

Pastor Search Plan of Action

- *Establish a pulpit committee*

The church constitution should provide guidance on setting up a pulpit committee. If there is a need or desire for additional members once the constitution's requirements are met seek for Godly, wise men who will have already shown in their lives discernment, discretion and dependence on the Holy Spirit.

The pulpit committee is not the place to "try to get more people involved in the ministry". In the absence of a pastor the pulpit committee will exert considerable influence over the direction of the church. The men entrusted with this responsibility should be honorable men of Biblical integrity who are faithful in church attendance, already involved in the work of the ministry and show a Godly concern for the spiritual growth of the church.

- *Begin making resume requests*

Contacting prospective men seems to be a daunting task but the resources of the digital age make it much easier to connect available men with seeking churches. The collection of good contacts can often be started as soon as the pulpit committee forms. Getting the ball rolling can be as simple as letting like minded churches and institutions know the church is seeking a pastor.

Several institutions offer online database services that help connect searching men with seeking churches, these include: Maranatha Baptist Bible College, Bob Jones University and Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary. These databases draw from a broad range of men, not just current students or alumni. Other institutions also provide similar services, but the doctrines and philosophies of an organization will usually be reflected in the men who are utilizing their pastor connection services. The majority of resumes received through a Southern Baptist School will be from Souther Baptist pastors. Often these databases provide a summary profile and contact information for an individual. It is then up to the church to personally contact each man to request a resume.

State associations, mission boards and regional pastor's fellowships can also provide a good avenue for getting in touch with men looking for a ministry.

- *Discover and spell out the congregations health and needs of a pastor*

A church wide survey is one way of determining this. Follow some systematic process to evaluate where the church is spiritually and physically. Seek to learn what the church members understand to be the purpose of the church, the needs of the church and the expectations of a pastor.

Be careful though that the goal is not to compile a list of the traits most popular with the congregation in order to find a man who fills most of those qualities. Great discernment needs to be exercised to determine which desires are Biblical or preferential, essential or optional. A man who may win the church popularity contest is not necessarily the right man to be the pastor. Any desires which do not line up with the Biblical qualifications of

a pastor need to be discarded. Those characteristics that would tend to go against the philosophy and ministry methodology of the church need to be set aside. Be very wary of responses which indicate a desire for a man who is not like the former pastor. A new pastor may not have the problems the previous pastor did, but he will have his own set of problems that will grow to be just as frustrating.

The congregational survey is intended to get a feel for the needs of the church, not act as a political survey to determine the man most likely to get the most votes. The answers to the questions tell more about the congregation than just the surface level responses. Be sure to ask questions which probe into the spiritual realities of the church and reveal attitudes of the heart.

The pulpit committee needs to have a solid understanding of the Biblical qualifications of the pastor as well as the unique needs of the congregation. They should be able to concisely summarize in writing the basic characteristics of the kind of man the church is looking for, including the Biblical qualifications for a pastor, important ministry philosophies, preaching and teaching style, years of experience and any other thing that is an important expectation or desire for the next pastor. Keep this realistic and as brief as possible. The point is not a hundred point outline of every quality everyone wants in a perfect pastor. Nor is the point to create an unalterable rule which the pastor must perfectly match to be considered. The point is a practical guide that will help keep the pulpit committee on track, narrow down the number of resumes being considered and enable consistent evaluation of all likely prospects.

- *Develop profile of the church*

Using the information gleaned from the church survey and the pulpit committee's own knowledge of the congregation, put together a short summary of the church. Include its attendance, membership, ages of attenders, government, history, philosophy regarding music, Bible versions and any other important issues, brief reason for the previous pastor's departure, specific interests and goals of the church, the church's purpose and vision statements, and any other information that you feel needs to be communicated up front to men considering the church.

Also develop a more detailed profile of the church that includes specifics about the church's history. This profile is for in committee use only and should not be distributed to candidates or congregants. Identify key factors in the church's history that have had a significant impact on where the church is today. Also make note of any areas that may still be triggers for the congregation (if the previous pastor was infamous for telling sports stories every Sunday, the incoming pastor might appreciate being forewarned of a potential negative reaction to discussing sports from the pulpit). Consider hindrances to the growth in the church. Describe the last significant problem and how it was handled by the church and the pastor.

Utilizing the information gleaned from the survey and the pulpit committee's personal knowledge include some information about the current attitude of the congregation

towards the church and whether the church is in a state of physical or spiritual decline. Being careful to avoid unsubstantiated rumors (“They said” or “I heard”) discuss the testimony of the church in the community.

Possibly most important is the inclusion of the philosophy and ministry methods of the church. If the church has a strong stance on issues like version, music, outreach programs, etc. make sure that information is clearly spelled out. If the church wants to make changes, identify the changes desired.

