

How to Get a Pastor to Move Across the Country to Your Church: A Checklist for a Small Congregation to Follow

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- **Unity of Doctrine in the Leadership**—If the church does not have or has a limited doctrinal statement, the leadership should request a *detailed* doctrinal statement from the pastor. There are several reasons for this:
 1. This is not a statement of the perfect doctrine. It is, rather, a statement of what this pastor believes with all his heart and will be preaching for many years to come. Therefore, it only makes sense for the leadership to know this in advance. It should be noted that the purpose is not to try to argue doctrinal points with the pastor, but to head off potential future conflicts over doctrine. There may be a few minor points that merit further discussion, but generally, trying to get the pastor to change his position or promise not to preach certain things will only delay a later conflict.
 2. This is, according to Ephesians 4:13 the basis for unity in a local church. Therefore, if the men in leadership are themselves unpracticed in expressing their doctrinal positions in detail, this document gives them a reasonable way to (a) affirm that it accurately represents their own positions, (b) provide opportunity to be further educated on issues they are more “fuzzy” on and (c) to think carefully through each doctrinal issue in detail. This sets the stage for a long ministry together in total doctrinal unity.
 3. Once doctrinal unity among the (a) leadership and (b) potential pastor is seen as existing (i.e., they all whole-heartedly agree with the doctrinal statement), the next step is to test congregational unity with the statement, bringing us to the next point:
- **Unity of Doctrine**—If the current leadership and potential pastor have come to a loving, not begrudging, agreement on the doctrinal statement presented by the pastor, then a plan should be made to present this to the congregation.
 1. The leadership should present to the congregation that they are in unity about (a) the need for a detailed doctrinal statement and (b) their unity and agreement the statement being proposed.
 2. Although this is not a formal “vote” per se, the reality is that congregation members vote with their checkbooks and with their feet—meaning that if a doctrinal statement is shoved into their laps, many may leave.
 3. The reason for presenting this statement to the congregation *before* the pastor is formally offered a position is to head off the potential catastrophe of the pastor moving his family to begin ministry, only to find that half the church leaves when he starts preaching a doctrinal position they are not used to or disagree with.
 4. The head of each family should be given a copy of the doctrinal statement and given a period of time to (a) read it and (b) note any questions they have. Another meeting should be held to allow for these questions to be raised and for informal agreement to be verbalized.
 5. It should be clear that no family is under obligation to like or agree with the statement. It is simply a gauge of how faithful they would be should this pastor be called.

- **Formalizing Unity of Doctrine**
 1. If, in the estimation of the elders, a reasonable and sufficient number of families informally agree with the doctrinal statement, then the pursuit of this pastor can continue.
 2. For the good of the church and the pastor, the doctrinal statement should immediately be adopted as the official position of the church, published in writing, and posted to the church website.
- **Formalizing Unity of Commitment: Membership**
 1. Now that the doctrinal statement is adopted and published, a new revitalized membership process can be immediately pursued. This is for two reasons in view of a potential new pastor:
 2. First: This gives current members an opportunity to formally agree with the statement and agree to support the promulgation and preaching of that doctrine.
 3. Second: This gives current members an opportunity to formally make a commitment to each other and to the leadership that they would support a pastor who preaches this statement. This is a commitment of faithful service, financial support, participation in discipleship and development, and generally to support enthusiastically the new potential pastor. Remember, he is taking a HUGE risk moving his family—the first step in caring for the pastor is to commit to faithfulness.
- **Leadership Development**—The current leadership of a church has basically two different attitudes to assess in themselves. Attitude “A” is a subtle form of pride which says that they are going to try to mold the pastor into their image, have him learn “their ways” so to speak. Attitude “B” says, “It’s time for refreshment and time to radically grow as men of God.” Attitude “B” invites and welcomes the new pastor to have them undergo extensive training and discipleship as elders and men of God. This training should be in the areas of theology, church history, spiritual leadership, ministry skills of teaching/preaching, general Bible knowledge, family life, and personal character. This training needs to include reading and homework or it cannot be done adequately.
 1. Attitude “A” complains about this and wants to just make decisions and lead.
 2. Attitude “B” relishes this and thanks God that the potential pastor want to pour into their lives in such detail. The leaders set the example for their congregation.
 3. NOTE: It is not uncommon for church revitalizations to have the elders temporarily step down as official elders until this training is complete. In order to not have a one-man-rule, the pastor can appoint temporary “elders-at-large” made up of other pastors or elders who can help even from long distance for 1-2 years.
- **Leadership Continued Development**—The leadership should be willing to undergo training for the entire time they serve as leaders. This means reading books and attending conferences. Again, the attitude toward this will help diagnose the health of the church. See 2 Timothy 2:2 for Paul’s command concerning leadership development.
- **Vision Development**—If the church has fewer than 15 families, does not have its own permanent facility, and does not have a pastor, it should be considered a church plant—no matter how long it has formally been going. It is in need of revitalization. This revitalization happens best when the church brings a man who is (a) a visionary and (b) administratively gifted to organize the implementation of a vision. The church and leadership should be excited about hearing the potential pastor’s vision and committed to helping carry it out. Many churches initially support the vision, then when the pastor comes, they do not work to help carry it out. Then they blame the pastor for the vision not happening! Again, this is part of the membership commitment outlined above.

