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# The Calling of a Pastor

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The calling of a pastor is one of the most important decisions that a church will ever make. The potential benefit to a church of a godly ministry is very great. A mistake, however, could cause great difficulty to both the church and the pastor. It is, therefore, vital that churches should know how to go about calling a pastor.

The Church seeking a pastor must ask important questions: What is the church looking for in a pastor? How long does it take to call a pastor? How should the church reach the decision to call a man? How are differences within the congregation to be handled?

The man who is a candidate for the pastorate also has important questions to consider: How is he to know the Lord's will concerning a call? Are there some churches from whom he ought not to accept an invitation to preach with a view? What safeguards are there to ensure that he does not make a mistake?

The pastor's relationship with his present congregation is an important consideration. At what point should he inform his fellow officers about the possibility of a call to another pastorate? When should the church be advised? Is it desirable for there to be some contact between the officers in his present church and the church considering him?

It is the purpose of this bulletin to provide some guidelines to assist both pastors and churches towards a competent handling of such matters.

## 2. THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

Structure and order are key features of the Church as described in the New Testament. The Church is Christ's body, he is its glorious head, and the body is under his control. (*Ephesians 1:22-23*) The Church is Christ's bride and is to submit to him in everything. (*Ephesians 5:23-*

## 7. SUMMARY

The procedure suggested in this bulletin may be summarised in the following steps:

1. The church seeking a pastor prayerfully considers the kind of pastor they should seek and their ability to support him.
2. Enquiries are made about the availability of suitable men. Men should be considered one at a time.
3. The first man is approached to ask if he is willing to consider a call to the pastorate. If he is willing, arrangements are made for him to preach on a Sunday or at a midweek meeting.
4. On his first visit an opportunity is taken for an informal discussion between the man and the church officers. Sometimes this may be deferred until his second visit.
5. If the church officers and the man are agreed to proceed further a second visit is arranged. On this visit an informal meeting with church members may be arranged to meet the man and his wife and family.
6. If the church officers are agreed that the matter should proceed further the man, should be invited to a meeting with them to discuss all relevant matters in detail with a view to putting his name to the church meeting. References, if any, could also be taken up at this point with the man's agreement.
7. If the church officers are agreed the man should be asked if he is willing for his name to be put to the church meeting.
8. The matter should be considered at a Special Church Meeting and if the required majority is obtained, a call should be extended.

It is in the church meeting that the Lord will make his will clear. If there is unanimity, that is very clear guidance for both church and pastor. However, unanimity is not necessary to extend a call. To seek unanimity is to allow the possibility of a minority having the final decision. If the necessary vote in favour is obtained a call should be extended.

Whichever way the church meeting decides, there should be an immediate correspondence with the candidate about the outcome. Telephone calls are open to misunderstanding and are quite unbusinesslike in matters of such grave and vital importance. They should inform the man either:

1. that the church extends to him a call to become their pastor, or
2. that the church is not proceeding any further with his name but is grateful for his willingness to have been considered by them. Unfortunately, some churches fail to do this, leaving the man to find out their decision from some other source, which is quite devastating.

Close contact and good communications ought to be maintained throughout the process. The man should be informed immediately if, for any reason, there is any breakdown in the relationship. Similarly, from the start, the prospective pastor will be prayerfully considering what he learns of the church, and communicating with them his own mind. Should he feel at any point that the relationship ought not to continue he should immediately inform the church so that time is not wasted.

With church and pastor prayerfully seeking to be sensitive to the Lord's will, the great Head of the Church will make his mind known.

25) The Church as a building is given its line, shape and character by Jesus Christ its chief cornerstone. (*Ephesians 2:19-22*)

The local church is to recognise the Lordship of Christ in every aspect of its life, not least in the calling of a pastor. It is the ascended Christ who gives gifts to his Church "for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." (*Ephesians 4:10-12*) It is, therefore, the responsibility of the local church to seek the Lord's mind concerning every aspect of calling a pastor. This can only be done by earnest prayer, careful study of New Testament teaching and wise and spiritual conduct in every aspect of the process.

Every local church needs a ministry of the word of God and pastoral oversight. Generally speaking, if these tasks are to be carried out adequately, it is necessary to have a man set apart full time. Pastors are men set apart to prayer and to the ministry of the word. (*Acts 6:1-6*) They are to labour in the word and doctrine. (*1 Timothy 5:17*) They are to give themselves wholly to these things and continue in them. (*1 Timothy 4:15-16*) Although it is sometimes necessary for a time that a pastor works in secular employment in addition to his pastoral work, this ought never to be regarded as a satisfactory or permanent arrangement. (*1 Corinthians 9:14*)

### **3. THE NEW TESTAMENT PASTOR**

#### **3.1 What is a Pastor?**

There are several terms used in the New Testament which clearly show the function of the pastor.

