

NAVIGATING THE PASTORAL SEARCH



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ABC NEBRASKA



Acknowledgements

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An Overview of the Pastoral Selection Process

When a pastor announces their departure, a congregation moves through several linked stages: the interim time, the search itself, and the calling and welcoming of a new pastor. Search Teams move through these stages at different paces — some quickly, others over several meetings — but a thorough process works through each stage below.

Work through each stage in order, checking off tasks as they are completed, and report progress to the congregation regularly. Communication is what keeps the congregation and the Search Team moving together toward calling a new pastor.

Step 1: First Steps

(Upon announcement of the current pastor's departure)

- Contact American Baptist Churches of Nebraska Region Staff
- Name the reason for the transition and conduct an exit interview
- Honor the departing pastor with a service of closure or farewell
- Develop an interim ministry plan and welcome the interim minister

Step 2: Pre-Search Phase

- Select the Search Team and assign roles
- Develop the Church Profile: self-study, vision, job description, compensation
- Share information collected with ABC NE Region Staff
- Post the position summary

Step 3: Search Phase

- Identify the gifts and qualities you are seeking in a minister
- Receive and review profiles and resumes; contact references
- Distribute the Church Profile to candidates who remain interested
- Collect responses and discern your top candidates

Step 4: Interview Phase

- Research candidates, check references, and evaluate sermons
- Conduct initial and follow-up interviews, including a neutral pulpit visit
- Conduct a criminal background check and choose one candidate to recommend

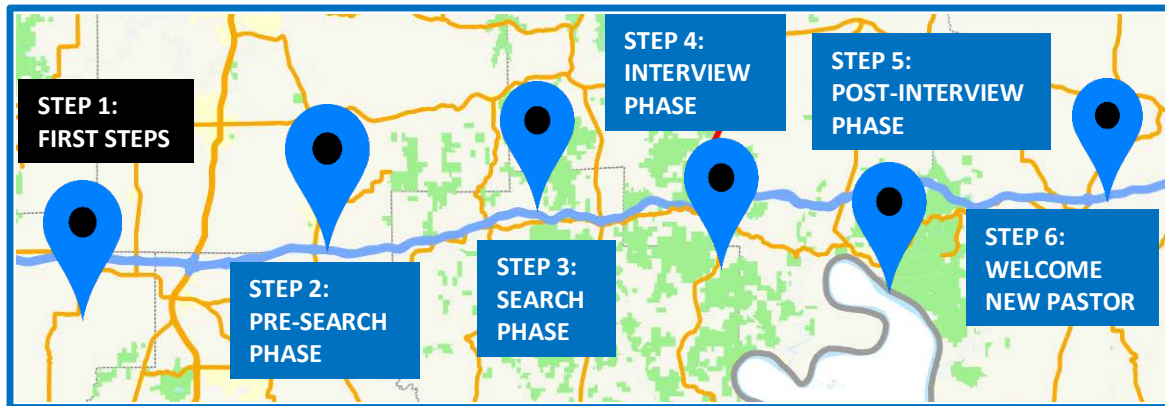
Step 5: Post-Interview Phase

- Host a Candidates Weekend and hold the congregational vote
- Say farewell to the interim minister

Step 6: Welcome the New Pastor

- Manage the transition and welcome
- Install the new minister
- Thank the Search Team

Notes



Step 1: First Steps

When the current pastor announces their departure, a few items need attention before they leave. These first steps help ensure a smooth transition and a strong start to the search process.

Name the Reason for the Transition and Conduct an Exit Interview

Naming why a pastor is leaving — retirement, a new call, or an unexpected departure — helps the congregation process the change and gives the Search Team clarity.

If possible, conduct an exit interview with the departing pastor, typically led by the Pastoral Relations Committee or its equivalent per your bylaws. The interview lets the departing pastor recall ministry highlights, share hopes for the congregation's future, and clarify their future relationship with the church — including a reminder that the Code of Ethics for Ministerial Leaders discourages former pastors from providing pastoral services to former members unless invited by the successor. Close with thanksgiving and prayer.

In sudden or difficult departures, it may not be possible to hold this conversation with the departing pastor — a Region Staff person can conduct it instead.

Sample Exit Interview Questions

- How was the church different from your expectations when you arrived, and how has the congregation changed during your tenure?
- What experiences were most important during your ministry here?
- What do you see as this congregation's strengths and weaknesses?
- Did you accomplish what you hoped to during your ministry? What still needs attention?
- What ministry or changes does this church need to address next?
- Have essential records and materials been transferred?

Say Farewell to the Departing Minister

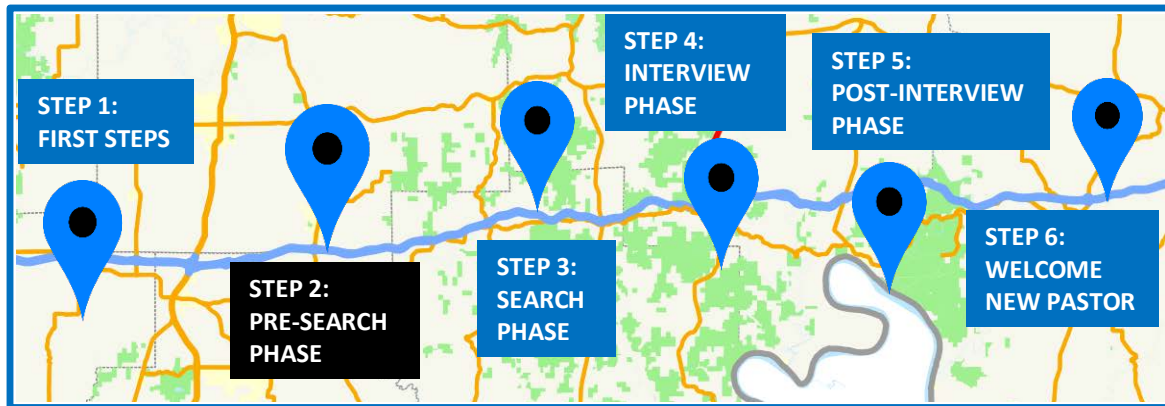
A congregation needs the chance to express love, gratitude, and even grief for a departing pastor. Public celebration — and, when a departure is difficult, private space to grieve — are both appropriate.

