

How to Find the Right Pastor

A HANDBOOK FOR PASTORAL
AND STAFF SEARCH COMMITTEES



Biblical Criteria

Unwritten
Expectations

Theology

Education

Pastor Profile

RON HUNTER JR.
DAVID C. GIBBS III

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What Others Are Saying

This book will save pulpit committees countless hours of unproductive “wheel spinning.” It should be the first investment in the pursuit of a new pastor.

Dr. Mark L. Bailey
Chancellor and Sr. Professor of Bible Exposition, Dallas Theological
Seminary

I have worked with many local churches over the years as they have searched for a new pastor. If I had had this book, I would have put it in their hands as a great tool in helping them search for their next pastor. Gibbs and Hunter have given the committee and individuals a tremendous guide to find the right pastor for their church. The most important feature about this book is that it covers all the necessary issues and questions and qualification needed for this very important position in the local church.

Dr. Elmer L. Towns
Co-Founder, Liberty University, Lynchburg, Virginia

How to find the right pastor for your congregation is one of the most important processes a church can undertake. While finding the right leader can be difficult, I hope you take advantage of this great tool to ease the burden and guide your church to the right leader at the right time.

J. Kevin Ingram
President, Manhattan Christian College, Manhattan, Kansas

A bad hire at any level, much less the senior pastor, is devastating to a church family. Churches will inevitably find themselves formulating and leading search committees. Unfortunately, most are ill-equipped to conduct the monumental task of finding the man of God who will lead their congregation. Ron Hunter and David Gibbs offer a much-needed road map that takes the guesswork out of the process. Every church should have this resource on hand.

Robby Gallaty, Ph.D.
Pastor, Long Hollow Church
Author of *Replicate* and *The Forgotten Jesus*

***How to Find the Right Pastor* is a marvelous, well-organized, and thoughtfully designed handbook for selecting pastoral leadership and church staff members in various size congregations and in diverse denominational settings. Highly recommended!**

David S. Dockery, Ph.D.
President, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

David Gibbs and Ron Hunter have prepared a masterclass for churches to use as they consider how to find their next pastor.

Rev. Jay Therell
President, Wesleyan Covenant Association

I've been a lead pastor for over 30 years and have been involved in many staff hirings. *How to Find the Right Pastor* is a resource I wish had been in print three decades ago.

Dr. Jeff Manning
Lead Pastor, Unity Church, Greenville, North Carolina

The process of seeking and calling a new pastor is one of the most challenging “roads” that a church will ever find itself traveling. In *How to Find the Right Pastor*, Ron Hunter and David Gibbs lay out the perfect “roadmap” for successfully navigating this often-treacherous journey from beginning to end. Well organized, concise, and yet comprehensive, I can't recommend this book enough for any pastoral search committee as they embark on their task of calling a new pastor.

Jim Lemons, Ph.D.
Professor of Theological Studies and Leadership
Director, Master of Arts in Theological Studies, Dallas Baptist University

***How to Find the Right Pastor* is the most thorough work on this subject that I have ever read. Ron Hunter Jr. and David Gibbs III have done an invaluable service to our churches by writing this easy-to-read, “A to Z” tutorial on this extremely important subject. Mandatory reading for every church leader in America!**

Jim McComas
Executive Director/CEO, Free Will Baptist Family Ministries,
Greeneville, Tennessee

This book provides a biblical approach and priceless information emphasizing the importance of prayer in the search journey for God’s appointed person—the right pastor for your church.

Mary Lou Hendry
Director, Sanctity of Human Life, Lakeland, Florida
Director, One More Child, Lakeland, Florida

A powder keg, with fuse intact, seems to come packaged with the process of choosing a new pastor. The search committee is handed a book of matches, while the church holds its breath. I highly recommend every church and search committee hold this book instead. David Gibbs and Ron Hunter have written a guidebook, based on years of practical wisdom and experience. Their guidance will defuse the process, saving the candidate, the committee, and the church from imminent danger.

Dr. Stephen Davey
Pastor/Teacher, The Shepherd’s Church, Cary, North Carolina
President, Shepherds Theological Seminary, Cary, North Carolina

This invaluable resource offers practical insights and expert advice to help your search committee make a wise and informed decision. Whether you’re just beginning the search or narrowing down top candidates, this book provides valuable tools and strategies to ensure a successful outcome.

Dr. Robert J. Pacienza
Senior Pastor, Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church, Fort Lauderdale,
Florida

Dr. Hunter and Attorney Gibbs included and discussed the vital selection of an interim pastor. They bring to the forefront numerous overlooked items for search committees to consider.

Edward Moody, Ph.D.
Executive Secretary of National Association of Free Will Baptists
Author of the *First Aid* counseling book series.

Ron Hunter and David Gibbs provide a wise, biblical, and practical step-by-step journey for helping churches meet one of their greatest needs: a pastoral leader who fits their congregation, culture, and community. As a pastor who has recently walked through an intensive pastoral search process, this book will not only serve as a helpful roadmap for search teams and church leaders, but will also benefit the candidates themselves who are making the life-changing decision of where to serve for the next chapter of their ministry.

