

United Church of Christ



Biblical Resources
for
Search Committees

*Also available in its original format at
<http://www.ucc.org/ministers/pdfs/brsc.pdf>*

Biblical Resources for Search Committees

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AN INVITATION TO THE SEARCH COMMITTEE

Suggestions for Use of This Resource

The search process in the United Church of Christ is an astonishing blend of employment work and spiritual work. Seeking to hire a well-qualified pastor, you will identify qualities and skills you desire in your new employee, and you will conduct yourselves professionally as you advertise, recruit, read applications, and interview candidates. While you follow these steps, you also are on a spiritual journey. What you do is much more than recruitment and hiring work, for you affirm that God is an active force in this search process. You seek to choose the candidate you believe God desires for your congregation. It is that dimension of God's active participation in the process which makes your task quite different from any other kind of personnel activity.

The candidates you will interview go through exactly the same delicate process. They are "job searching," looking for situations that will offer adequate compensation, healthy work environments, professional growth, and communities that are comfortable for their families; at the same time, they too seek to discern God's will for their next ministry.

In the church, we use the word "call" to reflect that distinct blend of practical and spiritual issues. The local congregation does not "hire" a new pastor but "calls" a pastor; that call process comes in response to a careful and business-like search combined with a strong sense of God's leading. The pastor does not seek a new "job" but rather enters into an employment process whose end result will be rooted in God's call to a new ministry.

Your Search Committee resources prepare you well to do the personnel portions of your work. By utilizing scripture passages and reflection questions, these devotions enable you to develop a pattern of intentionally speaking "faith language" as you go about your work. You will have structured opportunities to talk frankly about your understanding of God's will for your church. At every step of the process, you will be encouraged to "ask the God question."

The work of a Search Committee is demanding and time-consuming. You may be tempted to avoid the faith conversations suggested by these devotions. But learning together to listen to God is indeed the "real" work of your committee.

THE ROLE OF THE CHAPLAIN

The Conference and Association suggest that your committee select a chairperson, a secretary/scribe, and a chaplain. The chaplain should be someone who enjoys scripture, is sensitive to group dynamics, and is willing to invest the time necessary to study the various devotional pieces and share them with the committee. Two of the sessions are designed to last approximately one hour; the first is a "get acquainted/community building" time; the second occurs as you begin to read ministerial profiles. The shorter reflections may be used as 10-15 minute opening devotions whenever your committee moves to a new stage of the search process.

YOUR SEARCH COMMITTEE BEGINS ITS WORK

We Each Bring a Story

“...Are you envious because I am generous?”

(Mathew 20:15b)

(45-60 minutes)

Each pastoral Search Committee offers a mini-picture of the total congregation. Among you are some life long members as well as newer members; you also represent various ages and arenas of church involvement. You may come from a variety of religious backgrounds; some of you may have had no formal religious involvement until recently. A few of you may have had previous experience serving on a pastoral Search Committee while others feel bewildered about the upcoming process. Some of you will approach this Search Committee work analytically while others will use intuition and feelings to aid in the discernment process. Whether you are a choir member or the treasurer, a recent confirmand, part of the retired men’s group, a person with extensive experience in personnel matters or a newcomer to this work, you are a member of this committee because you care deeply about the ministry of this particular church and the quality of pastoral leadership needed to carry out that ministry.

Because you will be working together for a period of 9-18 months, you will find it beneficial to become acquainted with one another at a deeper faith level than may customarily happen in church meetings. A four-step process is suggested.

First, take three-four minutes for each person to share both his/her religious background and current involvement with this particular congregation. Rather than simply listing committees on which you have served, talk about what energizes you, what discourages you, what hopes and dreams you have. You may want to tell something amusing about your first memory of this congregation. Try to include one piece of information that others in the room may not know.

Second, go around the group again and invite the members to relate an experience when they felt the closeness of God’s Presence; (such experiences might include the Christmas Eve service, a period of illness or loss of a family member, the birth of a child, etc.)

