

The Pastoral Search Process

Helpful Suggestions to Discover the Right Leader for your Ministry Position

From the Placement Office of Western Seminary Portland, Oregon

Faced with the task of choosing a successor for the leadership of the early church, God's people pointedly prayed "*show us who you have chosen to take over this ministry*" (Acts 1:25). Two equally good and godly men were at the top of the list. Both of them had the right qualifications, but determining the best choice for "*this ministry*" was not as easy to discern.

Discovering the best choice for a specific position in church leadership today is not any easier. Required for this crucial decision are diligent prayer and a careful search process. When these two imperatives are executed properly, God will confirm His choice to us for our ministry.

The objective of this booklet is to help provide guidelines and suggestions that will result in a good match of the right leader with a specific ministry. Western Seminary is aware that each church is unique and has its own polity, history, and opportunities.

There are, however, proven procedures that are applicable for all churches. These are presented in outline form only and are by no means exhaustive. We cite these as checkpoints for search committees to help them cover some essential bases and to provide help to choose the right candidate.

The Length of Time for the Pastoral Search

This process will take anywhere between 6 and 18 months or longer. Major factors affecting this are:

- Tenure of the previous pastor at the church
- Reason for the leaving of the previous pastor
- Size and denomination of the church
- Time of year for the process to begin
- Guidelines and procedures established by the church's by-laws

Four Major Steps

There are four major steps that must be carefully and prayerfully made:

Step One – Initial Church Leadership Responsibilities & Decisions

- Saying farewell to the departing pastor and family
- Determining pulpit/interim supply
- Establishing strategic prayer times during transition
- Appointing a Search Committee
- (Optional) Appointing a Transition Committee

Step Two – The Responsibilities of the Pulpit/Search Committee

- Determining an overall plan for the pastoral search
- Adhering to a search committee covenant with its respective responsibilities
- Communicating responsibilities to church leadership, staff, and congregation
- Clarifying essential issues such as:
 - Reporting Relationships
 - Budget
 - Presenting a Candidate
 - Salary
 - Relationships of any Present Staff
- Developing three profiles

1. CHURCH PROFILE – Who are we? It is very important for both the church and any prospect to clearly know the characteristics and direction of the church. Areas to be covered in this profile include:

- Church History
- Vital Documents
 - Mission Statement
 - Vision Statement
 - Core Values
 - Statement of Faith
 - By Laws
 - Master Plan
- Membership and Attendance
- Finances
- Facilities (include pictures)
- Ministry Programs
- Congregational profile and make-up

2. PASTOR PROFILE – What characteristics of the pastor is the church seeking? (This wide range of characteristics may be acquired through a survey of the congregation)

- Biblical Qualifications
- Leadership Characteristics
- Church Experiences
- Educational Requirements
- Philosophy of Ministry

3. COMMUNITY PROFILE – What community resources are available in the area where the church is located?

- Population
- Schools
- Medical accessibility and Hospitals
- Local Economy
- Real Estate/Taxes

Step Three – Finding and Contacting Potential Candidates

On the strength of the three profiles developed in step two, the work of contacting potential candidates begins.

- Gather names by contacting reliable referral sources. If your church is associated with a denomination, begin by contacting its placement office. Contact the placement offices of evangelical seminaries or Bible colleges endorsed by your church. Do not overlook contacts you have had in the past. When you survey your congregation for your pastor profile, names may be gathered from your parishioners.
- Publicize your opening with churches, seminaries, and ministry websites. The Placement Office at Western Seminary can advertise your ministry position on our website. Our alumni who are seeking a ministry position will contact your church if they fit your criteria.
- As names surface, the Search Committee must be reminded that confidentiality (which should be part of the Search Committee's Covenant) must be strictly observed.
- Designate members of the committee to call the potential candidates to find out if they would be interested in receiving a packet of information about the church with a view of prayerfully examining the possibility of being considered for the pastoral position.

- Send a packet of information to the interested parties. Include the appropriate information for this step such as the three profiles and a preliminary and brief questionnaire for those willing to pursue a next step. This first questionnaire should provide essential information enabling the committee to make its first cut of the prospective candidates. The cover letter accompanying this packet of information should have a date deadline for a response.

Step Four – Evaluating the Potential Candidates

This evaluation process will go through several stages as determined by the committee. When the committee has received a reply from initial candidates, the first cut will need to be made. Those who will not be further considered should receive a letter informing them of this fact. Those who will be further considered should then receive a questionnaire providing additional information desired by the committee to make a more thorough examination. (The Pastoral Placement Information Form, available on Western Seminary's website, provides the kind of information most search committees desire.)

BE CAREFUL TO DO YOUR HOMEWORK before listening to any messages either in person or through tapes. Check out references! Go at least two or three deep. You will want to know not only how the candidate worked with his friends, but also how did he get along with those who had differences of opinion. Check out both personal and professional references. Ask permission to make a credit and police background check.

When you make your phone interviews, if different members of the committee will be calling, be uniform regarding the kind of questions that will be asked. A conference call involving at least two members of the committee is a good procedure.

Now when your committee comes together, the information provided will allow you to make a new cut. Again, those no longer being considered should have a letter informing them of the same, and those being further considered must be informed of where they are in the process along with any additional information the church desires.

