

Pastoral Ethics
Questions for a Search Committee
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Few resources are available for search committees as they seek to do their job and fulfill a charge placed upon them by a church. Generally these resources suggest questions to ask a candidate. As well, suggestions for building a profile for your church are available. Further, some materials are available regarding the ethics and etiquette expected of the search committee.

Relatively little is available, however, for those who are candidates being interviewed by search committees. There are no courses in seminary called “How to deal with search committees.” Most information comes through oral tradition. The following is a list of several questions, offered without commentary, thus expected to stand upon their own. The reader can reflect upon these questions from her or his experience. Though candidates for a place of ministry may find these questions and statements most helpful, search committees can benefit from them as well.

The questions are arranged in alphabetically listed categories. Of course, some artificiality is implemented since some of the questions could easily fit with more than one category. The important point is whether one can respond to a question or matter from which perspective the question may arise. For, more than one search committee has come to say, “We thought we were supposed to ask all the questions. We simply are not as ready as we thought we were to do our job.”

The questions arise in no particular order of priority—simply to be noted as questions which should arise or will arise. If the questions as stated do not fit a particular context, adapt them to do so. As these questions are reflected upon and some resolution can be found between a candidate and committee, potential land mines can be defused.

ADMINISTRATION

1. If a conflict situation was to arise between pastor/staff and members of the congregation, do you have a plan to deal with this contingency?
2. How much input does your pastor have with the hiring/firing of other staff members?
3. Who will be my secretary? What is he/she like to work with?
4. If you become dissatisfied with my work, how will I find out? Informal? Committee? Deacons? Business meeting?
5. Do you have guidelines/policies related to infectious diseases?
6. Who is expected to handle/administer the day-to-day operations?
7. Who is the staff supervisor?
8. How are you handling notification of your committee’s final decision?
9. Does your church have legal counsel?
10. What level of liability insurance does the church carry?
11. Does the church have liability insurance for the staff which also covers counseling functions?
12. Do you have wedding policies; for instance, what is expected of someone approaching the pastor to do a ceremony?
13. Is there a pre-marital counseling process in place?
14. What are your policies for funerals?
15. Has the church ever asked a staff member to leave his or her position?
16. If yes, why?
17. How was that situation handled?
18. How would it be handled now?
19. Is there an accountability process related to each staff person?

COMMITTEES

20. What kind of committee system do you have?
21. Has there been a review of your committees in the last five years?
22. Do your committees have job descriptions?
23. Is there a committee on committees which nominates new committee members? How is the committee on committees arrived at?
24. Which committees are the most functional?
25. What are the functions of the personnel committee?
26. Do you have a pastor-church relations committee?
27. Do you have a denominational relations committee?

COMMUNITY

28. What are the community's concerns?
29. What are some long standing traditions in your community?
30. What is the economic base of your community?
31. What is the racial make-up of your community?
32. If it is multi-racial what are some of the ways you have considered reaching these people?
33. What is my role in community affairs to be? High profile? Non-existent?
34. What is the school system like in your community?
35. Are there any schools that you would recommend over others?

CONGREGATIONAL PROFILE

36. How is the community profile represented in the congregation?
37. What is the age profile for your church?
38. What are the theological perspectives of the congregation?
39. What particular world-views do they have?
40. How are these world-views represented?
41. What social ethical concerns are particularly important?
42. Tell me the strengths of your church.
43. Tell me the weaknesses.
44. Name the power struggles within your church.
45. How long have these gone on? Has anyone attempted to mediate them?

EDUCATION

46. Describe your education ministry.
47. Characterize the educational philosophy/philosophies at work in your church.
48. What curricula do you currently use?
49. What curricula have you used?
50. Do you have a graded program of sex education?
51. Do you have a Vacation Bible School?

FINANCIAL

52. What is your process for budget preparation, promotion, and pledging?
53. How much indebtedness do you have?
54. When was your last capital needs program?
55. Are you in need of another capital needs program?
56. What will be the process for determining such a capital needs program?
57. Do you have a "watch dog" process for collecting, counting, and depositing monetary offerings?
58. How will the salary and benefits package you are offering affect the other staff positions and/or church budget?

59. Is the salary package in line with what the previous pastor/staff made? If not, why have you changed?
60. How would you describe your budgetary process? For example, as a designated or unified budget?
61. How does your church handle the situation if you oversubscribe your budget?
62. How does your church handle the situation if you do not meet your budget?

LONG RANGE PLANNING

63. Have you had a long range planning study recently?
64. Is there need for a long range planning review presently?
65. Relate some of the dreams you have for your church.
66. Delineate some of the ways some of those dreams could be realized.

MEMBERSHIP

67. How do you receive people for membership?
68. Do you have a new member packet, program, orientation?

MINISTRY

69. Do you have a youth ministry, singles ministry, and/or seniors ministry?
70. Do you have a children's and preschool ministry?
71. How would you typify each of these which you have?
72. What is your view of the deacons?
73. In what ways do your deacons function?
74. How often do you expect your pastor/staff to visit the hospital? Shut ins?
75. What is your church's view of women in ministry?
76. Do you have a well baby clinic or a clinic for indigents?
77. Does your church minister to those who are handicapped?

