

PASTORAL TRANSITION GUIDE

A CHURCH'S JOURNEY
THROUGH THE INTERIM WILDERNESS



Pastoral Transition Guide

A Church's Journey Through the Interim Wilderness

Dr. Aaron Summers

Pastoral Transition Guide: A Church's Journey Through the Interim Wilderness

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FORWORD

Previous to my current role I pastored two churches for a total of thirty years, seventeen in Fort Worth and thirteen in McAllen. Those three decades were some of the most fulfilling times of my ministry. I grew to love those churches and I felt loved by them. My family shared that sentiment.

When I was at each of those two churches it was hard to imagine leaving. Yet the time came when it was clear to me and my family that God was calling us away to a new assignment. Saying goodbye involved mixed emotions: the celebration of things God did while we were together, the tears of separation, and the joyful anticipation of what God had in store for the future.

One of my greatest burdens in leaving a church was their time of transition. My prayer was that they would have a process that was thorough, principled in Baptist identity, bathed in prayer, reflective of the current season of the church and community, and timely (not too rushed and not too slow). I wanted them to find a better pastor than I ever could have been.

I am convinced that one of the most important, strategic and, often vulnerable, seasons of a church is their time of pastoral transition.

At best a pastoral transition time can yield spiritual growth, healthy self-discovery of the congregation, the best in lay leadership, and eventually the calling of a pastor who fits the profile of the church in such a way that they will move on to the next level of living out the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.

At worst the season of pastoral transition can result in factions, divisions, discouragement, decline, control by leaders who are self-serving, and/or the calling of an individual who does not fit the profile of the church, or worse yet, someone who is not qualified to be a pastor.

For that reason we consider it a priority to come alongside churches and assist them to have the best possible pastoral transition process. I am thankful for Dr. Aaron Summers, our coordinator of ministry to pastorless churches because he understands this, has a passion for it and is well-versed in it too.

Dr. Summers has compiled and edited resources that have been developed from decades of experience and best practices. The result is this Pastoral Transition Guide, which he has updated and made user friendly. It is relevant for various size churches and for the various circumstances which bring about a pastorless season.

This new resource will offer church search committees, church leadership teams, associational leaders and others who assist churches in transition times a very practical 12-step guide that sequentially will help the church move through the stages of pastoral departure, congregational assessment, pastoral search and new beginnings.

My prayer is that God will use this guide to encourage you and equip you so that the church can follow God's direction walking through the transition time in a healthy way and in due time finding the pastor who will lead the congregation to a future prepared by Him.

Julio S. Guarneri, Ph. D.
Texas Baptists Executive Director/CEO

Acknowledgments

Executive Leadership Support

This Pastor Search Committee guide exists because of the faithful vision and generous support of Texas Baptists leadership. I express my deepest gratitude to these executive leaders who made this resource possible:

Dr. Julio Guarneri, Executive Director of Texas Baptists, whose commitment to strengthening churches through effective pastoral transitions provided the vision and direction for this project. His leadership ensures that Texas Baptist churches have practical tools for one of their most important decisions.

Dr. Craig Christina, Associate Executive Director of Texas Baptists, whose operational leadership and dedication to serving local churches provided essential support throughout this project's development. His commitment to church health made this resource a priority.

Dr. Ward Hayes, Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer of Texas Baptists, whose careful stewardship of resources funded this project. His wise management ensures that practical tools for pastoral search committees can reach churches across our state.

Foundation Acknowledgment

This guide builds upon the excellent foundation laid by **Dr. Karl F. Fickling**, whose previous work, "A Not So Simple Search: Best Practices for Your Pastor Search Committee," has served Texas Baptist churches faithfully for many years. Dr. Fickling's insights, practical wisdom, and commitment to helping churches find God's chosen pastors provided the essential framework for this new guide. This new guide honors his legacy while updating and expanding resources for today's churches.

Content Contributors

Dr. David Bowman, Executive Director of the Tarrant Baptist Association in Fort Worth, Texas, provided guidance on choosing the proper interim structure, helping churches understand the difference between standard and intentional interim approaches.

Dr. Josh Ellis, Executive Director of the Union Baptist Association in Houston, Texas, offered insights on walking through the actual search process while balancing logic, emotion, and faith in decision making.

Dr. Ryan Jespersen, Executive Director of the Dallas Baptist Association in Dallas, Texas, addressed why theology matters in pastoral searches, including considerations of Reformed and non-Reformed perspectives, women in ministry, church governance, and other theological distinctives.

John Litzler, JD, General Counsel and Director of Public Policy for Texas Baptists, contributed guidance on constitution and bylaw review during pastoral transition periods.

Morgan Malone, Executive Director of the Denton Baptist Association in Denton, Texas, contributed valuable insights on the importance of patience throughout the search process, helping committees understand both spiritual and practical aspects of waiting on God's timing.

Jimmie Neel, Director of Missions for the Sabine Neches Baptist Area in East Texas, shared wisdom on maintaining regular communication with the church body throughout the search process, ensuring transparency and unity during times of transition.

Dr. David Smith, Executive Director of the Austin Baptist Association in Austin, Texas, shared expertise in prayer and spiritual dynamics throughout the pastoral search process, bringing essential spiritual perspective to this practical guide.

Dr. Jonathan Smith, Director of Church Health and Growth for Texas Baptists, provided expertise on developing effective church profiles and pastor profiles, essential tools for successful pastoral matches.

Dr. Randy Stone, Professor Emeritus of Christian Education at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, provided valuable guidance on managing current staff emotions and expectations while allowing appropriate staff participation in the interview process.

Dr. Roger Yancey, Executive Director of the Tryon Evergreen Baptist Association in Conroe, Texas, contributed insights on training pastor search committees, drawing from his extensive experience in associational ministry and church development.

Dr. Michael Wright, Church Replant Consultant, provided expertise on pastorless churches in crisis through his addendum guidance on church renewal and replanting.

Editorial Support

David Williams, Director of Missions at Trinity River Baptist Association in Liberty, Texas, provided careful editing and review work that helped ensure the clarity and usefulness of this guide for pastor search committees across Texas.

This guide represents a collaborative effort among Texas Baptist leaders who share a common commitment to helping churches navigate pastoral transitions with wisdom, prayer, and biblical faithfulness. It is our prayer that these resources will serve to strengthen local churches and help God call pastors to the congregations He has prepared for them.

"And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-12, CSB).

Dr. Aaron Summers

Coordinator for Pastorless Churches
Texas Baptists Center for Ministerial Health
Editor and Writer

How to Use This Manual

Whether your church is large or small, thriving or struggling, this guide offers both **spiritual encouragement** and **practical guidance** to help you move forward in faith—not just to find your next pastor, but to become the church God is calling you to be.

Read the Short Version to get a quick overview of the process. The Long Version is for the committees to work through systematically as they walk the interim journey.

Who This Manual Is For:

- Lay leaders and deacons
- Church councils and search teams
- Transitional leadership teams
- Directors of Missions and Associational Leaders

What This Manual Offers:

- A 12-step roadmap rooted in Scripture and best practices
- Guidance on choosing between Standard and Intentional Interim Ministry
- Tools to help your church assess its health, identity, and calling
- Practical instructions for forming search teams, evaluating candidates, and preparing for new leadership
- Insights into the interim pastor's role at every stage
- QR codes linking to customizable resources (surveys, rubrics, timelines)

How to Use It:

- Follow the 4 Phases and 12 steps sequentially, one phase at a time.
- Assign a leader or team to oversee each step using the included checklists and tools.
- Use the Scripture reflections at the start of each step to keep the process rooted in prayer and God's Word.
- Use the appendices and linked QR resources to access templates, worksheets, and sample documents, such as:
 - Church Profile
 - Pastor Profile
 - Evaluation Rubric
 - Sermon Evaluation

Important Note: Not every church needs the same pace or path. While many churches complete the process in 9-15 months, others may need more time. Take the steps that apply to your context and trust God's timing more than your calendar.

The following story shows how these 12 steps worked for one Texas Baptist church.

One Church's Story: From Departure to New Beginnings

A mid-sized Baptist church in a small Texas community found itself without a pastor after their minister of eight years accepted a call to another congregation. Following their pastor's announcement, the church leadership immediately contacted their BGCT area representative for guidance.

Rather than rushing to fill the pulpit, the church formed a combined transition/search team of seven members representing different age groups and ministry areas. They secured a retired pastor from a neighboring town to serve as their interim minister, with the clear understanding that he would not be a candidate for the permanent position.

The team began by studying their church's history and statistical trends, discovering that while worship attendance had remained stable over the past decade, Sunday School participation had gradually declined. Community demographic research revealed growth among young families in nearby neighborhoods that weren't being reached.

Through a series of Sunday morning conversations and a simple church-wide survey, the team identified their congregation's core values: biblical teaching, missions involvement, and intergenerational ministry. They developed a church profile that honestly acknowledged both strengths (strong missions giving, dedicated core members) and challenges (aging facilities, limited youth participation).

Based on this self-assessment, they created a pastoral profile focusing on a shepherd-teacher with a heart for both biblical faithfulness and community outreach. They posted the position through BGCT channels and received seventeen applications over the next two months.

After careful review, they conducted initial interviews with four candidates, eventually narrowing to two finalists. Following in-person interviews, they extended an invitation for a candidate visit weekend.

The congregation responded enthusiastically to the candidate during the Q&A session and Sunday worship service, voting with 94% approval to extend a call. The new pastor began his ministry two months later after completing commitments at his previous church.

The search committee transformed into a pastor support team, helping the new family integrate into the community and church. Six months after the new pastor's arrival, the church had already begun to see growth, particularly among young families, and had launched two new outreach initiatives identified during the assessment process.

From departure announcement to installation of their new pastor, the entire process took fourteen months. Though longer than initially anticipated, the congregation later recognized that the thorough assessment process and patient search had been essential to finding the right match for their church needs and future ministry.

This guide outlines the steps a church should take during pastoral transition, using the biblical metaphor of Israel's wilderness journey. While the complete process typically takes around 12 months, each church's journey is unique—some steps may require more, or less, time depending on church health and circumstances. All profiles, assessments, and guides can be found by clicking the QR code below.

If you have any questions, let's connect!



Pastoral Transition Timeline



phase
1

DEPARTURE

1. Our Pastor is Leaving
2. Getting Help

phase
2

ASSESSMENT

3. Learning About Ourselves
4. Discovering Who We Are
5. Understanding Our Purpose
6. What We Need in a Pastor

phase
3

SEARCH

7. Let the Search Begin
8. Looking Through Resumes
9. Reducing Candidates
10. Choosing One

phase
4

NEW BEGINNINGS

11. In View of the Call Weekend
12. The First Sunday

Scriptural Framing Chart: From Egypt to Canaan

Following Israel's Journey as a Model for Pastoral Transition

Phase	Step	Spiritual Theme	Biblical Parallel	Reference
Departure	1. Our Pastor Is Leaving	Grief, uncertainty, and God's presence	God tells Moses, "I have seen the misery of My people..."	Exodus 3:7-10
	2. Getting Help During the Transition	God provides guidance through trusted leaders	Moses receives Aaron's help; elders appointed	Exodus 4:14-16; 18:13-26
Assessment	3. Getting Ready to Learn About Ourselves	God invites reflection before moving forward	Israel pauses at Sinai to receive the covenant	Exodus 19:1-6; 24:3-8
	4. Discovering Who We Are as a Church	Identity formed in covenant relationship	"You will be My people... a kingdom of priests"	Exodus 19:5-6
	5. Understanding Our Purpose and Values	Called for worship, holiness, and mission	Instructions for holy living and God's presence in camp	Leviticus 19:1-2; Numbers 2
	6. Deciding What We Need in a Pastor	Leadership matters for the journey ahead	Moses selects leaders; Joshua begins to emerge	Numbers 11:16-17; 27:18-23
Search	7. Let the Search Begin	Trusting God to lead through unknown terrain	Israel follows cloud by day, fire by night	Numbers 9:15-23
	8. Looking Through Resumes	Discernment and testing are essential	Twelve spies explore the land	Numbers 13:1-25
	9. Reducing the Number of Candidates	Faithful discernment over fear-based decisions	People reject God's promise after hearing bad reports	Numbers 13:26-14:10
	10. Choosing Your Final Candidate	Affirming God's chosen leader	Joshua commissioned as Moses' successor	Deuteronomy 31:7-8
New Beginnings	11. In View of a Call Weekend	Crossing over into a new season	Israel crosses the Jordan into Canaan	Joshua 1:2
	12. The First Sunday with Your Pastor	New leadership, same faithful God	Feasting in the Promised Land	Joshua 5:10-12

The Short Version



Phase 1: Your Departure Journey (Steps 1-2)

"I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering." Exodus 3:7 (CSB)

Just as God initiated Israel's journey from the familiar bondage of Egypt into the wilderness toward the Promised Land, your church begins its own exodus from settled pastoral leadership into the challenging yet transformative wilderness of transition.

STEP 1: Our Pastor is Leaving

Initial Response *(Month 1)*

- **Process the Announcement** - Allow congregation to absorb and respond
- **Develop Transition Strategy** - Church leadership plans next steps
- **Seek Interim Preaching** - Arrange immediate pulpit coverage
- **Host Appropriate Farewell** - Honor ministry relationship and create closure
- **Contact Denominational Leaders** - Connect with DOM and BGCT Area Rep

Departure Focus: *Responding faithfully to unexpected change*

STEP 2: Getting Help During the Transition

Stability Building *(Month 2)*

- **Secure Interim Plan** - Standard vs. Intentional interim decision
- **Form Transition/Search Team** - Select representative, trained committee (2-4 meetings)
- **Develop Communication Plan** - Keep congregation informed and unified
- **Clarify Pastoral Care** - Ensure member needs continue to be met

- **Begin Prayer Emphasis** - Center process in spiritual discernment

Departure Focus: *Creating stability during uncertainty*

Your Transition Decision Points:

STEP 1: Crisis or Planned Departure?

↓

STEP 2: Standard or Intentional Interim?

↓

RESULT: Stable Foundation for Assessment Phase

Departure Integration Dashboard:

Step	Key Decisions	Critical Actions	Timeline
1	How will we respond?	Process announcement, plan farewell	Month 1
1	What interim approach?	Research standard vs. intentional options	Month 1
2	Who will guide transition?	Form and train transition/search team	Month 2
2	How will we communicate?	Develop congregation communication plan	Month 2
2	Who provides pastoral care?	Establish interim care systems	Month 2

Critical Success Factors:

RESIST RUSHING - Hasty decisions create long-term problems

SEEK GUIDANCE - Denominational leaders provide essential perspective

COMMUNICATE CLEARLY - Transparency prevents rumors and anxiety

PRAY CONTINUOUSLY - Spiritual foundation guides practical decisions

Time Investment: Plan 2 months to establish stable transition foundation

Goal: Move from "Our pastor is leaving" to "We're ready to seek God's choice"

Result: Calm congregation + trained team + clear process = successful transition start

"The wilderness journey begins with faithful response to God's call to leave the familiar and trust His guidance into the unknown."

Phase 2: Your Assessment Journey (Steps 3-6)

"In the third month, on the same day of the month that the Israelites had left the land of Egypt, they entered the Wilderness of Sinai." Exodus 19:1 (CSB)

Just as Israel paused at Sinai to discover their identity as God's people, your church must first understand who you are before determining what kind of pastor you need.

STEP 3: Getting Ready to Learn About Ourselves

Preparation (Month 3)

- **Team Training** - Equip your committee for effective assessment
- **Process Planning** - Determine how you'll gather information
- **Resource Gathering** - Collect historical data and statistics

Assessment Focus: *Setting the foundation for honest self-evaluation*

STEP 4: Discovering Who We Are as a Church

Data Gathering (Month 4)

- **Church History Review** - Document your story, including pastoral patterns
- **Statistical Analysis** - Examine attendance, giving, and demographic trends
- **Community Demographics** - Understand your ministry context
- **Financial Health Assessment** - Evaluate resources and stewardship
- **Review Denominational Relationships** – Understand the partnerships in ministry

Assessment Focus: *Collecting factual information about your church*

STEP 5: Understanding Our Purpose and Values

Identity Clarification (Month 4-5)

- **Four Helpful Lists Assessment** - What's Right, Wrong, Confused, Missing
- **Seven Community Interviews** - External perspective on ministry opportunities
- **Mission & Values Clarification** - Confirm your fundamental purpose

Assessment Focus: *Understanding your calling and community impact*

STEP 6: Deciding What We Need in a Pastor

Profile Development (Month 5-6)

- **Pastor Profile Creation** - Define needed gifts and experience
- **Congregational Input** - Gather member perspectives on pastoral needs

- **Church Profile Completion** - Finalize your comprehensive church description

Assessment Focus: *Translating church identity into pastoral requirements*

Note: Phase 3 posting can begin while finishing final assessment work

How Your Assessments Connect:

STEPS 3-4 provide the **FACTS** about your church

STEP 5 reveals the **HEART** of your church

STEP 6 defines the **LEADER** your church needs

Assessment Integration Dashboard:

Step	What You Learn	How It Helps	Where It Goes
4	Church History Patterns	Understand your story and context	Church Profile
4	Current Demographics	Understand who you're reaching	Church Profile
4	Financial Health	Set realistic compensation	Church Profile & Pastoral Covenant
5	Community Needs	Discover ministry opportunities	Pastor Profile & Vision Discussion
5	Core Values	Clarify non-negotiables	Church Profile & Candidate Evaluation
6	Member Input	Build ownership in decision	Pastor Profile

Critical Success Factors:

PATIENCE - God's timing rarely matches our urgency

THOROUGHNESS - Each evaluation phase reveals new information

PRAYER - Spiritual discernment guides human evaluation

UNITY - Committee consensus builds congregational confidence

Time Investment: Plan 3 months for thorough assessment work

Goal: Move from "We need a pastor" to "We need THIS KIND of pastor"

Result: Clear church identity + focused pastoral profile = better pastoral match

"The time you invest in honest self-assessment will save years of ministry frustration."

Phase 3: Your Search Journey (Steps 7-10)

"Whenever the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, the Israelites would set out; at the place where the cloud stopped, there the Israelites camped." Numbers 9:17 (CSB)

Just as Israel followed God's guidance through unmapped wilderness territory, your search committee must trust God's leading throughout the unfamiliar process of pastoral selection.

STEP 7: Let the Search Begin

Candidate Sourcing *(Month 7-8)*

- **Post Position** - BGCT Minister Connection, seminaries, associations
- **Develop Screening Process** - Establish rubric and evaluation methods
- **Begin Receiving Applications** - Expect 20-50+ candidates
- **Prepare for 6-Month Timeline** - Set realistic expectations

Search Focus: *Casting a wide net to find qualified candidates*

STEP 8: Looking Through Resumes

Initial Screening *(Months 9)*

- **Phase 1 Rubric Evaluation** - Screen all applications systematically
- **Narrow to Top Candidates** - Reduce the pool to 8-12 promising candidates

Search Focus: *Identifying candidates worth deeper consideration*

STEP 9: Reducing the Number of Candidates

Deeper Evaluations *(Months 10-11)*

- **Phase 2 Rubric Evaluation** - Written questionnaire assessment
- **Comprehensive Sermon Review** - Multiple sermon evaluation
- **Narrow to Finalists** - Reduce the pool to 3-5 top candidates

Search Focus: *Thorough evaluation of most promising candidates*

STEP 10: Choosing Your Final Candidate

Final Selection *(Months 12-13)*

- **Phase 3 Rubric Evaluation** - In-person interviews
- **Perform Reference Checks** – Primary and Secondary
- **Finalize Pastoral Covenant** - Negotiate terms and expectations

- **Complete Background Checks** - Verify credentials and conduct
- **Staff Meeting Coordination** - Ensure team compatibility
- **Prepare for Candidate Visit** - Plan "in view of a call" weekend

Search Focus: *Confirming God's choice for your church*

Your Candidate Evaluation Funnel:

STEP 7: 20-50+ Initial Applications

↓

STEP 8: 8-12 Promising Candidates (Phase 1 Rubric)

↓

STEP 9: 3-5 Top Finalists (Phase 2 Rubric)

↓

STEP 10: 1 Final Candidate (Phase 3 Rubric)

Search Integration Dashboard:

Step	Evaluation Tool	Key Decision	Timeline
7	Position posting	Who applies?	Month 1
8	Phase 1 Rubric + Sermons	Who advances?	Months 1-2
9	Phase 2 Rubric + Questionnaire	Who are finalists?	Months 2-4
10	Phase 3 Rubric + Interviews	Who is God's choice?	Months 4-6

Critical Success Factors:

SYSTEMATIC EVALUATION - Use consistent criteria rather than emotional reactions

SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT - Balance practical assessment with prayer-led decisions

CONFIDENTIALITY - Protect candidates while maintaining transparency with congregation

OBJECTIVE ASSESSMENT - Look beyond impressive credentials to genuine pastoral fit

Time Investment: Plan 6 months from posting to final selection

Goal: Move from "We have many options" to "We have God's choice"

Result: Confident recommendation + congregational unity = successful pastoral call

"The pastor God has chosen for your church is worth the patient, thorough search required to find them."

Phase 4: Your New Beginnings Journey (Steps 11-12)

"Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." Philippians 1:6 (CSB)

Just as Israel crossed the Jordan River under Joshua's leadership to claim the inheritance God had prepared, your church now begins establishing new patterns and relationships in the fertile ground of settled ministry.

STEP 11: In View of a Call Weekend

Candidate Presentation (3-6 weeks after final interview)

- **Host Candidate Visit** - Provide meaningful opportunities for congregation-candidate interaction
- **Organize Multiple Touchpoints** - Fellowship, Q&A, worship leadership
- **Schedule Sermon and Vote** - Allow congregation to hear and decide
- **Conduct Congregational Vote** - Formal affirmation of God's choice
- **Begin Transition Planning** - Prepare for pastoral arrival and ministry start

New Beginnings Focus: *Confirming God's choice and beginning partnership*

STEP 12: The First Sunday with Your Pastor

Ministry Establishment (3-6 weeks after call acceptance)

- **Prepare for Arrival** - Ready office, housing, and administrative needs
- **Transform to Support Team** - Shift from searching to supporting
- **Plan Installation Service** - Formally celebrate and commission new ministry
- **Develop Orientation Process** - Help pastor understand church and community
- **Begin New Relationship** - Establish healthy patterns for ministry partnership

New Beginnings Focus: *Building foundation for effective ministry partnership*

Your Ministry Launch Sequence:

Final Interview → 3-6 weeks → Candidate Visit → Vote → Call Extended

↓

Call Acceptance → 3-6 weeks → Pastor Arrives → First Sunday

↓

RESULT: Fruitful Ministry Partnership in the Promised Land

New Beginnings Integration Dashboard:

Step	Key Events	Critical Outcomes	Timeline
11	Candidate weekend visit	Congregation meets and evaluates	3-6 weeks after interview
11	Q&A and worship	Authentic interaction and preaching	Weekend event
11	Congregational vote	Formal affirmation of call	Weekend event
12	Pastor arrival preparation	Smooth transition logistics	3-6 weeks after call
12	Installation service	Public celebration and commissioning	Within first month
12	First Sunday ministry	Official start of pastoral relationship	End of transition

Critical Success Factors:

Celebrate Faithfully - Honor God's provision and guidance through the journey

Support Generously - Invest in your pastor's early success

Communicate Expectations - Establish healthy patterns from the beginning

Pray Continually - Seek God's blessing on the new ministry partnership

Time Investment: 2 months from final interview to first Sunday

Goal: Move from "We found our pastor" to "We're beginning ministry together"

Result: Effective pastor + supportive congregation + clear expectations = fruitful ministry

"Your wilderness journey is complete, but the wilderness lessons of faith, patience, and dependence on God become the foundation for abundant ministry in your Promised Land."

PHASE ONE

Your Departure Journey

"I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering." Exodus 3:7 (CSB)

When a pastor announces their departure, your church begins its own exodus from the familiar land of settled pastoral leadership into the unfamiliar wilderness of transition. Just as the Israelites could no longer remain in Egypt despite its familiarity, your congregation must now leave behind the known rhythms and relationships of previous pastoral ministry to journey toward the leader God has prepared for your future.

This departure phase requires both courage and wisdom. Like Israel, you may be tempted to rush the process or make hasty decisions driven by anxiety rather than faith. The pressure to quickly secure interim arrangements or immediately begin searching for the next pastor can lead to choices that create problems throughout the entire transition journey.

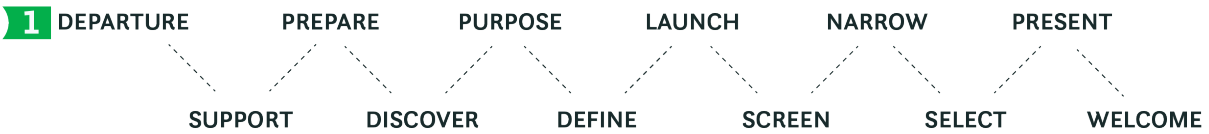
However, this departure season presents unique opportunities. Just as God used Israel's exodus to reveal His power and faithfulness, your church's pastoral transition can become a time of spiritual growth, congregational unity, and renewed dependence on divine guidance. The way you handle these early weeks often determines whether your transition becomes a wilderness of complaint and confusion or a journey of faith and discovery.

The Departure Journey includes two critical steps: processing the pastoral announcement and establishing stable interim arrangements. These steps parallel Israel's final preparations in Egypt and their initial steps into the wilderness. Just as Moses received Aaron's assistance and the elders' support for the journey ahead, your church must secure appropriate guidance and leadership for the transition period.

Resist the temptation to view this phase as merely logistical. While practical matters require attention, the spiritual and emotional aspects of departure are equally important. How you say goodbye to your previous pastor, process the change, and prepare your heart for the transition will impact every subsequent step of your journey.

The wilderness ahead may seem uncertain, but remember that God has already seen your needs and prepared provision for every step. Like Israel discovering that the same God who called them out of Egypt would sustain them through the wilderness, your church will find that the faithful God who guided your previous ministry will direct your path to the pastor He has chosen for your next chapter.

As you work through these departure steps, maintain a spirit of prayer, seek wise counsel, and trust God's timing more than your own sense of urgency. The foundation you build in this phase will support the entire transition process and prepare your congregation for the assessment, search, and new beginnings that lie ahead.



STEP 1: Our Pastor is Leaving

"I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering." Exodus 3:7 (CSB)

When a pastor announces their departure, your church begins its own exodus from the familiar land of settled pastoral leadership into the wilderness of transition. Like the Israelites who could no longer remain in Egypt despite its familiarity, your congregation must now leave behind the known rhythms and relationships of previous pastoral ministry. This departure marks the beginning of your wilderness journey. This season that will test your faith, refine your identity, and ultimately lead you to the Promised Land of new pastoral leadership. Just as God heard Israel's cries and initiated their journey toward freedom, He sees your church's needs and is calling you out of one season and into the wilderness path that leads to His chosen leader for your future.

This step exists because pastoral departures create anxiety and confusion that leads to hasty decisions undermining the entire transition process. Churches that skip proper departure processing typically experience prolonged conflict, rushed search decisions, and another pastoral search within 18 months.

You'll know this step is complete when your church has processed the departure emotionally, established interim arrangements, received denominational guidance, and developed a clear transition strategy with realistic timelines.

Understanding the Initial Response Phase

The first days and weeks after a pastor announces their departure are crucial for setting the tone of the entire transition process. This section explains not just what to do, but why each step matters.

Pastoral Departure Announced and Processed

Purpose: To acknowledge the significant change and begin a healthy transition process.

When a pastor announces their departure, it represents more than just a staffing change. It's a significant moment in the church's journey requiring spiritual and emotional processing:

- **Create space for understanding:** Provide clear information about why the pastor is leaving, when the departure will occur, and what the initial plans for moving forward
- **Facilitate healthy processing:** Allow the congregation time to absorb the news and express their reactions in appropriate settings
- **Frame spiritually:** Help the congregation see this as a "wilderness journey" similar to Israel's time between Egypt and the Promised Land, which is a challenging but potentially transformative experience guided by God
- **Prevent rumors:** Transparent communication prevents harmful speculation that can damage trust

Without proper processing, unresolved feelings can create obstacles later in the search process or for the incoming pastor.

Contact Your Director of Missions and BGCT Area Representative

Purpose: To access experienced guidance and resources for the transition journey.

Denominational support provides invaluable expertise that most search committees need:

- **Gain objective perspective:** Receive counsel from those not emotionally involved in the transition.
- **Access to resources:** Utilize materials and processes developed through extensive experience.
- **Connect with potential candidates:** Tap into networks that can identify suitable pastoral prospects.
- **Navigate potential challenges:** Receive guidance for addressing any unique circumstances.
- **Understand best practices:** Learn from the experiences of other churches that have successfully navigated transitions.
- **Remain connected to the larger body:** Remember that your church is part of a family of churches during this journey.

