particularly for the neighborhood around the church
- School information
- Primary businesses/industries
- Major annual events
- Unique aspects of the community and/or what the community is known for
- State/county rankings (e.g., "this county is ranked 5th out of 67 in the state for…")
- Public transportation availability

Make sure all materials sent to candidates are compelling, accurate, clear, informative, and free of grammatical and spelling errors. If you are unsure whether your materials meet these criteria, have an outsider who knows your church well read through them and give feedback.

Compensation considerations

Ministerial compensation is based on a number of factors. Education and experience are perhaps the most obvious, but they are by no means the only aspects. Here is essential information for putting together a fair salary package.

Know the cost of living in the area. If it is important to the congregation that the minister lives near the church, that minister must be able to afford rent or mortgage payments for dwellings in the area.

Find out judicatory minimums and/or guidelines. If your judicatory has set minimums, remember that they are just that: *minimums*.

Research what other ministers of similar skill and experience make in the area, both within the denomination and ecumenically. Make sure your church is on par with what others are paying.

Understand seminary debt. Seminary education is expensive, and many ministers spend much of their careers paying it off.

Research pieces of a ministerial compensation package. There is much more to a minister's salary than the take-home amount.

Offer as many benefits as possible. For example, cover participation in denominational health insurance plans. (Consider paying for family coverage!)

Be clear about cash salary vs. benefits. Don't lump everything together. Otherwise, the offer will look much higher than it really is after insurance, pension, etc. come out, and you'll have a stressed and resentful clergyperson.

Know what you can offer. Don't paint a rosier financial health picture than is realistic with the compensation offer. Be honest about what the general fund and reserves will allow in the short and long term.

Have some grasp of related tax issues for minister and church. Ministers are paid and taxed differently than most people.

Think creatively about benefits if you reach a monetary impasse. Offer more time away, for instance.

Consider what part-time ministry would look like, if needed. See "hacks for small churches" (p. 124).

Keep in mind that it is expensive to move. Moving companies, house closing expenses, ad valorem tax, and deposits are just some of the many front-end costs of going to a new place.

In coming up with an offer, ask what the church is saying about minister's worth with this package. And remember that an adequately-paid pastor is more able to focus on the work at hand.

Other financial matters to keep in mind:

- **Transferring benefits.** Ensure someone at the church knows how to transfer health insurance and pension payments so that the minister has no interruption of coverage.
- **Planning for cost of living (COLA) raises.** COLA increases are not based on merit but are intended to account for the rising costs of housing, gas, food, etc. due to inflation.

Extending the welcome:
inviting potential candidates to consider your open position

Overview of this search phase

For potential candidates to consider the joy of being your minister, they must know about your open position. In this phase the search team begins to share widely the congregation's story and invite candidates to imagine themselves within it. When this is done thoroughly and authentically, candidates will be eager to explore how their journeys might intersect with the church's.

Essential tasks & why they matter

- *Updating the church's web presence.* Most candidates will look at a church's website and/or social media before self-referring their profile/resume.
- *Identifying the appropriate pools in which to look for candidates that match your church's needs.* Outlets that appeal to candidates who don't share your congregation's lived values will not result in a long list of potential fits.
- *Getting the word out to these candidates.* For candidates to consider your position, they must first know about it.

Key reflection questions

- What does our church's web presence say about us?
- What means of getting the word out about our open position align with our congregation's identity? With the interests of the kinds of candidates we seek?
- Under what circumstances can/should we consider candidates outside our denomination? How do we reach out to those candidates?
- What does our pool of candidates tell us about our church? Our search process?

Best practices

- Clearly stating essential qualifications and means of applying
- Disseminating the position description widely
- Asking people who know your church well to suggest candidates

- Refraining from approaching candidates who have not applied *and* who have been at their current call for fewer than three years

Tools

- Possible pools for finding candidates (p. 83)
- Reasons why the interim minister should not be considered for the settled position, from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA): http://semnsynod.org/for-rostered-leaders/interims/interim-vs-candidate/

From the candidate's perspective

- Excitement and curiosity as the candidate mulls the position announcement, begins to research your congregation and community, and sends profile or resume.
- Confusion if conflicting, outdated, or minimal information is available on the position and your congregation.
- Inner turmoil if the candidate was not looking for a new position but a recommendation, phone call, or chance encounter prompted consideration of the opportunity.

Are we ready for the next phase?

✓ The congregation has updated its website so that information is accurate, helpful, and interesting.

✓ The search team has circulated the position announcement among all relevant outlets and resource people.

✓ The search team has communicated with all candidates who have sent materials to acknowledge receipt and inform about next steps and timeline.

✓ The search team has shared with the church what it has been doing and how this work benefits the process.

Possible ponds for finding candidates

When deciding where to advertise your open ministry position, consider the following.

- What outlets share our congregation's lived values?
- What do the kind of candidates we're looking for read and/or listen to?
- How do we encourage applications from candidates who would stretch our assumptions and imaginations?

If you don't know the answers to these questions, ask a judicatory or denominational leader or consult a minister who is very familiar with your church.

Once you're able to answer the above questions, start by advertising through denominational databases and referral systems. From there, move outward to other notification channels:

- Formal networks within the denomination
- Judicatory and denominational publications
- Judicatory and denominational leaders
- Ministry and theology magazines and newspapers
- Podcasts
- Websites and blogs
- Social media
- Seminary, theological school, and divinity school faculty and staff
- Well-networked clergy and lay leaders
- Parachurch and/or ecumenical organizations
- Word of mouth

Imagining new possibilities: discerning whom to interview

Overview of this search phase

With ministerial profiles and/or resumes in hand, the time has come for the search team members to name which candidates they would like to invite into conversation. Drawing upon the already-established process for moving forward, the search team sets up interviews with and offers more information to continuing candidates, thus fostering relationship and mutual investment.

Essential tasks & why they matter

- *Narrowing the pool of candidates to a manageable number*. A smaller number of candidates allows for deeper, more informative conversations with those candidates.
- *Communicating with candidates the search team chooses not to interview*. Informing candidates that they are no longer in consideration frees them up to make good choices about other search opportunities.
- *Sending additional information on the position, church, and community to candidates the search team plans to interview*. Transparency breeds trust.

Key reflection questions

- After reading the profiles and/or resumes, whom do we want to learn more about?
- What do we want to make sure continuing candidates understand about our congregation, the position, and/or the process?

Best practices

- Making clearance calls to ensure candidates are still available and interested
- Refraining from requesting additional information from candidates that is out of proportion with the search team's investment in them (e.g., multi-page questionnaires)

- Naming the difference between a candidate that would stretch the congregation and one that might break it

Tools

- Eliminating gender bias in the evaluation process (geared for congregations who have called a female minister, but helpful for search as well), from the Lewis Center for Church Leadership: https://www.churchleadership.com/to-the-point/to-the-point-suggestions-for-churches-with-a-clergywoman/

From the candidate's perspective

- Anxiety and/or anticipation in the wait to hear if the candidate will be invited to meet with the search team by phone or internet or in person.
- Aggravation if the search team asks for additional materials that will be time-intensive to write or gather without any indication of team's level of investment.
- Frustration if references get the opportunity to talk with the search team before the candidate.

