

The **Right**
Pastor

**Seeking God's Man
for Your Church**

Wesley E. Johnson

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THE RIGHT PASTOR: SEEKING GOD'S MAN FOR YOUR CHURCH

(A Manual for the Pastoral Search Committee)

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Each member of the pastoral search committee should have a copy of this manual.

Permission is hereby granted to the pastoral search committee of a congregation to reproduce the surveys and forms necessary in its efforts to find a pastor.

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Foreword

VIRTUALLY EVERY WEEK churches ask me to submit names of possible pastoral candidates. The process of trying to match prospective pastors with appropriate churches can be frustrating. Customarily I will include disclaimers in my replies to emphasize that my recommendations are not guaranteed. I advise the search committees and the churches to conduct careful evaluations to determine the worthiness of the men.

The task of evaluating the suitability of potential candidates is no small assignment. The work would be easier if I, like a denominational bishop, had the authority to place pastors in churches. However, this approach does not match our Baptist polity, nor would I want that responsibility. The local church has the duty of facilitating the pastoral search process.

Most pastoral search committees do not view themselves as qualified for the task. They readily admit their inadequacies and ask for help. For some time I have wanted to provide a step-by-step guide for churches that would lead them through the unfamiliar territory of finding a pastor.

What a delight to discover a most helpful tool! *The Right Pastor* is a practical and easy-to-use workbook that will lead a church through the process of pastoral search from start to finish. Wesley Johnson has done a masterful job of “covering all the bases.”

Wesley graciously permitted Regular Baptist Press to edit his manuscript to suit an independent Baptist model. I am confident that any church that follows these guidelines will find the challenge far easier. This workbook will point the church’s pastoral search process in the right direction.

John Greening
GARBC National Representative
Schaumburg, Illinois

Introduction

ANY LOCAL CHURCH has episodes in its history that may alter both its life and its future. One such event is a change in pastoral leadership. Because of the position and influence of the pastor within a congregation, the calling of a man to shepherd the flock becomes an all-important decision.

The purpose of this manual is to help a church, through an orderly process, find a properly qualified and gifted pastor. I do not guarantee that this manual will ensure the perfect union of a pastor and a congregation, but I believe it can prevent a tragic union.

People make decisions in response to both objective as well as subjective information. The material in this manual is designed to help a church obtain objective information in its decision-making process. The profile developed will provide a framework by which both the committee and the congregation can view and evaluate a candidate. The material will also give structure to the process.

This manual was produced for churches holding the congregational form of church government. Because God's Holy Spirit indwells each Christian, I also believe the consensus of the congregation expressed by its vote affirms the calling of a candidate.

The manual has been used in approximately a thousand churches, whose memberships have ranged from twenty members to more than two thousand members.

May the Lord guide and bless your congregation at this important time in the ongoing history of your church.

The Establishment of the Pastoral Search Committee

The Importance of the Pastoral Search Committee

The success, effectiveness, and tenure of the pastoral ministry is directly related to the work of a pastoral search committee. The quest of a thoughtful Christian is to know the will of God for his/her own life. Likewise, the quest of a pastoral search committee is to help the congregation and pastoral candidate understand and determine God's will. To do this, the committee must establish the needs, expectations, and goals of the church and also decide what gifts and qualities a candidate must have to meet them. Failing to make this evaluation will send the church into a cyclical process of changing pastors and thus will dilute the effectiveness of the church's ministry.

The Selection of the Pastoral Search Committee

It is best when the church constitution directs the congregation on how the selection of the pastoral search committee should take place. This direction will usually give the congregation a neutral profile of the pastoral search committee, particularly if the last pastor left under pressure. If no constitutional directives exist, a special congregational meeting must be called for the explicit purpose of estab-

lishing the pastoral search committee. The method of nomination, the size of the committee, and the required vote should be defined before any specific names are brought to the floor of the business meeting. The committee should be elected by the entire church membership.

The committee should be established soon after the pastor resigns. Some members will feel uneasy about taking such action before the pastor leaves, but the issue of the committee must quickly be addressed, as the calling process will take from four to twenty-four months.

The committee will function best with five to seven members. It should not exceed nine members and should have an odd number.

In the event that there are no constitutional directives, the following is a suggested procedure for nominating members to the committee: (1) Ask the members of the congregation to list on a ballot their choices for the pastoral search committee. The number listed by each member should not exceed the number to serve on the committee. (2) The names receiving the most votes are then put on a ballot. This list would contain twice the number required. (3) Then the church will elect the committee from those so nominated.

