

▶▶▶ PASTOR SEARCH COMMITTEE HANDBOOK ◀◀◀



**PASTOR SEARCH
COMMITTEE HANDBOOK**

**LifeWay Press®
Nashville, Tennessee**

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Much of the information and many of the tools in this handbook are adapted from approaches and resources used by Baptist state-convention leaders who regularly work with pastor search committees. These leaders graciously gave permission to include their material in this resource without footnotes. Four of these leaders—Clyde Cain (Oklahoma), Leonard Dupree (Georgia), Sylvan Knobloch (Illinois), and Wayne Oakes (North Carolina)—worked on a writing team led by Robert Sheffield of LifeWay Christian Resources. Ernest Mosley, retired executive vice-president, Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee, and Henry Webb, retired director of Pastoral Ministries at LifeWay Christian Resources, provided key work in bringing this resource to completion. We gratefully acknowledge the work of all contributors.

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Toolbox

The following tools are provided on pages 43–94 and online at www.lifeway.com/pastorsearchcommitteehandbook.

1. Pastor Search Committee Retreat
2. Directory of Baptist State Conventions
3. Pastor Search Committee Covenant of Agreements
4. Pastor-Church Covenant of Relationship
5. Pastor’s Salary, Housing, Benefits, and Expenses
6. Checklist for Pastor’s Salary, Housing, Benefits, and Expenses
7. Pastor Search Congregational Survey
8. Position Insights and Ministry Insights Assessments
9. Demographic Profile of Church Membership
10. Directory of Southern Baptist Seminaries
11. Biographical Profile
12. Prospective-Pastor Evaluation
13. Degrees Related to Pastoral Ministry
14. Confidential Personnel Information
15. Reference Release
16. Portfolio of Church and Community
17. Letter for Written References
18. Character-Reference Inquiry
19. Letter for Telephone Interviews
20. Interview Questions
21. Sermon Evaluation
22. Credit and Legal Information Release
23. Request for Criminal-Records Check and Authorization
24. Letter to Prospective Pastor About Questionnaire
25. Prospective-Pastor Questionnaire
26. Service of Installation and Commitment
27. Installation Service
28. Pastor-Church Relations Team
29. Performance Review

Introduction

Pastor Search Committee Handbook is designed to be practical in content, user-friendly in approach, and comprehensive in scope. It addresses the needs of churches of various sizes and is simple enough that all churches will find it easy to use. Although the process is detailed, it is not cumbersome.

The first question a church without a pastor should ask is, Who can give us the leadership we need in this time of transition? Perhaps adequate leadership can be provided by a staff member or by other church members. Or maybe the church should call a transitional pastor to help the church thoroughly prepare to call a new pastor. Optional approaches to this transitional period are described in phase 1.

One role a transitional pastor may fill is serving as a consultant to the pastor search committee. If your church has already elected a committee, it may be best to delay its search activities until the church, with the assistance of a transitional pastor, has completed the important stages of preparation for calling a new pastor. If the church elects a pastor search committee first and then decides to call a transitional pastor, the committee may study the church constitution and bylaws for information about what the church desires of the search committee and the process it will follow when it begins its work. Careful study of these documents will save valuable time and will prevent duplicating efforts as the committee carries out its assignment.

If the committee perceives that the constitution, bylaws, or other policies and procedures need to be changed, recommendations should be taken to the church for approval. The church should officially change a policy that prescribes a procedure before a committee unilaterally changes the procedure. The committee must remember that its purpose is to help the church find the man God calls to serve as its pastor. In Baptist church polity the ultimate decision-making authority lies with the church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The search committee should spend much time in prayer seeking God's guidance. Only the Holy Spirit can perfectly guide the committee in finding God's man to lead God's church. Human reasoning is never adequate for spiritual challenges. Regular, frequent sessions of corporate prayer can prepare the committee to begin its work and can keep it in the right spirit and on the right course to find the right pastor.

Pastor Search Committee Handbook recommends a five-phase process in calling a pastor:

Phase 1: Our Pastor Has Resigned! What Do We Do Next?

Phase 1 provides information about the transitional process and the selection and organization of the pastor search committee.

Phase 2: How Do We Gather the Information We Need?

This section provides a process of information gathering, a critical part of the search.

Phase 3: How Do We Let God Lead Us to the Right Pastor?

This phase contains information about the actual selection process that gets you ready to present the prospective pastor to your church for consideration.

Phase 4: How Should We Present the Prospective Pastor?

Phase 4 is a presentation/recommendation process that involves the church in affirming the committee's search for the pastor God has prepared for your church.

Phase 5: How Do We Give the Pastor a Good Start?

This section provides guidance for giving a new pastor and his family a good beginning. Remember that you and your pastor will have only one opportunity to have a right start.

The toolbox in this handbook (pp. 43–94) provides useful forms, sample letters, and other tools that will help the committee carry out its responsibilities. All of these items are also provided in PDF and RTF formats for download at www.lifeway.com/pastorsearchcommitteehandbook. Delete the tool numbers and reproduce the forms you need or modify the forms to fit your circumstances. You have permission to modify, print, and duplicate these tools to meet the needs of your church.

