EFFECTIVE TRANSITIONAL MINISTRY PLAN: PASTORAL LEADERSHIP IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY CHURCH

A Thesis Proposal Submitted to Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Ministry

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ABSTRACT

EFFECTIVE TRANSITIONAL MINISTRY PLAN: PASTORAL LEADERSHIP IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY CHURCH

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The short term nature of the role of transitional pastors allows them to address spiritual deficiencies, provide spiritual corrections and prepare a congregation for change within a shorter time frame than normally required. Having served as a transitional pastor this writer believes the real calling of transitional ministry is to strengthen the church and place it on an effective path for the cause of Christ. Writing on this topic will provide an outline for what a successful transitional ministry plan should look like. This project will include pastoral surveys and interviews that identify spiritual deficiencies and provide biblical solutions for congregational problems. The result will be a step-by-step action plan to guide transitional pastors in effective short-term ministry. The desired outcome is to spiritually reposition the Twenty-first century church so it embraces the future ministry and impacts the world for Christ.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Across America, churches are in need of spiritual nurture and pastoral adjustments that bring them in line with biblical and scriptural mandates. What has occurred in many churches is the development of a mindset that feeds on personal fellowship and organization rather than on mission and ministry. More than just a few churches have unknowingly adopted a pharisaical attitude of wanting the church to grow, but wanting the growth to resemble their own people and worship style. While the church is a multi-functional organization, it has one primary mission: to reach, teach, and touch others for Christ. Churches generally are conservative and slow to change. The reality is that cultures, society, technology, and even organizations must change. The church must also be willing to change or risk being left behind by society. The culture and the world will not wait for the church to catch up.

A prime time to assist churches in making long lasting biblical changes is during the transition time between pastors. Eventually, every church, whether large or small, will experience the loss of a pastor and experience a need for a replacement. Churches are more receptive to change when the church senses a major adjustment taking place. Many churches desire change, but are not really sure how to go about it. Transitional or interim pastors are often given a measure of authority and spiritual clout as they enter a ministry. That authority, if used wisely, can be invested in strengthening the church and preparing it for change. Spiritual weaknesses and deficiencies can be identified and dealt with without long term consequences. A biblical foundation can be established and built on during this transition period that helps a church get to the next level in spiritual maturity. A transitional pastor can also act as a modern day John the Baptist for the incoming pastor in preparing the pathway that helps focus on the
immediate needs of the church while also being a buffer that eliminates comparisons to the former ministry. In short, a transition period can be a very fertile time of spiritual revitalization that helps a church become what Christ intended it to be.

**Background Leading to the Awareness of the Problem**

A number of years ago, while serving as the chairman of a Pulpit search committee, this author experienced the difficulty of trying to locate qualified people to fill the pulpit for each service while balancing the spiritual needs of a congregation. There were people who were willing to supply preach, but not as many that were truly willing to minister to the congregation. Consequently, because of the tremendous need for qualified pastors, this author began pursuing a degree in Religion with Liberty University. Ordination came in September of 2002 in the Free Will Baptist Denomination and the call for transitional ministry began in the eastern North Carolina area. After 10 years of transitional and bi-vocational ministries, there is an appreciation for the unique role and calling of a transitional pastor. It has lead to the conclusion that God can use this special position to reenergize and rejuvenate the local church if transitional pastors are aware of the need to reposition the Twenty-first century church.

**Rationale for Selecting This Topic**

The last words of Christ, in Scripture, are words of instruction to the church. In the Book of Revelation chapters two and three, Christ appeals to seven churches exhorting, correcting and providing instruction (Rev. 2:2-3:22). He has commissioned the church to impact the world in positive ways. Christ has authorized the church to “go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.”¹ While the Church is God’s chosen

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¹ Matthew 28:18b-20a. The New King James Version. The NKJV will be the version that will be referenced throughout, unless otherwise noted.
method of reaching the world, God also recognizes that many churches have deficiencies. Christ addressed the deficiencies in the early churches in Revelation and much of the New Testament was written to correct spiritual deficiencies, attitudes and the conduct within the Church. The truth is, after two thousand years of ministry, many deficiencies continue to linger. One of the most effective ways of handling modern day deficiencies within the local church is by using the position of a transitional pastor and the time afforded them to affect change during the transitional period.

**Statement of the Problem**

Many people wonder why their church is not growing. Most churches have the stated desired to grow, but are uncertain how to accomplish growth. The problem is a lot of church members are unwilling to make changes, especially changes that will be necessary to attract people different from themselves and grow the ministry. The church has a tendency to erect barriers to protect the organization of the church and continue the status quo. Church members are unaware that barriers also keep people out and work against the mission of the church. Dr. Elmer Towns, President and Dean of Liberty University Baptist Theological Seminary says, “The first step in overcoming barriers is to identify them. The Christian has the responsibility to make that step.”

A major part of the problem is that churches do not identify barriers because they see them and use them as cultural protection. They have a desire to protect the history of the church and their personal experience with the church and fail to recognize that, culturally, the world is changing. They have little power to change things on the outside of the church. Therefore, they turn inward where they have a voice and hold tightly to their security blanket, the church. They resist change by holding on to memories and traditions. They look back on things

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that were done in the past, rather than looking forward to things to accomplish. Consequently, there exists a tension of holding on to the past rather than reaching forward to the future. Many churches today resemble museums filled with history rather than a spiritual hospital actively treating the spiritually sick. The words of the Apostle Paul, “forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus,”[^3] are words that become relegated to their Sunday school criteria instead of being part of a practical outreach. The church needs reminding that it has an important role to play in transforming the lives of people in today’s world. The mission of Christ is just as important today as it was two thousand years ago. Transitional ministry can be an effective way to revitalize the church.

**Terminology Defined**

In this thesis project the term “transitional” and “interim” will refer to the same position; a temporary pastoral role in the local church. Different denominations have different titles they use to describe the leader of a local congregation. The term “pastor,” “clergy,” “bishop,” “shepherd,” “minister,” “priest,” “rector,” or “elder” will be used interchangeably to refer to the local ministry leader. The term “church” or “parish” will be defined in a general way as being a body of believers within the local congregation. While the church can be referred to as the universal church (meaning all believers worldwide), for the purposes of this paper, it will refer to the local congregation of believers, unless specifically noted. According to Dr. Elmer Towns, as part of the first criterion of the New Testament, a church was an assembly of professing believers who have faith in Jesus Christ (Rom.10:9).[^4] It is with this local church congregation in mind that

this writer has chosen to develop the concept of using transitional ministry to transform the church.

“Transition” is defined by *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* as: (a): passage from one state, stage, subject, or place to another: change; (b): a movement, development, or evolution from one form, stage, or style to another. While a “transitional ministry” can be defined as a ministry going through a process of transition, without the loss of a permanent pastor, for the purposes of this paper a “transitional ministry” will specially refer to the loss of a permanent pastor and the replacement of a temporary pastor for short term ministry.

Conflict can be viewed in many different ways depending on one’s perspective. Merriam-Webster defines conflict as (1) fight, battle, war (2a) competitive or opposing action of incompatibles: antagonistic state or action (2b) mental struggle resulting from incompatible or opposing needs, drives, wishes, or external or internal demands. For the purposes of this paper, the latter definition (2b) will be used to describe conflict; a mental struggle resulting from incompatible or opposing needs.

Power is defined as the ability to act or produce an effect. Roger S. Nicholson in his book *Temporary Shepherds* says, “Conflict and power are normal elements of church life and if managed carefully, conflict helps bring about needed change….and the positive aspect of power is that it makes things happen.” This author believes that harnessing the energy of these two dynamic factors and carefully managing them can be critical to the transitional period for a

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church. Transitional pastors must be sensitive, skillful, and methodical in their approach to managing both conflict and power.

**Statement of Limitations**

The goal of this project is to help local churches develop a plan that is simple to understand, diverse in its application, and clear in its implementation. The research information was drawn from many pastors and writers from different denominations. The goal was to understand the challenges faced by transitional pastors in their service to churches and provide a framework for strengthening the church with biblical solutions. However, there is no one method or one process that will work in every church. Churches are as diverse as people, each having their own set of issues and problems to work through. God’s principles are time tested and still very applicable. The Apostle Paul provides instruction from Philippians (1:27): “Whatever happens, as citizens of heaven live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together with one accord for the faith of the gospel.” With God’s grace, proper training, a sensitive heart and a willingness to invest in God’s kingdom, the transitional time can prove very beneficial for the church and the incoming pastor. Change is inevitable in the world therefore, how people respond to change can determine whether a church ends up with a successful outcome or whether disaster strikes. Molly Dale Smith makes the following observation: “Those who fail to plan, plan to fail. Lack of meaningful attention to transition is failure to plan.” Transitions and change require a general idea and direction in which to go. This paper seeks to provide a strategy that can be easily understood and adopted. Significant and

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9. Phil. 1:27.

deep rooted problems in transitional ministry will not be addressed specifically due to their extensive nature. This author recognizes that there are some situations and issues that require the work of trained specialists and professional counselors. It is beyond the scope of this paper to deal adequately with situations that require intensive care. Situations where there have been sexual abuses, embezzlement, fraud, and pastoral misconduct may require the services of a counselor or someone who specializes in a particular field. There are many fine organizations such as the Interim Ministry Network, Center for Congregational Health, Interim Pastor Ministries and the Alban Institute that serve as resources to help local congregations with pastoral vacancies that have trained specialists and resources available. The Alban Institute recognizes three basic types of interim or transitional ministries. The first type is the most basic, supply ministry. The second type is simple interim ministry and the third type is more complex, intentional interim ministry.\(^{11}\) This paper reflects the second type of interim ministry, the simple interim ministry. It is designed to help smaller congregations that have limited resources and congregations normally with less than 100 people. There are also churches that do not have denominational associations or ties with any particular organization; these churches are the primary target group for this project. Replacing a pastor can be difficult even under routine circumstances. This paper puts forth a competent method for congregations in need. This project will certainly not be an exhaustive process, but one that addresses basic and practical issues. By examining the general nature of transitional ministry, guidelines will be developed which enhance the transitional period for both the congregation and the pastor.

**Theoretical Basis**

Jesus reached a point in His ministry where He asked a question of the disciples:

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‘Who do men say that I, the son of Man, am?’ So they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.’\textsuperscript{12}

The concept of a church and its mission fully belongs to Christ. His words, “I will build My church,” clearly articulate ownership of the church. Later in the Book of Ephesians, the Apostle Paul builds on this concept by providing insight into the church by using it as an analogy of marriage:

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.\textsuperscript{13}

The Apostle Paul’s church analogy develops the structure of authority and the decision making process for the church. Christ is the head and the church is subject to Christ. The church has both an obligation and a commitment to Christ and the church plays an important role in God’s economy regarding the redemption of man. The church needs to be strong so it weathers the spiritual storms of a changing culture and impacts the local community.

While the historical result of the church will be reunited and presented back to Christ, the church will face difficult and unhealthy times. Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church says of the church, “I believe the key issue for churches in the twenty-first century will be church health,\textsuperscript{12, 13}

\textsuperscript{12. Matthew 16:13-18.}
\textsuperscript{13. Ephesians 6:22-27.}
not church growth.”¹⁴ Warren does not dismiss the idea of church growth, he simply is making the point that growth becomes a natural part of the life of a church and if a church is genuinely healthy, it will grow. Effective transitional ministry is designed to produce healthy churches by nurturing and strengthening the mission of the church, which should be a natural part of church life.

In Revelation 2:1 through 3:22, Christ addresses the issue of health as it relates to the seven churches through prophetic letters. Each of these letters represents both instruction and encouragement for dealing with difficult circumstances within the church. Jesus was well aware that the church would be attacked internally and externally throughout history. These letters represent an effort to prepare the church for the future. There are both good and bad aspects of every church and things that can be improved upon. A common theme of Christ in each of the letters is, “I know your works.” At the beginning of each letter, Christ informs the church that He is aware of their activities. This indicates an assessment or evaluation of what is happening spiritually. This is generally the first step with any ministry when determining the spiritual condition of a congregation. This will be one of the steps in developing a plan for effective transitional ministry. It must be determined how sick or healthy the church is by checking the spiritual temperature of the congregation. For the purposes of this project, this will be done by a survey evaluating the spiritual strengths and weaknesses within the church, as it relates to biblical standards. The fact that Jesus was aware of the activities of each of the churches signals the fact that spiritual assessment of the ministry is necessary. Jesus balances both praise and correction for the churches as He sets forth His instruction and expectation. The desire of Christ was to strengthen the church and prepare the church to impact the world where it existed.

Developing the spiritual expectation and redirecting the mission of the church toward biblical

standards is foundational to church health. Assessing, instructing, healing, preparing and directing ministry is what effective transitional ministry is all about. Jesus provides insight into how this is accomplished by how He handles the seven churches in Revelation.

In the church at Ephesus, Jesus exposes the deficiency of forsaking their first love and not focusing on what should be their primary motivation of ministry. Jesus highlighted the things they were doing well in the church, but He was also holding them accountable for their shortcomings. They were told to repent and do the first works; to love the Lord their God or God’s judgment would end the ministry of the Ephesians’ church.

In Smyrna, Jesus prepares the church for a bumpy ministry by sympathizing with their afflictions and encouraging them about their future ministry suffering. When a church understands that difficulties are coming and they must weather the storm, encouragement can be the key to overcoming their trials. Jesus provides the vision and encouragement to sustain the church at Smyrna.

In Pergamum, Jesus dealt with the church compromising with false teaching and immoral practices. They were allowing the world to influence the church rather than the church influencing the world. He conveyed a message of repentance and correction, or He would come against them with a righteous judgment and hold them accountable.

In Thyatira, Jesus acknowledges good behavior and admirable qualities. The church was a loving and laboring church marked by loyalty. The church was also allowing a cancer of immorality and false teaching to spread through the church through one person (Jezebel). Most churches have people with strong personalities that influence the behavior and direction of a church. Jesus recognized how devastating one person can be to the life-blood of the church when he or she is allowed to influence through immoral teaching and behavior. He corrected the
tolerance level of the church by aligning them with the teaching of scripture. Then He offered them protection.

