

## **Best Practices, Hints and Etiquette for Search Committees and Congregations in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)**

**Introduction:** Thank you for accepting the challenging and sacred work of serving on your congregation's Search Committee. Perhaps this is the first time you are on this team, or perhaps you have done this before. Perhaps your congregation has experienced the Search Process in recent years, or perhaps this is a once in a generation experience for you. In any case, serving on the Search Committee in a congregation can be one of the most important and rewarding experiences for many people. It can also, at times, be challenging, sometimes frustrating, and even discouraging as many search processes can take many months and contain some twists, turns, and even detours along the way. It is our hope that the following pages may provide guidance and suggestions for navigating through this holy and sacred work.

These best practices and hints are gathered from the experiences of pastors, congregations and regional leadership, all of whom share the same goal: to help congregations and pastors find each other so that God's ministry through the church of Jesus Christ may be healthy, creative, faith-full and hope-filled. Through the process you are encouraged to surround this work in prayer. Trust that God is at work in the process, in your ministry and in the ministries of the pastors you will consider. Seek God's guidance, rely on Christ's strength, and trust the Spirit's leading. God has a mission in need of a church and has called and equipped pastors to offer leadership and gifts to our congregations. Know also that others will be praying with you as even these words are bathed in prayer. May they be helpful to God's chosen servants and communities.

### **Chapter 1: Getting Started**

1. Honor the sacred nature of this process. Even before the Search Committee is formed, begin praying for the season of transition you are entering and for God's wisdom to prevail. Consider appointing a spiritual leader for the process who will hold the sacred space for this journey. Within each meeting this person will lead opening prayer, be aware of the God moments when silence or additional prayer should prevail, and lift up opportunities for celebration.
2. Consult your Bylaws for requirements about the make-up and size of the Search Committee and follow the process outlined. If the Bylaws do not designate specific people who will serve (such as Chair of the Elders, Moderator/Board chairperson, etc.), ensure that the Search Committee is representative of the make up of the congregation in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, tenure in the congregation, and relation to specific groups within the congregation (both formal and informal), etc.
3. Contact your Regional Office as soon as possible for assistance and schedule a meeting with the Regional or Area Minister assigned to work with congregations in the Search Process. The sooner your Regional or Area Minister is involved, the better they will be able to help you. Use the process

- outlined by your Area/Regional Minister for gathering information and completing the discernment work. Involve your Area or Regional Minister throughout the process, copying them on meeting minutes and possibly including them in search committee emails.
4. During the transition time, work with the Regional or Area Minister in securing pastoral leadership. The general recommendation is that an Interim minister will not be a candidate for the settled position. There may be some instances in which different forms of transitional leadership may be appropriate. Again, your Area/Regional Minister will be helpful in making this determination. In any case, be clear in the call agreement what the expectations in this regard are, and communicate them to the pastor and congregation.
  5. Define the work of the transitional time. Are there conflict issues to be resolved? Does the congregation need time to grieve the loss of the previous pastor or engage in visioning for future ministry? Are there questions around finances, staffing, building, governance, or other issues that need to be resolved before the congregation will be at its healthiest place to embrace a new pastor?
  6. Honestly evaluate the realities of the congregation in preparation for completing the congregational profile in terms of resources available to the congregation moving forward. These include financial, property, human/volunteer, emotional/spiritual energy and the ways in which the congregants engage each other and the community. The interim minister and your Area/Regional resource person can be helpful in designing avenues for this evaluation.
  7. Stay open to possibilities in seeking the next pastor. Describe the needs of the next pastor in terms of characteristics (leadership skills, administrative skills, preaching and worship, etc.) rather than demographics (age, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, family situation).
  8. Complete the congregational profile and gather other materials as requested by your Regional Office. Your congregational profile should be both honest AND present your congregation in the best possible light. The congregational [profile](#) and directions for completing the profile can be found at <http://disciples.org/gcom/resources/>
  9. Update your website and other online presence. In most cases, the candidates you will be most interested in will first meet you online. Be sure that their first impression of you is a positive one.
  10. Keep the congregation informed of the progress of the search process. Use generalities rather than specifics and keep discussions of various candidates confidential within the Search Committee.
  11. Take your time in completing this part of the search process. Approximately 80% of your interim time will be spent in this discernment phase. While it is tempting to rush ahead and begin interviewing candidates, the groundwork you lay during this initial phase will serve you well in recognizing the gifts and skills needed in your next pastor.