Churches that attempt transitions without denominational support often face unnecessary difficulties.

Begin Seeking Immediate Preaching Arrangements

Purpose: To maintain spiritual nourishment and stability during the initial weeks of the transition period.

Because the pulpit remains central to Baptist church life, and arrangements for this ministry should be thoughtful.

- **Options for Filling the Pulpit:**
 - Staff

- Deacons and Lay Leaders with preaching experience
- Associational Leadership
- **Determine the amount to be paid for guest speakers.**
- **Maintain theological consistency:** Ensure interim preachers align with the church's doctrinal positions.
- **Consider all worship services:** Make arrangements for all regular preaching occasions.
- **Recognize the importance of teaching:** Look for interim ministers who can provide biblical teaching that meets the congregation's needs during times of uncertainty.
- **Begin praying for God's provision:** Invite the congregation to pray specifically for the interim preaching ministry.

Quality preaching prevents the anxiety that can result from inconsistent pulpit ministry.

Host Appropriate Farewell for Departing Pastor

Purpose: To provide closure and honor the ministry relationship in a way that facilitates future health.

A thoughtful farewell serves essential functions in the transition process.

- **Express appreciation:** Provide opportunities for members to acknowledge the pastor's impact.
- **Create closure:** Mark the end of this chapter in the church's life through appropriate ceremonies.
- **Transfer knowledge:** Ensure important information about church operations, pastoral care needs, and ongoing initiatives is documented.
- **Establish appropriate boundaries:** Clarify the departing pastor's future relationship with the church (typically maintaining distance during the interim period).
- **Look forward in hope:** While honoring the past, begin turning attention to God's future provision.
- **Avoid idolizing or demonizing:** Keep the focus balanced rather than excessively praising or critiquing the departing pastor.

A healthy farewell allows the church to honor its past while being open to what God has next.

Church Leadership Meets to Develop Transition Strategy

Purpose: To establish a prayerful, intentional approach rather than rushing to fill the vacancy.

This initial leadership gathering is not merely administrative; it sets the spiritual foundation for the entire transition.

- **Seek God first:** Begin with extended prayer, acknowledging dependence on divine guidance.
- **Establish governance clarity:** Review church bylaws and determine who is responsible for each aspect of the transition.

- **Create a preliminary timeline:** Develop realistic expectations about the duration of the process (typically 9-18 months).
- **Consider church health:** Honestly assess whether the church needs a standard interim or might benefit from addressing deeper issues through intentional interim ministry.
- **Begin communication planning:** Determine how and when to update the congregation.
- **Resist rushing:** Acknowledge the natural anxiety to "get a pastor faster" but commit to a thorough, discerning process.

A well-planned strategy prevents hasty decisions that could lead to a poor pastoral match. Dr. Randall Stone shares this wisdom on planning, communication, and the emotional impact on current staff.

Pastoral transitions are pivotal moments in the life of a church. Whether the transition is anticipated or unexpected, the departure of a senior pastor triggers a range of emotions, shifting responsibilities, and role expectations, particularly among staff members. Effective management of staff during this season is critical for maintaining stability, unity, and mission continuity. This chapter explores the key aspects of managing church staff during pastoral transitions, including navigating the pastoral departure, addressing emotional dynamics, managing interim roles and responsibilities, involving staff in the search process, cultivating staff chemistry, onboarding a new pastor into an existing team, and understanding the potential impact of the hire on current staff stability.

Pastoral Departure: Planning and Communication

The transition begins with the announcement of the pastoral departure. Whether due to retirement, a new call, or unforeseen circumstances, the clarity and tone of the communication surrounding the departure significantly influence the congregation and staff's ability to navigate the transition well.

Transparent communication is paramount. Staff should be informed prior to a public announcement, allowing them to process and prepare to support the congregation. The departing pastor, if still present, should affirm the current staff's contributions and reassure the church of their importance during the transition. If the pastor leaves the church suddenly or under suspicious circumstances, honest and forthright communication is essential to creating a healthy congregational environment. The reason for the departure may taint the search process or skew the expectations of a new pastor.

Once the departure is known, church leaders must provide a timeline, outline the next steps, and clearly define interim roles. When overseen with clarity, humility, and pastoral care, this initial phase can set a hopeful and orderly tone. Four priorities are critical for stabilizing the church and establishing a proper mindset.

1. *Maintain focus on the basics of Worship, Evangelism and Disciple making. Keeping the mission of making disciples unifies staff and congregants.*

2. *Provide for congregational care. "When the shepherd is absent the sheep get restless." Use this season to bolster group life and/or deacon ministry within the church body. Respond to known needs privately and publicly (informs the church).*
3. *Determine a simple but effective decision-making process. Overreliance on pastors to make decisions can weaken the lay leadership of the church over time. A leadership vacuum is often a time for unscrupulous members to assume authorities which have not been granted by the church.*
4. *Maintain minimal programing. Do not start new ministry programs or endeavors. The change in pastoral leadership will generate enough uncertainty and stress. Limiting additional anxiety is crucial.*

Emotional Impact on Staff

Pastoral transitions often generate a mixture of grief, anxiety, anticipation, and confusion. Staff members may feel personally affected, especially if they shared a close bond with, or were hired by, the outgoing pastor. The uncertainty of leadership changes can cause staff to fear job security, changes in ministry direction, or loss of congregational trust.

Church leaders must create safe spaces for staff to express these emotions without fear of reprisal. Regular check-ins with staff, individual and group conversations, and involving a pastoral counselor or outside consultant can foster emotional health. Acknowledging emotions while remaining mission-focused helps stabilize the team and reinforces unity.

Staff members experience a wide range of emotions during interims and without consistent pastoral authority may react in ways that can be harmful to themselves or the church. Staff members will often suffer silently for the sake of the church or self-protection. Staff members may inflate their influence within the congregation or perceive themselves as insignificant. Failure to acknowledge the staff responses will reinforce their feelings.

Understanding Interim Ministry Approaches

Before deciding of what kind of interim is needed for your church, consider the wisdom of David Bowman, Executive Director for Tarrant Baptist Association.

The first church I served as a full-time pastor employed a well-seasoned interim pastor before my arrival. He was a delightful gentleman who had reached his eighth decade of life. Like many in his day, and too many in this day, the churches he served through the years had not provided adequate resources for retirement. He was still preaching every Sunday because he had to do so to continue providing a steady income for his wife and himself.

He guided the church through those months with a gentle hand. He was kind, gracious, and helpful. He extended an offer of assistance when we met. I visited him a few months later when he was hospitalized. Again, our interaction was pleasant. I overheard him ask his wife who I was when I left the room. He passed away not long afterward.

This long-tenured pastor had no official training in the area of interim ministry. Instead, like many interim pastors, he was a retired pastor who had been there, done that, and knew the field of play. He was like that television commercial that says, "We know a thing or two because we've seen a thing or two." He helpfully steered the search committee toward helpful resources. He helped them investigate the accuracy of resume details. He helped them arrange a place and time to interview the candidate in person and hear him preach.

Another interim arrangement occurs when a church invites two or more preachers to provide pulpit supply. This style of interim occurs when a church has high confidence in its staff and lay leaders to guide the church during the interim. One local congregation invited three well-known denominational leaders to serve as part of a preaching team. The three men rotated on successive Sundays as their schedules allowed. This worked well for all concerned, for the most part.

On one occasion, one of the preachers employed one of his favorite illustrations, which promptly fell flat. He told the story well. It fit the context well. Yet, the congregation didn't respond at all. Not a single "Amen!"

The preacher discussed this matter with one of the other preachers in the rotation and discovered the issue. The other preacher had used the same illustration the week before.

This rotation worked well in this unique situation. Another church attempted the same approach. They invited three men to serve in a rotation. Two problems arose during the course of the interim.

First, two of the three preachers decided they wanted to become that church's next pastor. This involves a very important rule regarding interim ministry. The interim pastor should not be considered as a candidate for the permanent pastor position. Rules at play during an interim season differ from those during normal times. An agreement that the interim pastor will not receive consideration for the permanent position protects churches from conflicts of interest and manipulation.

The second problem was that none of the three preachers on rotation spent enough time with the staff and lay leaders to provide helpful guidance. This was especially important

since the former pastor did not leave voluntarily. If he had lived in colonial times, he might have been ridden out of town on a rail while tarred and feathered.

The church desperately required healing and direction. The staff and lay leaders kept things moving forward, but they could not provide the leadership necessary to clean up the mess left by the former pastor. This inevitably fell to the new pastor, who had no idea he was stepping into a storm not of his making. He had to live down the reputation of his predecessor in the church and the community. A better interim pastor arrangement could have moved the church toward resolving many of the issues on the table.

This church could have benefited from an intentional interim pastor. Intentional interim ministers are typically specially trained leaders who help churches gain perspective on how they arrived at the place where they find themselves. They lead through reflection regarding denominational issues. They clarify where the church stands in terms of polity, leadership structure, and financial well-being.

Intentional interim ministers require advanced emotional intelligence and great patience. They ideally possess the mind of a scholar, the hide of a rhinoceros, and the heart of a child. Two out of three of these are essential. Make sure one of them is the hide of a rhinoceros.

Intentional interim ministry typically requires a more extended interim period than a traditional interim or guest preacher rotation. The search process does not begin immediately upon agreement with an intentional interim pastor. Instead, the search process begins after necessary healing and repairs. The extended timeline between pastors provides opportunities for reconciliation and reconsideration, leading the church toward health and readiness for what God has for them next. This is an incalculable gift to the next pastor.

The decision between standard interim ministry and intentional interim ministry is a crucial early choice that will shape your entire transition process.

Standard Interim Ministry	Topic Area	Intentional Interim Ministry
Focus on maintaining ministries	Primary Purpose	Focus on systemic assessment and renewal
Primarily provides pulpit supply	Pastor's Role	Addresses five focus points (heritage, mission, leadership, connections, future)
Shorter timeframe (typically 6-9 months)	Timeframe	Extended timeframe (typically 9-15 months)
Best for healthy, stable congregations	When Appropriate	Recommended for churches after long pastorates, conflict, or decline
Minimal organizational assessment	Assessment Level	Comprehensive congregational assessment
Keeps things running until the new pastor arrives	Organizational Goal	Prepares church culture and systems for next pastor
Interim pastors are largely Sunday mornings and a few meetings	Commitment Level	Preaching and guiding the church through self-assessments.
Primarily pastoral maintenance	Leadership Approach	Transformational leadership development
Search process begins immediately	Search Timeline	Search process delayed until assessments completed

Standard Interim Ministry

The standard interim approach focuses primarily on maintaining stability and regular ministry functions during the transition period. This approach works well for churches that are healthy, stable, and simply need consistent leadership while searching for their next pastor.

When Standard Interim Is Appropriate:

- Church is relatively healthy with no significant internal conflicts.
- Previous pastor left under favorable circumstances.
- Church has a clear sense of identity and mission.
- Leadership structures are functioning effectively.
- Congregation is unified and engaged.

What to Expect from a Standard Interim:

- Preach regularly and provide basic pastoral care.
- Attend key leadership meetings.
- Support existing ministries rather than launching new initiatives.
- Help maintain momentum while the search process moves forward.
- Provide objective feedback to the search committee when requested.

Intentional Interim Ministry

The intentional interim approach addresses deeper congregational issues and prepares the church more thoroughly for its next chapter. This approach is designed for churches that need healing, clarity, or renewal before they're ready to call their next pastor.

When Intentional Interim Is Appropriate:

- Church has experienced significant conflict or a difficult pastoral departure.
- Previous pastor had a long tenure (i.e., 10+ years).
- Church has experienced decline or lacks clear direction.
- Leadership structures need evaluation or reorganization.
- Congregation needs healing from past hurts or divisions.

What to Expect from an Intentional Interim

Lead the congregation through a structured assessment process.

- Facilitate conversations about church identity and future direction.
- Help address unresolved conflicts or systemic problems.
- Work with leadership to update policies, procedures, and ministry approaches.
- Prepare a comprehensive report to guide the search committee and next pastor.

The Five Focus Points: Intentional interim processes address these key areas:

1. **Heritage:** Examining the church's history, celebrating strengths and addressing painful chapters.
2. **Mission:** Clarifying the church's purpose and unique calling in its community.
3. **Leadership:** Evaluating governance structures and developing healthy leadership patterns.
4. **Connections:** Strengthening relationships with denominational bodies and community partners.
5. **Future:** Developing clarity for the next chapter of ministry.

Making Your Decision

The choice between these approaches should be made prayerfully with input from:

- Church leadership
- Your Associational Leadership and BGCT Area Representative
- Honest assessment of your church's current health and needs

Remember that this decision isn't merely about efficiency. You are to position your church for a fruitful future ministry. Sometimes longer intentional interim process actually saves time by preventing failed pastoral tenures that result from unaddressed issues.

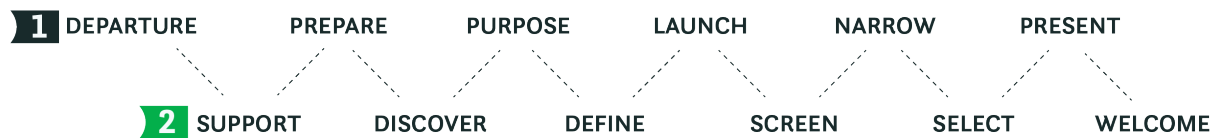
Common Pitfalls in This Step

Waiting Too Long to Address the Transition

Just as the Israelites were reluctant to leave the familiar bondage of Egypt even when it was harmful, churches often delay taking action after a pastoral departure, hoping things will work themselves out or that a quick solution will emerge. This hesitation typically results in scrambling for last-minute pulpit supply arrangements, often settling for whoever is available rather than securing quality interim preaching. The congregation begins to feel anxious and directionless while leadership struggles to maintain stability. Start planning immediately when you know a transition is coming, even if the departure date is months away.

Failing to Ask for Help Early Enough

Many churches believe they can handle pastoral transitions independently, drawing only on their previous experience or assumptions about the process. This self-reliant approach often leads to repeating the same methods while expecting different results. Denominational resources, experienced interim pastors, and your Director of Missions can provide invaluable guidance that prevents common mistakes. Contact your BGCT Area Representative and local association leadership within the first week of learning about the pastoral departure.



STEP 2: Getting Help During the Transition

“²⁴ Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said. ²⁵ So Moses chose able men from all Israel and made them leaders over the people as commanders of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. ²⁶ They judged the people at all times; they would bring the hard cases to Moses, but they would judge every minor case themselves.” Exodus 18:24-26 (CSB)

No one survives the wilderness alone. Just as God provided Moses with Aaron's assistance and appointed elders to help guide Israel through their desert journey, He provides your church with wise counselors for your wilderness transition. Your interim pastor, denominational leaders, and experienced guides become like the pillar of cloud and fire—visible signs of God's presence and direction during your time between pastors. This wilderness season strips away the comfort of familiar leadership but reveals God's faithfulness through new sources of guidance. Embrace these wilderness guides as God's provision for your journey, knowing that He will sustain you through trusted voices until you reach the Promised Land of settled pastoral leadership.

This step exists because churches without stable interim leadership and trained search teams make poor decisions that create long-term problems. Churches that skip proper interim arrangements and team formation typically experience ministry drift, committee dysfunction, and congregational anxiety that undermines the search process.

You'll know this step is complete when you have secured an appropriate interim ministry, formed a trained and unified search team, established clear communication with the congregation, and created pastoral care systems that maintain stability throughout the transition.

Secure Interim Preaching Plan

Purpose: To ensure consistent biblical teaching and worship leadership during the transition.

Whereas Step 1 involved making immediate arrangements for pulpit coverage, this step focuses on establishing a sustainable plan for the entire interim period.

- **Identify Interim Options:** Based on your decision about standard vs. intentional interim ministry, determine the best approach for your church:

- Part-time interim pastor
- Full-time interim pastor
- Rotating pulpit supply
- Staff ministers handling preaching duties
- **Define Scope of Responsibility:** Clearly outline what the interim preacher(s) will be responsible for beyond Sunday sermons. Some options include:
 - Staff oversight
 - Administrative duties
 - Pastoral care
 - Leadership development
 - Attendance at meetings
- **Develop Formal Agreement:** Create a written covenant or contract that outlines:
 - Compensation and benefits
 - Expected work hours/days
 - Specific responsibilities
 - Duration of service
 - Evaluation process
 - Whether the interim can be considered for the permanent position (generally not recommended)
- **Maintain Theological Consistency:** Ensure interim preachers align with your church's theological positions and spiritual values.
- **Plan for Special Occasions:** Consider in advance how special services (such as Christmas, Easter, funerals, and weddings) will be handled during the interim period.

Best Practice: If using a rotation of preachers, consider creating a preaching calendar with assigned texts or topics to provide continuity for the congregation and to avoid the scenario mentioned by Dr. Bowman in Step 1!

Creating Stability During Transition

After the initial response to a pastor's departure, the church must establish structures that will provide stability throughout the interim period. This second step focuses on creating the framework that will support the congregation during this wilderness journey. However, this journey requires much patience. Don't get in a rush.

Morgan Malone, Executive Director of the Denton Baptist Association, shares his experiences with practicing patience throughout the process.

I received a message that one of our long-time pastors was going to retire. I decided to pay him a visit. I drove to the church, asked if he was available, and sat down with him in his office. I congratulated him on his over 20 years of service at the same church. I asked

him about his plans. He shared with me that he still had a desire to preach. I assured him that we would keep him on our supply list.

Following our conversation about his departure, I asked if he knew what the church's plans were for finding a new pastor. He then shared with me that he was going to stay on for the next 2 months. He stated that by staying on the church, they could go ahead and create a pastor search committee that would find their next pastor. He felt like they would have a new pastor in place within 3 to 5 months.

I listened to what he had to say about the timing, and then I began to ask a few questions.

- *What does your constitution and bylaws say about selecting a committee?*
- *Have you selected your team?*
- *Have you thought about creating a survey for the church on what they need in a pastor to create a profile?*
- *How long would it take to get that information?*

It was at that moment that he stopped me in mid-sentence and said, "Can you share this information with my secretary and staff?" I said sure, and we went to the adjacent office. Once I got there, he asked me to repeat the previous information. I then added a few more questions.

- *Once you have created a profile, how long will you advertise the position?*
- *Once you have received the prospective resumes, how will you weed them out?*
- *Will you listen to messages online or go to a church to hear them preach?*

The more I talked, the more I could see that the secretary had no idea about the magnitude of the pastoral search process. She had what I would call a deer-in-the-headlights look as she began to mentally calculate the days, weeks, and literally months it would take to find their next pastor.

What I later found out was that the secretary was the one who kept the church running and organized. She had assumed that the church could hire a pastor like any other position in the secular workplace. Her impression was that all they had to do was elect a team, post the position, receive resumes for four weeks, go through them in a few weeks, and within three months have a pastor on the field. What she realized based on our conversation was that her perception was unrealistic. It was going to take a minimum of nine months to a year, or maybe longer. She began to learn that she and the church were going to have to be patient. They would have to pray and work through a step-by-step process to find the right man of God for their local church.

In my position as an Associational Missions Strategist, I have found that the majority of local churches are naïve, like the previously mentioned experience, when it comes to finding the next pastor. They have no idea about the amount of patience and endurance that is required for this significant decision.

Unfortunately, due to a lack of knowledge, anxiety, and impatience on the part of the church or key leaders, shortcuts are taken to save time. As a church considers the interim time, may they practice the words of Proverbs 16:32 "Patience is better than power and controlling one's emotions, than capturing a city."

Form Transition/Search Team

Purpose: To create a representative group trusted to guide the church through the transition process.

The formation of this team is one of the most critical decisions in the entire pastoral transition process.

- **Team Composition:** Select members who represent the church's diversity in age, gender, tenure, and perspective. This representation builds congregation-wide trust in the process.
- **Spiritual Maturity:** Look for members who demonstrate spiritual maturity, emotional stability, and commitment to the church's mission rather than personal agendas.
- **Role Clarity:** Determine whether this will be a single team handling both transition issues and the eventual search, or whether separate teams are needed for each function. The team chooses a chair, vice-chair, secretary, and possibly a process manager, which I discuss later.
- **Communication:** The team should create a single Gmail account to unify correspondence, avoid appearance of tampering, and avoid using personal emails.
- **Size Consideration:** A transition team can be 7-20 members, depending on the size and makeup of the church. However, a pastor search team of 5-7 members typically works best - large enough to represent diversity but small enough to work efficiently.
- **Selection Process:** Follow your church's bylaws for team selection. Common methods include:
 - Nomination by church leadership followed by congregational approval
 - Congregation-wide nomination process followed by voting
 - Appointment by deacons or church council
- **Initial Training:** Provide comprehensive training for the team before they begin their work. This could include team-building exercises, clarification of the search process, and spiritual preparation. Contact the BGCT for assistance with this training.

Caution: Churches often rush this step, selecting a team without adequate thought or preparation. Take time to get this right—a well-composed team will make the entire process smoother.

Dr. Roger Yancey, Executive Director of the Tyron-Evergreen Baptist Association, shares the importance of proper training for the transition/search team(s).

My earliest memories include riding in a vehicle of one sort or another. By the time I was 16, I had logged thousands of hours with multiple drivers, in various vehicle types, and in a variety of weather and driving situations. I had ridden a bike for over 10 years and even driven a riding lawn mower. With all that experience, it would stand to reason that I knew something about driving a car. I was confident I did.

Until I was behind the wheel for the first time.

My first car was a 10-year-old cherry-red 1966 Mustang without an air conditioner, which made for some sticky summers. The car was bought on a Thursday. We went to the Department of Motor Vehicles on Friday for a driving manual so I could take the test on Monday and get my license.

My father drove us home from the DMV and pulled into our driveway. He turned and looked at me and said, "Take the weekend to familiarize yourself with the car, make sure you practice parallel parking, stay in the neighborhood, and don't hit anybody." My first and only driving lesson complete, he handed me the keys and walked into the house.

As I sat alone behind the wheel for the first time, I was ready to put all those hours of passenger experience to use as I became an actual driver. Suddenly, I had to remember to complete several tasks at once—watching the road, working the accelerator, using turn indicators, windshield wipers, braking, and operating the clutch and stick shift—all before I was even out of the driveway.

I spent Friday night, Saturday, and Sunday after church learning to drive. On Monday, I went in and passed the written test, the driving test, had my picture taken, and was handed my driver's license.

They must have been out of their minds.

In a similar way, when I was 23, I was asked to serve on a Pastor Search Committee, I assumed all my church experience had prepared me for this new task. After all, I was a Cradle Roll kid. The only children in church other than us belonged to the preacher, and we were a close second. If the doors were open, we were walking through them. Our family was active in all aspects of the church and understood it was a blessing and a privilege to serve God and God's family.

Here I was—called to ministry, in my first year of seminary, newly married, helping start a new church, teaching Sunday School, serving as the Sunday School Director and Outreach Coordinator, and volunteering in the nursery when needed. Certainly, all those years of experience and being around the church would have prepared me to serve on a Pastor Search Committee.

I would learn otherwise.

The many months of service on the Pastor Search Committee proved to be one of the most challenging and rewarding times in my life. I learned about working as a team,

being sensitive to those I worked alongside, the importance of prayer, the certainty of God's faithfulness, and the joy of discovering God's choice for our new pastor.

I learned that the experiences I had as a church member were helpful, but the impact of being trained as a Pastor Search Committee member cannot be overstated.

This has proven true as I reflect on having trained or worked with over 100 Pastor Search Committees in the last 21 years. The most effective committees are those that have participated in training, while those that did not often found themselves searching for answers they would have readily had if they had chosen to be trained.

On several occasions, I have been contacted by Pastor Search Committees with questions that demonstrated a lack of training. I have trained Pastor Search Committees that began on their own, reached an impasse, or became frustrated in the process, and realized they needed to pause and be trained.

Why is a Pastor Search Committee training so beneficial?

Focuses the Pastor Search Committee on its purpose. This is a spiritual journey of discovering God's will while walking through a series of practical steps. Training helps the team come together to prayerfully engage in the process while keeping focused on their singular purpose.

Provides a general roadmap to help the Pastor Search Committee reach its ultimate destination. Training offers processes, procedures, and guidelines for fruitful efforts on the part of the team. While the pathway taken is up to the committee, the training helps define direction, boundaries, and solutions to overcome obstacles.

Gives the Pastor Search Committee a uniform understanding of how to operate. Training offers an overview of the committee's work and provides a framework for understanding how the committee will function and make decisions.

Allows a safe context for the Pastor Search Committee to discuss process and procedures. Many decisions will have to be made by the Pastor Search Committee. It's better to have the team discuss these with a neutral party at the beginning of the process than to risk offending a fellow committee member.

Puts the agendas on the table in a healthy manner. Every member of the Pastor Search Committee comes with their own expectations, concerns, hopes, and dreams related to the future pastor. Training provides a way to share those with one another in a healthy manner, allowing each member to be honest and open about their thoughts and preferences.

Helps quieter voices have an equal impact in the search process. Good training ensures all voices are heard and every person has an equal share in decision-making. Without such safeguards, it's easy for more outspoken members to mute others on the team inadvertently.

***Illuminates considerations that might otherwise be overlooked.** Whether it's doctrinal positions, church governance preferences, or family considerations, good training reminds the team of the various aspects that need to be considered when discovering the right pastoral fit for a church family.*

***Creates awareness of resources available to the Pastor Search Committee.** Most church members will never serve on a Pastor Search Committee, and those who do will rarely serve on more than one. A competent trainer will have access to resources to recommend, which will prove highly beneficial.*

***Offers a trustworthy outside, non-anxious voice to the Pastor Search Committee.** As the committee progresses, it is helpful to have a trusted, outside person available for confidential inquiries, coaching if needed, and prayer support.*

These are just a few reasons a Pastor Search Team will benefit from being trained. It's not that they cannot operate successfully without the benefit of training, but that they will find participating in training will make a significant difference in their overall experience and in reaching their ultimate purpose as a committee.

Don't leave the church driveway without it.

Develop a Communication Plan for the Congregation

Purpose: To maintain transparency and trust through regular, thoughtful updates.

Clear communication prevents rumors, reduces anxiety, and helps maintain unity during transition.

- **Identify Communication Channels:** Determine which methods will be most effective for your church:
 - Sunday morning announcements
 - Church newsletter
 - Email updates
 - Social media
 - Website updates
 - Letters to members
 - Town hall meetings
- **Establish Communication Frequency:** Decide how often updates will be provided (even when there seems to be little news to share).
- **Create Communication Templates:** Develop standard formats for:
 - Progress updates
 - Prayer requests
 - Milestone announcements
 - FAQs about the process

- **Designate Spokespersons:** Identify who will communicate on behalf of the team to ensure consistency:
 - Team chairperson
 - Church staff member
 - Rotating team representatives
- **Address Sensitive Information:** Establish guidelines for what information remains confidential (e.g., candidate names) and what can be shared with the congregation.
- **Manage Expectations:** Communicate realistic timelines and explain the value of a thorough process rather than a rushed one.

Sample Communication Timeline:

Timeframe	Communication Type	Content Focus
Weekly	Bulletin/Announcement	Brief status update and prayer focus
Monthly	Newsletter Article	Detailed explanation of the current phase
Quarterly	Town Hall Meeting	In-person update with Q&A opportunity
At Milestones	Special Letter/Email	Celebration of completed phases and next steps
As Needed	FAQ Updates	Addressing common questions that arise

Remember: Even when there seems to be little progress to report, regular communication demonstrates transparency and helps maintain trust.

Clarify Pastoral Care System During Interim

Purpose: To ensure that the congregation's spiritual and personal needs continue to be met.

Pastoral care often suffers during transitions unless intentionally addressed:

- **Inventory Care Needs:**
 - Hospital visits
 - Homebound members
 - Counseling needs
 - Crisis response
 - Regular visitation
- **Define Responsibility Roles:**
 - Interim pastor's role (Discussed earlier in this step)
 - Staff ministers' responsibilities (Note Dr. Stone's advice below)
 - Deacons' involvement
 - Lay caregivers' contributions
- **Create Notification Systems:** Establish transparent processes for members to report care needs and how those requests will be channeled to the appropriate caregivers.

- **Create Guidelines and Responses:**
 - Hospital emergencies
 - Deaths and funerals
 - Counseling requests
 - Spiritual crises
- **Provide Training:** Equip lay leaders who will be taking on additional care responsibilities during the interim period.
- **Monitor Effectiveness:** Regularly review how well care needs are being met and adjust the system as necessary.