Jay Strother, D.Ed.Min.
Senior Pastor, Brentwood Baptist Church, Brentwood, Tennessee

Search committees are filled with solid Christian leaders who genuinely don't know where, or how, to begin their work. Now they will. *How to Find the Right Pastor* will be "that book" that will be in the library of every church and Christian organization for a long time to come.

Phil Miller
Director, Center for Church Health
Texas Baptists

No decision more directly impacts a congregation, the families within it, and the community around it, than the pastoral search process. Read this book now, then put it on your shelf for the next time you are in a pastoral call process, or when someone asks you for advice. There is no "magic bullet" for finding the right pastor, but embracing an approach that includes an honest look at your congregation and its leadership will bring benefits far beyond finding the right shepherd.

Wade Mobley, Ph.D.
President of Free Lutheran Seminary and Bible College

***How to Find the Right Pastor* is invaluable! Every church should have this book in their library for when the time comes.**

Dr. Frank Harber
President and Chief Legal Counsel, Defending The Faith Alliance

Hunter and Gibbs have created a pragmatic and thorough guide to help a congregation walk through the difficult process resulting from a change of pastors. Each chapter clearly and concisely defines an area that is essential in the process of this change—whether the change is healthy or not. I am impressed both with the thoroughness of the material and with the ease of reading.

Michael Swiger
Executive Director, True Freedom Ministries, Cleveland, Ohio

Dr. Ron Hunter and Attorney David Gibbs III have masterfully simplified an otherwise complicated process. This comprehensive handbook provides a much-needed strategic roadmap for pastoral search committees as they embark on the time-sensitive and emotional process of finding a new pastor.

Rev. Steven M. Baran
President, National Christian Counselors Association, Sarasota, Florida

Sadly, we live in a time that pastoral transition and disqualifications leave many churches void of leadership. This work is clear and concise, yet rich and deep, making a relatively complex task seem manageable.

Kevin M. Jones, Ph.D.
Dean and Assistant Professor, Cedarville University

***How to Find the Right Pastor* helps reduce anxiety during transitional periods between pastors. The book's process reduces some of the anxiety as its comprehensive scope pushes you to ask the right questions in any church context.**

Barry Raper, D.Min.
Associate Dean, Welch Divinity School
Pastor, Bethel Free Will Baptist Church

Perhaps no greater decision confronts a church than the selection of their pastor. Many churches don't even know where to begin the process, but great care must be taken in determining who will shepherd the flock as the one charged with "watching for their souls." This book is an invaluable resource for deacons, pulpit committees, and congregations to safeguard their efforts.

Kelly McInerney
Pastor, Bible Baptist Church, Savannah, Georgia

In the days in which we live, David and Ron draw upon their combined experience to provide a detailed and practical roadmap for Bible-believing churches to follow as they seek the senior pastor God has to lead them.

Pastor Dennis W. Jennings
Vice President, Baptist Church Ministry Network

The need for the "right" pastor or staff to lead a church cannot be overstated! *How to Find the Right Pastor* is an invaluable tool that can lessen the intimidation of this important task.

Mason Polk
Director of Institutional Advancement, Randall University

Hunter and Gibbs provide a pointed, honest perspective on this critical process in the life of a church. Every church search committee should prayerfully work through this guide before hiring another pastor.

William Slater
Dean of Adult and Online Studies, Welch College, Gallatin, Tennessee
Tennessee State Representative

The clear, step-by-step process in this book will help our search committees know how to get started right to proceed in a mutually understandable process. This book will help our churches truly find the right pastor and will be the standard for best practices with our pastor-search committees.

Dr. Bruce McCoy
Author of *The Reluctant Peacemaker*
Baptist General Convention of Texas, Dallas, Texas

***How to Find the Right Pastor* is a much-needed resource for churches and especially helpful for pastoral search committees. It also helps you avoid costly mistakes. One of the real gems of this book is the section on building your profile before beginning your search.**

Jonathan Denton, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Christian Studies/Student Ministry
Charleston Southern University

This book contains incredible advice and biblical strategies to any church committee to find the right pastor for their church. The five phases laid out in the book are concise and compelling tools for finding God's man for your church.

Dr. Eric Capaci
Pastor, Gospel Light Baptist Church, Hot Spring, Arkansas
President, Champion Christian College, Hot Springs, Arkansas

Concise, adaptable, timely, and weighty, describe this handbook. The combination of David C. Gibbs III and Ron Hunter Jr., embraces years of experience from valued and distinctive perspectives. I highly recommend this resource for pastors, boards, and ministry leaders who want to extend legacy and wisely steward any season of transition for the Kingdom's sake.

Rev. Frank Cantadore
Board President, Association of Christian Teachers and Schools
Head of School, Concord Academy, Concord, North Carolina

Personally witnessing the trial and error other churches have gone through in hiring pastors, it's with my highest recommendation that search committees read this comprehensive, practical, and biblical resource prior to the process of finding the right pastor for their congregation.