- **Ecclesiology**—“Ecclesiology” is simply “How we do church.” This is the outworking practical outworking of the doctrinal statement. It includes the pastor’s passions about preaching, adult ministry, children’s ministry, etc. This statement, often called a “Philosophy of Ministry” determines what the pastor’s and church’s priorities are to be. For example, if expositional Bible preaching is the priority (as it should be!), then the time spent during the week in study by the pastor should reflect this. Church members should understand that the pastor needs 30 hours per week to study and bring God’s Word to them. The leadership should (a) understand and (b) be on board with the pastor’s Philosophy of Ministry. It is vitally connected to the vision for the church and sets the direction that the church prayerfully moves.
- **Financial Support**—There are four possible positions churches can take in regards to supporting their potential pastor. The potential pastor needs a feel for what category the leadership falls into:
 1. **Able and Willing**—This is the church that has membership that has committed to give above and beyond what the pastor and his family would need to live on. The leadership is eager and willing to look at resources such as Stewardship Services Foundation that gives specific guidance on a remuneration package. The general attitude is to pay the pastor “double honor” (1 Tim 5:17) rather than to try to keep the pastor humble by making him struggle financially. He is a professional who has trained as long as a dentist or chiropractor, just to give a sense of time invested. The church who is able and willing is extremely eager to meet the pastor’s family needs generously and non-judgmentally as well. Having a faithful pastor is a privilege and worthy of generosity, not because he is a perfect man, but because of his work (See 1 Thes 5:12-13 for the correct attitude).
 2. **Unable and Willing**—This the church with all the right attitudes, but simply too small to fully support the pastor. This leadership expresses to the pastor that it will be their prayer and earnest desire to give immediate pay raises as soon as giving increases. The church will also deeply commit to evangelism and discipleship to save and train new believers who will be fruitful in giving as well.
 3. **Able and Unwilling**—This is an attitude of stinginess and trying to have power over the pastor by “keeping him humble.” This church does not deserve a pastor.
 4. **Unable and Unwilling**—This is an attitude of stinginess accompanied by inability to pay a pastor. This is often the by-product of an extremely unhealthy church and leadership. This church should consider seriously closing its doors permanently.

The leadership of the church should make very clear which category they are in. Category #1 is certainly the preference. This part of the conversation needs to include *precisely* how much money is (a) currently available for the pastor’s package (E.g. in savings) and (b) how much is anticipated to be available monthly. Remember, this is not just salary, but insurance, housing, retirement etc. A REALLY REALLY good indicator of having attitude #1 is that the leadership is very willing to research and learn what a really nice pastoral package looks like, such as at the Stewardship Services Foundation website, which specializes in pastors and churches.