



Baptist Churches
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

PASTORAL SEARCH GUIDELINES
FOR CHURCHES AND
PASTORS IN TRANSITION

INTRODUCTION

“The autonomous right of the local church to call its own pastor is undoubtedly both a source of strength and a most difficult issue for all congregational-type policies. Baptists have not escaped this problem. Many think that the settlement of pastors is the weakest spot in our organisation....It is therefore incumbent on us to work out some efficient and dignified method of finding the desired pastor and extending the call. Lack of a stable policy in this regard can create a condition unfair to the ministry, and hazardous for the churches.”

With this in mind we need to think and plan carefully so we are prepared when faced with finding a new pastor. We have strategically broken this process into a number of phases to help churches and pastors as they work their way through a new pastoral call.

PRELIMINARY PLANNING

Before any other decisions are contemplated the church should carefully consider whether appointing an external moderator to help facilitate the rest of the process would be helpful. See appendix 1 for more information.

Purpose

The purpose of all that is recommended in these guidelines is to prayerfully discover God's will for church and pastor. In spite of all the fact finding, interviews, questions and conditions it sometimes happens that there comes the indefinable but recognisable prompting of the Spirit that this is the person; this is the church. It is wise to heed such 'guidance' though it in no way diminishes the responsibility for diligence in following through the processes of settlement.

Planning in the Interim

When a pastoral position becomes vacant and there is no prospect for early settlement, the church leadership needs to plan and organise to sustain and grow the church's life and ministry.

Three areas that will require attention:

- 1 The pastoral search, coupled with evaluation of where the church 'is at', and the direction it wants to go. A church 'self appraisal' is very important.
- 2 The preaching and public ministry and arrangements for funerals, weddings, baptisms etc. Suitable arrangements should be made and information given to the congregation.
- 3 The pastoral care and oversight of people by the leadership and any existing care group, ensuring that information is passed on so that needs for pastoral, crisis and hospital visiting may be met. Regular visitation ministry needs to be maintained as a high priority.

Resources

While there are helpful resources outside the church to help in some of the above areas it will be good to identify and utilise resources within the church also.

When it is known that the pastorate is to become vacant, it is recommended that the church notify the Director of Ministries as a matter of courtesy and he will then notify the Church Consultants.

The Church Consultants

The Church Consultants have much to offer in resources and information and upon request, will consult with the local church and discuss the needs and future directions of the church, and within that context provide information that can be prayerfully considered by the local church. Sometimes it may be appropriate to have a church consultation and this is a matter for church discussion.

