

More Than a Search Committee

Exploring Opportunities in Times of Transition

**Sustaining Pastoral Excellence in
the Christian Reformed Church
2850 Kalamazoo Avenue SE Grand**

Rapids, MI 49560

More Than a Search Committee

Exploring Opportunities in Times of Transition

Grand Rapids, Michigan

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The format of this training tool has been intentionally designed for you, the reader. Our desire is for you to move from reading to understanding to doing. As stated in the subtitle, “Exploring Opportunities in Times of Transition,” we aim to help you look for and examine opportunities throughout the process. Our intent is that this training tool may help lead you into rich conversation as you seek and acknowledge the guiding presence of God.

On the cover, and throughout the training tool, you will notice the image of binoculars. As you read the tool, see the binoculars as signifying a wide and careful look at your congregation and prospective pastors.

You will also see references such as “**PT 6 (pp. 17-19)**” and “**ET 6 (p. 91)**.” These are references to chapters in *Beginning Ministry Together: The Alban Handbook for Clergy Transitions*.¹ In the process of writing this tool, we discovered the *Alban Handbook* to be an excellent resource on the search process and clergy transitions. Rather than reinvent the wheel, we decided to reference pertinent chapters from the book throughout this tool. For a limited time, a free copy of *Beginning Ministry Together* is available for churches that are in the search process and plan to use both this tool *and* the book. For your free copy of the book and/or additional free copies of this training tool, please contact pastoralexcellence@crcna.org.

Collaborator

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This training tool is a publication of the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence (SPE) initiative of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA). The people responsible for putting together this booklet are staff of the Office of Pastor-Church Relations: Rev. Norm Thomasma, Rev. Cecil VanNiejenhuis, and Mrs. Jeanne Kallemeyn. SPE’s Implementation Team gave valuable input along the way. Thanks to Rev. Neal Rylaarsdam, a Specialized Transitional Minister and to selected CRC churches for sharing some of their resources.

¹Roy M. Oswald, James M. Heath, and Ann W. Heath. *Beginning Ministry Together: The Alban Handbook for Clergy Transitions*. Herndon, Va.: The Alban Institute, 2003. Alban has given the CRCNA permission to reference *Beginning Ministry Together* in this publication. Permission granted by Richard Bass in April 2012.

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Letter to Church Councils and Search Committees

Dear friends,

Greetings to you from the authors of this training tool. 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. The relationships that intersect the lives of a congregation and pastor are important for many reasons, including pastoral care, spiritual growth, and understanding and implementing a vision for the church in the kingdom of God.

This tool intends to do two things: (1) assist with the nuts and bolts of a search process, wrapped within some practical, pertinent wisdom, and (2) encourage a search process that is alert to a bigger picture, doing its work with a sense that the calling of a pastor has to do with the calling of a church—and that the calling of a church has to do with the call and mission of God. Our preparation of this tool has been significantly informed by *Beginning Ministry Together* published by the Alban Institute. We consider Alban's book to be well conceived, well written and largely relevant to a pastor search process in the CRCNA. The training tool we have written is intended to complement Alban's book and to offer some guidance that fits the specific context of the CRCNA.

Our invitation, or perhaps challenge, is for you to take the time that's needed to ask the kinds of nuts and bolts questions that arise in the search process *and* to ask bigger picture kinds of

questions. These bigger questions are not superfluous, and they are not hurdles or hoops. They're actually part and parcel of a thorough search process for any congregation, regardless of size, location, or history.

The first step leading into the calling of a pastor is to reflect on the calling of the church. What exactly is the church—depicted in the Bible by terms such as “new creation,” “body of Christ,” “communion of saints,” and “household of faith”?

Second, our invitation is for you to spend time thinking, praying, and discerning how your congregation fits into the calling of the church. **How is God 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?

To include these conversations in your search process 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.

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This training tool 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. To that end, may God bless you as you engage in this time of opportunity and discernment.

Respectfully yours,

Cecil, Jeanne, and Norm

Introduction

The search for a new pastor is a significant challenge and adventure in a congregation's life! There is a need for prayer: acknowledging our dependence on the hand and heart of God and on the stirring, mysterious work of the Holy Spirit.

There's also a need for hard work: coming to a clear and honest understanding of who we are at this point in time, and of the kind of leader whose gifts might best serve with us. Ideally the fit will be a blessing to both congregation and pastor—and ultimately to the Lord of the church.

A congregation is an expression and revelation of the body of Christ. And among the key, designated leaders in this body of believers is the pastor. When pastor(s) and congregation enjoy a warm, engaging, trusting relationship, the life-giving comforts and challenges of the gospel seem especially strong to engage us and to bear fruit. When pastor(s) and congregations struggle to understand and appreciate one another, the strain in the relationship can be a heavy cloud that obscures our vision, steals our vitality, and restricts the mission.

The variables informing the health of the pastor-congregation relationship are many. They can be observed in the way the relationship between pastor and congregation began, in the readiness of congregation and pastor to enter into their new relationship, and in the discernment process itself.

