

Minister Search Committee Reference Guide

When a Church Seeks New Staff An Overview of the Search Committee Process

Researched and compiled by the Congregational Leadership Team
of the Baptist General Convention of Texas

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The material provided in this document is intended solely as a guide. It is a summary of materials written about the search committee process and based on experiences and insights gained from church search committees which have been through the process in the past. Each church is responsible for its own procedures under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

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Minister Search Committee Reference Guide

Local church autonomy is a basic precept for Baptists. Historically this belief is one of the primary characteristics that have identified a local congregation as “Baptist.” Baptist churches today remain committed to the autonomy of the local church. However, the majority of Baptist churches today recognize that cooperating with other Baptist churches can greatly multiply their ministry, witness, influence and effectiveness for the Lord. Baptist conventions, both nationally and on the state level, exist within that cooperative spirit. Built into the fabric of conventions in the past has been the recognition that they serve the local churches and do not have authority over them.

In that spirit of cooperation, the Baptist General Convention of Texas attempts to provide resources and opportunities to increase the effectiveness of each local church as the congregation follows God’s direction. When a church is seeking God’s will in finding a person to fill a church staff position, the BGCT honors the church’s autonomy, while attempting to support the church by providing resources to make that search possibly more efficient and effective. This Minister Search Committee Reference Guide is one such resource. Based on past experiences of churches and staff position candidates, the Congregational Leadership Team of the Baptist General Convention has compiled documents and recommendations that can be used as each local church sees fit to aid them as they seek God’s direction in finding the right person to minister in their local church, whether the minister position is pastor or church staff position. This handbook is not a book of rules but a compilation of insights and processes others have found useful. Seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit should always be the first step and the first resource sought when serving on a church staff search committee. It is the hope and prayer of the Congregational Leadership Team that this handbook will simply be a tool in the hands of God to assist the minister search committee as they seek His will.

To contact the Leader Connect Office with any questions or concerns related to this guidebook or the Leader Connect résumé-matching online system, call 214-887-5454 and ask for Linda Wear or email her at linda.wear@bgct.org.

To contact the Congregational Leadership Team office for other questions or requests regarding church leadership topics, call Dana Perkins at 214-828-5126 or email her at dana.perkins@bgct.org.

To contact the BGCT’s Congregational Strategist serving your area go to www.bgct.org and click on the icon to the left *At Your Service the BGCT Staff* and then click on *Congregational Strategists/Affinity Groups* and scroll down the page.

To contact anyone within the BGCT, you may call 888-244-9400 and ask a Service Center Representative to connect you.

When a Church Seeks New Staff

An Overview of the Search Committee Process

I. Responsibilities of Congregation Checklist:

I. A. Decide how the responsibilities of the vacant staff position will be handled until a new staff is selected. Consider forming a transition committee.

A transition committee is made up of trusted church members elected by the congregation who will see that the ministries of the church continue while a position is vacant. If the position is for pastor, the transition committee can assist the interim pastor. If the position is one such as youth director, the committee will see that there is still leadership for the ministries related to that position while the position is vacant. This committee can lead in a church-wide self-study and help the church develop or revise the direction for the ministry before calling a new minister.

If position is for pastor, consider borrowing the video *When the Pastor Leaves* from the Baptist General Convention of Texas Leadership Team office for viewing by the congregation and/or search committee. (www.bgct.org/leadership 214-887-5407)

The period in which the congregation is without its pastor is called the “interim period.” Providing someone to preach in each worship service during this time is referred to as “filling the pulpit” or “supplying the pulpit.” Sometimes churches elect an interim committee separate from either the transition committee or the search committee to make sure the pulpit is “filled” each Sunday. There are two methods used by congregations to “fill the pulpit.”

- a. Various experienced ministers are asked to preach on different occasions. The one who preaches is said to be the “pulpit supply.” This method requires a constant enlistment of ministers, which can be a difficult job. The committee responsible for pulpit supply should consider several sources for finding those persons, including retired ministers, missionaries, chaplains, seminary or college professors, convention agency staff, the association’s Director of Missions, and the Congregational Strategist for their BGCT Service Area.
- b. An experienced pastor is asked to serve as temporary pastor. This person will be the primary person preaching in all services and sometimes will serve in other ways, such as making hospital visits, etc. This person becomes the “interim pastor.” It is usually best that neither the former pastor nor the present associate pastor become the interim. It is also generally the rule that the interim pastor agrees not to be considered as a candidate for the pastor position.

I. B. If position is for pastor, consider calling an interim pastor.

Expectations of churches for their pastors vary enormously. The characteristics of the congregation and their expectations about their own ministry may also have changed dramatically over the years. The interim is the best time to develop a clear sense of expectations for the new pastor as well as to clarify and evaluate the church’s identity and vision.

It is also often the case that the congregation needs time to deal with unresolved issues, release anger, and process grief. This is true whether the former pastor left under pleasant circumstances or not. An interim pastor can guide the church through this time of transition.

If the church chooses to have an interim pastor, decide which type of interim is best for your church: intentional or traditional. It will then be the responsibility of the interim pastor committee to discover and recommend an interim pastor for congregational approval. (It is often advisable, if the church chooses to use an intentional interim pastor, that the election of a search committee for the pastor be delayed until some preliminary work of the interim pastor has been accomplished. If the search committee has already been elected, the search committee could serve as the interim pastor committee as well.)

