

The pastor's gone...now what?

Your pastor has just announced his resignation.

Feelings in the congregation run the gamut of emotions. Some saw it coming. Some are surprised. Some feel grief. Others feel jubilation. If the pastor has left under duress, some may blame others for his exodus.

Regardless of the emotions, life goes on—the church must face the future. There are a couple of things that need to happen—and the sooner the better.

First, the church should consider the question of who will step up to lead the congregation.

Nature abhors a vacuum. The exodus of the pastor may result in a scramble among those in the church who want to “take over the reins.” If the pastor has left in response to growing conflict, the problem is exacerbated. Which “side” will fill the vacuum? The potential for loss is great. It is to be hoped that there are mature lay leaders in the congregation who will recognize the critical need for a balanced decision leading to interim leadership.

Second, the church should elect a Pastor Search Committee or Team.

Care should be taken that the steps followed in this process are in compliance with the church's Constitution and By-laws. There is a tremendous amount of preparation that goes into getting the Search Committee/ Team ready to do its work.

During a time of transition, many churches tend to move too quickly. Churches passing from the leadership of one pastor to another may be well served by transitional pastors who help the passage be as positive and constructive as possible, gaining momentum and productivity in the process of changes.

Who Will Preach for Us?

The period in which the congregation is without its pastor is called the "interim period" or "transitional period." This refers to "the time between the former pastor leaves and the new one comes." Providing someone to preach in each worship service during the interim is referred to as "filling" or "supplying the pulpit."

During the absence of a pastor, everyone wonders who might be preaching in his place. Most churches "fill the pulpit" in one of three ways:

- **"Pulpit supply"**—Some churches ask a minister to preach on a variety of different occasions. This is often referred to as "supplying the pulpit" and the one who preaches is said to be the "pulpit supply." Ministers who pulpit supply do just that—they preach during worship services. They are generally not expected to perform other pastoral functions (visiting the sick, presiding at meetings, etc.)
- **"Temporary/interim pastor"** Some churches ask a minister to serve as temporary pastor. This does not mean he will become the new pastor. It merely means he will be the primary person preaching in all services of the congregation and serving in ways common to a pastor (sometimes making hospital visits, counseling needs, etc.). This is often referred to as an "interim pastorate," and the one who serves is said to be the "interim pastor." He is not a candidate to become the next pastor, and his work is completed when the congregation secures its new pastor.
- **"Transitional pastor"** The Transitional Pastor is not just an "interim preacher." A Transitional Pastor is a temporary shepherd who is trained to lead a church through specific steps toward a healthy beginning for the arrival of the new pastor. Transitional Pastors come from a variety of ministerial backgrounds, but they all have these things in common:
 - He is a seasoned minister who has a wealth of experience, training, and skills with which he can move a church forward during the interim period.
 - He provides pastoral leadership to the church during the interim period.
 - He performs ministerial duties (leading worship, counseling, visiting the sick, conducting funerals, weddings, etc.) as agreed upon in consultation with the church.
 - He helps the church clarify her purpose and vision.

- He provides training and guidance to the church-elected Transition Team.
- He works with the Transition Team in helping the church deal with matters that affect future health and progress.
- He provides training and guidance to the Pastor Search Committee/Team.
- He readies the congregation to accept a new pastor.
- He is not a candidate to become the next pastor.

The church is well advised to call an interim pastor or a transitional pastor to help the church move through the transition from pastor to pastor. During a time when the members are anxious about the future of the church, the interim or transitional pastor strives to be a “*non-anxious*” presence for the congregation. **It should be understood that when a person agrees to serve as interim pastor, he also agrees not to allow himself to be considered as a candidate for the position of pastor.**

The Missouri Baptist Convention offers training for men who wish to serve as Transitional Pastors. Contact Dr. Gary Mathes, Pastoral Ministries Specialist at 800-736-6227 ext. 338, (gmathes@mobaptist.org) for a current list of those who have completed this training.

Next steps...

First, when the pastor announces his resignation, it would be helpful to invite the Director of Missions to come and speak to the church. He can help the church adjust to being without a pastor by clarifying what to expect, spiritually and emotionally, in the days ahead.

