

The Process

Helpful Hints for a Successful Ministry Position Search

Special thanks to Dallas Theological Seminary for granting permission to use this document

Introduction

Congratulations! You are either graduating from Western Seminary or have already graduated. We want to help you navigate the transition into ministry and avoid some of the pitfalls that lie along the road. While we have tried to anticipate your questions, we might not have addressed all of the specifics that apply to your situation. Feel free to contact us personally. We would consider it a privilege to talk with you.

Where do you begin? Let's take it step by step.

Step 1: Pray!

Pray for God's wisdom and guidance as you begin to make decisions regarding your future ministry. Spend some significant time in God's Word and in prayer as you seek His direction. If you have allowed your spiritual disciplines to slip, now is the time to get back on track. Make your time with Jesus Christ the priority in your life (John 15:4-5).

Step 2: Gather Your Thoughts

A number of questions may initially begin your focus:

"I'm about ready to graduate. When do I start the process?"

Placement services are available to you whenever they are needed. If you are about to graduate and you have not reached out to the Placement department sooner is better than later. We're here for you whenever you need us.

"I'm currently in a ministry. When is it time to leave?"

First, realize for those currently in a ministry, a transition will probably take between 12 to 18 months. So, plan accordingly!

Second, remember that in any ministry transition, God often "releases" you from your current ministry before He calls you to another. Have you been released from your current ministry? Search God's heart and timing regarding your current ministry situation.

"When should I tell the church leadership I am thinking about a transition?"

You should probably talk to the leadership when you know you have been released from the current ministry and are **seriously engaged in talking** with another opportunity. The ideal time to tell the leadership is when you have made a decision to pursue another ministry and a date for your departure can be established.

Step 3: Contact Western Seminary

The Placement Office at Western exists solely to provide you with assistance, direction, and resources to help in the search process. As soon as you begin to consider a new ministry, go to and fill out the online.

<https://www.westernseminary.edu/alumni/experience/placement>. In addition, you may want to look at the numerous resources we have available online to aid you in your search.

Begin to think through the answers on the placement application. Where do you feel called to serve? What area of the country would best fit your calling? We're here for whenever you need us.

Step 4: Prepare Your Résumé

Remember that during this time any thought of a transition is probably tougher on your spouse and family than it is on you. Keep your family close and allow them ample time to voice any fears or concerns. Spend a lot of quality time together.

A key ingredient for a successful ministry search is your résumé. Ministry résumés are different than business résumés in that they not only represent what you can do, but also represent who you are and what you are like.

Make sure your résumé is personal and show your passion for ministry. The content should be long enough but not too long, and will depend on your length of and experience and the nature of the job. Make sure your résumé highlights what you want to highlight and is geared to the position you are applying for. Does it accurately reflect your personality, your strengths, desires, philosophy and passion for ministry?

Your references should include people from a variety of backgrounds who can give a personal account of your character and what you are like in a ministry setting.

Make sure that anyone you use as a reference is aware that you have used them.

The Placement Office is ready to help you with your résumé and has résumé recommendations and examples available online under Resources at. <https://www.westernseminary.edu/alumni/experience/placement>

Step 5: Do Some Honest Self-Reflection

Do some honest self-reflection of where you have been in the past and where you would like to see yourself going in the future. Who are you? What are your natural abilities? What are your spiritual gifts? What is your experience? What might be a good fit in a new ministry setting? Where have you seen God use you in the past? Talk to your spouse, family, close friends, and other ministers. Ask for honest feedback from them.

Be honest with yourself. This is not a dream sheet indicating where you would like to effectively serve in the future, but a realistic appraisal of where you have seen yourself used of God in the past.

After some honest self-reflection, look down the road and ask where you want to be in the future. Is God leading you to transition to a different type of pastoral role? Has God given you the desire and qualifications to do something different?

As part of your self-reflection, begin to clarify your position on certain issues you know will come up in future conversations. Some of these questions might surface due to something you revealed in your résumé. Other questions might surface due to issues the church has faced over the years. For example, what is your position regarding divorce and remarriage? How do you view church government? Remember this is a two sided process, it has to work for you as much as the ministry.

Step 6: Enter Placement

The placement site includes all new and relisted opportunities in churches, schools, missions, and parachurch organizations the Seminary has received.

