

Some considerations in the ministry appointment process

Taking on a ministry has parallels with getting married. The time taken in careful preparation will pay dividends in the long term. The list below is far from comprehensive. You (and your spouse) will be able to adapt the questions to fit your particular context.

The process of obtaining information can be a challenge. Where possible obtain copies of written documents. Investigations need to be wide and subtle. Remember that those interviewing you may tend to overlook the shortfalls of the church or organisation they represent. If you are married seek to involve your spouse in as much of the process as possible.

Information/Questions about the church

1. A summary of its history, including significant events in the life of the church (changing location, church splits etc)
2. Where is the church in its life cycle. Is it growing, on a plateau or in decline? Are people being added through conversion or transfer?
3. What big decisions has the church made in the past couple of years? What big decisions are pending?
4. Seek to obtain a history of who has been on the pastoral team (for at least the past 10 years) Try to find out why these pastors left. Did they go to another church/ministry? Are they contactable? Did they resign from ministry and if so, why? e.g. reached retirement age, burnt out, moral failure etc.
5. The state of the church's finances. Try to obtain a copy of the budget. Look at how giving matches up with the budget. Does the budget incorporate the position you are considering? Find out about outstanding loans and how they are being serviced. Look at what proportion is given to mission or other ministry or community organizations.
6. What is the worship style(s) of the church? Are you able to fit in with this style? (Aim to attend at least one service incognito.)
7. Does the church have a written statement of faith? Can you comply with this? What is their position on issues such as special creation; tithing; the exercising of spiritual gifts (especially healing and tongues), women in ministry, marrying divorced people or couples living together, church membership, dedicating/baptizing children of non-Christians, funerals for people outside the church, the status before God of Christians who commit suicide?
8. What is the church's vision? Is there a vision statement? When was it reviewed? Can the leaders articulate the vision?
9. Is there a particular group or family who exercise inappropriate power in the church?

The position you are applying for (or being called to)

1. How long has the position you are considering been in existence?
2. Is there a comprehensive job description? (obtain a copy)
3. If there is a predecessor, what is his/her name? Try to contact them.
4. If the position is new, how did it come to exist? Is there any paperwork (proposals to members meetings etc) you can look at?
5. Can the role be negotiated prior to appointment? Can the role be renegotiated later?
6. What stated or unstated expectations are there of what you will achieve during your term of appointment? e.g. Is the church expecting that the size of the youth group will double in your first year of appointment?
7. Irrespective of the term of appointment, how long would you be expected to stay in the job?

Use of your gifts and opportunities for growth

1. Is this a role/context where you will be able to exercise your primary gifts?
2. Will this appointment help you to grow in your gifts and experience?

Your Spouse and Family

1. How will your spouse and children fit into the church? Is there a suitable Sunday School, youth group etc?
2. Are there appropriate health and education facilities in the place where you will need to live?
3. If a house isn't provided are rentals available? Is purchasing an option?
4. What expectations are there of the role of your spouse? What did his/her predecessor do?
5. If you and your spouse normally work as a team, how would the church/organisation feel about that?

The Leadership Team

1. What is the leadership structure? How are members elected/appointed? Is there a limit to their term? How long have current members been in office? Try to obtain a copy of the constitution and any associated papers.
2. How are pastors involved in the decision making processes of the church/organisation? Do pastors have voting rights on the leadership team?
3. How do the members of the leadership team get on with one another? Are there any current issues of conflict? Any in the recent past?
4. How does the church handle grievances against church leaders? Is there a written policy?
5. Is there a diagram of the authority structure in the church/organization?
6. Who do you report to? For what? Is this stated in a written document?

Terms and conditions of employment

1. Are the terms and conditions in writing and can you have a copy? (Some churches may use standard conditions issued by their denomination)
2. What is the salary/stipend? How often is it paid? What fringe benefits are paid and how? What is the situation with superannuation? Is a house, vehicle, telephone, internet access etc provided? What is their attitude to paying for a care package?
3. What are the church facilities like? Is your office/work area adequate? What is the telephone system like? Is there internet access? Is there any administrative assistance available?
4. Is the call open or for a fixed term? What is the process for determining an extension or termination of a call?
5. If the position is part-time, how many hours are expected? What is counted as voluntary? How much flexibility is there in the hours worked?
6. What records are you expected to keep?
7. How will public holidays be treated? e.g. if you have to take services on Christmas day, Good Friday etc, is there time off in lieu?
8. How many Sundays can you have off each year?
9. What services/meetings/functions are you expected to attend?
10. What conferences are you expected to attend? Who pays?
11. Is the church happy for you to be part of a pastors support group e.g. a retreat group? Who pays?
12. What systems of review are in place?
13. What is the leadership's attitude to you pursuing more study? What are the conditions?
14. If you are not ordained, does the leadership expect you to pursue ordination?
15. What dress standard is expected of members of the pastoral team?
16. Does the church have a code of conduct for pastors? (Obtain a copy) Does this fit with your personal code of conduct?
17. What gifts may be accepted? (e.g. funerals, weddings etc)

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