Transitional Pastor Logo

®

# TRAINING MANUAL

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**TRANSITIONAL PASTOR TRAINING TEAM**

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# WELCOME!

## Welcome to Transitional Pastor Ministry, a challenging and rewarding way to contribute to the advancement of God’s kingdom through the building up of His churches. The world is rapidly changing, and churches are facing change and transition on an unprecedented scale. The Transitional Pastor Ministry is intended to equip you to navigate the transitions and help prepare churches for their next pastor. The process requires both competence and credibility. The Transitional Pastor Ministry seeks to give you both.

## You are not a novice in ministry, but you are entering a new and unique experience in ministry. You have learned much through both your formal and informal training as well as your practice of pastoral ministry, However, you have not finished learning. The Transitional Pastor Ministry will challenge you to learn and use ministry tools and methods you may not have used before. It will cause you to learn and practice adaptive leadership skills in the uncharted territory of transition.

Over the years, we have had the opportunity to serve dozens of churches as a transitional pastor. This entire project, is, in great part, what we have learned and experienced in the many churches we have been blessed to serve, both as a transitional and/or “permanent” pastor (duly noting that no pastor is truly permanent!). This manual also includes insights and content provided by the four men who began the Transitional Pastor Process: Henry Webb, Ernest Mosley, Bill Hogue, and Roy Edgemon. These men have been our encouragers and our guides as we have served churches in their time of transition. They also have challenged us to continue to refine and retool the process as church practices change. Therefore, this manual refresh is our attempt to stay current while honoring the original intent of the Transitional Pastor Ministry.

Our study of transitional leadership has led us to notice that there is a vast field of writing “out there” regarding pastoral leadership. It goes without saying that our bookshelves are filled with books on effective pastoral leadership in general. However, we have observed that little has been written about the specific role of the leadership of *the transitional* pastor.

While many of the principles set forth in this manual will apply to pastoral leadership in general, it is our intent to focus on the role of the transitional pastor who most often finds himself serving in the “in-between” time in which one pastor has left the church and the search is underway (or soon to be under way) for a new pastor.

The transitional pastor faces unique challenges in the relatively short time that he leads a congregation. He often knows little about his congregation prior to his assumption of the role as transitional pastor. These challenges are numerous, and we will attempt to deal with many of them throughout the manual. However, we want to emphasize that while the challenges encountered by the transitional pastor are many, so are the opportunities that come to the church during the time of transition! The transitional pastor can truly accomplish much in his season of service (usually 9-18 months).

Revitalization is a term used frequently in church talk today. We believe that while radical revitalization is seldom accomplished during the tenure of a transitional pastor, progress toward such revitalization should be the reasonable goal and hope during the transitional period.

For many years, the term “interim pastor” was often used to describe the pastor that was “called” by the church to preach and lead services when the pastor resigned or retired (or dismissed!). Then, relatively recently (30 years or so) the descriptor “intentional” was added to “interim” and thus the “intentional interim” was often used to describe an interim that did far more than provide preaching for the church. The intentional interim would work with the staff and the congregation and provide leadership for a set period of time, usually not exceeding two years. A formal agreement established a beginning and an end date, with the interim often living on the church field. Several organizations provided a certification of sorts through extensive intentional interim training.

Our material and suggested process goes one step farther, using the term “transitional” rather than “interim.” Our terminology grows out of reality and our experience. The reality is, that when a pastor leaves a church (whatever the reason), the church enters a time or season of significant transition.

Decades ago, William Bridges noted the differences between transition and change: “It isn’t the changes that will do you in; it’s the transitions. They aren’t the same thing. Change is situational: the move to a new site…, the reorganization of the roles on the team, and new technology. Transition, on the other hand, is psychological; it is a three-phase process that people go through as they internalize and come to terms with the details of the new situation that the change brings about…. Transition isn’t an optional “if-you-get-around-to-it” add-on to the change; it’s not icing on the cake that can be forgotten until things ease up and you’ve finished with the important stuff. Getting people through the transition is essential if the change is actually to work as planned.” (*Managing Transitions,* p. 25)

According to Bridges, any transition begins with an ending and finishes with a beginning. He identified three phases of a transition: (1) letting go of the old ways; (2) going through an in-between time when the old is gone but the new isn’t fully operational; (3) coming out of the transition and making a new beginning. (Bridges, p. 23)

Closely related to “transition” is “transformation.” The transitional pastor seeks to begin the process transformation during the season of transition. Leadership therefore is about the transformation of a congregation so that they, collectively, can fulfill the mission they, corporately, have been given. (Tod Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains,* p. 40)

Transitions bring necessary but often difficult changes to the local congregation. John Kotter, the best-known change guru in America, gives eight errors we commit in our attempts to gain the desired transformation: (1) Not establishing a great enough sense of urgency; (2) not creating a powerful enough guiding coalition; (3) lacking a vision; (4) under communicating the vision by a factor of ten; (5) not removing obstacles to the new vision; (6) not systematically planning for and creating short-term wins; (7) declaring victory too soon; (8) not anchoring the changes in the organization’s culture. (Kotter, “Why Transformation Efforts Fail,” *Harvard Business Review*)

Lyle Schaller notes that change in the local church comes with difficulty and risk: “Only when a widely perceived crisis exists is there much chance of changing the status quo by majority vote. Most of the time the majority will favor a continuation of the present conditions over change.” (*Wisdom,* p. 108)

Jeff Iorg cautioned, “The only legitimate reason for leading major change [is] advancing the mission of your ministry organization as it serves God’s mission.” (*Leading Major Change in Your Ministry*)

Tod Bolsinger, in *Tempered Resilience*, presents a clear challenge facing the transitional pastor: “Groups are hardwired to believe that survival means reinforcing the way things have always been. So, when an organization feels stress, the default behavior of most organizational leaders is to solve the problems for our organizations rather than change our organizations for meeting the needs of the world. Most leaders have not been trained for the challenge of trying to bring change to churches that need transformation in order to be faithful to their missional calling.” (Bolsinger, p. 19)

Bridges relates transformation and change to transition: ﻿“With a change, you naturally focus on the outcome that the change produces. ﻿Transition is different. The starting point for dealing with transition is not the outcome but the ending that you’ll have to make to leave the old situation behind. Situational change hinges on the new thing, but psychological transition depends on letting go of the old reality and the old identity you had before the change took place. Organizations overlook that letting go process completely, however, and do nothing about the feelings of loss that it generates. And in overlooking those effects, they nearly guarantee that the transition will be mismanaged and that, as a result, the change will go badly. Unmanaged transition makes change unmanageable.” (*Managing Transitions,* p. 25)

It is our hope that what follows in this manual will serve as a reference and guide that you as a transitional pastor will find to be a helpful tool as you lead your congregation through a season of transition and change. The subtitle of Tod Bolsinger’s book, *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory*, reminds us as transitional pastors we find ourselves in a place we’ve never been before with the charge to lead people who have never been there either!

For the glory of Christ and the sake of His church,

Dan Garland

Brett Selby

Rusty Ellison

Henry Webb

**A TALE OF THREE CHURCHES**

Highways and Hedges Baptist Church, Fortified Hills Baptist Church, and Sweet Song Baptist Church are three fictitious churches that represent the 10 percent of Southern Baptist churches without pastors at any given time. The reasons they are without pastors are as varied as the churches themselves.

Regardless of age, size, or location, all churches will benefit from wise counsel and experienced leadership through the stages of transition between the end of one pastor’s ministry and the beginning of another’s. That is what this manual is about. That is the work of a transitional pastor.

**Highways and Hedges Baptist Church (HHBC)** was experiencing rapid growth, out of proportion to its demographically static community. Since George Evergreen came to serve as pastor, fresh from seminary and bustling with enthusiasm, people had been joining the church and filling available classrooms and the worship center. Members liked Brother George’s preaching; sermons related to their everyday lives. The choir sounded better; vocal discords were less obvious to those who knew the difference. Benefiting from his seminary course in worship planning, Brother George informed the music leaders of his sermon plans. Music and message were usually in agreement like a harmonious marriage. Brother George was affable; hugs were as natural as handshakes and hellos. Within three years HHBC discussed bringing in a person to serve as minister of education and youth, building a new worship center, and converting the old one to classroom and office space.

Building plans had been approved and pledges had reached 75 percent of the goal when a surprise event shocked the heart of fast-growing HHBC. Brother George announced his resignation, citing plans to become pastor of a much larger church in the suburbs of Capital City. Stunned, some members wept in disbelief, feeling as they did when the high school football coach resigned just after coaching the team to its only state championship. Several long-term members openly expressed feeling that they had been used by a “church climber” to build his credentials and earn a more prominent spot in the denomination and a bigger salary. Many younger members, mostly friends of the pastor’s wife, Eva, felt some “old-timers” in the church had hurt their pastor with criticism. They were determined to find out who did it. Very soon you could hear talk about getting an older preacher next time, one who wouldn’t make them just a steppingstone, who believed it more rewarding to grow a big church than to get called to one somebody else helped build.

In a short time HHBC went from boundless enthusiasm to self-pity. HHBC needed someone to help them sort out all that was happening and then transition to new leadership without losing the enthusiasm and vision they had known for four years and becoming players in the “whose fault is it” game.

1. What are some of the factors you sense led George Evergreen to leave?

2. Identify the emotions found among HHBC members after George Evergreen announced his resignation.

3. How would you “help them sort out all that was happening” (paragraph 3) if you become transitional pastor of HHBC?

**Fortified Hills Baptist Church (FHBC)** celebrated both the church’s 100th anniversary and Joshua Long’s 32nd anniversary as their pastor the same week. The adjective heard most often to describe both anniversaries was “comfortable.” Members were comfortable with the reputation their church had maintained in the community and the denomination for many years. They were comfortable with their pastor who had preached to them, counseled them about becoming Christians and living for Christ, baptized them, married them, helped them dedicate their babies to the Lord, bragged on their covered-dish-lunch casseroles, and conducted funeral services for generations of their families and neighbors.

What they weren’t comfortable with was the announcement Pastor Long made in the afternoon service that he would retire, effective at the end of the month. Happy memories and haunting fears flooded their minds: Could anyone else ever love us like Pastor Long loves us? Can we ever find another pastor like him? Privately they told him he would always be their “real” pastor.

FHBC would soon need help in going through the stages of transition between pastors. They needed help seeing spiritual growth opportunities in uncomfortable circumstances. They needed help sorting through memories both painful and pleasant, celebrating the past and turning it loose, deciding what God desires the church to be and do now, and seeking pastoral leadership for a new era in the life of their beloved church.

1. What are some overt or covert factors you sense led to Pastor Long’s retirement?

2. How would you, as transitional pastor of FHBC, go about making the “comfortable” membership uncomfortable for the sake of effective ministry and growth?

3. How can you as transitional pastor help them in “sorting through the memories both painful and pleasant … [and] deciding what God desires the church to be and do now” (paragraph 3)?

4. How would you, as transitional pastor, help make Joshua Long’s relationship to the membership of FHBC positive and constructive rather than negative and destructive if (1) he continues to reside in the church community, or (2) he chooses to move away from the church community?

Tom Ably knew **Sweet Song Baptist Church (SSBC)** had a record of short pastoral tenure. Only one of the last five pastors had lasted four years. Two of them had been asked to leave because of what was perceived to be sexual misconduct, something he would never be guilty of. No one told him that just as the other two short timers began to provide growth leadership, the spiritual pride of two long-time members launched gossip campaigns against them. Though the gossip was blatantly false, none of the other members were willing to support the pastor and challenge those whose relatives had led church organizations for years and contributed much to the budget.

Brother Ably launched his Sweet Song ministry confidently preaching the gospel, visiting the sick and the prospects, and promoting the growing church ministries. All went well for a couple of years—that is, until he suggested reorganizing the Sunday School and including some of the “outside the family” members in key places of leadership. In less than three months the subject of many telephone conversations was the “problem” with Pastor Ably’s preaching: “He just doesn’t feed us like we’re used to.” Then a rumor circulated that just before coming to Sweet Song Pastor Ably and his wife had gone to a marriage retreat to get some help because of his wandering eye. He tried valiantly and prayerfully to help them understand the purpose of the retreat was to make good marriages better, but his ministry there had been damaged beyond repair. In pain, Brother Ably resigned. The first Sunday morning after he left, the choir called Sweet Song to worship singing “There’s a Sweet, Sweet Spirit in This Place.”

Sweet Song Baptist Church desperately needed help with understanding how their church had become dysfunctional and how it could be changed before a new pastor was called and the tragic scenario reenacted. They needed a transitional pastor to lead them in the process of self-awareness and spiritual renewal if Sweet Song Baptist was ever to be more than bittersweet.

1. What actions could prospective pastor Tom Ably have taken to improve the possibility of effective, long-term ministry at SSBC?

2. As SSBC’s transitional pastor, how would you develop positive and productive relationships with the “two long-time members”?

3. Identify actions a transitional pastor can take in helping SSBC members recognize the dysfunctional characteristics and how the church got that way.

**THE TRANSITIONAL PERIOD IN THE LIFE OF A CHURCH**

**The Transition between Pastors**

Church leaders often see the period between pastors as the “hold things together, keep things going” period. Most church members likely view the transition as the “wait and see” period. Church members who attend only Sunday-morning services and irregular attenders may use the transition as the “I’ll just stay home since my preacher left us” period. Prospective church members often treat it as the “a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush; look elsewhere” period. But with effective transitional leadership, the period between pastors can be very productive—a time of growth in personal and congregational awareness, renewal, and celebration; and a time to refocus on worship, evangelism, fellowship, discipleship, and personal and family ministries of the church.

Every transition begins with an ending and finishes with a beginning. A popular song from the 1990’s called “Closing Time” uses an apt description that could be applied to transition when it states, “Every new beginning comes from some other beginning’s end.” So, the question becomes that of how we get from an ending to a new beginning.

*Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* defines “transition” or “transitional” as “a passage from one state, stage, subject, or place to another.” However, this definition speaks more of change than transition. William Bridges in *Managing Transition* distinguishes between change and transition: “Change is situational…. Transition is the psychological process people go through to come to terms with the new situation.” Changes are usually external, while transition is internal. Transition is how we handle the changes, uncharted territory, unfamiliar emotions, the unsettled unknown.

Bridges identified three stages that every transitional pastor should take into consideration. First, the ending/losing/letting go stage is where most people are on the first Sunday after a pastor has left. Second, the neutral zone stage is the space between letting go of the trapeze bar and still waiting to grasp the one moving toward us. Finally, the new beginning stagewhen we emerge from the transition into a new normal. (*Managing Transitions,* p. 23)

Most of the time during a transition is spent in the neutral zone, and that makes it important for those leading through transition. According to Bridges, there are three reasons why people must be led to embrace the neutral zone and not deny it. First, they may try and rush through it but become discouraged when they realize that doesn’t work. Second, they become anxious and try to escape it. Third, if they escape it, they lose a great opportunity for growth and progress.

Transition is all natural, all normal. And it's all navigable. That is what we are called to do as transitional pastors. Churches passing from the leadership of one pastor to another are well served by securing a transitional pastor who can help make the passage as positive and constructive as possible, gaining ministry momentum and productivity in the process of change. The period between pastors should be treated as an opportunity to:

* Define current reality
* Assess strengths and weaknesses
* Mend broken fences
* Focus on the mission
* Align ministries with the mission
* Revitalize the church
* Pray – Pray – Pray – Pray

Some churches without pastors have smooth transitions because of the healthy ministry of the former pastor and a cadre of effective ministry leaders in the church. Even these churches need help in dealing with grief resulting from the loss of a helpful and trusted friend, in overcoming fear that accompanies the uncertainties of change, and in developing trust in a new pastor who has a personality and style that differ from those of the former pastor. Other churches have rough transitions because the previous pastor left just before relationships and trust were damaged beyond repair. Some churches have crisis transitions because of the circumstances surrounding the previous pastor’s departure and because of a variety of disabilities that render church leaders spiritually unprepared to guide the church through emotional healing and comprehensive preparation for a new pastor.

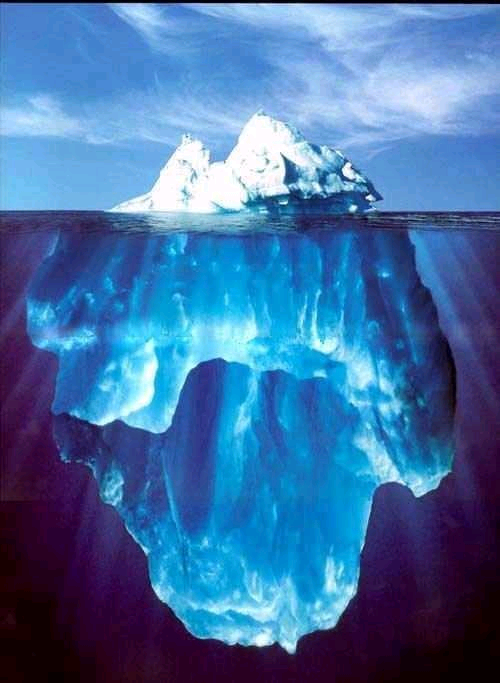
Effective communication is essential during all situations of transition. However, communication is sometimes described using the iceberg model (see next page). This model expresses graphically the extreme challenge of helping people talk about needs that vitally affect their participation in the life of the church, both with individuals and groups.

Level 1 Needs are expressed openly like the part of an iceberg that is visible above the water line. The needy share their needs and feelings openly and ask for help. People listen, question for clarity, remember, and feel free to respond openly when response is appropriate. Meanings are clarified, feelings are acknowledged, supplies are provided, and relationships are maintained or improved. However, only a limited percentage of the needs are expressed and responded to at this level.

Level 2 Needs are below the surface and unexpressed. People are hesitant to express these needs. They are not confident that others will understand. They fear criticism and rejection or that they will be considered unspiritual or uncooperative. They may fear they will not be able to express their needs in ways that are understood. All the while their feelings are unknown by those with whom they worship, teach, lead, minister, and fellowship. They need friends who will ask helpful questions, listen carefully, and remember.

Level 3 Needs are deep beneath the surface, either unknown or not understood even by the needy. For whatever reasons, the needy are unable to express their thoughts or feelings. They need friends who sense or know that there are needs they cannot express and ask questions, listen carefully, discern meaning in the spoken and unspoken, and remember what they have learned to minister graciously to the needy.

A transitional pastor needs to help church leaders identify and articulate all three levels for the church to move forward in their mission of making disciples.



***Level 1 – Expressed Needs***

***Level 2 – Unexpressed Needs***

***Level 3 – Unknown Needs***

**Pastoral Leadership Options for Periods without a Pastor**

1. The church may call a transitional pastor to both preach and lead the ongoing church ministries and to guide the church through the spiritual, situational, and psychological stages of transition that end in the calling of a new pastor.
2. Multiple-staff churches may assign pastoral responsibilities to staff members according to their gifts and available time. This creates a danger that members begin to promote their favorite staff member to be the next pastor.
3. A series of preachers may be enlisted to preach in one or more services, giving members opportunity to hear a variety of preachers during this period. However, this lacks continuity in the messages being heard by the congregation.
4. An interim preacher may be employed to preach in some or all congregational services. Other pastoral duties may be assigned to church staff or lay leaders.
5. A professional consultant may be enlisted to guide the church during the time of transition. Sometimes this option is combined with one of the other options.

Many churches without pastors need transitional pastors with experience, training, and ministry gifts that assure high-quality transitional leadership. Transitional pastors are equipped to lead churches through smooth transitions, rough transitions, and crisis transitions. They may serve effectively as a preacher, a pastor, and a consultant.

**Objectives of Transitional Pastor Ministry**

The aim of the Transitional Pastor Ministry is to meet the following objectives which focus on church health and kingdom priorities:

* Churches will become more effective as they learn from past experiences, free themselves from hindering traditions, and replace discord with harmony.
* Churches will understand the mission of the church.
* Churches will develop more effective church practices to fulfill their mission.
* Churches will have an increased understanding of the pastor’s role and responsibilities.
* More members will become equipped for their churches’ ministries.
* Energy previously spent addressing conflict will be redirected to expanded ministries.
* The effectiveness of the next pastor will be increased, and his tenure will be extended, sparing the church the expense of frequent pastoral changes and making more money available for ministries.

**LEADING THROUGH THE TRANSITIONAL PERIOD**

**Preparing to Lead through the Stages of Transition (First 8 weeks)**

Leadership in the first two months should focus on getting prepared to lead the church through the stages of transition. This preparation will influence the level of success in the crucial change-oriented decision-making activities during the following months.

**1. Read the pages on “Understanding the Church’s Capacity for Denial.”**

In Stage 2 you will guide the church to “Assess the Church’s Current Reality.” While leading the church to determine, understand, and accept current reality does not take place until the fourth and fifth months, dealing with the church’s denial of current reality begins sooner. You need to read the section on denial on pages 82-84 when you are first contacted about serving the church as transitional pastor. Then read those pages again when you start.

**2. Get acquainted with the Church Leadership Team.**

Familiarize yourself regarding the church’s schedule of events, elected leaders, community resources, and its denominational resources. Give particular attention to the Church Leadership Team. The Church Leadership Team, sometimes called Church Council, is composed of leaders (chairmen, directors, and coordinators) of ministry and service organizations such as deacon ministry, Bible study (Sunday School/Small Groups), discipleship, music ministry, and finance ministry. The team assists in coordinating and promoting activities essential to the applications of biblical principles in church practice.

**3. Conduct listening sessions.**

Lead a series of listening sessions using the guidance on pages 19-20.

**4. Schedule a Church Memories Workshop for month three.**

The guidance for this workshop is on pages 74-80.

**5. Form the Transition Team.**

Form the Transition Team using either Option One or Option Two on pages 21-22.

**6. Train the Transition Team.**

Train the Transition Team to work as a team using the guidance on pages 23-26.

**7. Schedule using *Come to the Lord’s Table* for spiritual preparation.**

Use the book, *Come to the Lord’s Table,* as the resource for adult and student Sunday School classes for four weeks. The Pastor Guide and the Small-Group Leader Guide in the back of the book provide all the guidance you will need. Schedule this study to lead up to the next Lord’s Supper planned for a Sunday morning service. Experiencing the Lord’s Supper will be a powerful climax to this study.

**8. Develop a Sequence of Process for leading through the stages of transition.**

Develop a Sequence of Process for leading the church through the stages. That schedule will influence the church’s calendar of events and the planning of worship emphases and your sermons. Estimated times required for each of the stages are provided below. Special events and circumstances unique to each church and the transitional pastor will determine the actual time needed for each of the stages. However, the process should not be hurried to the point of moving to another stage before the prerequisite stage is completed.

8 weeks Preparing to Lead through the Stages of Transition.

4 weeks Stage 1: View the Church’s History through the Eyes of Christ

8 weeks Stage 2: Assess the Church’s Current Reality

4 weeks Stage 3: Affirm Biblical Principles for Church Health

4 weeks Stage 4: Focus on Kingdom Results

4 weeks Stage 5: Establish Church Practice

8 weeks Stage 6: Refocus the Church around Mission

Open Stage 7: Find a Pastor to Lead in Fulfilling God’s Future for the Church

Open Stage 8: Help the Pastor Get a Good Start in the Church and Community

See pages 27-27 for a Sample Sequence of Process.

If this Sample Sequence of Process is followed, two months will be invested in getting acquainted and getting started. Then approximately eight months are used to get the church ready for the next pastor. The work of the pastor search committee (stage 7) will overlap part of the other stages. Completing the whole process can resolve relational conflicts and deal with negative emotions that would otherwise hinder the work of a pastor search committee. The process also provides the pastor search committee information about what the church desires its future to be for interpretation to a prospective pastor.

**9. Communicate the Sequence of Process to the congregation.**

**Listening Sessions**

A transitional pastor may begin to feel anxious early in the process. Within the first month after coming to the church, the church may seem to be asking, either verbally or non-verbally, “When are we going to get started?” While it is important to lay a relational foundation in the beginning that cannot be rushed, the tension is nevertheless real and should be addressed.

Aubrey Malphurs gives a valuable caution: “Good listening, not necessarily more talking, is the key to good communication. Failure to listen well communicates that we may not value the person talking or we may not think what he or she is important enough to give him or her a hearing. It could also mean that we have made up our mind. We owe it to our brothers and sisters in the faith to give them a hearing, whatever the topic. This is especially true if they disagree with us or stand on the side of an issue that we do not support. On the one hand, we tend not to discuss issues in the church that divide us. On the other hand, when we do, we can short-circuit the process by not listening well.” (*Advanced Strategic Planning,* pp. 86-87)

Asking questions, listening, discerning, and remembering will guide the transitional pastor’s leadership and enrich his preaching. Therefore, asking good questions and listening actively enables the transitional pastor to get a more effective start for his ministry to the church.

The transitional pastor should conduct a series of listening sessions early in the transitional process, most likely the first or second month. The benefits of this approach are as follows:

1. Since some in the church struggle with impatience, the listening sessions will address the concern that “nothing is going on and we are wasting time.”

2. This approach allows the transitional pastor time to assess and discern some dimensions of the current reality in the church.

3. It affirms and encourages church members with their concerns, grief, and fears.

4. It validates their importance as members of the body of Christ and allows them to be heard.

5. It communicates to the church that the transitional pastor has not come with a preconceived agenda.

6. It provides the transitional pastor a look at the personalities that will likely emerge on the Transition Team.

**Scheduling and Size of Group**

On average, the transitional pastor should schedule three listening sessions. For example, invite all members and regular attenders with last names that begin with A to G to the first session, H to Q to the second session, and R to Z to the third session. A smaller church might only need one or two listening sessions while a larger one will need multiple sessions. In determining the number of groups, consider that a group with more than 20 people will hinder discussion. However, keep in mind that not everyone in the church will attend.

**Agenda and Contents**

The agenda for each listening session should be simple and built around a series of open-ended questions that promote healthy and thoughtful discussion. Begin the session by briefly stating the purpose, which is to help you as transitional pastor begin to understand the church and get to know its members. Affirm that the members and regular attenders will do the majority of the talking during the session, not the transitional pastor. It might be helpful to provide nametags for everyone present and ask those who speak to identify themselves before they begin.

Should the transitional pastor take notes or have someone present to do that for him? Opinions vary: Some believe that doing so would squelch discussion while others believe that helpful information might be lost. Whichever approach is used, great care should be taken to make those present feel safe and comfortable in sharing without it being used against them in the future.

Here are some possible questions:

* What is your name and what first brought you to this church?
* Why did you continue coming?
* Why did you decide to join?
* What distinguishes this church from other churches (other than denominational affiliation)?
* What is the most significant change that has happened here since you became a member?
* Picture in your mind what you would like this congregation to look like five years from now. How does that picture differ from today?
* What is the biggest barrier to making your vision become the reality for the church five years from now?
* What is the primary issue with which this church needs to deal?
* What does this church do best? Brag to me about this church.
* What is the question that I should have asked but didn’t know enough to ask?

**FORMING THE TRANSITION TEAM**

**Option One**

The Transition Team will be the key working group throughout the period of transition. Some of its work will be in subgroups. The transitional pastor will form the Transition Team from people already in elected positions in the church such as those in the list below. However, members of the Transition Team may suggest that one or more other key influencers be added to the Transition Team.

* Church leadership team
* Deacons/elders
* Ministry staff (full-time, bi-vocational, or volunteer; include only one or two)
* Chairmen of strategic committees or ministry teams (such as personnel, finances/budget, properties, and nominating)
* Pastor search committee/team

The number of Transition Team members will be according to the size and needs of the church. Since members may serve in more than one of the positions, the number of Transition Team members will not equal the number of positions in the church’s organization chart, but the number of people serving in those positions.

**Option Two**

One of the first tasks for the transitional pastor is to put together the Transition Team that will lead the church through the transitional period. It is important to remember that every investment made with this team stays with the church after the transitional pastor departs. Thus, the formation and development of the Transition Team will be one of the most significant leadership development tasks accomplished by the transitional pastor.

**How Is the Team Selected?**

The team must be representative of the congregation and have the respect of the congregation. Therefore, the congregation must have a significant role in selecting the team. Beginning with early discussions with the church, the transitional pastor should make it clear that the congregation will nominate members for the team. The process of nomination is not an election, but it provides a very good pool of names and priority of selection. The transitional pastor will make the final determination of members for him to have the latitude to include or exclude individuals who can contribute to or may detract from the work.

For example, if the church nominates a good team, but does not include a significant leader because they are not popular or because they have a contrary opinion, the transitional pastor may want to add that person to the team anyway. Though the personality may be challenging to manage, it is often important to have all sides represented at the table for the outcome to have integrity. There may be occasions where contrary individuals change their opinion when they serve on the team because they realize they are alone in their perspective. In the same way, there may be family members or other relationships that would dominate the team. The transitional pastor may choose to limit participation to only one or two representatives from a family. Husbands and wives should not both serve on the team. If a married couple is nominated, the transitional pastor will allow the couple to decide which one will serve.

**Who Should Serve on the Team?**

Ministry or support staff members should not serve on the Transition Team. Their input is important, and they will have an important voice in the process, but they are not formal team members. Because of their roles in the church, their opinions tend to put the team discussion out of balance. Exceptionally mature high school students might serve on the Transition Team. However, a student’s spiritual growth could be negatively impacted by certain types of discussion within the Transition Team, such as in the aftermath of a pastor’s moral failure and termination.

The size of the team is an important consideration. A good rule of thumb is 10-15% of the regularly attending congregation. In churches of 100 or less, this number could be increased to 20%. In congregations of over 500, this number should be reduced to less than 10%. Usually, the Transition Team would have a maximum of 40 members. Having more than a 40-person team would be unwieldy for the transitional pastor.

**A Recommended Process**

On an announced Sunday morning, distribute nomination sheets to give members the opportunity to nominate up to five names for the Transition Team. The nominations are collected and are also accepted throughout the week. After one week, the church secretary or another designated person tallies nominations and ranks them according to the number of nominations received.

