

**CAREER
PLACEMENT
HANDBOOK**

FOR ORDAINED MINISTRY

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*The heart of man plans his way but the Lord establishes his steps
Proverbs 16:9*

Welcome!

What is this handbook?

Westminster Theological Seminary is committed to helping its students pursue God's purpose for their lives, both personally and professionally. To that end, the Center for Theological Writing has created two career placement handbooks that place a strong emphasis upon the relational aspects of the process within the larger covenant community. This specific handbook has been designed for finding full-time ministry positions.

How should I use this handbook?

This handbook is meant to be used in conjunction with other resources given to you during your time at Westminster. In particular, materials from Orientation to Ministerial Formation (PT 111), Seminar in Leadership (PT 332), and Preparing for Licensure and Ordination (PT 243). If you do not have access to these materials, contact Dr. Timothy Witmer or refer to the copies available in the Student Resource Room and Tutoring Center (A413).

How is this handbook organized?

This handbook is organized chronologically, according to the steps one would normally take, from start to finish, when seeking an ordained position.

How does this handbook fit into the scheme of Westminster career placement?

This book is a good place to start thinking about your future after Westminster. Get to know and stay in contact with key individuals who are named here to help you find God's will for your life and ministry. Keep in mind that the Center for Theological Writing is another important resource that can help you by providing personal consultation on your resume and cover letter writing. Finally, don't forget to consult with friends and spiritual mentors.

Associate Dean of Students – Ms. Jayne Clark

Helps with career decisions; networking; job leads; women in ministry; women in the mission field

Director of Mentored Ministry – Dr. Timothy Witmer

Helps with spiritual dynamics; career decisions; networking

Dean of Students – Dr. Brandon Crowe

Helps with spiritual dynamics; career decisions; networking; feedback on résumés

Director of the Center for Theological Writing – Dr. Leslie Altena

Helps with print and online resources; inquiry e-mails; CV and résumé writing; cover letters; thank you notes

What does it mean to look for ordained ministry as a Christian?

In any endeavor, it is vital to keep Christ in the foreground and to remember the reason you are seeking employment. This is especially true for those seeking ordained positions. Focusing upon Christ throughout this process will remind you of God's sovereignty and the reasons you felt called to ordained ministry in the first place.

Another integral aspect of pursuing Christian ministry is the covenant community. It takes humility to rely on others and on God in finding a job. Yet part of God's calling for all Christians is covenant fellowship. Take this opportunity to embrace your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ and to allow them to assist you. Be sure to keep your eyes open for opportunities to help them out as well.

CHAPTER 1: *Calling*

One of the biggest challenges facing anyone who is considering ordained ministry is recognizing God's calling. **What does it mean to be called? How does it "feel?" How does one determine and confirm a call?** This section addresses your perceived call to ministry and outlines resources available to you for confirming it.

Discerning Your Calling

What does it "feel" like to be called into ordained ministry? This is a difficult question to answer, and no two callings will be identical. Within this section are some broad guidelines for you to use as you pursue God's will for your ministerial (and personal) life. However, a vital part of discerning and confirming your call is working closely with mentors and seeking the advice of seasoned ministers. The church's role in helping you recognize your call is paramount and must not be overlooked.

Also critical to your success in pursuing ministry, if you are married, is the counsel of your spouse. In this section, you will find various tools and resources that you can use to help determine whether or not you are called to ordained ministry and how to confirm that call.



Factors to Consider

Only you and God can know your true spiritual state. If the Lord is guiding you in the direction of ordained ministry, reviewing the information below may help you confirm your sense of calling. However, if you are choosing the path of ordained ministry simply because you're not sure what else to do with a degree from Westminster, pray and think very carefully about proceeding with your quest. Talk with those in positions of authority over you, members of your church, and the faculty with whom you are close to gain their insights into your career aspirations. Look over [*Career Placement Handbook for Non-Ordained Ministry*](#); you will find that there are *many* options other than ordained ministry that are available to you. Keep in mind that even if you are not called to ordained ministry, you *are* called to Christian service in some capacity. God will lead you to the place he has especially reserved for you.

The information in this section is designed for your personal reflection. Use it prayerfully to begin pursuing ordained ministry.

Internal Factors

- **Spiritual Life Inventory (PT 111 Handbook, pgs. 14-15):** A pastor is the spiritual leader of a community. As such, his own walk with the Lord should be solid. Make sure that you have taken inventory of your walk with the Lord before you begin any endeavor, let alone one that has the ramifications of ordained ministry.
- **Family Life Inventory:** Is your family life good? Does your family, especially your spouse, if you are married, support your decision to enter the pastorate? Take stock of your family's spiritual state and the level of support that they have for your desire to pursue ordained ministry. If you are unmarried, your family's input is important but

should not necessarily deter you from pursuing ordained ministry if you have received confirmation of your calling from your church and mentors.

- **Your Desires/Motives:** Before pursuing ordination, it is vital for you to evaluate your desires and motives for such a pursuit. Do you want to become a minister because you have the right gifts? Do you enjoy being in charge of others and in control of most situations you find yourself in? Do you like it when others listen to you and take your advice above the advice of others? If these are your main reasons for becoming a minister, perhaps you should reconsider your motives. As Titus 1:7 points out, a minister cannot be arrogant, but must be “upright, holy, and disciplined.” Prayerfully consider whether you meet the qualifications laid out in Scripture for pastors (see 1 Tim 3:1-13 and Titus 1:6-9 in particular). The courses you take in the Practical Theology department at Westminster will also assist you in interpreting the passages that speak about pastoral qualifications and measuring yourself against those qualifications.
- **Prospective Planning Timeline (required in PT 111):** Planning for your ordination ahead of time will enable you to know what will be asked of you. This will not only help you tailor your time at Westminster for maximum benefit to you, but it will also allow you to avoid obstacles and delays that could have been foreseen. A timeline will ensure that your spouse and family know what to expect and how best to support you.
- **PRAYER!** Above all, keep your call in prayer. Commune with the Lord frequently so that you are sensitive to His will for your life. Have others pray for you along the way as well. Prayer should be both a starting point and constant companion in your search for ordained employment.

External Factors

Confirmation of Call: If you believe that you are being called into the pastorate, it will be important for you to have confirmation of that call from the people closest to you.

- **Family:** If your spouse does not support your decision to pursue ordained ministry, perhaps you should reconsider your calling. Talk openly with her to find out why she does not want you to become a pastor. Pray together and let the Lord speak to your hearts. Talk to a pastor or another mentor you respect for input regarding your particular familial situation. If members of your extended family offer resistance to the idea of you pursuing ordained ministry, consider their opinion but be sure to speak to other Christian mentors whose advice you value. While your family’s input is valuable and should be considered in this process, your goal is, ultimately, service to the church. For that reason, the counsel of spiritual leaders, particularly your pastor, will be especially important.
- **Mentors:** Your pastor, elders, members of your presbytery, and other respected, mature Christians will have much insight to share with you, not only about the demands of being an ordained minister, but also about your preparedness for pursuing ministry. Consider the external call of the church to have priority in confirming (or questioning) your pursuit of ordained ministry.
- **Other Mentors:** Speak with other spiritual mentors as well. Family members, professors, and friends can all give you insight into your calling and raise questions or concerns that you might have overlooked.
- **Mentored Ministry:** Graduates from Westminster have consistently reported that the time they invested in the mentored ministry program was critical in evaluating their

decision to pursue ordained ministry. Make sure to begin your mentored ministry requirement early in your Westminster career so that you can reap the maximum benefits of this program.

- **Spiritual Gifts:** In addition to seeking out the advice of family and spiritual mentors, another way to discern your call to ordained ministry is to evaluate the spiritual gifts that the Lord has given to you. Ephesians 4:7 reminds us that the Lord has gifted every member of Christ's body. If your gifts are suited for ministry, and that is God's plan for you, then he will see you through. Scripture speaks of several gifts that are important for those seeking professional ministry. 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:6-9 in particular are important passages for you to consider seriously and pray over regarding your call to the pastorate. If your skill set matches your call, this may be an indication of what the Lord has in store for you. However, if you lack several of the gifts required of pastors, speak with a close mentor to obtain guidance as to how you should proceed.