In Sardis, the church was growing numerically and building a reputation of being an active church in the community, but they were neglecting their spiritual condition and allowing it to die. Jesus addresses the issue of church health and tells them to strengthen their spiritual condition. Jesus communicated that the expectation for the church was more than just church attendance and numbers. He expected the church to develop spiritually and to be obedient to His instruction. Failure to repent and be obedient would result in the loss of ministry, a serious indictment on any church.

In Philadelphia, Jesus had no rebuke of the church but recognized that the church was becoming weak. Sometimes churches can be in difficult geographical areas where economic situations impact ministry and people and resources dry up. Jesus says three things of tremendous importance to Philadelphia, “I know,” “I will” and “I am.” Jesus knew the church had little strength. He was willing to intercede for them and He assures them that He is coming soon. These are powerful reinforcement efforts to strengthen the church and a message churches need to hear today. Depend on God.

In Laodicea, Jesus finds a church with many qualities of today’s twenty-first century church. A comfortable, self-assured, conceited church marked with indifference towards reaching others for Christ. Jesus rips off the façade and exposes the truth about the church. It is time that preachers became honest with churches regarding the true mission of the church. The church is headed toward judgment and it is time for honesty and truthfulness with congregations about their ministry. There are many challenges regarding the church and its relevancy. Douglas
Groothuis makes the following observation concerning the church and defending its relevancy in today’s society:

While apologetics needs to be truth-centered, it may also be person-sensitive and culturally aware. Unbelievers come to the table with a variety of issues, misconceptions and values that need to be discerned before a fruitful apologetic encounter can occur. The truths for which we argue are not relative, but the level of knowledge of our hearers is relative and must be taken into account.¹⁵

Churches have a tendency to focus on internal situations, and especially in times of transitions. A transitional pastor must remind the church of its evangelistic mission of impacting the world for Christ and not losing site of the goal. Jesus did this very effectively with His messages to the seven churches. The examples that Christ provided in handling the challenges within the seven churches represent a paradigm for effective transitional ministry. It is with this scriptural basis that a plan for effective transitional ministry through pastoral leadership is developed.

**Statement of Methodology**

The proposed thesis project will provide four chapters that overview transitional ministry and its impact on the local congregation. This paper will examine the role of the transitional pastor and design a five-step plan for effective transitional ministry. The five-step plan will be based on current research, interviews and previously developed interim ministry models. Below are the chapter listings for the project and a summary of what each chapter will contain.

The chapter divisions are:

- **Chapter 1:** Introduction
- **Chapter 2:** Why Transitional Ministry is Important?
- **Chapter 3:** Assessing the Needs of a Congregation
- **Chapter 4:** Purpose of a Plan and Preparing the Congregation

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Chapter One – Introduction

The introduction of this thesis will serve to explain the primary reasons why transitional ministry is important to the church. It will explore issues surrounding transitional ministry and give an explanation of what can be expected throughout the transitional process. Many churches lack the resources to effectively seek out a new pastor and this paper desires to provide a resource. This thesis project is designed to be helpful by providing information to churches that heighten their awareness of decisions regarding ministry transitions. The Introduction will propose the problem, examine the critical time between permanent pastors, set forth a theological basis for the project, provide a methodology and include a literature review of important related works.

Chapter Two – Why Transitional Ministry is Important?

Much work needs to be done during the transitional period so a congregation will become unified and organized in its search for a new pastor. Working together, a renewed sense of commitment and a clear understanding of where the church is to go are extremely important. The hiring process for a pastor more resembles an engagement and wedding rather than the hiring an employee to perform a service. The dynamics include the matching and blending of lives between the pastor and church. It will include considerations of vision, mission, and purpose of the church. The relationship will also incorporate faith, commitment, trust and love; attributes generally associated with close and intimate relationships. Having an effective transitional process in place provides for a successful marriage of pastor and church. Change is difficult for every church and, depending on the circumstances surrounding the loss of a pastor; emotions can be all over the place. This paper will introduce the role of a transitional pastor and look at some
of the challenges associated with transitional ministry. The desired outcome is to restore the health of the congregation and place it on a path for growth and spiritual success.

Chapter Three – Assessing the Needs of a Congregation

This chapter will look inside the congregation and explore the needs of the people. Results of current research and information provided by pastors and transitional pastors will be considered. A local congregation is made up of people with various needs and problems. During the transitional period an interim pastor may deal with conflict, anger, persons who desire to control the power or direction of the church, and those who are complacent. Each of these situations presents either a challenge or an opportunity, depending on how each of these situations is managed. The goal is to recognize the issues, seek out solutions and work together with a plan. In this chapter, results of a recent survey intended to measure the current spiritual climate of local congregations around the United States will be examined.

Chapter Four – Purpose of a Ministry Plan

This chapter will examine components of the five-step ministry plan and outline why each of these steps are critical to the transitional process. A major factor will be how the transitional pastor addresses each issue and how they prepare the church for each phase throughout the transition period. The goal of a pastor, whether transitional or permanent, is to lead, feed and protect the sheep. Chapter four will provide details regarding the role of the shepherd and how they effectively lead the local congregation.

A transitional pastor, having guided the church through the transitional period of ministry, it is now time to plan for departure, or the final transition. In a sense, the transitional pastor should be planning for his or her departure even as new ministry begins. This chapter highlights the final actions and considerations of a transitional pastor. The transitional pastor must be a
modern-day John the Baptist for the incoming pastor and encourage the people to rally around the new minister. A sense of excitement should be developed for the incoming ministry on what can be realized through faith, commitment, and sincere yearning to see God’s will accomplished. A spiritual celebration of the things that have already occurred during the transition period should be recognized, and there will be some victories. Then, finally, the last service for the transitional pastor should be a challenge to the local congregation to far exceed expectations.

Jesus made the comment to the disciples in the Upper room concerning future ministry works, “greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father.”16 Jesus was not speaking regarding greater in power, but in the extent of ministry. Two people can do more than one and a church can do more than a single pastor. The transitional pastor should encourage the church in all spiritual aspects as they depart the ministry and remind them that God’s work is the only work with eternal benefits.

**Literature Review**

**Books**

*Change of Pastors: And How It Affects Change in the Congregation* by Loren B. Mead is an excellent resource for churches seeking to understand the transition period and what to expect throughout the transitional process. Loren Mead is a pioneer in the area of interim ministry, having founded the Alban Institute in 1974 that seeks to help and strengthen congregations in transition. This book addresses the time between one pastor’s leaving and another’s arrival. Mead discovered that the time between pastoral transitions is a time that incredible congregational change can happen. This book helps church leaders take advantage of this fertile time in church history and embrace change so they become what God intended them to be.

The Once and Future Church: Reinventing the Congregation for a New Mission Frontier
by Loren B. Mead offers an insightful look at the paradigms of church development and looks at the roles and relationships within the structure of a church and how they are affected by change. How things were important in one age of the church, but become obsolete or useless in the next age. How the group reassesses what it values. This book offers principals and strategies for the future church. It places emphasis on the mission of the church and how God may do something new and different as He prepares the church for the next age.

Transitional Ministry: A Time of Opportunity by Molly Dale Smith is an enlightening resource that prepares congregations for significant changes in the life of a congregation. This book addresses issues like natural disasters and catastrophes that impact congregations as well as the loss of a pastor. This book clears up misconceptions related to transitional ministries and describes various settings that transitional ministry can be helpful and beneficial. Providing additional insight in this book are experts in transitional ministry including Robert Friedrich, John Keydel, George Martin, Loren Mead and Nancy Miller.

Temporary Shepherds: A Congregational Handbook for Interim Ministry by Roger S. Nicholson is another excellent source that seeks to demystify intentional interim ministry. Nicholson answers questions related to interim ministry and helps prepare the church by eliminating anxiety and outlining the process for transitional ministry. This book is the basis for the Alban Institute and it outlines what intentional interim ministry should look like. This is an outstanding resource for churches that desire the best possible outcome for their congregations.

Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual Organizational Tools for Leaders by Gilbert R. Rendle is an exceptional how-to resource for transitioning churches. In his book, he addresses questions regarding leadership and change and how they impact a congregation.
Rendle also seeks to answer questions that every congregation must deal with when a vacancy occurs. Rendel’s book makes the point of getting the church out of the rut of doing the same old thing using the same old methods. He makes the case for using Systems Theory, a mechanical way of looking at component parts as a method of evaluating a congregation. By seeing how individual parts come together to work as a whole, a church is able to understand the dynamics of unity and dependency. Using the transitional period to understand this concept helps breathe new life into a congregation. Rendle maximizes the possibility for change by allowing the leaders to be agents of change in the church.

*The Interim Pastor’s Manual* by Alan Gripe identifies five major tasks of the interim pastor and provides insight into how to handle the responsibilities associated with them. This is an interim pastor’s manual developed for the polity of the Presbyterian Church, it adds significant feedback for understanding the role of the interim pastor in congregational life.

*Beginning Ministry Together: The Alban Handbook for Clergy Transitions* by Roy M. Oswald, James M. Heath and Ann W. Heath provides a wealth of knowledge and experience to finding a new pastor and maximizing the transitional time. The book is structured toward helping the church put together an effective search process for a pastor first and then focuses on how to help the church in the transition period. This is an excellent book for pulpit or search committee members.

*The Red Sea Rules: The Same God Who Led You In Will Lead You Out* by Robert J. Morgan is an outstanding book that provides ten effective God given strategies for difficult times. Morgan drives home the point that God is with the church during the most difficult times in its history and He will lead the church throughout the process. This is an important factor for people of faith, knowing that God has not abandoned them and desires to answer their prayers and
provide deliverance.

*Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God’s Agenda* by Henry and Richard Blackaby is an exceptional guide to understanding God’s design for spiritual leaders and how they are to motivate God’s people to His agenda. This book offers insightful counsel into the ways that God develops and guides and empowers spiritual leaders to impact others for Christ.

*Leadership is an Art* by Max DePree is a tremendous reminder that leadership is an important quality – an art – in moving organizations and corporations forward. People will follow a leader in who they have confidence in. Max DePree describes how to manifest leadership qualities in life by looking at history, leadership and a vision for corporate or organizational life.

The *Leadership Challenge* by James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner shows what leaders do and what a congregation expects. They show how to model leadership by enlisting others, taking risks, empowering others and encouraging those that have participated in the process. An important factor comes at the end of the book where they discuss celebrating the values and victories by creating a spirit of community.

*Leadership Handbook of Management & Administration* by James D. Berkley helps provide the management and administrative resources necessary to structure the church. Anytime a pastor leaves it will upset the administrative and management structure that is in place. Many times there are components of management that need to be overhauled and retooled. This manual helps organize the administrative aspect of church life and it provides an excellent resource for strengthening and developing other areas of church management.

*A Pastor’s Guide to Interpersonal Communication: The Other Six Days* by Blake Jeff highlights the important role that the pastor or transitional pastor must fill regarding
communication, which is the single most important human quality that the transitional pastor brings to the table. This book helps pastors understand the need for listening, recognizing verbal and non-verbal communication, and how to break through with a message to God’s people. What a pastor does on Sundays is important, but it will be ineffective if the pastor does not have the ability to connect with the congregation the other six days.

*Firestorm: Preventing and Overcoming Church Conflicts* by Ron Susek is an excellent resource for understanding the destructive nature of church conflict and finding a way to resolve them biblically. This book looks beyond just recognition of conflicts to a process of reconciliation.

*The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict* by Ken Sande is an interesting book that looks into conflicts as opportunities for developing faith. Conflict is almost a certainty with many congregations when they lose their spiritual leader, but it also presents opportunities for self evaluation and reconciliation for many members. Having to work together for a common cause can bring people together and build alliances that would not have happened otherwise. Sande carries the reader through the process of forgiveness and reconciliation, which is critical to restoring the spiritual health of a church.

*The Emotionally Healthy Church* by Peter Sczazero outlines how to look beneath the surface of a church and see the bigger picture of emotional problems that may exist. Sczazero uses the analogy of an iceberg to make the point that what you see on the surface is just a small percentage of what actually lays beneath the surface. In his book, Sczazero makes the point that a church and its people will have emotional limitations and the goal is to move forward, carefully embracing limitations as a new normal. The outcome is for church health and renewed vitalization. Sczazero makes the argument that it can be done if handled properly.
Perimeters of Light: Biblical Boundaries for the Emerging Church by Elmer Towns and Ed Stetzer is an excellent resource for understanding the unwritten boundaries within today’s churches and how to navigate a congregation toward spiritual relevance. The church faces many philosophical, theological and cultural challenges in fulfilling the Great Commission. God is a diverse God that uses many ways to reach people and draw them into the Kingdom. This book provides a framework for helping pastors be biblically faithful while being culturally relevant through periods of transitions.

Post-modern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21st Century World by Leonard Sweet helps the church understand where the culture is heading. There will always be tension between what was (past history) and what is to be (the future). Leonard Sweet’s book helps understand why it is important to keep a fresh perspective on reaching out to the culture. He makes the point that Christians should not embrace the postmodern world view, but must adapt to postmodern thinking in order to reach them with the Gospel. The contribution of this book is that it challenges the isolated thinking of many congregations of protectionism for the risks of evangelism.

The Pharisees’ Guide to Total Holiness by William L. Coleman takes a look at how similar the Church is to the demands of the Pharisees in the first century. The church builds fences for protection which undermines the true purpose of the Gospel. Coleman’s book acts as a mirror for the church so a proper vision is cast for reaching the lost. It is a book that has the Church soul-searching for its Twenty-first Century mission to being obedient to the Great Commission.

Who Stole My Church?: What to Do When the Church You Love Tries to Enter the 21st Century by Gordon Macdonald explores the mindset of the church from an inward perspective.
In this book Macdonald uses real life experiences through a fictional church to highlight the issues of real life problems within the local congregation. Many churches have concerns over losing the past while trying to be relevant with the future. Macdonald promotes how to meet the needs of believers without abandoning their dreams and desires of ministry.

11 Innovations in the Local Church: How Today’s Leaders Can Learn, Discern and Move Into the Future by Elmer Towns, Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird show how churches that are willing to be different, are choosing growth over the status quo. Many churches have found new ways to reach more people by their willingness to take a risk in ministry norms. This insightful look into the variance from traditional church opens the mind to ministry possibilities.

