

17 – Pastoral Staff Hiring

Search and call process for the Senior Pastor and other pastoral staff. Contains the Guidelines for Seeking a Pastor (SBC), which supersede the former CCCC Guidelines for Seeking a Minister. Non-pastoral hiring is covered in Book 08.

- [Overview: Pastoral Staff Hiring](#)
- [Guidelines for Seeking a Pastor \(SBC\) — May 2026](#)

Overview: Pastoral Staff Hiring

Status

Implementation status: Adopted by the Servants Council on May 30, 2026.

Purpose

This book governs the search and call of the Senior Pastor and any other pastoral staff. It holds the church's pastoral-search procedure as a Council policy, per the July 26, 2026 congregational vote (Motion 4), which struck the former CCCC "Guidelines for Seeking a Minister" appendix from the Constitution and Bylaws and directed that any retained pastoral-search procedure live in the Church Operations Plan.

Scope

Pastoral hires only. Non-pastoral staff hiring follows Book 08 – Hiring Process (Non-Pastoral). Short-term and emergency pastoral absence is covered by the Pastoral Emergency-Coverage Plan in Book 12 – Leadership Transitions.

Governance and Document References

- Mayflower Constitution and Bylaws — call of a Pastor (congregational vote by ballot; see the current bylaws for thresholds and notice requirements)
- Guidelines for Seeking a Pastor (SBC) — this book
- Book 08 – Hiring Process (Non-Pastoral)
- Book 12 – Leadership Transitions

Guidelines for Seeking a Pastor (SBC) — May 2026

Status

Adopted by the Servants Council on May 30, 2026. Supersedes the CCCC "Guidelines for Seeking a Minister," struck from the Constitution and Bylaws appendix by Motion 4 at the July 26, 2026 congregational meeting; the pastoral-search procedure is held as a Council policy in this Operations Plan.

MAYFLOWER CHURCH

Kingston, Massachusetts

GUIDELINES FOR SEEKING A PASTOR

Purpose of This Policy

These guidelines are a procedural resource intended to assist the Elders, any duly constituted Pastor Search Committee, and the congregation in the event a vacancy arises in the office of Pastor. They are consistent with, and subordinate to, Article V of the Constitution and Bylaws concerning the call of a Pastor.

The Composite Ministry of the Church

The ministry of the Church of Jesus Christ is a composite one, comprising both a congregation and a plurality of pastors and elders who shepherd that congregation under the headship of Christ. Its activities are most visible on the Lord's Day in the gathered assembly for the ministry of the Word, prayer, and the ordinances; but its ministry is being carried on continually, in every place where Christ's people are found, six days as well as one.

Churches, like people, vary from community to community and from one generation to the next. Eventually the time comes when a church finds it necessary to seek a new under-shepherd for the flock. For some, this occurs every so often; for others it is a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and the congregation finds itself in a wholly unfamiliar situation. In either case, it is wise to take into account a number of issues and suggestions that may ease what can be a difficult season and, by God's grace, forestall serious problems later on.

Plan Before the Need Arises

The best time to think about these matters is while the church is still enjoying the ministry of its current Pastor. To wait until the Pastor has announced his call to another church, or has already left, is a poor time to come under the pressure of establishing guidelines and procedures. Therefore, it is wise to keep a previously planned procedure on file either within the church's bylaws or as part of the permanent records of the Board of Elders.

The Elders ordinarily take primary responsibility for initiating and supervising the search, working in close cooperation with the Deacons and with representation from the broader congregation. Because a new Pastor will serve as a fellow elder and as the primary teacher of the flock, elder oversight of the process is a Reformed Baptist distinctive of particular importance at Mayflower.

Constituting the Pastor Search Committee

The body previously referred to as the "Pulpit Committee" is here renamed the "Pastor Search Committee" in keeping with common SBC practice. The Board of Elders, acting on the counsel of the congregation, should nominate a Pastor Search Committee whose size, composition, and term of service are approved by a duly called business meeting of the church.

