

To the RBC congregation:

How do you know when you've found "the one"? This is a question the search team has asked frequently throughout this process. Much like finding a spouse, seeking out God's man to be RBC's senior pastor is a much more detailed endeavor than simply hiring for a standard job. We are tasked with evaluating a man's LIFE; not simply his skill set pertaining to a job description, but his heart, his character, his deepest failures and shortcomings, his family, his hopes, etc. I am so thankful for the diligence that God granted us in how the search process was put together. I believe we have thoroughly vetted each applicant that God has graciously brought to us. I am also overwhelmingly thankful for every member of the search team. God chose to richly bless each of us through our experience together. I am very excited to say that I believe our search has been fruitful in bringing us to Jason Swanson. I would like to outline my personal process of coming to this conclusion.

When we first received Jason Swanson's application, we had already assessed a sizable amount of applicants at length. Each candidate had their own strengths and weaknesses, but I didn't quite know what I personally felt was consistently missing in these candidates until we read Jason's application. Jason was real and raw. He had no problem delving into his own shortcomings and beautifully displaying how God has used him despite of them. Because of his experience overseas as a missionary in Papua New Guinea, he wasn't locked into the traditions of the American church; instead he just looked to the Word for guidance. Jason displayed a real sense of humility in the way he worked with his tribe and relied on the Lord whenever things became extremely difficult. Many applications we received read like a seminary textbook. While Jason's application was entirely theologically sound, it read like a glimpse into a man who knew what it looked like to live for and rely on the Lord entirely in a completely different way than most Americans will ever have the chance to experience.

We discussed at length Jason's lack of experience leading a church stateside, and the fact that he did not have practice leading a large staff. However, through these discussions, we kept coming back to the idea that Jason and his family had gone to an unbelieving tribe, started from scratch, encouraged an understanding and love for the Word, raised up leaders and elders from a congregation of new believers, and was able to step back and let the church run on its own. Yes, this wasn't the typical church we're used to seeing here, but that is undeniably extensive pastoring experience. I am actually increasingly excited at the fact that Jason does not have exclusive experience in the American church. I have always seen this as one of his strengths. While obviously experience is valuable, I think there is something to be said for the idea that Jason would be able to see areas in need of growth at RBC that we may overlook because it's simply "how it's done", or "what we always do". He has a different perspective on what's truly important in God's kingdom, and hasn't become blind to potential areas of sin or misguided motives that may have become entrenched over the years. He has an extensive track record of fighting the good fight for the sake of Christ in his work overseas and I have no reason to believe that he'd do anything less at RBC.

When I listened to Jason's sermons, all of these same themes continued. When you listen to Jason teach, you are left with an overwhelming sense of how amazing GOD is, not at how great Jason is. He is passionate and engaging when he speaks, and it is very apparent that Jason is personally challenged in his study of the Word when preparing the sermon. He BELIEVES what he is preaching. He

personally connects to what he is saying. I found that this made me really pay attention to what this man was so fervent about. It was interesting to learn about his experience teaching overseas in the native Siawi language. Jason has told us repeatedly how excited he is to be able to teach in English and have no constraints as to what will translate well in the culture, or how word choice could potentially impact his teaching. He was faithful to deliver consistent solid teaching that resulted in much fruit in the tribe despite the language barrier. I am excited to see how much more he will blossom without language constraints to constantly worry about. He has the heart and spiritual compass to deliver God's Word in an effective and truly powerful way, and truly shines God's amazing light from the pulpit.

Through the next three interviews, we saw many more strengths come to light. Jason sometimes wandered in his responses, but I was always able to follow him back to his point, and often found myself nodding in amazement at the picture or concept he was able to ultimately illustrate. A few instances stick out in my mind when I recall the interviews. At one point, we asked him to share about someone who has challenged and deepened his relationship with God. We obviously were looking to hear about someone who had mentored him, but instead he shared about how his best friend had strayed from the Lord throughout his life, and how Jason has had to really press into the Lord because of this relationship. It was an unorthodox response to be sure, but his ability to think outside the box and come up with an incredibly moving response on the spot impressed me. Another instance was when we crafted a question about a time when maybe a Papua New Guinea reference fell flat. We were actually trying to gauge his awareness about how often he talked about PNG, and he immediately pinned the true purpose of the question. He responded very clearly that he was aware of his frequent PNG references, and that he would be strict in his sermons regarding how often he used these illustrations and make sure to never repeat stories. I never knew exactly what to expect in Jason's answers. At first, this took me off guard. As time went by, I couldn't wait to hear what Jason was going to say.

The team noted several quirks that were somewhat puzzling at first, but we discovered that almost every one of these were present in him as a result of his time overseas and his intentional sensitivity to Siawi culture. We learned that his bluntness of speech came from the fact that if you mince words or speak around a subject in Siawi, the meaning would be entirely lost. We also recently learned that his lack of eye contact arose from the fact that in Siawi, eye contact is seen as a threat to men and flirtation to women. Even our small, somewhat nit-picky critiques of Jason have come to have very understandable reasons. Does he need to adapt back to our culture and make sure that he applies these same cultural sensitivities here? Yes. Am I confident that he is 100% willing and able? Absolutely.