MUSIC

78. Describe your music ministry.
79. What musical styles find appeal in your congregation?
80. How does the church respond to an orchestra, sound tracks, classical and contemporary music, drama, and special musical presentations?
81. Do you have a graded choir approach?

OUTREACH

82. Describe how you do public relations.
83. What mission organizations does your church have?
84. How do they function?
85. Is your church involved in any kind of mission trips?
86. Most churches want to "grow." In what areas do you think your church needs the most growth "assistance"?
87. Are there plans in place to reach any of those goals?
88. Do you have missions organizations? WMU? Baptist Men? Children's programs?

PASTORAL STYLE

89. Name the roles/functions of a pastor as you understand them.
90. What are the most important for you?
91. Give examples of the types of pastoral leadership you would recognize.
92. To what style of pastoral leadership has the church been most accustomed?
93. What kind of pastoral leadership do you think would work best with your church?
94. Do you want your pastor to be actively involved in denominational politics?

95. Which word best typifies your understanding of a pastor/staff person? Servant? Shepherd? Leader? Authoritarian? Preacher? Pastor?
96. Do your pastors traditionally have “open houses”? Any other social responsibilities?
97. Many say they want biblical preaching. Describe what you would mean by that term. Can you give examples?
98. What areas would you prefer your preacher not to address from the pulpit?

PHYSICAL PLANT

99. What goes on in the church plant during the week?
100. Do you have a floor plan of your church plant?
101. What kinds of office equipment do you have?
102. Does your church plant have a security system?
103. Have there been any breeches to this security process?
104. Who has access to the physical plant before or after normal operating hours?
105. Is there an accountability process for check out and security of church property—e.g. a church van?
106. Do you have property other than that upon which the sanctuary and educational spaces are located?
107. Is your physical plant accessible to those who are physically limited?

POLITY

108. Do you have a church constitution?
109. Do you have by-laws?
110. What kind of committee system do you have?
111. How are your church committees selected?
112. Can you trace out the process by which decision making is handled in your church?
113. How often do you conduct your business?
114. What is the tone of your business meetings? Tense? Comfortable? Confrontational?
115. Who is the moderator? The pastor or a layperson?
116. What are your denominational relationships?
117. What is your church’s identity in the association, state convention, and/or national denominational organization?
118. What do the people in your church think of (name of more progressive individual) and/or of (name of ultra conservative individual)?
119. Would you mind if I called former pastors and staff persons?

SELF IMAGE

120. What is an idea that you have seen in other churches which you think would work in yours?
121. Are there any programs or dimensions of your church’s life which you would like to change or eliminate?
122. Give me a brief history of your church.
123. What is your idea of the perfect church member?
124. How would this perfect church member relate to the pastor/staff?
125. When and why did you become a member of this church?
126. Why have you maintained your membership here?
127. Name some traditions important to your congregation and to your community.
128. If I were to look in your state convention annual’s statistical reports, what would I learn about your church?
129. How would these statistics reflect accurately or inaccurately your church?
130. Which Baptist confession best fits your church’s perspective?

STAFF

131. What do you think is a reasonable work schedule for the position about which you are searching to fill?
132. What are your church's expectations for the spouse of the staff person for which position you are searching?
133. What do you expect from the pastor's family?
134. What are your policies for staff related to vacation, professional meetings, and revivals or conferences?
135. Do you have any kind of study leave for staff?
136. Do you have the staff enrolled in an annuity program in health insurance (medical and dental)?
137. Are support staff included in any of these aforementioned policies and programs?
138. Do you recognize anniversaries of staff members? Are there any other built-in "recognition" processes?
139. How often do you have staff meetings?
140. The staff position for which you are searching, where does it fit on your staff organizational chart?
141. Do you administer any kind of personality profile to your staff as they come aboard?
142. Are there any periodic personality evaluations?
143. Are there periodic evaluations of staff? Who does these?

WORSHIP

144. What is your sense of the style of worship of your church?
145. Who does worship planning?
146. Does your church have pew Bibles?
147. If you do have pew Bibles, what version do you use?
148. If you do not have pew Bibles, why not?
149. If you have given thought to pew Bibles, which version would you probably use?
150. Does it matter which version the pastor uses?
151. What is the hymnal which you currently use?
152. What are your policies related to baptism and the Lord's Supper?
153. Does your church have a prayer ministry?
154. Do you follow the Christian year? e.g. Advent?

SEARCH COMMITTEE

155. How was your committee selected?
156. What has your committee's process been?
157. For example, are you dealing with one person at a time?
158. Why do you think you specifically were picked, asked, or chosen to serve on this search committee?
159. How much latitude have you been given by your church to negotiate with a candidate over details such as salary and benefits package?
160. How long have you been involved in your search process?
161. How long have you held in your mind that the process would take?
162. Is your committee supposed to present a unanimous vote to your church on a candidate?
163. Imagine that you have been called to serve in the ministry for which you are seeking to fill this place of service. Why and/or why not would you go to the place for which you are serving on a search committee?
164. Will you have involvement in the transition process with the coming of the new staff person?

