



Wisdom for Pastors in Transition

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

WHEREVER YOU GO, THERE YOU ARE

Many pastors think that a new call will resolve something amiss in their lives or ministry. Entering a new call can quickly reveal that much of what you said “needed to change” about your last church had less to do with the church and more to do with you. Rather than take a new call, first seek out help to address those things now. Your next (and subsequent) calls will thank you for it.

TRANSITIONS REQUIRE PATIENCE AND ENDURANCE

The calling process takes time. Once you decide to seek a new call, there are conversations, prayer, inquiries, interviews, visits and meet and greets that need to happen. There will be frustrations and disappointments. Knowing this at the start can mitigate the unpleasant parts of the process.

THE SEARCH CAN FEEL AWKWARD

Pastors often describe the experience of interacting with other churches in the calling process as feeling like they’re “cheating” on their current church. Unfortunately, there’s not a great way to avoid a certain amount of secrecy in the process.

DISCERNING WELL

DISCERNMENT IS BEST IN COMMUNITY

Most pastors wish they had found a better way to include others in their discernment of whether or not to accept a new call. But the risk of sharing vulnerably with others about a position you may or may not be offered often prevents disclosure.

“CALL” IS COMPLEX

God called you, a person, with talents and gifts under development. God called you to pastor, a role shaped by service and expectations. God called you to a church, a context with its own culture and peculiarities. Discerning how God is at work in each of these is key to good discernment.

IS YOUR CALL CHANGING OR ARE YOU?

Individuals change at faster rates than churches do. God has been using your ministry experience to develop you as a person and a pastor. It’s natural to develop new ministry and interests. A good question to ask yourself is: “Do I need a new church or do I need a new job description?”

NAME WHAT YOU’RE LOOKING FOR

When you articulate the types of ministry opportunities and settings you feel called to next, you give yourself the gift of clarity and decisiveness in your search. Knowing what you’re looking for will empower you to say “yes” to the right opportunities, and “no” to those that aren’t a match.

QUESTION YOUR INDISPENSABILITY

Pastors are just as vulnerable to delusions of grandeur as anyone. Beware the temptation to overestimate your own importance. Your leadership is essential, but lasts only for a season of the church's life.

LEAVING WELL

SAY "GOODBYE" NOT "SEE YOU LATER"

In an age of social media connection and in the sometimes-small world of the CRCNA, it can be hard to navigate relationships with former parishioners, even after you've moved across the country. Your ability to say goodbye to your current congregation will impact your ability to say hello to your new congregation of ministry.

RECOGNIZE THE LOSSES, GRIEVE WELL

Pastoral ministry, by its nature, requires pastors and their families to become embedded in their communities. The pastor becomes a part of the church "family." Leaving that "family" can provoke strong feelings for you. If you don't grieve the goodbye, it's harder to celebrate the hello.

TELL THE TRUTH (WITH GRACE AND WHEN ASKED)

Pastors report having conflicted feelings about just how honest to be with their church as they leave. While the pastors don't want to sully the church's reputation, they fear that an overly-positive assessment will make it harder for the next pastor to succeed.

ENTERING WELL

ASSUME LESS, ADVOCATE MORE

Different contexts can have radically different concepts of who and what a pastor is. Don't assume that your concepts match. Instead, share your strengths and ministry interests clearly. Ask specific questions about the role. And ask for a position description if there isn't one already.

HOLD SEARCH COMMITTEE PROMISES LOOSELY

Just because a church says, in the calling process, that they want you to lead them in a certain way doesn't mean you have a mandate from the whole congregation. You can use those promises or your job description as a reference point, but you can't take it for granted that everyone will be willing to follow. You still have to lead.

EXPECT A SHORTER HONEYMOON

Many pastors benefit from the extra measure of grace offered them by their first church. Pastors in their second call and beyond report that such a grace-filled honeymoon, if it exists at all, is often shorter. Congregations may assume that the pastor, having done this once before, is now an expert.

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE IMPACT ON YOUR FAMILY

While pastors often report a feeling of excitement and relief upon starting at their next call, they tend to underestimate the impact of the move on their family. It takes a lot of work to get socially connected in a new community. Your stage of life may be more or less conducive to making those connections.

MAKE A FRESH START

A new call affords you the chance to set a healthier rhythm of life from day one, including better boundaries and a more consistent sabbath.