

CALLING
A
NEW
PASTOR



in the
West Virginia Region
of the
Christian Church
(Disciples of Christ)

***A Prayer for a Congregation
That is Searching for
A Minister***

(This prayer was created by the Regional Minister for those searching for a pastor in West Virginia. It is influenced greatly by personal prayer and a prayer for such occasion that is found in the *Book of Common Prayer*.)

Almighty and Gracious God, Giver of every good gift; look with favor upon your Church and upon those who are charged with discerning who it is, who is to be, the next minister for this congregation of your beloved and holy people. Help us, Dear God, so that we might find and be sent a loving and faithful pastor who will love and care for your flock and equip us for the ministries that you are calling us to do and to be about. Be with our search committee, our congregation, our regional minister and all those who are watching and waiting for the one who is to come. Keep us faithful to the process and keep us near to you in these days we humbly pray.

Bless us in this time of new life and grant us your presence, your peace and a deep and abiding trust in you, in your church, and in ourselves as this time of life unfolds.

In the name of Jesus Christ we offer this prayer. Amen

**Calling a New Pastor
in the
West Virginia Region of the
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)**

Pray.

As you undertake this most important task in the life of the congregation pray regularly. Pray privately and in committee. Ask God to grant the committee the wisdom, patience, energy, insight, creativity, and all the attributes necessary to undertake the search well. Ask the congregation to be at prayer for the work of the committee both in their private devotions and in services of worship.

Preliminary Activities

1. When the Pastor resigns.

The Moderator or Board Chairperson should contact the Regional Minister immediately.

The Regional Minister will arrange to meet with the board or, preferably, the congregation as soon as possible to discuss the procedures related to the interim time and the calling of a new pastor. This will usually be in the context of morning worship when possible.

2. Appoint a Representative Search Committee.

The constitution of the congregation may state the required make-up of the committee.

If this is not the case the general procedure is for the Chairperson or Moderator to appoint a representative committee (including men and women, people of various age ranges, and members of different groups within the congregation). A small committee of five to seven members is better able to hold meetings on short notice and maintain the confidentiality that is necessary for the process.

3. *Meeting with the Regional Minister.*

The Search Committee will meet with the Regional Minister at its first meeting.

4. *Secure an Interim Minister*

If the constitution outlines a process for securing an interim minister this should be followed. If not, the Moderator or Chairperson should establish a procedure with the concurrence of the Board. The Regional Minister will provide the names of possible candidates for interim ministries.

5. *Develop a Congregational Inventory*

The first task of the Search Committee will be to develop a profile of the congregation which will include a description of the congregation, the community, the financial situation of the church, the nature of its ministry, the desired characteristics in a new pastor. A form is available to assist in this process.

The Exploratory Phase

6. *Search Committee Secures Names*

When the congregational profile has been completed and filed in the Regional Office, the Regional Minister will supply names from the Search and Call files of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Any names secured from outside the Search and Call files should be given to the Regional Minister in order to check references. This may well allay problems later in the process.

7. *Gather Information.*

The Committee should gather as much information as possible on candidates it might desire to consider further. The Regional Minister can assist in this process by securing references and checking on previous employment records. The Committee should be very diligent in checking the references provided by candidates.

Some Guiding Principals:

Do not rush and do not let a candidate rush you. If the candidate does this, there are some serious questions to be asked. Likewise, if the Committee becomes over-bearing, the candidate may well become uncomfortable.

Please model hospitality, generosity, and grace throughout the process. If we invite a candidate to visit, then all of their expenses should be covered. Remember that the candidates are interviewing us as much as we are interviewing them. Let them find hospitality and generosity in our midst.

The Search Committee should be unanimous in its recommendation to the Board.

The Board should be unanimous in its recommendation to the congregation.

Despite what the constitution may say, it is highly advantageous if the candidate has at least a 90% positive vote by the congregation. The less unanimity before the vote, the harder it will be to function after he or she arrives.

Every step of this process should be undertaken in strictest confidence. The reputation of each minister considered and the peace of the church depend on this confidentiality.

In all things observe confidentiality.

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18. Celebrate.

Plan to have the Regional Minister come to install the new pastor. You will probably want to have representatives from the wider community and members of the pastor's family on hand to join in the celebration. A church dinner or reception will add to the festive atmosphere.