The transitional pastor should evaluate the nominations and form a draft slate of names. These names should be evaluated by one or two trusted individuals (chairman of deacons, senior staff member, etc.) for input as to who might or might not be included. Additions or deletions should be made to the list. The resulting slate for the transitional pastor should include about five additional names in the event some people decline to serve.

Starting at the top of the list, the transitional pastor should personally contact each nominee and request them to serve on the team. This should be a personal contact by phone or private conversation (not a contact by letter). They will have questions and need to understand they are being recruited for an important task. The task will require commitment of time and energy for a short duration. There will probably be weekly meetings while the team gets started and then additional assignments will come as the process unfolds. Generally, personal recruitment yields a better response and a higher level of commitment from the participants.

Once the list of committed persons is completed, the transitional pastor will announce the membership of the Transition Team to the church. Schedule a commissioning service for the team on a Sunday morning. Include a time of prayer and a commitment by the congregation to continue praying for the team.

**TRaining the Transition Team**

Functionally speaking, the most important work you do as a transitional pastor is the work you do with the Transition Team. This is not to minimize your interaction with and ministry to other individuals in the church. However, the role of an effective transitional pastor involves the empowering of others to make a difference in the lives of individuals. Pulpit skills are not enough. Leadership is needed – the ability of a person (pastor) to influence people (the church) toward a purpose (the Great Commission).

This leadership must be hands on in nature. The Transition Team will need encouragement in the process because their work will become difficult and laborious. Yet it is vital that they own the process as well as the report they will bring to the church. Apart from your work with them, it is doubtful that this will happen.

The ever-present danger for you as a transitional pastor is that your work—the time, effort, energy invested in a church—will become transitory. Many factors can influence that, and most are out of your control. However, the greatest factor to determine the lasting impact of your ministry is in your hands. It is the nature and quality of your leadership of the Transition Team. The crucial question then is, “How will I lead and work with this team?”

**Why Is This Important?**

Any truly great work requires the involvement of more than one person. Kingdom ministry is such that one person cannot do it alone and so requires a cooperative effort for its success. Consider the example of a great man of God, Moses. He led the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage and toward the land of promise. However, even someone as great as Moses needed help. In Exodus 18, his father-in-law Jethro came to visit Moses, observed his leadership of the people, and asked, “What is this thing you’re doing for the people? Why are you alone sitting as judge, while all the people stand around you from morning until evening?” (Ex. 18:14).

Moses explained to Jethro the details about his ministry and perhaps expected an accommodation for his labor. However, no pat on the back was forthcoming. Jethro responded, “What you’re doing is not good.” Then Jethro added, “You will certainly wear out both yourself and these people who are with you because the task is too heavy for you. You can’t do it alone” (Ex. 18:17–18).

Let Jethro’s last five words there be a reminder to you. You can’t do it alone. Effective ministry requires a team. Effective leaders understand this and direct their leadership accordingly. If you want the impact of your transitional ministry to last beyond your brief time on the field, then you must give serious consideration to the task of team building.

**What Are the Characteristics of an Effective Transition Team?**

Effective teams have six defining characteristics and each one is very important. Failure to incorporate any one of the six will likely derail any type of team building initiative.

1. Common Purpose and Direction

All effective teamwork begins with a common purpose. This purpose must be both clear and compelling. Humanly speaking, only you as the transitional pastor can make this happen. Don’t assume that the Transition Team knows their purpose. It must be crystal-clear in your mind before it will become clear in theirs. Remember the old saying: “A mist in the pulpit brings a fog in the pew.” Along with clarifying the purpose, there must be an inspirational element as well. Make sure the team understands what is at stake and why their work is so important.

Your goal as team leader is the alignment of the team. Each person must embrace the team purpose for themselves if the team as a whole is to become powerful in its work. While each person may have slightly different motivation for working together, there must be a shared sense of direction.

2. Clearly Defined Roles

Dividing the task is a crucial activity in the formation of a team. The question must be asked and answered: “Who will do what on this team?” However, the issue is more than just one of clarity of assignment. Appropriate division of labor is important as well. As a team leader, you must seek to put people in roles matched with their strengths.

Notice strengths are not the same thing as interests. You will discover that the best person to strategize about worship is not always the person who leads worship each week. Sometimes it is the person who experiences worship each week.

Resist the temptation to build a team comprised of people who are all the same. The more diverse a team is, the stronger and smarter it is. Just because a team gets along well doesn’t mean that it will produce great results.

Equally important as the tasks associated with different roles are the accompanying attitudes. Some will say, “This is my job, stay out.” Others will say, “That’s your job, see you later.” The preferred attitude is, “This is *my* part of *our* job.” A great team principle is illustrated in Joshua 1:12-18 where Joshua in essence teaches the people of God that no one is finished until everyone is finished.

3. Balanced Leadership

Leadership styles run the gamut between being highly directive to passively laissez faire. The current tendency is less directive and more participative. However, less leadership is not the same as better leadership. Effective leaders provide structure for the teams they lead. Balance is crucial. Too much structure and the team will become overly dependent on the leader. Too little and they begin to flounder in unproductivity.

It is hard to imagine a real leader who does not care whether his or her leadership is accepted or not. Assuming as much, begin with review of a definition of leadership as “a person influencing people to accomplish a purpose.” In this context, purpose becomes boss. This is the character of true servant leadership, where everything is subservient to the accomplishment of the God-given purpose. Servant leadership is more than a willingness to perform servant-like tasks; it is an attitude that views everything, including oneself and ministry, through the lens of the Great Commission.

The acceptance of one’s leadership is earned, not demanded. Leaders will find their leadership being accepted by the team when they: (1) serve the purpose with determination and (2) embody the qualities that followers look for in a leader.

4. Effective Processes

It is hard to imagine certain types of teams apart from effective processes. The surgical team that performs your operation has them. You see it in the crew on the flight deck of your most recent airplane ride. Your favorite football team has a playbook which delineates their process for team success.

The same will be true of a successful Transition Team. Plan carefully the process which the team will use to accomplish its purpose. Processes are the “how” that speaks to the “what” of the purpose of the team. Think of your team process as the map for your journey. As the team leader, you hold the map and are using it to guide the team and navigate the trip. Make your thinking visible and let others see the process to be used through appropriate visual aids (such as A Church Model and Process on page 95) as well as ongoing communication.

Examples of the processes of a team would include how a team reaches consensus, how they resolve conflict, how they divide the workload, how they brainstorm issues, and how they think together on strategic issues. Leadership is crucial in the facilitation of these functions.

5. Healthy Relationships

Healthy relationships are characterized first and foremost by *trust*. No one will be interdependent with someone they do not trust. It is built one person at a time through character, competence, and concern. In addition, *understanding* must be a component of teamwork. Members need to be aware of what each person brings to the table – their respective strengths and weaknesses. In addition to these, *acceptance*, *respect*, and *courtesy* are necessary for healthy interpersonal relationships on a Transition Team.

Another critical characteristic of relationships on effective teams is *mutual accountability*. Each member must be willing to give an account of their actions, progress, or results. The key word in this context is “mutual.” No one is exempt. While our tendency may be to resist it, this inclination is minimized and quieted when a team is aligned and has embraced the whole team concept. Remember what was said about clear roles: “It isn’t my job or your job, but *my* part of *our* job.”

The question might be asked, “Accountable to what?” The answer is found in a set of team operating principles. These vary from team to team, and they cannot be arbitrarily imposed. Just like cooperation, a choice must be made by each team member. These principles should be stated in the present tense to convey the idea that “this is what we do, not what we hope to do someday.” Here are some examples of team operating principles:

* We will treat each other with dignity and respect.
* We will listen for understanding.
* We will not take things personally, and we will not mean things personally.
* We will ask, but we will not assume motives.
* We will avoid degrading language, and we will not attack each other’s credibility.
* Everyone has input, regardless of position.
* We will not take ourselves too seriously.
* Silence is agreement: If I don’t speak up about an issue, then I agree to the conclusion to which the team comes.
* We will honor our commitments and keep our promises.
* We will maintain confidentiality.

6. Cooperation and Communication

Teams are ultimately about work. The very word “teamwork” highlights this. Some teams can accomplish much because of their capacity for communication. It allows the collective brilliance of the team to emerge and shapes the strategic plan for the future of the church. Yet, as most understand, communication is an endeavor that is fraught with peril.

Perhaps the greatest misconception regarding communication is that it is primarily about sending a message. Wisdom and experience, along with actual research, teach us that until a message is received as the sender intended, there is no communication. The actual words we use are not as influential as our tone and inflection, as are facial expressions and postures.

Teams are all about purpose, but common purpose cannot be sustained apart from excellent communication. As the leader of the Transition Team, you must be aware of the following dynamics of communication and plan how to lead considering them:

* Communication is crucial to cooperation and teamwork.
* Focus is typically placed on message sending when it should be focused on message receiving.
* “Groupthink” and an undue stress on conformity of thought expressed through giving acceptable answers will thwart true synergy on a team.
* Clear communication does not prevent but rather leads to conflict.

**SAMPLE SEQUENCE OF PROCESS**

**FOR THE TRANSITIONAL PASTOR MINISTRY**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Before 1st Month | 1. Develop a Covenant of Relationship between the Transitional Pastor and the Church. (pages 69-72) 2. Call and install a transitional pastor. |
| 1st & 2nd Month | * 1. Get acquainted with the Church Leadership Team. (page 17)   2. Conduct listening sessions. (pages 19-20)   3. Schedule a Church Memories Workshop.   4. Form the Transition Team. (pages 21-22)   5. Train the Transition Team. (pages 23-26)   6. Schedule using *Come to the Lord’s Table* for spiritual preparation. (page 18)   7. Develop a Sequence of Process for leading through the stages of transition. (pages 27-28)   8. Communicate the process to the congregation. |
|  |  |
| 3rd Month  **Stage 1** | * 1. Preach on the Seven Realities of Experiencing God, the kingdom of God, the activity of Satan, and the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3. (page 73)   2. Conduct the Church Memories Workshop. (pages 74-80). |
|  |  |
| 4th & 5th Months  **Stage 2** | * 1. Provide the Transition Team an overview of the information on understanding a church’s capacity for denial. (pages 82-84)   2. Provide the Transition Team an overview of the information on understanding church culture. (pages 85-86)   3. Provide the Transition Team an overview of the information on understanding community context. (pages 87-88)   4. Request a demographic report and review it with the Transition Team. (pages 81, 89)   5. Preach a sermon related to demographics using Acts 10:1 – 11:18. (pages 90-91)   6. Complete the Current Reality worksheets, follow the instructions at the bottom of the forms, and lead a discussion with the Transition Team. (page 81)   7. Provide an overview of values to the Transition Team and lead it through the Values Inventory exercise. (pages 92-94)   8. Give an overview of A Church Model and Process diagram. (page 95) |
|  |  |
| 6th Month  **Stage 3** | * 1. Lead the Transition Team in studying about the Great Commission and the five functions—evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, ministry, and worship. (pages 102-107)   2. Preach on the Great Commission and the biblical functions. (page 108)   3. Divide the Transition Team into five subgroups, one for each function. Each subgroup will use the SWOTs form (page 111) to evaluate its assigned function and report to the total Transition Team.   4. Use the development of key objectives for the 5 functions. (pages 112-118) |
|  |  |
| 7th Month  **Stage 4** | * 1. Lead the Transition Team in studying about the four kingdom results—numerical growth, spiritual transformation, ministry expansion, and kingdom advance. (pages 120-122)   2. Preach on the four kingdom results.   3. Divide the Transition Team into four subgroups, one for each result area. Each subgroup will use the SWOTs form (page 111) to evaluate its assigned result area and report to the total Transition Team. |
|  |  |
| 8th Month  **Stage 5** | * 1. Lead the Transition Team in studying about the four church practices of open groups, closed groups, corporate worship, and ministry teams. (pages 124-127)   2. Communicate to the congregation about the four church practices.   3. Lead the Transition Team in a discussion of the church practices using the drawing exercise. (page 128)   4. Divide the Transition Team m into four subgroups, one for each church practice. Each subgroup will use the SWOTs form (page 111) to evaluate its assigned practice and report to the total Transition Team |
|  |  |
| 9th & 10th Months  **Stage 6** | * 1. Lead the Transition Team to use the principles and concepts learned during the previous five stages to review or write a mission statement. Use the process on pages 130.   2. Lead the church to recommit to their mission statement or adopt the new mission statement.   3. Communicate the mission statement to the church through a series of sermons.   4. Lead the Transition Team and the leaders from all church ministries on a retreat. The purpose of the retreat is to refocus the church around the five functions and the mission of the church. Use the Strategy Map using the guidance on pages 131-136.   5. Use the results of the six stages to develop initiatives to be recommended from the church. (page 129)   6. Present the recommended initiatives to the congregation for affirmation. (page 129) |
|  |  |
| **Stage 7** | * 1. Lead the church to elect a Pastor Search Committee and begin the search or to release the Pastor Search Committee previously elected to proceed with their assignment using the plans the church has adopted in finding the pastor the Lord has prepared for the church. (page 137)   2. Train the committee for its task using the *Pastor Search Committee Handbook.*   3. Continue to serve as a process consultant to the committee.   4. Interpret the search process to the church.   5. Train the pastor search committee to use the doctrinal assessment with a serious candidate. (pages 138-146)   6. Preach a message on “Honoring the Pastor” before the pastor comes. |
|  |  |
| **Stage 8** | * 1. Help the pastor get a good start in the church and community. |

**THE TRANSITIONAL PASTOR IN THE LIFE OF A CHURCH**

This section focuses on the qualities of leadership which continue to be admirable and necessary in the ministry of a transitional pastor. We will examine who you are as a person, as a man called of God, and the abilities which enable you as the transitional pastor to effectively serve the church.

The transitional pastor is to lead the church through a viable transition. You are most important! There is a difference between a supply preacher, an interim, and the transitional pastor. With a transitional pastor this time is unique. It is a small window in the life of the church—to change concepts, attitudes, develop a vision, and prepare for the future.

This explains the need for qualified men to take the church through this vital time, to prepare the church to call a strong, fruitful, and long-term pastor. Transitional pastors perform pastoral ministries according to mutual agreements expressed in a covenant of relationship.

**Duties of Transitional Pastors**

Among Paul’s farewell words to Timothy are “discharge all the duties of your ministry” (2 Tim. 4:5, NIV). Some writers and teachers refer to functions, roles, or tasks instead of duties. Whether the word is *duties*, *functions*, or *tasks*, the obligation is as serious to a pastor’s work as breathing is to his body. On trial before the Sanhedrin, Paul declared, “I have lived my life before God in all good conscience to this day” (Acts 23:1).

In a Covenant of Relationship, the church and transitional pastor agree on the transitional pastor’s duties. The list will vary from church to church, but consideration should be given to each of the following general and specific duties. In good conscience, the pastor will be diligent in fulfilling these duties, believing them to represent his duty to God in this relationship.

**General Duties:**

* Provide spiritual leadership.
* Guide the church through the stages of transition.

**Specific Duties:**

* Preach the gospel.
* Coordinate worship.
* Supervise staff.
* Counsel staff and church ministry leaders.
* Coordinate baptismal services; officiate weddings and funerals when available.
* Provide pastoral care and involve others in caring actions.
* Resolve conflict.
* Lead the Transition Team.
* Represent the church in community and denominational activities.

The transitional pastor may move his membership to the church. This will be dependent on the family’s or wife’s involvement with the church where the transitional pastor may live. There are advantages to membership since leadership has a stronger impact when giving guidance to needs and changes within the church. It gives credibility to say, “our church.” The people will know you give your tithe to the church and see your personal involvement. If married, your wife, who is a vital part of your ministry, should be supportive of this ministry in this church. If you have family at home, the same support is needed from the family.

If the church is some distance from where you reside, it is advantageous to live in the community if provisions are made. This allows the transitional pastor to assume more of the administrative and pastoral care responsibilities than commuters are expected to assume. Those who commute and those who have other employment will coordinate the work of other church staff members and/or lay leaders as they lead in administrative and pastoral care ministries.

Priority attention of transitional pastors is given to leading the church through the stages of transition so the church will be prepared for effective ministry under the leadership of a new pastor.Because the ministry of transitional pastors is normally completed within   
9–18 months, they must have servant hearts and gifts that enable them to quickly gain credibility and trust in order to become effective leaders in a brief period of time.

**Dimensions of a Pastor’s Life**

Biblical standards set guidance for strong character traits (1 Timothy 3:1-7). This does not suggest you are lacking in any of these traits. But you need to give evidence as to who you are, whatyou do, and whatyou represent. These standards should be examined in the life of any pastor or person who ministers in the church.

1. Observable balance
2. Good family
3. Observable maturing
4. Respect for others

There are six dimensions of a pastor’s life. Each person should be well balanced in these areas to strengthen the positive character traits.

1. Intimate relationship with God
2. Marriage and family
3. Integrity
4. Physical health
5. Emotional health
6. Financial responsibility

Transitional pastors must be confident in God’s call to this ministry and committed to it because of a holy compulsion. The evidence of call is observed in these four areas: (1) to salvation, (2) to discipleship, (3) to ministry, and (4) to a place of service.

**Character Traits**

Just as normal pastoral ministry in general is more than “a way to make a living,” the ministry of transitional pastors is more than a way to supplement another salary or earn some additional retirement income. Rather than novices in pastoral ministry, they must have demonstrated personal character and pastoral competence in the testing fires of prior experience. This includes knowledge of the spiritual and psychological impact of pastoral changes and how to enable churches and individuals to work together in making wise choices. Their lives must reveal the fruit of the Holy Spirit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23).

Working through the following character traits does not mean you lack or are weak on any of them. However, it is good to re-emphasize them and gauge ourselves on our strengths and weaknesses. The character traits of the transitional pastor’s life should be taken for granted, especially for someone with many years of experience. This is simply a reminder of the personal character and pastoral competence essential for effective transitional pastor ministry.

* Healthy Spirituality

With 10% of our churches without pastors and pastors staying 42 months as an average with some averages as low as 18 months, churches need an example of healthy pastors who will serve long-term in the church. The transitional pastor can be what they look like. The transitional pastor can portray to the congregation spiritual growth as a person and as a leader. Healthy spirituality grows through disciplined prayer and Bible study that focus and clarify a pastor’s relationship with God. Healthy spirituality bears the fruit of the Spirit, equips pastors for effective relationships and productive work, and manifests itself in piety without pretense and compassion without compromise.

* Emotionally Stable

Love leads the “fruit of the Spirit” list and self-control anchors it. Leaders with self-control are stable and not stirred to displays of anger or depression when confronted with disagreement and resistance. They are not easily provoked. They calm troubled waters, not churn them. They encourage optimism in working for a solution. By their example of self-control, they elicit from the people love, joy, and peace.

* Christ-like Love for People

Transitional pastors do well if they like the work and love the people. If they love the people as Jesus did, they will relate to them effectively in the ministries of the church. Peter called on Christians to “honor everyone” (1 Pet. 2:17), by which he meant those in authority, fellow Christians, those who agree with us, and those who disagree with us. Technical skills in organizational development or sermon delivery cannot substitute for relational skills that do not reflect Christ’s love.

* Clothed with Humility

Peter contrasted humility with pride and admonished all Christians to be clothed in it and live humbly under God’s control (see 1 Pet. 5:5-6). David knew that God guides the humble in knowing and doing what is right (see Ps. 25:9), and Solomon cautioned people “don’t be wise in your own eyes” because God “gives grace to the humble” (Prov. 3:7, 34). Humility is not the opposite of strength; it is neither self-effacing nor self-exalting.

* Visionary Leader

Vision, applied to effective pastoral leaders, is spiritual discernment or foresight. With time, you can observe the condition of the church and then recommend your vision for the church. A visionary leader, inspired by the Holy Spirit and informed by the counsel of spiritually mature friends, sees with the eyes of the soul those things God is doing in the church as well as things God wants to do through the church and shares the vision with the church.

* Man of Integrity

Spiritual leaders with integrity adhere carefully to biblical standards of morality and character. They are committed to being holy, with Jesus Christ as their example, aware they must hate and avoid evil and hold fast to what is good in God’s eyes. The holiness requirement applies in all personal, family, and public behavior. In a society of compromise, sexual morality, and financial ethics are of special concern.

* Energetic

Paul challenges us, “Whatever you do, do it from the heart, as something done for the Lord and not for people, knowing that you will receive the reward of an inheritance from the Lord. You serve the Lord Christ” (Col. 3:23-24). Transitional pastors who balance diligent work and healthy recreational leisure set a good example for others.

* Experienced in Pastoral Ministry

Because one must deal with all issues of ministry, effective transitional pastors draw on effective pastoral experience in a variety of churches. No amount of classroom training alone can prepare someone to lead churches during transition, especially those in emotional turmoil. Experienced pastors will continue to grow in wisdom through study that enables them to apply lessons learned in the trenches of experience to the circumstances of each new transitional pastor challenge.

* Zealous for Missions and Evangelism

Paul instructed Christians: “Do not lack diligence in zeal; be fervent in the Spirit; serve the Lord” (Rom. 12:11). Zeal is never more important than in the ministry of personal and public evangelism. Diligence or zeal for missions and evangelism enables a transitional pastor to say, as Paul said, “Follow my example” instead of “Do as I say and not as I do.” Zeal for missions and evangelism should represent who he is in Christ, not just who he is in church leadership work.

* Patience

Patience has the same spiritual DNA as love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, and self-control. They exist together as a collective whole. If you don’t desire all, you won’t have any. Transitional pastors are often tempted to be impatient because they need to accomplish so much in a relatively short period of time. In leading people to achieve kingdom goals, patience (not impatience) produces the greater harvest.

* Unavailable

A transitional pastor is unavailable to be called as the pastor of the church he is serving. His pastoral calling is to the unique role of transitional pastor. With this fact clearly established prior to beginning a transitional ministry, time and emotional energy will not be misdirected to deliberating whether he should become the pastor or not. Though church members love him and are blessed by his ministry, they will not be encouraged to try to persuade him to be the pastor.

**THE SKILLS USED BY THE TRANSITIONAL PASTOR**

Transitional pastor effectiveness results from both the *character traits* that describe *who you are* and the *skills* that demonstrate *what you can do*. Christ-like character is refined as we walk humbly with God through mountains of celebrations and valleys of sufferings. Ministry skills are honed through purposeful study and careful observation with minds open to truth and growth. God can bless and use people with all levels of training, but those not willing to learn and grow and to improve their skills will be limited in their contributions to kingdom growth. Paul saw the potential in Timothy and admonished him to “Be diligent to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who doesn’t need to be ashamed, correctly teaching the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).

Most transitional pastors have had extensive training in biblical and theological studies, as well as practical pastoral ministries, but they continue to participate in formal and informal training experiences that produce growth in understanding truth and skill in performing the ministries called for by truth. That is consistent with Paul’s life view. Trained formally in Hebrew law under the tutelage of the renowned Gamaliel, taught about saving grace in solitude sessions with the Holy Spirit, coached by the disciples in Damascus, and endorsed by Barnabas in Jerusalem, Paul honored the Lord with passionate and convincing use of his knowledge and skills. After years of experience in life transforming, church-nurturing ministry, Paul declared he was not yet complete. He vowed to “pursue as my goal the prize promised by God’s heavenly call in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14). That is the educational model for transitional pastors. The goal is to keep growing as long as you live.

Training helps for these transitional pastor ministry skills are not presented to imply that every transitional pastor needs all the information because of deficient skills. Much of it will be useful to you. That which is not useful to you, will be useful to someone else. All of it will be useful to some among the hundreds to be enlisted and equipped for effective transitional pastor ministry.

The Spiritual Gift of Discernment

(Foundational for All the Skills)

The strategic work of leading a church in the transitional experience of turning loose, grieving, healing, reorienting, taking hold, or whatever else must be experienced cannot be done effectively without God’s guidance, regardless of the leader’s education or experience. Spiritual discernment is required. God said, “Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and incomprehensible things you do not know” (Jer. 33:3). That is God’s promise to help us with discernment.

Some mistake discernment for wisdom and vice-versa. What is the difference? Wisdom is knowing what to do with knowledge, while discernment is knowing what to do with wisdom.

Demographic data, statistical charts, historical documents, and anecdotal reports provide knowledge but do not assure discernment of truth. Spiritual discernment is essential in transitional ministry. Such discernment is available from God to those who seek it through disciplined prayer, both talking to Him and listening to Him.

A person who is able to understand and clarify the obscure has discernment. A discerning person sees inside (sights in) to what is not evident on the surface, that which the average person does not see, and uses the insight to help others. Discernment has the ability to “see through” with spiritual intuition. As a result, a person applies the ability to weigh the pros and cons of a situation. Such discerning insight is mental tuning which in turn clarifies thought for leadership, sensitivity for caring, and revelation for preaching.

1. Biblical Example about Spiritual Discernment

First Kings 3–9 tell the story of Solomon’s great wisdom and leadership in building the nation and the temple after asking one thing of God—an understanding heart. God was pleased to grant Solomon’s request. “I will give you a wise and discerning heart,” God said, “so that there has never have been anyone like you before and never will be again…. If you walk in my ways and keep my statutes and commandments just as your Father David did, I will give you a long life” (1 Kings 3:12, 14). Solomon’s discernment was soon revealed in a conflict resolution situation involving two women who claimed to be the mother of the same child.

The writer of 1 Kings affirmed Solomon’s discernment in matters of government and teaching. “God gave Solomon wisdom, very great insight, and understanding as vast as the sand on the seashore. Solomon’s wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the people of the East, greater than all the wisdom of Egypt…. Solomon spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs numbered 1,005…. Emissaries of all peoples, sent by every king on earth who had heard of his wisdom, came to listen to Solomon’s wisdom” (1 Kings 4:29, 30, 32, 34).

Shamefully, Solomon’s head was turned from seeking after God to seeking after pleasure and the applause of those who admired his wisdom. “The Lord was angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice. He had commanded him about this, so that he would not follow other gods, but Solomon did not do what the Lord had commanded. Then the Lord said to Solomon, ‘Since you have done this and did not keep My covenant and my statutes, which I commanded you, I will tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant’” (1 Kings 11:9-11).

Spiritual discernment is God’s gift to those who earnestly seek it and faithfully use it with integrity to honor the Lord. Spiritual discernment cannot co-exist with self-interest and self-service.

2. Prayer as a Door to Spiritual Discernment

Transitional pastors, though enriched with training and much experience, should often hear their hearts speak the words the boy Samuel spoke to the Lord: “Speak, for your servant is listening” (1 Sam. 3:10b). The testimony to Samuel as a listener follows in the last three verses of the same chapter. “Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and he fulfilled everything Samuel prophesied. All Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was a confirmed prophet of the Lord. The Lord continued to appear in Shiloh, because there he revealed himself to Samuel by his word” (1 Sam. 3:19-21).

Honestly evaluate how much of your prayer time is given to speaking and how much is given to listening. Remember the adage: God gave us two ears and one mouth, so He must have intended for us to listen twice as much as we talk. Use the young Samuel model, “Speak, for your servant is listening.” Then listen to his counsel to your soul. Pray with the words of an old prayer song: “Speak to my heart, Lord Jesus; speak that my soul may hear.”

T. W. Hunt, whose writing and speaking on prayer enriched many pastors’ lives, often shared his experiences of listening to God. He would get up early each morning, prepare two cups of coffee, go to his quiet place, and sit at a table with his cup of coffee. An empty chair was at the other side of the table with the second cup placed on the table in front of the empty chair. In that setting he had a quiet conversation with God. Conversation involves exposing one’s understandings, feelings, and desires to God and listening to God’s understandings, feelings, and desires. That is the way to become rich in discernment.

3. Devotional Bible Reading as a Door to Spiritual Discernment

Devotional Bible reading dismisses any idea of gleaning information for the sake of teaching or preaching. It focuses entirely on gleaning information because we want the truth of God to penetrate every fiber of our beings, control and order every desire of our hearts, and guide us in every relationship involved in our daily walks. Through devotional Bible reading, God can speak to our hearts so our souls may hear. Pastors, as people who work with the Word vocationally, are most liable to be lax in exercising themselves unto godliness by feasting on the Word personally.

**A Leadership Model for Transitional Pastors**

“He shepherded them with a pure heart and guided them with his skillful hands” (Psalm 78:72). This verse provides a model for developing one’s leadership as a transitional pastor. It also provides a simple checklist, if you will, of what should characterize your leadership. This model can be fleshed out in much greater detail, but the simple outline consists of a pure heart and skillful hands.

It is important to see the connection between the two. When a leader isolates either heart or hands at the expense of the other, either personal integrity or effectiveness gets slighted. A leader may have a pure heart but no skillful hands. Often this type of leader can be identified by an expression that is used to describe them: “Well, their heart is in the right place.” Usually, this is code language for, “Well, basically, they are incompetent.”

On the other hand, a would-be leader might have skillful hands, great abilities in administration or planning, but no purity of heart. With these types of individuals, we often end up hearing stories of forced termination, raging church conflict, or public moral failure.

The pure heart may see the end and the skillful hands understand the means to get there, but we need both. God seeks leaders who can, with their hands, direct others toward an end that is pure, which glorifies and honors Him.

*Harvard Business Review* captured this dichotomy well several years ago when they identified two types of ineffective managers: competent jerks and lovable idiots. (Tiziana Casciaro and Miguel Sousa Lobo, “Competent Jerks, Lovable Fools, and the Formation of Social Networks,” June 1, 2005) The former are ineffective in relational issues, and the latter are ineffective in tactical issues. What is needed is a blend of both the hard and the soft skills.

The old adage of “know thyself” is crucial at this point. In terms of our personality, we tend to gravitate toward either relationship or task, leading from the heart or leading from the hands. One without the other is always insufficient. Transitional pastor ministry is more than just “loving on the people” but it is certainly not less.

Transitional pastors that embody Psalm 78:72 possess both character and competency. They have both the soft skills of relationship and interaction and the hard skills of leadership and administration. The training that you are in the process of receiving will begin by focusing on the character of the transitional pastor, his heart for ministry and the missional advance of the church. Next, the focus of the training will shift to competency, the hands of the transitional pastor, his ability to facilitate a process of corporate and team reflection, discovery, planning, and execution.

