

III. SEARCH PROCESS

A. Introduction

The search process is an explanation of the logical steps in helping a local church to locate a minister of the Word. Following these steps will help the Search Committee to understand and expedite this undertaking. Sections 11-5,6 of the *Book of Government* establish the basic procedures for the search process.

- G.11-5 The call of a Minister by a particular church: When a particular church desires to call a Minister as Pastor, the procedure shall be as follows:
- A. The Church Session shall call a congregational meeting following the procedures for the purpose of electing a Search Committee. The Church Session may nominate a Search Committee to the congregation, although the floor must be opened for other nominations. The congregation shall proceed to determine how many persons are to serve and to select them.
 - B. The Search Committee shall carry on its work in regular consultation with the Ministerial Committee of the Presbytery.
 - C. Upon agreeing on a Minister they feel led of God to nominate, the Search Committee shall secure the consent of the Ministerial Committee. Should that Committee decline to consent, the Search Committee may persist with the nomination, recognizing the Presbytery has the right to reject the call. (See Section 11-3)
 - D. The Search Committee shall notify the Church Session in writing and the Church Session shall call a congregational meeting.
 - E. When the congregational meeting has been convened, the Search Committee shall make its report and recommendations to call a Pastor. This recommendation shall include the details for remuneration, including all benefits. The congregation shall conduct a counted vote in a fashion it deems appropriate. A majority favoring the recommendation is required to elect a Pastor. The exact vote must be recorded in the minutes and the person elected notified of the count. The congregation shall appoint representatives to advocate the call at a meeting of the Presbytery.
 - F. The call of the congregation shall be stated in the following or like terms:
The _____ Evangelical Presbyterian Church of _____, feeling led by the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit, have covenanted together to call you, _____, as Pastor (or other office). In issuing this call to you to be our Pastor and spiritual leader, we commit ourselves to support you in every way. We commit ourselves to support you in prayer, in participation in the work of ministry, and in your material needs.

In meeting your material needs, we initially commit ourselves as follows:

1. Annual Salary _____ (and frequency of payment)
2. Housing or housing allowance _____
3. Utilities and maintenance _____
4. Car and expense allowance _____
5. Full portion of the denominational retirement program
6. Medical insurance for you and your family _____
7. Annual vacation leave of _____
8. Others shall be stipulated, such as: study leave (required), book allowance, etc.

We commit ourselves to continue this remuneration as long as you continue as our Pastor [or other]. We commit ourselves to review this pledge annually and to adjust it appropriately, with the consent of Presbytery. In addition, we commit ourselves to paying the expense related to your move.

In testimony whereof we have subscribed our names on behalf of the congregation this

_____ day of _____, A.D. _____.

Clerk of Meeting

Moderator of Meeting

Chairman of Search Committee

G.11-6 A congregation may call a Minister to serve as Associate Pastor and shall proceed in the same fashion as indicated above, with the exception that the call of the congregation shall stipulate the primary responsibilities to be exercised by the Associate. Ordinarily, an Associate Pastor is not eligible to succeed the Pastor. However, should a Search Committee desire to consider an Associate Pastor as Pastor, approval by a three-fourths vote of the Ministerial Committee shall be required for the Search Committee to proceed.

B. Overview

The steps outlined below are the result of practices which have been proven over the years:

1. The session calls a congregational meeting to elect a Search Committee.
2. Prior to that meeting, the session will ask discerning and spiritually mature members of the congregation, often representing such key areas as the session, the Christian Education Department, the Deacons, etc., to consider serving on the Search Committee and nominates them to the congregation (G.11-5.A). The number is usually between 7 and 10 members.
3. The congregation elects a Search Committee at this duly called meeting. This meeting should include an action providing for the Search Committee to serve until the duly called minister is ordained/installed.
4. The Search Committee consults with the Ministerial Committee of the presbytery and requests that a member of the Ministerial Committee be appointed to act as a liaison.
5. The Search Committee is encouraged by the presbytery to give priority to all persons within the EPC seeking calls.
6. The Search Committee selects the best prospect for the position and discusses the suggested terms of the call with the minister, asking for a response. In its discussion with the minister, the Search Committee should explain that it cannot by itself extend a call to a minister but only proposes a recommendation to the congregation that the minister be called.
7. The Search Committee obtains the consent of the Ministerial Committee. (If the Ministerial Committee declines to consent, the Search Committee may persist with the nomination, recognizing that the presbytery will be informed of the Ministerial Committee's response to the candidate and has the right to reject the call. (G.11-3).