Here's how it works:

- When a church or organization contacts Western with an available ministry opportunity, its information is collected and posted on the placement site.
- Stay current with what is new as the opportunities listed on the change almost daily. Pick a day of the week every week and go on the site and see what is new.

- When the ministry opportunity is posted, it is immediately available to view. The Placement director will forward opportunities to candidates that have reached out to the placement office to inform Western they are looking.

If you're interested in serving within a particular denomination, contact them about using their placement system. Various online search sites may be of interest to you. If appropriate to your situation, give a copy of your résumé to family and friends and let them know you are looking for a ministry.

Step 7: Be Proactive

Regularly check the Placement site and be proactive in sending your résumé to opportunities that appear to be a possibility. Make sure you include a personal cover letter. A well-worded email stands in place of a cover letter. Information about a cover letter is available online under Resources at:

<https://www.westernseminary.edu/alumni/experience/placement>

After a week, it is appropriate to call the contact person to see if he or she has received your résumé and if you can provide additional information.

This is what may be happening on the ministry's end:

- Usually, they will take the first wave of applications and sift out the ones that are obviously not a good fit. Hopefully they will contact any candidate who did not make it past the first cut.
- If the ministry is interested, they may send you a questionnaire to gather more information. These questionnaires can sometimes be quite extensive. Save your responses since you may use the same answers for multiple questionnaires with different ministries.
- After they have received the completed questionnaires, they will narrow the potential candidates down to approximately five to seven.

Pay attention to your interaction with the church. Watch how they treat you and how they conduct the interviews. Be careful to notice the little things. How sensitive are they to your needs? Notice the questions they ask, and the questions they do not ask. Make sure the church matches your style and personality. **Remember you are going for a good fit—not a fast fit.**

- With the five remaining candidates, they usually call for a phone interview. The Placement Office has a list of questions for both the ministry and candidate to help them think through the issues to discuss. These questions can be used both during the initial interview and the candidating process. This is available online under Resources at: <https://www.westernseminary.edu/alumni/experience/placement>.
- After the phone interview, they may ask for preaching samples and start checking references.
- The next step is face-to-face meetings. Either they will travel to you, ask you to meet at a neutral site, or have you visit the church.
- If all goes well, the next step is for you to candidate following their constitutional procedures.

Remember, church searches take time. They are not intentionally trying to be slow; it is just the nature of the process. It takes time to cycle all of the material to everyone who needs to see it and then get everyone together to make the next decision. So, be patient.

“What is the average number of résumés that applicants send out before being offered a position?”

A couple of variables come into play. The more experience you have, the more opportunities you will most likely receive. The more open you are to consider any opportunity, the more likely you will be called to a ministry in a short period of time. If your résumé is sent out to 30 to 40 ministry possibilities, you will most likely be in a very good position to receive a call. It is typical to hear back from only about ten percent of the ministries where you send your résumé, so

don't be alarmed. Don't get discouraged. You may need to expand your desired geographical considerations and/or your desired ministry options to stimulate more interest.

Step 8: Evaluate the Material

Once a ministry has contacted you for an interview, they will likely send you information or direct you to their ministry's website for you to review (which of course you've already done =). This might include their complete doctrinal statement, constitution and by-laws, budget, a detailed job description, philosophy of ministry, and their vision and mission statement and core values.

Pay attention to the materials they send. Are there any areas of disagreement? What was their giving and spending record over the past five years? Remember you are going to live and die by the constitution. Make sure you understand how it works and what it says. The likelihood of their constitution being changed is very remote.

Begin to gather information to aid you in the interview and decision-making process.

- Doctrinal statements should be in agreement.
- What biblical qualities and spiritual gifts are they seeking? Your discernment of what they are truly looking for is extremely important to ensure a compatible fit for you and your family.
- Have a clear understanding of the job description and the expectations of the leadership.
- Know the strengths and weaknesses of the church. What challenges does this church face in the future?
- What are the leaders' plans for the next five years? What are they working towards and how do you fit within their plans?
- What is the history of the church? Remember you are committing to a church that brings its own set of baggage. Notice what they emphasize. Do they talk more about their spiritual growth or their budget and church building?
- What is the community like? Is the community growing?
- What is the average profile of a member of this church? Describe this person. Does that fit with whom God is calling you to minister?

If there is a small group of pastors in the area that meet, reach out to them to get their input on the church.

Keep praying!