The **Leadership Team** of the Baptist General Convention of Texas offers a special ministry for churches called the **Intentional Interim Ministry** that can help a congregation work through five crucial developmental tasks in search of a new pastor. If congregational members do the following tasks thoroughly with wide participation, the chances for effective ministry with a new pastor are greatly enhanced. The five developmental tasks are:

- (1.) Coming to Terms with History
- (2.) Examining Leadership and Organizational Needs
- (3.) Rethinking Denominational Linkage
- (4.) Developing a New Identity and Vision
- (5.) Commitment to New Leadership

For assistance in finding an Intentional Interim for your church, please call the BGCT's Intentional Interim Specialist Karl Fickling at 972-765-3362 or email him at karl.fickling@bgct.org. Or go to www.bgct.org/leadership and look under [Help for Search Committees](#) and scroll down to Help in Finding an Interim Pastor.

The Traditional Interim can be anyone the church wishes to call. No interim training is necessary, but the person usually will have had pastoral experience.

Whether your congregation chooses to use an "Traditional Interim Pastor" or an "Intentional Interim Pastor", having an interim pastor, rather than having a variety of guest pulpit supply preachers, has proven in hundreds of churches to be the wisest use of the interim time.

"The way a congregation chooses to use its interim time will shape congregational growth, identity, and health for years to come. We also know that what is done in the interim time really determines whether the new minister and congregation will form a solid ministry team."

--R. Neil Chafin, an experienced consultant to congregations

Significant studies of hundreds of interim congregations over the past twenty years are now showing that the interim time between pastors can be an important time in the congregational life. Congregations that fail to make wise use of the interim time tend to repeat their history with the new minister. --Center for Congregational Health, Winston, Salem, NC

I. C. Covenant to pray for search committee and future minister.

The names of the search committee should be placed before the congregation regularly, such as in the weekly bulletin. Serving on such a committee is a huge responsibility and requires much time and personal sacrifice. The committee needs prayer that they will be led by the Holy Spirit in all that they do. They will also need prayer for themselves and their families, as this could be a stressful time as they fulfill the responsibilities and demands of their regular jobs, family and personal needs.

God is already at work in the life of the person who will eventually become your new minister. The prayers of your congregation can already be impacting his or her life.

I. D. Select search committee members based on church's by-laws.

Refer to your church's constitutional by-laws regarding how to select a search committee. Your church should follow those guidelines regardless of the suggestions given here.

Usually a search committee will have five, seven, or nine members chosen by the congregation by secret ballot. Sometimes alternates are also chosen—the two or three who had the closest number of votes to the ones actually elected. Prior to the vote, share with the congregation the desired qualifications for committee members. Make sure everyone understands that the committee is chosen by and reports to the congregation. It has no power of itself but works on behalf of the congregation to suggest persons for positions. The committee does not choose the new staff person.

Announce when the vote will be taken ahead of time. Take the vote in a service which is normally well-attended. Ask children to sit with their parents and give parents a chance to explain to their children the significance of the vote.

Some churches provide a ballot with five/nine blanks for names to be fill-in. Some churches provide a ballot with the names of church members that have been previously recommended by the congregation, and the members vote for their top five/seven choices from that list. Some churches require that some members of the committee represent various components of the church body—at least one youth, at least one woman, at least one person from a missions organization, at least one senior adult, etc. (In that case, for example, the woman with the most votes would be on the committee whether she was in the top five/nine or not.) Whatever system is chosen, however, it is important to devise a plan that will not split the committee over special interest group considerations. The minister is chosen for the church as a whole, not to favor any one group within the church.

The Nominating Committee or the Committee on Committees usually is responsible for counting the votes. This committee will then check with those who received the most ballots to see if the person will accept a position on the committee. The top five/nine who accept will be presented to the church for a final affirmation.

If the church chooses to have alternates, the alternates will attend meetings and observe, but they will not participate in discussion or travel with the committee. Some churches choose not to use alternates, as it makes demands of time from more people than is often necessary.

It is a good idea to review the constitution and by-laws and have guidelines available for the new staff that explain 1) procedures for resigning from a staff position, 2) procedures for

handling conflicts between the staff and the congregation, and 3) procedures for terminating a minister, including minimum severance package. These should be approved by the church ahead of time. It is best for the church and staff to know how each of these situations will be addressed from the beginning rather than after the situation arises. Keep in mind that the BGCT Congregational Leadership Team's Crisis Intervention Specialist Sonny Spurger (214-828-5169 sonny.spurger@bgct.org) is available to work with ministers and congregations when conflicts do arise.

I. E. Plan a church-wide self-discovery and re-visioning time for the church as a whole, if seeking a new pastor, or for the particular ministry if for a different staff position.

If the church chooses an intentional interim pastor, this person will have training to help the church spend time in self-discovery and re-visioning. The church "owns" the vision—not the pastor. The church needs to be able to tell a prospective pastor who it is and where it believes it needs to go. Spend time studying the Bible together and re-discovering God's plan for his church. Consider the five functions of the church: worship, evangelism, discipleship, ministry, and fellowship. In what areas is the church doing well? What areas need attention? Look at the last ten years in the life of the church. Study the church's demographics. (The Research and Development Office of the BGCT can furnish demographics of the area around your church free of charge. Call 214-828-5139.)

If the search is for a position other than pastor, a survey related to that particular ministry area is also advisable.

If the church is not clear about identity, mission and direction, its relationship with a new minister could be difficult. If this is not clearly stated, it will take a long time for the new minister to find out where the church is and what its mission ought to be. Unrealized or unstated expectations are often at the core of minister/church disharmony. The prospective minister's individual gifts and dreams for ministry considered alongside the church's recognition of its own identity and vision can be invaluable in discovering God's will for bringing the right minister and church together.

I. F. Consider taking a church-wide survey or hold a church-wide open forum to discover church members' expectations for new minister.

Church members need to be heard and to know that they are being heard, especially during this time of transition. Provide means for the church members to share their desires and needs, which need to be recognized and then enunciated clearly for the new minister.

