

## **A letter to prospective pastors.**

I'm currently on the pastor search committee of an average small town church in Arkansas. We as a committee have been charged with the task of finding the man that God has already called to be our shepherds. It is an arduous task at times, but also very fulfilling. We are immersed in the word of God through reading the stories, testimonies and philosophies of potential pastors, while listening to, reading and watching many sermons of the numerous pastors who have sent in resumes.

My purpose in writing this letter is to help those men of God who are looking for their next flock, to more effectively put them in a position to be seriously considered for the position. These are only my opinions, but I believe that some of them would make a huge difference for some of these potential pastors.

The physical task of considering this number of applicants is very difficult. As imperfect, selfish beings we have to make decisions in how we read through resumes, prioritize them, and ultimately narrow down our search to a manageable number, a few men and ultimately the one that we feel the Lord is leading us to call.

### **Avoid the culling of the herd:**

Our first step as we begin receiving resumes is to narrow down the seemingly insurmountable pile of papers to a manageable number. I'm going to tell you what I personally look for during this first round. This will likely vary from church to church and member to member. First, I want a resume that I can follow, a real resume. Some of you have some great stories and testimonies, but I need to know basic, general information first. This is not the place to tell your life story, nor do I want to wade through 8 pages of paragraphs to find this information. With literally hundreds of resumes to go over, please be considerate of the committee's time. One resume comes to mind that was written in the form of a newspaper, with multiple articles, pages, pictures, and columns. While this was a novel idea and probably got the young man a high grade in class, it was not enjoyable trying to decipher all of the information into a manageable format. Your story is important, but please offer a concise resume first.

Remember you are in a profession that requires preparation and attention to detail. Spelling, punctuation, word usage, and grammar make a difference. As a professional, I am very particular about my resume. It's not current right now because I'm not looking to change jobs. However if that time comes, I will make sure all of my dates are correct, and it is grammatically perfect before I send it out. Take your resume to a local high school or university writing center and have an English teacher proofread it. I know from experience, and even in writing this letter, that I will make errors and typographical mistakes before the final draft. An extra eye will always catch something you didn't. My personal opinion is that if a man doesn't care enough to have a professional resume, then his work will likely follow that trend.

## **Pictures**

I love seeing pictures on a resume. Though I don't believe they are necessary, it is nice to see what you and your family looks like. But please remember, you are giving us our first impression of you with that picture. It doesn't have to be a professional portrait. In fact, I love seeing casual family photos. However, if you use a picture, make sure you would hire the person in it for a professional position. To the several men whose picture was a selfie in bed with a dirty t-shirt on, 3 day beard and unbrushed hair: I didn't even read your name. Yes, that's harsh, but it is also honest. I'm sorry, but if you show that little regard for yourself, don't expect people hiring for this position to take you seriously either.

## **Be specific, be completely honest:**

Several resumes we received were vague about some very important things. Several had names of churches where they had served but no dates, cities, or states. One even said something like, "various senior pastor positions" over a span of 10-12 years. Others had degrees listed but no school or graduation year. For a larger church, education is a very important issue, as is the institution from which you graduated. As a member of a conservative Southern Baptist Church, it's important for us to know that your theology lines up with our beliefs, and we want to know that you went to an institution that is theologically compatible. Also remember, a simple Google search can reveal more than you may think. There were several resumes that listed churches where men were not employed. A dishonest resume will go in the shred pile with no hesitation. There have also been several candidates with gaps in their resumes. As a personal friend to several pastors, I know that there are circumstances that take you out of preaching sometimes, either by your choice or the choices of others. Just be honest about it.

## **A resume is not the place for dirty laundry:**

Sometimes churches are not spirit-led, and no pastor can get them out of their rut. That's just a fact of life. People can fall out of the will of God and put their own selfish desires before Him and force a man out of a church. We know that. When you tell the story of how bad a former church was, it reflects poorly on you for the simple fact that you are assigning blame. I would rather read nothing at all, than read about blame and ill-will. A simple, "It was not a good fit," would be more than enough explanation. If what is on your resume comes off as bitter, so do you.