- Reception and recognition: a meal or closing communion; gifts from ministry groups and the congregation; a video, slideshow, or letters of thanks.
- Farewell worship: the pastor shares their call to ministry and to what's next; laying on of hands and prayer; congregants share memories; a final communion and sermon.
- For difficult departures: use the Preferred Path model of conflict mediation (ABC NE staff are trained to help); create small-group or one-on-one spaces for people to process pain; bring in licensed counselors if needed.
- If misconduct is suspected: do not protect the pastor involved. Take every allegation seriously, contact legal authorities first, then the ABC NE Region Office.

Develop an Interim Ministry Plan

Anxiety often follows a pastor's departure, along with the temptation to seek a quick fix. This in-between season matters: it is a time to process the previous pastor's departure, take stock of strengths and weaknesses, and refocus on the congregation's identity before calling a new pastor.

Contact ABC NE Region Staff for help developing and implementing an interim plan suited to your church's practice, and to welcome an interim minister where appropriate.



Step 2: Pre-Search Phase

Selecting a Search Team

The Search Team identifies, interviews, and ultimately recommends one candidate to the congregation — work that requires time, focus, and prayerful discernment over several months. Always follow your church’s constitution and bylaws for who serves and how the team is formed.

An ideal team has 5–7 members. An odd number avoids tie votes; if a tie does occur, it is a sign the team needs more discussion before reaching consensus. Aim for a team that reflects the congregation — different ages, genders, and groups within the church. Look for members with:

- Spiritual maturity and the trust and respect of the congregation
- The ability to keep confidences and stay agenda-free
- A clear sense of the congregation’s interests, mission, and vision
- Real availability — do not add already-overcommitted people
- A non-anxious presence and a willingness to work toward consensus

Build Trust, Sign a Covenant, and Assign Roles

Much of the Search Team’s work depends on the trust between its members. Spend time in prayer together, and in early meetings set aside 15 minutes for members to share their personal testimony and why they have been called to serve on this team. Many teams solidify their commitment by signing a covenant (see below). Having a commissioning moment in Sunday worship is also recommended, which empowers the search members and reminds the congregation of its responsibility to support the team.

Assign every member a role at your first meeting, starting with a chairperson — an organized, respected person who becomes the primary contact with ABC NE Region staff.

- Chairperson: administrative lead and primary Region Staff contact
- Prayer Coordinator: leads prayer exercises and shares requests with the congregation
- Secretary: schedules meetings, sets agendas, and takes and distributes minutes
- Church Communications: manages congregation-wide surveys and updates

- Candidate Communications: point of contact for candidates and interview scheduling
- Researcher: background, reference, social media, and sermon research on candidates
- Hospitality Coordinator: arranges candidate visits and interviews

Decisions, Logistics, and Budget

Decide early — before any major task is underway — how the team will make decisions: unanimous vote, majority, or consensus. Meet weekly in early stages, tapering off as tasks are completed; teams that meet more often tend to move faster.

Update the congregation at least monthly, with more frequent updates through public announcements, newsletters, websites, or social media, including specific prayer requests. Finally, secure a budget: search costs are often left out of annual budgets but typically include candidate travel, background checks, job board postings, printing, and eventual moving costs.

Search Team Covenant

Having been entrusted with the important task of finding and recommending to our congregation the person whom God is calling as the next pastor of our congregation, I thoughtfully and prayerfully make these promises:

- We will pray for the Search Team, our church, and the prospective pastor we are searching for.
- We will seek the leading of the Holy Spirit
- We will agree on clear roles and responsibilities
- We will pursue with integrity the pastoral selection process upon which the team has agreed
- We will respect the opinion of others
- We will strive for peace, cooperation, respect, and unity in our discussions
- We will follow the Preferred Path model from Matthew 5 and Matthew 18 to resolve conflicts
- We will maintain confidentiality—candidate names, references, and team discussions will not be shared beyond the team and ABC NE Region Staff. I will not disclose confidential information to friends, family, or others.
- We will be punctual and attend all meetings to the best of our ability
- We will follow through on assignments
- We will respect and communicate support for the team's decision as we recommend a candidate to our congregation.

Team Member

Team Member

Team Member

Team Member

Team Member

Team Member

Team Member

Date

Develop a Church Profile

The church profile introduces potential candidates to your congregation's characteristics, story, beliefs, vision, and basic demographics. Building it involves gathering data, identifying your mission and vision, writing a job description, determining compensation, and assembling the profile itself.

Gather Basic Church Information

Having a clear picture of your congregation helps the Search Team find a pastor who is a good match. ABC NE Region Staff provide an online survey tool to gather this information efficiently — it is fully customizable, analyzed centrally, and shared back with the Search Team and congregation. If you prefer to build your own snapshot, the table below outlines what to collect.

Category	What to Record
Community & size	City/town population and type: center city, urban neighborhood, suburb, small city, small town, or open country.
Congregation type	Downtown, neighborhood, new/restarted, old established, small-town, federated/union, or yoked (note any other denomination if yoked).
Distance members live from church	Approximate share within 1, 1–2, 2–5, 5–10, and 10+ miles.
Age & gender breakdown	Members/participants by decade (0–9 through 80+), by male/female/total.
Racial & ethnic makeup	Approximate percentages across the congregation.
Household composition	Single parents, married couples with/without children at home, singles, widowed, etc.
Employment	Full-time, part-time, homemaker, retired, student, unemployed, and general employment categories.
Household income	Approximate distribution across income brackets.
Denominational participation	Attendance at ABC NE annual meeting, association meetings, training events, and camping/conference programs.
Governance & structure	Organizational chart: boards, committees, pastoral relations committee, cooperative programs, clubs.
Finances	Total budget, average annual giving per participant, expenses, mission giving, and endowment (and how endowment income is used).