Walter Colace
Founding/Senior Pastor, Christ Community Church of Imperial Valley

Since everything rises and falls on leadership, you must prepare for these crucial conversations. This amazing book prepares leaders as well as the church, school, or ministry to hire right. As you are well aware, there are no do-overs in these critical searches. The five carefully crafted sections allow you to distinguish between emotional decisions and reality.

Dr. Jay Strack
President and Founder
Student Leadership University

Selections of this magnitude need processes and guardrails. *How to Find the Right Pastor* provides both!

Joe Turner
President & Chief Executive Officer, Ministry Partners Investment
Company

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Introduction

“NOT ANOTHER SEARCH COMMITTEE MEETING! We have to fill this position, and we have to fill it now! Quickly! The congregation is getting restless, and some families have already left the church while others are threatening to go. My family wants all this search committee work finished already. I am not thrilled with the candidates we have, but we aren’t getting any new ones. Maybe it’s God’s will for me to ignore my better instincts and just select someone—anyone. What’s the worst thing that could happen? Can it be any worse than what we have happening now?”

We understand your frustration, but don’t rush this process! Too many pastoral or staff selections have been made based on what the search committee finally decided was “adequate” due diligence, only to realize six months later that slowing down and taking further steps would have been a much better option. Now many of these “short-cut” committees need to begin a new search all over again.

REMEMBER THIS: If you only take one lesson away from this entire handbook, please do not miss this first truth: **NOBODY IS ALWAYS BETTER THAN THE WRONG SOMEBODY!** “Nobody” will ever embezzle money from the ministry, abuse a child in Sunday School or youth group, split the church, change the church’s theology and beliefs, or destroy the church! Tragically, the wrong “somebody” could potentially do all of that and so much more to hurt the work of the Lord.

As you approach this most important task of finding a new pastor, recognize that your overarching goal is to find the right “somebody” who will maximize the ministry of your church and minimize unnecessary hurt and liability.

You feel the pressure. We know. But take a deep breath and realize that finding the right person for your church requires patience and much prayer so you can keep in sync with the leading of the Lord. Just as Luke 14:28 counsels, if you start building a house or if you launch a business with no plans, you will not efficiently and effectively achieve your goal of a solid house or a successful business. While we understand that such diligence is necessary in our daily lives, when it comes to the church, we must be at least as diligent. We can't throw caution to the wind and just hope for the best.

Churches searching for a pastor should have a definitive process for doing so. Resist making a hasty selection about "who" without first doing the homework of deciding "what" you are looking for.

Just as pastors have distinct personalities, so do congregations. Many mismatches have caused major frustrations and hurt for both sides of this spiritual equation. But taking the time to find a healthy fit requires more effort than some churches are willing to put into the process. Because the hiring processes of a typical company's human resources department may not fit a ministry's goals, the methodology of searching for a pastor may also be unfamiliar to even professionals in the congregation.

Finding a high-capacity candidate isn't terribly difficult, but does that person's chemistry fit with your particular congregation? Many search committees do not know how to detect such nuances that could cause problems later on in the church.

The following chapters help you navigate through the categories your search committee will need to wrestle with to find just the right pastor for your church. Such categories include biblical criteria, educational expectations, geographical predispositions, work and ministry experience, spouse expectations, kid-related issues, involvement within the church leadership, social organizations, political involvement, and much more.

Because you must consider so many variables in your search, the process can get overwhelming. This book lays out an easy-to-follow

search process with coaching provided at each step along the way—plus forms to help you compare the most important criteria among your potential candidates.

Consider the FBI behavioral analysis unit. When solving a crime, the FBI observes clues and creates a profile that describes in detail the suspect's traits and characteristics. This profile includes things such as a suspect's general age, socio-economic background, education level, childhood history, and their likely habits. The many details they are looking for in a suspect help them build a suspect profile, all without having a name.

Those congregations that take the time to first do a fair assessment of their church and then build a pastor profile to measure their candidates will have a decisive advantage in finding a long-term healthy fit for the congregation. This book will guide you to build a profile of “what” you are looking for, with all the desired traits, before you ever look at a single résumé or candidate questionnaire. Once the church assessment and pastor profile are complete, the selection process will become much more straightforward. The more time spent crafting the profile, the less time the search committee will agonize over hard choices.

This book covers five sections, one for each of the five vital steps needed in your search.

The **first section** helps you *Prepare for Your Search* by analyzing your church, forming the search committee, and finding an interim—all before interviewing potential candidates—to ensure your church is ready for the next steps.

The **second section** helps the search committee begin *Building Your Pastoral Profile* of characteristics your church will want and need in its next pastor, which will provide a matrix upon which all candidates will be evaluated.

The **third section** assists the committee in *Finding and Narrowing to Your Top 3 to 5 Candidates*. Most search committees start at step three, which hinders their selection process.

