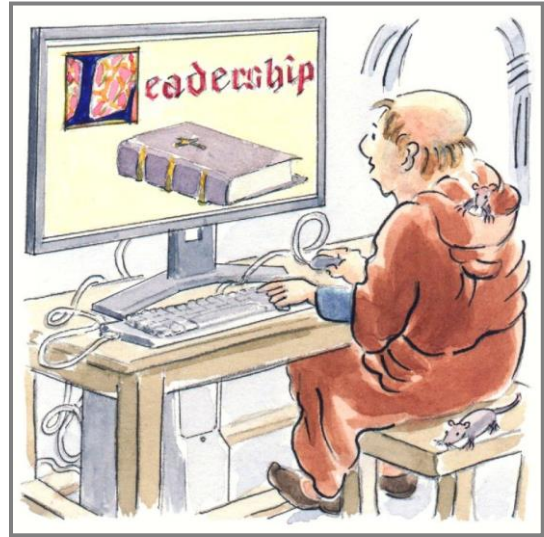


Job applications in Christian ministry

Part A: Preparation

A22 Articles series: Leadership



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Throughout this article I am addressing you as you apply for any post in a church such as Minister, Youth Pastor, Director of Music or Administrator, or for a post in a mission agency such as CEO, Regional Manager or Finance Officer. Most of the examples will come from a church setting.

I am writing personally to you as though I am one of the team who are short-listing and interviewing for this appointment. I do this not because I wish to appear to put myself in a position of power. No, in this process we are both on a journey to discover God's will for this post and your application so he must be the one in control.

But I want you, in your application, always to have someone like me in mind. Put yourself in the shoes of those responsible for the selection and you are more likely to write and present yourself in a helpful way.

As this article is longer than most items on this website it is split into two separate files. This is Article A22, **Preparation**. Article A23, **Presentation**, follows on. Here is how the two fit together.

A: PREPARATION (Article A22)

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1: Be ready

This first section assumes you have not yet started your search process. This is the homework stage to be done, wherever possible, well in advance of your first application.

1.1 Seek God's will

I will assume that your first desire is to find God's will for your life and, in particular, for the next chapter of your ministry. This should be equally true whether you are looking for a church or mission post (as a Minister or a lay worker as assumed here) or employment as a butcher, baker or candlestick maker.

Some of what I say will not differ greatly from advice for an application by a butcher's boy or baker's girl who makes no claim to Christian beliefs. What will be distinctive, among other points, is the motivation that supports the whole process. The Christian should be seeking to please his or her Lord in finding the next post.

So the first area of preparation has to be seeking wisdom from God and trusted counsellors. Guidance may well then come, in part at least, through the process of applying for posts. But there needs to be a prior period of reflection before God and discussion with those who know you best as to what you should be looking for.

Here are some of the issues to consider (you will be able to add others).

For a church Minister:

- Why do I feel it may be right to look for another post now rather than later?
- To what extent might considerations such as my spouse's needs, my children's education, my singleness, my parents' health, my need for access to specialist academic input, and so on affect my decision?
- Am I looking for a fresh challenge, possibly outside my comfort zone, or an escape from my present post at any price?
- Am I looking for another church or a more specialised ministry, and why?
- To what extent is any present restlessness driven by my need for 'promotion' (such as to move to a larger church), or 'an easier life' (to get away from the inner-city), or do I feel my gifts mean I should expect to seek to do something similar to what I have done here (such as grow a small church)?
- Am I a pioneer or a maintainer, an evangelist or a pastor, a leader or a follower, a team player or a solo worker?

Some of those questions will also apply to other types of workers too, but here are additional issues to explain, which are not necessarily restricted to the headings I suggest.

For a church's young people's worker:

- Should I be working for Christ in a church or for a local authority / other employer?
- I have had a good/bad experience of management in my present role, but am I hoping for or fearing a different outcome in a new post and how would I cope if it was not good?
- To what extent do I need to consider the young people I am currently responsible for in my decision whether to move now or not?