Are we ready for the next phase?

- ✓ The search team has set up interviews with candidates it wants to know more about.
- ✓ The search team has sent additional information to these candidates about the congregation, position, and preparation requested for interviews.
- ✓ The search team has communicated with all other candidates to release them from the process.
- ✓ The search team has updated the congregation on the search's progress.

Opening to one another: conducting initial interviews

Overview of this search phase

In this phase the process moves from reading papers to live interaction. The search team delves deeper into the gifts and passions of candidates, allowing these ministers to show where they meet and challenge the team's criteria and assumptions. The candidates explore the position and the context with their questions and their observations of the search team's dynamics. The search team and candidates then decide whether to pursue further conversation with one another or to part ways graciously.

Essential tasks & why they matter

- *Designing interview goals, format, and questions.* A solid interview plan allows the search team to deepen trust with candidates and glean the most relevant interview responses.
- *Narrowing the pool of candidates.* The search team must choose which candidates to pursue further so that both parties can be increasingly frank about what a partnership might look like.
- *Communicating with candidates at the close of or soon after interviews about their status and next steps.* Telling candidates where they stand allows them to make informed choices about this and other search opportunities.

Key reflection questions

- How can we create means of knowing and being known by the candidates?
- When interacting with candidates, how do we distinguish between charisma and competence?
- What questions from candidates should we anticipate?

Best practices

- Stepping into the candidates' shoes as you plan for interviews, taking into account such considerations as time zone differences and the candidates' need for space to ask their own questions
- Allowing enough time between interviews and not scheduling too many conversations for the same day so that all candidates get the search team's full attention
- Doing a technology trial run before the first interview
- Telling congregational narratives and eliciting relevant candidate stories
- Making individual notes after each interview so that key insights and impressions aren't forgotten
- Reserving judgment on candidates until all interviews for that round have been completed
- Scheduling additional rounds of phone and/or internet interviews as needed
- Defining the silences for candidates in between contacts
- Naming and exploring all reservations about each candidate
- Personalizing correspondence with interviewees that won't be continuing in the process

Tools

- Technology options for interviews (p. 89)
- Interview planning worksheet (p. 91)
- Crafting a good interview question (p. 93)
- Sample interview questions (p. 95)

From the candidate's perspective

- Excitement about the opportunity to explore the possibility of ministry in your context, may already be researching housing, schools (if applicable), and professional opportunities for significant other (if applicable).
- Disappointment if the interview questions focus on areas that do not directly relate to past and potential performance in ministry.

- Confusion if the candidate senses that the search team is not being up front about the congregation's gifts and challenges.
- Anxiety (which could quickly turn into frustration) if the process and timeline beyond the interview are unclear.
- Discouragement (which could turn into questioning call to ministry) if there is radio silence after interview.
- Deepening sense of betraying current ministry context as the process progresses.
- Uncertainty if the candidate is in a later stage of the search with another church. (Stay in that process? End it for what might unfold with your congregation?)

Are we ready for the next phase?

- ✓ The search team has conducted as many rounds of phone and/or internet interviews as needed to name which candidate(s) it wants to invite for in-person interview(s).
- ✓ The search team has communicated with all other candidates to release them from the process.
- ✓ The search team has updated the congregation on the search's progress.

Technology options for interviews

There are many ways for search teams in the early stages of candidate engagement to interview ministers. Here are just a few. (Note that this page is merely informational. Searching for the Called does not endorse any of these services.)

Audio calls:

Speaker phone – Almost all phones (mobile and landline) have a speaker button so that multiple people can talk and listen. This option should only be considered if your search team is small and everyone can gather closely around the phone. Even then, it's important for everyone to speak clearly and to identify themselves when talking.

Video call options include but are not limited to:

Zoom – Zoom offers a free plan for up to 100 participants, though group meetings are limited to 40 minutes. (There is a $15/month plan that removes this time restriction.) Both plans allow up to 25 video feeds per screen with active speaker view, offer chat and recording options, and feature desktop sharing if the search team and/or candidate would like to present a website or file.

Google Hangouts – This platform is free for users with Google-based email accounts. Up to 10 participants can video chat, and screen sharing is available. One of the upsides to this platform is the option to move relatively seamlessly between devices (e.g., tablet, phone, computer) during a call.

Skype – Most people may be more familiar with one-on-one uses of Skype, but Skype can also be used for group calls. Group calls can include up to 25 people, though the number of video feeds will vary based on the participants' devices. (Participants will all need Skype handles to make the call free and to allow everyone to see the video.) Screen sharing is available. Skype also offers a more professional platform called Meetings, which can accommodate up to 10 participants for the free trial period and offers additional presentation options such as a whiteboard.

Always try out technology platforms in advance of using them in interviews.

Note that with video calls, the entire search team can participate in a single video feed, or each person can call in from a unique phone number/handle so that every individual has a video feed.

Pros for search team using a single video feed:

- Calling in is simpler for the search team.
- The whole search team can be in the same room.

Cons for search team using a single video feed:

- It's difficult to position the webcam so that the candidate can see all search team members well.
- Depending on the placement of the microphone, it might be difficult for the candidate to hear all the search team members well.

Pros for search team using multiple video feeds:

- Candidate can see and hear each search team member better.
- If there is a need for screen sharing, each search team member can see the screen better.
- Search team could potentially conduct interviews with team members in different locations, making it easier to find interview times that work for everyone.
- Each video feed would have the person's name on it, making it easier for the candidate to learn and remember search team members' names.

Cons for search team using multiple video feeds:

- The search team could likely not all be in the same room due to interference and noise overlap.
- Each search team member would need a smartphone or computer with webcam to be able to participate.

Interview planning worksheet

It's essential to come into candidate interviews with a solid plan. That ensures the search team and the candidates get the information they need and that both parties put their best feet forward.

In advance of the interview

- Clearly communicate with candidate about interview day, time (taking time zone differences into account), and means.
- Establish goals for the interview.
- Outline questions that will contribute to meeting these goals and decide who will ask what.
  - Discuss what the search team is trying to accomplish with each question.
  - Consider whether the search team would ask this kind of question of every candidate. (If not, don't ask it!)
- Designate a facilitator who will guide the conversation and manage the time.
- Practice interviewing.
  - Invite a local minister to role play the interviewee and give feedback to the search team.
- Ensure the search team knows how to work the equipment/software/app to be used (if applicable).

On the day of the interview

- Choose an interview space conducive to comfort and confidentiality (even if using phone or internet for the interview).
- Set up the space for hospitality.
- Make sure the technology is working properly.
- Get centered individually and collectively.
- Review the candidate's materials.
- Make sure each search team member has a copy and a good grasp of the interview plan.

