

## **Finding a New Pastor: Search Committee Homework**

In my first article, I wrote about the beginning steps of the search process and finding an Interim Minister. Once that is accomplished the search committee has a good deal of “homework” to complete before candidates should be interviewed.

Before the full Church Information Form can be completed, the search committee must have a good understanding of the congregation’s make up and its expectations for the new pastor. This is a very important part of the search as the Church Information Form (CIF) is the first bit of information most seeking pastors will see. A well prepared CIF will offer a concise “picture” of the congregation and its needs. A congregational survey is often the primary tool to accomplish this.

The congregational survey should include questions about the age group, occupation, interests and the ministerial expectations of each respondent. It should also give the respondent the opportunity to reflect on theological questions. Our Association’s member churches represent a very broad range of theological understandings and positions. It is important to give as much information as possible about the theological frame and culture of the church. Accurately tabulating such information is no small task. It may be wise of the search committee to call a congregational meeting to review their interpretation of the responses before publication of the CIF.

The CIF is available in digital and paper forms. We encourage the use of the online CIF which, when completed, is viewable by seeking ministers on our password protected Pastorates and Pulpits website page.

Once the survey has been mailed to church members, the search committee needs to spend time shaping the compensation package. In most cases the Trustees or fiduciary board have a determining voice in what the church can “afford” in salary. In most cases I suggest that the search committee discover at what level a local educational professional, holding a master’s degree, is compensated. This may offer a meaningful benchmark. Health and disability insurance, retirement and payroll taxes (FICA) should also enter into the equation. I always recommend that a “cafeteria” style package be offered. Specify a total dollar amount and allow the new minister to divide the salary into pre-tax benefits and taxable salary for his or her best advantage.

The search handbook contains a template for “Church-Minister Agreement” and our website ([http://www.nacc.org/Member\\_Church\\_Forms.htm](http://www.nacc.org/Member_Church_Forms.htm)) offers a “Letter of Understanding” template. Each contains various benefits that the committee should consider: housing, vacation, maternity leave, sabbatical and educational/associational expenses to name a few. There is a clergy shortage which spans every religious group, including our Association. It is important to offer the best compensation package possible. In a tight economy, offering additional benefits is a common way to attract and keep a pastor.

In my next article, I will write about receiving profiles, interviewing and the reference and background information a search committee should have on their final candidates.

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