



REASONING BEHIND THE QUESTIONS!

How To Use: This paper is a companion to “*How To Approach A Pastor Search Committee*” by the same author at GodsGreenhouse.net.

Additional notes are provided below to help the reader understand why certain questions have been asked. An * in the question (see “*How To Approach A Pastor Search Committee*”) indicates further notes have been provided below. Please note the topics are arranged in a random order. This allows a constant shift of direction in the hope of uncovering different answers when the topic gets re-visited at a later time. One goal is to move the committee away from its “canned” answers to “reality” answers.

PASTOR SEARCH COMMITTEE MEMBERS*: If you are new to this, I suggest writing the members’ names in a clockwise manner so you always know whom you are addressing! People enjoy being called by their first name.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PASTOR SEARCH COMMITTEE MEMBERS*: Write down each member’s church responsibility. Some may do nothing at all! But they may talk like they know how to do everything. This list may also help you identify to whom you should address certain questions.

MY PERSONAL PURPOSE STATEMENT*: Every minister needs to develop a purpose statement to clarify for the committee that the minister genuinely knows what he wishes to accomplish!

MINISTRY GOAL*: These goals will vary widely within my readers. No one minister can be everything that a church needs. God designed you to be you. Above all, be honest in who you are! For example, if you advocate the traditional church service, you should not pretend to be a contemporary service enthusiast.

LAST FIVE YEARS EVALUATION – a five year comparison gives you a point of reference that is consistent in any question you ask. The committee should be able to furnish you with this type of history. Be wary if they refuse to share the data. Most committees think the best of their church. Therefore, they have a tendency to gloss over their problems. You need to identify their problems and determine if those problems are temporary or rooted. If the problems are rooted, then it is *unlikely* you will change the situation. Are you, therefore, able to *live with* the situation? A five year case study shows you what the church is actually doing rather than what the committee views as happening. Perceptions are not always reality!

- Identify a program/ministry which has been added in the past five years (including Sunday School classes)*. This is one of my favorite questions. Churches are like any other organization...they need to be reinvented every few years. Reinvention unleashes creativity, vision and keeps things moving forward. Perhaps the church does not want the change you wish to bring. Now is the time to identify this possible conflict! Past history is the best way to predict the future of a church. Remember: churches rarely change. The past continually repeats itself.
- Identify a program/ministry (including Sunday School, Wednesday, or weekly classes) which has been dropped in the last five years*. Most churches have a program they need to bury but lack the political will to do so. So the program dies a long, quiet death on its own. Such a program normally dies because of a lack of participation. Lack of participation arises from a lack of enthusiasm. It might be interesting to see what the church does not like to do!
- Identify a program/ministry you want to begin in the next five years*. I personally am known for expanding the church's training programs as well as designing new special services/events. I don't like to do the same thing all the time. I like to identify the visioning members of the committee, provide them an opportunity to share their ideas, and to see how the other members react. Sometimes I learn more about a church by getting the committee to argue among themselves!
- How do you measure progress as a church*? Identifying expectations is critical in a pastor search committee meeting. What is the church's target? If it is shooting at nothing, then it is hitting its target every time. Surveys indicate most churches are shooting at nothing. Hence, this question indicates whether the church's target is your target also.
- What is the average age of the church*? Most churches have no idea and can only guess. If they have no idea, ask them to take an average age survey before the next meeting using my survey at GodsGreenhouse.net. If the average age exceeds 60, the church has serious problems and it is unlikely the trend can be reversed. Such a church is unlikely to appeal to younger folk with children and to, therefore, reverse its downtrend. I suggest every church do an annual average age survey in order to identify the trend and to make adjustments before the church becomes too old. On the other hand, the church may be very young. In such a case, will your ministry be effective with the very young?
- What one word would currently describe your church*? "Stale" was the predominant word in one committee I met. Not one committee has ever used the word "exciting." Wonder if the gospel was exciting to blind Bartimaeus? Surveys indicate 80% of the churches in America are stagnant or declining in attendance. I have only met with one committee that could say they were in the other 20%.
- Is there a job description for the pastor*? This is critical. I was replaced by a pastor who inserted in the bulletin he did not wish to receive any telephone calls after 6 p.m. That shocked the church and led to some issues. Some churches want the pastor to attend every hospital surgery. Learn what you can!
- Is the Pastor expected to teach Sunday School or other classes outside the pulpit*? In our denomination the pastor is expected to have three messages per week: Sunday

morning, Sunday evening, and Wednesday evening. That's a lot of work! But some churches expect EVEN MORE! This specific question will help identify an extra load that you may not be able to carry.

