

Vetting Candidates for Ministry

By Steve Staten

“Like an archer who wounds at random is one who hires a fool or any passer-by.” —King Solomon, Proverbs 26:10

Over the years, I have observed these mistakes made in hiring processes:

- (1) quickness in deciding, usually out of desperation
- (2) the decision makers do not sufficiently collaborate or consider the perspectives of members
- (3) trusting in “a good feeling” rather than fuller exploration to see if the candidate is really a good fit, along with inquiring of the Lord

Poor choices can lead to dire and troubling outcomes for the candidate and/or the congregation.

In order to preempt relational and financially expensive problems, I developed the following vetting and hiring process. This roadmap has been used in multiple churches. The selection process is not to be understood as democratic (i.e., voting), yet it is transparent and inclusive. This approach can be adapted for single churches or congregations with satellite ministries. It is focused on the ministry where the leader will serve, yet it can work in parallel with evaluation processes for the staff and the overall church leadership.

I typically teach a lesson called “Decisions in the Book of Acts,” which covers the themes of examination, prayer, fasting, being of “one accord” and asking God to make the hiring decision clear. We set aside a day for fasting. On one occasion, it took 11 days (the O’ahu Church), beginning to end. On another it took 26 days (Los Angeles), but it can take months—especially if there are multiple eligible candidates.

This approach combined with the list of considerations and the process is *one way*, not the only way, to find a minister-ministry match.

Confidential “Vetting” (pre-screening)—The most delicate part of selecting a minister is the vetting of a candidate—both as individuals and as couples. This term means investigating, inspecting or screening. Many ministers are not used to having someone look into their viability, because they are hired within the same network of churches where the answers to an inquiry are already known. Therefore, it is good to remember the Golden Rule when inspecting someone’s personal and professional history—“Do to others what you would have them do to you” (Matt. 7:12). This means looking into one’s background without doing harm along the way.

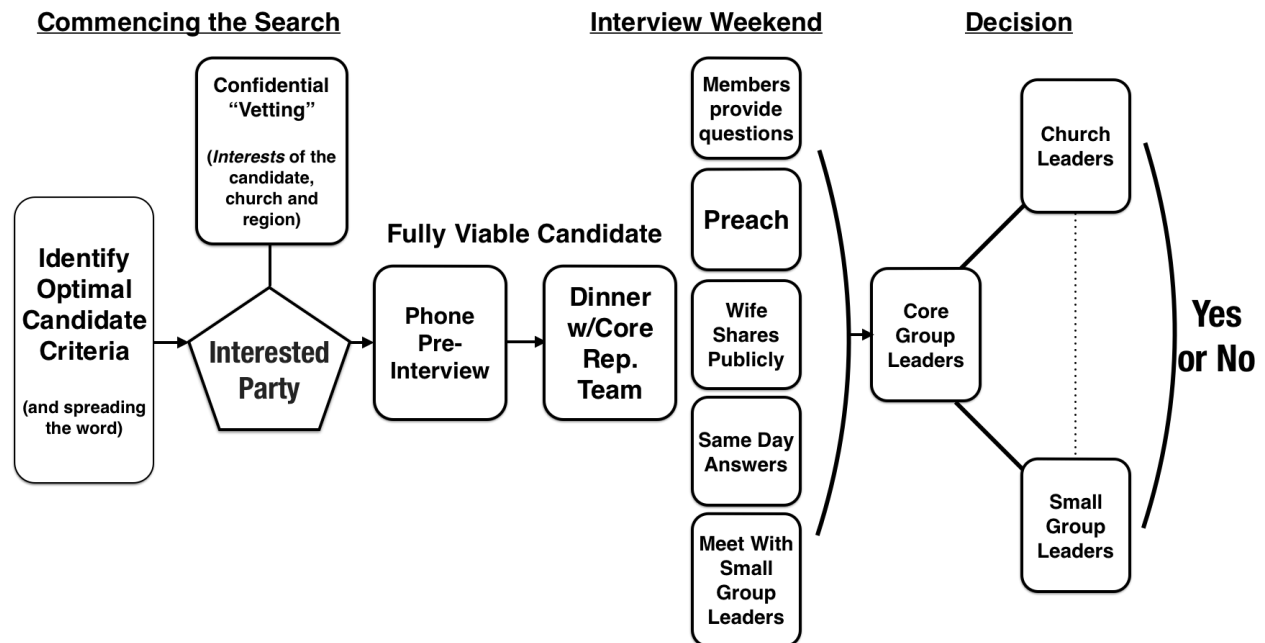
Background Inquiry. Some of the basic areas in which to consider looking:

- (1) *Intentional Presence*—reviewing samples of public writings, sermons, websites, and social media

(2) *Current Standing*—contacting objective officials in the current congregation that are able to verify the overall status of the member

(3) *Significant History*—the use of references and other reliable sources to determine if a past event (a job termination, a divorce or an unresolved or unhealed matter) is relevant to the present

MINISTER SELECTION PROCESS



The person or persons conducting the inquiry is not on a fault-finding mission but is attempting to determine if the ministry application matches with the candidate's reputation and accomplishments. It is best to inquire through official channels. The findings of a background screening might turn up sensitive information. Therefore, great care should be taken to protect the church and the candidate in the handling of information.