The church could hold listening sessions during Sunday School time or Sunday afternoon or evening. A well-prepared agenda and an effective moderator can keep the sessions from becoming "gripe" sessions and allow the voices of the church members to be heard clearly. A summary of these sessions would be of great benefit to a new minister as well as provide excellent information in formulating a profile for the position.

Another popular way to hear from church members is to take a church-wide survey. Sample church questionnaires are available on this website, but make the questionnaires fit the needs of your church. ([Sample Church Self-Study](#); [Sample Minister Search Committee Questionnaire](#); [Sample Pastor Search Committee Questionnaire](#)--these are on the Leadership Team's website www.bgct.org/leadership under Search Committee Help.)

The survey questionnaire should be mailed to church members with a cover letter explaining how the information will be used. The questionnaire should also be available on two different Sundays before or after the worship service. It is a good idea for the questionnaire to be completed during a meeting of the church with a member of the Search Committee ready to give instructions and clarify questions. After the survey has been taken, the Search Committee will tabulate the results to use as they develop a staff profile to be used to evaluate incoming résumés.

I. G. Create/revise a job description for the position.

The church personnel committee is responsible for developing a job description which should be clearly outlined and presented to the congregation as a written document for approval prior to searching for a new minister. The duties and responsibilities in the job description are to be determined in conjunction with the committee or body that will supervise that staff position. The job description will outline the individual tasks and responsibilities specific to the position as well as stating the overall purpose of the position. The job description should also reflect the information received from the church questionnaire and open forums, if these were used, keeping in mind that the requirements in the description need to be reasonable and attainable. Certain laws of the U.S. government apply to church employment positions, and these should be followed carefully. ([Sample job descriptions](#) can be found at www.bgct.org/leadership under Search Committee Help.)

I. H. Create/revise a reasonable compensation package.

The church finance committee has the responsibility for determining budget allocations. The search committee should negotiate with the finance committee in developing an appropriate and reasonable compensation package. The resulting compensation package will be submitted to the congregation for their approval.

It is a difficult task to represent both the needs of staff and the ability of the church to cover those needs in regard to compensation. Many churches give their pastor/minister a lump sum and allow him/her decide how to divide it up. However, it is often more advisable and better both for the church and the staff person if the church requires participation in an annuity plan such as Guidestone, provides adequate insurance plans, and then lets the minister provide an estimate for tax-excluded housing as a part of his/her salary. Items to consider in the compensation package are:

Initial Expenses:

 Moving expenses

Annual Salary Compensation:

 Income:

 Salary

 Housing Allowance

 Utilities Allowance

 Social Security Supplement

 Housing Equity Fund (If living in parsonage, reportable as income only

 when received.)

 Protection Coverage

 Retirement

 Church contribution

 Staff contribution

 Insurance

- Life
- Medical
- Disability
- Termination severance pay
- Resignation notice requirement
- Annual Time Arrangements:
 - Work Schedule
 - Vacation
 - Holiday Pay
 - Study Leave Time
 - Revivals and Outside Speaking Engagements
 - Pulpit Supply
 - Sick Leave
 - Long Term Disability
- Church-Related Expenses:
 - Automobile Reimbursement
 - Convention/Conference Reimbursement
 - Continuing Education, Books, Periodicals, Tapes, Office Supplies
 - Hospitality

[Sample Compensation Worksheet for Personnel Costs](#); [Sample Church/Minister Compensation Agreement](#); [Legal Considerations for the Church](#) are available at www.bgct.org/leadership under Search Committee Help.

Guidestone's resource *Planning Financial Support for Ministers and Church Employees* and other resources may be ordered at: www.guidestone.org/Resources/ChurchResources
 SBC's 2006 Compensation Study may be found at <http://server.kybaptist.org/compstudy>
 A national salary survey is also available for a reasonable charge at <http://www.nacba.net>.

I. I. Gather appropriate/official documents for search committee reference.

Some documents will be needed by the search committee. Some should be provided to the new minister. Your church can determine which of these will be appropriate and/or necessary. These are listed for your consideration.

- Brief history of church
 - Description of church facilities
 - Description of congregation (membership, attendance, special ministries)
 - Description of community (school enrollment, estimated growth, ethnicity, demographics--The Research and Development Office of the BGCT can furnish free demographic information. 214-828-5139)
- Adopted church goals; vision/mission statement
 - Description of present facilities
- Plans for future construction
- 10-year giving record
- Present paid staff names, titles, duties
- Names of present church officers, organizational leaders, committee members
- Job description
- Self-study results
- Church budget
- Constitution and by-laws
- Personnel policies
- Organizational chart

- Committee structure
- Copies of church bulletins and newsletters
- Present church visitation program
- Contact information for last three staff persons, their tenure, why they left
- Pictorial directory
- Association annual report, name of DOM, association newsletter
- Map of city and state
- Census statistics
- Projected growth of community; profile of community
- Chamber of Commerce brochures and information

I. J. Submit résumés of prospects to search committee.

Church members will often have persons in mind that they wish to recommend to the search committee. These recommendations should be complete résumés, if possible, rather than just a name. The committee will accept those recommendations with the understanding that they will not report back to the church member whether or not a candidate is being considered or handle that prospect any differently from the way all other résumés are handled. The search committee should also establish a deadline for church members to submit résumés.

II. Responsibilities of Search Committee During the Search:

II. A. Choose officers: chair, vice-chair, recording secretary, (correspondence secretary?) (prayer coordinator?)

The committee chair is sometimes the person who received the most votes. However, it is often advisable to let the committee choose all the officers at the first meeting. It is the responsibility of the chair to communicate to the church on a regular basis, and some on the committee might not be comfortable speaking before the church. The recording secretary will keep minutes of all meetings. This person could also handle all correspondence, or another person could be assigned that responsibility as the correspondence secretary. The vice-chair's main responsibility is to preside in the absence of the chair and support the work of the chair as needed. The vice-chair could take on the role of the prayer coordinator, or a different person could take on that role.