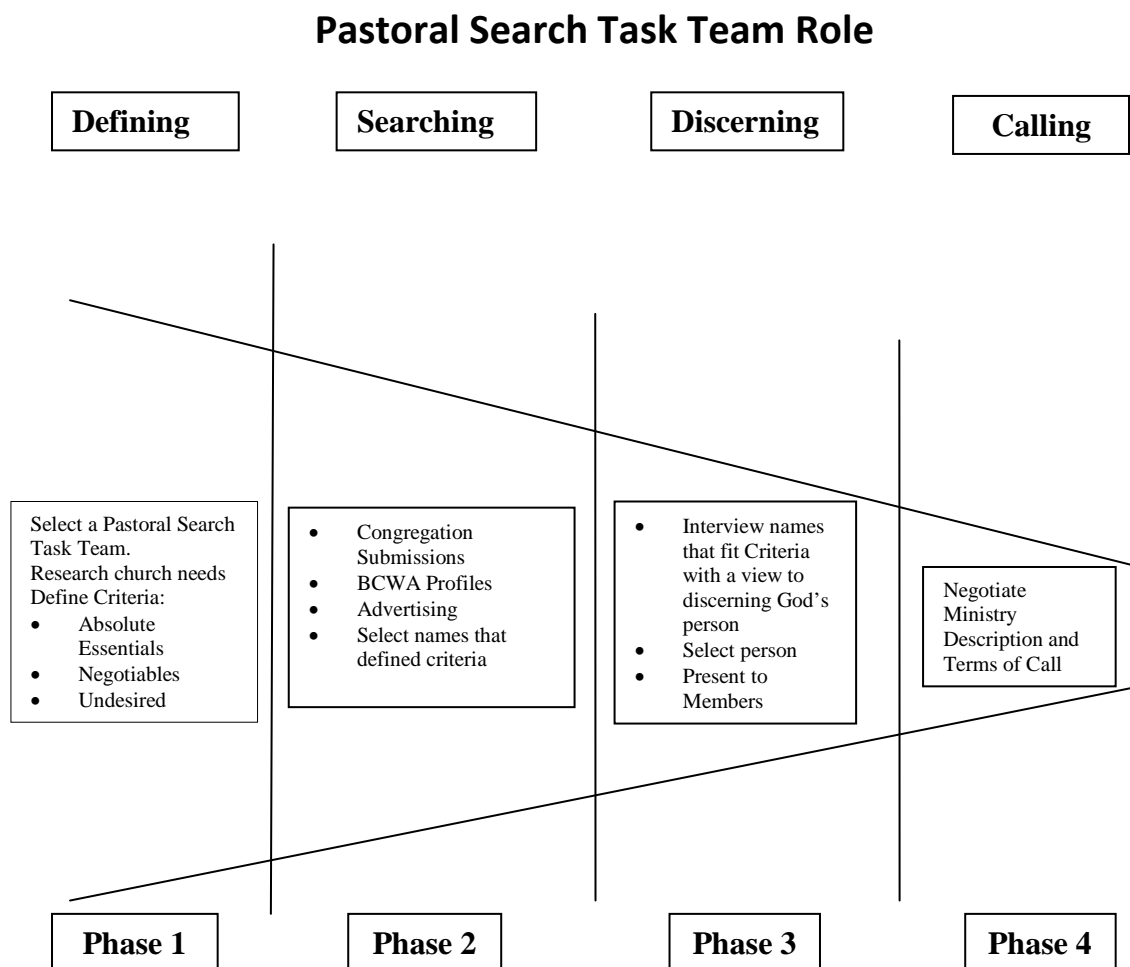
In working with the Church Consultants the church needs to recognised that the consultant is an 'advisory' person and not appointing anyone, therefore it is the responsibility of the church and/prospective pastor to prayerfully reach their own decision on who is the right person/church for ministry, and to that end to satisfy themselves that they have all possible information and have given full information to those involved in negotiation.

We strongly recommend the use of an external Moderator, especially where the church lacks resources to seek a pastor, has little or no experience in calling a pastor, has ceased to grow or is unhealthy.

STEPS TO TAKE

(See also Appendix 1 Churches and Moderators and Appendix 2 Interim Pastors)

When it is known that the church is to become vacant, and when the church is ready to prayerfully seek a new pastor, the church should take the following steps:



PHASE 1: DEFINING

In this phase the church sets up a Pastoral Search Task Team (PSTT) and researches the needs of the church in order to put together a list of characteristics necessary in a new pastor and also a draft of the terms and conditions of any potential call.

Establishing a Pastoral Search Task Team

- 1 Normally the Church Leadership will act as the Pastoral Search Task Team (PSTT). However some churches may choose to appoint a representative PSTT with preferably an external Moderator as chairman (See section on Moderator in appendix 1) or one of the local leadership group as Chairman of all meetings related to the pastorate. Where seeking to appoint an Associate Pastor or other staff member the Senior Pastor should always be a member of the PSTT and have significant influence. In order to avoid conflict of interest, the PSTT should not include the Pastor being replaced or any of their family members, Church Staff members and if possible, family members of Church Staff members. All discussions that take place within the PSTT should remain confidential to the members of that team.

Defining Criteria

- 2 The needs of the church, both immediate and future should be carefully assessed using appraisals. The local church may be best qualified to make this assessment, however, there are times when the local church may feel that this assessment would be more helpful when assistance is received from outside advisors and so call in a BCWA Church Consultant.
- 3 The appropriate pastoral leadership qualities should then be listed, and these, with the above assessment, should be communicated to members. Members need to agree to this analysis of the church and pastor's profile.
- 4 It is strongly advised that when researching the church's pastoral needs the PSTT compile a list defining 4-6 essential characteristics in a pastor, followed by a second list of negotiable characteristics and a third list of undesirable characteristics.