A word of caution is in order before turning to phase 1: in the past the way a man preached was the determining factor in calling a pastor. That's why the search committee was usually called a pulpit committee. Today a pastor search committee must evaluate preaching skill but must also give careful attention to leadership and personal-ministry skills. The prince in the pulpit often fails if he is a pauper in interpersonal relationships, which are crucial to leadership and personal ministry. In pastor-church relations a good match is a wonderful thing. The church is blessed, and God is honored.

This handbook uses the terms *candidate(s)*, *prospects(s)*, and *prospective pastor(s)* to refer to the same person or persons. Pastor search committees may use one term of their choice or all of these terms interchangeably.

Profile, meaning *a precise biographical sketch*, is used instead of *résumé*. You may use the term with which you are most comfortable. The officer term *chairman* is used without regard to gender.

As you read the material in this handbook and progress through the phases of your search, remember that speed is not the priority; finding and doing the will of God is.

▶▶▶ Phase 1

Our Pastor Has Resigned! What Do We Do Next?

Understanding the Transitional Period in the Life of a Church

Many church members see the period between pastors as the “hold things together and keep things going” period. Nominal church members likely view it as the “wait and see” period. Church members who attend only Sunday-morning services may use it as the “I’ll just stay home since my preacher left us” period. Prospective church members often treat it as the “a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush; look elsewhere” period. But with effective transitional leadership, the period between pastors can be very productive—a time of growth in personal and congregational worship, evangelism, fellowship, discipleship, and personal and family ministries. Churches passing from the leadership of one pastor to another may be well served by transitional pastors who help make the passage as positive and constructive as possible, gaining momentum and productivity in the process of change.

Some churches without pastors have smooth transitions because of the healthy ministry of the former pastor and a cadre of effective ministry leaders in the church. Even these churches need help in dealing with grief resulting from the loss of a helpful and trusted friend, in overcoming fear that accompanies the uncertainties of change, and in developing trust in a new pastor who has a personality and style that differ from those of the former pastor. Other churches have rough transitions because the previous pastor left just before relationships and trust were damaged beyond repair. Some churches have crisis transitions because of the circumstances surrounding the previous pastor’s departure and because of a variety of disabilities that render church leaders spiritually unprepared to guide the church through emotional healing and comprehensive preparation for a new pastor.

Considering Pastoral-Leadership Options for Periods Without a Pastor

Most churches choose from the following options to provide pastoral leadership during the time between pastors.

1. The church may call a transitional pastor to lead ongoing church ministries and to guide the church through the situational and psychological stages of transition that end in employing and engaging with a new pastor.
2. Multiple-staff churches may assign pastoral responsibilities to staff members according to their gifts and available time.
3. Preachers may be enlisted to preach in one or more services, giving church members opportunities to hear a variety of preachers during this period.
4. A preacher may be employed to preach in some or all meetings of the congregation in which sermons are appropriate. In such arrangements other pastoral duties may be assigned to church-staff members or to lay leaders.
5. A person may be employed to provide limited pastoral-ministry services according to his availability.

Many churches without pastors need transitional pastors with experience, training, and ministry gifts that ensure high-quality transitional leadership. Transitional pastors are prepared to lead churches through smooth transitions, rough transitions, and crisis transitions. They may serve effectively as a preacher, a pastor, and a consultant.

LifeWay Christian Resources assists churches by enlisting, training, and providing resources for transitional pastors to serve during the period between pastors. Its aim is to meet the following objectives, which focus on church health and which result in church growth and kingdom priorities.

1. Churches will become more effective as they learn from past experiences, free themselves from hindering traditions, replace discord with harmony, and plan ministries strategically instead of traditionally.
2. Churches will develop more effective church practices.
3. Churches experiencing decline or a growth plateau will experience spiritual and numerical growth. Growing churches will accelerate.
4. Churches will grow in their understanding of pastoral ministry and in their appreciation of pastors and their families.
5. More members will become personally involved in their churches' ministries.
6. Energy previously spent addressing conflict will be redirected to expanded ministries.
7. The next pastor's tenure will be increased, sparing the church the expense of frequent pastoral changes and making more money available for ministries.
8. Thus, the percentage of churches without pastors will decrease. Less time will be spent in interim mode with growth plans put on hold.

Transitional pastors lead churches to move from one pastor to another regardless of the reasons for being without a pastor. They help the church bring closure to one era of pastoral leadership, prepare thoroughly for calling a

new pastor, and launch a new pastoral-leadership era. The transitional growth process involves the following steps.

1. Viewing the church's history through the eyes of Christ
2. Affirming biblical principles for church growth
3. Focusing on kingdom results
4. Establishing church practice
5. Allocating resources to support effective church practice
6. Finding a pastor to lead in fulfilling God's future for the church
7. Helping the pastor make a good start in the church and community

Churches that choose the transitional-pastor approach do not need to elect a pastor search committee until step 5, allocating resources, is under way. They will have the benefit of the transitional pastor's counsel in the processes to be followed, a more focused church to serve, and many valuable information resources for use in the search.

