

SECOND EDITION

# More Than a Search Committee



exploring opportunities in times of transition

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Christian Reformed Church  
Pastor Church  
Resources



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We welcome your comments. Call us at 877-279-9994 X2837 or email us at Pastor Church Resources [pastorchurch@crcna.org](mailto:pastorchurch@crcna.org).

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# How to Use This Resource

When a former pastor departs, the congregation that is left behind can become a complex mix of anxiety, hope, and fear. Such a mix of feelings sometimes causes churches to rush the pastoral search process and neglect the rich opportunities God embeds in seasons of transition.

We hope this resource can help reduce that anxiety by casting a vision of opportunity for transition seasons and pastor searches, while also giving practical advice to guide you every step of the way.

We suspect that many churches, after reading this booklet, will see two distinct but related tasks before them. The first task is to engage the congregation in asking and answering some of the big questions about identity and calling that a pastoral transition makes possible. It is work that is often, but not necessarily, led by a dedicated transition team. The second task, deeply connected to the first, is to conduct a thorough search process to identify and call a pastor for the next chapter of the church's life. The search process is often best led by an appointed search team.

This resource is meant to be short enough that a leadership team could read the whole thing and then meet together to discuss how its wisdom and practical guidance about both transition and search can reframe the next chapter of the church's life.

This booklet has benefited from the good insights of *Beginning Ministry Together: The Alban Handbook for Clergy Transitions*<sup>1</sup>. We recommend it as worthy supplemental reading for at least a few key leaders in the church. Perhaps two each from the transition team, search committee, and/or council.

For additional hard copies of *More than a Search Committee*, please contact Pastor Church Resources [pastorchurch@crcna.org](mailto:pastorchurch@crcna.org).

## **An Invitation: Adapt Current “Best Practices” to Your Context**

The Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) is a diverse family of congregations drawing from a rich variety of cultures and traditions. Each council and search committee is prompted to develop culturally relevant ways in which the insights of this resource can function within the parameters of Christian Reformed church polity and can fit your particular cultural context.

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<sup>1</sup> Roy M. Oswald, James M. Heath, and Ann W. Heath. *Beginning Ministry Together: The Alban Handbook for Clergy Transitions*. New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003.

## Letter to Church Councils and Search Committees

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Although we may not know you personally, we affirm our connection with you as we share in the life of God's family, the church of Jesus Christ.

Many of you are reading this because the church of which you are a part is about to begin the process that will lead to the calling of a new pastor. This is an important juncture in the life of your congregation. Pastors play a pivotal role in the life and mission of a congregation. Finding and calling a new pastor is not a process to be undertaken lightly.

This resource intends to do two things: (1) assist with the nuts and bolts of a transition and search process and (2) connect this transition season and the pastor search to the bigger picture of what God is doing in you, your church, and your community.

Our invitation and encouragement is for you not just to skim this resource for the practical checklist to get a search done, but to also catch the vision of pastoral transitions and pastoral searches being an opportunity for God to do important work in you and your church.

The first opportunity of a transition is to ask, "What exactly is the church of Christ? And where does our congregation fit into God's bigger Kingdom project?" What has God been doing in your church and community over the past decades? What ministry challenges and missional opportunities has God raised to the surface in the present? How is God now calling your congregation as you anticipate the next decade of life and ministry together? What are your congregation's gifts? Opportunities? Needs? What does it seem God is doing among you and around you? How might he be calling and equipping you for this next chapter in the life of your congregation?

The second opportunity of a transition is to thoughtfully apply what you have just learned about your church and community into a strategic, thorough search process, finding a pastor to help lead your church as you engage the ministry opportunities and challenges God is calling you to pursue in the years ahead.

Including these bigger questions and engaging the congregation will not always be easy. There will be members of your congregation very eager to see swift action and results in terms of extending a call to a pastor. There may even be a pastor eager to receive a call from your congregation, and there may be some who see that pastor as having the right set of gifts. We challenge you to resist the temptation to proceed too quickly.

This resource is designed to help you as leaders in this time of transition. It is intended to encourage you in healthy processes of discerning God's call for your congregation and to view the calling of a pastor as a part of that larger picture.

God bless you as you engage in this time of opportunity and discernment.

## Some Scriptural Wisdom

“Our help is in the name of the Lord, Creator of heaven and earth.” This is a sentence which has often opened the Sunday worship of congregations. It reminds the church at worship that followers of Jesus are engaged in something much wider, longer, higher, and deeper than just the present moment. It provides a sense of perspective from the first moment of worship. So too for the search process.

Before any committee is chosen or any mandate spelled out, we acknowledge that God is already at work. This is one of the rhythms of life in God’s world: we are born into already existing family circles, already existing churches, and already existing cultures. Our lives merge into lanes of traffic already under way. In fact, this is a rhythm that can be traced all the way back to the record of creation in Scripture.

Human beings were the last creatures to be formed. By the time we entered the picture, the creation was well under way. And, when one considers the Hebrew rhythm of telling time (“it was evening, and it was morning . . .”), when we human beings begin our day, God has been at work already for hours. We human beings do not initiate so much as we join in and merge with processes that began before us and will continue after us. This is true in the rhythm of each day, in the rhythm of each life, and in the rhythm of more specific activities such as the search for a new pastor.

So, from the start, we acknowledge this reality by professing our faith. The Spirit of God is stirring, and as much as there are practical questions and realities of gifts, needs, and fit, there is the mystery of life in a church and world that serves as the workplace of God. Who knows the turns and twists that lie ahead in this search process? Who knows what surprises and disappointments may be in store?

God knows.

And he intends for us to join in a journey of faith, hope, and love. This is a journey that calls for prayer, and for a posture that remembers our efforts fit within the larger framework of our God whose work on our behalf has already begun.

### Note About Succession Planning

This resource is written for congregations in which the position to be filled is vacant or will be vacated soon. There are models for pastor searches based on a succession approach that recommends finding the next pastor three years or more before the impending departure or retirement of the lead pastor. Succession models typically aim for smooth transitions of pastoral leadership without the challenges that a pastoral vacancy might bring. We believe that such succession models also carry challenges. They often prove difficult to orchestrate in terms of timelines. They tend to put the leaders still on scene in awkward and frustrating positions, often souring the end of otherwise fruitful pastoral tenures. And good succession models typically end up requiring the same level of engagement with difficult transition concerns and questions that the succession was meant to smooth over. While succession planning imagines managing the process for purposes of seamlessness, achieving this goal is elusive.

We believe the intentional engagement of the whole church, the body of Christ, and the experience of a time without a pastor can often prove to be a catalyst for spiritual growth and vitality in the life of a congregation. We prefer this route because we believe the challenge of wrestling with these dynamics can be a body-building exercise. The church of Jesus follows in the footsteps of patriarch Jacob, who wrestled with God and was renamed Israel. We recommend it not because it is easy, but because it is a worthy, healthy challenge.



# Attentive to the Transition

## Some Things Do Not Change

There are certain things within the church that are timeless. Basic expectations for pastors include the ability to present the gospel by way of preaching, teaching, and discipling; the capacity to provide pastoral care and the nurture of a healthy community. Basic expectations for a church include the opportunities to worship, fellowship, steward gifts, and make disciples both within the church family and beyond.

Reformed Christians frequently affirm together the Apostles' Creed. We confess "the holy catholic church, the communion of saints." In doing so we connect ourselves to the forever and universal church of Jesus Christ, a church whose foundation and future are anchored in the saving and sanctifying work of God. This solid foundation is not subject to change or decay, and that is a wonderful truth by which God supports our life together.

## Some Things Do Change

To be Reformed also means that we are persistently "reforming" our perspectives and lives in new times and situations, and forever re-tilting them to conform to God's Word and to the confessions that provide consistent lenses into that Word. These roots help us look to the future while recognizing that which provides our consistent stability and nourishment. These roots also help us grow new adaptive branches in a changing context and culture. Both the rootedness of a healthy tree and its flexibility are important perspectives for congregations seeking to call a new pastor, especially in a time of many changes.

### *Congregations Are Changing*

North American congregations have been changing for decades. And the pace of change seems to be increasing. Within the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) there have been vast and diverse changes that affect many dimensions of the congregation's life, not the least of which is the need for effective, adaptive pastoral leadership. This resource does not attempt to evaluate these changes as much as help the leaders of local congregations provide creative leadership in the midst of these changes.

### *Some noteworthy changes include*

- greater diversity of membership, practices, and culture from congregation to congregation
- differences of values, language, style, communication, mobility, and family life between/within generations
- a marked loss of loyalty to the institutional church, including diminishing interest in denominational concerns
- greater diversity in the number, style, and times of worship services
- increased rates of conflict reported by congregations
- an increased emphasis on personal faith stories and authentic spiritual experience
- greater openness to practices and emphases of other Christian faith traditions, including those of other ethnicities and geographical settings

### ***Society Is Changing***

The changes evident in congregations are related to the surrounding North American culture.

A number of relevant factors can be observed:

- growing distrust of leadership in the culture influences how church members view leadership in the church. On the one hand, this includes skepticism toward institutions; on the other hand, it highlights the quest for relevance and meaning.
- global mass media that sensationalize events and tend to increase the baseline anxiety of individuals and groups. We are inundated with more information, more opportunities, and more images and stories of pain than we can possibly absorb.
- degeneration of civil discourse. Increased polarization across North America is characterizing the rhetoric of our time.
- heightened concern about ethnic and gender diversity.
- the role of technology in changing the nature of communication and community among family and friends. What does this mean for the experience of community within the church?
- the disruptive presence of social media, creating opportunities for connection and outreach, but also aggravating tendencies toward conflict, comparison, and polarization.

### ***Pastors and Pastor Roles Are Changing***

Ministers of the Word continue to major in the basic tasks and competencies of the pastoral vocation. But there are also changing ways in which pastors see themselves, their families, and their relationship to the community in which they serve. The following are some changing trends:

- There are more second career pastors.
- More pastors are entering CRC ministry through routes other than the denominational seminary.
- More pastors are women.
- More pastors are negotiating their own sense of call with that of their spouse.
- More pastors are inclined to purchase their own homes and live away from the church building.
- More pastors are considering a variety of educational options for their children, including Christian day school, public school, home schooling, and charter schools.
- More pastors are placing higher value on living close to family.
- More pastors expect a balanced life where the priority of their ministry calling is not absolute, but negotiated alongside priorities to spouse, family, significant friends, and self-care.

Overall, pastors are staying longer in a given congregation. This can be related to the benefits of longer tenures for the health and wellbeing of congregations and pastors, or, less happily, it can be related to the difficulty of receiving another call, the desires and needs of the pastor's nuclear or extended family, or the vocational path of the pastor's spouse. And it can often be related to a combination of reasons, some of which are in the best interests of the pastor and congregation and some of which are not.

Being attentive to these and other changes will affect the outcome of the pastor search process. Congregations that call pastors before gaining clarity on some important values and priorities as well as pastors who accept calls to churches without appropriate discernment and wisdom will be highly vulnerable to frustration, conflict, and broken relationships. That is why it is so important for churches to tend to the transition *before* extending a call.

## The Previous Pastor's Departure

Pastors play a key role in the ongoing life of a congregation. So, when a pastor leaves, patterns are disrupted. For example, congregations develop patterns of thinking, relating, leading, deciding, reacting, worrying, and agreeing. Some of these repetitive patterns are readily apparent. Many are not. Who “makes the coffee” or “leads the meeting” is fairly obvious, but who quietly calms the chronically upset or helps the congregation sort through difficult priorities may be less apparent. Many such disruptions are not initially noticed. And yet they are felt.

No matter what the pastor/congregation relationship has been, when a pastor leaves, there are changes and losses. These are not experienced in the same way by every member. And the way the pastor leaves can be significant. Gracious, warm, grateful departures leave sweet memories and fond grief. Difficult departures, characterized by adversarial relationships, sickness, or even death can leave all kinds of other grief. But most departures, whether generally seen as positive or negative, will include a range of responses from grief to relief, from resentment to gratitude. The point here is that the transition is the ideal time to take stock of the departure dynamics of the previous pastor and account for them thoroughly.

Healthy search processes begin with a healthy farewell and the processing of the previous pastor's leaving. A failure to do so creates a flawed foundation from which the new search can begin. If the farewell was difficult, a visit with classical church visitors or other objective observers may be helpful. Councils (or pastor search teams) who sense there is significant unfinished business with the previous pastor may want to consider the services of a Specialized Transitional Minister (*STM*—see p. 12 for more information) or a wise helper such as a church consultant or coach.

An STM may be an important option to consider not only in the aftermath of a difficult parting or a challenging relationship with a previous pastor. When a long-standing, good relationship with a pastor has concluded, the transition will also be challenging because the church will need to consider its identity apart from this pastor.

Interestingly, when a church calls a pastor without attending to significant leftover feelings or unrecognized dynamics, it is often the case that the next pastor will become what is sometimes referred to as an *unintentional interim*. In other words, the leftover issues from the previous season of the congregation's life find an unwitting expression in the relationship of the congregation with their new pastor.

➤ See Appendix A (p. 37) for a further description of this phenomenon.

## Transition: A Time to Consider the Anxiety of the Moment . . .

One temptation to which many congregations and councils succumb is that of *beginning to look for a pastor too quickly*. There are good reasons for the seductive power of this temptation. Congregations without a pastor can become unsettled, with congregants anxious and the atmosphere filled with uncertainty. It is a difficult place for a group of people to settle into, and it is a place from which a group eagerly seeks relief. Waiting can be difficult. Therefore, it is essential that leaders remain calm during this time of transition and not allow impatience to undermine a process that will take some time.