**The Transitional Pastor Leading Change**

**(Kotter Comes to Church)**

Experience and research on leading change in the church have led us to the works of John Kotter. Kotter is best known for his work on change theory, specifically in his three most influential books: (1*) Leading Change*, (2) *Change: How Organizations Achieve Hard-To-Imagine Results in Uncertain and Volatile Times*, and (3) *The Heart of Change*. Kotter has numerous other well-researched writings that are very helpful to the transitional pastor. The most often quoted is “Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail” first published in the *Harvard Business Review* (May-June 1995) and provides the foundation for this section interpreting how Kotter’s language and process can be applied in the church.

While originally most intended for the corporate world, we have found Kotter’s wisdom to be helpfully applied to our work as transitional pastors in the church. You should proceed with caution when you do not follow Kotter’s ideas at least to some degree. We have learned the hard way when we get in a hurry, which is often. We have already mentioned elsewhere in this manual that we are “on the clock” from the moments of initial conversation with the team that recommends us to the church. Inevitably, we tend to come up a bit short of what we had hoped we would accomplish in our limited time at a church. Kotter reminds us that “transformation is a process, not an event.”

Our tendency as leaders may be to hurry and cut corners in our process. This manual gives us a process to follow as we serve churches during a time of transition. While every transitional pastor will put his own mark on this process, we hope the process we outline through this manual is helpful.

Kotter writes that “neither the core of human nature, hardwired into us many thousands of years ago, nor the central design of many modern organizations [translate: “churches”] … were built to change quickly, easily and smartly. People and organizations [“churches” again!] were designed mostly to be efficient and reliable enough to ensure survival.” (*Change*) Many of us serving in transitional roles will find ourselves in churches struggling to survive. Many churches have “missional amnesia” and have forgotten why they exist. Most churches perhaps, will lack any clarity of a compelling vision (see below). Others will be living in denial of the reality of their current circumstances. Denial of reality will likely be one of the most frequently encountered characteristics of the church in transition.

What we give you in this section is a brief outline of Kotter’s process to leading a church through change and transformation. Most of us most of the time will find ourselves serving a church in serious need of transformation. We hope you will find this process significant in your work and that you will not only apply these eight principles, but that you will execute the 8 stages in Kotter’s suggested order.

We follow Kotter’s advice to view the process in stages rather than steps. (The transitional ministry in this manual uses eight “stages” for the Transitional Ministry process.) Webster defines “stage” as “a step forward in a journey.” One stage follows another and builds upon the previous stage. For churches finding themselves in the “in-between” time without a more permanent pastor, the journey forward begins under the leadership of the transitional pastor and continues under the leadership of the called under-shepherd. As Kotter’s assertion that transformation (and revitalization) is a process, not an event, he says that “it advances through the stages that build on each other and it takes years.”

**Stage One: Establish a sense of urgency**.

The beginning point of most transformation/change processes is urgency. The transitional pastor frequently steps into a church setting where a sense of urgency is lacking. Many of the members are relatively content with the status quo.

The late Lyle Schaller rightly notes, “Without discontent with the present situation there can be no planned, internally motivated and directed intentional change. Only when a widely perceived crisis exists is there much chance of changing the status quo by majority vote. Most of the time the majority will favor a continuation of the present conditions over change.” (*Wisdom,* p. 108)

Some churches and some members already have this sense of urgency. They are aware of the pressing need to begin to do what must be done to move the church in the direction of revitalization. However, it is usually a minority that holds to this sense of urgency. For many members, the sense conveyed to the transitional pastor is, “Pastor, we all know that you need to bring some changes, or the church is going to die. It’s just that this is our church, and while we know it needs to change, we like it the way it is. Could we just figure out how to delay those changes until after some of us die first?” (Bolsinger, *Tempered Resilience,* p. 27)

For many churches, it is change or die. The sooner the change the better. Kotter’s observation: Failure to establish enough sense of urgency is the first error leaders make on their quest for transformation. “Transformations often begin, and begin well, when an organization has a new head who has a new leader and who sees the need for major change.” The transitional pastor, though temporary, can be that “new leader.”

**Stage Two: Form a powerful guiding coalition.**

A Transition Team is put together to begin to evaluate present reality and propose a plan for moving forward. See pages 21-22 for guidance in forming the Transition Team. The makeup of this coalition is of great importance. The transitional pastor should recognize that the assembling of this group is one of the most significant stages of the effort (if not the most significant stage). The process by which this team is put together varies. Depending on church structure and decision-making, it may include the chairs of significant committees (key word: significant!). However, the congregation itself usually has a voice in determining who is on the team. Usually, the transitional pastor “reserves the right to add to the team” and make the final determination regarding who will serve. More than the size of the group, if the right people are not at the table, the entire transition is likely to fail or come up short of goals and hopes.

This Transition Team or coalition usually does not have decision-making authority. It has only the power to bring well thought out, prayerfully determined recommendations to the larger church body. A word of caution here: Once the Transition Team completes its recommendations, the next challenge is to get the buy in of the congregation through what is most often a series of “town hall” type meetings in which the recommendations are discussed openly but no vote is taken at the end of each meeting. Voting to approve the proposal usually comes later, after the congregation has had adequate opportunity to digest the plan.

**Stage Three: Create a vision.**

As has been previously mentioned, based upon our experience over the years in numerous transitional roles, most often there is little to no sense of vision of where the church is headed. One of the primary roles of the Transition Team is to begin to put together the vision of where God wants that church to go. Kotter says that “in every successful transformation effort that I have seen, the guiding coalition develops a picture of the future that is relatively easy to communicate.” In the case of the transitional church, that picture presented by the Transition Team must be easy to communicate.

Vision is not the same as mission. Hopefully the church understands the mission: The Great Commission and Great Commandment. The vision has more to do with God’s unique plan for that church in carrying out the Great Commission and Commandment. Aubrey Malphurs says vision is a clear and challenging picture of the future of a ministry as you believe that it can and must be. Add descriptive characteristics to such a vision for it to be shared: mouth-watering, compelling, concise, transferrable from one member to another.

The process by which a Transition Team brings a new, fresh vision is challenging. Remember, the role of the transitional pastor is to guide, not to decide. The transitional pastor must architect the conditions in which the Transition Team can develop and own the vision, then convey that vision to the church. The transitional pastor cannot “own” the vision. If he does, when he leaves, the vision usually leaves with him.

It should also be noted that according to Kotter “without a sensible vision, a transformation effort can easily dissolve into a list of confusing and incompatible projects that can take an organization in the wrong direction or nowhere at all.”

**Stage Four: Communicate the vision.**

Kotter says that another error leaders make is to “under communicate the vision by a factor of ten.” As mentioned before, the Transition Team is charged with the responsibility of conveying their work regarding the vision to the larger congregation through meetings, town halls, and other necessary communication. Our experience has been that when we (as transitional pastors) have adequately communicated the plan, we’ve likely just begun. Andy Stanley once astutely noted: “Vision leaks.” That says it all. Once is not enough. Cast the vision over. And over. And over. And over. And then some more.

Kotter sees the necessary sharing of the vision throughout the church: “Transformation is impossible unless people are willing to help, often to the point of making short-term sacrifices.” To achieve a broadly based willingness to help and serve, the transitional pastor (then the pastor) must take advantage of every possible channel of communication with the church, constantly and repeatedly keeping the vision in front of those in the church.

**Stage Five: Empower others to act on the vision.**

With the sense that “the best is yet to come,” once the church has had the opportunity to thoroughly grasp the vision from the Transition Team, the fresh vision should become the lens through which all the efforts of the church should be viewed and evaluated. The question becomes: Does this ministry/idea/initiative/effort/project/missional endeavor move us in the direction we have determined to move?

There is usually discussion regarding the role of a new pastor in determining the vision for the church. So often a search committee asks a candidate, “What is your vision for our church?” It is our position that this is the wrong question at the wrong time. We find it much more effective if a church can clearly articulate their vision to the candidate instead of the other way around. The stronger pastoral candidates are usually drawn and called to a church that knows God’s unique plan for that church. According to Kotter, “People (and pastors) are motivated to give to churches and organizations that project a clear, compelling vision of what they believe is God’s future for them…. Vision announces not only is God doing something now, but that the best is yet to come.”

**Stage Six: Plan for and create short-term wins.**

The frequent error: not removing obstacles to the new vision. This stage can obviously be a sticky one for the transitional pastor and the church. It goes without saying that the transitional pastor can’t just fire those who stand in the way and don’t buy in. However, it must also be said that there are sometimes situations in which the transitional pastor finds himself that must be dealt with, regardless of the sensitivity or difficulty. For example, numerous transitional churches we have served had staff structures that have evolved over years and years. Changes in staff structure are usually very difficult for some staff and church members.

Thus, the transitional pastor (and then the pastor) should always plan for, look for and celebrate authentic short-term wins.

**Stage Seven: Consolidate improvements and produce more change.**

One mistake leaders often make is to declare victory too soon. Recently a kick receiver returned a kick -off in his own end zone and returned it for what was ruled to be a touchdown of 104 yards. But the observant down field ref whistled and said, “Not so fast. It looks like he dropped the ball on the one-yard line.” After review, the call was reversed. The back celebrated victory one yard too soon. The temptation for all of us, while we celebrate progress, is to call our victory too soon. The process of transformation and revitalization is very arduous and demanding work. It’s wearisome. Often in our eagerness to get “there,” we drop the ball just a bit too soon.

**Stage Eight: Institutionalize new approaches.**

It takes time, often long times, for a new approach to truly become “the way we do things around here.” For changes to take root in a church, they must become part of the church’s culture. Bud Wrenn asks, “How can we capture, communicate, and infuse the vision into the culture of our church so it influences all we do?” (*Innovative Planning,* p. xi)

Bill Easum writes of the challenges regarding institutionalizing the changes and new vision: “The vision becomes a nightmare if it does not find a shared, collective home…. Failure to build a shared vision is the biggest mistake that gifted leaders make. In their desire to create something far better, they forge ahead and don’t take time to foster the growing dialogue, not allowing people to shape the vision and become part of the vision.”

It is our hope that the transitional pastor will find wisdom and guidance for his work with the local church. Very few of us have been trained to navigate the white water often associated with transitional work. We learn from experience and mistakes. Kotter’s principles can help us minimize and mitigate our errors as we lead a church toward revitalization.

**Pastoral Ministry Skills**

What do churches need from pastors to become and remain spiritually healthy and dynamically reproductive? Church members need the pastor to proclaim the gospel. They need the pastor to lead them according to the spirit and style of Jesus. They need the pastor to provide care that creates a caring community in which members are cared for and involved in caring for others. Proclaim, lead, and care are interdependent tasks. To produce the desired results in one task area requires good quality of ministry in each of the other two areas. (Ernest Mosley, *Called to Joy*, p.26)

**Proclaim**

**Lead**

**Care**

The transitional pastor cannot do all that is needed in each task, but he can equip and partner with others in the church to see that all the needs of the congregation are met. When they are, dynamic fellowship like that in the post-Pentecost Jerusalem church will flourish.

**Leading Skills**

Extraordinary skills are required for becoming a trusted leader and guiding a church through significant change in 9–18 months. Listening and relating skills are vital interpersonal platforms for this acceleration of trust development. Spirituality without false piety, confidence without arrogance, wisdom without snobbery, and boldness without brashness are some of the personal qualities that enable a leader in the process of guiding a church through the stages of transition.

Jesus told his disciples he had chosen to be leaders, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those in high positions act as tyrants over them. But it is not so among you. On the contrary, whoever wants to become great among you [leader/pastor] will be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you will be a slave to all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:42–45).

Jesus calls transitional pastors not to lordship but to leadership. He calls to servanthood. Servanthood is responding to the lordship of Jesus Christ by using the resources God has graciously given you in building up Christ’s bride, His church. Servanthood is strong work, hard work—Jesus’ work.

1. Unique Challenge of Leadership as a Transitional Pastor

Leadership for transitional pastors focuses on the unique nature of a ministry that calls for significant constructive change in a relatively short period of time. For decades pastors have been cautioned about recommending major changes in church practices before getting to know the church well and to being known by the church. That normally takes more than a year, perhaps two or three years. However, transitional pastors are challenged with the responsibility to lead a church through critical growth processes in approximately 9 to 18 months. That’s a challenge!

A transitional pastor begins serving with a position and a reputation, two shaky launching pads. Many church members, including organizational leaders, will not understand the work the transitional pastor has to do, or the relationships required in doing the work, regardless of the means used in the process of calling and covenanting to interpret his work. It is a new breed of leader to them, and they aren’t sure what to expect. (They are more familiar with preachers who “fill the pulpit” for an interim period.) Initially they follow because they are supposed to, or they feel obligated to. That shaky leadership launching pad will collapse into follower-ship lethargy after a short period of time unless the transitional pastor is able to demonstrate competency and credibility in leading a process to prepare for the next pastor. This can be done fairly quickly through the listening sessions, getting to know the church leadership, and casting the vision of the transitional process from the pulpit.

2. Enhancing Leadership and Influence

The unique challenge in becoming a productive leader in a short period of time is a reason for prayerfully selecting a Transition Team as soon as possible to lead through the process of transition. These influencers in the church can help you accomplish this time-sensitive goal. As the Transition Team members demonstrate confidence in your leadership and provide counsel regarding the needs of church leaders affected by change, they will lead others to follow with respect and personal involvement. With their endorsement you will build relationships, produce positive results, and reproduce leaders for growing ministries.

The unique challenge makes it imperative that transitional pastors not attempt to be all things to all people. Remember that Paul instructed the Ephesians that pastors were called to *prepare* God’s people for their works of service (Eph. 4:12), not to *do* all the works of service that need doing. In transitional pastor terms that means putting before the people a biblical challenge; helping them know what to do next, why that is important, how it can be accomplished, and what results they can expect; and coaching them gently yet firmly with godly wisdom as they navigate the period between pastors.

3. Adaptive Leadership

Tod Bolsinger, in *Canoeing the Mountains,* uses the Lewis and Clark expedition to describe adaptive leadership. His insights are relevant to a transitional pastor’s leadership in a church. Lewis and Clark were commissioned in 1803 to explore and map the Louisiana Purchase and to find a water passage to the Pacific. However, they found the West to be totally different than the East. Their discoveries forced them to continually readjust strategies and to adapt. Listen to these questions, insights, and principles that can be applied to your transitional pastor ministry. How do you “canoe” over mountains? We were trained for rivers, not mountains. We were trained for a different context. The world in front of us is nothing like the world behind you. Therefore, we need to learn a new way of leading. No one is going to follow you off the map unless they trust you on the map. In uncharted territory, adaptation is everything.

The church and its leaders must develop adaptability. Adaptive processes don’t require leadership with answers. Rather they need a collaborative process where team members “co-labor” together to discover the next best steps for the church. And sometimes, many of those steps have never been done before. Therefore, you can’t go it alone. You must assemble team members (such as the Transition Team) who are willing to be on a journey of discovery. Everybody will be changed, including the leader.

As transitional pastor, you must demonstrate both competency and credibility. You must have a proven track record of leading transitions “on the map” before church leaders and members will trust you to lead them “off the map.” A grasp and understanding of current church practices and dynamics are essential to gain credibility.

4. The Management Factor in Leadership

Leading sets the course, managing guides the process. Leadership is a wrap-around for management. It plans the menu and sets the table. Management cooks and serves the meal. Then leadership returns to evaluate the experience, affirm those who prepared and served the meal, and celebrate its delights.

Leadership is a primary role as transitional pastors relate to the organizational life of the church; management is secondary. Transitional pastors focus on the big picture, the direction and overall movement. They assign details to other employed and elected leaders along with clear understandings of responsibility and accountability.

The pastor provides general leadership in evaluating progress toward the process goals and in affirming the managers and workers and celebrating the group effort. Effective management involves prioritizing, delegating, coordinating, team building, and supplying resources.

(1) Prioritizing

Transitional pastors have a limited amount of time and none to waste on non-essentials. In no other vocational endeavor is prioritizing more important. Simply stated, priorities take precedence. Every project needs a priority ranking in the family of projects, and the component elements of every project must be prioritized. Priorities affect scheduling, funding, and staffing. Not all the good things that can be done and are needed can be done at the same time. A key question is: Of the many tasks to be performed, which must be done first to set the stage for that which must be done next?

(2) Delegating

Delegation, for transitional pastors, is the management activity of discovering the abilities and limitations of others and involving them in doing some of the work that is not necessary for you to do but is essential to the overall ministry of the church. The abilities of some will be obvious because of their history of effective service in church organizations. The Transition Team may provide insight about others with abilities to carry through on special assignments. If lack of ability limits a willing person but the person is teachable and the work to be done is recurring, arrange for training to prepare the person for responsibility in the future.

Bring others onto the team. Involve them in doing some of the work. Challenge them with the opportunity to contribute to something that is important to the church and to the kingdom of God. Provide them with a clear picture of the work to be done and the ways it can best be done. Honor their creativity and initiative if their work moves the job toward completion. Agree on an accountability procedure. When and how is progress to be reviewed? When is the job to be completed? How will you measure effectiveness in the job?

Make sure the work they are assigned is essential to the overall ministry of the church. Being assigned busy work demeans people. If the project considered for delegation is not essential to the overall ministry of the church, forget it. The concept of giving everyone something to do, whether or not it is important to the Great Commission, devalues people and ultimately destroys their desire to help the church accomplish its mission.

(3) Coordinating

Coordinating is enablingthe various components of the church to relate harmoniously, complimentarily, and productively. Coordinating requires supervision (super-vision)—maintaining a view of the whole organizational landscape—including structure, personnel, and resource allocation. Supervision and coordination are “hand in glove.” Supervision sees the many parts of one body, coordination results in the many parts working together as one body. (See 1 Cor. 12:12.) With supervision none is neglected; with coordination each makes a significant contribution to the whole.

Coordination is teamwork, every person manning his station and backing up others when needs arise. So very evident in all team sports, coordination is no less required in successful churches, and the transitional pastor is the team coach working to see that the team is well organized, and the energy of all players is utilized in the most productive ways. Coordination is essentialto assure that all ministry bases are covered and to avoid duplication of services, competition for resources, and “lone ranger” separatism.

(4) Team Building

Team building is relating persons to persons and persons to tasks in ways that build up people and achieve the goals of the church. One of the transitional pastor’s most valuable contributions can be relating to leaders in ways that stimulate them toward growth and greater achievement that brings fulfillment as members of effective ministry teams.

Team building does not use up people for the sake of the church; it builds up people for the sake of the kingdom of God. It builds up people spiritually, socially, emotionally, and technically. Many inactive church members, who were leaders in church organizations, were used up in doing “church work” instead of built up in the joy of serving with Christ’s followers in compassionately carrying out the Great Commission. They found their respite as dropouts.

The law of multiplication says the time spent in growing leaders is more productive than time spent in growing followers. The result will serve the church well into the future.

Teamwork is as important to a church on mission as it is to a championship sports team. There is no place for prima donnas seeking glory for themselves at the expense of team success and kingdom growth. Every team member needs to be fully committed to team tasks and equipped with “how-to” training and enthusiasm (*en theos,* God with us).

(5) Supplying Resources

Paul encouraged believers in Philippi that God would “supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19). What an encouragement! God would not ask them to do something for which he would not supply them the resources with which to do it.

That is a good model for church ministry development. Decisions must be made about distributing church resources needed to conduct the ministries. Ministry teams will need to be staffed, provided facilities in which to do their work, and allocated needed financial resources.

It is no more reasonable to assign responsibility to church leaders without allocating the resources with which to manage the responsibility to a successful conclusion than it is to enlist an army and send it into battle without the weapons that are essential to their engagement.

Three questions help pinpoint priorities in resource allocation:

* What can we not afford not to do? These are the primary priorities in allocating personnel, space, and finances.
* What can we not afford to do? These are secondary priorities that will be implemented as soon as resources are available.
* What can we afford not to do? These are not priorities and should be funded only after the primary and secondary priorities have been supplied. If a church treats as priority that which it can afford not to do, weak, understaffed, under-budgeted, and poorly housed ministries will be allowed to claim emotional energy and become sources of dissension and embarrassment to the church.

**Facilitating Skills**

The word “facilitation” has a definite meaning that is all too often overlooked. Literally it means, “to make easy.” So, it is accurate to look at the skill of facilitation as the ministry of making something difficult easier to accomplish. Think of it in connection with a facility. Imagine how difficult it would be to host a meeting, experience a worship service, or lead a training session without the benefit of a physical structure.

Functioning effectively as a facilitator requires God-given attitudes and aptitudes. Leaders need to possess both the right heart and the required skills (Psalm 78:72). The prerequisite character for facilitation is the attitude of servant leadership. One’s focus must be on the needs of the group, not the brilliance of the leader. An accompanying skill set must include both the ability to ask good questions and to practice active listening. Yet many would-be leaders undermine their effectiveness in facilitation through their uneasiness with silence in the room.

Most pastoral training on a seminary level is geared toward providing church members with answers to vital questions. Pastors are used to being asked the great questions of life: why are we here, what truly matters, and what comes after this life ceases? While proclaiming truth is at the heart of the pastoral role, yet at times there is a need for a leader to wear a different hat. Asking questions and allowing people to struggle with finding the answers promotes their ownership of the vitality and effectiveness of their church. However, taking this approach is a risk and requires courageous leadership. Insecure leaders are handicapped in making this shift because of their pride and/or fear. Being the “answer man” may stroke one’s ego but leave the people in an infantile and disabled condition.

While the pulpit is extremely important in a transitional process, great care must be taken to not rely exclusively on one’s imagined ability to “speak things into existence,” a prerogative reserved to God alone. Transitional pastors must facilitate change as a shepherd, guiding the church along a transformational pathway.

In its application to the transitional pastor process, facilitation must be exercised in two vital dimensions. First, a transitional pastor must lead a group of people through a process. In addition, he is facilitating multiple meetings as a part of guiding the church through the stages of transition. Both dimensions must be considered.

1. Facilitation of the Process

The attitudes for shepherding a process would be multiple in nature: humility, a belief in the collective brilliance of a group over mere individuals, respect of the value brought by each person, and a realistic view of the impotence of leaders to speak things into existence. Skills needed in this endeavor include the capacity to honor and balance the priorities of both relationship and task, the ability to plan and lead a meeting, ability to build consensus along with seeing the big picture while simultaneously managing details.

There is a second “micro-skill” that is a part of facilitation, making the group’s thinking visible. Sometimes you will hear someone say to someone else, “I'm just not tracking with you.” Truer words couldn't be said. Every person's thinking follows a particular path, but all of them are different. All of this takes place underneath the surface, invisible to others.

Conversations in groups typically start and stop at conclusion. On a particular subject or issue, we offer our conclusions about it. When my conclusion differs from yours, we are set up for conflict. The only way to solve the problem in a way that honors both the issue and the relationship with the other person is to backtrack and trace the reasoning process that brought each of us to that conclusion.

The thinking process goes like this: (1) We begin the pool of information and data available to us. (2) We choose some data and neglect other parts. (3) We filter it through our experience and add meaning to it. (4) We make assumptions on the meaning we ascribe to it. (5) We draw conclusions based on those assumptions and information. And then of course, every person acts based on those conclusions.

It is arrogant to refuse to make our thinking visible, insisting that our conclusion is the final word. Team members must be led through this process, and as they share it with others, the possibility for collaboration emerges. When we value the collective I.Q. of the group, then we are willing to make our own thinking visible so that others can speak into and positively shape our process.

2. Facilitation of a Meeting

While all the “heart” and “hands” needed to facilitate a process are also required for managing meetings, additional skills and character traits are needed. As a matter of conviction, an effective facilitator must value diversity while also being aware of the dangers it poses. The skill of leading a brainstorming session and generating a multiplicity of ideas is a must for effective meetings. Good facilitators know how to help people make their thinking visible as well as to leverage it in building consensus among a group. Once again, the ability to ask great questions, not just give answers, is paramount. Most helpful meetings begin with a carefully planned agenda.

There are always those in a group who will speak and discuss more freely than others. Effective facilitators do not allow just a few people to dominate the conversation. Instead, while acknowledging and affirming those who are quick to speak, they draw thoughts and insights out of the quiet ones (Proverbs 20:5).

Regarding both a process and a meeting, the other required skills of a transitional pastor come into play in connection with facilitation. Facilitation is a subset of leadership practice in general and thus to improve the latter is to improve the former. The ability to honor relationships while simultaneously working on a goal necessitates one’s caring skills. Listening is crucial in every aspect. At every point along the way a leader must be able to discern what is really going on during the interactions between participants, as well as sensing the connection between past and present events.

3. Facilitation of Consensus

To achieve consensus, the transitional pastor must clearly understand what it is exactly. It is not majority rule. It is not complete and unanimous agreement. And it is not when everyone is totally satisfied. However, consensus can be described as the following: every team member has been heard and every team member is ready to accept a particular decision by the group and to move forward. Without the ability to build consensus, a leader will find how the presence of opposing views can bring the process to a standstill.

An excellent tool is the “Secret of Five-Finger Consensus.” Consensus can be defined as “I can live with it, and I will support it.” The facilitator asks each group member to hold up between one and five fingers indicating the degree of support that person has for the recommendation or idea that is on the table:

5—I strongly agree.

4—I agree.

3—I can see pluses and minuses, but I am willing to go along with the group.

2—I disagree.

1—I strongly disagree, and I can’t support.

The facilitator needs to understand three levels of disagreement.

Level 1: The people involved lack shared information. – Those disagreeing have not clearly heard or understood each other’s alternative and the reasons for supporting it. These disagreements are often a result of assumed understanding of what the other person is saying or meaning. Once all those involved identify the unshared information, the disagreement is resolved.

Level 2: The people involved have different values or experiences. – Those disagreeing have fully heard and understood one another’s alternatives. However, they have different experiences or hold different values that result in their preferring one alternative over another. Unlike a Level 1 disagreement, once all those involved identify the unshared experience or value, they are just startingto resolve the disagreement.

Level 3: Outside forces are affecting the disagreement. – These are the most difficult disagreements to resolve. Because the disagreement is based on factors that don’t relate to the alternatives being considered, resolution cannot be achieved by discussing them. A Level 3 disagreement is based on personality, past histories, or other outside factors.

(See *The Secrets of Facilitation* by Michael Wilkinson, pages 205-235, for a more detailed description of how to do lead a group to make a consensus decision.)

**Caring Skills**

Even in a numerically small church, no one person can provide all the special-needs care of individuals and families in the church and community. An effective transitional pastor shows his love and compassion for all these people. In that sense he is a “soul-source” but does not presume to be their “sole source” of pastoral care. He knows how to be directly involved with them and to equip individuals and groups (deacons, Bible study classes, and special ministry teams) and to involve them in caring ministries.

The compassion of Jesus saturates the biblical accounts of His life and His death. It is demonstrated many more times than it is talked about. Peter specifically wrote that we may cast all our cares on the Lord because he cares for us (1 Pet. 5:7).

At no time in a church’s life should there be words of love that are not demonstrated in compassion-driven acts of caring. That is never more important in a church than in the disrupted period between pastors. Both the direct pastoral care ministry of the transitional pastor and hisdirected pastoral care ministry are vital to the health of the church from his first day of service until the last.

Direct pastoral care is responding to personal needs with personal contact or pulpit ministry. Directed pastoral care is responding to personal needs by equipping and leading others to minister through personal contacts and as teachers and leaders of groups in the church. In this way a transitional pastor demonstrates compassion by providing pastoral care beyond the resources of his limited time and energy.

1. Direct Pastoral Care: Counseling People through the Process of Change

As churches move through the stages of transition, impending change will become evident. That will be encouraging to some and threatening to others. Traditional ways of doing things provide a comfort zone of familiarity requiring little new learning or adjustment. For many it’s just easier to keep the same old saggy, lumpy mattress than to adjust to scientifically improved ones that respond to the needs of their skeletal systems. Some are being dragged by their occupations from the familiar to challenges. “Surely,” they plead, “the church can be a place that doesn’t take from us everything that is familiar.”

Personal counseling is needed by some to deal with the impact change will have on their lives. Transitional pastors should not lead in making major changes in the church without also scheduling time for personal counseling with those who need help and bringing the truth of Scripture to bear on the circumstances of change.

Preaching is an effective tool of pastoral care through which people may get help with both understandings and attitudes.

* The New Testament contains the account of drastic change in a religious system with which Jews were very familiar and comfortable. Review the accounts in the four Gospels and the Epistles to see how pervasive and impacting the changes were to those who followed the promised Messiah.
* Consider the “you have heard it said, but I say unto you” passages and the “except a man lay down his life” passages. Through gracious and informative preaching many people may receive answers to important questions and the emotional support needed to adjust to change. The Bible is rich with truth and inspiration all people need in managing change in a rapid-change society.

There are three basic reasons why church members resist change.

*First*, *people resist change because it threatens to move them outside their comfort zones*.Theyneed help in understanding the religious-system changes Jesus brought to the lives of His disciples and all those who came to believe Him and serve Him.

We are not left alone in managing the change. Jesus assured His disciples the coming Holy Spirit would help them face the fear of the unknown and help them to do things they had never done before. Review John 15:26 and 16:5-16. See the challenge to change in Acts 1:8 and the first fruit of change in Acts 2. The message is that the Holy Spirit introduces change to our lives, walks with (comforts) us through change, and celebrates with us the growth that change produces.

*Second,* *people resist change because they fear the loss of power, influence, or control in the church*.Theyneed help in understanding “there’s plenty good power in my Father’s kingdom, there’s power enough for you, there’s power enough for me, there’s power enough for all.” One person does not have to give up power for another person to have power. He may need to give up an office, but he does not have to give up significance unless he is using the office as a base for self-assertion, a base for controlling decision making, or a base for manipulating others.

*Third,* *people may resist change because they do not intellectually agree that change is improvement****.*** Information is powerful. If the process of proposing and approving change was not easy to understand or time to study it and comprehend its strength not adequate, then better presentation of the rationale, without coercion or disrespect for those who do not agree, will help some accept it and support it.