The **fourth section** provides you with tools to conduct *First Interviews With Your Top 3 to 5 Candidates* based upon your defined pastor profile, measuring every candidate in a very objective manner to narrow your list to the one candidate you wish to bring in for a low-key, in-person second interview with your search committee and a visit to your church.

The **fifth section** walks you through the *Top Candidate Visit and the Vote* components that bring your top candidate in to meet and preach to the congregation, visit with various groups in the church, and participate in a churchwide question-and-answer session, all of which ends in a vote on whether to affirm the candidate as your new pastor.

The appendix provides forms, questionnaires, examples, and other resources (all downloadable at FindPastor.com).

Divided into short chapters, this handbook forms a true reference book to help you find the needed information quickly. While it is recommended that you read the entire book before beginning your search, the chapter divisions will allow you to return quickly to each of the specific topics and concerns as they arise during your search process.

This handbook will work well for finding any church staff member, but finding a pastor is always the most difficult and important. Finding the right type of spiritual leader for you and your family and your church is far more involved and a much more serious process than simply hiring a clerk for a convenience store. If you put in the necessary prayer, dedication, and hard work, you will find great satisfaction in what you accomplish for your church and for the Lord. Roll up your sleeves; it is time to do the hard work of finding and keeping your next pastor.

SECTION 1

Preparing for Your Search 





Avoiding Fatal Scenarios

While some pastors will stay at one church for decades or even their entire career, if your church finds itself looking for a pastor every three or four years, you're not alone. In fact, you're among the average. But it doesn't have to stay this way. Increasing the service longevity of the pastors your church chooses may just be a matter of improving your pastoral search process.

Putting this book in the hands of church search committee members will save churches thousands of dollars, countless time, and a great deal of frustration.

An all-too-familiar scenario:

We welcomed Pastor Mark and his family. He was just what our church needed—or so we thought. After about six months, some of us began to notice a few red flags. Others would not see the issues for another year, but it was obvious that the result of our pastoral search would not and could not be a long-term fit. What started as minor concerns later turned into full-blown issues. Certain age groups felt isolated, ignored, and with no voice. The pastor changed so many things that we hardly recognized our church anymore. What mattered most to us did not seem to matter to our new pastor.

How did the pulpit committee find Mark? Well, someone suggested him, and we started with a phone interview. Mark made a great impression and had a solid résumé. His previous church's website seemed positive and healthy. Every clue he provided indicated we had discovered someone who would fit in with our ministry. We invited him and his family to the church for a meet-and-greet, a "trial sermon," and a basic question-and-answer period, where he handled each question with passion and insight. If only we had known what questions needed to be asked at that time.

In hindsight, Mark had probably preached his all-time best sermon that day, but we should have explored his historical preaching content from the past couple of years. The biggest miss was not knowing what questions to ask of him and others before inviting him to come and meet the church. It's no wonder our search ultimately failed; we apparently didn't know how to evaluate candidates properly.

Another scenario:

Mark just resigned, and the police are asking us, "Did you do a background check before you hired him?" A teenage girl in the church is posting online that she and Mark are "in love" and are having an "affair." The sex crime detectives are asking where they can find Mark to interview him.

The church treasurer is also trying to understand what happened. Apparently, our church missionaries are saying they haven't received any support from the church for months. Upon investigation, the mission funds appear to have been paying for some personal credit cards used by Mark's wife and children. Upon his resignation, Mark's last words to our board president

were, “You didn’t pay me enough, so go to the police if you want to, but they won’t do anything about it because you and the treasurer let it happen.”

Even if your pastoral experience is less dramatic than the above scenarios, if you find yourself seeking a pastor, your entire search committee should read this handbook. **The table of contents will work like an index, helping you quickly find any information.** Combine the insights of this book with committee prayers for discernment, and your outcomes should start looking very different from the above fatal scenarios.



Ordering the Search Process Timeline

Your pastor has left or will soon be leaving your church. So, that position is open or will open soon. What are your next steps? Below is a timeline you can check off as you move through the search process. A short summary of each step follows the checklist.

TIMELINE CHECKLIST

- READ THIS BOOK
- CHOOSE YOUR SEARCH COMMITTEE
- INSTALL AN INTERIM PASTOR
- DEVELOP A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY AND SCHEDULE
- ANALYZE YOUR CHURCH
- BUILD YOUR PASTOR PROFILE
- LOOK FOR CANDIDATES
- PRAY AND EVALUATE
- FIRST INTERVIEWS WITH YOUR TOP 3 TO 5 CANDIDATES
- LOW-KEY WEEKEND VISIT WITH THE TOP CANDIDATE
- CONDITIONAL OFFER OF EMPLOYMENT AND BACKGROUND CHECKS
- ANNOUNCE THE CANDIDATE TO THE CONGREGATION
- SECOND CHURCH VISIT: CANDIDATE PREACHES/CHURCHWIDE Q & A
- EVALUATE
- FINAL STEPS & VOTE

READ THIS BOOK – Every member of the leadership board that will select the search committee, any current pastoral staff, and the search committee itself (if it's already chosen), should read this book before beginning the search process.

