



Seven Thoughts as You Begin Searching for a Chaplain

Rev. Jeremy Wilhelmi

As President of the Presbyterian College Chaplains Association (PCCA), I've spoken to a few institutions who have had some difficulties in the search for their next chaplain. This has led me to write a few things I think are important for institutions to consider as you begin your search.

Here are seven thoughts to help you make your next search a successful search.

- 1) *Don't go searching on your own.* We chaplains can help! Reach out to the PCCA and ask us to help identify colleagues in ministry who we believe may be a good fit for your institution. Plus, we have social media groups we are part of that have direct access to qualified candidates. Let us advocate for you! The PCCA wants good colleagues in chaplaincy as much as you want a good and faithful chaplain serving your institution.
- 2) *Know which avenues are best to advertise your chaplain position.* Ask the ministers you know, "Where do you look to find new opportunities?" Don't assume. In the PC(USA), ministers who might be intrigued about a chaplaincy position aren't looking at Indeed.com or Ziprecruiter.com. (And when I was serving a congregation before coming into a higher ed setting, I didn't even know Higheredjobs.com existed!) Most Presbyterian ministers first go to: <http://clc.pcusa.org>. This is the denomination's internal site for ministers seeking new calls. (Warning – it's not the most user-friendly, but it's where we go!) It may also be of value to reach out to *The Presbyterian Outlook* (pres-outlook.org) at their advertising possibilities or create some social media advertising that will target ministers.
- 3) *Have somebody with ministry experience on your search committee.* Whether it's a local pastor who knows your institution well, or maybe a chaplain at a nearby institution, include a resource who can offer some perspective on what to look for in a resume or what questions to ask that will be helpful to your search team. It's essential. Let's be honest, the higher ed world and the ministry world are often on different planes. Sometime, bridging the two planes can be difficult. Ministers will certainly have different approaches to situations than, say, an administrator would have because ministers don't necessarily know what a higher education institution's policies and procedures are. By having someone on your search team able to translate "minister talk" and "college talk" will help bridge the gaps needed to better discern candidates.



- 4) *Have a student or two also serve on your search committee.* I'm not talking about simply putting together a student forum or having a small number of students with the candidate for an informal lunch chat during a site visit. No, put students on the search process from the beginning to end. They have perspectives that others on campus simply will not. It's essential to know if a candidate can actually connect and relate to college students even through a resume. Also, be intentional about how you pull perspective from the students. Don't just ask them if they "liked" a candidate or not. Talk with your students about what they hope to have from a chaplain, why they did or did not connect with them, and what they feel makes for a good fit. On the other side, as ministers are discerning institutions, it may be a red flag if an institution doesn't include students in the search process. You may lose a quality candidate if it appears the institution does not value the students' input in the search.
- 5) *What are you waiting for? It's hiring season.* This is true for ministers too. If you plan to have a chaplain in place by the start of the fall semester and you haven't already posted, you're probably behind. Between moving homes, transferring schools for their children, and taking time for a minister to transition out of their current position, you want to give your new hire as much time as possible to tighten up loose ends for a smooth transition. Most ministers need at least a month to leave their current position from the time they submit their resignation. Then, they will need time to transition and maybe even breathe a little. Ministers are lovers of people. Leaving is difficult for them no matter what position they currently hold because they are fully immersed in the lives of people they currently serve. Give them adequate time to make the transition both personally and professionally by starting your search as soon as you can.
- 6) *Don't drag out the search process.* It's quite possible a candidate is entertaining other opportunities along with yours. Ensure your search team is moving quickly once the interviews begin. Your institution does not want to miss out on the right candidate because your process is taking too long.
- 7) *Do not settle!* This is one of your institutions most important hires simply because of the unique role they play on your campus and what a chaplain represents. Just like other positions, there are some ministers out there looking for anything to help pay the bills and will see your opening as way to do that. Chaplaincy in higher education settings is a calling. Discern if your candidates are truly called and equipped to this unique and amazing role. Give your students the candidate they deserve! Settling for a chaplain who you are not 100% confident about that turns out to be a terrible chaplain can cause far more spiritual harm for an institution than going without a chaplain for a period of time. If you have the right candidate but there are obstacles they have articulated that are making it difficult for



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them to take the leap, do your best to be as generous and flexible as you can be in order to ensure you secure the chaplain you feel called to have serve your campus.

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