The Qualifications of the Pastoral Search Committee

Members of the committee should meet the following qualifications. Each one should be

1. An active member of the local congregation;
2. Known for prayer and spiritual maturity;
3. Respected by the congregation;
4. Self-committed to the time and energy necessary to complete the task;
5. Representative. Members collectively should represent the full spectrum of the congregation.

The Organization of the Pastoral Search Committee

Unless the chairman of the committee has been designated by the church, it is well to have the chairman of the church/deacon board convene the first meeting. At this meeting the following officers should be selected.

Chairman

The chairman must possess qualities of leadership, a sensitive spirit, and an ability to get things done. He should make available a prepared agenda for each member for each meeting, chair all meetings, expedite and/or delegate all activities of the committee, and be the official voice of the committee.

Vice Chairman

The vice chairman will act in the absence of the chairman or on instruction of the committee.

Secretary

The secretary will keep an accurate record of all committee proceedings, provide copies of minutes for each committee member, notify members of scheduled

meetings, and carry on correspondence as directed. All minutes and correspondence must be kept strictly confidential.

The flow chart (Item E, p. 43), timeline schedule (Item A, p. 25), and this manual should be explained and adopted by the committee as a guideline to its functioning. Each member should have a copy of this manual.

The Responsibilities of the Pastoral Search Committee

At the same meeting during which the committee is selected, the congregation should also spell out in writing the job description and expectations it has for the pastoral search committee. The following is a list of what should be considered.

1. Is the pastoral search committee responsible for obtaining pulpit supply and/or an interim pastor?
2. Is the committee responsible for all aspects of the calling process?
Examples:
 - a. Establishing qualifications
 - b. Screening possible candidates
 - c. Presenting the candidate
 - d. Arranging candidate exposure and time at church
 - e. Negotiating a financial package
 - f. Handling business sessions
 - g. Writing a letter of "call"
 - h. Arranging the move
3. What type of budget will the pastoral search committee be allotted?
 - a. Telephone
 - b. Mailing
 - c. Travel for committee members to interview possible candidates
 - d. Expenses for candidate
4. Concerning negotiations with the candidate, in what areas is the committee

empowered to speak and work?

- a. Salary
- b. Housing
- c. Utilities
- d. Moving expenses
- e. Car expenses
- f. Hospitalization
- g. Retirement
- h. Conference time and expenses
- i. Vacation
- j. Personal ministry days
- k. Continuing education
- l. Book allowance
- m. Professional allowance
- n. Miscellaneous

**The Relationship
of the Pastoral Search Committee
to Leaders in an Association
of Churches**

It is helpful for a pastoral search committee to contact a proper leader if the church is a part of a fellowship or association. In the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches (GARBC), for example, the state representative and the national representative have a vested interest in helping to secure the best possible pastor for the church. Experience has shown that the advice and help a state or national

representative can give often saves the committee from costly and time-consuming errors.

**The Interrelationship
of the Members
of the Pastoral Search Committee**

As in any joint effort, people do not become a team merely by being appointed to some committee. They may be members of the same committee, but until they know and trust each other enough to exercise risks, they will have difficulty in accomplishing their assigned task. This is particularly true if the church has suffered some difficulty with the previous pastor. The pastoral search committee has been placed in the position of *union* by appointment. The pastoral search committee must develop a relationship of *unity* by commitment.

This relationship involves taking quality time to know and build mutual confidence in each other. Therefore, at the first meeting the priority must be to spend time in sharing concerns, studying a portion of God's Word, and prayer. These items should be included in the agenda of every meeting. Oneness of spirit and consensus of opinion cannot be obtained if there is a fracture in personal unity.

CHAPTER 2

The Procedure for the Pastoral Search Committee

The Pastoral Search Committee and Communication with the Congregation

When a pastor leaves, people typically speculate as to the reasons for his move. Unless these reasons are clear, an undercurrent of strange rumors often arises. Rumors tend to polarize people and activate needless tensions. These feelings of tension are difficult to isolate and resolve. As a result, the pastoral search committee comes into its role under an atmosphere of suspicion. Two notions arise: “They are not really doing their job, or else we would know more by now,” and “We are being railroaded into this.”

Another issue the pastoral search committee must face is the matter of ownership. The committee can be excited about a certain candidate, but how will the congregation respond? Ownership of the process, as well as of the candidate, must be generated among the total congregation.