Step 9: Candidate

The formal candidating process will involve a number of contacts with a variety of people. You will probably be in meetings with at least the search committee and the board.

Depending on the position, you may preach at a morning or evening service or teach a class. In all of these interactions, the leadership is observing how you handle yourself, your style of communication, and how the congregation receives you.

At this point in the process, you may be the only candidate they are considering. It is very reasonable for you to inquire about the timeline for making a decision and transition.

You should be prepared to provide any financial information concerning indebtedness or background information to obtain a background check. Your life at this stage becomes an open book for evaluation.

Remember your primary goal is to minister to the people and not just candidate for another job. Also remember if you have eight or ten people sitting around a table, you have eight or ten different expectations of what you should be doing. When they state the church is interested in evangelism, what exactly does that mean? Are they interested in being equipped to do the work of an evangelist? Or are they interested in you doing all of the evangelism?

Alleviate as many surprises as you can! Observe what is happening during your candidating period.

A helpful handout concerning candidating is available online under Resources at.

<https://www.westernseminary.edu/alumni/experience/placement>. Included are questions for consideration and helpful hints on how to conduct yourself during this crucial time.

Step 10: Evaluate the Call

Listen to your spouse! He or she will have insights you might not have picked up on. This decision must be a joint decision and completely agreed on by both of you. Be intentional about praying together concerning this opportunity.

At some churches or ministries an individual has the authority to offer a position. At others, the vote of the congregation to call a minister is required. Ask the leadership prior to the vote what they view as acceptable. As a general rule, in most voting situations where the congregation is involved the senior pastor should receive at least a 90 percent positive vote in order to accept the call. The church constitution might accept a smaller margin. Feel free to contact the Placement Office to discuss any unique circumstances you may have.

Carefully evaluate the financial package. Is the financial package commensurate with the giving and median income of the church? Will this financial package require your spouse to work? How is your family situation going to be changing in the future? Are additional children planned? How are you planning to pay for college tuition, replacing your automobile, and saving for retirement and health needs?

If you are a finalist and the church has yet to discuss compensation, you should ask a member of the search committee for information. The salary discussion should naturally flow out of a realization that you are a potential match. The Placement Office has resources available to help you determine the average salary for various positions in every region of the country. It is very common for the church to be unaware of salary changes over the years. A good general benchmark for a geographic area is what a school principal who has a master's degree is making. Make sure you include all benefits. The Placement Office has information about compensation available online under Resources at:

<https://www.westernseminary.edu/alumni/experience/placement>

Step 11: Accept the Call

In any decision-making process there are usually objective factors and subjective factors that influence the decision. The objective factors include the location, type of ministry, the direction of the church, the size, and the people extending the call. The subjective factors involve your own spiritual life and giftedness in the Lord.

Trust God with your decision. Make the best decision you can with the information you have at the time. Choose what you believe to be the best decision for you and your family.

Once you formally accept the call, make plans to bring closure to your current ministry and celebrate your new beginning. It is wise to take advantage of any time off during this transition. Make the move, rest, get settled and adjust to life in your new area. If you have a family, they will also appreciate this time to orient themselves to their new surroundings and daily routines.

Prepare yourself for all of those unexpected expenses that come up during a move. Be prepared emotionally, spiritually, and physically for those unique situations that will arise. Some, but not all, ministries may offer to help pay for all or a portion of the cost of your relocation. You can ask for relocation assistance but certainly don't demand it.

Step 12: Begin Your New Ministry

Now that you have officially started your new ministry, where should you focus? The temptation is to study hard, prepare for sermons, and present an action plan for the next three months. While these are all important, don't make

them your primary focus. Begin building relationships with the leadership and the congregation. Let people know you are there to minister and serve. Do basic visitation. Unless the ministry has asked you to make significant changes, take the first year to build trust, understand the people, and absorb how the ministry's yearly cycle runs.

Remember you are a servant of Christ and He has placed you where He wants you. It is a privilege and honor to serve fellow believers in church and ministry settings. Remember to maintain a healthy balance between ministry and family time to prevent burnout.

Know that Western Seminary is always here to encourage, enable, and equip you for ministry. Be faithful. Press on and finish the race well.

Resources Available

The Placement Office at Western Seminary can assist you with:

- Résumé Development
- Cover Letters
- Candidating
- Interview Questions
- Compensation Considerations