#### **Pastor**

The pastor is a shepherd or under-shepherd. He is to feed the flock of God. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Chief Shepherd.

*Acts 20:28; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Peter 5:2-4*

#### **Elder**

This suggests maturity and experience. "Elders" were recognised both in Greek and Jewish culture as groups of men with wisdom and understanding, who exercised leadership, made decisions and gave counsel within a town or village. Although elders in the church need not

be older in years than others, it is essential that they are mature in judgement.

*Acts 14:23; 15:2; 1 Timothy 5:17-19; Titus 1:5-9*

### **Overseer**

This is translated in the King James Version by "bishop". The overseer has the responsibility of spiritual oversight; watching over those entrusted to his care.

*Acts 20:28; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-7*

### **Teacher**

This word introduces us to all those verses which speak of the word in preaching and teaching. All elders are to be apt to teach, but the pastor is called to give himself specifically to preaching the word.

*Acts 6:4; 13:1; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Timothy 3:2; 4:6-16; 2 Timothy 2:15; 3:14; 4:5; James 3:1*

### **Leader**

This suggests guiding God's own people and also indicates authority in doing so. It also includes the ideas of ruling and setting an example.

*1 Timothy 5:17; Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24; 1 Peter 5:3*

## **3.2 What sort of man is a pastor required to be?**

1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 set out in terms of general Christian character the sort of man who is suitable for the office of pastor:

- ◆ A man who has a good, consistent character. This is the main emphasis and is indispensable for calling to the ministry.
- ◆ A man who has already learned and shown the ability to lead and rule wisely in his own family.
- ◆ A man whose reputation with unbelievers is untarnished.
- ◆ A man who has been a believer for a sufficient time to have gained some experience and maturity, so that he is not exposed to the temptation to pride.

Matters which may need to be discussed include:

Doctrinal position; views about worship; the place of preaching; the gifts of the Spirit; evangelism; authority of the pastor, elders and deacons; church meetings; women's ministry; inter-church relationships and the ecumenical movement. It would be wise to send him a copy of the church's statement of faith, constitution and trust deed prior to such a meeting.

Practical matters will need to be discussed, including housing, salary, pension, holidays, expenses, study leave and so on. The A.E.C.W. advisory bulletin on "The Care and Support of Pastors by Churches" provides practical help on these and many other matters. The prospective pastor will want time to consider these things and to respond to the church leadership before a call is actually extended.

An informal meeting with the church, with refreshments provided, could be arranged at which the pastor and his wife can meet the congregation.

If the man being considered is in pastoral charge, serious consideration should be given to contact with the officers at his present church, either by letter or personal contact. Wherever possible, it is desirable for there to be a good relationship between the two churches, and for both to be able to pray about the possible call. If the man should be called it would be good if, in the process, the fellowship between the two congregations was strengthened.

## **6.5 How will we know the Lord's will?**

The church leadership will have been involved prayerfully and intimately with the prospective pastor from the start. They will have informed the church of progress at various stages, so that the whole congregation could be engaged in prayer. As progress is made there ought to be a growing conviction of the Lord's will in the whole church.

The matter will be decided at a special church meeting. The church constitution should state how such a meeting is to be called and what majority is required for a decision. A vote in favour by two thirds or three quarters of the membership is usually required for a call to be extended.

### 6.3 How many men do we consider?

It would be helpful to ministers if churches seeking a pastor would proceed along the lines of "one man at a time". The one man should be considered after much prayer and discussion by the church leadership. The whole concept of a church making a list of four, six or even more men to be considered for the pastorate, and then inviting them in turn to visit that congregation "on trial" cannot but be disastrous, and for two reasons:

Firstly, such a method causes the church to polarise. "I like the man we had last Sunday," says one; another will say, "there is a good man coming next Sunday"; then a third and fourth will speak of their preferences, each representing a constituency in the church. Immediately the church is divided into sections, each holding out for "their man". There seems to be something distasteful about a multiplicity of candidates.

Secondly, the men themselves, through this long and unnecessary process of selection are feeling akin to racehorses, wondering whether they are going to be pipped at the post, or will come out as "winners". All but one, the successful candidate, may face the process again. As a result, they are left bewildered, confused and anxious.

### 6.4 How can we get to know the prospective pastor?

You need to evaluate a man's ability as a preacher and to discover if your congregation is helped by his ministry. Does he teach God's word faithfully and clearly? Can he preach evangelistically? Does he move hearts in devotion to Christ? Is there authority and power in his preaching?

You will need to hear a man on two or three Sundays and perhaps midweek as well. But it is unrealistic to ask, as some churches do, for much more than that.

