

## When your Church Seeks New Pastoral Leadership: Guide for the Search Committee

### First Steps

Meet with your area conference minister for orientation of the pastoral search process. The area conference minister will also introduce you to the Ministerial Leadership Information (MLI) form which is formal application for all potential candidates.

Clarify the task of your committee and list the expectations of committee member participation.

Plan a regular meeting schedule to keep the process moving.

Gather documents such as the job description, your Congregational Information Form, the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, and *The Shared understanding of Ministerial Leadership* which can be purchased here – [www.commonword.ca/go/1379](http://www.commonword.ca/go/1379) and [www.commonword.ca/go/1380](http://www.commonword.ca/go/1380). The latter booklet has a section on the calling and locating of pastors. Also obtain the resources found in the Ministerial Transitions Packet-search committee version at [www.commonword.ca/go/1384](http://www.commonword.ca/go/1384).

Keep the congregation informed of the work and activities of the search committee. Involve the congregation in prayer and in other ways as appropriate. (A timeline poster is available at [www.commonword.ca/go/1385](http://www.commonword.ca/go/1385).)

Invite members of the congregation to suggest names to the search committee.

All persons interested in applying for the position should be required to fill out an MLI even if they are members of the congregation. Some people will simply send a resume which isn't really helpful to the committee. Refer all inquiries back to your area conference minister. Names of pastors presently serving a congregation should be given to your area conference minister. The protocol is for your area conference minister to contact the person's area conference minister before contacting the pastor directly.

### The Committee is ready to consider candidates. How does it proceed with the "stage of exploration?"

Request candidate profiles from your area conference minister. These profiles include the Ministerial Leadership Information (MLI) form which gives you information on the potential candidate's background, education, employment and/or ministry history, their rating of themselves on 34 skills and gifts, a brief introduction to their theology, their spiritual life and their understanding of ministry. You will also receive a summary of four

of their references and the results of a background check of criminal history and sex offender history.

It is most helpful to your committee if you examine a MLI and references before interviewing a potential candidate and work on how you will conduct the interviews.

Identify the primary candidates you wish to consider as a search committee after reading the candidate profiles.

Note: During this exploration stage, it is acceptable, though sometimes hazardous, for the search committee to be in contact with several candidates. Proceed with openness in communication and with caution!

Call or have your area conference minister contact those potential candidate(s) to determine their interest and availability. Send candidate(s) your congregational profile.

Seek adequate references regarding the qualifications of the potential candidate(s). Consult with present area conference minister of the candidate(s) and others who can give trusted evaluations. It is recommended that you make personal calls to the references listed, in addition to reading the summary of references.

Determine which potential candidate(s) the search committee wishes to interview and invite them at the committee's expense. This first interview is not the time to introduce potential candidate(s) to the congregation.

In cases where geographical distance may limit the candidate to one visit to your community or where additional contact is desirable, an extended area conference call between your committee and candidate(s) is another option.

Carefully plan the interview process and agenda remembering that this is still the exploration stage. This is a key time to discuss job expectations and to assess the personal qualities which the candidate(s) would bring to this leadership role. (Note: the interview question guide in this packet.)

Continue to stay in touch with your area conference minister as you proceed, requesting help, counsel, and suggestions.

Keep the congregation informed of the committee's activity though not yet of a specific candidate's name. Even if the committee is not making good progress, it is important that the congregation know the search committee is working.

After the exploration interviews have taken place, the search committee should act unanimously, as much as possible in assessing the suitability of the potential candidates and in the selection of the primary candidate.

Keep candidate(s) informed about your processes and their current status.

**The search committee has selected one candidate. How does it proceed through the "stage of negotiation?"**

Inform your area conference minister that you have settled on one primary candidate. Since the area conference holds a pastor's credential, some wish to have the primary candidate interviewed by the Ministerial Committee.

Assemble all the available data and reports concerning the candidate. The search committee may wish to contact several additional references by phone regarding the candidate and their qualifications/suitability for ministry if it hasn't already done so.

Provide adequate written and verbal information to the church governing body regarding the candidate.

The governing body and the search committee jointly arrange for the candidate (and spouse) to visit and meet the congregation during which the following should occur:

- Meet with the governing body of the congregation and other key groups in the congregation.
- Provide opportunity for the candidate to make some public presentation, such as a sermon.
- Provide opportunity for all members of the congregation to personally meet the candidate informally.
- Provide opportunity for the candidate to raise questions regarding the church and whatever other concerns the candidate may have.
- Provide the candidate opportunity to assess the larger community and its assets.
- During this visit, the search committee must enter into specific negotiations regarding salary using the Pastoral Salary guidelines ([www.commonword.ca/go/1381](http://www.commonword.ca/go/1381)), benefits, reimbursements, housing, sabbatical policy, beginning date, length of initial term, moving expenses and anticipated procedures for decision. (It might help to follow the suggested covenant of understanding.) It may be helpful to have the area conference minister present. This is also the time for further clarification of job descriptions and role expectations.

The church governing body and the search committee jointly recommend the candidate to the congregation, both by a letter to all members and by public announcement with notification of a congregational meeting for decision.

Continue to keep the area conference minister informed of your progress and anticipated action.

The congregation votes to accept or reject the recommendation for pastoral leadership following congregational bylaws and procedures.

The candidate is informed promptly concerning the outcome of the vote. If the vote is positive, besides an immediate call, a formal written call to ministry will be sent to the candidate with specific details of the negotiated agreement or the proposed covenant of understanding.

The candidate responds in writing with a decision accepting or rejecting the call of the congregation.

### **Your candidate has accepted the call. Now what?**

Notify the congregation that the pastor-elect has accepted the call.

Notify the area conference minister that the call has been accepted.

Notify any other potential candidates you interviewed that the congregation has called a new pastor.

Offer appropriate assistance to the candidate-elect and family in the moving process.

Prepare church office. If there is a parsonage, prepare it for the arrival of the new pastor and family, checking with them regarding preferences in decorating.

Plan a joyful welcoming event for pastor and family.

Introduce the new pastor to your community and its community leadership.

Form a pastor-congregation relations committee to maintain ongoing and regular communication between the pastor and the congregation. (A packet with suggested guidelines is available here – [www.commonword.ca/go/1386](http://www.commonword.ca/go/1386).)

Make plans for a formal installation event, in consultation with the new pastor and the area conference minister.

Pray for welfare of this unique relationship and work positively to make it go well.