Search committee kit

From Church Posting, churchposting.com/jobs/search-committee-kit/

The normal search process ranges from eight to eighteen months. (Dallas Theological Seminary, “The Search”)

The steps

1. Form the committee and agree how it works
Name the members, a chair and a secretary. Agree in writing to keep every candidate’s name and every discussion confidential, to attend, and to speak with one voice to the church.

2. Write the church profile
Describe the church as it is: attendance, budget, staff, the confession of faith, how the church worships, and what the next pastor will face. Candidates read this first. (Dallas Theological Seminary, “The Search”)

3. Write the job profile and the pay range
List the duties, the hours, who the role answers to, the pay range, housing (parsonage or allowance), retirement, health coverage and time off. Put housing terms in writing.

4. Post the job and collect résumés
The SBTC handbook receives résumés for thirty to forty-five days. (Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, Pastor Search Committee Handbook)

5. Narrow in rounds
The SBTC handbook allows two weeks of prayer and evaluation for each round, narrowing from all résumés to about 30 to 35, then to a top five. (Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, Pastor Search Committee Handbook)

6. Send a short questionnaire
The SBTC handbook keeps the questionnaire to no more than ten questions, sent to the top three to five candidates. (Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, Pastor Search Committee Handbook)

7. Interview, hear the candidate preach or lead, and check references
The SBTC handbook checks references for up to three candidates, asks each reference for a second reference, and never contacts a candidate’s current church without written permission. (Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, Pastor Search Committee Handbook)

8. Write to every candidate you release
The SBTC handbook sends a letter to each candidate who is no longer under consideration. A short, kind letter at each round keeps no one waiting. (Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, Pastor Search Committee Handbook)

9. Present one candidate and call the vote
The SBTC handbook announces the vote and the candidate’s weekend two weeks in advance. (Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, Pastor Search Committee Handbook)

Reference check questions

- How do you know the candidate, and for how long have you known him? (Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, Pastor Search Committee Handbook)
- What can you tell me about his character and his leadership style? (Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, Pastor Search Committee Handbook)

- Do you have any concerns about this candidate's ability or willingness to serve our church as the senior pastor? (Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, Pastor Search Committee Handbook)
- Is there any matter you feel we should consider if we are to pursue him further? (Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, Pastor Search Committee Handbook)
- In your opinion, what are his greatest strengths? (Carolina Baptist Association, reference questions)
- Is he able to lead through or in spite of difficult circumstances? (Carolina Baptist Association, reference questions)
- How does he respond to criticism? (Carolina Baptist Association, reference questions)
- If you were in our place, would you consider Pastor ***** as your pastor? Why or why not? (Carolina Baptist Association, reference questions)

Templates

Committee covenant
As a member of the [Church] search committee, I will pray for this search, attend every meeting I can, read every candidate's file before we meet, keep each candidate's name and our discussions confidential inside the committee, speak about the search to the church only through the chair, and support the committee's decision once it is made.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Acknowledgment to an applicant
Dear [Name],

Thank you for applying for [Role] at [Church]. We received your materials on [date]. Our committee meets every [day] and expects to finish its first review by [date]. We will write to you either way by then.

In Christ,
[Chair], for the search committee

Release letter
Dear [Name],

Thank you for the care you put into your application for [Role] at [Church]. After prayer and review, the committee has decided not to move your application forward. We are grateful for your ministry and will pray for the next step God has for you.

In Christ,
[Chair], for the search committee

Reference request
Dear [Reference],

[Candidate] has named you as a reference for [Role] at [Church], and has given written permission for us to contact you. Could we speak by phone for twenty minutes this week or next? Everything you tell us stays inside the search committee.

Thank you,
[Name], [phone], for the search committee

Interview questions by role

Senior pastor

- Describe your conversion and your call to ministry.
- What is your position on the inspiration, authority, and inerrancy of the Bible?
- What is your policy on pastoral counseling?
- What do you think is the most important thing for you to do during the first year as the new pastor of a church?
- How do you go about making changes in the church?
- Describe your leadership style.
- What measures have you put in place for personal accountability?
- How do you respond to criticism?
- What would be your most important priorities in the first 6 months as our pastor?
- How have you approached issues of financial stewardship in congregations you have served?
- What type of conflicts have you experienced with other staff members and how was it resolved?
- Have you ever had to terminate a church staff member? If so, how did you handle it?