Third, the chaplain or person leading this meditation time should briefly summarize what you have learned about yourselves as a group after listening to these personal histories.

Fourth, read together **Mathew 20:1-16**. This story is one of the most challenging and difficult of all the parables Jesus shared. A first reaction is usually expressed with the simple words, “But it’s not fair!” In your Search Committee discussion, focus less on the economics of the parable than on the image of God’s relationship with us; remember that Jesus frames the story to emphasize the giver rather than the gift.

- How do you feel about the “picture” of God presented in this parable?
- Are you angered by God’s generosity?
- How can this story help you develop common understandings about respecting one another and listening to one another?

PRAYER: God of surprises, we are astonished by your overflowing love. We offer you thanks that—through many different routes—we each have come to an experience of faith in you. We rejoice in the fact that we are equally valued by you, whether we have been life long followers of your Son Jesus or whether we have come to our faith very recently. May we rely on your guidance as we begin to work together in this committee. In Christ’s name, Amen.

Matthew 20: 1-16

¹ For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ² After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. ³ When he went out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace ⁴ and he said to them, “You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.” So they went. ⁵ When he went out again about noon and about three o’clock he did the same. ⁶ And about five o’clock he went out and found others standing around and he said to them, “Why are you standing here idle all day?” ⁷ They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, “you also go into the vineyard.” ⁸ When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, “Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.” ⁹ When those hired about five o’clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. ¹⁰ Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. ¹¹ And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, ¹² saying, “these last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.” ¹³ But he replied to one of them, “Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? ¹⁴ Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give you. ¹⁵ Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? **Or are you envious because I am generous?**” ¹⁶ So the last will be first, and the first will be last.

BEGINNING DATA GATHERING FOR YOUR LOCAL CHURCH PROFILE

Understanding Our Church Family

*“Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”
(Mark 3:35)*

During these first weeks together, your committee will be asked to spend a great deal of time gathering data, conducting a survey and exploring perspectives on your congregation. The process may feel time-consuming and frustrating. But the work you do at this stage is essential because it will enable you to understand the unique characteristics of your congregation and to interpret them effectively to prospective candidates.

Read Mark 3:31-35

Jesus reminds us that all family ties are subordinate to attentiveness to God’s will. In your work as a Search Committee, you might use these verses from Mark to help you reflect on the question: who is it who makes up our family of faith? Congregations committed to urban ministry may view their constituency as a community far more extensive than the membership rolls. Congregations in communities experiencing rapid demographic changes may be exploring ways of welcoming and incorporating a more diverse population. In many small towns, the church pastor is expected to provide a ministry to the entire community. It will be important for your group to have some clear definition of your own understanding of the pastor’s relationship to the wider community. Whatever the size of the church, outreach to the community and mission/service within the community are both essential to the church’s ministry. It will be your task to talk honestly about how that outreach is balanced between the pastor and the people.

- What do you believe Jesus meant when he made this statement?
- Do these words of Jesus give you any help in describing the unique qualities of your particular church?

Mark 3:31-35

Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. ³² A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside asking for you.” ³³ And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” ³⁴ And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and brothers! ³⁵ **Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”**

Prayer: It is far too easy, O God, to forget that we first joined the church because we wanted to learn more about you and do your will. As members of this committee, we ask for your guidance as we seek to discern your will; help us to know where you would lead us, to know what work you call us to do. Broaden us, challenge us, for we remember that the work we do describing our church is designed to reflect your glory. In Christ’s name, Amen.

COMPLETING YOUR FIRST DRAFT OF THE LOCAL CHURCH PROFILE

Reflections on Truth Telling

*“...you will know the truth,
and the truth will make you free.”
(John 8:32)*

Completing the first draft of your Local Church Profile has required both diligent individual work and teamwork. Data has been gathered and processed, questions have been discussed. Sometimes it has felt tedious, sometimes frustrating, occasionally very revealing. Some of the questions about congregational history and future goals may have received input from the entire membership. As you move toward completing the document, it will be vital that the material reflect the perspectives of the whole committee.

