

4. Assessing a potential pastor

What's in the suitcase?

When a wedding takes place both bride and groom are likely to bring a suitcase. Each one is filled with family traditions, values, interests, dreams, relational experiences and abilities they have gathered since birth. What is discovered in the suitcase reveals a great deal about the person. A marriage is the sorting and mingling together of the contents of these two suitcases over a lifetime. Marriage is a process of creating a new suitcase.

The relationship between a pastor and people can be likened to a courtship ritual that could lead to marriage. Whereas love should never be blind many churches expect a prolonged period of happiness without checking out what may be tucked away in the suitcase. With all the best intentions marriages do sometimes result in separation or divorce. Pain in the wider family will be experienced. Sadly too many pastor – church relationships follow the same course.

The decision to invite a pastor should not be based simply on first impressions, preaching style or even the recommendation of others. A more thorough and discerning process is required. Why not develop your own rating scale based on the one below and use it as part of the interview process? If you have already used the Rural Ministries information form, these questions are designed to provide additional information.

Possible questions to ask potential pastors are included in each category. You should select the ones you consider most helpful and if necessary develop your own. The goal is not to conduct an interrogation but discover whether someone has sufficiently common expectation values and theologies to establish an effective pastor-church relationship. You are aiming to discover the truth about each other.

While you are seeking to discover what is in the suitcase of the potential pastor, remember they will be seeking to explore what lurks within the suitcase of the church.



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Categories and possible questions

Remember

Just like everyone else, no Pastor is perfect or in possession of all the required gifts. They are also a work in progress and develop best in a setting where they are respected, loved and prayed for.

1. SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND SENSE OF CALL

Unquestioned belief that God has called the person into ministry; strongly impelled to preach, teach, care and take the gospel to the lost. An evident desire for the glory of God?

1. Who have been the most significant influences on your life and faith?
2. Describe how you came to be a follower of Jesus Christ?
3. What has particularly helped you in your spiritual development?
4. Why would you want to be considered as a pastor?
5. What in motivates you as a pastor?

Potential Pastor rating scale.....

5 = Outstanding

4 = Very good

3 = Developing

2 = Needs work

1 = Very weak

2. MINISTRY PREPARATION

Meets the Biblical qualifications for an Elder. Shows active involvement and support from churches where they have been involved. Recognizes the importance of initial and ongoing Christian education.

1. Who first encouraged you to consider being a pastor?
2. What preparations have you made to become equipped for pastoral ministry?
3. How would you assess your future training requirements?
4. For which of the tasks of the ministry have you had most affirmed by other church leaders.

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3. PERSONAL MATURITY

Confident in the use of God given gifts/abilities. A stable well integrated personality. Copes with stress effectively. Not anxious or severely depressed.

1. Describe your greatest success and biggest disappointment. What did they teach you?
2. What do you consider to be you dominant spiritual gifts?
3. When are you aware of high levels of stress? What do you do to deal with some of the symptoms?
4. Describe a situation where you have been you have had to confront a difficult situation? What inner tensions were apparent?
5. What aspects of the role of a pastor do you find most personally difficult?
6. How important is your free time to you and what do you do in it?

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4. THEOLOGICAL CONVICTIONS

Displays both knowledge and clarity concerning both core convictions and controversial matters. Able to teach appropriately and sympathetically advise individuals.

1. What theological label or a combination of the same would come close to describe you?
2. What do you think are some of the biggest challenges to the Christian faith today and how should people be prepared to face them?
3. Pastors often have a preference for the Old or New Testament: how do you view the importance of the Old Testament and what would you do to ensure people are acquainted with the whole council of God?
4. Describe your perspective on issues that may be considered controversial, including: the baptism and gifts of the Holy Spirit; what happened when Jesus died on the cross; women in church leadership; the second coming.
5. How would you help people discover what the Bible teaches about cohabitation; divorce and remarriage; homosexuality and other issues impacting society and the church?

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5. CHURCH CONVICTIONS

Show an understanding of how Christ sees the church. Aware of the value of each person and the contribution they can make. Displays patience and love to those who may see things differently.

1. With what Christian groups have you had meaningful relationship or experiences?
2. Why do you think the church has a future?
3. Tell us about the church and community where you have recently been involved. What issues, concerns and attitudes were dominant?
4. Describe the content and style of a worship service you prefer?
5. How do you view the importance of visiting members and visitors?
6. How would you seek to relate to other churches in the area?
7. Describe any experience of exercising church discipline. In what circumstances do you think it is appropriate?
8. The church is made up of diverse people with sometimes competing values. How would you seek to keep people united and focused on worthwhile goals?
9. What changes would you anticipate could be in store for us if you became our pastor?

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6. LEADERSHIP

Able to establish priorities and focus the church on a realistic range of possibilities. Know how to delegate and involve others. Calm under pressure and able to concentrate on solutions rather than problems.

1. Pastors are involved in many aspects of ministry. Which ones do you find the most energizing and which are the most difficult?
2. With what age group do you find yourself most comfortable with?
3. Describe a project or programme that you have initiated and developed?
4. How do you think a Pastor should use their time during an average week?
5. Give an example of how you have sought to develop and involve others in using their gifts.

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7. EVANGELISM COMMITMENT

Knows the elements of the Gospel. Shows evidence of doing the work of the evangelist. Is proactive in leading the church to face outwards and relate to the lost.

1. What aspects of the gospel are crucial for an enquirer to understand?
2. Would you agree with the statement that "the church is only society on earth that exists for the benefit of non-members?"
3. How have you been seeking to "do the work of an evangelist?"
4. How do you help people appreciate that without evangelism churches do not grow and eventually die?
5. What approaches, courses or programmes would you recommend? What would you avoid?

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8. MARRIAGE AND FAMILY (IF APPROPRIATE)

There is evidence of a stable supportive marriage based on love and mutual respect. Both partners show an equal desire to follow and serve the Lord regardless of their employment situation.

1. Spouses of pastors relate in many ways to a congregation: tell us about your spouse, their gifts and perspective on church ministry.
2. How would your spouse and any family respond to an invitation here?
3. What would help you to settle as a family?

A FINAL QUESTION

What questions do you have that may have been unanswered?

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Potential Pastor Assessment

Rating scale.....

5 Outstanding

4 Very good

3 Developing

2 Needs work

1 Very weak

NAME		
ASPECT	SCORE	REMARKS
1. Spiritual Formation		
2. Ministry Preparation		
3. Personal Maturity		
4. Theological Convictions		
5. Church Convictions		
6. Leadership		
7. Evangelism Commitment		
8. Marriage and Family		
TOTAL (maximum of 40)		
Comments:		