

**Twenty-One Common Mistakes
Pastor Nominating Committees Make**
(adapted from Choosing a New Pastor by Henry Virkler)
(distributed courtesy of Interim Pastor Ministries)

1. Mistake: Failure to carefully select members of a PNC.

Results: May fail to represent important subgroups of the church (e.g., women and older members). PNC may end up including members who monopolize time and try to force decisions based on their views. There may not be enough new viewpoints represented so that the PNC makes decisions with the present and the future in mind. Unwise choice of committee members may result in factions developing on the PNC and later in the church. Potential candidates may be scared away from considering the church because of outspoken, dogmatic, or divisive PNC members.

Solution: Be careful in selecting members of this committee.

2. Mistake: Too large or too small a PNC.

Results: Too small results in too much work per member or in failure to represent adequately all the important subgroups within a church. Too large means that discussions and decision making take longer than necessary.

Solution: Appoint or elect between five and thirteen people, depending on size of congregation, whether a separate task force will do the self-study, and the number of applicants the committee will consider.

3. Mistake: Failure to do self-study.

Results: PNC may not consider how the congregation, the new pastor, and the community will fit together. They may fail to consider the kind of person the congregation needs who will challenge them to grow spiritually or to consider whether present programs need to be refocused. They may look for either a clone or an opposite of the last pastor, depending on whether they liked him or not. They may fail to become specific about their expectations.

Solution: Do a self-study and submit it to some groups such as the district and the elders for their input. Then translate the results of the self-study into characteristics needed by the new pastor.

4. Mistake: Failure to adopt an explicit code of confidentiality.

Results: Word can leak out about possible applicants. Such news that gets back to their present congregations can jeopardize their ministry there. If some of your own congregation members know of an applicant and like him, they can start campaigns within the congregation. Congregation members can resent it if some people have access to “inside information” about the candidates while they do not.

Solution: Develop an explicit code of confidentiality. PNC members should be prepared with sentences to use if someone tries to pry for confidential information

5. Mistake: Failure to get a clear charge from the board.

Results: Can cause friction between the board and the PNC and the finance committee if the PNC does things without proper authorization. That can lead to failure to be reimbursed for PNC expenses or to early difficulties with the new pastor if the PNC promises things that the board later fails to uphold.

Solution: Get PNC charge in writing. Clarify any jurisdictional ambiguities early, again preferably in writing.

6. Mistake: Failure to adequately use denominational resources.

Results: The PNC may use inefficient methods when better methods are available. Search process may take longer than necessary. The PNC may fail to become aware of candidates who would be excellent for the church. The PNC is much more likely to make mistakes if it does not consult with denominational leaders.

Solution: Use the search time to reestablish good connections and communication with the District.

7. Mistake: Not clearly organizing the entire search process at the beginning

Results: Committee members become confused, questions may not be asked of applicants in the most appropriate sequence, some applications may get “lost,” and correspondence with applicants may become disorganized.

Solution: Plan all the steps in the process before taking any steps. Identify the most appropriate sequence for doing each part of the interview and selection process.

8. Mistake: Allowing the interim to become an applicant.

Results: Serious problems may occur later if the congregation elects the interim, resulting in significant losses of church members and even church splits.

Solution: Make certain that the congregation, the PNC, and the potential interim know that the interim cannot be considered a candidate for the permanent position.

9. Mistake: Having more than one PNC member communicate with applicants.

Results: Chaos. No one knows who said what to whom.

Solution: One person, usually the chair, is responsible for all formal communication with applicants.

10. Mistake: Failure to be honest about congregational problems.

Results: Applicant may learn of problems through other sources. He may decide not to come because of lack of honesty or forthrightness of the PNC. If he does come, he may become quickly disillusioned for the same reason. He may not have the skills to handle the specific problem.

Solution: Be honest with applicants, especially finalists, about the problems in the church and let them decide if they can help the church resolve these problems.

11. Mistake: Failure to prepare well for interviews.

Results: Awkward silences. Interviews may fail to accomplish their intended purposes of obtaining and sharing vital information about the church and the applicant. PNC does not impress applicant, which affects his perception of the church.

Solution: Have clear goals for every interview. Each PNC member should know what questions to ask and in what order.

