

PASTORAL TRANSITIONS

INTERVIEW GUIDELINES FOR BOARDS AND PASTORS



THE
River
Conference

LOCAL BOARD OF ADMINISTRATION AND DELEGATE

When The River Conference (TRC) recommends a pastoral candidate for appointment to a local church, the Ministerial Appointments Committee (MAC) has generally reviewed the church profile constructed by the Local Board of Administration (LBOA). That profile includes information about the needs of the church and community. In addition, the pastoral candidate has had several interviews with the Superintendents and the MAC to carefully evaluate their academic, experiential, spiritual, and personal preparation to lead a local congregation. Based upon this information, the first best-fit available pastor is recommended for appointment to the church.

When this happens, the delegate(s), LBOA, and recommended pastoral candidate have an opportunity to reflect with one another prior to final affirmation of the appointment. This happens through a meeting between the prospective pastor, delegate(s), and LBOA.

WHO SHOULD BE PRESENT FROM THE CHURCH?

Those present should only be the LBOA and duly elected delegate(s). The chair, for the purposes of this interview, should either be a delegate or board member agreed upon by the majority of the LBOA. The existing pastor and pastoral staff should not be part of this interview, nor is this an open board meeting.

The pastoral candidate should, except under the most unusual of circumstances, bring their spouse to the interview. We encourage the spouse to be a part of the interview process. TRC does not prohibit a church from seeking to hire a spouse or the MAC from making a dual appointment under the appropriate circumstances.

The chair should have all present introduce themselves, including the prospective pastor and family. Please, make this gracious, fun, and informative. For example, ask people to share their favorite T.V. show or book, or share one hope they have for the future of the church, or their role in the church. The purpose of these types of questions are to “break the ice” and make everyone comfortable, but limit this to one of the above ideas as to not take too much time.

IN WHAT SPIRIT SHOULD THE MEETING BE CONDUCTED?

The chair of the meeting should ensure that the interview begins with prayer. This may be a good opportunity to invite the prospective spiritual-leader to pray.

This is a serious interview where hard questions should be asked but always in a spirit of grace. This is not a combative or confrontational moment, but an opportunity to learn from one another and begin a very important and possible long-term relationship with one another. Treat each other well.

WHAT KIND OF QUESTIONS SHOULD BE ASKED?

Asking about the pastoral candidate's spiritual journey or conversion story is often an instructive way to begin.

Some aspects of a church ministry interview require questions to be asked that in most other non-religious positions are illegal or at best inadvisable. For example, it is unlawful to discriminate or to ask questions on the basis of race, gender, age, religion, sexual-orientation, and the like. However, religious organizations with clear and well documented religious and moral beliefs can and must be clear on some issues that otherwise could not be explored. The Free Methodist Church exists to propagate a clearly defined view of Christianity, including sexual mores, so religious and doctrinal questions can and should be asked. Our ordination process requires that pastors are able to live, model, and teach healthy family life and marriage - not perfect family life, of course. Questions about family, divorce, etc., are generally answered favorably before a pastoral candidate is recommended to the church by the conference MAC.

Ask about experiences with other congregations or organizations that may have prepared them for the role under consideration.

Ask about the pastoral candidate's vision for ministry in general and for this particular church.

Bring up some of the scenarios in the recent history of your church and ask how, hypothetically, they may have handled those situations, or in fact did handle under similar circumstances.

Discuss theology and spiritual life. Every leader you interview must demonstrate significant biblical knowledge, adherence to the Scripture as the word of God, and harmony with the Free Methodist doctrinal core. However, there may be particular spiritual or biblical issues that are very important to your church. Most important in this line of questioning is to get a sense of how the person communicates biblical truth; is it in a way that would make sense to your congregation and community? Do not get bent out of shape if there are minor theological differences. The core of the gospel is critical, a particular end-of-the-world-view for example is not as important as a person who evidences a life lived biblically, full of the Spirit, capable of leading people to salvation in Jesus, and building up believers as healthy disciples of Jesus. If you have questions about theological distinctives in the Free Methodist Church, review the basics here: <https://fmcusa.org/resources/2019bod> (pages 1-7).

Ask about the pastoral candidate and spouse's initial impressions of the church, or any research they have done into the community at large. Can they be happy living in the area? Do they see potential for growth and community impact? If so, what kind. If not, why not? Do they feel their children could be happy in the church?

Bring up major problems in the church and ask about potential solutions. For example, if the church recently went through a very divisive issue, how might the pastoral candidate approach healing? If the church has plateaued or is in decline, how might they approach growth? If there seems to be a lack of discipleship for adults or children, what might be a good solution? Understand that in asking such questions, you should ask yourselves the same questions! The church is not the pastor, but all of God's people working together under a leader to accomplish a common, Christ-centered goal.

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations ...

MATT 28:19

WHAT ABOUT THE MONEY THING?

In general, the guideline for pastoral compensation is the average pay for a teacher of similar education and experience in your community. Pastors are called to serve Christ and are not “shepherds for hire” (a phrase Jesus used to indicate a leader who may be more self-interested than gospel-centered). Few pastors in the Free Methodist denomination place dollars above ministry. Most pastors are professionals, much like teachers, physicians, lawyers and the like, and most have college degrees, many have master’s degrees or doctorates. Pastors deserve proper compensation and to be treated as professionals. In turn, TRC expects that pastors will behave as professionals as well and will be called to account when this does not happen.

The average teacher with a bachelor’s in the Denver, Colorado area earns between \$52,119 to \$68,851 annually with the average base salary of \$59,612, not including benefits like health insurance, professional expenses, continuing education and the like. Chances are the pastors serving your congregation are serving with some degree of personal sacrifice, because they believe in you, your church, and the principles of the Free Methodist Church.