Discovery of Spiritual Gifts

It is easy, especially in times of economic downturn, to forget God's role in our lives. Yet, as Christians, we affirm that God has a plan for each of us; this is no less true of our vocation. God has special work set aside just for you. This is comforting for Christians because it means that God has a place for us, and will You may consider using one of the many available tests as a starting point for determining areas in which you are gifted. One suggested site provides a [free spiritual gift analysis](#). However, **do not let quizzes and speculation be your only indication** of what spiritual gifts you possess. **Experience is far more effective in discerning which gifts the Lord has bestowed upon you.** Actually doing ministry allows you and those around you to identify your proficiencies and deficiencies. For those humble and wise enough to accept criticism (Prov 12:1), experience in a ministry setting is invaluable in the pursuit of ordained ministry.



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Realistic Expectations: Before deciding to pursue ordination, it is important to have a clear idea of what the process will entail. Starting early could mean the difference between becoming ordained shortly after graduation from Westminster and waiting many months after graduation to fulfill the necessary requirements for your church or denomination.

Mentored Ministry and Internships: The Mentored Ministry program at Westminster not only provides you with important contacts for finding ordained ministry positions, it is also vital for a full understanding of ordained ministry and what it entails. If you have not yet completed your Mentored Ministry requirement, find a place to serve that will allow you to practice the gifts and skills you'll need to be an effective pastor.

If, during your time in your Mentored Ministry, you struggle to relate to people and to exercise compassion and care toward difficult people, and you find yourself loathing your time there, you should consider reevaluating your decision to pursue ordained ministry.

Books and Other Resources: For a more in-depth look at life as a pastor, and at whether you are being called to the pastorate, consult the following books and resources:

- Jay Adams - [Shepherding God's Flock](#)
- Tim Witmer - [The Shepherd Leader: Achieving Effective Shepherding in Your Church](#)
- Os Guinness - [The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life](#)
- Richard Baxter - [The Reformed Pastor](#)
- Edmund Clowney - [Called to the Ministry](#)
- TheResurgence.com - [Discerning God's Call](#)

CHAPTER 2: Ordination

Ordination is usually required prior to the acquisition of full-time pastoral ministry. This section covers the ordination process of major Presbyterian denominations, and describes where you can find information about the ordination process for some other denominations.

It is advisable to begin the ordination process as early in your Westminster career as possible so that you can tailor your time to best meet the requirements for ordination. If you begin the steps early, you may find that you are eligible for ordination soon after graduation. This is particularly true for denominations that require a mandatory waiting period between the initial stages of pursuing ordination and ordination itself. Beginning the process while you are in the later stages of your time in seminary may significantly delay ordination, resulting in an uncomfortable interim period between graduation and full-time ministry.



The following steps are required for ordination in the OPC. For more detailed information, consult the [Book of Church Order](#).

Overview of Process:

1. Church Membership
2. Come Under Care
3. Licensure
4. Calling
5. Ordination
6. Installation

Church Membership: The first step in becoming ordained is membership in an OPC church (ordinarily in the presbytery in which the candidate is taken under care).

Under Care: Next, a candidate is taken under care of a presbytery. He must provide his testimony, sense of inward calling, and reasons he has chosen to pursue ordination in the OPC. The session of his local congregation then certifies that the candidate's faith and potential gifts qualify him to be taken under the care of the presbytery with a view to ordination.

Licensure: After a candidate has been taken under care, the next step is licensure. The candidate is eligible for licensure after earning a Bachelor's degree and completing a year and a half of study at a theological seminary. The candidate is examined by the presbytery in the English Bible, ecclesiastical history, theology, and the original languages of Scripture. He must also prepare a sermon, a theological essay, and an exegetical essay on a passage from Scripture.

Calling: A licentiate may be called into ministerial service by a congregation prior to ordination.

Ordination: According to the OPC Book of Church Order, "Ordination is that act by which men are set apart to the offices of deacon, ruling elder, and minister. It is the church's solemn approval of and public

attestation to a man's inward call, his gifts, and his calling by the church." Ordination occurs after a call is issued to a qualified licentiate for his installation.

Installation: The OPC Book of Church Order defines installation as "the act by which a person who has been chosen to perform official work in the church, having been ordained, is placed in position to do that work. When a man receives his first call to a service his ordination and installation shall be performed at the same time." This is the final step in the pursuit of ordained ministry in the OPC.

Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)

The following steps are required for ordination in the PCA. For more information, refer to the [PCA Book of Church Order](#).

Overview of the Process:

1. Church Membership
2. Coming Under Care
3. Licensure
4. Internship
5. Calling
6. Ordination
7. Installation

Church Membership: Before beginning the ordination process, a candidate must be a member of a PCA church for at least six months.

Under Care: The next step in ordination is to come under care of a PCA presbytery. This involves providing a testimony, demonstrating a sense of inward calling, and explaining the reasons for choosing the PCA.

Licensure: Prior to eligibility for ordination, a candidate must be licensed by his presbytery. This requires an examination, including a personal statement of Christian experience and inward call, basic knowledge of biblical doctrine as outlined in the Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms, practical knowledge of the Bible, and basic knowledge of PCA church government as outlined in the Book of Church Order.

Internship: In addition to licensure, a candidate must serve in an internship. This is a trial period that helps the church judge the candidate's qualifications for service. The internship must last for at least a year and may occur during the candidate's time in seminary.

Receiving a Call: Before a licentiate can become ordained, he must receive a call to definite work. This call comes from a church, presbytery, or General Assembly.

Ordination: The PCA Book of Church Order defines Ordination as "the authoritative admission of one duly called to an office in the Church of God, accompanied with prayer and the laying on of hands, to which it is proper to add the giving of the right hand of fellowship." After a candidate has met the requirements for ordination and received a call, he is examined in several areas and then ordained.

Installation: Once the candidate has been ordained, he is eligible for installation into the office of minister at the church that has called him.

Other Presbyterian and Reformed Denominations

Below you will find websites containing information on ordination in other Reformed denominations.

- [Evangelical Presbyterian Church \(EPC\)](#)
- [Christian Reformed Church \(CRC\)](#)
- [Presbyterian Church \(U.S.A.\) \(PCUSA\)](#)

Other Denominations

A good place to look for information on the ordination process in other denominations is their websites. You should be able to locate information about the steps you must complete in order to qualify for ordination. Make sure that you are aware of all the necessary steps before you begin the process, especially if you are planning to use your degree from Westminster to satisfy any education requirements.

CHAPTER 3: *Finding Open Positions*

In this section we explore the best resources available to you for finding an ordained ministry position. This search presupposes that your heart and spiritual life are attuned to God's will. For that, a note about prayer is warranted.

Prayer

The best way to begin any endeavor, especially one with major repercussions, is prayer. Prayer helps to ensure that your hunt for ordained ministry is oriented toward Christ and away from self. Ask for the Lord's guidance and for assurance that you are pursuing the right field and that an open position is suited for you, your family, and those seeking a shepherd. Maintaining a prayerful, Christian attitude in such a turbulent process is not always easy, but it helps to keep your focus on the Lord and to remember why you are seeking ordained ministry in the first place.



Networking

Aside from the spiritual component of job hunting, networking is the single most important professional step you will take in your job search. In fact, many (if not most) jobs are never even posted because they are filled, instead, through networking. In this case, it definitely pays to know someone.

Westminster Theological Seminary

If you are just beginning your time at Westminster, keep in mind that every person you meet may be a potential contact for future employment. Foster relationships with students and professors. Remember that fellowship in the Lord's family is not just meant to be recreational; God uses fellow Christians for his purposes and he may well use a brother or sister to help you acquire a ministry position.

If you are nearing the end of your time at Westminster but spent every waking second tucked people who will keep their ears open for an ordained position suited to you. However, do not despair; it is never too late to reach out to others and to help those who reach out to you.

Other Places for Networking

Presbytery: It is important to get involved in your local presbytery. Not only will you make valuable contacts with the denomination in which you hope to be an ordained member, you will also gain professional insight into the workings of the church and how to avoid problems and issues faced by churches in your denomination.

Mentored Ministry: Mentored Ministry does more than give you useful and relevant ministry experience; it provides you with valuable exposure to mentors who will see your work firsthand and be able to give you advice and tips on finding ordained ministry. Perhaps you can even

acquire a position with the church where you were mentored. At the very least, your mentor should be able to point you in the direction of people to contact regarding ordained ministry.

Home Church: If you have been involved in your hometown church, there may be valuable contacts for you there. Your pastor, elders, deacons and church members may know of open positions within your denomination. They may also be able to spread the word about your job hunt and be willing to provide references for you.