The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message & Mission by Rick Warren is a book that helps people recognize the importance of a purpose driven church. Christ performed ministry with intentionality and purpose. Rick Warren’s book helps the church realize that ministry like Christ’s is still a worthwhile investment into people and beneficial to the Kingdom of God.

Journal Articles

“Transitional ministry: the new, the old, the need” by Dave Rogalsky cited how transitional ministry is changing Mennonite Canadian congregations. Rogalsky lists five reasons that show how transitional ministry is important. It is adapted from Ken Bechtel’s conference on intentional interim ministry that proves helpful.

“The emergency room: A mindset for intentional interim ministry” by Milton K. Staskal uses the analogy of a medical field and vital signs to see how the trauma of losing a pastor can resemble the internal trauma of a congregation. The pastor must depend on reading the signs of health in their respective congregations to determine what steps will be required next. This
would be applicable to congregations when attendance, finances, and personal involvement are required.

“A love affair with interim ministry” by Betty Hellenbeck Clark speaks to the importance of interim ministry and how rewarding it can be even if there are difficulties that emerge. To take a congregation from where they have come, to where they are and to where they need to go is an important factor to consider. Clark makes the point that such a journey does not happen automatically, which is important encouragement to transitional pastors.

“Intentional interim ministry” by Paul N. Svingen highlights the advantages of intentional interim ministry and what its purpose is. Borrowing from Loren Mead’s example, Svingen lists five things that congregations have to come to terms with: history, a new identity, allowing leadership change, renewing denominational linkage, and a commitment to new directions in ministry.

“One church’s experience of interim ministry” by Jean B. Sibley shares the experience of interim ministry with one New England church of 600 members. In the article, Sibley tells of the hiring of Betty Clark and how she performed successful interim ministry by her leadership ability, embracing the congregation and each individual. This article was a positive reinforcement of what effective transitional ministry is supposed to accomplish.

“Interim ministry: having an interim or transitional pastor between long-term leaders is increasingly important for Mennonite Church Canada churches” by Jacob F. Pauls highlights the specialized need and requirements for transitional ministry. He makes the point that transitional ministry should not proceed too quickly. He suggests that when replacing a long time pastor, it is helpful for a congregation to take enough time between the two that comparisons are eliminated.
“Transforming a local church congregation through action research” by Bruce Martin takes a look at utilizing the marketing model of Action Research in local congregations so change occurs. The idea is to use a collaborative activity by people involved and committed to the social situation that they are in for the purpose of improving some aspect of a particular situation or understanding of it. This article was interesting and would certainly work with congregations that desire and look forward to change.

“Interim ministry requires special skills” by Bertha Landers, speaks about the variety of needs within a local congregation and the interim ministry’s task of responding to those needs. Lander’s indicates that interim ministry is not placing a piece of cardboard over a broken window, but an interactive response to the local congregation regarding their pastoral vacancy.

Internet

www.alban.org is a website designed to introduce the concept of interim ministry to churches or individuals and provide resources to assist. The Alban Institute was founded in 1974 by Loren Mead, who was a pioneer in the field of interim ministry. Although retired now, Mead was instrumental in developing and promoting interim ministry in the early 1970’s and the Alban Institute carries on his legacy today. The Alban Institute provides counseling, educational resources, research, publications, and memberships to help churches in need of pastoral assistance.

http://healthychurch.org is a website that is beneficial to churches and individuals who desire the services of transitional or interim ministry. They also provide resources, leadership development, seminars, training, consulting and workshops to assist churches in transition.

www.imnedu.org the Interim Ministry Network has dedicated itself to the wellness and health of church congregations for over three decades. They hold annual conferences, provide
education resources, have links to resources and include memberships for churches and individuals regarding interim ministry. IMN have skilled and proven faculty who are practicing ministers who are able to provide practical educational experience.

www.interimministries-abc.org is a website that is dedicated to the training and recruitment of interim pastors. Their stated goal is to help churches renew after the sense of loss of a pastor by helping assess the congregation’s strengths and weakness then helping them reset healthy patterns for effective and intentional growth.

www.barna.org is a website that provides current research information on a variety of ministry topics. For the purposes of this thesis project topics like, “What People Experience in Churches” and “Lots of Spiritual Dialogue but Not Much Change” are but a few of the topics that are being researched. The Barna Group is considered one of the premier survey groups in America concerning trends and practices in the church.

www.ccccusa.com is a website that promotes interim ministries by providing support and resources to churches in need. The organization is the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference that helps in church development, church growth, and conference services.

www.uus.org is a website devoted to the Transitions Office of the Unitarian Universalist Association. On the site they provide the Transitional Ministry Handbook: A Guide for Congregations and Ministers (formerly Interim and Consulting Ministries Handbook). This handbook covers the processes and procedures with the Unitarian Universalist Association for calling, consulting and hiring an Interim Pastor.

Theses

“Stories told: Using narrative tools during a time of pastor transition at South Congressional Church United Church of Christ, Middletown, Connecticut.” Wright, Charlotte
Tracy. Hartford Seminary; 2009. Publication number: AAT 3370431. This Doctor of Ministry project (2008) was conducted during a time of pastor transition at South Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, in Middletown, Connecticut. After the departure of their long time pastor in 2007, the church faced the prospects of having to fill the void of internal, communal and cultural transitions. The author of this thesis recounts the use of narrative tools to reconnect the congregation to biblical, communal and personal faith stories during the time of transition. The author’s tools consisted of: (1) a Lenten-Eastertide sermon series about loss, transformation and new direction; (2) remembering church history; (3) facilitating an Appreciative Inquiry Process. The goal was to help the church by defining who they were, who they are and where did they want to go in light of new pastoral leadership.

“The contributions of transitional ministry specialists to the mission of the early 21st Century Upstate New York ELCA Lutheran and full communion partner churches.” Roppel, David J. University of Dubuque Theological Seminary; 2008. Publication Number: AAT 3305920. This thesis project explored the history of transitional ministry specialists and interim ministry theory with special attention to the geographical area of Upstate New York Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The findings revealed several effective and vital roles regarding the transitional ministry specialist that are helpful to congregations they serve. These roles include companion to a congregation in its grief, encourager in and through the interim journey, problem solver, conflict manager, bridge builder, change agent, hopeful realist and spiritual director.

“Pastoral strategies for effective interim ministries.” Miles, David Charles. Fuller Theological Seminary; 2000. Publication Number: AAT 9969659. The focus of this paper is to develop a process for the practice of intentional interim ministry in churches that are in transition.
or in need of intervention. The goal of this project is to describe the theology and practice of intentional interim ministry and to effectively implement interim ministry in churches in North America.

“What is the unique experience of the interim minister? A case study approach.” Grunden, Larry Alan. The Union Institute; 1997. Publication Number: AAT 9721711. The study in this thesis was focused on what the interim minister does and the significance of this ministerial specialty. Using Patton’s (1990) model of case study research, the inquiry captures the essence of the experience of four interim ministers. Interviews were conducted and each case was compared and contrasted to see if there were similar themes. Part of the results were the interim pastors view regular pastors as fearful of instigating change and their roles as solidified, whereas interim ministry was seen as non-traditional and challenging. They were entrepreneurs who instigate change, and they espouse a death and resurrection theology.

“Dissemination an understanding of the importance of the role of the interim pastor as healer and transformer in the small churches of the New Hampshire Conference, United Church of Christ.” Young, Terri Lee. Hartford Seminary; 1995. Publication Number: AAT 9539438. This project dealt with the way that interim ministry has been traditionally performed in small, rural churches in the New Hampshire Conference, United Church of Christ. It compares and contrasts traditional interim ministry with more intentional interim processes and discusses the implications of both experiences for faith life and spiritual growth in the small church. The comparison for the project was between five churches that chose a traditional interim process with five churches that opted for intentional interim ministry. The results were that both situations were beneficial to the well being of the church, but churches that opted for intentional interim ministry stood the better chance of changing and growing. The author of this thesis
indicated that a booklet was written to encourage small churches to consider their options for interim leadership.

“Between the no longer and the not yet: The impact of an interim minister on an urban church in transition.” Diehl, Richard Clinton. Hartford Seminary; 1986. Publication Number: AAT 8706279. The author addresses the issue of urban churches having unique problems when a pastoral vacancy becomes available. Their loss of members and finances usually results in the church having to hire a supply pastor rather than a full time consultant. The question that this thesis deals with is: is a supply pastor sufficient for a church suffering through special problems such as maintaining a relationship with the community, maintaining financial support and other resources, making choices that may determine the life or death of the church? A pastoral search survey and special church consultants were used to ascertain what the church perceived about itself and how it lived up to its hopes, goals, and expectations. Special church meetings, individual interviews and the pastoral search survey were utilized as the main tools for gathering data. The conclusion reached was that an interim pastor in an urban church in transition would offer skills and unique learning opportunities and growth experiences that would not be afforded through supply ministry.

“All analysis of the interim period in a selected group of southern Baptist churches with 900 or more resident members having multiple professional ministers.” Robinson, Buel Leslie, Jr. Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary; 1984. Publication Number: AAT 0555370. The purpose of this project was to determine how Southern Baptist Churches having 900 or more members with multiple professional ministers are able to function during the interim period. The author’s findings found that Southern Baptist churches are usually not prepared to operate during an interim period. The time period is not used to its fullest capacity. Rather than being a time of
reflection and renewal, it becomes a time of maintaining the status quo. The author concluded his remarks by indicating that the interim time was not a time to establish a “holding pattern” until the new pastor arrives, but a time to seize upon growth, renewal, joy and celebration that a new horizon is opening for the people of God.

“Preparing persons for interim ministry: An examination of present practices in the United Church of Christ relating to interim ministry, including a design and project for equipping persons to do interim ministries based on current thinking and research.” Nicholson, Roger Steward. Hartford Seminary; 1984. Publication Number: AAT 8412622. The writer of this project was engaged in full-time Interim Ministry when he was requested by the Conference Executive to design training events for persons desiring to do Interim Ministry in Connecticut Conference churches. The report reflects work in four major areas: (1) An overview of current thinking about Interim Ministry; (2) A survey of present practices in Interim Ministry in the United Church of Christ; (3) A design and critique of training events for persons in Interim Ministry; (4) The development of Guidelines for Interim Ministry in the Conference. Special study and training was undertaken through the Mid-Atlantic Association for Training and Consulting to acquaint the writer with current research and thinking regarding Interim Ministry in mainline Protestant denominations. A survey was carried out to determine the United Church of Christ’s pattern associated with Interim Ministry in various Conferences. Training events were designed and implemented and reflected on. An ad hoc task force worked out Guidelines to be used by the Connecticut Conference in administering Interim Ministry. Results were: (1) Interim Ministry is a concern of the Conference since it has a direct bearing on the development of local churches, (2) Persons interested in Interim Ministry need special preparation for the role, in order to make the most of the interim opportunity in a congregation’s life, (3) Specific policies and
procedures need to be applied to this specialized form of ministry in a given Conference.

“Grief in the loss of a pastor: Implications for interim ministry.” Clark, Beth Pendleton. Lancaster Theological Seminary; 1981. Publication Number: AAT 8119180. The backdrop of this thesis is the local Protestant church, one that is autonomous and chooses its own minister. Usually these churches suffer during an interim period because there is no designated leader. There is little research on this type of grief and its effect on a congregation. Expressions and implications of grief are explored in this study. There were three churches that had recently lost a pastor that were the subjects of the research. Ten persons from each church were interviewed, most being leaders within the local congregations. A follow-up questionnaire was submitted to clarify and confirm responses. Three key dynamics of the interim period were noted: time, change, and leadership. The understanding of grief which results from a death give direction for comprehending and working with grief which results in the loss of a supportive relationship. This understanding speaks to the trained interim minister.

“Creating a leadership model for transitional church.” Harding, Kevass, J. United Theological Seminary; 2006. UNI Number: 3279071. This project addressed the development and implementation of creating a leadership model at Dellrose United Methodist Church in Wichita, Kansas. The author of this paper was the pastor of Dellrose United Methodist Church. He oversaw the transitioning of the ministry through decline and economic circumstances. His findings were Dellrose concluded that if they wanted to continue to do ministry, they would have to alter their ministries, leadership, and worship style to meet the needs of the community. The author of this project carried out analysis of the neighborhood and began altering its programs to meet the need and cultural pattern that had developed. The end result is that designing a ministry to meet the cultural, economic and ethnic group was critical to ministry success. The church had
begun as a white upper-class Protestant church, but had been transitioning into a fruitful African-American church that was culturally relevant and productive.

**Biblical Context**

Scripture clearly points to the concept of the church belonging to Christ: “I will build My church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”\(^{17}\) As the Builder and the Creator of the church, Christ has commissioned the church to be the guardian of the culture. His plan included reaching out to others and impacting them in a godly way. Christ commanded, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.”\(^{18}\) Jesus also knew that the church would come under attack from internal and external forces. He warned of it telling the disciples, “If they persecute Me, they will persecute you.”\(^{19}\) Christ realized that church health would become a concern for the church. His last message to the church in Revelation 2:1 through Revelation 3:22 had to do with the issue of church health. Jesus did not leave the church the same way He found it. He provides a spiritual prescription by developing a paradigm for church health. Church health and church mission is also the goal for transitional ministry. Many denominations and mainline religions have adopted a process by Loren Mead that addresses church health. Mead outlines a process of five developmental steps:

1. Coming to terms with the congregation’s history.
2. Discovering a new identity, a new sense of mission.
3. Helping the congregation’s internal leadership to grow and change.

\(^{17}\) Matthew 16: 18b.

\(^{18}\) Matthew 28: 19-20a.

\(^{19}\) John 15: 20b.
4. Rediscovering linkages to the denomination.

5. Establishing a new commitment between people and a new pastor to engage in the mission together.  

The methods put forth by Loren Mead assist the church in renewing its health and its mission. If one considers the way Christ responded to the churches, many of the elements of Mead’s developmental steps are present and can be identified.

- Jesus said “I know your works.” This statement reveals knowledge of their history and their ministry. One of the steps that will be outlined in this project will be a review of church history with the congregations. There are success stories in every church and a transitional pastor needs to find them and remind the people of them. This aspect is important because it opens the door for encouragement and accountability. Both accountability and encouragement function from the same source of information and provides foundational support.