Critical Insight: Congregations often judge the effectiveness of church leadership during transition primarily by how well pastoral care needs are addressed. Dr. Stone offers valuable advice here,

*The interim period between pastors can stretch from a few months to more than a year. During this time, interim leadership must be defined clearly. Churches may appoint an interim pastor, elevate an executive pastor or associate, or utilize a transitional consultant. Regardless of the model, a **leadership void must not exist**. The interim leader must:*

- *Offer consistent vision and spiritual leadership.*
- *Support and empower staff.*
- *Maintain decision-making structures.*
- *Guide the church through a season of self-assessment and prayer.*

Staff roles may need temporary adjustment. For instance, a worship pastor may take on additional preaching responsibilities, or a communications director may help manage congregational updates. Flexibility, clarity, and appreciation are essential in sustaining morale during this demanding period. Self-assessment and ministry evaluation are critical during the transition to select an effective pastor. Likewise, staff should be reflective about ministry passions, skills, and call during this season.

Begin Congregational Prayer Emphasis

Purpose: To center the transition process in spiritual discernment rather than merely human selection.

A focused prayer emphasis reminds everyone that finding the right pastor is primarily a spiritual process.

- **Create Prayer Resources:**
 - Prayer guides with specific requests
 - Scripture readings focused on God's guidance
 - Prayer cards for personal use

- Prayer bulletin inserts
- **Establish Prayer Opportunities:** Incorporate prayer for the transition into multiple church gatherings.
 - Sunday worship services
 - Wednesday prayer meetings
 - Small group gatherings
 - Special prayer vigils or events
- **Include Various Prayer Methods:**
 - Guided congregational prayer
 - Prayer teams
 - Prayer chains
 - Prayer walks on the church campus
 - Prayer journals
- **Prayer Content Focal Points:**
 - Wisdom for the transition/search team
 - Unity in the congregation
 - Preparation of the future pastor's heart
 - Patience during the waiting period
 - Openness to God's timing and direction
- **Celebration of Prayer Answers:** Regularly acknowledge how God is answering prayers throughout the process.

Spiritual Foundation: Prayer is not merely a supportive activity but rather it should be the foundation from which all other transition activities emerge.

Common Pitfalls in This Step

Assuming Interim Arrangements Will Handle Themselves

Churches sometimes believe that once they secure Sunday morning pulpit supply, the interim period will manage itself. This passive approach overlooks the need for pastoral care coordination, staff oversight, and congregational leadership during transition. Without intentional planning for the interim period, ministry momentum can stall, pastoral care needs go unmet, and anxiety increases throughout the congregation. Develop comprehensive interim arrangements that address all aspects of church life, not just Sunday morning preaching.

Rushing to Form a Search Team Without Preparation

The pressure to "get started" on finding a new pastor often leads churches to quickly elect a search committee without giving adequate thought to its composition, training, or process. This haste can result in a team that lacks diversity, necessary skills, or a clear understanding of their

role. Take time to carefully consider who should serve on the team and ensure they receive proper training before beginning their work.

What Does the Interim Pastor Do During This Phase?

The interim minister's role during this second step will differ based on whether you've chosen a standard or intentional interim approach.

Standard Interim Ministry Focus

Worship and Preaching

- Provides consistent biblical preaching
- Maintains worship traditions and patterns
- Offers stability through familiar service elements
- Avoids significant changes to worship style or format

Regular Ministry Functions

- Supports existing ministry programs and staff
- Attends regular leadership meetings
- Provides basic pastoral care or coordinates care systems
- Maintains administrative functions
- Preserves church traditions and rhythms

Leadership Stance

- Serves primarily as a caretaker rather than a change agent
- Focuses on continuity and stability
- Defers major decisions to permanent leadership when possible
- Works within existing structures rather than modifying them
- Supports the search process from a distance

Intentional Interim Ministry Focus

Systematic Assessment

- Begins formal evaluation of church health
- Interviews key leaders about church strengths and challenges
- Reviews historical data and trends
- Identifies systemic issues that need addressing
- Develops assessment tools appropriate to your church context

Specialized Leadership Team

- Forms a specialized transition team distinct from the search committee
- Recruits members with gifts for organizational development
- Develops working groups focused on specific church needs
- Creates task forces for addressing identified issues
- Builds leadership capacity for the change process

Focus Area Development

- Begins initial work on heritage exploration
- Initiates conversations about mission clarification
- Examines leadership structures and effectiveness
- Reviews denominational connections
- Starts preliminary future visioning

Preparation Work

- Develops educational resources about church systems
- Creates opportunities for congregational self-discovery
- Designs processes for healthy conflict resolution
- Establishes covenant practices for difficult conversations
- Lays groundwork for deeper congregational work

PHASE TWO

Your Assessment Journey

"In the third month, on the same day of the month that the Israelites had left the land of Egypt, they entered the Wilderness of Sinai." Exodus 19:1 (CSB)

The first phase of the pastoral transition process focused on establishing stability during a time of change. Now, as the church enters the second phase, the focus shifts to understanding who you are as a church before determining who you need as a pastor.

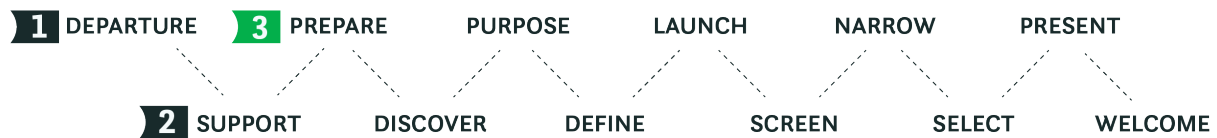
This assessment phase parallels Israel's time at Mount Sinai during their wilderness journey. Just as God called the Israelites to pause at the mountain to receive the Law, establish their covenant identity, and create structures for their community life, your church now has the opportunity to clarify its own identity, mission, and needs.

At Sinai, Israel did not immediately rush forward on their journey. Instead, they took time to understand who they were as God's people, what God expected of them, and how they should be organized for their future. Similarly, churches in transition benefit from a deliberate assessment process that examines their history, current reality, and future calling.

The temptation during this phase is often to focus solely on what you want in a new pastor without first clarifying who you are as a congregation. However, just as Israel needed to understand its covenant relationship with God before it could fulfill its mission, your church needs self-understanding before it can identify the right pastoral leadership.

This assessment phase includes critical steps: preparing for assessment through team training, developing a church profile based on history and current reality, and evaluating organizational structures. Through this process, like Israel receiving the tablets of the covenant, your church gains clarity about its unique calling and the leadership needed to fulfill that calling.

As you work through this phase, remember that honest self-assessment, while sometimes challenging, is a biblical practice. The wilderness was where God's people discovered their weaknesses and God's faithful provision. Your church's willingness to examine itself truthfully during this time will lay the foundation for a stronger future under new pastoral leadership.



STEP 3: Getting Ready to Learn About Ourselves

"In the third month, on the same day of the month that the Israelites had left the land of Egypt, they entered the Wilderness of Sinai." Exodus 19:1 (CSB)

Your church has now entered the deeper wilderness of self-examination, much like Israel arriving at the sacred mountain where God would reveal their true identity. This pause in your journey is not a delay, but a divine design—the wilderness always includes seasons of reflection before moving forward. Like Israel camping at Sinai to receive the covenant that would define them as God's people, your congregation must discover who you truly are beyond the identity shaped by your previous pastor. The wilderness strips away assumptions and forces honest evaluation. This sacred assessment time prepares you to recognize the leader God will send to guide you from the wilderness into your promised future.

This step exists because churches that begin searching without proper preparation waste time evaluating inappropriate candidates and miss crucial information about their own needs. Churches that skip assessment preparation typically experience extended search timelines, multiple failed candidates, and eventual pastoral mismatches.

You'll know this step is complete when your team is trained and unified, your assessment process is planned, historical data is gathered, and governance documents are current and clear.

Laying the Foundation for Effective Assessment

Before the actual assessment of your church, it's essential to prepare thoroughly. This preparation ensures that the information you gather will be comprehensive, accurate, and genuinely beneficial for identifying your next pastor. With that said, the effectiveness of assessments is directly linked to the depth of your prayer life. Hear these words that Austin Baptist Association Executive Director Dr. David Smith gathered from his people,

In today's leadership culture, it's tempting to follow corporate strategies: looking for metrics, models, and measurable leadership skills. But while God certainly uses

preparation and wisdom, He often chooses the unexpected. David was a shepherd boy, not a warrior. Moses stuttered. Gideon was the least in his tribe. God's strategy always defies human logic.

Ephesians 3:20 reminds us: “Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us...”

When a committee relies on God's supernatural guidance through prayer, they open the door for Him to do immeasurably more than they could have imagined on their own. God's plan is not just good—it's greater than we can conceive.

God Has Already Supplied What Is Needed

*The process of pastoral selection can feel overwhelming. There may be concerns about church health, leadership gaps, and future direction. But **2 Peter 1:2-3** offers this encouragement: “Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness...”*

God's divine power has already supplied everything needed—including the right man for the role. The committee's task is to stay tethered to God's voice in prayer so they can recognize His provision when it arrives, even if it comes wrapped in an unexpected package.

Desperately Seeking God's Heart

The phrase “desperately seeking God” is not just poetic—it is practical. It means setting aside time daily to intercede. It means fasting, listening, and even surrendering preconceived preferences. It means being willing to say, “God, not our will, but Yours be done.”

David may not have been man's first choice, but he was God's perfect choice. The pastor God has prepared for a congregation will reflect His own heart. That kind of man cannot be found through programs or popularity, but only through persistent prayer and humble listening.

Prayer tunes the heart of the committee to the rhythm of heaven. It safeguards against bias, presumption, and haste. It invites wisdom, patience, and peace. It unites the committee in purpose and protects against division. Most importantly, prayer invites the Holy Spirit to lead the process, not just advise it.

The Importance of Waiting and Listening for God to Speak

*In a process that often feels urgent or pressured, the discipline of waiting on the Lord is a mark of spiritual maturity. **Isaiah 40:31** says, “But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.” Waiting is not passive—it is an active trust that God will speak, that His timing is perfect, and that rushing ahead can lead to costly mistakes.*

Listening for God's voice requires silence, stillness, and spiritual attentiveness. Psalm 46:10 urges us, “Be still, and know that I am God.” In the stillness, God reveals what the

noise of our own opinions can easily drown out. A committee grounded in prayer and committed to stillness will hear His whisper, His warning, and His wisdom.

*Samuel had to listen carefully—not just assume. In that waiting posture, God revealed David. So, it is with us. We must pause long enough to hear heaven's instruction. **The right choice is not just about agreement around the table; it's about alignment with the throne.***

Train Transition/Search Team on Their Role

Purpose: To equip the team with the knowledge, skills, and spiritual foundation needed for their sacred task.

The quality of your pastoral search largely depends on how well your team understands their role.

- **Spiritual Preparation:** Help the team recognize this as primarily a spiritual process rather than merely hiring an employee.
 - Establish team prayer practices.
 - Study biblical examples of leadership selection.
 - Develop spiritual discernment practices.
 - Create a team covenant emphasizing seeking God's will.
- **Process Overview Training:** Ensure the team understands each step of the transition and search process.
 - Review the entire pastoral transition timeline.
 - Clarify what happens in each phase.
 - Establish realistic expectations about duration.
 - Identify potential challenges and how to address them.
- **Team Dynamics Development:** Build a cohesive team that can work effectively together:
 - Include team-building exercises.
 - Establish communication norms.
 - Determine decision-making processes (consensus vs. voting).
 - Discuss conflict resolution approaches.
 - Clarify roles within the team (chair, secretary, communications liaison).
- **Practical Skill Development:** Equip the team with specific skills they'll need.
 - Interview techniques
 - Resume evaluation
 - Reference checking protocols
 - Confidentiality practices
 - Documentation methods

- **Resource Familiarization:** Introduce tools and resources available to support the process.
 - Associational Leadership
 - BGCT resources and contacts
 - Denominational search tools
 - Church profile templates – QR code in Step 4
 - Assessment instruments – QR code in Step 5 and 6
- **Team Training Options:**
 - Request training from your Associational Leadership, BGCT Area Representative, or Dr. Aaron Summers, Coordinator for Pastorless Churches, at the BGCT office.
 - Engage an experienced interim minister to train the team

Begin Developing Church Profile

Purpose: To create an accurate, comprehensive picture of who your church is, creating the foundation for identifying the right pastoral match.

The church profile serves multiple purposes. It helps your search team understand what type of pastor you need, provides potential candidates insight into your church, and helps your congregation clarify its identity. All of this will be added to the Church Profile you do in Step 4. Listen to Dr. Jonathan Smith’s passion for building a church profile.

Building a church profile causes the church to study herself, understanding the victories and challenges of the recent past, and present a clear and honest picture of the church to interested pastors.

When a church is seeking a new pastor, one of the most important steps it can take is to tell the truth, openly and humbly, in its church profile. An honest profile sets realistic expectations and builds trust from the very beginning. Every church has strengths and struggles, victories and valleys. Being transparent about attendance trends, leadership dynamics, financial health, community engagement, and ministry challenges does not diminish a church’s value. Being transparent demonstrates integrity. It tells a potential pastor, “We’re not perfect, but we’re ready to move forward with you and your family into a new era.”

A truthful church profile helps ensure a better fit between the pastor and the congregation. If the church paints a picture that’s overly idealized or avoids hard truths, a new pastor may enter with unrealistic expectations and become disillusioned. On the other hand, a pastor who sees and understands the full picture, and still feels called to lead, comes in better prepared, with a realistic timeline and realistic expectations. Truth sets free.

Review Church History and Previous Pastoral Tenures

Understanding your church's story provides crucial context for the current transition. This is best accomplished through a churchwide gathering and exploration. The shared experience will help down the road in the search process.

- **Historical Timeline Creation:** Develop a visual timeline of significant events.
 - Church founding and major milestones
 - Building programs and relocations
 - Periods of significant growth or decline
 - Major transitions or crises
 - Mission initiatives and community impact
- **Pastoral History Analysis:** Examine patterns in previous pastoral leadership.
 - List all previous pastors with tenure length
 - Identify the gifts and leadership styles that worked well
 - Note any recurring challenges in pastoral relationships
 - Analyze the circumstances of previous pastoral departures
 - Recognize any unhealthy patterns that need addressing
- **Cultural Heritage Exploration:** Identify the unique DNA of your congregation.
 - Founding vision and purpose
 - Theological traditions and distinctives
 - Cherished values and ministry priorities
 - Notable church "heroes" and their legacy
 - Stories that get told and retold
- **History Methods:** Consider multiple approaches to gathering historical information.
 - Church archives and historical documents
 - Interviews with long-time members
 - Previous anniversary celebrations or church histories
 - Associational or denominational records
 - Local newspaper archives

Historical Reflection Questions:

- What has God consistently done through our church over the years?
- What pastoral leadership approaches have been most effective in our context?
- What lessons can we learn from previous transitions?
- Are there any unresolved issues from our past that need addressing?
- What aspects of our history should inform our future direction?

Begin Gathering Church Statistical Information

Numbers tell an important part of your church's story and help potential candidates understand your context. Much of this can be gleaned from your Annual Church Profile, generally compiled through the church office. The remainder of the data needed can be drawn from staff, deacons, and other church leaders.

- **Membership and Attendance Data:** Collect 5-10 years of data.
 - Worship attendance
 - Sunday School/small group participation
 - Membership additions and losses
 - Baptism numbers
 - Age demographics of the congregation
- **Financial Information:** Compile recent financial history.
 - Annual budgets and actual expenses
 - Giving patterns and trends
 - Missions and benevolence giving
 - Building and property assets and liabilities
 - Current staff compensation packages
- **Ministry Participation:**
 - Current ministries and their participation levels
 - Leadership positions and how they're filled
 - Volunteer engagement rates
 - Missions involvement and impact
 - Community outreach effectiveness
- **Community Demographics:**
 - Population trends in your community
 - Socioeconomic makeup of your area
 - Ethnic and cultural demographics
 - Age distribution in your community
 - Other churches and religious groups nearby

Statistical Analysis Tips:

- Look for trends rather than isolated data points.
- Compare your church data to community demographics.
- Seek to understand the "why" behind the numbers.
- Include both encouraging and concerning information.
- Your BGCT Area Representative can help you obtain community demographic information FREE from Texas Baptists.

Plan Church Assessment Process

Determine how you'll gather information about your church's current reality and needs.

- **Assessment Methods Selection:** Choose appropriate tools based on your church's size and culture.
 - Congregational surveys
 - Focus groups by demographic or ministry area
 - Individual interviews with key leaders
 - Town hall meetings
 - SWOT analysis sessions (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)
- **Assessment Content Areas:** Determine what aspects of church life to evaluate.
 - Current ministries and their effectiveness
 - Congregational health and unity
 - Governance and decision-making processes
 - Financial stewardship and resource allocation
 - Facilities and their utilization
 - Discipleship and spiritual formation
 - Missions and community impact
 - Worship and music
- **Assessment Timeline:** Create a realistic schedule for the assessment process.
 - When will each assessment component occur
 - Who will facilitate each element
 - How information will be compiled
 - Plans for reporting findings to the congregation
 - How assessment results will inform the pastor profile
- **Participation Planning:** Ensure broad engagement in the assessment.
 - Involve different age groups
 - Include less active members
 - Encourage honest feedback
 - Involve various ministry areas

Assessment Purpose Reminder: The goal of the assessment is not to criticize but to gain an accurate understanding of who you are as a church so you can identify the pastoral leadership that best fits your needs and calling.

Update Church Constitution/Bylaws if Needed

Purpose: To ensure governance documents are current, clear, and supportive of a healthy pastor-church relationship

Outdated or unclear governance documents can create significant problems for a new pastor.

- **Document Review:** Examine current governance documents for needed updates.
 - Pastor's job description and responsibilities
 - Search and calling procedures
 - Decision-making processes and authority
 - Staff supervision and accountability structures
 - Conflict resolution procedures
 - Membership requirements and expectations
 - Leadership selection and terms
 - Financial management policies
- **Comparison Assessment:** Evaluate your documents with these in mind.
 - Current church practices (do you follow what's written?)
 - Legal requirements for non-profit organizations
 - Baptist distinctives and theological values
 - Best practices in church governance
 - Healthy staff-church relationships
- **Update Process Planning:** If updates are needed, develop a clear plan.
 - Who will draft the proposed changes
 - Process for congregational input
 - Timeline for revision and approval
 - Communication strategies for explaining changes
 - Voting procedures according to the current bylaws
- **Focus Areas for Updates:**
 - Clear definition of the pastor's role and authority
 - Well-defined relationship between the pastor and other leadership
 - Reasonable performance expectations and evaluation processes
 - Healthy accountability structures
 - Clear conflict resolution procedures
 - Family and Gender Statements

John Litzler, JD, General Counsel and Director of Public Policy for Texas Baptists, states

In addition to promoting unity and eliminating confusion, bylaws help promote a sense of continuity during a time of pastoral or leadership transition. Bylaws provide a structure for church operations and often describe the process of forming search committees, calling staff (including interim pastors), and other important processes. When well-used, a church's constitution and bylaws create a framework for healthy and productive relationships in the body of Christ. This framework is always important in the life of a church, but it is particularly beneficial during a time of pastoral or leadership transition.

A church's constitution and bylaws are not static documents that are adopted once and then placed on a shelf to collect dust. These governing documents should be reviewed and amended to adapt to meet the changing needs of the congregation. In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, many churches were still not holding in-person business meetings. They found that they needed to update their bylaws to allow for teleconference (Zoom) attendance and voting at business meetings. It's wise for a church to schedule a regular periodic review of the church bylaws to see if there are any areas that may need to be updated. Some churches make it the duty of a committee or team to conduct this periodic review.

When a church is without a senior pastor, it can be a great time to update bylaws. This is true for at least two reasons. First, updated bylaws contain statements on church structure, polity, beliefs, and organization. It's kind and helpful to provide current information to pastoral candidates and not an outdated version. Second, it sets the new pastor up for success. Making "big" changes to the church bylaws, even if they are needed, is rarely a popular decision by a new pastor. Updating bylaws prior to calling a pastor can help avoid false perceptions that the pastor is changing "everything about the church" or that the new changes are targeted at any particular individual or circumstance.

For more helpful information, including a sample constitution and bylaws, please visit the Texas Baptists' church administration resources page and look under the heading "Bylaws and Governance."

<https://www.texasbaptists.org/ministries/church-administration/resources>

Common Pitfalls in This Step

Believing There's Nothing New to Learn

Just as Israel sometimes assumed they knew the route through the wilderness and resisted Moses' guidance, search teams often assume that pastoral transitions are straightforward and that common sense alone will guide them through the process. This attitude leads to skipping essential training and missing important insights that could prevent conflicts and disagreements. Team members may have strong opinions about how things should be done without understanding best practices or potential consequences. Even if committee members have previous search experience, each church context is unique, and the process continues to evolve. Invest in proper training regardless of prior experience.

Underestimating the Importance of Team Building

Committees sometimes rush past relationship building, assuming that shared commitment to finding a pastor is a sufficient foundation for working together effectively. This oversight can lead to miscommunication, conflicting approaches, and difficulty reaching consensus on important decisions. Strong working relationships among team members are essential for navigating the challenges ahead and maintaining unity throughout the process.

What Does the Interim Pastor Do During This Phase?

The approach to assessment preparation differs based on whether you're following a standard or intentional interim model.

Standard Interim Ministry Focus

Administrative Preparation

- Focuses primarily on gathering factual information needed for the search.
- Emphasizes documenting current practices rather than evaluating them.
- Concentrates on the information candidates will need to understand the church.
- Compiles historical and statistical data with minimal interpretive analysis.
- Reviews governance documents primarily for clarity and currency.

Process Management

- Helps the search committee establish an efficient timeline.
- Assists in identifying necessary information sources.
- Provides templates and formats for data gathering.
- Ensures basic assessment tools are available.
- Maintains focus on moving toward the search phase.

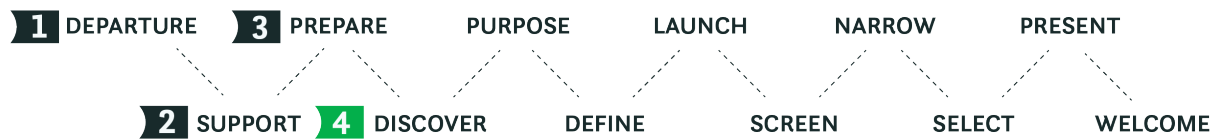
Intentional Interim Ministry Focus

Systematic Analysis

- Uses specialized assessment tools designed for church health evaluation.
- Helps the congregation identify underlying issues needing attention.
- Facilitates deeper historical analysis to uncover patterns and themes.
- Guides leadership through self-discovery of strengths and challenges.
- Prepares for addressing systemic issues before calling a new pastor.

Congregational Development

- Forms and trains specialized teams for different assessment areas.
- Builds capacity for honest self-evaluation and constructive feedback.
- Develops skills for healthy conflict engagement around findings.
- Creates safe spaces for truth-telling about church realities.
- Prepares the congregation for potential changes based on findings.



STEP 4: Discovering Who We Are as a Church

"Now if you will carefully listen to me and keep my covenant, you will be my own possession out of all the peoples, although the whole earth is mine, and you will be my kingdom of priests and my holy nation." Exodus 19:5-6 (CSB)

Deep in the wilderness at Sinai, Israel discovered their identity as God's chosen people with a unique calling among the nations. Your church's wilderness journey includes this same profound self-discovery as you explore your congregation's distinctive identity and mission apart from any particular pastoral leader. Just as Israel received covenant clarity in the wilderness, your assessment process reveals how God has uniquely shaped your fellowship for His purposes. The wilderness has a way of burning off what is superficial and showing what is essential. This identity clarification during your transition prepares you to recognize the pastoral leader who will guide you faithfully from the wilderness into the fruitful ministry of your Promised Land.

This step exists because churches that don't understand their own identity, context, and resources cannot identify the pastoral leadership they actually need. Churches that skip thorough self-assessment typically attract candidates who appear well-suited on paper but a strong lack fit with the church's culture, community, or financial reality.

You'll know this step is complete when you have documented your church's history and patterns, current demographics and participation, community context, financial health, and can articulate your church's unique identity clearly.

Discovering Your Congregational Identity

While Step 3 focused on preparing for assessment, Step 4 involves the actual self-study process. This step parallels Israel's experiences at Mount Sinai, where they discovered who they were as God's covenant people. Your church's self-study provides the essential foundation for identifying the right pastoral match.

Continue Church Profile Development

Purpose: To create a comprehensive understanding of your church's identity, relationships, context, and health

The church profile serves as the primary document for both understanding your church and presenting it to potential candidates. This process involves several key components and builds on the work done in Step 3.

Conduct Conversations About Church Identity

Understanding your church's unique identity is essential for finding a pastor who aligns with your DNA.

- **Church Life Cycle Assessment:** Evaluate your church's current position on the organizational life cycle.
 - **Launch** - New church with minimal structure and few people
 - **Momentum Growth** - Young church growing quickly with developing structure
 - **Strategic Growth** - Growth necessitating the creation of systems and strategies
 - **Sustained Health** - Growing in ministry with increasing organizational size
 - **Maintenance** - Complex and increasingly inward-focused organization
 - **Preservation** - Resistant to change and attempting to preserve "good days" of the past
 - **Life Support** - Church on the brink of closure
- **Life Cycle Implications:** Discuss what your current position means.
 - How your position affects what type of pastor you need
 - Whether revitalization leadership skills are needed
 - If your church requires a pastor with growth or maintenance gifts
 - What this means for your church's future trajectory
 - Whether system changes are required before or during new pastoral leadership
- **Vision and Purpose Exploration:** Engage the congregation in discussion.
 - Your church's unique calling and mission
 - Core values that define your congregation
 - Ministry priorities and focus areas
 - Congregation's understanding of success in ministry
 - Dreams for the future
- **Current Ministry Assessment:** Evaluate existing ministries through:
 - Ministry inventory and effectiveness evaluation
 - Identification of ministry strengths and weaknesses
 - Analysis of alignment between activities and stated mission
 - Evaluation of resource allocation versus priorities

- Assessment of ministry impact in the church and the community
- **Church Culture Examination:** Identify the unique personality of your congregation.
 - Worship style preferences and expectations
 - Communication patterns and decision-making approach
 - Fellowship characteristics and relational dynamics
 - Approach to change and innovation
 - Conflict management patterns
- **Congregational Self-Perception:** Explore how members view the church.
 - What members value most about their church
 - How would they describe the church to others
 - What they believe makes the church unique
 - Areas where they see a need for growth or change
 - Qualities they hope to maintain regardless of leadership changes

Conversation Methods:

- Congregational surveys (limit these)
- Focus group discussions
- Sunday School or small group conversations
- Town hall meetings
- One-on-one interviews with key leaders
- Ministry team assessments

Review Denominational Relationships

Understanding your church's connections to the broader Baptist family helps identify candidates with compatible perspectives.

- **Current Affiliations Assessment:** Document your church's relationships with:
 - Baptist General Convention of Texas
 - Local Baptist association
 - Other Baptist or evangelical networks
 - Mission partnerships and supported organizations
 - Parachurch ministries and local service organizations
- **Participation Analysis:** Evaluate the nature and depth of these relationships.
 - Financial support and giving patterns
 - Leadership involvement in denominational life
 - Use of denominational resources and programs
 - Attendance at denominational meetings and events
 - Historical significance of these connections
- **Theological Alignment:** Clarify where your church stands on various issues, such as

- Baptist distinctives important to your congregation
- Key theological positions and their importance
- Areas where flexibility exists
- Non-negotiable doctrinal commitments
- How theological positions influence church practices
- **Future Direction Considerations:** Discuss whether the current relationships
 - Should be maintained as is
 - Need strengthening or renewal
 - Require reconsideration or adjustment
 - Should be supplemented with new connections
 - Align with the church's mission and vision

Key Questions:

- How important are our denominational connections to our identity?
- What benefits do we receive from these relationships?
- How do these relationships influence our expectations for pastoral leadership?
- Are there tensions or questions about these affiliations among church members?
- What level of denominational involvement do we expect from our pastor?

Gather Community Demographic Information

Understanding your ministry context is vital for effective outreach and identifying a pastor who can connect with your community. Dr. Jonathan Smith writes,

Building a community profile leads the church to study the Jerusalem around them they are called to serve. In many cases, churches lose perspective of what is really happening in the community, often with a sterilized view of reality. Potential pastors need to understand the primary mission field they are considering engaging with the gospel.