The one great factor for both the establishment of ownership and the stifling of criticism is communication. All meetings of the pastoral search committee should be announced. Every meeting should be reported by a sentence or two in the Sunday bulletin as to actions or decisions.

Names of candidates should not be

revealed to anyone outside the committee until such a candidate has agreed by a written commitment that he will be at your church on a specific weekend to candidate. It is a good idea, if possible, to bring a man to the church as a “pulpit supply” initially. Then the committee can better evaluate him and decide whether to go to the next step: candidacy. Keeping names concealed is especially true of a simple list of suggested names. A pastor may not know you are considering his name, and he may have no interest. Yet a church’s interest in the man could easily creep back to his own church, consequently putting him in an embarrassing situation.

The Pastoral Search Committee and the Interim Pastor

The consideration of an interim pastor is especially important at this juncture in the church’s ministry. If the pastoral search committee is not responsible for the engaging of an interim pastor, the following information should be channeled to the proper place.

Consider these seven common questions:

1. When is it advisable to engage an interim pastor?

- When the previous pastor left under pressure, the interim’s tenure will

provide a period of healing and restoration.

- When the church does not have adequate lay leadership, the interim's leadership will be a rallying point for the congregation and can initiate positive actions and feelings.
- When there is division and polarization within the congregation, the interim can give objective spiritual leadership from a neutral platform.
- When the church needs a transitional process, the interim has more liberty to deal head-on with such issues, since he does not represent some vested interest group.

2. When is an interim pastor not really needed?

- When the lay leadership is strong and capable of taking up many of the normal everyday responsibilities of the pastor. The one issue here is the availability of time. If those leaders, because of lack of time and the size of the church, will be unable to cover the work, they should consider an interim pastor.
- When supply preachers are readily available.
- When the church is healthy and there are no dividing factions.

3. What provisions should be made for an interim pastor?

- He should be paid commensurate with the time he is asked to give to the church.
- He should be provided housing if he is expected to stay in the community. This provision should also include related benefits.
- He should be paid for every week and Sunday he has been contracted to

serve. If a pastoral candidate is presented on a weekend, the interim pastor should still be paid. Only when the pastor comes should the contract be broken.

4. What should be the tenure of an interim pastor?

- The usual tenure is three months. That term is shortened only by the call and presence of a new pastor.
- No interim should serve for more than four terms, or twelve months. His effectiveness diminishes rapidly after twelve months. If the people really enjoy him, the pastoral search committee has a tendency to procrastinate.

5. What understanding should a church have with an interim pastor?

- Before he comes, he and the church should clearly understand his tenure.
- He should be informed that your church will not consider him as a candidate. If pressure arises from within the church to have him as a candidate and he so desires, he must resign as the interim. He will be put through the same process as all other candidates; and if he is not considered or does not receive the call, he can no longer be the interim.
- He cannot serve on the pastoral search committee.
- He should not be present during the days a candidate is presented, except for funerals and emergencies.

6. How does a church find men to serve as interim pastors?

- In the GARBC, the state representatives or the national representative in the Ministry Resource Center in Schaumburg, Illinois, will usually have the names of several available men.

7. How is the interim pastor called?

- Because the interim pastor is called for a limited term, the pastoral search committee and/or the church board are usually authorized to call the interim.
- If the church desires or requires that an interim be called by a vote of the congregation, it should be by a simple majority vote. The reason is that a church usually needs an interim when it has experienced problems. It is both difficult and sometimes detrimental to force a body for a unanimous vote concerning an interim pastor.

The Pastoral Search Committee and the Development of a Church and Pastoral Profile

Before any names are discussed in the committee, the committee must develop a pastoral profile. Your committee will receive many names of “favorite sons” (candidates suggested by the congregation) and résumés from men looking for a church. All names should be recorded but not presented for discussion. Any name brought up tends to destroy the ability of the committee to be objective in the research for a profile.

To develop a pastoral profile, the committee must research and evaluate the church’s needs and expectations. In the process of determining the present needs of the church, be careful that the committee does not make its evaluation on either the weaknesses or strengths of the previous pastor.

In determining needs, do not begin by asking the committee members what they would like to see in a new man. The friends of the previous pastor will list his strengths as needs, and the “not-so-friendly” will list

the needs in terms of his weaknesses. It is more than probable that both sides will miss the real issues and needs of the church. Besides blinding the committee, this approach can develop parties within the committee. It will also be important for the committee to look at future needs and goals.