II. B. Decide on guidelines for how the committee will function and create a committee covenant.

Begin with a study of the church's constitution and by-laws and follow any guidelines found there. Areas to consider in setting up guidelines, if not covered in the constitution and by-laws, might be:

Set up a meeting schedule. Consider the working schedules and church responsibilities of the committee members in deciding the best time and how often to meet. Will child care be needed? If so, consider that need in setting up a schedule.

Decide on a method and timetable for reporting on progress to congregation. Decide who will be the spokesperson. Usually, the chair is the spokesperson. It is often best for one person, the chair if possible, to be the regular person reporting rather than having several different members report at different times. How often will the congregation be expecting a

report on committee progress? Sunday morning worship service is an ideal time, and once a month is usually sufficient for reporting to the church body. To supplement the report on Sundays, churches often use the church newsletter or Sunday bulletin to keep church members informed. Some churches have also used a bulletin board display to share brief general information.

Outline a budget for committee expenses, which might include: cost of duplicating materials, postage for mail-outs to candidates and church members, long distance telephone calls to candidates and references, rent for a post office box to provide confidentiality for incoming candidate information, travel expenses for committee members (meals, car or plane travel, hotel) and for bringing prospective candidates to the community. ([Sample Minister Search Committee Expenses](#) is available at www.bgct.org/leadership under Search Committee Help.)

Expense reimbursement will always require receipts. Discuss with the finance committee and get approval from the church body on how these expenses will be covered. They are often taken from the vacant staff position salary. However, expenses for pulpit supply will come from that same line item on the budget, as well as moving expenses when a new staff person comes to the field.

Decide what percentage of votes will be required. Will a unanimous vote be required when the committee votes on the final selection of a candidate to be presented to the congregation for consideration? Some churches require this, and some don't. Consider the effect if one or two disagree with the majority. Will this be interpreted as the Lord working to affect his will or that this person or persons are not in the Lord's will? Whichever choice the committee makes on requiring a unanimous vote, it is important that each member be allowed to vote his or her conviction without pressure from the rest of the committee members.

What percentage of votes will be required when the congregation eventually votes on the candidate the committee recommends? At least 80%, more often 90%, is usually required for a candidate to be invited to serve on a church staff.

Establish procedures for alternates if the committee has those. Alternates listen during meetings but do not enter the discussion, do not vote, and do not travel with the committee. Alternates should agree to the same confidentiality standards as the rest of the committee and sign the committee covenant.

Establish rules of confidentiality. Discussions and actions taken by the committee are confidential. Members are not to discuss any business of the committee outside the committee, including other church members or even their spouses or other family members.

Establish travel guidelines. Spouses/family members do not travel with committee members for committee work.

Participate in a Staff Search Committee Seminar provided free of charge to BGCT churches by the Leadership Team of the BGCT. (Contact Congregational Leadership Team of the BGCT at 214-828-5126.)

Prepare a committee covenant that outlines the spiritual and personal commitments of committee members as well as the procedures to be observed by all committee members during the search for the new minister. ([Sample Code of Ethics/Covenant For Minister](#)

[Search Committee Members](#) is available at www.bgct.org/leadership under Search Committee Help.)

II. C. Spend time bonding; commit to pray together regularly, asking for the guidance the Holy Spirit.

The committee may need time to deal with feelings of inadequacy or negative feelings, especially if the past staff person left under less than desirable conditions. Also, each committee member will need time to examine his or her own heart and make sure to have a servant attitude. It may take time to feel comfortable enough to be honest and open, which will be necessary to complete the search process. The committee will need to pray and study scripture together and come to a group realization of how the church and the new minister will fulfill God's purposes.

II. D. Discuss any areas of doctrine, theology, leadership styles, worship styles, and other issues that the committee members believe would be critical to their choosing the new staff person.

Be clear on what you believe. Consider what basic beliefs your new minister must share with the congregation as well as those that reflect the practices of your particular church. Include beliefs about the Bible, evangelism, the role of the church in ministering to human needs, church autonomy, priesthood of believers, the role of women in leadership within the church, congregational church governance, authority of the pastor, role of deacons, missions support and involvement, baptism for non-Baptists joining church, participation by non-Baptists in Lord's Supper, etc.

Be clear on how the church stands on affiliations with the local association and state and national conventions.

Consider how important an affirmation of the [Baptist Faith and Message of 1925, 1963, 2000](#) will be to your congregation and the new minister. (The three BF&Ms side by side are available at www.bgct.org/leadership under [Comparison of 3 BF&Ms](#). A [comparison between the 1963 and 2000 BF&Ms](#) is available at www.bgct.org under About Us.

What worship style does your church find most comfortable and meaningful—liturgical, traditional, contemporary, blended, gospel, western heritage, etc.? Is your congregation open to other worship styles?

II. E. Decide whether or not to put ads in Baptist newspapers (state & association).

Contact your association's Director of Missions office about sharing your staff need through the association newsletter and website. (Contact information for DOMs can be found at www.bgct.org under Partners/Associations.)

The *Baptist Standard* publishes staff vacancies and staff new to churches as part of their regular "On the Move" news section. Ads may also be purchased for the classified ads section. For either, you may contact the *Baptist Standard* by calling 800-749-4610 or 214-630-4571 and ask for:

George Henson, ext. 11, ghenson@baptiststandard.com
Doug Hylton, ext. 22, bapstand@baptiststandard.com.