Internships: If you held an internship during college or at Westminster, make sure that the place where you interned is aware of your job hunt as well. They may be interested in hiring you in an ordained capacity. If you worked for a Christian organization, they may have information on churches looking for ministers within your denomination. You never know where you will find your next lead.

Conferences/Professional Meetings

Conferences and professional meetings are a great way not only to increase your professional knowledge but also to meet people with common interests and affiliations. This is especially true of conferences for ministers. Within this section we highlight the conferences most helpful in pursuing your desire to become a minister.

Westminster Conferences: Westminster has several conferences throughout the year that may be useful for building a contact list, particularly within the PCA and OPC denominations. Of special interest is the preaching conference. Make sure that you check the Westminster website to stay informed about conferences held at Westminster.

Presbytery: Going to presbytery meetings regularly will help you form contacts within your target denomination, as well as gain insight into how particular church and ministry situations are handled. Knowing the right people within your denomination will be beneficial for finding the right ordained position.

Other Seminaries: Another possible option to look into is conferences at other seminaries, particularly Reformed seminaries. You may be able to make valuable contacts that would not otherwise have been available.

Denominational Conferences: Many denominations hold conferences throughout the year with a specific theme or ministry topic. Make sure to stay informed about your particular denomination's conferences for the year.

Non-Denominational Conferences: Many non-denominational conferences are held during the year. These provide excellent opportunities to learn more about different aspects of ministry and to extend your networking efforts. Organizations that hold annual conferences include: Christian Counseling and Education Foundation (CCEF), the Gospel Coalition, Together for the Gospel (T4G), and the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals (particularly, the annual Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology). Make sure to stay abreast of when these and other conferences are held so that you don't miss a valuable opportunity to network.

Evangelical Theological Society and Society of Biblical Literature: Though these two conferences are not specifically geared toward ministry, you may come in contact with individuals who belong to your denomination or share a common interest with you.

Often alumni will hire others who attended the same undergraduate school. Many schools have alumni associations that encourage graduates to keep in contact and help each other out. Sometimes there are regional alumni associations that help graduates find jobs in a specific geographical area. Check out the alumni association of your undergraduate institution to see what resources might be available to you. Let former professors (especially those who may have recommended you previously) and old friends know that you are looking for employment as well.

Westminster Placement

Westminster has its own resources available for your ordained ministry hunt. Check out the website for employers specifically seeking Westminster students. Also make sure that you talk to key individuals on campus who can provide you with more insights and information about your search.



Placement Website

Visit Westminster's [employment opportunities page](#).

Key Personnel

- **Rev. Dr. Brandon Crowe**, [Dean of Students](#)
- **Rev. Dr. Tim Witmer**, [Professor of Practical Theology and Director of the Office of Mentored Ministry](#)
- **Jayne Clarke**, [Associate Dean of Student Development](#)
- **Dr. Leslie Altena**, [Director of the Center for Theological Writing](#)

Additional Places to Look

Denominational Websites

Another excellent place to find vacant ordained positions is at the website of the denomination in which you are seeking ordained ministry.

- [Orthodox Presbyterian Church](#) - You may contact their administrative offices by calling (215) 830-0900.
- [Presbyterian Church in America](#)
- [Evangelical Presbyterian Church](#)
- [Christian Reformed Church](#)
- [Presbyterian Church USA](#)

Non-Reformed Denominations: A good place to find open positions outside of Reformed circles are on each denomination's website. If this information is not located online, use the contact information provided on its webpage to find someone who can direct your search.

Ministry Websites

Another place to find ordained ministry positions is the Internet. It can be hard to differentiate a legitimate posting from a scam, even on Christian sites (since many sites do not review the content of posts). If you find a promising lead using one of these websites, do not give out any personal information until you are sure that the offer is legitimate. Check to see if the same ad has been posted multiple times over a short span of time; this is generally an indication of a scam. Never pay these services. If a website asks you to pay in order to access postings, walk away.

Despite a fairly large number of misleading posts, some ordained positions posted online are legitimate. The following sites may provide you with good leads for finding open positions. However, Westminster has not tested the veracity of posts on these sites, so make sure you proceed with caution.

- [Ministry List.com](http://MinistryList.com)
- [Church Jobs.net](http://ChurchJobs.net)
- [Christian Jobs.com](http://ChristianJobs.com)
- [Church Staffing.com](http://ChurchStaffing.com)
- [Christia Net.com](http://ChristiaNet.com)
- [Christian Career Center.com](http://ChristianCareerCenter.com)
- [Ministry Jobs.com](http://MinistryJobs.com)
- [Professional Chaplains.org](http://ProfessionalChaplains.org)
- [Youth Pastor.com](http://YouthPastor.com)

Other Seminaries: Check out the websites of other seminaries, particularly of those in the geographical area in which you are planning to live. Often these seminaries will have job placement services and postings of their own and you may be able to find leads using them.

Direct Contact: If there is a particular church where you'd like to work, it may be worthwhile to inquire about open positions directly. You may be able to do summer internships at that church during your time in seminary so that upon graduation you are more likely to be hired there. While there is, of course, no guarantee that you directly contacting a church will work, this may be a viable option for your particular search.

A Note on Sovereignty: The process of searching for ordained ministry can be long and slow. A church may receive dozens of applications for one vacancy. Having a deadline in mind for finding an ordained position can cause frustration and discouragement. Instead of taking matters into your own hands, remember to wait for the Lord's timing. He has chosen a place just for you, and he will see you through the highs and lows of finding it.

**Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established.
Proverbs 16:3**

CHAPTER 4: *Applying for Open Positions*



This section focuses on the initial stages of applying for an open position, such as writing resumes, CVs, and cover letters. You will also find information on obtaining appropriate references and submitting them to prospective employers. Finally, the importance of including a Philosophy of Ministry and a Statement of Faith is discussed.

Résumés

This section takes you through the process of **writing a resume specifically for a ministry position**. (For more information on writing a standard resume, see the [Career Placement Handbook for Non-Ordained Ministry](#).) There are several differences between a standard resume and the

type of resume you will need to submit when hunting for ordained employment, particularly in terms of which sections to include or exclude.

- **Spiritual Component:** As with any endeavor, your preparation for obtaining an ordained position is first and foremost a spiritual exercise. The task of pursuing professional ministry should be accomplished through prayer and the earnest seeking of counsel from the Lord, your family, and Christian mentors. Allow the Lord to guide you through this process and to illumine his will for your life as you go out into the field to harvest for him.
- **A Different Kind of Resume:** Resumes for ministerial positions are different from business resumes. Often, when applying for jobs in the business world, potential employers will spend less than a minute reviewing your credentials. In the case of ordained employment, churches want to get to know you and will likely spend more time examining your resume to get a sense of who you are. For that reason, pastoral resumes should be longer and contain more information than you would normally include in a standard business resume.
- **The good news** is that if you have already devoted time to crafting a great business resume, you will not have to start from scratch when sitting down to write your ministry resume. You can cull, reformulate, and expand entire sections of your resume, such as your education, process of writing your resume from start to finish.

Writing

This section provides an overview of the process of translating your professional experience into a written document, beginning with work to be done prior to writing your resume. Part of writing a business document is knowing what sections to include and in what order, as well as what is not relevant and what should be omitted.

Before beginning the writing phase, make sure that you have compiled a list of your complete employment history, as well as volunteer experience, college and graduate education information, and any awards you have received or other achievements. It is also worthwhile to keep a list of your skills,

gifts, and abilities. Part of the task of writing a resume is determining what aspects of your professional experience to include, having it all gathered and organized in one place will make this step much easier.

Guidelines

- **Length:** Your resume should be no longer than two pages. Whereas a standard resume is only one page, a ministerial resume can be a bit longer. This allows you ample space to showcase your most compelling qualifications.
- **Formatting:** Your resume should be cleanly formatted. Avoid non-standard fonts or creative layouts. Your task is to create a neat looking document that will allow a prospective employer to glean information about you. Since electronic submission of resumes is common practice, be sure to use a font (such a Times New Roman or Arial) that is readable on any computer.
- **Submission:** Follow carefully any and all submission instructions. Failure to do so may imperil your future at a church or elsewhere.

Sections to Include



Heading

Full Name

Address

E-mail: Make sure to use a professional-sounding e-mail address such as your first initial and last name, not one named after a pet, favorite television show, etc.

