

Port Community Church

Of Port Republic, NJ



**Our Prayer Journey toward
Calling the Next Pastor**

Our Prayer Journey toward Calling the Next Pastor



By: James Schroeder

The Vital Role of Prayer in Our Search for a New Pastor

In the life of any faith community, few transitions carry as much weight as the search for a new pastor. Port Community Church is in a unique place with a history that few churches in the United States can match. The process of finding a leader for this group is beyond the capabilities of any one person or any leadership group.

This process is not merely an administrative task or a personnel decision; it is a sacred journey that shapes the spiritual trajectory of the congregation for years to come. Amidst resumes, interviews, and committee deliberations, one element stands paramount: PRAYER. Prayer is the lifeblood of this endeavor, serving as the church's direct line to divine wisdom and intervention. Without it, the search risks becoming a human-centric exercise driven by preferences, politics, or pragmatism. With it, the process transforms into a collaborative act of faith, where God's sovereignty guides every step. Ultimately, prayer ensures that the chosen leader is not just qualified but divinely appointed.

The biblical imperative for prayer in leadership selection is unmistakable, providing a timeless blueprint for churches today. Scripture repeatedly illustrates that God's people must seek His face before making pivotal decisions. Consider the appointment of elders in the early church, as described in Acts 6:1-7. When the apostles faced a crisis of administration (neglect of widows in daily distributions), they did not rush to fill vacancies with the most charismatic candidates. Instead, they gathered the congregation and urged, "Brothers and sisters,

choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom" (Acts 6:3, NIV). This discernment was rooted in communal prayer, leading to the selection of Stephen and others who propelled the church's mission forward. Similarly, in 1 Timothy 2:1-8, Paul exhorts believers to pray for all people, including those in authority, so that the church may live "peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness." Extending this to pastoral leadership, prayer aligns the search with God's redemptive purposes, filtering candidates through the lens of spiritual maturity rather than superficial metrics.

The Old Testament offers even more vivid examples of prayer's role in divine appointments. When Israel sought a king after the era of the judges, the prophet Samuel did not rely on polls or pedigrees. In 1 Samuel 16, God instructed him to anoint David, the shepherd boy, over his more imposing brothers. "The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7, NIV). Samuel's journey to Bethlehem was bathed in prayer, shielding him from Saul's jealousy and ensuring obedience to God's counterintuitive choice. This narrative underscores a critical truth: Human judgment is fallible, prone to favoring eloquence or experience, while prayer invites the Holy Spirit to reveal hidden character and calling. In the New Testament, Jesus Himself modeled this in selecting the Twelve apostles. Luke 6:12-13 recounts how He spent the night in prayer before choosing from among His disciples those He would appoint as apostles. This clearly demonstrates that even the Son of God sought the Father's will in leadership formation. For contemporary churches, these passages are not relics but mandates. A pastoral search committee that begins each meeting with prayer, intercedes for candidates by name, and fasts collectively is emulating the early church's dependence on God, fostering a process where the pastorate becomes a vessel for divine glory rather than institutional survival.

Beyond scriptural commands, history abounds with testimonies of prayer's transformative power in pastoral transitions. The Great Awakening of the 18th century, for instance, was ignited partly through fervent prayer during leadership voids. When Jonathan Edwards was dismissed from his Northampton pulpit in 1750, his congregation faced a spiritual crisis. Yet, figures like George Whitefield and the Tennent brothers rallied in prayer, not for a quick replacement, but for revival. This intercession birthed a season of awakening that influenced American Christianity profoundly, proving that prayer in vacancy can yield unexpected fruit.

A 2019 study by the Barna Group on church leadership transitions found that congregations prioritizing prayer reported 40% higher satisfaction with new pastors and sustained growth rates. Prayer, it seems, acts as a historical catalyst, turning potential crises into opportunities for renewal.

Practically speaking, prayer infuses the pastoral search with indispensable benefits that no strategic planning session can replicate. First and foremost, it cultivates discernment—a supernatural clarity amid the fog of options and opinions. In an era of polished LinkedIn profiles and viral sermons, distinguishing true calling from performative talent is challenging. Prayer sharpens intuition, as Proverbs 3:5-6 promises: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight." Committees that pray over candidate videos or references often report "gut checks" that later prove prophetic, avoiding mismatches born of haste. Second, prayer fosters unity, a rare commodity in

divided churches. This is not a divided church but without prayer over this decision it most certainly will be. I make my living trying to keep people out of court and conflict. and I can tell you that the greatest tool I have is to pray over these cases. Why would prayer not also be the most important part of calling a pastor?