When presenting a community profile to a potential pastor, honesty is just as critical as it is in the church profile. A pastor stepping into a new role needs to understand the church and the mission field of the community. If the surrounding neighborhood is changing demographically, experiencing economic challenges, or impervious to the gospel message, those realities must be communicated clearly. Sugarcoating the truth may seem polite, but it can lead to frustration and misalignment later. A truthful community profile invites the pastor to engage the community as it truly is, not as the church remembers it or wishes it still were.

Transparency honors the calling of the pastor. A leader who knows the real makeup, needs, and potential of the community can pray and plan with clarity. Whether the area is thriving, declining, diverse, underserved, or full of opportunity, the church and pastor are called to love that community well. An honest profile says, "We know our neighbors,

and we're ready to reach them." It becomes not just a data set, but a missional motivation for the pastor.

- **Basic Demographic Data:** Collect key information about your community. Contact Dr. Aaron Summers with BGCT for help with this and receive a FREE detailed demographics report.
 - Population size and growth trends
 - Age distribution and generational makeup
 - Racial and ethnic composition
 - Income levels and economic indicators
 - Educational attainment
 - Family structures and household types
 - Housing patterns and stability
- **Community Needs Assessment:** Identify significant needs in your area.
 - Economic challenges and opportunities
 - Social issues and concerns
 - Educational needs and resources
 - Health and wellness factors
 - Spiritual climate and religious participation
 - 7 Interviews Process
- **Ministry Context Analysis:** Understand the religious landscape.
 - Other churches and faith communities nearby
 - Unchurched or underserved populations
 - Receptivity to spiritual conversations
 - Unique ministry opportunities
 - Potential partnership possibilities
- **Resource Utilization:** Take advantage of available tools.
 - BGCT demographic services (one free study per year)
 - Census data and government reports
 - Chamber of Commerce information
 - School district demographics
 - City planning documents
 - Local social service agency reports
 - The 7-Interviews Model

Application Focus: Don't just collect demographic data—interpret what it means for your ministry. Consider how your church's current makeup compares to the community and what implications this has for future ministry direction and pastoral leadership needs.

Assess Church Financial Health

A clear understanding of financial realities is essential for sustainable ministry and establishing appropriate compensation:

- **Current Financial Position:** Document your church's financial situation.
 - Annual income and expense patterns
 - Giving trends (increasing, stable, or decreasing)
 - Reserve funds and designated accounts
 - Debt obligations and payment schedules
 - Property assets and maintenance needs
- **Budget Analysis:** Evaluate your church's resource allocation.
 - Staff compensation as a percentage of the total budget
 - Ministry and program funding distribution
 - Missions and outreach investment
 - Facilities and operations expenses
 - Savings and long-term financial planning
- **Stewardship Assessment:** Understand giving patterns.
 - Number of giving units (families/individuals)
 - Distribution of giving across membership
 - Percentage of members who give regularly
 - Special offerings and designated giving trends
 - Stewardship education and emphasis
- **Financial Systems Review:** Evaluate financial management practices.
 - Budgeting processes and financial controls
 - Financial reporting and transparency
 - Giving methods and technologies
 - Financial policy documentation
 - Audit or financial review practices

Financial Health Indicators:

- Consistent ability to meet budget
- Three to six months of operating expenses in reserve
- Debt levels below 20% of the annual budget
- Maintenance reserves for facility needs
- Balanced allocation between staff, facilities, and ministry
- Growing or stable giving patterns

Determine Compensation Package

Purpose: To establish fair, sustainable compensation that will attract qualified candidates while being fiscally responsible

Determining appropriate compensation requires balancing ministry needs with financial realities. An added consideration would be whether the church can financially commit to a full-time pastor or should it consider a bi-vocational pastor.

- **Total Package Calculation:** Consider all components of compensation.
 - Base salary
 - Housing allowance or parsonage value
 - Health insurance and benefits
 - Retirement contributions
 - Continuing education allowance
 - Ministry expense reimbursement
 - Paid time off (vacation, sick leave, study leave)
 - Social Security offset (if applicable)
- **Compensation Research:** Base your offer on relevant comparisons.
 - Lifeway compensation studies for churches of similar size
 - Local cost of living considerations
 - Educational and experience expectations
 - Previous pastor's compensation (adjusted for current realities)
 - Compensation at comparable churches in your area
- **Sustainability Analysis:** Ensure long-term financial viability.
 - Projected giving patterns
 - Impact on the overall church budget
 - Growth potential and financial trajectory
 - Ability to provide appropriate increases over time
 - Balance between pastoral compensation and other ministry needs
- **Presentation Format:** Prepare compensation information in multiple formats.
 - Total package value for church budgeting
 - Take-home pay estimate for candidate consideration
 - Detailed breakdown of each component
 - Tax implications explanation
 - Growth or review provisions

Best Practices:

- Involve the finance committee in developing the package
- Obtain congregational approval for the compensation range

- Be prepared to justify the package to both the congregation and candidates
- Consider both what you can afford and what is fair for the work expected
- Balance generosity with fiscal responsibility

In today's economic climate, pastor search committees that withhold compensation details until late in the process are inadvertently hindering their own success. The days of expecting pastoral candidates to proceed through multiple interview rounds without knowing basic financial information have passed. Churches must recognize that salary transparency isn't a lack of faith. It's responsible stewardship for both parties. The following comes from Dr. Aaron Summers, Coordinator for Pastorless Churches at Texas Baptists.

The Generational Shift in Expectations

Generation X, Millennial, and Generation Z pastors approach career decisions differently than their predecessors. These generations carry higher education debt, face increased housing costs, and often support aging parents while raising children. They view salary discussions as a fundamental part of financial planning, not spiritual weakness. When churches delay compensation conversations, they signal either poor planning or intentional evasiveness—neither of which attracts quality candidates.

Today's pastoral candidates research potential churches online before applying. They examine community cost of living, housing markets, and school districts. Withholding compensation information forces candidates to make blind applications, wasting everyone's time when financial realities don't align with family needs.

The Business Case for Early Transparency

Publishing compensation details with position announcements creates a more efficient search process. Clear financial information attracts candidates who can genuinely afford to serve in that context while deterring those for whom the position isn't financially viable. This natural screening saves search committees countless hours reviewing applications from otherwise qualified candidates who simply cannot afford the role.

Moreover, churches that provide detailed compensation information demonstrate organizational maturity and respect for candidates' time. This transparency becomes a competitive advantage in attracting top-tier pastoral talent who have multiple opportunities.

Beyond Package Deals: The Tax Advantage Strategy

Many churches still offer vague "compensation packages" that place administrative burdens on pastors while creating tax disadvantages. When churches provide a lump sum for pastors to handle their own insurance, retirement, and benefits, those funds become taxable income. This approach reduces the pastor's actual take-home pay and increases their tax liability.

Smart churches structure compensation to maximize tax benefits for their pastor. When the church directly pays insurance premiums, those payments aren't considered taxable income to the pastor. Similarly, church-paid retirement contributions, professional development expenses, and mileage reimbursements provide tax advantages that benefit both parties.

Consider two scenarios with identical church expenditures of \$75,000:

Church A: *Offers a \$75,000 "package" from which the pastor pays \$18,000 for health insurance and contributes to GuideStone retirement (all taxable income to the pastor).*

Church B: *Offers \$54,000 salary plus church-paid health insurance (\$18,000) and matches the pastor's \$3,000 GuideStone contribution with an additional \$3,000 church contribution.*

The financial reality becomes clear when accounting for actual housing costs. Both pastors likely have similar housing expenses (\$30,000 annually for mortgage/rent, utilities, and maintenance) regardless of their compensation structure, and both will claim this amount as housing allowance.

Scenario A: *Pastor claims \$30,000 housing allowance, leaving \$45,000 taxable income for federal purposes. After the standard deduction for married filing jointly (\$29,200), the pastor pays federal income tax on \$15,800. However, the full \$75,000 remains subject to self-employment tax at 15.3%, totaling approximately \$13,055 in taxes.*

Scenario B: *Pastor claims the same \$30,000 housing allowance, leaving only \$24,000 taxable income for federal purposes. This falls completely below the standard deduction, meaning the pastor pays zero federal income tax. The full \$54,000 is subject to self-employment tax at 15.3%, totaling approximately \$8,262.*

The result: *Church B's pastor saves \$4,793 annually in taxes alone, plus builds \$6,000 in retirement savings compared to \$3,000 in Scenario A. The total annual advantage is \$7,793, that's \$649 more per month. Both churches spend exactly \$75,000, but Church B's pastor pays significantly less in self-employment taxes while doubling their retirement savings.*

Note: *Pastors are considered self-employed for Social Security purposes and pay self-employment tax at 15.3% on their full compensation, including housing allowances. Tax situations vary, and pastors should consult qualified tax professionals familiar with clergy tax law.*

Compensation Transparency

Effective position postings should include:

- *Base salary range*
- *Church-paid benefits (health, dental, retirement percentage)*

- *Professional development allowances*
- *Housing arrangements or allowances*
- *Mileage and expense reimbursement policies*

This information helps qualified candidates assess fit before investing time in applications. It demonstrates the church's commitment to supporting their pastor's financial well-being.

Compensation transparency isn't about reducing ministry to a transaction—it's about enabling faithful servants to serve without financial anxiety. Churches that embrace early salary discussions attract candidates who can focus on ministry rather than worrying about their family's basic needs. In today's competitive ministry landscape, transparency isn't just helpful—it's essential for finding and retaining quality pastoral leadership.

Search committees that publish detailed, tax-advantaged compensation structures will discover they attract more qualified candidates, conduct more efficient searches, and ultimately call pastors who can serve with greater peace of mind.

Complete Church Profile Document

Purpose: To compile all gathered information into a comprehensive, accurate, and appealing presentation of your church



The completed profile serves as both a tool for self-understanding and a presentation document for potential candidates.

- **Using the Church Profile Template:**
 - **Basic Information** - Church name, contact details, year established, and denominational affiliations
 - **Church History and Identity** - Historical narrative, mission statement, theological identity, and unique characteristics
 - **Church Demographics and Participation** - Attendance patterns, baptism trends, age distribution, and giving trends
 - **Church Ministries and Programming** - Worship style, strongest ministries, outreach efforts, and missions partnerships
 - **Church Leadership and Structure** - Staff positions, governance structure, deacons, committees, and decision-making processes
 - **Financial Information** - Budget details, Cooperative Program giving, missions support, and financial obligations
 - **Compensation Package** - Salary range, benefits, housing allowance, and other compensation elements
 - **Facilities** - Description of church property, condition, and capacity

- **Church Relationships** - Denominational connections and community relationships
- **Church Self-Assessment** - Strengths, challenges, spiritual health, and areas open to change
- **Beyond the Template:** Enhance your profile.
 - Supporting documents or appendices for detailed information
 - Photos that represent your church's life and ministry
 - Charts or graphs to illustrate statistical trends
 - Brief testimonials or stories that capture your church's personality
 - Digital presentation format in addition to the print version
- **Honesty and Transparency:** Present an accurate picture of your church.
 - Include both strengths and growth areas
 - Acknowledge challenges without dwelling on them
 - Avoid excessive marketing language
 - Present realistic expectations for pastoral leadership
 - Be forthright about sensitive issues that candidates should know
- **Review Process:** Ensure accuracy and completeness.
 - Have multiple church leaders review the draft
 - Consider having someone unfamiliar with your church provide feedback
 - Check for clarity, accuracy, and appropriate tone
 - Verify that sensitive information is presented appropriately
 - Confirm that the document truly represents who you are as a church

Profile Purpose Reminder: The church profile serves two essential purposes: to help your church understand itself more clearly and to provide potential candidates with an accurate picture of your congregation. Both purposes require honesty, clarity, and thoroughness.

Common Pitfalls in This Step

Rushing Past the Assessment Process

Like Israel wanting to bypass the necessary wilderness lessons and rush straight to the Promised Land, churches eager to begin searching for candidates often minimize or skip the thorough self-study process, believing they already understand who they are. This impatience prevents the honest reflection necessary for identifying the right pastoral match. Without deep assessment, churches may not recognize patterns from their history, understand their true needs, or present an accurate picture to potential candidates. The time invested in assessment work pays dividends by preventing mismatched pastoral relationships.

Avoiding Difficult Conversations About Church Reality

Some committees solely focus on the positive aspects of their church while avoiding honest discussions of challenges, conflicts, or areas needing improvement. Such selective self-

examination creates unrealistic profiles that attract pastors unprepared for the church's actual situation. Authentic assessment includes both strengths and growth areas, providing a foundation for identifying a pastor who is a strong fit to lead your specific congregation.

What Does the Interim Pastor Do During This Phase?

The approach to church self-study differs based on whether you're following a standard or intentional interim model.

Standard Interim Ministry Focus

Information Gathering Efficiency

- Focuses on collecting essential factual information
- Emphasizes efficient data collection processes
- Uses straightforward survey and feedback methods
- Maintains existing church systems during the study
- Compiles information without extensive processing or analysis
- Helps organize findings in a clear, accessible format
- Keeps the process moving toward the search phase

Organizational Support

- Assists leadership in managing the self-study process
- Provides templates and resources from previous experiences
- Ensures all necessary information is gathered
- Helps interpret demographic and statistical information
- Maintains objectivity in recording findings
- Supports the development of a comprehensive but concise profile

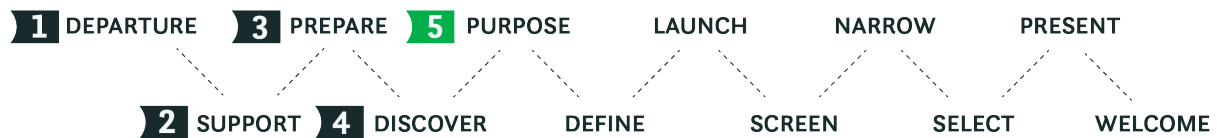
Intentional Interim Ministry Focus

Deeper Conversation Facilitation

- Creates a safe space for honest dialogue about church identity
- Helps surface underlying issues that affect church health
- Facilitates difficult conversations about past conflicts
- Guides the congregation in addressing unresolved issues
- Encourages exploration of unstated assumptions
- Promotes healing conversations where needed
- Helps the church address "elephants in the room"

Systems Analysis and Development

- Conducts more extensive analysis of organizational health
- Identifies patterns and systems that need attention
- Helps the church recognize unhealthy cycles or dynamics
- Facilitates preliminary work on systems that need change
- Guides deeper explorations of church culture and practices
- Assists in developing healthier patterns of interaction
- Prepares the church to be ready for new leadership



STEP 5: Understanding Our Purpose and Values

"Speak to the entire Israelite community and tell them: Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy." Leviticus 19:2 (CSB)

The wilderness is where God's people learn to live by His values rather than the world's expectations. As Israel received instructions for holy living while camped around God's presence in the wilderness, your church now clarifies the mission and values that will guide your future ministry. This wilderness season moves you beyond understanding who you are to embracing what God has called you to become. Like Israel organizing their entire camp life around worship and obedience in the wilderness, your congregation identifies the core commitments that will shape your journey toward the Promised Land. These wilderness-tested values become the foundation upon which your future pastor will build and the compass that will guide you both through whatever challenges lie ahead.

This step exists because churches unclear about their mission and values cannot evaluate whether candidates share their fundamental commitments and calling. Churches that skip purpose clarification typically call pastors whose vision conflicts with the congregation's values, creating inevitable tension and eventual failure.

You'll know this step is complete when you have honestly assessed your church's current reality, understand community ministry opportunities, and can clearly articulate your non-negotiable mission and values.

Discovering Your Identity and Purpose

While Step 4 focused on gathering information about your church (Page 41), Step 5 moves deeper into understanding your foundational identity and mission. This step parallels Israel's time at Sinai when they received the covenant that defined who they were as God's people.

Importantly, this step focuses on clarifying who you are, not determining a specific future vision, which should be a collaborative process with your new pastor.

Church Governance

This item is widely discussed in churches today. As you seek a new pastor it is vital that the church body reflect on and be reminded of where they stand on the issues. There is a generational debate surging through the convention as the younger pastor begin to lead older churches. Dr. Ryan Jespersen, Executive Director of the Dallas Baptist Association, writes on this important subject.

Understanding Church Governance in Your Pastoral Search

Churches across our great state hold various views on how to interpret scripture in multiple areas, including church governance. As a search committee, you will encounter pastoral candidates with varying opinions on church leadership, some of which may differ from your church's current practices. When you speak with a pastoral candidate, understanding their views on specific issues and how they may differ from your church's practices is essential to a successful partnership.

In this chapter, we aim to address the issue of church governance, specifically why you and a candidate need to be on the same page, or if not in complete uniformity, have a solid plan to work together so that the gospel of Jesus Christ is effectively advanced.

The Current Landscape

Many ministers entering Southern Baptist and Texas Baptist life today hold a view of church governance that includes a system where you have a plurality of elders who provide leadership to the congregation. This approach, though different than the congregational form of government many Baptist churches hold today, does reflect historic Baptist practice for some of the churches, not a modern innovation. For instance, in some churches, elders have significant input in major decisions, including the hiring of staff and the allocation of funds. Furthermore, in some cases, churches that were once governed by committees now receive leadership from elders. However, the congregation typically retains authority in matters of membership, discipline, property, doctrine, and calling pastors.

There are varying degrees of elder leadership. As one pastor describes it, "Elder leadership differs from elder rule. Biblical elder leadership involves shepherding, leading, and teaching (1 Peter 5:2-3; Hebrews 13:17), while the gathered congregation retains final authority under Christ in essential matters (Matthew 18; 1 Corinthians 5; Galatians 1)." This is a Biblical approach, and in fact, many believers who thoroughly believe in the Bible and love the Savior dearly hold these beliefs. For most, the desire for elder leadership is not about power, but rather about how to better care for all members of the congregation.

Congregational government typically differs from this in that you do not have a plurality of elders, but instead, a pastor, other staff who may or may not hold the title "pastor," along with committees and deacons who share in the leadership of the congregation. In

this form of church governance, in many ways, you are practicing something called Single-elder Congregationalism, where the senior pastor serves as the elder. The church members then take part in leadership through deacons, committees, and church business meetings. In this way, the congregation partners with the pastor to lead the church. Most of the time, churches, including yours, will not use this term, but in practice, it is what you are doing.

Keep in mind that both forms of church governance can still have committees and quite often still have deacons. Both forms of church governance honor the same principle: the whole church family, not just one leader or a few leaders, carries the responsibility of guiding the church together.

Understanding the Biblical Balance

One pastor with whom we consulted on this topic shared the following about a balanced approach many churches take on this matter.

“The key is recognizing that both approaches seek to honor Christ as the Head of the church (Colossians 1:18). Both elders and congregation are accountable to Him. Problems arise on both extremes: elders can wrongly silence the congregation and become authoritarian, but congregations can also fall into hyper-democratic practices that erode pastoral leadership and create chaos. The biblical model is elder-led, congregationally governed, where qualified leaders shepherd and guide. At the same time, the congregation exercises its God-given authority in matters of membership, discipline, doctrine, and pastoral calling.”

Both forms of governance, “Congregational” or “Congregationally ruled-Elder-led,” with a plurality of elders, are Biblical, and it is up to the church to prayerfully consider how they will handle this issue. Keep in mind that the only way a form of church governance works is if each member of the congregation is doing all that he or she can to run towards Christ Jesus, to seek His will, and to not come to decision-making time as a place to bring their opinion but rather come with a prayerful perspective.

Determining Your Church's Identity

It is essential that your church determine its identity and ask crucial questions about this issue. Here are some prompts that may help you begin the conversation. We would strongly encourage you to reach out to the Director of Missions or associational leader in your area, who may be able to help you determine who you are as a congregation, which will then inform the kinds of questions you want to ask a pastoral candidate. Directors of Missions can provide valuable insights and guidance based on their experience working with various churches, and they can help facilitate discussions within your church to clarify its identity and governance preferences.

There is a reality that more of our pastoral candidates in the next ten years will hold views that include some form of elder leadership, and it is essential that you can determine how you can work with your congregation to work with someone who may

hold a different view on church governance than you do. We have seen several young pastors who hold opinions on church governance that differ from those of many in the churches they serve. Yet, with love and grace from each side, these pastors and congregations not only coexist but have an excellent pastor and people relationship, and they have learned to work together for the cause of Christ. In some cases, shifts in governance have been made, but in other cases, they continue in the form of governance that they held when the pastor came and do so peacefully and with love. Yet we must understand that there are also stories of churches and pastors who have had an impossible time coexisting because they could not come together on how decisions would be made.

Essential Questions for Candidates

One helpful question that allows candidates to discuss their thoughts is simply this: "How do you feel decisions should be made in the church?" This open question allows the candidate to discuss their thoughts on the differences between elder and congregational leadership, committees, church votes, and various other issues. If necessary, provide more specific details; however, most candidates who hold a view of church governance that includes elders will be completely honest about it.

Additional questions to consider include:

- *"How do you see the role of pastor and congregation working together?"*
- *"What decisions, according to Scripture, belong to the whole church?"*
- *"How would you work within our current system, and would you attempt to change it over the years?"*
- *"How would you shepherd a congregation toward health if they see things differently than you?"*

The key is to determine non-negotiables for both the candidate and the church. If a candidate has a non-negotiable view on church leadership that differs from your church, and you know your church will not likely move on the issue, then that is very likely not a match. If your church is open to change, then perhaps you can continue to talk with this candidate about how they would do that through the years. But if your church is not open to change, then it may be best to move forward, looking at other candidates who will better match your church's views. An important note here is that oftentimes members of the pastor search committee are leaders of the church, thus you may be more open to change than the rest of the church. Keep in mind previous comments about there have been pastors who hold a different view work for years with a church in a gracious pastor-people relationship, yet we have also seen situations where it is very difficult. The key is what is and is not non-negotiable for the church and the candidate.

Special note: Though this book is written specifically for churches, I would say a word to pastoral candidates who may be reading this: if your view on this issue is non-negotiable and you determine that the church is not going to change, then it may be best for you to move on to other opportunities. However, if you can work in the system the church has

and can do that for the length of your tenure, then continue in the conversation as the Lord leads.

Moving Forward Together

The key is open communication and understanding, which will always lead to the best decisions for your church. Remember the aim is not simply what works best practically, but what honors Christ as Head of His church. Both the candidate and your congregation must be committed to seeking God's will together, whether that means maintaining your current governance structure or prayerfully considering changes that serve the kingdom better.

Churches that succeed in navigating these differences do so through honest dialogue, mutual respect, and a shared commitment to the advancement of the gospel. The goal is not uniformity in every detail, but unity in purpose, that Christ might be glorified and His church might flourish under faithful leadership that serves His people well.

Special note: We have found extreme situations where a pastor tried to move the church to complete elder rule. While this is a form of church governance that some adhere to, it is unusual in Baptist life and should be carefully and prayerfully considered before adopting. This would mean that the elders have complete say over everything in the congregation and the church has no say at all, including matters of who the pastor is, the location of the church, and other significant decisions.

It will be stated multiple times throughout this volume that as a church, do not feel like you must do this by yourself. Call your local association, or if you do not have a local association, find a local association near you or call me at Dallas Baptist Association. Call Texas Baptists and our friend, Aaron Summers, who is committed to helping churches in this process. We are here to be of help to you.

As you have questions, please reach out to Texas Baptists or your local Baptist association.

Conduct Four Helpful Lists Assessment

Purpose: To systematically evaluate your church's current reality to inform your pastoral search

The Four Helpful Lists Assessment provides a balanced approach to understanding your church by examining four key areas:

- **What is Right?** - Strengths to maintain and build upon
- **What is Wrong?** - Problems that need correction
- **What is Confused?** - Areas needing clarification
- **What is Missing?** - Gaps and opportunities for growth



This framework helps you see both positive aspects to preserve and challenges to address. Unlike assessments that focus only on problems, this approach celebrates what's working while honestly identifying areas needing attention.

Implementation Process:

- Schedule a 90-minute session with church leaders or the whole congregation
- Use the detailed process guide
- Work through each category systematically
- Prioritize the findings from each list
- Document results to guide pastor profile development

Why This Assessment Matters: Your findings will directly inform what type of pastoral leadership you need. Items in "What is Missing?" suggest pastoral gifts to prioritize. Items in "What is Wrong?" indicate change management skills required. Items in "What is Confused?" highlight the communication and teaching abilities required. Items in "What is Right?" demonstrate pastoral approaches that should continue.

The assessment typically reveals patterns that help committees understand their church's unique needs and the leadership qualities that will best serve their congregation in its next chapter.

Assessment Results Application:

- Develop specific criteria for your pastor profile
- Prepare interview questions that address your church's realities
- Share appropriate insights with candidates about your church's context
- Plan initial priorities for your new pastor's first year

Click the QR code for the complete Four Helpful Lists Assessment process guide.

Consider Community Ministry Opportunities Through Seven Community Interviews

Purpose: To gain objective insight into community needs and potential ministry impact

The Seven Community Interviews approach, developed by Dr. Jonathan Smith with Texas Baptists, provides an invaluable perspective from community leaders about needs your church might address.

- **Interview Structure:** Conduct face-to-face interviews with seven community leaders, asking two key questions.
 - What hidden issues/problems exist in our community?

- How could our church address these issues/problems?
- **Required Interview Subjects:** Include these four essential perspectives.
 - **Pediatrician or Family Doctor** - For insight into family health challenges
 - **Teacher(s)** - For understanding educational needs and youth issues
 - **Police Officer/EMT/Firefighter** - For awareness of public safety concerns
 - **Counselor/Social Worker** - For perspective on mental health and social needs
- **Recommended Additional Interview Subjects:** Choose three from these options.
 - Housing authority representative
 - School administrator (principal, counselor, superintendent)
 - Emergency room doctor
 - Tattoo artist (for perspective on younger demographics)
 - Barber or hairdresser (who often hear community concerns)
 - Your personal physician
 - Another pastor in the community
 - Justice of the peace
 - City council member
 - County judge
 - Mayor
- **Interview Best Practices:**
 - Schedule 30-45 minutes for each conversation
 - Explain that you're seeking to understand how your church can better serve
 - Ask the same two core questions of each person
 - Take detailed notes without interrupting or defending
 - Thank them for their candid feedback
 - Consider a small thank-you gift for their time
- **Analyzing Interview Results:**
 - Look for patterns or recurring themes across interviews
 - Note surprising or unexpected insights
 - Compare community perceptions with your church's self-understanding
 - Identify gaps between community needs and current ministries
 - Consider which needs align with your church's strengths and calling
 - Develop a summary report for church leadership

Interview Insight: Community leaders often see needs that church members miss. Their perspective can reveal blind spots in your ministry approach and uncover opportunities for meaningful impact that align with your church's strengths. (Step 4, Page 42)

Clarify Mission and Core Values

Purpose: To ensure your church has a clear understanding of its fundamental purpose and guiding principles

Focusing on mission and core values provides the foundation that a new pastor will need to develop a vision with your congregation.

- **Mission Statement Review:** Evaluate your current mission statement.
 - Does it clearly express why your church exists?
 - Is it rooted in the Great Commission and Great Commandment?
 - Is it memorable and meaningful to members?
 - Does it provide guidance for decision-making?
 - Is it biblically grounded and theologically sound?
 - Does it need updating or clarification?
- **Core Values Identification:** Clarify what principles guide your church.
 - What non-negotiable values define how you operate?
 - What biblical principles are fundamental to your congregation?
 - What behaviors or attitudes do you want to characterize your church?
 - How do these values influence ministry decisions?
 - How are these values demonstrated in practice?
- **Great Commission Commitment:** Affirm your church's commitment.
 - Making disciples who make disciples
 - Evangelism and outreach
 - Baptizing new believers
 - Teaching Scripture faithfully
 - Sending members on a mission trip
- **Great Commandment Affirmation:** Confirm your church's dedication.
 - Loving God with heart, soul, mind, and strength
 - Loving neighbors as ourselves
 - Serving the community with Christ's compassion
 - Meeting needs in Jesus' name
 - Demonstrating God's love in practical ways

Note About Vision:

While clarifying mission and values is essential during transition, detailed vision development should be a collaborative process with your new pastor. Provide the new pastor with insights from your Four Helpful Lists analysis and community interviews, but avoid creating rigid vision expectations that might limit the pastor's leadership. The mission defines your purpose (why you exist); the new pastor should help shape the vision (where you're going).

Common Pitfalls in This Step

Making Assumptions About Church Systems and Processes

Churches often assume their governance structures, policies, and procedures are adequate without careful examination. This oversight prevents necessary updates that could support healthy pastoral leadership. Outdated bylaws, unclear authority structures, or inadequate conflict resolution procedures can create significant problems for incoming pastors. Use the transition period to evaluate and update organizational systems that affect pastoral effectiveness.

