

# Who Should Be On Your Pastor Search Committee?

by William Vanderbloemen – May 2, 2019

Finding the right people to lead your church is critical. Purpose powers people, and people power churches. So it's essential to build teams with people who fit your culture and vision.

But it turns out, finding the right people is the hardest part. When you're looking for your next pastor, who you have on your search committee makes a significant difference. Assembling your pastor search committee is an important decision and should be approached thoughtfully and prayerfully. After all, these individuals will be making decisions that will affect the church or ministry not only in the short term, but also for the years to come.

This means the pastor search committee carries a heavy and sacred responsibility as they seek the Lord on behalf of the congregation about who He is calling to be the church's next pastor.

Chapter 4 of [\*SEARCH: The Pastoral Search Committee Handbook\*](#) will give you a comprehensive look at the kind of people you want to include on your search committee with eleven characteristics of people you should include on your pastor search committee.

Aside from these key characteristics, there are five critical areas to consider when assembling your committee. Let's dive in!



## 1. Determine the size of your committee.

Remember the old adage, "Too many cooks in the kitchen?" Having too large of a search committee is a pitfall for many pastor search committees. Before you start, decide how large the committee will be. Be specific and stick to your number. Size is important because a small committee risks under representing the thoughts of the congregation as a whole. But too large, and you swing to the other extreme, risking a longer search process and a greater likelihood of conflict among the members.

We've seen churches with as little as two people on the committee and up to as many as thirty. But, in *Search: The Pastoral Search Committee Handbook*, William Vanderbloemen says, "The suggested size range for a pastor search committee is seven to eleven people. Make sure the committee is an odd number of people, to prevent any stalemates when taking any votes."

The bottom line here: Keep your search committee lean. You'll find your decisions are made more efficiently and you'll be more unified and stronger as a team this way.

Once your church has determined how many people will be on the search committee, you can begin discerning who should be on the committee - next, we'll go over our recommendations for great church committee members.

## 2. Include diversity – but not just for diversity's sake.

Think through the key ministries and demographics within your church, the ones that really represent who your church is trying to reach. Who are those key voices or leaders within those groupings? Who has been faithfully serving the church for some time? When looking for search committee members, consider diversity in gender, age, and experience. If your church's mission is to be a diverse church, make sure that diversity is represented on your search team as well.

But at the same time, when you're thinking about who should be on the committee, remember that selecting people with spiritual depth, who have the church's best interest at heart, is of utmost importance. In fact, it's more important than trying to include someone who represents the entire body of the church - every demographic, gender, ministry, age group, etc.

While the intention of the conventional wisdom to have a “well-rounded and well-represented search committee” is indeed well-meaning, we’ve often seen that it doesn’t work. You’re trying to include everyone who you believe needs to have a voice in the decision, but when a church takes this approach, then each of the members may strive to be the voice of their specific demographic and its agenda. This results in many different ideas of what to look for in their next pastor—even with the best of intentions.

Many different ideas will make it more difficult for you to come to a unified consensus of who you need - potentially prolonging the search as you work through differing opinions among yourselves.

Instead, find people for your pastor search committee who have in mind the best interests of the church as a whole and who have broad enough perspective to see beyond their own personal preferences and needs. Come to a balance of ministry representation, diversity, expertise, and spiritual heart for the truly “well-rounded” committee member who has the broader vision of the church and the best interest of the church they’re serving clearly in focus.

### **3. Remember that expertise lends credibility.**

Look for members who can offer expertise, not just experience. Experience is valuable, and it must be gained before a person becomes an expert in his or her field. Experience offers maturity, but expertise gives credibility. A good gauge if someone is an expert is if they can offer 10+ years of experience in the same field. This is particularly helpful, for example, in searches for Senior Leadership positions - committee members who are experts in their field or offer significant leadership experience can more clearly see potential in an upcoming leader, understand the ways that they would be a good fit as a leader, or where they may have blind spots that would caution the committee to hold off on moving forward with that person.

### **4. Avoid the church curmudgeon.**

Unfortunately, most churches have a committee curmudgeon - the person who always seems to find their way onto a committee and has a negative opinion about everything. They tend to be a complainer and like to pick fights over little changes. This is such a common tendency on church committees that there’s even a parody Twitter account devoted to it. If you’ve been on a church committee at some point, you likely understand what we’re talking about.

Many churches make the mistake of putting this person on the committee thinking, “If we give them a voice in the decision, they won’t complain about it after the person they chose is here.”

While this may seem logical at first, it’s a quick way to torpedo your pastor search process. It’s vitally important to choose people who are agenda-free, who can set aside what they personally want in their next pastor, and think about the big picture of the whole church. One great way to include these types of people without putting them on a committee is to allow them to give their input in a congregational survey - they’ll feel like their voice is heard without being a potentially hindering active voice in the process.

### **5. Select spiritually mature believers who prayerfully discern how God is leading.**

Lastly – and most importantly – select committee members who are actively discerning who God is calling as the church’s next pastor. This aligns with the point above about agenda-free people. The pastor search process should be covered with prayer from start to finish, so select people who are prayer warriors and seek the Lord’s guidance above all else.

Assembling the search committee is the critical first step to finding the right candidate. Without the right committee, it likely won’t be possible to find the best candidate who can help the church move forward into new seasons of growth through effective leadership. So make sure that your focus is not just on who is making the decision about which candidates to move forward with, but also the One who is orchestrating the process behind the scenes - God will move in your church through the hiring process and your Pastor Search Committee is on the frontlines!