Second, review the church's by-laws and constitution, to determine guidelines such as:

- Who is responsible to invite the pulpit supply and call an interim/transitional pastor?
- How is the church instructed by the constitution to select the Pastor Search Committee/Team and Transition Team?
- Who serves on the committees/teams?
- What size should the committees/teams be?

Third, gather a list of prospective interim/transitional pastors. The Director of Missions or Missouri Baptist Convention Pastoral Ministries Specialist may be helpful in securing names of ministers available to serve as an interim/transitional pastor.

Fourth, interview the prospective interim/transitional pastor to determine his qualifications for the position (according to the church's by-laws and constitution.)

Fifth, define expectations and compensation. The team responsible for recommending the interim/transitional pastor, in consultation with the Budget/Finance Committee and the prospective interim/transitional pastor, will want to negotiate a Covenant of Agreement with the interim/transitional pastor. The covenant should include compensation details, expenses, expected duties, and any other conditions of his employment.

Last, the team will bring to the church a recommendation (including the signed covenant) for calling the interim/transitional pastor.

A WORD TO THE WISE...

- While many churches may have a person in the congregation who is able to serve as interim pastor, those responsible for calling an interim pastor need to review the pros and cons of calling a church member to serve in this role.
- It is strongly suggested that the Pastor/Staff Search Committee (hereafter referred to as the search committee) not consider the interim pastor as a candidate for pastor. In the event the search committee decides to consider the interim pastor as a candidate, he should resign immediately. His resume would be considered first, but will be evaluated based on the profile developed by the search committee.

What do we want him to do?

Sample Job Description Worksheet for Interim/Transitional Pastor

Principle Function: The Interim or Transitional Pastor is responsible to the Chairman of Deacons and the Chairman of the Personnel Committee and shall provide pastoral and administrative leadership for the church and shall use his skills in proclamation and pastoral care to minister to the needs of persons in the church and community as negotiated in a covenant agreement.

Responsibilities to be Negotiated between the Interim or Transitional Pastor and the Church:

- _____ 1. Prepare for and preach at worship services on Sunday morning and Sunday evening — (3 units) {Note: 1 unit = 4 hours}.
- _____ 2. Prepare for and lead mid-week prayer/Bible study service — (1 unit).
- _____ 3. Administer office responsibilities, including the preparation of bulletins, newsletters, financial reports, etc.) — ($\frac{3}{4}$ units).
- _____ 4. Supervise the church staff and other church employees — (2 units).
- _____ 5. Minister to the sick in the hospitals and nursing homes — (1 unit).
- _____ 6. Participate in church outreach and visit prospective members — (1 unit).
- _____ 7. Visit the homebound — (1 unit).
- _____ 8. Counsel with members in crisis — (1 unit).
- _____ 9. Meet with the Deacons in their regular meetings — ($\frac{1}{2}$ unit).
- _____ 10. Meet with other church committees (e.g., church council, trustees, personnel committee, budget/finance committee, and search committee) — ($\frac{1}{2}$ unit).
- _____ 11. Conduct training for deacons and committees — (1 unit).
- _____ 12. Prepare for and conduct funerals and weddings — (1 unit).
- _____ 13. Prepare for and serve as moderator for church business meetings — ($\frac{1}{4}$ unit).
- _____ 14. Attend other church functions (e.g. class socials, anniversaries, prayer breakfasts, denominational meetings, etc.) — (1 unit).

What about compensation?

The average layperson in the church works 40 hours a week, or 10 4-hour quadrants of time.

The average pastor works 52-56 hours a week representing 13-14 quadrants of time.

The search committee should ask themselves what responsibilities they want the interim/transitional pastor to fulfill. Make a list and place an "X" in the appropriate quadrant when the interim/transitional pastor would complete that task. For example: We want our interim/transitional pastor to preach Sunday AM and PM and Wednesday PM. Place an "X" in those blocks.

The interim/transitional pastor will need to prepare his messages; allow 8 hours (2 4-hour quadrants) preparation time during the week for this work.

What other responsibilities will the interim/transitional pastor have: hospital visits, deacon and church committee meetings, etc. Place an "X" on these quadrants.

