**Frequently Asked Questions**

**Ask Phase**

1. Is an exit interview with the departing pastor always possible?

*An exit interview may not always be possible, but it is always desirable. Even when relations are strained, there are insights to be gained from the perspective of the departing pastor that will be helpful in understanding the dynamics of the church. If it’s not possible for a member of the church board to conduct the interview, consider asking the interim pastor or a denominational representative to do it.*

1. Why do we need to hire an interim pastor?

*Let me summarize some of the leading reasons why it is wise to consider having an intentional interim pastor:*

* *He can provide a bridge between your departing pastor and your next pastor, providing continuity in the pulpit, a presence in the church office, and pastoral care to the flock at large.*
* *He can offer perspective and a fresh set of eyes to raise and help answer the right questions before the church starts to search for its next pastor.*
* *He can take the pressure off of the pastoral search team so they can take the time to conduct the search well.*
1. Why can’t we simply get pulpit supply while we search for a new pastor?

*The preaching ministry is absolutely vital, but there is so much more that could be accomplished during the interim period that could further the mission of the church. Examples include visiting congregants, leading the staff, working with the board, refining vision, coordinating events, training leaders, resolving conflict, conducting pastoral counseling, and many other functions of a fulltime pastor. Asking church staff and volunteers to cover all of those bases puts an undue strain on them. The difference between having pulpit supply and having an intentional interim pastor can mean the difference between struggling to keep up and actually making progress during the interim period.*

1. How do we go about securing an interim pastor? What kind of a pastor do we look for, and how should the congregation be involved, if at all, in the selection of an interim pastor?

*Check with your denominational leadership if applicable. Many denominations have their own interim pastors and procedures.*

*Interim Pastor Ministries has an intake procedure that helps a church identify what it needs in an intentional interim pastor. A seasoned staff member walks a church through a series of questions that will help IPM find the right pastor for the job. IPM typically sends two or three resumes to the church for consideration by church leadership. The church then brings one candidate in to meet with church leadership, preach, and interact with the congregation before it decides whether or not to extend a call. The initial agreement is for three months, after which the interim pastor’s ongoing involvement is month-to-month.*

1. Why should an interim pastor not be a candidate for the longer-term position?

*One reason is that the skills required of and developed in an intentional interim pastor are different than the skills that will be needed in the church’s next long-term pastor. The interim’s job is strategic and preparatory to the next chapter in the church’s ministry. He will help the church clarify its direction and identify the gifts needed in the pastor it will call to lead in the next chapter.*

*Another reason is that not being a candidate for the long-term role frees the interim pastor up to say what needs to be said, without pulling punches. The interim may need to point out some things that would not lend to popularity or long-term ministry, but need to be pointed out nonetheless.*

1. How do we assess our church adequately? What do we need to explore and what tools can we use for this?

*The intentional interim pastor will have tools to offer that can help a church assess its health and determine its direction. He will personally interview a large segment of the congregation, and will work with a transition team of church members to look at matters of history, polity, identity, affinity and strategy. The work of the transition team, under the leadership of the interim pastor, will be instrumental to the pastoral search.*

1. How do we keep the assessment process from becoming a black hole in which it seems like there is never an end to the aspects and issues of our church that we could explore and assess? How do we know when our assessment process is adequate?

*The interim pastor is accountable to the church leadership. He will do his best to recommend what he believes the church needs, but the decision to employ any of those tools will come down to what he and the church leadership agree upon.*

1. What is the relationship between the transition team and the search team?

*The transition team is primarily employed in the “Ask” phase of the pastoral transition. In other words, its function is to help you raise and answer questions of the church’s history, identity and direction. In order to do that, it will create some sub-teams to work on various aspects of the task, and it will also interface with the church leadership along the way. When it is finished, it will present a final transition team report to the church leadership and to the congregation as a whole.*

*The search team picks up from there and seeks to find the person who can lead the church into the preferred future identified by the transition team and the church leadership. It will operate through the rest of the pastoral transition – the “Seek” and “Knock” phases.*

