

Suggestions for Alliance Clergy and Students in the Search and Call Process

These suggested guidelines were developed by the Alliance's Search and Call committee comprised of Elizabeth Hagan (chair), Ned Parker, Jeremy Rutledge, Aaron Brittan, Mary Catherine Cole, Steve Jolly and Chris Copeland, Alliance staff representative. Last updated September 2011.

1. Before submitting your name to the search committee:

- Visit the church's website
 - Look at content, mission statement, church calendar and anything else that might help you get a sense of the community
 - Are they mission-oriented? Attraction-oriented? Family-oriented?
 - Are their identity statements a draw or a drawback for you?
 - Do they have worship videos posted? Is worship formal/informal? Picture yourself in the space – is it comfortable to you?
- Visit the church's Facebook page and/or blog (if they have one)
 - What conversations are happening at the church right now?
 - What are people excited about?
- Visit the church's YouTube or Vimeo channel (Again, if they have one)
 - What is the worship practice and style?
 - How are children/young people included? Other groups?
- Perform a Google-News search for the church
 - What has it been recognized for?
 - How is it seen in its community?
 - Does the church seem to be active outside of Sunday morning? Is this a good thing/ bad thing for you?
- After doing your own research, find mentors/colleagues who know of the church
 - Use them as soundboards for discernment
 - Gauge their reaction and your own level of excitement during your conversations

2. Submitting the initial inquiry:

- Both electronic and hardcopy
 - Electronic
 - Email greeting
 - Your email greeting is not a cover letter; the cover letter should be sent as an attachment along with your resume and other application documents

- This greeting and other correspondence should be sent to the attention of the search committee chair, unless otherwise directed on the website
 - Note: Try to make it a habit to ‘CC’ or ‘Bcc’ yourself whenever you send an email to the search committee or chair so that (a) you have a record of your correspondence and (b) you know it was successfully sent
- The greeting should be brief (express your excitement about the position and direct the reader to the ‘attached documents’) and should include all of your current contact information in the signature
 - Note: Always list the documents that you are attaching so that (a) you can use it as a checklist for yourself and (b) the recipient knows to contact you if they fail to receive something
- Cover Letter
 - Try and keep your cover letter to a single page; there will be other opportunities to talk about yourself!
 - Introduce yourself and your current title and state the name of the position you are applying for
 - Talk briefly about your qualifications for this position
 - Tell them why you are excited about their church/community specifically (prove to them you know what you’re applying for)
 - Finally, ask them to reach out to you with questions, and to extend your greeting to the rest of the pastoral search committee
 - Again, all signatures should include your contact information
 - Note: Particularly when applying to multiple parishes, proof read your cover letter to be sure you are not including one of your notes to a previous church and that you are applying to the position as they list it on their website.
- Resume
 - Note: In many professions it is suggested that applicants keep their resumes to two pages (some even suggest one!); however, in pastoral searches, it is ok to take up to three (and maybe some overflow onto the fourth). You are not filling a job and they are

not seeking an employee – the relationship will hopefully be deeper than that, so tell them who you are!

- Be sure to list your employment history (both church and non-church), community service, awards and recognitions and your educational background – including training and certificate programs
- References: Feel free to include as many as six or seven references, and list their relationship to you (former pastor, seminary professor, coworker, previous employer, etc); this provides the search committee the opportunity to choose who they will speak with based on information they might think is lacking in your resume, or based on specific things they want to find out about you (“What is the candidate’s worship style?” is a very different question than “What is the candidate’s leadership/management style?”)

- Church and Faith-Related C.V.

- Note: Along with many other clergy working bi-vocationally or discerning a call to ministry as a second or third career, your resume might not feel like it is directly transferrable onto an application to a pastorate, so supplement your document with a glimpse of your faith journey, including work at camps as a teenager, through service on your diaconate to lay ministry and interim work. Take them through a brief chronologically bulleted presentation of your ‘walk.’ This is only a suggestion!

- Hardcopy

- All documents from ‘electronic’ sans email greeting

3. Following up on your inquiry and submission of your documents:

- A note on timing: If you did not receive an acknowledgment of your application, feel free to follow up two to three weeks afterwards. If you did receive acknowledgement, wait three weeks to a month to follow up... Remember that if a search committee is taking a full two years for their search, they might only be meeting once every month.
 - From this point forward, you should feel free to correspond by email, unless you send along more documents, which should be sent electronically and as hardcopies

- Follow-up email:
 - Ask if the committee has any questions about the paperwork you sent; this affords them an opportunity to ask questions without stepping into a formal interview
 - Offer to send along your list of references (if not already provided)
 - Finally, offer supplemental information
 - This can include:
 - A hyperlink to a sermon or sermons that you have offered (a dvd works too!)
 - Links to blogs or podcasts that you run
 - Many polity courses now require students to write their ordination papers as part of the class; as a way of entering into conversation about theological issues (progressive/conservative; welcome/open & affirming / or not) you can offer to send this paper or pieces of it. Again, this provides opportunities for search committees to enter into informal conversation about items of interest
 - Note: Offering all of these things at the same time might be overwhelming for search committees, but as you offer supplemental materials one at a time, you will be able to gauge there level of response and interest to these materials

4. Making it to the Interview:

- Interviews usually happen in two to three stages:
 1. Telephone
 2. In person/Skype
 3. Conversation with congregation (hosted by the search committee)
- Interviews will take three forms
 1. In person – this is ideal; even if you need to cover a distance to get there
 2. Telephone – for both candidates and committee telephone presents the most interpersonal problems, but most committees will conduct their initial rounds of the process this way
 3. Skype/online – while this is more desirable than a phone interview, it does present its own unique set of complications (see these below)

- Tips for preparation
 - Review all materials before the interview
 - This includes your resume, cover letter and even the emails you may have exchanged with the committee or committee chair
 - Prepare for questions
 - If the committee sends you a list:
 - Jot handwritten notes for your answers, then type out full answers (as a way of teasing out deeper answers); then make a bulleted list
 - Make a list of your own questions to practice with
 - Even if you received a list of questions from the committee, make a list of ten or twelve that you think they may ask; consider worship, leadership style, community outreach, etc; make a list of specific and concrete ideas for questions that include “What would you do if...?”
 - Make a list of questions to ask the committee!
 - Too often candidates think that they will come up with questions during the actual interview, and while this might be the case, the committee wants to see that you’ve prepared for this conversation and they want to be able to see your level of investment
 - Contact your colleagues
 - Have your colleagues ask you practice questions and engage with them about your answers
 - Bring copies of your paperwork to the interview for yourself and committee
- Tips for interviewing on Skype
 - Look at the camera!
 - Many search committees express feeling unnerved during Skype interviews because the candidates don’t seem to be looking at them
 - Use a computer that has a camera as part of the unit just above the screen or place your camera just above the screen so that you can “make eye contact”
 - Be aware of your background
 - What’s behind you that the committee can see?
 - Take advantage of the fact that the committee has a limited view
 - Draw a box (which could represent a table or a room) on a scrap of paper. When the committee introduces themselves

- jot down each of the members' names in the their location and then address them each by name during the interview
- Print out your bulleted answers, tape them to the back of three-ring binders and stand these up to the right and left of your screen so you can use them in a fix.