

Guidelines for Pastoral Transitions

1. Develop a general strategy that is agreeable to all.

- A. This includes coming to a unified decision.
 1. Following the constitutional (legal) guidelines
 2. Eldership agreement
 3. Congregational support
- B. This includes developing a timeline for the transition. This timeline should include:
 1. Determining the length of the transition period (recommend 4-6 months).
 2. Setting a date for the official baton pass.
 3. Making announcement to the congregation with a document answering common questions (See questions).
 4. Celebrating of the out-going pastor.
 5. Official baton passing serviced
- C. This includes determining the financial issues related to the transition.
 1. Retirement package or agreement for the outgoing pastor.
 2. Wages and salary for the incoming pastor.
 3. Budget for the transition ceremonies.

Generosity is the rule of the day here. These decisions will be remembered for a long time afterward.

- D. This includes a list of role responsibilities during the transition period.

2. Guidelines for the Outgoing Pastor

Your goal is to leave well and make it as easy as possible for your successor to succeed.

- A. Prepare the way for the incoming pastor.

- General good order in house
- Financial records in good order
- Problems areas addressed

Make sure that the church is in good health before transition.

- B. Preempt as many changes as possible in harmony with the incoming pastor.

Be willing to take the heat if early changes are wanted by incoming leader including:

- Leadership changes
- Staffing changes
- Other changes that congregational members may get defensive over the past (i.e. name changes, etc.)

C. Prepare the incoming pastor with a complete review of history and ministry philosophy.

This includes:

- Personal History
- Key Decisions
- Staff Members

Make sure that the new pastor has a complete history and download of how and why past decisions have been made and how to handle people in staff and volunteer positions.

D. Publically honor the incoming pastor and show your support even when changes are made.

E. Encourage the incoming pastor regularly with notes of praise and blessing.

F. Be willing to step in the background after the transition.

- Consider resigning as an official elder.
- Take some time off and disappear for a period of time (3-6 months).
- Be careful about listening to complaints of former sheep. Send them back to the new senior pastor.
- Be cautious about letting people force you back into the leadership role (weddings, funerals, etc.). Push them toward the new pastor. Understand that the incoming pastor will naturally feel threatened.

Think of John the Baptist, “He must increase, I must decrease.”

3. Guidelines for the Incoming Pastor

A. Honor your predecessor and the past history of the church.

1. This means being sensitive to his or her “raw feelings during this time.”
2. This means being careful about words said about past decisions or current programs.
3. This means highlighting the successes of the past.

4. This means speaking highly of him or her with a spirit of thankfulness.
5. This means giving him or her access to the pulpit from time to time.
6. This means giving him or her honor when referencing the past and the works of the past.

Highlight the heritage and celebrate the past.

- B. Honor the core values that will never change.
- C. Spent time with key leaders and get a download, listening first to them and their history in their area of responsibility.
- D. Don't try to change too much too soon, focus on building relationship with the people and especially the team and edifying the church with inspirational, uplifting messages.
- E. When changes are required move from simple changes to the more demanding and give people time.

If big changes will be made in the first year it would be good to agree to do them together.

4. Questions to Answer for Congregation

1. Why is _____ transitioning?
2. What will _____'s role be?
3. How often is _____ going to preach?
4. What will (wife's) role be?
5. How long has this process taken?
6. When does this transition officially happen?
8. How/why was _____ identified as the next senior leader?
9. How do the elder's feel about this transition?
10. Will (church name) change?