If your church is blessed with abundant financial resources, it would not likely be a difficult decision to pay the pastor a healthy salary and benefit package. Yet most churches are not experiencing an abundance of cash flow. Understand that your ability to attract a well-educated, experienced pastor will be impacted by the compensation you are able to provide.

Ask about what the pastor expects and needs in terms of compensation. Work out a mutually satisfactory compensation package. Be sensitive in this. Sometimes churches justify paying a pastor less when the spouse earns a reasonable income. Ask yourself this, when was the last time you had a job interview when your potential employer said something like, ‘Well, if your spouse is working, we don’t have to pay you as much, right?’

Address the compensation issue, even if the pastor doesn’t ask. Clarity on compensation will need to be provided well in advance of actual arrival on the job. Under most circumstances, this first interview can establish basic parameters for compensation and expectations, both on part of the church and potential pastor. However, until the board and pastor have an opportunity to prayerfully reflect post-interview, no formal agreement should be entered into.

HOW DO WE END THE INTERVIEW?

It’s always good to pray! If an opportunity has not already occurred, it may be appropriate for a board member to invite the pastoral candidate and spouse to tour your church and community and perhaps share a meal. If they have traveled a distance for the interview, please be sure there are good accommodations provided by the church.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE PASTORAL CANDIDATE HAS GONE?

Please synthesize the thoughts and impressions of the delegate(s) and LBOA. Document these thoughts and impressions so that they can be easily communicated back to the Superintendents. Remember the final decision for appointment belongs to TRC’s MAC.

WHAT SHOULD THE PASTORAL CANDIDATE DO?

WITH WHAT SPIRIT SHOULD YOU ENTER INTO THE CONVERSATION?

Most likely, you have been spending a great deal of time in prayer about this. Always enter into the conversation with an open heart toward those you are meeting. Sometimes rumors are spread or conversations are held about churches that give a predisposing view. Another person's experience should not be your own. Enter with an attitude of respect for the sacrifices made by the congregation over its history and love for all the children of God, including the delegate(s) and members of the LBOA seated before you. If in your prayer and meditation, God has revealed to you a word of encouragement or a matter of spiritual consideration, explore this with the LBOA and listen to their responses. What does this tell you?

WHAT SHOULD YOU SHARE ABOUT YOURSELF?

It's a good idea, if you haven't been asked, to BRIEFLY share your spiritual journey, and allow your spouse to share as you both see appropriate. Let people see what God has done in your life, what led you to ministry, and why you are open to this particular appointment.

WHAT KIND OF QUESTIONS SHOULD YOU ASK?

You may have been asked about vision. If not, ask the LBOA about their vision and direction. Seek to discern how your ministry vision and values may impact the work of pastoring this group of believers. If they have a well-developed vision, and strategy to fulfill it, can you share that vision?

Ask about the community, How is the church engaged in relevant or impactful ministry?

Ask about recent conversions or major spiritual, life-decisions in the church. What does this tell you about the level of concern the church has for the great commission?

Observe how people relate with one another and with you. What does this tell you about the commitment the leaders have to the great commandment.

Ask about how decisions are made. Different pastors will comfortably lead different kinds of churches, and church leaders will be significantly impacted by leadership and pastoral style. Are decisions made based upon who will feel honored or hurt (a family style church), or upon a particular direction laid out by a strong leader (pastor-led church), or upon how a particular set of visionary goals will be achieved through following a clear strategy to reach the community (a program/large church). Each of these styles can be healthy or unhealthy. If you are a large-church pastor (in reality, not your imagination) and find yourself trying to lead a church that can only do what feels good to key people you will be frustrated if the church is unwilling to modify its way of doing things. Likewise, a church that is ready to follow a strong leader and reach the community for Christ and you are more comfortable providing pastoral care and maintaining a sense of family or community, you and they will be frustrated. Help the congregation to understand its style of church and tolerance for change, as well as your own. Always, always,

seek to carry on such a discussion without judgment or a negative spirit! Different styles are not bad, they simply need to be understood. God's family has need of it all.

Worship styles are often flashpoints of controversy. Ask about this and share your heart for worship. Help define biblical worship (which is not a matter of style at its core).

Ask about the biblical knowledge of the folks on the LBOA, and their understanding of core theological principles. Don't teach, don't judge, just listen and this will help you discern the level of discipleship that the leaders experienced as well as what they desire.

*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all
your soul and with all your mind.*

MATT 22:37

SHOULD YOU ASK ABOUT COMPENSATION?

Yes, ask about compensation. Many people are shy about this, but a lot of misunderstanding happens here. It's important to be clear up front. If the church is small and unable to provide a significant compensation package they are probably sacrificing and struggling to provide what they do. Encourage and honor the sacrifices. Recognize that as God enables you to potentially lead the congregation toward growth, the compensation will likely rise as well, if not, how can it? It is right for the workman to receive compensation, as Saint Paul encourages the churches to understand, but be sure to remember that the call of Christ to pastoral ministry is not first and foremost a job, but a profession of faith and to the cross. Engage the conversation about compensation with clarity but sensitivity and respect.

ENDING THE CONVERSATION

End on a positive note. Summarize the major points that have been discovered in the interview, point to possible renewal or affirmation of vision. Be encouraged to spend time in prayer and fasting as you and the church discerns next steps. Feel free to ask the delegate or others on the board further clarifying questions over the week, visit the community, gain understanding. And may God bless the journey!