



THE CANDIDATING PROCESS

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RETHINKING THE CANDIDATING PROCESS

Putting Candidating into Perspective

The process of becoming pastor to a congregation is similar to the steps leading up to marriage. At one end of the “personal relationship” continuum is the becoming-acquainted stage; at the other end lies deep awareness and intimacy. The process moves from dating, to “going steady,” to engagement, to the wedding ceremony, in which the exchanging of vows seals the relationship before God and state.

As a couple spends additional time together and enjoys each other’s company more and more, the relationship grows and their thoughts turn to making it permanent. The chances for a successful marriage, however, depend on the quality of the courtship. A rocky dating relationship is seldom followed by a stable marriage, but a courtship characterized by honesty and discovery usually results in a healthy, long-term commitment.

The making of a strong ministry marriage likewise requires relationship wisdom. Authenticity and transparency are required of both prospective pastor and parish. A “first date” is likened to the initial letter or telephone call from a search committee. As subsequent conversations deepen knowledge and understanding of one another, they reach the “going steady” period, during which little time and energy are given to other relationships. Eventually the church may “pop the big question,” leading to an engagement period called “candidacy.” The marriage of pastor is confirmed when both parties say “I do” after the official candidating visit.

-John R. Cionca, *Red Light, Green Light*, p. 135-136

Pursuing Ministry Positions

1. Start searching for ministry opportunities
 - a. Placement Services
 - Christian Jobs – www.christianjobs.com
 - Church Job Finder – www.churchjobfinder.com
 - Church Jobs – www.churchjobs.net
 - Church Jobs Online – www.churchjobsonline.com
 - Church Staffing – www.churchstaffing.com
 - Ekklesia 360 – www.ekklesia360.com
 - Lancaster Bible College – www.LBCjobs.com
 - Lifeway Jobs – www.indeed.com

- Minister Search – www.ministersearch.com
 - Pastor Job Sites – links to denominations, associations & independents
 - The Pastor Search Network – www.pastorsearch.net
 - Vanderbloemen Search Group – www.vanderbloemen.com
 - Youth Specialties – www.jobbank.youthspecialties.com
- b. Network through friends
 - c. Placement services of Colleges, Graduate Schools, and Seminaries (may need to be an alumnus)
 - d. Church Denominations' Placement Office
2. Update your resume
 3. Articulate your philosophy of ministry
 4. Write out your doctrinal statement including position statements on controversial issues of practical theology
 5. State your personal mission statement and core values
 6. Know your S.H.A.P.E. (Spiritual Gifts, Heart, Abilities, Personality, Experiences)
 7. Pray
 8. Have you clearly determined the kind of position you desire?
 9. Include a list of personal references

Perceiving a Search Committee's Priorities

The search committee should be able to articulate what the church desires in a candidate. What exactly is the position? What kind of person are they seeking as it relates to:

1. Communication Skills
 - a. Interpersonal
 - b. Congregational
 - c. Preaching/Teaching Style
2. Education/Training

3. Experience
4. Character
5. Leadership
6. Biblical Qualifications
7. Personality
8. Doctrinal Beliefs
9. Spiritual Gifts
10. Less critical preferences such as age or marital status may be included

Plowing New Ground with a Search Committee

Some general principles to keep in mind:

1. First impressions are hard to erase
2. Be yourself and interact honestly
3. Let rapport develop naturally
4. Suppress any desire for acceptance by not saying just what they want to hear
5. Do not major on the minors
6. Promise only what you can deliver
7. Before wasting time and money on a visit, when long distances are involved, participate in thorough phone or Skype interviews to determine if a visit would be productive
8. Inquire: *Why am I of particular interest to you?*
9. If invited to interview, make it clear from the start that you will also be asking a number of questions; let them lead the discussion and inevitably, some of your questions will be answered

10. This is the time for hard and direct conversation; understand their expectations and state yours; know which hills you are willing to die on
11. Expect idealistic answers
 - a. The church is trying to make their first impression a positive one
 - b. Expose unrealistic expectations and explain any of your concerns
12. Listen for inconsistencies between what is spoken and what is written, asking for clarification on anything which is written

Progressing Through the Stages of Candidating

Although every church has their own unique process, you can expect some interaction with some or all of the following:

1. Denominational Overseers
2. Pastoral Search Committee
3. Board(s) or other Executive Committees
4. Other Staff [part-time and full-time] and Ministry Leaders
5. Informal Gatherings with Ministry Leaders
6. Congregation

Perusing Church Documents

A church should be willing to supply you with these critical written documents. These may be requested progressively based on their/your level of interest and conversation.