Phone Number

Education

GPA: Generally, if your GPA is above a 3.0, include it on your résumé. If you are short on space, you may consider leaving your GPA off. This determination should be made in light of the type of job you are applying for. Though you may not be applying for an academic position, including a high GPA on a ministerial resume shows the amount of dedication and perseverance it took to finish your Westminster degree.

Degrees: Include any degrees earned, your specialization, and date of graduation. Also note if you earned a minor or honors (such as *cum laude*). If you have a bachelor's degree, do not put high school information in this section.

Relevant Coursework: If you have taken courses that are relevant to a specific position (but outside of classes required for your major), you may consider including them. This is especially true if you have taken courses at more than one seminary. However, if you are short on space, this material can be excluded.

Employment History

A ministry resume should embody who you are and your skills as a potential spiritual leader in a community. Your employment history should reflect traits that are desirable for ministers to have. However, do not discount a position you have held because it was not ministry. Potential employers are looking for an array of traits that are attainable in a wide variety of positions. Many skills, such as leadership aptitude, effective communication, and the ability to teach, are transferable from a former position to ordained ministry.

Volunteer Experience: If your work experience is slim, or you have volunteer experience that is particularly impressive or relevant to a position, include it in a separate section of your résumé! Your unpaid mentored ministry experience is an example of the type of experience that can be included in this section (paid mentored ministry experience should be included under employment history).

Honors or Activities: Consider including on your résumé substantial honors or honors and activities that are directly related to the position for which you are applying. If you don't have a long employment history, listing honors and activities is a good way to communicate your accomplishments. This section can include college or graduate school honors, but do not include high school honors in this section.

Skills: Space permitting, include skills that might make you look more attractive to an employer. This is a useful section to include if you do not have a lengthy employment history and need to fill out your résumé.

Sections to Exclude Unless Specifically Requested



Do not include an objective (generally). Carefully consider whether including an objective is necessary. Your cover letter should contain your reasons for seeking employment at a particular church or organization and repeating those reasons in your resume could be superfluous. You may actually harm your chances of employment if you include a poorly written objective, or one that is too broad, or one that is not broad enough. Of course, include an objective if specifically requested by an employer.

Do not include a list of references. All employers know that your references are available upon request. It is unnecessary to note this information in the résumé. It is also unnecessary to include references' contact information in your résumé or cover letter.

If you have a bachelor's degree, do not include detailed information about high school. If you have a bachelor's degree, you do not need to note your high school diploma. Also, leave out information about clubs or other activities you participated in during high school.

Writing Tips



You've read about what to put in a résumé, as well as what not to put in your résumé, but how do you even begin actually writing one? This section takes you through the process of writing a résumé step-by-step. For additional help with the writing process, see the **Director of the Center for Theological Writing**.

Gather data first. To begin writing, you need to take some time to collect information about all of your past jobs, internships, volunteer experience, education, references, special honors/activities, hobbies, skills, and anything else you deem relevant. Having this information in one place, particularly if electronic, will streamline your résumé-writing process.

List duties and accomplishments. Make a list of responsibilities or duties that were yours for each job you've had. Make sure each list is exhaustive. Even if you don't think a particular task is substantial, put it on the list.

Don't discount any employment you've had in the past. List duties and accomplishments for each job, volunteer positions, and internships that you have had. You never know how your past experience could help your current job hunt. If you had a substantial success or helped your company in a tangible way, include that in your list.

Prioritize your experience. You need to decide at this stage if you are going to organize your employment and other experience chronologically (i.e., most recent to least recent) or according to relevance (most relevant or substantial experience to least relevant). Look at all of the experiences you've had and determine which is the most substantial and/or relevant to the type of job you want.

This prioritizing step will be useful later, for writing inquiry e-mails, your cover letter, and other correspondence. In addition, it will help you when it comes time to interview for a position because it will encourage you to remember and classify the various roles and responsibilities you have had.

Tailor your résumé to the position. Depending on your priorities (see the previous step), select which jobs you will include on your résumé and which ones you will exclude. Since it is vital that your résumé be no longer than one page, you will likely have to leave out some of your employment history.

Sometimes, you will shift the portions of your employment history to showcase your qualifications for a certain position. Having a master list of duties and responsibilities for each of your past jobs prepared in advance (as described above) will be a tremendous help when it comes time to customizing your résumé for specific positions.

Craft each section carefully. Now that you've organized your employment data, writing your résumé will be easier. The following tips will help you through this portion of the process.

Header: A good place to begin is with the header. Include your name, address, e-mail address, and at least one telephone number.

Education: Education is a good section to tackle second. You may choose to put this at the top, especially if you feel it is your most impressive asset. If you have a stunning employment history, you may wish to put education near the bottom of your résumé.

Employment History/Experience: This section is a little bit trickier, especially if you have had more than one job. A good way to help you narrow down which former jobs you will include on your résumé is to fill them in from your prioritization list, beginning with the top of the list. Use at least two bullet points, preferably more, to describe your tasks and responsibilities for each

position. Wise selection is key. Having too many jobs on your résumé, even if they fit onto one page, can make you look unstable.

Other Sections: If there's enough space to include other sections such as volunteer experience, internships, ministry experience, and skills, place them last. The exception to this rule is if you have unpaid experience that is directly relevant to a job you are applying for. In that case, it may be worthwhile to make space for it by removing a job from your employment history section or by shortening your job descriptions.

Use tense appropriately. When describing your roles and responsibilities for a position you already have, use the present tense. If you are describing a position you no longer have, use the past tense.

Tell a story. Use simple statements to describe your experience instead of sentences or paragraphs. You can imagine each of your former jobs in terms of a story: What were some of the obstacles you overcame? What tangible results did your actions achieve?

Be concise. Keep each bullet point to one line or less. This will not only keep your résumé clean-looking, but it will also help you describe your experience succinctly. Remember, your potential employer will probably only spend a few seconds looking at your résumé—make them count!

Take time to edit and proofread. Once you've written your résumé, have at least one person look at it to make sure there are no errors. If possible, have more people look at it. Take a break from your résumé so you can approach it with fresh eyes. After you have gone over it a few more times and had it proofread, you should be ready to send it out!

The **Director of the Center for Theological Writing** can help you with the process and can also provide a template that you can customize.

Helpful Resources

These resources from other seminaries provide more information on crafting great resumes.

- [Dallas Theological Seminary](#)
- [Southern Baptist Theological Seminary](#)
- [Regent University](#)

Résumé Samples

Samples included in this handbook are examples of what to do and what to avoid when writing your résumé. See also this [Sample Ordained Ministry Resume](#).

Limits length to one page.
Overall formatting is clean
and simple.



Effective Sample Résumé

Roberta M. Jones

87 w. 2nd street, Philadelphia, pa 19455
(215) 555-8793 ☞ roberta.jones@fake-mail.com

Provides proper contact information (phone number, professional e-mail, and mailing address)

EDUCATION:

☞ **Westminster Theological Seminary**; Glenside, PA
Master of Divinity in General Studies; May 2010
Current GPA: 3.89

☞ **The School of Hard Knocks**; Nowhere, VA
Bachelor of Arts in Sociology; May, 2005
GPA: 3.65

Displays strongest asset (education) at the top

Lists GPA of 3.0 or better

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

☞ **Philadelphia High School**

Spanish Teacher, Philadelphia, PA (01/10-Present)

- Design curriculum to meet unique needs of each class
- Utilize learning strategies for high school students
- Teach students fundamentals of Spanish grammar, vocabulary, and structure
- Stimulate interest in Spanish and Latin culture
- Guide students in spoken component of Spanish
- Review homework and answer questions
- Maintain class website to facilitate learning from home

Uses present tense to describe responsibilities of current job

Contains simple phrases and vivid verbs to describe employment history

☞ **Startrucks Coffee Company**

Barista, Philadelphia, PA (09/08-01/10)

- Prepared custom-order drinks swiftly and accurately
- Provided excellent service to customers
- Created new drinks such as “March Mocha Madness”
- Brainstormed promotional and revenue-generating strategies
- Promoted new products and other merchandise

Keeps bullet points to one line or less

Uses past tense to describe responsibilities of former jobs

☞ **Philadelphia State University**

Student Library Worker, Philadelphia, PA (02/06-09/08)

- Assisted patrons with checkouts and renewals of library materials
- Performed research to answer patrons’ inquiries
- Maintained productive learning environment
- Reshelfed library books and journals

VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE:

☞ **Christ Rocks Presbyterian Church**

Youth Leader, Philadelphia, PA (03/06-08/09)

- Led Bible study for high school students
- Counseled and disciplined teenage girls
- Created games and activities for kids to play

Includes volunteer experience relevant to desired position



Ineffective Sample Résumé

WILLIAM JENKINS
(215) 555-8793 ☞ robbjopants@fake-mail.com

Incomplete contact information, e-mail address is not professional

OBJECTIVE: To secure a position that will allow me to make a positive contribution and gain new skills.