For an administrator in a mission agency office:

- Might God be calling me to something back in the normal employment world this time round?
- Would I be more useful in the long run if I took a year out for training, or looked for a part-time post to enable me to undertake a course, and how would I finance this?
- To what extent do the needs of my mission agency and of my colleagues there affect my decision?

For an itinerant evangelist:

- Would I be able to work as an employee when I have become used to doing my own thing?
- Would I be better in 'tent-making work' to finance part-time evangelism rather than seeking financial support from friends?
- Are my gifts the same as they were ten years ago or are they slowly changing and have I taken account of this?

For someone not currently in paid Christian ministry

- Is God calling me away from my career and, if so, what might be the costs that I need to count carefully (not only financial)?

- Do I have an over-rosy view of how wonderful it must be to 'work for Jesus full time' and just how much do I know as to what the true situation is often like?
- Am I trying to escape my responsibilities of Christian witness in the world to hide within a cosy Christian environment?

Before you rush to your study to write your CV, as I advise in the next section, make sure you have taken time and given careful thought to such points. Perhaps a one-day 'retreat' away from all distractions and your present post with just a Bible and a notebook might enable you to hear God's voice for you. Then open your heart to your close family (whether Christian or not) and a few friends to see what their reaction might be.

But perhaps the application process has been thrust on you without warning. You are being 'head-hunted' for a post or a friend saw an ad in the church press and 'thought of you'. In this case much of what is said here may need to be telescoped into a short time-scale.

Having followed this process you are more likely to give a satisfactory answer to that standard initial interview question: "So why did you apply for this post?"

1.2 Consider your CV

If you are thinking of looking for a new post, writing (or updating) your CV will be a good starting point, whether or not you ever need to use it in your applications.

If you are a Minister you may not have done this since before ordination. On the other hand, if you are coming from a secular post, remember that your present CV may not be what is required when applying for a specifically Christian position. It may have too much detail about professional qualifications and responsibilities, too much management jargon, and too little about Christian gifting and your experience of church work. It may also be written in a style that is designed to sell 'you' as a 'product' against the 'opposition' with excessive language about your brilliance. See the guidelines in section 1.4 for help here.

Purpose and content

A CV (*curriculum vitae* – literally, the course of one's life) is a straightforward document written to tell a prospective employer about your education, aptitudes and professional experience.

But, and this is a crucial point, it also has to give the selectors clues as to what you may be *capable of achieving*. So I can see that you have led one church through a change process, but do

I feel you are capable of doing the same with this church now? I read you have had an amazingly successful career as a music teacher, but will you be able to cope in a much less structured environment as a Worship Minister? You have had a great time as Administrator of a 200-sized church, but can you step up to the post of Operations Director for this 800-sized one? You were awarded your PhD on 'The deep theology of Jürgen Moltmann', but can you teach our unruly teens?

Your application and your interview are trying to do exactly the same thing: converting a past track record into information for decisions about the future. It helps to keep this point in mind all the way through the application and selection process.

A typical CV (for a church or mission post) is likely to be in pretty standard format. See section 1.3 for more detail. But there is sometimes a case for writing something just a fraction out of the ordinary.

For example, the normal content might be ideal for a Minister of a pastoral church, a Church Administrator or a Leader of Seniors Ministry. But if you are applying for posts as a Youth Leader or for a pioneer ministry in any form, I would be more open to a less predictable format because this would show me that you have that spark that this particular post requires.

So a CV that gives the briefest detail on career to date and more information on skills or personality or gifting might be appropriate. If you have extensive experience of, for example, planting a church while holding down a full-time job in the bank, you might want to hold back on the bank details and qualifications and play up the voluntary activity more.

In most cases, one CV can back several job applications (if similar). But there are two key exceptions to this. First, if you apply for equivalent posts in Christian missions and secular charities or other bodies, you will need two CVs.

