

## What to Expect During Interviews with a Search Team

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**The season of conducting interviews with potential candidates is the most important part of a search team's work.** They have been working toward these discussions for several months. Keep in mind they are excited to have the opportunity to talk with you. They can also be nervous about doing this work well. Sometimes they are anxious about carrying out this significant responsibility of vital work that their brothers and sisters have entrusted to them. All these elements and more are in play as you visit with them. Though you are not called yet to be their pastor, you can serve the body of Christ by being a pastoral presence with them even in the midst of the interview.

### Purpose of Interviews

Interviews give the search team an opportunity to get to know you, your beliefs, ideas, and attitudes about ministry, as well as how you interact with people. Your answers to their questions give the search team insight and help the team prayerfully discern whether you are the person the Lord is calling to be their pastor.

Questions asked are intended to answer this question:

**Are you the person the Lord is calling to be the next pastor?**

### There are two kinds of interviews

- **The initial interview** helps the team get to know something about you, your skills, and gifts. An initial interview consists of about 6 - 10 initial questions, some of which are based on your resume, sermon samples and other materials you provided. This is the **non-obligatory interview** you agreed to with region staff as a result of reviewing the church's materials and having conversation with region staff. There may or may not be any additional interviews. Any follow up interviews are by mutual agreement.
- **The follow up interview** seeks more information. Questions for the follow up interview come from answers given in the initial interview.

### Preparation for the interview

If you have not participated in an interview for a while or are new to the search process, here are some suggestions to help you engage well with a search team:

- **Reserve time and preserve energy for the interview.** Most initial interviews last between an hour and a half and two hours.

- **Check your computer connections ahead of time.** There are between 5 and 7 people who have made arrangements to meet with you, and it is really disappointing to them if the interview doesn't happen because of technical issues on your end.
- **Be dressed as you would be for a face-to-face interview or 'formal' meeting.** Most of the teams will want to conduct the interview by Skype, Zoom, or some similar video conferencing software. The team is looking forward to seeing you as well as talking with you. This gives them a fuller sense of who you are and helps them make decisions on more than just two dimensional information found in a resume.
- **Read through all materials you have for the church.** Having those things fresh in your mind will help create a positive conversation.
- **Write 2 – 4 questions you would like to ask the search team.** Prioritize the questions because there may not be enough time to ask all of them.
- **Work to be clear and concise in your answers.** One of the most often named frustrations of search teams is that the potential candidate talked in **too much detail** on the first questions so that there wasn't enough time to ask other questions. It is a balance between too little and too much information. That is why it is important to think ahead of time about your answers to the following questions you may be asked.

## General Questions

Below is a list of questions that are typical in a first interview. The questions are **not listed in order of importance**. This list is found in the Search Team Resource that Mission Northwest provides to our churches' search teams. Typically a team will have 2 to 4 questions like these below.

1. Tell us about how you became a Christian.
2. Please share how you were called to ministry.
3. Why are you looking for a new position?
4. What are your two greatest strengths? Two greatest weaknesses?
5. What do you believe is the primary purpose of the church? What Scripture supports your understanding?
6. How do you cope with stress?
7. What are your short-term and long-term goals?
8. Tell us about a time when you have both successfully and unsuccessfully handled conflict.
9. How do you develop team members and volunteers?
10. What constructive criticism have you received in the past that surprised you the most?
11. Describe the cultures of your last few job or church settings, how they differed, and which one fit you best.

12. Tell me about a time when you had to get people with different viewpoints to the same level of understanding.
13. How do you stay organized?
14. What most resonates with you about the opportunity to serve as the Senior Pastor of our church?

[adapted from *Search: The Pastoral Committee Handbook* by William Vanderblohmen (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2016): Appendix L]

## Specific Questions

The search team will also have 2 to 4 questions based on the information you have provided them in your resume, sermon samples, and other materials you've already provided to us (personal website link, blogs, current church website, or other written materials). Note: the only materials we pass forward from the documents requested on our website are your resume and/or MinistrElife profile and New Pastor Covenant.

## Typical outline for the interview

Below is an outline for a typical interview. Each team may modify this to meet their needs. The **times given are approximates** to help everyone move through the time in as productive and enjoyable way possible.

