

## **Best Practices, Hints and Etiquette for Seeking a Call in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)**

**Introduction:** So you are preparing to enter the Search and Call process in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)? Perhaps this is your first search, and you are unsure what to expect. Perhaps you are new to the denomination and are wondering how to navigate a new and different system. Perhaps you have been in the search process before and either found it frustrating or know it has changed since the last time. In any case, the following pages will provide guidance and suggestions for navigating what can be a confusing and challenging time and help you discover the place where God is calling you to serve.

These best practices and hints are gathered from the experiences of pastors, congregations, and Regional Ministers, all of whom share the same goal: to help congregations and pastors find each other so that God's ministry through the church of Jesus Christ may be healthy, creative, faith-full and hope-filled. Throughout the search you are encouraged to bathe the process in prayer. Trust that God is in the process and is at work, both in your own ministry and in the ministries of the congregations who will review your profile. Seek God's guidance, rely on Christ's strength and trust the Spirit's leading. God has a mission in need of a church, and God's church has a ministry in need of pastoral leadership. Know also that others will be praying with you as even these words are bathed in prayer. May they be helpful to God's chosen servants and communities.

### **Chapter 1: Before Entering the Search Process**

1. Pray. Enter into a time of discernment about your calling and where you believe God might be calling you to serve.
2. Stay open to possibilities but be honest with yourself. If you already have a detailed picture of where Spirit will lead you, you are encouraged to blur it up a bit. God may be sending you in a new direction. However, you should also be realistic and truthful. If you really are not willing to consider moving to a particular area or serving in a particular ministry setting, it is important that you acknowledge that and complete your profile accordingly.
3. Talk with your Regional or Area Minister. You will need a Regional Reference for your Search and Call profile and it is important for your Regional/Area Minister to know you, your gifts and skills, and your passions for ministry. Even more, your Regional/Area Minister can offer advice and counsel about timing, process and possibilities that will be helpful in your search as well as help you with early drafts of your relocation profile.
4. Talk with your family or the significant people in your life who will be affected by a possible move to a new location. Be honest with them, and encourage honesty from them about realistic parameters in regards to

- financial, geographic or other needs. This will be important information as you consider possibilities and have conversations with Search Committees.
5. Consider carefully whom you will ask to be your references. You will need three references in addition to the Regional/Area Minister. Ideally, at least two of these references will be members of your current or most recent congregation or place of ministry. All three should have knowledge of your ministry during the past 5 years. Secure permission from the references ahead of time before entering their names into the Search and Call profile and let them know they will likely be contacted for follow up information from Search Committees.
  6. Spend some time reflecting on the successes and blessings of past ministries. Reflect also on the challenging situations and experiences. Conduct an honest self-evaluation about those challenges and what you have learned about yourself and your gifts for ministry. Gather stories of successes and learnings that you can recall during interviews and throughout the process.
  7. Prepare a CD or DVD of 1-2 recent sermons that reflect your preaching style. Search Committees will likely ask you for this if/when they are seriously considering you. Even better, be prepared to send links to YouTube videos or sermons posted on your own or congregational websites for ease in distributing the sermons to the Search Committees.
  8. Review and clean up your online presence. When considering a congregation, you will likely go online to find out what you can about them. Know that congregations will probably be doing the same with you. Ensure that your online presence reflects what you want the world to know about you. This includes Googling your name to see what kind of information is listed and reviewing your Facebook, Twitter, Instagram presence, etc.
  9. Complete all steps in filling out the Ministerial Profile. More information about how to begin and complete the profile can be found here: <https://www.discipleshomemissions.org/dhm/clergy/christian-vocation-search-call/>.
  10. Ask your Regional/Area Minister or another trusted person to review your profile prior to circulation to identify any red flags, unhelpful buzzwords or phrases, or other information that may work against you in the search process.
  11. Ask others to proofread your profile with an eye to grammatical or spelling errors, incomplete or run-on sentences, or other mistakes that may cause a Search Committee to eliminate your profile from consideration. Remember, your profile will most likely be one of many that a Search Committee will review before deciding which candidates to pursue. Your goal in the initial step is to present a profile that will get you an interview! Make sure that every sentence you write answering the essay questions has direct bearing on the question you are answering. Remember the first essay question is

KEY, because if you don't hook the readers with your first answer, the readers will start skimming instead of reading carefully.