In personal counseling review the rationale, invite questions, and respond to the questions with information and without emotional pressure. Encourage careful consideration of the rationale. If agreement is not expressed, encourage support based on the actions of the majority with confidence that the experience of change will lead to greater understanding and approval as the process unfolds.

2. Direct Pastoral Care: Assisting Families through Life Transitions

The amount of time a transitional pastor will give to weddings and funerals should be clear in the Covenant of Relationship. Bi-vocational or part-time transitional pastors will not be available to respond to all needs, especially those for which arrangements could not be made in advance. An important factor is consistency: don’t respond selectively; don’t be available to prominent families without also being available to those less prominent in the church and community. Another important factor is communication. Use the telephone and/or written communication to let members know you care. When you can arrange to do so, visit them to personally extend your blessings.

Your personal contact also is a great encouragement at the time of the birth of babies into the families of church members. Visit when you can. Even if you can’t visit the newborn and parents for several days, contact them to know if all is well and to share your joy with them.

Because transitional pastors have much experience in ministering at weddings and funerals, skill development information for these ministries is not provided in this document.

3. Directed Pastoral Care

Many churches have equipped deacons, Bible study teachers, and others with skills for use in ministering to people with special needs. They have highlighted this ministry as an important part of all teaching, training, and ministry groups. Care has become a characteristic of the church. Transitional pastors who minister in such churches can use the structures and the prepared people to assure that people will not be neglected even if the transitional pastor is not available as much as their pastor was.

If this is not the case where you serve, arrange a meeting with deacon officers and a meeting with Sunday School leadership for exploring the ways those organizations may involve people in effectively caring for those who are sick, shut-in, and distressed. The primary concern is to reduce the possibility that people needing attention and care may not receive it.

From the pulpit and through print media inform the church that, when it comes to pastoral care, the pastor is not the church. The pastor represents the church in this ministry but cannot assume the burden of being the only manifestation of the love of the church for its people. A Bible study teacher can minister as lovingly to a person in need as when the pastor does it personally.

In many churches, deacons or an assigned staff member assume responsibility for benevolence ministry. Check with them to determine the policies that guide their decisions to be informed when people ask you about how people in need receive help.

The transitional pastor period in a church is a good opportunity to train the congregation that the evidence of care is not so much in who provides it as in the fact that care is provided. But the pastor must relate to people in ways that lead them to know he really cares about them.

**Proclaiming Skills**

Preaching the Word as a transitional pastor should inform, inspire, and equip the church for moving effectively through the stages of transition. While preaching is the most public expression of pastoral proclamation; teaching, personal evangelism, and writing are other important ways to proclaim the truth and call for action.

1. Through Preaching

The pulpit and preaching provide transitional pastors their greatest visibility and opportunity to impact the life of the church. Transitional pastors must take preaching as seriously as Paul did when he instructed his young protégé Timothy: “Preach the word, be ready in season and out of season; rebuke, correct, and encourage with great patience and teaching” (2 Tim. 4:2).

Sermons need to be relevant and fresh in the heart of the preacher. Warmed-over messages prepared for other times and places may not adequately address here-and-now issues. Sermons prepared years ago without thorough review and contemporary adaptations, rarely respond adequately to the here-and-now challenges facing transitional pastors. Following the recommended messages during the stages of transition will guide much of the transitional pastor’s study time and pulpit time. Several preaching themes requiring multiple sermons are recommended in the Sample Sequence of Process (pages 27-28).

Negatively, the transitional pastor is not in the church to show how great a communicator he may be, nor is he called to this pulpit to “straighten out” the church. In general, he is to “feed the flock.” He does this as he speaks to issues of specific need without addressing specific individuals, focuses on life situations, and draws the people closer to God as an encourager and healer. His messages will be biblical and expository. The transitional pastor is in a unique position through his pulpit ministry to assist the church to understand and participate in the stages of transition. He can inform, challenge, call to commitment, and address positive change.

To nurture churches and reach people for Christ through preaching, every new opportunity is like a new day. While retaining all that you have learned and all the ideas you have compiled in previous preparations for preaching, don’t depend so much on the work of the past that you fail to carefully prepare for the opportunities of the present.

2. Through Effective Invitations

Do not hesitate to give a positive invitation at the end of the sermon. The entire message calls for decision in one way or another. It also gives the hearers the opportunity to reflect on the need and ability to make commitment both to Christ and to the church.

When Jesus began His ministry, He said, “Follow Me, … and I will make you fish for people” (Mark 1:17). At the end of His ministry, Jesus said, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations…. I am with you always” (Matthew 28:19–20).

Since Jesus began His ministry and closed His ministry with these divine imperatives, it is the responsibility of every Christian to win the lost. A great opportunity to fulfill this commission is giving a powerful invitation at the climax of each service to lead people to the most defining moment of their life, the moment they receive Christ as Lord and Savior.

Consider these six vital requirements in extending a great invitation.

1. A great invitation begins with *conviction*. We must be absolutely convinced that Jesus is not a way of salvation, not the best way of salvation, but the only way of salvation (John 14:6).
2. A great invitation burns with *compassion*. We must look on the congregation not as prospects but as persons dearly loved by Christ and desperately in need of Him (Romans 9:2–3).
3. A great invitation is bold because of *consecration*. Any tolerated sin in our lives hinders our anointing in reaching the lost in the invitation (Romans 12:1–2).
4. A great invitation is beautiful in *clarity*. Since the lost might not understand Baptist jargon, we must be very clear in what we are asking them to do (John 3:16).
5. A great invitation is backed by *counselors*. Since this is the defining moment of a person’s entire life, we need to make sure it counts. Each person needs an individual counselor in a private place to thoroughly clarify the decision they are making. This cannot be accomplished by taking three minutes to fill out a card on the front pew. The counselors must be thoroughly trained so that this moment will not be lost (2 Corinthians 5:18–20).
6. A great invitation is bathed in *celebration*. Since this is the most significant moment of a person’s life, we must make sure that they and the entire church recognize this as we publicly celebrate, along with the angels in heaven, the decision that has been made (Luke 15:7).

3. Through Personal Witnessing

Churches should not have to put personal soul winning in a pastor’s job description; it is already in the pastor’s life description. It is in every Christian’s life description. A church cannot pay enough salary to a pastor to make him a soul winner if he is not already one.

**Listening Skills**

Listening prayerfully, patiently, and purposefully to people who see events differently, who want different things for the church, and who are at different levels of spiritual maturity is an affirming gift to others and a resource God can use in sharpening the pastor’s discernment of truth. Churches don’t exist in vacuums but in communities. Church celebrations and church conflicts are soon known in the community outside the church. Satan is happy when news of conflict filters through the community faster than news of celebration. Prayerfully listening to people outside the church can help in discerning the true impact of the church on the community.

Consider the following four types of listening.

* Inactive listening — This is the kind of listening you want to avoid. It is inefficient and unproductive. You hear only the words. They go in one ear and out the other.
* Selective listening — This kind of listening is probably the most common. It is when you hear only what you want to hear. You filter the message. Like inactive listening, it is also inefficient and unproductive.
* Active listening — This is when you make a conscious effort not only to hear the words but also to listen for the complete message the speaker is sending. It takes into consideration the intent and the nonverbal communication of the speaker. Active listening also uses empathy and is nonjudgmental.
* Reflective listening — Like active listening, reflective listening takes in the whole message. It is particularly important if you are dealing with a complicated issue or resolving a conflict. Reflective listening is used to clarify what is being said and to convey mutual understanding. The listener often asks the speaker questions to help clarify the message.

Communication is a challenging process. In many ways it is amazing that we can communicate with each other at all. A person puts his or her own thoughts, feelings, and experiences into words, vocal communication, and body language and sends his message across to the other person. The difficulty in communicating is that the other person has his or her own thoughts, feelings, and experiences. These act as a filter to what is heard and seen coming from the other person. Thus, the receiver is tempted to assume that he or she knows exactly what the other person desires to communicate. However, since that is not the case at all, the receiver must resist the temptation of that assumption. The effective listener will use listening skills and listening principles in the response. The original speaker will then have the opportunity to correct the receiver if he or she has not completely understood. The goal of good communication is to facilitate this clear understanding.

**Relating Skills**

The ability to work with people who are different in spiritual maturity, values, personalities, and life experiences requires good relational skills. People are gracious, mean-spirited, hurting, lonely, greedy, loving, generous, happy, and sad. All these people need the respect and encouragement of a transitional pastor. One person may be most or all of these over a period of time. Transitional pastors must have a healthy self-esteem and good interpersonal skills to minister to all the people God has put in their care.

The church is not wood or brick and mortar. The church is not organizations and meetings. The church is people, and the most critical issue of the church is relationships.

Bring all you learned about listening to the skill of relating. Listening demonstrates respect and humility. Respecting others enough to listen actively and reflectively affirms their worth and enhances their self-esteem, two qualities of good team members. Acknowledging that you are still learning and want to learn from them helps them relate to you not just as an authority figure but also as a fellow pilgrim on the journey of faith.

Transitional pastors have the opportunity to model good relationships inspired by the example of Jesus and empowered by the Holy Spirit. All churches need pastors and others who serve as models of healthy, nurturing relationships. A church is a body of many parts. How these parts relate to each other determines the health and productivity of the body. How the transitional pastor relatesto all parts of the body, weak parts and strong parts, diseased parts and healthy parts, may serve as the tuning fork by which the church discovers its harmony or discord.

The incarnation of Jesus was God’s demonstration of how much He cares for people, including those who reject Him and scorn His Son. In an undeniable way, He showed them His heart. He showed them divine love in human flesh. He offered them not a new religion but a new relationship, one that expresses itself in laughter and tears, in submission and sacrifice, in acceptance and rejection. The relationship flourished first in a few and then bore fruit in many. The transitional pastor is to represent and reflect Jesus in relating to people with hurts, fears, concerns, opinions, and insights. You set the tone and teach by your example as you help them learn to live like Jesus.

**Conflict Resolution Skills**

We all wish it were not so but wishing will not make it “not so.” The serpent of the Garden of Eden is the serpent of today’s churches. Satan’s attack on church fellowship increases as the day when he is cast eternally into hell grows nearer. The conflict that characterizes social systems throughout the world infiltrates churches. Paul’s epistles addressed churches in conflict, especially the Corinthian church. He appealed to the churches to live out the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Still there was conflict. Centuries later, there is conflict in churches; the redeemed are not yet perfected.

Many churches will employ transitional pastors because the church has become entangled in conflict requiring third-party assistance to clarify the conflict issues and take the steps necessary to resolving the conflict.Conflict resolution is supported through the efforts of employing good listening, relating, leading, proclaiming, and caring skills. Other specific skills, such as diagnosing, prescribing, negotiating/mediating, and affirming/celebrating, are required in leadership actions that produce a resolution of conflict.

How does the transitional pastor help churches in conflict? What is your role? Are there principles and actions that help churches confront the conflict in the spirit of Christ and come to work together as the forgiving and forgiven children of God?

You will find two resources especially helpful for dealing with conflict: *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict* by Ken Sande and *The Peacemaking Pastor* by Albert Poirier.

**Definition of Conflict**

Dictionary: “The opposition or simultaneous functioning of mutually exclusive impulses, desires, or tendencies.”

Speed Leas: “Conflict happens when two pieces of matter try to occupy the same space at the same time.”

Larry McSwain: “Conflict is a situation in which two or more human beings desire goals which they perceive as being attainable by one or the other but not by both.”

Composite: “Conflict is the tension that exists because of real or perceived differences over resolving issues or problems.”

**New Testament Biblical Examples**

* Religious traditionalism versus Christ (John 8:1-11)
* Struggle of self-interest versus servanthood (Mark 10:35-45)
* Diversity in membership, prejudice (Acts 6:1-3)
* Partners in ministry split when they couldn’t agree (Acts 15:36-40)
* Personal and spiritual immaturity (1 Corinthians 3:1-3)
* Church was full of cliques (1 Corinthians 1:10-12; 11:17-22)
* Individual response to issues, values (Galatians 2:11-12)
* Prominent women couldn’t get along (Philippians 4:2-3)
* People treated rich believers better than poor believers (James 2:1-9)
* Self-will and rebellious spirit (James 4:1-3)

# Patterns of Conflict

Ongoing conflict – The issue continues over time.

Isolated conflict – There are several distinct and separate issues over time.

Examples: Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15); Paul and Peter (Galatians 2)

**Biblical Principles**

**Ken Sande**

* Know what is worth fighting over. (Proverbs 19:11)
* Know what part you contribute to the issues. (Matthew 7:3-5)
* Practice mercy and grace in your relationships and actions. (Galatians 6:1)
* Practice Christian communication. (Ephesians 4:15)
* Practice Matthew 18.
* Develop a forgiving spirit. (Colossians 3:12-14)
* Show an unselfish spirit toward others. (Philippians 2:4)
* Overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:21)

# Goals of Conflict Resolution

1. Make clear decisions.
2. Increase tolerance for differences.
3. Reduce aggressive behavior.
4. Reduce passive behavior.
5. Reduce manipulative behavior

# Truths about Conflict

1. Conflict is inevitable.
2. Conflict is neutral.
3. We need to confront a conflict as soon as possible rather than denying or ignoring it.
4. You cannot have healthy change without conflict.
5. If you don’t manage the rate of change appropriately, you will produce destructive conflict.
6. The pastor’s leadership style is a key factor in whether a conflict is constructive or destructive.
7. God is notthe author of chaos but the provider of qualities that lead to peace.
8. Prior unresolved church conflict exists as a key ingredient in most current church conflict situations.
9. When people grow spiritually and emotionally, they are less likely to be the initiator of destructive conflict.
10. We need to pray more and talk less about issues for church approval. We should not seek an answer from our human reason but from the revelation of God’s will.

### Causes of Friction

### Stress

### Confusion

### Power

### Fact or rate of change

### Communication difficulties

### Congregational differences

### Unmet needs within the congregation

### Fear

### Worldview

### Decision-making style

### 7 Rules for Keeping Conflict Healthy

### Conflict can be healthy and useful for our church.

### Conflict is neither negative nor positive – it is managed or mismanaged.

### Resolutions for quick agreement are worse than those worked out over time.

### Manage conflict fairly: Take one issue at a time and explore all dimensions of the problem.

### Work in an agreed upon setting.

### Use appropriate behavior: no name calling, no mind reading, and no information from unnamed sources.

### Know who or what issue is fueling the conflict so you can respond appropriately.

### Thought-Provoking Questions

### What’s the difference between offering a dissenting opinion and being divisive?

### What’s the biblical definition of submission?

### What makes it difficult for us to submit to one another?

### How can we lovingly challenge leaders who feed a divisive spirit?

### When have you seen a quick resolution to a conflict, only to find the resolution was inadequate?

**Preparation for Confronting a Difficult Person**

♦ Pray. This prepares us spiritually.

♦ Write it out. This prepares us mentally.

♦ Rehearse it. This prepares us emotionally.

♦ Feed self-worth. This prepares us psychologically.

♦ Anticipate response. This prepares us decisively.

♦ Make an appointment. This prepares us ethically.

♦ Decide next plan of action. This prepares us futuristically.

♦ Keep accurate records. This prepares us authentically.

♦ Pray some more. This prepares us redemptively.

**Levels of Conflict**

Level One: Problem to Solve

Real disagreement: conflicting goals, values, needs; problem oriented rather than person oriented

Level Two: Disagreement

Real disagreement: mixing of personalities and issues; problem cannot be clearly defined; beginning of distrust and personalizing the problem

Level Three: Contest

Begin the dynamics of win/lose: personal attacks; formation of factions or sides; distortion of the problem

Level Four: Fight/Flight

Winning: means getting rid of the other person or persons; breaking the relationship by leaving or getting others to leave

Level Five: Intractable

No longer clear understanding of issue: personalities have become the issue; the conflict is now unmanageable; it focuses on the elimination and/or the destruction of the other

**Issues Worth Battling Over**

* Biblical fidelity. Don’t discount the teachings of Christ.
* Living out what we believe. Biblical teaching must affect our daily lives.
* Our church’s unity. All members must support this, divisiveness is sin.
* Verbal integrity. Remain truthful in confrontation or conflict.

**Conflict Acrostic**

**C** alm down; keep a cool head.

**O** pen your mind; try to understand opposing viewpoints.

**N** ever resort to name calling in personal insults.

**F** ight fair.

**L** ook to the Scriptures for guidance.

**I** nvite others who can shed light on the discussion.

**C** onsider solutions that all parties can accept.

**T** rust the Lord to help you implement solutions.

**THE TRANSITIONAL PASTOR COVENANT OF RELATIONSHIP**

**Spiritual Preparation**

The role of the transitional pastor is not an easy task. If this important time is to be successful, prepare yourself spiritually. Here are some suggestions to consider before you take a transitional pastorate.

1. Take several days to pray asking God if He is calling you to this place of service.

Too many of us jump into areas that require skills that we do not possess. For instance, you may be called to a conflicted church that will require a lot of time and energy calming groups of people before you can accomplish any of the tasks of the transitional pastor ministry. If that is not your strength, you will quickly find yourself worn out and frustrated. If the Lord is not calling you to the church, please don’t take the transitional pastorate. This may be a given, but the point is to only go to those places where God is leading you with a clear mind and a genuine heart.

2. Ask the Lord to give you a clear picture of the needs of the church.

Since this is not a program, you must have a clear picture of what is needed in that specific church before taking the pastorate.

3. Spend a couple of weeks alone with the Lord, charging your spiritual batteries before you begin as transitional pastor.

You might want to take a few days of spiritual retreat and restful vacation. It is important that your approach the time with the church with a fully charged spiritual battery.

4. Beware of your need to “fix” the church.

This ministry is not a “fix it” ministry. Over responsibility is a curse that many pastors must deal with. We constantly think that we have the solution for every church’s problem. Many have developed a “messiah” mentality and believe they have all the answers for a church’s problem. This ministry requires you to rely on the Holy Spirit and turn the people of the church toward that power to reach their respective communities for Christ.

5. Allow God to do the work.

It is your responsibility to turn the people of the church toward the Lord during this time of transition. If you get ahead of the Lord, you will only lead the church to do what you can do. If you allow God to work in the lives of the leaders and members of the church, more will be done in the short time you are with them than you or any other person could possibly accomplish.

1. Focus on the role of the Holy Spirit.

Many stories have been shared during this transitional pastor ministry that testify to the work of the Holy Spirit in this process. If a transitional pastor will go into the church with a biblically sound concept of the work of the Holy Spirit, more will be accomplished than any program could possibly do. Notice from Acts 2 how the Holy Spirit can work in the life of the people of God.

(1) The people were together in one place (v. 1).

Gatherings are important. We Baptists have a lot of meetings. You may have heard the saying, “Politicians build roads, and Baptists wear them out going to meetings!” We certainly don’t want to neglect the assembling of ourselves together, but that’s not what the writer is recording here. The word he used is interpreted; *together, together.* The 120 people in the upper room that day were together, together. They were of one heart and mind and were ready to receive whatever the Lord had for them. This includes the concepts of unity and oneness. Please don’t read that as sameness. They were unique individuals, but corporately they deferred to one another so that the body would be together, together.

The transitional pastor must be very aware of the areas where the church he is serving is not together and ask the Lord to break down those barriers and strongholds. As stated earlier, this is not the responsibility of the transitional pastor; it is the responsibility of the Holy Spirit. Consecrated private and corporate prayer is essential in this work.

(2) The place was filled (v. 2).

The word is *replete.* That means that every bit of the place was filled to capacity. Because the people were open to whatever the Lord had for them, He filled them with His Holy Spirit to the maximum. They were open to change and to the things that God desired for them, so the Holy Spirit filled them and the place where they were meeting.

We have all been in those times in leadership when there was a filling of the Holy Spirit in the church. The air was electric, and it seemed that nothing could stop the flow of the work. The lost were being saved, and the broken were finding Christ. The transitional pastor must pray for this sort of filling to do the work that is set before him. He himself must walk with the Lord daily to lead the church toward the filling of the Holy Spirit.

(3) There was a purpose (v. 3-4).

Tongues of fire were given to those gathered. They were able to speak the languages of those outside the upper room for the purpose of proclaiming the Gospel. This outpouring of the Holy Spirit was never repeated in Scripture. It was a one-time event that had a purpose. The Holy Spirit desires to fill God’s people so that they can accomplish the task that is before them.

Every church in transition will have certain things that need to be done before the next pastor arrives. Some of those tasks will seem impossible. They may be something that the church has attempted for years or decades. As the Transitional Pastor discerns those needs, he must rely on the Holy Spirit to accomplish those things according to His will.

The Process of Engagement

It is as important that the transitional pastor be thorough in determining where his ministry can be most effective as it is for a church to determine who they believe can best serve the church. Accepting the role of transitional pastor based on convenience, church prominence, or financial benefits without carefully considering how one’s experience, spiritual gifts, and personal strengths match the needs of the church serves as a predictor of difficult times, perhaps failure.

The following actions take place before you begin serving the church.

1. If you have been contacted by a church seeking a transitional pastor and are free to pursue the possibility, request from the church a copy of the following reports:

* The church’s history in whatever form it is available (book, anniversary programs, etc.), including the beginning and ending dates for the last five pastors
* The organizational structure of the church, including the names and length of tenure of church staff members
* Attendance in worship services and Sunday School for the past year
* A statement of circumstances that affected the prior pastor’s departure from the church

1. Request from the associational office or the state convention office a copy of five recent Annual Church Profiles. Do not take lightly the information on these profiles. They will tell you much about the church, its leaders, and some existing circumstances affecting the church.
2. Prepare a list of questions you will ask members of the transitional pastor search committee and others in the interview process. Consider some questions like the following (some for the committee and others for other influential church members):

* How long has each of you lived in this community (town, city)?
* During what decade did you become a member of this church?
* How many other members of your family are members of this church?
* How many students or adult members of your family are not members of this church?
* What do you consider to be the church’s major strength?
* What do you consider to be the church’s major weakness?
* In the past five years, what event or activity of the church gave you the most satisfaction?
* What event or activity gave you the most disappointment?
* What about this church influences people to join the church?
* What about this church influences people not to join the church?
* What about this church influences members to leave the church and join another church in the area?
* What about this church influences members to become inactive members?
* What do you understand to be the reason the former pastor left the church?
* How do you classify your relationship with the most recent pastor? (friend/close friend/uncomfortable/distant/adversarial)
* What do you understand to be the work of a transitional pastor?
* How long should it take this church to get another pastor?
* If I should come to this church as transitional pastor, what would be my greatest challenge?
* What would be my greatest source of enjoyment?
* What is the issue the church most needs to focus on?
* Please write the names of three members who most influence the church’s decisions then pass the paper to me.

4. If the committee requests an interview, ask that the schedule include time for you to interview the committee and, separately, four or five other members who impact the decision-making processes of the church. If logistics make an on-location interview impractical, request the committee to arrange for a telephone or video conference call with the committee and the other members separately.

5. If the previous interview process provided opportunity to meet with only the transitional pastor search committee, request that time be provided to meet with some or all the following:

* persons not on the search committee who strongly influence church decision making
* two or three currently active members with the longest tenure in the church
* two or three members who joined the church in the past six months
* two or three high school student members
* church staff members, including the building superintendent or custodian
* one pastor with at least five years’ tenure in a neighboring church

Requesting these interviews tells the search committee you desire to be thorough and patient in making this decision. If you and the church enter into a transitional pastor – church relationship, you will invest huge amounts of mental, emotional, and physical energy in the relationship and you want to assure the greatest possibility of effectiveness. Many churches need transitional pastors. You need to be a good steward of the experiences and ministry gifts God has given you.

6. If invited to visit the church and preach in one of its services, prayerfully review the information gained and the feelings experienced in contacts with church members. Evaluate the potential for effectively using your ministry gifts in this church at this time. If the evaluation up to this point is positive, schedule a time to visit the church and inform the committee of the contacts you would like to have with individuals and groups while in the church community.

7. If the church visit results in a positive response from the transitional pastor search committee and you feel accepting this church challenge would be good stewardship of your ministry resources, ask the search committee to draft a covenant of relationship. Provide each committee member a copy of the Sample Covenant of Relationship between the Church and the Transitional Pastor (pages 70-72) to use as a starter in preparing the Covenant to be proposed for approval by the church*.* When their draft is completed, it should be sent to you for your input. Refinement of the draft continues until mutual agreement is reached to recommend action by the church based on the covenant of relationship.

**The Covenant of Relationship**

The statement of desired relationships between a church and a transitional pastor is best referred to as a *covenant* instead of a *contract*. Churches enter into legally binding contracts with secular organizations and become liable to courts of law if contracts are violated. Churches enter into covenants when dealing with business within the church, agreements that should never be enforced in courts of law. This concept identifies the church with the constraints of new covenant grace rather than the controls of law.

Covenants are statements of solemn agreements within a community of faith expressing commitments and responsibilities between two or more parties. Covenant language abounds in the story of God’s relationship with His people.

The purpose of a covenant of relationship is to assure common understanding of the role, relationships, tenure expectations, and financial provisions related to the transitional pastor. A covenant of relationship should be written by the group representing the church in the search process, in consultation with the prospective transitional pastor, and approved by the transitional pastor before presentation to the church for approval.

Covenant agreements vary depending on where the transitional pastor lives, whether the transitional pastor is bi-vocational or fully funded, and the scope of ministry responsibilities. This may mean the covenant will exclude from pastoral responsibility duties like officiating at weddings and funerals or others normally handled by a pastor. The church and the potential transitional pastor need to be honest in dealing with expectations on behalf of both parties. The covenant should clearly address essential areas but not be cluttered with unnecessary detail.

A covenant of relationship expresses what the relationship requires to meet the needs of the employer and the employee with the goal being kingdom growth and church health to the glory of Christ. Such a covenant between a church and a transitional pastor focuses on what each party brings to the relationship more than on what each party requires of the other. Such a covenant should not be entered into unless there is conviction that God has led in bringing the two parties together and that each is worthy of the confidence of the other. The following Sample Covenant of Relationship provides ideas about structuring and wording that may be adapted to express the desires in any church – transitional pastor relationship. (This may be copied for use in stimulating the committee’s thinking.)

**SAMPLE**

**COVENANT OF RELATIONSHIP**

**BETWEEN THE CHURCH AND**

**THE TRANSITIONAL PASTOR**

This Covenant between \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Church, at (address), and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (“transitional pastor”) is entered to provide clear under-standings about relationships and responsibi­lities necessary to bring glory to God through the growth of the church and the transitional pastor throughout the tenure of his ministry.

The church and the transitional pastor are pleased to enter into this covenant, effective \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (date). This covenant shall continue until a pastor called by the church has begun his ministry in the church or until health problems or other emergency conditions make it necessary for the transitional pastor to resign.

Led by the Spirit of God, the transitional pastor agrees to the following:

* Seek the mind of Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in all things.
* Be a person of integrity in his family, the church, and the community.
* Be loving and gracious to all.
* Be diligent in work according to the work schedule shared with the church.
* Use his ministry gifts, knowledge, and wisdom to glorify Christ through the church.
* Provide spiritual leadership to the church.
* Form a Transition Team for working through the transitional process.
* Lead the church through the stages of transition:

1. View the church’s history through the eyes of Christ.

2. Assess the church’s current reality.

3. Affirm biblical principles for church health.

4. Focus on kingdom results.

5. Establish church practice.

6. Refocus the church around mission.

7. Find a pastor to lead in fulfilling God’s future for the church.

8. Help the pastor get a good start in the church and community.

* Preach to instruct, inspire, and enable the church through transition.
* Coordinate baptismal services; officiate weddings and funerals; or delegate responsibility, as needed and available.
* Resolve conflict to produce healthy, productive relationships in the church.
* Lead the church staff and delegate responsibilities to staff members and church leaders.
* Lead the Church Leadership Team (Church Council) in its tasks.
* Counsel other church leaders and ministry teams about their work.
* Evangelize the lost through preaching and personally as a disciple of Jesus Christ.
* Care for people with special needs and lead others to be involved in caring ministries.
* Respect the ministry gifts of church members and encourage their growth and involvement in the life of the church.
* Train the Pastor Search Committee and assist the committee as a process consultant.
* Be unavailable for a call to the office of pastor.
* Represent the church in community and denominational activities.

Led by the Spirit of God, the church agrees to the following:

* Be loving and gracious to the transitional pastor and his family.
* Pray for spiritual power in his life and work.
* Respectfully relate to him as God’s anointed leader for this task.
* Support his leadership with active participation in the church’s ministries.
* Talk with him about personal concerns instead of talking about him to others.
* Provide the resources for doing the work to which he is committed.
* Provide a salary and benefits commensurate with the duties of his office.
* Free him to do the work for which he is called as other church leaders and members fulfill their responsibilities.
* Follow his leadership in forming a Transition Team.
* Follow his leadership in conducting a Church Memories Workshop.

Work Schedule

Inasmuch as the transitional pastor has responsibilities that cannot be measured in definite schedules of time, he will give care to scheduling his time and activities to best serve the Lord and the interests of the church, allowing time for personal and family needs. He is encouraged to have two days off per week while being on call in times of crisis. If the transitional pastor is not to live in the community and serve in the position full-time, the agreed upon work schedule should be stated. The pastor and the church will be best served if the pastor establishes a schedule of office hours and informs members of the schedule. The pastor’s responsibilities require many hours of isolation for prayer, study, and preparation. Church members will regard this time as vital to the ministry and, whenever possible, arrange meetings at other times.

Salary and Benefits

The church will provide the following transitional pastor salary and benefits: These benefits should take into consideration variations in residency; amount of time the transitional pastor will commit to pastoral work (fully funded or bi-vocational); and protection benefits already being received from other sources. As a rule of thumb, the salary of the transitional pastor should be no less than the salary of the former pastor if the transitional pastor is to provide pastoral services similar to the former pastor. If the transitional pastor serves on a part-time basis the salary may be reduced proportionately. See the *Pastor Search Committee Handbook* for descriptions of a pastor’s salary, housing, benefits, and expenses.