Experience teaches us that searching for a new pastor calls for the wisdom of the Christian community, a community that reaches far beyond the experience and wisdom of any single congregation.

Note: This training tool is written for congregations in which the position to be filled is vacant or will be vacated soon. There are other models for pastor search 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. Some large churches may want to consider that model. It is described in *The Elephant in the Boardroom* by Carolyn Weese and J. Russell Crabtree (Jossey-Bass, 2004).

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

The CRCNA is now 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 tool can function within the parameters of Christian Reformed church polity and can fit your particular cultural context.

Some Scriptural Wisdom PT 1: *Spiritual Grounding* section (p. 3)²

“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 don’t 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!

²These are references to chapters in *Beginning Ministry Together: The Alban Handbook for Clergy Transitions*. See the second paragraph under “How to Use This Training Tool” on p. 6 for details.

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chapter 1 Attentive to the Time

Some Things Do Not Change . .

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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 healthy community. Basic expectations for a church include the opportunities for worship, for fellowship, for stewardship of gifts, for a nurturing of 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 so doing 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’s 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 PT 10: *Characteristics Based on Congregation Size* section to end of chapter (pp. 31-32)

North American congregations have been changing for decades. And the pace of change seems to be increasing. Within the 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 training tool

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does not attempt to evaluate these changes as much as help the leaders of local congregations provide creative leadership among 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 of, style of, and times offered for 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 secular culture that influences how church members view leadership. Some of this is related to the rise of the “Millennial” generation (born between 1980-2000). On the one hand, this includes skepticism toward institutions; on the other hand, it highlights the quest for relevance and meaning.
- 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?

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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.
- Formal and informal expectations of congregations and pastors are changing.

Overall, pastors are staying longer in a given congregation. This can be related to the benefits of longer tenures for the health and well-being of congregations and pastors, or, less happily, it can be related to the difficulty of receiving another call, the desires/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.

The Context of a Pastor Leaving PT 2 (pp. 5-8), PT 4 (pp. 11-13), PT 6 (pp. 17-19), ET 6 (p. 91), ET 9 (p. 97), ET 10 (pp. 98-101), CT 1 (pp. 105-107)

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

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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.

PT 4 (pp. 11-13), ET 9 (pp. 97) ET 10 (pp. 98-101), CT 1 (pp. 105-107)

The point here is that the search for a new pastor should begin with taking stock of the departure dynamics of the previous pastor and accounting 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) or a wise helper such as a church consultant or coach. STMs are seasoned pastors who have received special training and are endorsed by the Office of Pastor-Church Relations, which may be able to help with finding such an individual.

The services of a **Specialized Transitional Minister** are 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 has not yet come to terms with its identity apart from this pastor. Interestingly, when churches call a pastor without attending to significant leftover feelings or unrecognized dynamics, there is a strong likelihood that the next pastor will effectively become what is often referred to as “an unintentional interim.” In other words, the leftover issues from the previous season of the congregation’s life find unwitting expression in the relationship of the

congregation with their new pastor.

See Appendix A (p. 51) for a further description of an unintentional interim.

See ET 2 (pp. 78-80) for more information on STMs (transitional companions)

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A Time to Step Back and Consider the Long View - The Congregational Life Cycle ET 1 (pp. 75-77), ET 7 (pp. 92-94)

One helpful lens through which to view a congregation is the lens of “life cycle.” All living organisms have a birth, a time of maturation, and a time of death or reconstitution. This also seems to be the case for congregations. Although the church of Jesus Christ is forever, it is apparent that congregations are not always forever. And, observation tells us that congregations pass through a typical life-cycle pattern. Knowing whether a church’s momentum is toward maturation (holding onto a peak level of program and performance) or on the decline is an important perspective in the calling of a pastor and in discerning the kind of gifts required for this particular time in a church’s life. **CT 9 (pp. 142-148)** provides a helpful expansion of this lens. Also, the following link provides an article (including the diagram below) by Rev. George Bullard on this subject:

http://sed-efca.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/08/stages_of_church_life_bullard.pdf

Diagram by George Bullard in “The Life Cycles and Stages of Congregational Development,” 2001. Used by permission. September 20, 2012.

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A Time to Consider the Anxiety of the Moment . . .

ET 1 (pp. 75-77), ET 7 (pp. 92-94)

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's a place from which a group eagerly seeks relief. Waiting can be difficult. Therefore, it is essential that the lay leaders remain calm during this time of transition and not allow a lack of patience 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 time is it in our journey together?
- What will we expect of our next pastor? How is that the same as or different from what we expected of our last pastor?
- What differences existing among us do we need to bring to the surface and discuss before we call the next pastor?
- What leftover hurts need some 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 dimensions of their life together. This is a time for leadership—not a time for quickly “forming a search team” and finding a new pastor. It takes courage and the peace of God that surpasses understanding to lead in a calm manner. It’s the task to which council members are called, and the task for which this training tool is designed.

Transition Team PT 3 (pp. 9-10)

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?

