



A Candidate's Perspective - Principals of Pastoral Search

US/Canadian Protocol

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Little has been written about pastoral search from the candidate's perspective. Therefore, this paper will offer some insights and practical applications for individuals considering the prospect of applying for a pulpit in Metropolitan Community Church.

I especially want to thank the numerous clergy and MCC staff members who have helped in the preparation of this paper. In particular, I want to acknowledge Barb Crabtree and Leah Sloan; Rev. Elders Nancy Wilson and Diane Fisher and Mona West, as well as Margaret Walker, Joe Cobb, and Dwayne Johnson. I reached out to numerous clergy to gain their insights into the search process and combined that with my experience of over thirty-six years as clergy in MCC (which includes twenty years serving in denominational leadership mentoring both candidates and churches through the process.)

Throughout this paper I will refer to the Pastoral Search Committee as the PSC. This is generally the name of the team that will lead the pastoral search process in the local church.

Preparation for Pastoral Search

You must be MCC ordained or approved for MCC ordination to apply for a pulpit within MCC unless special advance arrangements have been made with the MCC Office of Church Life and Health. For more information on becoming MCC clergy go to <http://ofld.ufmcc.com>.

Secondly, you must decide to begin a pastoral search—a major step in anyone's spiritual journey. It is certainly desirable that before you actually begin sending out applications you will have done your due diligence. That is, you will have spent time both in prayer and with a spiritual director, mentor, counselor or colleague, intentionally exploring the important questions: *Why now? What gifts do I bring? What is God calling me to do?* Additionally, you will have addressed any unresolved issues from your last position(s). The importance of these preparatory processes cannot be overstated. Refer to the book, *The Competent Pastor: Skills and Self-Knowledge for Serving Well*, listed on the Resource List.

Third, you should consider what you are looking for in a church. This question must be approached seriously and in a spirit of deep reflection and honesty. All too often candidates say, "I want a larger church, a church that wants to grow and is healthy," when in truth, the speaker

has little or no experience in or understanding of the dynamics of a larger church, and does not possess the skills to evaluate whether or not a church is ready for growth.

Here is a partial list for reflection—consider journaling on each item and then discussing the results with your spiritual director or mentor:

1. What do you value most about pastoring?
2. Read the attached article, “Size Theory.” Assess candidly how your values, life experience, interest and skills “match up” with the needs and dynamics of differently-sized churches. [Failure to consider this match is one of the biggest and most frequent mistakes made in pastoral searches. Clergy who have great skills and experience in one size church feel they *should* move on to a larger church or take a smaller church, yet they lack the experience, knowledge and skills to be successful in the alternate setting.]
3. Where in life have you experienced your greatest success? How do you work best: alone or in groups; as a follower or a leader; within diverse or heterogeneous racial groups? Are you better: in an urban or a rural setting; with elderly or young people or mixed-age groups; at ministering personally to church members or at developing and empowering other leaders?
4. The culture in different parts of the country varies greatly. What regional cultures do you best understand and function well in? Are you open to and skilled in cross-cultural learning?
5. Where does your passion for learning and personal development lie? Is it in church growth, leadership development, leading innovative worship, leading a Bible study, offering more effective pastoral care, or doing theological reflection? How do these insights inform your search process?
6. What vision do you have for a church that you would like to pastor? Have you purposely experienced that kind of church? Have you intentionally studied what makes that kind of church successful? Do you have the God-given mix of gifts necessary to lead that kind of church? Do you understand the administrative needs? Do you have skills in those areas?
7. If you have a spouse, refer to *Beginning Ministry Together* (see the attached Resource List.) It contains an excellent article regarding issues pertaining to clergy spouses. Have you discussed with your spouse: where you might move; employment opportunities in other places; your spouse’s involvement with the church; creating support system(s) outside of the church; etc? Will your spouse have a say in whether or not you accept a call from a church? Have you discussed how the two of you will handle any disagreements?

