

# Best practices for pastor search teams


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## Big picture


- The many opportunities inherent in pastor searches
- The orientation needed to make the most of these opportunities



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## Five stages of a pastor search


- Pre-search
- Developing the search team
- Designing process and core documents
- Engaging with candidates
- Covenanting with the new minister



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## Pre-search: goals


- Bring closure to the minister's tenure
- Celebrate the congregation's past
- Assess where the church is now
- Listen for God-given direction about the congregation's future



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## Pre-search: best practices


- Work toward a good ending with the departing minister
- Make a transition leadership plan and put it into place
- Research protocols and resources for search processes
- Create a safe, open environment for frank conversation



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## Questions for churches to ask themselves

- How have our history and location shaped us?
- What are our church's values?
- What must our congregation do during the transition to be ready for this new minister?



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**Questions for churches to ask themselves**

- How is God at work in our neighborhood?
- What has changed during the pandemic?
- What is God’s dream for our congregation?
- Given all of the above, what skills do we need in a pastoral leader?



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**Developing the pastor search team: goals**

- Commission a few representatives to bring the whole of the church into search conversations and considerations
- Build trust within search team and between the search team and the congregation
- Craft a structure for worshipful work



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**Developing the pastor search team: best practices**

- Following protocols for selecting or electing a search team
- Determining the optimal number of search team members and the qualities needed in search team members
- Team members taking the time to get to know each other in ways they haven’t previously



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**Developing the pastor search team: best practices**

- Creating a search team covenant as a touchstone
- Developing a meeting outline that weaves together spiritual disciplines and search tasks
- Agreeing on the basis for taking actions



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**Designing process and core documents: goals**

- Ensure the search team has the information it needs
- Detail how to carry out the search
- Compose key documents for getting the word out
- Make a plan to share widely the congregation’s story and invite candidates to imagine themselves within it



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**Designing process and core documents: best practices**

- Seeking out search team and anti-bias training
- Naming and probing assumptions search team/congregation has about next pastor
- Deciding how to involve other staff in the search appropriately



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**Designing process and core documents: best practices**

- Claiming roles within the search team
- Setting a tentative timeline for the process
- Establishing a tracking system for candidates
- Composing the position description and salary range



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**Designing process and core documents: best practices**

- Compiling the congregational profile/information
- Ensuring church's web presence is up to date
- Disseminating the position description widely



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**Places to look for candidates**

- Denominational databases and referral systems
- Formal networks within the denomination
- Judicatory and denominational publications
- Judicatory and denominational leaders



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**Places to advertise to/look for candidates**

- Ministry and theology magazines and newspapers
- Ministry and theology podcasts
- Websites and blogs
- Social media



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**Places to look for candidates**

- Seminary, theological school, divinity school faculty and staff
- Parachurch and/or ecumenical organizations
- Well-networked clergy and lay leaders



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**Tips for small churches**

- Look locally
- Name what is special about your congregation/community and network/advertise around those characteristics
- Embrace a teaching church role for ministry students
- Know that there are ministers who look for small churches



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**Tips for small churches**

- Connect with other smaller churches in town about the possibility of setting up a multi-congregational position
- Seek salary support from your judicatory
- Ensure your part-time position is truly part-time
- Know how you'll help your candidate of choice seek other employment opportunities



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**Communicating with candidates**

- Acknowledge receipt of ministerial materials
- Invite candidate to interview
- Opt not to continue conversation



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**Communicating with candidates**

- Explain extra time needed for process
- Extend call to a candidate
- Notify finalist that another candidate has been called



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**Communicating with candidates**

- The further along in the process, the more personalized
- Consider hospitality over comfort
- Never mass communicate
- Be encouraging when you can to those being released from process



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**Engaging with candidates: goals**

- Set up interviews with and offer more information to continuing candidates
- Learn more about the gifts and passions of candidates
- Answer candidate questions
- Ascertain candidate of choice
- Present candidate of choice



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**Engaging with candidates: best practices**


- Refraining from requesting information from candidates out of proportion with the search team's investment
- Culling candidates from a positive perspective
- Planning well for interview logistics
- Telling honest congregational narratives and eliciting relevant candidate stories in interviews



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**Engaging with candidates: best practices**


- Naming and setting aside unhelpful interview questions
- Ensuring thoroughness
- Defining the silences for candidates in between contacts
- Naming and exploring all reservations about candidates
- Personalizing timely correspondence with interviewees that won't be continuing in the process



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**Engaging with candidates: best practices**


- Designing a hospitable site visit
- Contacting references and running background checks as well as giving the church's references to candidates
- Being clear with the candidate of choice about plans and expectations for candidating visit
- Urging the church to respect confidentiality



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**Reading resumes**


- What excites us about each candidate?
- What questions do we have about each candidate?
- How does each candidate match the criteria we named for a minister who would lead us toward God's vision for our church?
- How does each candidate challenge us?



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**Reading resumes**


- In what areas does each candidate have the necessary skills to lead our church?
- What do our heads, hearts, and guts tell us about each candidate?
- Considering all of these factors, which candidates do we want to invite into conversation?



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**Kinds of interview questions to ask**


- Aimed at what *this* search team in *this* context needs to know
- Open-ended
- Relevant to ministry
- Focused on what candidate has done
- Questions search team does not know the answers to



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**Kinds of interview questions to ask**

- Clarifying as needed
- Concentrated on how candidate would approach a hot-button issue pastorally
- Aiming to connect
- What, when, how (invitational questions)



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### Additional interview tips

- Make questions consistent across all interviews
- Know that some types of queries put interviewees in a defensive posture
- Test out questions on yourselves



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### Covenanting with the new minister: goals

- Finalize details of the covenant with the new minister
- Stoke energy and sense of care for all involved
- Ensure that church members claim responsibility for providing the incoming minister with essential information and assistance



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### Covenanting with the new minister: best practices

- Expecting that candidate of choice will negotiate
- Being flexible with minister about start date
- Informing other candidates about search conclusion
- Celebrating the close of a fruitful search process
- Disposing properly of sensitive search materials



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### Covenanting with the new minister: best practices

- Celebrating/thanking the interim minister
- Stoking excitement about the new minister's arrival approach/job description and need for boundaries
- Dialing back expectations and ramping up welcome of minister's loved ones
- Setting up a pastoral support team



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### Overall essentials for your search

- Take the time you need
- Consider the language you use
- Communicate, then communicate some more
- Imagine the process from the candidate's perspective



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### Overall essentials for your search

- Ground the process in God
- Learn from candidates
- Look for the many gifts this transition/process offers



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**Additional help**

- Searching for the Called manual
- Initial search team training
- Coaching throughout search process
- Coaching for pastor (or pastor and congregation) through the first year of mutual ministry
- Coaching for pastoral candidates



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