There should be a meeting of the prospective pastor and the church leadership so that frank and friendly discussion can take place. Both sides must be free to speak of their views, visions and practices.

- ◆ A man who has sufficient knowledge of Christian teaching to be able to refute those who contradict sound doctrine, and who has the ability to teach and preach the word to others.

## 4. CHURCHES WITHOUT A PASTOR

Losing the pastor is one of the most difficult experiences which a church may have to face. The pastorate may become vacant for a number of reasons:

### Home Call

The sovereign Lord of the Church may call his servant home to heaven. This may be sudden and unexpected, or foreseen. Either way it thrusts the Church into a difficult time. The shock and sorrow of losing a faithful and beloved servant of the Lord will add to the problems usually experienced at such times.

### A Call to Another Church

This is sometimes regarded as "poaching". Yet we must recognise that the Lord does move men from one sphere of service to another. The principle is, "one man sows and another reaps." *John 4:37* A move has sometimes been followed by a period of blessing. There are examples in the New Testament of men being called from one situation to another. *Acts 11:25-26; 16:1-3*

### Retirement

A pastor's retirement is usually foreseen, and steps can be taken before he retires to set in motion the calling of the next pastor. The new pastor may serve alongside the retiring pastor for a time. This could have great advantages for continuity and a smooth transition.

### Dismissal/ Resignation

Sadly there are times when pastors may have to be dismissed or when they have to resign. Whatever the reasons, it will inevitably have a serious effect upon the church, and may influence the search for a new pastor.

## 5. MAKING A START

For whatever reason the pastor may have left, the church will need to come to terms with his departure. There will be a deep sense of loss and possibly even shock, among members of the congregation.

It is a time when firm, but gracious, leadership will need to be exercised by the remaining church officers, yet it is also a time when that very leadership has been weakened by the pastor's departure.

Lack of experience of what it is like to be without a pastor can also be a problem, particularly if the previous ministry has been a long one. In addition, there may be no clear guidelines or procedures laid down in the church's constitution, if indeed it has one, to guide it as to the way forward.

There may also be other difficulties. The task of supplying the pulpit each Sunday can prove difficult, as well as that of maintaining the midweek ministry. The church may feel a sense of isolation. In addition, there is the problem of trying to maintain a unity of purpose in the church during the interregnum. Above all, Satan will be very active at this time, sowing seeds of division and unsettling the church in its quest for the Lord's will.

If a church is larger and its leadership strong the church will have a sense of direction in calling a new pastor. Smaller churches may feel overwhelmed at the difficulty of the task. It is just at this point that a church should remember other churches with whom she is in fellowship. It may be helpful to invite an evangelical minister who commands the respect of the church to give advice and perhaps to chair the officers' and church meetings.

It would be helpful for the church officers and congregation to undertake a thorough assessment of the church prior to considering a man. What is the church's present position, spiritual strength, need and vision? How will a prospective pastor view the church?

## 6. CALLING A PASTOR

### 6.1 What kind of man are we looking for?

There are important considerations which the church must seek to discern and ascertain. They will need to ask; Is he still a Bible student? Is personal prayer high on his agenda? Is his moral life impeccable? (i.e. consistent with his profession) Is he patient? What is his doctrinal position? Has he a love for the lost and a concern for the glory of God? Other questions will also need to be asked; What is he like with young people? (For some this, wrongly, appears to be the number one qualification). Is he good with the elderly? What are his administrative capabilities? Will he evangelise? Many of these questions can be answered by discreet enquiries from respected Christian leaders. At a later stage a more formal reference may be requested from men who know the man and his ministry.

### 6.2 Where do we look?

What means can a church use to come into contact with men who might be considered? Consideration should be given to men within the church who have pastoral gifts and whose ministry to the church has been blessed. There may have been visiting preachers in recent years whose ministry has been appreciated - not just the big names! Were there any to whom the church particularly warmed? You may wish to ask advice of experienced pastors who may know the evangelical scene better than you when it comes to men who might be suitable for your church.

There are men in colleges preparing for pastoral ministry. You could write to the principals of theological colleges in which you have confidence. There are also assistant pastors whose training and experience have prepared them for the work of the ministry.

Soundings can be taken, on a confidential basis, from pastors and other church leaders whose contacts on a regional or national scale provide them with knowledge of men who may be responsive to a call. There are also registers of prospective candidates for the ministry which are compiled by some church associations.



*'Yn llosgi, heb ei difa'*  
*'On fire, but not consumed'*

Associating Evangelical Churches of Wales  
Cymdeithas o Eglwysi Efengylaidd yng Nghymru

# The Calling of a Pastor

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