## ... and the Opportunity of the Moment

This time of unsettledness is exactly the kind of time when a congregation does well to ask some important questions. For example,

- How have we been shaped by our distant and recent history?
- Who are we now that our previous pastor has left?
- What are core values of our congregation from which we will not depart?
- What will we expect of our next pastor? How is that the same or different from what we expected of our last pastor?
- What can our next pastor expect of us? How is that the same or different from what our last pastor expected?
- What differences existing among us do we need to surface and begin to discuss before we call the next pastor?
- What leftover hurts need some naming and healing before the next pastor is called so that he/she is not blindsided by the anger and grief that accompany those hurts?

Congregations and their councils that move too quickly into the search process miss a golden opportunity to explore these dimensions of their life together. In this context, leadership requires the courage to be calm. If your church is able to set aside its anxiety about not having a pastor, it will find that transition is an ideal time for taking stock of where you have been, what has changed and what remains the same about your identity, needs, and mission since the last time you called a pastor. Ensuring that these broad questions are engaged is the task to which council members are called, and the task for which this resource is designed.

## A Transition Team

For some congregations, the formation of a transition team can be a good step. This team could provide assistance to a church council with the overall process of transition, including issues that should be dealt with before a pastor search team is formed and a search is conducted.

Some of the questions that *might* warrant attention are:

- Should we move away from team ministry?
- Is this a good time to begin team ministry?
- Are there job descriptions that should be rewritten?
- Are there particular qualifications or gifts that should be sought in a prospective pastor?
- Should we consider having a fill-in pastor or contracting with a Specialized Transitional Minister during our vacancy?
- Who might be well suited to serve on a search committee?

There are at least two transition tasks/activities that are essential, and should be engaged prior to a formal search process beginning. In fact, we recommend that those who write the church profile wait until these two activities have taken place before writing the profile.

- Engaging the Past: [A Night to Remember](#)
- Naming the Present: [Appreciative Inquiry](#)

🔗 You can either access these transition tasks by clicking on the links above or by viewing them in Appendix B (p. 40)



These activities could be hosted by the council or by a transition team appointed by council. A transition team could also assist the council in forming the pastor search committee.

Transition teams can also provide some creative assistance to the council in communicating with the congregation about the congregation's life and ministry during the time of pastoral vacancy. This could include letters, sight-sound presentations, or a short video explaining how the programs, pastoral care, and leadership of the church will be managed during the time of pastoral vacancy.

➤ See Appendix B (p. 40) for more information on transition teams, including a sample Transition Team Mandate.

A congregation may find that the issues of transition require attention beyond what a coach or a volunteer transition committee can provide. In such cases, many churches appreciate the ministry of interim pastors. There are basically two kinds of interim pastors to consider.

*Specialized Transitional Ministers (STM)* are seasoned pastors who have received specific training to help a congregation through a time of transition. These pastors serve for 10 to 20 months and are well suited to help a congregation adjust to the departure of a longtime pastor, or to help a congregation that has had some difficulty or conflict in recent years. Often an STM will help a congregation with

- healing of relationships
- clarifying congregational identity
- strengthening lay leadership
- charting a vision for the next season of ministry
- setting up an effective pastor search process.

A number of STMs have been vetted and endorsed by Pastor Church Resources (PCR).

Names of STMs can be obtained from PCR at [pastorchurch@crcna.org](mailto:pastorchurch@crcna.org).

*Supply Pastors* are usually experienced pastors who help to provide continuity of preaching, pastoral care, and administration during a time of pastoral vacancy. Generally they do not lead a congregation through specific developmental tasks, but they can be very helpful in providing continuity of ministry during a time of transition. PCR maintains a list of supply pastors who have indicated their willingness to serve in an interim capacity. Contact us at [pastorchurch@crcna.org](mailto:pastorchurch@crcna.org).

# Attentive to Persons

## Introduction

Sorting out questions of identity, core values, and vision for the upcoming years renews your awareness that you are more than an organized institution—you are the body of Christ! The nature of your community is dynamic, built on relationships within an ever-changing group of people, and indwelt by an ever-stirring Spirit. Congregations themselves change, develop, and grow in much the same way that individuals and families do.

What this means for the search process is that both the pastor and the congregation are living, moving beings, and the relationship between them is fluid. It is not possible to reduce the picture of a congregation to a “still life”. Nor is it possible to reduce the picture of a pastor to a set of gifts. Beyond the matching of needs, vision, and gifts, there are personalities and dynamics that impact just how well the confluence of a given congregation, pastor, and setting will unfold. And there is still the mystery of God’s hand in the process.

What is important to remember is that thoroughness in the search process is a very good thing. Thoroughness is vital for each step along the way: for unceasing and hopeful prayers; for articulating identity, needs, and vision; for preparing profiles; for exploring options; and for carefully vetting candidates. But thoroughness does not ensure predictability. Examples abound of thorough processes resulting in disappointment, and of less than substantial processes being blessed abundantly.

Whenever we join in with what God is doing, we can be sure that there will be mystery involved. The process insists on faith, requires hope, and tests our love for each other, for the church, and for her leaders while also testing our love and trust in Jesus Christ, the Lord of the church. The Lord seems to resist any process that we imagine can be formulaic or managed. But Christ’s love and his longing for us to flourish ensure that trust in him will be blessed.

What is true for congregations and for pastors is also true for search committees. A committee is made up of persons—unique individuals who bring their own persons and histories and perspectives to the table. Together, these persons form a working group. It will be wise to attend to the personal nature of a committee and then to attend further to the personal nature of a congregation and of each and every pastor.

## When Selecting a Search Committee

A pastor search committee is a committee of the council, selected and appointed by the council and reporting to the council. It should work on behalf of the council and congregation to recommend a future pastor, but it does not have the power to obligate the church or to make the final choice of the new pastor. Here are some practical suggestions:

- It is wise to solicit names from the congregation for potential committee members, but the final selection is made by the council.
- A council member should be appointed to serve as a council liaison. This liaison attends all meetings of the committee and serves as a personal communications conduit between the council and committee, and vice versa.

- The size and composition of the search committee is determined by the council. Usually the committee is composed of five to twelve members.
- Considerations in choosing members of the search committee should include diversity of age, ethnicity, race, gender, long-time church members and newer members, spiritual gifts, and perspectives. Include, if possible, some who have had prior pastor search team experience.
- If your church has a personnel team, it may be helpful to have one of its members on the search committee to ensure that employment and personnel matters are properly considered.
- It is not recommended to include current staff members on the search committee, but opportunity for interaction between staff and prospective pastors should be facilitated. Current staff should not have “veto” power on any prospective pastor, but the search committee would be wise to listen to and consider any staff input given.
- The council informs the congregation when the pastor search committee has been appointed. There is benefit in commissioning the search team at a regularly scheduled worship service of the congregation.

### Everyone Contributes

For some committee members, serving on a pastor search committee might be a first experience of the “inner workings” of a church, and this may be disconcerting, surprising, or even daunting. For others who might have experience in this or in other church positions (such as council or ministry leader), a tendency might be to view these committee members as having the answers. It is important early on to set the expectation that everyone has something valuable to add to the process and to encourage everyone to contribute. In Chapter 3, in the section titled “The Kinds of Persons Needed for the Search Committee” (p. 18), you will find additional information regarding search committee members.

### When Establishing Workload

Effective pastor search committees are made up of people who have sufficient time available to function as part of an effective team. Congregational members who could serve well on such a team but whose schedule would make it difficult to attend meetings or accomplish tasks between meetings should not be asked to serve.

A key task of the search committee’s chairperson is to monitor the pace and workload of the group and of individual members. The pace of a search committee pertains to both the frequency of the meetings and how much is expected of each member between meetings. The effective chairperson will see that the work is distributed in such a way that no individual member is doing too much and no one is doing too little.

### Sensitive to the Vulnerability of Committee Membership

Because the search for a pastor occurs within a larger context, there are times when anxieties, tensions, or frustrations of others in the congregation are turned in the direction of the committee and its members. Sometimes strong voices can be critical of or impatient with the committee. It is important to remember that the committee works together as a whole team. It can be difficult if one or more members perceive themselves as representatives of certain groups within a congregation and therefore are accountable to them. Ultimately, committee members are members of the congregation as a whole, and accountable to Christ for this work done on behalf of the council.

For this reason, it is important that there be intentional ways for the congregation to pray for the committee and their work, both during the process but also after the new pastor arrives. There is significant anecdotal evidence indicating that during the first two years after a pastor arrives, those who were involved in the search committee process can struggle, even leaving the church. This may be related to their sense of connection with the new pastor, their investment in the new pastor's success, and their sense of vulnerability if or when congregants express some disappointment in the newly called pastor.

It is the church council's responsibility to make sure that the pastor search committee is supported by prayer, encouragement, expressions of appreciation, and spiritual care. Throughout the pastor search process and well into the new pastor's tenure, the council needs to consider and discuss the ongoing support of the search committee both as individuals and as a group.

## Open to Input from the Congregation

An important dimension of congregational transitions and pastor search processes is to create mechanisms and space for members of the congregation to provide input. There are many creative ways in which to accomplish this.

**One caution:** although a congregation should have sufficient opportunity for input, it can also happen that a congregation can feel “processed to death.” There is a limit to the number of surveys, pulse groups, and structured dialogues a congregation can endure. Prayerful discernment is needed to determine when the benefits of input are outweighed by the costs of obtaining it.

## Developing a Pool of Prospective Pastors

In the process of preparing a profile of the church, it will become possible to begin envisioning a profile of pastors who might be suitable fits for a congregation. The key is to recognize that there will be a number of pastors who may be able to engage with a congregation in a meaningful, flourishing, and fruitful ministry relationship. If you imagine that there is only one perfect fit that God has in mind, you have effectively put this process under a great deal of unwarranted pressure. You have placed undue pressure on yourselves, and you will place undue pressure on a pastor when you extend a call.

The purpose of preparing a church profile and then considering pastor profiles is to explore the question of fit. There will be a range of gifts, needs, personality, and the like that will provide parameters for considering likely possibilities. Within this range, a committee may well determine that certain gifts or skills or qualities are essential. But there is no guarantee of a perfect fit.

There are elements of mystery in every relationship, even (and especially?) in very good relationships. There are relational dynamics and circumstances and twists along the way that cannot be predicted and certainly cannot be managed to perfection. Not even Samuel was convinced about the anointing of David! Saul, on the other hand, was acclaimed as the right person for the job. Would Matthew the tax collector have been anyone's choice for a disciple of Jesus? What about Paul when he was an enemy of the church? Who could have imagined that he might become a chief apostle?

The point is that those who might love to manage the process so carefully need to remember that God strikes straight blows with crooked sticks. A nation of wayward, rebellious tribes named Israel was chosen to be a light among the Gentiles—a minister of God's grace and truth. Humility insists that you not take yourselves or your processes more seriously than is wise. Too much of a good thing is simply too much. And God's sense of humor has a way of reminding us of just that.



## Finding the Right Persons: Discerning a Good Fit

One of the most daunting tasks for search committees and prospective pastors is discerning a good fit. This discernment involves both science and mystery. No algorithm can tell you, with certainty, which pastor is right for your church. There are elements of intuition and intangible nudging of the Holy Spirit that need to be expected and prayed for.

### Beware of the Pendulum

Sometimes in an effort to maintain balance, a search committee looks for a pastor who is very much the opposite of the previous one. For example, after a very traditional pastor, a search committee might opt for a very innovative pastor or vice versa. Take the initiative to consider not only the balance of pastoral gifts and personality, but also the healthy need of the congregation at this time. A search committee does well to avoid the pitfall of a pendulum's extremes.

Still, careful thinking, prudent discernment, and wise investigation are also used by God to help you understand his care and his ways. In this regard multiple perspectives can work together to help determine fit both as a congregation seeking a pastor and as a pastor wondering about a prospective congregation. The following perspectives may prove helpful:

#### *The Perspective of Effective Leadership*

In the manual *Effective Leadership in the Church*<sup>2</sup> four qualities are presented that describe situations in which the relationship between pastor and congregation is working well. These can be considered in ways that help determine fit.

**Four factors (the four “Cs”) seem ever-present in situations of effective leadership:**

1. **Character** in the leader (which generates **trust** on the part of the followers.)
2. **Conviction** in the leader (which helps the congregation discern its **purpose and conviction**.)
3. **Competencies** in the leader (which help a congregation function as a **healthy system**—i.e., deal with the normal anxieties and conflicts of communal life in healthy and productive ways.)
4. **Confluence** of leader, congregation, time, place, ministry opportunity, and resources that is **a gift of God’s Spirit** and that enables a leader and a congregation to work joyfully together in realizing God’s purposes.<sup>3</sup>

(These characteristics are explained more fully in *Effective Leadership in the Church*, an excellent resource in the pastor search process. For free hard copies of this booklet, send an email to [pastorchurch@crcna.org](mailto:pastorchurch@crcna.org). For an electronic copy, visit [www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/spe\\_effectiveleadership.pdf](http://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/spe_effectiveleadership.pdf).)

#### *The Perspective of Culture*

Culture can suggest the external world in which someone feels most at home. But, more important, it invites consideration of the inner world in which someone feels most at home.

<sup>2</sup> Sustaining Pastoral Excellence. *Effective Leadership in the Church*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Christian Reformed Church in North America, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Sustaining Pastoral Excellence, *Effective Leadership in the Church*. p. 20.