1. **Open with Prayer**
2. **Get Acquainted**
  - a. Search team introduces themselves
  - b. Some of the following information may already be in what you have provided. Answering these questions helps the search team get to know you as a person and as a fellow Christ-follower. Some questions they may ask are these:
 

10-15 mins	{	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Please share with us your experience and walk with Christ, current family situation, and previous ministry places and positions.</li> <li>ii. Please share how you came to your call to ministry.</li> <li>iii. What are the most important aspects of ministry to you? What are your passions in ministry?</li> <li>iv. What things in ministry do you find most difficult or troubling?</li> </ol>
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3. **History and background of the church** – Even though some of this information is in the church's prospectus, it will be good for you to get the following information from them directly. Some of the things shared will be these items:
 

10-15 mins	{	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. 2 or 3 of the congregation's strengths and assets.</li> <li>ii. 2 or 3 of the biggest challenges the church faces.</li> <li>iii. The two or three things we need most from our next pastor are ....</li> </ol>
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4. **Deeper questions** - Having some background and sense of each other, the search team will want to ask several additional questions that are related to the statements above. Here are some examples:

- 15 mins {
- i. Given what you have read from our prospectus and what we have shared here, what are two or three areas of ministry you would want to lead us to work in the first year?
  - ii. Where are your general hopes and dreams for us to be in 5 years? What would the congregation look like? What beginning steps would you take to lead us to get there?
    - Here they may articulate some of the mission / vision things they have been working on that the church believes is part of its call. Example: reaching a certain demographic of people.

5. **Get to know a pastor's "style"** questions (for example):

- 15 mins {
- i. "We realize every congregation and community is different, but please share with us your general ministry routine over the course of a week. For example, how do you go about preparing sermons? How do you engage with people in the community?"
  - ii. "Please share with us how you generally work with the leadership of the church. For example, do you work with a chairperson to create agendas ahead of time, bring your own list of items, or some other way?"
  - iii. "What kinds of sermons do you preach? (Topical? Expository? Aided by visuals? Etc.)"

6. **Specific questions for each person**

- 15 mins {
- a. These are based on your resume.
  - b. Some may come as a result to statements made during the interview itself.

7. **Potential candidate's questions**

- 15 mins {
- a. Be prepared here for 2 to 4 questions you'd like to ask the search team.
  - b. Ask questions that will help you discern whether the Lord is asking you to consider further the possibility of becoming the pastor.
  - c. The first interview is NOT a good time to discuss compensation.

8. **Close with prayer**

## Further Interviews

Beyond the first, non-obligatory interview, there will be further discussions by Skype and or phone **by mutual agreement**. These discussions are to help the search team and you prayerfully discern whether you are the person the Lord is calling to be the next pastor. These discussions are focused on details of the church's ministry needs, goals, and what you would be doing as the pastor, if called. While the search team usually initiates further interviews, you may request time with the search team. In other words, they may have their questions answered, but you may have further items you'd like to discuss. As long as they are still open to considering you, the request for additional discussions is acceptable. If the search team has indicated they are no longer want to pursue the opportunity with you, do not request another time to visit.

## Neutral Pulpit

Before a final decision is made about whether to invite you to be THE candidate, the search team MAY ask you to meet face-to-face with them in a neutral location. This may also include preaching in a neutral church. If they make this request, they will pay the traveling expenses for you, and your spouse if appropriate. Most Mission Northwest churches may not be able to pay for an entire family to participate in this event.

## The Final Discussions

When the search team is "of one mind" about the person they believe is the one the Lord is calling to be the candidate, the search team will invite you to become THE candidate. **Ethically** this means that you will need to close any discussions you may be having with other congregations and concentrate solely on this congregation to the end of the process. *Do not accept the invitation to become THE candidate unless you are reasonably sure you will accept the call to become the next pastor.* To be sure, expected things may happen and the congregational vote may not fall within the required range for the call to be extended to you.\* **Practically**, this means you will want to make sure the following are finalized BEFORE you accept the invitation to become the candidate:

- the pastor/church covenant - contains expectations and a position description that you've discussed with the search team already (with any needed changes)
- the compensation package
- dates and arrangements for the candidating weekend

Once these things have been completed, the search team will announce and present you to the congregation. They will do this in a way that conforms to the church's constitution.

\*Most church constitutions require a supermajority to call a pastor. We adamantly recommend a person NOT accept a call that is not at least 90% in the affirmative.