Source: Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, Pastor Search Committee Handbook, Appendix XVIII, https://sbtexas.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/pastor-search-committee-handbook-85x11-1.pdf

Associate pastor

- Are you comfortable leading worship services on your own?
- How do you handle disagreements with the senior pastor or other clergy members?
- What is your process for making decisions on your own or consulting others when the senior pastor is unavailable?
- Provide an example of a time when you helped implement a new program or policy at the church.
- If you had to choose one area of ministry to focus on, what would it be and why?
- Describe your ideal Sunday morning service.
- What do you think is the most important aspect of pastoral care?
- What is your experience working with volunteers?
- How would you go about resolving a conflict between two staff members?

Source: ClimbTheLadder, associate pastor interview questions (July 15, 2025), https://climbtheladder.com/associate-pastor-interview-questions/

- What parts of your current (or last) ministry job are the most energizing to you and what parts are the most draining?
- If we were to hire you today, what would your game plan be for your first 3 months in this role?
- Which of your ministry gifts have other leaders previously confirmed? What have they said about your strengths or your potential blind spots?

Source: Vanderbloemen, church staff interview questions, https://www.vanderbloemen.com/resources/church-staff-interview-questions/

Youth pastor

- What’s your ideal work environment?
- What are your biggest strengths and greatest weaknesses?
- Tell me about a time you faced conflict with a supervisor. How did it get resolved?
- How would you define a successful youth ministry?
- What is the last book you read?
- Complete this sentence: Ultimately, the local church should be focused on ___.
- What frustrates you about ministry?
- Talk to me about adolescent development.

- What is the role of the family in faith development?
- Tell me your biblical understanding of ___ (insert theological distinctives important to your church).

Source: Kurt Johnston, 20 interview questions for youth workers, youthministry.com, https://youthministry.com/20-interview-questions-for-youth-workers/

Worship leader

- What do you consider the main responsibilities of a worship leader in the life of the church?
- What is your theology of worship and how has it impacted the way you plan and lead?
- Why do you want to lead worship at this church?
- How have you worked with a worship committee and other ministry staff to plan individual services as well as themes for later in the calendar year?
- What does your weekly schedule look like?
- What music do you listen to?
- What is your music involvement outside the church?
- What does your personal worship life look like?
- How familiar are you with worship technology?
- How do you recruit people to participate in various roles?
- What skill level do you require of musicians and others participating in some way?

Source: The Covenant Companion, 11 questions search committees should ask potential worship leaders (October 23, 2015), https://covchurch.org/2015/10/23/11-questions-search-committees-should-ask-potential-worship-leaders/

Children’s ministry director

- Can you tell me about your relationship with Jesus? When did you enter a relationship with Him? What do you do to grow in your faith?
- Why are you applying for this position? What drew you to this?
- What are your strengths? What comes easy for you?
- What are some things you are working on to get better at?
- What are 3 goals you would set and try to accomplish in your first year?
- Can you tell me about a time when there was conflict in a previous job and how you handled it?
- How would you build and equip a volunteer team? What experience do you have leading adults?
- How would you partner with parents and equip them to disciple their children?
- What have I not asked you that I should ask you?

Source: Dale Hudson, 10 questions to ask when hiring a children’s ministry director, ChurchLeaders (May 7, 2021), https://churchleaders.com/children/childrens-ministry-articles/381208-10-questions-to-ask-when-hiring-a-childrens-ministry-director.html

Church administrator

- Are you comfortable working with a budget and managing finances?
- How would you handle a situation where you have multiple staff members complaining about another employee?
- What is your experience with managing and training staff members?
- Provide an example of a time when you had to make a difficult decision that impacted multiple people.
- What would you do if you noticed that a staff member was consistently not meeting expectations?
- Describe your experience with using church management software.
- How do you ensure that all church policies and procedures are followed?

Source: ClimbTheLadder, church administrator interview questions (July 15, 2025), https://climbtheladder.com/church-administrator-interview-questions/

- What key strategic initiatives have you led in your current or a previous position?
- How have you simplified a process in the past?
- What areas of financial and/or operational management are you most and least comfortable with?

- Why do you want to work here and what do you anticipate will be different about working in a church or non-profit from working in a for-profit business?

Source: Vanderbloemen, 7 key interview questions for operations and finance roles, https://www.vanderbloemen.com/resources/7-key-interview-questions-to-ask-for-operations-and-finance-roles/

Sources

Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, Pastor Search Committee Handbook: https://sbtexas.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/pastor-search-committee-handbook-85x11-1.pdf
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Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec, “What’s Next? Our Pastor Resigned”: https://baptist.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Whats-Next-Pastor-Resigned1-Copy.pdf
Carolina Baptist Association, reference questions: https://www.carbc.org/hp_wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Reference-Questions.pdf