

SENIOR PASTOR

TRANSITION CHECKLIST



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Passing the baton is critical to winning relay races. Success or failure depends not only on how fast the runners run, but how well they transfer the baton. Muddling the transfer or dropping the baton will lose time. It can result in losing the race. We want to help you transfer the baton successfully!

*"I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow."
(1 Corinthians 3:6)*

1. EVERY CHURCH WILL MAKE THIS TRANSITION AT SOME POINT!

Some might like the idea of staying a long time, thinking, "I'll be here 'til I die."

Others might be thinking, "I cannot wait till God moves me on." In any event, remember Tim Keller's paper *Leadership and Church Size Dynamics*: The current church size may mean you no longer have the leadership and spiritual gifts to take it to the next level.

In either case, we should prepare for the inevitable change of pastors, whether it is in 1, 5, 10, 25, or 50 years.

2. A POOR TRANSITION CAN GREATLY HINDER OR EVEN DESTROY THE CHURCH!

Unfortunately, stories abound of churches that have faltered and even died during the transition from one pastor to the next pastor. The importance of having a God-initiated plan in place cannot be overstated.

3. A GOOD TRANSITION TO THE RIGHT LEADER CAN RESULT IN SIGNIFICANT MINISTRY GROWTH!

Many transitions result in a flourishing ministry. Some pastors have the giftedness to start, restart, or revive a church and lead it to a certain level. Look for a leader who knows how to stimulate growth and continue growth. It is never too late for a new beginning.

4. A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION DEPENDS ON PRAYER AND THE WORK OF GOD!

The entire process must be bathed in prayer and dependence on God. While looking to Him for direction you must also do your due diligence to seek the right man, at the right time, in the right place. You should consider examining all of the following:

- Testimony of salvation and call to the ministry.
- Testimony from the wife of her salvation and of her support for her husband's ministry and willingness to go wherever the Lord leads. They are a team.
- A resume that shows ministry experience, education, and other pertinent information.
- A copy of a recently preached message.
- Their understanding of the *BMA Doctrinal statement*.
- A clear, written philosophy of ministry and where they would desire to lead any New Testament church. This should include the ability to answer the following:

- What are your core values?
- How do you view the Great Commission and God's mission?
- How will you lead a church in developing a vision for it to carry out God's mission for them?
- How do you plan to engage a community with the gospel?
- What is your plan for discipleship and leadership development?
- What should leadership look like, and how would you build a team?
- How would you articulate historical biblical doctrine?

5. FORM A PRAYER TEAM IMMEDIATELY! - BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER

- Lead in prayer and fasting!
- Schedule and organize congregational prayer events!
- Consider a season of prayer and utilizing *21 Days of Prayer* booklets (<https://www.yourjourneyresources.com/category-s/90.htm>).
- Be willing to repent of sin.
- Pray for unity and a willingness to do whatever God requires for His church to thrive and flourish.
- Make sure that all conflict is dealt with and not swept under the carpet.
- Bury the past and be ready to embrace the future.
- It is never too late for a new beginning.

6. DETERMINE WHAT THE LEADERSHIP TEAM WILL LOOK LIKE DURING THE TRANSITION.

- Strive to build a team concept, because there is wisdom in the multitude of counsel.
- Appoint an interim leader/pastor if possible.
 - Consider retired pastors.
- Make a schedule for pulpit supply.
 - Consider those inside the church who may have the gift of teaching.
 - Ask other churches if they have someone who could help for a season.
 - Contact BMA departments and see if they can help.

7. FORM A SEARCH COMMITTEE.

- Do not be in too much of a hurry, but slow down and wait on the Lord.
 - Include deacons & mature members of the congregation.
 - Seek outside advice/counsel (local/state/national association leaders).
- Proceed with church-wide initiatives (VBS, mission trips, small groups, evangelistic outreach).
- Form a search committee (3-6 months into it)
 - Become Familiarize and answer the Committee Questionnaire (See Appendix A).
 - Designate someone to formulate and ask theological questions (seek outside help).

- Place an ad in State papers (e.g. Baptist Trumpet, Baptist Progress, Facebook pages) and counsel of other pastors.
- Familiarize yourself with, prepare and send out “Questionnaire for Prospective Candidate” (See Appendix B).
- Remember, your church will never make a more important decision than who will become their spiritual leader.

8. DEVELOP A GAME PLAN FOR THE PROCESS OF INTERVIEWING AND SELECTING POTENTIAL CANDIDATES.

- Review applications and interview process
- Invite potential candidates, if possible, to come and meet with your leadership and selection team in an informal setting. They can come back and preach another time.
 - Enjoy dinner together.
 - A smaller group is better with up to 20-25.
 - Allow the couple to share their hearts.
 - Allow people to ask questions.
 - Go over philosophy.
- Select 2-3 men to meet with the candidate and go over the doctrinal statement.
 - Make sure there are no hidden agendas on either side.
 - Openly discuss controversial positions.
 - This is not to decide who is right and who is wrong but rather to determine if it is a fit or not!