Confusing Organizational Maintenance with Mission Clarity

Some churches mistake keeping current programs running with having a clear mission and purpose. They may list numerous activities without understanding how these connect to their fundamental calling or community impact. Mission clarity extends beyond program inventory to address why the church exists and what unique role God has called it to play in its community.

What Does the Interim Pastor Do During This Phase?

Standard Interim Ministry Focus

Identity Articulation

- Helps the church express its existing identity more clearly
- Facilitates conversations that surface current understanding
- Assists in documenting established mission and values
- Organizes information gathering without significant reorientation
- Provides an objective perspective on current strengths and challenges
- Ensures the search committee understands the church's identity as it is

Process Guidance

- Recommends appropriate processes for the church's context
- Provides resources and templates for mission clarification
- Facilitates meetings as a neutral party
- Helps organize and interpret community feedback
- Ensures key insights are incorporated into the church profile

Intentional Interim Ministry Focus

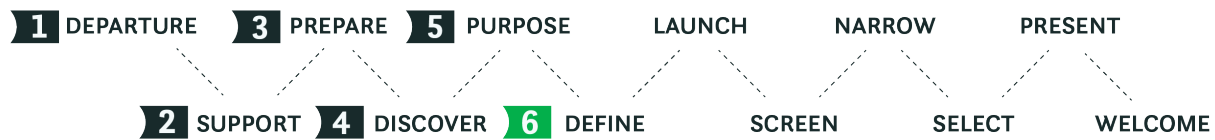
Purpose Rediscovery

- Guides deeper exploration of the church's fundamental purpose
- Facilitates processes that question assumptions about identity

- Helps the congregation reconnect with the founding vision and values
- Creates space for reimagining the church's calling
- Addresses disconnects between stated mission and actual practice
- Promotes honest conversation about needed shifts in direction

Mission Drift Correction

- Identifies ways the church has drifted from its core purpose
- Facilitates discussions about returning to the essential mission
- Helps distinguish between timeless purpose and changing methods
- Guides the congregation in addressing identity confusion
- Assists in reconnecting with denominational heritage and values
- Helps rebuild missional focus where it has been lost



STEP 6: Deciding What We Need in a Pastor

"Take Joshua son of Nun, a man who has the Spirit in him, and lay your hand on him." Numbers 27:18 (CSB)

As Israel prepared to leave the wilderness and enter the Promised Land, God revealed the specific leadership qualities needed for the journey ahead. Moses could lead through the wilderness, but Joshua possessed the gifts required to conquer and settle the land. Your church's wilderness assessment now informs what type of leader you need for your own Promised Land season. The challenges you've faced in the wilderness and the calling God has clarified during your transition wilderness reveal the pastoral gifts and experience necessary for your next chapter. Like Moses recognizing that Joshua had the spirit and skills needed for what lay ahead, your wilderness journey has prepared you to identify the pastor equipped to lead you from transition into fruitful, settled ministry.

This step exists because churches that search without clear pastoral requirements waste time on inappropriate candidates and create unrealistic expectations that set pastors up for failure. Churches that skip pastoral profile development typically make emotional decisions based on preaching ability alone, ignoring crucial leadership, relational, and cultural fit.

You'll know this step is complete when you have created a comprehensive pastor profile based on your church's actual needs, gathered congregational input thoughtfully, and finalized a complete church profile that accurately represents your congregation.

Defining What You Need in a Pastor

After clarifying who you are as a church (Step 4, Page 41), the next critical step is determining what kind of pastoral leadership you need. We, again, turn our attention to Dr. Jonathan Smith and his insights into this significant part of the journey.

Many search committees are tempted to build the pastor profile right away! Don't do it! The pastor profile should not be created until the church and community profiles are created.

Once a church and community profile have been created with honesty and clarity, the next step is to write a pastor profile that aligns with those realities. The goal is not to describe a perfect pastor, but to prayerfully identify the kind of leader best suited to shepherd the church and engage the community as they truly are. A well-written pastor profile reflects both the current needs and the future hopes of the congregation, shaped by the surrounding mission field. It helps ensure the search team is not just hiring for personality or preaching style, but for vision, calling, and capacity to lead the church faithfully and effectively in its unique context.

High character. Medium skill.

I once heard a talk by a Green Beret about their final selection process. It was fascinating. Their conclusion: choose people with high character but medium skill. Here is their logic:

High character and high skill. You simply do not find many of these people. They are unicorns.

High character and low skill. While high character certainly matters, this person will likely lack the education and skill set to lead the church. This pastor will not be ready for another five years.

Low character and high skill. Often, this person is egotistical and a jerk!

Low character and low skill. Should not be considered a candidate.

The sweet spot is to hire for high character and medium skill.

*A church should prioritize hiring a pastor with high character, even if their skill level is only moderate, because **character is the foundation of lasting, trustworthy leadership**. Skills can be developed over time via coaching, experience, education, and support. **But integrity, humility, teachability, and a genuine love for people are core traits that cannot be quickly taught or easily replaced.** A pastor of high character creates a culture of trust, security, and authenticity, which are essential for long-term health in both leadership and the congregation. A flashy pastor who preaches a dynamic sermon, yet is a person of low character and a bully, is a means of disaster. Do your homework. Check references. Speak with previous staff members and laypeople.*

However, a pastor with high character is more likely to rely on others, build strong teams, and seek wisdom when facing challenges. They don't pretend to have all the answers; instead, they model dependence on God and collaboration with others. This posture often results in a more unified church and a more sustainable pace of ministry. In contrast, hiring a highly skilled but low-character leader can result in short-term success but long-term damage.

Good preacher. Great leader.

*Far too many search teams become fixated on hiring a stellar preacher. Some of you may disagree with me, but here goes: while preaching is the most visible part of a pastor's ministry, it may not be the most important. With more than 85% of churches in America plateaued or declining, search committees should prioritize finding **great leaders who are good preachers**—not the other way around.*

Why? Because great leadership, not just great preaching, revitalizes a plateaued or declining church. Is preaching important? Absolutely. It's highly public and influential. But leadership is what earns trust, casts vision, navigates hard conversations, and shepherds a congregation toward a healthier future. Steady encouragement, relational credibility, and courageous decision-making...these are the qualities that bring lasting change to a church.

This step parallels Israel's preparation to enter the Promised Land as leadership transitioned from Moses to Joshua, requiring clarity about the type of leader needed for the next phase of their journey.

Create Pastor Profile Based on Church Needs

Purpose: To develop a clear description of the pastoral characteristics that will best serve your church's unique context.

Using the Pastor Profile Template allows you to create a comprehensive description of the pastor you need. Later, this can be used to help evaluate candidates.



Profile Development Tip: The pastor profile should flow naturally from your church profile and assessment work done. (Step 4, page 42 and Step 5, Page 53) Every characteristic you identify should connect to a specific need or aspect of your church's identity, mission, or context. Avoid creating a profile of an idealized "super pastor" that no real person could fulfill.

Review Pastoral Duties and Expectations

Purpose: To define realistic job responsibilities that align with your church's needs and resources.

Clear expectations help both the search committee and potential candidates understand the role. Be sure to include the personnel committee and policies.

- **Core Responsibilities Assessment:**
 - What specific duties must the pastor perform?
 - How should the pastor allocate time across various responsibilities?
 - Which functions are essential vs. preferable?
 - What responsibilities are handled by other staff or volunteers?
 - How will responsibilities be evaluated?
- **Time Allocation Considerations:**
 - How much time should be devoted to sermon preparation?

- What level of administrative responsibility is expected?
- How much time should be dedicated to pastoral care?
- What leadership development responsibilities exist?
- How much time should be spent in community engagement?
- **Authority and Accountability Clarification:**
 - What decisions can the pastor make independently?
 - What matters require consultation with leadership?
 - What accountability structures are in place?
 - How will performance be evaluated and by whom?
 - What reporting is expected and to whom?
- **Staff Supervision Expectations:**
 - What staff will the pastor supervise directly?
 - What role will the pastor play in staff evaluation?
 - How should the pastor develop the ministry team?
 - What authority does the pastor have in personnel matters?
 - How should the pastor handle staff conflicts?
- **Establishing Reasonable Boundaries:**
 - What are reasonable expectations for availability?
 - How will time off and vacation be protected?
 - What family considerations should be respected?
 - How will work-life balance be maintained?
 - What constitutes success in the position?

Expectation Reality Check: Pastors typically work 50-60 hours weekly (in office and out of office). Be realistic about what can be accomplished within this time frame. Every "yes" to one responsibility is a "no" to something else. Consider whether your expectations align with your compensation package and the size of your church.

Gather Congregation Input

Purpose: To ensure the pastor profile reflects the congregation's needs and builds support for the search process.

Congregational involvement creates ownership and reduces the risk of mismatched expectations.

- **Input Methods:**
 - Congregational surveys (Scan QR code for sample)
 - Small group discussions
 - Town hall meetings
 - Ministry team feedback sessions
 - Individual interviews with key stakeholders



- Online feedback forms
- **Key Questions to Ask:**
 - What qualities do you most value in pastoral leadership?
 - What pastoral roles are most important to you personally?
 - What skills or gifts will our next pastor need to lead us effectively?
 - What theological perspectives are most important to you?
 - How would you describe the ideal candidate for our church?
 - What challenges will our next pastor need to address?
- **Data Collection Considerations:**
 - Gather demographic information from respondents
 - Look for patterns across different age groups or ministry areas
 - Identify areas of consensus vs. differing expectations
 - Compare the input with the conclusions from earlier assessment work
 - Balance congregational desires with objective church needs
- **Input Processing Approach:**
 - Compile and analyze results objectively
 - Look for themes and patterns rather than isolated opinions
 - Consider the spiritual maturity behind various perspectives
 - Weigh input based on alignment with the mission of the church
 - Prepare a summary report for the search committee
- **Sharing Results with the Congregation:**
 - Communicate what you heard from the congregation
 - Explain how input influenced the pastor profile
 - Address any unrealistic expectations with grace
 - Share the final profile once completed
 - Continue to invite prayer for the search process

Input Interpretation Note: Congregational input is valuable but should not simply become a popularity contest or a wish list. The search committee must prayerfully discern which input aligns with the church's mission and actual needs. (Step 4, Page 42; Step 5, Page 54) Input gathering is not a vote but a source of wisdom to inform the committee's discernment.

Finalize Church Profile Document

Purpose: To complete a comprehensive, accurate, and appealing presentation of your church for potential candidates.

With your pastoral profile developed, now is the time to finalize the complete church profile document begun in Step 5, Page 54.

- **Using the Church Profile Template:** Ensure you've completed all sections of the template provided through the QR code.
 - **Basic Information** - Church name, contact details, year established, and denominational affiliations
 - **Church History and Identity** - Historical narrative, mission statement, theological identity, and unique characteristics
 - **Church Demographics and Participation** - Attendance patterns, baptism trends, age distribution, and giving trends
 - **Church Ministries and Programming** - Worship style, strongest ministries, outreach efforts, and missions partnerships
 - **Church Leadership and Structure** - Staff positions, governance structure, deacons, committees, and decision-making processes
 - **Financial Information** - Budget details, Cooperative Program giving, missions support, and financial obligations
 - **Compensation Package** - Salary range, benefits, housing allowance, and other compensation elements
 - **Facilities** - Description of church property, condition, and capacity
 - **Church Relationships** - Denominational connections and community relationships
 - **Church Self-Assessment** - Strengths, challenges, spiritual health, and areas open to change
 - **Pastor Profile** - Insert your newly developed pastoral profile
- **Profile Enhancement Elements:**
 - Include high-quality photos of church activities and facilities
 - Add charts or graphs to illustrate trends and statistics
 - Consider testimonials from members about what makes your church special
 - Create maps showing church location and community context
 - Include summary results from your assessment process
- **Final Review Process:**
 - Have multiple people proofread for errors
 - Check for consistency between the church profile and the pastor profile
 - Ensure the document presents an honest but positive picture
 - Verify that all necessary information for candidates is included
 - Consider having someone outside your church review for clarity
- **Format and Distribution Preparation:**
 - Create both print and digital versions
 - Consider professional design elements for visual appeal
 - Prepare an abbreviated version for initial inquiries
 - Develop a plan for secure distribution to candidates
 - Create a cover letter template to accompany the profile



Profile Authenticity Check: The final profile should honestly represent who you are as a church, both strength and growth areas. Candidates will quickly discover discrepancies between what you presented and reality, potentially damaging trust. An authentic presentation attracts candidates who are genuinely the right fit.

Common Pitfalls in This Step

Using Assessment Tools for Wants Rather Than Needs

Congregational input processes can become wish lists rather than thoughtful analysis of what type of pastor the church actually needs. This consumer approach to calling a pastor prioritizes personal preferences over the church's mission requirements and contextual realities. While congregational desires matter, they must be balanced with an objective assessment of what leadership qualities will best serve the church's calling and challenges.

Creating Unrealistic Pastoral Expectations

Churches sometimes develop pastor profiles that describe superhuman qualifications or impossible combinations of skills and experience. These unrealistic expectations make it difficult to find suitable candidates and sets them up for failure. Base your pastoral profile on genuine needs identified through your assessment process rather than idealized visions of perfect pastoral leadership.

What Does the Interim Pastor Do During This Phase?

Standard Interim Ministry Focus

Expectation Guidance

- Provides perspective on realistic pastoral expectations
- Offers insights from experience about workload balance
- Helps identify which responsibilities are truly essential
- Advises on appropriate compensation for the position
- Reviews draft profiles to ensure they reflect church needs
- Suggests improvements based on a pastoral perspective

Process Support

- Assists with designing input gathering methods
- Helps organize and interpret congregational feedback
- Provides an objective viewpoint on church needs
- Suggests questions that might reveal unstated expectations
- Reviews final documents for clarity and accuracy

- Maintains an appropriate distance from the actual candidate selection

Intentional Interim Ministry Focus

Expectation Adjustment

- Actively addresses unrealistic expectations
- Helps the church understand pastoral limitations
- Guides discussions about healthy pastoral roles
- Works to heal unhealthy patterns from previous pastoral relationships
- Facilitates conversations about appropriate boundaries
- Assists in developing sustainable expectations

Leadership System Work

- Identifies and addresses dysfunctional leadership patterns
- Helps restructure problematic reporting relationships
- Guides the development of healthier accountability systems
- Addresses power dynamics that might undermine pastoral leadership
- Works to establish appropriate authority structures
- Helps develop healthier pastoral evaluation processes

PHASE THREE

Your Search Journey

"Whenever the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, the Israelites would set out; at the place where the cloud stopped, there the Israelites camped." Numbers 9:17 (CSB)

Having completed the first two phases of your pastoral transition journey—Departure and Assessment—your church now stands at a pivotal moment, much like Israel poised to enter the Promised Land after their wilderness sojourn. The time has come to actively seek the leader God has prepared for your congregation's next chapter.

This Search phase parallels Israel's careful reconnaissance and preparation to enter Canaan. Just as Moses wanted to understand the land God had promised, your search committee now ventures out to discover the pastor God has already chosen. Like those ancient scouts, your task is not to determine whether to proceed—God has already commanded the journey—but to discern how best to move forward and whom God has selected to lead.

The foundation laid in previous phases is crucial now. Your understanding of who you are as a church (your identity and mission) and what kind of leader you need (your pastoral profile) will guide your discernment. Without this clarity, you risk being either overly impressed by charismatic personalities or unduly influenced by superficial qualities rather than substance.

During this phase, patience and prayer remain essential. The temptation to rush will intensify as you begin meeting potential candidates, but hasty decisions often lead to poor matches. Remember that God's timing rarely aligns with our desire for immediacy. The search process typically takes 6-9 months from this point, and rushing rarely produces better results.

This phase represents a critical balance between human effort and divine guidance. While you will employ practical tools like interviews, reference checks, and sermon evaluations, these must be bathed in prayer and spiritual discernment. Your task is not merely to hire an employee but to recognize the shepherd God has appointed for His flock.

The following steps will guide you through posting your position, reviewing candidates, conducting interviews, and making your final selection. As you proceed, continue to seek God's guidance, maintain confidentiality, and trust the process you've established. God has been faithful throughout your wilderness journey, and He remains faithful as you search for the leader who will guide your church into its next season of ministry.



STEP 7: Let the Search Begin

"Whenever the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, the Israelites would set out; at the place where the cloud stopped, there the Israelites camped." Numbers 9:17 (CSB)

Your active search for pastoral leadership mirrors Israel's careful movement through the wilderness, following God's guidance when the way forward was unclear. Like Israel trusting the cloud by day and fire by night through unmapped desert terrain, your search committee must follow God's leading through the unfamiliar territory of pastoral selection. The wilderness teaches dependence on divine guidance rather than human planning. You cannot see your destination pastor from where you stand, just as Israel could not see the Promised Land from their wilderness camps. Yet the same faithful God who led Israel day by day through the wilderness will guide your committee step by step to the leader He has chosen to bring you out of your transition wilderness into your ministry Promised Land.

This step exists because churches without systematic candidate sourcing and evaluation processes miss qualified candidates while wasting time on inappropriate ones. Churches that fail to launch an organized search typically receive few quality applications, lack objective evaluation methods, and make decisions based on limited information.

You'll know this step is complete when you have posted your position through multiple quality channels, established systematic evaluation processes, begun receiving applications, and prepared for the extended timeline required for thorough assessment.

Beginning the Active Search Process

With your church and pastoral profiles completed, it's time to launch the actual search for your next pastor. If your church has been using a separate transition team to this point, it is time to elect the pastor search team. Review your church's governing documents to determine how to proceed. Dr. Josh Ellis, Executive Director of the Union Baptist Association (Houston), shares how logic and emotion play a role and should be understood before engaging in the search. You, as a search committee, should read this before moving forward.

The work of the pastor search committee is one of the most challenging tasks a church faces. Many people on a pastor search committee have never done so, which is probably for the best. Churches that have to hire often tend to do it badly. Individuals with a lot of experience on pastor search committees are well aware of the pressure, scrutiny, and stress of serving in that role. There is a beauty that can result from a unified, prayerful team, as they become more invested in one another and the church than they were before.

How does that positive experience happen? Many pastor search committees have started the process of finding the next pastor feeling overwhelmed and burdened with the responsibility the church has imposed on them. In the foreign world of ministry, resumes often include elements not typically found on secular resumes. The work of a pastor search committee is an exercise in spiritual discernment, congregational leadership, and human psychology. Committees face the challenging task of selecting a candidate whose theological convictions, pastoral competencies, interpersonal skills, and calling align with the needs and culture of their church. The work can have a political element if an internal candidate steps forward. Successfully navigating the entire process requires a balanced interplay between logic, faith, and emotion—three elements that, when held in tension, can promote both spiritual integrity and church health.

Logic provides the search committee with the necessary structure and evaluative clarity. Objective criteria such as doctrinal alignment, leadership experience, communication skills, educational background, a clean background check, and evidence of fruitfulness in prior ministry should form the basis of any candidacy review. These factors allow committees to compare candidates fairly and consistently, mitigating the risk of favoritism or bias. Reducing the influence of favoritism can be especially important cases involving unqualified internal candidates or familial references from church members. Strategic questions concerning congregational culture, ministry needs, and future vision are crucial to the analysis of any candidate. The presence of logic fosters the act of due diligence, the use of well-structured interview processes, and the assurance that decisions are based on more than surface impressions or relational connections.

However, a purely rational approach to pastoral selection risks reducing ministry to managerialism. Pastoral ministry is not merely a compilation of skills enabling work to be done, but a calling, and this reality invites committees to exercise faith as a central lens. In this context, faith refers to trust in God's guidance and a posture of spiritual openness and prayerful discernment. Committees must remain attuned to the mysterious ways in which God calls and equips leaders, acknowledging that the Spirit may guide them to a candidate who does not "check every box" on paper yet is deeply anointed for the particular moment in a church's life. Incorporating communal prayer, fasting, and theological reflection can elevate the process from mere recruitment to spiritual discernment.

At the same time, the role of emotion cannot be denied. Emotion is often viewed with suspicion in decision-making processes. Yet emotions—when rightly understood—can serve as valid indicators of relational vitality and spiritual alignment. A sense of peace, excitement, or conviction may be Spirit-led, while recurring unease or lack of enthusiasm might suggest caution. Many successful committees have benefited from giving their

members ways to express their intangible “hunches” about candidates who may not have the best resumes. Satisfying team members’ curiosity about a candidate, through a questionnaire or interview that might not otherwise be given, is a small price to achieve team unity. By acknowledging the role of emotions in the process, team members can lean into their feelings about a candidate without allowing the process to be completely hijacked by emotions.

Furthermore, emotional intelligence is a critical pastoral competency. A candidate who elicits warmth, trust, and relational connection with the committee may be more likely to connect meaningfully with the congregation. Emotional awareness equips the committee to recognize their internal biases, fears, or desires that might unconsciously shape the process.

Which of these elements is greater, or should take precedence? If any of these elements dominates the process to the detriment of the others, the process will be in trouble. A committee that is too focused on faith will elevate candidates in the hope that God will fill in the potential pastor’s theological gaps or help the church overcome the apparent strategic disagreements between the church and the possible leader. A committee that is too focused on emotion will “fall in love” with a candidate based on the single sermon that the candidate provides and ignore the candidate’s insufficient qualifications or lack of interpersonal skills. A committee that is too focused on logic can try to make sense of hiring a candidate based on their paper credentials while ignoring the problems surfaced by an interview or the Holy Spirit’s prompting through their sense of discernment.

The challenge, then, is not to eliminate any of these elements but to hold them in creative tension. Logic without faith becomes sterile; faith without logic becomes naïve; emotion without both can become manipulative. A faithful pastor search process honors the necessity of careful reasoning, embraces the mystery of God’s leading, and attends to the emotional contours of human relationships. Leaning on all these elements, committee members experience the very nature of pastoral ministry: an integration of the mind, the spirit, and the heart in service to God and the church.

This step corresponds to Joshua sending scouts to survey the Promised Land - you're now actively looking for the leader God has prepared for your church.

Post Position Through BGCT Minister Connection

Purpose: To connect with qualified candidates through the Texas Baptists' official ministry placement service.

The BGCT Minister Connection should be your primary starting point for finding candidates.

- **Accessing the System:**
 - Go to <https://texasbaptists.org/minister-connection>
 - Register as a church seeking a minister
 - Complete the required church information
 - Upload your church and pastor profiles

- Set application deadline (typically 60-90 days)
- **Creating an Effective Position Posting:**
 - Provide clear, concise information about your church
 - Highlight key aspects of your church's mission and identity
 - List essential qualifications (education, experience, skills)
 - Include compensation range if appropriate
 - Specify application requirements (resume, references, sermon links)
 - Clearly state your timeline and process
- **Managing Your Posting:**
 - Check the system regularly for new applications
 - Respond promptly to inquiries
 - Update your posting if needs change
 - Consider extending the deadline if needed
 - Use the system's tools to track candidate communications
- **Maximizing the Platform:**
 - Search the resume database proactively
 - Review suggested candidate matches
 - Contact promising candidates directly
 - Update your posting status as your search progresses
 - Utilize BGCT staff assistance when needed

BGCT Resource Note: Your BGCT Area Representative can help you navigate the Minister Connection system and may be aware of candidates not yet in the system. Schedule a conversation with them early in your search process.

Contact Baptist Universities and Seminaries

Purpose: To connect with recent graduates and those utilizing placement services at educational institutions.

Baptist schools can be excellent sources for finding qualified candidates.

- **Texas Baptist Schools:**
 - **Seminaries**
 - George W. Truett Theological Seminary (Baylor University)
 - B.H. Carroll Theological Institute (East Texas Baptist University)
 - **Universities with Religion/Ministry Departments**
 - Baylor University
 - Dallas Baptist University
 - East Texas Baptist University
 - Hardin-Simmons University

- Houston Baptist University
 - Howard Payne University
 - University of Mary Hardin-Baylor
 - Wayland Baptist University
- **Other Institutions:**
 - Baptist University of the Americas
- **Other Key Seminaries:**
 - Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
 - New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary
 - Gateway Seminary
 - Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary
 - Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
 - Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
- **Effective Communication Approach:**
 - Contact placement offices or ministry departments directly
 - Send your church and pastor profiles with a cover letter
 - Develop a relationship with key placement personnel
 - Follow up after initial contact
 - Provide clear instructions for candidates on how to apply
- **Specialized Program Connections:**
 - Inquire about recent graduates or current students seeking placement
 - Ask about recommendations from faculty members
 - Connect with residency or internship program directors
 - Consider candidates completing advanced degrees
 - Explore connections with continuing education programs

Educational Connection Tip: When contacting these institutions, provide a concise email that placement officers can forward to potential candidates. Include a brief church description, key qualifications, and clear application instructions.

*Connect with Local Association Leader
(Associational Missions Strategist/Director of Missions (AMS/DOM))*

Purpose: To leverage local knowledge and networks for finding candidates that fit your specific context

Your AMS/DOM often has valuable insights and connections to offer.

- **Contact Approach:**
 - Schedule a meeting or call specifically about your search
 - Share your church and pastor profiles

- Discuss unique aspects of your church and community
- Ask for recommendations based on your specific needs
- Inquire about pastors who might be open to a move
- **Networking Opportunities:**
 - Request introductions to potential candidates
 - Ask about other AMS/DOM leaders who might know suitable pastors
 - Inquire about recent seminary graduates returning to the area
 - Discuss pastors in transition within the association
 - Explore connections with nearby associations
- **Ongoing Communication:**
 - Keep your AMS/DOM updated on your search progress
 - Revisit for additional recommendations as needed
 - Ask for feedback on candidates you're considering
 - Seek advice if your search encounters difficulties
 - Invite input on your interview and selection process
- **Additional Association Resources:**
 - Inquire about association-specific search resources
 - Ask about successful search processes from other churches
 - Consider whether the AMS/DOM might meet with your committee
 - Explore whether association events might connect you with candidates
 - Utilize association communication channels to spread the word

Association Partnership Note: Your AMS/DOM often knows pastors and churches at a deeper level than formal resumes reveal. Their insights about cultural fit, leadership style, and ministry effectiveness can be invaluable in your search.

Develop a Resume Screening Process

Purpose: To establish a fair, consistent method for evaluating all candidates based on your church's needs and pastor profile developed in Steps 3-6.

Creating a systematic approach to resume review ensures a thorough and objective evaluation.

- **Using the Pastor Search Team Evaluation Rubric:**
 - Review the comprehensive rubric provided by scanning the QR code.
 - Understand the three-phase evaluation process:
 - Phase 1: Initial resume screening
 - Phase 2: Written questionnaire evaluation
 - Phase 3: In-depth evaluation through interviews and references
 - Familiarize all committee members with scoring guidelines



- Practice using the rubric with sample resumes if available
- Adapt the rubric as needed for your specific context
- **Establishing Review Procedures:**
 - Determine how resumes will be distributed to committee members since every member should have access to every resume.
 - Decide whether initial reviews will be individual or group-based
 - Establish deadlines for completing each review phase
 - Create a system for combining individual evaluations
 - Develop a method for discussing evaluations as a committee
- **Creating Categories for Candidates:**
 - "Definitely Consider" - Meets all essential criteria
 - "Possibly Consider" - Meets most criteria with some questions
 - "Do Not Consider" - Fails to meet multiple essential criteria
 - Move candidates between categories as more information emerges
 - Document reasons for each categorization
- **Handling Communication:**
 - Develop standard acknowledgment responses for all applications
 - Create appropriate responses for each candidate category
 - Determine who will manage communications with candidates
 - Establish timelines for responding to candidates
 - Maintain detailed records of all communications

Screening Process Note: Be careful not to eliminate candidates too quickly based solely on resume review. Some excellent pastors may not present themselves well on paper, but could be exactly what your church needs. When in doubt, gather more information before making a decision.

Begin Receiving Applications

Purpose: To efficiently manage the influx of resumes and maintain an organized search process

As applications arrive, you'll need systems to process them effectively.

- **Application Management System:**
 - Create a secure, centralized location for storing all applications
 - Develop a standardized filing system (digital and/or physical)
 - Maintain a master list of all applicants with key information
 - Track communication history with each candidate
 - Record committee evaluations and decisions
- **Initial Processing Steps:**
 - Acknowledge receipt of all applications promptly

- Check for completeness of submitted materials
- Request any missing information or documentation
- Distribute applications to committee members for review
- Begin initial screening using your established process
- **Confidentiality Practices:**
 - Establish strict confidentiality protocols for all applications
 - Limit access to application materials to committee members only
 - Use secure methods for sharing sensitive information
 - Avoid discussing candidates by name outside the committee
 - Determine how to handle applications from church members or local ministers
- **Tracking System Development:**
 - Document where each candidate is in your process
 - Record key dates (application received, initial review, etc.)
 - Note follow-up actions needed for each candidate
 - Track committee decisions and next steps
 - Create a visual dashboard of your search progress

Application Management Tip: Consider assigning one committee member to serve as the "process manager" who tracks applications, ensures follow-through, and maintains organization. This person doesn't make decisions alone but helps the committee stay organized and effective.