I found myself thinking often through the interviews that his lack of refinement and polish was incredibly refreshing. I never felt like I was seeing a mask or a "put on" version of Jason. People want to follow someone who actually believe and practice what they preach, and Jason seems like a prime example of this. During his in-depth behavioral interview, Jason had an abundance of past examples to share regarding everything from leadership to admitting wrongdoing to persevering through challenging times. If past behavior is indicative of future conduct, then I am excited about what God would be able to do through Jason at RBC.

We, as a search team, always made it a focus to never turn a blind eye to any potential problems we saw in candidates. It didn't matter if six of us were of a similar mind and one was not, we always gave full attention to the one with any kind of concern. The interviews did leave some of us with

questions that needed to be answered. Is Jason impulsive? Does he speak before he thinks? Is Jason teachable? Will he be able to delegate work after being essentially a one-man-show in PNG? We made it our effort to fill in any gaps in our knowledge through our extensive reference checks. This is where my personal excitement for Jason substantially grew. Every single potential negative thing that we were trying to research regarding Jason was explained or completely refuted by his references. For example, in wondering if Jason was impulsive, several of his references went as far to say that, if anything, Jason would go out of his way to take extra time to pray before making a decision. When we inquired into whether Jason tried to wear every hat, we were reminded that Jason's job in PNG was to work himself out of a job. His entire focus was in raising up leaders to replace him; therefore delegation was a key part of his whole purpose there. When asked if they had ever experienced Jason being impulsive, we were met with a resounding, "No, absolutely not." The references could not speak higher praise about Jason. One stated that if he could choose his replacement as head pastor of his church, it would be Jason. Many of them said that they would be quick to go to any church Jason pastored. Jason's ministry partners in Papua New Guinea praised his willingness to be flexible in whatever God wanted to do, and attested to a long history of consistent faithfulness. They sang his praises for his boldness in the gospel and willingness to try new tactics to get people to see the amazing love and grace of God. These are only a few examples of the myriad of affirming things that Jason's references had to say about him.

One of the most interesting parts about the reference checks was the increased look into Jason's ministry in PNG. We learned from his missionary partners that the tribe he and his family were tasked with ministering to was considered an extremely difficult situation that some missionaries had abandoned and other missionaries had then passed on. The tribe was only ten years removed from cannibalism, and other missionaries who began their work there had decided to leave. Jason's family faced many trials and ongoing sickness, and "no one would have blamed them for coming home" on multiple occasions. Yet, they stuck with it. They not only chose to go to an undesirable area, but they persevered and ended up coming to completion in their mission there. We didn't learn about ANY of these aspects until we talked to his references. Jason had every opportunity to paint himself to us as somewhat of a hero in the missionary world; yet he either chose not to, or didn't think to. This speaks to his humility and character more than anything. I believe that he truly sees God as the champion of his story; not himself.

The next and final large step in our process involved going to Jason's house to meet his family. I can only imagine how intimidating that kind of meeting would be. People are coming to judge your house, your life, your kids, your interactions, etc. The Swanson family handled this pressure beautifully. Shannon was gracious and a wonderful host. Their kids were talkative and involved in the entire (admittedly long) afternoon without so much as a single complaint or request to go do something else. They all helped each other in a very natural way. Jason obviously is present and intimately involved in each of their lives. Two things stand out the most to me from this visit. The first involves Jason's response when we stated our intentions to move forward with him as our only candidate, and asked him to stop pursuing any other positions at another church. This was our "proposal" moment if you will. Jason didn't even blink an eye before responding, "I already have." This was impactful to me because up to this point, we didn't know where Jason stood in his desire and willingness to come to RBC. This confidence in God's clear guidance was very reassuring. The second memorable moment happened a few seconds later when we were all somewhat distractedly talking amongst each other. Jason very quietly started speaking to each of his kids in Siawi, I assume to affirm that he had all of their support. He made eye contact with each one and they spoke a few words back and forth. Some members of our

team didn't even notice this exchange taking place. I feel like I was able to witness how seriously he took his relationship with each of his children, and acknowledged that this decision greatly impacted each of them as well. They are a family unit, and really show a respect for each other. If we weren't already excited about calling Jason to continue on in the process, we definitely were after the home visit.

Going from our initial survey to actually being called to candidate as RBC's next senior pastor is a very long road. Our search was built in such a way to evaluate each candidate as thoroughly as possible. We evaluated candidates through surveys, on the phone, through writing, in person, with their families, in situations of pressure, etc. Getting to the place where each member of the search team was entirely excited about Jason as our candidate was quite a process. All throughout the journey, I have been challenged with the temptation to fear man instead of rely on the Lord. What if the pastors and elders don't like him? What if the congregation wants a different kind of man? What if he doesn't perform well during one of the interviews? I have been reminded time and time again that this is God's church, and we are simply to seek the Lord. Our team did its best work when we removed ourselves from the equation and sought out God's heart. It is a freeing place to be now, after all this work, to know that each one of these outcomes have been in God's hands all along.

From our first meeting, we have prayed for unanimity amongst our team when we came to the right man. With Jason, we have found that with flying colors. We have continually submitted this to the Lord and asked Him to either very clearly open this door wider or to swiftly close it if this man is not in His plan for RBC. We can unreservedly recommend Jason to you as a unanimous decision, and I truly am excited at the perspective that Jason will bring to RBC. I am thankful for this journey, and couldn't be happier to recommend Jason Swanson.

Respectfully,
Bree Lathrop