Truth telling is not easy. You want to present a positive view of your church because you want to attract strong and committed pastoral candidates. You do not want to be deceptive, and it is sometimes difficult to determine “how much” to tell. Every church experiences conflict. Every church has unpleasant “skeletons in the closet.” Discussions about your history and the process of describing that history in a written form will probably present some difficult moments for your committee; these discussions will also offer you the opportunity to create common understandings that will be very beneficial when you begin interviewing candidates.

Even as you seek to be candid about the not so good, perhaps even harmful, events in your history, don't forget to be proud of your achievements. Celebrating the work you do in the name of Christ is not bragging; rather it is witnessing to the power of Christ's Spirit working in your midst.

Read John 8:31-32

- Share with one another what you think Jesus means by “If you continue in my word...”
- Give some concrete examples of how the truth can set us free.
- If a previous pastor has been asked to leave by your church leaders or your whole congregation, how do Jesus' words apply to your perspective on that situation?
- If a previous pastor has been involved in inappropriate or unethical behavior, how do Jesus' words apply to your perspective on that situation?

John 8:31-32

Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; 32 **and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.**”

Prayer: O God of truth, help us in our desire to take risks. Set us free from those things which bind us in order that we may be free for the new life Christ offers. Give us strength and courage to face difficult truths in order to free our church to follow your Son more fully. Let your peacefulness surround us even as we remember that Jesus did not avoid honest anger and confrontation. In our Savior's name, Amen

PUBLICIZING YOUR VACANCY

Facing Our Fears As We Move Forward

*“The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”
(Psalm 27:1)*

Read Psalm 27

Psalm 27 is both a cry for help from God and a song that reflects absolute trust in God. The psalm evokes a wide variety of emotions because it paradoxically acknowledges our deep fears and our absolute belief that God is with us. God is our strength and God will not abandon us in the midst of our fears. Take some time to read all of Psalm 27 aloud. You may want to identify the verses that seem to speak most directly to your current committee discussions.

- What are your greatest fears as you begin to receive applications for your position?
- What are the greatest fears of the congregation?
- If you have a recent pastorate that has been difficult, how does that history impact your fears?

Prayer: Strengthen us in the midst of our fears, O God. Remind us again and again that nothing can overwhelm us if we remember to turn to you. Give us courage to sing; give us joy as we embark—with you—on the next phase of our important work. Amen.

Psalm 27

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? ² When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh--my adversaries and foes--they shall stumble and fall. ³ Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident. ⁴ One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple. ⁵ For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will set me high on a rock. ⁶ Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the Lord. ⁷ Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me! ⁸ "Come," my heart says, "seek his face!" Your face, Lord, do I seek. ⁹ Do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help. Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation! ¹⁰ If my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up. ¹¹ Teach me your way, O Lord, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies. ¹² Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries, for false witnesses have risen against me, and they are breathing out violence. ¹³ I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. ¹⁴ Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!

DECISION-MAKING

Reflections on Decision-making
(45-60 minutes)

*"Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people,
able to discern between good and evil....
(I Kings 3:9a)*

Read I Kings 3:3-14

You have now finished your congregational description; your position is being advertised, and you are beginning to read profile material from candidates. It would be very helpful to devote one meeting during this period to your own spiritual nurture. If you have not done so before, it is time to come to agreement about the process you will follow in your decision-making.

Your committee now has an opportunity to reflect together on the wisdom that you will need to make careful decisions about candidates. Such wisdom comes from being attentive to the Holy Spirit and to one another. Wisdom in scripture is seen as a companion, a quality of the heart as well as the head. As committee members, you may wish, like Solomon, to ask God to give you wise and discerning minds.

Reflect together briefly on this passage from I Kings. Then enter into a discussion, facilitated by your chaplain, of different patterns of decision-making. This “waiting period” is the perfect time to evaluate how you are working together, how you are listening to one another, and how you will make decisions. Think back to your first or your second meeting and spend some time evaluating how you are functioning now. After you have had discussion on this topic, focus on the following questions.

