## Taking the Congregational Vote

When it comes to the matter of the vote, most committee members ask “what,” “when” and “how” questions.

What constitutes a good vote? When it comes to answering this question, there is no standard. A pastor has gone to a church with a 75% vote and done well. Conversely, there have been times when a pastor has gone to a church with a vote in the high 90% and failed. Often the Bylaws of the church will stipulate what percentage of the vote is required to issue a call. When this question is not addressed by the Bylaws, the congregation should determine in advance of the trial sermon and vote what percentage is required for a call to be extended.

When is the best time to vote? The desire is to involve as many people as possible in the vote. Since Sunday morning is the most attended service, it makes sense to have the vote on the Sunday morning following the Sunday of the trial sermon. That time frame also gives the congregation a week to pray about their vote.

How should the vote be taken? In order to ascertain the most accurate opinion of the congregation, the vote should be taken by secret ballot. As people enter the sanctuary for the Sunday morning worship service, a prepared ballot with the simple options of “YES” and “NO” may be handed out. Before the worship service begins, the vote can be taken. Someone should be selected to preside over the vote. That person will recognize the Chairperson of the Search Committee who then will ask the entire Committee to join him on the platform. He will underscore the unanimity and enthusiasm of every member of the Committee in presenting a motion to the church that Bro. “So and So” be called as pastor. There will be no discussion of the motion. The individual presiding will then step up and announce that every church member is entitled to vote. The ushers need to be prepared to hand a ballot to anyone who failed to obtain one upon entering the sanctuary. The instructions are simple. The members should vote either “YES” to call or “NO” not to call the candidate as pastor. When all the ballots have been marked, they should be collected and counted by the ushers or others who have been designated for that purpose. By the end of the worship service, the count should have been easily completed and the results should be shared with the congregation.[[1]](#footnote-1)

As soon as feasible, after the vote has been determined, the Chairperson of the Search Committee should notify the candidate. The candidate will likely respond in one of two ways. He will excitedly accept the call or he will ask for time to pray about it. Of course, there exists the possibility he could decline the call. However, that is unlikely at this point. If the candidate asks for time to pray about the decision, the Chairperson will warmly agree but will emphasize the importance of informing the congregation in an expeditious and timely manner. It is reasonable for the Chairperson to ask for the candidate’s decision in time to announce it to the congregation on the upcoming Sunday.

Assuming the final decision is to consummate the call, the candidate and Committee will work together to arrange the details of relocation. It is the responsibility of the Committee to go the extra mile in laying the groundwork for a positive beginning. Once the new pastor is on the field, the Committee might consider scheduling a general reception for the pastor and his family, including especially local pastors and congregations, the Director of Missions, a Baptist state convention representative, as well as a representative from the community at large. The Committee should also plan, with the new pastor’s input, an installation service35 to formalize the relationship between pastor and congregation.

1. Often the question is raised about what is a “good” percentage vote. This question may be addressed in the church’s Constitution and Bylaws; however, if it is not, the Search Committee should work with the key leaders of the church to make that call. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)