II. F. Clarify a desirable profile for person to fill the open staff position.

Develop a minister profile based partly on the information received from the church survey and/or the church-wide open forum and partly on your general understanding of the church's needs regarding the staff position. This document will outline the requirements, qualifications and general characteristics of the person the committee believes will best fit the position. It will be a valuable source in evaluating incoming résumés, making it easier for the committee to agree on whether or not each prospect is a viable candidate. The profile is not the same as the job description, but the two should be compatible. The profile should also influence the compensation package offered. If the profile calls for 15 years' experience, for example, the salary in the compensation package would not be the same as for a minister just out of seminary. Present this profile to the congregation for their approval. ([Sample Minister Profile](#) is available at www.bgct.org/leadership under Search Committee Help.)

Consider a study of the following resources: *Broken Trust*, *Keeping Your Church Out of Court*, and *Ministerial Ethics: A Covenant of Trust*, which are available from the Christian Life Commission of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, to help your church avoid problems with clergy ethical or sexual misconduct. (clc@bgct.org 214-828-5194.)

II. G. Meet with present staff.

Listen to their concerns, answer questions, and receive suggestions. They can often give much insight into the needs of the church for that position. While their involvement is strictly advisory, it is good to consider their perspectives. If the position is for pastor, this is also a time to recognize and address their anxiety about their own futures when a new pastor is eventually called.

Keep in mind that individual characteristics do play an important role in the effectiveness of a given minister in a specific church. Consider having current staff and key church lay leaders take the online questionnaire that produces the new BGCT Leader Report and BGCT Leadership Styles™ Report. These reports are based on the Birkman Method® in use for over 50 years by leading corporations world-wide. The cost per person is less than 1/3 of the rates paid by outside organizations. Our own certified consultants will provide individual and group feedback and will equip your people with the necessary knowledge to facilitate effective teamwork. The prospective staff person could also use the assessment to consider the "fit" between their own strengths, needs and interests in light of those of the staff and key lay leaders prior to final decisions.

(Contact Mary Johnson mary.johnson@bgct.org . 214-887-5491.)

II. H. Collect prospect résumés:

From church members

From BGCT online résumé service --*Leader Connect* at
www.bgct.org/leaderconnect

From Association Directors of Missions. (Contact information for DOMs can be found at www.bgct.org under *Partners/Associations*.)

From other staff and other churches' staffs

From seminaries, universities and divinity schools

It is also good to have a standard biographical profile format to request from each prospect so that the same basic information can be considered for everyone.

II. I. Verify each prospect's availability and interest.

Contact the persons whose résumés you have received to let them know that the search committee has received their names to be considered for the position. Ask if they wish to be considered. Note if they are not actively seeking a new position but are open to the Lord's leadership and do not object to being considered. Be aware that this person probably does not want his or her present church to know of this response. If a candidate is not interested at this time, note that and respect that. However, do not discard the name completely. If you continue your search and do not find the person God intends for your ministry, you may contact this person again after a reasonable length of time. The person may have been communicating with another search committee earlier and could not, in fairness, also communicate with your committee. Sometimes God has been working in a person's life and he or she is just now open to exploring the possibility. ([Sample Letter: Acknowledgement of Résumé Received](#) is available at www.bgct.org/leadership under Search Committee Help.)

II. J. Examine prospect résumés based on desirable profile.

Once you have received verification of interest, refer to the profile approved by the congregation and prioritize each résumé.

There will be some résumés which the group will want to eliminate immediately. These are résumés of those who do not meet the committee's basic criteria. These candidates should be notified immediately and graciously by letter that they are no longer being considered. ([Sample Letter: Initial No Longer Considered](#) available at www.bgct.org/leadership under Search Committee Helps.)

II. K. Contact those still being considered to get permission for reference checks.

In a new letter, ask for the candidate's written permission to contact references. This permission may also have been included in the résumé. ([Sample Letter: Continued Consideration as a Candidate](#) is available at www.bgct.org/leadership under Search Committee Help.)

There will be many résumés that the committee will initially consider as unlikely candidates; however, these should not be sent the letter of non-consideration at this time. Many times churches have gone through the list of probable candidates and discovered that those unlikely candidates may need to be reviewed again. The person God intends to fill a staff position oftentimes is not in the original top ten or so that the committee is considering.

However, it is also inconsiderate to let candidates wonder where they stand for months and never get a positive or negative indication about whether or not they are being considered any longer. Some system of communication with all candidates being considered should be established, and definitely let every candidate who may think he or she is possibly still being considered know immediately once you have called someone to the position. If much time has elapsed, you might consider a letter to those way down the list that your committee at this time is moving in a different direction, without dismissing the candidate altogether. There may be other church search committees contacting this person, and he/she should feel free to respond to them if there is little chance you will consider them in the future. ([Sample Letter: Second Evaluation: Different Direction At this Time](#) is available at www.bgct.org/leadership under Search Committee Helps.)

II. L. Prioritize remaining possible candidates' résumés.

If the committee is small enough and has fewer résumés to consider, the committee could look at each one together. Or each committee member could take a portion of the résumés, rate them in some way, and report back to the group. A tally of the ratings would be a basis for an initial prioritizing by the group.

Based on the number of résumés received, all committee members may review each résumé, or they could divide up the résumés for preliminary screening and report back to the group.

Some suggested methods of rating résumés:

Rate each résumé generally, such as excellent, good, fair. Consider only the excellent category to come up with the top five to ten. If there are not enough "excellents," go to the "good" category. If the résumés have been divided up by the committee, look at combined ratings when ordering them for consideration by the whole committee.

Have each committee member rate the résumés one through ten. The scores of each résumé would be totaled. (The résumés could be divided into two or three stacks. Two or three committee members could take a stack and independently rate the résumés one through ten.) The committee would then total the scores for each résumé and consider résumés based on these totals.