## **Technology can be your friend if you use it.**

In the culling of the herd, I personally categorize prospective pastor's resumes as Yes, No, or Maybe based on age, education, years of experience, his consistency and track record in churches, and with a large emphasis on the spirit's guidance. Sometimes the resume says "NO" but the spirit tells me yes. The "Yes" men have everything that we are looking for in a pastor. The "No" resumes generally meet none or few of our criteria, and the "Maybes" are somewhere in between. Honestly I spend more time with the Maybe resumes than the others in this phase. These are generally men that may not seem qualified, but for some reason God has put on my heart to look into them further. Technology can help a lot. I have listened to several men preach and a shaky "maybe" has turned into an emphatic "YES"!!! Having the ability to listen to or see you preach will make a difference. There are several ways to do this. Some sources have been on resumes, some have not. I have spent hours searching your names, along with present and past church service, on Google, Yahoo, Facebook, Twitter and Youtube. Having a link or QR code on your resume to hear and see you preach could put you in with the "keepers," especially for someone who isn't willing to do the searches like I have. While not everyone on a committee may be as tech savvy as I am, chances are that someone is, and they may be your foot in the door if you use technology wisely. If your current church has video or audio, that's great. We can do a pretty easy search. If you have a link, that's even better. Thank you so much for the men who have provided links! A tiny URL or QR Code is even better. A tiny URL is just that, your link, shrunk down to make less effort for the person doing the search. To do it, type in <http://tinyurl.com/> and it will take you straight the page. Copy and paste your link in the box and shrink your url. It can even be customized like "pastor bob.tiniurl.com". Then just copy it and paste it into your resume. Another great tool is the QR code. This is a computer generated code, much like a barcode that can be scanned by a smartphone or tablet. It will take the user directly to your intended link. They are great, but not a single resume I've read has used them. You simply Google QR code generator and follow the directions. Or click on this link. <http://www.qr-code-generator.com/> You have to download the code as a jpeg, esp or svg file and paste it to your resume as a picture. I copy mine into paint, save it as a picture and then insert it onto whatever document I am putting it on. You can even paste it onto a webpage or Facebook account. I'll post a QR at the bottom of the page to the SBC Arkansas so you can try it out. You will need a smartphone or tablet with a QR code reader.



**Social media and web: the good, the bad and the ugly.**

I am constantly on the internet while reading resumes. I search your church pages, your name, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube videos, news and print articles. There have been several strong “maybe’s” that have turned negative because of questionable Facebook posts, newspaper articles, and blogs. Don’t be afraid to voice your opinions. As a very conservative person, I’ve read several blogs that turned a maybe into a yes. I encourage you to be honest in your postings, but be aware that a more progressive church may pass you up for a conservative view. I would certainly pass you up for certain popular views circulating in our media today and have several. Honesty is always best. Remember we will check all of your pages. I have several friends on my Facebook account who often post “questionable” memes, pictures, and opinions that I don’t agree with or find distasteful. There is a “Hide Post” button you can click to get rid of those things. I use it almost daily. It doesn’t affect your friend’s wall, but it gets content off your wall so other people don’t see it. This would be smart to use. By not doing this, and thus allowing questionable content on your page, it infers your acceptance of that opinion or material.

On the other hand, I’ve learned a lot about some of our prospective pastors, their likes, their hobbies, and politics. I’ve viewed their pages for pictures, church events, family photos, and vacations. It’s nice to see you in your natural environment and to see how you interact with other people.

**You are in our prayers.**

While this may have seemed to make the process impersonal, I do want you to know that we take every resume seriously. We understand that with each resume, we are considering a man’s livelihood and the direction the Lord is leading he and his family, as well as the life and leadership of our own church. The time that we spend as a committee, and as individuals, in prayer and meditation have not been mentioned, but please be certain that it is nearly constant. My wife even complains (jokingly) that I am married to the search committee now because of all the time I’m investing in it. Know that we take each of your resumes with a sober and prayerful heart, and we are constantly searching for God’s will in this endeavor.