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## Suggestions for search committees

### ◆ **State all expectations.**

Sometimes, "the church sees a pastor in one light and the pastor sees a church in another light, and they never talk about it," said Vaughn Manning of the BGCT minister-church relations office.

Unstated and unclear expectations lead to mismatches between ministers and



congregations, he warned. "It is very important that the expectations are made clear."

### ◆ **Communicate clearly with candidates.**

A common complaint of ministers is lack of communication from search committees. Candidates may submit a résumé, or even submit additional information at a committee's request, and then not hear anything from the committee again.

This is not fair to the candidates, advised Gary Loudermilk, director of missions for Denton Baptist Association. "If I'm no longer in the process, let me know."

### ◆ **Investigate thoroughly.**

A thorough investigation of a pastoral candidate includes a background check and credit check, said Larry Johnson, director of missions for Ellis Baptist Association.

"Because of the suit-happy society we live in, churches are particularly vulnerable," he warned. "I encourage them to do background checks and credit checks for their own protection."

While most ministers have nothing to hide and are freely truthful about their background, a few people take advantage of naturally trusting church people, he said.

"Committees tend to do this little mating dance," added Manning. "They only want to show their good side. He only wants to show his good side. They do that little dance, and then each one of them finds out that instead of getting Rachel they got Leah. This comes from lack of thorough investigation."

### ◆ **Check multiple references.**

"Reference checks have to go far beyond those names that are given by the candidate," Loudermilk said. "Those are friends. Talk to people those people know or others to find out who that person really is."

Manning concurred: "A committee should always ask references, 'Could you give me another name of someone who might give additional insights?' Particularly you want to get names of laypeople."

Most of the references given by pastoral candidates are other pastors, he said. "They do not know them as well as the people in their congregation. They don't know how well they wear."

It is appropriate to check with churches the candidate served prior to his current church, Loudermilk said. "Now that he's been gone from that congregation five years, were there problems?"

◆ **Be wary of unsolicited recommendations from people who don't know your church.**

In recent years, some pastor search committees have been impressed by letters from high-profile pastors within the Southern Baptist Convention who write to say God has revealed to them who should be pastor of that church.

Ignore such letters, advises Gary Loudermilk, director of missions for Denton Baptist Association. A recommendation from a prominent pastor or even a denominational leader is far less important than finding out whether a candidate truly fits the needs of the congregation, he said.

Manning said he has seen big-city pastors with name recognition offer advice to smaller churches frequently. "I do not see how a man pastoring an urban church in the city can really understand what a small-city church may need in a pastor," he said. "Therefore, I don't think he has the right to say, 'God gave me this vision of this man for your church.' He has the right to say this man might be worth your looking at. But he should be honest and say, 'I don't know if he would fit you or not.'"