**Church Field Visits**

## Scheduling the First Visit

The Committee and candidate will decide together a mutually acceptable weekend for the candidate to be introduced to the church and preach in view of a call. The Social Coordinator will take care of arranging for motel accommodations, restaurant reservations, and any other physical aspects of the visit. Remember, the church should cover any expenses incurred by the candidate during the visit. The Committee should also decide what needs to happen during this visit. How important is it for the candidate to meet with the staff, deacons, senior adults, youth, etc.? A tour of the church community might need to be scheduled. A general reception may be planned for Sunday afternoon in the fellowship hall of the church. The Committee and the candidate can decide together what the weekend should look like

**A second meeting** would be an excellent time to schedule meetings between the staff and the prospective pastor. It will be important to make ample time for each staff person to sit down with the candidate so that they may begin to understand one another. The members of the church staff will be naturally anxious about a new man coming in. Their anxiety can be lessened (or heightened) by meeting with the candidate. The Committee should provide a time for the staff to give feedback to them regarding any concern they have as a consequence of their meeting. Conversely, the prospective pastor should also be given an opportunity to speak candidly about his impressions of the staff. The author was once asked if the staff should tender their resignation upon the installation of a new pastor. The answer to this question depends upon how you understand calling. Is a staff person in the ministry because it’s a job or a calling? Has the staff person experienced God’s divine calling upon his or her life? Is the staff person called by the pastor or the church?

A word of caution at this point. Do not wait until the last minute to allow the staff to meet the candidate. Treat them with trust and respect in this process by giving them adequate time to dialogue with the candidate the committee is bringing before the church. If the staff is not positive about the candidate, it may not be a positive experience moving forward. For example, this would be the time to discuss salary, housing, insurance, retirement, time off for vacation, conferences, conventions, revivals, reimbursable ministry expenses, etc.

In View of a Call Weekend

## Calendar for the View of Call Weekend

*Friday Night:* Supper with the Pastor Search Committee and their spouses and Ministerial Staff and Spouses

*Saturday Morning:* Meeting Deacons and Wives

 Meeting with Church Leadership: Sunday School Teachers and Committees

*Saturday Afternoon:* Church Social a time to informally speak to perspective Pastor Candidate

 5:00 Perspective Pastor Candidate sharing his Testimony and answering Questions

*Sunday Morning*: Worship with prospective Pastor preaching. Immediately after the service a called business meeting for the purpose of voting for the Pastor Candidate.

## Preparing the Congregation for the Visit

It goes without saying that by the time you reach this point in the process a lot is at stake for the candidate, Committee and congregation. How the candidate is presented to the congregation will make a tremendous difference in how he is accepted. The importance of unanimity among the committee members has been underscored already. If the committee members are not excited about their recommendation of this candidate, it is highly unlikely that the congregation will be. On the other hand, if the Committee demonstrates excitement in presenting the candidate, the congregation will catch it! The Committee can help pave the way for the candidate’s visit to the church field and a positive reception by providing useful information to the congregation. One of the things the Committee will want to do is develop a nice biographical form31 that can be used in introducing the candidate to the congregation. A nice picture of the pastor and his family, along with important information about his ministerial preparation and experience, will go a long way in creating a welcoming atmosphere among the congregants. This form could be included in the newsletter or passed out on a Sunday morning through the Sunday School. It should not be used too early because there is the potential that the news could get back to his current congregation. A good approach might be to use this particular piece the week before the candidate is scheduled to make his visit. That does not mean, however, that nothing can be done in advance of the candidate’s visit. Some committees have utilized a kind of “town hall” meeting to share information (excluding details of name and current ministry) about the candidate with the congregation. This type of meeting would allow the Committee to present answers to questions that might be anticipated and to answer unanticipated questions. Certainly, the Committee would want to share with the congregation important matters involving salary and benefits, vacation, time off for revivals, continuing education, etc. Of course, the congregation should have already approved these matters. It is simply a courtesy of making sure everybody is on the same page. This type of meeting would provide a context for sharing with the congregation the formal covenant32 that articulates the mutual commitments being made by both the candidate and the congregation. In fact, this would be a good time for the congregation to affirm the covenant and to make sure that all questions have been adequately addressed.

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1. See Appendix 16 for sample Information Form.
2. See Appendix 17 for sample Pastor-Congregation Covenant.

In addition to the “town hall” meeting, the Committee will be wise to utilize other means for informing the congregation of the candidate’s visit, e.g., bulletin, newsletter, pulpit announcements; without disclosing the name of the candidate. The biographical form, with details, will be sent out to all resident members’ homes the week before the candidate’s visit.

An important aspect of the weekend visit will be the trial sermon. It is suggested that the Committee work with the candidate to discover any special requests he may have for the worship service. The Committee will also work closely with the Minister of Music to assure that the candidate will be properly introduced and have ample time to deliver his message.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The Sunday evening service is an excellent time for the candidate to share informally with the congregation his Christian pilgrimage, including his conversion, call to preach, ministerial experience and other information of his choosing. Following his testimony, he could invite questions from the congregation.

1. One contributor remembers vividly stepping into the pulpit to preach a “trial sermon” when the clock read 11:40

a.m. The announcements, music, and the awarding of Bibles to graduating seniors had crowded the worship service and resulted in a window of about twenty minutes for a four-point sermon. If you are a Baptist, you know the magic of the noon hour. Talk about pressure! Through careful planning, this uncomfortable scenario can be avoided. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)