It has been observed that the committee that does its homework will have an easier time throughout the whole transitional period. The members will always know the kind of person they need, and consequently they will move more quickly and with greater confidence. When the work of the committee is done well, the pastor’s tenure will likely be longer.

This process has five phases. Note the timeline schedule for these phases (see Item A, page 25).

PHASE ONE—Acquisition of Church Information (Item B, p. 27)

The committee must gather and know the general facts about the church. The facts will not only aid the search committee but will also be used in communication with the candidates.

PHASE TWO—Acquisition of Church Goals

The church board should enumerate the goals and expectations of the church for the next three, five, and ten years. The board members should spell out what they expect and hope to be as a church by those dates. They should include items such as membership, attendance, general budget, missions budget, church programs, outreach, church expansion, church planting, and building programs. The board members should also make available the church’s mission statement and should spell out what they see as the church’s priorities and vision for the

coming years. A state and/or national representative or associational leader can provide advice and encouragement in these areas.

PHASE THREE—Acquisition of Pastoral History (Item C, p. 31)

The church should compile a pastoral history of the church. This will enlighten the committee concerning any recurring issues that have possibly been overlooked in the calling processes of the past. This is also a place to consider the expectations and job description for the pastor (Item T, p. 111).

PHASE FOUR—Congregational Survey (Items D₁ and D₂, pp. 33, 39)

The committee must survey the congregation as to its expectations for a pastor. To obtain the greatest return, survey forms should be distributed at a morning worship service. Allow about ten to twelve minutes to complete them; then collect them immediately. Survey forms can be mailed, but the result is not great in this way—usually only about 30 percent of a mailing finds its way back.

Because congregational ownership of both the process and pastoral candidate is so important, many churches will also conduct personal surveys of groups of people within the congregation, such as Sunday School classes, fellowship groups, youth groups, senior citizens, and so on. In these sessions, members of the search committee will spend at least an hour with the group. A member from the committee will moderate the sessions, and another will take notes. The following is a possible list of subjects presented:

- Biblical admonition, such as the value of searching for wisdom (Proverbs 2; Psalm 139:2, 3; 1 Corinthians 2:10)

- The pastoral search process
- Expectations concerning the new pastor
- Suggestions of possible new programs or emphases
- Concerns the members have for their group
- Concerns they have for the church
- The strengths they see in the church
- The weaknesses they see in the church

PHASE FIVE—Profile Development

Upon receipt of all the material, the committee is then ready to compile a profile of the prospective pastor. Carefully categorize and integrate the material so that you can list in the pastor's profile the qualities you believe you need. After you have made the list, put the qualities in a priority order and check those items that must be found in the pastor. Remember, the profile cannot be perfectly matched with a man, but now at least you have explicit guidelines with which to work and compare.

After the statistical profile has been established, a committee member should be assigned to put the profile into prose form. This form should be mailed to the members of the congregation, and this communication will help the congregation in the matter of ownership. It will also help to solidify the thinking and begin to give unity in the process of deciding upon a specific candidate.

The Pastoral Search Committee and the Calling Procedure

Please note the flow chart (Item E, p. 43) and timeline (Item A, p. 25).

STEP ONE—The Acquisition of Names and Résumés of Potential Candidates

Your pastoral profile should be mailed to the national representative and/or state

representatives, who will be able to send you a number of résumés. You will also receive names from other sources, such as seminaries and members of your church. *Do not allow friendships to cause you to bypass the pastoral profile.* Always use it as your frame of reference.

STEP TWO—Review of all potential candidates

Carefully review all names of potential candidates. If, within the committee, a name is found to be unacceptable, seek the reasons but don't argue. Then simply set that name aside. If a candidate is unacceptable at this level, he probably never will be acceptable.

To a candidate who is acceptable, send a letter to determine his interest. You will find a sample copy of such a letter (Item F, p. 47). You will notice that the request is non-committal. The purpose is to allow both the committee and the pastor to proceed without obligation to each other. (The average positive response is less than 50 percent.) If you do not have a résumé of the candidate, you should send a pastoral questionnaire (Items G₁ and G₂, pp. 49, 55).

At this point you may wish to send informative material concerning the church and the community. A suggested list of information can be found on Item H (p. 71). The committee may decide to wait with this material until Step Four. It is advisable to fill out a form for each candidate so that you will always know where you are in the process of his candidacy (Item S, p. 109).

STEP THREE—The verification of responses

After you receive an affirmative response from a candidate, write immediately to notify him that you have received his

material. *Do not fail to write* to each of the references that he has given to you (Item I, p. 73). To the candidate who responded negatively, reply with a note of thanks.