In the interview

- Warmly welcome the candidate.
- Explain the interview format and goals to the candidate.
- Start with the lowest-risk questions and move to more involved queries.
- Leave ample time for the candidate to ask questions.
- Provide information on the next steps in process and a timetable for contact.

After the interview

- Spend time individually recording thoughts immediately after the interview.
- Discuss candidates as a group after <u>all</u> interviews for that round have been completed.
    - What excites us about each candidate?
    - What questions do we have about each candidate?
    - How does each candidate match the criteria we named for a minister who would lead us toward God's vision for our church?
    - How does each candidate challenge us?
    - In what areas does each candidate have the necessary skills to lead our church, even if the candidate does not yet have the experience?
        - How essential is prior experience, and in what ways might our church be able to provide that experience?
    - What do our heads, hearts, and guts tell us about each candidate?
    - Considering all of these factors, with which candidates do we want to continue conversation?

Crafting a good interview question

Well-crafted interview questions allow search teams to ascertain the most helpful information. Here are some of the characteristics of powerful questions.

- Aimed at what *this* search team in *this* context needs to know vs. boilerplate queries
- Open-ended vs. yes/no
- Relevant to ministry vs. simply to satisfy curiosity
- Focused on what candidate has done vs. focused on hypotheticals
- Questions search team does not know the answers to vs. leading questions
- Clarifying as needed vs. assuming
- Concentrated on how candidate would *approach* a hot-button issue pastorally vs. concentrated on what the candidate *believes* about the hot-button issue
- Aiming to connect vs. aiming to interrogate
- What, when, how (invitational questions) vs. why (questions that put candidates on defense)

Questions should be consistent across all interviews – particularly in the early stages – except for a few questions tailored to the specifics of candidates' resumes or profiles. Those more tailored questions might probe such matters as resume gaps, a pattern of short tenures, or the lack of a logical professional progression.

Just as there are questions that promote healthy dialogue during interviews, some types of queries understandably put interviewees in a defensive posture:

- Questions that fish for a buzzword
- Litmus tests
- Vague questions
- Questions based on gender, age, race, family status, health, ability, sexuality, etc.
- Questions that invite rehearsed responses

When the search team is unsure about asking a particular question, consider:

- What do we hope to glean by asking this question?
- How would I feel if I were asked this question?

Sample interview questions

Below are examples of questions that can open up focused dialogue with candidates. This list is meant to give search teams a feel for what a powerful question looks like, not merely to provide an interview outline to copy and paste. Your context, after all, is unique, and your questions should be tailored accordingly.

- What life experiences have most shaped who you are as a person and pastor?
- How do you think this position would allow you to live into your call to ministry?
- How have your education and experiences (including non-ministry ones) prepared you for this ministry opportunity?
- What do you understand this congregation's strengths to be? How do your strengths align with and/or complement those of our church?
- What pieces of ministry bring you the most joy? How do you approach the aspects that do not align with your strengths and gifts?
- Tell us about a time you led change. What prompted the change? What was your role in the situation? How did you involve others? What were the outcomes?
- What kinds of people are challenging for you to work with? How have you gone about working with them in the past?
- Imagine you are fully embodying your call to ministry. What kind of environment has enabled you to do so?
- Tell us about a time you had to improvise. What was the situation? How did you adjust midstream? What were the outcomes?
- What's the most difficult decision you've ever had to make? How did you go about it?
- Here's where we stand as a congregation on [hot-button political/theological issue]. How would you engage with a parishioner who came to you with a question or problem related to this issue?
- Talk about seasons in your professional life when you were not in congregational ministry. What were the reasons? What did you gain from those seasons?
- What does your ideal weekly schedule look like?
- Beyond the congregation, where do you find support for your ministry?

- Beyond the world of ministry, what do you like to learn about and/or keep current on? How do you do so?
- What, if anything, might keep you from fully living into the role of minister in our context?

Don’t hesitate to follow up on candidate responses as needed or to ask a candidate to dream with your search team about possibilities for mutual ministry.

Deepening the dialogue: interacting in person with candidates

Overview of this search phase

In this phase the search team is considering what it would look like for each of the remaining candidates to be the church's minister. At the same time, the candidates are imagining what it would be like to work and live in your congregation and community. By the end of this phase the search team will be ready to recommend the candidate whose abilities align most closely with the church's leadership needs for its God-given direction.

Essential tasks & why they matter

- *Interacting in person with and interviewing candidates at a more thorough level.* Much can be gleaned through non-verbal communication and by meeting with candidates in context that cannot be learned otherwise.
- *Communicating with candidates at the close of or soon after visits about status and next steps.* This information allows candidates to make informed choices about this and other search opportunities. It also permits the candidate(s) still under consideration to begin exploring the logistics of a potential move.
- *Doing due diligence with candidates.* Congregations can decrease the potential of legal liability and the pain and expense of a poor fit by running thorough background checks and holding in-depth conversations with references.

Key reflection questions

- How should we include a candidate's family (if applicable) in the interview process?
- In what situations do we want to observe a candidate's leadership and relationship-building skills?
- What would our church look like with each candidate's leadership?
- What do we need to be really honest with candidates about?
- How do we make best use of references, background checks, and web searches?

Best practices

- Considering a neutral site visit
- Designing a site visit that attends to a candidate's family needs (if applicable) and leaves space for a candidate to rest and explore the community
- Paying travel expenses up front as much as possible instead of reimbursing
- Contacting references (first letting candidates know that you are doing so) and running background checks
- Giving the church's references to candidates

Tools

- Site visit considerations: going to the candidate (p. 100)
- Site visit considerations: candidate comes to neutral location (p. 101)
- Site visit considerations: candidate comes to church (p. 103)
- Doing due diligence with candidates (p. 105)

From the candidate's perspective

- Hope about the deepening of relationships and possibilities with your congregation.
- Hesitancy to name considerations that the candidate and family (if applicable) need in an on-site visit.
- Conflict about having to give limited or less than forthright information to current ministry setting when coming for a site visit.
- Risk to current position if that ministry setting finds out about the candidate's search.

Are we ready for the next phase?

- ✓ The search team and candidates have asked questions of each other that will enable the parties to determine fit.
- ✓ The search team has called references, run background checks, and followed up on any questions raised by this due diligence.

- ✓ The search team has taken care of any remaining expenses incurred by candidates on site visits.
- ✓ The search team has named the candidate of choice and is prepared to present the candidate to the confirming body.
- ✓ The search team has notified other candidates who came for on-site visits that a candidate of choice will be presented to the congregation.