- What do you understand the word “consensus” to mean? Is it possible for someone to disagree with a particular decision and still support the work of the committee?
- What are the dangers of “voting” on candidates and letting the majority rule?
- What will you do if one member truly discerns God’s will in a way that is different from the others?
- How will you maintain confidentiality about your various candidates?

I Kings 3:3-14

Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David; only, he sacrificed and offered incense at the high places. ⁴ The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the principal high place; Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. ⁵ At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask what I should give you." ⁶ And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. ⁷ And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. ⁸ And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. ⁹ **Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil;** for who can govern this your great people?" ¹⁰ It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. ¹¹ God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, ¹² I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you. ¹³ I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor all your life; no other king shall compare with you. ¹⁴ If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life."

Prayer: When Solomon became King of Israel, his one request of God was that he be given "an understanding mind." the wisdom to discern between good and evil. May

READING CANDIDATE PROFILES

“Can You See Anything?”

“I can see people, but they look like trees, walking.”
(Mark 8:24)

Read Mark 8:22-26

This healing episode, recorded only in Mark's gospel, is a peculiar little story. The man is indeed healed of his blindness, but the process is slow. His vision is restored in stages. Jesus appeared to need extra time to allow the man's vision to develop; only then could the man see with absolute clarity.

So it is with the process of reading profiles. It is sometimes overwhelming, and there is a tendency to have difficulty differentiating among candidates. At times you may feel concerned about the lack of extensive parish experience among your candidates. You may be seeking particular administrative skills or you may have identified preaching as a high priority, and the qualifications of candidates do not seem to match your expectations. Sometimes it is discouraging because there simply are too few applicants.

Reading and re-reading this little healing episode can be very instructive for your Search Committee. Even with Jesus' best efforts, the man's vision was still distorted. The healing took longer than expected. Even for Jesus, the process of carrying out God's will was slow. Yet, at the end of this little account, the author of Mark says, "...he saw everything clearly." Relying on God's grace and guidance, so will you.

- What can you learn from this story that will help you read profiles carefully?
- What are the dangers of "rushing" the reading process, hurrying to find the "right" one?
- How will you know when you have found candidates who seem to "fit" your church setting?

Prayer: Gracious God, we remember that your Son needed to take time with the blind man from Bethsaida before the man could see clearly. Give us patience. Give us wisdom. Give us insight. May we rely on you and you alone for our clarity of vision. In the name of the one who heals, even Jesus Christ our Savior, Amen.

Mark 8:22-26

They came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him. ²³ He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village; and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, "Can you see anything?" ²⁴ **And the man looked up and said, "I can see people, but they look like trees, walking."** ²⁵ Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. ²⁶ Then he sent him away to his home, saying, "Do not even go into the village."

PREPARING FOR INTERVIEWS

Anticipating Seeing Candidates "Face To Face"

"...for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."

(I Samuel 16:7)

Read I Samuel 16: 1-13

Samuel was instructed by God to seek out the man named Jesse, a resident of Bethlehem, and to anoint one of Jesse's sons to be King of Israel. As the sons of Jesse paraded in front of Samuel, the prophet assumed that God would want him to anoint the tallest, the most handsome of the sons. But God said,

“Samuel, don't think Eliab is the one just because he's tall and handsome. He isn't the one I have chosen. People judge others by what they look like, but I judge people by what is in their hearts.”

Each is rejected. Eventually Samuel asks Jesse to send for his last remaining son, a young boy who is taking care of the sheep. And he, David, is the one God chooses to be the new King.

One of the most difficult challenges during the interview process is treating candidates fairly. Sometimes it is difficult to determine what is in the heart of a person because we stumble over the person's age, or gender, or race, or sexual orientation, or weight, or disability, or outer appearance. Each of us has a mental picture of the candidate we had imagined; then we are faced with the reality of interviewing individuals (or clergy couples) who may be quite different. Judging—not by outer appearance but by what is in the heart—is a great challenge and can only be done with wisdom and insight that comes from honest sharing with one another and prayerful time with God.

