

Some guidance to churches from the Association of Presbyterian Tentmakers

written by tentmaker Linda Kuhn

First of all, attitude is important. Don't sell yourself short as a congregation. Your church may be small in membership, but there's more to being faithful than numbers. Look at what you have and celebrate it, rather than at what you don't have. Look at the opportunities for ministry and mission God has placed before you and the gifts and skills with which God has already empowered you. Make sure this is reflected in your Church Information Form.

Tentmakers need a "tent." Make sure you describe on your Church Information Form (CIF) what kinds of employment options are available in your community and larger region. Present these options in a positive light. Some tentmaker pastors will bring their tent with them, all ready to set up; others will need some time to find or re-establish their tent. Consider providing an extra financial "cushion" to help your new pastor over the "hump" for a few months while he/she works on establishing that tent. Perhaps your Presbytery has some funds to help with this specific kind of need. Show your willingness to help a candidate find other employment.

Be aggressive in your search. Do not just wait around, expecting a Personal Information Form (PIF, or "dossier") to drop in your lap. There are many more congregations looking for tentmakers than there are tentmakers to respond. Be in regular contact with Churchwide Personnel Services in Louisville. Advertise your congregation in the APT newsletter [Tent Talk] as well as any other denominational magazine that is appropriate.

Many tentmakers are geographically "bound" due to their tent or family. As a consequence, a good number of tentmakers do not make much use of national placement services. Make sure "the word" gets out within your own presbytery and neighboring presbyteries that you are looking. Your presbytery's Committee on Ministry or presbytery executive may be able to help you with this.

Approach someone within your presbytery. Frankly, we think there are a good number of clergy who would make good tentmakers but who haven't given it a second thought. You may need to be "persuasive" with someone whose first thought is that they need a fully supported position. There are some clergy who are members-at-large or serve in specialized ministries who might be open to serving your congregation. There may be some pastors within your presbytery who have taken "time off" to care for family and might now be open to serving a church part time. Near-retirement pastors whose financial needs may be diminished may also be candidates. Perhaps your presbytery's Committee on Ministry or Committee on Preparation could be of assistance here.

Realize that the search for a tentmaker pastor may take a good length of time. The demand for tentmaker pastors far exceeds the supply at this time in the history of our

denomination. It is important that your congregation be able to "hang together." The Session, in cooperation with your Presbytery's Committee on Ministry, needs to arrange for consistent preaching to carry you through this interim time. Get in touch with other tentmaking congregations in your presbytery for support.

If your most recent pastor was fully supported, and you are now turning to a tentmaker option for the first time, you need to re-think your ministry and mission as a congregation in this new light. This process will require a good amount of "give and take." You may want to review the two videos "Today's Presbyterian Tentmakers" and "Presbyterian Tentmaking Churches." These should be available at your Presbytery's Resource Center or contact the Association of Presbyterian Tentmakers.

Look upon the time of the search process as a prime opportunity to be trained as a tentmaking congregation. Seeking a tentmaker pastor is not just a "cheap way" to find a minister. Yes, we realize that limited financial resources are often a motivating reason for a congregation to turn to a tentmaking option. However, for the match to be effective, a tentmaker pastor needs a tentmaking congregation — which means a congregation willing to share in the responsibilities for ministry in order to allow the pastor to use his/her limited time for essential tasks for which they are particularly trained.

Use this time while you are searching to "get a feel" for functioning as a tentmaking congregation. Reflect on it. Ask persons with particular skills to take on tasks formerly "reserved" for the pastor, whether in worship leadership, teaching, pastoral care, outreach, administration, or ecumenical/community connections. The session of your congregation should direct and monitor this effort. Call upon the leadership in your presbytery for assistance.

See information about the [Association of Presbyterian Tentmakers](#).