*Please note that the Ministerial Committee cannot approve a minister without first asking for a background check, as well as conducting its own interview regarding the minister's experience of salvation, spiritual growth, and views on Bible, theology, sacraments, **Book of Order**, the Reformed tradition, and the nature of the office the Minister of the Word. (G.13-4,5)*

8. The Search Committee notifies the Church Session which should call a congregational meeting.
9. The Search Committee gives its report at this congregational meeting and makes the recommendation to call a Pastor/Associate. A majority favoring the recommendation is required to elect a pastor. The exact vote shall be recorded in the minutes and the person elected shall be notified of the count.
10. The call of the congregation shall be stated in a form similar to the form in **G.11-5F** (see p. 107).
11. The call and terms of call are forwarded to the Ministerial Committee for processing.
12. The congregation should invite two or three members to speak on the candidate's behalf when he is presented to presbytery.
13. At the service of ordination/installation, the Moderator of the service should note the work of the Search Committee and express appreciation to the Committee for its work.

C. Important Relationships

The Search Committee has important relationships with the Ministerial Committee, presbytery and congregation.

1. Ministerial Committee:

- a. Each presbytery has a committee dealing with ministers and their working relationships (**G.16-27A**). Duties of this Committee relevant to the pastoral search process are as follows:

G.16-27A:2. It shall work with particular churches in securing Pastor(s). Calls shall always be placed in the hands of this Committee who shall then make its recommendation to Presbytery.

4. It shall counsel with congregations seeking a Pastor or other pastoral staff, shall recommend to the Presbytery a Minister to serve as Moderator of the Church Session, and shall work with a congregation in securing pulpit supply.
6. It shall confer with each Minister desiring to become a member of the Presbytery or Candidate desiring ordination, and conduct any examination it deems necessary in order to make a decision for its recommendation to Presbytery concerning the application. It shall also conduct the examination by the Presbytery of the applicant according to the ***Book of Government***.
7. No call to a Pastor may be issued by a congregation which has not first consulted with the Committee.

- b. The Ministerial Committee is responsible for assisting a church that is seeking a pastor because its pulpit is vacant.

G.16-9 If there is no Pastor, the Church Session may elect one of its members to serve in that capacity [*Moderator*]. Also, Presbytery, at its discretion, may appoint a Minister of the

Presbytery to serve as Moderator when a church has no Pastor.

The Presbytery may authorize its Ministerial Committee to appoint, at its discretion and with concurrence of the Church Session, a minister of Presbytery to serve as interim Moderator of the Church Session until such time as a Presbytery can act in the matter.

- (1) The Session may elect one of its members as moderator. However, experience has taught the wisdom of selecting a minister to moderate the church session who is not on the staff or session of that church. When a staff member is asked to serve as the Moderator it may have potential implications for the pastoral search process. Owing to the particular needs of the church, dynamics of the staff or session of the church, a Moderator from the presbytery may be more helpful than a member of the session. Presbytery may appoint a Moderator. If authorized by the Presbytery and with the concurrence of the Session, the Ministerial Committee may appoint an interim Moderator until the presbytery can act.
- (2) The Committee should work with the congregation in securing pulpit supply.
- (3) Committee should appoint one of its members to be a liaison with the Search Committee.
- (4) The representative of the Ministerial Committee should meet with the Search Committee promptly after the Search Committee has been elected. In the meeting, the following steps should be undertaken:
 - (a) The Ministerial Committee's representative should discuss with the Search Committee the appropriate theological framework necessary for conducting their search. This discussion should include, but not be limited to, the following areas:
 - i. the nature of the office of the minister in the Reformed tradition
 - ii. the three-way call as understood by the Reformed tradition
 - iii. the connectional system of church government within the EPC
 - (b) Discuss the nature of the ministerial interview with potential nominees and the need for a background check. (See page 23)
 - (c) The Call process should be explained.
 - (d) Potential problems should be explored, identified and discussed. Particular attention should be given to the steps of moving the minister onto the field of ministry, to any ordination exams that will need to be administered, and to the process that is to be followed if the candidate is coming from another denomination.
 - (e) The need for the church to develop a clear and concise statement and explanation of its theological views, congregation and community identification, etc., should be explained. (See p. 165 "Church Information Form")
 - (f) The Ministerial Committee representative should review the remuneration guidelines as indicated by the terms of call form (see p. 107 "Terms of Call") with the Search Committee in order to assure that the Committee has given appropriate reflection to the different categories of remuneration and compensation.