CHOOSE YOUR SEARCH COMMITTEE – Your first task is to select a search committee. Try to include representatives from as many ages and ministry groups in the church as possible while keeping the total number of committee members to no more than seven to nine. The search committee can be appointed by your church leadership board (perhaps with nominations from the various groups or church members). Or the leadership board can nominate individuals to present to the church membership for a vote. Or your church may already have this aspect of the search process written into its bylaws.

INSTALL AN INTERIM PASTOR – Before beginning the search, the combined leadership board and search committee should determine whether to utilize an interim pastor or whether a current pastoral staff member should fill in as the interim. The advantages and pitfalls of each choice are discussed in this handbook.

DEVELOP A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY AND SCHEDULE – Develop a strategy for how the search committee will communicate to the congregation and to others during the search process. How much will be communicated? In what forum? Emphasize the importance of confidentiality. Make sure that an important part of your communication strategy is prayer—both as a committee and with the congregation—when making reports. Developing a time schedule is also important; however, that schedule should be loosely held and retooled regularly, since you don't really know at this point how long the various elements of the search will actually take.

ANALYZE YOUR CHURCH – Begin the process of objectively evaluating your church. Identify the various stakeholders. What is important to the church? What are its needs? What broader community factors should be considered, such as its atmosphere and its needs that the church might be able to address? What sort of pastor will be needed?

BUILD YOUR PASTOR PROFILE – Once you have assessed your church and its surrounding community, you will be better able to make the list of characteristics you’ll want to see in your ideal candidate. The pastor profile will be your guide for screening any candidate and arriving at the one you will announce to the church as your pastoral candidate.

LOOK FOR CANDIDATES – Create a specific window of time to receive résumés and provide a deadline for ending this collection process. However, keep in mind and be open to the fact that God may bring someone to you later in the process. Discuss the various options available to you for finding candidates: seminaries, word of mouth, job posting websites (preferably only those that advertise ministry-related positions), or denominational or faith community resources. Appoint one person on the committee to receive and hold all candidate submissions until reaching the deadline for receiving them. When you have all the candidate résumés and submissions, share them with the entire search committee for the first time.

PRAY AND EVALUATE – After each committee member has reviewed and evaluated all the résumés and submissions, pray for guidance and discuss each candidate. You may, as a group, dismiss some immediately. Other candidates may already stand out as good possibilities. Continue to have your entire committee evaluate those who are not immediately dismissed. After reviewing candidate questionnaires and conducting on-site visits or website visits, compare the top candidates to the pastor profile you have developed and rank the candidates in descending order starting with the person who best seems to match your pastor profile. Then plan to interview your top three to five candidates, beginning with the best match and working down your list.

FIRST INTERVIEWS WITH YOUR TOP 3 TO 5 CANDIDATES – Plan to interview your top three to five candidates either in person or via a web-based video call, depending on distance factors and what would work best for each candidate. Develop a score for

each candidate based on the interviews, site visits, websites, sermons, and other interactions or information. **Always score based on your pastor profile.** Determine the strengths and weaknesses of each candidate. Make this a serious matter of prayer, asking God to help you choose the best candidate for your church as you continue with the process.

LOW-KEY WEEKEND VISIT WITH THE TOP CANDIDATE – Invite your top candidate (with spouse or alone) to visit your church for a weekend. The candidate can see the church, look at the area, evaluate the local schools, and get a “feel” for the church and the community. This visit would also be the time for the search committee’s second interview, this time in-person in a more personal and casual setting. This second interview will also be the time to begin discussing practical considerations, such as salary, benefits, work expectations, and other “housekeeping” items to make sure that both your committee and the candidate are on the same page regarding these areas. What does the church expect from the pastor? What does the pastor expect from the church? Explore both of these questions in depth, so the big issues are settled if the candidate is presented to the church for a vote.

CONDITIONAL OFFER OF EMPLOYMENT AND BACKGROUND CHECKS – If, after the weekend visit, your top candidate is still your top candidate and this person still wants to move forward pursuing the pastoral opportunity, the church is now ready to make a conditional offer of employment. This step means informing the candidate that the church intends to hire pending approval from the church (either the congregation or the leadership board—or whatever other approval method is set forth in the church bylaws) and acceptable background checks. Once this conditional offer has been made, obtain written approval from the candidate to do a credit check and a criminal background check. Some churches have been very surprised to learn at this point that the person they were considering has a sordid or checkered background, so don’t skip this part! By completing your conditional offer of employment, you ensure the

candidate will accept the terms and benefits before involving the entire church and getting everyone's hopes falsely raised.

ANNOUNCE THE CANDIDATE TO THE CONGREGATION

– Assuming this candidate passes the credit and background checks and accepts the conditional employment offer, it is time to announce the candidate to the church. Inform the congregation by having the candidate record a video to be shown in the church service or simply by having the chair of the search committee introduce and describe the candidate during a church service while displaying a photo of the candidate with the candidate's family on a large screen. Explain to those in the service (and in a follow-up email to your congregation so those who may have missed the service are not left in the dark) the steps the church has taken to get to this point and what the next steps will be.

