
Tips for Finding and Interviewing a New Pastor

Tim Strickland, Leadership Development Director, FEB Central

Finding the right pastor is of vital importance to your church. Your goal should be to find a pastor who will lead your church forward for the next 6 - 12 years or longer.

The following tips are offered to help you in finding the right shepherd for your church.

Look for 4 “C’s”

CHARACTER: Is he a man of God, marked by integrity, humility and love?

- Meets elder qualifications of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1
- Word-driven and Spirit-filled
- *You learn about his character by calling references and hearing how they speak of him.*

COMPETENCY: Does he have the gifts and skills needed to lead your church?

- A Strong Leader (Leadership Gifts, Vision, Initiative)
- A Faithful Preacher (Sound Doctrine, Word/Speaking Gifts & Pastoral Delivery)
- Outwardly Focused (Will he lead the church to evangelize the community?)
- A Competent Ministry Manager (Able to implement leadership vision in practical ministries)
- Good with People (Does he attract people? Does he like people? How does he handle conflict? Can he provide pastoral care? Can he train others for the work of ministry?)
- *You determine competency by asking questions about how he handled ministry situations in the past that were similar to what is needed at your church.*

CHEMISTRY: Will he fit in well with our team?

- Board, staff and key leaders
- *You learn if there is chemistry by interviewing him and observing him.*

CULTURE: Will he fit our church and community culture?

- Consider cultural demographics—small town? inner city? urban centre? White or blue collar?
- Unique parts of your church and community culture
- *You learn if he fits the culture by examining his background and understanding who he is.*

Interview Questions

You can learn a lot about a candidate’s fit for your church by asking questions about how he handled situations that required the qualities you want in your next pastor. For example, if you wanted to learn how he handles conflict, you would ask, “Tell us about a time where you were in the middle of a significant conflict and how you resolved it.” Below are some suggested interview questions. You can create additional questions based on additional qualities you are looking for in a pastor.

Suggested Interview Questions

General

- 1. Please tell us about yourself, covering both personal and ministry experience.**

This is an open-ended question where he can tell you his personal and ministry background. He will likely tell you about his work history, family, strengths, ministry passion, and why he thinks he would be a good fit at your church. You are looking to understand both the chemistry and culture questions – as you get to know him through this question be asking yourself:

- Will he fit with our team?
- Will he fit with our church culture?

It also helps him feel comfortable in the interview since it is an easy question to tell about yourself.

Walk with God

- 2. Tell us about your walk with God. (if he didn't tell you in #1)**

You want to hear that he has a strong relationship with Jesus, and is a man of prayer and of the Word.

Spiritual Gifts

- 3. What are your primary spiritual gifts? Please share an example of how you have used each of them in your ministry.**

You want to understand the gifts God has given him and make sure they align with your church's needs.

Ministry Passion(s)

- 4. What are you passionate about in your ministry?**

You want to hear his heart and make sure it aligns with pastoring at your church.

Leadership Competency

- 5. You were recently a pastor at _____. Tell us about the strategy you implemented to grow and strengthen the church.**

You want to hear what his strategy was in his last position and how he leads.

- 6. Tell us about a time you saw a ministry opportunity and created a new ministry in the church.**

You want to hear if he is good at taking initiative, and to learn more about how he leads from vision to implementation.

Evangelism Competency

- 7. Tell us about any evangelism strategies have you utilized in your ministry. How might you implement those here at our church?**

You want to hear about his past effectiveness in evangelism and what he might do at your church.

Discipleship Competency

8. Tell us how you disciplined people to become stronger Christians in your previous ministry.

You want to see that he has a track record and a plan for discipleship.

Leadership Development

9. Tell us how you developed people to become leaders and to grow as leaders in a previous ministry.

You want to see that he has a track record and a plan for leadership development.

Staff Management

10. How have you managed your ministry staff?

(Did you have regular staff meetings, annual goals for them to meet, annual performance reviews, etc...?)

You want to get a sense that he has an idea how to manage and take care of staff.

Conflict Management

11. Tell us about a conflict you had in ministry and how you resolved it.

You want to see that he is level-headed and willing to deal with conflict that inevitably will come.

Financial Management

12. Tell us how you have managed the church budget and those of your staff in past ministry roles.

You want to learn how he thinks about money and budgets, and how he keeps an eye on the budget.

Long Term Pastorate - Commitment

13. If we call you to be our pastor, we would want you to have a long term ministry at our church. Would you be willing to commit for staying at least ___ years (pick a number, probably 5 years), unless there are unforeseen circumstances beyond all of our control?

You are looking to see if he is in it for the long haul, as successful pastorates tend to be longer. He may not be able to commit definitively to ___ years, but you just want to hear that he is planning for a long-term pastorate.

14. What would you want us to do to support you in having a successful long term ministry?

His answer will help you understand him better and what he thinks he needs for success. You are also showing that you care about him personally and are offering to support him if you call him. The answer may vary widely from candidate to candidate, as people are motivated in different ways. Ideally you would like to hear a leader say some of the following:

- *I need you to support my leadership, especially when people disagree with changes.*
- *I need you to give me freedom to lead and make day-to-day leadership decisions.*
- *I need for my family to feel truly at home here, so I need you to care for them as well as me.*

Questions a Candidate May Ask You

(He is also conducting an interview—to see if your church would be a good fit for him.)

The candidate you are interviewing should be observing the board and the church, and asking questions to determine if he would want to work with you as the pastor. When you interview him, be sure to allow time for him to ask questions. Some questions he might ask are:

1. *What is your church's Vision?*

He would ask this to see if you have a clear sense of vision. Be ready to share your vision statement, your desire to have an outward focus, and any major plans for the future.

2. *What do you see God doing in the life of the church?*

He will want to hear from you about what you see God blessing in the church, and hear your hearts for what excites you at your church.

3. *What do you think is the greatest need at your church right now?*

He will want to know where he may need to focus his energy early in his ministry. For many churches the answer will be evangelism, discipleship, and leadership development.

4. *Tell me more about the church staff. Do you think they will be here for a while?*

He will be interested in who he would be working with, their roles, and how they are to work with.

5. *Tell me more about yourselves and your involvement in the church.*

He will want to get to know you more and hear your heart for the Lord and for your church.

6. *What are the schools like in the community? Are there many other Christians in the schools?*

If he has school-aged children he will be interested in schools and other community services.

7. *Does the church have any expectations of my wife or kids (ie ministry involvement, volunteer roles, small group involvement, regular attendance)?*

Most pastor's wives are interested to be involved in some way, but prefer not to have high expectations placed on them. Note that the wife's occupation and the age of their kids will impact her involvement.

8. *Why did your previous pastor(s) leave?*

He will want to know if there are any challenges that might cause him to leave as well, so that he can avoid them, or choose not to come at all if the problems are too deep.

9. *What is the compensation package that you offer? What does it cost to live in your community?*

Most pastors will be concerned about housing affordability and whether or not the salary will be sufficient to live in the community. The proximity of the pastor to the church will be often proportional to the salary he is paid (higher=closer, lower=further). The closer the pastor is to the church's community, the easier it will be to be an effective evangelist and community pastor, especially if your church is primarily a community church as opposed to a commuter church. FEB Central can provide suggested salary ranges.