



CONSIDERING LESS TRADITIONAL CANDIDATES

Many Cooperative Baptist Fellowship churches are uniquely open to calling what might be considered non-traditional pastoral candidates. For most of the history of Baptists in the United States, men have been the most common applicants for pastoral ministry. But over 30 years ago, CBF was born with a commitment to the calling of women ministers, who now in many churches, have growing opportunities to be considered for many roles, including that of senior pastor.

The openness of many CBF churches to egalitarian leadership has helped create space in a number of congregations for other historically-less frequent calls. These include clergy couples, Black pastors serving predominantly white churches, and internal candidates.

This resource offers considerations for search teams as they select, interview and call less- traditional pastoral leaders. The wise search team will be open to the unique gifts that may come when engaging diverse candidates. And the wise search team will be committed to understanding the relational and institutional complexity that comes with calling ministers who differ from those in the church's past experience. Teams should seek to understand from this and other resources, along with CBF-related experts, how the nuances of culture, experience and expectation shape engagements with candidates.

This resource is intended to inform the work of such a search and to invite curiosity when considering historically-alternative candidates.

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INTERNAL CANDIDATES

Churches considering internal applicants for senior ministry positions constitute a recent yet growing trend. Traditionally, conventional wisdom taught that shifting ministry roles within the same congregation was nearly impossible. “Once a youth minister in a church,” the saying went, “always seen as the youth minister.” Today, the presence of professional couples, the economics of changing jobs and cities, and the needs of families conspire to make moving less attractive to some ministers. Taking a new role within one’s existing congregation can help provide economic and relational stability for the minister and his or her family.

A ministry staff member seeking a new role in the current congregation creates both opportunities and challenges for a search team. The internal candidate has a uniquely robust knowledge of the congregation and, probably, elevated familiarity and trust on the part of the search team. The opportunity exists to call someone who can onboard quickly with carried-over confidence from the congregation.

However, challenges come as the search team must decide how to engage the internal candidate fairly. Should such a candidate be treated as all other applicants or be treated differently? Are there detractors in the congregation who should be heard? How might the team evaluate if the minister is prepared for the change in roles?

The wise search team acknowledges that engagement with internal candidates is vastly different than considering applications from a distance. Because of established relationships, knowledge of the church, and pre-formed impressions of the minister among the search team, these candidates should be assessed separately from the general pool of applicants. Staff ministers seeking a change in role should be interviewed and evaluated completely before turning attention to other candidates. In most cases, it should be decided if the internal candidate will or will not be recommended to the church before considering any other clergy.

The logic for dealing first with internal applicants lies in the fairness of evaluation and the managing of church expectations. A deep knowledge of a serving minister’s performance, and the possible presence of detractors, places the internal candidate at a disadvantage when compared to other candidates. In other words, an internal candidate’s deficiencies, no matter how minor, are visible to the team while other applicants’ challenges remain hidden. Considering the current staff person before assessing others allows the team fairly to assess if the minister’s shortcomings are surmountable.

Search teams may assume that supporters and friends have encouraged the staff minister to apply. So, when an internal candidate remains under consideration, church members supporting the minister’s candidacy will begin to transfer allegiance to the minister as if they are in the new role. If the search team eliminates the internal candidate at a late stage of their search, then those supporting their candidacy will may struggle to accept the minister recommended in the end. Finally, completing the candidacy process for the staff minister before moving to others, if they are not called to the new role, also creates time for those candidates to evaluate their current call or seek another.

CLERGY COUPLES

The Fellowship is unique among other Baptists with the existence of a considerable number of married clergy couples. Sometimes clergy couples will work jointly on a church staff, occupying individual roles; or one of the ministers will serve another local ministry or chaplaincy. More rarely, clergy couples will co-pastor a congregation, sharing the preaching, pastoral care and other leadership roles.

The potential challenges of calling a clergy couple include the most common complaint of nepotism:



Will there be adequate supervision? Who is really in charge? How is the possibility of favoritism addressed? Additionally, the church budget may be a limiting factor when there is funding for only one staff person or when health insurance is not provided by the church. If these challenges can be overcome, the combined gifts of the clergy couple expressed through a family fully committed to the flourishing of the church can lead to a blessed ministry.

