*Candidacy Committee of the CRCNA*

Characteristics of an Effective Pastor

What kind of character traits, knowledge, and skills would you expect to find in an effective pastor? While church contexts and pastors’ personalities are unique, here are some things to look for if your church is hiring a new pastor or if you yourself are discerning whether you’re called to ordained pastoral ministry.

The document uses categories of “character, knowledge, and skill.” Some of the items described here will be developed in a seminary program. Others represent native gifts of the Spirit of God. All of the items described represent qualities that would be desirable in a person serving in ordained pastoral ministry.

In creating this resource, the Candidacy Committee borrowed heavily from a document prepared by the faculty of Calvin Theological Seminary. It has been adapted to provide guidance regarding evaluating the qualifications of persons applying to be ordained as Commissioned Pastor.

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## Character

The person is mature in Christ. “Christ-likeness” covers all of what it means to be godly. The following guidelines, which are rooted in Scripture (references are meant to be illustrative, not exhaustive), suggest many aspects of godly character:

1. **Devoted to Jesus:** The person is “in Christ” (John 15:5), filled with his Spirit (Acts 1:8), and exercises personal spiritual disciplines.

2. **Committed to the church and its mission** (Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:1-4, Eph. 4:11-13, 1 Tim. 5:22): The person is in Christian community. She/he has been tested and proven. She/he has been recognized as preparing for ministry by the community of believers and evidences accountability to it.

3. **Called and gifted** (Matt. 28:16ff, Acts 1:8): The person is able to testify to a calling from God that is confirmed by the church. That calling provides her/him with a mission, with vision, and with intrinsic motivation. She/he ministers out of giftedness (1 Cor. 12, Rom. 12, etc.).

4. **Filled with love** (Matt. 22:37-40): The person is characterized by love—love of God, love of self, and love of others, including people inside and outside the church, and those from various ethnic and economic backgrounds.

5. **Possesses the fruit of the Spirit** (Gal. 5:22-23): The person gives evidence of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control.

6. **Possesses the qualities of an officebearer** (1 Tim. 3:1-13, Titus 1:5-9): The person demonstrates such qualities as being reputable, loyal, self-disciplined, respected, hospitable, mature, honest, sincere, teachable and able to teach, emotionally stable, blameless, lover of God and not money, resilient, responsible, not quick-tempered, not overbearing, not quarrelsome, not abusive (of others or substances), managing her/his own household well (including spousal support of ministry), risk-taking, flexible, adaptable, etc.

7. **Has a servant’s heart** (Matt. 20:26): The person evidences an ability to be a servant-leader.

8. **Possesses wisdom** (Prov. 1:1-7): The person lives according to God’s design, recognizes Christ as “wisdom from God” (1 Cor. 1:30, Col. 2:3), and seeks wisdom from above (James 1:5, 3:13).

9. **Manages life well:** The person practices good stewardship of time, relationships, talents, finances, and physical creation (Gen. 1:27-28, Ps. 8:6-8).

10. **Eager to learn:** The person is a lifelong learner who studies God’ Word and world (Ps. 19) and demonstrates that she/he has been and is currently being mentored.

## Biblical Knowledge

The person is eager to pursue a working knowledge of the Bible in her/his native language, which will make the person:

1. able to identify Scripture’s main themes (covenant, kingdom of God, missio Dei, etc.) and to locate her/his place in the redemptive history that is centered in Christ;

2. have command of the divisions of Scripture (Law, prophets, gospels, epistles, etc.), the historical and literary contexts of each biblical book, and basic hermeneutical principles required to interpret them;

3. able to demonstrate knowledge of key Scripture passages and to apply them appropriately to life and ministry.

Based on the above, the person is willing to learn to prepare and preach/teach meaningful and motivational messages/lessons that are true to Scripture. The person will seek to be able to communicate clearly the gospel to unbelievers and believers.

## Theological Knowledge

1. The person aspires to a knowledge of doctrinal standards and systematic theology. This would include knowledge of Reformed systematic theology, the Ecumenical Creeds, and the three confessional standards of the Christian Reformed Church. Furthermore, the person seeks to be able to differentiate and defend the Reformed faith biblically from other systems of thought, both Christian and non-Christian. She/he is able to reflect from a biblical perspective on the cultures, circumstances, and events of everyday life and ministry.

2. The person aspires to a basic knowledge of church history (including Christian Reformed Church history and culture) and seeks to be able to apply its lessons to present reality and ministry.

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## Skill/Practice of Ministry

The person is committed to developing her or his ministry skills. The skills necessary for ministry are many, and not all persons possess them in the same measure. Someone in a ministry position will be expected to demonstrate skills in relation to the particularity of her/his position. Yet the following list describes the general skills needed to lead the church of Jesus Christ to fulfill the New Testament purposes of outreach, worship, fellowship, discipleship, and service. Some necessary ministry skills are:

1. **Leadership & administration:** A pastor is able to help people and the church move from where they are to where God wants them to be. To do this, pastors possess such skills as: casting vision; creating ownership; creating functional organizational systems; resolving conflict; developing gift-based ministries; planning ministry; developing and mentoring leaders; and managing time, money, and people (according to principles of CRC polity).

2. **Outreach:** Pastors are able personally to share (witness); to defend (apologetics) the faith; and to lead the church in reaching out to the lost, in receiving them, and in developing new churches.

3. **Worship:** Pastors are able to prepare and deliver messages/teach lessons (homiletics), administer the sacraments, and lead in worship and prayer.

4. **Pastoral Care:** Pastors possess relational skills that enable her/him to provide personally and through the church (corporately) pastoral care, visitation, small groups, youth ministry, spiritual counsel, and conduct of weddings and funerals.

5. **Fellowship:** Pastors are able to foster a nurturing Christian community.

6. **Discipleship:** Pastors are able to raise up, teach, and nurture disciple-making disciples.

7. **Service:** Pastors are able to respond to personal and community needs by mobilizing the church for ministry.

8. **Specialized:** Pastors have any necessary skills specific to their particular calling within the church.