The best indicator of future success is your past experience. This section could be titled, “Know Thyself.” Only in knowing yourself can you find the church that is the best match for you and them.

A successful pastoral search is finding the best match between church and pastor! It is essential that you and the leadership of the church have shared values, vision and purpose; that you are culturally compatible; that you are attuned with regard to leadership expectations and worship appreciation; and it is critical that you and the church be well-matched in all aspects and issues relating to church size theory. Ask yourself, “Is this a church/people/community I can relate to?” Of course, these considerations only scratch the surface of working to discover a good match, but

hopefully it will get you thinking. Finding the right church is considerably more complex than merely looking for your next job.

General Steps

- 1. Contact the MCC Office of Leadership**
2. Read the MCC Pastoral Search Protocol which is listed on the MCC Website listed under Resources, Local Churches. Understand the process that will guide many MCC pastoral search committees (PSC).
3. Pay close attention to the attached Sample Application. Some churches may use different versions or make modifications, but this will provide you with a good overview.
4. Select people to use as references. Ask them in advance if they are willing to act as references for you and determine their preference for the contact information you will be citing. Choose your references thoughtfully; opt for individuals who can best inform a PSC as to your gifts, talents and areas for the greatest growth. You might want to include someone you have supervised, a former board member or other lay leader, an Elder, and/or a senior pastor with whom you have worked.
5. Prepare a DVD of two sermons and/or church services for which you provided leadership. Alternately, establish a link to some of your sermons on a webpage that the PSC can access. Be sure to choose sermons that best reflect your general style of preaching. Watching these sermons can have a significant impact on the PSC. Be sure that the content and delivery of the message as well as the sound and visuals are all of high quality. If need be, engage the services of a professional editor to address any technical aspects of your recording.
6. Prepare a professional resume that includes a statement of purpose, values, list of strengths and interests, education, secular and church work experience, references, etc.
7. Prepare a cover letter or letter of interest to be sent to the PSC of any church you might be interested in. Be sure that the letter asks specifically for both an application and the PCS's timeline. It is important for you to know whether they are within days of reviewing applicants or still a few months away from that stage of the process.

Finding Available Pulpits

Most clergy will learn about available pulpits from the MCC Office of Church Life and Health and/or the MCC Office of Leadership Development, from a colleague, from the Available Pulpit listings on the MCC website or through direct, personal contact by a PSC or Elder regarding a specific vacancy.

Contact the MCC Office of Leadership Development and **fill out the Clergy Profile Form**. This will be used by the Elders and Pastoral Search Mentors to help match you with available pulpits. It has become a very useful way of identifying in a confidential way pastors who would like to explore possible pulpits.

Take the time to get to know the Elders; don't be afraid to send them your resume. Introduce yourself at conferences or other events. Help them to get to know your name and a little about yourself. They can be very helpful in the process.

More and more frequently PSCs are utilizing an executive search process for finding potentially well-matched candidates. Often the PCS will ask Elders and other clergy whom they hold in high regard to suggest names of persons they believe might "fit the bill." Therefore, if you are newly

ordained clergy, it will be important for you to establish a good working relationship with the Elders, the MCC Office of Leadership Development, your supervising pastor, and others.

There may be times when a PSC will contact you directly to invite you to apply for their pulpit. Generally this invitation comes because someone they respect has recommended your name; you should not interpret the contact as a sign that they know you or that you are already a leading candidate. What it does mean is that you have the opportunity to consider this opening and, if interested, to fill out the application and begin the process of discernment.

Interaction with the PSC

1. When you find an available pulpit that you feel interested in, send a confidential Letter of Interest to the chair of the PSC or to their mentor if listed as the contact person.
2. Some PSCs will provide you with a packet of information about the church along with the application; others will not. Keep in mind that you have the right to ask for more information about the church you are considering. To fully understand the dynamics of a local church you will need to obtain a considerable amount of information, but don't ask for more than you really need.

Examples of useful and/or necessary info:

- a. the timeline of the Pastoral Search Process
- b. the vision statement of the church; including, if applicable, goals for the next several years and steps the church has implemented/is implementing to reach those goals
- c. a list of their Core Values if they are up to date
- d. a clear statement of what the church is offering in terms of salary/housing allowance, relocation expenses and benefits
- e. copies of the church's year-end financial reports for the last three years
- f. current budget
- g. current bylaws
- h. copies of church's Annual Reports to the congregation for the last three years
- i. sample bulletins and newsletters
- j. an overview of the church's history including transitions, celebrations, accomplishments and failures
- k. a description of the church and its current ministries
- l. an assessment of the level of engagement of the membership: percentages participating in regular worship, outreach, special ministries, etc.
- m. a candid account of any recent or ongoing conflicts in the church and how such were/are being addressed

You will want to look for trends, which is why it is recommended that you ask for at least a three year history on some items. Is the church in decline or growing or on a plateau? How do the facts compare with what the PSC tells you? These are just some of the important things you will want to consider.

3. Be sure to visit the church's website. You can learn a lot about a church by what is and is not included in their online presence.
4. Inquire of the MCC Office of Church Life and Health whether the church in question had an Interim Pastor and/or if the work of the Interim was completed. If the answer to either part of your question is no, be aware that the church's eventual pastor may spend the first

12 to 18 months addressing interim issues and/or functioning as an unintentional interim. For more information on Interim Pastors consult the attached Resource List.

5. Once you receive the application complete it and send it in without delay. Some potential candidates retain their applications for so long that the PSC moves on in the process without them. Don't ask for an application unless and until you are ready to submit it.
6. Do not broadcast where you are applying; especially do not alert members or friends of the church where you are applying except, of course, for the PSC. If you let it be known beyond the PSC, you could jeopardize not only their process but the possibility of your being considered as a viable candidate.
7. Should your application be chosen to move forward to a phone interview, you will want to prepare yourself in three ways:
 1. prepare a quiet place for the call, make sure there will be no interruptions
 2. prepare spiritually; spend time with God before your call, trust that God is in this process
 3. put together a list of questions that you have for the PSC. This is a great opportunity to ask about the church's strengths and weaknesses, the role of the Board, etc. but do limit yourself to three or four questions. Many PSCs will hold two or more phone interviews if/when they feel additional information is necessary.
8. Many larger churches will bring in their top one or two candidates for a confidential, in-person interview solely with the PSC. They will pay all expenses. The congregation will not know with whom, when or where this interview will take place—you too must keep the interview confidential. Be sure to request in advance that you be allowed time during the interview to ask your own questions of the PCS. Accept the offer of such an interview only if you are very serious about feeling called to this church.
9. Clarify the intended relationship, if any, between the church and the most recent pastor. Will she still be living in the area? Will he still have a role in the local church? For a discussion of this very complicated issue read, "When the Departing Pastor Stays In Town," a chapter in the book *Beginning Ministry Together*, listed in the resources given below.
10. Should you be selected as the candidate to be presented to the church for election, be sure to share this with your current congregation before any broader public announcement is made. Ideally, you will have spoken with your current Board and/or Pastor(s) before you began submitting applications. It is appropriate to share with them your intentions in advance, confidentially of course, and to ask them to keep you in prayer as you seek God's will. Once you are selected as the candidate for the new church, that information will become "news" and the confidentiality aspects moot. It would be wise for you to be the one to share the news with your current church before they hear it through the grapevine. If you are currently pastoring an MCC consider the following steps to take place no more than three or four days before the congregational announcement.
 - a. Share confidentially with your Board of Directors
 - b. Share confidentially with your key leadership people
 - c. Share confidentially with your key support people
 - d. Announce to the congregation at the end of worship service(s) the same week
 - e. The same day, send out a letter to the membership explaining your reasons for leaving and the process you used in discerning your decision

No one wants to feel like they are the last to find out, nor do you want your leadership to be surprised by the announcement. You need them to help the congregation with concerns and questions. Keeping to a short timeline should minimize rumors.

11. Prior to candidating make sure that there have been some preliminary discussions with the Board of Directors (of the prospective new church) concerning a tentative contract. It is the Board and not the PSC who negotiates the contract.
12. Expect to be asked to complete forms giving permission for the PSC to complete criminal and financial background checks. [You can find Sample Contracts and a Pastoral Contract/Agreements Introduction on the Resources page of the MCC website under either Board of Director Training or the Pastoral Search Process.
13. Don't assume anything... ask, ask, ask!

The Candidating Week/end

If you are selected to be the candidate to come and meet the congregation and stand for election, be sure in your own heart that you have a genuine interest in pastoring this church. Do not accept the call to candidate unless you feel strongly that this church may be the right match for you.

Generally the candidating period is an extended weekend for a small church and a full week, including two weekends, for a large church.

The church should pay all reasonable costs for you and, if appropriate, your spouse, including airfare or mileage, hotel, and food allowance. Some churches will provide for a rental car.

Your spouse, if you have one, may be involved in all public and social events planned by the church; however, it is not appropriate for the spouse to attend staff meetings, meetings of the Board, and especially the congregational meeting. Of course, make an exception if your spouse is specifically invited to a social event with the Board or a specific ministry team meeting. If in doubt ask the chair of the PSC. Be sure that you and your spouse have time to explore housing options, employment opportunities, and schools if you have children.

General Principals

1. In MCC we have agreed to use a process where only one candidate is presented to the congregation for a vote. Should a church want to present more than one candidate, let the MCC Office of Church Life and Health know immediately, and simply do not participate. The PSC should be presenting the person they feel is best qualified to serve as pastor. If they cannot make that decision their work is not complete. We have found that presenting two candidates divides a congregation.
2. You may have sent out applications to more than one church. Should you become the candidate at any one of the churches and agree to go for a candidating time and stand for election, you must put all other searches on hold. You should be prepared at the end of the candidating time to let the church know if you will accept their call should the congregation vote to elect you.
3. Be aware of what percentage of the congregational meeting vote is needed to elect a new pastor. Most church bylaws require 75% or 85%. Also, be clear, in advance, of the vote outcome conditions under which you will accept the call. Will you accept the pastorate with only a 75% vote knowing that 25% voted against you? We have seen cases in which churches only required a majority vote and pastors actually accepted calls with only a 54% vote. Those pastorates were not long-lived. Be realistic; beginning a new pastorate without the support of almost half the congregation will likely result in unhappiness for you and the church.

4. Do not offer or agree to stay in someone's home during the candidating time. While this may seem like a simple gesture of goodwill, especially during challenging economic times, it can foster a perception of unfairness or favoritism. It is important that a newly elected pastor not seem obligated to a former host or family; it is equally vital that any individuals in the congregation not feel that they had greater access to the pastor or that he/she is "in their camp." And lastly, staying in someone's home eliminates any possibility of your having any real down time to completely relax during already intense days.
5. Make sure time has been set up for you to meet all key leaders, ministry teams and the entire Board. If this is a small church you will also want to meet with the matriarch/patriarch and her/his tight group. In larger churches you will also want to meet with the staff as a group and individually. Find out if you will inherit these staff members. Some clergy also set up a time for those in the congregation who would like to drop in for a brief 15 minute chat. Ask yourself if these are people you feel comfortable around and called to work with? You will want to ask each of them what they are looking for in a pastor.
6. As the visit is being planned with the PSC be sure that your needs are considered. At a minimum, these questions should be taken into account: Will you need a rental car? Is there time set aside for you to explore the community and look for housing, schools, or secular employment? Is there adequate allowance for you to rest and have the space for reflection and sermon preparation? Are there specific people or groups with which you want to meet?
7. Most PSCs will host a forum to introduce you to the congregation and allow time for some public questions and answers. The beginning and ending times should be clearly established beforehand. Some churches will want to include your spouse, but remember your spouse is not applying for this position. (For more information on the role and issues pertaining to the clergy spouse refer to the book *Beginning Ministry Together*, already mentioned as being in the Resource List below.)
8. Key questions to ask yourself:
 - Does what the PSC told you in advance match with what you are learning?
 - Does what you bring match with what they need?
 - Are there any key leaders not in attendance and why?
 - If there are missing key leaders, might it be possible to do a phone or Skype meeting with them?
9. You can expect to preach during worship and generally there will be some kind of reception to follow.
10. In many churches the congregational meeting and vote will follow the worship service. It is important that you and your spouse not attend the meeting. The congregation needs their time to make this important decision. In some cases the church will wait for a few days after you leave to hold the meeting. Just be clear ahead of time so you know exactly when to expect the chair of the PSC to notify you of the meeting's results.
11. Ideally, should the congregation vote to elect you and the vote meets your expectations, plan on giving your answer when the PSC chair calls. If you need more time, set a specific day and time with the chair of the PSC when you will give your answer. It is acceptable not to give an immediate response, but do not delay more than two days at the most.

