

Guidelines for Congregations to Follow in Discovering, Evaluating and Calling a Pastor

The 43rd (1976) General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church requested the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension to develop guidelines for congregations to follow in discovering, evaluating and calling a pastor. A subcommittee of the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension studied this request and presented the following guidelines for use by the churches and presbyteries:

I. Establishing a Pulpit Committee

- A. The session ordinarily serves as the Pulpit Committee.
- B. In the carrying out of this function, the session may appoint a sub-committee to assist.
- C. This sub-committee may be composed of ordained or unordained members of the congregation.

II. Evaluating Needs and Qualifications

- A. The session evaluates the congregation and community to determine the gifts, ministries, and needs of the congregation and community, listing strengths and weaknesses of the congregation and community. They establish from the evaluation what has been the ministry of the church, what the ministry of the church is now, and what they believe the ministry should be with a pastor.
- B. The congregation reviews the session's evaluation and submits its own critique of the evaluation to the session.
- C. The session and congregation list the desired qualifications of a prospective pastor, keeping in mind the evaluation that has been made.
- D. The list of qualifications is revised to contain only the non-negotiable qualifications. (Ask which qualifications are absolutely necessary, keeping in mind your needs and ministries.)

III. Screening Prospective Candidates

- A. The session sends to the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension for resumes of prospects and evaluates them to determine which men would fit the non-negotiable qualifications.
- B. For each prospective candidate, letters should be written to:
 1. The Credentials Committee of the Presbytery which examined him, if examined within the past three years.
 2. The Practical Theology Department of the theological seminary which he attended, if graduated within the past three years.
 3. All references mentioned on the resume.
- C. After determining which candidates to consider further, ask the first choice to come for at least eight days, including two Sundays.

IV. Hearing a Candidate

- A. Have him preach four messages (two Lord's days).
- B. Have him lead a mid-week Bible study.

- C. Have him teach a Sunday school class.
- D. Have him visit all shut-inns and those in the hospital.
- E. Have him in as many homes as possible.
- F. Have him meet with as many groups within the congregation as possible; i.e., missionary society, men's groups, young adults, youth, etc.
- G. Ask him what he would do in specific situations that are unique to your congregation and community, and in ordinary situations.
- H. Near the end of his stay, ask him what kind of vision he has for the furtherance of God's Kingdom in the congregation and community.
- I. Take proper steps to call a congregational meeting to determine whether they are ready to call a pastor.

(It is important to decide on a given candidate before hearing another one. This prevents personality contests and makes it possible to determine if the man's gifts fit the needs of the congregation and community. A given candidate can always be considered again at a later time.)