12. Mistake: Failure to assess candidates from other denominations with extra care.

Results: Applicant may have a history of immoral behavior, splitting churches, poor financial management, idiosyncratic theology, recurring power struggles, and so on that are a significant reason for wanting to leave his history behind him. Unless he has sought counseling and has shown that he has changed the traits that led to his problems in the other denomination, the same problems are likely to emerge in the new denomination.

Solution: Make certain to assess crossover candidates with extra care. Check with denominational overseers and members of previous two congregations (not his current church) to see if there are any problem patterns.

13. Mistake: Failure to include consideration of the spouse and children in the recruitment process.

Results: May lose a good candidate through failure to consider adequately the needs of the spouse and children or through failure to allow the spouse to be part of the interview process. Also, may fail to detect that a candidate's partner may not be suited to a particular congregation or has personal problems that could significantly impair the candidate's ability to serve as pastor.

Solution: Focus on the needs of the entire family when preparing materials and conducting interviews. Include spouse in interviews.

14. Mistake: Failure to be discreet when visiting another church.

Results: May cause unnecessary anxiety for the congregation of a pastor whom you may not even invite to be a candidate. If there is a faction against that pastor already, knowing that he is considering another church may intensify the activity.

Solution: Be sensitive if you visit a candidate in his home church. Use your common sense to avoid drawing unnecessary attention to your visit. Despite your care, the ushers and a few members of the board probably will be aware of your presence, but the whole church doesn't have to know.

15. Mistake: Overemphasizing pulpit skills.

Results: May select a pastor with impressive pulpit skills but with significant deficiencies in other areas.

Solution: Make certain that your selection process includes adequate emphasis on interpersonal skills, emotional healthiness, organizational skills, and other pastoral gifts.

16. Mistake: Not scheduling enough time for the candidate and the congregation to meet each other.

Results: There may not be a good match on some other areas besides pulpit ability that are necessary for a good pastor- congregation relationship.

Solution: Schedule enough time and structure it so that the pastor, his family, and the congregation have an adequate opportunity to learn about each other and each other's expectations.

17. Mistake: The "beauty pageant" approach.

Results: Demeaning to all candidates. You may lose some of your best candidates because they will be unwilling to participate in this type of selection process. Unfair to candidates seen first; congregation will be more likely to vote for those candidates seen most recently. Use of this approach has caused church splits.

Solution: Have PNC or elders identify the candidate they believe is best for the church. Have church give feedback on him. Only if the elders do not call him should a second candidate be presented to the congregation.

18. Mistake: Not keeping the interim pastor and pastoral staff informed.

Results: Poor staff morale, for they think the PNC or elders does not consider them important. Poor morale can affect their performance when the church needs them to give their best. May lose gifted pastoral staff during or after the interim because of their hurt and anger.

Solution: PNC gives pastoral staff and interim biweekly reports before reporting to congregation. One person (e.g., the vice-chair or secretary) can be designated to do this.

19. Mistake: Not allowing enough grieving time between pastors.

Results: Congregation fails to or is slow to bond with new pastor. New pastor frequently compared with previous one, sometimes not objectively. Anger comes out at new pastor that is transferred from former pastor.

Solution: Design one or more experiences to facilitate grieving. If the former pastor was deeply loved or was at the church for ten or more years, purposely have an interim for a time before introducing any candidates for pastor.

20. Mistake: Inadequate communication with candidates.

Results: Applicants feel anxious or angry at lack of information. Lack of feedback from numerous PNCs has caused some seminary graduates to be discouraged and give up plans for the ministry.

Solution: Have a well-organized plan of return letters, many of which can be form letters with minor changes for each individual. Keep applicants informed of the process and of their position in the process with the same regularity that you would desire if you were one of them.

21. Mistake: Failure to get all agreements in writing.

Results: A verbal agreement is not passed on to the appropriate person or is misunderstood, or the elders later disagree with an agreement made by the PNC and fail to abide by it. The pastor or his family may become angry or disillusioned, which will affect his ministry at the church

Solution: Get all the agreements in writing. Agreements that have to be approved by someone other than the PNC should be so approved, with the notice of the approval in the committee's/elders' minutes.