Conduct a Church Self-Study

Understanding what pastoral gifts, training, and priorities the congregation values most helps the Search Team filter resumes and profiles — and it is worth sharing these findings with the congregation. ABC NE Region Staff's online survey is fully customizable; a few sample questions:

- Which ministry skills matter most in your next pastor?
- What minimum education should they have?
- Are you open to a female candidate?
- What are this church's greatest strengths and weaknesses?
- Where should the next pastor focus their leadership?

Identify Your Mission, Vision, and Statement of Faith

If your congregation already has a written mission or vision statement, use it — alongside your constitution and bylaws — to shape the kind of candidate who fits. If not, many resources exist to help craft one; the goal is simply to state the congregation's ministry passion so the Search Team can identify candidates who strengthen it.

Likewise, a statement of faith (often already in your bylaws, or available from denominational leadership) helps ensure candidates share your theological convictions. Ask candidates for their own statement of faith as part of the process.

Create a Job Description

With your bylaws, research, mission/vision statements, and survey data in hand, it is time to write a job description — the foundation for advertising the role and discussing concrete expectations with candidates. Your ABC NE Region staff can help shape it. Consider including:

- Education and experience expected of candidates
- Leadership and pastoral style that fits your congregation (relational vs. operational, hands-on vs. hands-off)
- Preaching, teaching, and communication style
- Theology and character traits (empathy, humility, vision, lifelong learning)
- Ministries and staff the pastor will lead or oversee

Ask yourselves: Is this description realistic? Does it address the congregation's concerns? Does it balance the practical with the spiritual? Plan for two versions — a short listing for job boards and a fuller description for candidates who respond.

Sample Introductory Job Posting

Healthy American Baptist church of 125 in a town of 26,000, a half-hour from Omaha, seeks a Senior Pastor to preach, teach, visit, lead staff, and engage the community in new ways. Interested pastors should submit resumes or ABC Profiles to the ABC Nebraska Region Office at gmamula@abcnebraska.com or by calling 402-556-4730.

Sample Detailed Job Description

- Worship: prepare and deliver an original sermon most Sundays; be present before and during the Sunday School hour; welcome guests; offer an invitation to respond to Christ.
- Special occasions: weddings, funerals, baptisms, dedications, ordinations, and Communion, coordinated with deacons and the worship team.
- Bible study: maintain a personal study discipline and participate in — or lead, on rotation — adult Bible study.
- Office hours: a 40-hour week balancing meetings, visitation, and sermon preparation, with open office hours for counsel.
- Visitation: regular visits to homebound and hospitalized members, coordinated with deacons.
- Community involvement: participate in town events, community worship services, and the local ministerial association.
- Denominational involvement: attend ABC NE pastor gatherings and region events.
- Church life: support church ministries (e.g., the youth group) and attend deacon, business, and pastoral relations meetings.

Reporting: to the deacon board for spiritual support and encouragement; to the pastoral relations committee for ongoing feedback on performance and concerns; and a summary report to the quarterly business meeting.

Determine Compensation

Compensation varies by budget and may shape whether you seek a full-time, part-time, or dual-income pastor. Many churches offer a salary range and let candidates allocate the package — salary, housing, retirement, and so on — according to their needs. Consider salary, Social Security offset, housing allowance, continuing education, retirement, insurance, and reimbursable expenses (mileage, meals, hospitality). The checklist and worksheets below, adapted from the Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board (MMBB), can guide the conversation; additional resources are available at mmbb.org/managing-church-finances.

Compensation Checklist	Yes/No
Is pastoral compensation (cash salary, housing, utilities) comparable to other local professionals with similar education and responsibilities?	
Have church and pastoral staff agreed on days off and vacation time?	
If the church provides a parsonage, is a realistic rental value reported to MMBB for retirement/death benefit purposes, and does the church cover utilities and an equity allowance?	
Has the church budgeted for auto reimbursement, convention/denominational events, books and resources, continuing education, and hospitality for all pastoral staff?	

Are all compensation, expense, and benefit agreements in writing?	
Does the church provide a Social Security/Medicare tax offset of at least 50% of the minister's tax liability?	
Does the church provide the ABC Retirement/Death Benefit Plan, plus medical and dental benefits, for all pastoral staff?	

Compensation Worksheet	This Year	Next Year
Cash salary		
Housing (parsonage rental value + utilities allowance, or housing allowance)		
MMBB ABC Retirement/Death Benefit Plan (16% of total compensation)		
Medical and dental benefits		
Social Security/Medicare tax offset		
Auto, convention, continuing education, books, and hospitality reimbursement		
Total compensation	\$	\$

Salary survey (based on MMBB national clergy compensation comparison and a matching ABC NE regional survey — figures reflect a wide range of experience and vary even among similarly sized churches):

Avg. Worship Attendance	Budget Size	National Pay Range (avg.)	ABC NE Avg.	Typical Vacation
50 or less	\$50,000–\$100,000	\$25,000–\$40,000	\$31,750	2–4 weeks
88	\$100,000–\$220,000	\$40,000–\$60,000	\$53,000	3–5 weeks
125	\$220,000–\$500,000	\$50,000–\$76,000	\$70,000	3–5 weeks
250+	\$500,000–\$1,000,000+	\$72,000–\$100,000	\$86,000	3–5 weeks

The median salary for a Pastor in Nebraska was \$64,890 in 2025

Source: MMBB Compensation Comparison.

Additional compensation includes: MMBB retirement, health insurance, housing, continuing education, travel, and church-related expenses.