Broad Terms and Conditions

- 5 The PSTT, in consultation with the church leadership should agree to broad terms and conditions to be offered to a prospective pastor.

PHASE 2: SEARCHING

In this phase the PSTT develops a list of potential pastors and analyses them based on the outcomes of phase 1.

1. At this point the PSTT should develop a list of potential names by:
 - Taking suggestions from church members
 - Speaking with a BCWA Church Consultant
 - Consider advertising networks eg. Advocate / Christianjobs.com
 - If appropriate, consider existing staff members or church members.
2. Background information should be collected and carefully and prayerfully considered. Information may be collected by application forms, interviews or from Pastor Profiles held by BCWA.
3. All communications in Phase 2 should clearly state to potential candidates that a number of names are being considered for the position at this stage.

4. If the church is drawn to someone currently in ministry then contact should be made with that person to see if they are willing to consider a call. This can be done through the BCWA Church Consultant or through the PSTT or moderator.

When a person is currently in ministry, there should be no discussion of any names outside of the PSTT. Confidentiality is paramount throughout this process.

PHASE 3: DISCERNING

During this phase the church begins the process of discerning the specific person God is calling to pastor the church. This normally involves interviews with at least one person from the list developed in phase 2.

1. The PSTT should pray about these names and seek guidance toward a single name.
2. In Phase 3 it is important for a number of reasons that the prospective pastor and the church are aware that only one name is being dealt with at time and that negotiations with that one person be completed, whatever the outcome, before considering discussions with another person.
3. Upon a conviction of the PSTT concerning one name, an in-depth interview of the pastor by PSTT should take place. This interview will allow for subjects to be discussed and questions exchanged between the PSTT and prospective pastor and so give some confirmation as to whether the process should proceed.

The aim is to find a 'good fit' between church directions and pastors' skill set/spiritual qualities/gifts, passions, abilities, personality and experience.

This interview should be prayerfully prepared for and conducted with courtesy, consideration and frankness in the exchange of convictions and information. A frequent cause of the breakdown of pastor-church relationships is that of unexpressed expectations that were assumed, but not discussed or confirmed during negotiations.

4. In the case where, after an interview with the prospective pastor, the PSTT or the pastor decides not to proceed, such a decision should be immediately and graciously communicated to the other party.

PHASE 4: CALLING

During this phase the PSTT has discerned a potential pastor and in cooperation with that person develops a ministry description and negotiates conditions of employment prior to bringing the pastor's name to the church for approval

1. The PSTT and the candidate negotiate a Ministry Description outlining the specific responsibilities, accountability and authority of the pastor.
2. The PSTT and the candidate negotiate the Conditions of Employment
3. The PSTT takes the name to the members for approval
4. When a church issues a call it remains confidential until the pastor concerned officially accepts the call.

5. A public announcement should not be made until a time agreed to by the church and the incoming pastor. It is recommended that this occur as soon as possible after agreement to accept the call.

See: Guidelines for Pastor Search Task Team & Pastor Interview

APPENDIX 1

CHURCHES AND MODERATORS

When a Vacancy Occurs

When a church becomes aware of a prospective vacancy for a sole or senior pastor it is recommended that it notify the Director of Ministries as a matter of courtesy.

The church may then decide to work through the Church Health Consultant as a wise and convenient approach.

The Church Health Consultant will then, if requested, consult with the local church and discuss the needs and future directions of the church and, within that context provide information that can be prayerfully considered by the local church.

It can be helpful for the church to work through a Moderator.

The Church Health Consultant would be happy to suggest the names of suitable Moderators, or the church may make its own appointment. The Church Health Consultant should be notified of the church's appointment of a Moderator.

Church and Moderator Relationships

In appointing a Moderator the church should satisfy itself that such a person is an experienced pastor or lay leader and of sufficient Christian maturity to recognise the need for strict confidence in his/her dealings both with the church and with pastors whose names he/she might acquire.

Distance may be a factor for country churches and sometimes a neighbouring pastor may serve as Moderator.