SECOND CHURCH VISIT: CANDIDATE PREACHES/CHURCHWIDE Q & A – Have the candidate come back for another weekend visit within a week or two of announcing the candidacy to the church. The goal of this weekend is to have the church family get to know the candidate and the candidate's family (and vice versa). Schedule the candidate to preach at least one sermon and to be available for a meet and greet and a question/answer session with the congregation. Also plan and schedule for this weekend to be a time of interaction with various church groups (if applicable) and leaders so the visit can be the most informative for both the candidate and the congregation.

EVALUATE – Following this weekend visit, plan a congregational townhall-style feedback session to invite honest impressions. Begin with prayer for guidance and allow everyone to freely express both positive and negative reactions. Don't try to justify the committee's decision or to force acceptance of the candidate. But if all lights appear to be green, the search committee is ready to declare that the candidate will be voted upon by the congregation (or whatever process the bylaws require). Be sure to leave this meeting letting the

congregation know that the leadership board and search committee are available to answer or discuss any further questions and concerns they may have.

FINAL STEPS & VOTE – Assuming a general positive consensus still exists, plan to have the church vote on the candidate two to three weeks after the candidate’s preaching weekend (most church bylaws require providing the congregation at least a two-week notice after the candidate preaches prior to voting). This time gives people a chance to pray about the candidate and how they will vote, time to listen or watch the candidate’s available online sermons (if any), discuss the candidate with family and friends, rearrange schedules so they can be available to vote, and ask further questions of the leadership board and search committee as necessary.

By the time the church votes on whether to call this candidate as their pastor, the search committee should be fairly certain of how the vote will turn out, and the candidate should be pretty clear about accepting the call if the final vote is favorable. Notify the candidate of the results of the vote soon after the results are tallied. The candidate should know ahead of time what percentage is necessary to be approved. Some church bylaws only require a majority while others require 90 or 95 percent.

If the vote is favorable, the candidate may decide to accept the offer immediately or may take some time to consider the results of the vote (extra time might be especially true if only a majority is needed and the vote barely reached a majority, as the candidate may not feel that scenario will be a very welcoming one). If the candidate verbally agrees to accept the vote and the call to the church, inform the church members as soon as possible; email is preferable if the church won’t be meeting together for another week. The church and the candidate will then formalize the agreement with an employment contract.

IF NO? – If the congregational vote to call the candidate as pastor is negative, or the candidate had a change of heart after interacting with the entire church, or if the vote total is not acceptable to the

candidate, the search committee should then move on to the next candidate on the top three to five list and repeat the process from that step forward.



Praying Through the Process

We all believe in prayer. Most lost people even believe in prayer, especially in crisis situations. But do we actually pray? That is a different question.

Ask yourself honestly: did the leadership group that selected (or recommended) your search committee members get together to pray for God's guidance in making those choices? And has your search committee gotten together and spent even 30 minutes together in prayer? A half hour is the length of a standard television show or video download, but often, we are "too busy" or too focused on the practical aspects of the search committee to bring God and prayer regularly into the process.

You can get every detail right and even vote on the perceived "best" candidate, but if you leave prayer out of the process, you could be starting over again in just a couple of years. A biblical reminder of this pitfall comes from the selection of the first two kings of Israel: Saul and David.

You know the story. The Israelites created a profile of what sort of king they wanted, but their criteria were shallow and lacked the characteristics of a true leader. When seeking their first king, Israel merely desired what other nations had instead of seeking what they really

needed. They first selected a tall, strong, handsome, kingly-looking leader with Saul.

But when seeking their second king, the people trusted their prophet Samuel, who first sought and heard from God before looking to where God was leading him. Coming to Jesse's home, Samuel asked to see all his sons. He looked them over carefully from oldest to youngest, thinking the older and stronger son would be "the one." Thankfully, while evaluating each of the brothers, Samuel was still praying AND listening to God. God was saying, "Not the one." Then when standing in front of the youngest, the smallest, and the child with the least experience, God told the selection committee (Samuel), not to look on the outside, but on the heart, because David was the one.

You will search for the best pastor, of course, not ignoring those obvious traits that typically result in optimum outcomes. But when you lean on God, praying consistently, you may find a candidate with greater potential than experience.

The rest of this handbook will help you discover the important criteria you should consider with God's leading. Your job will then be to help your congregation see and agree to what truly matters. As you pray, also share verses among yourselves (and possibly with the congregation) to reinforce your posture of seeking God's choice over your own.

Claim the promise so clearly given in the book of James that says if any lack wisdom, they can admit that lack and totally depend on God in prayer. He always promises to give abundantly beyond what we can ask or think in our own human condition.

It is an awesome thought to recognize that God owns the church, God loves the church, Christ died for the church, and we (you!) now have the privilege of doing the very work of God! We most certainly need to admit our limits as mere mortals and put our faith in total dependence on the Almighty!