2. The Session:

In the absence of the pastor, the Session is responsible for the following:

- a. Continuing regular worship services.
- b. Engaging a Stated Supply, Interim Supply, or Occasional Supply as appropriate (See **G.16-27A.4** above and pages 85ff (*Guidelines for Interim Ministries*)). It is preferable to engage a

Stated or Interim Supply Minister so that the minister can exercise leadership in helping continue the activities of the church. Presbytery's Ministerial Committee shall be consulted before engaging a Stated or Interim Supply. This is also true of Occasional Supply if for longer than one month.

- c. Calling a congregational meeting to elect a Search Committee. The Search Committee should nominate one minister to the congregation for consideration for a call to fill the available position. Session shall give the congregation notice of the meeting at least two Sundays prior to the meeting and shall transact only business stated in the notice.
 - d. Concurring in the terms of call and on the financial terms which shall be stated in the terms of call (see p.107 "Terms of Call").
 - e. Calling a congregational meeting to approve a call.
3. The Congregation:

The Search Committee is a committee of the congregation. It is not a committee of session. The congregation is responsible for the following:

- a. Determining the number of members (typically seven to ten) and electing a Search Committee that is representative of the congregation. It may elect alternates to fill potential vacancies on the committee, or else fill vacancies as they occur at a subsequent congregational meeting. Alternates shall not be used to expand the Committee.
- b. Acting on the recommendation of the Search Committee, including terms of call, and discharging the Committee when its work is finished.

D. General Guidance for Search Committees

The discernment of members of a Search Committee is extremely important as they proceed to select a person to be nominated. The task requires guidance from God. Members of the Search Committee should:

1. Join in a prayer covenant for God's guidance and direction in the selection.
2. Open and close all meetings with prayer.
3. Schedule regular meetings.
4. Elect a chairman, vice-chairman, and secretary.
5. Establish a covenant of confidentiality with clear boundaries for the committee.
6. Decide early in the formation of the committee the method of voting, type of majority to select person and how decisions are to be made.
7. Keep the session and the congregation informed of the Search Committee's progress, but also keep confidential, even from family members and church officers, the names of individuals being

considered.

8. Keep the Ministerial Committee fully informed of progress.
9. Keep clear and accurate files of ministers under consideration, including their Personal Information Forms with the dates it was requested and received, correspondence with persons, decisions made concerning each candidate.
10. Keep candidates still under consideration informed of committee's progress.
11. Promptly inform candidates when they are no longer under consideration.
12. Although unanimity is not essential, strive to receive unanimous and enthusiastic support in the choice of the candidate.
13. Include the pastor, in the case of associate or assistant pastor searches, as an ex-officio member, to attend any and all meetings of the search committee.
14. Avoid speaking for the committee unless authorized to do so.
15. Avoid making a commitment to a person concerning a call during preliminary communications and interviews.

E. Church Information Form

One of the first tasks of a Search Committee in consultation with the session is to prepare an informational description of its church. Preparing this document may help identify the training, experience, and abilities that a minister should have in order to serve the particular congregation. It will also provide a description of the church and community for the perspective minister. In addition, this document can be used in evaluating the match between the candidate and the church (see the Church Information Form, p. 165)

F. Source of Names

Names of prospective ministers will come from various sources including:

1. Circulation of the EPC Opportunity List (see p. 8)
2. Members of the congregation;
3. Former members and interested friends;
4. Members of the Committee;
5. Representative of Ministerial Committee;
6. Referrals from the Office of the Stated Clerk (General Assembly);
7. Self-referrals from persons who are aware of the position;

8. Seminaries and other ecclesiastical institutions;
9. Face-to-Face segment of General Assembly (Acts of the Assembly #83-02)

83-02 Opportunity shall be provided at each General Assembly for Pastors seeking a call to meet with churches and ministries seeking to issue a call (Minutes, 3-53)

The Search Committee may wish to invite the congregation to suggest names and should request Personal Information Forms (PIF) for those whose names are submitted. Anyone suggesting a candidate should furnish the Committee with the full name and current address of the person being proposed. Personal Information Forms may be requested from the Office of the Stated Clerk, Evangelical Presbyterian Church, 17197 N. Laurel Park Dr., Suite 567, Livonia, Michigan 48152; tel. 734/742-2020; fax: 734/742-2033; e-mail: epchurch@epc.org (see also p. 149)

High priority should be given to candidates who are a part of the EPC.