When you continue the process, you will select the top three finalists. At this point you will want to spend time with them on their home turf, observing the dynamics in a church service and interactions of the potential candidates with church attendees and family members. This will give the committee the ability to establish a priority order of the finalists. When the committee has made this important decision and takes action in accord with the church's by-laws, the top candidate must spend some quality time at your church with broad exposure to the church family. If all signals are "go" you will receive the vote as spelled out in the by-laws of your church. Should the church or candidate not respond positively, the candidate next in order will be considered.

What About All of These Degrees?

Degrees simply are an indication of a successful educational pursuit of a required course of study. If you have a tooth ache you will be more pleased to see a physician with the letters D.D.S. behind his name indicating that he/she is a Doctor of Dental Surgery rather than go to a person with an M.D. who has specialized in podiatry or to a Ph.D. in rocket science.

There are different levels and kinds of training that have a way of predicting interest, training, and capability.

Levels of Degrees

College training	B.A. B.S.	Bachelor of Arts Bachelor of Science
Graduate training	M.A. M.Div. Th.M.	Master of Arts (may be 1, 2, or 3 yr) Master of Divinity (3 year) Master of Theology (either 4 yr. or M.Div with 1 extra yr.)
Post-graduate training	Ph.D. Th.D. Ed.D. D.Min. D.Miss.	Doctor of Philosophy Doctor of Theology Doctor of Education Doctor of Ministry Doctor of Missiology

Degrees from the school of hard knocks.

It is vital that each candidate be examined based on the experience of "doing ministry" in addition to "knowing ministry." Has the student been an intern? Who have been his "Ministry Mentors"? Past ministry is the best predictor of future success. For this reason Western Seminary incorporates field experience and personal mentoring into its curriculum.

Summary description of degrees offered at Western Seminary

Master of Divinity (3 years)

This degree focuses on training men and women for pastoral ministries in the church. The *core courses* of this degree encompass biblical, theological, and applied ministry studies. Flexible *program electives* are designed to allow students concentrated studies respective of God-given gifts and abilities. These electives are in the areas of pastoral ministry, intercultural service, Christian education, chaplaincy, evangelism, and worship ministries.

Master of Arts in Counseling (2 years)

This degree is designed to equip an individual for the counseling ministry in and through the church, private practice, or state-licensed counseling programs.

Master of Arts in Exegetical Theology (2 years)

This degree, with a concentration in Exegetical Theology, focuses upon graduate level education in the biblical and theological disciplines.

Master of Arts in Intercultural Studies (2 years)

This degree with a concentration in Intercultural Studies is designed to prepare students for an effective ministry within rapidly changing cultural settings in the United States and overseas.

Master of Arts in Specialized Ministries (2 years)

This degree has a specialized concentration of studies in a choice of one of several tracks: Pastoral Care to Women, Evangelism and Equipping, Spiritual Formation, Educational Ministries, or Youth and Family Ministry.

Master of Arts in Specialized Ministries in Pastoral Care to Women (2 years)

This degree prepares women for ministry in church staff roles (such as Women's Ministry), compassionate ministries (such as parachurch ministries), or community services (such as domestic violence shelters). The primary focus is building, maintaining, and expanding effective ministries to women.

Master of Theology (1 year beyond the M.Div.)

This advanced degree is a research-oriented program intended for persons who desire further graduate work in biblical, theological, and ministerial studies.

Doctor of Ministry

This degree, based upon a M.Div. degree, is designed for those already in ministry to sharpen their ministry skills, and to deepen their spiritual commitment.

Doctor of Missiology

This degree, based upon a master's degree, is designed for those who work outside their own culture and for those who are faced with the challenge of a pluralistic society where different ethnic groups may or may not share a common language.

Resources for Search Committees

Since many search committee members have never served in this capacity, and since each church has its own set of dynamics, we recommend strongly that you avail yourselves to the resources available.

Most denominational headquarters will have a search committee handbook that you can secure. Many of these headquarters will also have personnel available to meet with your search committee. If your church is not part of a denomination, you may contact the Placement Office at Western Seminary and we will put you into contact with resources to help you as you search for the right pastoral leadership needed in your church.

There are numerous books available in Christian bookstores and/or in libraries of Christian colleges and seminaries. Presently, we offer our pastoral students the book, *Confirming the Pastoral Call*, by Joseph Umidi (Kregel Publications, 2000). We recommend that you secure this resource or an alternative for every member of your committee. The bookstore at Western Seminary will be glad to assist you in obtaining copies for your committee.

Additional Services of the Placement Office at Western Seminary

Visit our Web Site (www.westernseminary.edu) under *Placement*

- If you would like your pastoral opening to be included on our web site (Complete the “Ministry Opportunity Form” and return it to the Placement Office)
- If you would like a copy of the “Pastoral Placement Information Form”

Contact our Office (npearson@westernseminary.edu or 503-517-1800)

- If you would like additional copies of this booklet
- If you have need for pulpit supply
- If you would like to have a pastoral consultant counsel with your search committee
- If you have need for an Interim Pastor

Call our bookstore (503-517-1850)

- If you would like pastoral search books ordered for you (usually a 20% discount is available on most books for churches)