- “But I have this against you.” (Christ offers correction and reproof where applicable). Jesus offers constructive and spiritual criticism regarding the activities of the church from an objective viewpoint. Because of Jesus’ unique role and involvement in the church, His words were powerful and uncompromised. A transitional pastor enjoys a similar type of freedom in a church. They are free to speak the truth because there is no real fear of termination or having to appease a particular person or group. This quality also opens the door of opportunity within the church for change. This is Mead’s third

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step in the development tasks he lists. The reason that Christ addresses correction with several of the churches is because change was needed. In most churches the transitional period represents the most opportune time to analyze and make adjustments to the ministry.

- “He, who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”23 Jesus addresses the issue of receptiveness to spiritual growth. When change is needed in the church and spiritual growth takes place, there must be a response. Jesus was urging the church to heed the spiritual instruction and respond. In a similar way the transitional pastor will make the same plead. The call is to a deeper sense of commitment to what God has designed the church to do. This step will become the fourth step in this project’s process. This process is discovering a new identity with a strong sense of mission and purpose. This is the fifth step identified in Mead’s process.

- “To him who overcomes, I will give.”24 This eschatological promise speaks to a future celebration of ministry with Christ and the church for their faithfulness and service. This represents the fifth step in this project for a transitional pastor. As the transitional period ends and preparations are made for the call of a new permanent pastor, the church should celebrate their accomplishments. While serving as a transitional pastor, this writer was fortunate to experience the baptism of thirteen people at one transitional pastorate. The church also experienced numerical growth of nearly twenty people in a small rural church during the twelve months of transitional ministry. While this may not be typical, victories do happen. Jesus encourages the churches by telling them what He has in store for them in the future. The local church should be encouraged too. Jesus

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has given a promise and a pledge that He will honor and bless them. Congregations
should be aware that they share in the blessings of Christ and the transitional time
should be celebrated.
CHAPTER TWO

Why Transitional Ministry Is Important to the Church

This chapter will explain the importance of transitional ministry and how it impacts the church. Every church will one day have to replace its pastor. History teaches this principal because people resign, they move to other geographical locations, they accept a calling to other ministries, or death makes an unwelcome intrusion into the life of the church. Consequently, every church will need to replace its pastor. The period of time between two permanent pastors is known as transitional ministry. Molly Smith makes the observation that; “transitional ministry” refers to the ministry that takes place during the time of transition. The transitional minister leads the congregation through the various processes needed to work on issues arising out of the change.”¹ The purpose of this project is to outline a procedure that will help churches maximize their efforts during the transition period to help strengthen the church and renew their sense of mission. Once a pastor resigns from a ministry or is suddenly terminated or removed, many people are anxious and begin wondering, “How long will it take to replace them?” Loren Mead offers wise counsel: “My general assessment is that if it takes less than 12 months, there isn’t much time to take care of the qualitative issues—the developmental tasks. If it takes more than 18 months you may run into leadership overload or depression.”² Each church will differ, somewhat, in the length of time it takes to replace a pastor. The reason, primarily, is due to pastoral availability, economic and financial factors, the time of the year (vacations/Christmas, etc.), or how prepared and organized the church is. All of these factors impact the time frame on transitional ministry. Loren Mead’s estimation of somewhere between twelve months to eighteen months is a reasonable estimate of time in most cases.

¹ Smith, Transitional Ministry, 3.
² Mead, A Change of Pastors: And How it Affects Change in a Congregation, 21.
The leadership and membership within the local church need to be aware of pressure to move quickly in replacing a pastor. Most seem to think that replacing the pastor fixes the problem. Nothing could be further from the truth. Losing a pastor can be like losing a spouse in a marriage. The worst advice that someone could give a grieving spouse is to “go find a replacement.” That would be insulting and insensitive. A grieving spouse will go through many changes. He or she will first experience grief and shock over the news of the loss. Then he or she will experience the loss and numbing affect of getting adjusted to a changed life. Nothing will ever be quite the same and these processes take time to adjust to and understand. The same is true of the church when a leader is lost. The church must go through the processes of dealing with change and seek to become healthy. The church is a living organism similar to the human body. The church relies on the health of its members to function properly. The Apostle Paul using the body as an analogy of the church said, “There should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it.”

The prevailing point is that each member has a responsibility to see to it that the church is healthy. When a church loses a pastor, the first responsibility is to insure that the health of the church is not jeopardized or compromised. In his book *The Once and Future Church: Reinventing the Congregation for a New Mission Frontier*, Loren Mead shares this insight: “Systems that seem stable and secure often have internal tensions and pressures that lead to dramatic, surprising changes.” As leaders of their congregations, pastors are very much a part of the system of ministry. As long as the pastor is in place, the system seems fine. Any change

3. 1 Corinthians 13: 25-26a.

with the pastoral leadership creates crisis and can cause the system to become unstable. Peter Scazzero makes the following observation about the emotional health of the church:

In emotionally healthy churches, people take a deep, hard look inside their hearts, asking, “What is going on that Jesus Christ is trying to change?” They understand that a person’s life is like an iceberg, with the vast majority of who we are lying deep beneath the surface. They invite God to bring to their awareness and to transform those beneath-the-surface layers that hinder them from becoming more like Jesus Christ.\(^5\)

Transitional ministry is designed to provide spiritual medicine through pastoral leadership so that delicate or fragile circumstances within a local congregation are strengthened.

**Benefits of Working with a Transitional Pastor**

There will be a need in every service of the church for someone to lead worship and provide pastoral care. The size of the congregation does not matter. Planning a sermon and organizing the service generally takes preparation time. Churches that fail to adequately prepare for services and upcoming events will begin to see a deterioration of church health. Consequently the results will be manifested in a lack of attendance and church support. It is recommended by this writer to consider the possibility of a transitional or interim pastor as soon as possible when a vacancy occurs. If your church is denominationally affiliated, your first response should be to the local denominational offices for assistance. If your church is non-denominational, it will be worth the effort to contact organizations such as the Interim Ministry Network, Center for Congregational Health, the Interim Pastor Ministries or the Alban Institute for advice and ministerial consultation. Seeking advice from some knowledgeable organizations is wise and beneficial. Many transitional organizations have trained specialists who are familiar with the processes that need to be implemented and can provide effective advice. The results may well be worth the time that you invest in learning about transitional ministry. The

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experience of this writer is that seeking an interim specialist will produce spiritual dividends for your church greater than you would have expected otherwise. According to Roy Oswald, one should consider three basic types of interim ministry. They are listed from the least to the most complex type:

1. Supply ministry. Supply pastors agree to conduct regular or special services and to perform specified pastoral duties (e.g., visiting those who are sick or grieving, perform weddings, funerals). There is no expectation on supply ministers that they will do any more than what they have agreed to do.

2. Simple interim ministry. It entails contracting with the governing board for a certain amount of time (six months, with possibilities of extension based on mutual agreement). This type of ministry performs most of the normal functions of the regular pastor, including meeting with board members and congregational committees to handle regular church functions.

3. Intentional interim ministry. This type of transitional ministry goes beyond simple interim ministry and is designed to handle specific congregational problems. The transitional pastor is trained and has special skills to help identify special problems or concerns that a congregation needs to work through. An intentional interim should be considered if the congregation has issues or concerns related to:

   - The ending of a long pastorate (more than 10 years);
   - The difficult ending of a pastorate (the previous pastor died, has been pressured to resign, or has been guilty of some inappropriate behavior),
   - Antiquated system of church government,
• The need for staff changes.\(^6\)

One of the major advantages a transitional pastor has is their ability to be objective and honest with a congregation in evaluating their needs. Alan Gripe makes an important observation regarding objectivity:

A key advantage of the interim pastor’s work is the objectivity and opportunity that come with its temporary character. The experienced interim is free to deal with a congregation’s grief over the loss of the previous pastor. Concerns arising out of the previous pastorate can be worked through to help the congregation avoid projecting past difficulties onto the new pastor and enter the new relationship with fresh hope, vision and confidence.\(^7\)

Transitional pastors are afforded a degree of flexibility when they enter into a short-term ministry with the congregation. The fact that a transitional pastor is not a candidate for the permanent pastoral position provides a forum for greater honesty with the congregation. The transitional pastor does not have to worry about local politics within a local congregation or some of the baggage of the previous ministry. The transitional pastor is able to remain objective and impartial and it gives him or her greater leverage in evaluating a ministry and suggesting change.

One of the other great benefits of a transitional pastor is that it provides immediate pastoral leadership to the congregation. Henry and Richard Blackaby draw attention to an observation made by George Barna regarding leadership: “the American church is dying due to a lack of strong leadership. In this time of unprecedented opportunity and plentiful resources, the church is actually losing influence. The primary reason is the lack of leadership. Nothing is more

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important than leadership.” When an experienced transitional pastor agrees to accept the call for a pastoral vacancy, the church immediately receives a leader. This reduces congregational anxiety and produces a level of calm that helps soothe the wounded spirit of the people. Roger S. Nicholson points out when conflict is a factor in pastoral vacancies:

The aftermath is a congregation full of hurt feelings and riddled with resentment among members. Skilled management of the situation is the order of the day, and conflicted interim congregations can be healed. A renewed and harmonious fellowship can emerge and indeed must be developed if the congregation is to progress.

Having an experienced transitional pastor to navigate the rough seas of a pastoral vacancy especially in light of conflict or anger can facilitate the healing of the people.

Perhaps the greatest advantage of having a transitional pastor is he or she can become an agent for effective change in a congregation. Transitional pastors have fresh sets of eyes, they bring a fresh ministry perspective to the table, and they have a desire to help the local church. In a recent Barna Group survey, 614 senior pastors of Protestant churches throughout the continental United States indicated that they planned to improve their churches. They were given the following twelve different strategies to evaluate:

- Assess your church’s vision and mission
- Assess your church’s reputation in the community
- Measure the demographic and spiritual needs of the community
- Be more focused on safety and security issues at your church
- Revamp your budgeting and spending process
- Conduct an assessment of spiritual transformation in your church
- Invest in facilities and equipment for children
- Invest in audio and visual equipment
- Invest in technology and digital media
- Work with an organization to help increase giving
- Find a search firm to help you hire the right staff person

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While each of these strategies can be effective strategies for developing the church, eighty eight percent of them said they were definitely or probably going to assess the church’s vision and mission as the primary strategy for implementation. A total of fifty nine percent said they definitely were going to be assessing the church’s vision and mission. The pastors revealed that assessment was a significant strategic priority of faith leaders. Of the dozen priorities examined in the survey, most were interested in getting clarity about their organization’s vision and mission. This appears to be the one common desire and need of the church—to reclaim the mission. One of the major priorities of a transitional pastor is to access the current spiritual climate of a congregation and restore its health and vision for mission. It will be one of the primary focuses of a transitional pastor during the time period between permanent pastors. This will also be one of the five steps in defining effective transitional ministry.

The final reason that transitional ministry is important to the church is that it provides the time necessary for a church to call the right pastor to its ministry. There are many interviews and considerations that must be discussed before a final decision is made. Sometimes the process of selecting a candidate for the pastoral position is like putting together a large puzzle. Churches will not have the full picture of what the candidate looks like until the last piece is in place. The process requires confidentiality and diligence among board members. They must methodically move through the process of evaluating all of the information until a single candidate emerges as the preferred selection. Why only one candidate? Loren Mead offers advice on why only one candidate should be considered: “One question deserves special note: does the search committee present one name or several? It is the experience of this author that it is best to present a single

name to the committee or group that makes the final decision.” The reason that presenting one candidate to the search committee or to the church for confirmation is critical is that it unites a congregation. The writer of this paper once chaired a pulpit committee responsible for contacting prospective candidates for a vacant pastoral position. Many members of the congregation, about two hundred and fifty people, wanted to see more than just one candidate; they wanted to have a choice. Having a choice of pastoral candidates sounded exciting and reasonable to this inexperienced committee member. The committee began its work of screening candidates and working to select three possible pastors for trial sermons. The committee immediately ran into problems using this strategy. As it turned out, no desirable pastors with any character, integrity or spiritual depth were interested in this process. They rightly pointed out this approach was flawed. It relied on human characteristics and desires for popularity and likeability rather than the spiritual consideration of God’s will for the church. The Pulpit committee had to discard this approach and revamp its approach. Simply put, the church had to allow God to be at the center of the process and not people.

Another factor for selecting only one candidate for the position is that it prevents splitting the pastoral vote. In churches that vote on calling a pastor, some pastors like to have a certain percentage of the vote. The only way to have a representative vote of the congregation is to call one candidate for consideration. Otherwise, the percentage of supported would be divided among candidates and no pastor would be fully supported. Utilizing the skill and abilities of a transitional pastor provides time for the church to go through a thorough process of matching a pastor with the ministry. It also helps the church define or renew its vision for the church. Both factors are extremely important to the health and ministry of a local congregation.

Additional Benefits of a Transitional Pastor

The heart of transitional ministry is the responsibility of stewardship. The transitional pastor’s primary role is to lead, feed, and protect the sheep. Transitional pastors are temporary shepherds that will one day give an account to God. What then can a church expect from a transitional pastor? Roger S. Nicholson highlights that an intentional interim pastor will bring calmness, thoughtfulness, objectivity, trustworthiness, care, and mature leadership into the context of change. One of the major needs of a congregation will be leadership and support. If a congregation feels they have effective leadership the church will have confidence to move forward. If there is a vacuum of leadership and the church is anxious over what to do next, the church will flounder. A church that calls an experienced transitional pastor to assist it, has taken the first step toward a healthy transition. The benefits in ministry are similar to the benefits of exercising. You must first determine that exercising is the path you want to pursue. You know that it is good for you, but it requires a decision. Then you must make the commitment to start and begin exercising. It will be slow at first, but as your health increases so does greater durability and endurance. Remaining disciplined in following the processes and working toward the goal will eventually lead one to the desired results. This is true of the processes employed during the transitional period. It will take a commitment from the church and it takes a commitment from the transitional pastor. The good news is that by following a proven transitional strategy the church can be successful. Alan Gripe makes the case that the church has two major considerations when it loses a pastor: “Where the church is (maintenance) and where the church needs to go (change). Church maintenance includes worship, pastoral care, and administration. The change within a church deals with grief resolution, conflict management, and

mission development.” These considerations form the basis for transitional ministry and they highlight the importance of selecting a good leader. A transitional pastor must have the ability to focus on more than just one aspect of the ministry in crisis. Loren Mead states:

> The leadership of a congregation often finds itself overloaded with responsibility during the period between installed pastors. The management of the search process is a significant call for leadership energy, and the board can find itself overwhelmed by trying also to locate a regular preaching and worship leadership, handle the regular and crisis pastoral care, and continue all the community building pastors provide in congregations. Having a professional on call to cover those bases can relieve leadership for the tasks of the transition.