Teams within the committee could review a certain number of résumés. The team chooses the top three to five résumés to present to the rest of the committee for their review.

II. M. Check references:

By mail: Send a cover letter ([Sample Letter: To Candidate's References](#) available at www.bgct.org/leaders under Search Committee Helps) and questionnaire ([Sample Reference Information Form](#) available at www.bgct.org/leadership under Search Committee Help) which requests information from the reference. The questionnaire needs to be simple. A long document is a burden, and often people do not want to put sensitive information in writing. Those can be better covered in the personal phone call. Leave room for additional comments.

By phone: Have a list of questions that all callers will use for consistency and fairness. ([Sample Questions for Initial Interview With Prospect—p 1](#)) available at www.bgct.org/leadership under Search Committee Help.) Take extensive notes.

Also, ask for other reference names.

Do not contact references in the prospect's present church without considering the implications for that church. Of course you will want to get reference information from the staff person's present church, but do nothing to disrupt the prospect's on-going ministry there. It may be that the prospect can give you the names of a few trusted church members to be contacted who will keep the contact confidential if the minister feels that is best for the church.

Remember, church staff persons have a difficult time being candid about each other's shortcomings. More will be shared through a phone contact than in written form.

II. N. Work with one candidate at a time.

Based on the rating that each prospect has received during the initial review and the reference information gathered, the committee may examine the top five to ten and prioritize those after careful examination and discussion. The ratings don't have to be followed exactly for this prioritization. Let the Holy Spirit guide the committee in determining the order the first résumés will be considered. Keep in mind that this person will be "called," not "hired." Begin with the top prospect and work with only this prospect until a definite decision has been made one way or the other. Only after this prospect is eliminated should the committee begin examining the second prospect.

II. O. Determine the procedure for considering candidates.

Once the committee is ready to begin contacting candidates personally, decide which meetings and in which order. The following are not all necessary, depending on the needs and preferences of the committee and the time and expense involved. Information in this document assumes all of these will take place, but your committee may decide all this is not necessary and may rearrange or combine some of these:

Set up a meeting with the prospect (and spouse) in a neutral location.

A few committee members visit the prospect's church to observe a service.

Set up a second meeting to ask more penetrating questions.

The entire committee members visit the prospect's church to observe a service.

Invite the prospect to your community and to view your church facilities.

Invite the prospect to meet with church leaders and staff.

Invite the prospect to preach in your church (if for pastor) or participate in a worship service (if for other staff positions).

II. P. Contact the prospect to express interest in considering this person for the position.

(At any time during the following process, let the prospect know immediately and with grace as soon as the committee agrees that for now this candidate is not the primary candidate. Then move to the next prospect. After a time, re-evaluate the priority list, including any new résumés that may have been submitted since the first evaluation.)

Respect the stability of the prospect's present church and keep communication as confidential as possible. Call the prospect at home or write a letter to the prospect's home address. If the position is for pastor, ask for an audiotape or video of a sermon. Be prepared to return the tape and also cover all postage expenses.

II. Q. Create confidential file on each prospect. (Destroy once prospect is eliminated.)

All documents related to this candidate should be kept on file, and the file should be kept in a secure location. Only the committee should have access to the file. Sometimes the information may be sensitive and require a high level of confidentiality. Items to include will be copies of all written correspondence, signed authorization documents, evaluations, personal reference forms, written findings from research done by committee members, etc.

II. R. Perform background checks (with candidate's permission).

Get the candidate's written, notarized permission for performing background checks. ([Sample Background and Reference Investigation Authorization](#) and information on some possible background check agencies for your consideration ([Employee Background Checks](#)) are available at www.bgct.org/leadership under Search Committee Help.) Perform at least these: credit, criminal (national and state), sexual offender, identity verification and education verification. If you have a questionnaire to send entities regarding the candidate, make sure the candidate also sees a copy of the questions (not the answers) and cover letter.

II. S. Set up first face-to-face meeting in neutral territory or in your community. (Take care of prospect expenses.)

Consider meeting at the pastor's home about 2 p.m. on a Sunday afternoon. Possibly a few committee members could meet with the prospect in a neutral place, perhaps in a restaurant not too close to the prospect's church or community, so that the initial contact can be relaxed and open and also somewhat confidential. This is a time to get a feel for the personality, conduct and spirit of the prospect and spouse, ask a few basic questions, and share a little about the committee's church and community and the expectations and responsibilities of the position.

Sometimes committees skip the face-to-face encounters until after hearing the pastor preach or the staff person demonstrate ministry at his or her home church. However, this initial visit can convey that, while preaching (for pastor) or "stage performance" before an audience is important, there are many other aspects of the minister's role that are equally important. The decision to extend a call to a minister should not be based solely on preaching or "stage" presence. Remember to allow time for the candidate to ask questions of you, also. If the prospect shows real interest in the church and the committee members develop a positive response to the prospect, it will make the visit to the prospect's church later a little easier and more natural for both. ([Sample Questions for Initial Visit With Prospect—p 2](#)). Also available: [Sample Questions Search Committee Should Be Prepared to Answer](#). Both are found at www.bgct.org/leadership under Search Committee Help.

Never try to hear two prospects on the same day "just because you are in the neighborhood."

II. T. Observe candidate in a church worship service (with proper etiquette and discretion).

Let prospect know you are coming. Here are five questions to ask in your contact with the prospect:

1. Will you be preaching in your pulpit this Sunday?
2. Would it be convenient for our committee to visit your church and hear you preach/lead? (Some special emphases are not convenient times. Perhaps a more customary service would be more practical, and you might have more time for us.)
3. Are you dealing with another search committee at the present time? (If so, simply explain: "We appreciate your honesty. It would be wise for use not to disrupt that process at the present time. Perhaps, if it does not work out and you would allow us to know, then we may still want to visit with you.")