Prepare for a 5-6 Month Searching Process

Purpose: To set realistic expectations and develop a sustainable approach to the search timeline

Understanding the typical duration helps manage expectations for both the committee and congregation.

- **Timeline Development:**
 - Create a detailed month-by-month schedule for the search process
 - Identify key milestones and decision points
 - Allow adequate time between steps for reflection and prayer
 - Build in flexibility for unexpected developments
 - Share appropriate timeline elements with the congregation
- **Committee Sustainability Planning:**
 - Establish a realistic meeting schedule that won't burn out members
 - Consider the personal and professional commitments of committee members
 - Plan for potential holiday or vacation interruptions
 - Develop a rotation for labor-intensive tasks
 - Schedule regular prayer and encouragement times
- **Congregation Communication Strategy:**

- Educate the church about typical search timeframes
- Provide regular updates on progress without revealing candidate identities
- Set appropriate expectations about when a candidate might be presented
- Explain the value of a thorough, unhurried process
- Celebrate progress milestones along the way
- **Interim Period Management:**
 - Work with church leadership to ensure stability during the extended interim
 - Coordinate with the interim pastor regarding their continued service
 - Consider potential adjustments if the search extends beyond 6 months
 - Maintain momentum in church ministries during the search
 - Use the time for congregation preparation and prayer

Timeline Perspective: Remember that the time spent finding the right pastor is insignificant compared to the impact of making the wrong choice. A thorough 6-month search that leads to a 10-year effective pastorate is far better than a 2-month search resulting in a difficult 18-month tenure.

Common Pitfalls in This Step

Rushing the Search Timeline

Just as Israel's impatience in the wilderness led to hasty decisions and extended wandering, pressure from the congregation to "hurry up and find someone" can lead committees to compress timelines and skip important steps in the process. This rushing typically results in poor decisions, inadequate candidate evaluation, and pastoral matches that don't last. A thorough search process takes time, but this investment prevents the much greater cost of failed pastoral relationships. Educate the congregation about realistic timelines and the value of patient, careful work.

Limiting Candidate Sources

Some churches rely too heavily on a single source for candidates, such as only posting online or only asking for personal recommendations. This narrow approach may miss excellent candidates who would be perfect fits for your church. Use multiple channels to ensure you're connecting with the full range of available pastoral candidates who match your needs.

Not Communicating Enough

Jimmie Neel, the Director of Missions of the Sabine Neches Baptist Area, writes on "The Importance of Meaningful Communication Between a Pastor Search Committee and the Congregation"

It was a quiet evening in the corner of a cozy restaurant. An older couple sat enjoying their dinner when the wife noticed a young couple in a booth nearby. The young man could hardly take his eyes off the young woman. Between bites of

food, he told her how beautiful she was, how much he loved her, and how thankful he was to be with her. The older woman leaned toward her husband of many years and whispered, “How come you don’t tell me you love me anymore?” Without missing a beat, the man replied, “I told you when we got married that I love you. If anything changes, I’ll let you know.”

The exchange is humorous—at least for those not sitting at that table—but it reveals a truth: communication that is absent or one-sided is not healthy for any relationship. In marriage, friendship, or church life, a lack of consistent, meaningful communication breeds uncertainty, frustration, and even mistrust. The same is true when a church forms a Pastor Search Committee. If the committee takes the approach of “We’ll let you know when we find him,” the congregation may feel left in the dark, even if the committee is working diligently behind the scenes. While the committee bears the responsibility for searching, they must guard confidential details about candidates. Yet open and intentional communication with the church family is both needed and necessary. It can make the difference between a smooth pastoral transition and one marked by suspicion or discouragement.

1. The Committee’s Responsibility and the Congregation’s Trust

The Pastor Search Committee is charged with one of the most significant assignments in the life of a local church: prayerfully identifying and recommending the next shepherd God is calling to lead His people. This is a sacred trust that requires diligence, discernment, and discretion.

The congregation entrusts the committee with this responsibility, believing they will handle it with both competence and integrity. However, trust is not a one-time transaction, but must be nurtured through ongoing communication. Just as the Apostle Paul kept the early churches informed of his missionary activities, the search committee should keep the church aware of progress, prayer needs, and the general direction of the process.

When communication is sparse or nonexistent, members may begin to wonder if the process has stalled, if something is being hidden, or if their input no longer matters. In contrast, regular updates affirm that the committee values the congregation’s prayers, support, and partnership in the search.

2. Balancing Transparency and Confidentiality

One of the greatest challenges for a Pastor Search Committee is walking the fine line between transparency and confidentiality. On one hand, the church family deserves to know the process is moving forward, that the committee is working faithfully, and that they have an important role in praying for God’s leading. On the other hand, revealing too much about specific candidates—names, churches, or locations—can jeopardize a candidate’s current ministry and create

unnecessary division or premature opinions within the congregation. The committee must be trustworthy stewards of sensitive information. Sharing general progress without divulging confidential details honors both the candidate and the church. This confidentiality extends to committee member's spouses.

For example, instead of saying, "We are interviewing Pastor John Smith from First Baptist in Another Town," the committee might communicate, "We have begun interviewing candidates who meet the profile developed through our congregational survey. Please pray for wisdom as we discern God's direction."

3. The Spiritual Benefit of Regular Updates

Meaningful communication from the committee is not merely about satisfying curiosity—it is about uniting the church in prayer and expectation. When the congregation knows the current stage of the process, they can pray specifically.

Paul often requested prayer for open doors for the gospel (Colossians 4:3) and for wisdom in ministry decisions (Ephesians 6:19). In the same way, the committee should invite the church to pray:

- For God's clear leading in each step*
- For unity in the committee and congregation*
- For wisdom in evaluating candidates*
- For the protection of the church, the committee, and the candidates from spiritual attack*
- To remove unnecessary distractions from the committee members' lives.*

By framing updates in prayer requests, the committee turns communication into an opportunity for spiritual growth and dependence on the Lord.

4. Preventing Rumors and Misunderstanding

Silence in the absence of information is rarely neutral—it tends to be filled by speculation. If the Pastor Search Committee does not share periodic, accurate updates, the vacuum may be filled with rumors or inaccurate assumptions.

Regular, clear communication helps prevent misinformation. This might take the form of a brief report in Sunday services, a written update in the bulletin, a page on the church website, or a monthly meeting for questions and answers. Whatever the method, consistency is key.

Even a short update such as, "We have reviewed fifteen resumes and are moving forward with interviews for several candidates," can reassure the congregation that progress is being made and that the process is being handled with care.

5. Encouraging Unity and Patience

The process of finding a new pastor can take months—or even longer. During this time, discouragement can set in, and factions may arise over differing opinions on what kind of leader the church needs. Consistent communication helps keep the congregation united and patient.

By regularly explaining the steps of the process—such as reviewing resumes, conducting initial interviews, checking references, and narrowing the list of candidates—the committee helps members understand why the search is taking time. This builds patience and reinforces the importance of seeking God’s will over rushing to a decision.

6. Communication Methods that Work

While every church context is different, several practical methods can foster effective communication:

- *Regular Public Updates – A two- to three-minute report during Sunday worship once a month*
- *Written Reports – A short paragraph in the church bulletin or newsletter*
- *Dedicated Email List – For members who want updates in their inbox*
- *Website or Social Media – A password-protected page with general progress notes*
- *Prayer Gatherings – Periodic times for the church to pray specifically for the search process*
- *When the time comes to present a candidate, consider providing a written biography, answers to FAQs, an interview article, and short endorsements from the committee members. The chairman or another representative should walk the church through a summary of the search process (again), and make the declaration- “We feel God has led us to this pastoral candidate.”*

These methods enable communication that is informative without being intrusive and transparent without violating confidentiality.

Communicate, because YOU ARE in this process together!

Just as a spouse from earlier needs to hear words of affirmation and assurance, a congregation needs to hear from its Pastor Search Committee. The goal is not just to announce the arrival of a new pastor but to lead the church through an entire process that honors God, reflects His character, and prepares His people to follow the shepherd He has chosen. In the end, the committee’s updates should say more than just “We’ll let you know if anything changes.” They should communicate, “We value you, we need your prayers, and we are walking this road together—trusting God to lead us to His choice for our next pastor.”

What Does the Interim Pastor Do During This Phase?

Standard Interim Ministry Focus

Search Process Perspective

- Offers insights on candidate evaluation based on pastoral experience
- Provides feedback on the realism of the pastor profile
- Suggests additional sources for finding candidates
- Shares observations about what might attract candidates to your church
- Helps the committee understand the pastor's perspective on the search process
- Maintains appropriate boundaries regarding specific candidate recommendations

Continuity Maintenance

- Continue regular ministry functions to maintain stability
- Reassures the congregation about the normal length of the search process
- Helps manage expectations regarding timeline
- Maintains momentum in church ministries during the search
- Prepares the congregation to receive new leadership

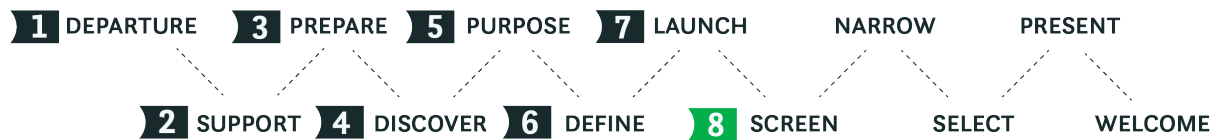
Intentional Interim Ministry Focus

Readiness Assessment

- Evaluates whether the church has addressed the necessary issues before searching
- Ensures that systemic problems have been sufficiently resolved
- Confirms that realistic expectations have been established
- Verifies that leadership structures are functioning healthily
- Assesses whether the church is truly ready for new pastoral leadership
- May recommend delaying the search if critical issues remain unaddressed

Preparation Completion

- Finalizes any outstanding work on the focus points
- Completes documentation of insights for the new pastor
- Prepares transition briefing materials to share with the final candidate
- Helps establish healthy boundaries between interim and settled pastor roles
- Works to create the best possible environment for a new pastor to succeed



STEP 8: Looking Through Resumes

"Send men to scout out the land of Canaan I am giving to the Israelites. Send one man who is a leader among them from each of their ancestral tribes." Numbers 13:2 (CSB)

Like Israel sending spies to explore the Promised Land from their wilderness camp carefully, your committee now investigates the pastoral candidates who might lead you out of the wilderness transition into settled ministry. The twelve spies were chosen to bring back accurate intelligence about what lay ahead—both the opportunities and the challenges. Your resume review requires similar wilderness wisdom, looking beyond surface impressions to discern each candidate's true leadership potential. Just as the spies needed to assess whether these leaders could handle the conquest and settlement of the Promised Land, you must evaluate whether these pastoral candidates possess the gifts to guide your church from the wilderness of transition into the fruitful ministry God has prepared.

This step exists because committees that don't systematically evaluate initial applications waste time on unqualified candidates while potentially overlooking excellent prospects. Churches that skip thorough resume screening typically advance inappropriate candidates to later stages, miss red flags that predict future problems, and make decisions based on superficial impressions.

You'll know this step is complete when you have evaluated all applications using consistent criteria and identified 8-12 candidates worthy of consideration.

Evaluating Potential Pastoral Candidates

As resumes and applications begin arriving, your committee now faces the important task of discerning which candidates warrant further consideration. This step parallels Israel's careful evaluation of the Promised Land. Not every opportunity that appears promising on the surface will be the right one for your unique context. This goes for the future of the church as well. Daunting as it may be, some searches are much more difficult for the simple reason that the church might need to consider becoming a replant. If, after seeking advice from your associational leadership, you feel this is you, then turn now to the Appendix section on the option for replanting.

Review Resumes and Applications Using a Rubric

Purpose: To systematically evaluate each candidate against your established criteria from the pastor profile. (Step 6, Page 60)

The Pastor Search Team Evaluation Rubric provides a comprehensive framework for assessment.



- **Initial Screening Process (Phase 1 of Rubric):**
 - Distribute each application/resume to all committee members
 - Have members independently complete the Phase 1 evaluation
 - Score each qualification based on resume and application materials:
 - Educational background
 - Ministry experience
 - Biblical teaching experience
 - Leadership history
 - Great Commission focus
 - Great Commandment focus
 - Evaluate alignment with congregational priorities
 - Assess demographic compatibility
 - Meet as a committee to discuss individual evaluations
 - Assign each candidate to a category:
 - Definitely Consider (80% or higher scoring)
 - Possibly Consider (70-79% scoring)
 - Consider Only If Limited Options (60-69% scoring)
 - Do Not Consider (below 60% scoring)
- **Application Organization:**
 - Create a secure file for each candidate's materials
 - Document committee scores and decisions
 - Maintain a master tracking document of all candidates
 - Record reasons for advancing or not advancing candidates
 - Note areas where additional information is needed
- **Red Flag Identification:**
 - Watch for unexplained gaps in ministry history
 - Note frequent moves between churches
 - Pay attention to vague descriptions of previous departures
 - Consider educational claims that seem inconsistent
 - Be alert to references that seem limited or unusual
 - Look for evidence of conflict patterns or issues
- **Initial Communication:**
 - Send acknowledgment to all applicants

- Notify candidates not being considered
- Request additional information from promising candidates
- Be clear about the next steps in the process
- Provide realistic timelines for decisions

Rubric Utilization Tip: The rubric is a tool to aid discernment, not replace it. Exceptional candidates might score lower in some areas but have unique strengths that make them worth considering. Don't let the scoring system override the committee's prayerful judgment.

Common Pitfalls in This Step

Being Too Emotionally Driven in Initial Screening

Like Israel, swayed by emotional reactions rather than faithful assessment of God's promises, search committees can become overly influenced by feelings about candidates rather than systematic evaluation based on established criteria. While spiritual discernment involves emotions, decisions should strike a balance between feelings and careful analysis of qualifications, experience, and fit. Liking a candidate's social media presence or being impressed by professional presentation materials should not substitute for a thorough evaluation of pastoral qualifications and church fit.

Focusing on Style Over Substance

Initial resume reviews can emphasize surface-level factors, such as education, pedigree, church size statistics, or polished presentation rather than evidence of genuine pastoral effectiveness and spiritual maturity. Look beyond impressive credentials to find indicators of character, calling, and ministry impact that align with your church's needs.

What Does the Interim Pastor Do During This Phase?

Standard Interim Ministry Focus

Objective Assessment

- Offers a perspective on candidate qualifications without personal involvement
- Provides insights about pastoral requirements for your specific context
- Helps interpret "ministerial language" in resumes and interviews
- Suggests questions that might reveal important candidate characteristics
- Assists in evaluating sermon effectiveness and biblical soundness
- Provides general counsel about pastoral transitions without advocating for specific candidates

Process Guidance

- Advises on common pitfalls in evaluation processes
- Helps the committee maintain objectivity during assessment
- Suggests methods for thorough but efficient evaluation
- Provides perspective on realistic expectations
- Supports the committee through evaluation challenges
- Maintains appropriate boundaries regarding specific candidate preferences

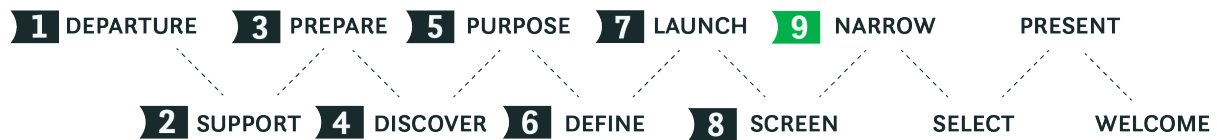
Intentional Interim Ministry Focus

Transition-Focused Assessment

- Helps identify candidates whose gifts match the church's transitional needs
- Assists in evaluating candidates' capacity to address identified issues
- Guides the committee in assessing change management abilities
- Provides insight into essential leadership qualities for recovery or revitalization
- Helps interpret candidate experiences with church transitions
- Assists in identifying candidates with appropriate emotional intelligence for your context

Church Health Perspective

- Helps connect candidate assessment to congregational health findings
- Provides insights into what leadership qualities will address the identified issues
- Suggests questions that reveal candidates' understanding of church systems
- Assists in evaluating candidates' potential effectiveness in your specific situation
- Helps identify candidates who might perpetuate unhealthy patterns
- Provides perspective on candidates' potential to lead necessary changes



STEP 9: Reducing the Number of Candidates

"But the men who went up with him said, 'We can't attack the people because they are stronger than we are!'" Numbers 13:31 (CSB)

The wilderness reveals character, and fear-based thinking can keep God's people wandering longer than necessary. When Israel's spies returned with mixed reports, fear led to rejecting God's promises and prolonging their wilderness experience. Your committee faces similar choices as you narrow candidates. Will you make decisions based on anxiety and unrealistic expectations, or trust God's faithfulness to provide the right leader? The wilderness of transition can tempt churches toward either paralyzed fear or desperate haste. Like Caleb and Joshua, who saw challenges but trusted God's provision, your committee must maintain faith that God has prepared a leader capable of bringing you out of the wilderness. Faithful discernment will help you recognize His choice and move toward your Promised Land.

This step exists because committees need focused evaluation of the most promising candidates rather than spreading their attention across too many prospects. Churches that skip systematic candidate reduction typically experience committee burnout, analysis paralysis, and difficulty reaching consensus on the best prospects.

You'll know this step is complete when you have conducted a written questionnaire evaluation, completed deeper reference checks, thoroughly assessed sermon effectiveness, and narrowed your focus to 5, or less, finalists who clearly align with your church's needs.

Moving from Initial Review to Deeper Assessment

After completing the initial screening of candidates in Step 8, your committee now narrows its focus to a smaller group of promising candidates for more thorough evaluation. This step parallels Israel's preparation to enter the Promised Land – gathering more specific intelligence before deciding which parts to claim first.

Phase 2 of Rubric – Written Questionnaire

Purpose: To gain deeper insight into candidates' theology, ministry philosophy, and alignment with your church's needs

The written questionnaire enables thoughtful and thorough responses going beyond what initial applications reveal.

- **Questionnaire Development:**

- Select 15-20 questions from the guide
- Customize questions to address your church's specific concerns
- Include a mix of theological, leadership, and vision questions
- Provide clear instructions and reasonable response length expectations
- Set a reasonable deadline (typically 2-3 weeks)



- **Key Question Categories:**

- Theological and doctrinal positions
- Leadership and ministry approach
- Vision and strategic thinking
- Great Commission/Great Commandment focus
- Personal ministry philosophy

- **Evaluation Process:**

- Have committee members independently review responses
- Use Phase 2 of the evaluation rubric to score candidates
- Meet to discuss findings and compare assessments
- Look for alignment with church needs identified in previous steps
- Consider both content and communication style in responses
- Note areas where follow-up questions would be beneficial

- **Response Red Flags:**

- Vague answers to direct questions
- Inconsistencies with the previous information provided
- Defensive responses to challenging questions
- Answers that reveal theological misalignment
- Responses suggesting unrealistic expectations
- Poor written communication skills for your church context

Questionnaire Insight: Written responses often reveal more about a candidate's thought process and theological depth than resumes or initial interviews. Pay attention to what they say and how they develop and express their ideas.

Listen to Sermon Recordings

Purpose: To evaluate preaching effectiveness and theological communication.

- **Structured Listening Approach:**

- Use the sermon evaluation rubric provided.
- Listen to multiple sermons from different contexts if possible
- Schedule specific committee time for group listening sessions
- Take detailed notes during listening
- Consider both content and delivery aspects
- Evaluate how the preaching would connect with your congregation



- **Key Evaluation Areas:**

- Biblical faithfulness and interpretation
- Theological soundness and depth
- Clarity of communication
- Relevance of application
- Balance of teaching and inspiration
- Engagement and connection
- Authenticity and conviction
- Pastoral sensitivity

- **Comparative Assessment:**

- Discuss how each candidate's preaching style differs
- Consider which style would best serve your congregation
- Evaluate how the preaching addresses various age groups
- Assess cultural connections within the messages
- Compare sermon length and structure to your church's expectations
- Note distinctive strengths and potential concerns

- **Beyond Content:**

- Observe pastoral presence and demeanor
- Note voice quality and speaking style
- Listen for evidence of preparation and organization
- Consider how scripture is handled and interpreted
- Evaluate the balance of grace and truth
- Assess emotional and spiritual impact

Preaching Balance Note: The most effective pastors typically combine solid biblical teaching with authentic passion and practical application. Consider how each candidate balances these elements in a way that would best serve your congregation.

Phase 3 of Rubric - Narrow Candidates to Less Than Five and Interview

Purpose: To focus committee energy and attention on the most promising candidates

Moving from a larger pool to a handful of top candidates requires careful discernment.

- **Evaluation Integration:**
 - Combine assessments from resume review, questionnaires, references, and sermons
 - Use the rubric scoring to provide an objective comparison
 - Create a comprehensive profile of each remaining candidate
 - Identify clear strengths and potential concerns for each
 - Consider fit with your church's specific needs and culture
 - Review alignment with your pastor profile
- **Discernment Process:**
 - Schedule extended committee time specifically for narrowing candidates
 - Begin with prayer and scripture reflection
 - Review assessment data for each candidate
 - Invite each committee member to share their perspectives
 - Discuss areas of consensus and different viewpoints
 - Create a prioritized list of candidates
 - Determine which candidates to move forward with
- **Decision Documentation:**
 - Record the committee's reasons for advancing each candidate
 - Document specific strengths that make each candidate promising
 - Note areas where further information is needed
 - Outline next steps for each candidate being considered
 - Prepare communication for candidates not moving forward
 - Update your committee tracking system
- **Candidate Communication:**
 - Notify candidates advancing to the next phase
 - Communicate next steps and timelines
 - Request any additional information needed
 - Schedule preliminary interviews
 - Send appropriate messages to candidates not advancing
 - Express appreciation for their participation in the process

Narrowing Insight: While the rubric provides valuable objective measures, don't ignore the subjective sense of the committee. Sometimes the "numbers" may suggest one candidate, but the committee has a strong understanding about another. Take time to explore these differences through prayer and conversation.

Common Pitfalls in This Step

Failing to Ask Probing Questions

Just as Israel's spies needed to look beyond surface observations to understand the true nature of the Promised Land, surface-level interactions with candidates often fail to reveal important information about theological positions, leadership approach, or cultural fit. This superficial evaluation can result in calling a pastor who seems qualified but lacks alignment with the church's values, expectations, or ministry context. Develop thoughtful questions that reveal depth of character, ministry philosophy, and potential for long-term effectiveness in your specific situation.

Not Checking Beyond Provided References

Candidates naturally provide references who will speak positively about them. Committees that only contact these primary references may miss important insights about potential challenges or areas of concern. While respecting confidentiality, seek additional perspectives from secondary references who can provide more balanced viewpoints about the candidate's ministry effectiveness and leadership style.

What Does the Interim Pastor Do During This Phase?

Standard Interim Ministry Focus

Interview Insight

- Helps interpret candidate responses from a pastoral perspective
- Provides context for understanding candidate questions and concerns
- Suggests clarifying questions based on candidate responses
- Offers insights about pastoral expectations and realities
- Helps the committee understand the implications of candidate statements
- Provides an objective perspective on candidate qualifications

Feedback Clarification

- Assists in interpreting reference feedback
- Helps distinguish between significant and minor concerns
- Provides context for understanding ministry challenges referenced
- Explains terminology or situations unfamiliar to committee members
- Offers a perspective on how common certain challenges are
- Maintains appropriate boundaries regarding specific candidate preferences

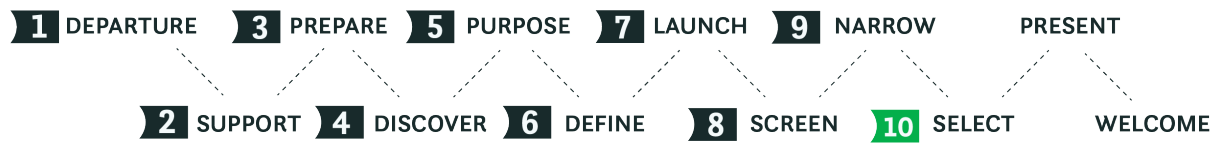
Intentional Interim Ministry Focus

Transition Need Assessment

- Helps connect candidate qualities to identified church needs
- Assists in evaluating candidates' capacity to address specific issues
- Points out potential matches between church challenges and candidate strengths
- Raises questions about candidates' experience with similar situations
- Provides perspective on change management capabilities
- Helps assess candidates' emotional intelligence for navigating transitions

Church Health Connection

- Links candidate assessment to congregational health findings
- Helps identify candidates who could address specific health issues
- Suggests questions to reveal candidates' understanding of church systems
- Assists in evaluating candidates' potential effectiveness with your church's dynamics
- Identifies candidates who might reinforce rather than address existing problems
- Provides insight into what leadership qualities would best serve the church's current needs



STEP 10: Choosing Your Final Candidate

"Be strong and courageous, for you will distribute the land I swore to their fathers to give them as an inheritance." Deuteronomy 31:7 (CSB)

As Moses formally commissioned Joshua to lead Israel from the wilderness into the Promised Land, your committee now confirms the pastor God has chosen to guide your church from transition into settled ministry. This moment requires wilderness-tested courage and confidence in God's faithfulness. Like Joshua, who received both divine calling and community affirmation to lead Israel's conquest and settlement, your pastoral candidate needs your strong support as they prepare to guide you from the wilderness of interim ministry into the Promised Land of your next ministry chapter. The same God who sustained you through the wilderness search will bless your partnership as you cross together into the fruitful ministry He has prepared.

This step exists because the final selection requires thorough personal evaluation, clear expectations, and complete preparation before presenting to the congregation. Churches that skip a comprehensive final evaluation typically experience post-call surprises, unrealistic expectations, and relationship problems that could have been prevented.

You'll know this step is complete when you have conducted in-person interviews, negotiated clear pastoral covenant terms, completed background verification, ensured staff compatibility, and prepared thoroughly for the candidate's congregational visit.

Making the Final Selection

After narrowing your candidate pool in previous steps, you now face the most significant decision in the search process. This step parallels the moment when Joshua was selected to succeed Moses, confirming God's choice to lead His people into their next chapter.

Conduct In-Person Interviews

Purpose: To personally engage with candidates to confirm their fit for your church

Face-to-face interaction provides insights that phone, video, and written communications cannot.

- **Interview Preparation:**
 - Use the Phase 3 interview questions from the evaluation rubric
 - Develop a structured interview schedule
 - Assign specific roles to committee members
 - Create a comfortable, professional setting
 - Plan appropriate hospitality for the candidate
 - Consider covering travel expenses for candidates
 - Prepare a packet of detailed church information
- **Interview Structure:**
 - Begin with prayer and relationship building
 - Use prepared questions from the rubric for consistency
 - Include church-specific questions based on your needs
 - Allow time for candidate questions
 - Include informal interaction time
 - Tour the church facilities and the community
 - Close with clear next steps and timeline
- **Key Areas to Address:**
 - Deeper theological assessment
 - Leadership philosophy and approach
 - Ministry priorities and passions
 - Family considerations and support
 - Vision for church growth and health
 - Specific questions arising from previous evaluation steps
 - Approach to challenges facing your church
- **Evaluation Process:**
 - Meet immediately after each interview while impressions are fresh
 - Have committee members share observations
 - Complete Phase 3 of the evaluation rubric
 - Document both positive impressions and concerns
 - Compare interview impressions with previous assessments
 - Discuss fit with church culture and needs
 - Pray for discernment about each candidate

Interview Insight: Pay attention not just to the content of answers but to how the candidate engages with the committee. Non-verbal cues, interpersonal dynamics, and the questions they ask often reveal as much as their direct responses.

Perform Reference Checks

Purpose: To gather insights about candidates from those who know their ministry firsthand

Reference checks provide a critical perspective beyond what candidates present themselves.