Prayer can lead us to address differences and concerns in a healthy manner, as Ephesians 4:3 urges, prayer binds believers "with the bond of peace," transforming debates into dialogues. Imagine a committee pausing mid-discussion to pray for wisdom; resentment dissolves, replaced by shared submission to God's will.

Third, prayer invites God's active involvement, giving us spiritual eyes to see what we cannot see with questionnaires and checklists. God reveals Himself through prayer and will reveal what we cannot see about ourselves and about those who seek to lead us, their character and their motives....and ours as well!

Moreover, prayer addresses the emotional and spiritual toll of the search on all involved. Pastors' spouses and families, often overlooked, bear hidden burdens; intercession for their peace honors their partnership. The congregation, prone to anxiety or gossip, finds stability in corporate prayer meetings, where vulnerability breeds resilience. I know of a church in rural Ohio, during a two-year vacancy in the early 2000s, hosted weekly prayer walks that not only filled the pulpit but revitalized lay leadership, turning passive members into active ministers. These outcomes highlight prayer's holistic impact: it doesn't just select a pastor; it disciples the entire body.

Yet, the converse warns of prayer's irreplaceable necessity. Neglecting it invites peril. Without prayer, searches devolve into popularity contests, yielding leaders who dazzle but disappoint, who are charismatic yet unanchored, leading to burnout or ethical lapses. Think of all of the high-profile pastoral failures in megachurches and even in local churches through the years, often traced to rushed, prayerless processes prioritizing metrics over the Spirit. Division festers unchecked as human agendas clash without divine arbitration. And worst of all, without prayer, the church misses God's best, settling for good enough when extraordinary awaits. As Jesus lamented in Matthew 7:7-8, those who do not ask do not receive. A prayerless search is a self-reliant one, echoing Babel's folly rather than Pentecost's power.

In conclusion, prayer is not an optional step in a church's search for a new pastor; it is the sacred scaffolding that upholds the entire edifice. From biblical precedents that command it, to historical revivals that celebrate it, to practical graces that sustain it, prayer ensures the pastoral search process reflects heaven's priorities. It guards against folly, unites the fractured, and unveils the divine. Churches embarking on this journey must commit to it unreservedly: daily devotions, fasting seasons, all-night vigils if needed. Let us heed the words of Isaiah 55:8-9, "God's thoughts are higher than ours," and make prayer the compass. In doing so, the pastor called will not merely lead a congregation but shepherd a movement, pointing all toward the Chief Shepherd. May our search reach to the place where God's chosen is answering the call, "Whom shall I send?" with a "Here am I, send me Lord!" [Isaiah 6:8] And as we wait on our God in prayer, let the faith of our church family flourish!

THIRTY DAY PRAYER GUIDE IN SEEKING A PASTOR

Day 1: Pray that the whole church body will begin to seek God first in prayer before they seek a pastor.

Proverbs 3: 5-6 *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”*

Day 2: Pray for patience. God’s timing and His plan is what is desired.

Philippians 4: 6-7 (NLT) *“Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank Him for all He has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.”*

Day 3: Pray for the church body to accept that God is bringing a change of pastoral leadership and that God will provide the right person.

Jeremiah 29:11 *“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future.”*

Day 4: Pray for God’s armor of spiritual protection upon the whole church during this process.

Ephesians 6:10-18 *“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore, put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all of this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.”*

Day 5: Pray for the pastor and his family as they are leaving the church. They, too, are learning to trust God for what is new for them.

Hebrews 13:7a (NLT) *“Remember your leaders who taught you the word of God.”*

Day 6: Pray for the influence of the church in the community during this process of seeking a new pastor.

Matthew 5:16 *“In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”*

Day 7: Pray for the church staff, church board and leadership team during this time of seeking a pastor as this puts more responsibility on them.

Galatians 6:2 *“Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”*

Day 8: Pray that a renewed attitude of Christ’s humility and servanthood permeates the church family in this time of seeking a shepherd for the church.

Matthew 11:29 *“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”*

Day 9: Pray that God will give to the church body a clear understanding of the right questions to ask during the interview process.

