

PRESBYTERY OF GENESEE VALLEY
COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY
Reference Questions - Phone

Not all that you wish to know about a candidate can be gleaned from even the most up-to-date and well written dossier. That's why personal interviews and hearing a candidate preach are so valuable. In addition, at least three reference checks should be made by three different PNC members on any candidate being seriously considered for your ministerial position. For the newly graduated seminarian, professors, former employers, Committee on Preparation chairs or pastors are possibilities. If no references have been listed, the candidate should be asked to name at least three, with addresses and phone numbers.

When making your telephone reference calls, please consider the following suggestions:

1. It is illegal to call a reference not listed on the PIF without the permission of the candidate. The signature only covers the listed references. You need written permission before going further. Email permission is acceptable, if it comes from the person's own email and identifies him/her by name. Keep a printed copy with their other information.
2. Before making any calls, your PNC should determine the reference questions you want answered and all specific skills you want verified. The same questions should be asked of each reference in order that you may gain as accurate a profile of the candidate as possible.
3. When making your reference calls, be professional and polite. Begin by introducing yourself and explaining on whose behalf you are calling. Be clear about the purpose of your call and mention that you have the candidate's permission to contact the reference. Also ask whether this is a convenient time to do the reference check or whether a call back would be preferable.
4. The calling of references for any particular candidate should be shared by different PNC members so no one will develop sole ownership/advocacy for any one candidate.
5. Please remember that we are all subject to the fair employment practice laws. That means that we cannot ask any questions which pertain to or could be construed as discriminating on the basis of age, sex, minority status, disability, marital status, etc. We cannot, and should not, ask these questions of candidates or references. If you have some doubt on the appropriateness of a question, contact your COM liaison for clarification or guidance.
6. Listen carefully to responses and nuances and gently probe further if questions arise as a result of the reference's response. It is often wise to ask, "Can you give me an example that illustrates that?"

Although your PNC should prepare reference questions that meet your specific needs, sample questions follow to stimulate your thinking:

1. How long and in what capacity have you known _____ (name)?
2. What do you consider to be _____ (name's) most significant accomplishments in her/his present position?
3. How would you characterize the leadership style of _____ (name) in working with committees and groups in the church?

4. From what we have read we do not have a clear picture of _____ (name's), e.g., administrative skills. Do you have any information that could inform us?
5. What is your perception of _____ (name's) ability to care for other people and for herself/himself?
6. Does this person bring a sense of passion (energy, enthusiasm) to ministry?
7. How would you describe _____ (name's) theological position?
8. Can you recall a specific situation where _____ (name) had to resolve a disagreement or conflict? How did the resolution affect the opposing parties for future working relationships?
9. Is there anything else you would like to share about _____ (name)?
10. Is there anyone else you would suggest we might contact? We will certainly get _____ (name's) permission before doing so.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND HELP AS WE CONSIDER _____ (name)
FOR OUR POSITION.