4. May we meet you prior to hearing you preach/lead; or take your family to lunch; or visit privately sometime in the afternoon?
5. What time does your worship hour begin?

When you arrive at the service, try to be unobtrusive, but you will probably be noticed anyway. Consider not sitting together during the service. Unless the bulletin has a section for taking notes and it will not be so obvious if you take notes, just listen carefully, observe, and write down your impressions immediately after returning to your vehicle. For pastor, it is a good idea to use a [Prospective Pastor's Sermon Evaluation Form](#) available at www.bgct.org/leadership under Search Committee Help.) After the service, exit as everyone else does. Have an understanding with the candidate that you will get in touch with him or her privately later. If you have not made an appointment to meet with the candidate that afternoon, call him or her to give some idea of your reaction, even if the news is "no news."

II. U. Have second face-to-face meeting with prospect in your community. (Pay prospect's expenses.)

Invite the candidate to your church's community for a tour of the facilities, drive around to see area schools, and have material about the school system available. Pay attention to the prospect's personal demeanor and behavioral tendencies. Both a congregation and individuals have personality distinctives. Consider how these will mesh. Ask more penetrating questions. ([Sample Questions for Second Face-To-Face Visit With Prospect—p 3](#)) available at www.bgct.org/leadership under Search Committee Helps.) Observe openness and how well the person's style of interpersonal relationships would suit the characteristics of the church.

Talk about "money matters," personnel policies, and more in-depth discussions about faith and vision. Share the job description and results of the church questionnaire.

II. V. As a committee decide if the person is a viable candidate. Let candidate know either way.

The committee should be open, honest and clear about how each senses the Lord's direction in this matter. Do not compare one candidate with another. Each has different gifts. Just ask, "Is this who God wants for our church at this time?" If the committee cannot reach a unanimous vote, this person should probably not be considered further at this time.

Either way the committee decides, they should contact the candidate right away and let the candidate know of their decision. If the candidate asks why he or she was not chosen, it is appropriate to be honest, with humility and grace. Oftentimes a candidate can be quite qualified, but the Lord is not leading the church and the candidate to come together. It does not necessarily reflect on either the church or the candidate.

If the candidate accepts your invitation to come to the church for consideration by the congregation for the staff position (called "coming in view of a call"), decide on the appropriate Sunday morning to introduce this person to the congregation.

III. Responsibilities of Search Committee After Candidate Is Selected Checklist:

III. A. Check church's constitution and by-laws regarding procedure for calling minister. Strictly follow those.

III. B. Anticipate and meet the needs of the congregation so that the members can make an informed decision.

Develop an information piece on the candidate. A brief biographical sketch with a picture of the minister and family is very appropriate. This information should contain a brief summary of the ministry in which the minister is currently serving and a simple explanation of the committee's conviction in presenting this candidate. This is not a campaign speech to sway the vote but an open explanation of the process used to bring this particular candidate before the church for consideration.

Mail information about the candidate, along with the minister/church covenant /agreement (see below), to church members. The timing of this mailing is very important. If the candidate's home church has not been informed that the candidate is considering a move, then the mailing should not arrive until the Friday afternoon before the candidate comes to the church on Sunday. If there is no need to keep his/her coming confidential in any way, then the mailing could go out well ahead of the day of the vote, maybe a week or two ahead of time.

III. C. Consider a minister/church covenant/agreement.

The church and the candidate should come to an agreement on the minister/church covenant. It should not be just handed to the minister to be signed. The purpose of this document is to clarify expectations in the relationship between the minister and the congregation. It should include the congregation's expectations of the minister and the minister's expectations of the congregation. Appropriate concerns include working guidelines and employment and financial agreements. The goal is to provide role clarity in as many areas as possible in order to reduce the likelihood of major conflict later. It should be mutually agreeable to the church and the minister. It should take into account the minister's unique gifts in ministry and reflect the congregation's primary concerns. It limits the possibility of misunderstanding or misrepresentation in the future and inspires the development of trust.

Once the covenant has been signed, it should be shared with the church so they know ahead of time what the church can expect from the minister. It should include the date the minister will begin his or her ministry at the church. ([Sample Covenant Between Church and Pastor](#); [Sample Covenant Between Church and Minister](#) are available at www.bgct.org/leadershp under Search Committee Help.)

III. D. Finalize proposed "package" to be offered.

Most of the work will probably already have been done, but the package may need to be customized to this particular candidate's needs and qualifications.

III. E. Plan for minister to participate in a Sunday morning worship service.

Make sure those involved in the service, such as the interim pastor, the minister of music and the church office (for preparing the bulletin), are informed as soon as possible. Make hotel reservations (preferable to a church member home).

Have an honorarium/expense check and a church bulletin ready to hand the candidate the morning of the service. Escort the candidate into the service.

III. F. Consider introducing candidate to the present church staff and lay leaders before the Sunday service.

For pastor (depending on size of church—this schedule can easily be revised and reduced):

Friday evening meal for church staff

Saturday morning breakfast, perhaps for Baptist Men and other men's groups

Saturday mid-morning or noon luncheon for Baptist Women and other women's groups

Saturday afternoon/evening for pizza and a visit with the youth

For other staff positions, these introduction times and participants will vary widely from church to church.

III. G. After the morning or the evening service or at a time when many church members will be present, allow the church members to vote and let the candidate know the results as soon as possible.

For the average church, the process will often be completed during one Sunday service.

At the end of the morning service or during the evening service allow the congregation to ask questions of the search committee. If the candidate is present, have a search committee member stay with the candidate at some other location in the church. Make sure everyone understands what percentage of the vote is needed to call this candidate as the new minister. Take the vote by secret ballot. Every church member present will receive a ballot on which to indicate yes or no. Ask children to sit with their parents and give parents a chance to explain to their children the significance of the vote.