12. Be sure to click the final "submit" button to get your profile into circulation!

## **Chapter 2: During the Search**

1. Pray. Continue to surround the process in prayer. Pray for patience during the process. Pray for the congregations that will receive your profile. Give thanks that the Spirit is moving in the process to help you find each other.
2. Review ministry positions listed on disciples.org:  
<https://secure.disciples.org/jobcenter/>. Not all open positions are listed there but it can be a place to start.
3. Contact Regional/Area Ministers in the regions/areas where you are interested in serving to ask about open congregations and request your profile be shared. Be willing to share about your passions, experience and hopes for your next call.
4. Do NOT contact congregations directly until/unless they have directly contacted you after having received your profile. This is considered a breach of etiquette and a violation of the process. Work through the Regional/Area Ministers to have your profile shared with congregations.
5. Do stay in contact with Search Committees with whom you are in conversation. A prompt response to emails or phone calls indicates you are engaged in the process and interested in continuing the conversation. If you have not heard from them for several weeks after an interview or other contact, contact them to check in and ask about your status in their consideration.
6. Periodically (every 4-6 months or so) update your profile. This is particularly important when life circumstances change or references are updated, but it is also recommended to keep your profile fresh. When a profile is updated, it is re-circulated in the Search and Call system and may give opportunity for interested Regional/Area Ministers to see it again with new eyes.
7. Ask for feedback. If you have been in the search process for a period of time without receiving a call, find out why. Talk with Regional/Area Ministers in the places where it has been shared. Ask for feedback about how the profile was received. Are there changes that need to be made in order to advance into the interview rounds? If you have received an interview but the process stopped there, ask for feedback about the interview from either the Search Committee or the Regional/Area Minister. What might you do differently? Be open to learning throughout the process.
8. Contain your frustration. The search process can be an anxious and discouraging time in the best of circumstances. It is tempting to express that frustration in public places (such as Facebook or in church gatherings) against either congregations, Regional/Area Ministers or others. While the

feelings are understandable, expressing them in public forums may not help you to secure a call. Instead, find trusted ears who are willing to listen and offer support privately.

9. During the search process you may be having conversations with multiple congregations, just as they are having conversations with multiple candidates. However, at the point where they indicate you are their one candidate and start negotiating a compensation package, you should consider yourself engaged. At that point, you should not be talking with other congregations nor should the congregation be talking with other candidates. When you have reached this point, you should follow the process until it leads to a call or until one party or the other ends negotiations and both parties re-enter the search process. (Contact your Regional/Area Minister if you have questions about this part of the search.)
10. If you are invited to visit a congregation, seek clarity about the expectations for the visit before you arrive. Be clear with the congregation about your expectations. Some congregations will bring several candidates out for an in-person interview and see this first visit as exploratory on both sides (congregation and candidate). In those visits, the candidate will not meet the whole congregation and a second visit would be scheduled with the final candidate. Other congregations may only be able to afford one visit and only with the final candidate. This visit would include meeting the congregation. In that case the congregation will hope and expect that, barring any unforeseen problems, the visit would lead to a call. In this situation, be clear with the Search Committee about your own level of commitment. Are you ready to move to this location and serve this congregation if all goes well in this visit? In rare circumstances, congregations have invited multiple candidates out for initial interviews and included preaching and meeting the congregation. This is not recommended and can lead to conflict and confusion within the congregation. If you discover that this is the direction the congregation is moving, please inform the Regional/Area Minister and seek advice and counsel.
11. During the compensation negotiation phase, seek advice and counsel from your Regional/Area Minister and/or the Regional/Area Minister for the calling congregation. They can help you navigate the conversation and secure a positive outcome for you and the congregation.
12. Do not broadcast the potential ministry call until after the congregation has voted to officially call you, you have announced your resignation at your current place of employment, AND the calling congregation has announced the call. Calls have been derailed when a minister or congregation prematurely posted on Facebook or announced in newsletters a calling that was not official and the above steps had not been taken.

### **Chapter 3: After the Search**

1. Pray. Give thanks for the Spirit's guidance in the process and pray for God's blessings on a new ministry partnership that is beginning.
2. Thank those who have helped you along the way. A thank you note or email to the congregation and Search Committee, Regional/Area Minister(s) and references is very appreciated.
3. Contact the Office of Church Vocation and remove your profile from circulation.
4. Contact the new and former regional office about transferring your Standing.
5. Two helpful resources—*Closing a Pastoral Ministry* and *Beginning a Pastoral Ministry*—can be downloaded from <http://disciples.org/gcom/resources/>.

#### **Chapter 4: Special Notes for Commissioned Ministers**

1. Commissioned Ministers can only circulate their profile in the region in which they are commissioned. To circulate your profile more widely, contact your Regional/Area Minister and request your profile be sent to regions where you have interest.
2. Commissioned Ministers are commissioned for specific ministries in specific locations. Upon receiving a call to a new congregation, you will need to request commissioning (or re-commissioning) from the region in which you will be serving. Be prepared when moving from one region to another that specific requirements for commissioning may vary and you may be required to meet additional criteria or training in the new region.