List of Considerations

The Candidate's Needs

1. Knowing what the culture of the people in the ministry is like
2. Knowing what the staff culture is like
3. Knowledge of what has happened in recent times (difficulties or any landmines to be aware of)
4. Cost of living, hidden or unanticipated expenses associated with the new location
5. Recommendations about ideal neighborhoods

The Receiving Church Leadership's Needs

1. Confirmation that there are no significant outstanding legacy issues (scandal fallout, reputational damage, unresolved conflicts, etc.)
2. Church leaders should be aware of significant personal situations (the candidate's need to visit an aging parent on a regular basis, pursuit of further education, extraordinary debt, etc.)
3. Clarity on the candidate's role with other staff, as well as discipling, schedule and responsibilities

The Needs of the Ministry to Be Served

1. Is the candidate the kind of leader that is needed at this stage of the ministry? (insiders know the preferred mix of pastoral, visionary, strategist, team-builder, high-EQ, cross-generational, etc.)
2. Does the candidate have a résumé? (not always necessary)
3. What references or other source of knowledge can be obtained of the candidate's history?
4. Is the candidate specifically able to help with the known weakest spots of the ministry?
5. Is the candidate comfortable working in the ministry culture?
6. Demographic considerations: age, race, etc. How does the candidate fit?
7. What is the evidence of the candidate's collaboration skills? Talk through scenarios.
8. What are some of the candidate's accomplishments?
9. What is the most accurate reason that the candidate is interviewing and available?
10. Is the ministry humble and respectful or is there an unstated and unrealistic expectation of hiring the perfect person?

Criteria for Region Evangelist / Ministry Couple

The criteria have been used in an evolving fashion in Hawaii, California, Illinois and Canada. The focus on is the preaching minister. The wife would ideally possess similar or complimentary qualifications, wherever appropriate, as it applies to the woman's role and ministry.

- Meets the minimum requirements of a deacon (1 Tim. 3:8-13) and an evangelist (2 Tim. 4:2-5).
- Is approachable, a servant, a great listener, worthy of respect (1 Tim. 5:17) and imitation (Heb. 13:7).
- Has the ability to train other ministers. Concerning the man, he must have the desire to develop and work alongside an ecclesiastical team of elders, teachers, evangelists, etc., according to the Bible (Eph. 4:11ff).
- Embraces a relational and collaborative leadership style/model.
- Has no significant baggage in their personal ministry history, and there are solid references, by phone or letter, from a combination of long-term mentors, peers, and local members. The candidate must be willing to be open about sensitive issues that might impair their ability to serve, in a strictly confidential setting with representatives of the congregation.
- Skilled at exegetical use of the Word and competent as a public speaker, be it preaching or teaching. The candidate is open to ongoing professional training in Bible and related ministry skills.
- Committed to working well with the local ministers, and the board in financial and legal responsibilities, and aspires to meet objective non-for-profit standards and practices. Will trust experienced parties from the ICOC fellowship, if in the case of disparity or deficit in understanding of church boards. The goal: doing right in the eyes of God and man (Rom. 12:17, 2 Cor. 8:19).
- Accepting of scheduled evaluations that would occur over time (at intervals yet to be designated) using a combination of outside ICOC figures or consultants and a variety of respected stakeholders within the congregation. Welcomes periodic certification training from a variety of disciplines.
- Committed to identifying long-term guides or mentors and demonstrating the same genuine openness with at least one person in an ecclesiastical role as well as a non-staff member. The goals: transparency and authenticity.
- Is transparent about time consuming outside commitments (boards, part time jobs, income streams, et cetera)
- Works with the closest biblical definition of roles and responsibilities.
- Has a track record for being mission-minded, effectively leading a dynamic church that possessed steady growth, of various forms.
- Willingness to lead their own ministry (sector).
- Will take the time to understand and use existing processes and protocols before attempting to prompt the development of new processes, which should only be accomplished in collaboration with others.