Recommended structure of the Pastor Search Committee:

- Size: seven (7) to eleven (11) members, always an odd number to prevent tied votes, per widely adopted SBC best practice (Lifeway Pastor Search Committee Handbook).
- Composition: at minimum, one Elder (serving as Chair unless the Elders designate otherwise), one Deacon, and members drawn from across the generations and ministries of the congregation. The Committee should reflect the makeup of the church it serves.
- Defined roles assigned at the first meeting: Chair/Coordinator, Communicator (liaison to Elders and congregation), Prayer Warrior, and Follow-Up Coordinator (point of contact for candidates and applications).
- Decision-making protocol agreed in advance: quorum, voting threshold for internal Committee decisions, attendance expectations, and confidentiality norms.
- Monthly, at minimum, communication with the congregation on the progress of the search, while protecting the privacy of candidates.
- Training: where feasible, Committee members should complete a brief orientation from the Lifeway Pastor Search Committee Handbook (Revised) and from NAMB's Pastor Search

resources. Lifeway Research reports that four of five search committees receive no formal training—this gap should not be reproduced at Mayflower.

A Presupposition of Prayer

As these suggestions are offered, it is a presupposed matter that the Pastor Search Committee and the entire congregation will be constantly praying for the leading of God in this process, asking the Lord of the harvest to send a shepherd after His own heart. The special gift of discernment is sought whereby personalities, preferences, and special interests are set aside in favor of the mind of Christ. This being done, the following suggestions are worthy of consideration.

Identifying and Evaluating Candidates

- Counsel and referrals. Seek counsel from the Associational Mission Strategist (Director of Missions) of the local Southern Baptist association and from the state convention's church consultation office. For Mayflower, the Baptist Convention of New England (BCNE) is the primary state convention point of contact. Where a Reformed Baptist sensibility is desired, Founders Ministries and the Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America may be consulted for additional counsel and referrals.
- Candidate pipelines. Names of possible candidates may be obtained through the SBC Job Board at jobs.sbc.net, through NAMB's pastoral placement resources, through the BCNE and local association offices, through seminaries (particularly Southern, Southeastern, and Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminaries), and through trusted informal recommendations. Lifeway research finds that churches are more likely to find their next pastor through formal and informal recommendations than through unsolicited résumés; the Committee should not rely on one channel alone.
- Interim ministry. A retired pastor, a seasoned elder, a pulpit-supply minister, or an intentional interim trained in transition ministry should be sought to serve during the vacancy. This provides continuity of preaching and pastoral care at a critical time. Intentional interim ministry is particularly commended where the previous pastor departed under difficult circumstances.
- Observation of candidates. Once names of possible candidates are in hand, it is desirable for the Committee to listen to representative sermons (via the candidate's church website or podcast), to read representative writings, and, where feasible, to visit the candidate's current church in person — unannounced — to observe his preaching and his congregation in their ordinary setting. Committee members should disperse throughout the congregation rather than sit together, so as not to create an awkward situation for the candidate.
- Introductions. When visiting a candidate's church, wait until after the service to make yourselves known, and arrange to meet with the Pastor later in the day. A discreet, unhurried conversation is more useful than an announced visit.
- Reference, background, and online review. Early in the evaluation of any serious candidate, the Committee should conduct a thorough background check, follow up

personally with references (including at minimum the candidate's current Elders where polity permits, trusted ministry peers, and the candidate's spouse), and review the candidate's publicly available online presence — sermons, blogs, social media, podcasts, and denominational writings.

The Call of a Candidate

After hearing several men in the manner described above, and after concentrated prayer and discussion, the Pastor Search Committee should invite the one who is its choice to preach as a candidate before the Mayflower congregation. A vote of the Church should follow soon after, according to the schedule and thresholds set forth in the Constitution and Bylaws.

A candidate called by a vote of less than three-fourths of the members present and voting should be seriously reconsidered before a call is extended. While a two-thirds threshold may satisfy formal requirements, a narrow margin often signals reservations that will undermine the candidate's future ministry at this church. A generous, prayerfully arrived-at consensus is worth waiting for.

Frank Discussion Before the Call

Before the Church votes to call a particular candidate, and before the candidate gives his answer accepting or declining, the Pastor Search Committee and the candidate should have a clear and frank discussion of the following matters.

Compensation and Practical Arrangements

Moving expenses, salary, housing or housing allowance, retirement and health benefits, continuing-education and book allowances, vacation, sabbatical policy, and ministry expense reimbursement should be agreed to in writing, consistent with SBC-aligned guidance and with the Church's Purchasing Policy and compensation practices. The candidate should not hesitate to be frank about his financial needs and habits, and the Committee should not hesitate to be frank about the Church's financial capacity.