**Seek Phase**

1. Should we match a man to our job description or our job description to a man?

*I believe the primary direction should be to match a man to the job description. That is the reason for the entire “Ask” phase of the pastoral transition – to raise and answer questions about the church’s history, identity and direction so that the search team can know what to look for rather than to leave the direction of the church in the hands of someone they don’t know yet.*

*That said, there needs to be a degree of flexibility in the search process to allow the Holy Spirit room to work. The pastoral search team will come up with a list of qualities and skills it wants in an ideal candidate, but no one will match perfectly. The key word in the pastoral search is discernment – finding the one the Lord has chosen to lead the congregation in its next chapter of ministry.*

1. How do we helpfully involve the congregation in our pastoral search? What is too little involvement? What is too much?

*The congregation will have significant opportunity for involvement throughout the process, but especially in the “Ask” phase, when they may be invited to participate in a church health survey, to serve on the transition team, or to take part in a Journey Wall exercise. During the “Seek” and “Knock” phases of the transition, the congregation will be kept informed of the search team’s progress. At the end of each of its meetings, the search team should ask, “Of the things we’ve decided tonight, what can be shared with the congregation?”*

1. Should we use a congregational survey in the assessment phase of our transition? What are the features of a truly useful survey?

*I would recommend a church health survey like Natural Church Development during the “Ask” phase of the transition. In addition, a journey wall exercise is a very helpful tool for determining the values of a church. When the search team is formed, I recommend a church survey that helps identify the demographics of the congregation, as well as its preferences for its next pastor. It should be explained with any opinion survey that while everyone’s preferences will be considered, not all can be guaranteed to make it to the final list of candidate qualities.*

1. Who should be on the search team? How do we know what kind of person we should seek for this assignment?

*To summarize who should be on the search team, look for people who*

* *are known to be spiritually mature and well respected in the congregation,*
* *work well together, and*
* *understand the workload and are willing to shoulder it.*

*In addition, one or two members of the church leadership team should be a regular part of the search team.*

1. How many persons should be on the search team?

*The team needs to be big enough to encourage good interaction, and small enough not to be unwieldy. I recommend between five and nine people.*

1. Do we have to do the Reverse Ministry Match?

*Yes! It will prove to be one of the most helpful resources your search team will employ, and it will be one of the most productive meetings your team will have. It will acquaint you with the terms used in the Ministry Match profile, and the exercise will allow you to create an “ideal type” of your next pastor. It will give you a template to compare candidate profiles with.*

1. Where should we post the position?

*If you are part of a denomination that has a placement tool such as the EFCA’s Pastor Search, you will find candidates who are already largely vetted according to what your church would prioritize. In addition, networking with people who may be in a position to know your next pastor will reveal some good potential candidates. Postings that are broadly seen will produce a broad variety of candidates – be prepared to respond to a lot of applications if you post your position broadly.*

1. How long should we keep the application process open?

*I see no need to post an end date for applications. You will narrow your search as you interact with potential candidates throughout the process, and there will come a time when you will recognize that you either have the right person to candidate, or you will need to refresh your search. Committing to an end date for applications seems to assume that you can know ahead of time how long your search will take. By the way, be sure to take any postings down when your search is completed.*

1. How do we know how much to pay our new pastor? How does the search team discuss this matter with potential candidates? At what point in the search process should compensation be discussed?

*The book discusses three methods for determining a pay package, and the website includes a sample letter of call that will help the church to be sure that it’s included everything that should be considered.*

*The church leadership team and the search team need to be agreed on the rough parameters of the package, such that the search team can discuss it with the potential candidate. The time to do so should be at the end of the first or second interview (telephone or online), depending on your interview plan. The search team should be prepared to offer a ballpark figure (knowing that any figure cited will then become the smallest figure the church will then be able to offer), to see if the church and candidate are on the same page. The search team should then ask the potential candidate to send his current pay and benefits package, with the assurance that the church will not ask him to step backwards. Final negotiation will be a part of the candidating weekend.*