Building the Church Profile

The church profile presents your congregation in greater detail to your top candidates — and once candidates know of your interest, they will search for you online, so the profile should be accurate, current, and inviting. Use the template below to build yours; present it as a webpage, PDF, printed booklet, or short video, whatever suits your ability, context, and budget.

Church Profile Template

- Contact information: church name, address, phone, website, and social media (Facebook, Twitter/X, Instagram, TikTok, other); your church motto or mission statement; a current photo of the church.
- Our story: a brief history in 200 words or less, with one or two historic photos.
- Mission and ministry: your most active ministries and outreach to community, region, and world, illustrated with a photo or two.
- Church structure: a short summary — or an organization chart — of how your congregation makes decisions, per your constitution and bylaws.
- Current budget: a high-level picture of your budget; a simple pie chart works well. If a parsonage is part of the package, describe it with photos.
- Our town: what you love about your community and why a pastor should want to live and minister there, in 250 words or less — plus the town website, chamber of commerce, school district website, example neighborhoods or housing, and local entertainment or points of interest.
- Meet the Search Team: names and roles of team members, with a group or individual photo.
- Anything else worth sharing about your congregation.

Sample budget presentation:

Budget Category	Amount
Discipleship	\$15,000
Worship	\$15,000
Evangelism	\$15,000
Church Internal Ministries	\$20,000
Church External Missions	\$20,000
Pastoral Staff Salary and Benefits	\$75,000
Building Maintenance	\$25,000
Other Items	\$15,000
Total	\$200,000

Church Timeline Exercise

Schedule a Church Timeline exercise with ABC NE Region staff, ideally over a potluck after worship. It helps the congregation surface its shared story, trends, and important ministry moments, giving the Search Team a clearer sense of what to look for in candidates and what questions to ask in interviews.

Share Information Collected with ABC NE Region Staff

Share your job description, survey results, compensation package, theology, and preferred education level with ABC NE Region Staff so they can begin compiling potential candidates. Names come from MinistrElife, pastors who have expressed interest in Nebraska, seminaries, job postings, and the region's ministry network — plus any candidates who reach out to you directly, who should also be passed to Region Staff for the same vetting as everyone else.

Posting the Position

Once your church profile is ready, it is time to post the opening and begin collecting resumes. Finding the right pastor takes more than a job ad — most churches find their strongest candidates through relationships and referrals rather than anonymous postings. ABC NE Region Staff will screen and reference-check candidates before passing them to your Search Team, but the channels below are also available to you directly.

1. Start with Relationships

Share the opening through the ABC Nebraska network before posting publicly: the [ABC Nebraska pastoral openings page](#), the ABC Nebraska [Facebook page](#), and direct outreach to ABC pastors and regional leaders. Search Team members should personally invite pastors to consider the role — good candidates often apply only after someone tells them, "you would be a great fit here."

2. Post with Baptist and Ministry Networks

These networks tend to produce the best cultural fit: [Baptist News Global](#) | barbara@baptistnews.com, [Baptist Women in Ministry](#), [Central Baptist Theological Seminary](#), [Baptist Seminary of Kentucky](#), [Kairos University](#), [Northern Seminary](#) (\$50 per post), and [Fuller Seminary](#).

3. Contact Seminary Placement Offices

Many strong candidates come directly from seminaries, including [Duke Divinity School](#), [SMU Perkins School of Theology](#), [Truett Seminary at Baylor University](#), [Denver Seminary](#), [Mercer University \(McAfee School of Theology\)](#), [Campbell University Divinity School](#), [University of Sioux Falls](#), and Manhattan Christian College Nita Prickett, nprickett@mccks.edu — plus Princeton, Garrett Evangelical, Iliff, and Columbia Theological Seminaries, which train pastors often open to mainline and Baptist ministry contexts.

4. Use Broader Job Platforms if You Need More Visibility

These reach more candidates but typically require more screening: [ChurchStaffing.com](#) (\$269 per month), [ChurchJobsCafe](#), [Just Church Jobs](#) (\$150 per post), [Indeed](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Ministrelife](#), and [Next Level Church Staffing](#). Note: [The Gospel Coalition's job board](#) requires agreement with a theological statement that most ABC NE churches do not match — use with caution.

5. Use Social Media Strategically

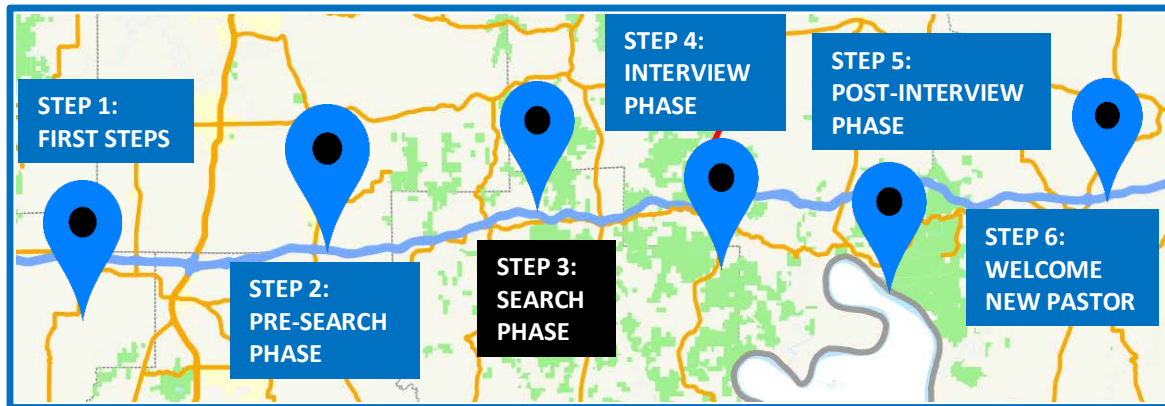
Facebook clergy groups, the ABC Nebraska [Facebook page](#) (or the [Central Region page](#)), [LinkedIn](#), and [Instagram](#) (for reaching younger pastors) can extend your reach. Posts that include a photo of the church or community tend to get noticeably more engagement.