Prayer, like a new eyeglass prescription, allows you to clearly see the details others might miss. Prayer provides the lens through which you should view the search process, the other committee members, the church, and the candidates themselves.

Do not forget to pray about your attitude. If your prayers sound like a search committee of one, then you may want to either remove yourself from the committee or pray to be a more healthy and collaborative part of the team. No one prays the following out loud, “My will God, not yours,” which you would acknowledge is dangerously unobjective.

Take ten minutes as a committee to confess together before the Lord. Confession can be healthy and humbling. Then take ten minutes to adore and thank the Lord for all the blessings He provides. Finally, take ten minutes to petition and ask Him to meet the needs of the church and the committee.

As you petition the Lord, pray for your heart to be ready to go where God wants to take you. Pray for discerning insight as you sort through the desired traits needed in your next pastor. Pray that you focus on what *could be* rather than on what *has been*. Pray for patience. Pray for God’s power in the church during the transition.

When praying, seek God’s choice over yours. Do not ask God to make the other search committee members see all the great attributes in your favorite candidate. Pray for spiritual objectivity and discernment. Ask God to help you discern the candidates’ true character, integrity, and capability.

Pray earnestly when analyzing your church and the target profile for the new pastor. Pray that the profile will show precisely what the church needs and what God desires. Pray for honest, open discussion from all search committee members. Pray for mutual respect to be a high priority among the search team as various opinions may conflict with others.

Prayer has a way of allowing you to see beyond the obvious. Your search committee should pray and function in the same way Samuel searched for King David and not the way the people desired Saul. Getting your hearts aligned in prayer will allow you to look discerningly at the candidates' hearts. Praying with the candidates themselves during the interview process is also a strongly recommended practice.

4

Recovering From Losing Your Pastor

Change is difficult. People grow comfortable with how things are, and living through change is an inherently unsettling process. Plus, churches are traditional organizations that often worry change will lead to unhealthy compromises or outright carnality. Change can also be painful, and being aware of how people in the church are hurting through the change process is important.

One of two scenarios likely unfolded to cause you to read this book. In the first scenario, the congregation regrets the departure of your long- or short-time pastor. You will deeply miss the vision, leadership, sermons, and personal touches. Your pastor may be stepping down for personal reasons, relocating to another position, or retiring, and you wonder how in the world you will ever find another pastor this great. The daunting task and impending search may make you wonder if it can ever be this good again.

The second scenario may occur more often than the first. Your pastor is leaving, and it may not be a day too soon. You have been waiting for this day, having recognized early on it was a bad fit—a mismatch evidenced by personality clashes and ineffectiveness. A lack of support from the membership or even an impending split may indicate this day is long overdue.

In either scenario, some people will be excited about the possibility of a fresh face while others will mourn the loss of a genuine connection. When a pastor leaves, emotions range from excitement to anxiety. Sadly, in many cases, if a spiritual forensics team came in to investigate, the chalked outlines of the fallen would reveal more victims than expected. In addition to members, attendees, and the former pastor, the biggest victim may be the church's unity and future direction. Many congregations have fractured or lost membership over pastoral or other key staffing changes.

When the church loses a pastor, emotions run high. Much like at the end of a championship game, part of the crowd will celebrate, and part will mourn. Both groups invested some degree of sweat, work, and emotion into the relationship. Everyone will feel drained and will need recovery time. Open and honest dialogue with key leaders (volunteers and staff), and perhaps even the congregation, will likely reveal that each "team on the field" (pastor and church) made mistakes. Like a great coach, it's important to take time to analyze the team's successes (what went right) and the team's failures (what went wrong) so they will be better prepared for the future.

Allowing open and honest dialogue, while perhaps painful, will help rebuild trust and heal wounds from the loss of a pastor, which will in turn minimize the risk of future church fractures. Healing begins with listening to everyone's thoughts and concerns. Only when the staff and congregation believe their views and concerns are understood and will be considered will you (and they) be ready to start the search process. Prepare a time to hear what the people want and do not want in their next pastor—without throwing the previous pastor under the bus. To get broad buy-in, provide convenient opportunities for various groups within the church to provide input, or (better yet) allow everyone that same opportunity if the congregation's size permits. Being receptive to input and feedback in this manner will not only build trust and begin to heal hurts, but it will also go a long way toward helping the search committee build a profile sheet for the next pastor.

If there are no immoral or illegal reasons for your pastor's leaving, take time to honor and recognize the pastor's tenure, even if a large group is happy about the pastor's exit. Making sure to honor the pastor's departure with a gift or social time or special recognition during a service will emphasize the positive and pare down the negative. Emphasizing positive experiences and contributions can also help dispel accusations or rumors.