For example, the various descriptions of congregations as “rural,” “urban,” “suburban,” “out west,” “immigrant,” or “college town” are relatively easy but superficial ways to characterize a community of faith. A myriad of other factors also define a congregation’s culture.

So too for pastors. Where a pastor grew up may be a helpful perspective in terms of potential fit. But, more important, the pastor’s experiences and faith development within the context of his/her experiences may be more telling.

It has been observed that pastors who “mirror” the culture of the congregation they serve may in fact not be the best fit. Too much similarity can lead to complacency or to a lack of creative tension within the relationship. On the other hand, a pastor whose external and internal culture is totally foreign to a congregational situation may not find sufficient points of connection with the congregation to minister effectively .

### ***A Family Systems Perspective***

This perspective likens any group to a family and the interpersonal, emotional processes that occur in every family. One dimension of this theory focuses on the individual members of the family, how each one functions as an individual while still respecting and staying connected to the family.

This helpful window on individuals and community highlights the leadership qualities of a prospective pastor rather than specific preferences or skills. This perspective would place less emphasis on a pastor’s positions with respect to specific issues such as Christian day schools or immigration policy and would focus more on the pastor’s capacity for being clear about her/his role and priorities.

From a family systems perspective, effective pastors pay attention to themselves in healthy ways while staying connected to members of the congregation. So, effective pastors would be able to define themselves in terms of principles and positions on issues without being overbearing or critical of those who do not agree.

From this perspective, effective pastors are also able to remain relatively calm and aware of what is happening in the congregation even when others might be reactionary or upset.

And, from this perspective, pastors are able to present a hospitable presence to people, encouraging them to say what they are thinking or feeling even if it differs from their own view or the views of many.

Finally, from this perspective, pastors acknowledge that they will always have blind spots, and therefore invite the input and critique of others. Being aware of having blind spots ideally produces an active humility, and an awareness of the need to collaborate in ministry. It also means that a pastor’s story or perspective is neither the only one nor the singularly defining one. Rather, a pastor’s story and a pastor’s perspective intersect with the stories and the perspective of others in the community.

### ***Open to the Spirit’s Stretching, Surprises, and Stirrings***

It is important to maintain a healthy balance between being respectful of what you have initially heard from pastors who have expressed interest, and being open to the surprises of God’s Spirit at work. Life—in the church or in the world—is always an adventure of waiting, watching, wondering, and growing in the mysteries of faith and hope and love.

Because you may have a sharply focused picture of your preferred next pastor, you could end up overlooking some potentially good prospective pastors.

It is human nature to imagine a preferable future. So, as has been said, “We are looking for a 38-year-old pastor with 24 years of experience who is a humbly dynamic leader and who cares deeply about each of us and leads us courageously but sensitively into a preferred future even though some of us may, at times, offer well-meaning but misguided resistance to his/her leadership.”

Churches that project a dynamic like this will often overlook some prospective pastors who may, in fact, be able to provide effective and timely leadership to their congregation.

Who might some of those pastors be?

### **Older Pastors**

There are pastors in their 50’s and 60’s who abound with creativity, energy, and capacity to relate to a variety of age groups. Many find a call in this time of life to provide a sweet spot where their experience and giftedness are very much what the congregation needs. In this regard, youthfulness is more about a well-developed life and less about chronological age.

### **Female Pastors**

Some congregations are very open to calling women pastors. Others may not consider this option at all. However, there are a number of congregations who have not seriously considered this option but, in fact, might be well advised to do so. The stories are increasing within the CRCNA of churches calling a woman pastor and finding a higher receptivity than some had imagined possible.

### **Recent Seminary Graduates or Candidates for Ministry**

Though many churches value pastoral ministry experience in their potential pastor, many other churches are pleasantly surprised to find that recent seminary graduates bring wisdom, energy, insights, and gifts that belie their apparent inexperience. Updated contact information on candidates for ordination in the CRCNA can be found at [Candidacy Committee crcna.org/candidacy](http://CandidacyCommittee.crcna.org/candidacy).

### **Pastors with Disabilities or Chronic Medical Challenges**

It is a marvel to experience Itzhak Perlman, the renowned violinist, in concert. It also catches one’s attention when he stands only with the help of his crutches. Considering persons with disabilities or chronic medical needs may require some congregational adjustments, but these factors ought not to remove a potential pastor from consideration.

### **The Binational Factor**

Congregations in Canada or in the United States may be reluctant to consider a pastor from across the border. While it is true that there may be some complications in cross-border calls, it is more significant that many such calls have resulted in highly effective ministries and can be well worth the effort they may entail. As one denomination in two distinct countries, we benefit from cross-pollination. We recommend you speak to an immigration lawyer and check with the CRNCA’s Human Resources department to find out what is involved in navigating cross-border calls.

### **Pastors who have experienced a separation from a previous congregation**

Sometimes search teams are leery of those who have an Article 17 (*Church Order and Its Supplements*<sup>4</sup>) separation in their past. While such experiences can be difficult, that is not always the case. Each one is unique and marks a time of change. Each separation has its own unique circumstances and invites the telling of a story. Separations are not the whole story. Rather than eliminate a pastor candidate because of an Article 17, invite that pastor to share with you what they experienced and what they learned. How we respond and what we learn through such experience are elements of the narrative that mark the journey of churches and their pastors. Pastors who have endured an unwanted separation with a former church may have gained invaluable, first-hand wisdom about themselves and ministry as a result.

### **Pastors ethnically different from the congregation's majority culture**

Pastors whose ethnic background differs from that of most of the congregation can provide opportunities worth imagining. For example, dare to imagine a pastor whose appearance does not mirror the majority culture of the congregation but whose very presence reminds you of the diversity of the worldwide body of Christ and challenges you to increase and welcome diversity in your congregation. In situations like this, the community of faith benefits by learning in profound ways that your Christian identity does not depend on external factors but on the love and grace of Christ, who desires that believers from all nations may be one in him.

### **Bivocational Pastors**

A growing number of congregations are choosing to call pastors to serve while earning part of their livelihood in another profession. The reasons for this vary. Some congregations simply cannot afford the salary and benefits of a full-time pastor. Some congregations choose this route to allow for multiple pastors or staff while taking on less financial obligation. Still other congregations seek to encourage the various gifts and roles of many members by not singling out one person as the sole pastor. And yet other congregations wish to affirm a pastor's gifts in other realms or their incarnational presence in another setting or industry.

Regardless of the rationale for bivocational ministry, a bivocational arrangement presents particular opportunities and challenges for the congregation and pastor to consider and attend to together. Models for bivocational ministry in the CRCNA are varied, continue to evolve in exciting ways, and are not included in this resource at this time. However, substantial guidance and wisdom for bivocational ministry will be available on [Pastor Church Resources](http://Pastor Church Resources)' website. [crcna.org/pcr](http://crcna.org/pcr) (In process during 2021.)

### **Compensation Considerations**

Some of the special circumstances cited above may warrant conversations about accommodations or compensation. Examples could include accessibility in the parsonage, maternity/paternity leave, time off for regular medical procedures, and, in bivocational situations, contingency plans for when the pastor's other job requires more of her/his time. Although these considerations may not involve large adjustments, it is important to discuss them in the calling process.

<sup>4</sup> Christian Reformed Church. *Church Order and Its Supplements*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Christian Reformed Church in North America, 2019.



## Respectful Etiquette and Confidentiality

Prospective pastors often experience a kind of limbo: not knowing exactly where things stand in the search process. Is their name still being considered as a prospective pastor for the position, or not? If it is, what will the next step be, and when will that step occur? Communication that happens intermittently and sometimes insufficiently can become significant negative data for a prospective pastor. Clear and timely communication among all parties involved is an essential courtesy. It is an expression of hospitality that can help to ensure best results in a process. Search committees do well to imagine life in a prospective pastor's shoes.

One inherent source of tension is the rate at which a search committee typically can work, in contrast with the rate at which a prospective pastor might hope. Although there are pressures on both sides, it can be a challenge for prospective pastors and committees to keep these variables in view so as to respect everyone in the process appropriately.

A related courtesy has to do with confidentiality. Appropriate, principled confidentiality is the kind of hospitable gesture by which committees respect and honor those involved in a search process. Even though a new relationship is being explored, the integrity of existing relationships between a pastor and his/her current congregation must be protected. Navigating this exploration is a challenge at the best of times, and the courtesy of confidentiality is essential.

As a relationship develops with a prospective pastor, there will be a time for checking the provided references. There will also be a time when a pastor will need to share with her/his current council that exploratory conversations with another church are under way. Ideally, this communication will take place in a way and at a time that is agreeable to the prospective pastor.

One additional note regarding courtesy. If a search team is in serious conversation with more than one pastor at a time, this should be noted and communicated openly. The same courtesy would be expected of pastors in conversation with more than one church at a time.

# Attentive to Process

## Introduction

A search committee might wish it were as efficient as an Internet search engine: virtually instant and amazingly thorough. And there are pastor search firms that promise results almost that effortlessly. But while search engines and databases may be helpful at certain points along the way, the search for a pastor is more than a mechanical venture. The relationship between pastor and congregation involves a great many variables and calls for significant discernment on the part of the search committee and prospective pastors.

### Head-Hunters

There are a number of “head-hunter” organizations which churches can hire for assistance in finding their next pastor. Some churches have found these organizations helpful in pastor searches. However, we have observed that such organizations have mixed track records. This may partly owe to:

- mismatched incentives (*A search firm may be motivated in the short-term to seal the deal, even if the deal is less than ideal for the pastor or the church.*)
- unfamiliarity with CRC polity (*A search firm may be unaware of the complexity of bringing a non-CRC pastor into a CRC congregation or the unique role of a CRC pastor's relationship to council.*)
- a false sense of confidence (*A pastor or church might think that if the search firm representative thinks it will be a good match, they can take their word for it.*)

While it may be a relief to have a third party take the lead in this process, we believe that the search process is important for a local congregation to engage and own for itself. The challenge of a search process is a vital exercise of health and conditioning for the body of believers. And it underlines the fact that a pastor is more than a hire. A pastor and congregation come together in a process which is a mysterious mix of divine calling and appointment on the one hand, and human responsibility and dependence on the other.

Search processes fueled by an anxious sense of hurry and need are unwise and unhelpful. Rather than simply getting the search process completed, ensure that the search process itself is thoughtful and thorough. The organic nature of engaging in conversations, pausing to reflect and evaluate, dealing with the reality of the human element and the divine are all factors that suggest a process that will require patience, persistence, and prayer. Pace should not be predetermined but flexible, guided by what is actually happening rather than expectations of what should be.

While it takes courage to be calm, such courage belongs to the community whose hope is in the Lord. It is striking, then, that we call such hope “*waiting on the Lord*”.

## The Kinds of Persons Needed for the Search Committee

An essential *first step* in establishing a healthy process is to begin where the previous chapter left off: attentive to persons. This is certainly true in identifying those persons who will make up the search committee.

- Effective committee members are team players. The level of honesty, communication, and trust in a well-functioning team is high. Effective committee members are not lone rangers and can be counted on to contribute to the effort and not just as bystanders.
- Effective committee members have proven character. That is, they have had experience and have been observed in other ministry opportunities with positive outcomes. When a church is searching for a pastor, that is probably not the best time to test out an individual's ministry performance.
- Effective committee members will be available for the long haul (maybe 18-24 months) with no long periods of absence anticipated.
- Effective committee members are personally and spiritually mature. There is a spiritual and relational vulnerability that comes with this assignment. Members of the congregation may intentionally or unintentionally seek to influence the process or glean information that must remain within the committee. Search committee members can feel personally responsible for the success/effectiveness of the called pastor.
- Effective committee members are patient. Search processes often take longer than expected and involve some disappointments and setbacks along the way.
- Effective committee members are persons with spiritual disciplines such as quietness, study, and prayer. Listening to the voice of God amid the noise of many other voices will be an important aspect of the search committee's work.
- Effective committee members recognize that the unsettled time between pastors is a time of opportunity when important congregational conversations can happen and when essential adjustments in congregational structure or culture can be accomplished.

### Including Persons of Influence?

Search committee members who have a great deal of informal power can find this process slow and excessively tedious. Leading members of founding families, those who contribute a significant percentage of the annual budget, or those who hold significant positions of influence in the surrounding community may struggle with the collaborative nature of the congregational community in general, and the search committee in particular, and become impatient with the required process and the importance of being hospitable to the viewpoint of others.

## Team Building

Time and effort spent in building a sense of unity and collaboration among the committee members is wise. Although at first it may seem to slow the process of getting to the actual work of the team, in the long run it will make the group more effective—and perhaps even more efficient.

- Spend time together in prayer for each other and for this process.
- Building a sense of trust comes from knowing and trusting each other as committed believers, devoted to the wellbeing of the congregation.

- Get to know each other by introducing yourselves and telling your stories, including that of your faith *journey*.
- Identify those things about your local church that you value, those things that concern you, and those things for which you hope and dream.
- Take time at the start of each meeting to check-in with one another with a question like, “What was your favorite part about today? What did you need to do to get here today?”
- At the end of each meeting, check-out with another question like, “What new thing did you learn in our time today? Where did you see God at work during our time together?”

Some of these activities may seem a little frivolous or a waste of time, but these simple interactions generate the kind of trust that will help maintain group unity and avoid the worst of group conflict.