1. Several bulletins or worship folders from Sunday services
2. History of the Church
3. Full Doctrinal Statement

4. Congregational Profile
5. Job Descriptions [yours and other staff members]
6. Constitution; Bylaws; Policy/Position Statements
7. Attendance patterns for the last five years
8. Vision/Purpose Statements
9. Core Values and any written Philosophy of Ministry Statements
10. Annual Report/Budget History for last 5 years
11. Salary and Benefits Package [detailed in writing]

Posing Good Questions: 101 Questions a Candidate Should Ask

Some questions are matters of fact; others are matters of feeling. Trust your “gut” impressions. Try not to ask yes/no questions.

ASSESSMENT

1. What are the church’s greatest strengths/weaknesses?
2. Is the church in debt? Making budget?
3. What has been the most significant event in the life of this congregation since you’ve been a member?
4. Aside from the pastoral search process, what has been the most challenging event in the life of this church?
5. What areas of concern need to be addressed by this congregation?
6. Which version of the Bible do most parishioners use?

7. Is there any affiliation or association with a denomination? If so, how does that effect decisions made by this local church?
8. What are the statistics on Church membership versus actual attendance?
9. Request a copy of the budget. What has been their five-year pattern?
10. Are there plans for building or renovations in the near future? When was the most recent capital campaign and for what was it used?
11. What is your view/practice/historical approach to fund raising?
12. When and why did your previous pastor leave?
13. How many candidates have already been interviewed since the former pastor left?
14. Has anyone been offered a call to the ministry and refused it?
15. Does the church draw its members from the surrounding community? What is the average time it takes for parishioners to drive to the church?
16. Which church programs are the most and least active?
17. What was the most recent ministry you started/ended?
18. When visitors attend a Sunday morning service, what makes them want to return?
19. What do you believe should be the pastor's top five priorities?
20. What percentage of church families have been here more than ten years? Less than ten years?

CHANGE

1. What is the church's general attitude toward change?
2. What significant changes have been made in the past seven years?
3. What are your "sacred cows" – things which can't be changed?
4. What new/innovative efforts have you tried which were unsuccessful? Why did they fail?

5. Are you open to new vision and the philosophy of ministry which may be needed to accomplish it?

COMMUNITY

1. What kind of community surrounds the church?
2. To what degree can a pastor get involved in the community? [Estimate the number of hours per week]
3. Describe the area's climate, geography, housing, schools, and economic conditions.
4. Have there been major demographic shifts in the past ten years?
5. How many other churches are within a 10-15 minute drive of the church? How many of them are evangelical? How are you partnering with them?

EDUCATION

1. How are your educational programs structured for children, youth and adults?
2. How does the church utilize technology?

EVANGELISM/DISCIPLESHIP

1. What is the church's philosophy of evangelism and making disciples?
2. Does evangelism training equip members of the congregation to live missionally?
3. Are any attractional "programs" currently implemented? Please describe.

EXPECTATIONS

1. Profile the kind of candidate for which you are looking.
2. What do you expect of my wife/children?
3. How many nights per week do you anticipate this person to be out of the home?
4. What kind of visitation is expected of the pastor?
5. How many and what meetings are expected of the pastor?

6. Is the pastor's day off flexible?
7. How many times a week does the pastor preach/teach?
8. Describe what an average week would look like for your next pastor. How many hours per week would that demand?
9. What would you like to see happen in the next two years? Why haven't they happened already?

