Contacting and Meeting the Candidates

The Chairperson of the Committee will logically be the one to make this contact. The Chairperson needs to be prepared to answer questions that may be raised by the candidate over the phone. To assist in the accurate dissemination of information, a church profile should be prepared and in the hands of the Chairperson.[[1]](#footnote-1) Such information will be helpful to the candidate in deciding whether or not to enter the search process. Of course, at this juncture, neither the Committee nor the candidate is making a decision beyond an initial meeting. The Chairperson will express the Committee’s interest in the candidate and ask him if he would be willing to set up a meeting with the Committee. The chairperson will respectfully request that the candidate’s spouse also attend the meeting. If for any reason the spouse cannot attend this meeting, then there needs to be a scheduled time for the Committee to meet the spouse. This could happen at one of the other meetings that will be held before the Committee makes its final decision. Why? Though the church is not calling the spouse to serve on the staff, the spouse will be either an asset or a liability to the candidate’s ministry. The church has every right to expect that the minister’s spouse will be committed to Christ and to the church, and the Committee has the responsibility of assessing that. If the candidate is interested in meeting with the Committee, a place and time should be mutually agreed upon by the candidate and the Chairman of the Committee. Often, a nice restaurant will have private rooms and provide the context for a productive meeting. The place should be selected based on convenience and privacy. Of course, the church should cover the expenses of the candidate and his spouse. Additionally, it is a professional courtesy for the church to cover all expenses incurred by the candidate throughout the entirety of the search process.26 This is only fair in view of the fact that the Committee initiated the process and the candidate has chosen to enter the process at their invitation.

A word should be said here about possible geographical restrictions. What was written above assumes that the candidate is within driving distance of the church. There may be instances where the candidate is far enough away that the Committee will need to make other arrangements for a meeting. In fact, the challenge of distance may be such that some of the steps in the process may need to dovetail into one another. The Committee will use their judgment to determine how the process needs to be adjusted.

In advance of the meeting, the committee members should have already studied the questions they want to ask the candidate and decided how the questions will be divided among them. The Committee wants to avoid the impression that they are working from a checklist. Therefore, it will be much easier if each member of the Committee accepts responsibility for three or four of the questions. At this meeting, it is appropriate for the Committee Chair to take the lead. If this is a dinner meeting, the Chairperson will get everyone’s attention and offer thanks for the meal and meeting. After the meal, the meeting can take on more formality. The first item will be a time of prayer, seeking God’s will and leadership. This will be followed by introductions. Likely, informal introductions have already been made as the candidate, his spouse and the committee members gather and eat. The chair may want to invite the members of the Committee to introduce themselves more fully by sharing a little about their family, work, and involvement in the church. After the committee members have introduced themselves, the Chairperson could invite the candidate to introduce himself and talk about his Christian pilgrimage. It would be appropriate to invite the spouse to share about their own Christian sojourn. From that point, the committee members will introduce their questions. It is very important that the answers to each question be understood by the committee members. It is perfectly acceptable to ask the candidate or his spouse to amplify on an answer that may be incomplete. The chairperson needs to be sensitive to the time and allow ample time for the candidate and his spouse to ask the questions they have brought to the meeting. The committee members should have done their homework and be able to respond intelligently to the questions of the candidate.[[2]](#footnote-2) As soon as possible after this meeting, the committee members should come back together to debrief. Each member of the Committee should be prepared to share his/her impressions. It is important to hear from each member. The Chairperson has the responsibility of encouraging and engaging each member to express her/his feelings. What did you like; what did you not like? Were there any red flags? Did the meeting raise other questions that need to be addressed? Does the committee feel good enough about the meeting to proceed to the next step? All concerns should be resolved before moving to the next step. If that cannot be done, the Chairperson should contact the candidate, thank him for the meeting and inform him that the Committee feels God is leading them in a different direction. In that case, the Committee will go back to the second choice and renew the process. If, however, the Committee feels positive about the initial meeting, they are ready to move ahead with this candidate.

1. See Appendix 12 for sample Church Profile form. 26 This includes meals, hotel, mileage (per IRS allowance) 27 See Appendix 14 for sample questions for ministers. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Appendix 14 for questions the candidate may ask. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)