Secondly, if you are asked to apply for a post simply by submitting a CV, then you need to target it much more, because it becomes your application. You might want to add a third page picking up specific points about the job you are applying for, just as though you had been asked to make an application on a standard form.

Here is a quote from advice on writing a cracking CV. "Think of your CV as your marketing literature. It should focus on the product – in other words, the service you offer. Your age, marital status, hobbies and vital statistics are not relevant, so leave them out." Do you agree with this for a church post?

1.3 Write your CV

Here are five sections I would hope to see.

1: The opening – key information

For most church posts I would expect to see:

- your full name, marital status and date of birth;
- spouse's name and children's details (names, ages) if applicable;
- postal address, telephone number(s), email address.

For most secular posts, discrimination legislation means that much of this information may be withheld from those deciding on short-listing and interviewing so that decisions cannot be influenced by age, gender or marital status. So the advice is to omit these details from CVs.

But in most church posts where there is an Occupational Requirement (OR) for the post-holder to be a Christian, and/or where any family will be involved in church life with you, this information is relevant and helpful.

Now for what makes you stand out from some others. I like to see a short statement to bring you to life in print:

- a one-sentence profile that describes you and summarises all that is to follow in the rest of the CV; or
- a statement of what you see as the next chapter in your life; or
- some idea of your vision for your service for Christ or your heart for ministry.

Check out the principles that follow in section 1.4 about being brief, truthful and not overselling yourself or this statement will backfire. It is worth taking time to get it 'right'. Share it with close friends and ask how it sounds to them. Aim for no more than about 25 words.

2: Education and qualifications

This section should include:

- secondary and tertiary education details and dates;
- A Levels and tertiary qualifications (or equivalents) including grades – GCSEs too if no tertiary qualifications;
- any theological training;
- other professional qualifications or academic/other achievements;
- courses attended;
- any relevant 'time out' activities (eg. VSO, Year in Industry, short-term mission).

'Courses attended' should not take more than a few lines, so summarise if necessary. As a reader of CVs I am not impressed by lists of 29 courses (often including trivia), but I am by short, selected lists of training relevant for this post. Something like "29 one-day and residential courses, including (1)... (2)... (3)...".

3: Employment history and achievements

It is normal to give your present post first, with name of employer, location, title of job and a brief outline of responsibilities and achievements. Then list previous positions with dates and outline details and achievements in reverse order (ie. going backwards in time) all in terse bullet format. Omit some of the detail if you are going back more than ten years, but don't leave gaps.

But you are not obliged to follow this format. For a start, look back to your 'secular' career and think what aspects of it are the most relevant ones to determine whether you will fit the kind of church or mission posts you will be applying for. Major on those, which may mean highlighting aspects of experience more than the chronological listing of posts. You will impress me if you give the basic information without being wooden in what you put across.

For example, if you have been a teacher the natural focus of your CV would be your professional responsibilities. But if you are now applying for Family Worker posts in churches, the out-of-school activity you ran each week might be more relevant. If you are now a Minister, the assemblies you created might need to be stressed.

4: Christian background and church involvement

In a normal CV this might be part of your voluntary activities. For a church post, it takes a much more prominent position.

It might include how and when you came to faith, some brief idea of your theological position realising the danger of simplistic labels, the church you belong to and responsibilities you hold there (with dates), and previous responsibilities in this or other churches. Focus on what matters: membership of the Leadership Team (for a Minister or CEO), organiser of the church weekend away (for an administrative post), trainer of the flower arrangers (for a mission team-leader).

5: Personal details

I often find these too predictable and therefore boring when reading a pile of CVs, so cut this section to a minimum. Give perhaps:

- one key interest (do include anything unusual such as hang-gliding or if you and your spouse are the North-West Rutland Salsa dance champions!);
- something revealing about your personality or past;
- your most satisfying voluntary responsibility provided it is *not* within a Christian context (to prove you are real).