Site visit considerations: going to the candidate

Visits to a candidate's ministry setting must be planned and executed with great care. If the candidate's congregation detects a search team's presence, the visit can endanger the candidate's current position. Consider these questions:

- What does the search team hope to gain from visiting the candidate in context?
    - How will the search team meet these goals?
    - Are there other options for arriving at these same outcomes?
- How will the search team compare apples to apples if one of its candidates is not currently serving in a congregational setting?
- What dates are convenient on the candidate's end for this visit?
- What concerns does the candidate have about the search team's visit? How might those be mitigated?
- What does the candidate hope to show the search team in the course of the visit? How might the candidate and the search team work together to make that happen?
- Who specifically from the search team needs to make the visit? How will this person/these people remain unobtrusive?
- What funds are available to the search team for travel? How might those funds be used most wisely?

Site visit considerations: candidate comes to neutral location

A neutral pulpit allows search teams to see a candidate in action without causing disruption in the candidate's ministry setting and without introducing multiple finalists to the searching congregation. Here are the factors to mull when planning a neutral pulpit:

- When should this visit take place?
    - Schedule far enough out so that the candidate can make plans to be away from current ministry setting.
    - Be sensitive to liturgical seasons and special events in the candidate's current setting.
    - Be sensitive to liturgical seasons and special events at the neutral site.
- Where should this visit take place?
    - Depending on judicatory protocols, contact either the judicatory leader to inquire about a neutral location or a clergyperson who might be willing to host the neutral pulpit. The search team should communicate to the point of contact what it hopes to see the candidate do.
- What interaction does the search team want with the candidate beyond worship?
    - Will there be lunch with the search team? A formal interview time?
- What are the hopes and/or expectations of the candidate and the search team regarding the candidate's family's (if applicable) participation in the visit?
    - Be clear with the candidate if family is encouraged to come on the visit.
    - Inquire about the availability of childcare at the neutral location if the candidate has need.
- What should the schedule for the visit be?
    - What does the candidate hope to learn from the visit?
    - What does the search team hope to learn from the candidate?
    - What should the candidate expect at the neutral pulpit and any accompanying events?
        - Who will be present?
        - What is the expected dress?

        - What does the candidate need to prepare?
    - How might the presence of the candidate's family impact the schedule?
- Where will the candidate (and family, if applicable) stay?
    - Best practice: Arrange for a hotel room. Even extroverts will need time during which they don't feel the need to be "on."
    - Private space is especially important if the candidate will be bringing family on the visit.
- How will visit expenses be handled?
    - Be clear about visit-related money matters.
    - Best practices: Pay up front for lodging, airfare, rental car, and entertainment/meals with the search team. Reimburse promptly for mileage and meals en route.
- What are tangible ways the search team can extend hospitality to the candidate?
    - Give (or have waiting in the hotel room) a small token of welcome.
        - Water bottles
        - Coffee/tea packets
        - Sweet treats and/or healthy snacks
        - Small goods unique to the community
        - Information about the community
    - If candidate is bringing child(ren), include child-geared tokens of welcome.

Site visit considerations: candidate comes to search team

It is common practice for a candidate to visit the search team's congregation in the final stage(s) of a search. This in-context interaction allows the candidate to get a feel for the church and to ask questions based on what the candidate observes. Consider the following when planning these visits:

- When should this visit take place?
    - Schedule far enough out so that the candidate can make plans to be away from current ministry setting.
    - Be sensitive to liturgical seasons and to special events in the candidate's current setting.
    - Be aware of major events in your own congregation, thinking through whether it would be enlightening or distracting to have a candidate visit during a special event.
- Where should this visit take place?
    - Though the candidate needs to tour the physical plant at some point, in-home conversations add layers of hospitality and confidentiality.
- What are the hopes and/or expectations of the candidate and the search team regarding the candidate's family's (if applicable) participation in the visit?
    - Be clear with the candidate if family is encouraged to come on the visit.
    - Be clear with the candidate about what conversations and events the spouse and/or child(ren) will be encouraged to attend.
    - Reassure the candidate that family is *not* being interviewed or evaluated.
    - Best practices:
        - For female candidates with small children, be sensitive to nursing needs
            - Schedule around feedings
            - Provide a private space for feedings
        - Offer experienced childcare for events as needed

- What should the schedule for the visit be?
    - What does the candidate hope to take away from the visit? Whom does the candidate hope to meet?
    - What does the search team hope to show and learn from the candidate? Whom does the search team want the candidate to meet?
    - What kind of transition time does the candidate need?
        - Recovering from travel
        - Moving between scheduled events
    - What should the candidate expect at each event or conversation?
        - Who will be present?
        - What is the expected dress?
        - What does the candidate need to prepare or bring?
    - How might the presence of the candidate's family impact the schedule?
- Where will the candidate (and family, if applicable) stay?
    - Best practice: Arrange for a hotel room. Even extroverts will need time during which they don't feel the need to be "on."
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Doing due diligence with candidates

It is essential to gather all available information about candidates before extending (or at least finalizing) a call. Failure to do so puts the congregation at risk of litigation and members in danger of spiritual, emotional, and/or physical harm. Candidates with nothing to hide *expect* that churches will call references, utilize search engines, and run background checks.

Reference checks

- When should a search team contact a candidate's references?
  - What are the search team's goals in contacting references?
  - Given those goals, when is the best time to contact references?
  - What are the downsides of calling at the beginning of the process? At the end?
- What should the search team ask a candidate's references?
  - What does the search team need to know or confirm?
  - Refer to tips on crafting good interview questions (p. 90).
    - Focus on specifics, past performance
    - Ask for stories
    - Clarify as needed
  - Look for – and follow up on – what is not being said as much as what is being said.
- How should the search team contact references?
  - Live voice interactions will give the search team the most information. Tone, pauses, and other non-verbal cues say a lot. Follow-up is easier. And references will generally be willing to say more than they are willing to write.

Internet searches

- Read through the entirety of the candidate's website or blog, if applicable.
- Enter the candidate's name in your favorite search engine. See what pops up.
- Look up the candidate on social media.

Background checks

- Some free checks are available through most states, but they are limited in what they information they can access.
- Many denominations and/or judicatories recommend or require a particular background check service. If yours does not, one option is ProtectMyMinistry.com.
- Thorough background checks include searches of criminal and driving records and sex offender registries, and they utilize county, state, and national databases.
- Some churches and/or judicatories require credit checks to guard against financial malfeasance.
- Consider what the line is for your congregation between protecting your church and being overly invasive.

What if there's a red flag?

Ask rather than make assumptions! There might be context that helps reframe the situation, and/or there might have been a misstep in the candidate's past that the candidate has worked hard to remedy (and possibly has learned much from). If the matter is not explained satisfactorily, contact the church's insurance agent or attorney for guidance.

Sharing the excitement: presenting the candidate of choice

Note: Denominational/congregational processes have differing guidelines regarding how many candidates to present to a congregation and/or its leaders. Some say only one, while others leave the option for multiple candidates.