There is much work that must be accomplished during the transition period. Calling an experienced transitional pastor is like adding lubrication to the internal parts of the church. Ministry has the ability to begin accomplishing its ministry without locking up the major components of the church engine.

**The Challenges Presented in Transitional Ministry**

One of the major purposes of this thesis is to highlight the need for vision renewal and show how the transitional pastor can help regain the focus of mission. Gilbert R. Rendle points out that “mainline denominations have consistently been reporting a decline in membership and attendance at worship over the past twenty to thirty years and have been reporting a decline in their membership as a percentage of the American population over the past thirty to forty years.” Churches are struggling to hold on to their members, and in many, the average age of the membership is aging. One of the major problems facing churches is their response to change. The church is slow to adapt to the changing environment and there is little desire to embrace


twenty-first century culture. Members become comfortable within their own worship style and many have lost sight of the vision for the church. George Barna in his book, *The Power of Vision*, makes an astonishing statement regarding pastors:

> Although they are good people and have been called to ministry, most senior pastors do not have an understanding of God’ vision for the ministries they are trying to lead and, consequently, most churches have little impact in their community or in the lives of their congregants. Not even 1 out of every 10 pastors of Protestant churches can articulate God’s vision for their church.16

This is a numbing indictment on churches and one area that must be addressed if the church is going to have any impact on the culture. Life outside the church is constantly changing and the church has fallen behind. For some, that is just fine. They have a desire to live in the past with their thoughts and memories from yesteryear. But, doing so puts at risk the mission of the church. One of the important roles of a transitional pastor is to help the church regain its mission and impact the culture. Elmer Towns observes, “The message to us all is this: When culture changes, adjust your methods or you will lose your effectiveness…but never change your message or your principals! When methods no longer work, don’t blame the harvest as being unreachable; instead, ask God if it’s time to change your methods!”17 This is good advice for the church of the twenty-first century. If it is still God’s will that none should perish, (and it is), then the church should do whatever is necessary to see that none should perish. It is not a complicated mission; many churches have just developed spiritual amnesia.


Duties Associated with a Transitional Pastor

One of the main responsibilities associated with transitional ministry is to find a cure for spiritual amnesia. The church must be reminded of its mission and its responsibility to the cause of Christ. There is no higher calling than to be a faithful servant of Christ and work toward kingdom goals. Molly Dale Smith shares five developmental tasks that become essentially the work of the transitional pastor. Her list is adopted from the developmental tasks listed by the Alban Institute and they include:

1. Examining the history of the church or parish and coming to terms with the past.
2. Claiming the current identity of the church or parish.
3. Encourage new leadership (while valuing the old leadership).
4. Renewing and strengthening the relationship with the diocese or denominational association.
5. Prepare to welcome the new pastor.\(^{18}\)

Each one of these five developmental tasks will require a specific plan in order to facilitate a smooth transition period that meets the desired goals of the congregation. Having the proper balance cannot be over emphasized during the transition period. Transitional pastors specialize in providing balance to a ministry and harmonizing each of the developmental tasks. Having the administrative skills to implement each of the tasks and working with the congregation and church leaders is an important part of the work of a transitional pastor.

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CHAPTER THREE

Assessing the Needs of a Congregation

One of the great characteristics of the ministry of Jesus Christ was assessing people’s needs and finding ways to meet them. In Revelation 2:1 through 3:22, Jesus focuses on the needs of the churches by assessing their local ministry. This will be the initial role for each transitional pastor as he or she enters into a new ministry opportunity. Assessing the needs of a congregation then developing an effective plan to meet those needs is their primary task. Alan G. Gipe shares:

Analysis begins the pre-entry stage of an interim call and continues at various levels of intensity throughout the term of service…this analysis should include two elements: the organization and the system. Organization here refers to the structure of the congregation and its various parts, such as boards, fellowship groups, couples’ clubs, choir, and church school. System describes the way those parts work together, work against one another, or just tolerate one another.¹

In a questionnaire that went to over a hundred professional interim pastors the question was asked, “How do you measure the “spiritual health” within a local congregation? The question was a probe of spiritual verification of church health. Several of the responses indicated “looking for vibrant worship and a high level of living one’s faith on weekdays.” Another suggested that “good stewardship and caring for the world entrusted to us and a healthy relationship with Lord are indicators of spiritual health.”² Faith is a good indicator and a driving force of church health within the local congregation. The late Dr. Jerry Falwell in his book Building Dynamic Faith says, “It is not the size of the miracle of faith that matters, but the size of our God.”³ Churches will vary in size, shape, and spiritual dimensions across the globe, but faith should be a common denominator. Developing and having a strong faith will determine the

health and well being of a church especially as it seeks out God’s mission and God’s purpose.

The problem that many churches face that impacts its congregational health is the “frog in the kettle syndrome.” If you place a frog in a kettle of boiling water, the frog will jump out immediately because it realizes the environment is hazardous. However, if you place a frog in a kettle at room temperature and slowly increase the heat, the frog will stay in the water until it dies. Many churches have members who have remained in the water so long they no longer realize the danger. They do not realize that the environment they created inside the church has become toxic to many outside observers. George Barna wrote a book in 1990 titled *The Frog in the Kettle*, which analyzes the life of the church as the church approached the twenty-first century:

> We are a materialistic society, more concerned about the physical comforts of today than the spiritual needs of the future.” He goes on to mention, “The result is that the Christian community, in the midst of a whirlpool of change and a hostile societal environment, is losing the battle. Charged by Christ Himself to be agents to change the world rather than agents changed by the world, we have been mesmerized by the lures of modern culture.”

In short, Barna is highlighting the weak spiritual nature of the church and how the church has been transformed by the culture rather than transforming the culture. The church has become weaker and less influential in the world and is flirting with becoming irrelevant. As part of the research for this thesis project, a survey was developed to measure the spiritual climate of churches across America. The context of the survey was to have pastors respond to the survey based on what they experienced as they entered their current ministry. The survey was sent to more than 132 pastors from various denominations across the United States. Seventy four percent of the pastors considered their church to be traditional. The results of the survey revealed some sobering statistics when considering the “frog in the kettle” analogy.

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When asked the question of the spiritual climate of their church as they entered their present ministry, just over forty one percent of the pastors indicated that their congregations were neither hot nor cold. This represents an indifference to the culture or the people who make up society. Another thirty nine percent indicated their spiritual climate could even be considered weak or stagnate. The graph below provides the percentages to each of the four responses of what the spiritual makeup is in their respective congregations. It should be noted that only about seven percent were experiencing the type of atmosphere that Christ intended for the church. Over thirteen percent viewed their congregation as being spiritually deprived or starved.

Figure 1. Church Climate

The church climate graph suggests that the largest majority of churches closely resemble the church at Laodicea that was neither cold nor hot. Churches have an indifferent attitude regarding
the mission of the church and less desire to fulfill the Great Commission. The other large majority of churches surveyed were more closely related to the church at Sardis that was weak, stagnant, or dead.

When asked the question, “If you had to categorize the fellowship aspect of your church prior to beginning your current ministry,” nearly twenty nine percent indicated that the fellowship aspect of their church was more like a country club. An additional thirty seven percent indicated that it was like a business network. Only twenty two percent responded that it was like a service industry and even less, only eleven percent indicated that their church was like a resource provider. If you consider the chart below the church seems to have taken on a different mission than Jesus intended.

Figure 2. Church Fellowship
Jesus made the comment, “For the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost.”

The church originally was designed to be an extension of the ministry of Christ. However, the church appears to have lost the concept of seeking and saving the lost. Seeking and saving has been replaced with preserving and promoting. The survey suggests that the church is preserving and promoting its fellowship and networking. Fellowship and networking have become the predominant factors in church climate.

It is a little difficult to realize how far the church has drifted off from its mission without having an understanding of what was the original mission. Jesus made known the extent of His ministry when He stood up in the synagogue in His hometown of Nazareth:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

The mission that Christ described for Himself is a mission of service and providing for others. Yet a combined eighty two percent of the pastors surveyed found their churches engaged in more self serving activities. These are alarming statistics regarding today’s church health. Clearly this is an indication that our churches have drifted away from the intended mission of the church. The church has placed greater emphasis on its organization rather than on its purpose. Many pastors are trying new techniques to revitalize the church only to find the congregations resistance to their efforts. Years ago revivals were common in churches across the globe. The goal during revival was to reset the mission of the church and motivate its member to renew its purpose. In the twenty-first century church revivals have largely become a thing of the past. Some churches still have them, but revivals have declined from two weeks to one week to three days, to virtually


extinct. Roger S. Nicholson sheds light on the decline of churches: “Beginning in the 1960’s there has been a steady erosion of commitment to religious institutions resulting in what some refer to as ‘the graying of the local church.’ The older generation decreases steadily by attrition while the younger generation goes its own way, with little or no sense of responsibility for the church of their baptism.” Change is hard with any organization, but change is necessary if the church hopes to reclaim its mission in the twenty-first century. There are many forces at work against the church such as: relevance, indifference, commitment, and the culture. When one considers the demands on the family, the involvement of other activities, and the social networks that have grown in every sector of society, it is easy to see that the church is being squeezed out of its social priority. Among adults who consider themselves to be Christians, about one-quarter say they do not attend services in a typical month; two out of five attend every weekend; and equal proportions of adults attend once, twice, or three times a month. It is expected that without some major adjustments and refocusing efforts by the church this trend will continue to increase for the church.

Ministering Like Jesus

Although Jesus had perfect knowledge of the events of His day, Jesus asked questions of those around Him. He interacted with people, confronted people, and mingled with people so He understood the essence and the heartbeat of society. Jesus never lost sight of the purpose of ministry and He continued to meet people’s most pressing need, salvation. Jesus was relevant to the culture around Him. Jesus used the backdrop of people’s lives to reach their hearts. He reached out on a personal basis to people in need and He did not compromise biblical values. In


John 3:1-17, -Jesus reaches out to Nicodemus, an elite Pharisee who came seeking and provided the greatest teaching in the Bible: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” In chapter four Jesus confronts the woman at the well who was indifferent and passive. Culturally, Nicodemus and the woman at the well were very different. Jesus found a way to reach both and the results were salvation for each one. A transitional pastor has the opportunity to refocus the church’s attention to mission. The church must be willing to make the same sacrifices that Jesus made if it wants to reclaim mission. Thom S. Rainer provides statistical information related to the demographic population of people who attends church on any given weekend:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation Types</th>
<th>Birth Years</th>
<th>Percentage Attending Church</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Builders</td>
<td>Before 1946</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boomers</td>
<td>1946 to1964</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Busters</td>
<td>1965 to1976</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridgers</td>
<td>1977 to 1994</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rainer points out that less than four percent of churches in America meet our criteria to be an effective evangelistic church. This graph illustrates proportionally how the church is losing the battle for the heart and soul of the future. One of the keys to reclaiming the future is by taking advantage of the opportunity for change during the transition period. One of the first steps in transitional ministry is to find ways to help the church heal after a crisis.

**Healing the Broken**

Assessing the needs of a church is like a doctor reading vital signs during an office visit. The doctor begins looking at the basic health issues and then works through the more complex health concerns. The doctor will begin asking questions and seeking feedback. Each test, each

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specimen, each lab results provides greater information in diagnosing the problem. Once the doctor has completed all of the initial tests he will look at the test results. If he notices something abnormal, he may call in a specialist for consultation. If they are assured they have located the problem, they will provide a strategic plan for combating the illness. It may be a regimen of exercise and prescription drugs. It may be something over the counter that has not been tried or it may be a combination of prescription drugs that have proven to be beneficial with difficult sicknesses. Recovery will take time and progress is reported incrementally. The spiritual role of the transitional pastor to the church is similar to that of a medical doctor to his patient. His or she must provide care and leadership that helps reestablish health. Henry and Richard Blackaby asks the question, “What is the spiritual leader’s role?” They provide a response. “It is to bear witness to what God says. Spiritual leaders must bring followers into a face-to-face encounter with God so they hear from God directly, not indirectly through their leader.”11 A transitional pastor becomes God’s representative to the church. Churches that have lost a pastor or are experiencing a spiritual crisis are in deep need of an encounter with God. The transitional pastor can facilitate the communication between God and the church by acting as a conduit of God’s grace and God’s mercy. In one of the research questions for this project the question pastors were asked, “From your first observation, how would you rank the needs that your congregation had as you began your ministry?” The choices were: administration, faith, forgiveness or healing and they were asked to rank them in order of the greatest need to the least. Over thirty seven percent of the pastors surveyed ranked administration as the greatest need their congregation had. Healing was next at twenty nine percent; faith came in at twenty percent and forgiveness at nearly twenty percent. It was obvious that many churches lacked leadership and experienced painful situations

11. Blackaby, and Blackaby, Moving People on to God’s Agenda: Spiritual Leadership, 75.
as pastoral vacancies occurred. Situations and circumstances vary from church to church. Some churches might experience grief at the loss of a pastor. Some might experience disappointment and pain, especially if the departure resulted in moral or spiritual failure. There will be issues of healing and various obstacles to be dealt with at the loss of a pastor. Molly Dale Smith shares on this subject:

Obstacles presented by change can be turned into opportunity during transition. This premise is the key to transitional ministry. Change will always be part of life, as will the period of transition that is the result. Each change and its accompanying transition confront us with an opportunity. We can allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by feelings of anxiety, loss, anger, and even desperation, or we can embrace this opportunity to create a better future.  

The mindset of the transitional pastor as they enter into a new ministry with a congregation must be one of seeking to take advantage of the opportunity of restoring health and mission to the church by providing leadership and direction.