STEP FOUR—The screening of possible candidates

After you have received all material concerning the candidates, review it in light of your pastoral profile. If a candidate is unacceptable, send him a letter immediately. Select several candidates who best fulfill your profile, then set up an appointment for an interview. If a candidate is close enough to visit, set up the appointment in some neutral place away from his city. If a candidate is a distance away, a conference phone call should be arranged.

A suggested procedure and list of questions is given on Item J (p. 79). If you have not given him the material concerning your church and committee in Step Two, be sure each candidate you interviewed has the material in his hands before your appointment with him.

STEP FIVE—The evaluation of the candidate

To more objectively evaluate the candidate, you may wish to use part of the Evaluation Worksheet as given in Item Q₁ (p. 97). If no candidates are acceptable, you will return to those candidates not yet interviewed in Step Four. If no names are left, you will return to Step One. If a candidate is unacceptable, please write him immediately of your decision. From those candidates whom you find acceptable, proceed to Step Six.

STEP SIX—The evaluation of the candidate's preaching performance

If at all possible you will want to visit each candidate in his church to hear him

preach. If this is prohibitive because of cost, you should ask for an audiotape or a videotape. Before traveling to a church, make sure your candidate is preaching. Try not to be conspicuous in the service, and do not announce the purpose of the visit to anyone in the congregation. If you have more than four people, do not sit together.

STEP SEVEN—The choice of several prime candidates

After you have evaluated their preaching style and ability and you have several potential candidates, or one candidate, proceed to Step Eight. (You may use Items Q₁₋₆ at this point. See pages 97—102.) Notify those candidates who are no longer potential candidates and would not be considered if the church rejects the prime candidate.

STEP EIGHT—The selection of one prime candidate

This is the most difficult step, especially if you have more than two candidates to consider. This is the point where the committee must rank each candidate and make its priority choice. (You may use Items Q₂ and Q₃ at this point. See pages 98, 99, 101, and 102.) The pastoral search committee should be unanimous on the candidate. If it happens that the committee members have not visited their number-one candidate in his church, they should do so now. It is imperative that the congregation be presented with one candidate. To present more than one at a time turns the process into a popularity contest. You are not hiring a preacher, you are calling a pastor/shepherd. Allow God's Holy Spirit to work in your people by making one choice at a time. To present two candidates will always divide

the congregation into "your candidate" and "my candidate." Set a date for the candidate to visit your church. A suggested schedule for a candidating visit is found in Item L (p. 87). Publish and present the material concerning the candidate to the congregation at least ten days before his scheduled visit.

STEP NINE—The church board's support and the pastor's remuneration/other benefits (Items K and N, pp. 83, 91)

If negotiations with the church and candidate concerning his remuneration, his benefits, and any other arrangements have not been completed, they should be agreed upon and put into writing at this point. A schedule for candidating should be set and agreed upon by the board. Other items that need to be considered are vacation time (schedule for years of service), continuing education, Sundays for ministry, conferences, and form of remuneration (Item T, p. 111).

STEP TEN—The congregational approval and call

A congregational meeting to vote on the call should be set for the week following the visit of the candidate. It is well to give the members at least a week to pray and think over their decision. Unless the voting is clearly defined in the constitution, you need to answer certain questions. Can absentee ballots be used? Does the church distinguish between voting members and nonvoting members (such as youth under eighteen)? Can constituents of long standing vote? What percentage of the vote is needed for the call? Should the vote be unanimous? Will there be a paper ballot? Can the congregation vote twice if the first ballot is close?

If the candidate is accepted, the committee has accomplished a great task, and it is finished. A telephone call should be made, and a formal call letter should be sent (Item M, p. 89). A letter should be sent to any candidate still being held as a possible candidate. If the church does not accept the candidate, return to Steps Seven and Eight. If you have no other candidates, return to Step One.

STEP ELEVEN—The completion of responsibilities

Upon a church's voting favorably and a candidate's accepting the call, two items of business are necessary:

1. Notify the state and national association (GARBC) concerning the calling of the pastor, present address, date of arrival, first Sunday in the pulpit, and the date of the installation service.
2. Make appropriate plans for the installation service (Item O, p. 93).

Conclusion

May the Lord give both your pastor and the people many years of exciting ministry together in your church and community. Please check over the letter list (Item P, p. 95) to assure that you have not failed to notify any potential candidate who may believe he is still being considered.