1. What are the respective roles of the search team, the elders, and the interim pastor in the transitional process?

*Too many congregations rush to establish a search team as soon as their pastor lets them know he will be leaving. If this book can encourage a church not to make that mistake, it will be worth the effort. I would begin with the elders or whatever leadership board the church has. It should meet with its denominational representative to discuss the pastoral transition, and then reach out to an agency like Interim Pastor Ministries to explore the possibility of having an intentional interim pastor. Please read the section on the Intentional Interim Pastor. A transition team may then be established to help the church deal with the issues of the “Ask” phase of the transition. The search team should be established after the “Ask” phase is completed, and it will take the baton from the transition team to carry it throughout the remainder of the search process.*

1. What role does the interim pastor play on or with the search team?

*The interim pastor will bring ministry insight and may have connections to potential sources for pastoral candidates, but should not lead the search team. Leadership for that team should come from the people who will be living with the results of their efforts. The interim pastor should be considered a coach or consultant to the search team, and should only offer his own opinions when asked.*

1. How do we organize the search team for the carrying out of their various tasks and responsibilities?

*Dividing the load is important to the success of the search team. Some roles that should be considered are chair, vice-chair, prayer chair, and secretary, as well as someone to correspond with potential candidates, someone to handle communication with the congregation, and someone to arrange hospitality when candidates come to town.*

1. Do we really have to conduct a practice interview?

*It depends – do you want to look prepared for your first candidate, or would you rather use him to learn the things you need to have in place in order to conduct a good interview? The fact of the matter is that we practice the things we want to do well, and you don’t want to sacrifice your first (and possibly most highly rated) candidate by not being adequately prepared for that interview yourselves.*

**Knock Phase**

1. Should we sort resumes by tier?

*I would recommend a simple “yes,” “maybe” and “no” (or “green,” “yellow,” “red”) categorization for individual search team members to work through and bring for discussion to the team. As the process continues, team members should use a Candidate Summary Sheet (see “Knock” tools on website) to keep track of and rank candidates.*

1. Should interviews be carried out in person or is video interaction sufficient?

*I recommend video interviews, which carry the advantage (over a phone call) of being able to show a potential candidate in a context of his choosing and which allow facial expression and other body language to be read. I would also recommend a site visit if possible before the decision to invite an applicant to candidate, where less formal opportunities for interaction with the search team can be set up.*

1. What are some best practices for carrying out reference interviews?

*In addition to the practices mentioned in the book, I would emphasize the importance of getting permission from the potential candidate before contacting references. You don’t want to jeopardize his present ministry situation by contacting people who don’t know he’s considering leaving. If you are able to get secondary references, be sure to run them by the candidate as well. To do so will promote transparency and build trust.*

1. Who does reference interviews (one person, or spread out over team; standardized list of questions or flexible discussion)?

*Again, see the discussion in the book. I would reiterate, though, that issues that raise questions should be pursued, either at the time of the reference call or with a follow-up call.*

1. How do we visit a candidate’s church without individuals within that congregation figuring out that the pastor is looking to make a move? How do we maintain protective confidentiality?

*This is a question that I have changed opinion on since the first edition of this book. I’ve come to the conclusion that the benefits gained from such a visit do not outweigh the risks of exposing a candidate to his present congregation. More may be able to be accomplished by bringing the candidate (with family) in for a site visit prior to candidating.*

1. What's the difference between a site visit and a candidate weekend?

*The site visit is primarily for the search team to get to know the candidate in a more casual environment than a structured interview by phone or video can allow, and to show the candidate and his family what your setting has to offer. While the site visit can introduce the candidate to the church staff and leadership, it is primarily intended for interaction with the search team. The candidating weekend, on the other hand, is intended for maximizing interaction with the congregation as they see the pastoral candidate do the things he would do if the church extended a call (preach, teach, lead staff, work with board, etc.).*

1. Should a search team’s recommendation of the final candidate be unanimous?

*As much as possible, yes. To* require *that the recommendation to be unanimous, though, is to give veto power to any member of the search team. And while you’ve worked hard to build the team with spiritually mature people, we all have our flaws. Be sure you’re working through concerns that team members may have with a candidate, and try to bring a united team consensus to the elders, but don’t require a unanimous vote. Decisions reached by the team should be supported outside the meeting by all members of the team. It undermines church leadership for a member of a team to say, “I voted against the motion.”*

1. How does the timing of (1) the search team’s recommendation, (2) the elders’ recommendation, and (3) the candidating event work? How do the elders become sufficiently acquainted with the recommended candidate?