Mention the season ticket for your football team if they are languishing in a low division (it encourages pity for you and indicates grit), but forget about it if you have the misfortune to support Chelsea or Manchester City.

You might want to include one or two general referees, people who have agreed to act on your behalf for any post for which you apply. But it is probably better to leave this until you make a specific application.

1.4 Follow key guidelines

It is not just what you include in your CV, you need to write in a certain way and (in 1.5 below) present it all attractively. Here are seven suggestions to consider.

Keep it snappy

... the whole document, well laid out with plenty of spaces, should not take more than two sides of A4 at the most. A CV consists of lists, bullets, short statements perhaps in note form, not long prose or turgid detail. Remember: I may have a pile of 15 to read on my desk. Yours needs to be the one with pizzazz.

Avoid jargon and verbiage

Many normal CVs are full of management-speak that threads several impressive words together but means almost nothing. I find them a turn-off, but very common for people still in a secular career.

Instead, be specific and give concrete examples. Use strong verbs: what have you pioneered, changed, closed down, evaluated, accomplished, initiated, promoted?

There is a danger of Christian jargon too – this is a professional document not a cosy testimony. Avoid overuse of words such as ‘worship’, ‘ministry’, ‘fellowship’, ‘anointed’.

Never lie

Be honest – the whole document should create an impression that is true to the real you.

Beware of being economical with the truth too. If I find you have misled me in your CV, how can you expect me to trust you with this post?

A winner of *The Apprentice* a few years ago lied on his CV. The interviewer rightly rounded on him – yet the candidate eventually won the series. It seemed to show he was smart. That’s business for you. But it’s not right for your CV.

Leave no scope for suspicion

Try to ensure that I don’t end up suspicious on some point where you have been silent. I may well think you were trying to slip something past me without my noticing it.

So explain the one-year gap between your last two jobs, why you went to uni but don’t list a degree, and why you seem to have been a member of your present church for only a year but have lived locally for ten.

I will be happier if you tell me you were sent down from uni for a spectacular misdemeanour that hit page one of *The Sun* than if you try to cover it up and I wheedle it out of you at interview. In fact it may make you a much more interesting person..... If it happened at Bible college, though, that might be a different matter!

Focus on specific outcomes

... even where you feel you failed, rather than on general responsibilities which do not tell me much. It’s OK that you were responsible for home groups at your last church, but better that you reorganised them and saw numbers grow by 15%, or that the weekly material you produced resulted in three more people offering to lead. If things went wrong (you reorganised and numbers fell by 50%), explain what you have learnt from the experience. I will be suspicious if you don’t appear to have failed at anything.

Don’t oversell yourself

If you make yourself look amazing, I shall be wondering why you have stooped so low as to apply for this post. In a Christian context I am looking for a realistic assessment with some humility. But don’t sound like a doormat either. Be realistic, then ask a close friend to check it and tell you whether it rings true or not.

Never sound too clever

Beware criticising a previous employer or church, as if they were not good enough for you or as though your failings were wholly their fault. If there were problems, say you can explain at interview.

1.5 Format your CV

It is not just the content of the CV that matters, it is just as much its look. The content needs to be laid out in a way that appears professional, reads easily and stands out. It may be helpful to ask advice from someone who works in graphic design, but it certainly does not need to be complicated. Something very simple will do nicely but it ought to follow principles like these.

- **Leave margins**

... so there is no feeling of trying to squash the print onto the page. Your CV will look much more professional if there are at least 2 cm margins all round and more like 3 cm for the left hand one.

- **Insert spaces between sections**

As well as good margins, there needs to be good spacing between each section (see also headings below) so that the sections are clearly units of print that can be distinguished from each other on a quick glance.

- **Emphasise heading and sub-headings**

It also helps if headings for each section can be in bold (not underlined) and at least 2 points larger than the text font (so 12 pt if the text is in 10 pt). Any sub-headings within sections can then be bold at 10 pt. The title for the whole CV should be larger still – probably better to emphasise your name here rather than the words ‘curriculum vitae’!

