COMMUNICATION PLANNING FOR SEARCH TEAMS

Timely and consistent communication with ministerial candidates and the congregation is vital for search team success. Keeping the church and candidates informed about the process and progress helps maintain engagement and good will.

In this resource, you will find templates for common communication tasks and guides to inform the creation of individual interactions. Most commonly, modern search team communication is by email, but the templates can be adapted for postal correspondence.

INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Selecting a "secretary" or "recorder" who is charged with coordination of communication is helpful for most teams. The secretary may execute all the communication from the team to candidates and the church or assign the communication tasks to others.

In general, search teams should plan for at least monthly communication with candidates who remain under active consideration. Similarly, the team should keep the church informed at regular intervals, either by reporting in worship or through the congregation's print or on-line media.

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FIRST COMMUNICATION WITH THE CANDIDATE

When the search team receives application or resume information, it should acknowledge receipt and inquire about the present search status of the candidate. This first correspondence should also include an overview of the search process and a timeline for future communication. The example below can guide the initial interaction with each candidate.

Dear Rev. [Candidate for Pastor],

We are delighted to have received your resume [and other materials] for consideration as our next minister at [church name]. We will carefully review all the applicant information that we receive. Be patient with us as we begin our process and, should you no longer wish to be considered in our search, kindly let us know as soon as possible.

The process we have planned for our search involves careful discernment and faithful prayer. We will continue to receive resumes [and application materials] until [date] or until such time that the filled. We will select from the applicants [number or approximate number] for initial interviews. From those interviews, we will then identify a smaller number of candidates for extended conversation, possibly including a visit to our campus, and reference checks before selecting a final candidate to present to the church. We commit to keeping all candidates informed of our process as we move forward.

If you have more information you would like to share with the team or if you have questions about our process, please feel free to contact us at this email address. Be prayerful for us, as we will for you. You will hear from us again by [date] with an update on our progress.

Kind regards,
[Name]
[Church name] Search Team

INFORMING MINISTERS NO LONGER BEING CONSIDERED

As the search team narrows their focus toward final candidates, ministers no longer under consideration should be notified. Timely notification that a minister is no longer a candidate, when accompanied by an expression of gratitude, releases the candidate to pursue another call. The template below can be a guide in notifying the candidate.

Dear Rev. [Candidate Name],

Thank you very much for engaging our [minister] search process. Our careful consideration and prayerful discernment have led us toward other candidates at this time. Though you will no longer be considered for our [minister] search, we are confident in God's grace that will lead you to a place of future service.

We pray that God richly blesses your ministry.

Kind regards,
[Name]
[Church name] Search Team

INTERMEDIATE PROGRESS UPDATE

As the search process continues, candidates who remain under consideration should be informed of the team's progress. At regular intervals, not less often than monthly, candidates should receive an update, even if no decisions have been made. Periodic emails keep the candidate engaged with the search and allow them to share any change in their circumstances that may affect the call. The example below can guide creation of an intermediate progress update.

Dear Rev. [Candidate Name],

Thank you again for participating in our [minister] search. We are grateful for your patience as we continue our process of discernment. [Include an update on current team work: i.e., "We continue to review resumes and watch sermons as we seek God's guidance," or, "We are meeting as a team to discuss candidate matches to our pastor profile." Or, "Because of vacations and holidays we have paused our meetings, but will resume after [Christmas," etc.]

You can expect to hear from us with another update by [date]. If your circumstances have changed relative to our search or if you would like to submit additional information, please contact us as soon as possible.

Kind regards,
[Name]
[Church name] Search Team

CONTEXT-SPECIFIC COMMUNICATIONS

As the search progress toward consideration of final candidates, several opportunities for context-specific communications will emerge. At each turn, consider the information that is necessary for candidates and how the team may follow up. The suggestions below might be a guide for planning.

Planning for Interviews When corresponding with candidates to initiate telephone or video interviews, consider the needs of the candidate's schedule. Offer multiple opportunities at various times of day to engage the committee. Be sure to include the committee's goal for the interview in the invitation. For example, is this a "get to know you" interview that will be conversational and less formal, or is this interview geared toward comparative information with multiple candidates answering the same questions about ministry, theology, preaching or pastoral care? Candidates will also find it helpful if the search team includes examples of questions or categories for conversation. This correspondence can help the candidate prepare for the interview.

FOLLOW-UP AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Within a day of interviewing a ministerial candidate, make a contact to thank them for their time and thoughtful interaction. If possible, mention something specific that the team found interesting or compelling from the conversation so that the candidate knows you listened carefully. It is not necessary in this "thank you" note to express the team's desire to move forward or not with the candidate; however, the note should include when the minister can expect to hear from the committee again.

PLANNING A CHURCH VISIT

When working with a candidate to plan a visit to the church and community, or when planning the call weekend, be sure to include sufficient detail to ensure candidate confidence. Offer an outline for the visit that includes with whom the candidate will meet and for what purpose. Also include a timeline of events and who will be their "host," especially if the host changes throughout the visit. Be sure to inquire from your guest if there are special housing or dietary requirements. If there will be a decisive moment during the visit, such as a vote by the search team or congregation, share the details of the voting plan as well as how the candidate will be hosted during that process.

FOLLOW-UP AFTER THE CHURCH VISIT

Within a day of the visit, thank the candidate for his or her time and the effort of travel. Be sure to ask if additional or unforeseen expenses that the church should reimburse were incurred. As with the telephone / video interview, it is not necessary in the "thank you" to express the team's desire to progress with the candidate; however, the correspondence should include when the candidate will hear from the team again.

TERMS OF CALL LETTER

When the search team identifies the final candidate, the "terms of call," or details of the church employment, should be carefully communicated to the ministerial candidate. The search team, the candidate, and the congregation must all understand the details of hiring that include start date, salary, benefits, and time off, as well as congregational requirements for completing the call (such as vote process and required affirmative percentage). The example below may be adapted to create a terms-of-call correspondence.

Dear Rev. [Name],

Being led by the Holy Spirit and filled with immense joy, we would like to extend to you the call to be our next [minister].

Following your visit and sermon on [date], our congregation will meet in a business session [specify time] to vote in affirmation of you as our next [minister]. With an affirmative vote of [percentage], [church name] will extend to you the following terms of call, to begin on [start date]:

Salary $_____
Housing Allowance $_____
Self-employment Tax Offset $_____
Total Compensation $_____

Church Retirement Contribution (403b plan) $_____
Church-paid Life Insurance Premium $_____
Church-paid Medical Insurance $_____
Church-paid Long Term Disability Insurance $_____
Total Benefits $_____

Annual Vacation (days) _____
Annual Sick Leave (days) _____
Annual Bereavement Leave (days) _____
Annual Conference / Convention / Revival (days) _____
Maternity / Paternity Leave (days) _____
Sabbatical Leave of _____ (days) may be available following _____ (years) of service.

Moving Expenses (not to exceed) $_____

Thank you for your openness to the leading and call of God and [church name].

Kind regards,
[Name]
[Church name] Search Team

COMMUNICATING WITH THE CONGREGATION

Consistent communication with the congregation instills confidence in the search team and paves the way for embracing the advent of the future minister. The church should be updated through both newsletters and/or in the worship service at regular intervals. Some updates may include statistics of the work, such as the number of resumes reviewed, sermons viewed or conversations with candidates. Other updates may include descriptions of current tasks, such as refining the interview questions, evaluating resumes, or scheduling conversations. Much like candidate communication, reports to the congregation will keep them engaged, prayerful and supportive of the search for the next minister.