The Transition Team could also assist the council in forming the pastor search committee. The work of the Transition Team would allow the search committee to focus on finding the next pastor. A date for the expected conclusion of the Transition Team's work should be determined by the council. If a Transition Team is not formed, the council needs to ensure that these key questions are addressed.

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. (A good example of a video can be found at http://www.crcna.org/pages/pastorchurch_searchteamvideo.cfm.)

Although it's not as frequent a problem, in some cases the search process can become too slow or protracted . Symptoms of this phenomenon would be the search team's failure to meet on a regular basis, a lack of interest from the congregation in the search process, or a loss of enthusiasm for the pastor search because several calls have resulted in declines or there is a lack of urgency in continuing the process . This problem may also result from trying to be too perfect with respect to finding an exact fit . If the process is moving too slowly, it is important that the council and members of the pastor search committee be honest and forthright about what is happening and consider alternative ways forward .

See Appendix B (p. 54) for more information on transition teams.

If the congregation would benefit from an “interim” pastor, an important distinction should be made . There are, basically, two kinds of interim pastors to consider:

Specialized Transitional Ministers 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 the Office of Pastor-Church Relations (PCR) . Names of such individuals can be obtained from the PCR office .

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 . The PCR office has a list of some Supply Pastors, but others may also be available .

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Chapter 2 Attentive to Persons

Introduction

Conversations that are so much a healthy part of the search process, both within a committee

and within a congregation, remind us that this is an adventure. Sorting out questions of identity, core values, and vision for the upcoming years renews our awareness that we are more than an organized institution—we are the body of Christ! The nature of our 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 thin or 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 PT 8 (pp. 23-26)

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 selection is made by the council.
- A council member should be appointed to serve as a council liaison; this non-voting 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 ages and gender, diversity of long-time church members and newer members, diversity of 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.

PT 8: *Congregational Support for the Committee* section (pp. 25-26)

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’s 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 . 29), 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.

One strategy that can be helpful is to distribute some of the secretarial and correspondence work. This can be too large an assignment for one person. If multiple persons are doing this work, it is essential that all correspondence/minutes, etc., are copied to other scribes for the sake of information and consistency.

Sensitivity to the Vulnerability of Committee

Membership PT 8: *Caring for Committee Members and Congregational Support for the Committee* section (p. 25)

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. An essential value for this committee will be to establish protocols for their work together and to own the process together, supported by the council, to whom the committee is accountable.

It is also important that there be intentional ways in which this committee will be supported by the prayers of the congregation not only during the search process but

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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. 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 team both as individuals and as a group.

PT 8: *Ending the Search Process* section (p. 26)

Openness to Input from the Congregation

PT 9 (pp. 27-29), PT 10 (pp. 30-32), ET 7 (pp. 92-94)

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 PT 12 (pp. 35-36)

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 we imagine that there is one perfect fit that God has in mind, we have effectively put this process under a great deal of unwarranted pressure. We've placed undue pressure on ourselves, and we will place undue pressure on a pastor when we 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.

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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 we 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 we not take ourselves or our 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.

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 .

Finding the Right Persons: Discerning a Good

Fit PT 12 (pp. 35-36)

One of the most daunting tasks for search committees and prospective pastors is discerning a good fit. This involves both science and mystery. So this is not a place for relying only on objective data. There are elements of intuition and intangible nudging of the Holy Spirit that need to be expected and prayed for.

Still, careful thinking, prudent discernment, and wise investigation are also used by God to help us 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:

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The Perspective of Effective Leadership

In the manual *Effective Leadership in the Church*³ 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.⁴

(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 pastoralexcellence@crnca.org. For an electronic copy, visit www.crnca.org/site_uploads/uploads/spe/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.

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 experiences may be more telling.

³Sustaining Pastoral Excellence. *Effective Leadership in the Church*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Christian Reformed Church in North

America, 2005.

⁴Sustaining Pastoral Excellence, *Effective Leadership in the Church*. p. 20.

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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 effectively minister.

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 welfare reform and would focus more on the pastor’s capacity for being clear about his/her 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 don’t 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 are growing in their understanding of themselves,

particularly those areas that are difficult to see or accept. And, recognizing there will always be blind spots, effective pastors demonstrate they are gaining some awareness of what those blind spots might be. 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.

Openness to the Spirit's Stretching, Surprises, and Stirrings

It is important to maintain a healthy balance between being respectful of what we've 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

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an adventure of waiting, watching, wondering, and growing in the mysteries of faith and hope and love.

Because we sometimes have a sharply focused picture of our preferred next pastor, we may end up overlooking some potentially good prospective pastors:

It is human nature to imagine a preferable future. So, as is often 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 the preferred future even though some of us may, at times, offer some well-meaning but misguided resistance to his 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. And who might some of those pastors be?

Older Pastors

There are pastors in their 50s and 60s 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. One caveat: congregations that consider women pastors are well served when this decision does not preclude the other discernment practices outlined in this training tool, such as particular giftedness of the pastor or the particular needs of the congregation.