12. Use this time to also work with the governing board, the personnel committee, and/or the finance committee to develop a framework for the compensation and benefits that you will offer the candidate. The specifics will be decided later in the process, but it is helpful for the committee to understand what the compensation and benefits package can include.

## **Chapter 2: Interviewing Candidates**

1. Pray. Ask the congregation to be praying with and for you during this phase and commit to praying together as a Search Team.
2. After completing the Congregational Profile and any other materials recommended by your Area/Regional Minister, contact him/her to receive specific instructions for receiving profiles. Follow regional recommendations for considering candidates and, as mentioned above, stay open to all possibilities, at least in the initial review of candidates.
3. When preparing to interview candidates, compile a list of questions to ask of each candidate and decide who will ask which questions during the interview. Keep in mind that the interviews are not comprehensive examinations. Develop interview questions that will stimulate creative conversation about mission, ministry, and leadership for both the church and the candidate. Your Area or Regional Minister can help you develop interview questions.
4. Be sure to ask, "What questions do you have for us?" The questions a candidate asks can give valuable information to the Search Committee.
5. Do check references. Call each one. Include a question like, "What else do we need to know or what would you like to tell us about the candidate?" Some references will give more information over the phone than they will in written form.
6. Do not call the congregation where the pastor is currently serving. Assume that the congregation does not know their pastor is seeking another position. Contacting the present congregation may jeopardize the search process for the candidate.
7. Do contact the candidate's current regional minister and previous regional minister if the candidate has only recently moved to the current region.
8. When you are ready to invite one or more candidates to visit, be clear on the expectations for the visit and communicate them to the candidate. Are you interviewing more than one in person? If so, the candidates should not be meeting the congregation as a whole during this initial visit as this can set up conflict within the congregation about favored candidates. Save the meeting with the congregation for the visit of the one final candidate. If you are only bringing one candidate out for a single visit, communicate the expectation that if all goes well with the visit you will be extending a call and confirm with the candidate that they have the same understanding. You will want to include spouse/partner and possibly children as well in one or both visits.
9. Throughout the process, keep all candidates informed of your progress and where they stand. If you are no longer considering a candidate, it is courtesy to inform them by phone or email that they are no longer under

- consideration. If you are very interested in a candidate, letting him/her know that she/he is still under consideration can be an encouragement and keep the candidate interested in you!
10. As you are narrowing the search down to the final candidates, contact your Area/Regional minister and ask him/her to contact the region where the candidates are currently serving to see if there is any new information that might have arisen (positive or negative) about the candidate that you should know before going forward.
  11. The committee should arrive at complete consensus before recommending the final candidate to the Board/Council and then to the congregation.
  12. Negotiating the contract: When you have agreed upon a final candidate, contact the final candidate to let him/her know that pending approval of the Board/Council and Congregation, you would like to extend a call and ask if he/she would accept. If the answer is yes, you can begin negotiating the details of the call including compensation and benefits. At this point, you are committed to each other for the duration of the process until it either leads to a call by the congregation or one or both parties end the discussions. You should cease conversations with other candidates and the candidate should cease conversations with other congregations. Your Area/Regional Minister can discuss this further and offer help in navigating the negotiation phase.
  13. Presentation to the Board/Council and Congregation: Prepare a brief history of the search process, number and range of candidates, why this candidate was chosen and the gifts she/he brings.
  14. Be cautious about announcing the name of the candidate on Facebook or in written publications unless you have the permission of the candidate. It is amazing how connected we are as Disciples and how quickly information travels.
  15. Sometimes it takes awhile to discover the right match between pastor and congregation. Throughout the process, stay in touch with your Area/Regional Minister and seek help, encouragement, and direction as needed.

### **Chapter 3: After the Search**

1. Congratulations! Your work is almost done! First, give thanks to God for Spirit's guidance during the process.
2. Contact any candidates who might still think they are under consideration.
3. Begin planning for the transition to the next pastor. This can include: planning a celebration for the interim minister, offering support and resources for the physical move of the new pastor and family, preparing to welcome the new pastor and family to the community, and scheduling and planning the Installation service.
4. Resources for welcoming and installing a new pastor can be found in a document called: Beginning a Pastoral Ministry. It can be found at <http://disciples.org/gcom/resources/>.