## Identifying Strengths and Gaps of the Committee

- Hopefully the council’s appointees to the search committee include the diversity of gifts necessary for the task. Still, it would be wise for the newly formed search committee to conduct its own assessment of gifts within the group. If there are key gifts lacking (e.g., organization, prayer, communication), additional people may be needed.
- Committee roles should be determined early by the group itself (rather than appointed by the council)—chair, co-chairs, secretary, communications, correspondence, liaison to the council, etc.
- Be sufficiently flexible to make assignment adjustments along the way.

## Establishing Protocols

Each of the following issues is important in the performance of the search committee and the outcome of the search. Talk about these so as to come to an understanding about how they will function for your group:

- We maintain confidentiality. What do we all mean by confidentiality? Talk about your expectations. Name them for the group.
- We coordinate all expenditures of the search with committee approval.
- There must be a significant majority vote of the search committee regarding the final recommendation of a pastor to our congregation.
- We will use the pastor profile provided by the CRCNA as a primary means to become acquainted with prospective pastors.
- The search committee thoroughly completes its investigation of the prospective pastor and references. (*A criminal background check will be conducted by following the safe church protocols of the congregation.*)
- Financial provisions (salary, housing, benefits, and moving costs) discussed with the prospective pastor have been approved by council.
- A prospective pastor will not preach for our congregation until the committee is seriously considering the recommendation of that prospective pastor.
- The congregation will be notified in advance that a prospective pastor will be preaching.

## Communication Protocols

Communication is an essential priority. Intentional communication with the prospective pastor, the council, and the congregation is essential for a healthy process that respects each participant.

### ***With prospective pastors***

Timely updates of status at every step of the process are courteous and proper. Once the search committee has made direct contact with a prospective pastor, the committee should regularly keep them informed as to how far along the search committee is in the process of selecting a pastor for recommendation. Wise search committees will even inform their candidates of delays or of months where no action was taken by the committee. Then, at a later date, if a particular prospective pastor is no longer under consideration, a letter should be sent to notify them of the committee's decision.

➤ See Appendix C (p. 45) for a sample email to prospective pastors.

If various people will be contacting potential pastors, it is wise to develop a template for those conversations.

### ***With the council***

Since the search committee is a committee of the council, regular and detailed communication with the council is important and should happen at least monthly—more often if needed. Communications to the council could include these topics:

- latest action
- next steps
- committee membership changes
- latest congregational communication

### ***With the congregation***

Communications with the congregation can be done in ways that are commonly used in your setting, such as via bulletin announcements, newsletters, special search committee flyers, verbal reports during a worship service, and more.

Written communications to the congregation could answer questions like these:

- What is new?
- Did I hear that some pastors are visiting our church?
- Is there anything you are learning about pastors that you can share with us?
- What can you tell us about the next steps?
- How will we as congregation members get to know the pastor(s)?
- What can we be praying about?

## **Committee Process Flow Chart**

It is not helpful to “predict” or “prescribe” when the search process should be completed. “We will have a new pastor by such and such date.” A good process takes time. A slow process is as likely to be a sign of a healthy committee as an unhealthy one. If people begin asking, “What’s taking so long?,” a search team does well to ask questions such as:

- Is the committee meeting on a regular schedule?
- Are committee members all meaningfully engaged?
- Has there been a loss of enthusiasm after several calls resulted in declines?



While the pace of a process is one consideration, the more important factor for a committee is to stay focused on following a good, consistent process like the following:

### ***Step One: Create a church profile***

The church profile is often the prospective pastor's first look at and therefore first impression of the congregation. Templates to create a church profile can be accessed through [Pastor Church Resources \[crcna.org/pcr\]\(http://PastorChurchResources.crcna.org/pcr\)](http://PastorChurchResources.crcna.org/pcr). If you spent time tending to the transition (Chapter 1), the church profile may already be largely written. If not, take your time filling it out thoroughly. A church profile should not be merely the product of one committee member's perspective. Along with your church's website, your church profile will play the biggest role in determining whether a pastor applies for your position.

In addition to the template church profile, some search teams find it helpful to create a more detailed and unique profile with a packet of information about the surrounding community. This provides an opportunity for the church to graciously, accurately, honestly, and winsomely portray its character as well as opportunities and challenges inherent in becoming its possible next pastor.

➤ See Appendix D (p. 46) for creating a church information packet.

### ***Step Two: Update your church's website***

Every prospective pastor will visit your church's website before they do anything else to investigate your church. Make sure the website is updated with relevant information. Remove old or outdated links or information.

### ***Step Three: Post a listing***

Once the profile is ready, it should be posted on the Church Positions page of the CRCNA [Network](http://Network.network.crcna.org) at [network.crcna.org](http://network.crcna.org). Position listings on the Network are the primary means by which pastors and churches find one another. The listing should be updated and reposted every six weeks until the position is filled. You may also want to post the position on the church's website.

### ***Step Four: Solicit names from the congregation***

Invite your congregation members or others who know your church well to recommend names of potential candidates.

- Acknowledge the receipt of a name, whatever the source.
- Determine as a committee whether or not to proceed with this person.
- If the committee wants to proceed, obtain an updated profile and distribute to each committee member.

➤ See Appendix E (p. 47) for forms used by congregational members to suggest a prospective pastor.

### ***Step Five: Seek input from PastorSearch***

The denomination supports search teams with the [PastorSearch \[www.crcna.org/pcr/churches/pastor-search-process\]\(http://PastorSearch.www.crcna.org/pcr/churches/pastor-search-process\)](http://PastorSearch.www.crcna.org/pcr/churches/pastor-search-process) process, which includes a database of all ministers of the Word in the CRCNA.

A search committee can ask for access to this database and search according to a few filters like length of time served in present call or regions of the U.S. and Canada the candidate is willing to serve.

(To access the database, email [pastorchurch@crcna.org](mailto:pastorchurch@crcna.org).)

The benefit of *PastorSearch* is that it gives you quick access to a lot of information about candidates, including their minister profiles. Many search committees appreciate being able to access so much information so quickly. Reading through profiles can help a search committee get a sense of the diversity of pastors in our denomination, and can help clarify what they, as a church, are really looking for.

The challenge with *PastorSearch* is that it tends to yield a very large number of candidates.

*It is important to remember that PastorSearch is designed to include every pastor in the CRC, including pastors who are not at all open to a call and those who have not updated their profiles in decades.*

(Tip: These two groups are often one and the same. An out-of-date profile is a pretty reliable clue a pastor is not actively seeking a call. Fortunately, once you have downloaded results from the *PastorSearch* portal, you can sort the results by how recently the profile was updated. The more recently the profile was updated, the more likely the pastor is to be willing to consider a call.)

The *PastorSearch* portal does not replace the process of discernment, but is one important piece of the larger discernment process. It does include the task of reading quite a number of minister profiles. If you are looking for that one, perfect needle in the *PastorSearch* haystack, your expectations probably need to be recalibrated. When you spend time on *PastorSearch*, part of what you learn is that there are many suitable needles in the haystack. In all likelihood, there are many pastors who could serve your church very well.

### ***Step Six: Review pastor profiles***

By now, you should have a number of applicants who have reached out to you (via your Network posting) in addition to names of potential pastors from your congregation, a list of recent seminary graduates, and the profiles you have identified as promising (via the *PastorSearch* portal.)

In general, we recommend that the entire search committee review every application you receive. If the number of profile matches generated by *PastorSearch*, [Candidacy\\_crcna.org/candidacy/candidates](http://Candidacy_crcna.org/candidacy/candidates), and member recommendations is especially high, it may be worth dividing the task of reading those profiles among all the members of the group. Any candidate or minister whose profile is particularly promising could then be contacted to see if they would be willing to consider applying or, at least, having a conversation with a search committee member.

### ***Step Seven: Look for fit, not Rev. Perfect***

The purpose of preparing a church profile and then considering pastor profiles is to explore the question of fit. There will be a range of gifts, needs, personalities, and the like that will provide parameters for considering likely possibilities. Within this range, a committee may well determine that certain gifts or skills or qualities are essential. There will be a number of pastors—each unique in gifts, personality, and experience—who are fitting prospects.

When reading pastor profiles, the challenge is to keep an open mind and heart. Continue to season this part of the process with grace. A profile represents a real person, loved and called by the Lord and the church.

Keep in mind that as much as a church can be tempted to airbrush its own profile, so may a pastor. This is precisely why the actual conversations between pastors and congregations are important in the process. On the other hand, pastors and congregations can also be guilty of presenting an overly negative self-image. Profiles offer glimpses, snapshots, and even some moving pictures of who a person may be. But profiles do not say everything.

There remains the challenge of sifting through a profile as thoroughly and diligently as wisdom requires. Part of a profile includes the provision of references. Search committees must follow through on checking the references provided, aiming to determine that the profile is fair in its depiction of the person. Generally, it is important to check references *before* extending an invitation to an in-person visit.

### ***Step Eight: Contact prospective pastors***

Be as clear and consistent in your communication with pastor candidates as possible. It may be wise to have one or two people on the committee act as “communications coordinators” to answer any questions raised by prospective pastors. The contents of those conversations should be shared with the whole committee.

It is also time to begin reaching out to your most promising candidates. Establishing a consistent pattern for dealing with prospective pastors is essential.

It is a courtesy that any prospective pastor has written communication with just one or two people instead of a variety of people. This is more likely to result in consistent, timely, and accurate information sharing.

Phone conversations are likely to take place between the prospective pastor and a named contact person. Content of the conversations should be shared with the whole committee, as much as possible.

If face-to-face conversations happen with just a few committee members and the prospective pastor, those conversations should be shared with the whole committee, as much as possible. The location of such conversations should be mutually decided upon.

### ***Interactions with Pastors Flow Chart***

- Send prospective pastors information about the church, including the church profile, a job description, and anything else that would help them become acquainted with the congregation and its ministries.
- *See Appendix C (p. 45) for a sample email.*
- Whenever possible, access an audiovisual source to observe the pastor preach. A follow-up discussion by the whole committee is essential. In certain cases it may be necessary to consider visiting the pastor onsite.
- If all remains favorable, schedule an interview. It is wise to conduct every first interview in the same manner (virtually or in person). This ensures a level playing field for all.
- Send a set of sample questions for the upcoming interview. Also, invite prospective pastors to consider questions they would like to ask of the search team.
- Check references.
- Consider a second interview that could include a prospective pastor’s spouse—if the pastor is married.
- The search committee brings forward the name of one, two, or three prospective pastors to the council for approval to continue the process.
- Upon approval, the congregation is informed. When possible, have the prospective pastor(s) preach and meet the congregation in an informal setting. Find ways for the prospective pastor to interact with groups and with individuals. This will give the pastor and yourselves the opportunity to observe and engage the interpersonal styles and dynamics at work.
- The congregation votes.

- If a call is extended and accepted, the search committee's work might conclude, with another group guiding the transition process. Or the search committee could continue meeting to complete the transition process. This decision should be made and agreed upon by the committee and the council at the beginning of the process so that everyone is aware of and understands the scope and duration of the committee's work.

**Note:** Both the prospective pastor and the council may discontinue the process at any time. Timely communication of this decision is essential.

### A Word About Email

One of the common means of communication today is email. While email is efficient and very useful, there is at least one drawback worth noting, and a hazard. The *drawback* is that email communication does not allow for nuance in communication that happens when we can hear the tone of voice (as by telephone) or when we can read a person's body language and facial expressions (as in a face-to-face meeting). Consequently, emails can sometimes lead to miscommunication. A *hazard* that must be noted involves the dreaded "reply to all" response, which can lead to some communications going to a broader audience than intended. Once an email is sent, it is part of the public record.

## The Interviews

At times it may be necessary to conduct a preliminary virtual interview by phone or video. Conducting an effective interview is both science and art. There is no one formula that fits every interviewer and every person being interviewed. But there are some best practice basics that are wise to keep in mind. For example, we think it wise to have the entire search committee in on the key first interviews but to have one or two individuals ask most of the questions. Another strategy is to have different persons on the team focus on specific aspects of the conversational agenda. In addition, make sure to provide an opportunity for the prospective pastor to ask questions both along the way and before the interview is concluded.

Generally, it is better to ask open-ended questions that cannot be answered by a simple choice or a "yes/no" answer. "Tell us a bit about how you plan for a meeting you are expected to lead," or, "What goes into your sermon planning and preparation?" are better questions than one that simply asks, "Do you prefer contemporary worship or liturgical worship?" In that regard, prospective pastors often report how an early question about their stance on a hot denominational issue can raise a red flag in terms of the cultural values and ministry vision of the congregation seeking a new pastor. While these issues may be important to the congregation and search committee, they are better handled when some rapport has been established between the search committee and the prospective pastor.

Face-to-face interviews are always preferable to virtual interviews. Nevertheless, if you are interviewing a number of different pastors, it is wise to be consistent in the method used. And if it is not possible to meet in person, then a video/phone interview is preferable to a "voice only" situation. One reason for this is that an effective interview involves asking good questions, listening well, and observing such intangibles as body language and the emotional processes that become apparent during the interchange. For example, the search committee and the prospective pastor may exhibit laughter or surprising silence around a particular interchange. These are important dynamics to observe.

Effective interviews take planning. They do not just happen—at least not when done well. Planning for this interchange is a crucial step in an effective process. In fact, some churches rehearse the interview by inviting a classis-appointed counselor or a neighboring pastor to help them get ready by being “interviewed” as if they were a prospective pastor. This is a beneficial exercise that helps the search committee prepare and even enjoy a bit of play as it anticipates these key interactions with prospective pastors.