1. Salary
2. Housing
3. Protection Benefits

Medical insurance

Disability insurance

Life insurance

Church annuity plan (10% of salary and housing)

Note: Retired or bi-vocational transitional pastors may have some or all insurance already provided and not need additional coverage.

1. Ministry Expenses

Mileage allowance

Book allowance

Costs for attending meetings

1. Vacation or Leave Time

When the duly elected representatives of the church and the transitional pastor agree on the conditions of this Covenant of Relationship, the committee will recommend that the church adopt the Covenant of Relationship and thereby call the transitional pastor.

This COVENANT OF RELATIONSHIP is entered into by:

Transitional Pastor

Authorized Church Representative

Date

**STAGE 1: View the Church’s History through the Eyes of Christ**

You, as transitional pastornot subjectively involved in the history of the church, can lead objectively in reviewing the church’s history to determine both positive and negative effects the history has on the present nature and ministry of the church. You serve much as an outside consultant while bringing the trust of the congregation, spiritual discernment, and compassion for healthy and productive church life to the task. You can help the church understand the impact of church history on the present nature of the church.

1. Review *Experiencing God,* written by Henry & Richard Blackaby and Claude King and published by B&H Books in 2020. This book introduces seven realities of experiencing God, realities that “identify ways God works with a person or group to involve them in His work.” Praying through the realities provides a valuable starting point for looking at and learning from the church’s history. Consider preaching one or more sermons based on the following seven realities.

* God is always at work around you.
* God pursues a continuing love relationship with you that is real and personal.
* God invites you to become involved with Him in His work.
* God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church to reveal Himself, His purposes, and His ways.
* God’s invitation for you to work with Him always leads to a crisis of belief that requires faith and action.
* You must make major adjustments in your life to join God in what He is doing.
* You come to know God by experience as you obey Him and He accomplishes His work through you.

2. The context for looking at a church’s history is the kingdom of God. The eternal kingdom is God’s. It knows no limits, but we limit our involvement in His kingdom when our attitudes and actions do not conform to the nature of the kingdom. A message on God’s kingdom could provide valuable context for the congregation.

3. Teach the church to clarify what the Bible says about the activity of Satan in seeking to discredit Christians and blunt the church’s spiritual power. Keep the focus on God’s power.

4. John’s letters to the churches of Asia Minor recorded in Revelation 2–3 would provide a biblical basis for a series of sermons preparing church members to deal with both personal sin and corporate sin as the Holy Spirit guides them.

5. Involve the Transition Team and other members of the church in a Church Memories Workshop (4 hours). See the following pages for guidance for this workshop. The transitional pastor will serve as leader/facilitator of the workshop. The workshop will take about four hours (3:00 – 7:00 p.m. on Sunday or 8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. Saturday).

**CHURCH MEMORIES WORKSHOP**

**Reflect on the Past; Prepare for the Future**

**Introduction**

Our church’s history is yesterday, last week, last month, last year, and all the way back to the beliefs and practices of the spiritual ancestors of our church’s founders. Church history reflects the constant love and absolute power of a perfect God as well as the successes and the failures, the victories and the defeats of His imperfect followers. The history of most churches can be expressed in the theme of a televised sports program several years ago: “The joy of victory and the agony of defeat.” The ups and downs of a church’s history affect how the church perceives itself today.

Though often unconsciously, that perception affects how power and control issues are expressed in the church, how decisions are made, and how personal and group relationships flow. How a church perceives itself in light of its history influences congregational values, faith actions, and expectations of the future.

Many churches find dysfunctional characteristics in their pasts that profoundly influence their present and call for awareness and an on-guard posture.They need help in recognizing how the rulers, the authorities, the powers of this dark world, and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms have led the church to relationships and behaviors that do not reflect the spirit of Christ or advance the kingdom of God (see Eph. 6:12). Churches need help in recognizing how the spiritual forces of evil can be resisted in the power of the omnipotent God. They need guidance in recognizing and repenting of personal behavior that perpetuates the sins of the past.

Churches also find periods of dynamic spiritual health in their history that call for celebration and recovery of the characteristics that produced such spiritual health.They need help in discerning how God’s Spirit moved in the lives of church members and in the church as a body in its times of spiritual health and growth.

This Church Memories Workshop will provide an opportunity for an interactive review of our past to determine both positive and negative effects the church’s collective memory has on the present nature and ministry of the church. The focus of the process is to view the church’s history through the eyes of Christ. During the workshop participants will discover both the dynamic and the dysfunctional qualities in our church’s past. Then church members can respond appropriately with repentance and celebration. The workshop is part of helping our church turn loose of the past in order to take hold of the present and move with spiritual power and holy confidence into the future. Then we as a church can celebrate how the Lord has blessed us in the past and how He can use us in the future. This workshop will include three major parts: (1) What did Jesus say to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3? (2) What would Jesus say to our church? (3) What are the good memories and painful memories throughout the time each of us has been a part of our church? (Use this paragraph in promotion.)

**Step One: What Did Jesus Say to the Seven Churches** (Revelation 2 & 3)

Break into small groups at each table (five to seven people). Assign each table one of the seven churches. Each church may be assigned to more than one table, or a table may be assigned more than one church. Have a sheet of paper with the name of the assigned church on each table. Distribute copies of the worksheet (page 79) to all participants.

Small groups

Ask each group to choose a facilitator to guide the discussion, a recorder to prepare the group response on one of the worksheets, and a reporter to share the group’s response with the large group.

Each group will study the assigned passage and prepare a group response for its assigned church: What is the Lord’s opinion of this church—His compliment, His criticism, His command, and the consequences? State that Laodicea did not receive a compliment; Smyrna and Philadelphia did not receive criticisms or consequences.

Large group

In the large group, let the reporter from each table give a brief report on their assigned church.

Ask for the reporter from the first table assigned Ephesus to report on the compliments. Then let the second table assigned Ephesus (if there is one) add any compliments not already mentioned. Then ask the second table to report on the criticisms. The first table can then add any criticisms not already mentioned. Then ask the first table to report on the commands. The second table can add any commands not already mentioned. Then ask the second table to report on the consequences for Ephesus. The first table can add any consequences not already mentioned.

Then use the same pattern for the other six churches – Smyrna (no criticisms or consequences), Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia (no criticisms or consequences), and Laodicea (no compliment).

**Step Two: What Would Jesus Say to our Church?**

Individual responses

Give each participant a copy of the worksheet (page 80). Ask all participants to write their personal responses on the worksheet. Also give each participant two sets (different colors) of five dots for use later.

Note: Since some participants may be responsible for areas of ministry that are thought to be criticisms for your church, it may be difficult for other participants to be open and honest. Encourage openness and frankness, reminding the group to speak the truth in love. Lead the group to understand the need for confidentiality.

Small groups

When everyone has finished writing their personal responses, ask each person to take turns within the same table group to read one compliment from his or her worksheet. As they are mentioned, the recorder will write the compliments on a worksheet. Allow time in the groups for everyone to name all the compliments on their lists that have not already been mentioned.

Then use the same process of each person taking turns within the group to read the criticisms from his or her worksheet. As they are mentioned, the recorder will write the criticisms on a worksheet.

When all the responses have been given, ask each person in the small group to vote for the top three compliments. Record the votes for each compliment. Circle the three with the highest number of votes. The recorder will then write the group’s top three compliments on a tear sheet.

Then, ask each person in the small group to vote for the top three criticisms. Record the votes for each criticism. Circle the three with the highest number of votes. The recorder will then write the group’s top three criticisms on a tear sheet.

Each small group will post their two tear sheets on the wall (compliments in one area and criticisms in another area).

Large group

In the large group, the leader (transitional pastor) will read all the compliments on the tear sheets posted on the wall. Acknowledge that there are similar compliments, but it is difficult to merge them at this time because valuable wording could be lost. Do not make comments on specific compliments at this time.

Then the leader will read all the criticisms on the tear sheets posted on the wall. Acknowledge that there are similar criticisms, but it is difficult to merge them at this time because valuable wording could be lost. Do not make comments on specific criticisms at this time.

Then ask each person to vote for the five most important compliments from all the tear sheets by using one set of five dots. Place a dot beside or below the compliment without covering any of the words.

Then ask each person to vote on the top five most important criticisms from all the tear sheets by using the other set of five dots. Place a dot beside or below the criticism without covering any of the words.

Review with the large group some of the top compliments. Have a time of prayer to thank God for all the compliments.

Then review with the large group the top criticisms. Acknowledge that it is much more difficult to face the reality of criticisms of our church by Jesus. Have a time of prayer to thank God for what He has done despite these criticisms. Lead the group to pray for wisdom to strengthen the church. Acknowledge our absolute dependence on the Lord as a church.

Later gather all the tear sheets. After the workshop, the Transition Team can create a summary report identifying the top compliments and the top criticisms. The team will use this information in developing recommendations for actions later in the process.

**Step Three: Timeline and Memories**

Prior to the workshop, prepare to post on the wall a piece of butcher paper (10-15 feet long). Put the date the church began on the far left of the paper and the next decade on the right end of the paper. Write each decade someone has memories of the church. Write in the first year of each decade for which information is available information such as the resident church membership, average Sunday School attendance, number of baptisms, number of other additions, and total contributions. Write the names and dates of service of each pastor. Possibly post a picture of each pastor at the point he began his service to the church. Possibly write a few other key events in the life of the church. Provide plenty of yellow and blue post-it notes (at least 3” by 3”) at each table.

Introduction

This part of the workshop asks an important question: What are the good memories and painful memories throughout the time each of us has been a part of our church? Our memories impact the decisions we make today and the plans we have for the future. Each church has a unique past that influences the present and the future. Surfacing memories is one way to turn loose of the past in order to take hold of the present and move with spiritual power and holy confidence into the future. With the Holy Spirit’s guidance, this exercise may be the most powerful part of the workshop.

Good Memories

Ask everyone in the group to use the yellow post-it notes to write their good memories of the church and the approximate year of that memory. These are anonymous, so remind them not to write their names on the post-it notes. Each person will write one memory per post-it note. Good memories may include (1) people – such as a pastor or staff member, Sunday School teacher, or other church member; (2) events – such as your baptism, baptism of a child, your wedding, the date you joined the church, a specific church service that had life-changing implications, a significant revival, or a new building; and (3) ministries – such as a year of many baptisms, a Sunday School class, choir, a discipleship study, the year you began serving in a ministry role, or the year you made a commitment to tithe. (Have this list as a handout on each table.)

Ask the participants to post their good memories on the appropriate decade on the timeline sheet on the wall. When all good memories have been posted, the leader will read some of them aloud and invite additional comments. Also, people will be able to read these at a break or after the workshop. Lead a time of celebration (including a song and prayer) for these blessings.

Painful Memories

Ask everyone in the group to use the blue post-it notes to write their painful memories of the church and the approximate year of that memory. These are anonymous, so remind them not to write their names on the post-it notes. Each person will write one memory per post-it note. Painful memories may include (1) people – such as the death of a loved church member, departure of a pastor or staff member; (2) events – such as the funeral of a family member, a major church conflict, members leaving the church; and (3) ministries – such as the discontinuation or reduction of a meaningful ministry. (Have this list as a handout on each table.) Remind the group to be tactful as they write in generalities rather than specific details. The purpose is to be constructive not hurtful. These will not be read aloud.

Ask the participants to post their painful memories on the appropriate decade on the timeline sheet on the wall. When all painful memories have been posted, the leader will comment on the clusters of painful memories and lead a time of prayerful confession. Ask the Lord to remove any bitterness or bad feelings that remain. After the prayer, collect all the blue post-it notes, and place them on a cross that has been provided as a symbol of giving these painful memories to the Lord. Use this as a cathartic moment to help people move forward in faith leaving the painful memories behind. Another option is to shred them to symbolize that we will no longer allow these painful memories to drag us down.

**Closing**

Form a circle around the room holding hands. Close with sentence prayers, allowing all members to voice thanksgiving for what the church has meant in their lives.

**WHAT DID JESUS SAY TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES?**

Ephesus (Rev. 2:1-7), Smyrna (Rev. 2:8-11), Pergamum (Rev. 2:12-17),

Thyatira (Rev. 2:18-29), Sardis (Rev. 3:1-6), Philadelphia (Rev. 3:7-13),

Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-22)

**What did Jesus say to the church in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_?**

**Compliments** – “I know your works….” (none for Laodicea)

**Criticisms** – “But I have this against you….” (none for Smyrna and Philadelphia)

**Commands** – “Therefore, you must….”

**Consequences –** “If you do not….” (none for Smyrna and Philadelphia)

**WHAT WOULD JESUS SAY TO OUR CHURCH?**

**Compliments** – “I know your works….” (What would Jesus say that our church does well? How has God uniquely gifted us as a body?)

**Criticisms** – “But I have this against you….” (What would Jesus say are our church’s shortcomings, faults, and failures? What would Jesus say we are not doing well? What would Jesus say we should be doing that we are not doing?)

**STAGE 2: Assess the Church’s Current Reality**

The transitional pastor should lead the church to understand and accept the current reality in the church and its community.

1. Provide the Transition Team an overview of portions of the information on Understanding a Church’s Capacity for Denial on pages 82-84.
2. Provide the Transition Team an overview of the information on Understanding Church Culture on pages 85-86.
3. Provide the Transition Team an overview of the information on Understanding Community Context on pages 87-88.
4. Request a demographic report from your state convention. This is a simplified demographic snapshot of the area in a 5-mile ring around the location of the church.
5. Lead a discussion of the demographic report with the Transition Team using the guide on page 89.
6. Preach through Acts 10:1 – 11:18, using insights from the demographic report. Use the ideas on pages 90-91.
7. Complete the Current Reality worksheets. Follow the instructions at the bottom of each form. These are available at [www.lifeway.com/currentreality](http://www.lifeway.com/currentreality). Lead a discussion about the counts, containers, and characteristics with the Transition Team using these questions:

* What did we learn?
* What does it mean?
* What will we do in response to this?

1. Provide the Transition Team an overview of the information on values and lead them through the Values Inventory exercise on pages 92-94.
2. Give an overview of the diagram of A Church Model and Process on page 95 as an introduction to Stages 3, 4, and 5.

**UNDERSTANDING A CHURCH’S CAPACITY FOR DENIAL**

“No organization under heaven has a greater capacity to look facts in the face

and deny reality than the local church.” – Garland, Selby, and Ellison

Richard Tedlow’s significant work on the science and tendency of denial is titled *Denial: Why Business Leaders Fail to Look Facts in the Face and What to Do about It*. We’ve taken the liberty of retitling this important work to “Denial: Why *Church* Leaders Fail to Look Facts in the Face and What to Do about It.”

What is denial? According to Tedlow, “Denial is the unconscious calculus that if an unpleasant reality was true, it would be too terrible, and therefore it cannot be true.... It is, in George Orwell’s blunt formation, ‘protective stupidity.’” (Tedlow, p. 2)

And why is there denial? “Why would a sane, smart person deny a fact of critical importance to his or her business? Because, to state the obvious, he or she is human. And the impulse to avoid painful truths, just like the impulse to avoid pain itself, is part of human nature.” (Tedlow, p. 2)

Upon his engagement as transitional pastor, one of the first determinations the transitional pastor must deal with is this: Where is this church today? The answer to such a question we refer to as “current reality.”

“At risk”is a very useful term for the transitional pastor. Most of the churches that call a transitional pastor, particularly on a full-time but temporary basis, are “at risk.” They are at a pivotal crossroads of sorts regarding where they go from here. Former Intel CEO Andy Grove called this “a strategic inflection point” which refers to the moment at which “the balance of forces shifts from the old structure, from the old ways … to the new.” (Tedlow, p. 58)

Statistical analysis, community demographics, budgets, and financial data, and more all are tools to help a pastor grasp his own perspective of current reality (where are wetoday?). A 20-year statistical picture can be obtained through the state convention office. This profile gives data on membership, attendance, giving, baptisms, and much more. While we understand that there is far more than 20 years of statistics that determine current reality, the transitional pastor will notice significant trends on the 20-year profile.

Through listening sessions, personal interviews, surveys, and the other suggestions in this manual, eventually a picture of “where we are today” begins to emerge. However, the challenge for the transitional pastor goes beyond such a determination. The assessment itself is not often the issue for the transitional pastor. The real challenge is to lead the church to understand and accept (rather than deny) current reality as it really exists*.*

Once the pastor and the Transition Team have a reasonable understanding of current reality the work of conveying this picture to the whole church begins in earnest. It is here that we bring the matter of denial into the work of the transitional pastor. It is at this point that there are almost always those within the church body that just will not accept the picture that is being presented by the transitional pastor and the Transition Team. Note here that the Transition Team plays a major role in gaining the church’s understanding and acceptance of the findings that bring clarity to where the church is at the moment.

This is but one of the reasons the makeup of the Transition Team is of such great importance. The right people must be at the table through the entire process. We say the role of the transitional pastor is to guide, not to decide. He “architects the conditions” in which the right decisions can be made at every step and stage of the transitional period. It is of critical importance that the Transition Team “own the work.” If the transitional pastor is seen as the one owning the work and making all the decisions, when his time at the church ends, the work often leaves with him.

In most every church the transitional pastor will face those (some with much influence and some with little) who can look current reality right in the face and deny that the reality is what it is. Lyle Schaller wisely wrote that “One of the most frequent signs of a dysfunctional congregation is denial. One common expression of denial is the hope that next year will closely resemble 1955.” (Schaller, p. 109) Schaller’s book, *The Interventionist,* should be required reading for the transitional pastor. In typical Schaller form, that book contains many questions that will help any transitional pastor in his quest to analyze the church.

“The organism that was intended by Jesus himself to be the most fluid on earth has become quite the opposite, so entrenched in the structure and habit of the “way we do things” that little if any fluidity remains. Sustaining the present (and even the past) has become the overarching force in most churches.” (Schaller, p. 113) It is our experience that when preservation and protection become the guiding concerns and forces in a church in transition, the church is in trouble, at risk at the very least.

Schaller writes “One of the more subtle lines of demarcation between the declining congregation and the growing is the organizational structure. The tradition-driven congregation that hopes to make tomorrow a continuation of yesterday often is organized with a governing board and a network of standing committees.”

Often the churches we have been called to serve in the role of transitional pastor are in a decline. The trend lines are down, sometimes over a very long time. The structure of the church and its governance were likely designed when the church was much larger. We see that many of our churches are prisoners to our polity. One of the most critical issues facing churches in need of revitalization is governance. Most of our systems were designed in the 1950s (and before!) for a world that no longer exists.

For many congregations, the standard mode of operation is maintaining the status quo. The focus is most likely on how things have been done in the past, doing church as it has always been done. There are significant reasons why denial of current reality is such a clear tendency.

First, in our experience, the church in transition that is clearly plateaued or in decline is often populated and even sustained by an older generation who have literally invested their lives (and financial resources) in “their church.” These older, “chronologically gifted adults” are understandable resistant to change. Their world is at a point at which change has never come faster or more profoundly. They wonder, “Is it too much to ask that just one thing, ‘my church,’ can stay the same?”

Thom Rainer writes, “The most pervasive and common thread of our autopsies was that the deceased churches lived for a long time with the past as hero…. We respect the past, at times we revere the past. But we can’t live in the past. More than any one item, dying churches focused on their own needs instead of needs of others. Looked inwardly instead of outwardly. Comfort and happiness are the goal!” (*Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive,* p. 186)

Second, when decline takes place over a long period of time, many of these with a lifetime investment just do not really grasp the implications of such decline. To be sure, there may be visible indicators of such decline (for example, “Where are all the young people and children today?”). However, the young people and their children did not usually disappear quickly…. it was likely more a very, very slow drip.

Third, the community has transitioned, and the church has not. It’s just not like it used to be here in Pleasuretown, USA. Failure to recognize that “our community has changed, and we haven’t” is not an unusual finding.

There are certainly other characteristics of churches in denial of where they really are. However. the main takeaway here should be: Denial of current reality can lead to death. An “at-risk church” transitions in the wrong direction and will eventually undergo an autopsy. To be sure, it might be a long, slow, very painful death. The pain of such a truth proves to be just too much for some. They choose to die rather than change. Their capacity to deny reality is stronger than their willingness to embrace the necessary changes that will be required for a church to experience revitalization.

The transitional pastor, when dealing with denial of current reality by a congregation, should be well prepared to help the congregation see what they have not seen before, even if it’s right before their eyes! Along with the task force, communicate, communicate, communicate the findings with the entire congregation. Listen patiently to the voices of those who deny current reality in listening sessions and more. It’s hard work, but a necessary, even critical part of leading the church in transition.

**UNDERSTANDING CHURCH CULTURE**

You have a wonderful opportunity in your role as transitional pastor to lead your church to better understand the elements that make up its unique character. God has provided the resources and opportunities for your church to become exactly what He desires. If there is no compelling reason to change, churches will continue to repeat programs, ministries, and practices from year to year regardless of what impact they may have, or may not be having, on the community or the congregation.

Church practices and structures must be viewed through the church’s culture to determine how relevant they are in their here-and-now world. Church culture means the local context of church life that shapes the way a church views itself and that leads to the unique history, identity, personality, and style of the church. Consequently, every church has its own culture.

Reviewing the present status reveals “the way we do church” expressed in the history and traditions of the church. It is a rich source for understanding the style of the church and what a church wants to become. Analyzing church culture requires a church to wrestle with the questions, “Who are we as a church today?” and “Who does God want us to become?” Multiple and complex appraisals influence a church’s identity. Every church is different. Every church develops a culture whether the church has a long history or is a new start.

Asking appropriate questions can help the congregation discover its personality and its image in the community. What is the present reality for your church? What resources, events, and personalities shape the nature of how the church responds to a changing world? What vision is there of a future that will honor God?

To understand the culture of your church you need to investigate using the following diagnostic questions.

* What affect is the church having on the lives of those who attend?

How do church members express their devotion to the Lord Jesus? Who has been on a short-term mission trip? How many participate in evangelism visitation? Do you have a prayer ministry? How is the financial support of the church?

* How is the community affected by the presence of the church and its members?

Who lives in the immediate areas around the church? How does the church reach out to them? What services are provided for children, students, singles, elderly, handicapped, or others? What does the community really think about this church and its members?

* What does the church emphasize?

What does the church pay for? What does the church pray for? What percent of the church budget is allocated for evangelism and missions? What place does prayer fit in the daily schedule of the church, staff, and members? How do the events and activities of the church relate to the overall mission of the church?

* How do guests feel when they visit your church?

Do you have a welcome center clearly identified for guests? Is your preschool space clean, safe, adequately sized, and well-staffed? Do you have adequate Bible study opportunities for all ages in spaces that are inviting and welcoming? How many parking spaces do you have? Is there adequate seating space in the worship center?

* How are leaders functioning in their ministry roles?

Is there relevant teaching and preaching that seeks to change lives and strengthen disciples? Do members of the church understand their responsibilities and their spiritual gifts? What are the deacons focused on?

* Do those attending have a good experience when they come to church?

How does the church fellowship together? What ministries are designed to help break down the sense of the large group and allow people to experience the joy of relationships?

In the same sense individuals are guided by their self-esteem, churches tend to be guided by the congregational church-esteem. With low church-esteem we are reluctant to mention our church in conversations at the grocery store, soccer field, or gym. With a high sense of church-esteem we recognize the value our church is in our own lives and the potential value it has for those around us.

Guests who visit your church are 83% more likely to remain a part of your church six months later if they have been a part of a small group such as Bible Study or Sunday School. So many in our culture, both young and old, are looking for a place to establish deep lasting relationships. Your church should be the place people turn to find acceptance and support.

Simple church principles call for each church to evaluate every activity considering how it relates to the main function of the local church. Ministries do not need to be complex or expensive to be effective. Seek to focus the ministries of your church around your unique set of core beliefs and values. Involve the whole church in developing a clear understanding of your present reality. Create an environment where the church begins to dream again about the future God has planned for them. Then organize leadership and direction around seeking to focus on those ministries that move the church toward that new desired future state.

**UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY CONTEXT**

Every church has been placed within a community. Understanding some key indicators and trends about that community will help the church determine better ways to relate to those who live around it.

Communities, and churches, go through a series of common stages or lifecycles:

* Birth – figuring out how to survive
* Growth – how to handle new people and the challenges of growth
* Maturity – slowing down, how to get unstuck
* Decline – trying to hold on, what do we do next to fix this

God’s ideal plan is for the church to renew itself and start a new cycle before it reaches the maturity stage. If the church waits until it begins to decline, the momentum works against it and regeneration becomes more difficult. For a church to maintain relevance within its community, it must understand who makes up the community. It also must understand who makes up the people in the church and how those people compare to the local community. This is the context in which the church must function.

Demographic data is available from your state convention that will tell you how many people live within a certain radius of the church. The data will provide current and projected increases for race, age, income level, and other variables.

Equally important to understanding the community is the need to understand who makes up the attenders at your church. Age groups can be estimated by tabulating Sunday School rolls. Other demographic information is more difficult without using a survey or enlisting the assistance of an outside consultant.

In addition to the age, gender, race, and income levels, computer technology has enabled the identification of lifestyle segmentation groups within small areas of your community. Each of these clusters of people share a great deal in common. Most churches will have about 80% of the congregation in three or four of these segmentation groups. The extent to which these clusters in the church match up with similar clusters in the surrounding community determines how well the church is reaching the community.

In a very large church, it may not be unusual for every social group to be represented in the congregation by at least one family. Churches are not exclusive of anyone. However, in churches of any size (small, medium, or large), most of the members will be from a limited number of the social groups identified in the study. These are the people that God has gifted the church to reach.

Lifestyle segmentation is based on the concept that “birds of a feather, flock together.” People who fit into a certain cluster that is highly represented in the congregation are more likely to continue to associate with your church because they find people like themselves. The opposite is also true. If your church primarily consists of three clusters and someone from a radically different cluster visits, they may find very few people like them.

Cluster analysis goes beyond just identifying who the different clusters are, but also provides information as to what locations have large percentages of those lifestyles. Now your church can make outreach in focused geographic areas to people who are very similar to those within the church body. You might organize a prayer walk of those communities, a door-to-door survey campaign, or a ministry event targeted to appeal to those segments of your community.

Most research indicates about 80 – 85% of any community is un-churched. Once your church has identified who the most receptive prospects might be, the field truly is “white unto harvest.”

**Demographic Study Discussion guide**

Why should a church be interested in demographics? Isn’t it a secular marketing concept best reserved for businesses and those trying to make money? The word *demographics* simply means “writings about people.” It is the research on and study of groups of people in society on either a large or small scale.

The biblical rationale for demographics is found in John 4:35 when Jesus said, “Don’t you say, ‘There are still four more months, then comes the harvest’? Listen to what I’m telling you: *Open your eyes and look at the fields*, because they are ready for harvest” (emphasis added). Demographic studies can be an eye-opener for some churches and help them begin to see through kingdom eyes the communities in which God has planted them.

After providing a printed summary of the report, presenting it verbally, and explaining the information in it; use the following questions to lead a discussion:

1. What surprised you in this report?

2. What did not surprise you in this report?

3. Does our church reflect the people who live within our primary ministry area?

4. For example, how do the percentages of age compare to our church? In other words, if our community is made up of 8% who are 10-14 years of age, shouldn’t that be reflective of our church as well? What does it say about us if it is less? What does it say about us if it is more?

5. What does the population change map have to say about our growth rate as a church?

6. Some people say, “Birds of a feather flock together.” Would you say that the profile of our community is reflective of our church? If it isn’t, what can we do about that? If it is but we’re not growing as fast as the population rate, what does that tell us?

7. What does the population breakdown according to families and non-families have to say about our strategy as a church?

1. The North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention asserts that 70% of the U.S. population is lost and does not know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. How many people does that represent in our community? What is our response to that?

**IDEAS FOR SERMON ON DEMOGRAPHICS**

**“Changing the Scorecard”**

**Using Acts 10:1 – 11:18**

Where are we going, church? If we don’t know where we are going or why we exist, some things happen to fill the void. Here are some responses from different perspectives:

* The status quo folks – Let’s keep doing what we have been doing.
* The deconstructionists – These are leaders who are obsessed with what they will not do anymore. They are often angry folks who do not like the status quo folks, so they want to throw out tradition and do everything differently.
* The methodologists – These folks are captured by the latest and greatest tool or method that promises to deliver new ministry and more results.
* The doctrinal purists – They embrace a certain doctrinal purity that they believe sets them apart from those just mentioned.

But there are better ways to carry on ministry in an ever-changing culture and context. Luke’s account in Acts 10-11 gives some principles to lift up for our examination and consideration.

In the flow of the book of Acts, Peter has seen the early church launched, preached the first sermon where 3000 came to Christ, seen the lame walk, and been released from prison by an angel. Yet he did not see or understand what Christ wanted to do with his life and the life of the church. He believed that Christ had come for the Jews and that the gospel was for the Jews. He was right that the Gospel was and is for the Jews, but it was and is also for all peoples everywhere. Christ had made that clear on Acts 1:8 – the missionis *from everywhere to everyone.* But something dramatic had to happen for Peter to get it. He did not get that the gospel was for people not like him. Yet, really, neither do we. What happened to Peter needs to happen to us if we are to understand why we are here and what we are to be doing. What God did was change the scorecard for Peter.

Listen to the Story of the Encounter.

God spoke to Cornelius, a Gentile who had been praying. His prayers had been heard. Does God hear the prayers of those who seek Him? Yes, and God not only heard the prayers, He answered in dramatic fashion. At the same time as the servants were on their way to find Peter, he was on the rooftop of Simon the tanner praying. God spoke to him in a dramatic vision. Peter went with the servants to the house of Cornelius. When Cornelius shared his vision, notice the response of Peter: “God does not show favoritism.” Think on that for a moment. Does God have favorites in your community? Are there people that God would say are unclean and unfit for salvation? Once Peter got the message of no favorites, he shared it with the Jewish leaders. The key phrase is in 11:18 “even to the Gentiles.”