Objective is too broad

EDUCATION:

☞ **Westminster Theological Seminary**

Master of Divinity in General Studies

Current GPA: 2.89

Does not include dates attended, location of school, or specific information about degree

☞ **The School of Life**, Somewhere, WA

Bachelor of Arts

GPA: 2.89

Includes GPA lower than 3.0

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

☞ **Church of the Savior**

Youth Pastor, Philadelphia, PA

Does not include employment dates for this position

- As a youth pastor at Church of the Savior, I am responsible for the spiritual formation and development of about 50 teenagers, ages 12-18. I organize weekly activities, yearly trips, and outreach opportunities. I also teach Sunday school each week and lead Wednesday night youth group.

☞ **Cool Stuff Furniture Shop**

Salesman, Philadelphia, PA

Contains misspellings

- I sold furniture to people. My goal was to make every experience at Cool Stuff Furniture Shop a positive one for the customer. I always gave my customers the best deals and helped them find the right furniture for their homes.

Uses complete sentences instead of phrases to describe responsibilities

☞ **Bavinck and Sons Law Firm**

Paralegal, Philadelphia, PA (02/03-09/06)

- In my role as a Paralegal for Bavinck and Sons Law Firm, I assisted lawyers with research for various cases. I also kept track of ongoing cases and filed petitions with the State of Pennsylvania.

Continues on next page, exceeding single page limit

Curriculum Vitae (CV)

Sometimes a curriculum vitae (CV) will be requested instead of a resume. Having one on hand will ensure not only the timely submission of your application but will also allow you to present a document that is well-crafted. Waiting until you find an open position to write your CV might result in a sub-standard document that lacks important data about you and could, ultimately, hurt your application.

The principal differences between a resume and CV are length and content. Your resume is meant to be a one or two-page summary of your education and experience most relevant to the open position. Your CV, on the other hand, should include all of your substantial educational and employment experience as well as any awards, publications, honors, interests, affiliations, and volunteer experience. The CV will typically be at least two pages long, if not more, and offers you more flexibility in terms of sections to include and how to organize them.

If you have been in ministry for years and have an extensive employment history, your CV will, naturally, be longer and more substantial than a newer minister's. However, if you only have a few years of ministry experience, your CV should not be longer than a few pages.

You will likely have to adjust or substantially rework your CV depending on the ministry position to which you are applying. Even if you're applying for what appears to be identical positions at different churches, you might need to tailor your CV to emphasize certain aspects of your experience that best fit the desires of each church. One way to do this is to rearrange the order of your CV so that the most relevant and compelling information appears closer to the top. Another way is to include specific experiences that might not be relevant for one opportunity but relevant for another. For example, if you are applying for a position at a church that requires a great deal of involvement in its youth ministry, be sure to include all the experience you have with youth from your college years to the present (even something that may seem trivial, such as a summer spent as a camp counselor years ago). If the open position emphasizes, instead, the need for a pastor who can reach out to the elderly members of the church, your summer job as a camp counselor would not be relevant, but your time volunteering at a nursing home in college certainly would be worth including.

Organizing Your CV

Much of the formatting for your CV will depend on what aspects of your experience you wish to emphasize. Generally, categories should appear in order of importance (e.g. name, contact information, education, teaching or ministry experience, and so on). You may choose to organize the information in each section of your CV chronologically (the most recent entry first) or according to relevance (with your most compelling experience listed at the top of each category). Organizing your CV chronologically allows the reader to easily survey the breadth and consistency of your experience. However, if your most recent position is not as relevant for the ministry position you are seeking, fronting experience that best qualifies you might better serve your needs. Your goals for organization should be clarity and readability. Note that education and experience gained while in high school should not be included.

Formatting

Formatting should be minimal so as not to distract from the information contained in your CV or make it difficult to read. A good way to get formatting ideas is to look at the CVs of professionals in your field. Try to survey an appropriately diverse sample group, including people who have long, well-established careers, as well as people just starting out. You should choose a format that delivers the most important information as clearly, easily, and effectively as possible. Make sure to choose standard fonts and

provide ample spacing; a cluttered CV with funky fonts will likely distract your reader and muddle the information you are trying to convey. This is especially important if you are submitting your CV electronically. Non-standard fonts do not always transfer well from one computer to the next and tend to give your CV an unprofessional appearance.

Content

Some information must be included on your CV: name, contact information, undergraduate and graduate degrees earned, and professional experience. Some information should not be included: information from when you were in high school, traveling you did just for fun, menial jobs you've held, interests or hobbies that are unrelated to the context or purpose of your CV. Much of what you include is up to your discretion. Be sure not to crowd your CV with common and relatively indistinctive or unimpressive details. On the other hand, if you devote some time to it, you are very likely to think of things that could enhance your CV – ministry experience or occasional teaching or writing opportunities or collaborations, mission trips or church initiatives, and so on.

Remember that the key principle is to make an effective CV. This will require economizing when necessary and expanding when appropriate. You must not be shy about what may feel like shameless self-promotion – if you can make it sound good without being dishonest, include it.

Perhaps the best way to proceed is to create a master CV that includes every professional or volunteer experience you've had and anything else remotely relevant. If you have already created a similar document for your resume, you simply need to expand your parameters to include interests, skills, volunteer positions, or other experience that you have had over the course of your professional career. Consider any post-high school awards, honors, publications, presentations, volunteer experience, jobs, research experience, teaching experience, skills, affiliations, ordination/licenses, personal/familial information, etc. Make sure to include dates for each of these items. Once you have created a master CV, you can customize it by paring down or expanding it to fit the job for which you are applying. Spending the time now to build a great master CV can pay off in the long run.

Sections You Must Include

Identifying Information

- **Name:** Your name should appear at the top of your CV. Include either your full legal name, or your first name, last name, and middle initial.
- **Address:** Provide your current home address.
- **Email Address:** Your email address should be professional. Make sure that your email address is spelled correctly and that your spam folder settings will allow correspondence from potential employers to reach your inbox.
- **Telephone Number:** Like your email address, double check the telephone number you provide for accuracy. If you have a landline and cell phone, you may wish to include both.

- **Nationality:** You may include your nationality, especially if you are applying for a foreign job or you are ministering to a non-American group of individuals.
- **Education:** Include the name of each degree, major and minor (if applicable), the institution from which you earned that degree, the location of the institution, and the date on which you earned the degree (do not include high school information).

Employment History

- **Include each employer's name, your job title, and the dates which you held the positions.** You may also include your chief roles, responsibilities, and duties. This is especially true if your experience makes you a strong candidate for a particular position. Deciding whether or not to itemize your roles is entirely up to you. The research you put into looking at representative CVs should help you make an informed decision for this section.
- **You may wish to separate your employment history into ministry experience and other professional experience.** Organizing your CV in this manner allows you to highlight your ministry experience in a way that quickly and clearly expresses your qualifications for a particular job. However, if your ministry experience (whether paid or unpaid) is slim, a better option for you may be to combine these two sections into one general section.

Skills/Other Education

- **Include skills that would be relevant to a particular position** (for instance, proficiency in the Microsoft Office Suite).
- **If you are ordained, you may include your ordination information,** such as the denomination in which you have been ordained as well as the date and location of your ordination, in this section or in a separate section.
- **You may also include non-degree related education** such as seminars, special classes, or certifications.
- **Foreign languages in which you have acquired proficiency** may also be subsumed under this heading, or in a separate section. If an open position has stressed knowledge of a second language or biblical languages, listing the languages you have acquired in a separate section will help draw attention to your language abilities. You may decide that containing your acquired languages within a more general category is a better option.