- See Appendix F (p. 49) for questions that can and cannot be asked in an interview.
- See Appendix G (p. 54) for samples of screening questions.
- See Appendix H (p. 55) for sample interview questions.

## Protocols for Visits “Away”

Technological advances in video technology make it much easier to observe the candidate in his/her current place. If the church does not already offer livestream or recorded worship services, your committee may ask the pastor to record her or himself.

If circumstances make it necessary to visit a prospective pastor in his/her current place, for the purpose of attending a worship service and listening to the pastor preach a sermon, it is wise to attend to these courtesies:

- Visitors do well to maintain a low profile, not calling attention to themselves. Alerting a pastor beforehand is not recommended. Congregational greeters at the door need only know that you are visiting.
- The presence of a visiting search committee can be disconcerting to a pastor and congregation. Respect for existing relationships calls for a discrete rather than flamboyant presence.
- Introducing yourself to the pastor *after the service* may or may not be possible but is appropriate.

## Protocols for Inviting Prospective Pastors to Visit Your Church

- Determine your rationale for inviting prospective pastors and whether or not proximity and travel costs will play a role.
- Inform your congregation of the reason for the visit.
- The visit typically includes an invitation to preach.



## Inclusion of Spouse and Children—If Pastor is Married

It will be important to think about including a pastor's spouse and/or children in this process. There may be a number of preferences, balances, and perhaps even inherent tensions involved.

- Will the spouse be included in the interview process at all? If so, at what stage and in what manner?
- Will the spouse and/or children be included in any visits to your church, and, if so, how will your church deal with the costs involved?
- Are there expectations, either formal or informal, for the pastor's spouse and family in this congregation? If so, are they negotiable, and how would such negotiations unfold?

There are significant dynamics for a pastor and family that need to be recognized.

- While a pastor is a very public figure, there may be ambiguity on the part of a spouse and children toward the public nature of this role. While pastors and their families typically embrace the visibility of the role with dignity and grace, it can be a significant challenge for some. Inviting input from a pastor and pastor's family about their level of comfort with public attention for themselves and their children is a welcome courtesy.
- Although the pastor is the one called and employed by a church, some spouses welcome a great deal of input in the interview and calling process; others do not.
- While the possibility of a new ministry setting carries much excitement, bear in mind that the consideration of leaving a current setting may involve a great deal of loss: relationships, securities, spousal career, and home are just a few examples. Sensitivity to potential losses will be helpful in navigating initial conversations with a prospective pastor and spouse.

## Protocols for Checking References

- It is important to check references before extending an invitation to an in-person visit. This is both an important and sensitive part of the process. Prospective pastors often are not ready for their inquiries into a new position to be known to others beyond the references they supply. Both the reference and the person who checks the reference should respect confidentiality.
- There is also a skill associated with gleaning information from the reference—how much can be asked, how much can be said, etc.
- Be sure to communicate with the prospective pastor about your intention to initiate this step.

➤ See *Appendix I* (p. 56) for sample requests for references.

## Search Committee Budget

Here are some basic principles to have in place with regard to a search committee budget:

- The council/finance team determines what the budget is to cover: meeting expenses, pastor prospect interviews/visits (travel, lodging), other?
- Committee members are not compensated (no honorariums, etc.), but costs incurred will be reimbursed.
- A mechanism should be in place to revisit the budget if the search process extends beyond the anticipated time.
- Moving expenses for the new pastor can be part of the search committee's budget, or such details can be overseen by, for example, a transition committee.

➤ See *Appendix J* (p. 59) for details on search committee expenses.

# Attentive to Denominational Protocol

## CRC Calling System

In the Christian Reformed Church, pastors are not appointed to serve in congregations; they await the call of a specific congregation or ministry context. In the case of a congregation, the call is extended after congregational voting and the subsequent decision of the congregation's council. It is understood that in extending a call and in responding to a call, the human will as well as the Spirit of God are at work.

When the calling system functions at its best, it allows for a sharing of ministry gifts and acknowledges the reality of changing circumstances and needs in both the lives of pastors and the lives of congregations. Search committees are free to propose calls to ministers of their choosing; ministers are free to either accept or decline such calls.

The length of pastoral tenure in any given congregation or ministry setting is flexible and a matter of significant discernment. It ranges from just a few years to well beyond twenty. How long is too long? How brief is too brief? In the ebb and flow of congregations extending calls, pastors receiving calls, and decisions being made to either accept or decline, the Spirit of God stirs and the human heart wrestles. (*As a matter of pastoral wisdom, ministers are encouraged to invite discernment input from their supervising council—ideally, a form of healthy collaboration.*)

## Who is Eligible to be Called?

Essentially, every ordained pastor in the CRC is available for call. This is the first and foremost pool of possibilities for a search committee to consider. Alongside this group are those who have completed their course of training and been approved by the annual Christian Reformed synod as [candidates for ministry](http://crcna.org/candidacy/candidates) and are therefore available for call. (Upon receiving and accepting a call for the first time, a candidate must submit to an examination by the regional classis of which the calling church is a part. Upon sustaining this examination, a candidate is ordained into ministry in the CRC.) Once ordained as ministers of the Word in the CRC, ministers may serve across the denomination. Since 2005, ordained ministers in the Reformed Church of America are also eligible to be called by Christian Reformed congregations (and vice versa), provided that the relevant rules are followed. (See Church Order Art. 8-d, for more information.)

A number of specific restrictions, courtesies, and protocols apply to the calling of pastors, and these guidelines are described in the [CRC's Church Order And Its Supplements](http://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/Church_Order_and_Its_Supplements.pdf), a document that is intended to bless the church with collected wisdom and identified parameters for the manner in which we organize ourselves as congregations and work together within our denomination.

- Ministers whose tenure in their present congregation is two years or less should not be nominated for a call unless there are “special and weighty reasons.” In such a case, there are specific protocols to follow. (Church Order, Art. 8-a)

- Ministers may not be called a second time to the same vacant congregation within the space of one year, except with advice of classis. (Church Order, Art. 8-b)
- A congregation's permission to call depends on sustaining a minimum number of active, professing members (45). Special permission to extend a call may be received via consultation and approval of classis. (Church Order, Art. 38-d)

There are a number of synodical decisions which are also relevant to the calling process:

- Staff positions for ordained ministers follow the same protocols with respect to calling.
- Moving costs for a minister and dependents are the responsibility of the calling church.
- Compensation package takes effect on the day after previous employment is concluded.
- Upon receiving an official call to become the pastor of a particular congregation, the time-frame for decision-making is three weeks. If needed, extensions may be requested and granted.

## A Classis Counselor Can Help

Whenever a church is searching for a pastor, it does so with the help of an outside resource person appointed by classis to be the counselor in the search process. The counselor is one of the other pastors in the classis and may be someone specifically requested by the church. The counselor's role can be as expansive as a coach—helping a church wrestle with big identity questions—or as narrow as helping a church attend to appropriate Church Order protocols. Ordinarily a counselor's interaction is with the council, rather than the search committee. This is one way in which a congregation experiences its relationship with the broader family (classis) of Christian Reformed congregations in a region.

Before a call can be extended, the church council must provide the counselor with a copy of the official letter of call. The counselor, on behalf of classis, must ensure that relevant provisions of the Church Order have been followed and that the compensation package and any other specific conditions attached to the letter of call are appropriate. The church counselor then endorses the letter of call by signing it. If the counselor cannot in good conscience sign the letter of call, adjustments to the letter of call may have to be made in consultation with the council. If agreement cannot be reached, the church council will need to appeal to classis or its interim committee for further advice.

**Note:** A letter of call speaks in broad terms about a minister's calling. It does not serve as a tightly defined position description, and therefore does not address specific expectations of a congregation or of a pastor. Search committees and councils will need to have a shared understanding of basic expectations for the prospective pastor—in areas such as worship leadership (preaching how often), teaching, pastoral care duties, engaging the community beyond the church, etc. These specifics will serve as the basis for ongoing conversations and consideration as a call is explored together, and Lord willing, as a longer term relationship gets underway. Position descriptions typically have some fixed elements, but must be flexible and current, based on gracious, candid, ongoing conversations between a pastor and council. A helpful resource is [Evaluation Essentials for Congregational Leaders](https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/Evaluation_Essentials.pdf). [crcna.org/sites/default/files/Evaluation\\_Essentials.pdf](https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/Evaluation_Essentials.pdf)

## Letter of Call

Search [The Network network.crcna.org](https://www.network.crcna.org) to download the most recent version of the official letter of call.

Included with the letter of call are the specifics of the compensation package relative to salary and benefits. Search committees will find the annual Minister Compensation Survey, available from the denomination, a helpful tool in preparing an appropriate package. The CRCNA conducts an annual "salary survey" and

produces a report that can serve as a guide for churches constructing a compensation package. The survey shows by region the salary that pastors are being paid and relative adjustments that are made for housing, health insurance, etc. One important talking point is often the expectations, availability, and suitability of a local Christian day school—a dynamic that can hold high value in a given CRC congregation.

Arrangements for housing vary between parsonages and housing allowances. This topic can require some intentional conversation because of the range of housing costs across the continent and how that relates to pastors' abilities to afford their own housing. Churches with parsonages sometimes meet pastors who would prefer a housing allowance; churches without parsonages sometimes meet pastors who would prefer or need to have housing provided. Some kind of understanding must be reached prior to a final decision on the call.

In situations where a church owns a parsonage, there are additional conversations that may be very helpful to have with respect to such matters as pets, painting and decorating, and protocols surrounding visits by maintenance and grounds committee members. If there are specific expectations with respect to a pastor's spouse, these might also be addressed. It may be helpful to draft a brief "memo of understanding" that identifies some of these specific matters.

Search committees dissolve, and councils (and council committees) regularly rotate membership. Memos of understanding can be a helpful way for all to remember what was promised and/or arranged.

◆ See Appendix K (p. 60) for details on a memo of understanding.

## Calling Pastors from Other Denominations

It is possible to consider calling a pastor from another denomination, but only if the search process for a pastor from within the CRCNA and RCA denominations has been thorough and unproductive. The need for extending such a call must be established to the satisfaction of the Candidacy Committee of the denomination and in consultation with the area classis.<sup>5</sup> If this need is considered valid, such a pastor would then follow the procedures outlined in the [Journey Toward Ordination](http://crcna.org/candidacy/journey-toward-ordination) [crcna.org/candidacy/journey-toward-ordination](http://crcna.org/candidacy/journey-toward-ordination) document as prescribed by the Candidacy Committee.

## Term Calls

Letters of call may designate a specific term of service. This would be an exception to the general indefinite tenure of a letter of call, but certain situations may benefit from such an arrangement. There are some precise protocols surrounding such term calls, with respect to setting in place the possibility of reappointment and the manner in which that would be determined, the financial arrangements, and protocols that cover the events following the end of such a term call.<sup>6</sup>

**Note:** If a term call is extended to a ministry candidate awaiting ordination, the length of the term should not be less than two years.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> For more information, see Art. 8-c and 8-d of the [Church Order](#), and in particular the Supplement, Art. 8-e and 8-f.

<sup>6</sup> For more information, see the [Church Order](#) Supplement, Art. 8-c.

<sup>7</sup> For more information, see the [Church Order](#) Supplement, Art. 8-c.4.

# Closing the Loops

## The New Pastor's Entry

In any new relationship there is a relatively short period of time in which to make a first impression. This is also true in the pastor-congregation relationship. The first year is an important year to begin well together. There are a number of strategies that various congregations have used to intentionally enhance good beginnings:

- The pastor search committee could remain intact and meet a few times with the new pastor and, potentially, the pastor's spouse. This would be a time of discussing what each is experiencing compared to what was expected. It could also be a time to clarify whatever understood agreements may now seem a bit unclear. And it could be a time to pray together about what is happening in this new relationship.
- There is wisdom in finding natural ways for the pastor to meet early with various groups of people in informal settings. Examples could include potlucks or picnics with elder districts, ministry teams, or particular age groups in the congregation, or could even extend to a pastor attempting to meet with each family or individual in the congregation. Strategies vary, depending on the context.
- Key lay leaders such as the executive committee or chair of council could meet frequently with the new pastor to discuss what is happening in ministry and to help the new pastor understand some of the subtleties of the congregational culture.

The key here is intentionality and flexibility. Recognizing the value of beginning well together can lead to many creative approaches to the opportunities and challenges that are unique to this first chapter in the pastor-congregation relationship.

## Reviewing Process, Caring for the Search Committee

Once a search committee has completed its task, there is wisdom in gathering for an intentional last meeting to review and debrief the committee's experience. There may be great reasons for thanksgiving; there may be mistakes and griefs to name and process; there may be learnings to document and preserve for the next search committee's benefit. It will be wise for the council to meet with this search committee as well for debriefing, sharing in thanksgivings, laments, and learnings. And as part of the process of welcoming a new pastor, the search team may be acknowledged during the course of public worship.

The search committee plays a key role in this process of transition within a congregation's life. Gifted members have served in their capacity as members of the body of Christ. But, now, a final word. When things turn out wonderfully well, search committees should neither receive nor take too much of the credit. And when there is disappointment down the road, search committees should neither receive nor take upon themselves too much of the blame. Instrumental as search committees may be, it is nevertheless the decision of a congregation and the authority of a council that extends a pastoral call.