- The selection team should make a recommendation to the church to have the candidate come preach and visit with the church. If your church constitution requires, you should then have the congregation extend an invitation for them to come.
- If the selection team and church agrees, then schedule a time for them to come back and he can preach to the entire congregation.
 - Schedule a time for the congregation to have the opportunity to ask questions.
 - There might be some awkward moments, but it is better to know upfront and not have surprises later on.
- Announce a later date (1-2 weeks away) to vote on whether to extend a call or not.
 - Read the recommendation from the search/transition team, elders, and/or deacons per your church policy.
 - Make sure you follow your church constitution on the percentage required to extend a call.

9. KEEP YOUR TEAM TOGETHER TO HELP WITH THE TRANSITION AND TO HELP YOUR NEW PASTOR AND FAMILY TO ADJUST.

- Will you pay moving expenses?
- Is everyone clear on the pay package?
- When will they begin?
- Is there a job description in place?
- Celebrate and honor the transition team.

10. SLOW DOWN AND BE CAREFUL IN THIS CRITICAL DECISION ABOUT THE FUTURE OF YOUR CHURCH.

- Seek strong consensus before moving forward.
- Seek God's peace and confirmation.
- Do not allow well-meaning people to hi-jack or stall the process.

Appendix A

SAMPLE QUESTIONS A SEARCH COMMITTEE SHOULD BE READY TO ANSWER

1. How would you describe your church?
2. Why was the church started?
3. What is this church's purpose? What is the church's unique role in this community?
4. How would you describe the atmosphere of the following:
 - worship services?
 - small group Bible studies (Sunday school, etc.)?
 - deacon meetings?
 - business meetings?
5. What style of worship does the church prefer? (traditional, contemporary, etc.)?
6. What is the church's position regarding the following:
 - doctrinal/moral issues such as reliability of Scripture.
 - the BMA Doctrinal Statement?
 - support of local, state, and national departments?
 - tithing?
7. What is the church's concept regarding growth? Does the church have a growth plan? What is the single biggest obstacle to growth in the church?
8. When did your last new members join?
9. What strong ministry does the church have? What new ministry initiatives have the church launched in the last five years?
10. Is there any conflict in the church now?

11. How are decisions made in the church?
12. How active are the deacons (in visitation, etc.), and how do they perceive their role (support/ministry/authority/etc.)?
13. What are the things that unite this church?
14. Where does the church want to go? Does the church have a viable mission statement?
15. What administrative responsibilities will the new staff person have? What administrative authority will the new staff person have?
16. What will be the new staff person's responsibilities and authority regarding worship services?
17. What are you looking for in a (position)? Why?
18. What were the strengths and weaknesses of your previous (position)? Why did the last (position) leave?
19. What are your expectations of the new staff person's family?
20. To whom will the new staff person be accountable? How will the new staff person's ministry be evaluated?

Appendix B - SAMPLE QUESTIONS SEARCH COMMITTEE MIGHT ASK PROSPECT

Sample Script and Questions to Ask Prospect During Initial Phone Contact

(If you are calling a large number of prospects, you might prefer not to invite questions from the prospect at this time. You could offer that option during later face-to-face contact.)

My name is _____ and I am a member of the (position) search committee of (church, city). Thank you for allowing us to begin our consideration of you for the (position) of our church. I know you are busy, and I don't want to take too much of your time. I just have a few questions to ask you so that we can get to know you a little better as we seek to recognize where the Lord is leading us in finding the person for this position. I also want to give you a chance to ask me some questions about our church. I may not have all the answers at this moment, but I can certainly find out for you.

1. First of all, when did you become a Christian, and under what circumstances?

2. What event, circumstance, person, or revelation has God used most strongly to lead you to believe he has called you and prepared you for this type of ministry?
3. What do you see as the two or three main purposes of this particular ministry position?
4. How do you measure success in the ministry? How do you know when you have done a good job?
5. Tell me about your education, training, and experience that qualify you for this position.
6. Tell me something about your family. Do they support your calling and vocation?
7. And now, do you have some questions for me?

Thank you so much for your time. Our committee will be praying for you and we ask that you pray for us also as both you and we seek the Lord's will.