Now count the number of quadrants. Divide the number of quadrants you expect the interim/transitional pastor to work by the number of quadrants you would expect a full time pastor to work (in the above example 6/14, or 43%) to determine the percentage of full time compensation (including salary and housing) to be paid to the interim/transitional pastor. (Continuing with the above example, if the proposed annual full-time compensation is \$35,000, the interim/transitional pastor would be paid \$15,050.)

With this information in place, the church can begin to negotiate expectations and develop a covenant for the interim/transitional pastor.

In addition, the interim/transitional pastor should be reimbursed for mileage (56cents per mile in 2014 – see IRS Publication 463, Travel, Entertainment, Gift, and Car Expenses) and other expenses incurred as indicated by receipts.

Clarify expectations.

SAMPLE COVENANT WITH TRANSITIONAL PASTOR

Covenant between Transitional Pastor _____ and
_____ Baptist Church

I. TRANSITIONAL MINISTRY OBJECTIVES:

- Move through grief and frustration.
- Resolve unfinished business that may be crippling the church.
- Listen to hurts and ideas.
- Reinforce the ministry of volunteer leadership.
- Raise the trust level.
- Renewed appreciation for fellowship and reconciliation.
- Fresh understanding of the church's mission.
- Deal with special needs of the church.
- Prepare congregation for a positive experience with next pastor.

II. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE TRANSITIONAL PASTOR

- Be directly accountable to the Church through the Deacon Body or its designate group.
- Under no circumstances be a candidate to become the next pastor.
 - Consult with the Pastor Search Committee in the process of organizing/training the committee for its work, but without interference.
- Serve until the church has called a new pastor or until the congregation releases him of his service.
- Provide regular pastoral and administrative leadership as agreed upon.
- Maintain regular office hours and work schedule as agreed upon by Transitional Pastor and Congregation.

III. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CONGREGATION

- Pray for and support the church throughout the interim process.
- Pray for and support the Transitional Pastor.
 - Work together to resolve any unfinished business and to establish healthy goals for ministries and missions.

IV. SALARY AND BENEFITS

The congregation agrees to provide the following salary and benefits:

1. Salary
2. Housing
3. Benefits _____ a.
Medical insurance _____ b.

- Disability insurance _____ c. Life insurance _____ d. Retirement
- 4. Reimbursable expenses
- 5. Vacation and/or leave time

V. TERMINATION OF THE COVENANT-AGREEMENT

Either the Transitional Pastor or the Church may terminate this Covenant-Agreement with thirty (30) days written notice.

The Covenant-Agreement is based on mutual trust and may be altered by mutual consent and agreement of both parties.

This Covenant-Agreement becomes effective _____
(DATE)

(signed) Deacon Chairperson

(signed) Transitional Pastor

SAMPLE COVENANT OF AGREEMENT WITH INTERIM PASTOR

Covenant between _____, Interim Pastor and the Baptist Church to serve as Interim Pastor.

He is to begin to serve this congregation on _____, 20__

Limitations: The Interim Pastor will not be considered as a candidate for the position of pastor. In the event that he or others consider the Interim Pastor a candidate, this covenant shall be considered null and void and the position of Interim Pastor shall be considered vacant. Further, this agreement shall be considered completed when the call has been extended to and accepted by the new pastor.

Goals: During the interim period between pastors, our church recognizes the need for pastoral leadership to maintain the congregation's health and ministry. *(Goals for the interim period are to be determined in consultation with church leadership and interim pastor.)* List goals to be achieved here:

Responsibilities of Interim Pastor: *(To be determined in consultation with church leadership and interim pastor)* List below:

Compensation

For services rendered by the interim pastor under this agreement, the Baptist Church will pay:

- Salary \$
- Housing allowance \$
- GuideStone..... \$

Monthly mileage expense (per mile) \$
Other expenses \$
Total \$

Termination of Covenant

The interim pastor agrees to do all in his power to make the transition of the new pastor to the field as effortless as possible. In the event unforeseen circumstances occur, either party will have the right to cancel this covenant with a _____-week notice.

Interim Pastor

_____Date

Chairman of the Committee: _____Date

Notes: