

INTERVIEW HELPS

A. THE NEED FOR GUIDELINES

In your search for a new pastor you may decide to interview one or more persons. If so, it is wise to begin with the assumption that for each person interviewed, two distinct interviews actually take place. (The guest pastor is also interviewing you.) This fact points to a definite need for a common agenda. Since both the pastor and your call committee have natural private agendas, you may each be tuned in to different frequencies of concern and response. A common agenda or some basic guidelines for your discussion is very important to both parties in a wholesome, candid manner.

How can you develop such an agenda? Here are two ways:

1. Build an interview agenda based upon important information about yourselves as a congregation and about the visiting staff person.
 - a. The CONGREGATIONAL PROFILE should provide a careful, updated view of your membership and ministries.
 - b. The staff person's "biographical record" should assist you in pursuing any particulars about the staff person during the interview.

OR

2. Build an interview agenda with CONGREGATIONAL PROFILE and staff person's "biographical record" information, as noted above, but supplement this information with existing interview guidelines. The attachments to this section provide some helpful samples.

In summary, it is important to consciously build the interview agenda on substantiated information. Failure to do this may project a "good old days" description of the congregation. The prospective staff person may then base his/her response to your call on stereotyped impressions that bear little relation to the present or future of your parish.

B. SOME SUGGESTED "DO'S AND DON'TS"

1. Do begin with prayer. Don't feel pressured to undertake this responsibility without adequate support and assistance from the congregation in terms of their prayers for you.
2. Do plan and prepare your interview with sufficient lead time so that you can send to the prospective staff person a copy of your agenda concerns for his/her own preparation for the interview. (He/she may also wish to send you his/her agenda concerns in advance of the interview.) Don't enter the interview without this advance preparation. Otherwise the staff person may decide it isn't worth it and decline your invitation.
3. Do plan time for the guest staff person to present his/her agenda items. Don't bypass or soft-pedal his/her concerns. Such questions will tell much about the person himself/herself. Your responses will tell you much about yourselves.
4. Do plan for your church council/call committee and perhaps for other key leaders in the parish to do the interviewing. (Probably no more than 8-10 people.) Allow a minimum of two hours. After the interview you may want to have an informal social hour for all congregational members. Don't invite the entire congregation for the interview or duplicate the call committee/church council interview in a larger group setting.
5. Do allow the staff person to express any particular personal or family needs. (Example: For a number of understandable reasons the staff person may prefer a housing allowance rather than parsonage housing.) Don't bargain over salary proposals, housing, etc. Only the congregation has authority to set remuneration sums. Customarily that occurs at the call meeting.

6. Do expect that the interview will give you a good idea of the staff person's interest and availability. Don't press the staff person to answer the question as to what he/she would do with the call if you extended it. Don't even ask the question!!
7. Do expect God to do great things in these interviews! (Example: You may gain as much or more new insight into your own congregation as into the persons you've interviewed.) Don't become impatient in the process. Take the time you need. You'll need the time you take.
8. Do follow up each interview with a note to the staff person, updating him/her on the status of the interview process, the date of the congregational meeting (once the date is set) and thank him/her for his/her willingness to be interviewed. Don't leave him/her dangling with little or no information about your schedule and plans.
9. Do keep the congregation informed during the interview process (parish paper, Sunday bulletins, verbal announcements, etc.). Don't assume they know what you (church council/call committee) are doing, why, or when. Chances are good they need regular reminders.
10. REGARDING THE CALL ITSELF: Do make contact immediately with the Synod Office, if in the church council, call committee or congregation if there are serious questions or misgivings about the remuneration package, or about any staff person to whom the call may be extended, or, as in some instances, has been extended. Don't enter into private counsel or individual negotiations with the called staff person. The Synod staff can best assist you in these circumstances.

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following is a list of discussion points for your call committee and potential staff person. Use these suggested questions to build your own list of interview questions. These questions are general in nature and do not represent your congregation's unique interests or needs.

A. THE IMAGE OF THE MINISTRY

How do you conceive of the ministry of the congregation? What is your style of ministry?

What is the role of the laity in the ministry? How do you view the following: "The purpose of the staff, the lay leaders and the various organizations is to assist the laity to be the Church in worship, nurture, witness, and in service to the world."

From a review of the Congregational Profile (self-study), do you see areas of particular ministry needs?

How do you see the staff person and laity assisting each other, as a community of faith, for maximum use of abilities and resources in ministry?

What functions do you see the staff person assuming; the laity assuming?

Who (staff or church council) best makes what kind of decisions in providing leadership for the congregation?

B. THE PLACE OF WORSHIP IN THE CHURCH

What are your concepts of worship?

What is the chief function of the staff person in worship?

How do you view “innovations” relating to traditional worship?

What do you expect to happen through the sermon?

How can the laity help the staff person maintain a high level of sermon quality?

C. EVANGELISM

What is your concept of evangelism?

What is your vision for preparing children, youth, and adults for church membership? Do you see this as a staff responsibility?

