



The Case for a Transitional Pastor

So what is the big deal about transitional pastoring?

Is it really important and if so why? As the EPC Church Health Leadership Team, we believe that this period in the life of the church is extremely important for a number of reasons. To that end, we have developed training that addresses the three big questions of transitional ministry.

WHY?

Why engage a transitional pastor?

WHO?

Who should our transitional pastors be and how do they interact with presbyteries, presbytery committees, sessions, and congregations?

HOW?

How does the work of the transitional pastor move a church toward greater health in the transitional process?



WHY?

Many churches are not prepared for the future:

Most American churches are in serious decline or decline. Thom Rainer uses the figure that 86% of American churches fall into that category. In addition, between 100-200 churches in America are closing each week.

Most American churches are unengaged from evangelistic efforts. In the EPC there is slightly more than 1 adult profession of faith per church per year.

It is also true that between 45-50% of our current pastors in leadership will retire in the next 5-7 years. Congregations will be facing transitional periods in greater numbers than ever before.

As presbyteries and as a denomination, we believe it is our responsibility to prepare well for this historic shift. We clearly need to look for opportunities to inject church health principles into the life of our congregations at every opportunity. Pastoral transition offers such an opportunity. We can no longer afford to merely maintain the status quo.

Pastoral Transition is a natural “pause” in routine:

When the natural rhythms of church life are altered congregations are encouraged to pause and take a deep spiritual breath. This pause can be a very important time for a church to take a long hard look at its overall health. In this time the congregation can assess who they are, where they are going, how to think strategically about how to get there, and outline a healthy process for searching for and calling their next pastor.

Pastoral Transition can be a God-given time to revitalize:

We believe that the transitional period is a valuable time for critical church health principles to be introduced into the life of the church. This is why we use the term “Transitional Pastor” rather than “Interim Pastor”. Interim Pastor implies that the transitional period is a matter of time until the new pastor is identified. Transitional Pastor implies that it is a matter of a process that a church experiences, that leads to a healthy search process for a new pastor. It is a process informed by answering questions like: “Who are we? Where are we going? How will we get there? And who is best qualified to help us get there as the senior leader?”

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WHO?

Taking advantage of this opportunity requires special skills and a special calling:

EPC Church Health thinks it is critically important to have trained leadership who are uniquely called and qualified to lead our churches through these important periods of transition. This is why we have committed to equipping Pastors who have the specialized skills, calling, and leadership skills to facilitate this time of examination and shift.



A Transitional Pastor will lead the congregation through 5 areas of examination and improvement:

1. Coming to terms with the history of the church.
2. Discovering a new identity.
3. Facilitating shifts of power.
4. Rethinking denominational ties.
5. Building commitment to new leadership and a new future.

10 advantages of a skilled and trained transitional pastor:

CLARITY:

- 1 “Fresh eyes” allow your church to see itself clearly.
- 2 Fresh leadership to **clarify roles** and hold staff and lay leadership accountable.

STABILITY:

- 3 **Consistency** in the pulpit contributes to congregational stability.
- 4 Equipping and empowering **the session** of the church to reach its full potential as shepherds of the flock.

IMPROVEMENT:

- 5 Empowering the congregation to **discover God’s vision** for its particular mission.
- 6 Discovering, naming, and **addressing systemic dysfunction** and sin that need repentance.
- 7 **Diffusing any negative emotions** of the congregation in transition so that the new pastor will not have to do so.

PROGRESS:

- 8 Clear understanding of mission and purpose allows the pastoral search team to **discern the gifts and experience needed for a pastor** that best suits the congregation.
- 9 Mature and stable leadership allows the pastoral search team the **time to be thorough**.
- 10 Intentional preparation for the congregation to **receive the new pastor well**.



HOW?

The Work of Transitional Ministry

The Transitional Ministry Process has three basic stages:

STAGE 01:

Self-assessment

Discovering who we are including leadership health and congregational health.

STAGE 02:

Establishing vision and strategy

Discovering where God has called us to go, how to get started and beginning the five phases of vitalization:

- 1) Aligning perception,
- 2) Aligning vision,
- 3) Aligning strategy,
- 4) Aligning structure, and
- 5) Aligning people.

STAGE 03:

a. The pastoral search process

Discovering who will lead as the next pastor.

b. Entrenching the new vision through continuing the phases of vitalization.

This also involves development of the Great Commission Matrix, The Leadership Ladder, and the Life Cycles assessment.

We hope you see that this is a critical time in the life of the church! There is a unique and amazing opportunity to introduce strong church health principles into the life of the congregations in a time when they are uniquely open to encouragement and guidance.

EPC Church Health strongly believes that a Transitional Pastor provides consistent pastoral ministry, while guiding a church health process with the Session and congregation, in order to craft a fresh mission and vision into which a new pastor is purposefully called.

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EPC

*A Global Movement of
Evangelical Presbyterian Churches*