- Does the pastor moderate the business meetings*? Some churches have an official moderator trained in parliamentary procedure. That is fine with me!
- Is the pastor an ex officio member of each committee*? Again, I am just looking for clues as to how the church actually functions versus what the committee says or I am used to. For example, what would happen if I showed up at the finance committee's meeting or the ladies' missionary meeting? I may not be wanted!
- What areas of the church require the pastor's attention*? This is one of several questions that will open the door to identifying the church's weaknesses from the vantage points of the committee members. It will be interesting to see if they agree!
- Ask the pastor search committee to outline the three greatest problems I will face*. This may be a way to enlist their help right now in addressing these issues. You may learn also that they don't consider themselves to be part of the solution. WOW! In such a case, you must then wonder who, if anyone, will be part of the solution.
- Vacation policy*: It is my experience the church will take as much energy as I give it. Hence, I need to take care of myself. Since I normally am a six or seven day a week pastor, I personally prefer the availability of three weeks vacation on day one of my pastorate. Some conventions have implemented that standard. ***Key: the church will not take care of your health! You must take care of your own health.***

OFFICE HOURS -

- Are office hours expected for the pastor? This was an issue with one church. I do my best sermon study at home where there are fewer interruptions. It may also be an issue with you. It is important to get this settled now. Note: there is a major difference between requiring office hours and requiring office contact.
- What does the secretary need from me*? This will vary from church to church. You may need to change your routine for the new church. Remember: the secretary funnels information into the rest of the church. You will need the secretary's cooperation and enthusiasm to motivate other church personnel. Use the secretary wisely!
- Who hires the staff? Who fires the staff*? If the pastor is responsible for the staff members but does not have authority to dismiss them, it will likely lead to problems. Make sure you read the bylaws and understand the church's organizational structure.

INTERNET/TECHNOLOGY - You are reading this article because of the internet. Some churches want an internet savvy pastor; other churches want nothing to do with the internet. I have problems, however, identifying how a church can reach its potential if it ignores this great tool for communication. The church website is also a great way to project the church image (post the website on your church sign and you will be surprised at how many outsiders visit the site). I issued a weekly internet mailing about future events to all of my on-line contacts. It was a great way to explain things to the entire church that could not be done in the bulletin.

WEDDING POLICY –

- What is the current policy on using the church facilities for a wedding*? Some traditional churches have a very tight policy regarding remarriage on the property.
- What restrictions exist on divorced/remarried members ministering in the church*? One church did not allow any remarried members to serve on a committee or teach in Sunday School. By contrast, another church had an unwritten policy that you had to be married at least twice before you could join! Just about everyone had been divorced and remarried!

FINANCES – Surveys show a financial crisis is on the doorstep of our churches. A disproportionate amount of giving is currently derived from the retired generation. The younger generations simply do not have the quality jobs that were enjoyed by the retired generation. Surveys indicate there will be a significant decline in giving as the older generation passes away. Due to my accounting background, I have a tendency to look closely at this area.

- Church debt* = Church debt is like a strait jacket. It limits the possible ministries of the church. Some pastors will need to scale back their dreams if the church has much debt; other pastors will be at home with such debt. Know thyself!
- Assets include the building and (vehicles, land elsewhere, possible cemetery)*? One church had potential exposure to a cemetery (including all of the upkeep). Another church had a vacant parsonage they could not give away or rent. One small church surprisingly had enormous cash reserves which would allow the hiring of additional staff, etc. You never know if you don't ask!
- Have the finances been recently audited*? Church embezzlements are on the rise. I will not accept a pastoral call unless an audit is first done. I want to be sure all of the money is there. The time for a criminal referral is before I come...not after!
- Request a church budget for personal review*. Show me how you spend your money and I will tell you what you really believe in. Some churches are top heavy with staff. Other churches won't even pay the custodian, because they want every available dollar sent to missionaries! The budget establishes priorities. Note: budgets are usually permanently fixed in concrete. Major changes are unlikely. Don't expect to make much of a difference in the budget. Second note: surveys show one mark of a troubled church is a 95-100% allocation of funds inwardly to the church rather than outwardly to missions/community.
- Fundraising policy*? Some churches are 100% against selling *anything* on the property including cookbooks, music cd's, etc. Other churches may have an on-site bookstore! You may encounter some old traditions that are like the laws of the Medes and Persians...they're permanent!
- Major financial outlays expected over the next five years (vans, roof, renovations)*: Committees often say, "we'll improve your salary as the church grows." But at the same time, they expect to spend any increase in offerings on other items! And the poor pastor's wife and children stay poor. Remember: committees don't usually connect all the dots...nor do they fully understand their church. They may be as honest as they can be, but it's unlikely all of their words are true.

