

# The Interview

## Preparing for the interview

1. Gather information about the position and situation for which you are interviewing.
  - a. Congregation size, make up, goals and vision for the next three to five years.
  - b. Organizational structure and financial picture, present giving, stewardship emphases, investments, endowments and indebtedness.
  - c. Church school statistics, ages involved, average attendance and curriculum being used.
  - d. Community outreach programs - AB Women and Men, youth groups, scouting programs.
  - e. Physical facilities, age, size, adequacy and condition of the buildings.
  - f. Denominational participation—regional and ecumenical involvement.
  - g. Recent problems—congregational split.
  - h. Community information, population, neighborhood structure, income levels and educational institutions.
  - i. Search committee members and their responsibilities in the church.
2. No one should enter into an interview without adequate preparation.
  - a. A real part of preparation is prayer. Seek God's guidance as you consider this position.
  - b. Review and reflect on your gifts, skills, strengths and weaknesses.
  - c. Be prepared to answer questions about your work style, leadership ability, etc.

## Interview setting

You do not have control over the setting for the interview. Interviews usually last no longer than two hours. You will want to be prepared to ask questions. Consult with the search committee chairperson about the process to be used.

## The actual interview

1. Confirm all the details for your interview in writing with the chairperson, date, time and location. Get exact directions
2. Be on time— if detained—call ahead and explain.
3. Dress appropriately—your appearance does send a message.
4. Let there be both light and life in the interview. Don't be too laid back as that gives the impression you are not interested—too casual indicates lack of excitement for ministry.
5. Be yourself, Honesty is always the best policy—it is to your advantage.

6. Establish rapport—address individuals by name—look directly at the person when responding to their question.

### **What will the search committee ask?**

The committee can ask anything it wishes. You cannot control the questions, but you can learn something about the committee and church. The committee might ask about your personal experience with God/Jesus Christ, call to ministry, and theology. What your vision is for the church, your leadership style and position on certain social and political issues.

1. What is your relationship to American Baptist Churches, your involvement in the wider Christian community and your professional life accomplishments?
2. Why are you seeking to relocate? What is your involvement in the life of your present community?
3. How does your spouse feel about ministry?
4. What are your spouse's employment plans and your children's thoughts about moving?
5. Your physical and financial health.
6. Listen intently to every question. Be sure you understand the question before responding— don't embellish—— keep to the subject.
7. Questions that appear to be controversial may require a polite question from you concerning the issue behind the question. This often reveals the real question being asked and will assist you in forming your response. Recognize inappropriate questions and be clear as to how you will respond.
8. Avoid answering hypothetical questions with hypothetical answers. Find a connection between what is being asked and what you have actually done. Give concrete illustrations from your own life or ministry indicating how you function—not how you think you might.

When preparing for your interview, compose some practice questions that you think the committee might ask. Have someone ask you the questions and listen to your answers. This exercise will help to clarify your thinking and provide an opportunity to refine your responses.

### **Gender equality**

Female and male should be asked the same types of questions.

What should you ask?

1. Ask questions that will give you a broad picture of the church:
  - a. Describe the relationship between the pastor and people of the congregation
  - b. What expectations does the church have of the pastor and the pastor of the church
  - c. Historically, what have been the ministry and mission of the church?

- d. What is the church's vision for the future?
  - e. How does the church function internally?
  - f. Where does the congregation stand on issues of theological awareness and its spiritual life?
2. The type of question you ask determines the type of answer you will receive:
- a. Be creative. Don't ask questions for which the answer is obvious. Avoid questions that can be answered with a simple "yes" or "no."
  - b. Be specific. Ask questions which elicit concrete answers. It is more important to know what the church has actually done than what the search committee thinks it might do.
  - c. Be simple. Avoid complex questions. Your questions should help the committee give you the information that you want.
  - d. Be sensitive—don't ask questions that put people on the defensive about their church.

### **Spouse attendance at interview**

There are no rules—only opinions—as to whether a spouse should be in attendance at the initial interview. You and your spouse will need to make that decision.

1. If your spouse has NOT been invited to the interview and you have made the decision to have him or her present, indicate this to the committee in advance. Do not surprise the committee by bringing your spouse without their knowledge.
2. If the search committee has included your spouse and your decision is to go alone, be sure to inform them in advance.
3. Remember, the interview is between you and the committee. Answer all questions unless they are specifically addressed to your spouse.
4. Expenses related to the interview are your responsibility. If the committee invites your spouse and family to join you at the interview, then they are responsible for your expenses.

### **Interviewing as a clergy couple**

A committee interviewing a couple is a very complex – interpersonal event. The way in which you function in the interview will reveal how you will function together in ministry. Since most committees do not start out looking for a clergy couple, you may need to help them visualize how it could look. Be prepared to present two or three scenarios. If possible, present a printed outline of how you—as a couple—function in the pastoral role.

### **Interviewing for a position other than senior pastor**

When interviewing for a position, other than a senior pastor, a search committee is not always required—the senior pastor will conduct the interview. If a search committee is used, the senior pastor may or may not be included.

Having a clear and definite understanding about the following issues will a benefit to you and the church.

1. Position description:
  - a. Programs that are your responsibility
    - i. What skills will be necessary
    - ii. Is there a budget for the various programs
    - iii. Goals – how will success be measured
  - b. Schedule – days and hours to be worked
2. What you need to know about the current structure
  - a. Size of staff
  - b. Frequency of staff meetings
  - c. Availability of a secretary
  - d. Working climate in the church
  - e. Future plans of the senior pastor
3. The compensation package:
  - a. What is included in addition to the cash salary
    - i. Housing, retirement, health insurance, vacation and continuing education allowance
4. Accountability
  - a. To whom do you report
    - i. Define the process of accountability

### **When to talk about money**

Prior to an interview, you should know the salary range being offered. This prevents embarrassment and possible anger later. It is generally agreed that salary discussions are not appropriate during the initial interview. Of course, if the committee brings it up then it is open for discussion.

### **Concluding the interview**

It is the committee's responsibility to watch the time and bring the session to an appropriate conclusion. If the committee has not provided the information, ask the following questions:

1. What are the next steps in the process?
2. When can you expect to hear from the committee?

### **After the interview**

Send thank you letters to the chairperson of the search committee—and to anyone who extended you hospitality. If you are no longer interested in the position, inform the search committee in writing immediately.