Evaluation: Rate this person 1-4, (4 being the strongest)

Pleasant voice_____

Pleasant personality_____

Expresses himself/herself clearly_____

Sincere personal testimony _____

A strong sense of calling_____

Clear purpose for ministry_____

Clear ministry goals_____

Qualified for this ministry_____

Good family relationships/support_____

Sample Questions to Ask Prospect During First Face-to-Face Meeting

1. Who are your role models/mentors for ministry and what about them do you admire most?
2. Describe a typical workweek as you prefer it to be. How much time in personal Bible study and prayer, how much time in preparation for preaching/teaching/ ministry, how much time in the office, how much time visiting prospects, the sick, shut-ins? Do you set aside specific family time each week?
3. Please share briefly your preferences or convictions regarding those issues and concerns that have arisen within Baptists and the BMA, such as:
 - What words do you use to describe the reliability of Scripture?
 - Would you be comfortable with women teaching men or women serving as deacons?
 - Do you believe God has already decided who will be saved, or do you believe each person is free to decide whether or not to respond to God's offer of salvation and be saved?
 - What role does the pastor have within church governance? What role do deacons have? What is the role of the congregation as a whole?

- What style of worship do you prefer? With what other styles are you comfortable with; for example, contemporary, traditional, western heritage, etc.? What instrumental accompaniment is acceptable to you?
4. In what area(s) of your ministry do you sense the most passion?
 5. What are the greatest challenges you have had to face so far in ministry?
 6. How much counseling of church members are you willing to do and qualified to do?
 7. How involved is your family/spouse in your ministry?
 8. What is your leadership/administrative style? Strengths? Weaknesses?
 9. Choose which is closer to your personality: (Elaborate if you wish)
 - a patient, loving, gentle person
 - a driven, passionate, high-standard-of-excellence person
 10. Which more closely describes your temperament? (Elaborate if you wish)
 - spontaneous, enthusiastic, works-well-under pressure person
 - even-tempered, advanced-planning, calm, structured person

11. Which more closely describes your leadership style? (Elaborate if you wish)
- prefer a responsible chain of command and authority with a “hands-on” overseer role
 - prefer a team approach with each team member contributing and being responsible in his or her role, expecting others to take care of their responsibilities without a great deal of personal supervision by a superior
12. What is your preferred involvement in the community?
13. What is your preferred involvement in associational/denominational life?
14. What do you do for fun and relaxation?
15. What are your requirements/needs regarding compensation from the church for salary, insurance, etc.?
16. What arrangements do you need for retirement, homeownership/ equity?

SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO ASK PROSPECT AT SECOND FACE-TO-FACE MEETING

1. What do you expect of the congregation concerning your ministry?
2. What visions and potential for church growth/ministry growth do you see for a church such as ours?
3. What is your vision for the participation of church members in witnessing, ministry, teaching, missions, and service to one another?
4. How do you balance your ministerial responsibilities for proclamation with responsibilities related to pastoral care/family care?
5. What is your philosophy of stewardship? Are you a tither?
6. How do you prefer to relate to and work with church ministry teams and the deacon body?
7. How do you relate to others on the church staff? (Ministerial and support)
8. How do you handle conflicts with church members or church staff? Have you developed a plan for handling these conflicts?

9. What do you think might be the greatest challenge in working with church staff and lay leaders of any church, not just this one? What do you expect would bring the greatest joy?
10. What do you think might be the greatest challenge in dealing with church members in general? What would you expect to bring the greatest joy?
11. What are your goals for continued training and education related to your ministry?
12. How can our church best support you should you be called to this church?
13. What do you believe would be the most important thing for your ministry to accomplish during the first year?
14. Which more closely describes the view you have of your future:
 - to become steadily more educated, experienced, and qualified for my ministry in the years to come
 - (being reasonably well-educated, experienced, and qualified already) to focus on using the talents, abilities, and wisdom I have gained and apply them to the opportunities provided by this ministry. (Elaborate if you wish)

15. Why are you a Baptist? What beliefs and traditions of the Baptist church do you consider the most important?

OTHER RESOURCES

1. The Moody Handbook of Theology -

Paul Enns.

<https://www.amazon.com/Moody-Handbook-Theology-Paul-Enns/dp/0802411983/ref=s>

2. Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Theology -

Charles Ryrie.

<https://www.amazon.com/Basic-Theology-Systematic-Understanding-Biblical/dp/0802427340/>

3. The Elephant in the Boardroom: Speaking the Unspoken Truth about Pastoral Transitions -

Russell Crabtree.

<https://www.amazon.com/Elephant-Boardroom-Transitions-Transition-Sensitivity/dp/150646341X/>

4. BMA Mission/Healthy Church Solutions Video on Senior Pastor Transition:

<https://vimeo.com/504571212>

5. Healthy Church Podcast Episode 33

<https://www.buzzsprout.com/835312/7358947-hcp-ep-33-guest-pastor-and-author-dani-el-im?play=true>