There is a larger picture within which you play your roles. Search committees are committees of councils. Councils and committee volunteers together are members of a local church. And local churches are part of the larger body of Christ. Our efforts—successes and disappointments—take place within the framework of a world, a kingdom, and a church that is held together in Jesus Christ.

The search process is not something you initiate, but it joins in work of the Lord that is already under way. A search process does not really complete anything either: the end of a search is the beginning of a ministry relationship—a new chapter in the ongoing story of God’s calling a people out of darkness into his wonderful light, making all things new.

## Checklists

If you would find it helpful, Appendix L (p. 61) is a summary of tasks, in the form of checklists, for participants in the pastor search process. Please note that these are not intended to cover everything that needs to be done, but are to be used as a start to creating your own checklists.

# Annotated Bibliography

## Book

- Oswald, Roy M., Heath, James M., Heath, Ann W. *Beginning Ministry Together*. New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003.  
This is a thoughtful, comprehensive and useful handbook dealing with clergy transitions. It serves as a foundational backdrop for *More Than a Search Committee*.

## Manuals

- Borgdorff, Peter. *Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2015.  
This revised edition of the manual pertaining to the Church Order of the Christian Reformed Church in North America incorporates decisions made by the synods of the CRCNA through Synod 2014.
- Christian Reformed Church. *Church Order and Its Supplements*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Christian Reformed Church in North America, 2019.  
This booklet is prepared by the Christian Reformed Church and incorporates the revisions adopted by Synod 2019.
- Christian Reformed Church. *Toward Effective Pastoral Mentoring. Fourth Edition*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Christian Reformed Church in North America, 2012.  
This is a practical resource for mentors (experienced pastors) and mentees (newly ordained into the CRC ministry). It covers a wide variety of topics that pastors generally will encounter during their first several years of ministry. Each module/topic has discussion questions and a resource list.
- Sustaining Pastoral Excellence. *Effective Leadership in the Church*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Christian Reformed Church in North America, 2005.  
This is a resource to help congregations, pastors, and other church leaders effectively work together to accomplish God's mission. It includes the four "Cs" that seem ever-present in situations for effective leadership: Character, Conviction, Competencies, Confluence.
- Sustaining Pastoral Excellence. *Evaluation Essentials for Congregational Leaders*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Christian Reformed Church in North America, 2010.  
This tool will assist congregations as they seek healthy ways in which to conduct evaluations of their pastor and/or ministry staff.

## Appendix A

### Special Circumstances: The Unintentional Interim<sup>8</sup> (see p. 10)

The following is a portion of a blog post. (The [entire post](http://placementreflections.blogspot.com/2009/02/special-circumstances-unintentional.html) can be found at [placementreflections.blogspot.com/2009/02/special-circumstances-unintentional.html](http://placementreflections.blogspot.com/2009/02/special-circumstances-unintentional.html).)

A friend of mine recently learned—the hard way—that he was in a type of position I call the “unintentional interim.”

Here’s the lay of the land: the pastor that served this congregation before my friend was their pastor for several decades. He was beloved by his people, and served them faithfully. This isn’t to say that there were not surely more difficult times, but over their many years together they learned how to weather those difficult seasons more easily. By the end of his tenure as their pastor, his ministry was marked more by how well he knew his flock—and how instinctively he could attend to their needs—than by anything else.

Because of health difficulties with this long-tenured, outgoing pastor, it wasn’t possible to execute a well-planned, thoughtful hand-off from him to his successor. It may be the case that such a hand-off was not in view at all, or that circumstances didn’t allow one to take place. Regardless, there was only so much that was done to ensure that the new pastor would be empowered for a long, effective ministry.

In comes my friend: new to pastoral ministry and fresh out of seminary, hopeful for a fruitful and long ministry among his new congregation. Over the course of his first two years of ministry there, however, it became clear to him that a portion of the congregation wasn’t ready for a new pastor; consciously or not, they still wanted their beloved former pastor instead of this new fellow. Before long, it was apparent that my friend’s only true choice was to resign and move on.

#### *Why It Didn’t Work*

There are a small handful of factors at play that are unique to that particular pastor and congregation, and I won’t address those. However, there are several factors that are true of nearly all churches with a long- (or longer) tenured pastor that, in this case, led to the failure of his successor. We can recognize and avoid these.

- **They needed to grieve the loss of their beloved pastor.** When a pastor leaves, the congregation needs to deal with the sense of loss they experience. This is true regardless of the circumstances of the pastor’s departure, but particularly in cases where the pastor was loved and isn’t leaving under duress or troublesome conditions. In some cases, the outgoing pastor retires in the area, stays on as an emeritus pastor, or in some way remains present—and in many ways, this can be even worse. There is still a substantial sense of loss (“he is no longer my pastor”) that a congregant can be made to feel like he/she shouldn’t have (“at least he’s still in the area”). There must be a good, healthy grieving by the whole congregation, especially the leadership and others who were personally close to the outgoing pastor.

<sup>8</sup> Ed Eubanks. *Special Circumstances: The Unintentional Interim*. Doulos Resources: February 25, 2009. Permission to reprint received from [Creative Commons](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/us/). <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/us/> Accessed September 18, 2012.

- **They needed to actively plan the hand-off.** Churches—and especially the leadership, be it a Session, a Board, or what have you—must address confidently and realistically the need for a succession plan. Many avoid this because they fear it will stir up concern among the members, or make a pastor feel like he is being pushed out. But the truth is that *there is going to be a hand-off whether you plan for it or not*. So you may as well plan for it, to ensure that it is done as well as possible.
- **They needed to seek someone similar, but not identical, to the outgoing pastor.** This was one of the factors that, in some ways, created the biggest problems for my classmate: his style of relating to the congregation was fairly different from his predecessor, if for no other reason than my friend didn't have 20+ years of history with them. Their preaching styles were quite different as well. This is common in pastoral transition for a church; consciously or unconsciously, they think, “this is our chance to fill in the gaps that we realize were missing with our previous/ outgoing pastor.” What they need, though, is someone who will expand the pastor's ministry to meet some of the most important needs that the previous pastor wasn't able to touch on, while not sacrificing the most important needs that the previous pastor DID meet. This can be difficult, but it almost always means finding someone who is like the outgoing pastor in many ways.
- **They needed to be patient and forgiving.** In many ways, they tried their best to do this—and that is to their credit. Anytime a church gets a new pastor, there *must* be a season where everyone extends an extra measure of grace and forgiveness to each other, and especially to the new pastor. Most pastors are given this grace period, at least to a degree; in some ways, it happens whether the congregation is intentional about it or not. For someone following a long-tenured pastor, it ought to be consciously and intentionally offered, and it ought to be for a longer time period than “normal” (which is usually between 6 months and a year, at most). I'd like to see such a grace-period last at least 18 months to two years for such a church.
- **They needed to work with him in his ministry.** One of the big differences between a long-term pastor and a newcomer—especially when the new pastor is recently out of seminary—is that the seasoned, long-tenured pastor has a clear understanding of both role and expectations. The new pastor needs to be counseled in both in a helpful, godly manner by the leadership of the church. For a very new pastor, this may be as basic as helping him learn what it means to be an Elder in the church! He simply may not have enough experience to *know how* to do things like visitation, counseling, etc. Even an experienced pastor might be helped by some frank discussions about how the pastor has fulfilled his role in this congregation's past. There must also be clear, upfront discussion about expectations. It is too easy for a congregation to assume that the incoming pastor knows and shares their expectations—but they should assume nothing of the sort. Instead, they should assume that the most helpful thing they could do—for themselves and for the incoming pastor—would be to spell out their expectations in as concrete a manner as possible.
- **They should have seriously considered an interim pastor.** An interim pastor is a vital help in a time like this. One of the things we in my denomination (the PCA) could learn from our brothers in another related denomination (the PC-USA) is how they handle long-tenured pastorates: they actually require that an interim pastor be brought in for a season of time, and that season's length corresponds to how long the outgoing pastor had been there. This affords everyone—the officers, the lay-leadership, the congregation, the community around the church—an opportunity to proactively think and plan for how the church's ministry and community will be inherently different, and how to maintain continuity as well. Objectively, the reasons for my friend's

resignation weren't entirely the fault of the congregation or leadership. They offered to him particular reasons why they felt it wasn't working out, and asked for change and improvement in several concrete areas. Even here, however, these things cannot be taken at full face-value; because of the factors above, it is difficult to distinguish which of their reasons and concerns are the fruit of an impossible comparison to the former pastor, and which are objectively legitimate.

In the end, my friend didn't have a strong hope of lasting long at this church. As I said, he unintentionally became the interim pastor that they needed. Thankfully, he maintains his commitment to his call to ministry and intends to pursue another opportunity; sadly, I fear that too many men, otherwise well-qualified for pastoral ministry, would leave the ministry after an experience like this one.

***The bottom line:*** churches and pastors alike would do quite well to be cautious in such situations and recognize the dangers of an unintentional interim.



# Appendix B

## Transition Team Information (see pp. 11-12)

### A Sample Transition Team Mandate

Meeting every other week for three months, the transition team will help recruit and recommend an interim pastor, develop good strategies for communication during the transition, and invite the congregation into meaningful reflection on our past, present, and future. This will allow the search committee to have a clear picture of the church's present and desired future as well as have a clear sense of the issues to be considered in searching for a new pastor.

**Membership:** 4 – 6 members—including at least one from council

### Interim Pastoral Work

1. Determine what kind of pastoral and preaching help we should seek in this interim period.
  - a specialized transitional minister
  - a supply pastor
  - a hybrid model
  - rely on internal resources only
2. Write job description and contract terms for interim pastor.
3. Recruit, interview, and recommend to council a candidate (or candidates) to serve in this interim capacity.

### Defining Reasonable Timeline Expectations

1. Compose and publish a tentative timeline of the pastoral search process for the congregation.
2. Recommend procedure for communicating and keeping the congregation informed.

### Creating a Search Committee

1. Who might be well-suited to serve on a search committee?
2. Are there any qualifications or disqualifications? Must they be a member? How about staff or spouse of staff? What diversity will we seek on this committee?

### Answering Key Questions

During special Sunday evening gatherings and church-wide retreats, the transition team will lead us in processes to help the church understand itself better and provide source material for the church profile that is sent to prospective pastor candidates. Key questions to be considered.

1. Help the congregation reflect on its history, inviting stories from the first 100 years, but with an emphasis on the past 10–20 years. Where have we seen God's faithfulness? What have been the strengths of our church? What have been weaknesses? Are there patterns?
2. What have been the most significant events or changes in the past 10–20 years? What has been the hardest in the past 10–20 years?
3. How has our ministry context/neighborhood changed in the past ten years? What's the same? What's different?

4. Help the congregation reflect on its present. What are the strengths of our church? What do we like about us and what God is doing here? What makes us unique? What are areas of weakness or growth?
5. Help the congregation reflect on its expectations of and relationship to its pastors. Have our pastors been healthy leaders? How have expectations of pastors and congregations changed during the last one or two pastorates? What are strengths in the way we have related to pastors? What are weaknesses?
6. Help the congregation reflect on its future:
  - What characteristics do you hope our church will exhibit in the next ten years? What is most important to you? What do you hope will change? What do you hope will stay the same?
  - What characteristics do you hope our new pastor will exhibit in the next ten years? What is most important to you? What do you hope will change? What do you hope will stay the same?
7. Is the church open to a new kind of pastor or pastoral team?  
(You may have to research to find out more about these various options.)
  - a co-pastorate
  - husband and wife
  - a woman
  - a bivocational ministry
  - a candidate out of seminary
  - a non-CRC candidate
8. What issues and perspectives from our church's anti-racism and diversity journey need to be considered in the search process?
9. Are we satisfied with the leadership structure of the church? Do we have the right staff doing the right work? Have we properly evaluated position descriptions?

By the time the transition team is getting feedback on these questions, the search committee may be ready to begin meeting.

## Transition Tasks

### *Engaging the Past Activity*

In this activity the congregation remembers, year by year or decade by decade, events from the past—wonderful events, challenging events, and anything in between. This activity could be accompanied by a meal together, which could be scheduled at the beginning, middle, or end of the activity.

***Time needed for activity:*** an evening

***Group size:*** any number of current members and regular visitors

### Steps for Activity

1. Do some prep work:
  - Try to identify all of the pastors who were born in or who spent time in your congregation while they were growing up.
  - Try to learn how many baptisms, professions of faith, weddings, and funerals took place within your congregation over its history.
  - Find a way to share all of this information with your congregation either prior to or during this activity.
2. Obtain a roll of butcher paper. Prior to the event, roll out the paper to a length that covers an entire wall of the room in which you'll be hosting the activity. Hang the paper at a height that enables people to reach it easily.

3. Divide the length of butcher paper, by vertical lines, into large sections. The sections will correspond to years or decades in your congregation's life depending on whatever is most appropriate for the length of your church's history (for example, 10 years per section).
4. Begin the evening with a time of prayer and dwelling in God's Word. Psalm 121 can be a helpful text because it describes what it's like to begin a journey with God as your help.
5. Ask participants to identify events/processes/people from the past, writing a sentence or two on sticky notes. Encourage people to name difficult memories as well as positive memories. Make sure they indicate, if possible, the year or decade in which each event happened.
6. Have the facilitator read each note before it's posted to the appropriate section. Ask congregation members if anyone would be willing to elaborate on the event.
7. After reading all the notes, ask if any events have been missed.
8. At the end of the remembering time, ask people to identify how they see God's hand at work through the life of the congregation. Try to identify themes or life-cycle stages (like the ones found in George Bullard's book).
9. Lead a time of prayer in which congregation members are asked to participate by praising God for his faithfulness, asking for forgiveness in connection with certain events, and voicing concerns and longings related to the past.
10. Decide if there are four or five signature events that are important enough or representative enough to be named in a future worship service and processed through praise, thanksgiving, confession, lament, etc. This might be a decision that involves the spiritual leaders (council) of the church.
11. Take pictures of the paper so that the memories can be captured for posterity or shared with people who were not able to participate in the activity.
12. Allow the paper to remain in place for a few weeks so that people who couldn't come to the event can see it.