G. Receiving and Reading Personal Information Forms

All interested persons should complete a Personal Information Form (see p. 149, “Personal Information Form”) and return it to the Search Committee. If a Search Committee decides to pursue a particular candidate, a copy of his PIF should be forwarded to the EPC office. In addition to an essay section, these forms contain objective information such as educational background, work experience, and major areas of interest. Evaluating the PIF provides a preliminary screening to help determine if the Committee wants to get more information on particular ministers. In evaluating the PIF, the following guidelines are suggested:

1. Establish a simple recording system to track when a form was received and its status during the Committee’s activities;
2. Establish selection criteria, keeping in mind experience, training, suitability, and availability.
3. Develop a procedure whereby members place candidates in one of at least three categories: appears to be very suitable; suitable; not suitable.
4. Contact first those who appear very suitable to see if available and, if so, determine if mutual interest exists.

H. Interviewing

While much can be learned from reading and evaluating the Personal Information Forms, the additional information gained from direct interviews and from hearing a person lead in worship and/or preach is invaluable. Thus when a Search Committee becomes seriously interested in a person, it would be beneficial to visit his church and observe him leading worship, and preaching a sermon. If that is not possible, it may be arranged for him to preach in another church for the convenience of the Search Committee. However, the Search Committee should not ask a potential nominee to visit its church for the purpose of preaching a trial sermon prior to being presented as the nominee, or prior to receiving a call. For mutual convenience, an interview usually can and should be arranged during the same trip when a Search Committee hears a potential nominee preach.

The following **guidelines** are suggested for the interview process:

1. Restudy your church information report so you are prepared to answer questions about it, your church, and community.
2. Review the Personal Information Form to identify points on which you would like further information, and formulate specific questions to generate the information.
3. Select a single Committee member to lead the interview, or designate certain members to lead specific parts of the interview.
4. Allow adequate opportunity for the minister to ask questions.
5. Take notes both during the interview and immediately following to capture impressions gained during the course of the interview.
6. Thank the minister and remind him that the interview is not a commitment on the part of either party.
7. Be sure to follow up by arranging a date and procedure to let each other know if further consideration is in order. Those who have been eliminated from consideration should be notified promptly and courteously of such action.

I. Hearing a Minister Preach

The following suggestions are offered for guidance:

1. Reread the person's Personal Information Form.
2. Verify the time of the service.
3. Be on time for the service.
4. If you are visiting the minister's church, enter the sanctuary either in singles or in pairs, but not as a large group which would be noticeable. Avoid being more conspicuous than necessary, lest you disturb both the person and the congregation.
5. Have a receptive and inquiring attitude:
 - Does the person read the Scripture well and carefully?
 - Is the pulpit manner compelling?
 - Are the prayers helpful?
 - Is the sermon easily followed, well organized, and applicable to life?
 - Is the congregation attentive?
 - Is the person's custom at the close of the service acceptable?
6. Note the activities announced in the bulletin or from the pulpit.
7. Greet the person simply and cordially as you leave the service.
8. It would be inappropriate to ask a minister/candidate to preach at the seeking church until the

Search Committee has agreed to present him to the church as their choice and session has been asked to call a congregational meeting to vote on the proposal.

J. Information about the Potential Nominee's Life, Character and Work Habits

The following suggestions may be helpful in securing additional information about the potential nominee's life, character and work habits:

1. The Ministerial Committee and the Search Committee may obtain information from various sources.
2. It may be obtained discreetly from friends of the members of the Committee living in the community where the person is located.
3. It may be obtained from credit bureaus.
4. It may include such matters as the record of the person in his previous pastorate, his ability to work easily among all ages and classes of people, his attitude toward the total program of the church, and his ability as a preacher, pastor, educator, and church administrator;
5. It should be received and held in confidence.

K. Search Committee's Report to the Ministerial Committee

The Search Committee is responsible for selecting and nominating a minister. While the congregation may call a minister of its own choosing, the Search Committee cannot act unilaterally.

G.16-27A.7 No call to a Pastor may be issued by a congregation which has not first consulted with the Ministerial Committee.

G.11-5B The Search Committee shall carry on its work in regular consultation with the Ministerial Committee of the Presbytery.

G.11-5C Upon agreeing on a Minister they feel led of God to nominate, the Search Committee shall secure the consent of the Ministerial Committee. Should that Committee decline to consent, the Search Committee may persist with the nomination, recognizing the Presbytery has the right to reject the call (*see G.11-3*).

The following guidelines are suggested:

1. Determine if the Ministerial Committee will recommend presbytery's approval of the call plus its terms, and seek the Committee's concurrence on the call before a name is submitted to the congregation.
2. Seek to process the approval of presbytery and the reception of the minister before he is invited to begin his new ministry.
3. The name of the person to be nominated should be sent to the Ministerial Committee in writing and a written response requested from the Ministerial Committee as to whether his call and ordination/installation will be recommended to presbytery.