After the votes have been collected, a committee, perhaps a "teller" committee, should count the votes. (Some churches have the search committee count the votes, but keep in mind that the search committee is anxious to have a positive outcome and will have a harder time dealing with a difficult vote result than a more impartial committee.) Share the outcome with the church members.

Have someone on the committee let the candidate know of the outcome. If it is positive and the candidate is ready to accept and is waiting in the building or nearby, escort the candidate back into the service so that the announcement can be made to the congregation. Openly celebrate a positive response.

If the vote was not positive for the call, share that information with humility and grace. Oftentimes a candidate can be quite qualified, but the Lord is not leading the church and the candidate to come together. It does not necessarily reflect on the candidate or the church.

Sometimes the process cannot be completed on Sunday.

The candidate may leave for the hotel or airport immediately after the morning service and await word from home. The church might wait until another time when most of the church members will be present to vote. Sometimes the candidate will want to inform his present church before he formally accepts the call to your church. If this is the case and your church members know the results, ask them not to share the results outside of the church until an answer has been received so that word will not get back to the candidate's present church prematurely.

III. H. Allow plenty of time for candidate to consider and to inform present church.

Allow the candidate as much time as he or she needs to respond. The candidate is seeking the Lord's guidance and may need time to affirm God's leadership in this move. The candidate's present church will need to be informed on a Sunday morning, most likely, and this means at least a week's delay.

III. I. Celebrate new minister's arrival.

Consider filling their pantry with food and providing a meal while the family unpacks. Ask children to draw welcome pictures and adults to write welcome letters. Be sensitive to the pain of leaving their former church friends and ministry.

III. J. Express your appreciation to the work of the interim pastor and others.

The interim pastor and/or any who supported the ministry of the vacant position during the interim time have done a great service to your church and should be honored. It is easy to overlook them in the excitement of the arrival of the new minister.

III. K. Notify appropriate entities, including the association and state convention offices, and especially the BGCT's *Leader Connect* office (resumeservice@bgct.org) if you used that service.

Provide a brief biography for publications. Give old and new church information.

III. L. Inform all remaining prospects that the position has been filled.

These prospects should not have to wait until they read about the position's being filled in the *Baptist Standard*. Let them know by letter immediately that the position has been filled. Destroy all files on all these prospects. Keep the sealed file of the new minister in a secure location to protect any sensitive information. ([Sample Letter: No Longer Considered: Position Filled](#) is available at www.bgct.org/leadership under Search Committee Help.)

IV. Responsibilities of the Search Committee Once the New Minister Is On the Field.

IV. A. If you have not already done this, consider having the staff take the online questionnaire that produces the new BGCT Leader Report & BGCT Leadership Styles™ Report.

The new BGCT Leader Report & BGCT Leadership Styles™ Report can provide insight into strengths, needs and interests of individuals (and the group collectively) to assist staff

members in working together to bring out the best in each other as they minister to the church and community. There is a reasonable charge for this service. (Contact Mary Johnson; mary.johnson@bgct.org or call 214-887-5491.)

IV. B. Either the search committee or a new committee should help the new staff person and family transition into the life of the church and community.

In many churches the search committee transitions to this role, as they know the new person so well and are excited about transitioning this person into the life of the church and the community. As time goes on they can be available to answer questions that come up.

Check with the members of the search committee to make sure they are comfortable with this extended commitment. If some on the search committee choose not to accept this new role, your committee may decide to ask a few knowledgeable and available church members to assist in this process. (Keep in mind that almost everyone will want to befriend the new minister. If hurt feelings will result, it is better not to add to the committee.)

This committee will have regular contact with the new minister and family during the first year to ease transition into the church and the community.

Consider a new name for this committee to differentiate it from the earlier transition committee, if you chose to have one—something like (Position) Welcome Team.

Some people to consider to add to the committee might be those in the church family who know the school system well and perhaps the school personnel where the new staff's children will be attending classes.

Others will have time during the day to take the minister and spouse around in the community to help them locate the library, the post office, the dry cleaners, etc.

Others can go with the new minister on initial visits to the hospital and introduce the new minister to the hospital chaplains, funeral home directors, and others. If the community has a civic club, perhaps someone could invite the new minister to attend.

For the whole family, the “welcome committee” members can be their friends in the beginning. They can invite the family to their homes for some companionship and fellowship.

The committee can help the new minister be open to a wide variety of church members and keep a balanced perspective. One or a few church members can be very passionate about a program or activity and try to influence the new staff person to support it. The passion is good and may deserve support, but it is important to make sure it is something appropriate and acceptable for the whole church, its needs, vision, and resources.

After a year, the welcome committee/search committee can have a meeting with the new minister to review “expectations” and help evaluate and strengthen the ministry. At that time they can officially resign, knowing the minister is solidly settled into the new ministry.

After the first year your church might consider using the suggestions for a [Church Staff Evaluation](#) available at www.bgct.org/leadership under Search Committee Helps.

Information included in this guide has been summarized and paraphrased from many sources, including:

Pastor Search Committee Workbook designed by Lynn Eckeberger and Ed Hale for the Baptist General Convention of Texas

A Better Way for a Better Day: A Manual of Suggestions for Pastor Search Committees by Vaughn D Manning

The Pastor Search Committee: A Guide To Finding God's Leader For Your Church by Paul W. Powell

Pastor Search Committee Guidebook and Committee Assignments compiled by the Virginia Baptist Mission Board.

Finding a New Minister For Your Church by M. Wayne Oakes

Pastor Search Committee Handbook. Lifeway Press, Nashville, TN.

Pastor & Staff Search Committee Guide by Don Mathis