**Option:** Instead of being asked to identify events/processes/people from the past, participants could be asked to identify ways in which the congregation did or didn't live up to its calling, its name, or its founding aspirations. Remember that when identifying ways in which your church may have fallen short, the most powerful examples are usually the ones where we bear some of the responsibility, not just the ones where other people (not me!) are to blame.

### Facilitator's Questions

After the activity, allow time for discussion around some questions like these:

1. What values/virtues/passions do you see in your past that you can carry into the future?
2. Which people or groups from your past do you need to honor?
3. What mistakes, misuses of power, and conflicts should you acknowledge and/or confess together?
4. With whom do you need to reconcile?\*
5. What hardships do you need to grieve or lament?\*
6. What do you need to thank God for?
7. What are some key moments when you saw the Holy Spirit lead you into something you wouldn't have been able to do yourself?
8. How has your community been transformed in big or little ways because of God's work in and through you?

\*If this question leads to a sense that there is work to be done in the areas of reconciliation and/or healing, then the group should feel free to seek assistance from Pastor Church Resources [pastorchurch@crcna.org](mailto:pastorchurch@crcna.org).

## Naming the Present Activity

When we're beginning any kind of assessment, it's important to have a posture of gratitude. That's why this exercise is called *appreciative* inquiry. A significant step in discernment about the present has to do with being honest, so it's important to be honest about what's good as well as what's not good.

Clearly there are losses and fears that accompany diminishing numbers, aging demographics, and decreased loyalty/trust toward institutions such as the local church. Honesty about those dynamics is one part of data that informs discernment. But beyond identifying what you don't have, there's a deep need to identify and name what you do have. A faith-full starting point asks that you begin from a confession—not of scarcity, but of provision. Whatever you discern, and whatever may truly be lamentable, a thread of thankfulness should weave its way through your discerning.

**Time needed for activity:** 60 – 90 minutes

**Group size:** any number of current members and regular visitors

## Steps for Activity

1. Review together the basic approach of appreciative inquiry—beginning with a focus on what God has given, rather than a focus on what is missing. The website [Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry](https://appreciativeinquiry.champlain.edu/learn/appreciative-inquiry-introduction/) <https://appreciativeinquiry.champlain.edu/learn/appreciative-inquiry-introduction/> has helpful information you can use in this step.
2. Note the patterns within Scripture that teach us to begin with thanksgiving—for example, 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10; 1 Corinthians 1:1-9; and the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3. While there's much concern about these churches, these letters of Paul and of Jesus begin with thanksgiving. Consistently. One might also note the way the Ten Commandments are introduced in Exodus 20, by declaring that the law-giving Sovereign Lord is the Savior and Life-Giver: a call to gratitude.
3. Divide people into small groups of six to eight persons. Have everyone in each group answer the following questions:
  - a. Focusing on the congregation:
    - What are the most important contributions the church has made to your life? When did this happen? Who made a difference? How did it affect you?
    - What are the most valuable ways you contribute to this church (this is important, so don't hide behind humility!)—in terms of personality, perspective, skills, gifts? If you find this hard to answer, try another angle: “What might someone else say are the most valuable ways you contribute to this church?”
    - When have you grown as a follower of Jesus within this church? How did this happen? What made a difference? Who was most helpful?
    - What is it that makes this church unique?
    - How do you see God's presence making itself known in your present reality?
  - b. Focusing on the community around your church:
    - How might you describe or define the community in which God has placed your church? (Is it a particular neighborhood, a city block, a town, a region?)
    - What do you love about the community around your church?

- Beyond the work of your church, what kingdom work do you see being addressed in this community?
  - What kingdom work are you personally trying to attend to in the community, and how is it going?
  - What kingdom work still needs attention in your community?
4. After the time of sharing answers to these questions, give each participant the opportunity to express what their heart senses. Have one member of each group record the key points on paper.
  5. After gathering back into the larger group, have representatives of the small groups share themes they heard in their conversations.
  6. Close the session by giving thanks for whom God made you to be and where God placed you. A song of praise could be included as you wrap up.

### Facilitator's Questions

After the activity, allow time for discussion around some questions like these:

1. How would you describe the overall tone of this appreciative inquiry exercise?
2. In what ways have you given weight to both the sense of gratitude for the past and the need for honesty about the present?
3. Did anything come up that may require further processing or exploration? Explain.
4. Are there any examples of gratitude that can help with enriching your understanding of what may be next? Give some examples and explain.

# Appendix C

## **Sample Email to Prospective Pastors** (see pp. 24/27)

The following is an outline for an email used to contact a prospective pastor. The premise is that churches will tend to receive more positive responses when they are able to name, in this email, specific attributes that prompted the search committee to reach out to this candidate.

It is important to customize it so that it fits your congregation/situation.

Dear Pastor,

Your name was referred to us in regard to our pastor position (add name of position). We think you could be a good fit for (reason one) and (reason two).

You can check out our position description and church profile at (provide the link to your church's network.crcna.org post that is advertising the position).

To find out more or to apply, contact (note designated search committee contact's name and email address).

Sincerely,

(name of person sending email)

On behalf of the search committee



# Appendix D

## Putting Together a Church Information Packet (see p. 25)

Make assignments to committee members to put together a packet of information on the church and community. Have several copies of the packet available to send to each viable prospective pastor about the time you schedule your first interview visit. It should include items such as:

- copy of church budget, church constitution and by-laws, personnel policies, any policy/procedure manuals, etc.
- chart of organizational responsibilities.
- copies of past newsletters and/or bulletins that give an indication of the types of activities in which your church participates.
- copy of your latest church calendar.
- copies of the last few monthly financial statements.
- any church brochure(s) you may have.
- information about the parsonage, as applicable (size, age, features, location, picture, floor plan, color scheme, drapes, carpet, etc.)
- a simple drawing of your present facilities with a list of statistics about the building.
- any future plans voted on by the church that would affect the future of the church (you may want to include copies of your last few business meetings).
- church statistics for at least the last five years (preferably ten years) to give the candidate information about your church.
- list of organizations in the church.
- copy of the latest church directory and latest church picture directory.
- information about your town/area (contact the chamber of commerce).

Note that long before a candidate sees your church information packet, he/she will have likely read every page of your website. Make sure your church's website is up-to-date without dead links or bad information. The beginning of a pastor search is a good time to refresh your website.

# Appendix E

## Congregational Suggestions for Prospective Pastors (see p. 25)

The following are samples of communication for requesting congregational input on prospective pastors.

### Sample #1

#### My Personal Suggestion for a Prospective Pastor

I suggest the pastor search committee consider the following minister as a potential pastor for our congregation and request his/her résumé from the denomination's *PastorSearch* database.

Minister or candidate's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of church: \_\_\_\_\_

Town/City: \_\_\_\_\_ State/Province: \_\_\_\_\_

The primary reason for suggesting this person as a possible prospect is:

In case the committee needs more information regarding my suggestion, you can contact me:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone/email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Sample #2****Letter to Congregational Members**

As you know, we are seeking applicants for the pastor position at our church. This position is an opportunity for a full-time, ordained pastor to join our ministry team, while having primary responsibility for

---

Who do you know that fits some of the following basic qualifications of the position (from the position's job description)?

- an ordained pastor in the CRC or the RCA
- experience with building and refining church ministry programs
- experience supporting networks of volunteers, serving as a resource person

The pastor(s) who come to mind may or may not be available right now. But if you will provide us with their name(s), we will reach out confidentially to see if they would like to learn more about our position.

I would recommend talking with: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact information (if known): \_\_\_\_\_

How do you know this pastor? \_\_\_\_\_

Why do you recommend him/her? \_\_\_\_\_

---

Your name? \_\_\_\_\_

Is it okay if we use your name when reaching out to this pastor? \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you! If you would like to learn more about our open position, please contact

---

# Appendix F

## Application and Interview Questions (see p. 29)

**NOTE:** The information listed below was obtained from the CRCNA's Human Resource office on December 27, 2020. Keep in mind that information changes as rules and regulations change.

*U.S. federal and state laws* prohibit discrimination on the basis of an applicant's race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, or disability. Some state laws also prohibit discrimination based on factors such as marital status or sexual orientation. If you ask a job applicant a question specifically relating to one of those characteristics, you are at risk of being sued.

Every question you ask should somehow relate to this central theme: *"How are you qualified to perform the job you are applying for?"* Hiring teams usually land in trouble when they ask for information that is irrelevant to a candidate's ability to do the job.

### Illegal and Legal Interview Questions: U.S.

#### 1. Age Questions

Inappropriate to ask:

- How old are you?
- What year were you born?
- When did you graduate from high school?

Appropriate to ask:

- Are you at least 18 (21) years of age? (*If* a minimum age required for the specific type of work.)

#### 2. Disability Questions

Inappropriate to ask:

- Do you have any disabilities?
- What is your medical history?
- How many days of work did you miss last year because of illness?
- How does your condition affect your abilities?
- I notice that you have (x condition). How will you be able to do this work?

Appropriate to ask:

- Can you perform the specific tasks/duties of the job with or without accommodation?

#### 3. Criminal Record Questions

Inappropriate to ask:

- Have you ever been arrested?
- Have you ever spent a night in jail?

Appropriate to ask:

- Have you ever been convicted of a felony?

#### 4. Parental Status Questions

Inappropriate to ask:

- How many children do you have?
- Do you plan to have children?
- How old are your children?
- Are you pregnant?
- What kind of child care arrangements have you made?

Appropriate to ask:

- Is there any reason you can't start at 7:30 am?
- Can you work overtime?
- Whether an applicant can meet specified work schedules or has activities or commitments that may prevent him/her from meeting attendance requirements.

#### 5. Marital Status Questions

Inappropriate to ask:

- Are you married, divorced, separated, engaged, widowed, etc.?
- Is this your maiden or married name?
- What is the name of your relative/spouse/children?
- Do you live with your parents?
- Questions concerning spouse, or spouse's employment, salary, arrangements, or dependents.
- How will your spouse feel about the amount of time you will be traveling if you get this job?

Appropriate to ask:

- None

#### 6. Citizenship Questions

Inappropriate to ask:

- Are you a U.S. citizen?
- Are your parents/spouse U.S. citizens?
- On what dates did you/parents/spouse acquire U.S. citizenship?
- Are you/parents/spouse naturalized or native-born U.S. citizens?

Appropriate to ask:

- Do you have the legal right to remain permanently in the U.S.?
- What is your visa status? (If no to the previous question.)
- Are you able to provide proof of employment eligibility upon hire?

#### 7. National Origin Questions

Inappropriate to ask:

- What is your nationality?
- Where were you born?
- Where are your parents from?
- What is your heritage?
- How did you acquire the ability to speak, read, or write a foreign language?
- What language is spoken in your home?

Appropriate to ask:

- Verifying legal U.S. residence or work visa status.
- What languages do you speak, read, or write fluently? (If job related.)

## 8. Race or Skin Color Questions

Inappropriate to ask:

- What race are you?
- Are you a member of a minority group?

Appropriate to ask:

- None

## 9. Residence Questions

Inappropriate to ask:

- Do you own or rent your home?
- Do you live in town?
- With whom do you live?

Appropriate to ask:

- Inquiries about the address to facilitate contact with the applicant.
- Will you be able to start work at 8:00 am?

**Final point:** If a job candidate reveals information that you are not allowed to ask, you should not pursue the topic further.

*Canadian law* prohibits questions regarding race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, ethnic origin, creed, citizenship, sex, sexual orientation, record of offences, disability, age, marital status, and family status. If a job candidate reveals information that you are not allowed to ask, you should not pursue the topic further.

## *Illegal and Legal Interview Questions: Canada*

### 1. Nationality Origin/Citizenship

Inappropriate to ask:

- Are you a Canadian citizen?
- Where were you/your parents born?
- What is your “native tongue”?

Appropriate to ask:

- Are you authorized to work in Canada?
- What language do you read/speak/write fluently? (If job related.)

### 2. Age

Inappropriate to ask:

- How old are you?
- When did you graduate?
- What is your birth date?

Appropriate to ask:

- Are you at least 18? (*If* a minimum age required for the specific type of work.)



### 3. Marital/Family Status

Inappropriate to ask:

- What is your marital status?
- With whom do you live?
- Do you plan to have a family? When?
- How many kids do you have?
- What are your childcare arrangements?

Appropriate to ask:

- Would you be willing to relocate if necessary?
- Would you be able and willing to travel as needed by the job?  
(This question is okay if asked of *all* applicants.)
- Would you be able and willing to work overtime as necessary?  
(This question is okay if asked of *all* applicants.)

### 4. Affiliations

Inappropriate to ask:

- What clubs or social organizations do you belong to?

Appropriate to ask:

- List any professional or trade groups or other organizations that you belong to that you consider relevant to your ability to perform this job.

### 5. Personal

Inappropriate to ask:

- How tall are you?
- How much do you weigh?