Overview of this search phase

Having gathered information from a variety of sources and listened for God's guidance through it, the search team is ready to present its candidate of choice to the body (e.g., governing board of the church, congregation as a whole, judicatory) that extends the call. When the search team sets up the candidate of choice to make the best possible first impression, the church is eager to welcome the candidate, paving the way for a fast start in the new position.

Essential tasks & why they matter

- *Understanding the process for extending a call, then communicating this information to the candidate of choice.* Confusion around protocols can quickly derail the end of the search process and bring down the level of trust between the judicatory, congregation, search team, and candidate of choice.
- *Presenting the candidate of choice to the confirming body in a compelling way.* Those beyond the search team have not been privy to the interactions the team has had with the candidate, the information the team has gathered from other sources, and the inner workings of the team's discernment process.
- *Allowing the candidate of choice to demonstrate pastoral leadership.* For those beyond the search team to catch the team's enthusiasm, it is as essential to show as it is to tell why this candidate is the right one for the church.

Key reflection questions

- In our denominational/congregational protocols, who has a say in whether to extend a call to the candidate of choice? How does this body come to agreement?

- How can we help our candidate of choice begin to be liked, known, and trusted by the congregation and/or leaders?
- How do we prepare the congregation and/or leaders to extend hospitality to the candidate of choice?

Best practices

- Being clear with the candidate of choice about plans and expectations regarding trial sermon, worship leadership, planned interactions with church members, etc., as applicable
- Giving the candidate of choice access to church leaders during candidating visit
- Urging the congregation/leaders to respect the candidate's confidentiality needs, including refraining from posting on social media or using gender-specific pronouns when speaking with others

Tools

- Considerations regarding the presentation of multiple candidates (p. 109)

From the candidate's perspective

- Excitement as the potential of mutual ministry with your church increases.
- Nervousness about putting best foot forward with your congregation's leaders and/or members.
- Uncertainty about the possibility of uprooting self and loved ones from church, jobs, community, schools, friends.

Are we ready for the next phase?

- ✓ The church is prepared to extend a call to the candidate of choice.
- ✓ The church has taken care of any remaining expenses incurred by the candidate during the candidating visit.

Considerations regarding the presentation of multiple candidates to the congregation/leaders

Some denominations expressly forbid the practice of introducing more than one candidate to the church leadership team and/or congregation as a whole. Other denominations place fewer (or no) restrictions on this practice. When considering how many candidates to allow the church access to, think through the following:

- Who is sponsoring the search?
    - To whom does search team answer – church leadership team, congregation as a whole, judicatory, or none of the above?
    - What level of input does this body expect or require on the selection of the minister?
- Since the most common best practice is to introduce only one candidate, what would be the search team's motivation for presenting more than one candidate?
    - Positive: The search team wants the congregation/leaders to have greater ownership of the outcome in order to deepen investment in the called minister.
    - Negative: The search team doesn't want to be held responsible if the called minister is not a good fit.
- What is the level of trust between the search team and the congregation/leaders?
    - If there was great intentionality around gleaning information from the whole congregation early in the process and the trust level is high, congregation/leaders will want and need less input later in the process and will have fewer questions about the outcomes.
- How much information can the search team transfer to the congregation/leaders?
    - What are the limits of confidentiality? Do the limits allow sharing enough information for the congregation/leaders to make an informed choice?
- How has the congregation been discerning in parallel with the search team?
    - To what extent has the congregation/leadership been mirroring the search team's spiritual disciplines? What is the impact on their ability to discern (rather than decide on) the next minister?

- What is the most hospitable option for the candidates?
    - Can the search team present more than one candidate without the finalists feeling like they are in a horse race or beauty pageant?
- What are the possible long-term effects of presenting multiple candidates?
    - Some congregants/leaders may come develop a sense of loyalty to the candidate who is not called. Their disappointment could manifest in unhelpful ways in the short and long term.

Note that if the search team's goal in introducing multiple candidates is unanimity in the congregation, that outcome is unlikely. It is rare that a candidate generates excitement in 100% of the congregation.

If the search team senses the need to see more than one candidate in action, other options include visiting candidates in their contexts or setting up neutral pulpit preaching opportunities.

Co-creating a partnership: extending the call

Overview of this search phase

In extending a call to be the minister, the congregation makes an offer not just of relationship but of true partnership. In this phase, the details of the covenant are finalized in ways that free the minister and the congregation to live toward the vision for the church. Done well, the congregation and minister emerge from this discussion feeling energized and cared for.

Essential tasks & why they matter

- *Composing a letter of covenant.* A covenant formalizes the responsibilities minister and church have to one another. It clarifies expectations on all sides and acts as a touchstone when there is confusion or difficulty in the pastor-parish relationship.
- *Negotiating compensation.* A package that honors the gifts, experience, responsibilities, and needs of the minister clears the way for focus on the ministry at hand.
- *Setting a start date.* A firm date allows the called minister to say proper goodbyes and prepare for a move and gives the calling congregation a timetable for welcoming the new minister properly.
- *Saying goodbye to interim minister (if applicable).* The interim minister has walked with the congregation through a short but significant season of challenge and opportunity.

Key reflection questions

- What expectations have yet to be named by the church, new minister, and/or judicatory?
- What additional information does the minister need from us in order to discern the fit?

- How can we approach compensation conversations from a framework of abundance rather than scarcity?

Best practices

- Ensuring the compensation offer is authorized by necessary parties before making it
- Being flexible with minister about start date
- Informing other candidates who made on-site visits about the conclusion of the process
- Staying in contact with called minister in the time leading up to arrival
- Celebrating the close of a fruitful search process and transition season
- Disposing properly of sensitive search materials
- Celebrating/thanking the interim minister (if applicable) for his/her service

Tools

- Minister-ministry setting covenant checklist (p. 114)

From the candidate's perspective

- Excitement about having been extended a call to your church.
- Grief about change, no matter how exciting.
- In addition to a simple yes or no, weighing various factors around the compensation offer:
    - Would I be making what I am worth? Would I be able to afford living in this area? If not, what are the reasons the offer is low?
    - Are the benefits commensurate with my level of responsibility and experience? Would they allow me ample opportunities for self-care and personal and professional growth?
- Encouragement when questions and requests about the terms of call are met with openness and flexibility, hesitancy when they are not.

- Confusion and disappointment for candidates not chosen, particularly those who are given no feedback and/or find out someone else was called from another source.

Are we ready for the next phase?

- ✓ The governing body, congregation, judicatory (if applicable), and minister are clear about and have agreed on terms of call, including responsibilities, compensation, and start date.
- ✓ The covenant between minister and congregation has been drafted, agreed upon, and signed by all involved parties.
- ✓ The search team has notified other candidates who came for on-site visits that a call has been extended and accepted.

Minister-ministry setting covenant checklist

The idea of covenanting (as opposed to contracting) with a minister might be new to your congregation. Covenants include much of the same information as contracts, but the framework is one of mutual support and accountability rather than the more one-way employer-employee relationship. Here are the basic elements.