- **Use lists, bullets, note form**

This point has already been made, but laying out a CV in lists and bullets clarifies the points being made, and note form keeps the whole document snappy and dynamic. If I am reading several CVs, I will take special note of the ones that sparkle in the way the information is given to me.

- **Use tabular form for layout**

Your list of employers needs to be laid out in columns so that everything is clear and tidy. Tabular format means that I as the reader can get a handle on the document very quickly, and it will also look tidy.

- **Be consistent in use of fonts**

Don't try to be clever with different fonts. If you want to be safe, stick to one (and probably best to be *sans serif* if you understand font terminology), or have one for text and one for headings.

- **Proof it thoroughly**

One typo and all your efforts are ruined. Check details like post codes and telephone numbers too. It will not impress me if you have made mistakes – especially if you are applying for a post as Administrator! Never proof your own typing.

- **Print it well**

If your computer is linked to an old ink-jet printer on its last legs, get it printed elsewhere. It does not need to have colour (but if you do use some use it very sparingly). Then print onto quality paper: 100 gsm weight or better.

- **Email as a pdf**

If you are sending it by email, remember that anything unusual in the print design or fonts may not print out as you want it at the other end if you leave the attachment in Word. To be safe, convert it to pdf.

- **Restrict to two sides**

Do not run to more than two sides, and head the second side with your name and the point that this is a continuation – just in case it gets detached.

1.6 Prepare a private assessment

Now write a second part of the CV which sums you up as a person and Christian disciple, but keep this privately for yourself.

I see too many people in Christian ministry who seem unaware of how they come across. Not only will this help you consider what kind of posts might fit you well, it will also help you at formal interview.

Having written this out, discuss it with a family member or close friend. Ask them to be totally honest with you about the kind of person you are and what you communicate about yourself. You might like to give yourself the kind of headings that you would expect to see in a person profile, so:

1 **Christian character**

How would others sum up your character? Test yourself, for example, against each in turn of the nine aspects of the fruit of the Spirit described in Galatians 5:22,23. Or take the person specification for an elder in 1 Timothy 3 (adjusted to a modern setting as required). If a referee was asked to sum up your Christian character, what do you think they would say?

2 Christian experience

You are on safer ground here. You are not here going through the employment list in your CV but listing the experience you have had of God at work in your life, God at work through you to others, different forms of Christian belief and priority, and of worship.

3 Personal qualities

How would you sum up your personality (don't just quote four Myers Briggs letters though that analysis can be part of this)? How would others see you? What do you hide from others?

4 Skills

Think here of practical abilities insofar as you would distinguish these from spiritual gifts which follow at No. 5. Are you a natural communicator with children or teens, can you use self-management tools with relative success, are you able

to lead people through change without too much blood being spilt?

5 Gifting

Which of the spiritual gifts of Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, 1 Peter 4, etc. would you say you had and were passionate about?

6 Work experience

This might be in both church and secular settings. Again, this is not a list of jobs you have held, but the experience you have gained through holding those jobs, perhaps experience forged out of spectacular failures.

Ask advisers what you have conveniently omitted in all this. This may be a painful process, but finding a new post is often just that. Discovering more about yourself can be one of the richest benefits.

2: Study the profile

In Section 2 I move on to the stage where you have asked for details of one or more particular posts. You now have to decide whether you wish to put in a formal application or not, or allow the search process to take place if operating under a different system.

Correct reading of the church or job profile is the key activity. It may be wise to ask for a few profiles before you are even ready to apply for one, to get a feel of what is available and to see how you react to what you read.

For a Minister position, the profile will often consist of details about the church, sometimes running to many pages and illustrated with a range of photographs. There will then be a section which outlines the 'person profile' – the kind of Minister the church is looking for.