The goal is to communicate as clearly as possible the information necessary for a man to make a wise decision. Discretion must be used in how and when this information is passed on to possible candidates. At some point a candidate needs to know as much as possible the church that he is considering, but he does not need to be told everything at the first meeting.

- *Establish base salary, benefits, insurance, housing, vacation and other details of how the pastor will be provided for.*
Examine the current financial state of the congregation. Determine a total salary package and suggested breakdowns for salary, insurance and other benefits. Be careful not to try to use the salary package as a means controlling the pastor. Leave some flexibility to adjust the details based upon the specific needs and wishes of an incoming pastor.
- *Screen potential candidates through resumes and then follow up on good prospects.*
It is helpful to pass out copies of the resumes to each man on the pulpit committee, giving them time to read through the resumes and mark down their likes, dislikes and concerns. Eliminate the resumes of men that obviously don't meet the characteristics you're looking for. Prioritize the others and request additional information including: testimony of conversion, doctrinal statements (many men don't include their doctrinal statements with their resumes), sermon recordings, blog address (if he has a blog), ministry philosophy and a brief questionnaire addressing the major points. When asking for sermons, request the most recent recorded message(s) rather than just requesting any message. The goal is to get a feel for a typical sermon, not the best one he's ever preached. Many men post their sermons on the internet. The website of a previous church and sermonaudio.com are good places to search for additional sermon content.

At the same time, send to these men a copy of the church constitution, church profile, pastor profile and some information about the community. This is your initial contact. Give them the necessary information about the church to help guide them in making an early decision about the church.

The goal of this initial contact stage is to identify as quickly as likely “deal-breakers”. If the church will reject a man who preaches limited atonement, that should be made known early in the process so that your time and his will not be wasted.

Any time a man is rejected after this point in the process, he must be communicated with to inform him that the church is no longer considering him. Don't leave men waiting on you for necessary information.

- *Further screen those men who return the requested information*
If a man does not return the requested information, drop him from the process, especially if a doctrinal statement is not provided. Give copies of the returned information to the pulpit committee (this information is not strictly confidential, but it would be wise to keep it's distribution limited to the pulpit committee) for their prayerful consideration. Discuss one at a time each prospect. Be wary of comparison among the prospects. Measure the merits of each man in light of the predetermined standards set by Scripture and the church. Make any follow up contacts that may need to be made to clarify points of question regarding an individual.
- *Begin following up with likely prospects.*
Indicate to the prospect your continued interest and send out a more detailed questionnaire that delves more deeply into pertinent issues. Appoint one person from the pulpit committee to be in contact with him, which may include emails and phone calls, to discuss questions and issues that may arise.
- *Conduct more thorough interview with the prospect*
Have an in depth conversation with him regarding his doctrines and philosophy of ministry. Specifically find out about potential hot button issues within the congregation (i.e. Calvinism, easy believism, ecumenicism, Bible versions, community involvement, divorce and remarriage or anything else that the congregation has strong feelings or disagreements about). Be sure to communicate to him the church's stance on any of these issues.

If at this point someone looks like a good prospect, make preparations to invite him to visit the church. From here through the rest of the process it is wisest to deal with one man at a time.

- *Call a specific prospect to preach at the church and have an initial face to face meeting with the pulpit committee.*
This is the time to meet the man and his family, hear him preach and introduce him to the church. Make sure it is clear that he is not candidating for the pastorate, but being considered as a possible candidate. This allows the church and him to meet and learn more about one another without too many strings attached.

Ask the candidate to publicly share his testimony of salvation, baptism, call to ministry and most recent ministry experience. Have his wife share her testimony of salvation and baptism with the church. If possible, plan a church wide fellowship to provide maximum opportunity to interact with as much of the congregation as possible. The pulpit committee members should take care to avoid monopolizing the prospect's time during

the church gatherings. The pulpit committee should introduce him to people, tell of things he might have in common with someone (i.e., He lived near your hometown) and take other steps to facilitate communication.

Plan a meeting with the prospect and the pulpit committee to address specific issues and questions of the ministry. Ask questions of him and allow him to ask questions of you, but remember the goal of the first visit is to meet one another, not conduct a lengthy interrogation. (That'll come later.)

Be aware of his schedule. He has traveled, preached and met many new people. This weekend will be fatiguing. Don't make it any more tiring than it needs to be.

- *Call references*

This step could go before first inviting a man to speak. I prefer to call references after a man has visited the church and the pulpit committee is ready to pursue him further. If calling references before a first visit it is advisable to make the conversations brief and leave a more in-depth interview for a follow-up conversation. Be wise in the use of your time and the time of others. Often after the initial visit it is obvious to everyone that he and the church are not a good fit together eliminating the need for the time consuming process of reference checks.