Does the staff person feel qualified to train the laity for organized programs of evangelism “outreach” in the community or “inreach” to nominal members?

D. CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

What is the role of Christian Education in the parish program?

Do you see any special emphasis - areas or ages - for Christian Education?

Can you suggest fresh patterns that might be employed in our Christian Education program?

What are your views on training and supervising the teaching staff?

What is your curriculum practice and preference?

E. THE PLACE OF STAFF PERSON’S RESPONSIBILITY

How does the staff person assist the laity in the tasks of the Church?

What is the role of the staff in visitation, such as: to the elderly, shut-ins, and the sick; to persons in distress; to persons with marital problems; for social purposes; parsonage entertainment.

How much of the responsibility for visitation should be shared by trained groups of laity? Which areas should be the staff’s sole responsibility?

What are your concepts of premarital, pre-baptismal, and pre-confirmation counseling? General pastoral counseling?

What is the role of the staff and the laity at the time of death in the congregation?

What are your preferences regarding the staff teaching role in the congregation? Which classes?

F. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Do you as a staff person/church council, in your position of leadership, encourage and practice the principle that people tend to support ideas they have had the opportunity to formulate? How?

What is your view of establishing a congregational vision to focus attention on and participation in high priority programs and to measure progress?

How do you feel about an annual review and evaluation of pastoral, church council, and committee ministries, made between key laity and the staff?

How do you feel about a congregational self-study once every two or three years, including such items as: goal attainment, major ongoing ministries, areas of need, expectations of parishioners, etc.?

Would you support the establishment of goals by the council and committees with an annual evaluation of the goals?

What are your views on an annual council retreat?

What is your response to this statement? “In the context of congregational life, church members (including the leaders) quickly learn to avoid conflict and often seek peace at most any price.”

What is your response to this statement? “To lead you must let go. You must delegate responsibility.”

G. COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL ACTION

What is your concept of the staff's role in community betterment activities?

How do you speak on social issues?

What is the place of the staff in social action?

H. WIDER CHURCH INVOLVEMENT

What will be your role in the Conference, Synod, Region, and ELCA?

What are your thoughts about local, Synod, Region, and ELCA benevolences?

I. GENERAL

1. Would you desire a Mutual Ministry Committee to work with the staff in the parish? How would members be chosen?

A Mutual Ministry Committee is most often a small group of carefully chosen persons who relate to the pastor and the entire church staff. They meet periodically with the staff and with individual staff members, as requested, to talk over matters of mutual interest and concern. More specifically, this committee normally functions to develop harmonious interpersonal staff relationships and to offer their counsel in ironing out difficulties and conflicts that may arise.

2. What are your views about the role of the staff person's spouse.... in congregational life, in community affairs, in employment, etc.?
3. Are there any significant needs concerning the parsonage (if offered), its condition or use?
4. Should we consider the possibility of a housing allowance instead of a parsonage?
5. Is there any need or plan for a major or minor building (facility) program?
6. Are there congregational provisions for continuing education?
7. What other items would you wish to discuss? Any special potentials or problems in the parish?

The purpose of this extensive outline is to build an agenda for your interview/conversation. Carefully chosen questions will contribute to an effective discussion. Toward this end, it is suggested that the candidate staff person be given the question outline when you arrange the interview.

INTERVIEW GUIDELINES

Keep in mind that you are interviewing a candidate for a prospective call. Questions that you ask should therefore focus on the candidate's ability to perform that ministry. Questions that have nothing to do with the ability of a candidate to fulfill the requirements of the ministry are UNFAIR.

Subject: AGE

It is UNFAIR to ask questions that show discrimination against persons of a certain age when age has nothing to do with the person's ability to do the job.

Subject: FAMILY

It is FAIR to ask whether a candidate might have activities or commitments that would prevent him or her from meeting work requirements.

It is UNFAIR to inquire about a spouse, the spouse's employment, children, childcare arrangements, or dependents.

Subject: HANDICAPS

It is FAIR to ask whether a candidate has certain specified sensory, mental, or physical handicaps that relate reasonably to fitness to perform the job or whether the candidate has handicaps or other health problems that may affect work performance.

It is UNFAIR to "go fishing" with overly general questions that would tend to divulge handicaps or health questions that do not relate reasonably to fitness to perform the job.

Subject: MARITAL STATUS

For purposes of pre-call inquiry, there are no FAIR questions unless one can show that such questions reasonably relate to the candidate's ability to perform the job.

Subject: NATIONAL ORIGIN

It is FAIR to inquire about an applicant's ability to speak, read, and write foreign languages when such requirements are based on ministry requirements.

It is UNFAIR to inquire about an applicant's lineage, ancestry, national origin, or mother tongue. This includes the national origin of the applicant's spouse or parents.

Subject: RACE OR COLOR

What does this have to do with the candidate's ability to do ministry? There are no FAIR questions here.

OTHER SENSITIVE ISSUES

Remember the general rule: Unless it can be shown that you need the information because it is an actual qualification for ministry, don't ask the question! Each applicant has a right to be considered on the merits and according to standards that are being used on all the other candidates.