

What makes a trip an adventure? I think it is the many unknowns you experience along the way. Being a part of the Pastoral Search Team for the past eighteen months has definitely been an adventure! We had a vague idea of what was in store. But we had no way of knowing the grace and unity God would supply to our team. Further, we could not have imagined the loving support, prayer and patience we would receive from the RBC church body. For all of these reasons and many more, I am grateful to be a part of Rancho Baptist Church. I am writing to recommend Jason Swanson as RBC's next Senior Pastor. In doing so, I would also like to retrace my path to this decision while sharing some of the high points of the journey. My hope is that you will also view the past eighteen months and the coming months as only part of the journey the Lord is leading us on. We don't know exactly what lies ahead. But we know our Savior has promised to never leave us or forsake us. He will certainly provide for our needs and bring glory to His Great Name.

What is needed in RBC's Senior Pastor? The initial stages of the search process sought to answer this question. The obvious primary source of information was God's Word. Doug led us through a practical study of 1st and 2nd Timothy and Titus. Each qualification of biblical leaders outlined in these epistles was studied and crafted into portions of our selection criteria. We also studied Chris Brauns' book, *When the Word Leads Your Pastoral Search*. The qualifications of biblical leaders derived from this study became the basis of our prayers as we asked God to give us the man He had prepared for RBC. A very important distinction is that the search team sought to understand and apply the criteria God gave as essential and not what we considered to be important. Some candidates looked very good from the standpoint of externals such as "contemporary style, very polished public speaker, and appeals to a wide audience." With the access we all have to gifted Bible teachers through radio or the internet, we had to be cautious not to compare our candidates with nationally or internationally known Christian leaders and Bible expositors. After all, each of these men were once new pastors and Bible teachers. Further we understood that appealing to the particular tastes of individuals in the body (ours included) would never satisfy everyone. The only way to achieve unity as a church body was to seek God's perfect will and not any of our own imperfect, short-sighted preferences. The bottom line is; we had to trust God to give us what we needed.

Beyond the initial stage of the search (*deciding what was needed*) a very important point of interest along the journey was what I will call *The Reflecting Pool*. It was humbling, to say the least, that a team of imperfect people would now hold experienced, trained pastors up to a biblical standard. We found it was impossible to do this without reflecting on how we were meeting these standards in our work, in our families, and in our personal lives. This was cause for immediate pause. We stopped searching long enough to say, "God, search my heart and show me what needs to change." This continued throughout the year and a half long search process. As you meet Jason, I urge you to visit the Great Physician. It may be that you need to see the 'Great Ophthalmologist' as I did and say, "Lord please take the plank out of my eye so I can see clearly."

The last stop on the pastoral search journey was *Returning to RBC's Foundation*. At this stop the Search Team had time to look carefully at all of the structures that are standing strong. No doubt a very destructive force came against the church. But we were led by Pastor Rick and the elders to consider the strong points of the church. Rebuilding would involve putting things back in order. But the foundation is unchanged. It is Christ alone! We trust in His inerrant Word. We love God. We love one another and we love the lost with the gospel. The SWOT assessment conducted by RBC's Pastors and Elders revealed some weaknesses and some things that would need to change. But more than this, it revealed the foundation and the girders that held us together were all still very strong. Humility, unity, uncompromising biblical teaching, genuine relationships with Jesus and with one another were all foundational elements of RBC. This was a good place to start the reconstruction. In the consideration of who RBC's next Senior Pastor would be, we had to acknowledge this was not about one man coming to solve all of our problems. All we could ask of God is to give us a shepherd who intensely loves God, and fervently and sacrificially loves God's people by caring for them and feeding them according to His Word. This is what God has sent us in Jason Swanson. I can truly say with all my heart that Jason is a faithful shepherd of God's flock. Based on every conversation we have had with Jason and on every bit of feedback given to us by those who know him over the past twenty years, I am convinced Jason is the man God has provided to be the next Senior Pastor of Rancho Baptist Church.

Respectfully,

Brad Hirst