For lay posts, it is more likely that the focus will be on the job description and person profile as the two key documents, with background information about the church or mission agency.

In this section the word 'profile' is used to describe the complete set of papers for the post unless the phrase 'person profile' is used when the reference is to what some would call the 'person specification'.

2.1 Check this could be you

It sounds so obvious, but the first thing to do is give yourself time and space away from distraction and check all the details you have received with care. It should be your prayer for

wisdom as to whether this is a post you would be right to apply for or not. But obvious though that appears, some people applying for posts I have been involved with have not been through this stage with sufficient thoroughness. Examples include:

- Someone desperate for a post who is applying for several very different positions at about the same time. If noted by selectors, this feels like a panic attack.
- Someone who clearly does not match one seemingly essential requirement of gifting, personality or experience and makes no attempt to explain this.
- Someone who has missed a key detail included in the profile for the post. So, if you are not a car driver, check that is not a requirement.

The papers for any post can only give a partial view of both the position and the church so undertake some further research. You might want to do this both before applying for the post and, if short-listed, before the interview.

Here are some of the options for a church post.

- **Ask**

There is nothing wrong in talking to those responsible for the process. It is quite reasonable to telephone and explain that there is further information you would value knowing, if that is possible. It is probably best not to overdo this, but a single call with two specific questions should not be seen as unreasonable.

- **Check information sources**

The website is the obvious first port of call. This may include the weekly newsletter and possibly MP3 files of services or, at least, sermons. Try to take in the information presented and the way it is being put across. If you feel the site is not as good as it might be, have some simple but specific improvements to suggest in case there is an opportunity at interview.

- **Use networks you may have**

Use any networks you have. If you have friends locally, ask them what they know about this church. But remember that this can only be one angle on the truth.

- **Visit incognito**

There is nothing against this, provided you act discreetly. This might be a midweek visit to the church and its area to get a feel for it all, or to a Sunday service provided you do not make your presence too obvious. Be careful, though, not to make too much of just one quick snapshot – it may not have been typical. And be ready for the Welcome Team member who asks why you are visiting that day!

If you are intending to commit yourself to a church position that will have a major impact on

your life and the lives of your family members for some years to come, it makes sense to give the process proper attention.

2.2 Read between the lines

If there was only one piece of advice I could give, it would be this one.

If I am short-listing for a post, I read the profile carefully and then try to define the three or four key characteristics that the church or mission agency is looking for. They may not be listed as such at all, but are clearly there by taking an overview of everything requested. Or they may be stated along with 46 other things which drown them out.

The list I come up with can be quite diverse. Here is an example for a Minister post.

- 1 This person must show they have a clear teaching gift which can cover discipling new Christians from this estate who have no church background at all through to mature Christians who are looking for biblical preaching and its application to life today.
- 2 He or she clearly needs to be comfortable with letting lay leaders take considerable responsibility and play a significant role in key decision-making.
- 3 Within the next few years it looks as though there will need to be either a major building project or a church plant of some kind. So this person needs to be able to handle significant change and challenge and find creative solutions for the way ahead.
- 4 The leader clearly needs to be comfortable with a diverse range of spiritualities and to hold together a younger sector of the congregation keen to move ahead and a significant group of over 65s who feel they have been disenfranchised in recent years.

I had garnered this from every part of the profile, and while the listing of requirements included predictable points (pastoral gifts, good sense of humour....) these four seemed to me to be the real needs and so offered me criteria on which to assess each candidate.

Here is an example for a Church Office Manager post.

- 1 One key need is for an innovative thinker who, given the required outcome, can devise office systems that will enable this to happen. This is a post with low supervision so someone who needs to be

told exactly what to do and when would quickly get out of their depth.

- 2 But this person also needs good people-skills as the church's first line of reception, able to help callers feel they really matter and will be treated sensitively and professionally.
- 3 Professional ability in IT is essential: so good applications for Microsoft Office, website maintenance and diary co-ordination are required.
- 4 The Manager needs to fit well into the team of Minister, Associate and Youth Worker, so that high levels of trust can be maintained.