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 may be reluctant to consider a pastor from the United States, and vice-versa. While it is true that there can 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.

Pastors who have experienced a separation from a previous congregation

Sometimes search teams are leery of those who have an "Article 17" 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. But how we respond and what we learn through such experiences— these are elements of the narrative that mark the journey of churches and their pastors. When we are honest about our stories as pastors and congregations, our strength may be renewed.

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 us of the diversity of the worldwide body of Christ and challenges us to increase and welcome diversity in our congregation. In situations like this, the community of faith benefits by learning in profound ways that our 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.

Bi-vocational 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 strategy 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 emphasize the various gifts and roles of many members by not singling out one person as the sole pastor. Models for bi-vocational ministry in the CRCNA are beginning to emerge and are too varied to include in this training tool. However, the writers anticipate that guidance and wisdom for bi-vocational ministry will soon be available on the website.

Compensation Considerations

Some of the special circumstances cited above may warrant conversations about accommodations or compensation. Examples could include handicap accessibility in the

parsonage, maternity/paternity leave, time off for regular medical procedures, and, in bi-vocational situations, contingency plans for when the pastor's other job requires more of his/her time. Although these considerations may not involve large adjustments, it is important to discuss them in the calling process.

Respectful Etiquette and Confidentiality PT 11 (pp. 33-34), PT 13 (pp. 37-39), PT 14 (pp. 40-41), PT 15 (pp. 42-45)

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's 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 his/her 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.

Chapter 3 Attentive to Process

Introduction

A search committee might wish it were as efficient as an internet search engine: virtually instant and amazingly thorough. But although the kinds of search engines that explore 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.

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—all these factors suggest a process that will require patience, persistence, and prayer. Pace should not be predetermined but flexible, guided by what’s 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’s striking, then, that we call such hope “*waiting* on the Lord”!

The Kinds of Persons Needed for the Search

Committee PT 8: *Selecting the Committee* section (pp. 23-24)

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 (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.

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- 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 Recognized 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 PT 1: *Team Building Strengthens*

***Trust* section (pp. 3-4)**

- Time and effort spent in building a sense of unity and collaboration among the team 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!

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

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Identifying Strengths and Gaps of the Committee

PT 8: *Selecting the Committee* section (pp. 23-24)

- 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), 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 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.
- 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.*) **PT 17 (p. 51)**
- Financial provisions (salary, housing and 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.

Protocols for Communication PT 13 (pp. 37-39), PT 14 (pp. 40-41), PT 15 (pp. 42-45)

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 him/her informed as to how far along the search committee is in the process of selecting a pastor for recommendation. If at a later date a particular prospective pastor is no longer under consideration, a letter should be sent to notify him/her of the committee's decision.

See Appendix C (p. 57) for a sample letter 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 team flyers, verbal reports during a worship service, and more.

One CRC congregation made a video in order to communicate key information to the congregation at the beginning of the search process. It was played during a worship service. To view the video go to http://www.crcna.org/pages/pastorchurch_searchteamvideo.cfm.

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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?

Sample Process Timeline/Flow Chart PT 16 (pp. 46-50), PT 17 (p. 51), PT 18 (pp. 52-55)

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). What is most helpful is to establish a consistent pattern for dealing with prospects, as in the following:

- Acknowledge anyone who suggests a name of a prospective pastor.
- 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.
- If, in the estimation of the search committee, the profile seems to fit, a contact should be made with the person to ascertain their willingness to be considered for the position. *See Appendix C (p. 57) for a sample letter.*
- Send prospective pastors information about the church, including the church profile, a job description, and anything else that would help him/her become acquainted with the congregation and its ministries.
- Visit the prospective pastor’s current congregation to hear him/her preach. Sermon tapes/videos of others who cannot be visited are essential. Follow-up discussion by the whole committee is essential.
- If all remains favorable, schedule an interview, preferably in person.
- 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.
- The search committee brings forward the name of one, two, or three prospective pastors to the council for approval to continue the process.

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- Upon approval, the congregation is informed. When possible, have the prospective pastor(s) preach and meet the congregation in an informal setting.
- 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, and timely communication of this decision is essential.

The Process of Engaging Each Other

Preparing a Church Profile/Information

Packet PT 9 (pp. 27-29), ET 1 (pp. 75-77), ET 7 (pp. 92-94)

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 this link: http://www.crcna.org/pages/pastorchurch_index.cfm#pcr_mis. The initial work in gathering the information and filling it out could be done by a subgroup of the search committee but should be agreed upon and owned by the whole committee. It is important to use and submit this template so that the matching systems of the Ministerial Information Service⁵ can be utilized in finding pastors who could be considered for your church. In addition, **PT 9 (pp. 27-29)** provides helpful input toward thinking through and preparing the church profile.

Additionally, for pastors with whom they would like to initiate more significant dialogue, most search teams consider it important to create a more complete profile along 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. 58) for creating a church informational packet.

⁵For a description of the Ministerial Information Service (MIS), go to p. 42.