Searching for a pulpit is a spiritual process. It takes prayer, reflection, honesty, discussion and asking hard questions of yourself, the church and God. Your search cannot be about ego, money or prestige. When the right match is made, you will know it deep within your soul.

Resource List

Beginning Ministry Together, The Alban Handbook for Clergy Transitions - Roy M. Oswald, James M. Heath, Ann W. Heath, The Alban Institute
An excellent book for pastors experiencing congregational transition, especially Part 3.

The Competent Pastor: Skills and Self-Knowledge for Serving Well - Ronald D. Sisk, The Alban Institute
Don't let the title scare you. This positive book will offer insights and tools for self reflection.

The Pastoral Search Journey - John Vonhof, The Alban Institute
The recommended book for Pastoral Search Committee's in the MCC Pastoral Search Protocol.

The Pastor's Start-Up Manual, Beginning a New Pastorate – Robert H. Ramey, Jr., The Alban Institute
A valuable resource for both new pastors and seasoned clergy moving to a new church.

Temporary Shepherds, The Alban Institute
The book explores the role, responsibilities and considerations of having an Intentional Interim Pastor.

Attachments

Church Size Theory – Rev. Elder Ken Martin

Sample Application



CHURCH SIZE THEORY

Reverend Elder Ken Martin

Church Size Theory begins with the simple observation that every aspect of a church's life changes according to its size. In order for a church to be healthy and grow—not just numerically but in its service to the larger community, its own infrastructure and the spiritual vitality of its members—the church's leaders, both professional and lay, must be aware of how church size affects the role of the pastor, the role of the board of directors, the style and content of worship, the amount and focus of programming, the adequacy of its facilities and the composition of its staff.

None of these is more important than the role of the pastor, which changes dramatically through the four size and culture categories used in Church Size Theory: the “family church” with average weekly attendance up to 50, the “pastor-centered church” from 50-150, the “program size church” 150-350, and the “corporate church” with average weekly attendance above 350.

Gary McIntosh, a respected pioneer in this new field, summarizes the changing role of the pastor by saying that the small church needs a “lover”; the medium size church needs an “administrator”; the large church needs a “leader”. Some pastors are able to and enjoy leading churches through the different size transitions and are able to adjust to the different demands made on them as the church grows. Others find themselves much more comfortable and competent in one or two size categories. Unfortunately, the different requirements of the different cultures that accompany size transitions are not well understood by the majority, and this causes frustration on the part of the pastor, dissatisfaction in the congregation, and may lead to an unhappy ending of the relationship between the two.

One of the great advantages of understanding the role of the pastor in terms of the congregation's size is that it allows the pastoral search process the opportunity to better match the needs and expectations of the church with the skills and interests of the pastor.