*Prayer: A Component of Healing*

A critical component will be the aspect of prayer in seeking God’s healing, God’s direction, and God’s blessing through the transition period. Prayer is saying to God, “I can’t, but You can,” and this is an important message for the church in crisis. Prayer is the reset button on each life and is the first step of spiritual healing for individuals and congregations. The transitional pastor must highlight the need for prayer in all aspects of the ministry. Prayer is an important concept because it was the action of Christ as He approached the most pressing crisis of His earthly life-death on the cross. Prayer will become one of the five steps for effective transitional ministry and will be discussed more comprehensively later in this paper. It should also be noted that Christ spent a great deal of time healing in the gospel accounts of His ministry. The transferred expectation is that if Christ devoted time to healing, transitional pastors should

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also seek healing for the church. Transitional pastors bring the optimism that God is interested in doing a new work in the church. Crises and challenges within the life of the church offer new opportunities. With new opportunities comes the need to connect with God in new ways. Spiritual development through prayer, meditation, Bible study, discussion groups, and other spiritual outlets is very important. The church is at a crossroads seeking new direction and healing. The window of opportunity does not last for long periods of time. Generally the time of transition between pastors provides the greatest and best opportunity to renew the mission of the church. An opportunity for change is not relegated to the loss of only a pastor. Opportunities appear at major times and crises within the life of a church. Most people, Christian or non-Christian, have an innate sense of approaching God through prayer during a crisis. The key is to take advantage of God answering by being obedient to His direction. Church healing can take both time and effort, but God has demonstrated His desire to see His people through their difficulties. Robert J. Morgan illustrates very vividly how God worked in the lives of His people to bring about their deliverance in Exodus 14:1-15:2. Morgan provides a list of ten God given strategies for difficult times. *The Red Sea Rules:*

1. Realize that God means for you to be where you are. (14:1-2)  
2. Be more concerned for God’s glory than for your relief. (14:3-4)  
3. Acknowledge your enemy, but keep your eyes on the Lord. (14:5-9)  
4. Pray. (14:10)  
5. Stay calm and confident, and give God time to work. (14:13-14)  
6. When unsure, just take the next logical step by faith. (14:15)  
7. Envision God’s enveloping presence. (14:19-20)  
8. Trust God to deliver in His own unique way. (14:21-22)  
9. View your current crisis as a faith builder for the future. (14:30-31)  
10. Don’t forget to praise Him. (15:1-2)  

Morgan’s point is that if God has worked in the past to deliver His people, He is timeless and will do the same for His people. Allowing God to work in His own special way and in His own

special time renews faith in God, which says, “God is going to do something new in the life of the church.” While serving as a transitional pastor, this author found these biblical reminders as ointment to the spiritual hurt in a congregation. With permission from Robert Morgan, sermons were developed to highlight these principals and implement them in a transitional setting. The result was a strengthening of faith and a developing spiritual outlook. If a church fails to heal and fails to open itself up to God, then it risks falling into the trap of doing the same old things it has done in the past. There is an old saying, “if you do what you’ve always done, you’ll get what you’ve always got.” The past is important and yields many memories of success and failure, but the past is still the past. The danger of looking back and trying to replicate the past is that it forfeits the future. It fails to place faith in God to come in and do a new work. It closes the door on God speaking to the church and the church being able to respond in obedience. Mead shares, “Your history can block your future or it can give you a foundation for your future. You can stay focused on what you used to be and try and recreate it or you can use that history like a launching pad.”

**Security and Comfort Provide Barriers**

What in the world is wrong with the church? In the research survey conducted for this paper, pastors were asked to describe the type of church they have: traditional, contemporary, mainline, or target-driven. Seventy five percent of the pastors indicated their church was a traditional church. The expectation is that a traditional church would be right at the heartbeat of the culture and society. Traditional churches have a long history of influencing the culture and being part of the fabric of America. At one time in its history, traditional churches were the

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driving force during cultural and society changes. Yet, church doors are closing by the thousands each year. Leonard Sweet offers an explanation in his book *Postmodern Pilgrims*:

In the midst of one of the greatest transactions in history—from modern to postmodern—Christian churches are owned lock, stock, and barrel by modernity. They have clung to modern modes of thought and action, their ways of embodying and enacting the Christian tradition frozen in patterns of high modernity.¹⁵

The indications are that the church is stuck in the past. The leadership and the controlling groups of the church have developed barriers of protection to insulate the church and what they are finding is they have isolated it. The church has lost touch with its mission of seeking and saving the lost. Now the focus is, “how much does it cost?” The church needs to find its spiritual compass for reaching people and making an eternal difference in the world. Throughout the Bible God utilizes different methods of impacting people with His message of hope and redemption by assessing their need and finding a way to meet it. This is the goal of the transitional pastor- to minister the way Christ did and motivate the church to embrace its mission.

**Dealing With Conflict**

Conflict can and will occur in the life of a church whose people are constantly interacting on a personal basis. Nicholson says, “Conflict and power are normal elements of life in congregations….the interim time provides an opportunity to focus on specific conflicts and misuse of power and to bring health to the congregation by enhancing the ability of the members and leaders to work together effectively.”¹⁶ When a church loses the pastor, some in the congregation feel the responsibility to fill that power vacuum. If they have been an outspoken member of the congregation in the past, chances are they will seek to dominate the future

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direction of the church. The role of the transitional pastor is to find ways to harness the passion and drive of individuals and channel the energy into seeking God’s plan and direction. In a chapter entitled, “Why We Fight”, Terry Foland, a church consultant with the Alban Institute, identifies nine primary reasons for church conflicts:

1. The deeply engrained consumer attitude. An attitude that demands personal satisfaction and reward. “I want what I want!”
2. The dominating competitive culture. Winning is everything.
3. Payback or revenge for previous actions. “You caused our preacher to leave; we’ll cause yours to leave.” A game played with a lot of subtlety and overt denial.
4. Pastor-centered churches. Pastor sets goals and provides all inspiration of mission, dominant sense of parent, reluctance to disagree openly with the pastor.
5. The urge to control. The use of manipulation to get things to go as they want.
6. Stress makes people do crazy things. Reverting to childish behaviors or react out of previous transactions that resulted in hurt.
7. Lack of stewardship foundation. Churches without a stewardship foundation are more apt to experience conflict patterns. Stewardship recognizes God as owner.
8. It is all about me. Church fights are often centered on the attitude of selfishness.
9. Genuine differences of opinions. Where there are two or more equally legitimate positions or conclusions that can be reached on a given issue or concern.

An important task of the transitional pastor will be to identify the type of conflict and the root of the conflict and work towards a solution. Regardless of the reason for church conflict the transitional pastor will want to display a sense of optimism that with God all things can be worked out. The transitional pastor should be sensitive and have an appreciation for differences. At the same time, he or she must direct the focus on the spiritual aspects of ministry and bring the congregation into harmony with God’s over-arching plan for the church. This takes an objective and strong leader who is confident in his or her ability to promote God’s agenda. It should be noted that not all conflict is beneficial or desired, but all conflict can provide opportunities if handled correctly. Ken Sande states, “Conflict always provides an opportunity to glorify God, that is, to show him honor and bring him praise. In particular, conflict gives you a

chance to show God that you love, respect, and trust him.” This is an important point because people often will hold their pride and ego close to the point of conflict within their heart. If people feel strong enough to make an argument over an issue, then they feel an obligation to win their argument. Otherwise, they probably would not have bothered to bring it up. If people feel they have to compromise or modify their position for something larger than themselves, namely God and His purposes, then they are more apt to accept not winning an argument. They will not accept defeat, but they will accept not winning if winning means God loses. The transitional pastor is in a good position to provide spiritual direction because of his or her objectivity. He or she is awarded a measure of respect and reverence as the temporary spiritual leader of the congregation. He or she also does not have the weight of historical baggage to carry. As the church prepares to select a new pastor, the transitional pastor can introduce new methods and situations that correct previous deficiencies. For example, if the church did not employ adequate security measures when taking up the tithes and offerings and they let only one person handle the counting and depositing of the funds, a transitional pastor could recommend to the governing board a change of procedures that would enhance financial accountability. This could be done because of the past experience of the transitional pastor. It could be implemented without concern for offending the person who had the responsibility in the past because the transitional pastor is bringing in a recommendation from a position of objectivity. The recommendation can be accepted by the church because the transitional pastor’s- vested interest is to strengthen the church. The motivation is above suspicion because the transitional pastor is bringing his or her experience into the new ministry setting. It is designed to enhance processes of the church.

The question was asked of intentional transitional/interim pastors as part of the research:

“What do you consider to be the most challenging aspect of doing transitional ministry?” Interim pastor Dave Phillips provided information that he felt was some of the most beneficial that he had encountered as it related to conflict and confrontation in transitional ministry. His source was Peacemaker Ministries from Billings, Montana where they listed the “Seven A’s of Confession,” referencing Matthew 7:3-5; 1 John 1:8-9; and Proverbs 28:13; and the “Four Promises of Forgiveness” listed below:

The “Seven A’s of Confession”:

1. Address everyone involved (All those whom you affected)
2. Avoid if, but, and maybe (Do not try to excuse your wrongs)
3. Admit specifically (Both attitudes and actions)
4. Acknowledge the hurt (Express sorrow for hurting someone)
5. Accept the consequences (Such as making restitution)
6. Alter behavior (Change your attitudes and actions)
7. Ask for forgiveness

Pastor Dave Phillips also included the “Four Promises of Forgiveness,” from the Peacemaker Ministries website, referencing Matthew 6:12, 1 Corinthians 13:5 and Ephesians 4:32:

1. “I will not dwell on this incident.”
2. “I will not bring up this incident again and use it against you.”
3. “I will not talk to others about this incident.”
4. “I will not let this incident stand between us or hinder our personal relationship.”

These are outstanding promises and commitments to live by for people who desire that Christ be honored by their behavior. This level of commitment requires that everyone involved in a situation has a humble spirit going forward and that ego, self, and sin are sacrificed at the altar of forgiveness.

Ron Susek says of interim or transitional pastors: “The role of intentional interim pastor requires unique traits.

1. *His focus of ministry is on the established church.* This person must be geared to honor the traditions and history of the church. It would be unethical for an interim to attempt to lead a church away from its roots, simply because he doesn’t share the same roots.

2. *He has a high-risk personality and is able to:*  
   - Envision potential in others,  
   - Confront sin and mediocrity,  
   - Challenge the saints for renewed activity in the kingdom.

3. *He has leadership training and gifts as:*  
   - Team player, multiple relationships exist  
   - Transformational leader, close to the congregational action  
   - A transition specialist, handling a variety of situations  
   - A tenacious investigator, exposing problems seeking solutions  
   - A temporary shepherd, caring for the flock.”

This list illustrates the unique tasks and skills needed by a transitional pastor in the twenty-first century church. If churches are to be successful in regaining their sense of mission and purpose, they must be transformed during the transition period so that they recapture the Spirit of Christ. Gilbert R. Rendle says, “Conflict is two or more ideas in the same place at the same time….it is the engagement and working out of differences.”

In a research survey, pastors were asked, “When considering a proper biblical World view (meaning how the church sees the world through the lens of scripture), would you consider your church to have a: Strong view, Weak view, Average view or No view?” In the largest category of respondents, nearly fifty nine percent said their church had only an average biblical world view. Another nine percent of the pastors responding said their church had a weak view.

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and one and one half percent indicated that their church had no biblical world view at all. Only thirty one and a third percent responded that their church had a strong biblical world-view and understood the mission of the church. That means that less than a third of the people that are responsible for carrying out the Great Commission and the biblical mandates of the Bible are engaged in the effort. It would be unimaginable if only thirty one percent of our military engaged in battle when the President and Congress declared war on another country. The result would be disastrous. Not only would the effort fail, our troops would face certain defeat. Yet, only thirty one percent of the surveyed congregations are engaged in the fight. This indicates a weak spiritual position for the church. Many issues may be linked to internal strife and division that currently takes place. Many congregants are so concerned with their own personal issues in the church they fail to see the bigger picture of impacting the world for Christ.

It is important that division and problems of conflict be dealt with during the transitional period so that lingering issues do not carry over into the new ministry. When asked the survey question, “If you had to describe one negative quality that you had to deal with as you began your ministry that you wished had been dealt with previously, what quality would that be?” pastors were able to respond individually. This question allowed pastors to type in their response rather than select from a list. Of the 132 responses given, the following are a few of the specific pastoral reactions: openness to change, unforgiveness, inept lay leadership, apathy, unity of board and church leaders, pride, control issues with established members, gossip, church vision and mission statement, removing unqualified people from church leadership, bitterness, discord, who was running things, hurt feelings, self-control, negative attitudes, former pastoral influences, anger, division and contention, and talking and backbiting over previous issues. Nearly every case of new pastors inherited problems when beginning their ministry. Many of the problems
should have and possibly could have been resolved prior to their arrival. Eliminating conflict would have provided a springboard into new ministry for the incoming pastor. However, instead of being able to take advantage of the excitement surrounding a new beginning, nearly every pastor had to deal with unresolved issues. Addressing issues in the church like Christ did in Revelation 2:1 through Revelation 3:22 provides a model for the transitional pastor. Jesus became familiar with the histories of each of the churches. He assessed their works and was proactive in confronting spiritual deficiencies. The transitional pastor will need to be active and proactive in addressing spiritual deficiencies. Ken Sande makes an important observation regarding conflict in the church:

> The message given by Jesus and the apostles is resoundingly clear: whether our conflicts involve minor irritations or major legal issues, peace and unity are of paramount importance to God. Therefore, peacemaking is not an optional activity for a believer. If you have committed your life to Christ, he commands you to make peace and unity a high priority in your life. Token efforts will not satisfy this command; God wants you to strive earnestly, diligently, and continually to maintain harmonious relationships with those around you. Your obedience to this call will advance the gospel and allow you to enjoy the personal peace that God gives to those who faithfully serve him.\(^\text{22}\)

This highlights the Christians’ responsibility in conflicts to take an active role in either forgiving or being forgiven. Christians are not afforded the luxury of carrying around feelings of conflict and agitation because peace and unity within the family of God comes with a high premium. The transitional pastor may have to be the arbitrator in many of the cases regarding conflict inside the church. Jesus makes clear how important forgiveness is in the life of the believer, it is a non-negotiable. In Matthew 18:22 Jesus is asked specifically how many times a person is to forgive another. He responds, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.”\(^\text{23}\)

\(^{22}\) Sande, *The Peacemaker*, 49.

