

Interviewing Students

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One responsibility you may have as a Ministerial Director is interviewing students who are graduating from the college/university supported by your conference and union. These are your students who have completed one stage of their training for ministry. They are children of members living in your conference and union. Make it a priority to be included in the interviewing process.

First of all, recognize that you do not have a finished product with students you interview. Don't expect or require that the candidate be one. They may have some experience, some may even have the ability to cover many church responsibilities, but they are not yet a finished product. You are looking for someone who you feel could grow into ministry and serve your conference in the future.

There are five basic things to look for at each interview. These can be found in their material which may include their basic resume, their statement of experience and expectation for ministry, as well as faculty recommendations, and student transcripts. Read this material thoroughly. Mark areas where you may wish further clarification.

1. **Does the student have a call from God to ministry?** Learn about the student's call for ministry. This is often reported in the material provided for the interview. Be careful not to be too critical. This is probably the hardest piece to write, and the part which makes them most vulnerable. Remember the difficulty you faced writing such a statement. Note how they may feel their ministry will be expressed. You will hear the current popular hopes such as called to work with youth or with praise ministry, serve as a church planter, evangelist, and maybe someday teach. What you really want to hear is that they desire to be a pastor. They want to serve as a pastor in a church. This is the basic building block of any ministry their call will lead them too.
2. **Is the student willing to learn?** Too often learning stops after graduation. Yet the complications of church and the continuous changes in the process of doing ministry requires someone who will always be wanting to improve their skills. Learning is imperative to good ministry. Do you sense that the student will want to continue learning?
3. **Is the student willing to work?** A minister does not punch a time clock. For the most part, there is no supervision of the pastor. You want to know if the student has a strong work ethic. One question to pose to students is for them to tell how they have prepared their sermons. Find out how they choose their topic, how they use the text, what resources are important in their study, and what the experience was when presented. Behind all of this is an indication of their willingness to work and put in the time needed. Sermons don't just happen on Sabbath morning. There is work and research behind the sermon. Seeing that appropriate time is taken in sermon preparation is an indication as to how they will work in other areas of ministry.

4. **Does the student truly love people?** Ministry is not only preaching, Bible studies, boards, and meetings. It has more to do with people coming together. It has everything to do with people celebrating their love for God, for people, and kindness. Does the candidate indicate his/her interest in a ministry that centers in building positive relationships within the church and community?
5. **Does the student live in the real world?** Once a colleague referenced a pastor who was so heavenly that he was no earthly good. You want someone whose life is committed to Jesus Christ, but you also need pastors who are real and who can relate and communicate with people. Common indicators for this area can be found in the material provided for the interview. Ask about their reading and about what they do with free time. Consider the transcript to see if there was a variety of courses that would allow them to comfortably communicate and spend time with people beyond a Bible study. You want to know that there is balance in their life. You want and need a balanced pastor.

Prepare a list of questions you intend to ask each candidate. Try to ask the same questions of all those being interviewed. Then in hearing the various responses to these questions, you can determine which candidates would be a good fit for the culture of your conference. *Realize that you are looking for a good fit not a perfect match.* A perfect match is nearly impossible to find.

Alongside each question write a brief statement as to what you hope to learn. This will help you to stay focused. You may have noticed that the sermon preparation question, is not simply considering the mechanics of a process. It informs as to the student's work ethic. You can also discover if they are using scripture in an appropriate way. You could learn as to whether their resources are credible. The initial question can lead to many layers of information.

The structure of the question is important. It is easy to ask how one would serve as a congregation's youth pastor. They would talk elegantly as to what they would do. This type of response is not always helpful. Structure your questions so you move beyond asking what they would do but rather what their experience is. "Tell us about what you did as the youth pastor of the Greenlake church." This type of question provides tangible insight into how they did ministry. You want to know the candidate's experience.

For the most part, candidates are scared. It's an uncomfortable experience for them. Do everything you can to set them at ease. Don't try to trick them with deep Biblical or theological questions. Theology can be learned. Just have a good conversation together. Give them an opportunity to ask a question of you. Interviews are two-way streets. Always realize that you are also being evaluated by the candidate. And again, take seriously the material provided by the college and student. Read their resumes and statements of ministry and when the interview is completed ask the candidate to pray.