FACILITIES

1. If you could change the church's facility, what would it look like?
2. Describe the age, condition, and usage of the current facilities.
3. Are the church facilities made available to the community to use? Give examples.

FAMILY

1. Describe the public school system in the area surrounding this church.
2. If there are Christian schools in the area, what percentage of children in the church attend Christian schools? What percentage are home schooled?
3. What percentage of the church's wives/women are stay at home moms? What percentage work part time? Full time?

FINANCES

1. Will the financial package meet the material needs of my family?
2. What is the average income of church families and is the pastor's salary/benefits package comparable?
3. Detail the salary/housing allowance and the benefits package [i.e. health/disability/life/malpractice insurance, retirement, taxes, Social Security, expense account, conferences, vacation, educational advancement, sabbaticals]
4. Is a parsonage provided? If so, which utilities are considered personal and which ones paid by the church?

5. Even if a parsonage is available, is it mandatory to live on church property or is purchasing a home still an option?
6. Can the pastor opt out of Social Security?
7. How is the pastor's compensation package determined?
 - a. How frequently is it reviewed?
 - b. By whom?
 - c. What objective criteria are used in determining that package...merit, longevity, or cost of living increases?

HISTORY

1. How many former pastors?
 - a. Their tenure?
 - b. Why did each one leave?
2. Have there ever been any forced terminations? If so, why?
3. Would you describe for me the strengths/weaknesses of the most recent lead pastor and his ministry?
 - a. Would you object if I contacted him?
 - b. How can I get in touch with him?
4. Has there ever been a church split? What were the surrounding circumstances? Has there been reconciliation with the other congregation?

LEADERSHIP

1. Do they want a shepherd or a sheep-dog? A manager or a visionary leader?
2. What kind of leader do they need?
3. What model of leadership structure currently exists? Elders? Deacons? Other?
4. To what degree do the leaders share ministry?

5. Are leaders accountable to one another?
6. How do leaders make decisions?
7. Describe the church's governing structure and do these leaders provide spiritual leadership?
8. What are parameters for pastoral decision making?
9. Describe a typical board meeting.
10. Do women serve on the governing board? If so, in what capacity?
11. How much influence does the congregation have in decision-making?
12. How are new leaders developed?
13. How would you assess the degree of "team" mentality?

MISSIONS

1. How is the church involved in holistic ministry? Global evangelism?
2. What percent of the annual budget is given to local/global outreach?
3. How many missionaries are supported? How many would consider this their home church?
4. When was the last time someone from the church sensed God's call to full time service?
5. Does the church sponsor short term mission trips for youth? For adults?

OFFICE

1. Describe the church's computer network and office equipment.

PARISHIONERS

1. Profile them. What are their ages, occupations, marital status, race, etc.

POLICIES/PROCEDURES/PRACTICES

1. Does the church exercise church discipline? If so, how?

2. How frequently has church discipline been exercised?
 - a. When was the last occasion?
 - b. What was the reason?
3. What is the process for terminating a pastor?
4. What is the church's view on divorce/remarriage?
5. Is there a statement about lifestyle standards?
6. What are your views regarding the role of women?
7. How does this church view charismatic gifts?
8. Is the church involved in social needs within the community?
9. What is the membership process? Expectations of members?

SMALL GROUPS

1. Is a small group ministry in place? If so, describe its form and function.
2. What percent of the congregation is involved in small groups?
3. How are small group leaders recruited/trained?

STAFF

1. Who are paid staff members? Are they part-time or full-time? [Request copies of their job descriptions]
2. Is there an administrative assistant for the pastor?
3. Any unfilled staff positions?

WORSHIP

1. What is their style of worship? Worship team? Band? Technology?
2. Is there variety in their worship?

Peering at the Past

1. Don't be so naïve as to think your experience will be radically different from previous pastors.
2. Question these former "husbands" who have given a portion of their lives to that "spouse," because their perspective on that "marriage" is critical.
3. Ask:
 - a. What kind of problems did you encounter?
 - b. How did your philosophy of ministry vary from the leadership team's?
 - c. Why did you leave?
 - d. What kind of pastor do you feel the church needs now and why?
 - e. If I were to pastor this church, what three pieces of advice would you offer?
5. Pastoral track records provide insight in how a congregation responds to and cares for its leaders.