Reviewing Pastor Profiles

- Pastor profiles are available from the Ministerial Information Service (MIS). A church looking for a pastor can request specific pastoral profiles from MIS, and MIS can also forward pastoral profiles to churches that it considers a potentially good match. (See the MIS section in Chapter 4 [p. 42] for more detailed information on this topic.)
- Each pastoral profile is studied, reviewed, discussed, and given appropriate consideration. This will be one of the earlier considerations for determining whether or not to proceed with a prospective pastor.
- While it is ideal that all search committee members read each profile, that goal may not be practical. An alternative is to have each profile read by a segment of the committee that then reports to the whole on their findings. If dividing the workload is necessary, all profiles should remain available to all committee members.

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! These documents can assist in the process of sorting through possibilities. 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 don't 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.

PT 16: Reference Checks section (pp. 47-48)

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Protocols for Creating a List of Prospects PT 12 (pp. 35-36)

There are three basic strategies for creating a list of prospects: (a) advertising, (b) Ministerial Information Service, and (c) networking.

Congregations will manage this task differently. In some congregations, it will be perfectly acceptable to advertise the position widely and invite pastors to indicate interest by way of a letter of introduction. This is a good way for any pastor to safely make inquiries and explore the possibility of a new ministry opportunity. These invitations will include an assurance of confidentiality. Sample places for advertisements might be the denominational magazine (*The Banner*) or the denominational website (www.crcna.org).

Other congregations may view such a strategy as too much like “corporate” North America and unbecoming to a church. They may wish to rely more on the denomination’s Ministerial Information Service (MIS), which provides a database capable of accessing the profiles of both ministers and churches and of suggesting possible matches. More information about this service is found in chapter 4, page 42. (To download the Church Profile form or the Minister Profile form, go to http://www.crcna.org/pages/pastorchurch_index.cfm#pcr_mis)

The third strategy involves making use of whatever informal networks are available. Invite members of the congregation to make suggestions.

See Appendix E (p. 59) for forms used by congregational members to suggest a prospective pastor.

A Word About Technology/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 .

Protocols for Conversations with Prospective Pastors PT 12 (pp. 35-36), PT 13 (pp. 37-39), PT 14 (pp. 40-41), PT 15 (pp. 42-45)

- 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.

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- 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.

Pastor's Interpersonal Style Interpersonal style is an important dimension of discerning how a prospective pastor will function in a given congregation . Again, this is not a simple factor in discerning a potential fit . And there are many assessment instruments available that can help clarify a particular pastor's interpersonal style . In this regard, the search committee will gain much of its data from their conversational experience with the potential pastor .

A suggestion: Find ways for the prospective pastor to interact with groups and with individuals . A prospective pastor may seem quite comfortable interacting with the group of search committee members but may be less attentive or comfortable meeting with someone one on one . Or, vice versa, a potential candidate may be cautious with the larger group but highly engaged when fewer people are present . Further, all interpersonal styles will play differently over the long haul . Someone who meets people easily may be less able to listen well to a long and difficult story . And someone who senses the *feelings* at work in another may be less attentive to the *facts* of the story .

PT 15 (pp. 42-45)

The Interviews

At times it may be necessary to conduct a preliminary phone interview. 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 phone interviews. And if it's 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.

PT 15 (pp. 42-45) is a "must read" chapter.

See Appendix F (p. 61) for questions that can and cannot be asked in an interview.

See Appendix G (p. 63) for samples of screening questions.

See Appendix H (p. 64) for sample interview questions.

Protocols for Visits "Away" PT 16: *Visiting Candidates in Their Home Settings, Forming Visiting Teams, Planning for the Visits, and Processing Information from Candidates' Home Settings* sections (pp. 48-50)

This refers to visiting the prospective pastor in his/her current place, usually for the purpose of attending a worship service and listening to the pastor preach a sermon.

- Visitors do well to maintain a low profile, not calling attention to themselves. Alerting a pastor beforehand is not recommended. And 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 discreet rather than flamboyant presence.
- Introducing yourself to the pastor *after the service* may or may not be possible but is appropriate.

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Protocols for Inviting Prospective Pastors to Visit Your Church PT 18: *Planning for Candidate Visits* section (pp. 52-53)

- 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 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 PT 16: *Reference Checks* section (pp. 47-48)

- 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.

See Appendix I (p. 65) for sample requests for references.

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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. 68) for details on search committee expenses.

chapter 4 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. Councils are free to extend calls to ministers of their choosing; ministers are equally free to either accept or decline such calls. However, a minister "shall not leave the congregation with which the minister is connected for another church without the consent of the council."⁶

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.

Church Order Parameters

Essentially, every ordained pastor in the Christian Reformed Church 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 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 Christian Reformed Church.) Once ordained as ministers of the Word

⁶Christian Reformed Church. *Church Order and Its Supplements: Christian Reformed Church in North America*, 2012, Art. 14A, p. 30.

in the Christian Reformed Church, 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. 8D, pp. 21-22 for more information.)

A number of specific restrictions, courtesies, and protocols apply to the calling of pastors, and these guidelines are described in the Church Order of the Christian Reformed Church,* 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.