If I, as a selector, am carrying out this exercise, you need to do so too. As a result your application will stand out from those that plod through every point listed. Take a typical plodding application for a Pastoral Worker which starts as follows.

"I appreciated the chance to read your profile and felt that I would enjoy working with you in future. You are in a lovely part of the country too. I was glad to see that you are looking for someone who prays because I do that. You want someone to visit the retirement homes in the street and I would be happy to do that."

Contrast that with an application from someone who has carried out the kind of analysis I suggest above.

"From my analysis of the church's profile, from studying your website and from the way you structure the job description I sense there are four priorities for this post as follows: (1), (2), (3), (4). I now address these four in turn to show how well I might fit each one."

As I read this I am on the edge of my seat, impressed with someone who has used their brain to think.

2.3 Define questions to ask

This is another aspect of reading between the lines, not to determine what the church really needs this time, but to see what they might have omitted to explain.

I have in mind not so much factual information (which you can research as above) but something rather more subtle, such as the reasons why some points have been mentioned, or how realistic the church has been in putting this post together.

As a selector I am impressed when a candidate has a couple of sharp questions for the interview panel, after either reading the profile (so included in the application) or after visiting (so brought in at interview).

Last year I read a church profile for a Minister which contained several photographs of church members on each page. It was great – a real feel of a people-centred church. But I noticed that most of the photos were of over-50s. Was this by chance, or did it mean there were few younger church members? The text made no mention of the age profile so I waited to see which candidates for short-listing had spotted this too. A couple had and slipped the question into their application – one of them was eventually appointed.

I was recently interviewing for a group of three churches. One was in a town, two were in nearby small villages. But the numbers attending the main church were only double those for the other two, when the population difference was much more marked. So what was going on? I could think of a number of possibilities, but the paperwork did not enlighten me. The candidates that impressed me had spotted this too and asked about it or commented in some way.

If a church asks for a teacher and a candidate (gently) asks if the church is prepared to become learners, that can offer a challenge that sets an application or interview alight. But it is easy to come across as rather too cheeky, so tread carefully.

2.4 Understand the process

It is worth being aware of the possible processes that you will be expected to follow as you seek a new post. Here are some options to bear in mind. In each case it is assumed that the church or mission agency will have prepared a detailed profile of the church or organisation and the post in question, including job description and person profile.

Competitive interview

This is the norm for most lay church posts and has now become the norm for many Minister posts too. The stages will be as follows.

- 1 The post is advertised in local and/or national media, web, etc.
- 2 Applications are invited either by completing a form that is provided or by sending a CV and some form of written response to the post's job description and person profile.

- 3 A panel short-lists a group of perhaps two to five candidates from those who have sent in written applications.
- 4 An interview process takes place for the short-listed candidates together which may include information sessions about the post and the church or organisation, meetings with staff, trustees and others, a test or presentation of some kind, tours of the area, and a formal interview for each candidate on their own. For more detail, see Part 4 of this article.
- 5 If necessary there may be a second formal interview with just one or two of the candidates if the first outcome is not clear.
- 6 The post is either offered to one candidate or the process starts all over again.

The candidates can therefore be said to be in 'competition' with each other. This is an unfortunate word for choosing the person that the church believes is God's choice for the post, since the aim here should be to find God's right way forward. If one person is not selected, this should be seen as helping them discern that this post was not for them.

Head-hunting

This title is no better than 'competitive interview' for a Christian position! This can follow much the same process as above except that stage 1 is omitted and, instead, possible candidates are personally approached to ask if they would be interested in submitting an application. This depends on knowing who might be suitable for the post and lacks the transparency of the previous process, but cuts out the advertising stage. It can still be a competitive interview.

However, another option is to select just one candidate and run through the process with them alone so that the idea of competition is no longer present. This means that at interview the panel are not able to compare the candidate against others, except those that have already been put through the process and not selected.