Who are the “even these” in your life and in the life of this church? Our eyes need to be opened by God to who is around us. Our minds need to be changed by God to understand new ways of doing ministry. God will change the way we keep score and the way we measure success.

Open Our Eyes Lord.

If you opened your eyes in the year this church was founded, you would have seen a strong working-class neighborhood populated by folks who knew about church and were open to the ministry of the church. [Adapt this to fit your church’s beginning.] However, to open our eyes today to the community in which this church is called to minister is to see a vastly different population. [Read from the church’s demographics report]

This means that the way you do ministry today has to be different than the way you did ministry even 10 years ago. And it will need to continue changing as the community and world around you change. Once our eyes are opened to those around us, we must get the people who are in our community on our hearts. Then we will open our hands to help.

However, it all begins with a personal encounter with the living Christ. What would God have you do? What would God have me do? Consider these actions:

1. Pray that God will open our eyes and hearts to the ministry He has for us – from everywhere to everyone – beginning right here and going to the ends of the earth.

2. Begin to see the “even these” through the eyes of Jesus.

3. Begin to do ministry to reach the “even these.”

4. Change the score card in order to do discipleship – to make disciples.

Here are some examples of ways we can do that:

* Create an environment of community and family.
* Build one-on-one disciple making relationships.
* Provide space for the messy and difficult people.
* Have systems and processes that foster disciple making through life-on-life change.
* Create a culture of inviting where our members are constantly inviting others to get connected to our church and then be sent out in meaningful ministries.
* Continue to be a praying church. When we bow before God, He works in us and through us.
* When we pray, God changes us.
* Sunday School teachers, deacons, and leaders, pray for people by name.
* Engage the community around you through prayer.
* Ask God to open your eyes.
* If you don’t see if before you see it, you will never see it.

**Values Inventory**

One of the most important aspects of understanding the culture of a church is the exploration and clarification of its core values. Briefly defined, values are beliefs put into practice. While it is possible for a congregation to have “aspirational” values, collective behaviors that they would like to see, their culture consists of their actual values. Current reality is what actually exists in the church.

The values of a church are those things that are non-negotiable, that for which we would be willing to sacrifice everything. Although the form in which they are expressed may vary, biblical values should never change. Core values should be marked by great passion. And these beliefs drive behavior that should reflect the actions and attitudes of Christ Himself.

An organization must know what it stands for. A study of values can be very powerful because it seeks to answer the questions: “Why do we do the things we do? Why does it matter?”

Values are behaviorally examined. A church can look at its budget and determine its values. It can do so by looking at its calendar because we always make time for what is important to us. And finally reviewing its collective decisions helps a church know what its true values are. In other words, a church’s business meeting minutes offer clues as to its values. As values get clearer, so do the decisions needing to be made.

Why should a congregation spend time examining its values? First, they are frequently held without awareness. Congregational culture has been compared to a fishbowl. Asking your congregation to describe it is like asking a fish to describe water. Values are so much a part of us that it is difficult to talk about them in an objective fashion. Second, any attempt to implement change in a congregation will be futile without factoring congregational values into the picture. They function as railroad tracks within the organization. Even if a desire for change is present, congregational behavior will stay the same unless new tracks and patterns of behavior are established.

It may be helpful to compare the types of values as “real” versus “expressed.” It is, of course, possible to have expressed values that are not real. It is also possible to have real values that have not been clearly and passionately articulated. Great synergy takes place when a congregation’s values are both real and expressed. We can call those values that are both real and expressed “powerful” because they become the impetus for change in the congregation.

**Leading the Exercise**

**Powerful**

Distribute copies of the Values Inventory on the next page. Remind team members that they are surveying the values of the church, *not their own personal values*. Briefly define each value, adding any needed clarification. Instruct team members to complete the inventory according to the directions. (Note: you may want to add to the list. Be sure that team members are clear as to definitions.)

**Group Follow-up of the Exercise**

Write each value on butcher paper or tear sheets. (Probably two or three per sheet will be optimimal.) Allow sufficent room to the left or right for the placement of color coding labels. Give each team member a limited number of labels (probably four but no more than six). Ascribe a numeric value to each color, such as red – 1, blue – 2, etc.

Total the numeric value of the dots placed by each value. The top six represent the actual values of the congregation. After identifying the actual values, lead the Transition Team in a discussion through the following questions:

* + Is this accurate? Why or why not?
  + What glaring omissions do you see? (Note: these can become aspirational values toward which the church will strive.)
  + How will actual values strengthen the transitional process?
  + How will they threaten the transitional process?

(The Values Inventory and guidance are adapted from Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning,* pages 110-113, 326.)

**Values Inventory**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** |
| **Not important** | **Somewhat important** | **Important** | **Most important** |

**Directions**: Using the scale below, circle the number that best expresses to what extent the following values are important now to your church (actual values). Work your way through the list quickly, going with your first impression.

1. **Preaching and teaching Scripture**: Communicating God’s Word to people 1 2 3 4

2. **Family**: People immediately related to one another by marriage or birth 1 2 3 4

3. **Bible knowledge**: A familiarity with the truths of Scripture 1 2 3 4

4. **World missions**: Spreading the gospel of Christ around the globe 1 2 3 4

5. **Community**: Caring about and addressing the needs of others 1 2 3 4

6. **Encouragement**: Giving hope to people who need some hope 1 2 3 4

7. **Giving**: Providing a portion of one’s finances to support the ministry 1 2 3 4

8. **Fellowship**: Relating to and enjoying one another 1 2 3 4

9. **Leadership**: A person’s ability to influence others to pursue God’s mission for their organization 1 2 3 4

10. **Cultural relevance**: Communicating truth in a way that people who aren’t like us understand it 1 2 3 4

11. **Prayer**: Communicating with God 1 2 3 4

12. **Excellence:** Maintaining the highest of ministry standards that bring glory to God 1 2 3 4

13. **Evangelism**: Telling others the good news about Christ 1 2 3 4

14. **Team ministry**: A group of people ministering together with synergy 1 2 3 4

15. **Creativity**: Coming up with new ideas and ways of doing ministry 1 2 3 4

16. **Worship**: Attributing worth to God 1 2 3 4

17. **Status quo**: A preference for the way things are now 1 2 3 4

18. **Cooperation**: The act of working together in the service of the Savior 1 2 3 4

19. **Lost people**: People who are non-Christians and may not attend church (unchurched) 1 2 3 4

20. **Mobilized laity**: Christians who are actively serving in the ministries of their church 1 2 3 4

21. **Tradition**: The customary ways or the “tried and true” 1 2 3 4

22. **Obedience**: A willingness to do what God or others ask 1 2 3 4

23. **Innovation**: Making changes that promote the ministry as it serves Christ 1 2 3 4

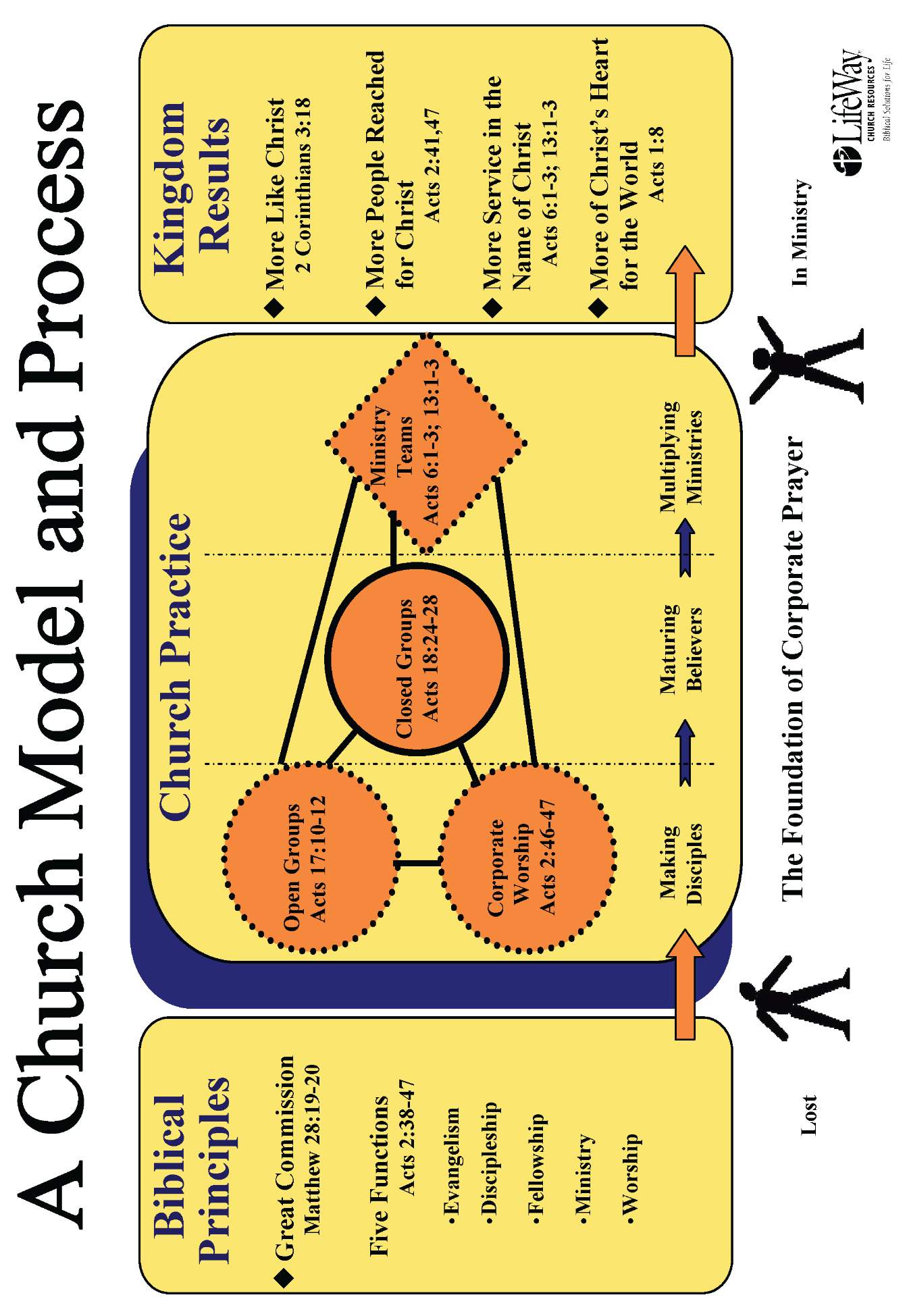
24. **Initiative**: The willingness to take the first step or make the first move in a ministry setting 1 2 3 4

25. **Benevolence**: Caring for basic human (physical) needs, either within or outside the church 1 2 3 4

26. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ 1 2 3 4

27. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ 1 2 3 4

28. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ 1 2 3 4



**THE FOUNDATION OF CORPORATE PRAYER**

Though they may not verbalize it, the hearts of many church members are saying, “Transitional pastor,teach us to pray.” Corporate prayer is essential to the spiritual well-being of any church.

Three Bible verses, selected from many, affirm corporate prayer as a biblical principle foundational to effective church practice and essential to producing desired kingdom results.

* “If I shut the sky so there is no rain, or if I command the grasshopper to consume the land, or if I send pestilence on my people, and my people who bear my name humble themselves, pray and seek my face, and turn from their evil ways, then I will hear from heaven, forgive their sin, and heal their land.” (The Lord; 2 Chron. 7:13–14)
* “My house will be called a house of prayer.” (Jesus; Matt. 21:13; quoting Is. 56:7)
* “Don’t worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” – (Paul; Phil. 4:6)

The following testimonies from godly leaders spanning three quarters of a century affirm corporate prayer as a biblical principle foundational to effective church practice and essential to producing desired kingdom results. One of the most prolific writers on prayer is E.M. Bounds. Several publishers have released a compilation of his writings on prayer. Bounds spent the last seventeen years of his life devoted to prayer, reading Scripture, and writing. He affirmed that prayer is the most important ingredient for spiritual growth and continuing power in the church.

In 1924 R. A. Torrey published a series of Bible studies on prayer in which he spoke about the blessings prayer will bring to churches. He wrote about the church gathered for prayer. “Prayer will bring blessing, definite and rich and immeasurable blessing, to the Church; praying will do more to make the Church what it ought to be than anything else we can do. Prayer will do more to root out heresy than all the heresy trials that were ever held. Prayer will do more to straighten out tangles and misunderstandings and unhappy complications in the life of a Church than all the councils and conferences that were ever held. Prayer will do more to bring a deep and lasting and sweeping revival, a revival that is real and lasting and altogether of the right sort, than all the organizations that were ever devised by man” (*The Power of Prayer,* pp. 52-53).

Writing in 1942, George Buttrick asserted that “the decline of the church prayer meeting is a more disturbing symptom of ill health than the alleged decline in church attendance or even than sectarian strife.” He charged churches with prayer meetings consisting of stereotyped and casual phrases that were repeated *ad nauseam* and declared “the church cannot redeem a tragic world without the vitality of corporate prayer” (*Prayer,* p. 279).

Over fifty years later T. W. Hunt wrote the influential book, *Disciple’s PrayerLife: Walking in Fellowship with God.* In another book Hunt wrote about the blessings that come through a church intercessory prayer ministry concentrated toward God’s glory and honor. “If a church develops a successful Intercessory Prayer Ministry, other programs of the church will be blessed. Baptisms will go up, Sunday School attendance will increase, … and all programs will be enhanced. The church will discover God blesses a ministry that comes from Him and depends upon Him” (*Church Prayer Ministry Manual,* p. 1).

In 1997 Jim Cymbala, pastor of the Brooklyn Tabernacle, wrote *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire,* describing how that church was transformed through corporate prayer. Citing an experience when God told him how to lead the church, he said, “From this day on, the prayer meeting will be the barometer of our church. What happens on Tuesday night will be the gauge by which we will judge the success or failure because that will be the measure by which God blesses us.” Cymbala, who speaks in conferences of church leaders across the country, including Southern Baptist conferences and churches, emphasizes to pastors that “for our churches and ministries to be all God wants them to be, they *must* be saturated with prayer. Spiritual power is *always* linked to communion with God” (p. 27).

These testimonies provide a message particularly pertinent to transitional pastors. Regardless of the circumstances in which you find the church, corporate prayer is a vital part of the solution of problems and determining directions for the future.

Growing out of this prayer emphasis from the 1900s that carries into the third millennium, many churches are returning to experienced traditional practices of prayer or are making significant changes to impact the church.

* Leaders are challenged to make corporate prayer the foundational focus of the church and its work.
* Prayer is considered a prerequisite for all ministry efforts.
* Churches are adding several types of prayer-related meetings to the church schedule.
* Prayer is a weapon and a shield in preparing for evangelistic meetings.
* Leaders are encouraged to rely on the work and power of the Holy Spirit rather than gimmicks or techniques.
* Prayer for personal repentance and confession of sin occurs in meetings of church members.
* Prayer becomes a personal priority in leaders’ lives and ministries.

Transitional pastors can make a lasting contribution in many churchesby helping them move beyond using prayer just to open a meeting and to close a meeting or to transition from one activity to another in worship services. Ritual praying may make *some* contribution in corporate meetings, but it falls dismally short of the blessing that comes from a dynamic encounter with the living God through prayer, the access into which He has invited us.

Another way is to recapture the meaning and practice of prayer meetings. Prayer meetings are becoming the key focus of the work of the church and corporate prayer an essential part of the ministry of the church.

John Franklin in *And the Place Was Shaken* provides the following guidance for revitalizing the church prayer meeting. Use that book to guide your planning for effective prayer meetings.

God has three desires He wants to fulfill in a prayer meeting.

* He wants to reveal Himself to His people.

The result is: People glorify God, learn the love relationship with Him, and become like Him.

* He wants to move people to His agenda.

The result is: The people of God are on mission with Him.

* He wants to build and ministerto His people, especially through His people.

The result is:*koinonia*.

Your job as a leader is to work with God by:

* Designing a format that encourages the three desires of God.
* Facilitating activities that encourage the three desires of God.
* Shepherding your people to do the three desires of God.
* Discerning the activity of God before and during prayer meeting to increase the three desires of God.

A leader must especially master three types of activities.

* Knowing how to set the focus on God.
* Knowing how to facilitate participation from the laity.
* Knowing how to facilitate ministering activities.

**STAGE 3: Affirm Biblical Principles for Church Health**

Biblical principles identify the primary scriptural teachings that direct the scope and work of the church. Biblical principles are the same for all churches in all places in any era. They require a church to wrestle with questions like: “Why do we exist?” and “What does God call us to do with Him that brings glory to Himself?”

Transitional pastors should teach and preach to help people understand and affirm the biblical principles that guide the church in its planning for growth and shape its practice. Leading churches through the following sequential steps is a major responsibility of transitional pastors.

1. Distribute to each member of the Transition Team a copy of “A Church Model and Process**”** diagram on page 95 and the overview of the “Biblical Principles for Church Health” on pages 102-107. Lead the Transition Team to pray faithfully and fervently for God’s guidance in understanding and applying the biblical principles upon which churches are to be built.
2. Preach a sermon on the Great Commission. Also preach on the five biblical functions of the church revealed in Acts and in selected portions of Paul’s letters to churches. Emphasize that God empowers the body of believers to bring people into the family of God and nurture them in faith and work. It is more than having a church name, a church building, and regularly scheduled activities. A suggest sermon series is on pages 108-109.
3. Divide the Transition Team into five subgroups, one for each of the five functions. Each subgroup will use the SWOTs form on page 111 to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats the church has in its assigned function area.
4. Each subgroup will present a summary report to the full Transition Team.
5. The five subgroups will then work through the Development of Key Objectives for the five functions of the church using the guidance on pages 112-118.
6. Each subgroup will present a summary report to the full Transition Team.

**BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES FOR CHURCH HEALTH**

Church health is the result of God’s supernatural work through His people to accomplish His kingdom purposes. Church health also is the result of God’s people obeying His will and His Word in the world.

**The Great Commission defines for God’s church His mission in the world.**

“Then Jesus came near and said to them, ‘All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age’” (Matt. 28:18-20).

The Great Commission is God’s mission expressed to His people in His Word and through His people to the world. At its core, the Great Commission is a command to join Christ in His mission.

It represents the overriding mandate—the driving force—to any New Testament church. That mandate is “to make disciples.” Making disciples involves leading people to personal faith in Jesus Christ as God’s Messiah and humanity’s personal redeemer, assimilating new believers into the life and ministry of the church, and leading them toward maturity in Christ.

Without the driving force of the Great Commission, church growth will be little more than a misguided attempt to gain numbers, increase enrollments, discover methods, utilize marketing techniques, and do something different. The Great Commission defines God’s mission (which is our mission) in the world. The Commission is the Lord’s marching orders for every believer and church.

*“All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.”* – We cannot fulfill the Great Commission in our own strength and in our way. The power and authority to do what our Lord commanded are His, not ours.

*“Go, therefore.”* – Christ commands us to go into our world with His message of hope and salvation. We go to family, friends, neighbors, and strangers because Jesus tells us to go. For a Christian, going is not an option; it is the Lord’s command.

*“Make disciples.”* – To become a disciple, a person must turn from sin and receive salvation from Christ. A disciple is a learner, a follower of Christ who has experienced a radical change of life and lifestyle. Christians are partners with the Lord in redemption.

*“All nations.”* – The kingdom of God is for all people. It is not limited to any racial, national, social, or cultural group. The gospel reveals the Lord’s love for all kinds of people in all kinds of circumstances in all kinds of places. There are no limits on the gospel, geographic or otherwise.

*“Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”* – Baptism is an act of obedience and a picture of a person’s identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. It symbolizes what God has done for us in redemption. When Christ redeems us, we die to sin and rise to new life in Him.

*“Teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you.”* – Christians are to bring disciples into a deeper relationship with Christ and into a better understanding of His will. New disciples are led to spiritual maturity by other believers who help them know and do the things Jesus commanded.

*“And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”* – Jesus assured His disciples that His constant presence would be with them to help them fulfill His Great Commission. Our Lord is beside us, around us, and within us. We join Him, at His invitation, in His redemptive work.

**The church fulfills the Great Commission through five functions.**

The New Testament describes five functions or purposes that every church can and must do in order to fulfill the Great Commission. These functions are evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, ministry, and worship. Since these functions are like facets on a gem, their order is not significant. Each believer must do the same five functions to fulfill his or her personal calling in the world.

**1. Evangelism**

Evangelism is the process of sharing the gospel with the lost and leading them to a personal relationship with Christ that enables them to enter the kingdom of God. It is asking them to repent of their sins, to put their faith in Christ for the forgiveness of sins and the free gift of eternal life, and to follow Him forever as Lord.

In response to hearing Peter’s Pentecost message, the people asked, “‘What should we do?’ Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call.’ And with many other words he testified and strongly urged them, saying, ‘Be saved from this corrupt generation!’ So those who accepted his message were baptized, and that day about 3,000 people were added to them” (Acts 2:37-41).

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come. Everything is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and he has committed the message of reconciliation to us. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us, we plead on Christ’s behalf: ‘Be reconciled to God.’ He made the One who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:17-21).

Evangelism is the good news of the gospel spoken by believers and lived out in their lives. Christians are saved to fellowship with the King of kings and Lord of lords. That is too much blessing to be kept to oneself. Evangelism is sharing the blessing with those who do not have it. It is a spiritual interaction between saved people and the lost.

Evangelism under the lordship of Christ is the only way to make disciples. The need for the gospel is universal and the message is universal and effective in all cultures. Evangelism is a believer sharing the gospel with a lost person of any age or culture in ways both understand. God saves His people for fellowship with Him and sends them into the world to help others to personally know the joy of forgiveness and the blessing of wholeness through the saving work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

**2. Discipleship**

Discipleship is a lifelong journey of obedience to Christ that transforms a person’s values and behavior and results in ministry in one’s home, church, and in the world. Disciples are people who have responded to the Holy Spirit’s conviction by repenting of their sins, have trusted Jesus Christ’s redeeming work for forgiveness from sin, and have begun the journey of life with Christ desiring to grow into the likeness of Christ. Mature discipleship, living for the Lord in every aspect of life while awaiting the coming of the Savior to bring everything under His control, is a goal for all believers.

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles” (Acts 2:42-43).

“For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God’s gift—not from works, so that no one can boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do” (Eph. 2:8-10).

Nothing about the Christian life is natural or easy. The life of a disciple involves struggle, inconvenience, and sometimes terrible suffering. Believers must be taught to understand and practice the ways of Christ. They must see kingdom living displayed in believers who are more spiritually mature. Then they must model kingdom living for those who are younger in their faith. Nurturing disciples is the process of teaching the new citizen in the kingdom of God to love, trust, and obey God the King and how to evangelize and train others to do the same. The discipleship process requires commitment, obedience, and patience because maturing believers requires time.

**3. Fellowship**

Fellowship is an intimate spiritual relationship with God and unity with other believers brought together in Jesus Christ, the way members express their “oneness” in Jesus Christ. The biblical word means “to share in” or “to come into communion” and suggests unity and community. See the biblical church covenant on page 110.

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer…. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. Every day the Lord added to them those who were being saved” (Acts 2:42, 46, 47).

Fellowship does not happen by accident. It is the result of the power of God working in individual believers and in the church body. As believers share with others their salvation experiences, practice living Christlike lives, and demonstrate their faith by serving others, fellowship flourishes as surely as summer follows spring.

Without warm, loving fellowship churches will not grow and be healthy. People will not come where bickering, selfishness, coldness, and tensions prevail. People want to be where peace, joy, love, and family relationships prevail.

In addition to the local fellowship of believers, the church is a great family of believers across the world. When one Christian meets another anywhere in the world, regardless of language, color, or culture, they have an immediate bond with each other because they share in the same saving grace of Jesus Christ. Jesus described His relationship with the Father in terms of oneness and offers His followers that same kind of relationship with Him and with each other.

Christ’s unity with the Father is the pattern for churches not bound together by creeds or confessions, programs, and ministries, but with the bonds of God’s love and the bonding power of the Holy Spirit. A prerequisite to fellowship among believers is dynamic worship of the living God who makes all people one through the cross of Christ. Those who experience fellowship with God in worship cannot withhold fellowship from others who worship this same one and only God.

**4. Ministry**

Ministry is meeting another person’s need in the name of Jesus, both members of the church and non-members. Using the resources God provides, it is expressed as service to people inside the church family and expressed as missions to those outside the church. This ministry grows out of a transformed and serving life.

“Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as any had a need” (Acts 2:44-45).

“And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, equipping the saints in the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God’s Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ’s fullness. Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit. But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into him who is the head—Christ” (Eph. 4:11-15).

Christian compassion demands that we minister to all people without regard to their race, religious affiliation, abilities, or circumstances. Ministry is rooted in the compassion and concern the Lord builds into the hearts of believers when they enter His kingdom.

Human need is so staggering that our own resources alone will never be enough. As God expects us to minister, He gives us the power and the means to do so. We must be good stewards of the faith, abilities, and resources God has given us.

Every church has the responsibility to equip its members to discover, develop, and use their ministry gifts in ways that honor Christ and build God’s kingdom. Ministry is as natural to growing Christians as are evangelism and discipleship because of the Holy Spirit dwelling in them. Churches that are relevant to their community grow and are healthy.

**5. Worship**

Worship is the response of believers to the presence, holiness, and revelation of Almighty God that transforms them into His likeness. It leads worshippers to a greater appreciation for God, a better understanding of His ways, and a deeper commitment to Him. Worship brings us face-to-face with our Creator and draws us closer to His image. Worship arises from the commands of God in Scripture and the grateful hearts of the redeemed. Worship is to the soul what breathing is to the body.

“Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts, praising God and having favor of all the people. Every day the Lord added to them those who were being saved” (Acts 2:46-47).

“Jesus told her, ‘Believe me, woman, an hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know. We worship what we do know, because salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth. Yes, the Father wants such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth’” (John 4:21-24).

Christian worship is first a personal experience; then it is a family and a congregational experience. Church leaders have the responsibility to help new believers grow in all aspects of worship: prayer, devotional Scripture reading, praise, adoration, confession, repentance, profession, and stewardship of life. In addition, corporate worship is fostered through public Scripture reading, preaching, and the ordinances.

The first worship experience of all Christians is when their yielded hearts bow before God confessing and repenting of sin, turn to Jesus Christ for salvation from sin, and rejoice at the reality of salvation. Encountering God in worship transforms believers more and more into His likeness.

**“Being a Great Church” Message Series**

**Being a Great Church (Introductory Sermon)**

When we are the church God wants us to be, then we are a great church. To be a great church does not mean we are greater than some previous time in the church’s history. And it does not mean we are greater than any other church in our state or association or anywhere else. We are not comparing our church to any other church. We just want to be the great church God intends for us to be.

**Members of a great church make the Great Confession. (Matthew 16:13-18, 20)**

“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

**Members of a great church live the Great Commandments. (Matthew 22:34-40)**

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands.”

**Members of a great church fulfill the Great Commission. (Matthew 28:16-20)**

“All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

**The Five Functions of a Church**

**(in any order)**

**A Great Church Worships Together**

Biblical worship is the response of believers to the presence, holiness, and revelation of Almighty God that transforms them into His likeness. It leads worshippers to a greater awe of God, a better understanding of His ways, and a deeper commitment to Him.

Members of a great church …

* Enter God’s presence to worship (Hebrews 10:19-25).
* Focus on God in worship (John 4:19-26).
* Please God with our worship (1 Peter 2:5; Romans 12:1-2).

**A Great Church Has Unity in their Fellowship**

Fellowship is an intimate spiritual relationship with God and unity with other believers brought together in Jesus Christ. As a result of the power of God working in individual believers and in the body of Christ, the church has unity with diversity.

Members of a great church …

* Know that every member is essential in the church (1 Corinthians 12:12, 14-22, 27).
* Are in a covenant relationship. (Use the Biblical Church Covenant on page 110 as an outline.)

**A Great Church Shares Jesus with Unbelievers**

Evangelism is sharing the good news of Jesus with unbelievers and leading them to a personal relationship with Jesus. It is asking them to repent of their sins, put their faith in Jesus for forgiveness of sins, receive eternal life, and follow Jesus forever as Lord.

Members of a great church …

* Accept Jesus’ commission (John 20:21; Matthew 28:18-20).
* Focus on the heart of the gospel (Acts 2:22-24, 32-33, 36-38).
* Prepare to share Jesus (Colossians 4:5-6).
* Are God’s representatives (2 Corinthians 5:17-20).
* Are all things to all people (1 Corinthians 9:19-22).
* Accept Jesus’ assignment to share Jesus (Acts 1:8).
* Pray for unbelievers (Matthew 9:36-38).

**A Great Church Grows Together in Discipleship**

Discipleship is a lifelong journey of obedience to Christ that transforms a person’s values, character, attitudes, and behavior and results in ministry in one’s home, church, and in the world. Spiritual transformation is God’s work of changing a believer into the likeness of Jesus by creating a new identity in Christ and by empowering a lifelong relationship of love, trust, and obedience that glorifies God.

Disciples in a great church …

* Follow Jesus (Luke 9:57-62).
* Make Jesus their priority relationship (Luke 14:26; Matthew 10:37-38).
* Let Jesus take charge of their lives (Luke 14:27; 9:23-24).
* Follow Jesus on a lifetime journey (Luke 14:28-32).
* Keep possessions secondary (Luke 14:33; Matthew 6:24).

**A Great Church Ministers in Jesus’ Name**

Ministry is meeting another person’s need in the name of Jesus, both members of the church and non-members. As the church becomes sensitive to the unmet needs in the fellowship, the community, and the world, they will expand their ministries to meet those needs. Using the resources God provides, ministry is expressed as service to people inside the church family and expressed as missions to those outside the church.

Members of a great church …

* Minister to people inside and people outside the church (Acts 6:1-4; 13:1-3).
* Have Jesus’ compassion for people (Matthew 9:36; Matthew 14:14; Colossians 3:12; 1 John 3:17; James 2:14-17).
* Love their neighbors by being neighbors (Luke 10:25-37).
* Serve Jesus by serving others (Matthew 25:31-40; 6:1-4).

