

STAGE V: INTERVIEWS AND CANDIDATE CLEARANCE

Conducting an Interview

Before any interviewing takes place, PNC members should ask themselves what they wish to know after the interview is completed. If the PNC decides something is important, a question should be formulated which will help the candidate reveal her/his views on that subject. That question should then be added to those pursued in the structured interview.

Interviews are often ineffective for one of the following reasons: a) PNC members do too much of the talking; b) PNC members are too quick to make judgments based on limited data; c) the way questions are asked reveals which response will be considered most or least favorable; or d) the interview bogs down on trivial questions and leaves more important matters unexplored.

To avoid such pitfalls, the PNC should commit itself to permit the candidate to do 85% of the talking. One way of doing that is to have either one or two members of the PNC ask the interview questions with the other members giving full attention to the responses. Hasty conclusions can be avoided by follow-up questions if they avoid signaling what it is hoped the candidate did or did not mean. A technique for doing this is to rephrase the candidate's answer and ask if this is what was meant or simply encourage more detail by a friendly "tell us more."

The best way to make sure the interview delivers as much relevant data as possible is to structure it by including a list of questions which must be asked before the interview is over. The chair or questioner(s) should be responsible for seeing that the complete list of predetermined questions has been covered with each candidate. It is extremely important that the same predetermined questions are asked of each candidate since that is the only way a fair comparison can be made of the views of several candidates.

Candidates for a position in churches with more than one pastor should have an opportunity to meet with the currently serving pastor or associate pastor (and other key program staff members if appropriate). Such a meeting should not be one-on-one but in a larger group. Ordinarily, it should occur before the neutral pulpit experience with the candidate.

Please consider the following suggestions as you prepare to conduct your interviews:

1. Each PNC member should prepare carefully for the interview by reviewing the PIF, the Pastoral Profile, the summary screening/evaluation sheet and your MIF.
2. Introduce yourselves to the candidate and have her/him introduce herself/himself. Attempt to put the candidate and yourselves at ease.
3. Provide an overview of the interview, e.g., provide one-half of the time for the PNC's questions and one-half of the time for the candidate's questions. Indicate the length of the interview. A suggestion: it should not exceed two hours.
4. Decide in advance who will ask the PNC's questions. After each question, permit some time for follow-up questions. All members should listen and take notes as the interview progresses. Your PNC will find it helpful to prepare an evaluation sheet for each question asked, providing space for your notes/comments as well as giving the response to each question a number value (as you did in the scoring/screening summary sheet).

5. Allow adequate time for the candidate's questions. The PNC will often learn more about the candidate from her/his questions than from responses to the PNC's questions.
6. Promote your position to the candidate but do not under-emphasize the difficulty of the position. Be clear about the amount of time and energy the position requires.
7. If concerns are raised regarding starting/moving dates, salary, family or housing needs, deal with them or get back to the candidate as soon as you have information.
8. Never conclude the interview without asking the candidate whether she/he is still interested in continuing to be considered.
9. Thank the candidate for meeting with you and indicate when she/he can anticipate hearing from you; be prepared to share your timeline with all candidates you interview.
10. Set aside twenty to thirty minutes for discussion immediately following the interview. Impressions and information quickly fade after important, energizing experiences. Your recollections the following day may be totally different from those immediately following the interview. Therefore, be sure all members set aside this time to debrief together.

Four important areas to explore in interviews are:

1. What the candidate does best, and therefore enjoys most.
2. What the candidate considers more important in ministry, and therefore is likely to give priority attention.
3. What kind of person does the candidate seem to be in terms of character, personality, functional and relational strengths and weaknesses.
4. What knowledge, experience and convictions the candidate brings to the practice of ministry at this point in her/his life.

Sample interview questions might include some of the following:

1. From what you have read, heard, and learned of our church, what seems particularly challenging to you?
2. What do you consider to be most important in your ministry and why?
3. As you look back over your current/most recent ministry, what happened that you feel best about? Most disappointed about?
4. Please describe one of the most stressful situations you were involved in. How did you handle it? What was the outcome?
5. How have your faith and theological views changed in the last decade or since you entered the ministry?
6. What are your views on _____?

7. Describe your practice in regard to pastoral calling, etc. What is your objective? What do you do? What makes you decide to make a call?
8. How do you maintain your own spiritual, emotional and physical health?
9. Which five adjectives best describe you?
10. If you were to be called as pastor of this church, what would you try to do during the first twelve months?

What questions do you have of us?

Interview Questions to Avoid

In the civil law arena, the protections of the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States give the Nominating Committee and the Committee on Ministry much greater flexibility in posing questions to a minister. The *Book of Order* requires the Nominating Committee to take care to consider candidates without regard to race, ethnic origin, sex, marital status, age, or disabilities.

The following questions and subjects, while not illegal, are best avoided and should not be asked in an interview unless the question is related to a *bona fide* qualification for the position as described in the position description:

- Marital status, spouse's name, original name of applicant whose name has been changed by court order, including inquiry of birth of a married woman.
- Inquiry into applicant's lineage, ancestry, national origin, descent, parentage or nationality, sex, birth circumstances.
- Birthplace, birthplace of applicant's parents, spouse, or other relatives.
- Are you a United States citizen? Requirement that applicant produce naturalization papers or her/his first papers. Requirement that applicant submit birth certificate, baptismal record.
- Whether applicant's parents or spouse are naturalized or native-born citizens of the United States; the date when such parents or spouse acquired citizenship.
- What is your native language (or "first language" or "language spoken at home")?
- Inquiry into how applicant acquired ability to read, write, or speak a foreign language.
- Names, addresses, ages, number or other information concerning applicant's spouse, children or other relatives; or inquires into a spouse's work.
- Do you rent or own a home? Names and addresses of persons to be notified in case of accident or emergency.
- Are you married? Single? Divorced? Separated? Do you wish to be addressed as Mr., Mrs., Miss, Ms.?
- Do you have children? Do you plan to have children? Are you pregnant? What are the ages of your children? Who takes care of your children?
- Comments reflecting age preferences; inquiry as to age, date of birth.
- Do you have any physical disability?
- Have you ever been arrested?
- Inquiry into applicant's general military experience.
- Listing all clubs, societies, and lodges to which applicant belongs.