19. Pastoral Relations Committee.

Establish an effective Pastoral Relations Committee at the very beginning of the pastorate. Some congregations have policy provision in place for the Pastoral Relations Committee, others will have to devise them. The Regional Church Office has guidelines for Pastor Relations Committees.

20. PRAY.

Undergird your new minister and all of the ministries of the church with prayer. Do not look back. Anticipate the future aware that God leads us forth into each new day.

8. The Committee Narrows the Field.

After gathering sufficient information on possible candidates, the committee determines which two or three will be its top choices. It assigns a priority to these and then contacts them in that order asking if the minister would like to become a candidate for the position.

This part of the process will include conversations with various possible candidates. **It should be made very clear to all concerned at this stage that any contact with the possible candidate is strictly exploratory.** Only the Chairperson of the Search Committee should be in conversation with any possible candidate at every stage of the process. Any other contact generally causes confusion.

If the Committee chooses to meet in person with a possible candidate at this exploratory stage, it should be done in strict confidence. This is to protect the possible candidate's confidentiality and to prevent members of the congregation from forming premature judgments regarding individuals who might later become candidates.

Video-tapes, audio-tapes, telephone conversations with the whole Search Committee using a speakerphone, and other such media can be immensely helpful in getting to know the style of a particular candidate.

9. Rank Ordering the Potential Candidates.

The Committee should rank order the people it would be interested in calling as pastor for the congregation. No person should be included on this list who does not have the unanimous support of the Committee.

When the top contenders have emerged, **contact the Regional Minister, before contacting any candidate,** to see if there is any last minute information that should be made available to the Search Committee.

The Negotiating Phase

10. *Contact the Candidate.*

When a satisfactory candidate is found, this may well not be the first or second person you contact, invite her or him to visit with the Committee for an interview and to proceed with the negotiation which will precede a call. **It should be made very clear that you are now desirous of negotiating with this person.** This visit should include an extensive interview which will enable the candidate and the Committee to get to know each other very well. It should then proceed to cover the terms of calling including salary, housing, benefits, vacation and study leave, assembly, continuing education, and travel allowances. It is important that the spouse of a married person be involved at this stage.

11. *Meeting the Congregation.*

When all of these arrangements are satisfactorily completed, the candidate should be invited to meet the congregation. This meeting may well be in the context of a fellowship dinner where members of the congregation will have the opportunity to engage the candidate in dialogue.

12. *The Minister's Intention.*

After this meeting the minister should indicate whether or not he or she wishes to remain a candidate for the position. This should be considered a firm commitment by the minister that if the congregation approves he or she will accept the pastorate.

13. *Board and Congregational Actions.*

Following this visit the Committee decides whether or not to recommend the candidate to the Board. This should be a unanimous vote. If the Committee forwards the name to the Board, the Board then votes on whether or not to send it to the congregation. This vote should be unanimous. Despite what many constitutions say the vote should be 100% before forwarding the name to the

congregation. If the Board forwards the name to the congregation, the congregation should also endorse the candidate by a very substantial majority.

14. *Notify the Candidate.*

Whatever the result of the congregation's vote, the candidate should be informed immediately by phone and by letter. If the vote is one of approval, the Letter of Calling incorporating all of the previously agreed upon terms should be mailed for the signature. If the Board or congregation alter the terms of the call these will have to be renegotiated with the minister and included in the Letter of Calling.

15. *Acceptance by the Candidate.*

The candidate notifies the congregation of her or his acceptance and returns the signed Letter of Calling.

Receiving Your New Minister

16. *Planning for the Arrival*

Plans may now be made for the arrival of the new pastor including the readying of the parsonage and pastor's study (the pastor should be consulted if any redecorating is planned). Plans for the installation should be made with Regional Minister. The call should be publicized through the local media.

17. *Welcome the New Pastor.*

Include the family in these plans. You will probably want to hold a reception on his or her first Sunday. The first days of the pastorate may include different members' entertaining or providing casseroles, and various opportunities for people from all segments of church life to welcome and get to know their new pastor. Find ways to emphasize that this is the pastor of the whole congregation, not just the Search Committee, nor the Board, nor some group within the church.