**Biblical Church Covenant**

God established a covenant relationship, first with His people—Israel, and then a new covenant with His people—the church (Hebrews 8:7-13; 9:15). Therefore, as members of God’s covenant family known as \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Baptist Church, we commit ourselves to God and to one another to be Christlike in our lives and relationships through the presence, guidance, and power of God’s Holy Spirit.

We will …

* love one another as Christ loved us (John 13:34),
* honor one another above ourselves (Romans 12:10),
* be kind and compassionate to one another (Ephesians 4:32),
* encourage and build up one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11),
* comfort one another (2 Corinthians 1:4),
* and offer hospitality to one another (1 Peter 4:9).

We will …

* have a spirit of unity based on our common bond in Christ (Ephesians 4:3-6),
* be united in mind and convictions (1 Corinthians 1:10),
* meet together regularly (Hebrews 10:25),
* have equal concern for each other, suffer when one suffers and rejoice when another is honored (1 Corinthians 12:25-26),
* and consider others more important than ourselves (Philippians 2:3).

We will …

* use our God-given knowledge to instruct one another (Romans 15:14),
* use our spiritual gifts to bless one another (1 Corinthians 12:7),
* use the Word of Christ to teach and admonish one another (Colossians 3:16),
* and nurture one another toward spiritual maturity measured by the life and ministry of Jesus (Ephesians 4:12-13).

We will …

* confess our sins to one another, pray for each other (James 5:16),
* warn those who are idle, encourage the discouraged, help the weak, be patient with one another (1 Thessalonians 5:14),
* forgive one another as the Lord forgave us (Colossians 3:13),
* and gently restore those who sin (Galatians 6:1).

We will …

* not talk negatively about one another (James 4:11),
* not pass judgment on one another, not put any stumbling block in one another’s way (Romans 14:13),
* not be morally impure, not use obscenities, not be greedy (Ephesians 5:3-4),
* rather we will be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18).

We will let the light of our godly lives shine together to bring glory to God (Matthew 5:16).

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**Development of Key Objectives**

In this phase of the transitional process, the Transition Team gets to the work of thinking through specific objectives for the church. This is done using scenarios investigating the five functions of the church: worship, evangelism, discipleship, ministry, and fellowship.

These areas can be briefly described as follows:

• Worship – Our worship serves as dress rehearsal for eternity for believers and as a powerful witness to unbelievers (Rev. 4—5).

• Evangelism – Our Lord has told us that the fields are ripe for harvest and has given us the Great Commission (John 4:35; Matt. 28:19-20).

• Discipleship – We are commanded to mature so that the image of Christ is formed in us (Col. 1:9-14).

• Ministry – Our personal and corporate growth will be demonstrated in ministry to others (Eph. 4:1-32).

• Fellowship – The early church enjoyed a sense of unity and community that allowed them to accomplish their mission (Acts 2:42-47).

The Transition Team will be divided into five subgroups, one for each function of the church. The transitional pastor should divide the group purposefully, not arbitrarily. By this stage in the process, the transitional pastor should know the team well enough to make the selection of who to serve on the subgroups. People should be placed on a subgroup where they do not have strengths. For example, although it may seem logical to place choir members on the worship subgroup, they should not serve there. The best person to evaluate worship is someone who sits in the congregation and participates in worship each week. The church’s Sunday School director may be consulted by the discipleship subgroup, but he should not be a member. His voice will be too strong and other subgroup members may not feel free to offer criticism in his presence.

Once the division is made, the Transition Team members should assemble with their subgroup. Their first agenda should be to elect a chairperson. Following that, each subgroup will be given a brief description of their function and a worksheet of “What if…?” questions, “What is…?” questions, and an action plan (pages 114-118).

The questions about future possibilities are designed to help the subgroup ask, “What if?” Without assistance, subgroups have difficulty imagining the future and many possible scenarios. These questions are designed to help them begin “future-thinking.” The ability to ask future-oriented questions is almost as important as the answers. There should not be too much weight placed on the answers to the questions. The questions are simply a tool to help begin thinking and talking about the “What If?”

The questions about present reality ask, “What is?” After looking at a future scenario, we should ask how our present reality compares to that scenario. The Transition Team has already been working on facing current reality in Stage 2.

The purpose of the questions is to fully examine each function in the church. This is an opportunity to critically evaluate the church’s effectiveness in each area. The subgroup is free (and encouraged) to consult with staff, obtain relevant data and information, and develop all the resources necessary to thoroughly evaluate their assigned area of focus (function).

The final subgroup task is to formulate an action plan. The action plan includes three questions to guide the subgroup in identifying specific actions. The subgroup is asking:

“What are one or two actions that we could do immediately and easily that will make a difference in the next few months?”

To help in their evaluation, each subgroup should recruit at least two more people to serve on their subgroup from the congregation at-large. This expands the group of people committed to the process and outcome. It enables the subgroup to gain any help they deem necessary. They should report to the transitional pastor who they have recruited.

The subgroup will set their own meeting times and schedule to conduct their work. They are given a very short time to accomplish their assignment. The short time raises the level of intensity and urgency. It elevates the importance of what they are doing and helps to ensure that the work gets accomplished. If this task is stretched out over a longer time, it tends to lose effectiveness and commitment wanes. Meeting several times over a two- or three-week period is long enough to accomplish the work.

The transitional pastor should meet with each subgroup at least once during the process. He should begin with the subgroup he considers the most challenged by the task. Subgroups often have difficulty getting the ball rolling, and they can benefit from encouragement and reassurance.

When the subgroups are finished, they will make a presentation to the full Transition Team It is an exciting time when the subgroups discover that they have all made some common recommendations. It is in this area of common recommendations that the team’s hard work is validated, and the members begin to see real, tangible opportunity for the future.

After the presentations, the five leaders of the subgroups are asked to meet and formulate one set of integrated recommendations that represents the work of all the subgroups. This set of recommendations will form a collective recommendation presented to the church. After the recommendations have been formulated and a presentation for the church developed, the leaders should rehearse their presentation in front of the Transition Team. This will give them helpful feedback as well as assure the Transition Team that their recommendations have been faithfully represented.

The transitional pastor may lead the Transition Team to hold these recommendations so they can be integrated with the total work of the team throughout Stages 1-6 (see Stage 6 on page 129).

**EVANGELISM**

Evangelism is sharing the good news of Jesus with unbelievers and leading them to a personal relationship with Jesus. It is asking them to repent of their sins, put their faith in Jesus for forgiveness of sins, receive eternal life, and follow Jesus forever as Lord.

**“What if…?” Questions**

These questions can help create dialogue about future possibilities God might want to happen in our church.

1. What if we had major outreach events each year aimed at reaching pre-Christians?

2. What if church members regularly brought their un-churched and pre-Christian friends to worship experiences and other church events?

3. What if our church’s evangelism included a greater focus on youth and children?

4. What if people were frequently encouraged to be a part of our church’s life even before they become Christians?

**“What is…?” Questions**

These questions help create dialogue as you compare the present reality with what could be in response to God’s guidance.

1. What is our church’s attitude toward pre-Christians? Are they to be avoided until they first adopt Christian values? Do we see them as people who matter to God and therefore should matter to us?

2. Over the past five years, how many children and students of church members have become Christians? How many children and students of non-church members have become Christians? How many adults have become Christians?

3. What percentage of current attenders of our worship services are pre-Christians?

4. What outreach events do we conduct each year?

**“What now…?” Action Plan for Evangelism**

What are the challenges we face that hinder being more effective in our evangelism?

What strengths can we build on for greater effectiveness in reaching pre-Christians?

What are one or two things that we could do immediately and easily that will make a difference in the next few months?

Prepare a report for the full Transition Team.

**FELLOWSHIP**

Fellowship is an intimate spiritual relationship with God and unity with other believers brought together in Jesus Christ. As a result of the power of God working in individual believers and in the body of Christ, the church has unity with diversity.

**“What if…?” Questions**

These questions can help create dialogue about future possibilities God might want to happen in our church.

1. What if our church routinely contacted members after two consecutive absences?

2. What if the primary care of church members occurred through church members looking after each other?

3. What if more members contributed their time, money, and energy willingly and enthusiastically?

4. What if our church had more effective communication about church life (website, e-mail, print media, etc.)?

**“What is…?” Questions**

These questions help create dialogue as you compare the present reality with what could be in response to God’s guidance.

1. Do we intentionally integrate new people into the life of our church? How do we facilitate the development of significant relationships during their first six months?

2. Do we currently track the attendance of members and visitors at worship and other activities? How do we follow up with guests and members?

3. Do we know who has missed two consecutive weeks? Who contacts the absentees?

4. Do people trust one another? Can they share concerns without fear of exposure?

**“What now…?” Action Plan for Fellowship**

What are the challenges we face that hinder being more effective in our fellowship?

What strengths can we build on for greater unity with diversity in our fellowship?

What are one or two things that we could do immediately and easily that will make a difference in the next few months?

Prepare a report for the full Transition Team.

**DISCIPLESHIP**

Discipleship is a lifelong journey of obedience to Christ that transforms a person’s values, character, attitudes, and behavior and results in ministry in one’s home, church, and in the world. Spiritual transformation is God’s work of changing a believer into the likeness of Jesus by creating a new identity in Christ and by empowering a lifelong relationship of love, trust, and obedience that glorifies God.

**“What if…?” Questions**

These questions can help create dialogue about future possibilities God might want to happen in our church.

1. What if we regularly heard testimonies of people whose lives have been transformed by the Lord through the ministry of this church?

2. What if all of our regular adult worship attenders were part of a Bible study group?

3. What if proven Christian character were a primary qualification for church leaders?

4. What if our church had an intentional process for the spiritual growth of members?

**“What is…?” Questions**

These questions help create dialogue as you compare the present reality with what could be in response to God’s guidance.

1. Is a central question for our church, “What kind of people are we developing?”

2. How do we celebrate transformed lives?

3. What small group support does our church provide for specific family/life issues (marriage, parenting, blended families, single parents, divorce recovery, etc.)?

4. How are our church members challenged in financial stewardship?

**“What now…?” Action Plan for Discipleship**

What are the challenges we face that hinder being more effective in our discipleship?

What strengths can we build on for greater effectiveness in transformational discipleship?

What are one or two things that we could do immediately and easily that will make a difference in the next few months?

Prepare a report for the full Transition Team.

**MINISTRY**

Ministry is meeting another person’s need in the name of Jesus, both members of the church and non-members. As the church becomes sensitive to the unmet needs in the fellowship, the community, and the world, they will expand their ministries to meet those needs. Using the resources God provides, ministry is expressed as service to people inside the church family and expressed as missions to those outside the church.

**“What if…?” Questions**

These questions can help create dialogue about future possibilities God might want to happen in our church.

1. What if an increasing number of our people are involved in community ministry?

2. What if our church helped members become involved in missions (community, national, and international) that express their passions, spiritual gifts, and talents?

3. What if our church provided people in our community with practical spiritual help for life issues (family, marriage, finances, etc.)?

4. What if our church members (including children, youth, and adults) had frequent opportunities to become personally involved in ministry and missions projects.

**“What is…?” Questions**

These questions help create dialogue as you compare the present reality with what could be in response to God’s guidance.

1. How do we guide our members into ministry? How are expectations communicated?

2. How do we help people discover and express their ministry passions, spiritual gifts, and calling?

3. What has our church done financially each year over the past five years in mission support for associational and state missions, North American Missions, and International Missions? What is the trend relative to the percent of the church budget in each of those years?

4. How do we celebrate involvement in missions (community, state, national, and international)?

**“What now…?” Action Plan for Ministry**

What are the challenges we face that hinder being more effective in our ministry?

What strengths can we build on for greater effectiveness in ministry and missions?

What are one or two things that we could do immediately and easily that will make a difference in the next few months?

Prepare a report for the full Transition Team.

**WORSHIP**

Worship is the response of believers to the presence, holiness, and revelation of Almighty God that transforms them into His likeness. It leads worshippers to a greater awe of God, a better understanding of His ways, and a deeper commitment to Him.

**“What if…?” Questions**

These questions can help create dialogue about future possibilities God might want to happen in our church.

1. What if more of our worshippers regularly feel they are in the presence of God?

2. What if more of our worshippers have a greater awe of God, a better understanding of His ways, and a deeper commitment to Him?

3. What if more of our worship attenders were pre-Christians?

4. What if our church conducted worship on days other than Sundays and in places other than the church worship center?

**“What is…?” Questions**

These questions help create dialogue as you compare the present reality with what could be in response to God’s guidance.

1. What is our goal for the worship experience for our congregation?

2. What makes our worship relevant to participants?

3. Will we consider days other than Sunday, multiple times on Sunday, and/or worship places other than the worship center?

4. What range of talent in our congregation is currently used in our worship experiences (audio, technical, vocal, instrumental, etc.)?

**“What now…?” Action Plan for Worship**

What are the challenges we face that hinder being more effective in our worship?

What strengths can we build on for greater effectiveness in our worship?

What are one or two things that we could do immediately and easily that will make a difference in the next few months?

Prepare a report for the full Transition Team.

**STAGE 4: Focus on Kingdom Results**

Kingdom results mean the supernatural activity of God is being expressed through the body of Christ and is being reflected in the changed lives of people. The results are measures or indicators of faithful obedience in responding to the Great Commission and serving God in growing His kingdom.

Having interpreted the Great Commission in terms of evangelism, discipleship, ministry, fellowship, and worship, it follows that a church should plan for the results of faithfully and effectively performing these functions enlightened by the Scriptures and empowered by the Holy Spirit (see diagram of “A Church Model and Process” on page 95).

Transitional pastors should teach and preach to help people understand and affirm the kingdom results that guide the church in its planning for growth. Leading churches through these sequential steps is a major responsibility of transitional pastors.

1. Distribute to each member of the Transition Team a copy of the overview of the “Kingdom Results” on pages 120-122. Use those pages and the diagram of “A Church Model and Process” on page 95 to lead the Transition Team to pray faithfully and fervently for God’s guidance in understanding the kingdom results that God want churches to achieve.
2. Preach a sermon series on the four kingdom results—spiritual transformation (More Like Christ), numerical growth (More People Reached for Christ), ministry expansion (More Service in the Name of Christ), and kingdom advance (More of Christ’s Heart for the World).
3. Divide the Transition Team into four subgroups to evaluate the church’s effectiveness in each of the four result areas using the SWOTs form on page 111.
4. Each subgroup will give a report to the full Transition Team.

**KINGDOM RESULTS**

Kingdom results mean the supernatural activity of God is being expressed through the body of Christ and is being reflected in the changed lives of people. The following four results are measures or indicators of faithful obedience in responding to the Great Commission and serving God in growing His kingdom.

**1. More Like Christ — Spiritual Transformation**

Spiritual transformation is God’s work of changing a believer into the likeness of Jesus by creating a new identity in Christ and by empowering a lifelong relationship of love, trust, and obedience that glorifies God.

In the Great Commission, Jesus said the church must be teaching new disciples to obey everything He commanded (Matt. 28:20). Paul wrote, “We all . . . are looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord and are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory; this is from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18).

New believers need to understand and live the true meaning of discipleship. Just as children pass a series of milestones on their way to maturity, believers go through transformational passages on their way to spiritual maturity.

Spiritual transformation can be observed in at least four dimensions.

* Developing in our relationship with Christ – We get our daily growth and spiritual nourishment from the same source we got our eternal life—Jesus Christ (John 15:5). Jesus desires for us to have the same kind of relationship with Him that He has with the Father (John 17:21). We are to grow to the point that He lives His life in and through us (Gal. 2:19-20).
* Developing in our relationships with other believers – The mark of a church is the warm, loving relationships believers enjoy with one another (John 13:34-35). Although we have many different backgrounds, cultures, ideas, opinions, and experiences, we have a common bond in Christ (Gal. 3:26-28).

* Developing in our relationships with unbelievers – Those who are objects of the Father’s love and concern must be on our hearts and minds as well. Believers have been given the ministry and message of reconciliation as His ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:18-20). With the power of the Holy Spirit, we are His witnesses to those nearby and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).
* Developing Christian disciplines – The Christian life is built on important disciplines such as Bible reading, prayer, worship, witnessing, and faithful participation in the fellowship of believers. These activities will not produce mature Christians by themselves, but believers need them to grow spiritually.

**2. More People Reached for Christ — Numerical Growth**

Numbers are important in the kingdom of God, or the Bible would not have recorded them. Twice in the second chapter of Acts, Luke records the number of people who were baptized and added to the church (Acts 2: 41, 47). Luke reports in Acts 6:1 that “the disciples were increasing in number.” Six verses later the number of disciples “increased greatly.” It is obvious that God is pleased when His children serve in ways that help His kingdom come on earth. Numerical growth means increases in all areas of the church. Also, numerical growth means any size church can grow.

There’s nothing wrong with seeing numbers as evidence of God at work. The danger is in seeing numbers as statistics rather than people and in using numbers as the only measure of growth.

What numerical growth does the church desire? Results can be expected in each of the following areas if the church is faithfully and effectively involved in evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, ministry, and worship.

* Professions of faith and baptisms
* People attending Bible study regularly
* People participating regularly in corporate worship and corporate prayer

Churches that expect numerical growth are normally engaged in training for these growth areas, involved in ministries outside the church, practicing biblical stewardship, providing effective discipleship, and participating in mission projects. Some churches already have practical and challenging growth goals while others have become comfortable being on a growth plateau or in a gradual decline.

**3. More Service in the Name of Christ — Ministry Expansion**

When Jesus spoke of the final judgment in Matthew 25:31–46, He talked about ministry. “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Matt. 25:40).

As the church becomes sensitive to the unmet needs in the fellowship, the community, and the world, they will expand their ministries to meet those needs. Ministry expansion means that as a church grows numerically and as people are transformed spiritually, the Holy Spirit opens additional doors of ministry. When we minister to hurting people, we will never lack for an audience.

“In those days, as the disciples were increasing in number, there arose a complaint by the Hellenistic Jews against the Hebraic Jews that their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution. The Twelve summoned the whole company of the disciples and said, ‘It would not be right for us to give up preaching the Word of God to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom we can appoint to this duty’” (Acts 6:1-3).

“Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen, a close friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them to.’ Then, after they had fasted, prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them off” (Acts 13:1-3).

God intends to meet the needs in the fellowship, community, and world through the lives of His children who seek out areas of ministry in which to serve. God expects us to place our gifts, abilities, and resources in His hands for His use. He will bless them and add to them so that we will have more than enough to meet the needs of all people. The church must listen to the Holy Spirit’s voice through the Word of God and prayer and must depend on the Spirit to lead it to the ministry He desires. The more mature believers are the more likely God will lead them to do greater and different things.

**4. More of Christ’s Heart for the World — Kingdom Advance**

Kingdom advance is God’s daily work of extending His kingdom throughout the world. The church is involved in reaching the world for Christ by praying, giving generously, and sending members on mission into the world. This is the Great Commission in its purest and best form. Remember, however, the Great Commission’s “go” is not complete until people are sent out from local churches––to advance His kingdom to “all nations” – as the Lord directs.

“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matt. 6:33).

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Kingdom advance results from kingdom consciousness. Sights are lifted above self-interest, or one class or group or team, or one church or denomination. Above all human structure is the kingdom of God. The measure of kingdom advance in a church is the church praying “Your kingdom come, your will be done” (Matt. 6:10) and accepting God’s rule in all its affairs.

When a church grows numerically, spiritually, and in ministry, believers become sensitive to the need to extend the gospel beyond their community to a world lost in sin. Their window on the world is enlarged. Their desire to witness, disciple, and minister is multiplied and enlarged. Involvement in missions reveals that the people of God have developed a worldview that is proper and biblical. The church will see the world as God sees it and will respond by sending its members into the world as missionaries.

God calls out believers to go into the world with the message of redemption. For some believers, the call will be to their families, churches, and neighborhoods. Others will be called to faraway places. But all believers are commissioned by Jesus to go into the world. “As the Father has sent me, I also send you” (John 20:21).

**STAGE 5: Establish Church Practice**

This is a crucial stage in transitional pastor ministry—leading a church from convictional principles to productive practice. Church practice means how you involve people in evangelism, discipleship, ministry, fellowship, and worship. It determines how people will relate to people and to tasks in carrying out the Great Commission. Shaping church practice answers questions like “What is the most effective way to do our work to make the greatest difference in the lives of people?” Strategy is the course a church decides to take to achieve kingdom results. Church practice is the operational plan to get there.

As transitional pastor you have the challenge of leading the church in the hard work of praying and planning. To succeed you must inspire churches to move beyond lethargy, constricting traditions, low expectations, and low commitment. To do that, you must pray for a discerning heart.

1. Distribute to each member of the Transition Team a copy of the overview of “Church Practice” on pages 124-127. Although you have already distributed the diagram of “A Church Model and Process” on page 95, have extra copies available. Lead the Transition Team in studying about the four church practices of open groups, closed groups, corporate worship, and ministry teams. Challenge them to pray fervently for God’s guidance in applying the church practices to carry out the biblical principles for church growth and to accomplish the kingdom results God desires for the church.

2. Communicate to the congregation about the church practices through sermons and church publications. Display throughout the church facilities the diagram of A Church Model and Process on page 95.

3. Lead a discussion of the Church Practices using the drawing exercise on page 128.

4. Divide the Transition Team into four subgroups to evaluate the church’s effectiveness in each of the four church practices using the SWOTs form (page 111).

5. Each subgroup will give a report to the full Transition Team.

**CHURCH PRACTICE**

The “A Church Model and Process” diagram provides a model for church practice defining three stages of growth: (1) making disciples through open groups and corporate worship, (2) maturing believers through closed groups, and (3) multiplying ministries through ministry teams. Understanding open groups, closed groups, corporate worship, and ministry teams and the process and essential actions for making them effective in achieving kingdom results may be the turning point for growth in your church. The visuals described in this section are on the diagram.

**Open Groups**

Open groups are on-going, evangelistic Bible study units including both believers and unbelievers. The dotted circle shows this is an entry point for unbelievers.

An open group is primarily an evangelistic Bible study group or event comprised of an intentional mix of both believers and unbelievers. The focus is evangelism, the context is Bible study, and the intent is to begin assimilation. It is also a great environment for building relationships and encouragement. Participants can enter the group at any point. Prior knowledge of the content being studied is not required.

An open group should be defined by its purpose, nature, function, and participants rather than by its resources, label, time frame, or location. “Open” means both believers and unbelievers are invited to participate in the Bible study experience. The group is intentionally formed around the study of God’s Word. Sunday School classes are open groups that have proven over time to be an effective way to involve families and individuals in Bible study. Vacation Bible School provides annual open groups.

Five transferable principles are valuable in guiding the effectiveness of open groups.

* The Principle of Foundational Evangelism – Open Bible study groups provide the best long-term approach for building a ministry environment that guides preschoolers and children toward conversion through foundational teaching, encourages unsaved people to come to faith in Christ, assimilates new believers into the life of the church, and encourages believers to lead others to Christ.
* The Principle of Foundational Discipleship – Open group Bible study provides a foundational step of discipleship for involving people in seeking the kingdom of God and fulfilling the Great Commission.
* The Principle of Family Responsibility – Open groups equip Christian parents to fulfill their responsibility as the primary Bible teachers of their children. These groups work to nurture sound, healthy families that help children and adults to integrate the Scriptures into their lives influencing how they think and act.
* The Principle of Spiritual Transformation – Open groups engage learners in the biblical method of instruction that leads people toward spiritual transformation. These groups champion the absolute truth and authority of God’s Word. They also lead believers to integrate a biblical worldview into their minds, hearts, and lives through ongoing systematic Bible study.
* The Principle of Biblical Leadership – Open groups call for leaders to follow the biblical standard for leadership. These groups call leaders to a prophetic ministry, listening to God’s voice, discovering His message, integrating the message into their lives, and proclaiming His truth through His church to the nations. Every leader is to be accountable for being an authentic example of Christ in personal living.

**Corporate Worship**

Worship services are focused on God but are designed for both believers and unbelievers. The dotted circle shows this is an entry point for unbelievers.

Worship that transforms is the response of believers to the presence, holiness, and revelation of Almighty God. As the leader of the church, the pastor is the primary worship leader. He will involve others in planning and leading worship experiences. The form of worship is not as important as the purpose of worship. *That* we worship is far more important than *how* we worship. A worship service must be designed to meet the fellowship needs of the church. This will create a family spirit that unites believers with the Lord and one another.

Corporate worship is open to unbelievers as the church gathers to praise God, study the Bible, and help people to understand, believe, and respond to the truths of the Bible. Some worship experiences focus primarily on the needs of Christians and others focus primarily on the needs of unbelievers, but the Holy Spirit can use both to speak to the needs of believers and unbelievers.

The New Testament identifies at least eight elements of worship the early church practiced. Worship must be planned with an intentional effort to balance and integrate these elements of worship. Some of these worship elements are expressed through music.

1. Corporate Prayer – Prayer is communication with God that leads the congregation to an awareness of His presence.

2. Praise – Praise expresses to God our adoration and thanks for His character, being, and work. It assists the congregation in understanding the reality of God’s kingdom and His reign over the world and their lives.

3. Confession and Repentance – God restores fellowship when the congregation confesses (agrees with God regarding the reality of their sins) and repents (turns from their sin to God).

4. Profession of Faith – Profession provides the opportunity for the congregation to acknowledge God as Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer and to respond to His Word and His activity.

5. Scripture Reading and Study – God transforms His church through His Word. The Holy Spirit uses the hearing, reading, and study of Scripture to draw attention to God and our fellowship with Him.

6. Preaching – God uses the preaching of the Word to teach, challenge, confront, convict, and exhort the congregation to obey His Word. Preaching focuses on the Lord and His magnificence.

7. Lord’s Supper and Baptism – Jesus established these two ordinances as dramatic symbols to make the congregation aware of His work on their behalf.

8. Offerings – A Christian’s giving of self, abilities, tithes, and offerings are responses of obedient stewardship, gratitude, and trust. To worship fully means to give yourself in obedience to God.

**Closed Groups**

Closed groups are short-term, self-contained units that (1) provide opportunities for believers to grow as discipleship, (2) develop disciples to serve, and (3) equip kingdom leaders. The solid circle shows these groups are focused on believers. The focus of closed groups is training, the context is discipling, and the intent is to continue assimilation. Closed groups build kingdom leaders and equip believers to serve by engaging people in discipleship that moves them toward spiritual transformation through short-term training units in an atmosphere of accountability to God and to each other. Because the discipleship group or event has a specific purpose, it is comprised of believers only who covenant to meet together for a limited period of time.

The church creates and maintains groups in which church members are led to discover their spiritual gifts and to develop knowledge and skills for effective ministry. The number and focus of closed groups should be determined by the felt needs of church members for spiritual transformation, teaching and leadership skills, family living skills, plus ministry and mission skills.

Six principles are valuable in guiding the effectiveness of closed groups.

* The Relationship Principle – Transformation takes place in relationships that start with and are based on an intimate relationship with Jesus. Also, transformational discipleship expresses itself in other relationships including marriage, family, friendships, church, work, acquaintances, community, and society.
* The Followship Principle – The church provides a spiritually sensitive environment that encourages believers to respond to God’s call to follow, challenges them to fulfill that call in the Body of Christ, and develops their skills for service.
* The Empowerment Principle – Throughout His ministry Jesus empowered, equipped, discipled, trained, built up, developed, and prepared His disciples to serve. The Holy Spirit empowers the church to develop servant leaders who depend on His power.
* The Flexibility Principle – Diverse people need flexible and adaptable ways to exercise spiritual transformation. A church ensures that its methods are appropriate for people of all learning styles, personality types, genders, ages, family types and situations, cultural differences, economic conditions, and ethnic backgrounds.
* The Lifestyle Principle – The bulk of Scripture is the story of diverse, ordinary, common people who demonstrated a life transformed by God. The church helps disciples express biblical principles in their everyday lives.
* The Accountability Principle – Although believers are ultimately accountable to God, God uses spouses, other family members, church members, friends, and others to keep us aware of our accountability to Him. The measure of discipleship is the degree to which a believer is like Jesus in attitudes, behavior, and relationships.

**Ministry Teams**

Ministry teams provide opportunities for service within the church (left side of the diamond) and involvement in missions beyond the church (right side of the diamond). The dotted diamond shows this is an entry point for unbelievers.

Ministry teams exist to build up the body of Christ to accomplish its work of ministry both within the church and outside the church. Ministry teams represent the multiplying stage that lets members extend their reach and their impact on the culture.

Five transferable principles are valuable in guiding the effectiveness of ministry teams.

* The Principle of Filtering – To keep the church and its ministries focused on work that is its calling, the church must filter out any proposed ministry action that is not compatible with its purpose based on fulfilling the Great Commission, accomplishing one or more of the five functions, and achieving one or more of the kingdom results.
* The Principle of Internal/External Focus – Church ministry teams can be focused on strengthening the church body or on sharing the love of Christ beyond the church. Churches must have ministry teams that focus both internally and externally.
* The Principle of Universal Involvement – Every Christian has a place of responsibility within the total ministry of the church and must accept responsibility for personal involvement in a ministry team.
* The Principle of Ministry-Team Integration – Churches integrate ministry teams into the life of the church as they staff various ministries of the church. For example, open-group, closed-group, and corporate worship activities are led by ministry teams.
* The Principle of Commission – Ministry teams are not an entity unto themselves. They function under the commission or authorization of the church. The leadership of the team is responsible for reporting the results of the team’s ministry to the church.

**church practices Exercise**

It has been estimated that 80% of the general population are visual learners. The Church Model and Process diagram helps church members have a picture in their mind’s eye and thus understand the mission and purpose of the church. In addition, many individuals prefer to learn in a kinesthetic manner, which means they prefer to learn by action.

In light of these two realities, the following drawing exercise is recommended. Divide the Transition Team into groups of four to five. Provide them with blank sheets of paper and pencils. (Have tear sheets or other drawing surfaces available for later in the exercise.)