- Language that emphasizes the mutuality of the relationship (responsibilities of each party to the other and ways each party will care for the other, including during conflict)
- Position title and basic expectations
- Start date
- End date (if a time-bound position)
- Compensation (all pieces)
- Titles of supervisor and/or supervisees (if applicable)
- Any other details that need to be agreed upon and officially recorded up front
- Mechanisms for regular feedforward (evaluation): when, and by whom?
- Regular intervals at which the covenant will be revisited and revised as necessary by clergy and congregation
- Protocol for the parting of ways when the time comes

Signatures (minister, usually governing body chair, possibly judicatory leader)

Embracing the new: resourcing the minister for a good start

Overview of this search phase

The search process does not end with the extension of a call and finalization of a covenant, because the work of helping the new minister transition in is just beginning. In this phase the search team ensures that church members claim responsibility for providing the incoming minister (and family, if applicable) with essential information and assistance. This attention to detail allows the minister to focus more quickly and fully on pastoral tasks and paves the way for a smooth start.

Essential tasks & why they matter

- *Helping congregation and staff know what to expect in the coming days, including timeline for minister's arrival and specifics of the minister's position description*. Information helps temper anxiety, and it keeps expectations properly placed.
- *Gathering essential information about church and community to give to minister*. The new minister can get off to a faster, more focused start if provided with details about traditions, influencers, church procedures, and community events and services.
- *Planning for the initial welcome and for a later installation service.* Solid, long-lasting relationships begin with warm welcomes.

Key reflection questions

- What does the minister need from us in the short and long term to be fruitful?
- What are our congregation's gifts of hospitality, and how might we creatively leverage them to welcome our new minister?
- What stresses do we anticipate for our minister's family (if applicable)? How might we help mitigate those?
- In what ways might we formally acknowledge - and create ownership around - the covenantal nature of the pastor-parish relationship?

Best practices

- Stoking excitement about the new minister's arrival
- Being an advocate for the new minister
- Dialing back expectations and ramping up welcome of minister's family (if applicable)
- Setting up or encouraging the minister to set up a pastoral support team
- Building in and encouraging support for the new minister from beyond the congregation
- Ensuring strong boundaries for the previous minister and advertising the reasons for them

Tools

- Roles/best practices for various parties involved in helping the minister get off to a strong start, from the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ): http://disciples.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Beginning_A_Pastoral_Ministry.pdf
- Ideas for welcoming the new minister (p. 118)
- Information to give to the new minister (p. 119)

From the candidate's perspective

- Relief that the search process has come to a close.
- Exhilaration about endless possibilities and desire for a fast start.
- Continued grief about what the minister left behind.
- Concerns for family (if applicable): big changes and worries about the fishbowl.
- Curiosity about people and systems, uncertainty about what the landmines are.
- Insecurity about others' unstated expectations of the minister.

Are we ready for the next phase?

✓ The new minister (and family, if applicable) is settled into the church and community.

- ✓ The minister has a pastoral support team to turn to for honest feedback and encouragement.
- ✓ The congregation members have embraced the minister (and family, if applicable) as their own.
- ✓ There is good, ongoing communication flow between minister and congregation about expectations of one another.

If you want to read more

- *Entering Wonderland: A Toolkit for Pastors New to a Church* *by* Robert A. Harris
- ➢ *The SPEED of Trust: The One Thing that Changes Everything* by Stephen M. R. Covey
- ➢ *Understanding Your Congregation as a System: Congregational Systems Inventory* by George Parsons and Speed Leas
- ➢ *Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations* by Gil Rendle and Alice Mann

Ideas for welcoming the new minister

Congratulations! The fruits of the discernment process are beginning to sprout. Continue to nurture them through hospitality to the new minister (and family, if applicable). Here are a few ideas for showing care.

Welcome cards, emails, and/or texts. Prior to the minister's arrival, send along words of greeting. Not only will the minister feel loved, your messages will allow the minister to begin getting to know names and stories.

Pounding. Stock the minister's pantry with staples.

Gifts that represent the community. Help the minister assimilate by sharing products with local flair.

Stole or chalice and paten made by members of the congregation. Give a heartfelt, handmade item that can be used in worship.

Meal train. Homecooked meals – especially when the dishes are yet to be unpacked – are great ways to show care. (Be sure to ask about dietary constraints!)

Comfort items for small children (if applicable). Moving is hard for people of any age, but especially for children. Let the minister's kids know that they are seen and loved.

Prayers. Pray for the minister to settle in well, for rest, for wisdom, and for clergy-congregation bonding.

Community information. Make the minister's transition easier by providing essential details about schools, services, and community events.

Reception. Allow the minister (and family, if applicable) to interact informally with the congregation over cake and punch on the first Sunday.

Installation. Plan a worship service to celebrate the new clergy-congregation partnership. (The shape and timing of this service vary by congregation/judicatory/denomination.) Invite the judicatory and partner churches and organizations to participate.

Information to give to the new minister

The minister will need help acclimating to the new church environment. The following information will allow the minister to get off to the fastest possible start.

- Most recent church directory
- Staff list and position descriptions
- Pastoral care list
    - Homebound
    - Critically ill
    - Anniversaries of deaths
- Church calendar
- Budget for the past three years
- Constitution and by-laws
- Policies
    - Personnel manual
    - Child protection policy
    - Clergy sexual abuse policy
- Locations of essential church information
    - Blueprints
    - Deed
    - Vendor list (e.g., exterminator, plumber, electrician)
    - Insurance policy and contact information for agent
    - Attorney contact information
- Committee information
    - Chair
    - Chair's contact information
    - Meeting schedule and location
    - Any additional information that is available, such as recent meeting notes or description of the committee's purpose
- Special events and traditions
    - When they occur

    - Contact person
    - Any additional information that is available, such as the history of the event or tradition
- Locations of hospitals and other key places
- Names and contact information for partner churches and organizations
- Judicatory calendar
- Notes left by previous or interim minister (if applicable)

Additional resources

Troubleshooting

While ministerial transitions present opportunities, they can also take their toll. Here are some thoughts around issues that commonly come up in interim periods:

- **The church is in conflict about who it is/is becoming.** This is a signal to slow down. Any settled minister called during a period of active conflict will likely end up becoming an *unintentional* interim minister. If your congregation is trying to manage the transition without outside help, now is the time to call in the eyes and ears of someone who is not emotionally invested. Contact your judicatory or denomination for help, covenant with an intentional interim minister, or seek out a coach or consultant. The cost in time and dollars in the short run will be far less than the financial, emotional, and spiritual expense of a short tenure and resulting search.
- **There is secrecy around the reason for the last minister's departure.** This is a really tricky situation, especially if people involved in the secret remain in the congregation. Seek guidance from your judicatory or denomination about how to proceed. An invaluable resource for lay leaders about the differences between secrecy and confidentiality is *Healthy Disclosure: Solving Communication Quandaries in Congregations* *by* Kibbie Simmons Ruth and Karen A. McClintock.
- **The judicatory is not offering the church and/or search team the help it needs.** Contact other current or former search team chairs in your judicatory and pool your knowledge and resources. Ask clergy in your judicatory who have a particularly good relationship with their congregations about what their search team did well. Conduct an internet search for resources. Contact a coach or consultant about their services.
- **Some search team and/or church members think the search team is wasting time with "soft" work (e.g., trust-building and discernment).** Trust – the kind that creates space for honesty and vulnerability, not just the kind that allows us to predict the behaviors of others – is the foundation for collaboration. Trust allows team members to feel comfortable putting all ideas and concerns on the table, even when there is disagreement. Trust seeds a shared vision and encourages team members to hold one another accountable for working

toward that vision. Without trust, the search "team" is actually a collection of individuals, not an entity that has fully put egos and agendas aside for the good of the search. While trust is the glue among humans, faith is the bond between people and God. In establishing disciplines that allow the team to listen for the movements of the Holy Spirit, the team is saying that it trusts God wants good for their congregation. Without this intentionality around discernment, the search process will likely end in a purely intellectual decision rather than a faithful response to God's guidance.

- **The pool of candidates is too small.** Here there are a few ways to proceed:
    - *Expand and re-cast your search net.* Timing is important; people who weren't searching when you originally put the word out might be looking now. Work your contacts, because word-of-mouth advertising is as important as utilizing official denominational channels.
    - *Re-consider the criteria for a good fit as well as the compensation range.* Staying true to the direction the congregation has discerned is crucial, but sometimes the stated skills and experience and the unspoken qualifications sought in a minister are out of sync with the actual needs of the church. Similarly, the proposed pay range can be out of step with the level of responsibility sought in the new minister.
    - *Ponder your congregation's reputation.* Clergy talk with one another about which congregations are good to partner with and which ones are not. If your church has a high rate of ministerial turnover, do some intensive self-examination around why that is and work toward changes as needed. Then communicate the courageous, vulnerable work you've done regarding these changes far and wide.
- **The pool of candidates is too big.** If all of your candidates meet your baseline criteria for a good-fit minister, consider increasing the requisite qualifications. In addition or alternatively, create a means for quickly identifying the heart of a ministerial profile or resume. For example, ask candidates to write or record a story about a time when the candidate has most fully lived into God's call.

- **The church cannot offer compensation commensurate with the skill and experience level it wants in a minister.** Mull the following:
  - See point # 2 under "The pool of candidates is too small" (p. 119) as well as the section on hacks for small churches (p. 124).
  - Consider what contribution your congregation could make to the wider Church by serving as a training ground for new ministers. Seminary students and recent graduates need spiritually mature, nurturing congregations to try out their new knowledge and skills and to develop their pastoral identities. Without the guidance, accountability, and love of these congregations, ministers struggle to live fully into their calling.
- **The search team is exhausted.** Ministerial searches are not for the faint of heart! They are long, sometimes difficult processes. Be sure to celebrate what the team has learned and accomplished to this point. Take time to breathe and to pray, sharing honestly with and listening for a response from God. Assess where the team is in the process. Is the home stretch in sight, or is the team having to go back to the drawing board? If it's the former, discuss what could re-energize the team. If it's the latter, consider whether the current search team members have the time and the will to keep serving. Remember that it is better to take the necessary time – which sometimes means a complete search reboot – than to make a hasty (which often translates to costly) decision.
- **There is conflict within the search team.** Conflict itself is value-neutral; it is simply a difference of opinion. If the team has laid a solid foundation of trust, then lean into established spiritual disciplines and check out the "questions to break open stuckness or tension" section (p. 16). If the team is experiencing the kind of conflict that results in team members either going into "my way or the highway" mode or emotionally withdrawing from the team, it's time to loop back around to trust-building exercises (p. 47). If the discussion points and exercises don't help everyone get on the same page, bring in some outside assistance such as a judicatory leader or coach.
- **The congregation is pushing the search team to go faster than it's able to go.** Transparency goes a long way in reducing anxiety. Share 1) as much

(appropriate) information about the search 2) as often as possible and 3) by as many different channels (written, oral, digital) as are available. Be clear as well about how the congregation can participate in the process, such as by praying or by sharing ideas and concerns with the search team leader. And continue to emphasize all the reasons that it's better to make the right choice instead of the fast choice.

- **The search team can imagine a future with more than one of the candidates.** Good news: your search team did a great job! Bad news: your search team will break one candidate's heart, and your hearts might break a little, too. It's important at this point for the search team to lean heavily on discernment practices. Rather than discussing which candidate is "better," mull which one is the best fit *for your church in this season*. And affirm the gifts of the candidate who is not called to your congregation, possibly even passing that candidate's name on to other churches that are searching.
- **The search team is worried that the candidate of choice will stretch the congregation too much.** Take some extra time to listen for confirmation that you've heard God clearly. Think through how to present the candidate of choice to the congregation and/or its leaders and how to prompt others to imagine the candidate as the church's minister. Consider what additional supports this candidate might need if called. Be honest with the called minister about potential challenges from within and from outside the congregation. Be prepared to serve as an advocate for the new minister.
- **A red flag came up in the reference or background checks of the candidate of choice.** Get more information before making any assumptions. Ask for additional references and/or for an explanation directly from the candidate. Carefully consider what this expanded information means for your search. How long ago did the red flag take place? Has there been a proven attempt to make amends and/or behavioral changes? How could the red flag affect the candidate's ministry at your church? What impact, if any, would this red flag have on your congregation's liability in the event of a similar incident? Talk with your church's insurance agent and/or attorney, if applicable.

- **The candidate of choice declined our offer.** Denominations differ about how to proceed in the event of a "no." Some allow the search team to approach another finalist. Others require search teams to jettison all candidates and start with an entirely new batch. If the latter, consult troubleshooting topic "the search team is exhausted" (p. 120) for guidance. If the former, consider why that person was not the original candidate of choice. What has changed? If there isn't excitement around this person, it could be time to reopen the search. If there is good energy, take plenty of time to pray before proceeding.
- **The congregation/governing board/judicatory didn't approve the candidate the search team put forth.** This can be crushing to a search team, but keep in mind that it is better for a candidate to be denied than for a settled minister to be removed. (Approval without widespread support is an unhealthy conflict waiting to happen.) Take a little break from the search. Do some digging about why the recommended candidate was not approved. Discuss the implications of what you discover within the search team. Then check out "the search team is exhausted" (p. 120).
- **The called minister can't start as soon as the congregation would like.** Remember that the new minister is fully uprooting to come to your church. The minister wants to finish the current call well. The minister has to make arrangements for housing (if there's no church-provided housing) and for moving as well as possibly for spouse's employment and children's schooling/care. The minister wants to feel somewhat settled after moving but before starting work to enable focus on the ministry at hand. All of these things take time. Work with your minister on the timeline; you will be building trust, and the minister's ability to be fully present will be worth the wait.
- **The called minister is getting off to a rough start.** Sometimes, even after a well-conducted search, things are rocky in the beginning. Do as much preventative work as possible by ensuring the new minister has an enthusiastic welcome and necessary contacts and information. Educate the church about the minister's responsibilities, especially if the position description has changed since the previous minister. Advocate for the formation of a pastoral support team to be a

sounding board for the minister. (Often a search team agrees to serve in this capacity for the minister's first year since the team members have already established a relationship with the minister.) Ask the congregation to pray for the new minister. Once the minister is in place, be the minister's cheerleader and advocate. Search teams understand better than anyone why this person was called to this church.