If there is a positive response to the prospect and he looks like a good fit for the church, begin working deeper into his character and background. Call all of his references and ask them tough questions about his fitness for ministry, character and doctrine. It is very important to ask his references for suggestions of others to call who can give further information about the man.

Call the references from the references to learn more of the prospects character. If possible, call his current (a man in active ministry will likely not want his current ministry to know he is considering another church) and former ministries. Typically, these conversations are confidential and the details of who said what are not to be shared with anyone outside the pulpit committee.

- *If possible schedule a second visit with a prospective candidate*

After the initial visit and thorough reference checks if the pulpit committee desires to continue pursuing a prospect, schedule a time for him to return to the church with the intention of working at length with the committee on matters of doctrine, philosophy, church government, methods and the many other things that need to be discussed. This does not have to coincide with a Sunday. Make sure to communicate the nature of this meeting so everyone involved with recognize it will involve a serious commitment of time. If possible, have a couple briefer meetings instead of one long meeting. (A video call may also be a good substitute to a return trip)

Use this time to discuss the problems, baggage and conflicts in the church. If they have not already been addressed tell him about folks that have left and why. Tell him about any

recent matters of church discipline. Give further, detailed information to him regarding the departure of the previous pastor. Be upfront with him. Do your very best to guard against a man being blindsided a month after he becomes the pastor. Ask him how he might handle specific situations that have or are likely to arise in the church. Strive to fully share with him the church's expectation for a pastor and to find out from him his expectations of a church, deacons and other leadership.

If a return visit prior to candidating is not possible, plan a conference call to address some of these issues. A conference call will not allow for the full level of communication needed. Email can also fill in to give some early answers to these questions. However, the goal is not just to get a bunch of facts about a man. It is to get to know him as well as possible. This kind of knowledge requires face to face interaction.

At any time up to this point in the search process the pulpit committee can decide to go no farther with an individual without a congregational vote.

When a man comes to candidate he is being presented to the church for their decision regarding him. Once a man is presented to a church as a candidate the congregation must have the opportunity to vote on extending a call. Just because a man is candidating does not mean the pulpit committee continues to be in favor of him. Things may arise during that candidating visit which changes the pulpit committee's opinion. The pulpit committee can, and probably should, make a recommendation to the congregation regarding whether or not they think the candidate should be called as the pastor.

- *Invite a man to candidate, providing for opportunity to spend time getting to know the congregation.*

If at all possible have the candidate and his family in town for several days to a week or even longer. Allow as much time as possible to get to know him as thoroughly as possible. If the church and candidate are able to do so allow for several return visits before a vote is taken. Encourage the church members to open up their homes to him for meals. Consider more than just his preaching. Get to know his manner of life and way of interacting with congregants, at the church and in their homes. Give ample opportunity for members to ask him their questions and share their concerns with him.

During the candidate's time in the area make sure to nail down a salary package with the candidate. Also, have someone take him on a tour of the community so he can get a better understanding of the area.

If the candidate desire to do so, have a public question and answer time in which the congregation can ask what they will of him. The pulpit committee may be wise to solicit written questions ahead of time rather than allowing an open mic for people to ask whatever pops into their heads at that moment.

If possible, have candidate speak a third Sunday (can be at the end of the week spent at the church)

- *Congregational vote on the whether or not to extend a call.*
Give the congregation time to pray and consider the matter, but have the vote in a timely fashion, preferably within two weeks.

Be sure to communicate to the church before the vote the details of the salary package worked out by the candidate and the pulpit committee.

- *Communicate promptly to the candidate the church's decision.*
If the candidate is called by the church wait for his final determination if he is going to accept the call.
- *Once the candidate is called and accepts, communicate to the other pastoral prospects that you have called a man to be the pastor.*
- *Work out arrangements for the arrival of new pastor.*
This may be the housing arrangements, temporary accommodations, timetable, installation service or transition period. Each situation is different, but the pulpit committee's job is to make the new pastor's move and transition into leadership as smooth as possible. The pulpit committee's task is not done until the new pastor has begun the ministry.

The pulpit committee needs to take the lead in working through moving plans and helping finalize housing arrangements. Don't leave all the work to the man who lives far away and knows little about your community.

- *Install the new pastor*
Plan a special service to welcome the new pastor and to officially install him as the pastor of the church. This will be a great opportunity to have local pastors and men who have impacted the new pastor's life challenge the church and the new pastor.

During this service, take time to pray for the new pastor, his family and the ministry. Allow the new pastor time to share with the congregation.

- *Go forward in rejoicing, prayer and submission.*