Probing the Church's Reputation

1. In final stages of discussion, ask for a list of addresses and phone numbers of several people knowledgeable about the church.
2. Call a neighbor of the church who does not attend.
 - a. What is the church's reputation in the community?
 - a. A win/win situation
 - (1) Information helps you know what you are up against.
 - (2) Makes a positive contact in the neighborhood
3. Talk with another minister in the denomination or in the area who has knowledge of the church
 - a. Sometimes they're aware of problems in sister churches
 - b. Reputation of sports teams; have they "inherited" any disgruntled folks who left the church?

Picking up Information through Quiet Observation

1. Did the people carry their Bibles [or technology] to church? Did they use them during the Scripture reading and sermon?
2. Was there a genuine sense of freedom while preaching in the church?
3. Was the congregation multigenerational? Multi-ethnic? More of one gender?
4. Was the church favorably located with regard to the shopping district and housing developments?
5. Type of congregation: lower class, middle class, or upper class?
6. Was there potential for future growth and room expansion?
7. What was the number and nature of services scheduled for the coming week and month? Check the bulletin, church literature, tracks, etc.
8. Was there any evidence of the church's impact upon the community? Did the employee at the nearby gas station know where the church was located?
9. Was the congregation attentive while you were preaching?
10. Did they take notes during the sermon?
11. Did the people appear to be hungry for the Word of God?
12. If there is a parsonage, it is suitable for the pastor's family? [If there is an option to live off campus, it is highly recommended.]
13. Did the attendance at prayer meeting give evidence of an interest in spiritual development?
14. What is the general cultural and educational background of the congregation?
15. How is the church equipped with regard to heating, air-conditioning, ventilation, and lighting?
16. How is the church equipped with technology, screens, coat rooms, classrooms, and parking?
17. Describe the church's neighborhood?

18. What is the average attendance at the various services?
19. What is the quality of the work of the church staff, sexton, secretary, etc.?
20. Was an attitude of friendliness evident? Were people greeted upon entrance to the church? Upon leaving it?
21. Did the quality of congregational singing indicate at least moderate musical talent within the church?
22. Did the ushers, choir, instrumentalists, band appear to be adequately prepared for the service? Was it well-planned or chaotic?
23. Do the people seem to enjoy interaction before and after the service?

Presenting Your Views/Positions to the Congregation

1. The minister's attitude toward the privacy of his home.
2. The hours which the minister expects to spend in study without interruption, except for emergencies.
3. The name which he prefers to be called.
4. An understanding that his wife is not a staff member.
5. Guidelines for counseling/confidentiality.
6. The minister's attitude toward marriage of divorced people.
7. Your summarized philosophy of ministry.
8. The minister's attitude toward missions and evangelism.
9. Expectations of the congregation.
10. The procedure of obtaining permission before accepting other speaking engagements.
11. A summary of the minister's doctrinal position.

12. The specific responsibilities of elders/deacons as viewed by the pastor.
13. The desire that no one should speak for the pastor, privately or publicly, unless specifically asked to do so by the pastor himself.

Processing All the Information

1. Accepting a call is at best a series of tradeoffs.
2. Am I willing to live with this particular drawback in order to acquire that specific benefit?
3. Assess your own professional needs, family's social and economic needs.
4. What are your non-negotiables? Personal preferences?
5. What is my wife's gut feeling?
6. How will this change affect the children?
7. Is the compensation package satisfactory?
8. Get counsel. What do your counselors advise?
 - a. Trust the advice of those who know you and your gifts.
 - b. Trust them to speak the truth in love.
9. Did they seem flexible in discussing areas where opinions differed?
10. Is this ministry a good fit for your S.H.A.P.E.?
11. How would I fit with the existing leadership team?
12. Would I have the support of the existing staff?
13. PRAY!

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