Hacks for small churches

Searching for a part-time minister looks a bit different from search for a full-time minister. Your search team might not have the budget to bring candidates in for multiple (or any) on-site interviews. Your search team might not know where to look for candidates that would be willing to move for a part-time position. If your congregation is seeking a part-time pastor, consider the following.

- If your budget doesn't support a full-time minister, how might you encourage candidates to consider your open position?
  - *Be very clear about your congregation's mission and the ways its small size is key to mission fulfillment. Tell the story of your congregation and community in particularly compelling ways.* Show your congregation's clarity and excitement. It could be contagious.
  - *Name the gifts of a part-time position and/or small congregation.* Help candidates imagine what a part-time position would allow the candidate to do that a larger one would not.
  - *Be very transparent about the job description to verify that the position is truly part-time.* Don't expect to pay part-time but get a full-time minister. Show that you respect the limits of the position.
  - *Use technology and seek financial help from the judicatory and/or denomination to minimize search costs.* There are all kinds of free web applications that allow for video calling. And don't be shy about asking for search subsidies; that's one of the perks of being in a collective of churches.

- If your budget doesn't support a full-time minister, how might you be creative in making your position work for a candidate who needs a full-time income?
  - *Increase non-monetary benefits (e.g., time away).* If your church is strapped compensation-wise, consider giving the minister one Sunday off per month. The minister can use that time to supplement income through filling other pulpits, leading retreats, or writing.

- *Yoke with another congregation (within your denomination or across denominational lines) to make the position full-time*. Many small congregations are on a circuit. Sometimes these churches remain completely separate in their ministries, while at other times they might pool their resources for a bigger impact in the community.
- *Join with another type of ministry to make the position full-time*. It might be possible for the part-time pastor to serve as a chaplain in the community or as part-time judicatory staff.
- *Partner with a local organization to offer a bi-vocational arrangement, or help candidates make connections with secular part-time employment*. Paul was a tentmaker. Ministry and secular positions can work together, and sometimes they even complement one another.
- *Ask the judicatory and/or denomination about the availability of income supplements*. Occasionally income subsidies are available to congregations that are doing vital ministry and/or have potential for growth.

* Consider other pastoral leadership models as detailed by the Alban Institute: https://alban.org/archive/alternative-pastoral-models/

* Check out these documents from the Mennonite Church USA related to what bi-vocational ministry might look like and how to negotiate time and compensation: http://mennoniteusa.org/resource/bivocational-pastors/

Would you like more information on how Searching for the Called can help your search?

There is a lot of information in this manual, but your particular concern might not be addressed. Choose one of the options below to get answers to your questions.

30-minute phone consult

Go to https://calendly.com/reverendlaura/search-process-consult to schedule a free phone call to talk about how Searching for the Called can aid in your ministerial search.

Introductory webinar

This free, 1-hour webinar offered via the Zoom platform is open to all interested parties. The webinar will highlight challenges and opportunities during the search for a best-fit minister, show how Searching for the Called addresses both, and leave ample space for participants to ask questions. Webinar registration is available at https://calendly.com/reverendlaura/searching-webinar.

Do you want assistance with your search process?

If your search team needs additional guidance to apply Searching to the Called in your congregation, the following options are available.

Search team coaching

Guidance throughout the search process will help your search team customize Searching for the Called for and implement it in your congregation. It will also allow your team to make the most of opportunities, overcome challenges, avoid shortcuts, and deal with overwhelm in the search for a great-fit minister. Hour-long calls will take place by phone or online platform at times convenient to the search team. The cost is $2000.

Initial search team training

In-person training will resource the search team for its essential work and give the team members confidence in their ability to carry out the search well. Cost will vary depending on the length of training and travel expenses.

Why search team training/coaching?

The Searching for the Called resources are available to download and use at no charge. There are several reasons you might want to consider training/coaching in addition to using the Searching for the Called materials:

When you feel overwhelmed, I will help you prioritize actions. Ministerial searches involve a lot of tasks, and it is normal to feel at times like you aren't making much headway. I can assist you in creating and sticking to a plan and in noting progress.

When you are tempted to take a shortcut, I will remind you why process matters. Ministerial searches are lengthy, and search teams sometimes want to cut corners. I will keep in front of you the possible consequences of doing so.

When you are overlooking a potential opportunity or challenge, I will help you identify it. Ministerial searches are each unique, so not every situation will be covered by the Searching for the Called materials. I will guide you in thinking through your particular issue.

When you are discouraged, I will help you stay focused. Ministerial searches can go off the rails quickly if there's an unexpected complication. I will pull you toward the light at the end of the tunnel.

When you are unsure, I will provide guidance. Ministerial searches can be head scratchers sometimes. If you get stuck, I can share some examples of practices that have worked well for other congregations and lead you in thinking about the takeaways for your process.

When you call your great-fit minister, I will celebrate with you. Ministerial searches are hard but good work. Your search team will have impacted the life of your congregation from this time onward. I will remind you that a celebration of a process done well is in order – and I will celebrate your team for all that you have done.

About the Searching for the Called creator

Rev. Laura Stephens-Reed believes in the power of the local church to change individuals and communities in the name of Christ. Her call is to increase churches' effectiveness by promoting well-being in congregations and in the people who lead them.

Laura has been credentialed as an Associate Certified Coach through the International Coach Federation. She has also been trained as a Congregational Consultant and an Intentional Interim Minister by the Center for Congregational Health. An ordained minister since 2002, Laura has served churches in a variety of settled and interim roles, including pastor, associate pastor, and minister with age-specific groups. She is affiliated with the Alliance of Baptists and holds Ministerial Standing in the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and she is a member and contract employee of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. In addition, Laura has been on staff and consulted with congregations in the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the United Methodist Church and has coached pastors in ten denominations. She earned her undergraduate degree from the University of Tennessee and her Master of Divinity from Candler School of Theology at Emory University.

Laura lives in Northport, Alabama, with her husband Matt, a United Methodist pastor, and their five-year-old son. She loves going to the playground and to music class, listening to audiobooks, watching tv and movies, and cheering on SEC football teams.

Contact information:

reverendlaura@gmail.com

www.searchingforthecalled.org

256.763.0868