Additional Information

This section can contain a wide variety of other relevant information about you, such as awards or honors earned, professional affiliations, volunteer experience, relevant or extensive travel experience, papers and presentations you have given, publications, teaching experience, guest lectures, professional blog details (with the caveat that a controversial blog will likely curtail your employability in certain contexts), mentoring, theses, and scholarships. What you choose

to include will depend upon what aspects of your experience you wish to emphasize and what qualities a church is seeking. If you have not had a long employment history and are struggling to fill even two pages, including many of these sections may help to bolster your CV. However, if your ministry and employment experience has already stretched beyond ten pages, consider curtailing (or possibly even excluding) additional sections that do not significantly strengthen your application.

- **Family information:** You will have to decide if you wish to include information about your family members in your CV. It is acceptable to list your spouse's name and the date of your marriage as well as the names and ages of your children. This is valid information to include on a ministry CV because it helps to paint a more complete picture of you as a person and minister.
- **Interests:** Since churches are usually motivated to get to know you as a person, including your interests and hobbies is not a bad idea (particularly if they make you more appealing as a minister). However, be sure that your hobbies don't detract from your viability as a serious candidate. For example, being a Spurgeon buff and including this information on your CV showcases your interest in Christianity's history and in great preaching, as well as the level of commitment you possess to theology and to ministry. While honesty is certainly important in crafting your CV, you are under no obligation to reveal personal information (such as hobbies) if you feel that to do so would impair your chances of success at a specific church.
- **References:** Though it is not necessary to include references in your CV, you may do so if you wish, since space is not as much of a factor in your CV as it is in your resume. However, be sensitive to the fact that your references may want to keep their contact information relatively confidential. Revealing their names and contact information early on in the employment stage may not be necessary (unless specifically requested by a church).

Submission

Be very careful to follow submission instructions exactly. If the document type is not specified, using PDF format will help to ensure that your CV is easy to open on all computers. If the church requests a specific file type, make sure to provide your CV in that type. The use of standard fonts and margins will facilitate the smoothest possible transfer of your application documents from your computer to your prospective employers.

Sample CVs

See the [sample CV included in this handbook](#) for ideas on formatting and layout. Also, be sure to spend some time online looking at other sample CVs. The following websites provide some great places to start your search.

- [About.com](#)
- [California State University: Fullerton](#)
- [Rev. Dr. H. Beecher Hicks, Jr.](#)
- [Piney Grove Baptist Church](#)

Resources

The following books and websites are great resources for you to reference as you begin the process of creating your CV:

- [Preparing the Perfect CV: How to Make a Great Impression and Get the Job You Want, Rebecca Corfield, 2009](#)
- [About.com: Job Searching](#)
- [Purdue Online Writing Lab](#)

Cover Letters

A well-constructed cover letter is vital to a successful job search. Submitting a good cover letter gives you the opportunity to impress a potential employer with your ability to write. Cover letters also allow you to showcase your communication and editing skills as well as your ability to synthesize material. Finally, you can highlight specific skills that are relevant to a particular position.

In your cover letter, you should present yourself in the best light. Your goal is to motivate a potential employer to hire you. Don't be shy about pointing out your strengths in your cover letter: being honest and up front about your gifts and talents is not bad. On the other hand, the cover letter is not the place to discuss your weaknesses as an employee nor is it the right place to give your testimony (your testimony is traditionally included in an application as a separate document). The cover letter is strictly meant to introduce you to a prospective employer and to briefly explain why you are the best candidate for the position.

Writing Tips

Include crucial information. A cover letter should indicate the reasons why you are applying for a particular position, from where or whom you learned about the opening, and your unique qualifications and skills for that specific position.

Use a formal heading. Include the date you are sending your cover letter and the prospective employer's name and address (with, preferably, the name of a person or body to whom you are addressing your cover letter).

Address a specific person whenever possible. Politely reference the person or body to whom you are sending the letter. It is fine to use "Dear." Whenever possible, try to find out the person who will be receiving your letter so you can address him or her specifically. If you cannot get that information, it is acceptable to use a position title or the name of a department as well.



Consider organizing your letter in a way that is familiar to your reader.

Introduction: Indicate how you learned of the position and why you are applying for it. Also, provide basic information about yourself.

Main Body: Highlight past experience and skills that pertain directly to the position. For ordained positions, experience with management, administration, teaching, and interaction with people are desirable. Ministry experience (or, if you're a seasoned candidate, the most pertinent experience) you've had should also be noted.

Closing Paragraph: Express an interest in interviewing for the position. Be sure to thank the reader for his or her time.

Formatting: Cover letters should be no longer than one page. Like your résumé, your cover letter should have a clean, uncluttered look. If another format is not expressly requested, sending your cover letter as a .pdf will reduce transmission problems.

The **Director of the Center for Theological Writing** can provide feedback on your cover letters, and help you with editing and proofreading.

Resources

The following links provide sample cover letters and additional advice on writing a great cover letter for ministerial positions.

- [Dallas Theological Seminary](#)
- [Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary](#)
- [Regent](#)

Sample Cover Letter

[Sample cover letter](#) for ordained ministry



Effective Sample Cover Letter

April 15, 2010

Dr. Jessica Miller
Assistant Principal
New Jersey Christian Academy
1234 Road Drive
Princeton, NJ 12345

Dear Dr. Miller:

Addressed to a specific person

Thank you for taking the time to review my credentials. Please find my résumé included to be considered for the Spanish Teacher opening advertised on Craigslist. I am confident that my academic and employment backgrounds qualify me for this position and that I can make a positive contribution to your school.

Indicates how she learned about the position

I hold a Bachelor of Arts degree in Spanish from the School of Hard Knocks in Nowhere, VA and will graduate in May with a Master of Religion degree from Westminster Theological Seminary. As a current Spanish teacher at Philadelphia High School, I have effectively guided students in learning and using Spanish. My students have consistently performed well in Pennsylvania standardized tests, and many students return to take upper level Spanish even though this class is not required for graduation. In my classroom, I have interacted with students from a wide variety of backgrounds and with many different learning styles. The class website I created and maintain facilitates home learning and allows students flexibility in obtaining homework and optional assignments.

Highlights relevant experience

My time as a barista at Startrucks Coffee Company allowed me to develop my interpersonal and communication skills. I also brainstormed revenue-generating strategies with my manager. I was promoted to assistant manager within 12 months, and acquired the additional responsibilities of supervising other employees, resolving customer complaints, and interviewing candidates for employment. Before that, I also served for three years as a youth leader in my church, guiding and discipling high school students in their spiritual walks.

I would like to discuss a possible future with your institution and am available for an interview at your convenience. Thank you for your consideration—I look forward to hearing from you!

Expresses desire to set up an interview

Sincerely,

Roberta Jones

References

Obtaining references when applying for a job in ministry can be trickier than when applying for any other type of job. Because of the nature of ordained work, trust becomes a huge factor in the hiring process. You must choose your references accordingly.

Who to Ask: When seeking ordained employment it is vital to choose references who can speak directly about your work. Don't choose a professor or pastor merely because he is well known. Ask those who supervised your work and who are willing to lobby for you. Those with whom you have cultivated close relationships will be your strongest references.



How to Ask: Make sure that you actually ask if someone is willing to provide a reference for you before supplying his or her name. This is not only considered common courtesy but it allows the person time to think about your strengths and skills in order to provide a better and more thoughtful answer to a prospective employer. If someone hesitates to be a reference, find another candidate. You want someone who will provide an enthusiastic and positive evaluation of you and your work.

When to Ask: Give your potential references enough notice so that they can reflect on your work, but not so much time that they forget that you are job hunting.

What to Include: Make sure that you obtain correct contact information from your references and that you know their preferred method of contact. When supplying their information, include: name, professional title, company/school/organization, address, phone number, and email.

Former Employers: Since most employers today require you to provide a complete job history and contact information for previous employers, it is courteous to let them know that they might be called even if you do not include them as references. They will be less likely to be surprised when contacted by your potential employer. Advance notice will also give them an opportunity to reflect on your work and plan out how to provide an accurate account of it.

Statement of Faith and Philosophy of Ministry: During your time in seminary, it is recommended that you begin to assemble your Statement of Faith and Philosophy of Ministry. The statement of faith is a summary of your theological positions. Take a look at your denomination's statement of faith to get an idea of what to include. Many prospective employers in ministry will request this statement. The philosophy of ministry outlines your approach to doing ministry in the context of the church. Having these documents prepared before you begin your job search will help to streamline and, ultimately, expedite the process.