Recommended Timeline

- Week 1: share with ABC Nebraska and personal networks.
- Week 2: post with Baptist organizations and seminary placement offices.
- Week 3: post on broader job boards if you still need more candidates.

Best Practices

- Do not rely on postings alone — most strong candidates are recruited personally.
- Respond quickly; delays often cost you candidates.
- Share salary information transparently — it builds trust and attracts the right fit.
- Be patient but proactive: healthy searches typically take 4–9 months.



Step 3: Search Phase

Once you have posted your job description and begun collecting resumes and profiles, the work turns to filtering candidates toward the best match for your congregation.

Identify the Gifts and Qualities You Are Seeking

Using your self-study, congregational input, and job description as a foundation, build a short list of qualities and abilities you are looking for — and know the difference between what is a must-have and what is simply preferred. No candidate is perfect; teams that treat every quality as non-negotiable end up divided and confused. Clarity here helps the team move faster and keeps subjective preferences from blocking a strong match.

Receiving Resumes and Profiles

ABC NE Region Staff check initial references and conduct first interviews before passing resumes and profiles to your Search Team, briefing you on why each candidate could be a good fit. Every candidate presented has already said yes to relocating, yes to your region, and yes to sharing their information — and has signed the ABC NE Clergy Code of Ethics.

Confidentiality

Remember the Search Team's commitment to confidentiality at this stage. Keep candidate information among the team; do not share names, locations, or backgrounds with the congregation, family, or friends, so candidates are not compromised in their current roles. It is fine to let the congregation know candidates are under consideration and ask them to pray for the team's discernment.

Two-Step Distribution to Candidates

The Search Team sends information to all candidates via email. This can include your full church profile, information on your congregation and community, a statement of faith, a job description, and an invitation to a 20-minute Zoom call. The Zoom call is for the candidates to share their call to Christ, their call to ministry, and their interest in your open pastoral position.

If you choose to move forward with candidates, feel free to send them 2-3 open-ended questions.

Choose 2–3 open-ended questions below (or write your own) to include with the first packet:

- Why are you considering a new ministry placement?
- What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses as a pastor?
- How do you handle conflict and stress?
- What in ministry are you most passionate about, and what is most depleting?
- How do you balance family, life, and ministry?
- Besides Scripture, what books, people, or blogs have most shaped you?
- What most resonates with you about this opportunity?

Model Initial Contact Email

(Include church logo, if possible)

Dear (Name):

We are from (Name of Church) in (Name of City). On (date), our pastor (retired / accepted a call elsewhere), and we are now seeking new pastoral leadership. We received your (Profile/Resume) from the American Baptist Churches of Nebraska and are contacting you to gauge your continued interest — we believe your gifts and experience may be a good match.

Enclosed is a brief sketch of our church and community, along with a short set of open-ended questions. Please review and respond by (date) or let us know by that date if you prefer not to be considered at this time. We also invite you to join a Zoom call scheduled in the next couple of weeks to learn more.

Sincerely, (Chairperson or Secretary, Search Committee)

Discerning the Right Candidate

After receiving open-ended question responses, focus on your top candidates. If a candidate misses the reply deadline, it may be worth a follow-up, though it can also be telling. A candidate or two withdrawing at this point is normal. Notify each candidate when you will next be in touch, then use the discernment process below to narrow the field — and use the decision-making method your team agreed on earlier.

A Suggested Process for Focusing on the Best Candidate

- First reading: Read 1 Samuel 3:1–11 and Matthew 4:18–22, and pray that God brings the best candidate to your church and opens your team to who has been chosen. Read through the job description, then the candidate packets, noting skills that stand out. Set them aside for the day.
- Second reading: Read 1 Kings 19:11–18 and Mark 2:13–17, praying for clarity and a candidate who hears God’s voice. Read the packets again and sort candidates into three piles — Yes, Maybe, and No — then set them aside again.
- Third reading: Read Amos 5:3–24 and Luke 4:16–22, praying for a candidate unafraid to proclaim truth and justice. Revisit your No and Maybe piles to see if any should move, then rank your Yes pile as first, second, and third choice. Come to the next meeting ready to give a 90-second defense of your choices.

- At the Search Team meeting: read Ephesians 4:1–16 and pray for unity. Each member shares their choices and 90-second defense; list candidate names where all can see them. Score responses (3 points for first choice, 2 for second, 1 for third) to help the team focus.

A Spiritual Discernment Process

Adapted from a handout developed by Dr. Judith Burns, presented by Brent and Patti Meyer, September 2006

Discernment is prayerfully seeking the will of God — distinguishing the right from the almost right. It is prayer, not debate, majority rule, or even consensus.

- Conditions necessary for discernment: mutual respect and trust; confidentiality; openness and a contemplative stance; a "holy indifference" — genuine openness to whatever is God's will.
- Do not enter discernment without willingness to trust God's presence, a true desire to be open to where the process leads, and the patience to let it unfold in its own time.
- Enter discernment prayerfully, open to any outcome, humbly, and only for major issues.
- Rules for the process: it cannot be rushed; it is a prayer meeting with business, not a business meeting with prayer; any member may call for silence; listen more than you talk; let each person speak without interruption, using "I..." statements — you never know who God will use, or how.