The supplement to Church Order Article 8 includes the following advice:

- 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 (Supplement, Art. 8A, p. 20).
- Ministers may not be called a second time to the same vacant congregation within the space of one year, except with advice of classis (Supplement, Art. 8B, p. 20).
- A congregation’s permission to call depends on sustaining a minimum number of active, professing members (75) or families (30). Special permission to extend a call may be received via consultation and approval of classis (see Art. 8, no. 2, p. 52 from *Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government*⁷).
- 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.

Ministerial Information Service (MIS)

The Christian Reformed denomination, through its Pastor-Church Relations office, maintains a database of profiles (both ordained ministers and ministry candidates) as well as church profiles. Once each month a committee reviews requests from search committees for potential pastoral prospects. Preliminary selections are provided by

⁷ Borgdorff, Peter. *Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Faith Alive, 2008.

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a basic computer matching program. These selections are reviewed, trimmed, and augmented by the committee prior to passing along these names and profiles to search committees. Additional pastor profiles may also be requested by name.

The committee also keeps a list of ministers who have discerned the need to consider the possibility of receiving a new call (for a variety of reasons), and, when appropriate, the committee adds these names to the generated lists.

All ministers who have served more than three years in their current setting are considered by the database program as eligible for call. It is possible for ministers to indicate on their profiles that they are currently unavailable.

Information and forms can be found and accessed at the Pastor-Church Relations website. Go to http://www.crcna.org/pages/pastorchurch_index.cfm#pcr_mis.

Classis Counselor

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 ideally is one whom the church has specifically requested. The counselor's role is to assist in ensuring that the calling process attends 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.

Letter of Call

The official letter of call can be downloaded from the denominational website. To access it go to http://www.faithaliveresources.org/Content/Site135/FilesSamples/49710464065pdf_00000009268.pdf. It speaks in broad terms of a minister's calling but does not function as a job description.

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

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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. 69) 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. If this need is considered valid, such a pastor would then follow the procedures outlined in the "Journey to Ministry" document as prescribed by the Candidacy Committee.⁸

⁸For more information, see Art. 8c and 8d of the Church Order (p. 20), and in particular the Supplement, Art. 8, sections E and F (pp. 22-24).

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.⁹

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.¹⁰

⁹For more information, see the Church Order Supplement, Art. 8, section C (pp. 20-21).

¹⁰Christian Reformed Church. *Church Order and Its Supplements*: Christian Reformed Church in North America, 2012,

Closing the Loops

The New Pastor's Entry PT 20 (pp. 62-63), PT 21 (pp. 64-65)

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 PT 8: *Congregational Support for the Committee and Ending the Search Process* sections (pp. 25-26), ET 8 (pp. 95-96)

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

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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.

Caring for the Search Committee

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 we play our 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 we 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!

Checklist

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If you would find it helpful, Appendix L (p. 70) 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

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k

Weese, Carolyn, and J. Russell Crabtree. *The Elephant in the Boardroom: Speaking the Unspoken about Pastoral Transitions*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004.

A nuts and bolts guide to developing a succession plan for smoothing pastoral transitions. Filled with strategies and solid advice, this resource is based in solid research and the authors' many years of experience working with churches in a wide variety of denominations.

Manual

s

Borgdorff, Peter. *Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2008.

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 2007.

Christian Reformed Church. *Church Order and its Supplements*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Christian Reformed Church in North America, 2012.

This booklet is prepared by the Christian Reformed Church and incorporates the revisions adopted by Synod 2012.

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

This is a training tool 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.

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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.

Sustaining Pastoral Excellence. *Toward Effective Pastoral Mentoring. Third Edition*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Christian Reformed Church in North America, 2008.

This is a practical tool for mentors (experienced pastors) and mentees (pastors new to

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.

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Appendix A Special Circumstances: The Unintentional Interim¹¹ (see p. 14)

The following is a portion of a blog post. (The entire post can be found at <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.

¹¹ Ed Eubanks. *Special Circumstances: The Unintentional Interim*. Doulos Resources: February 25, 2009. Permission ^{to} reprint received from Creative Commons. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/us/> Accessed September 18, 2012.

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.

- **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. This should take place well before the pastor plans or needs to leave. I recommend highly the book on this subject called *The Elephant in the Boardroom* by Carolyn Weese and J. Russell Crabtree (Jossey-Bass, 2004) for guidance on how to do this well.

- **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

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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 p. 17)

The following are examples from two congregations that formed a Transition Team and how that was communicated to the congregation.

Congregation #1

At its June meeting, Council decided that it would be prudent to appoint a Transition Committee to prepare for the upcoming search process. The Executive Committee would like you to serve on that committee, and if you agree, your name will be presented to Council at its July 11 meeting.