- Salary breakdown*: Every pastor needs to understand tax law and be sure the proper amount is being sent to the IRS. One pastor friend thought the church was withholding his taxes, but the church expected him to go the estimated tax route. As a result, he ended up with a \$5,000 tax bill. Ouch! The Southern Baptist Convention provides a free minister's tax guide each year at guidestone.org. Note: most tax accountants are not trained in handling pastor's taxes due to their dual status as an employee and non-employee.
- Does the church pay into worker's compensation including the pastor*? In one church I was seriously injured in a church softball accident. Believe it or not, all of my medical expense was covered under workman's compensation, because it was a church sponsored activity and I was the church's representative! Many churches try to save pennies by eliminating worker's compensation. In so doing, they reveal how they actually feel about their most important employees.

OUTREACH MINISTRY:

- Does the church have an evangelism/outreach director*? Someone has to be in charge of outreach. Let's hope someone is already trained and doing the job! Unfortunately, not one of my pastorates had such a person when I arrived. That means I must do recruiting, training, etc. Needless to say, the first year can be fun!
 - One pastorate had 93,000 people within 7 miles of the church. It is my philosophy that we need to operate as if we are the *only* church within those 7 miles, because we are exactly that church for many people!
 - So I ask myself, "Does this church have that kind of outreach attitude?"
- Is any visitation or soul-winning training done*? Several questions in this area will identify whether the church is a missionary church or an inside the walls church. Most churches pay only lip service to the Great Commission of world evangelism. For example, my largest inherited budget included zero dollars for world evangelism. Also, not one of my pastorates began with a door-to-door evangelism program already in place. This question will give you insight into the true thinking of the church. James says, "Don't tell me what you believe; show me what you believe." Showing is much more accurate than telling!
- Who on the committee visits*? Let the excuses begin! You'll quickly find out if the committee walks the talk.
- How much money is budgeted for Outreach*? The State Evangelism Director reviewed our church budget and said, "*You know the church is in trouble when the budget for flowers is greater than the budget for outreach.*"

SENIOR ADULT MINISTRY – Take care of the seniors and they will likely take care of you! Some churches (especially in retirement communities) exist basically for the snowbirds from the North or the retired. That ministry will be much different than normal! The pastor must reset his expectations to be successful in that environment. Even the budget will have seasonal patterns!

- Is there a Senior Adult Director*? In future meetings it might be beneficial to meet with the various directors and hear their vision for that ministry.

- Describe your senior adult ministry*. My best experience in one pastorate was driving our Seniors to their annual retreat. My time with them was a blast!
- Does this ministry have an outreach component or is it strictly for the church members*? Again, this type of question opens the door for what is actually happening. Since I am strongly motivated by the Great Commission, I want to hear their answers!

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY –

- Is there a Children's Director*? Be sure to write down the name of each director. Look for a pattern. Does the same name appear over and over again?
- Is there a Children's Church on Sunday morning*? Some churches allow the children to have their own worship experience. There are pro's and con's to such a service. Other churches have a children's time with the pastor in the main worship service and keep the children in the auditorium. Are you in agreement with their practice?
- Is the nursery appropriate for my own children*? Look at the nursery closely when you tour the facilities. The nursery and rest rooms should be the best rooms in the church. They send signals to visitors like no other rooms!
- Does the church do a criminal background check on children's workers*? This became a big issue with one deacon chairman who was 100% against a background check; his opposition created lots of problems. Church lawsuits are on the rise, because churches (you don't have to be guilty to be sued) are very vulnerable in this area. Background checks are inexpensive. You could even advertise that your church does background checks, because you love your children! That will steer away the predators and steer concerned parents in your direction!
- Who directs VBS*? It is possible the church expects the pastor to direct the VBS. If that is so, it needs to be established now. I want to know what kind of work load is expected before I say yes! After all, I may not be able to do everything they expect. Part of pastoring includes *surviving* the work, too.