- **Initial Reference Contact Strategy:**
 - Begin with the references provided by the candidate
 - Contact references by phone rather than email when possible
 - Introduce yourself and explain the purpose of your call
 - Establish rapport before asking specific questions
 - Assure appropriate confidentiality for their responses
 - Ask permission to take notes during the conversation
- **Key Questions for References:**
 - "Can you describe a time when this candidate faced significant conflict or criticism, and how they responded to it?"
 - Listen for: Emotional regulation, wisdom in addressing issues, reconciliation efforts, growth from challenges
 - "Beyond their obvious strengths, what areas would you say this candidate is 'still growing in' that our church should be prepared to support?"
 - Listen for: Self-awareness, humility, specific development areas, willingness to learn
 - "If we called this candidate and they accepted, what advice would you give our church about how to help them thrive in their first year?"
 - Listen for: Work style preferences, communication needs, family considerations, ministry priorities
- **Additional Valuable Questions:**
 - "How would you describe the candidate's leadership style?"
 - "What types of people does the candidate work with most effectively?"
 - "How does the candidate handle stress or pressure?"
 - "In what ways have you seen the candidate's faith influence their ministry?"
 - "What kinds of ministry contexts bring out the candidate's best work?"
 - "How has the candidate's ministry impacted individual lives?"
- **Listening Techniques:**
 - Pay attention to hesitations or qualifications
 - Note enthusiasm or lack thereof
 - Listen for specific examples rather than generalizations
 - Be attentive to what is not said as much as what is
 - Ask follow-up questions for clarity
 - Look for patterns across multiple references

- **Second-Level References:**

- Ask primary references for additional people who know the candidate
- Seek diverse perspectives (staff members, church leaders, community contacts)
- Consider community sources like funeral directors or wedding venues
- Look for colleagues from denominational or association work
- Pursue references that the candidate might not anticipate
- Contact previous churches the candidate served with care and discretion
- Contact the candidate's associational leader

Reference Check Insight: References directly provided by candidates will typically be positive. The most valuable insights often come from "secondary references" - people suggested by the primary references who may offer more balanced perspectives. When a reference suggests contacting someone else, it often leads to crucial information.

Finalize Pastoral Covenant for Final Candidate

Purpose: To clearly define the relationship between pastor and church, establishing mutual expectations based on the fit between the church and the final candidate.

A well-developed covenant helps prevent misunderstandings and provides a foundation for a healthy ministry relationship.

- **Covenant Purpose:**

- Creates clarity and shared understanding
- Establishes appropriate accountability
- Supports a healthy ministry partnership
- Provides a framework for addressing future concerns
- Demonstrates good stewardship of church resources
- Supports the pastor's financial and ministry well-being

- **Covenant Components:**

- Comprehensive job description with clear responsibilities (Step 6, Page 60)
- Reasonable work schedule expectations and boundaries (Step 6, Page 60)
- Complete compensation details (Step 4, Page 42; Personnel Policies)
 - Base salary
 - Housing allowance or parsonage value – based on formal appraisal
 - Health insurance and other benefits
 - Retirement contributions
 - Expense reimbursement procedures
 - Continuing education provisions
 - Vacation, sick leave, and family time
- Ministry goals and priorities for the first year (Steps 4-6)

- Evaluation process and timeline (Personnel Policies)
- Conflict resolution procedures (Personnel Policies)
- Provision for regular covenant review and updates (Personnel Policies)
- **Package Clarification (Step 4)**

Covenant Balance: While the covenant establishes clear expectations, remember that ministry is ultimately a calling, not just employment. The document should support a relationship characterized by mutual trust, respect, and commitment to the church's mission.

Negotiate Terms

Purpose: To reach a mutually beneficial agreement on the specifics of the pastoral relationship

Negotiation is a collaborative process that respects both church resources and pastoral needs.

- **Negotiation Preparation:**
 - Understand your budget parameters and flexibilities
 - Identify which aspects are negotiable and which are not
 - Prepare creative alternatives for addressing pastoral needs
 - Designate who has the authority to negotiate on behalf of the church
 - Determine what levels of approval are needed for any adjustments
- **Negotiation Approach:**
 - Present the draft covenant clearly and professionally
 - Allow adequate time for the candidate to review and consider it
 - Schedule a specific conversation time for discussing terms
 - Listen attentively to the candidate's needs and perspectives
 - Focus on long-term relationship sustainability for both parties
 - Consider family circumstances and financial responsibilities
 - Document all agreed changes and confirm mutual understanding
 - Finalize the covenant with appropriate signatures
- **Common Discussion Areas:**
 - Salary and benefit structure
 - Relocation assistance and timing
 - Start date flexibility
 - Office arrangements and work flexibility
 - Ministry development opportunities
 - Technology and resource provisions
 - Family considerations and support
 - Future growth and development potential
- **Negotiation Spirit:**
 - Approach as ministry partners with shared goals

- Prioritize solutions that benefit both the church and the pastor
- Balance generosity with responsible stewardship
- Consider both immediate needs and long-term implications
- Maintain transparency throughout discussions
- Work toward arrangements that all parties can enthusiastically support
- Remember, this process establishes patterns for future interactions

Negotiation Perspective: Explore the "why" behind requests to find creative solutions that satisfy underlying needs. Remember that this process is about establishing a relationship built on mutual respect and understanding.

Complete Background and Credit Checks

Purpose: To verify candidate information and ensure appropriate safeguards for the church

Thorough background checks are not about distrust but about responsible stewardship.

- **When to Conduct Checks:**
 - Complete with the finalist candidate before extending a formal call
 - Obtain written permission from the candidate
 - Allow sufficient time to process results before finalizing decisions
 - Handle with appropriate confidentiality and sensitivity
- **Types of Checks:**
 - Criminal background check (multi-state Level 3 recommended through MinistrySafe.com or contact your Area Rep, Associational Leadership, or TXB)
 - Credit history review
 - Education and Employment verification
 - Sexual misconduct screening (Covered in Level 3 Check)
 - Professional reference verification
 - Social media review
- **Results Management:**
 - Limit access to results to designated committee members
 - Maintain strict confidentiality throughout the process
 - Have a predetermined plan for addressing potential findings
 - Discuss any concerns directly and respectfully with the candidate
 - Document completion of all required checks
 - Securely store all background information according to legal requirements
 - Follow proper procedures for handling sensitive information

Background Check Perspective: These checks serve as due diligence for protecting the congregation while treating candidates with respect and dignity. Perfect credit or a flawless past

is not the standard; instead, look for patterns that might indicate significant character concerns or unaddressed issues.

Schedule Staff Meeting with Candidate

Purpose: To ensure staff compatibility and address potential concerns before finalizing the selection

Staff relationships are crucial to ministry effectiveness and should be considered before the public introduction of new staff members.

- **Meeting Arrangement:**
 - Schedule time for the candidate to meet with staff before finalizing the "in view of a call" weekend and cover all the expenses incurred.
 - Conduct these meetings with confidentiality to protect the candidate's current ministry
 - Determine whether individual or group meetings would be most productive
 - Consider including key volunteer leaders where appropriate
 - Create an environment that encourages open but respectful dialogue
 - Prepare staff by explaining the purpose and confidential nature of these meetings
 - Provide clear guidelines about the staff's role in the selection process
- **Staff Meeting Focus:**
 - Discuss potential ministry collaboration opportunities
 - Explore complementary gifts and abilities
 - Share ministry philosophies and approaches
 - Address practical questions about working relationships
 - Clarify expectations about team dynamics
 - Begin building relationships that will support future ministry
 - Allow for authentic but professional interaction
- **Post-Meeting Assessment:**
 - Gather thoughtful feedback from staff members
 - Distinguish between preference issues and significant concerns
 - Evaluate input within the context of the church's overall needs
 - Consider how team dynamics might develop over time
 - Determine if any critical issues need further exploration
 - Assess whether adjustments to the proposed ministry structure might be needed
- **Decision Approach:**
 - Receive staff input as valuable information, not a deciding vote
 - Recognize that initial impressions may evolve with time
 - Consider the long-term ministry health of the church
 - Address any legitimate concerns directly with the candidate

- Make decisions based on the overall fit with the church's needs and vision
- Communicate next steps clearly to both staff and candidate

Staff Meeting Balance: These meetings serve to establish working relationships rather than as an approval process. The search committee should maintain its leadership role while valuing the perspectives of its staff. Remember that adjusting to new leadership always involves change and adaptation for existing staff.

Prepare for Candidate Visit

Purpose: To plan a meaningful visit that allows the congregation and candidate to confirm God's leading

The "in view of a call" weekend is a pivotal moment in your search process:

- **Visit Planning:**
 - Coordinate dates that work for both the candidate and the church
 - Develop a thoughtful, balanced schedule
 - Allow sufficient advance notice to the congregation
 - Consider the church calendar and avoid conflict with major events
 - Plan for 2-3 days when possible (typically Friday-Sunday)
 - Create a detailed itinerary for the entire visit
 - Share the schedule with the candidate well in advance
 - Include appropriate rest periods throughout
- **Key Components:**
 - Fellowship opportunities with various church groups
 - Q&A sessions with the congregation
 - Worship leadership and preaching
 - Meetings with key leadership groups
 - Community tour and orientation
 - Housing/relocation discussions, if applicable
 - Conversations with specific ministry areas
 - Vote preparation and process explanation
- **Hospitality Elements:**
 - Cover all of the candidate's expenses for this trip.
 - Arrange comfortable accommodations
 - Plan appropriate meals and fellowship times
 - Consider family needs if spouse/children are visiting
 - Provide thoughtful welcome gestures
 - Assign specific hosts to assist throughout the visit
 - Arrange transportation as needed

- Balance structured time with periods of rest
- Consider the candidate's energy and personal needs
- **Communication Planning:**
 - Announce the visit to the congregation appropriately
 - Provide helpful biographical information
 - Share the visit schedule with members
 - Explain the decision process and timeline clearly
 - Prepare introduction materials and presentations
 - Develop clear voting procedures and materials
 - Plan post-vote communication for either outcome
 - Consider how to welcome the pastor if the vote is affirmative

Visit Perspective: Remember that while the church is evaluating the candidate, the candidate and family are also evaluating the church. Create an authentic experience that reflects your church's true character while putting your best foot forward.

Common Pitfalls in This Step

Creating a Beauty Pageant Environment

Like Israel comparing potential leaders based on outward appearance rather than spiritual qualifications, when multiple candidates are interviewed or presented, churches can inadvertently create a competitive atmosphere that reduces pastoral calling to a performance contest. This approach removes spiritual dynamics from the discernment process, potentially pressuring candidates to present artificial versions of themselves. Focus on finding the pastor God has chosen for your church rather than selecting the most impressive performer.

Avoiding Staff and Leadership Meetings Before Final Decisions

Some committees postpone meetings between candidates and current staff until after the congregation vote, missing opportunities to identify potential compatibility issues. Staff members often have valuable insights into ministry dynamics and leadership needs that can help evaluate a candidate's fit. Schedule these meetings before scheduling the "in view of a call" weekend to address any significant concerns before the public presentation.

What Does the Interim Pastor Do During This Phase?

Standard Interim Ministry Focus

Covenant Development Guidance

- Offers insights on job description components
- Provides perspective on reasonable expectations
- Advises on appropriate compensation structures

- Suggests covenant elements based on experience
- Reviews draft documents for clarity and completeness
- Helps identify potential areas of misunderstanding
- Assists in creating realistic ministry parameters

Transition Planning

- Advises on appropriate timing for leadership transition
- Helps develop a healthy handoff process
- Suggests ways to honor the interim period while embracing new leadership
- Provides guidance on appropriate boundaries during transition
- Assists in planning installation and welcome events
- Offers to meet with the incoming pastor if desired
- Prepares to conclude his own ministry appropriately

Intentional Interim Ministry Focus

Readiness Assessment

- Evaluates whether the church has addressed critical issues
- Confirms that systems are in place for healthy pastoral leadership
- Helps the committee discern if the candidate can address the identified needs
- Assesses whether unresolved issues might undermine the new pastor
- Provides counsel about the timing of the transition
- Offers a perspective on the church's preparedness for new leadership
- Suggests transition approaches based on the church's current health

Expectation Management

- Helps develop realistic expectations for the new pastor
- Assists in creating appropriate boundaries and support systems
- Guides the development of healthy accountability structures
- Advises on how to avoid common transition pitfalls
- Helps the church understand what to expect in the early months
- Prepares leadership for adjustment challenges
- Develops resources to support the incoming pastor

PHASE FOUR

Your New Beginnings Journey

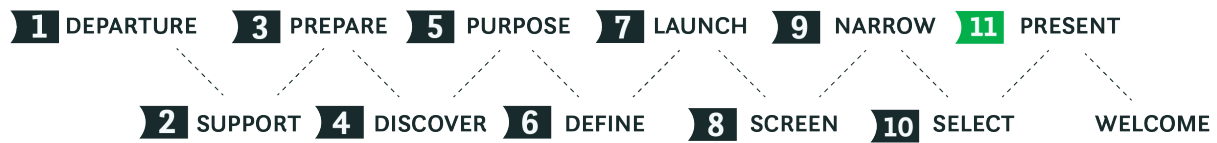
This phase parallels Israel's crossing of the Jordan River into Canaan under Joshua's leadership. Just as Joshua led God's people to claim the inheritance God had prepared for them, your new pastor will lead the congregation into the future God has planned. And like Israel's experience, this transition is not merely a change in geography but a significant spiritual milestone in your church's journey.

The New Beginnings phase encompasses the candidate's visit and vote, the initial transition period, and the establishment of a healthy, long-term pastoral relationship. These steps require as much intentionality and spiritual discernment as the earlier phases of your journey. How you welcome, support, and partner with your new pastor will significantly impact their ministry effectiveness and longevity.

During this phase, the committee's role evolves from searching to supporting. The focus shifts from evaluation to integration, from discernment to development. This transformation requires committee members to adopt new perspectives and practices as they help both pastor and congregation navigate the challenges and opportunities of new leadership.

Remember that pastoral transitions are both technical and adaptive challenges. The technical aspects like scheduling the candidate visit, conducting the vote, and arranging the pastor's office are relatively straightforward. The adaptive challenges like helping the congregation embrace new leadership, establishing healthy expectations, and developing productive relationships require ongoing attention, patience, and wisdom.

The following steps will guide you through presenting your candidate to the congregation, welcoming your new pastor, and establishing patterns for a fruitful ministry partnership. As you move through these final milestones, continue to seek God's guidance, maintain clear communication, and cultivate a spirit of unity and expectancy for what God will do in this new season of your church's life.



STEP 11: In View of a Call Weekend

"Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites." Joshua 1:2 (CSB)

After forty years of wilderness wandering, Israel finally stood at the edge of the Promised Land, ready to cross the Jordan under Joshua's leadership. Your congregation now stands at your own Jordan River—the threshold between the wilderness of pastoral transition and the Promised Land of new ministry under fresh leadership. This candidate weekend represents your crossing over moment, when you transition from the uncertainty of the wilderness search into the certainty of God's chosen leader. Like Israel breaking camp for the final time before entering Canaan, your church prepares to leave behind the wilderness season of interim ministry and enter the abundant ministry God has prepared with your new pastor.

This step exists because both congregation and candidate need meaningful interaction and mutual discernment before making a commitment that will shape the church's future. Churches that skip thoughtful candidate presentation typically experience buyer's remorse, unrealistic expectations, or missed opportunities to address concerns before the pastoral relationship begins.

You'll know this step is complete when you have provided authentic congregation-candidate interaction, facilitated meaningful Q&A opportunities, presented the candidate fairly in worship, conducted an appropriate congregational vote, and begun transition planning based on the outcome.

Presenting Your Candidate to the Congregation

After months of searching, praying, and discerning, the moment arrives to present your candidate to the congregation. This step parallels the Israelites' formal acceptance of Joshua as their new leader, a pivotal moment of transition from the past into God's future for the congregation.

Sample Weekend Overview

Below is a brief overview of a typical "In View of a Call" weekend. Scan the QR code for a detailed sample schedule with specific timings and components for each element.



Friday Evening

- Leadership reception with deacons and key ministry leaders
- Informal fellowship and conversation
- Prayer for the weekend ahead

Saturday Morning

- Church-wide meet and greet event
- Candidate and spouse share testimonies
- Extended Q&A with congregation

Saturday Afternoon/Evening

- Free time for the candidate and family
- Rest and preparation for Sunday

Sunday

- Brief visits to Sunday School classes
- Worship service with candidate preaching
- Special business meeting for a vote
- Results announcement
- Fellowship meal to celebrate a positive vote or to pray if the vote was negative

Host Candidate Visit Weekend

Purpose: To provide opportunities for the congregation and candidate to meet, interact, and discern God's leading together

The visit weekend is the culmination of your search process.

- **Preparation Elements:**
 - Ensure all logistics are arranged well in advance
 - Prepare the congregation through appropriate announcements

- Brief all participants on their roles during the weekend
- Create a detailed schedule for the candidate and family
- Assign specific committee members to host various events
- Prepare printed materials about the candidate
- Arrange comfortable accommodations for the candidate's stay
- Plan for the candidate's family's needs if they are participating
- **Weekend Components:**
 - Leadership gatherings with deacons, committees, and staff
 - Church-wide reception or fellowship opportunity
 - Worship leadership by the candidate
 - Q&A sessions with various groups
 - Community tour, if not previously completed
 - Social interactions with different age groups
 - Appropriate rest periods for the candidate
 - Voting process following established church procedures
- **Hospitality Considerations:**
 - Assign escorts for the candidate and family throughout the weekend
 - Provide thoughtful welcome gifts or local items
 - Arrange for meals with various church groups
 - Consider the energy levels and stamina of all participants
 - Balance formal and informal interactions
 - Prepare for children's needs if applicable
 - Make transportation arrangements as needed
 - Consider weather contingencies for all events
- **Communication Planning:**
 - Provide a detailed written schedule to the candidate in advance
 - Share appropriate information with the congregation
 - Create name tags for key leaders to help the candidate
 - Develop information packets about the church and community
 - Plan the announcement of the vote
 - Prepare for possible outcomes (acceptance or rejection)
 - Consider the media needs for recording the sermon

Visit Weekend Balance: Create a schedule that provides meaningful interaction without exhausting the candidate. Remember that while this is a significant moment for your church, it's a significant life transition for the pastoral candidate and family.

Organize Congregation-Candidate Interactions

Purpose: To facilitate meaningful connections between the candidate and various church constituencies

Thoughtful planning of these interactions helps everyone participate in the discernment process.

- **Interaction Types:**

- Fellowship meals or receptions
- Small group conversations
- Age-group specific gatherings
- Ministry team discussions
- Informal social settings
- Worship participation
- Town hall style meetings
- Individual time with key leaders

- **Interaction Planning:**

- Consider the church's demographic makeup when planning
- Include various age groups and ministry interests
- Balance formal and informal settings
- Create opportunities for authentic conversation
- Allow the candidate's gifts and personality to shine
- Include time with youth and children where appropriate
- Consider accessibility issues for all church members
- Develop question guidelines for group settings

- **Productive Conversations:**

- Provide topics or questions that facilitate meaningful dialogue
- Avoid putting the candidate "on the spot" with controversial issues
- Create settings where genuine relationships can begin to form
- Allow time for listening as well as asking questions
- Focus on ministry vision and hopes rather than policies or procedures
- Encourage questions about the candidate's calling and journey
- Help church members focus on substantive rather than superficial issues
- Create appropriate boundaries around sensitive topics

- **Candidate Care:**

- Assign "hosts" for different events to support the candidate
- Provide breaks between major interactions
- Brief the candidate on each group's composition and interests
- Create "safe space" for authentic conversation
- Protect from inappropriate questioning or awkward situations
- Allow opportunities for the candidate to ask questions as well
- Consider energy management throughout the schedule
- Respect the candidate's personal and family boundaries

Interaction Guidance: Help both the congregation and candidate focus on substance rather than style. While first impressions matter, the goal is to discern long-term fit and ministry potential rather than immediate appeal or charisma.

Schedule Q&A and Sermon

Purpose: To provide opportunities for the congregation to hear the candidate's preaching and responses to questions.

Q&A opportunities and the Sunday sermon are typically the centerpieces of the candidate visit.

- **Q&A Session Planning:**
 - Determine format (moderated, open microphone, written questions, etc.)
 - Establish time parameters and question guidelines
 - Select an appropriate moderator
 - Decide which questions will be screened and which will be spontaneous
 - Prepare the candidate for likely areas of interest or concern
 - Consider having some prepared questions to begin the session
 - Create a comfortable physical setting for conversation
 - Plan how to conclude the session meaningfully
- **Q&A Content Areas:**
 - Calling and ministry journey
 - Theological perspectives
 - Ministry philosophy and approach
 - Leadership style and experience
 - Vision for the future
 - Family life and interests
 - Specific church concerns or opportunities
 - Areas of passion and gifting
- **Sermon Arrangements:**
 - Discuss the sermon topic with the candidate in advance
 - Coordinate with the worship planning team
 - Consider how to introduce the candidate
 - Determine the candidate's role in the full service
 - Make the necessary technical arrangements (microphone, etc.)
 - Plan for sermon recording if desired
 - Consider how to transition from the sermon to the voting process
 - Arrange for proper feedback after the sermon
- **Worship Service Elements:**
 - Determine which parts the candidate will lead
 - Consider including elements that showcase church life

- Plan music that creates a worshipful atmosphere
- Create a service that feels both special and authentic
- Include meaningful elements of your church's usual worship pattern
- Ensure the focus remains on worship rather than performance
- Consider the emotional and spiritual dynamics of the service
- Plan appropriate prayer moments for the decision ahead

Worship Balance: Create a worship experience that feels authentic to your church while allowing the candidate to participate in meaningful ways. Avoid creating artificial expectations through a "special" service that doesn't reflect normal church life.

Conduct Congregational Vote

Purpose: To formally discern the congregation's affirmation of the candidate as their next pastor

The voting process should be clear, fair, and handled with appropriate solemnity.

- **Voting Preparation:**

- Review church bylaws regarding voting procedures
- Determine the required percentage for approval
- Prepare official ballots in advance
- Identify who is eligible to vote
- Select neutral vote counters
- Prepare the motion for calling the pastor
- Determine how results will be tallied and announced

- **Voting Process:**

- Conduct according to church bylaws
- Provide clear instructions to the congregation
- Allow appropriate discussion time if required
- Use written ballots for confidentiality
- Have designated counters tally votes in a private setting
- Ensure accuracy in counting and reporting
- Document the results officially
- Communicate results clearly to both the congregation and the candidate

- **Vote Settings:**

- Often conducted after the Sunday morning service
- May be held in a special-called business meeting
- Should include prayer and scripture before voting
- May include final comments from the search committee
- Provide a private space for the candidate during voting
- Should minimize anxiety for the congregation and the candidate

- Should emphasize spiritual discernment rather than mere voting
- Should include thanksgiving regardless of outcome
- **Response Planning:**
 - Prepare for both positive and negative outcomes
 - Plan how to welcome the candidate if approved
 - Develop contingency plans if the vote fails
 - Consider the emotional impact on all involved
 - Plan an appropriate celebration if the vote passes
 - Consider the immediate next steps after the vote
 - Prepare the congregation for the transition ahead
 - Plan how to communicate the results to those not present or if the call is not accepted.

Voting Perspective: While a democratic process is an important Baptist principle, it is essential to emphasize that this vote represents spiritual discernment of God's will for the church. Encourage members to vote based on prayerful consideration rather than personal preferences alone.

Begin Transition Planning

Purpose: To lay the groundwork for a healthy leadership transition

Effective transitions begin with intentional planning before the new pastor arrives.

- **Immediate Next Steps:**
 - Establish the new pastor's start date
 - Develop a communication plan for the congregation
 - Plan an appropriate farewell for the interim pastor
 - Prepare the pastor's office and equipment
 - Address any housing or relocation needs
 - Plan welcome events for the new pastor and family
 - Schedule an installation service
 - Create a transition support team if appropriate
- **First 90 Days Planning:**
 - Develop a church-wide calendar for the first three months
 - Schedule initial meetings with key leaders and groups
 - Plan orientation to church systems and procedures
 - Identify immediate priorities for the new pastor
 - Create opportunities for relationship building
 - Consider ministry pace and expectations
 - Develop realistic goals for the early transition period

- Plan communication strategies for the transition
- **Congregational Preparation:**
 - Educate the congregation about healthy transitions
 - Set appropriate expectations for change and adjustment
 - Address any lingering issues before the pastor arrives
 - Prepare ministry leaders for new leadership
 - Develop prayer initiatives for the transition
 - Plan ways to incorporate new ideas and leadership
 - Create feedback mechanisms for the transition period
 - Begin shifting from bring the search committee to supportive roles
- **Documentation and Information:**
 - Compile key information the new pastor will need
 - Gather church membership and leadership contact information
 - Provide access to governing documents and policies
 - Document ongoing projects and initiatives
 - Identify immediate decisions or issues needing attention
 - Prepare financial and administrative information
 - Create a community resource guide if helpful
 - Document church traditions and annual patterns

Transition Insight: The first 90 days set the tone for a pastor's tenure. Intentional planning for this period helps both the pastor and congregation navigate change while establishing healthy patterns for the future.

Common Pitfalls in This Step

Treating the Weekend as a Performance Evaluation

Just as Israel needed to recognize Joshua's calling rather than judge his performance against Moses, churches sometimes approach the candidate visit as an audition where the pastor must prove worthiness through impressive preaching or perfect answers to questions. This performance mindset creates artificial pressure and prevents authentic interaction that reveals genuine fit. Instead, view the weekend as a mutual discernment process where the church and candidate seek to understand God's leading about their potential partnership.

Inadequate Preparation for the Voting Process

Some churches fail to educate their congregation about the decision-making process, leaving members uncertain about the criteria for evaluation or the expectations for the vote. Without proper preparation, voting can become based on superficial impressions rather than a prayerful consideration of pastoral calling and the church's needs. Prepare the congregation to participate thoughtfully in this crucial decision.

What Does the Interim Pastor Do During This Phase?

Standard Interim Ministry Focus

Leadership Transition Preparation

- Works with church leadership to prepare for the handoff
- Concludes ongoing ministries appropriately
- Organizes pastoral records and information
- Prepares the congregation for a change in leadership style
- Offers insights to help the incoming pastor
- Participates appropriately in the transition weekend
- Begins stepping back from leadership visibility
- Plans a farewell and closure

Pastoral Continuity

- Ensures pastoral care needs are covered during transition
- Prepares staff for leadership change
- Helps maintain momentum in ongoing ministries
- Addresses any lingering issues before departure
- Documents the current ministry status for the new pastor
- Identifies immediate priorities for incoming leadership
- Creates a space for the new pastor to lead
- Models support for the new pastor and the church's decision

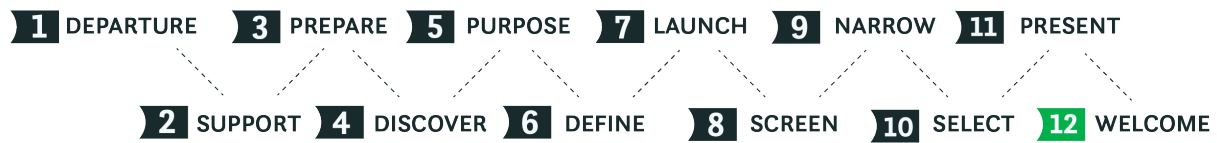
Intentional Interim Ministry Focus

Process Documentation

- Creates a comprehensive transition report
- Documents progress in the five focus areas
- Identifies ongoing work needed in each area
- Prepares resources for the incoming pastor
- Summarizes key insights from the interim process
- Develops specific recommendations for continuing growth
- Creates appropriate handoff materials
- Plans for possible consultation early in the transition

Continued Development Support

- Identifies areas needing ongoing attention
- Helps leadership internalize lessons from the interim period
- Creates sustainable momentum for continuing change
- Prepares key leaders to support new pastoral leadership
- Develops realistic expectations for the transition period
- Plans appropriate follow-up at 3-6 month intervals if helpful
- Offers consultation availability to the new pastor if desired
- Celebrates progress while acknowledging continuing journey



STEP 12: The First Sunday with Your Pastor

¹⁰ While the Israelites camped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho, they observed the Passover on the evening of the fourteenth day of the month. ¹¹ The day after Passover they ate unleavened bread and roasted grain from the produce of the land. ¹² And the day after they ate from the produce of the land, the manna ceased. Since there was no more manna for the Israelites, they ate from the crops of the land of Canaan that year. Joshua 5:10-12 (CSB)

You have crossed your Jordan River and entered your ministry Promised Land. Like Israel establishing new patterns and renewing their covenant with God at Gilgal under Joshua's leadership, your church now begins building fresh rhythms with your pastor in the fertile ground of settled ministry. The wilderness journey is complete, but the wilderness lessons remain. The faith you developed during your transition, the identity you clarified during your assessment time, and the unity you forged during your search all become the foundation for fruitful ministry in your Promised Land. God's faithfulness that sustained you through every wilderness season will continue to bless your church as you cultivate the abundant ministry He has prepared for you and your new pastoral leader.