The purpose of the Transition Committee is to help Council resolve a number of issues that should be dealt with before undertaking a search for the pastor’s successor. For example, is there any reason we should move away from its team ministry approach and adopt a more hierarchical structure? Should we revise the Minister of Preaching’s job description? Are there particular qualifications or gifts that should be sought in a candidate? Would it be wise to hire

an interim minister to handle most preaching duties? Who might be well-suited to serve on a search committee? Presumably the committee would seek input from the ministers and the congregation for Council's consideration.

The Transition Committee will be, consequently, examining some important issues and providing much-needed guidance to Council. In the end, a search committee will be spared the need to work through those issues and can get started with the process of finding our next Minister of Preaching. Council's current expectation is that the Transition Committee will be concluding its work by the end of the year, hopefully in time for Council's December meeting.

Attached is a document that Council adopted as a guideline for the Transition Committee. This is a working document, but it may be helpful in terms of your evaluating the call to serve our church in this important way.

Please let me know at your earliest opportunity, after prayerfully considering this request, whether you are willing to serve on the Transition Committee. I would appreciate getting your response by the middle of next week if that is possible for you to do.

Thanks, and may God bless you as you seek his guidance in considering this request.

Congregation #2

Things to Be Considered in the Succession Process

Introduction A high priority on the Council's agenda—perhaps the highest priority—is the establishment of an orderly and well-thought-out succession process. The list below is a first attempt at listing some of the things to be considered. Some of these items in the nature of the case must be decided at the very beginning of the process. The rest of the process depends on them. For this reason, it seems advisable, at least to me, to assemble the Council, staff, and the Succession Study Committee this summer in a place conducive to and with the time necessary to discuss thoroughly and make these initial decisions.

At such a meeting the agenda should include, from the list below, I (time frame), II (overall strategy), and III (establishment of the search committee). Items IV (farewell committee), V (boundaries), and VI (discussions with staff members) are not quite so time sensitive and can be taken up during the fall.

I. Establish a time frame

- A. Date for current pastor's farewell
- B. Dates for other events leading up to the farewell
- C. Target date for new senior pastor
- D. Target date for the job posting

II. Adoption of overall strategy

A. Decision on the succession model to be followed

(Three basic choices with various combinations of the approaches possible; events may force moving from one strategy to another.)

- 1. Overlap (New senior arrives before Current pastor leaves.)
- 2. Interim (A year or more intervenes between Current pastor's departure and

the arrival of a new senior pastor. The interim period is filled with one or more interim pastors. The time is used to make a thorough search for a new pastor.)

- 3. Immediate Succession (The new senior accepts the call prior to Current pastor's departure and arrives at the church within a month or two after Current pastor leaves.)

B. Consider how and when to roll out the succession process for the congregation.

- 1. When to announce the date for Current pastor's farewell (not too soon; not too late).
- 2. How to involve the congregation in the process.

III. Establishment of a search committee with a time frame to reflect the Council

decision on II above. The establishment of the search committee includes decisions about (some of these can be made in process):

- A. The composition of the committee (how many people; who will serve on it; how

many Council members, how many non-Council members; chair, etc.) B. Mandate for the committee (how often they will report; range of the search:

CRC only? Broader?) C. Assembling the proper documents (job description; church profile, materials for

posting the position, etc. Who does this—the search committee? Council?) D. Reporting to the congregation (how, when, etc.) E. Recruitment of the search committee members (Who will do this?) F. Writing the job description G. Merge what has been learned in the

Auxano¹¹ process with the church profile

and job description so that the search is focused on a candidate who fits the vision of the church. H. Determine mechanisms for posting the position 18 months prior to the current pastor's departure.

IV. Establish a farewell committee (probably not the same as the search committee) to schedule and manage farewell events.

V. Work with the current pastor to set boundaries for the period after he leaves. When is it appropriate to come back; when not?

VI. Discuss with the staff how the ongoing ministry of the church will be handled in the interim (if there is any), their roles, and their plans for the future.

¹¹ Auxano™ is a consulting group for ministry leaders. For more information, visit www.willmancini.com.

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Appendix C Sample Letter to Prospective Pastors **(see pp. 32 & 33)**

The following is an outline for a letter used to contact a prospective pastor. 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 _____. We are looking for a qualified person to _____. This pastor would take on primary responsibility for _____. We are looking for someone who

- has experience with and/or passion for . . .
- would be great at working with . . .
- is ordained (or eligible for ordination) in the CRC or the RCA

- has experience with building and refining church ministry programs
- has experience supporting networks of volunteers, serving as a resource person

If you would like to serve in a church

- that is spiritually alive
- that . . .
- that . . .

and is eager to grow in the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ, _____ we'd like to hear from you. Please contact _____ to find out more about our church and the scope of this ministry opportunity.

Sincerely,

_____ on behalf of the search committee

Appendix D Putting Together a Church Information Packet (see p. 34)

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).

Appendix E Congregational Suggestions for Prospective Pastors (see p. 36)

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 denominational Ministerial Information Service.

Minister's name: _____

Name of church: _____

Town: _____ 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: _____

Sample #2 Letter to Congregational Members

As you know, we are seeking applicants for the open 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 these basic qualifications of the position (from the job description for the position)?