A CLERGY COUPLE APPLYING FOR TWO OPEN STAFF POSITIONS

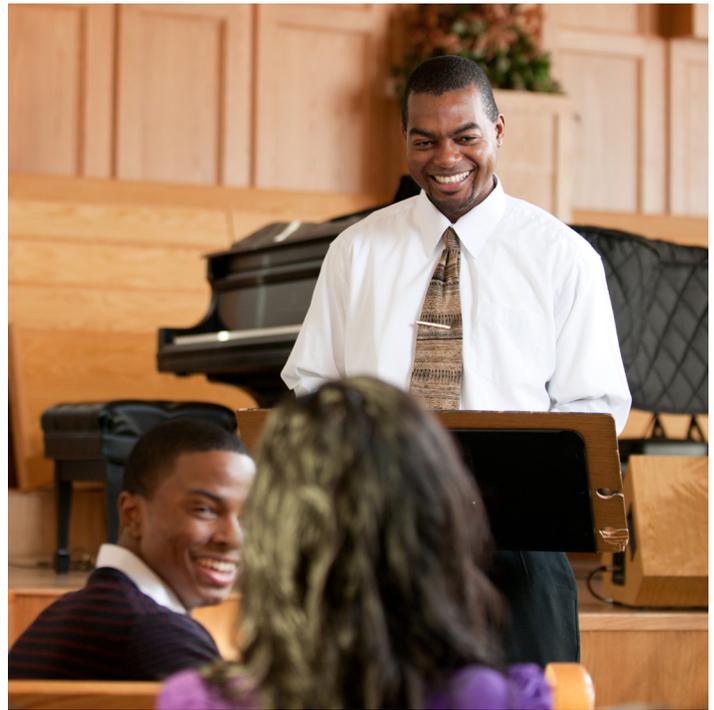
A common clergy couple scenario is applying together at a church with multiple staff openings. With multiple ministry positions, the first action of the search team should be to clarify the hopes of the couple. Is the couple seeking a co-pastor designation, where the duties of the pastoral and other ministerial role will be shared? Or, is the couple applying so that each of them occupies a distinct role? A second key action for the team, is to determine if one of the couple is willing to proceed in the search process should the other be removed from consideration.

When a church with multiple open positions has more than one active search team, the teams should meet jointly to explore the possibility of calling the clergy couple. Together, they may assess the couple for the shared or separate roles, address position descriptions or other administrative changes necessary to accommodate a couple, and finally coordinate a call or release from the search.

A CLERGY COUPLE APPLYING AS CO-PASTORS FOR A SINGLE POSITION

A clergy couple who are called to pastor together may apply for the open pastorate. Before proceeding with the clergy couple, the team should ascertain the church's ability to fairly compensate and provide the necessary insurance for the pair. Then the team should ascertain if either member of the couple would continue in the search should the other be removed from consideration. Having addressed the two initial concerns, the search team can move to hearing how the couple envision a shared ministry.

Should the search team sense God's leading to call the clergy couple within multiple or single roles, the committee should help ensure the pair's thriving in this ministry as they set the terms-of-call and welcome the new ministers. In communicating with the church and



working with other committees, prepare the church for this joint ministry by articulating boundaries and expectations as a part of the call. For example, share how the couple plans to manage days off or to fill the pulpit or manage the covering of duties when they are away together on vacation. Or, the team may suggest how committee work can be divided so that evenings when both are away from home are minimized.

FEMALE SENIOR PASTORS

The commitment of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship to women in ministry creates opportunities for gifted clergywomen. And yet, the number of women serving in lead pastor roles remains smaller than the overall number of existing female ministers would suggest. That the experiences of women clergy are significantly different than their male counterparts accounts for much of the discrepancy. Female candidates are still considered for fewer senior pastoral positions overall and thus have longer tenures in associate roles. Female clergy also face gendered expectations of culture that inform family roles and ministerial roles that men do not. Clergywomen are more likely to have experienced sexual harassment in ministry as well as non-acceptance as a woman in ministry. It is not surprising that some female ministers struggle with "imposter syndrome," the feeling of being unqualified despite holding credentials, accomplishments, and overall success in ministry. The cumulative weight of difficult experiences, rejection and subjugation often

leads to women applying for pastoral positions at rate lower than men.

With these experiences in mind, search teams may consider treating women's application materials differently and/or separately. It might be productive to evaluate the resumes of women first, selecting a "contender," even before dealing with the male applicants.

Considering women separately in no way suggests that women are lesser candidates and therefore need a boost to compete with male applicants. If anything, some women who apply will shine compared to all others no matter when her materials and qualifications are reviewed. But when you hear a few women preaching in close succession, you may be better able to appreciate the differences in style and approach from their male colleagues. Since men's preaching has been the "default" in most congregations, the team may need to "tune their ears" fully to appreciate a woman's voice in the pulpit. Similarly, it could be helpful to hear the stories, passions and leadership gifts of women in proximity to one another because, again, men have been the default.

Having heard first from women candidates, the search team may be better equipped to hear from and evaluate their male colleagues, too. By engaging the women in a considered way, their gifts for ministry will be more easily seen by the search team. And with the gifts for ministry of women seen more clearly, even if a male pastor is called by the church, it won't be just by default, but by a deeply-considered decision.

CROSS-CULTURAL OR CROSS-RACIAL CANDIDATES

When surveyed as a part of CBF's "Toward Bold Faithfulness" initiative, CBF participants named "diversity" as an aspirational value. Both lay and clergy members expressed a desire for greater racial and ethnic representation in congregations and in the Fellowship. In pursuit of diversity, CBF relates to both the Pan African Koinonia, a network of Black clergy and churches, and La Familia, a network of Latinx churches and clergy. Both networks help provide leadership for CBF councils and committees as well as fostering seminary students and congregational leaders.

Search teams that engage cross-cultural or cross-racial candidates should call on CBF leaders in the Pan African Koinonia or La Familia for insight into the complexities of calling diverse ministers. Even churches and search teams that cultivate diversity probably operate with cultural perspectives and expectations that inform experiences with candidates. Conversations and learning about the nuances of differing experiences of ministry applicants can pave the way for more successful search and call.