In a family church (up to 50), the pastor is usually part time or retired and functions as a chaplain. In a pastor-centered church (50-150), the pastor is the hub of the wheel. Everything centers around the pastor who coordinates all activities. By the time a church reaches program size (150-350), the pastor's primary emphases shift from interpersonal relationships to planning, recruiting, training, supervising and evaluating—from creating and nurturing personal relationships to creating and nurturing leaders who can sustain successful programs.

The pastors of a corporate churches (above 350), must be comfortable with no longer being available to the congregation in any of the traditional pastoral roles. They must focus narrowly on the activities where their influence will have the greatest impact: worship planning and sermon preparation, visioning, developing a high functioning staff and working with the governing board. Many experts say that up to 80% of the pastors' influence in corporate churches is in worship and so up to 80% of their time must be spent in worship preparation and

preaching! They must have the personal charisma and *gravitas* to hold the respect and trust of staff and lay leaders, inspire the loyalty of the congregation, embody the church's vision for the congregation and the larger community and generate and sustain the energy and momentum for the church constantly to be moving forward.

A pastoral search process prayerfully committed to finding the person rightly suited and skilled for the job goes a long way toward providing the church with the extended and stable pastorate needed in churches of all sizes.

Additional Resources

One Size Doesn't Fit All by Gary L. McIntosh
Fleming H. Revell

Size Transitions in Congregations by Beth Ann Gaede, editor
The Alban Institute



Sample Application

Dear (candidates name)

Thank you for your interest in (church name) and we look forward to reviewing your application.

After we review applications we will select our top candidates for phone interview. Once we select our top candidates we will request that they complete a Due Diligence Application which will ask for more personal information and information that is needed to complete the necessary background checks.

Please send your application to (insert name and address).

Sincerely,

(signature and typed name)

Chair, Pastoral Search Team on behalf of church name

1. Submit a Professional Resume

Include education, employment history, personal and professional references including contact information (at least 3 of each) and other information as you wish to share. Include a list of all MCC congregations you have been a member of or served in.

2. Submit a Worship Service DVD or Web Link

Include a bulletin or other pertinent information.

3. Personal Information

Name: _____

Present Address: _____

Home Phone: _____ Cell Phone: _____

Email Address _____

Spiritual Gifts

(1.) _____ (2.) _____ (3.) _____

Spouse's Name _____

What role if any does your spouse have in your ministry or in the church? Describe.

Children

(1.) _____ Age ____ (2.) _____ Age ____

Date of Availability: _____

I am: US Citizen? _____ Alien legally authorized to work in US? _____

In UFMCC, I am: ordained? Yes _____ No _____

4. Questions (Based in part on the book, *Pastoral Search Journey* by John Vonhof)
Feel free to attach additional pages as needed.

a. Thoughts about ministry

The areas of ministry I find most challenging are:

The areas of ministry I find most satisfying are:

The areas in which I most need to grow are:

Why are you open to a new call at this time?

b. Describe your thoughts about leadership

My style of leadership is

I hope my relationship to the board will be:

I hope my relationship to staff and ministry team leaders will be:

Developing and nurturing a vision means:

Involving others in lay ministry means:

I mentor others by:

I foster commitment and accountability by:

c. Describe your thoughts about administration

I think administration of the church's business is:

The board and ministry teams assist in the church's administration by:

d. Describe your thoughts about worship

The worship style I prefer is:

My preaching style is:

Lay participation in worship should include:

e. Describe your thoughts about education

Good children's and youth ministry includes:

Good adult education includes:

f. Describe your thoughts about discipleship

I think good discipleship means:

Discipleship training and involvement includes:

g. Describe your thoughts about doing justice ministry

Doing good justice ministry means:

I think being involved in justice ministry is:

h. Describe your thoughts about fellowship

Good church fellowship is:

Caring for one another means:

Hospital/home visits:

i. Attach a brief statement of faith.