*The search team presents its recommendation to the elders (or governing board), who in turn present the candidate to the congregation. If the search team has included a member or two from the elder board throughout the process, and has been diligent with communication after its meetings, the church leadership should be fairly well acquainted with the candidate already, and recorded interviews with the final candidate should be reviewed by the members of the church leadership who were not on the search team.*

1. How do we keep a diligent search process from falling apart at the end through disagreement over the salary package and/or work agreement?

*I would recommend that the final construction of the salary package and letter of call would be entrusted to the search chair, the elder chair and the interim pastor, to be approved by the governing board of the church. Those who finalize the package should be familiar with pastoral compensation and should be committed to generosity in what the church provides to the man it is trusting to lead the next chapter of ministry.*

1. Should the compensation package and work agreement be settled prior to the candidating event or after?

*Before the pastor comes to candidate, he should know the framework of the agreement in terms of pay and benefits. He should be familiar with a ballpark figure for the package and be assured that he will not be asked to move backwards in compensation from his present assignment. The final details should be worked out during the candidating weekend.*

1. Can you candidate more than one person at a time?

*“Candidate” (as a verb) is the key word. Interview many; invite more than one for a site visit if needed; but candidate only one person. When a church invites a person to candidate, it is stating that it believes God has led them to him as the one who will be the church’s next pastor unless something unforeseen happens. Similarly, when a pastor accepts an invitation to candidate, he is saying he is willing to come unless he finds something unexpected that would reverse that course. It has long been considered a breach of ministerial ethics either for a church to have more than one person at a time candidate, or for a pastor to be a final candidate in more than one church at a time. The reason is that the search process is one of* discernment *by a committed team of people and a pastoral candidate as they seek God’s direction together, and not a popularity contest in a congregational setting. A commitment to candidate is a declaration by a church leadership team and a pastoral candidate that they believe God has led them to each other. In that sense, it is much like an engagement – it is possible to be engaged to more than one person at a time, but what do you think of such a person?*

1. What are some good options for background checks?

*Several options for background checks are offered in the book. As I become aware of others, I will post them to the website.*

1. Is a credit check necessary?

*A credit check is inexpensive and easy. It should not be overlooked. Concerns raised by a credit check should be discussed with the potential candidate, and the help of a trusted financial counselor should be insisted upon.*

1. Should the congregation vote at the end of the candidating weekend or wait a week?

*Either is acceptable. Each has its advantages and disadvantages. The church leadership team should prayerfully consider which would be better for its congregation.*

1. When should an installation service be held? How important is the timing?

*The installation service should be held as soon as possible after the arrival of the new pastor and his family, to mark the beginning of his ministry and of a new chapter in the life of the church. Be sure to keep your denominational leaders informed of progress as your search nears the end of its task, so that they will be able to schedule your installation service without delay.*

1. Should our church have a contingency plan for a pastoral transition, other than your book?

*Yes! The fact is that your new pastor will be leaving one day, one way or another. You should have an emergency plan that would cover such things as who you would call upon to preach and handle other functions that your pastor currently handles. This is the same plan you should have in case your pastor were incapacitated for a couple of weeks. If you don’t currently have such a plan, drop what you’re doing and write one now.*

*Next, turn your attention to developing a generic plan that lays out your overall approach to the pastoral transition. What are the biblical principles that must inform your transition? Will you groom a staff member for succession one day? If so, when should that start? Will you plan to call an intentional interim pastor? Such questions are important to discuss between pastor and board when there is no crisis. It will prepare you well for the day when your present pastor is gone.*