## RIGHT or WRONG? Pastorsearch committee guidelines

May 6, 2011

What are some ethical guidelines for pastor-search committees?

The question itself is encouraging, since finding a good "fit" does not guarantee the process itself is done ethically. As you consider ethical guidelines for your committee, ask yourselves what you ought to do. Self-examination will cause you to explore the manner in which you conduct yourselves during the search. The following ethical guidelines are a start along the journey:

- Work confidentially. As you study your church, you will uncover information about people within the fellowship. As you analyze resumes, you will learn about individuals' lives. As you talk to ref-erences, you will learn about ministers' personhood. As you visit churches, you will enter the trusting world of the minister and congregation. Your work is confidential, and all of these relationships and others depend on trusting how you handle this information.
- **Tell the truth.** There is no perfect church setting, no perfect church people, no perfect min-isterial candidate. So, failing to tell the truth about your congregation not only is unethical, but also is thwarting the design of God to unite your church and her future minister. Candid honesty builds trust that will strengthen the relationship in the years ahead.
- Value the call. Many ingredients contrib-ute to why a resume is saved or tossed. All commit-tees have their own bases for making the initial decision about a potential ministerial candidate. Some-times based on congregational survey and opinion, a variety of criteria are used. Important in ethical decision-making is to keep proper values at the fore-front.

Remember that your primary value is the call. Who is God calling to become your new minister?

- Reflect your church fairly. Does your committee provide a true reflection of your church body? The ministerial candidates will study the makeup of your committee to seek insight into the nature of the church. The committee reveals some-thing about the personality of the church, as well as her theological bent, priorities and general vision. If the makeup of your committee misses the mark in fairly representing the congregation, make sure you offer the other "faces" of your fellowship to candi-dates in conversation.
- Treat the candidates as you would wish them to treat the church. This application of the Golden Rule for pastor-search committees is important. There will come a day when the installed minister will seek support from you with whom there was first contact. This bond between search committee and minister is valuable. The strength of this relationship is evidence of how well the behavior of the committee mirrors the integrity of the new minister.

How you do your work ultimately may determine the individual you present to your congregation. Make decisions as a committee in the same way you want the new pastor to make decisions in the future ministry.

Allen Reasons, pastor

Fifth Avenue Baptist Church, Charleston, W. Va.

Right or Wrong? is sponsored by the T.B. Maston Chair of Christian Ethics at Hardin-Simmons University's Logsdon School of Theology. Send your questions about how to apply your faith to <a href="mailto:btillman@hsutx.edu">btillman@hsutx.edu</a>.