As you read the story from I Samuel, notice how the tension builds. Everyone is waiting. God wants Samuel to choose the one with the “right heart.” Eliab passes by. And Abinadab. And Shammah. And then four more unnamed sons pass by. And Samuel says, “The Lord has not chosen **any** of these.” The eighth son is summoned from the fields, and the whole group must have waited a long time for his arrival. Young, not a

I Samuel 16:1-13

The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." ² Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me." And the Lord said, "Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.'" ³ Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you." ⁴ Samuel did what the Lord commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, "Do you come peaceably?" ⁵ He said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. ⁶ When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the Lord." ⁷ But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; **for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.**" ⁸ Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." ⁹ Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." ¹⁰ Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen any of these." ¹¹ Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here." ¹² He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one." ¹³ Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

soldier, clearly inexperienced and unqualified, dirty, and yet God says, "...this is the one."

Obviously you seek a well-qualified candidate. But the power of this story lies in its ability to remind you that God's choice may be the unlikely candidate. It is a reminder of the importance of not rushing to a hasty decision and of praying for God's guidance at this critical moment in your committee work.

- How are you working together to make certain that personal biases or discriminatory attitudes do not influence your decision-making?
- Samuel had a clear advantage: God spoke directly to him and told him which person to anoint as King. How can we listen to God's guidance when it may come to us in much more subtle ways?

Prayer: God of wisdom, you spoke to Samuel and guided him in the selection of a new leader for your people. So too speak to us in the silence of this moment and guide us as we prepare for personal interviews. In the name of David's Son, Amen.

ATTENDING WORSHIP

The Challenge of Worshiping While Evaluating

"If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love,

*I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal “
(I Corinthians 13:1)*

Read I Corinthians 13

You will now hear selected candidates lead worship. In that process you will have an opportunity to evaluate their skills as liturgists and preachers. You will listen to the earnestness of their prayers. Personally you face the challenge of being worshipful while also perceiving the pastor's leadership from an evaluative stance. It will be important for you to enter into the worship experience as fully as possible; if you remain detached, you will miss the opportunity to know what it is like to truly worship in the context of this person's leadership.

There is a saying among clergy that we need to bear in mind at this stage of the process: "Every pastor has at least ONE good sermon." Church members always rank "good preaching" high on their list of qualifications; yet it is only one of the skills and gifts that you seek. The joke-telling, humorous preacher may indeed be amusing, but the entertaining, superficial style will not necessarily be helpful when a young church member has been killed in an automobile accident.

Some preachers are extroverted, others quiet and reflective. Some are gifted storytellers and others are skilled at "opening up" a scripture passage. Some preach from manuscripts, others from notes, still others with no notes at all. Some seem to reflect God's love while others resemble a "noisy gong." You will sense when someone truly is genuine. And you will have the joy of discovering that some candidates have the love of Christ so deeply internalized that it will radiate through all they say and do.

Paul's words about the centrality of love are sometimes so familiar to us (from wedding services) that we lose sight of their power. The message of the centrality of love will help you in the process of evaluating the worship experiences you have shared with various candidates.

- How can you tell if a preacher is "entertaining" you rather than proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

I Corinthians 13

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. ⁴ Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. ⁷ It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ⁸ Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. ⁹ For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; ¹⁰ but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. ¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. ¹² For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. ¹³ And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

- If love is the greatest of the three—faith, hope, and love—how do we evaluate candidates to determine whether they are truly loving human beings?
- How do you experience love in a pastoral prayer, children’s sermon, or choice of hymns and liturgy?
- How do you balance a pastor’s gifts for preaching/teaching/worship with gifts for administration, pastoral care, mission, and justice action?

Prayer: We are easily tempted, gracious God, to be swayed by superficial qualities. Help us to look for the inner faith and love that a worship leader demonstrates as we share together in singing your praises and honoring your name. Amen.