The Moderator normally chairs all pastoral committee, elders/deacons and church meetings when the pastorate is under discussion. Where there is no interim pastor or associate pastor, or an experienced chairman in the leadership the Moderator may, by mutual arrangement, chair other meetings when the pastorate has become vacant. The Moderator may also be able to represent the interests of the pastor since sometimes the church's expectations may be unrealistic or unfair.

The Moderator may be involved in other pastoral and preaching responsibilities as mutually agreed.

The Moderator is a helpful resource person who can give impartial and objective chairmanship; help the church to clarify its needs in the selection of a new pastor; and to determine the direction the church wants to go in the future.

The church secretary and leadership should maintain good lines of communication with the Moderator in regard to meetings where his/her presence is desired, and for keeping the Moderator informed of progress toward settlement of the pastorate.

After acceptance by a pastor of a call to the pastorate, the Moderator may continue to serve until the induction of the incoming pastor.

Costs incurred by the Moderator in the course of his/her duties should be borne by the church.

APPENDIX 2

INTERIM PASTORS

Definition

When the church pastorate becomes vacant the church may decide that its best option is to call an Interim Pastor to serve the church while it waits for the appointment of a permanent pastor.

An Interim Pastor will normally be an accredited pastor. He/she will work under the supervision of the church leadership and should not be expected to take initiatives to do with the goals and ministry of the church without the direct invitation of the church leadership. He/she is not expected to be involved in the process of calling the new pastor.

Interim pastors are not expected to meet the same criteria which the church may have established for the appointment of a permanent pastor.

Role

The role of the interim pastor will vary according to the specific needs of the church. These needs will usually be identified by the church leadership, and could vary from preaching once or twice on a Sunday only, to taking the full responsibility for the pastoral needs of the church, covering all aspects of the life of the church on a full time basis.

These responsibilities should be set out in writing along with financial and other arrangements, and be fully understood and approved by all parties.

Uncertainty of the role of an interim pastor can lead to misunderstanding that could be detrimental to the longer term stability of the church.

If a moderator is appointed it is important that the responsibilities of the interim pastor and moderator be clearly defined and that there be good communication and cooperation between them.

Practical Suggestions

In seeking the services of an interim pastor it is helpful to consult with the Director of Ministries who will be aware of the availability of pastors for interim ministries. There can be some pitfalls in using a willing person who offers their services.

Some interim pastors are anxious to obtain a full time ministry in the church and will do interim ministry while waiting. It is important that in such cases it is made clear that the ministry being offered is purely interim and there can be no expectation that it may become a permanent call.

Should it happen that the interim pastor be considered by the church to be a possibility as a permanent pastor, he/she should be treated in exactly the same way as any other pastor being considered for the call. Being the interim pastor does not in any way mean that they may be the most likely permanent pastor. In fact it is rare that an interim pastor is even considered for the permanent position.

It is often found to be helpful to make interim appointments on a short term basis with provision for review and renewal. This retains flexibility for both the church and the interim in the event of circumstances of either party changing.

Advantages

Some interim ministries can prove to be vital to the long term health and spirit of the church that is served. There are some pastors who find being an interim pastor is both fulfilling and strategic in the life of the church.

Some advantages in having a suitable interim pastor are:

- It takes the pressure off the need to find a pastor really quickly.
- It gives continuity of preaching and relieves the leadership from having to search to fill the pulpit week by week.
- In these days vacancies can be lengthy and the interim pastor can help fill the leadership gap helping to stabilise the church and enable it to maintain its role in the wider community. He/she can also serve the congregation by the conducting of weddings and funerals.
- If there has been difficulty with the previous pastor or division the interim pastor can try to address that need and bring a ministry of reconciliation and healing.

The interim pastor can be a 'bridge' between pastors. It has been suggested that three kinds of congregations always need a trained interim:

- those who have just passed through exceptional crisis or conflict with their previous pastor,
- congregations which have just concluded a long pastorate, and
- large congregations with multiple arrangements.

Intentional Interim Ministry

Churches are encouraged to make use of pastors who have been approved for Intentional Interim Ministry. This is a structured approach to interim ministry, in which the church, with the guidance of the Intentional Interim pastor, works through a process arrived at preparing the church for the arrival of the next pastor. The Pastoral Services Department can recommend pastors who have been trained for this specialised ministry.