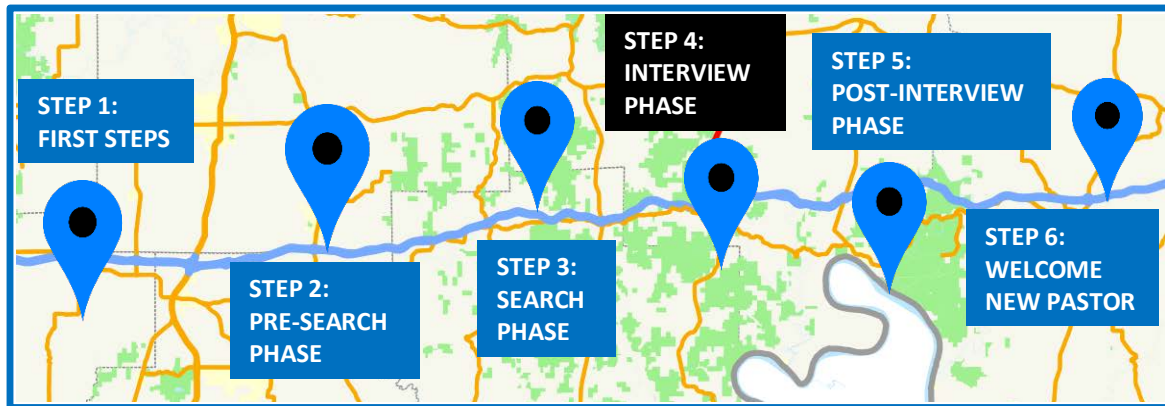
Removing Candidates from the Process

Use the model letter below as a starting point to notify candidates who are no longer under consideration.

(Include church logo, if appropriate)

Dear (name), the Search Committee of (name of church) wants to thank you for your interest and time during our search for a new pastor — a process that requires discerning prayer and careful decision-making. We valued getting acquainted with your gifts and experiences as you shared your spiritual journey with us. Though we believe God has led us elsewhere, your call and ministry are certainly leading you as well, and we will pray for your discernment of where God is calling you next.

Yours in Christ's service, (name), Chair, Search Committee



Step 4: Interview Phase

Now is the time to check references, sample sermons and publications, and hold initial phone or video interviews — potentially including a neutral pulpit visit to hear a candidate preach in a setting that is neither their current church nor yours. ABC NE Region Staff can help arrange technology-based interviews or neutral pulpits. The goal is to narrow toward one candidate to introduce for a candidate weekend.

Checking References

The Search Team's researcher — or the whole team — should conduct reference checks to learn how candidates have led congregations and supervised staff, and to confirm details shared in earlier interviews. Ask each reference, "Who else might I speak to about this candidate?" Stay consistent with your questions so responses are easy to compare. Choose 3–4 from this list:

- In what capacity, and for how long, have you known the candidate?
- Describe their personality, leadership/preaching/teaching style, and work ethic.
- What are their strengths and weaknesses?
- Does the candidate support the denomination's mission, region, and offerings?
- Do you know of anything that would prevent them from serving in this role?
- Is there someone else you would recommend we speak to?

Digital Research

Search each candidate's name and church online for news, blogs, and social media. Look for red flags (overly political or aggressive content, concerning posts) as well as bright spots (community engagement, positive mentions, strong writing or preaching). Never take what you find online at face value — raise anything notable directly with the candidate or their references, citing your source.

Evaluating Sermons and Other Publications

Sermons are written for their original context, so compare them thoughtfully rather than side by side — public speaking is a craft that develops with experience. Use the tool below for each sermon (make copies as needed); a "no" answer is simply data, not a mark against the candidate.

Presentation & Content	Notes
Comfortable, confident, and articulate?	
Captures attention early; easy to follow and listen to?	
Appropriate length and well prepared?	
Begins with Scripture; exegetical or topical style?	
Appeals more to emotion or to reason?	
Illustrations appropriate and clarifying?	
Original, practical, and applicable?	
Evidence of wisdom and insight?	
A clear call to action at the close?	

Interview the Candidates

Initial Interview

The initial interview — by phone or video — is a chance to get acquainted and explore values, temperament, and theology. Send a confirmation with time, date, and location in advance, and test the technology beforehand. Schedule all initial interviews in the same week to keep momentum. Have candidate materials at hand for reference. Plan for about 25 minutes. Suggested questions:

- Tell us your testimony and describe your current ministry.
- What is the best part of being a minister, and what are your hobbies and continuing education?
- From what you know about our church, what excites you most, and what concerns you?

Candidates may ask the team similar questions in return — about your previous pastor, worship style, congregational polity, and the compensation package. Use the Interview Evaluation form below after each interview.

Second Interview

After initial interviews with your top 5–6 candidates, narrow again to two or three — using your earlier discernment process and decision-making method as needed. Notify remaining candidates of where they stand.

Hold second interviews in person where possible, with the church covering travel, lodging, and meals. Discourage a visit during Sunday worship at this stage, since the team has not yet chosen a finalist. If the church has multiple staff, give top candidates time to meet them separately. Use this deeper conversation to discuss the financial package, living arrangements, and potential start dates — inviting your finance person as needed. Aim for 10–12 well-prepared questions drawn from the topics below, and use the Interview Evaluation form again.

Family Interview

If the candidate is married, discuss with their spouse during the process to assess their interest, and later, to confirm their support for the move. Ask about career and school considerations, and how they have engaged (or hope to engage) in congregational life — without presuming a role for them. You are

hiring the candidate, not a "two for one" package; a pastor's spouse may engage in church life as much, or as little, as any other member.