YOUTH MINISTRY –

- Is there a Youth Director*? Get the name! Is that person on the committee? If yes, let that person talk freely in this section. Learn all you can about the director's philosophy and dedication to the youth. Listen closely for suggestions the youth director may be too old for the youth or perhaps not have enough time.
- Outline the monthly youth calendar*. Show me how you spend your time and I will know what kind of person you are. A good youth program requires activities. It also reveals whether the youth have considerable support from the adults since adults are necessary for sponsoring the activities!
- How are the youth involved in the main worship services*? Many churches allow the youth to direct/organize one service per month/quarter. Instead of the youth worshipping with the adults, the adults worship with the youth. I encountered opposition in one church from senior deacons who were totally opposed to the youth ladies saying a single word. Hence, the youth backed away from participating in the main worship service.

- Do the youth work in Vacation Bible School*? One church was so weak it could not have a VBS without youth involvement. Other churches want the youth to be taught! Still other churches have a VBS for only the youth, then allow the youth to work in a second VBS for the younger ages.
- In what other ministries do the youth participate*? Door-to-door visitation, mission work, a monthly nursing home service, puppet ministry...there are many possibilities. Be sure to check out the condition of the youth classrooms, too! Look closely to see if the adults are backing the youth with real dollars or just a pat on the back.

CONSTITUTION* – No church follows its rules 100% of the time. Most churches, including the leadership, don't even know everything that is in the Constitution. It may be wise to recruit two senior leaders to review the constitution and report back regarding those church practices which vary from the written policy.

YOUNG ADULTS –

- What do you currently have that appeals to the 20 – 45 age group*? This question always generates discussion among the committee members.

ASSIMILATION INFORMATION -

- Do you have an Assimilation Director*? I have written extensively on the subject of Assimilation. Please download my guide at GodsGreenhouse.net.
- How do you obtain information from the visitors as to their address/telephone/spiritual needs*? Use this question to determine if there is a process already in place and what happens to the information.
- Any additional follow up contact*? Is there a process already in place? If yes, praise the Lord!
- Is there a list of ministries available*? In a church that averaged 120 for worship, we identified 332 different ministry slots. Such a list is a great tool for mapping new members to a quick ministry.
- How do you assimilate new members*? The biblical goal is to turn every member into a capable minister. Effective assimilation, therefore, must be to a ministry. The Rick Warren baseball diamond plan identified in *The Purpose Driven Church* is one such process.

MID-WEEK SERVICE *- What is their expectation? Does it match your expectation?

MISSION/PURPOSE STATEMENT -

- Can anyone recite the church's Mission Statement*? I like these statements, because they help focus the staff's energy. Most churches fail in their basic purpose. For better understanding see my paper titled "How To Measure My Church's Effectiveness" at GodsGreenhouse.net. It is one of the most important papers I have written.
- What translations do the committee members use in their personal Bible Study*? I personally use seven translations in my sermon preparation to help me get the fullest

- sense of a passage. I like to know which translations work well with the committee members.
- Is there a recommended translation for use in the church services or classes*? The best-selling translation for many years has been the New International Version. But the traditional King James Version is still in the top five. It is best to determine if the church will accept your preferred translation for preaching.
 - What is the doctrinal persuasion of the church and can I agree with it*? Amos 3:3 asks, “Can two walk together except they be in agreement?” Very few churches change doctrinally; don’t make the mistake of thinking you can change the church’s doctrinal beliefs. It is usually best to wait for a church which agrees theologically with your views.
 - What type of specialized discipleship studies has the church done in the last three years*? For better understanding see my paper titled “How To Measure My Church’s Effectiveness” at GodsGreenhouse.net.

GENERAL QUESTIONS:

- What distinguishes this church from other churches in this area*? McDonald’s is distinguished from its “competition” by its menu. What distinguishes this church from the other nearby churches? That question will get the committee to think!
- Does the church provide any leadership Training/Manuals*? Most church leaders have little to no training in what the church should accomplish or their ministry should accomplish. My purpose is to grow those who wish to grow!
- Define the culture of the church*. Calvin Whittman writes, “The power of culture should never be underestimated. Every church, to some degree, reflects the culture in which it is located. Oftentimes the personalities which comprise the search committee will reflect the culture of the church. Ask as many questions as necessary to determine the culture of the church.” Quite honestly, your personal culture may not match the church’s culture and its level of expectations.