\(^{23}\) Matt. 18:22.
Seventy times seven was not a numerical formula that Jesus came up with to satisfy the disciples, rather it suggests a continual action on the part of the Christian to maintain a heart of forgiveness towards others. The transitional pastor must lead in this area and make sure that all parties accept responsibility for forgiving and forgiveness.

Preventing the Church for Change

Max DePree was an exceptional leader and chairman of the board of directors of Herman Miller, Inc. He writes, “Vision is the basis for the best kind of leadership. A vision exists somewhere when teams succeed. Instinctively, most of us follow a leader who has real vision and who can transform that vision into a meaningful and hopeful strategy.”

The best time to assess the ministry and lay out a new or renewed vision for the church is during the transition period. Members of a local congregation are going to be more receptive and more open to change than at any other time in their history. The transition period can be a little disorienting to members of the congregation because there is the fear of the unknown. Dr. Jerry Falwell shared this about his personal long, dark nights of crisis. In his book Building Dynamic Faith he writes,

I’ve had several dark nights when I wondered if I would make it to the next day. I’ve told you about how concerned I was when the Securities and Exchange Commission sued us over fraud. I’ve told you about almost losing Liberty University when the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) was about to take away our accreditation. There have been physical treats on my life by individuals and a couple of times by mobs in Wisconsin, San Francisco, and Sydney, Australia. The time when finances were so tight I couldn’t pay my faculty was a low watermark. Through all of these, it was my God who kept me going.

Dr. Falwell illustrates an important lesson for the church. It is God that delivers through personal and corporate crises in life. It is God that shapes and molds the Christian into the type of vessel that He has designed that person or that church to be. It is God that provides the means and the


25. Falwell, 178.
resources to accomplish His purposes and His will. It is the responsibility of the church and the individuals to be willing to be shaped and molded into His purposes. The responsibility to carry this message to the congregation is that of the transitional pastor. In the research for this paper pastors were asked, “How well do you feel that your congregation had been prepared for the beginning of your ministry?” The graph below illustrates the percentage of congregational preparation that pastors felt their congregations had.

![Graph showing percentage of congregational preparation](image)

**Figure 3. Ministry Preparation**

Only sixteen percent felt that their church had been prepared for their new ministry. The highest category of respondents forty three and a half percent were only somewhat prepared for the beginning of a new ministry, while only nineteen percent were a little prepared compared to nearly seventeen percent who were totally unprepared for new ministry. This indicates that much of the work for change and preparation for new ministry is currently inadequate. This should alarm everyone within the context of the local church. This leaves only a combined total of just
over twenty percent of congregations with adequate preparation for renewing their mission and embracing their new leader. This highlights the need for intentional transitional ministry and what the transitional pastor can do to facilitate change. Is this really important? Absolutely!

Roger Nicholson says,

> As much as possible needs to be done during the interim time to help the congregation become more unified; to increase understanding and commitment for its work; to develop as clear a vision, mission, and identity as possible; and to get off to the best possible beginning with a new pastor.\(^{26}\)

Much of the work of the transitional pastor is like a farmer who begins tilling the ground and uprooting the earth prior to planting. Preparation of the soil is critical to having a good crop. The farmer understands that what they do is foundation to the quality of the harvest tomorrow.

Preparation for change can be laborsome and challenging. It may well be one of the reasons that so little effort is put forth regarding change. Mead asks the question, “How do you change a human enterprise that’s stuck in a way that doesn’t destroy the people in it, that doesn’t subvert its values, but that helps it adapt to the changing world around it? How do you do that in a way that affirms the people, affirms their basis values, and strengthens their effectiveness?\(^{27}\) Mead has worked very effectively in developing research that leads to effective transitional processes. There are tools and resources available to help during transitions; the problem is that many churches are just not aware of where to find them.

Seeking change during the transition period requires the opportunity to change and a willingness to change. When a preacher vacates the role as leader of the congregation, opportunity becomes apparent. The other part of the equation is having a willingness to change. It has been said that “you can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make them drink.” This can be

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27. Mead, 80.
said of many congregations across America, “you can introduce change to a church, but without a willingness to embrace it, the effort will fall short.” Transitional pastors must be willing to be used in ways that brings God glory and reignites mission and purpose within the church. Pastor Jim Cymbala speaks of God turning around the ministry of the Brooklyn Tabernacle Church. He indicates the fire was nearly out in the church he was called to pastor and then the Holy Spirit reignited a fire that could not be quenched. In his book *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*, he said, “I discovered an astonishing truth: God is attracted to weakness. He can’t resist those who humbly and honestly admit how desperately they need him.”

This can be said of the church also. God is in the business of providing assistance and direction to churches who desire to follow the biblical mandate of the Great Commission. Mead says, “The strategy is to recognize that church renewal is an extraordinary gift from God. It comes where it will and when it wills if we open ourselves to it.” This is an important point that transitional pastors should communicate to their church as they enter a new transitional ministry. God desires to work and renew ministry within the church, but it is conditional. The condition: members have to be open and willing to let God direct and they must be willing to follow in humble obedience. If the church approaches God with the right spiritual attitude and they have a willingness to follow the leading of His Spirit, change will occur. R. Neil Chafin, an experienced consultant who helped start the Center for Congregational Health associated with the Southern Baptist Hospital in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, puts it this way: “The way a congregation chooses to use its interim time will shape congregational growth, identity, and health for years to come. We also know that what is done in the interim time really determines whether the new minister and congregation will form a solid ministry

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The important thing for congregations to remember is that the decisions they choose during their transition period will impact the future ministry of the church. This is why seeking God’s direction and His input is critical to the life and ministry of the church. The church exists to serve Christ and its purpose is to grow healthy and fulfill its mission. As things grow they change. Anyone seeking growth must accept that change must occur. If change is to be embraced in the local church, then mission must be emphasized. It is mission and purpose that becomes the catalyst for change in the church.

**Preaching Biblically**

One of the ways that transitional pastors can help churches understand their need for change is by preaching biblical sermons. The prophet Isaiah recorded an important principal regarding the word of God, “So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”

God has a special interest in the success of every fundamental bible believing church. He has a plan and a process designed to accomplish His purposes. The key aspect for the church is to be sensitive enough to hear God’s voice when He speaks. Preaching is by far the most effective way of communicating truth to a large number of people in a congregation. It provides a platform of authority designed to seize God’s promises and communicate them to His people, the church.

In a lecture at Liberty University, Dr. Kevin King, Professor of Expository Preaching, made the statement that a sermon needs the elements of, “the What, the So What and the Now

30. Oswald, Heath, and Heath, 77.

What.\textsuperscript{32} What Dr. King was alluding to was that members of a congregation need to hear “what” the issue is. Then they need to understand the “so what,” or relevance of the issue. Then they need to be challenged to make a decision as the final part of the sermon the “now what,” a personal response. This becomes important because the church has to make important spiritual decisions. God has provided principals and directives within the pages of the Bible for His people to follow. The transitional pastor can connect with the congregation through biblical sermons that help a church find its spiritual direction. God has made two important promises to the church and His people that they should never forget. The first is right on the heels of the Great Commission, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you, (the promise), and Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”\textsuperscript{33} What an encouraging promise for the church that Christ is always with them even to the end of the age. The Christian is never abandoned and never forsaken and always supported in mission.

The second promise is also equally important and is found in Romans 8:28, “For we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”\textsuperscript{34} This is an extraordinary promise that God will insure that He will make all things work out good for those who are called according to His purposes. Robert J. Morgan says of this verse, “In Christ, we have an ironclad, unfailing, all-encompassing God-given guarantee that every single circumstance in life will sooner or later turn out well for those

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{32} Dr. Kevin King, “Expository Preaching,” (lecture, Liberty University: Baptist Theological Seminary, Lynchburg, VA, October 2011).
\item \textsuperscript{33} Matt. 28:19-20.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Rom. 8:28.
\end{itemize}
committed to Him,” Morgan goes on to say: “It’s arguably the most powerful promise in the Bible.” Through the power of expositional preaching, the transitional pastor can help the church realize that God is seeking the church to be a partner in mission and ministry. The church may review its past history and find that it has been weak in areas of spiritual growth and maturity.

The transition period offers a great opportunity for spiritual renewal and revitalization. By engaging the congregation in exposition and pointing out spiritual promises, the church can reclaim its mission of reaching, teaching and touching others for Christ. In Lectures to My Students, Charles Haddon Spurgeon said to pastors,

> Our great object of glorifying God is, however, to be mainly achieved by the winning of souls. We must see souls born unto God. If we do not, our cry should be that of Rachel, “Give me children, or I die.” If we do not win souls, we should mourn as the husbandman who sees no harvest, as the fisherman who returns to his cottage with an empty net, or as the huntsman who has in vain roamed over hill and dale. Ours should be Isaiah’s language uttered with many a sigh and groan—“Who hath believed our report? And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?” The ambassadors of peace should not cease to weep bitterly until sinners weep for their sins.

The church cannot afford to lose its sense of mission and purpose. Jesus sought to win the heart and soul of people during His ministry. Spurgeon emphasized the need to win people to Christ during his ministry. The need to win people to Christ has not diminished, only the desire of the church and its motivation towards mission. The transitional period provides the best opportunity to make spiritual corrections. Roger Nicholson says: “It is generally understood that an interim minister will bring the congregation to the point where it is ready to commit itself to a new

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visionary mission statement and to give its loyalty to a new pastor.” ³⁷ This idea is the heartbeat of every missions minded transitional pastor. To reach, teach and touch others for Christ.

A research question for this project asked pastors: “If you could have suggested a series of messages prior to your call, rank in order the most important to the least, the priority that you would have placed on the following topics: discipleship, finances, commitment, Bible exposition or preparing for change?” With a hundred thirty two pastors actively participating the topic that pastors most desired to have preached prior to beginning their current ministry was “Bible exposition” at thirty one percent. Pastors felt that by having sermons supporting biblical principals presented to the congregation, the foundation for effective ministry was being established. The second most desired sermon series was “preparing for change” listed with twenty eight percent. These pastoral sermon preferences help develop an understanding of how important the transition period is to the church. It highlights the spiritual emphasis that best serves the church and the incoming pastor. The ministry of John the Baptist played an important role in establishing the preaching and teaching ministry of Christ. The Bible says of John the Baptist, “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not the Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.” ³⁸ John the Baptist prepared others for the ministry of Jesus Christ. In a similar way, transitional pastors are forerunners to the permanent pastors in local congregations. Their role is to inform, educate, lead, feed, nurture, and prepare the church for new ministry. The better the church is prepared the better the results will be of the spiritual harvest.

³⁸ John 1: 8.
If change is inevitable, one of the most important features a person can possess is the ability to incorporate transformational change into their processes in positive ways. Dr. Howard Hendricks of Dallas Theological Seminary says: “God’s purpose is that we become His agents of transformation for the world around us.” Therefore, the goal of the Christian should be to transform so much into the image of Christ that he or she becomes more influential in reaching others with the message of redemption. The transitional pastor can use the Word of God to message out the excitement of being a link in God’s chain of salvation to others. Why would biblical preaching be such a premium in the local church for transformation? Dr. Hershael W. York of Southern Seminary answers that question: “God has made us visual creatures. Pastors don’t mail printed texts of their sermons to parishioners; they deliver them in person.” Transitional pastors deliver God’s message personally and directly to the church through their preaching and teaching. It is by far still one of the greatest methods of reaching God’s people corporately. When God begins to move in a church, He also moves through the church and the ministry begins to respond to change and mission in positive ways.


CHAPTER FOUR

Purpose of a Ministry Plan

Fundamentally, a plan is necessary because it provides a roadmap for achieving success. A plan is the structured process of developing steps to reach the desired goal. Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the verb use of “plan” as, (a): “a method for achieving an end; (b): an often customary method of doing something; (c): a detailed formulation of a program of action.”¹ This is exactly the reason why a temporary shepherd would desire to develop a plan for transitional ministry. Having a transitional plan helps the temporary pastor fulfill the requirements and the expectations of God. In each letter to the seven churches in the Book of Revelation, Jesus Christ reveals a plan. Even the churches with no rebuke or admonition from Christ received a plan for spiritual strength and church health. God, who is supremely organized, has created a plan for every person who has ever lived. God, speaking through the prophet Jeremiah, says to His people, “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart.”² God has given a special promise of a plan to His people. This is true individually and this is true corporately. Jesus said, “I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”³ John MacArthur says of this description of the church by Christ: “Christ called it “My church,” emphasizing that He alone is its Architect, Builder, Owner and Lord.”⁴ By stating that the “gates of Hades shall not prevail against it,” Christ implies that He will see to it that a

². Jer. 29:11-13 (TNIV).
³. Matt. 16:18b.
A protective plan will be in place to protect the church. The church has a mission, a purpose and a supernatural plan initiated by God designed to further the work of Christ. The challenge for the local church is to find God’s will and move toward God’s agenda. Henry Blackaby addresses the vision of the church:

Spiritual leaders don’t sell vision; they share what God has revealed to them and trust that the Holy Spirit will confirm that same vision in the hearts of their people. Today, Christian leaders often develop a vision for their organizations and then demand the members either get on board or find another organization. This approach could not be further from the New Testament pattern. Spiritual leaders know they cannot change people; only the Holy Spirit can do this.5

Dr. Blackaby makes the important observation that only the Holy Spirit can change people and any plan that is introduced into the local congregation must have the endorsement of the Holy Spirit. The five step transitional plan that will be introduced incorporates the Holy Spirit in all five steps with special emphasis on starting right. Without the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit throughout the process of transitional ministry, everything will amount to wood, hay, and stubble.