It is also possible to follow steps 1 to 3 above but then to invite only one candidate at a time for interview. This is rarely used these days.

Church of England patronage system

This affects Church of England parish clergy appointments (other than curates), even under 'Common Tenure' arrangements. The patronage system remains a total mystery to many non-Anglicans but, even though archaic, it works pretty well. It has much to commend it over some other methods.

There are three parties to the appointment:

- The Patron (or, quite often these days, two or more Patrons) whose role it is to find candidates and, on appointment, present the chosen one to the Bishop. The Patron may be the diocese, the Bishop, the monarch, one of the large patronage trusts, or an individual.
- The Bishop (and, increasingly, the Archdeacon and Rural or Area Dean) who will license the person appointed.
- The Parish Representatives, two people chosen by the PCC to represent the Council throughout the process.

The process is now usually conducted through the CofE 'Pathways' programme which links clergy and parishes online.

The Patron normally arranges for advertising and short-listing, although the other two parties will usually be asked to consider the short-list. It is now common for all three parties to be present for interview.

Technically, the Patron 'presents', the Bishop 'institutes' or 'licenses' and the church 'receives' the chosen candidate. The strength of this strange system is that there are three distinct parties (unless the Bishop himself is the patron when there are two) who have to agree together. The church do not make an appointment themselves, although have a greater part to play in the process than would have been the case some years ago.

If you are going through a patronage process, it is worth finding out from the patron exactly how it will work.

Preaching with a view

In many Free Churches, the process of finding a new Minister may be under the guidance of a regional Superintendent whose role is to link up churches looking for Ministers with Ministers looking for churches. There is no public advertising as such, but the process at the church may go as follows (based here on the Baptist system).

- 1 Those responsible for the appointment may be the Elders, Deacons or a specially appointed Search Committee.
- 2 Ministers may be expected to prepare their own profile which will then be seen by a number of churches with a vacancy.
- 3 If a church is interested in a particular Minister a series of visits and meetings may be arranged. This may include opportunities to lead worship and preach.

- 4 If the Search Committee feels that this one person is right, they then invite him or her to 'preach with a view to the pastorate' and the visit usually includes a chance for church members to meet the prospective Minister.
- 5 A decision is taken at a special Church Meeting a few days later or by other prescribed means.

This is therefore a 'one at a time' system with the whole congregation involved in the decision (by vote). The congregation are not party to a normal formal interview, although the preaching with a view only takes place once that stage has been reached and passed.

God's plan for people's lives

Whatever the system in use, this should be seen as a carefully worked out process to determine God's choice of person for this role, whether it is Vicar, Pastor, Worship Director, Youth Worker, Office Manager, CEO, Regional Team Leader, or other. The mechanics are important, but at heart it is an exercise in divine guidance as all

parties try to seek God's will. Prayer will therefore be at the heart of the exercise – and this makes it distinctive from a typical secular interview.

As someone who is involved in a range of church and mission agency appointments, I am often impressed with the way those appointing approach what is an awesome task. There has often been more thought, prayer and discussion put into the process than candidates may appreciate. I have been in several interviews where groups of people have been praying continuously in another room right through the day, asking for wisdom and discernment for everyone.

This is the first of two parts of this article (see page 1 for list of contents). To read Part B, 'Presentation', covering written application and interview go to <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Articles-index> then A23.

This article is available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Articles-index> then A22. The item continues as Article A23. See also A17, *Staff selection step-by-step*, and Training Notes TN28, *No two leaders are the same*, TN65, *Sharp interview questions*, TN76, *How to prepare a job reference* and TN114, *How to prepare a church profile*.

Contact John if you would like to enquire about the possibility of assistance with selection processes, whether you are the selectors or a candidate.

Cartoons are by Micki Hounslow for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication, Administration. File A22 under Leadership (with a link to Communication)

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