- 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

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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

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Appendix F Application and Interview Question Checklist (see p. 38)

US 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're 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?"*** Managers usually land in trouble when they ask for information that's irrelevant to a candidate's ability to do the job.

To avoid the appearance of discrimination during interviews, **do not ask** the following questions:

1. Are you married? Divorced?
2. If you're single, are you living with anyone?
3. How old are you?
4. Do you have children? If so, how many and how old are they?
5. Do you own or rent your home?
6. What church do you attend?*
7. Do you have any debts?
8. Do you belong to any social or political groups?
9. How much and what kinds of insurance do you have?
10. Do you

suffer from an illness or disability? 11. Have you ever had or been treated for any conditions or diseases? 12. Have you been hospitalized? What for? 13. Have you ever been treated by a psychiatrist or psychologist? 14. Have you had a major illness recently? 15. How many days of work did you miss last year because of illness? 16. Do you have any disabilities or impairments that might affect your performance in

this job? 17. Are you taking any prescribed drugs? 18. Have you ever been treated for drug addiction or alcoholism? 19. Do you plan to get married? 20. Do you intend to start a family? 21. What are your day care plans? 22. Are you comfortable supervising men? 23. What would you do if your husband were transferred? 24. Do you think you could perform the job as well as a man? 25. Are you likely to take time off under the Family and Medical Leave Act?

*Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 allows churches and religious organizations to discriminate on the basis of religion. Therefore you may ask questions like #6.

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Final point: If a job candidate reveals information that you're not allowed to ask, you should not pursue the topic further.¹³

Canadian law prohibits questions regarding the following:

1. Race 2. Colour 3. Ancestry 4. Place of origin 5. Ethnic origin 6. Creed 7. Citizenship 8. Sex 9. Sexual Orientation 10. Record of offences 11. Disability 12. Age 13. Marital status 14. Family status¹⁴

¹³Information obtained from the CRCNA HR office and is based on US laws. September 24, 2012.

¹⁴Kathryn J. Filsinger. *Employment Law for Business and Human Resources Professionals*. 2nd edition. Toronto, On: Emond Montgomery Publications Limited, 2010. p. 54.

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Appendix G Screening Questions for Preliminary Phone Interview (see p. 38)

The following are instructions and possible questions for the preliminary screening phone call 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 member at our 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 phone interview based on an optimistic review of their materials by our search committee to date, and that we are hoping to learn more about them to see if taking additional next steps is appropriate and desired. Please 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 . . . (that fit this position. What is your experience planning and programming . . . (that fits 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. What specific clarifications are needed to see if this applicant meets the basic qualifications for our position? 6. What questions do you have for us?

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

”

The following are sample questions for a phone interview of a prospective pastor. Note that this interview would occur *after* the phone interview mentioned in Appendix G (p. 63).

1. Please share with us about yourself and your family.
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 (this church) and its ministries? What are some things about (this church) that pique your interest?
7. What would you consider to be the primary goals of your ministry at (this church)? What is your vision for (this 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. Tell us about your strategy for self-care.
12. What do you enjoy in your life as play?

Appendix I Samples of Requests for References (see p. 39)

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

Sample #1: Letter with a form to complete

Send the letter and form to the references noted on the résumé.

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

*Letter (on church
letterhead)*

Dear Reference:

The Pastor Search Committee of _____ Christian Reformed Church has been given your name as a reference for Rev. _____ who is a prospective pastor for this church.

Our 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 would handle your comments 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

_____ Christian Reformed Church

Form to Send With Letter

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

Administrator 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.

Community Relations Supporter 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.

Counselor The pastor should be an effective counselor, setting aside a portion of his/her time for counseling and making referrals when appropriate.

Denominational Relations 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.

Evangelizer The pastor should be involved personally in evangelism, sharing the gospel with those inside and outside the church.

Leader 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.

Missionary Vision 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.

Prayer and Worship Leader 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.

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Proclaimer 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.

Student 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.

Visitor 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.

Sample #2: Questionnaire

Applicant's Name:

Reference's Name:

Your Name: Date:

Questions How do you know pastor (name)?

What have you observed about his/her specific areas of giftedness and passion?

What do you consider his/her weaknesses?

Our open position is for a (name position type: sole, team, associate pastor, etc.) As you have observed, how would he/she perform in that situation?

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 (pastor's name) relates to (name focus of ministry position). On a scale of 1-5, 5 being the best, how would you rate (pastor's name)?

Please share some examples of your observations about his/her interactions with your congregation.

As you have observed, does he/she take criticism well?

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.

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Appendix J Pastor Search Committee Expenses (see p. 40)

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 chair of the search committee.
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 as possible 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 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; check for current amount.)
- Postage expenses related to the search.
- Telephone expenses related to the search. (The church phone should be used as much as possible to call the prospective pastor. If call charges apply and the prospective pastor should call, it would be courteous to offer to call the person right back so that the church can pay for the call.)
- 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; 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.

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. 48)

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 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

- 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.
- Other steps unique to your situation?

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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 include.

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.