WOMEN’S MINISTRY –

- Is there a Women’s Ministry Director? Most churches would close their doors if our women stopped doing the work. Your success in any church will depend to a large extent upon the capability of the women.
- What women’s ministries exist*? Since women usually work harder than men, it is wise to identify which ministry receives their greatest effort.
- Do the women conduct an annual service for the church*? Some pastors are not comfortable with women conducting even a small part of any service. What is your own comfort zone in this area?

WORLD MISSIONS -

- How does the church conduct its world missions program*? Jesus said, “As the Father sent me, so send I you!” Highland Park Baptist Church (where I received my college training) gave 50% of its income to world missions. Some churches give a tithe or 10% of their income. One Colorado church said, “Tithe your 10% this way:

give 5% to the church and 5% to a world mission of your own choice.” Other churches follow a process called Faith Promise and have their members pledge an amount to be given throughout the church year. It is important that you recognize the church’s process.

RACE RELATIONS *- Race relations is still a touchy subject in some areas. This will hopefully be the easiest part of your discussion!

ORDINANCES* - Most churches practice two ordinances; however, some add footwashing as an ordinance. There is also great variety in the practice of the ordinances. Once again, be sure that you can live with how the church observes the ordinances. It is very unlikely you will change their view!

SPECIAL SERVICES:

- Review the church calendar for the last twelve months as to their annual events*. This discussion helps me determine the activity/participation level of the membership. Certain events require great effort. Healthy churches are able to derive great effort from their membership.

DEACONS – Every church has a ruling body within the overall body. It may be a church council, leaders such as deacons/elders, or a strong family. Is the Pastor Search Committee representative of that ruling body? It is possible the Pastor Search Committee is trying to do a reversal of the ruling body. These questions have been selected as if the deacons represent the ruling body; therefore, the pastor must work closely with the deacons in order to have success. It is true that some deacons could best be described as demons; however, I have been blessed with some wonderful deacons who became my best friends in all of life.

- Are any of the deacons divorced/remarried*? This may be a big issue for you. One nearby church recently rejected a pastor candidate because it disagreed with his policy in this area. You may as well find out now!
- Does all church business pass through the deacons*? If yes, you now know not to crawl out on a limb by yourself!
- What are the ages of the deacons*? An older group usually implies a conservative, “don’t-rock-the-boat” group. It can also suggest a resistance to younger deacons since younger deacons have new ideas. A younger group usually implies, “Let’s change the world.”

TESTIMONY/PRAISE REPORT POLICY:

- Does the church allow members to share a personal testimony, praise report, or prayer request*? Can you agree with the church’s policy?

CHURCH BUSINESS:

- Is this church ruled by congregational vote, church council, pastor only, deacons only, or a combination of the above*? It is possible the church may operate in a much

different way than you are accustomed. If so, you need to be very careful in your first twelve months. Every church has a city hall. Successful pastors find a way to operate within the confinements of city hall to get the work done. But you have to first figure out how that city hall operates.

CONCLUSION DOCUMENTATION: Have you learned anything? I hope so! I thoroughly enjoy meeting with Pastor Search Committees because it gives me opportunity to, first, review my own ministry and, second, to learn new processes for doing God's work. This review helps me determine if I am accomplishing what I set out to accomplish...or have I somehow become sidetracked.

Dr. Calvin Whittman's advice is also worth considering. "Finally, to make sure there is mutual understanding, get things in writing. Before you go in view of a call, **write down everything you thought was agreed upon and put it in a 'memo of understanding.'** Send it back to the search committee and ask them to change anything they understood to be different and then to sign the final copy and return it to you. Since lay leadership will change during your tenure, it is always good to have a written understanding of what was agreed to when you were called. *Remember, the time to ask questions is before you go.*"

I encourage you to carefully think through the Conclusion process. It is indeed a process! What have you seen that you like or dislike? Will your preliminary decision hold up under further review? And, above all, will you have peace when you reach your final decision?

May God make His path plain...and may you have the faith to walk therein!