



Wisdom for Pastors Approaching Retirement

These ten insights summarize learnings gained by Thrive through conversations with pastors who are in the last year or two of their careers and approaching retirement. We hope they are helpful to you.

- 1. CONGRATULATIONS!**
You've made it this far, in a very challenging vocation. God has led you through valleys and over mountains. That is worth celebrating!
- 2. ASSESS YOUR READINESS TO RETIRE:**
A key question for you is, "Do you still have a vision/sense of direction for your ministry?" Do this assessment work with people you trust, who can ask you good, clarifying questions related to your sense of call and direction.
- 3. GET YOURSELF READY:**
Develop your list of the practical/logistical questions related to your upcoming retirement, and develop a timeline for obtaining wisdom related to those questions.
- 4. GET THEM READY, PART 1:**
Invest in your church's lay leadership so that you don't leave a vacuum when you eventually leave your ministry. You have wisdom to share. Share it.



5. **GET THEM READY, PART 2:**
Partner with your lay leadership to prepare the congregation by thinking with your lay leaders about the near future—yours and theirs. You have a voice. Use it.
6. **ANNOUNCING RETIREMENT: STRATEGY MATTERS!**
Be aware that the announcement of your retirement date could bring a change in your relationship with your congregation—particularly if you have been at your church for a while, if you have relied heavily on your ministerial role for permission to function in your setting (as opposed to relationship capital and/or your personal character), and if you are moving away after retirement. You are no longer part of the congregation's future, and that reality will show up in all kinds of conversations. So it will be wise to have the large pieces of your retirement plans in place before you announce. However, don't wait too long to make the announcement. You'll shortchange the time needed for the transition.
7. **FORTIFY THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE ROLE AND THE PERSON**
So that when the role evaporates you don't evaporate with it.
8. **RECAPTURE THE CORE OF YOUR CALL:**
As you near the end of the end of your ministry career you might find yourself trying to knock off a "professional bucket list." Such lists are usually collections of ministry projects that are important but still unfinished. Yours might actually be a weight around your shoulders. Focus on the core of your calling: Love your people and lead them to God.
9. **WHERE TO LAND?**
The best place to set down roots after retirement seems to be wherever you can regain or create a support community. Sometimes that means being near family, but don't count on it. Adult kids relocate for a variety of reasons. So some pastors find that going back to the community where they raised their children is the wiser move.
10. **RETIREMENT IS ALSO A CALLING.**
Retirement is not a triumph over the drudgery of work. Neither is it a lamentable diminishment of you as a person. It is simply a new opportunity to explore how God's call upon your life is to be lived, shared, and enjoyed.