Interview Evaluation

Question	Notes
Did the candidate answer directly, or talk around the question?	
Did they express their views clearly and succinctly?	
Did you ask for clarification where needed, and was it satisfactory?	
Overall rating: highly favorable / moderately favorable / neutral / somewhat unfavorable / very unfavorable	

Secondary Interview Questions by Topic

A well-prepared in-person interview draws on 10–12 questions focused on the gifts your congregation needs most. Sample questions by topic:

Topic	Sample Question
Budget	Describe the size of budget you have worked with in recent years, and your role in it.
Church Growth	How has your definition of church growth shaped your approach to ministry?
Communication	How have you improved communication between groups in your church?
Conflict Management	Discuss your conflict management style, with specific examples.
Counseling	What training do you have in counseling, and where are you most comfortable counseling?
Education	How have you worked with teachers and leaders to improve your church's education program?
Evangelism	How do you define evangelism, and how comfortable are you sharing your faith?
Interchurch Cooperation	How have you been involved ecumenically, and what is a church's role within its denomination?
Interpreting the Faith	How have you helped your congregation find an understanding of the Bible that makes sense to their lives?
Leadership Development	How do you identify, select, and train leaders?
Leadership	What is your greatest leadership success, and what were the results?
Multicultural Ministry	What is your experience working in multicultural settings?

Music	What sort of music ministry do you hope to develop?
Nurturing Fellowship	What does "nurturing fellowship" mean to you, and how would you build it here?
Planning & Management	How do you work with ministry groups to make decisions affecting the whole congregation?
Pastoral Care	Describe your ministry experience with persons in crisis.
Personnel Supervision	Have you supervised staff before, and how would you describe your style?
Preaching	How do you develop a sermon, and how would you describe your preaching style?
Programs	What are some programs you have developed?
Social Action	What social concerns matter most to you, and how have you addressed them in ministry?
Spiritual Life	What do you do to nurture your own spiritual life, and to help others develop theirs?
Stewardship	How have you brought a stewardship emphasis to a congregation, and what difference did it make?
Teaching	Describe your teaching style and experience.
Visitation	Do you follow a regular visitation program, or respond based on need?
Worship	What changes have you made to worship recently, and how were they received?
Youth Ministry	What is your philosophy and experience with youth ministry?
Other	Are there any issues we have not discussed that might affect our ministry together?

Choosing One Candidate to Recommend

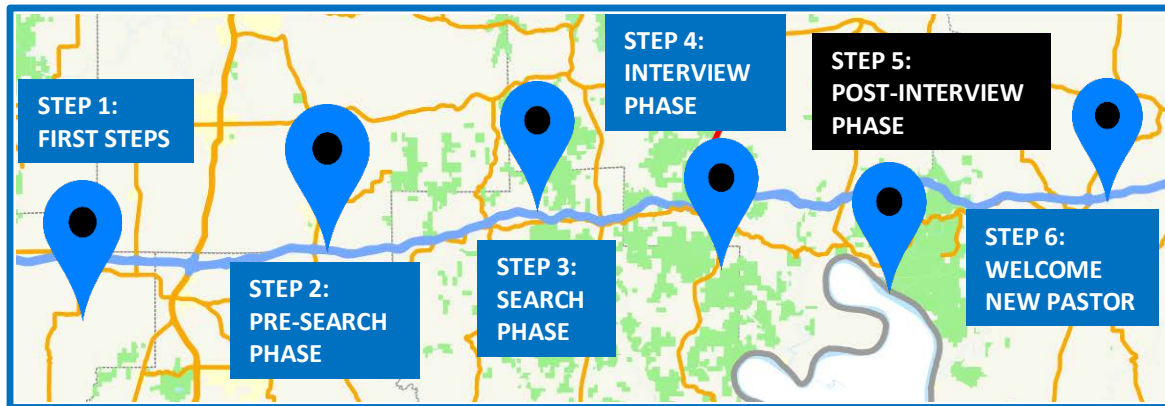
The region provides, at no cost, a criminal background check on your final candidate — a state, national, sex-offender, and criminal record search. You will need to provide the candidate's name and email so Region Staff can obtain their permission.

Once references, sermons, online presence, and background checks are complete, narrow to the one candidate you wish to recommend. Ask the congregation to pray with the team through this step, and continue using your agreed-upon decision method. Re-check your constitution and bylaws for notice periods, quorum, and the vote required to extend a call — and present only one candidate to the congregation at a time.

Salary and Benefit Package

Put the salary and benefit package in writing before presenting the candidate to the congregation. A few tips for building an agreeable package:

- Be creative — not every candidate will divide the package the same way. A spouse's existing health coverage, other retirement income, a signing bonus, or a forgivable home-down-payment loan can all help tailor the offer.
- Work the budget, but do not let the process unravel over numbers that do not immediately match, nor stretch well beyond what the congregation can sustain.
- Remember moving costs — a professional mover, a rental truck, or church members with pickups all count as reasonable options.
- Consider non-financial perks: extra vacation or continuing education days, a phone or computer, a gym membership, or help with lawn care and snow removal.



Step 5: Post-Interview Phase

Candidates Weekend

Once the Search Team and chosen candidate agree, schedule a candidates weekend. Notify the congregation outlining the weekend and voting procedures, with the candidate's biography and/or resume attached. The church covers all expenses, and the weekend should include a service where the candidate preaches and prays. A sample schedule:

- Friday: the candidate and family arrive; provide comfortable lodging and a small welcome gift; the Search Team may share a welcome meal and review the schedule.
- Saturday morning: an informal breakfast at the church with the candidate, congregational leaders, and the Search Team — introductions, a short devotion, and time for questions both ways.
- Saturday afternoon: rest, a tour of the parsonage, church, and area, and family debrief; multi-staff churches should give candidates time to meet other staff.
- Saturday evening: a congregational meet-and-greet or meal, with the Search Team explaining the process and sharing what they learned about the candidate — get creative with format (interview, Q&A, testimony, devotion).
- Sunday morning: introductions before worship; the candidate leads portions of worship, prays, and preaches, with the Search Team seated nearby.
- After worship or the vote (per your bylaws): hold the vote as your constitution specifies, inform the congregation and then the candidate of the result — they may accept immediately or ask for a few days to decide. Host a hospitality reception, then release the family to travel home, notifying ABC NE Region Staff of the vote and, once set, the start date.

