

PRE-CALL INTERVIEW FORMAT - SAMPLE

Some areas of concern and typical questions relating to them may be of benefit to you as you structure your interview process. The following statements or questions are meant to serve as thought starters in developing your interview format. Your statements or questions, of course, should be based on your own congregational situation and on the information about the candidates being interviewed.

CHRISTIAN WORSHIP AND PREACHING

When a change in pastors takes place, changes are also likely to take place in the worship practice of the congregation. The principle concern in the interview is for the committee to determine the candidate's attitudes and convictions about worship, preaching, and the liturgy.

Preaching, teaching, and leading worship are important aspects of the pastor's work. However, there is often a variety of attitudes concerning what constitutes a "good" sermon, a "good" Bible class, and "good" worship. Therefore, some issues to address with the pastor in this area might be:

- 1) Describe how you make decisions about worship.
- 2) Describe how you have introduced changes in the worship practice of your present congregation.
- 3) Describe your convictions about the importance of the liturgy and the Sacrament of the Altar and how you carry out these convictions.
- 4) Describe how you go about preparing your sermons.
- 5) Describe your satisfactions and disappointments in preparing and delivering sermons.
- 6) In preparing sermons, describe what use you make of the Bible, the church year, the Scripture lessons, personal experiences (your own or others), current events, contemporary issues in culture and society.
- 7) What is the average length of your sermons?
- 8) Describe how important you consider preaching to be in the life of the church.
- 9) Describe how you use guest preachers.

You should remember that the style and schedule of worship in the candidate's present congregation is not necessarily what he prefers or would choose, or would try to duplicate in another situation.

CHRISTIAN GROWTH

Your objective in this area is to discover what might happen if this candidate and your congregation undertake a spiritual journey together. You will be concerned here not only about the candidate's spiritual/devotional life, but also about the spiritual life, growth, and health of your congregation.

In discussing Christian education, your committee will be interested in some of the following elements in the candidate's responses: his level of creative energy, the range of resources he has used, his familiarity with various educational materials and curricula, his views on the training and involvement of lay people in various roles, and his level of direct personal involvement and competence in education.

Your committee will want to discuss all levels of congregational education as it now exists and as you hope it will develop, including Bible classes, Sunday school, confirmation instruction, youth programs, and topics for auxiliary organizations.

If you operate a Christian day school, your board of education or whoever is responsible for its operation undoubtedly will have a list of concerns relating to the school. Possible issues to address with the pastor might include:

- 1) Describe how you and your present congregation have grown in spiritual life, separately and together.
- 2) Describe how you view Christian education and its role in the life of the congregation.
- 3) Describe some of the resources you use to enhance the spiritual life of the congregation.
- 4) Describe what you expect adults and children to learn and retain through the congregational education program.
- 5) Describe some of your favorite tools and resources for Bible study, Sunday school, and catechism.
- 6) Describe what curriculum material you use and why.
- 7) Describe how you recruit, train, assist, support, and supervise a teaching staff.
- 8) Describe how you involve parents in the Christian education of children.
- 9) Describe how you teach people to pray.
- 10) Describe your experience with various traditions of spiritual life, for example, retreats, prayer disciplines, private confession, observance of church festivals, etc.
- 11) Describe what resources refresh you personally.

PASTORAL CARE

At all times but especially in time of personal crisis or transition—birth, death, marriage, divorce, vocational stress or change, physical or mental illness—parishioners look to the pastor for pastoral care. They want to know and be convinced that their pastor really cares about them, that he will be available in time of need, and that he will apply the resources of the Gospel to their need. Parishioners are also interested in knowing how the pastor deals with problem situations. It is appropriate to visit with the candidate about his response to specific situations. For example:

- 1) Describe what kinds of pastoral care and counseling congregational members can expect from you.
- 2) Describe how you visit your parishioners (hospital calls, nursing homes, homebound, other).
- 3) Describe how you prepare a couple for marriage (pre-marital counseling).
- 4) Describe how you address the issue of couples living together outside of marriage.
- 5) Describe how you handle unwed pregnancies.
- 6) Describe how you work with:
 - a) troubled teenagers
 - b) persons involved in abuse of alcohol or drugs
 - c) patient and family members in a terminal illness situation
- 7) Describe how you minister to those afflicted with bereavement.
- 8) Describe what you do about people who are non-members but come to you for pastoral care or counseling.
- 9) Describe how you deal with your own limitations in counseling.
- 10) Describe how you provide for pastoral care when you are not there (e.g. on your day off or during vacation).

PASTORAL LEADERSHIP

As the “overseer” of the congregation, a parish pastor faces a wide range of administrative responsibilities. In covering this area during an interview, you will want to keep your congregational situation in mind and concentrate on it rather than on the candidate’s present situation.

During this part of the interview, your committee may wish to ask the candidate to:

- 1) Describe how you relate to the staff, boards, committees, and other leadership groups in the congregation. How do you maintain a balance of power among the various groups of the congregation?
- 2) Describe how you handle conflict in the congregation.
- 3) Describe how you deal with staff changes.
- 4) Describe how you recruit and train volunteers.
- 5) Describe how the agenda is prepared for council and voters' meetings.

Many clues to the candidate's administrative skills will also emerge in the way he handles the correspondence and arrangements for the interview.

PERSONAL QUESTIONS

Many personal questions are illegal to ask during pre-employment discussions. In addition, you need to be guided by the principle: "Don't ask a question that you would not answer for yourself." You should not raise questions about the candidate's marital history, sexuality, personal financial matters, or past history of alcoholism or mental illness. If such matters are of concern to your committee, a means of dealing with them should be worked out before the interview with input from the district president and circuit visitor.

At the same time, a pastor is to some degree a public person so your congregation will naturally have some interest in the candidate as a person. An appropriate approach here might be to ask the candidate to:

- 1) Describe your goals for your own personal development.
- 2) Describe how you schedule and use your time off.
- 3) Tell us what books you are reading.
- 4) Describe what you do for fun.
- 5) Describe your likes and dislikes about the way your life and ministry have gone thus far.
- 6) Describe your appearance and dress while in the office, attending meetings, or making calls.

CONCLUSION

Finally, your committee may find it useful to conclude each interview by asking the candidate one final question—"Is there anything that we should know about you that we didn't ask?"

Although each interview will be personal and unique, it is to be hoped that there will be enough uniformity of process and content so that conclusions about each candidate interviewed can be arrived at and compared with fairness and accuracy.

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