For more information about transitional-pastor ministry, contact Pastoral Ministries; LifeWay Christian Resources; One LifeWay Plaza; Nashville, TN 37234-0157; 615.251.2216. For training opportunities visit www.lifeway.com/article/transitional-pastor-overview. To view a video describing the transitional pastor's ministry, visit www.youtube.com/watch?v=9xZGjWrMVLk.

Selecting the Pastor Search Committee

Now that the church is ready to call a new pastor, at the appropriate time the church will enlist a pastor search committee. Enlistment can be done in several ways. Before beginning the selection process, the church should consult its bylaws to learn the process for finding and calling a pastor. If no guidelines are found, the search committee may recommend appropriate policies and/or procedures for approval by the church. If existing policies and procedures hinder the committee's work, revisions can be proposed to the church.

Before proceeding, consider some common mistakes churches and pastor search committees make in the process of searching for a new pastor.

1. Forming a pastor search committee that doesn't represent all the church
2. Providing an unclear assignment from the church
3. Providing unclear committee guidelines
4. Failing to keep confidences within the committee
5. Not doing a congregational self-study
6. Working with a poorly organized search process
7. Considering the interim or transitional pastor as a pastoral candidate
8. Having more than one committee member contact prospects
9. Not being honest with candidates about your church situation
10. Not preparing well for interviews
11. Not considering the candidate's family throughout the process

12. Not being discreet when visiting a prospective pastor's church
13. Considering only the pulpit skills of a prospective pastor
14. Considering more than one candidate at a time
15. Not checking all references thoroughly
16. Moving the process too fast, being impatient
17. Communicating poorly or inadequately with pastoral prospects
18. Failing to get all agreements in writing
19. Allowing inadequate time for the prospective pastor and the church to get to know each other
20. Treating the search as a human process instead of a spiritual process¹

Size of the Committee

If your church bylaws specify the number to serve on a pastor search committee, follow that procedure. For most churches five to seven members should be enough for the committee. Determine the suitable number according to resident membership. Smaller-membership churches should not need more than five members. Larger-membership churches may be served well by seven members. Guard against having too large a committee. When a committee becomes too large, everything about the committee process becomes more complicated than is necessary and helpful. If a church bylaw calls for a very large committee, ask the church to consider revising the bylaw.

Selecting Alternates

Some churches elect alternates to serve in case a regular member becomes ill or resigns. Alternates normally don't have the right to vote, even though they may meet regularly with the committee. However, this approach is not recommended unless a church's bylaws require it. In the unlikely event that a committee member resigns, the church can elect a person at that time. Because the need for alternates does not occur often, it unnecessarily complicates the process of determining the membership of the committee and the present-but-inactive status of alternate members.

Candidates for the Pastor Search Committee

Good candidates for the pastor search committee are characterized by—

1. continuing spiritual growth;
2. spiritual discernment;
3. knowing Bible truths and practicing them;
4. faithful attendance and support of the church;
5. skills as a team player;
6. willingness to maintain confidentiality;
7. freedom to attend meetings and occasionally travel;
8. priority commitment to seeking and doing God's will;
9. absence of a self-serving agenda.

Additionally, members of the search committee should represent all segments of the church. Some churches' documents clearly require that persons from certain age groups serve on the committee. Whether or not that is true of your church, include individuals from different age groups. Regardless of age, persons selected should possess a maturity level that fits the list of qualifications.

In no case should your church ask a person to serve on the committee just to satisfy a faction in the church. The committee needs to consist of persons whom church members are led by the Lord to select and persons who themselves sense the Lord's leadership to serve in this vital ministry.

If the bylaws designate certain persons to serve on the committee by virtue of their position, consider recommending a bylaw revision. Persons may be qualified to serve in other important offices but not qualified to serve on the pastor search committee. Church-staff members effectively serve as resource persons to the committee. However, experience shows that it is not best for them to be committee members.

Election of the Committee

Churches use many different ways to elect pastor search committees. Because of space limitations, all of the possibilities will not be discussed. The following election procedure is recommended.

Electing a pastor search committee should be done on a Sunday morning at an appropriate time after the former pastor leaves. If the pastor's departure involved difficult circumstances, such as a forced termination or death, it is probably best to postpone the election of the committee for several months. That time will give the church, under the leadership of a transitional pastor, an opportunity to process issues related to forced termination or death and to think more clearly about how to approach the future. The church will then be able to make solid practical decisions about a pastor search committee.

Prior to the Sunday designated for the election, publish the qualifications for committee members. If qualifications have not been adopted, a suitable group in the church should recommend that the church consider the suggestions presented earlier or an amended version of them for adoption. The nominating committee, the committee on committees, or the church-leadership team (church council) could function as the recommending body. This group may also recommend the total election procedure for the church's approval.

On the Sunday set aside for that purpose, the congregation nominates persons who fit the qualifications that have been previously adopted. Each member of the congregation can nominate as many persons as the church requires for the committee. For example, if you have decided that five members should compose the committee, then each church member can nominate up to five persons.

Next, the nominating committee or the committee on committees ranks nominees in order of the number of nominations received. The final tally