Recognition brings closure and appropriate honor, whether for much or for little, in the same way that a funeral helps family members adjust to a loss. Like at a funeral, people know the good and the bad, but why focus on the failures? A leader in the congregation should be able to highlight particular accomplishments of the pastor's leadership. You can never go wrong publicly honoring the successes no matter how few or insignificant, but quiet informal conclaves of pastor-bashing will leave scars on the next generation and are likely to cause further division in the church. Show young believers how to honor and respect the shepherd's role even in disagreement.

Regardless of the reasons, a pastor's departure will cause wounds. If the pastor leaves due to an affair, embezzlement, bad ethical choices, or other forms of immorality, the church will be left feeling angry, deceived, manipulated, and very hurt. Even having a pastor leave to take a bigger church can result in feelings of inferiority and a sense of loss for a congregation. In today's climate, the church needs to own and communicate the reality of the situation and the why behind the departure. Unexplained hasty departures tend to cause later disruptions for seemingly insignificant reasons. In such circumstances, there needs to be tactful honesty without spelling out all the sordid details.

Healing the wounds left behind is not the responsibility of the departing pastor. Healing occurs when the hurting patient decides to accept treatment, which can only begin by looking forward rather than dwelling in the past. Some congregations cannot grow because they think their best days are in the past. Others cannot succeed be-

cause they keep reopening old wounds. If you have open wounds in the church, building trust and healing those wounds is vital. Encourage forgiveness. Invest significant time in prayer, asking God what *He* wants to do with the church's future rather than deciding *for* Him what should be done. Encourage your church to look to the future by praying and trusting the Lord to bring *His* choice for the pastor who will be most effective at reaching the next generation. Praying together tears down walls, builds community, and heals hurts.

As it is commonly said, "Hurting people hurt people and are easily hurt by them." A congregation that's been hurt by a previous pastor or staff member's departure may, even unintentionally, hurt their new pastor, who may in turn, reflect those same actions or feelings toward the flock, leading to a vicious cycle that never ends well. Prayer and forgiveness that occurs *before* the new pastor is chosen will allow the congregation's wounds to heal so the church can become healthy and ready to take on the search challenge. Admit that wounds exist and identify what caused them. But then build trust by facilitating an environment of openness, healing, reconciliation, and forgiveness.

APPENDIX—Website Resources

FindPastor.com contains the following for your search process:

Downloadable PDF Forms

- Pastor/Staff Profile (worksheet)
- Pastor/Staff Profile Sample (example worksheet filled out)
- Pastor/Staff Profile Comparison Chart (to help rank candidates)
- Church Assessment
- Communication Evaluation Sheet
- Pastor/Staff Candidate Questionnaire

Links to Resources

- *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator* personality assessment
- *Leading From Your Strengths* Christian personality assessment
- Criminal Background Checks
- Credit Reports: No link for credit check is provided as we recommend search committees request candidates provide a copy of their credit report.

Available for Purchase on FindPastor.com

- Books in a Bundle Discount (for each search committee member or member of your church)
- Preprinted Bundle of All PDF Forms (multiples of PDFs based on average use – photocopy permission granted)
- Consultation time to meet with your committee via web-based video call from one or both authors

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This handbook helps churches find and hire the right pastor or staff member for their youth, children, family, executive, next-gen, or worship ministries. Short chapters make the most relevant information easy to find. A ministry leader and a Christian attorney combine their skills to help your search committee find the right pastor or staff member for your church. This book covers five phases of the search process: *Prepare for Your Search*, *Build the Profile*, *Find and Narrow to Your Top 3 to 5 Candidates*, *First Interviews With the Top 3 to 5 Candidates*, and finally, *Top Candidate Visit and the Vote*. If you are looking at this book, it means you take the role of finding that next ministry leader seriously. You want to get it right, but how do you prioritize one set of preferences over another especially when your committee has yet to agree?

Identifying and proactively managing the issues most likely to cause tension between new leaders and their congregations is an essential part of the search process. This handbook will help churches explore the categories they should consider when searching for a candidate such as the biblical criteria expected, education expectations, geographical predispositions, work and ministry experience, spouse expectations, kid-related issues, involvement within the church leadership, social organizations, political involvement, and so much more.

How to Find the Right Pastor

FIVE KEY CRITERIA:

Create Your **Pastor Profile** before examining any names

Examine the **Biblical Criteria**

Unwritten Expectations That Often Burn Churches

Theology is a Non-Negotiable

Look for **Education** Comparable to Your Congregation

Download Forms from FindPastor.com



Ron Hunter Jr., Ph.D.

His military background and pastoral experience prepared Dr. Ron Hunter to assume his role as CEO of Randall House and D6 Family Ministry in 2002. He also serves as a speaker and consultant for various organizations and an adjunct professor at Dallas Baptist University, where he earned his Ph.D. He co-founded and directs the D6 Conference. Dr. Hunter has authored five other books, including *Toy Box Leadership*, *The DNA of D6: Building Blocks for Generational Discipleship*, *Youth Ministry in the 21st Century*; *Recalibrate: A New Measure for Family Ministry*; and *About You, About Me: Generational Legacy Journal*. Additionally, he has written over 80 articles for various magazines.



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