Chapter 5: Candidating

In this section, we review the process of candidating. If a congregation is interested in you as a prospective minister, they will often invite you to interview for the open position. This invitation will usually entail providing answers to a series of questions, preaching a sample sermon, meeting with church leaders, and other activities geared toward determining whether or not you are a good fit for the church and vice versa.

It is important to remember that this process is a two-way street. Candidating is as much about you evaluating the church as it is about the church evaluating you. For that reason, this chapter contains information on what types of questions you should ask of the church as well as factors to consider before accepting an offer.



Overview

Knowing, generally, what to expect when you are candidating will help you prepare better for the experience. The following steps will give you an idea of how churches go about hiring ordained staff (individual experience may vary):

1. You send your cover letter, resume, Philosophy of Ministry, and Statement of Faith, which are then reviewed. If the search committee is interested in you as a potential candidate, one of the members will send you a questionnaire.
2. You answer the questionnaire and send it back (after saving a copy of your answers!).
3. Further communication. The search committee may ask you for an audio or video file of you giving a sermon (so make sure to have both on hand!). Additional information may be requested.
4. Phone calls and other communication. You may receive a visit from a member of the search committee.
5. Finally, at this stage, it is time for you to visit the church and candidate for the position.

Steps to Success

Pray: A theme throughout this handbook has been that prayer should be the foundation of any endeavor, no less so when you are journeying to find God's will for your career. Be sure to request prayer from those close to you as well!

Preparation: Make sure that you are prepared for the candidating process. Talk with friends who have recently candidated to get a feel for what to expect, and also consider speaking with your pastor. Dr. Timothy Witmer, Dr. Brandon Crowe and others at Westminster are also great resources that you should take advantage of. Check your denomination's website to learn more about the specifics of the candidating process. Answer the sample interview questions provided below. Have a sermon of yours recorded in both audio and video format in case the search committee requests it. The more preparation you do, the smoother your candidating experience will be.

Patience: The candidating process is likely to be long and time-consuming. Having realistic expectations will help you to remain patient and Christ-oriented throughout the entire experience.

Record Keeping: Keep track of the churches with which you've been in contact as well as your answers to any questions they ask. Often, churches will ask similar questions (if not identical ones), so you will save yourself a great deal of work by keeping records of all the interactions you have had. This step also allows you to remember what you've told each church.

Interviewing

Interviewing Yourself: Before you can relate your strengths to others, you need to know what strengths you possess. In this section, we explore ways you can get to know yourself better so that you can both help yourself in the search for ordained ministry and better serve members of the body for years to come. The following information is adapted from Dr. Witmer's Seminar in Leadership (PT 332).



- **Spiritual Gifts** (What are your spiritual gifts? Have others confirmed them?)
- **Heart** (Where is your *passion* for ministry?)
- **Abilities** (What are your strongest competencies? What do you do well?)
- **Personality** (How would others describe you? Friendly? Stiff?)
- **Experiences** (What has contributed to your wisdom bank?)
- **Serious convictions** (What deep convictions do you hold about relevant issues?) Make sure to identify the type of situation for which you are best suited *and* least suited before candidating.

Interview Preparation: Preparing for your interview is always a good idea. Dozens of practice questions are available for your use (for a large sampling of questions you can expect to field in an interview, refer to the resources listed below). Practice your answers to these questions and then ask a friend or two to interview you. The more time you spend preparing for your interview, the more confident and comfortable you will be when you sit down for the real experience.

Interview Techniques:

- Before the interview begins, make sure that someone prays (whether you or a member of the committee), especially that the Lord's will is done and that he is honored throughout the process. Pray that he'll give you and the search committee wisdom and clarity to know whether or not you are called to be their newest pastor.

- Keep in mind that the interview will allow you to make a first impression on the committee and church members you encounter. Have a positive attitude and use appropriate, professional body language. Be confident, but not arrogant.
- Always be honest about who you are, what your strengths are, and what you feel you can do.
- Attempt to ascertain where there are differences between you and the congregation. Your Philosophy of Ministry will come in handy here. Do you and the church agree on your approach to ministry?

Interviewing the Church

Part of your task during the candidating process is to evaluate the church and to think about whether or not it is a good fit for you. To that end, it is best to come prepared with questions to ask. This is particularly true if you have a family to consider. For example, you will want to know whether your spouse and children fit in well with the congregation. This section contains some suggestions for the type of information you want to acquire while candidating. For a list of specific questions, see the appendix to this chapter.



Information to gather about the congregation:

- **General Facts** (growth history, mission/purpose statement, constitution/by-laws, written history, annual report/budget, etc.)
- **Ministry Model** (purposes of the church, biblical emphasis of church's purpose, church's methods for carrying out biblical purposes, etc.)
- **Pastoral Expectations** (job description, expectations of your spouse, terms of call, etc.)

Questions to ask about context:

- **Geographic delimitations** (community/regional)
- **Demographics** (age, ethnic group, economic status, and so on)

What to Bring to the Interview: When you are visiting a church to begin candidating, make sure to bring copies of your resume, cover letter, Philosophy of Ministry, Statement of Faith, and any written interaction you've had with the church.

Salary Negotiation: Compensation can be a topic that is touchy, taboo even, for those in ministry. While salary should not be your motivation for pursuing ordained ministry, it is a reality that you need income to support yourself and your family. In fact, it is a Scriptural mandate to provide for your family (1 Timothy 5:8) and for the church to support you, as a minister, in that endeavor (1

Timothy 5:17-18; 1 Corinthians 9:14). Accepting a call that does not offer a livable income runs the risk of creating tension, stress, and resentment for all parties involved.

If you have received an offer that is just not adequate for your family, but you can see yourself working well at the church, you may want to negotiate *humbly* with the church for compensation that will meet your family's needs. It is imperative, of course, that your request not be fueled by greed or arrogance. While the Master of Divinity degree is similar to a law or medical degree in terms of time investment and rigor, average salaries for pastors are far below those of lawyers and doctors. Tailoring your fiscal expectations will help you better evaluate whether an offer is fair. However, if you are not able to support your family on what is offered, consider communicating this information to the church in a godly and respectful way by framing your request in terms of *needs*.

Another option may be tent-making. Many pastors work jobs outside of the church to support themselves while at the same time serving as ministers. This is certainly no easy task, but if you feel the Lord is calling you to a church that does not offer enough income to live on, perhaps this route is the best option.

Accepting a Call

Before accepting an offer, it is important to evaluate the situation as thoroughly as possible. After praying, take the time to consider the following factors.

Spiritual

Is the Lord calling you to the church? How does your spouse feel about the offer? Can close mentors affirm that you would be a good match for the church and vice versa?

Fiscal

Can you support your family on the compensation package offered to you? Will your spouse work? If the compensation package does not meet your fiscal needs, is your spouse willing to work? These types of questions must be answered before you accept an offer. To help you evaluate whether the compensation package offered is livable for you and your family, the following considerations should be weighed carefully before deciding to accept or reject an offer.

Determining Fair Compensation: How do you decide whether or not what is offered to you is fair? Your denomination may have standards regarding minimum packages offered to pastors. Additionally, you can check out salary.com to get a very general idea of what pastors are paid in your area. Ministrypay.com offers access to a survey of ministry salaries across the nation (for a



fee). You can also speak with friends in ministry and mentors to help determine whether or not what is offered to you is fair.

Cost of Living: Before declining an offer because you feel the compensation is too low, do some research to get a feel for the cost of living in the area. The cost of living may be significantly lower than where you currently reside, making the seemingly low offer fair. You can check local classified ads to find out how much housing costs. Gas prices should also give you an indication of the cost of living. The bottom line is that you should do your homework and research an area before accepting or declining an offer.

Elements of Compensation: Your take-home pay is likely only a portion of your total compensation. The following are other elements often included in packages:

- **Salary:** Your actual take-home pay, excluding any benefits or housing.
- **Housing:** Churches will often provide housing in the form of a manse/parsonage or a housing allowance for a pastor who owns a home. This and other compensation details are covered in Dr. Witmer's Seminar in Leadership (PT 332).
- **Benefits:** This may include medical insurance, life insurance, dental/vision, or a retirement plan.
- **Reimbursements:** Some churches will offer reimbursements for educational advancement, travel for work, conferences, etc.
- **Vacation Time:** Your compensation package should outline how much *paid* vacation time you receive as well as when you will be eligible for a sabbatical. You might also receive time off for study leave and personal advancement. You should also know what holidays you have off.