Ecclesial and Doctrinal Discussion

The position of both the Church and the candidate should be carefully discussed with respect to:

- Any particular strengths or weaknesses the Church may have, including recent history, current membership health, finances, and ministry capacity.
- The reason for the previous Pastor's leaving.
- The reason the candidate wishes a change.
- The position of both the Church and the candidate on the following theological and practical matters:

- Believer's baptism by immersion as the only proper mode and the regenerate as the only proper subject.
- Cessationism and the Charismatic Movement, including the sign gifts, prophecy, and the ordinary means of grace.
- Complementarianism and the biblical qualification of the pastoral office for qualified men (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1), including the candidate's posture on the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood's Danvers Statement.
- A plurality of elders as Mayflower's governing pattern, and the candidate's readiness to serve as a fellow elder rather than as a sole pastor.
- Marriage, divorce, and biblical sexuality — including the candidate's counsel concerning same-sex attraction, gender identity, and remarriage after divorce.
- The Regulative Principle of Worship as Mayflower understands and practices it, including the ordinary elements of corporate worship.
- The Lord's Day and the Christian's Sabbath observance.
- Formative and corrective church discipline, including the candidate's prior experience in restoring the fallen and exercising Matthew 18 processes.
- Reformed soteriology — the Doctrines of Grace — as summarized in the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith, including the candidate's personal subscription with or without stated exceptions.
- Missions and cooperative ministry, including participation in the Cooperative Program and the Annie Armstrong (North American) and Lottie Moon (International) Mission Offerings.
- Relationship with the Southern Baptist Convention, the Baptist Convention of New England (BCNE), the local Baptist association, Founders Ministries, and other parachurch fellowships with which Mayflower is or may become associated.
- Does the candidate unreservedly accept the Church's Statement of Faith? Mayflower's governing confessions are the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith and the Baptist Faith and Message 2000. The Committee should clarify whether the candidate subscribes to these without exception, or with stated exceptions, and should carefully review any exceptions for their significance to the Church's life and witness. Elders, as those obliged to teach the confession, are expected to hold a higher degree of agreement with it than is required of members.
- Is there a clear, biblical understanding of the proper expectations for, and appropriate privacy of, the Pastor's family? The candidate's spouse and children hold no ex officio church office, and their ministry involvement is a matter of voluntary gifting, not congregational expectation.

A Written Statement of Agreement

There should be a full and comprehensive discussion of the matters above, followed by a written statement of agreement, signed by the candidate and by the chair of the Pastor Search Committee (with a copy held by the Church Clerk). This signed statement is not a contract of employment; it is a pastoral record of mutual understanding, and it will protect both parties should questions arise later.

Ordination and Installation

If the candidate has not previously been ordained to the gospel ministry by a Baptist body, or if Mayflower wishes to affirm his call as one of its own, an ordination council may be convened in cooperation with sister churches of the local association and, where appropriate, the BCNE. Following a successful vote of the congregation, the new Pastor should be publicly installed in an ordinary Lord's Day service by charge, prayer, and the laying on of hands by the Elders, in keeping with 1 Timothy 4:14.

A Closing Word

Pastors and their congregations are human and fallible, but as they center their lives and ministries around the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, hold fast to the infallible Word of God, and cultivate a balance of sound doctrine and genuine, Spirit-wrought piety, the work of Christ will go on, God will be glorified, the saints edified, and the lost won to Christ.

It is our prayer that our Church, making use of these suggestions, will be led in God's own time to the Pastor of His choice.

Sources and Acknowledgements

This appendix has been compiled from the following sources:

- The Conservative Congregational Christian Conference, "Guidelines for Seeking a Minister" (the prior appendix to Mayflower's Constitution and Bylaws).
- Lifeway Christian Resources, Pastor Search Committee Handbook (Revised).
- Lifeway Research, "8 Things You Need to Know About Pastor Search Committees" and "7 Common Mistakes Pastor Search Committees Make."
- North American Mission Board (NAMB) pastor and pastoral-transition resources (namb.net).
- The Baptist Faith and Message 2000 (bfm.sbc.net).
- The Second London Baptist Confession of Faith, 1677/1689.
- Founders Ministries and the Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America, published candidate and ministerial resources.