Colossians 1:9 *“For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with knowledge of His will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives.”*

Day 10: Pray that God will be glorified in this pastoral search process.

Revelations 7:12 *“Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!”*

Day 11: Pray for your next Pastor to be a person who exhibits Christ-like character both publicly and privately.

Philippians 2:3-4 *“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”*

Day 12: Pray that love for one another grows during this time of seeking God.

John 15:16-17 *“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit - fruit that will last - and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: Love one another.”*

Day 13: Ask God to give members of the search committee wisdom, understanding and insight in the interview process.

Daniel 2:21 *“He changes times and seasons; He deposes kings and raises up others. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning.”*

Day 14: Pray for unity as the search committee and church body complete the vote and invite the pastor to come.

I Corinthians 1:10 *“I appeal to you brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.”*

Day 15: Pray for those who don’t know Jesus Christ to open their hearts and seek to be saved.

Luke 19:10 *“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”*

Day 16: Pray that the children and youth of the church do not become discouraged during the process of their pastor leaving and then learning to trust a new pastor.

Mark 10:14-18 (NLT) *Jesus said, “Let the children come to me... For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children.” Then He took the children in His arms and placed His hands on their heads and blessed them.*

Day 17: Pray that when the time comes to extend an invitation to the next pastor, that God will make clear to him His plan for his future.

Jeremiah 29:13 *“You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart.”*

Day 18: Pray for the future pastor to be a faithful shepherd of the church, and pray for members of the church to willingly and joyfully place themselves under his servant leadership.

I Thessalonians 5:12-14 *“Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone.”*

Day 19: Pray we learn to prioritize biblical preaching over personality, programs or any other ideas. II

Timothy 4:2 *“Preach the word; be prepared in season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction.*

Day 20: Pray for the interim pastor or speakers that fill the pulpit during the pastoral search time.

Day 21: Pray for your church to reflect the elements of a healthy church: worship, evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, and helping those in need—all done under the umbrella of prayer—while seeking a pastor.

John 15:16 *“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last – and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.”*

Day 22: Ask God to protect the church from worry, discouragement and losing patience if the process takes longer than expected.

I Peter 5:6-7 *“Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.”*

Day 23: Pray that the new pastor and the church leadership form a bond of love, trust and respect as they develop a working relationship.

Hebrews 13:17 *“Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.”*

Day 24: Ask God to bring a renewed spirit of worship and praise during this time of seeking a pastor.

Psalms 104:4 *“He makes winds His messengers, flames of fire His servants .”*

Day 25: Pray that a spirit of prayer would permeate the church during this process of seeking a pastor.

I Thessalonians 5:16-18 *“Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”*

Day 26: Pray for young Christians and those who have recently started attending the church not to be discouraged during the search process.

Day 27: Pray for the new pastor and church leaders as they ask God for direction and leadership for the next steps in the future of the church.

Matthew 28:19-20 *“Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

Day 28: Pray that the finances of the church stay strong and increase during the time of seeking a new pastor.

Malachi 3:10 *“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. “Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.”*

Day 29: Pray that one of the purposes of the church [“equipping the saints for the work of ministry”] not not be overlooked during this time of pastoral transition.

Ephesians 4:11-12 *“So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip His people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.”*

Day 30: Thank the Lord that He is the head of the church and we can look to Him for direction and our future.

Colossians 1:18 *“And He is the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything He might have the supremacy.”*

Prepared by James Schroeder for Port Community Church



Conclusion: Continuing the Journey in Prayer

As we conclude this 30-day season of intentional prayer, we acknowledge with grateful hearts that God has heard every petition, seen every moment of unity, and guided every step taken in faith. Our prayers have not simply been words spoken into the air but a fragrant offering before the Lord who leads His people with wisdom, compassion, and perfect timing.

Though the daily guide ends here, our commitment to prayer must continue. The Lord who has walked with us through transition will faithfully shepherd us into the future He has prepared. As we await the pastor He has already chosen, let us remain steadfast in hope, humble in spirit, and united in purpose. Let us encourage one another, uphold our leaders, and keep our eyes on Jesus Christ, the Chief Shepherd and Head of the Church.

God is at work among us. We trust His heart. We follow His lead. And with confidence we declare: The best days of His church are still ahead.

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” [Ephesians 3:20-21]