

# PASTORAL SEARCH OVERVIEW

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## **The five foundations upon which our ‘Pastoral Search’ process is built:**

1. Only the resident bishop can make an appointment.
2. If a potential candidate (a prospect) emerges out-of-conference the resident bishop will contact and receive permission from the prospect’s bishop before he/she will be considered a candidate.
3. Candidate confidentiality is our highest priority.
4. The Consultant, Search Team, and Staff Parish Relations committee work in partnership with the bishop and cabinet.
5. To mitigate church wide anxiety during a time of transition, the congregation should be kept constantly up to date with all public aspects of the search process.

## **The Church Search Team**

Typically, a local church has been given permission by the resident bishop to contract with Church Difference Makers to utilize the ‘consultant model’ of conducting a pastoral search. In those situations, the SPR forms a ‘Search Team’ as an extension of its work in a pastoral transition. The Search Team usually consists of several members of the SPR plus other leadership influencers. The Search Team works directly with the Consultant and reports to the SPR. Its functions include (a) developing the church’s ‘Current Reality’ and ‘Values Priority’ with input from appropriate leadership groups and the current pastor. This function creates the church’s ‘Search Statement’ to be shared with prospects and candidates. (b) Assesses potential prospects and candidates based on the Search Statement. (c) Ensures a consistent communication strategy to keep the congregation in the loop and up to date. (d) In conjunction with the SPR and the Consultant agrees on the logistics to recruit potential candidates and secure a new pastor.

## **The three steps of a Pastoral Search.**

A pastoral search is made up of three sequential and connected steps: (1st) The Sonar Search, (2nd) the Prospect Search, and (3rd) the Candidate Search.

These three sequential steps form the basis of a pastoral search, which is done with the blessing of the resident bishop in the UMC and in conjunction with a particular church going through a significant pastoral transition. Sometimes the local church contracts with us; other times the bishop or a district superintendent does. Our process is the same either way. *(This overview presents the essentials of each step; more detailed explanations of each are found in the respective guideline documents available from Church Difference Makers.)*

1. **‘Sonar Search’** ... The consultant begins networking with colleagues to lift up names of

pastors who may possibly match the ministry needs of a particular size and complexity of church; If the church and/or the bishop has publicly made it known there will be a change, the church is identified in the Sonar Search. If the church has not publicly announced its intentions, then the Sonar Search is done with no identifiers.... just a generic description, like “a large progressive church in the Midwest” for example. It is akin to brainstorming names who may be a possibility. This begins before the church compiles its ‘current reality’ case statement and its values priorities to be shared with prospects. Sonar Search names may come also from church members, DSs, etc. Typically, less than 50% of names will become actual prospects.

2. **Prospect search** is done by consultant reflecting on sonar search names and needs of church...thru UMC Data, etc. The consultant will have conversation with any prospective prospects. When pastors choose to be considered a prospect and the consultant agrees, their name will be given to the resident bishop, who in turn and out of courtesy may share with the prospect’s bishop, stressing the importance of confidentiality in this early stage of the process. Typically, less than 60% of prospects will be invited to become candidates.

3. **Candidate search:** The search narrows prospects and arrives at candidates by Examining data, third party input, church values specs, and with the green light of the resident bishop.  
NOTE: Pastors ONLY becomes candidates WHEN they inform the consultant they would like to be considered as a candidate, the Search Team invites them to be a candidate, and AFTER the resident bishop blesses their candidacy. Their candidacy is not public, and we strive for complete confidentiality. Typically, the candidate search will narrow down to 1-3 finalists.

If a potential prospect or candidate is out of conference, the resident bishop will do due diligence. The potential prospect for candidacy should initiate appropriate conversations with their DS and or bishop. REMEMBER...all the above is only part of the journey toward church selection of a new pastor; no assumption should be made as to being selected for appointment.

### Sources of Potential Candidates

Usually for a large church Pastoral Search, there are four sources of candidates:

1. **Internal** ... Effective and beloved staff members of the searching church. They may ask to be considered as prospects for the Sr Position. Often such staff members have enthusiastic cheerleaders advocating for them, but they must still go through the search process to become considered as candidates.
2. **External** ... Usually these are pastors from the church’s district or conference lifted up by friends and share dynamics like the above.
3. **Expanded** ... Begins with the sonar search and may be regional, or nationwide. These pastors are subject to all aspects of a search as described in the process.
4. **Cabinet** ... These are pastors that the cabinet would be considering, even if the church was not utilizing the consultant model of a pastoral search.