This step exists because how churches welcome and support new pastors in the early months determines the long-term health and effectiveness of the pastoral relationship. Churches that skip intentional transition support typically experience early misunderstandings, unmet expectations, and relationship problems that undermine ministry effectiveness.

You'll know this step is complete when you have thoroughly prepared for the pastor's arrival, transformed the search team's energy into ongoing support, celebrated the new relationship appropriately through the installation, provided comprehensive orientation, and established healthy patterns for long-term ministry partnership.

Beginning Well Together

The arrival of your new pastor marks the end of your search process but the beginning of a vital relationship that will shape your church's future. This step parallels Israel's first days in the

Promised Land - establishing patterns, relationships, and commitments that will define this new season of ministry.

Prepare for Pastor's Arrival

Purpose: To create a welcoming environment that enables the pastor to begin ministry effectively

Thoughtful preparation demonstrates care and helps the pastor transition smoothly.

- **Physical Preparation:**
 - Prepare and refresh the pastor's office
 - Ensure all necessary equipment is functional
 - Provide keys, passwords, and access credentials
 - Address technology and communication needs
 - Ensure appropriate signage and name updates
 - Prepare welcome materials and resources
 - Assist with housing needs if applicable
 - Arrange for moving assistance if needed
- **Administrative Preparation:**
 - Complete all employment paperwork
 - Establish payroll and benefit arrangements
 - Provide church policy and procedure manuals
 - Arrange for email, website, and directory updates
 - Prepare church letterhead and business cards
 - Ensure insurance coverage and legal requirements
 - Update all appropriate records and accounts
 - Develop appropriate communication channels
- **Relational Preparation:**
 - Communicate the arrival date to the congregation
 - Schedule initial meetings with key leaders
 - Plan appropriate welcome events
 - Consider community welcome opportunities
 - Arrange introductions to community leaders
 - Coordinate with local media if appropriate
 - Prepare staff for transition in leadership style
 - Help the pastor's family connect in the community
- **Ministry Preparation:**
 - Identify immediate ministry priorities
 - Prepare a calendar of upcoming events and commitments

- Document ongoing projects and initiatives
- Compile congregation directory with photos if possible
- Create a pastoral care needs list
- Develop church ministry overview documents
- Arrange for an introduction to ministry partners
- Prepare orientation to church traditions and practices

Arrival Insight: The first impressions a pastor and congregation make on each other can set the tone for the entire relationship. Thoughtful preparation communicates value and establishes a foundation for a healthy partnership. Dr. Stone provides valuable insights:

Once a new pastor is selected, a purposeful onboarding process is vital. The transition does not end with a call vote; it continues through the first year and beyond. The new pastor must be introduced to the congregation and the rhythms, relationships, and responsibilities of the staff team.

Key elements of onboarding include:

- **Orientation Meetings:** Introduce the new pastor to organizational systems, culture, and staff roles. Provide historical context to current ministries.
- **Relational Integration:** Schedule one-on-one meetings between the new pastor and each staff member to foster personal connection and clarify mutual expectations.
- **Boundary Setting and Role Clarity:** Encourage the new pastor to clarify his leadership style, decision-making process, and ministry priorities. Simultaneously, reinforce staff role definitions and areas of autonomy.
- **Staff Retreat or Planning Session:** Within the first 90 days, a team retreat can accelerate relational trust and allow for early collaboration on vision-setting.
- **Mentoring and Support:** Assigning a coach, denominational leader, or seasoned pastor to walk alongside the new pastor during the first year is invaluable.

A thoughtful onboarding process builds trust, prevents misunderstandings, and promotes long-term alignment.

Consequences of a New Hire: Transitions and Departures

Despite the best efforts, some level of staff turnover following a pastoral transition is common. In fact, between two-thirds and three-fourths of the existing staff will leave the staff during the interim or within two years of the new pastor's arrival. When a new pastor is hired, particularly if he brings significant changes to leadership or vision, existing staff members may:

- **Sense a shift in calling** – They may discern that their gifts and passions are better suited elsewhere.
- **Experience relational misalignment** – Differences in communication or values may create tension.
- **Feel displaced or underutilized** – A new pastor may intentionally or unintentionally marginalize staff hired by the predecessor.

- **Most churches are overly optimistic** about staff retention or unaware of the inevitability of staff departures and therefore neglect to plan for staff replacement. Finding a pastor who fits the church's profile and integrates well with the existing staff is rare. Understanding the financial cost of staff replacement and the loss of ministry momentum during restaffing is critical. Church leaders must prepare for this possibility with grace and proactive care.

Churches should take the initiative to oversee staff transitions and departures. Here are a few suggestions.

- **Encourage open dialogue** – Staff should feel free to discuss their future and explore their alignment with the new pastor.
- **Offer transition support** – If a staff member decides to leave, assist them with placement support, references, and a healthy farewell. Pastors frequently have access to or awareness of financial support after a forced termination or untimely departure. State denominations or other organizations offer grants and bridge resources for staff who are without salaries. The same is not always true for staff, as they may be unaware of such resources. Churches should be gracious and generous when separating staff and their families.
- **Avoid reactionary hiring or restructuring** – Let the new pastor assess the team before making major personnel changes. A 6–12-month period of observation is often recommended.
- **Celebrate tenure and transitions** – Acknowledge the contributions of departing staff. A farewell blessing or public affirmation can preserve unity and gratitude.

Recognizing that staff changes are a natural part of leadership evolution enables the church to grieve well, transition smoothly, and remain mission-focused. When mishandled, the personal, financial, spiritual, and emotional costs to staff and their families are enormous. Many suffer great financial setbacks until new ministry opportunities are secured. Staff and their families suffer emotional damage from insensitive pastors, committees, or church members. Kingdom leaders are sometimes lost when staff drop out of the ministry due to irreparable monetary loss, spiritual burnout, or emotional scars.

Transform Search Team into Support Team

Purpose: To provide ongoing assistance during the critical early months of the pastor's ministry

The search committee's relationship with the new pastor offers unique support during transition.

- **Role Transition:**
 - Redefine the committee's purpose from searching to supporting
 - Establish a clear duration for the support role (typically 6-12 months)
 - Develop specific support objectives and expectations
 - Create a covenant of confidentiality and encouragement
 - Schedule regular support team meetings with the pastor
 - Plan for eventual dissolution of the formal support relationship

- Consider which members will continue in ongoing support roles
- Clarify boundaries between support and supervision
- **Support Functions:**
 - Provide feedback on church culture and context
 - Offer encouragement during challenging moments
 - Serve as a sounding board for ideas and concerns
 - Help navigate relationships with key leaders and members
 - Address misunderstandings or unrealistic expectations
 - Create social connections and community integration
 - Assist with family transition needs
 - Act as advocates and encouragers within the congregation
- **Practical Assistance:**
 - Help with community orientation and connections
 - Arrange meals during the initial transition period
 - Assist with unpacking and settling in if needed
 - Provide local information and recommendations
 - Introduce to service providers and resources
 - Share insider knowledge about church dynamics
 - Help identify resource people for various needs
 - Be available for questions and guidance
- **Healthy Boundaries:**
 - Respect the pastor's leadership authority
 - Avoid creating dependency or controlling relationships
 - Maintain appropriate confidentiality
 - Resist the temptation to direct the pastor's decisions
 - Don't serve as a complaint channel for the congregation
 - Support without overprotecting
 - Allow the pastor to develop independent relationships
 - Recognize when to step back as support becomes less necessary

Support Team Perspective: The support team serves as a bridge between the search process and the pastor's independent ministry. The goal is to provide enough support to enable early success while encouraging appropriate independence and direct relationships with the congregation.

Plan Installation Service

Purpose: To formally recognize, commission, and celebrate the new pastoral relationship

The installation service marks the official beginning of the new ministry partnership.

- **Installation Planning:**
 - Set a date for the service (typically 4-6 weeks after arrival)
 - Form a planning team, including the pastor
 - Identify participants and assign responsibilities
 - Develop the order of service with pastoral input
 - Invite special guests and community representatives
 - Prepare printed materials and announcements
 - Address logistics for reception and fellowship
 - Consider media coverage and documentation
- **Theological Significance:**
 - Emphasize God's calling and provision
 - Highlight mutual commitments and responsibilities
 - Focus on the church's mission and future
 - Acknowledge denominational connections
 - Incorporate appropriate Scripture and symbolism
 - Include covenantal elements between the pastor and the congregation
 - Emphasize both celebration and solemnity
 - Provide an opportunity for congregational participation
- **Key Service Elements:**
 - Recognition of God's guidance through the search process
 - Acknowledgment of the search committee's work
 - Charge to the pastor
 - Charge to the congregation
 - Prayer of dedication and blessing
 - Symbolic presentations (Bible, church key, etc.)
 - Covenant or commitment statements
 - Fellowship celebration
- **Community Connection:**
 - Invite area pastors and ministry colleagues
 - Include denominational representatives
 - Consider community leader participation
 - Extend invitations to the pastor's former church
 - Publicize the event appropriately
 - Use as an opportunity to reintroduce the church to the community
 - Include welcome elements from the community
 - Demonstrate the church's connection to the broader body of Christ

Installation Overview: See below for a condensed installation service outline. A more detailed service plan is available by scanning the QR.



Installation Service Outline: "From Wilderness to Promised Land"

Pre-Service

- Musical prelude with themes of journey, arrival, and celebration

Service Opening

- Welcome by Search Committee Chair
- Call to Worship from Psalm 100
- Opening Prayer by Deacon Chair or Elder
- Congregational Hymn: "Great Is Thy Faithfulness"

Recognition and Scripture

- Scripture Readings: Joshua 1:1-9 and 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13
- Special Music
- Recognition of the search journey and participants

Installation Elements

- Charge to the Pastor (1 Peter 5:1-4)
- Pastor's Response
- Charge to the Congregation (Hebrews 13:17)
- Act of Installation with prayer and laying on of hands
- Reading of Ministry Covenant (Step 10, Page 92)
- Installation Prayer

Celebration and Commitment

- Welcome from Community Representatives
- Hymn of Dedication
- Pastor's Brief Message
- Closing Hymn: "Blest Be the Tie That Binds"
- Benediction by New Pastor
- Reception Following

Develop Orientation Process

Purpose: To help the new pastor understand the church's context, culture, and operations

A thoughtful orientation accelerates the pastor's effectiveness and integration.

- **Orientation Planning:**
 - Create a structured orientation schedule
 - Identify key aspects of church life to cover
 - Designate appropriate leaders to conduct various sessions
 - Develop orientation materials and resources
 - Balance information with relationship-building
 - Pace orientation to prevent overload
 - Include both formal and informal elements
 - Create opportunities for questions and clarification
- **Organizational Elements:**
 - Review the church governance structure and processes
 - Explain budget and financial procedures
 - Introduce church calendar and annual rhythms
 - Outline staff roles and reporting relationships
 - Review church policies and procedures
 - Tour facilities and explain usage patterns
 - Introduce ministry software and systems
 - Explain communication patterns and expectations
- **Ministry Orientation:**
 - Profile of congregation demographics and needs
 - Overview of ministry programs and priorities
 - Introduction to ministry leaders and volunteers
 - Explanation of the worship planning process
 - Overview of discipleship and education approaches
 - Introduction to outreach and missions involvement
 - Review of pastoral care expectations and systems
 - Description of community ministry connections
- **Cultural Elements:**
 - Share church history and significant milestones
 - Explain cherished traditions and practices
 - Discuss unwritten rules and expectations
 - Identify potential sensitive areas or topics
 - Share stories that illuminate church values
 - Explain generational and demographic dynamics
 - Discuss community context and reputation

- Identify church strengths and growth areas

Orientation Balance: Provide enough information to help the pastor function effectively without creating information overload. Remember that orientation is a process, not an event, and should extend over several weeks or months.

Begin New Pastoral Relationship

Purpose: To establish healthy patterns that support long-term ministry effectiveness

The early weeks set the tone for the entire pastoral relationship.

- **First Impressions:**
 - Help the pastor make positive initial connections
 - Introduce to as many members as possible
 - Create name learning tools
 - Arrange informal fellowship opportunities
 - Schedule visits with homebound members
 - Plan intentional visibility in various ministries
 - Create opportunities for personal stories
 - Establish the pastor's public presence
- **Early Expectations:**
 - Clarify immediate priorities and responsibilities
 - Establish realistic workload boundaries
 - Define initial ministry focus areas
 - Set an appropriate pace for the first 90 days
 - Discourage major changes during the early months
 - Create reasonable visitation expectations
 - Develop initial preaching calendar
 - Establish healthy feedback mechanisms
- **Relationship Building:**
 - Prioritize key leadership relationships
 - Develop staff team dynamics
 - Create committee connection opportunities
 - Establish community leader relationships
 - Build denominational connections
 - Develop prayer partner relationships
 - Connect with area pastors
 - Cultivate mentoring relationships
- **Early Wins:**
 - Identify potential "quick wins" for early success

- Create a visible ministry presence
- Learn and use names quickly
- Demonstrate care through hospital visits
- Preach messages that connect with the congregation
- Meet immediate pastoral care needs
- Participate actively in church life
- Express gratitude and appreciation consistently

Relationship Insight: The early relationship between pastor and congregation is similar to a marriage where both parties are on their best behavior and establishing patterns that will endure. Focus on developing healthy communication, setting appropriate expectations, and fostering genuine connections.

Ten Ways Church Members Can Make Pastoring a Joy

"The elders who are good leaders are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching." - 1 Timothy 5:17 (CSB)

When the apostle Paul penned these words to Timothy, he understood something profound about ministry leadership: those who faithfully shepherd God's people deserve not just respect, but "double honor." This isn't merely about financial compensation—though that's certainly included—but about the deep appreciation and support that makes pastoral ministry sustainable and joyful.

In our modern church context, pastors face unprecedented challenges. From navigating cultural shifts to managing complex congregational dynamics, from preaching truth in love to shepherding families through crisis, the pastoral calling demands much. Yet Scripture reminds us that ministry isn't meant to be a burden carried alone. The health of pastoral ministry depends significantly on how the congregation chooses to honor and support their shepherd.

So how can church members practically demonstrate this "double honor"? Here are ten ways to transform your pastor's ministry from mere survival into genuine joy.

1. Prayer: Pray for Your Pastor Regularly and Tell Him You're Doing It

Nothing strengthens a pastor's heart like knowing his congregation is lifting him before the throne of grace. Prayer isn't just a spiritual duty, it's pastoral fuel. When you commit to regularly interceding for your pastor's wisdom, family, sermon preparation, and spiritual health, you're participating in God's work through his life.

But don't keep this prayer private. Let your pastor know you're praying for him. Send a brief text: "Praying for you as you prepare Sunday's message." Leave a note: "Our family prayed for you during our devotions this week." These simple acknowledgments remind pastors they're not laboring alone and that God's people are partnering with them through prayer.

2. Gratitude: Express Gratitude Specifically and Publicly

Generic appreciation is nice, but specific gratitude is powerful. Instead of "Great sermon, Pastor," try "Your explanation of justification really helped me understand how God sees me differently now." Rather than "Thanks for all you do," say "Thank you for visiting Dad in the hospital last Tuesday. Your prayer with him meant the world to our family."

Public appreciation matters too. When appropriate, share specific ways your pastor has influenced your spiritual growth during testimony times, in church newsletters, or in conversations with other members. This public honor encourages both your pastor and demonstrates to others the value of pastoral ministry.

3. Provision: Give Generous, Consistent Financial Support

Paul's reference to "double honor" in 1 Timothy 5:17 includes material provision. Pastors shouldn't have to worry about making ends meet while caring for others' spiritual needs. Generous and consistent giving demonstrates that you value your pastor's work and want to relieve him of financial anxiety.

This extends beyond just meeting basic needs. When churches provide adequately for their pastors, they enable focused, long-term ministry rather than forcing their shepherds to constantly seek outside income or worry about their families' financial security.

4. Initiative: Take Initiative in Ministry Instead of Waiting to Be Asked

Churches thrive when members don't wait for official invitations to serve. Look around your congregation and community—where do you see needs? Instead of expecting your pastor to notice everything and organize responses, step forward with solutions and willing hands.

Whether it's organizing a meal train for a struggling family, coordinating volunteers for a community service project, or simply ensuring the fellowship hall is clean after events, your initiative frees your pastor to focus on distinctly pastoral tasks like prayer, preaching preparation, and personal discipleship.

5. Boundaries: Protect His Family Time and Days Off

Pastoral ministry can easily consume every waking hour if boundaries aren't respected. Your pastor's family needs him as husband and father, not just as their local minister. When you honor his day off, respect family dinner hours, and avoid non-emergency calls during designated family time, you're protecting one of his most important ministries—his home.

A well-rested pastor with strong family relationships will serve your church far better than one who's constantly available but burning out. Give your pastor permission to be unavailable from time to time. His family will thank you, and your church will benefit from his renewed energy and perspective.

6. Solutions: Bring Solutions, Not Just Problems

Every pastor appreciates members who care enough to notice issues within the church. However, there's a significant difference between those who simply point out problems and those who provide potential solutions. When you approach your pastor with concerns, take the time to think through possible remedies first.

Instead of saying, "The youth aren't engaged during worship," try, "I've noticed the youth seem disengaged during worship. I've been thinking we might consider creating a special role for them in leading certain elements of the service. Would you like me to explore some options?" This approach shows you're genuinely invested in improvement, not just criticism.

7. Investment: Invest in His Professional Development

Pastoral ministry demands continuous growth. Encourage your pastor's participation in conferences, continuing education, or sabbatical opportunities. This might mean supporting these investments financially, covering his responsibilities while he's away, or simply expressing enthusiasm for his learning opportunities.

When pastors grow in knowledge, skills, and spiritual depth, the entire congregation benefits. View investments in your pastor's development as investments in your church's future health and effectiveness.

8. Resolution: Handle Conflicts Biblically

Disagreements in church life are inevitable, but how they're handled determines whether they become destructive or constructive. When you have concerns about your pastor's decisions or approach, follow Jesus' model in Matthew 18:15-17. Go directly to him first, privately and respectfully.

Avoid the temptation to discuss pastoral frustrations with other members before addressing them directly with your pastor. Gossip destroys pastoral joy and congregational unity. Biblical conflict resolution, however, often strengthens relationships and builds mutual respect.

9. Unity: Support His Vision Even When You're Not Personally Excited About It

Pastoral leadership often requires casting a vision for ministry directions that don't excite every member equally. Maybe your pastor feels called to emphasize missions, but you're more passionate about local outreach. Perhaps he wants to adjust worship styles, but you prefer things as they are.

Supporting your pastor's vision doesn't mean surrendering your preferences or never offering input. It means trusting his pastoral calling and supporting initiatives even when they may not be

your first choice. This kind of unity strengthens the entire congregation and demonstrates the submission to leadership that Scripture commends.

10. Grace: Remember He's Human and Give Him Permission to Fail

Perhaps most importantly, remember that your pastor is a fellow believer on his own spiritual journey. He'll make mistakes, have bad days, and struggle with the same human frailties we all face. When you extend grace for his failures and patience with his growth areas, you create an environment where authentic ministry can flourish.

Perfectionist expectations crush pastoral joy. However, when congregations embrace their pastors' humanity while still maintaining appropriate respect for their office, they create spaces where both pastor and people can grow together in Christlikeness.

Living Out Double Honor

These ten practices aren't mere suggestions—they're expressions of the "double honor" Scripture calls us to show those who labor among us in the Word. When church members adopt these attitudes and actions, they make their pastor's job easier, create an environment where the gospel can flourish, and allow God's people to thrive.

Your pastor didn't enter the ministry for personal glory or an easy life. He answered God's call to shepherd His people, often at significant personal cost. How beautiful when congregations respond by making that calling a source of deep joy rather than a heavy burden.

The health of your church, the effectiveness of your gospel witness, and the spiritual growth of your community all benefit when pastoral ministry is supported, honored, and celebrated. As you consider these ten ways to bless your pastor, remember: you're not just encouraging one man—you're participating in God's work of building His kingdom through faithful pastoral leadership.

Common Pitfalls in This Step

Adopting a "Business as usual" Approach

Like Israel needing to celebrate their arrival in the Promised Land rather than simply setting up camp, once the search concludes, churches sometimes treat the pastor's arrival as merely filling a vacant position rather than celebrating a new chapter in the church's ministry. This casual approach overlooks opportunities to honor God's faithfulness, acknowledge the significance of pastoral calling, and create momentum for the new ministry relationship. Plan appropriate celebration, installation, and welcome events that acknowledge the sacred nature of pastoral ministry.

Dissolving the Search Team Too Quickly

Search committees often disband immediately after the pastoral decision, leaving the new pastor without the support network formed during the search process. The people who invested months

in finding the right pastor are uniquely positioned to help during the critical early months of ministry. Transform the search team into a support team for the first year to provide encouragement, feedback, and assistance during the transition period.

What Does the Interim Pastor Do During This Phase?

Standard Interim Ministry Focus

Ministry Completion

- Concludes ministry responsibilities gracefully
- Prepares final reports and recommendations
- Communicates support for the new pastor
- Attends the installation service if appropriate
- Maintains appropriate boundaries with the congregation
- Expresses gratitude for the interim opportunity
- Provides requested information to the new pastor
- Celebrates the church's new chapter

Leadership Transition

- Helps staff prepare for leadership change
- Ensures pastoral care continuity during transition
- Completes documentation of ongoing projects
- Creates an appropriate distance for a new relationship
- Makes himself available for consultation if needed
- Models support for the new pastor
- Encourages the congregation to embrace new leadership
- Transitions relationships appropriately

Intentional Interim Ministry Focus

Transition Documentation

- Creates comprehensive transition reports
- Documents progress in focus areas
- Identifies ongoing work needed
- Prepares resources for continuing development
- Completes documentation of process and learnings
- Creates appropriate handoff materials
- Offers consultation during early transition

- Provides specific recommendations for continued growth

Early Transition Support

- Remains available for consultation with the new pastor
- Maintains appropriate boundaries with the congregation
- Offers insights about church dynamics when requested
- Helps interpret culture and context if needed
- Provides feedback on progress in focus areas
- Supports implementation of recommended changes
- Celebrates milestones in the church's journey
- Plans appropriate follow-up at agreed intervals

Addendum

Guidance for Pastorless Churches in Crisis

Michael W. Wright, DMin
Church Replant Consultant

A denominational leader recently shared with me that we will soon witness a tsunami of church closings in the next few years. If that is true, we should sound the horns and warn the people. Congregations who are not well-anchored will be washed out to sea. The most vulnerable are pastorless churches in crisis.

In general, churches in crisis are those who have lost momentum and are declining in health and number. There are many reasons for their decline, such as leadership failures, lack of sound biblical preaching, shifts in culture, and more. When this happens, congregations shrink and often find it difficult to call a new pastor. Consider some facts. There are approximately over 5,300 Texas Baptist churches:

- 70–75% are plateaued or declining
- 10–15% are at risk of closing permanently
- 80% of churches in crisis are in urban or city settings
- The average American church lasts 50–70 years
- Few churches live beyond 100 years

This means nearly 4,000 Texas Baptist churches are currently plateaued or declining, with close to 800 at serious risk of dying. Currently, around 200 Texas Baptist churches are pastorless – and too many of these are in grave danger of disappearing forever.

The Stakes Are High

When pastorless churches in crisis fail to take appropriate action, the consequences can be significant. Vital issues are at stake. Here are just four:

1. **The Gospel Witness**
If a church closes its doors, the community loses a living gospel presence. As Paul wrote, *“the gospel is the power of God for salvation.”* (Romans 1:16–17) A closed church means fewer opportunities for people to hear the message that brings eternal life at that location.
2. **Christian Community**
Local churches provide teaching, prayer, fellowship, and encouragement – essentials for believers and their families. When a congregation disappears, so does the community of faith. Without *koinonia*, people are scattered into the winds and left vulnerable to cultural pressures.
3. **Kingdom Resources**
Church properties are valuable assets for gospel work. Yet, when churches close and transfer property, there is no guarantee it will remain in Kingdom use. Take for an

example a Church in Colleyville, Texas. They closed their doors and donated property worth \$2.4 million to a Christian foundation, hoping another church would be planted in their location. Instead, it was sold to a developer. Promises were broken and legacy members were devastated. The lesson: Do not donate but hold on to church property and engage in replanting efforts at that location.

4. The Glory of God

The church exists to glorify God. A property with a “For Sale” sign signals defeat, not victory. A dead church triggers doubt in the minds of unbelievers, while a living, thriving church testifies to the greatness of the invisible God made visible in his people.

A True Story

Consider the story of a DFW church I served as Interim Pastor. Thirty years ago, this church averaged more than 300 in weekly worship. In March 2024, when I first supplied the pulpit, only 25-35 people remained. The church was pastorless and on the verge of closing. But God was not finished with his church. In just seventeen months (March 2024–July 2025), the church:

- Called an Interim Pastor
- Formed a Replant Team
- Forged strong partnerships
- Created a fresh set of bylaws
- Crafted a new budget
- Called a new full-time replant pastor

Today, the church gathers 60–75 people each week in vibrant worship, with momentum building toward more than 100 soon. Giving has tripled, and through generous partnerships, the church is on track to see annual revenues exceed \$400,000 in the coming year.

This is nothing short of God’s grace. I was humbled to serve this congregation as both Interim Pastor and Replant Catalyst, and through that journey I witnessed firsthand how the Lord can breathe new life into a struggling church. This story stands as living proof that pastorless churches in crisis are not beyond hope.

But for renewal to take root, we must trust the Spirit of God to move in power and raise up faithful men who are willing to lead with courage, perseverance, and love. When such leaders step forward – and when churches lean on the Spirit’s strength – God can write fresh stories of renewal across Texas.

What Every Pastorless Church in Crisis Can Do

- Face the Facts
Many dying churches resist acknowledging their condition, delaying critical decisions. This denial is the greatest cause of closure. The DFW church I served chose differently – they faced the reality of death and turned toward renewal. Every church in crisis must accept its condition, then chart a new course toward health and gospel vitality.
- Call an Interim Pastor Replant Catalyst
Churches need strong leaders who meet biblical qualifications of Elders (1 Timothy 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9), who love Christ deeply, and are willing to serve 12–18 months or more.

At first, I served the DFW church as a typical interim pastor, but quickly realized the church needed renewal and replanting. My role then shifted to that of a pastor and catalyst – guiding the church through both renewal and replanting.

Renewal actions include preaching exegetical messages, stirring more prayer, organizing community service, and refocusing the church on Christ's mission. *Replanting* activity included forming a Replant Team, securing multiple partnerships, guiding legacy members in adopting a new name, rewriting bylaws, developing a budget, and leading the search for a qualified Replant Pastor.

Note: Renewal always comes before replanting. Replanting is hard and requires a spiritually well-prepared and practically well-equipped people who can carry the weight of the work. When renewal begins to happen, the people will be ready to replant the church for the glory of God and the good of the gospel.

Surrender Control

A church in crisis must entrust day-to-day operations to a Replant Team (usually a mix of legacy members and outside partners) under the guidance of the Interim Pastor Replant Catalyst. When the DFW church transferred authority to a seven-member team, new doors opened for bold and effective action.

Celebrate Every Milestone

Renewal and replanting are demanding journeys, but every step forward deserves celebration. At the DFW church I served, we rejoiced each time God provided a breakthrough – forming the Replant Team, welcoming new partners, adopting bylaws, or creating a budget. We prayed, ate, and worshiped together in the spirit of Acts 2:42.

We also celebrated spiritual victories. Early on a young man trusted Christ alone for salvation and was baptized. We also reinstituted a regular gathering for the Lord's Supper. These two ordinances – Baptism and Table – are commanded by Christ. It pleases him when God's people obey his commands, even in an interim period. The result was a sense of having a solid foundation. Instead of being swept away by the waters of decline, God anchored his people with hope and demonstrated his power to save, renew his people, and replant his church.

A Final Word

If the tsunami of church closures is indeed upon us, then we must prepare for action. The church in crisis needs more than survival – it needs the power of the Spirit of God and a prepared leader called to guide it through the storm. By God's grace, the Interim Pastor Replant Catalyst can help renew the people and replant the church for a new day of gospel witness.

About the Author

Dr. Michael Wright is a retired pastor with 45 years of experience serving churches in Colorado, Florida, and Texas. He now leads replant efforts primarily in North Texas, serving as a Replant Team Leader, Interim Pastor, and Replant Catalyst. For more information, contact Dr. Wright at michael@drmichaelwright.com.

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DR. AARON SUMMERS

serves as Coordinator for Pastorless Churches with Texas Baptists Center for Ministerial Health. Drawing from thirty years of pastoral experience and extensive work with transitional churches, Dr. Summers has compiled insights from Texas Baptist associational leaders to create this essential resource for search committees, church leadership teams and denominational workers.



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