Direct each team member to draw the church practice section of the Church Model and Process diagram as they see it currently existing in their church. Emphasize that they are attempting to picture current reality or “where we are,” not the ideal reality or “where we should be.” Make sure that team members understand that the four elements of church practice are not restricted to certain programs or events. Help them to see that they are evaluating overall effectiveness in each of the four areas.

The size of the shapes (circles, diamond) should be drawn to reflect effectiveness. For example, a large corporate worship circle indicates effectiveness in this area. Dotted lines indicate accessibility for the unchurched, while solid lines denote an intentional focus on believers. Lines between the shapes convey connectedness. An example might be as follows: a line between corporate worship and open groups might indicate visitors to worship services are invited to participate in small group Bible study experiences.

Note to facilitator: You will have to assure team members that this is not an art class, and their “creation” will not be judged or critiqued. Help them see that the point is to promote discussion and interaction, not to produce an artistic masterpiece. Remind the team that there is not a right way to draw the church practice. Rather, the drawing is a diagnostic tool that leads to dialogue. It helps a church see where they are and to talk about that.

Allow time for each team member to complete their drawing of church practice as it currently exists in their church setting. The, provide time in each group for each person to show their drawing and to explain why they portrayed as they did. Finally, create a group drawing on a tear sheet to share with the full Transition Team.

Have each group enlist one volunteer to share their drawing with the entire Transition Team. After all groups have shared their drawings, facilitate follow-up discussion.

**STAGE 6: Refocus the Church around Mission**

1. Lead the Transition Team to review or write a church mission statement using the process on page 130. Make copies of that page. Use the principles and concepts learned in the previous five stages. Even if the church has a mission statement, it may not be clear or stated clearly as a discipleship process. This can be a healthy exercise in leading the team members to rethink and refocus on the mission of the church. It will help prepare the way for the new pastor.
2. Lead the church to recommit to their mission statement or adopt the new mission statement.
3. Communicate the mission statement to the church through a series of sermons.
4. Lead the Transition Team and the leaders from all church ministries on a retreat. The retreat can be conducted on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon and evening. A good timeframe is from 4:00 – 9:00 p.m. including a light soup and/or salad dinner.

Use the retreat guidance on pages 131-136. The purpose of the retreat is to refocus the church around the five functions and the mission of the church. It provides an opportunity to overview all the information gathered in Stages 1-6, to guide discussion using the Strategy Map, and to give the team time to dream about the future.

Use the following resources from Stages 1 through 6 to develop initiatives to be recommended to the church.

* The listening sessions
* The compliments and criticisms from the Church Memories Workshop
* The discussion of the demographics report
* The review of the Current Reality worksheets
* The Values Inventory exercise
* The SWOTs evaluation of the five church functions
* The Development of Key Objectives for the five church functions
* The SWOTs evaluation of the kingdom results
* The SWOTs evaluation of the church practices
* The discussion of the church practices using the drawing exercise
* The church mission statement
* The results of the discussion of the Strategy Map

1. Present the recommended initiatives to the congregation for affirmation.

**WRITING A CHURCH MISSION STATEMENT**

Ask these questions as you review what the Bible says about the mission of the church. Look for God’s purpose for the church and the process God wants us to use to accomplish that purpose.

1. Why does the church exist?
2. Who or what are we to be as a church?
3. What does God want us to do as a church?
4. How are we to do it?

The biblical foundations for the church are numerous, but three passages are essential to understanding the mission of the church:

* The Great Confession – Matthew 16:13-18
* The Great Commandments – Matthew 22:34-40
* The Great Commission – Matthew 28:16-20

Based on these three foundational Scriptures, write in the space provided what you believe the mission of the church to be (purpose and process). Don’t get bogged down in the wording or flow, just write out what you understand these scriptures to say about the mission of the church.

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If your church currently has a mission statement, write it in the space provided.

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**THE TRANSITION TEAM RETREAT**

**(Including How to Use the Strategy Map)**

Lead the Transition Team and the leaders from all church ministries on a retreat. The retreat can be conducted on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon and evening. A good timeframe is from 4:00 – 9:00 p.m. including a light soup and/or salad dinner.

The purpose of the Transition Team Retreat is to refocus the church around the five functions and the mission of the church. It provides an opportunity to overview all the information gathered in Stages 1-6 and to give the team a time to dream about the future.

The purpose of the Strategy Map is to create conversations and clarity around the goal of a better future for the church. It will help the Transition Team better understand what was, what is, and what could be concerning their church.

Before the retreat, give each member of the Transition Team and other leaders attending the retreat a packet containing all the following data and findings from the previous stages and ask them to review the information before the retreat.

* The listening sessions
* The compliments and criticisms from the Church Memories Workshop
* The discussion of the demographics report
* The review of the Current Reality worksheets
* The Values Inventory exercise (optional)
* The SWOTs evaluation of the church functions
* The development of key objectives for the five functions
* The SWOTs evaluation of the kingdom results
* The SWOTs evaluation of the church practices
* The discussion of the church practices using the drawing exercise
* The church mission statement

Begin the retreat with an overview using the following:

What was – Review the compliments and criticisms from the Church Memories Workshop in Stage One. As you also share your observations of the past, emphasize what the church can build on for a better future.

What is – Review some of the information learned from the rest of the data and findings from Stages Two, Three, Four, and Five. Add your observations as their transitional pastor. Use this time to prepare them to dream about God’s better future for the church.

What could be – Introduce the Strategy Map by using the Super Bowl as an example (page 132). The Strategy Map will help them understand how to begin looking at their church. The goal is to get them dreaming about the church’s better future.

**Example of How to Use the Strategy Map**

The future state – “Win the Super Bowl.”

Barriers: Identify some barriers that must be overcome to reach our goal.

* Other teams want to win the Super Bowl.
* We must learn to play as a team.
* Our salary cap is limiting our draft picks and trades.
* We have never won the Super Bowl.

Current State: Define current reality of where you are in relation to the goal.

* We are fourth place in our division.
* We have a tough schedule ahead.
* Our star quarterback is injured.
* We have come close to winning some big games.

Critical Success Factors: These should be measurable and attainable.

* We must win 70% of our remaining games.
* We must average 4 yards per carry.
* We must complete 60% of passes.
* We must average 30 yards on kick-off returns.
* We must cause 2 turnovers per game by the other team while limiting our turnovers.

Strategic Initiatives/Projects: These are the things that will need to be done to overcome the barriers and implement the critical success factors.

* Make player trades – backup quarterback and experienced offensive linemen.
* Implement a new conditioning regime to be more effective in the fourth quarter.
* Install a more aggressive offensive scheme.

**Applying the Strategy Map to our Church**

Divide the Transition Team and the other church leaders into groups of 4-7. Ask each group to complete their Strategy Map for our church. Allow plenty of time for the groups to complete their maps. They will need you to guide them through the process. Here are some suggested times for each of the four areas.

* 15 minutes – Decide as a small group your preferred “Future State” (example: A Disciple Making Culture”).
* 15 minutes – Identify the church’s current reality (state) as it relates to your preferred “Future State.”
* 15 minutes – Define the obstacles/challenges/barriers to overcome to realize your preferred “Future State.”
* 30- 45 minutes – Decide on strategic initiatives/projects to achieve the “Future State.”
* 3-6 months – 90% certainty to accomplish, an early win
* 6-12 months – Builds on the first strategic initiative, 80% certainty to accomplish
* 15 minutes – Identify critical success actions, give to a ministry team to implement.

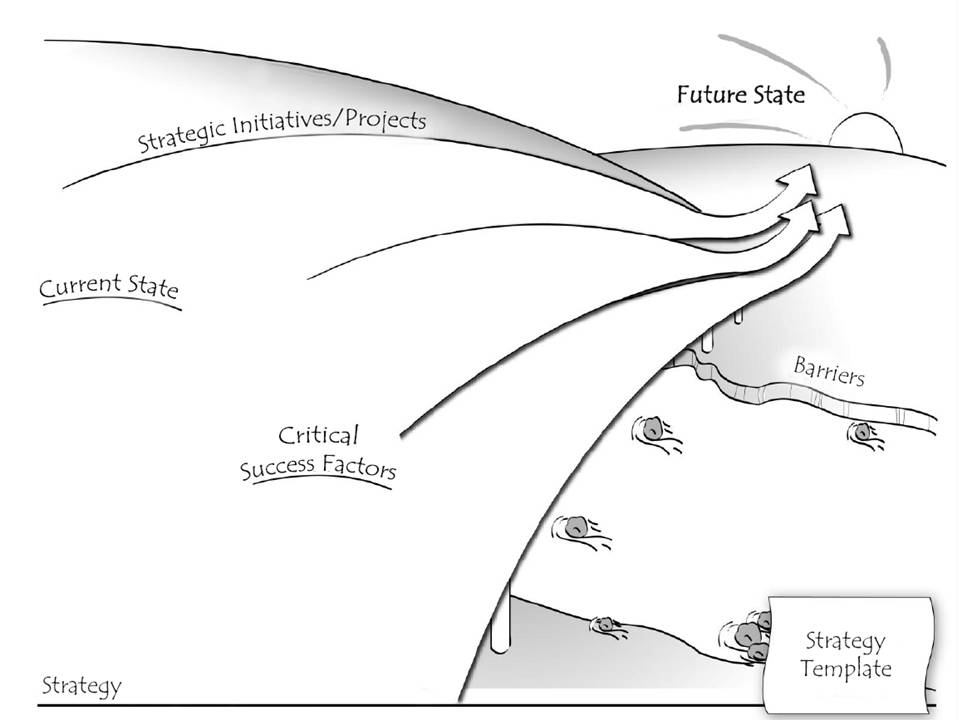
After a break, have each group present their map. Begin to note the common themes and ideas that are emerging. After each group has presented, take a 15-minute break. Capture the common themes and ideas onto one map.

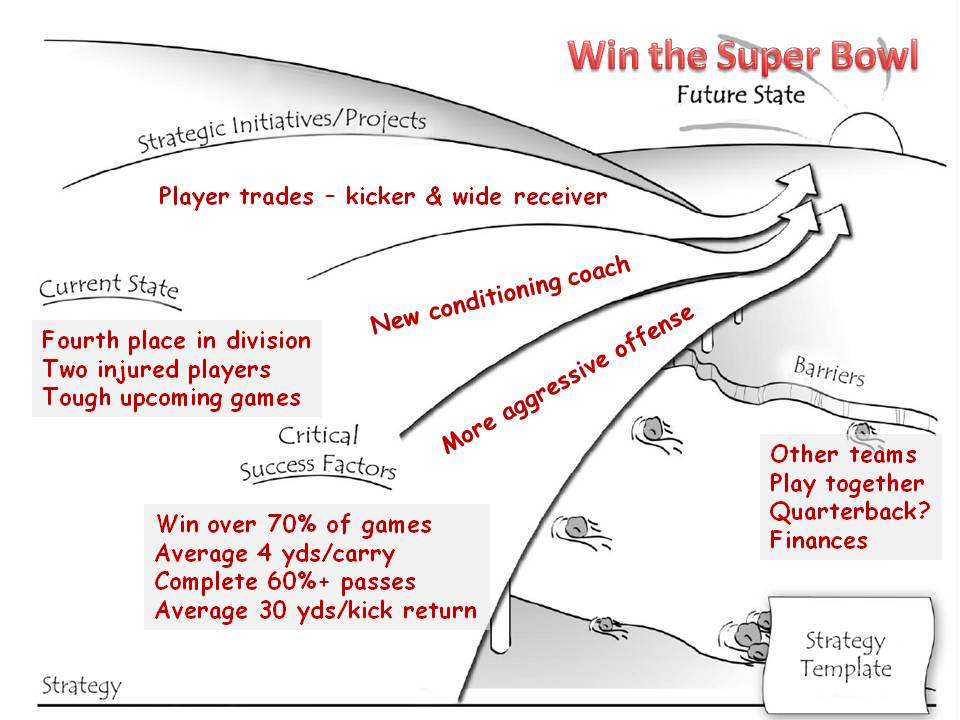
What will be – Share the common themes that emerge from each group’s strategy map. Ask the group if you have missed anything. Ask them to help narrow the initiatives to (1) no more than five things to focus on in the next three to six months and (2) no more than five to focus on for the next six to twelve months.

It will be the responsibility of the Transition Team to present the recommended initiatives to the congregation for affirmation. Then the Transition Team will make assignments to begin implementing those strategic initiatives.

The Strategy Template consists of five sections, which are Current Reality, Future State, Obstacles/Challenges, Critical Success Actions, and Strategic Initiatives/Projects.

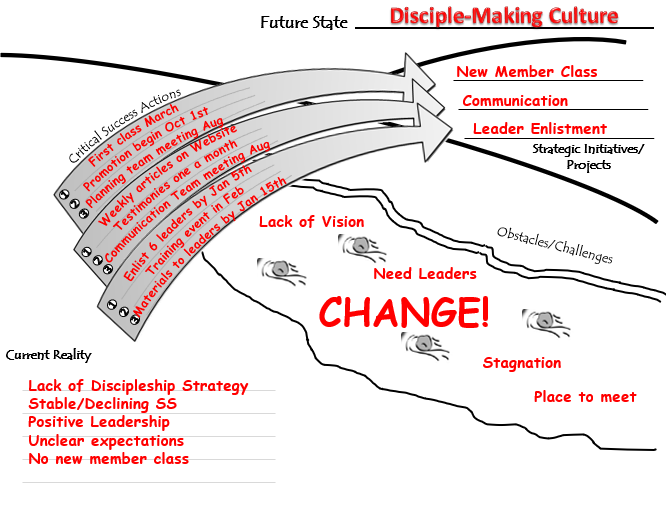
* Future State: In a general sense, this description serves as somewhat of a mission statement for whatever the template is being used. However, in the sub team setting, a formulaic expression is used. Since the mission of the church has been previously defined as that of making disciples, the statement here should be tied to that, and the function being examined. (e.g., Making Disciples through Evangelism, Making Disciples through Worship, etc.)
* Current Reality: This section formulates the need for the preferred future envisioned in each area. It includes both positive and negatives factors related to each function. It can be expressed in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Both the summary of “What Would Christ Say to Our Church?” and the SWOT analysis should be used to populate this section and may in fact be the full expression of it. Information from previous Listening Session would likely show up here.
* Obstacles/Challenges: This section is closely tied to the following section of Critical Success Actions. They should mirror each other and track together in an integrated fashion. While it is possible that you might have something listed in this section that does not show up in the next, the converse is not true. If something is not an obstacle or a challenge, it is highly unlikely that it would merit being addressed as a part of the overall action plan.
* Critical Success Actions: The key here is measurability in time. What is defined here becomes in essence the action plan to accomplishing the future state. While some of the strategic initiatives will likely be vague enough to defy measurability, this cannot be true of these action steps.
* Strategic Initiatives/Projects: These items answer in a general sense the question, “So how are we going to do this?” in response to the preferred future state. These are almost as much for communicating with the church as anything else. They are general and therefore must be linked to an action, i.e., the critical success actions.





Diagram

Description automatically generated



**STAGE 7: Find a Pastor to Lead in Fulfilling God’s Future for the Church**

Use the following five transitional pastor leadership actions in helping a church to find, call, and install a new pastor. The goal is to prepare the church to call a strong and fruitful pastor.

1. Order copies of the *Pastor Search Committee Handbook* from LifeWay Christian Resources for each Pastor Search Committee member. This handbook provides guidance for the church in finding and calling a pastor. It serves as a very important tool for the transitional pastor as he guides the committee and the church through the steps necessary to a wise decision.

2. Train the committee for its task using the *Pastor Search Committee Handbook*.

3. Continue to serve as a process consultant to the committee.

4. Interpret the search process to the church.

5. Train the pastor search committee to use the doctrinal assessment with a serious candidate.

This assessment is a tool that can be used to help a church perform due diligence in assessing where a pastoral candidate stands on some crucial and contemporary doctrinal positions. The transitional pastor can lead the pastor search committee to arrive at consensus in their responses to the Baptist Faith and Message teaching points using the five levels of agreement responses. (See guidance for facilitation of consensus on page 52.) The transitional pastor can highlight some of the relevant questions, especially in the sections on the doctrines of salvation and the church. It is essential that the search committee reach consensus on these key doctrines. Experience has shown that these areas tend to be the ones in which a potential pastor may not be completely forthright in stating his actual doctrinal convictions, for fear he might not be further considered as the church’s next pastor. Some of the questions could be used by the pastor search committee

6. In preparation for the coming of a new pastor, the transitional pastor should preach a message on “Honoring the Pastor.”

Note: It is unethical for a transitional pastor to attempt to sway the committee to choose one of his friends as the next pastor. It is also unwise because the church may blame the transitional pastor for causing them to call a pastor whose leadership or character do not live up to what they received in the search process.

**DOCTRINAL ASSESSMENT**

**The Doctrine of the Word of God**

Questions

Is the Bible completely true and inerrant?

How do we know that the Bible is God’s Word?

How would you respond to a person who claims that the Bible is full of errors?

Can only Bible scholars understand the Bible rightly?

How much can people know about God without the Bible?

Is the Bible enough for knowing what God wants us to think or do?

*Baptist Faith and Message,* June 14, 2000, p. 7

“The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God’s revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.”

Teaching Points

* *… truth, without any mixture of error. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy …*
* *… written by men … has God for its author*
* *… All Scripture is a testimony to Christ*

Response

❒ I agree with this statement without hesitation in all aspects.

❒ I find this statement perfectly acceptable.

❒ I can live with this statement because I trust the wisdom of Southern Baptist leaders who formulated it.

❒ I do not fully agree with this statement and need to share my concerns about certain aspects.

❒ I do not agree with this statement and reject it as an articulation of my beliefs.

**The Doctrine of God**

Questions

How do we know that God exists?

How is God different from us?

How is God like us in his being and in mental and moral attributes?

What is the doctrine of the Trinity?

How can God be three persons, yet one God?

Why, how, and when did God create the universe?

If God controls all things, how can our actions have real meaning?

What are angels?

Why did God create them?

How should Christians think of Satan and demons today?

In what way do believers relate to demons today?

*Baptist Faith and Message,* p. 7-8

“There is one and only one living and true God. He is an intelligent, spiritual, and personal Being, the Creator, Redeemer, Preserver, and Ruler of the universe. God is infinite in holiness and all other perfections. God is all powerful and all knowing; and His perfect knowledge extends to all things, past, present, and future, including the future decisions of His free creatures. To Him we owe the highest love, reverence, and obedience. The eternal triune God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence, or being.”

“God as Father reigns with providential care over His universe, His creatures, and the flow of the stream of human history according to the purposes of His grace. He is all powerful, all knowing, all loving, and all wise. God is Father in truth to those who become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. He is fatherly in His attitude toward all men.”

*Teaching Points*

* *… one and only one …*
* *… all powerful and all knowing; and His perfect knowledge extends to all things … including the future decisions of His free creatures …*
* *… triune God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*
* *… with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence, or being…*

Response

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**The Doctrine of Man**

Questions

Why did God create us?

How did God make us like himself?

Why did God create two sexes?

Can men and women be equal and yet have different roles?

What does Scripture mean by “soul” and “spirit”?

Are they the same thing?

What is sin?

Where did it come from?

Do we inherit a sinful nature from Adam?

Do we inherit guilt from Adam?

In what way does man have freedom in his moral and spiritual choices?

*Baptist Faith and Message,* p. 10

“Man is the special creation of God, made in His own image. He created them male and female as the crowning work of His creation. The gift of gender is thus part of the goodness of God’s creation. In the beginning man was innocent of sin and was endowed by his Creator with freedom of choice. By his free choice man sinned against God and brought sin into the human race. Through the temptation of Satan man transgressed the command of God, and fell from his original innocence whereby his posterity inherit a nature and an environment inclined toward sin. Therefore, as soon as they are capable of moral action, they become transgressors and are under condemnation. Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God. The sacredness of human personality is evident in that God created man in His own image, and in that Christ died for man; therefore, every person of every race possesses full dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love.”

Teaching Points

* *… the special creation of God, made in His own image …*
* *… created them male and female … the gift of gender is thus part of the goodness of God’s creation …*
* *… endowed by his Creator with freedom of choice …*
* *… by his free choice man sinned against God …*
* *… a nature and an environment inclined toward sin …*
* *… as soon as they are capable of moral action, they become transgressors …*

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**The Doctrines of Christ and the Holy Spirit**

Questions

How is Jesus fully God and fully man, yet one person?

Was it necessary for Christ to die? Why?

For whom did Jesus die?

What was Christ’s resurrection body like?

What is its significance for us?

What happened to Christ when he ascended into heaven?

What are the distinctive activities of the Holy Spirit throughout the history of the Bible?

*Baptist Faith and Message,* p. 8-9

“Christ is the eternal Son of God. In His incarnation as Jesus Christ He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Jesus perfectly revealed and did the will of God, taking upon Himself human nature with its demands and necessities and identifying Himself completely with mankind yet without sin. He honored the divine law by His personal obedience, and in His substitutionary death on the cross He made provision for the redemption of men from sin. He was raised from the dead with a glorified body and appeared to His disciples as the person who was with them before His crucifixion. He ascended into heaven and is now exalted at the right hand of God where He is the One Mediator, fully God, fully man, in whose Person is effected the reconciliation between God and man. He will return in power and glory to judge the world and to consummate His redemptive mission. He now dwells in all believers as the living and ever present Lord.”

“The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God, fully divine. He inspired holy men of old to write the Scriptures. Through illumination He enables men to understand truth. He exalts Christ. He convicts men of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. He calls men to the Saviour, and effects regeneration. At the moment of regeneration He baptizes every believer into the Body of Christ. He cultivates Christian character, comforts believers, and bestows the spiritual gifts by which they serve God through His church. He seals the believer unto the day of final redemption. His presence in the Christian is the guarantee that God will bring the believer into the fullness of the stature of Christ. He enlightens and empowers the believer and the church in worship, evangelism, and service.”

Teaching Points

* *… Christ is the eternal Son of God …*
* *… conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary …*
* *… yet without sin …*
* *… (Christ is) fully God, fully man …*
* *… (The Holy Spirit is) fully divine …*
* *… at the moment of regeneration, He baptizes every believer into the Body of Christ …*

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**The Doctrine of Salvation**

Questions

What are the undeserved blessings that God gives to all people, both believers and unbelievers? What is election?

When and why did God choose us?

Are some not chosen for salvation?

What is the gospel message?

What role does the conviction of the Holy Spirit play in a person coming to faith?

Can that conviction be resisted and ignored?

What does it mean to be born again?

What is true repentance?

What is saving faith?

Can people accept Jesus as Savior and not as Lord?

How and when do we gain right legal standing before God?

How do we grow in Christian maturity?

What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit?

Should we seek a “baptism in the Holy Spirit” after conversion?

Can true Christians lose their salvation?

How can we know if we are truly born again?

*Baptist Faith and Message,* p. 11-12

“Salvation involves the redemption of the whole man, and is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, who by His own blood obtained eternal redemption for the believer. In its broadest sense salvation includes regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification. There is no salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord.

A. Regeneration, or the new birth, is a work of God’s grace whereby believers become new creatures in Christ Jesus. It is a change of heart wrought by the Holy Spirit through conviction of sin, to which the sinner responds in repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance and faith are inseparable experiences of grace. Repentance is a genuine turning from sin toward God. Faith is the acceptance of Jesus Christ and commitment of the entire personality to Him as Lord and Saviour.

B. Justification is God’s gracious and full acquittal upon principles of His righteousness of all sinners who repent and believe in Christ. Justification brings the believer unto a relationship of peace and favor with God.

C. Sanctification is the experience, beginning in regeneration, by which the believer is set apart to God’s purposes, and is enabled to progress toward moral and spiritual maturity through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. Growth in grace should continue throughout the regenerate person’s life.

D. Glorification is the culmination of salvation and is the final blessed and abiding state of the redeemed.”

“Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners. It is consistent with the free agency of man, and comprehends all the means in connection with the end. It is the glorious display of God’s sovereign goodness, and is infinitely wise, holy, and unchangeable. It excludes boasting and promotes humility. All true believers endure to the end. Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end. Believers may fall into sin through neglect and temptation, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, and bring reproach on the cause of Christ and temporal judgments on themselves; yet they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.”

Teaching Points

* *… (Salvation) is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour …*
* *… no salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord …*
* *… regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification …*
* *… a change of heart wrought by the Holy Spirit through conviction of sin …*
* *… election is the gracious purpose of God … consistent with the free agency of man …*
* *… (election) comprehends all the means in connection with the end …*
* *… all true believers endure to the end …*

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**The Doctrine of the Church**

Questions

What is necessary to make a church?

How can we recognize a true church?

What are the purpose(s) of the church?

What is the relationship between the church and Israel?

What kind of authority does the church have?

How should church discipline function?

How should a church be governed?

How should church officers be chosen?

Who are the officers of the church?

Should women serve as pastors of churches? Deacons?

Who should be baptized?

How should it be done?

What does it mean?

What is the meaning of the Lord’s Supper?

How should it be observed?

What role does worship play in the life of the church?

What is your definition of worship? What are spiritual gifts? Have some gifts ceased*?*

*Baptist Faith and Message,* p. 13-14

“A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. Its scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture. The New Testament speaks also of the church as the Body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.”

“Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer’s faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Saviour, the believer’s death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead. Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord’s Supper. The Lord’s Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialize the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His second coming.”

Teaching Points

* *… an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers …*
* *… associated by covenant …*
* *… observing the two ordinances of Christ …*
* *… seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth …*
* *… operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes …*
* *… scriptural officers are pastors and deacons …*
* *… the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture …*
* *… (baptism) is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord’s Supper …*

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**The Christian and Society**

Questions

What do you believe about social justice in society? How should it best be addressed?

What do you believe about racism in society? How should it best be addressed?

What do you believe about same sex marriage? How should it best be addressed?

What do you believe the involvement of Christians in adoption and foster care?

What do you believe about abortion? How should it best be addressed?

*Baptist Faith and Message,* p. 19

“All Christians are under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in our own lives and in human society. Means and methods used for the improvement of society and the establishment of righteousness among men can be truly and permanently helpful only when they are rooted in the regeneration of the individual by the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ. In the spirit of Christ, Christians should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, and vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography. We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death. Every Christian should seek to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love. In order to promote these ends Christians should be ready to work with all men of good will in any good cause, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and His truth.”

Teaching Points

* *… methods used for the improvement of society … rooted in the regeneration of the individual …*
* *… should oppose racism … and all forms of sexual immorality …*
* *… provide for the orphaned … et. Al ….*
* *… speak on behalf of the unborn …*
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**The Doctrines of Kingdom and the Future**

Questions

When and how will Christ return?

Could he come back at any hour?

What is the Millennium?

When does it occur in relation to Christ’s return?

Will Christians go through the Great Tribulation?

Who will be judged at the final judgment?

What is hell? What is heaven? Is it a place?

How will the earth be renewed?

What will it be like to live in the new heavens and new earth?

What happens to our bodies and souls when we die?

When will we receive resurrection bodies? What will they be like?

*Baptist Faith and Message,* p. 15

“The Kingdom of God includes both His general sovereignty over the universe and His particular kingship over men who willfully acknowledge Him as King. Particularly the Kingdom is the realm of salvation into which men enter by trustful, childlike commitment to Jesus Christ. Christians ought to pray and to labor that the Kingdom may come and God’s will be done on earth. The full consummation of the Kingdom awaits the return of Jesus Christ and the end of this age.”

“God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end. According to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised; and Christ will judge all men in righteousness. The unrighteous will be consigned to Hell, the place of everlasting punishment. The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in Heaven with the Lord.”

Teaching Points

* *… Christians ought to pray and labor that the Kingdom may come …*
* *… the full consummation of the Kingdom awaits the return of Jesus Christ …*
* *… Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth …*
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**STAGE 8: Help the Pastor Get a Good Start in the Church and Community**

Barring disabling illness or injury, transitional pastors serve the church until a pastor is called and begins his work. Normal tenure lasts from 9 to 18 months. Guiding a church through the stages of transition will rarely be accomplished in less time; some require more time.

As soon as the date when the new pastor is to begin his work with the church is known, work with the pastor search committee to arrange for extending invitations to community leaders, other churches in the community, and denominational leaders to attend and participate in a service of installation for the new pastor under the guidance of the transitional pastor and led by the pastor search committee. See Tool 26 and Tool 27 in the *Pastor Search Committee Handbook* for celebration suggestions. The transitional pastor may be asked to participate in the service of installation and symbolically pass the mantle of leadership to the new pastor.

The transitional pastor may be asked to continue as a consultant to a new pastor for a brief time after the new pastor arrives to help orient the new pastor to the people and process of the church.

The pastor search committee may ask the transitional pastor to assist in arranging to introduce the new pastor to leadership in the community and denomination. You can help the committee make appointments with civic and religious, such as:

* Some of the faithful church members who are now physically unable to attend.
* The director of missions for the local association of southern Baptist churches
* Pastors of neighboring Southern Baptist churches
* Chairman of the interdenominational ministers’ fellowship
* A local hospital administrator
* Principals of schools serving the area of the church
* Mayor and council member representing the area in which the church is located

If the transitional pastor’s wife can participate in this orientation process, she can introduce the pastor’s wife to grocery stores and other shops, the public library, and other services important for the pastor’s family. Facilitating a brunch or tea at which the pastor’s wife may meet and fellowship with women of the church may be helpful. Any such activity that helps the pastor’s wife become more comfortable in the new environment reduces stress normally associated with moving and adjusting to different living circumstances. If the transitional pastor’s wife is not available for this ministry, encourage some of the women on the pastor search committee to coordinate orientation activities for the pastor’s wife.

Whether the transitional pastor remains on the field or not, it will be constructive for him to write a letter to the church or communicate through a church publication thanking the church for the privilege of serving them and being blessed in the relationship. Include affirming words about the new pastor, words that encourage full support of him by the entire church for the sake of the kingdom of God.