Choosing Your Recommended Candidate

The Work Is Almost Completed

“O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your

servants who delight in revering your name. Give success to your servant today...”
(Nehemiah 1:11)

Read Nehemiah 1:4-11

For the Old Testament figure Nehemiah, the word “success” always referred to two distinct realities—one structural and the other religious. Nehemiah led a group of Hebrew exiles from Babylon back to Jerusalem where he personally spent many years supervising the overwhelming task of rebuilding the wall that had surrounded the entire city. As an administrator, Nehemiah obtained building material, dealt with complaints, and organized the workers so that some labored while others stood guard and offered protection from groups who resented the return of the Hebrews. The dedication of the wall represents the successful completion of Nehemiah’s administrative responsibilities.

But Nehemiah was equally concerned with rebuilding the ruins of the people’s religious community. Prayers and sacred observances had disappeared from the lives of the people; they had lost their awareness of their own faith traditions because they had lived for decades among people who worshiped many gods. Nehemiah prayed constantly for God’s active guidance in both “rebuilding” efforts. When he and the priest, Ezra, read portions of the laws of Moses to the assembled people, they all wept as they made a new commitment to their own faith heritage.

- As you are about to choose your final candidate, spend a moment reflecting on the ways in which your community has been “rebuilt” during this interim time.
- How do you want to approach God in prayer as you make this significant decision?
- Assuming that your candidate accepts your offer, how can you—like Nehemiah— share with your congregation the role God played in your decision-making processes?

Nehemiah 1:4-11a

When I heard these words I sat down and wept, and mourned for days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven. 5 I said, "O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments; 6 let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Both I and my family have sinned. 7 We have offended you deeply, failing to keep the commandments, the statutes, and the ordinances that you commanded your servant Moses. 8 Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples; 9 but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are under the farthest skies, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place at which I have chosen to establish my name.' **10 They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great power and your strong hand. 11 O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give success to your servant today....”**

- Do you feel that your work has come to a successful conclusion? And/or a faithful conclusion? How are the words different?
- Are there issues of transition for your staff or your congregation that still need “rebuilding” as you anticipate calling a new pastor?

Prayer: With gratitude, O God, we approach you this day. You have sustained and supported us through each step of our work. You have been our solid foundation as we have searched for pastoral leadership to help us rebuild, recommit, and move forward into your future. Surround us with your loving arms as we make this major decision, for we ask it in the name of Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Concluding Your Search Committee Work

A Time for Rejoicing

“I thank my God every time I remember you....”

(Philippians 1:3)

Read Philippians 1:3-11

When the details of the letter of call have been finalized and the congregation has called the new pastor, your official work as a Search Committee is complete. You may find yourselves asking if there is anything else you should do.

Some Search Committees make an agreement with the new pastor to gather together at a specific time (three months after the beginning of the ministry, for example) to have an informal conversation and to ask “How is it going?” If your church does not have a pastoral relations committee, during the early weeks of the ministry your Search Committee could play a key role in advocating that such a committee be established.

In addition to making certain there is support for the new pastor, you will want to find a way to celebrate the work you have done together. Serving on a Search Committee is an intense experience! You have prayed together, laughed together, disagreed together, and sometimes cried together. Your faith has deepened, and your understanding of your own congregation has grown and changed.

Whether it is a potluck supper or some other informal gathering, you will want to seek out an opportunity to rejoice and to “debrief” your experience. As part of that closure time, read together Paul’s opening words in Philippians 1:3-11. Written from prison to parishioners he loved, Paul gives thanks for their faithfulness and expresses confidence that the work they have done in the name of Jesus Christ will be brought to a fruitful conclusion. These words from his prayer may form an appropriate blessing for the conclusion of your work:

“And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you determine what is best...having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.”

Philippians 1:3-11

I thank my God every time I remember you,
⁴ constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, ⁵ because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷ It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. ⁸ For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. ⁹ And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight ¹⁰ to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, ¹¹ having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

All scripture quotations are taken from the
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