4. It is strongly suggested that person **not** be allowed to begin his ministry prior to the presbytery having completed all its work in approving and receiving him into the presbytery. Past experience proves the necessity of utmost caution in this matter.

L. Congregational Meeting to Elect Pastor/Associate Pastor

When the Search Committee is ready to nominate, it informs the session and calls a congregational meeting for that purpose (G.11-5D).

G.11-5D The Search Committee shall notify the Church Session in writing and the Church Session shall call a congregational meeting.

M. Terms of Call

The following Acts of the Assembly stipulate minimum requirements for the terms of call:

- 81-04 *Terms of call for any Minister of member churches shall provide for participation in the denominational hospitalization and disabilities program. (Minutes, 1-32)*
- 81-05 *Terms of call for any Minister shall provide a minimum of 18% benefit to provide for group hospitalization, disability and pension. The pension factor shall not be less than 10%. This benefit shall be computed on the gross effective salary base, i.e., salary and housing/utilities allowance (Minutes, 1-32).*
- 81-06 *The denominational group insurance plan providing health, disability, and life coverage shall be mandatory for all Ministers within member churches (Minutes, 1-36).*
- 82-07
 4. *Terms of call: The amount of annual vacation time shall be one month.*
 5. *Terms of call: The amount of time to be given for study leave shall be two weeks, cumulative up to six weeks. (Minutes, 2-42)*
- 82-10 *The General Assembly approves the concept of self-funding insurance and instructs its Committee on Administration to execute a plan in trust as appropriate. Individual churches are urged to assume the deductible portion of the health insurance program and cost of co-insurance as part of a Minister's compensation. (Minutes, 2-56)*
- 84-08 *General Assembly adopts the self-funding group insurance plan offered by the Travelers Insurance Company and gives authority to the permanent Committee on Administration to approve and establish all details relative to the establishment of proposed plan. (Minutes, 4-37)*
- 87-12 *The Assembly approves the establishment of an employer sponsored tax-sheltered annuity program for the required minimum (10%) of gross effective salary for retirement for each Minister and Missionary and urges each congregation to participate in such program. (Minutes, 4-37)*
- 88-08 *Assembly amends participatory requirements for group health insurance plan by requiring participation of all Ministers on the rolls of Presbyteries with the exception of:*
 1. *Missionaries laboring in cooperative agreements with mission agencies;*
 2. *Ministers laboring in institutional agencies providing their own group insurance plans;*
 3. *Ministers afforded group insurance coverage as part of retirement benefits from a previous employer;*
 4. *Ministers without call and Ministers laboring less than 20 hours in a place of ministry. (Minutes, 8-24)*

The Assembly has urged presbyteries and churches to be diligent to insure that housing allowance provisions conform to the accepted IRS standard cap of fair rental value (furnished) plus utilities (Acts of Assembly 02-04(3)).

The formal process of extending a call by a congregation involves documenting specific actions on the "Terms of Call" form. This form is conceptually described and its purpose explained in G.11-5F (see p. 107).

Consult with presbytery on any special requirements that should be included in the call.

The Search Committee should keep in mind the importance of providing continuing coverage of the minister's insurance and pension programs when processing a new call.

N. Public Notices of Acceptance of Call

Public notices of acceptance of a call are made jointly by the session of the church issuing the call and the minister called. The Search Committee should coordinate this process and see that these notices are issued.

O. Associate Pastor

The same steps are followed in calling an Associate Pastor as in calling a Pastor. Note the following points:

1. The congregation is required to vote upon the terms of call;
2. The terms of call shall set forth the particular functions to be fulfilled (see p. 107, "Terms of Call: Pastor, Associate Pastor, Assistant Pastor);
3. An Associate Pastor is ordinarily not eligible to succeed the Pastor. However, with a three-fourths vote of the church session, and a three-fourths vote of the Ministerial Committee, the Search Committee may consider the Associate as a nominee for pastor (G.11-6).

P. Dismissal of Search Committee

At the time the Search Committee is elected, provision should be made for it to serve until the duly called minister is ordained/installed. At the service of ordination/installation, the Moderator of the service should note the work of the Search Committee, express appreciation to the Committee for its work, and, on behalf of the congregation, dismiss the Committee from its charge.

Q. Concluding Thoughts

Experience shows that a little courtesy can go a long way in making the search process more pleasant for both Search Committee and minister. Give serious consideration to the minister's family and personal feelings and the result will reflect sincere appreciation from all concerned.