Model Letter to Congregation Introducing the Candidate

(On church letterhead, if possible)

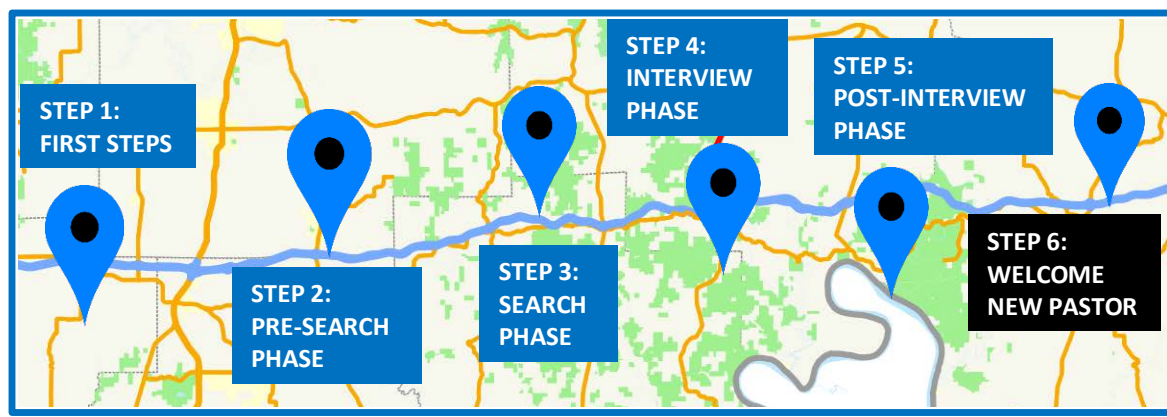
Dear Members of (name of church): After a long and careful search, we are ready to present a name to the congregation as a candidate for ministry — a biographical summary of Rev. (name) of (city, state), recommended by the Search Committee, is enclosed.

The candidate (and spouse) has visited our community and church, and if the congregation is led to extend a call, will give it full consideration. (State the date, time, and format of the presentation and vote, per your bylaws, noting that a copy of the call agreement is enclosed.) Additional opportunities to meet the candidate (and family) will be announced with date, time, and place.

We invite your prayerful support as we come to this time of decision. Sincerely, (Name), Chairperson.
Enclosures.

Farewell to the Interim Minister

It may be several weeks before the new pastor can relocate. Use this time to finalize moving arrangements, prepare the parsonage, and complete facility repairs — and begin thanking the interim minister for their role during the transition. Even a short interim tenure builds real relationships, so give the congregation a well-defined, appropriate close: recognition, thanks, and a ritual or prayer of farewell in worship on their last Sunday (see Step 1 for more ideas on saying farewell well).



Step 6: Welcome the New Pastor

The Search Team has worked diligently from formation to the congregational vote — a few final steps remain for a smooth transition.

Manage the Transition and Welcome

- Assign someone from the Search Team to oversee the transition and introduction activities.
- Communicate the new pastor's moving date and first worship service — this is the team's final major communication. Consider a brief letter and photo from the candidate for the newsletter, website, or social media.
- Host welcome events within the first month — meals with leaders or ministry groups, and visits to Men's and Women's groups and other programs — to orient the new pastor to the church's life.
- Introduce the pastor to the community: a short article in local media, introductions to clergy groups and networks, and invitations to community events the church regularly supports.
- Connect them with the Region, if this has not already happened, so they can be invited into region life, pastor training events, and available resources.

The First Few Days and Weeks

New names, programs, and office norms can be overwhelming at first. Give the new pastor time, and let the Search Team be a resource for questions — even if they do not know the answer, they should know who does. Helpful materials include employee handbooks, church directories, org charts, facility maps, an annual calendar, current ministry lists, and a list of homebound members or those with pressing pastoral needs. Provide technology access (passwords, email, devices) as early as possible.

Ideas for Welcoming a New Pastor

Adapted from "50 Ways to Welcome a New Pastor," prepared by Robert Crossman for the [Lewis Center for Christian Leadership](#).

- Prepare: begin praying daily for the new pastor and family; invite members to send welcome cards; appoint a liaison for transition questions; plan ahead so gestures are not missed.

- Make things move-in ready: ensure the parsonage and office are clean, repaired, and not "under construction"; consult the new pastor on paint, furnishings, and yard care; clarify how moving and reimbursement expenses are handled.
- Moving day: stock the parsonage kitchen with staples and kid-friendly food if children are arriving; have a small welcome group on hand; offer childcare for young children and invite kids/youth in the household to meet peers.
- The entry period: bring food over the first few days; provide a local map and service directory (dry cleaner, grocery, vet, internet/cable); host a welcome reception the first Sunday; invite the family to Sunday School and early social events; keep them in your prayers.
- Help them learn the congregation: introduce yourself repeatedly and wear name tags for a few weeks; share a pictorial directory, committee list, and facility tour; note homebound members, those in long-term illness, or recent grief, and introduce the pastor personally where possible.
- Connect them to the community: share local media, introduce them to other clergy and public leaders, and invite them to civic club meetings.

Installation Service

After the pastor has settled in for a few weeks, an installation service — often held Sunday afternoon so other pastors, members, and Region staff can attend — marks the final step in welcoming them. Choose the elements that fit your context; a sample order of service:

1. Welcome and greetings from the congregation
2. Call to worship, songs, and scripture readings
3. Special songs or gifts
4. Sermon (from the new pastor, Region staff, or another local pastor)
5. Charge to minister and congregation
6. Words and prayer of installation
7. Declaration of installation and response from the new pastor
8. Thanks to the Search Team
9. Benediction

Thank the Search Team

Do not skip this final, crucial step. Find an appropriate way for the congregation to publicly thank the Search Team — you have served your God and congregation well. At this point the team can officially disband; in many churches it becomes the new Pastoral Relations Team. Contact the Region office for more on forming and running one.