For more information on evaluating a compensation package (including questions you should ask), check out the following [compensation guide](#) from Dallas Theological Seminary.

Personal/Familial

It is critical that you evaluate your prospective employer through the lens of your family, particularly your spouse. Is your spouse comfortable with the expectations that the church has for her and for you? Does she feel that she would fit in well with the church congregation? Does she like the location? Take time to pray together and to make an informed decision that *both* of you feel is right.

Practical

Below are more elements of a call to consider before accepting.

Church Environment: Do you enjoy the church environment and feel comfortable enough to minister there?

Ministry Model: Do you and the church have a similar style of ministry, vision, and purpose? Will you be a good fit for their future plans?

Pastoral Expectations: Do you know what the church expects of you? Are you comfortable with the church members? Do you know how many hours per week you are expected to work? Which day(s) will you have off during the week?

Assessing Church Leadership: Will the church leadership support you? Can you work well with other pastors and elders? Is there enough support staff for you?

Region: Do you and your spouse like the geographical location of the church? The neighborhood? This is especially important to consider if you will be living in church housing.

Declining a Call

If, after prayer, consultation with family and others, and careful evaluation on your part, you have decided not to accept an offer, let the church know graciously that you do not feel that you are the right candidate for the job. This situation may require delicate handling. You do not have to (and probably shouldn't) divulge specifics regarding your decision. It should be sufficient to tell them that you feel that you and the church are on different ministry paths, or have different styles of ministry, or that you've decided to take another offer. Be careful not to burn bridges; the Christian world is small, and, if you handle declining an offer badly, it could affect other ministry prospects.

Appendix: Sample Questions to Ask a Church

The following will give you a feel for the types of questions to ask a prospective church while candidating. Do not ask them all of these questions, but use them to help figure out what is important to you and how best to frame what you do wish to ask. (This list was compiled by Will Spokes and John Larson, July 2011, and is drawn from Dr. Timothy Witmer's Seminar in Leadership, PT 332.)

1. What should your pastor be and look like?
2. What should the pastor's wife be and look like?
3. What kind of involvement do you think the pastor's wife should have in the church?
4. What do you think about the pastor's family (e.g. how it shapes the pastor's time)?
5. What do you think about church choirs, Christmas trees, Easter egg hunts, etc.?
6. What do you consider to be "billable hours" for the pastor?
7. What do you think is reasonable vacation time for the pastor and his family?
8. How often do you expect your pastor to preach?
9. Should the pastor always be at every church function?
10. What do you think about church functions?
11. Are you willing to call a young pastor to lead, teach, take care of the congregation, moderate the session, and to make mistakes?
12. Is the session constantly aware of and making allowances for their own failures and mistakes?
13. What do the ruling elders perceive to be their responsibility to the congregation?
14. What kind of church do you envision?
15. Who do you want to worship at your church?
16. How should the lost be reached?

17. What fears do you have about calling a pastor?
18. Worship: what do you want or not want (what's wrong and what's right)?
19. Are church facilities good, bad, or are you happy with them?
20. What are your ideas about deacons and mercy ministry?
21. What are your thoughts on Christian education (expectations and "strategies")?
22. How much should you pay your pastor? How do you make this decision?
23. What is your stance toward those outside the church?
24. What about teaching and training covenant children? What does this look like to you?
25. Are ruling elders willing to be perceived as having made mistakes as they work out their principles?
26. What is negotiable and what is non-negotiable in the church? (e.g. nursery, sunday school, youth group, Trinity Hymnal, etc.)
27. What ministries do you support? How do you make those decisions?
28. What is your view of para-church ministries?
29. What should or should not happen at a session meeting?
30. What does fellowship look like?
31. Is there an implicit or explicit dress code at your church? Why or why not?
32. Small groups or not?
33. How many "official" church meetings are/will be held weekly?
34. What do you think about Christian coffee houses, sports/recreation leagues, support groups, etc.?
35. Would you be in favor of a numerical growth ceiling for your church? Why or why not?
36. When (if ever) would you want to think about planting another church? How would you go about doing such a thing?
37. How much money would it take to do what you want/need to do?
38. Would you be in favor of spending down a budget surplus? Why or why not?
39. What dictates what does or does not happen your church?
40. What does it mean to the officers when they take vows of doctrinal subscription?
41. What kind of relationship do the ruling elders want with the pastor?
42. What do you want from your church?
43. Are you willing to examine your practice in light of biblical principle?

Additional Resources

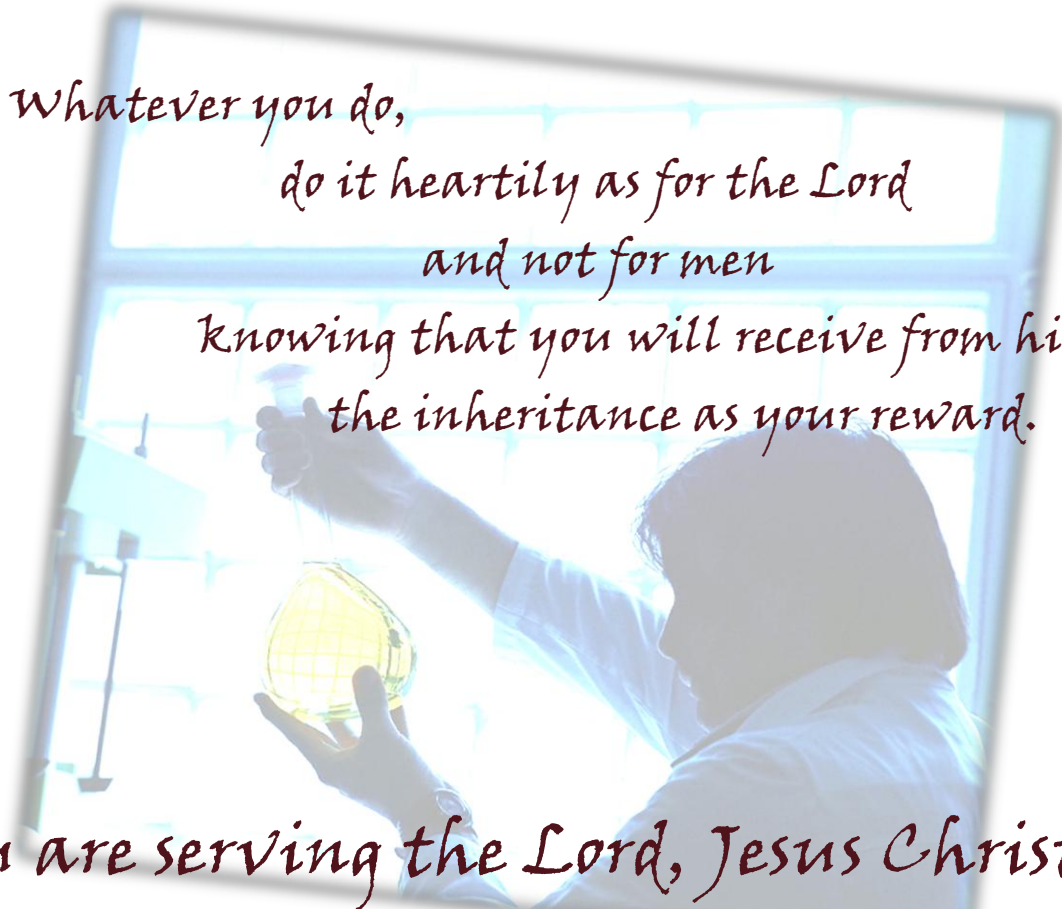
- Dallas Theological Seminary: [candidating](#) and [pastoral compensation](#)
- Regent: [Career Resources Selected Bibliography](#)
- Doulos Resources: [Reflections](#) on transitioning from seminary into pastoral ministry.

*Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us;
yes, establish the work of our hands!*

Psalm 90:17 ESV

Conclusion...

This handbook has outlined the basic steps you can take to find a job. It is intended to be a guide to help you navigate your way through finding, applying for, and landing your dream job. However, it is important above all else to listen to the voice of the Lord during your hunt. Let Him guide your endeavors, center yourself in His will for your work, and you will find the job God has for you.



*Whatever you do,
do it heartily as for the Lord
and not for men
knowing that you will receive from him
the inheritance as your reward.*

You are serving the Lord, Jesus Christ.

Colossians 3:23 ESV