

9.5.2 PRE-CALL INTERVIEWS - FORMAT AND QUESTIONS

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) Regarding worship, tell us about a specific decision you made and why you felt that a change needed to be made.
- 3) Tell us about a significant change you made in a worship practice and how you introduced this change in your congregation.
- 4) Tell us about how you conduct Liturgy and the Sacrament of the Altar and why this is important to you to do so in this manner.
- 5) Tell us how you prepared your last sermon. Then follow up with questions as desired as illustrated in question #6 in the original document. Use of the Bible, the church year, Scripture lessons, personal and other experiences, current events, issues in culture and society.
- 6) Describe your satisfactions and disappointments in preparing and delivering sermons.
- 7) Give us an example of a challenging sermon that you have preached and/or one you felt was disappointing and the reasons why.
- 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. Ask for specific examples.
- 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. Why did you use these particular resources?
- 4) Describe what you expect adults and children to learn and retain through the congregational education program. What is your desired outcome of your education program?
- 5) Describe some of your favorite tools and resources for Bible study, Sunday school, and catechism.
- 6) Describe how you recruit, train, assist, support, and supervise a teaching staff. Give us a specific example of a person you trained and what you would do differently the next time.
- 7) Describe how you involve parents in the Christian education of children.
- 8) Describe how you teach people to pray.
- 9) Describe your experience with various traditions of spiritual life, for example, retreats, prayer disciplines, private confession, observance of church festivals, etc. to deepen the congregation's spiritual life?
- 10) Describe what resources refresh you personally.
- 11) What books are you currently reading?

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). What specific tools and resources do you use, and why?
- 4) Describe how you address the issue of couples living together outside of marriage.
- 5) Describe how you handle unwed pregnancies. Give us specific examples.
- 6) Describe how you work with: (Give us specific examples.)
 - a) troubled teenagers
 - b) persons involved in abuse of alcohol or drugs
 - c) patient and family members in a terminal illness situation
 - d) shut-ins
- 7) Describe how you minister to those afflicted with bereavement. Please give us an example of how you handled a specific incident.

- 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. What formal training do you have and when do you know you have reached your limits in providing 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) Tell us about your last staff, board, and committee meeting that you had and how you related to the members of the group. Ask about balance of power issues among the various groups
- 2) Tells us about a significant conflict in your congregation and the role you played in the resolution. Ask questions regarding the process used.
- 3) Tell us about the last time you had a staff change and your role in this change and how it affected you.
- 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) Tell us your goals for your own personal development and why you choose these goals.
- 2) Tell us how you schedule and use your time off from the congregation.
- 3) What are the last three books that you read and why you choose these books?
- 4) Tell us what you do for fun, relaxation and rejuvenation.
- 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.
- 7) What would you like to see in the congregation that you would like to serve?
- 8) Without saying the opposite of what you like to see in the congregation that you would like to serve; what do you not want to see?
- 9) What would like to see as the duties in the position to what you would like to be called?
- 10) Without saying the opposite of what you would like to see as the duties in the position to what you like to be called; what duties do you not want to see?
- 11) What would you like to see in the governing body (council) you would report to?

- 12) Without saying the opposite of what you would like to see in the governing body (council) you would report to; what do you not want to see?
- 13) What would describe as your strongest attributes?
- 14) Where do you feel you need to improve?
- 15) Is there anything about yourself that you feel that we should know that either we did not ask you or did not give you enough time to answer when we did ask you

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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