(Questions about height and weight are not acceptable unless minimum standards are essential to the safe performance of the job.)

Appropriate to ask:

- Are you able to lift a 30kg weight and carry it 100 metres? (If job related.)

### 6. Disabilities

Inappropriate to ask:

- Do you have any disabilities?
- Please complete the following medical history.
- Have you had any recent or past illnesses or operations?
- What was the date of your last physical exam?
- How is your family's health?
- When did you lose your eyesight? How?
- Do you need an accommodation to perform the job?

(This question can only be asked *after* a job offer has been made.)

Appropriate to ask:

- Are you able to perform the essential functions of this job?  
(This question is okay if the interviewer has thoroughly described the job.)

- As part of the hiring process, after a job offer has been made, you will be required to undergo a medical exam. (Exam results must be kept strictly confidential. However, medical/safety personnel may be informed if emergency medical treatment is required, and supervisors may be informed about necessary job accommodations based on exam results.)

## 7. Arrest Record

Inappropriate to ask:

- Have you ever been arrested?

Appropriate to ask:

- Have you ever been convicted of \_\_\_\_\_?  
(The crime named should be reasonably related to the performance of the job in question.)

## 8. Sex

Inappropriate to ask:

- Are you male or female?
- What are the names and relationships of persons living with you?

Appropriate to ask:

- None

## 9. Race/Colour

Inappropriate to ask:

- What is your race?

Appropriate to ask:

- None

# Appendix G

## Screening Questions for Preliminary Phone or Video Interview (see p. 29)

The following are instructions and possible questions for the preliminary screening phone or video interview that members of the search committee will have with a prospective pastor.

At least two search committee members will make an appointment with applicants selected for this step. Begin by introducing yourselves briefly (name, ministries involved in, length of time as a member at your church, role on committee, etc.). One member will take the lead on the questions, and the other will take notes.

Feel free to let applicants know they have been selected for this preliminary interview based on an optimistic review of their materials by your search committee to date, and that you are hoping to learn more about them to see if taking additional next steps is appropriate and desired. Offer a prayer as you begin.

1. What is it about this position that interests you?
2. Please describe the ways you may have already been involved in ministries . . .  
(Name ministries that fit the position.) What is your experience planning and programming . . .  
(Name those that fit this position.)
3. Please tell us about your preaching. What do you think makes a good sermon?
4. What do you enjoy most about your current position? How have you been most challenged and changed?
5. Review the applicant's resume/profile. Ask for any specific clarifications needed to see if this applicant meets the basic qualifications for the position.
6. What questions do you have for us?

“Thank you for talking with us today. Our next steps include reviewing our preliminary interviews as a committee and selecting some candidates for a longer phone or video interview within a few weeks. If you have any other questions or need clarification on our process in the meantime, please contact (name the lead interviewer) or our search committee chair (name the chair).”

# Appendix H

## Sample Questions for Prospective Pastor Interview (see p. 29)

The following are sample questions for a second phone or video interview of a prospective pastor. Note that this interview would occur *after* the phone/video interview mentioned in Appendix G (p. 54).

1. Please share the parts of your personal story that you feel are pertinent for this position.
2. What are your spiritual gifts? Give some examples of how you have used them.
3. Looking back, how has God led you in ministry, and what are some of your goals and visions for future ministry?
4. List some of the greatest strengths, and weaknesses, you would bring to this position.
5. What has been your greatest joy as a pastor so far in your ministry?
6. What initially do you know about (name your church) and its ministries? What are some things about (name your church) that pique your interest?
7. What would you consider to be the primary goals of your ministry at (name your church)? What is your vision for (name your church)?
8. Do you work better alone or as part of a team? Explain why. Are you more a “doer” or “delegator”?
9. How do you keep yourself nourished spiritually? Please share a favorite Scripture verse and why that verse is special to you.
10. Through what events have you grown more spiritually, and how would these experiences help you minister in this position?
11. If you might have four hours to be totally self-indulgent, what might you do?
12. Tell us about your strategy for selfcare.
13. What do you enjoy in your life as play?

# Appendix I

## **Samples of Requests for References** (see p. 30)

What follows are two samples of ways in which references can be requested.

### **Sample #1**

#### **Letter with a form to complete**

Send the following letter (on church letterhead) and form to the references noted on the résumé.

Enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope (with church logo) for the response.

Dear (name of reference):

The Pastor Search Committee of (name of church) has been given your name as a reference for (name of candidate/pastor) who is a prospective pastor for our church.

Our search committee is particularly interested in your evaluation of this prospective pastor and will be awaiting your earliest reply before proceeding with further consideration of this prospective pastor.

We would greatly appreciate your forthright and honest opinion of this prospective pastor's current and past ministry, as you know it. Please rest assured we will handle your comments, and the information on the enclosed form, with the utmost care and confidentiality. Any narrative or additional information you might give us beyond the questions asked regarding pastoral skills, giving both positive and negative factors, would be very insightful and useful to this church.

The committee would appreciate receiving this vital information in the next 15 days.

Thank you for your help, and please join our church in prayer that the church and the prospective pastor may know God's will.

Yours in His service,

Chair, Pastor Search Committee  
(name of church)

*Form to send with letter on next page*

The following items, in alphabetical order, include many responsibilities of a pastor. All of the responsibilities are important. Please rank the prospective pastor as to his/her strengths regarding responsibilities, roles, and attributes of a pastor. Rank strengths in order using the numbers 1-11 (with 1 being the most important/greatest strength, in your opinion).

	<p><b>ADMINISTRATOR</b></p> <p>The pastor should possess good administrative skills; be capable of leading the church staff, the deacons, and lay leaders to carry out effectively their respective ministries.</p>
	<p><b>COMMUNITY RELATIONS SUPPORTER</b></p> <p>The pastor should be aware of and concerned with community needs, activities, and affairs and be knowledgeably capable of addressing these concerns from a pastoral perspective, thus establishing respect in the community.</p>
	<p><b>COUNSELOR</b></p> <p>The pastor should be an effective counselor, setting aside a portion of his/her time for counseling and making referrals when appropriate.</p>
	<p><b>DENOMINATIONAL RELATIONS</b></p> <p>The pastor should be knowledgeable of and concerned about our church's efforts to cooperate and maintain historic values with sister churches in missions, education, evangelism, and other denominational activities.</p>
	<p><b>EVANGELIZER</b></p> <p>The pastor should be involved personally in evangelism, sharing the gospel with those inside and outside the church.</p>
	<p><b>LEADER</b></p> <p>The pastor should be a leader capable of inspiring, encouraging, and motivating church members to use their time and talents in doing the work of the church.</p>
	<p><b>MISSIONARY VISION</b></p> <p>The pastor should be excited about being called to the ministry and to our church, should exhibit a vision for doing God's work here, and should enthusiastically share it with the church. The pastor should support home and foreign missions, be aware of local community needs, and lead the church in ministering to these needs.</p>
	<p><b>PRAYER AND WORSHIP LEADER</b></p> <p>The pastor should arouse all people to prayer. His worship leadership should help members and those attending services to experience worship in both the church services and their personal lives.</p>
	<p><b>PROCLAIMER</b></p> <p>Each sermon should have substance and should be delivered in a manner that holds the attention of the congregation. The pastor must prepare well and then forth-tell God's Word from the pulpit.</p>
	<p><b>STUDENT</b></p> <p>The pastor should have an ongoing program of study (including, but going beyond personal Bible study and prayer) to develop new skills and knowledge and participation in activities that renew the pastor's physical, emotional, and spiritual energy and zest for ministry.</p>
	<p><b>VISITOR</b></p> <p>Within the limits of available working time, the pastor should visit the church membership, including times of hospital care, grief, personal crisis, and joy. The pastor should be friendly, approachable, and personable and should relate well to each age group in the church.</p>



**Sample #2****Questionnaire**

Applicant's Name:

Reference's Name:

Your Name:

Date:

**QUESTIONS**

1. How do you know candidate (name) OR Pastor (name)?
2. What have you observed about his/her specific areas of giftedness and passion?
3. What do you consider his/her weaknesses?
4. Our open position is for a (name position type: sole, team, associate pastor etc.) As you have observed (name of candidate/pastor), how would (he/she) perform in that situation?
5. Since this is a pastor position that is focusing on (name the focus of the ministry position), it is important for the search committee to understand how well (candidate/pastor's name) relates to (name focus of ministry position). On a scale of one to five, five being the best, how would you rate (candidate/pastor's name)?
6. Please share some examples of your observations about (his/her) interactions with your congregation.
7. As you have observed, does (he/she) take criticism well?
8. Do you have any other comments that might be helpful to us?

Our search committee appreciates your time, and we thank you for answering these questions.

# Appendix J

## Pastor Search Committee Expenses (see p. 30)

Understanding that there will more than likely be expenses related to finding the next pastor, the following guidelines should be followed:

1. All expenses should be coordinated through the search committee chair.
2. Reimbursement should only be expected when there are receipts submitted to the church.
3. It is recommended that the cost of the pastor search committee would come from the line item in the church budget “Pastor’s Salary” or other related line items. However, it would be wise to save as much of the pastor’s salary for moving expenses for the pastor your church will select, since there probably is no provision in the budget for these related expenses. The interim pastor—pulpit supply/transitional pastor—expense can also come from the “Pastor’s Salary” line item.
4. A monthly allotment should be established early in the search. If it appears that expenditures will exceed the monthly allotment, church approval should be received prior to financial commitment, if at all possible.
5. Reimbursements should be expected for the following items:
  - Transportation, meals, and lodging of the search committee for trips to interview a prospective pastor. (A suggested amount for automobile expenses would be the allowed tax-deductible expense per mile/km; check for current amount.)
  - Postage expenses related to the search.
  - Quality video or phone technology to facilitate early-round interviews.
  - Transportation, meals, and lodging for the prospective pastor to and from the church field. (A suggested amount for automobile expenses would be the allowed tax-deductible expense per mile/km; check for current amount).
6. Any other expense related to searching for a pastor that is approved by the church.

The committee should be fair and frugal with expenses. The search could last for several months.

# Appendix K

## **Memo of Understanding** (see p. 33)

An official letter of call includes some key and central information. But it does not include much of what is talked about in conversations leading up to the call. Much in those conversations does not need to be remembered or recorded, but some parts of those conversations do need to be remembered as agreed-upon understandings. A “memo of understanding” can be useful for putting into writing some key agreements that arose during pre-call conversations involving the search committee and the council. What follows is a guide to developing such a memo. Like with “Goldilocks and the Three Bears,” some memos could be too large and detailed, and some could be too brief or unclear. Finding a happy medium is a valuable step in the calling process.

A draft of such a memo could be prepared prior to the call being issued. It could then be clarified during the pastor’s time of discernment and signed in conjunction with the pastor’s acceptance of the call.

A memo might include agreements about:

- study leave and sabbatical policy
- management, upkeep, and improvement of the parsonage (e.g., new countertop, allowing pets, congregational access, etc.)
- expectations for spouse or family
- accommodations for special needs
- frequency of and approach to performance evaluations
- criteria for adding additional staff
- any variety of other points that is of concern to the prospective pastor or the calling church

It is important to acknowledge that the current search committee and council membership will disappear or change within a couple of years. Some record of important understandings is key to avoiding misunderstandings later on.

# Appendix L

## Checklists (see p. 35)

These checklists are samples only. They include some of the basic steps each of the following groups should pay attention to during the pastor search process. These are not intended to cover everything that will need to be done. Please use these as starting points for creating your own checklists.

### *Tasks of the Council*

- Facilitate the healthy farewell and the processing of the previous pastor's leaving.
- Step back and consider the congregation's past, present, and future.
- Decide if some kind of interim ministry is needed, and if so, what that should look like.
- Form a pastor search committee and support it at every step.
- Communicate regularly with the congregation.
- Issue the call to the prospective pastor(s).
- Determine the details of the call, including compensation.
- Facilitate the welcoming and assimilation of the new pastor.
- Other steps unique to your situation?

### *Tasks of the Transition Team*

- Recruit, interview, and recommend an interim pastor.
- Create a tentative timeline for the pastor search process.
- Identify and define issues that should be dealt with before a search committee is formed.
- Assist the council in forming the pastor search committee.
- Assist the council in communicating to the congregation about the congregation's life and ministry during the time of vacancy.
- Lead the congregation through processes of reflection.
- Determine if the church is open to a new kind of pastor.
- Review the leadership structure, staffing, and position descriptions.
- Other steps unique to your situation?

### *Tasks of the Search Committee*

- Organize to function effectively and efficiently and commit to working as a team.
- Communicate regularly with the council.
- Solicit and accept the input of the congregation.
- Prepare a church profile.
- Prepare a congregational information packet.
- Develop a pool of prospective pastors and determine which are a good fit.
- Engage and interview prospective pastors.
- Make a recommendation to the council regarding the calling of prospective pastor(s).
- Other steps unique to your situation?

***Tasks of the Congregation***

- Provide helpful input as requested.
- Participate in survey/listening groups.
- Other steps unique to your situation?

***Tasks of the Prospective Pastor***

- Be open to God's leading.
- Be honest when approached by the search committee regarding availability and interest in the position.
- Let the search committee know what your expectations for the search process includes.

***Important Things for All Participants***

- Remain calm during this time of transition.
- Be in much prayer—as individuals and as a community.
- Listen to each other well.
- Cultivate and model a culture of respectful etiquette and confidentiality.

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Christian Reformed Church  
**Pastor Church  
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