Molly Dale Smith says there are “three key hallmarks” that differentiate transitional ministry from other specialized ministries. The hallmarks are task, training, and time. When she speaks of task she is speaking about the work that must be done to respond to change. Training refers to the skill and leadership ability of guiding and leading a congregation in their work of renewal. Time is the final component. It speaks to the process from beginning to end that must be invested into the transition process.6 No magic formula exists for effective transitional ministry. A transitional pastor will require a servant’s heart. Just as farmer tills the earth to prepare for planting season, so a transitional pastor must till and soften the hearts of many believers before


they are receptive to change. The transitional pastor must be patient, but not too patient. The transitional pastor must lead, but not force. The transitional pastor must love, but be decisive. The transitional pastor must be knowledgeable, but not a know-it-all. In a survey for this project, 132 pastors were asked what the most important qualities were from the list of the Fruits of the Spirit that would have been beneficial to ministering to their congregation. The results were a little surprising when you consider the variety of people in churches, but not totally unexpected. The highest rated quality in the survey was goodness. Pastors felt that goodness above all other qualities would be the most effective in ministering to their congregation effectively. Self-control ranked a close second with pastors displaying a confidence in themselves and their leadership ability. Gentleness came in third, with pastors being sensitive to the needs of others and responding in ways that reflected the heart of a shepherd. Joy and peace rounded out the top five qualities with pastors believing that a transitional pastor with the joy of Christ in their heart could effectively influence the tone of the ministry, especially if accompanied with the peace of God that transcends human understanding. Listed on the chart below are the total results of each of the qualities:
Figure 4. Transitional Pastoral Qualities

The three top qualities chosen by pastors (goodness, self-control and gentleness) would indicate that congregations are fragile during the transition period and require pastoral care. At the same time the transitional pastor must have a keen sense of where God is directing them on their pathway to spiritual health. Where do we begin the transitional journey? The transitional journey begins where everything spiritual begins—with God. Every time that Jesus Christ faced a crisis He always went to God the Father. In both the Old and New Testaments every spiritual leader that faced incredible challenges sought out God and His leadership. Transitional pastors are wise to seek God’s direction and intervention as they begin the work of transitional ministry.
Development of a Step-by-Step Action Plan

Step One: Prayer—A Fundamental and Foundational Building Block

In most of the material researched for this project, this writer found that many had focused on the processes and the procedures that were needed to be successful in transitional ministry. Much of the focus was on what the transitional pastor needed to do from a human perspective in organizing the church. Collecting information, analyzing data, seeking out local leaders, developing a process, getting denominational support, etc. These things are tremendously important, but one critical element that needed to be emphasized as the process begins is the incorporation of God into the process through the power of prayer. There seems to be this idea that transitional pastors and congregations are going to pray instinctively, so there is little reason to highlight it in a plan. This type of thinking would be fatally flawed. It is true that most people pray when faced with a crisis. To assume that everyone knows how to pray and that everyone is praying for the same outcome within the church would simply be a mistake. In every spiritual crisis listed in the Bible, people who relied on God’s direction sought Him out through prayer. Jesus, when facing the chief crises of His life—(death on a cross),—sought to remain in prayer with God the Father until He was delivered to the Sanhedrin. The Bible says He was,—“sorrowful and deeply distressed” and that He “fell on His face and prayed,” not just once but at least three separate times.7 This example of Christ seeking the resources and the strength of God in His moment of crises,—establishes a biblical precedent that should not be overlooked or taken for granted.

Intentional corporate prayer is Step One of the five steps to Effective Transitional Ministry Plan. Listed below are four important “I’s” that describe why prayer should be listed as Step One of the process: Invitation, Incorporation, Interaction and Inclusion.

1. **Invitation: Prayer invites God into the transitional process.** Jesus said in the Book of Revelation, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door I will come in to him and dine with him and he with me.” God enters the lives of believer’s through invitation. He will not impose His will on an unreceptive and unresponsive church. The church and the transitional pastor both have the responsibility of extending a corporate and personal invitation for God to lead the transitional process. This is not lip service to God, but a sincere request on the part of the church that God would dominate the transitional process and work to fulfill His will in the church. Dr. Jerry Falwell, Sr., was fond of saying “nothing of eternal significance happens apart from prayer.” Jesus was very clear in His instruction to the disciples: “Apart from Me you can do nothing.” It would seem very arrogant to think that the church would have a successful transition period without the working of God throughout the process. The importance of prayer should not be understated or minimized; it is a foundational building block.

2. **Incorporation: Prayer incorporates God in the process.** God is all-powerful and all-knowing. God has all of the resources at His disposal that the church will ever need. Jesus said, “Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” God does not need people to accomplish His will. God has the power and the supernatural ability to accomplish His desires without human intervention. God did not require human resources to create the universe. Consider the questioning by God of Job

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in the Book of Job. God, in revealing His omnipotence asked Job, “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding. Who determined it measurements? Surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?” It is clear that God does not need man’s input or assistance to accomplish His will, but God desires it. God wants people to partner with Him in ministry and that is one of the primary purposes of the church. The Apostle Paul shares,

> For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

God has created an opportunity for people to be involved in the work of God and to serve as a partner in ministry. Therefore, it becomes incumbent on His people to solicit His involvement through active communication in prayer.

3. **Interaction: Prayer interacts with God to find direction.** When God’s people seek to interact with Him, they place the focus where it needs to be-on Him. The church that is God-centered and God-focused will out perform other ministries simply because they have placed God in His rightful place, which is the heart of ministry. They have decided to connect with God and to interact with Him on a personal level. They connect with God with the expectation that God is going to hear their voice and He is going to respond to their prayer. Interacting with God heightens the sensitivity and the awareness factors

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12. 1 Cor. 3:9-11.
within the church. Author and pastor John Maxwell writes on the subject of communication and connecting. He shares one point related to connecting: “Connecting is never about me. It’s about the person with whom I’m communicating . . . If you want to connect with others; you have to get over yourself. You have to change the focus from inward to outward, off of yourself and onto others.”13 This is true of people, but it is especially true with God. The church must corporately seek to interact with God during the transition period. God wants to use the transition time to strengthen the faith of a congregation and to give direction and renew the mission and ministry of the church. God does this through connecting with His people.

4. **Inclusion: Prayer includes God in the solution.** Many times God’s people use prayer as a last resort rather than the first step of a process. Jesus said to the disciples concerning prayer, “For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.”14 It seems logical if God already knows what you have need of before you ask that you would open up the lines of communication and include Him in the process from the beginning. By seeking out God at the beginning of the transitional period, it allows Him to direct the church towards the best outcome and solution. Every church that is seeking a pastor wants primarily the same thing. They want a competent, spirit lead pastor that will preach the gospel, be morally upright, has a wealth of knowledge and experience, and who will dynamically lead the church. They want a pastor who will love the people; be sensitive to the needs of the young, the older, and the middle aged of the church; and who will have a servant’s heart. A pastor who has a good disposition and a great family makes everyone

feel important. With these types of qualities what kind of church do you think God is most likely to lead a pastor towards? Most likely the church that has bathed itself in prayer and seeking the person that God would desire for them to have. Church members need to have a sensitive spirit that allows God to work in them and through them so His will is being fulfilled. This happens when the church includes God from the beginning and seeks His partnership throughout the transitional period.

**Step Two—Evaluating the Ministry: Coming to Terms with the Past**

One thing that a church develops through the course of ministry is a religious identity in the community. Carl S. Dudley says, “Identity is often established by the affirmation of a common past.”\(^{15}\) What Dudley is referring to is that members of the church are linked together based on their common membership to the same church. Essentially, their spiritual heritage is the same. Some churches have long and impressive histories with victories and successes and some churches have rather short histories. An important element in the transitional process is to review the history of the church. The transitional pastor should remind people of their spiritual heritage and how the Lord has used them. Loren Mead first introduced the five developmental tasks of interim ministry into the work of transitional ministry and listed below are the processes that he puts forth:

1. Coming to terms with the congregation’s history.
2. Discovering a new identity, a new sense of mission.
3. Helping the congregation’s internal leadership to grow and change.
4. Rediscover linkages to the denomination.

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5. Establishing a new commitment between people and the new pastor to engage in their ministry together.\textsuperscript{16}

He referred to them as a “process map,” listing coming to terms with the congregation’s history first. Mead is an authority on interim ministry and many of the concepts that he researched and developed have been incorporated in this paper. When a transitional pastor leads the church into “coming to terms with their history” it helps identify the future path of ministry for them. One popular phrase: “those who fail to know their history are doomed to repeat it.” Having a sense of where the church has been spiritually helps to understand the biblical foundations that helped establish the church originally. Many churches have an amazing history of brave and courageous spiritual leaders who have sacrificed personally and corporately for the benefit of the local congregation. Examining church history helps revive stories of past successes and failures and gives a good indication of where the church is. Molly Dale Smith says, “The point of examining a parish’s history is not to pass judgment one way or the other, but rather to name it honestly so that the parish can make an informed and prayerful decision about how to move forward.”\textsuperscript{17} The goal of transitional ministry is to strengthen the church spiritually so it renews its purpose and its mission. Only by examining what the church has previously done will the church be ready to move forward.

If a church has experienced misconduct or moral failure by a previous pastor or leadership personnel, it is critical that the church come to terms with its past. Trust and confidence are two important tools in the ministry workshop that all pastors need. If there are lingering problems within a church that go unspoken and are not confronted, the lack of trust and confidence will roll over into the next pastorate. The advantage of dealing with delicate issues

\textsuperscript{16} Mead, \textit{A Change of Pastors}, 18.

\textsuperscript{17} Smith, \textit{Transitional Ministry}, 30.
during the transitional period is that they can be resolved and handled without adversely affecting the new ministry. When the transitional pastor completes his or her temporary ministry assignment, the book closes on those issues. The transitional pastor takes the issues of the past with them giving the new pastor a clean slate with which to work. Another reason that problems need to be dealt with during the transitional period is the search for a new pastor may seek to compensate for the deficiencies of a former pastor. In other words, if the pastor were weak on hospital visitation, for instance, and the church desired greater hospital participation, the search committee might make that issue a prerequisite. Seeking qualities in a new pastor based on the deficiencies of the former pastor is a flawed method of a pastoral search. While issues should not be ignored, focusing on former pastoral deficiencies and trying to correct them has the potential to overlook good candidate searches. It also may hinder the spiritual aspect of seeking God’s choice for the ministry. Each pastor will have strengths and weaknesses and the key is to determine who God has prepared for that particular ministry. A church should seek who God wants as the pastor rather than who an individual wants for the position, placing spiritual responsibility in God’s hands. It should be noted that God already knows what you have need of in a pastor even before you ask. So it is wise to allow the Lord to be a major player in the pastoral selection of a church. Loren Mead explains the tension between the old and new ministries:

Every congregation lives in dialogue with its past. Every congregation is strengthened immeasurably by its history, but every congregation has also been deeply wounded by its past. It is both the heir and the victim of its story. Congregations are not blank slates simply waiting for a new pastor to write a totally new story. A pastor sometimes is confused by resistance to what he or she plan to do in “their” congregation. The congregation is a living, breathing cauldron of ministry and story and mission and tragedy.\(^{18}\)

The following are actual pastoral comments received from pastors who participated in the research for this paper. They were asked, “If there was one thing the previous pastor could have done for you to make your transition seamless, what would that one thing be?” Listed below are some of the actual responses from more than a 130 received. Each of the responses is important because it represents the unresolved history of the churches that the new pastor inherited:

- Train deacons
- Allow people to do more
- Developed more leaders for transition
- Leave them with teaching that a new pastor will not be like the old pastor
- Support individualism
- Remove some deacons from their leadership positions
- Stop moving backwards and move forward
- Move on graciously without bitterness
- Leave well without blaming the church
- Communicate a clear direction to the leadership so that elected and lay leaders were on the same page
- Left without splitting the church
- Don’t leave with issues unresolved
- Create a climate for change
- Prepare people to be open to differences
- Teach the importance of changing with society to reach out to the community and bring them into the church to hear the Word of God
- Prepare the congregation for change
- Deal with the division in the congregation over a previous pastor’s transgression
- Not leaving without having mended broken relationships and apologizing

These issues speak to the problems that are left behind as pastors leave ministry positions.

Transitional pastors are able to enter into new ministry where there is spiritual baggage and begin separating the issues to be dealt with. Roger Nicholson recommends an outline for coming to terms with history:

A. Issues
- Putting the tenure of former pastors in perspective
- Acknowledging the past and accepting both the good and the bad
- Deciding what is important and worthwhile to carry into the future
- Appropriately ventilating feelings, grieving, accepting, and moving on
B. Suggestions
- Tell the church’s story, make a timeline for the church, update written history
- Identify and celebrate watersheds in the congregation’s life, significant moments and accomplishments
- Teach the grief process and provide for safe ventilation of feelings
- Hold small-group meetings to reminisce and ventilate feelings
- List strengths and weaknesses of previous pastor(s)
- Listen and teach listening skills
- Review covenants or statements which bind members together

C. Symptoms of Non-Resolution
- Continuing to dwell on the past
- Being stuck in grief, anger, denial, guilt, alienation
- Declining membership, giving, participation
- Trying to clone the previous pastor or find his or her exact opposite

D. Indications of Resolution
- Living in the present while accepting the past
- Movement through the grief process; closure of relationship to previous pastor
- Stabilizing membership, giving, participation
- Open to change and ready to try new ideas
- Asking process questions: Where are we going? What do we do now?
- Investment in current and future issues; new mission statement

Each congregation will be different and there will not be a one-size fits all approach to transitional ministry. The transitional pastor who incorporates a process for examining the past and effectively communicates the spiritual history of the church stands a greater chance of finding ways to strengthen the church.

Step Three—Building Spiritual Bridges

The concept or “bridge building” is Step Three of the transitional ministry model. In order to cross over difficult terrain or connect two separate entities a bridge must be built. Merriam Webster dictionary defines a bridge as: (a) a structure carrying a roadway over a

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depression or obstacle. (b) A time, place or means of connection or transition. Not every situation that a transitional pastor deals with will fall into the category of “easily resolved.” In fact, in many situations there will not be an absolute resolution that can be found. This can be the most difficult step of the five-step process because it involves human emotions, attitudes, and the willingness to change. Each of these situations can become obstacles in moving the church forward and rediscovering mission. Whether a transitional pastor is dealing with strong personalities, age-old traditions or legitimate church problems, bridge building is key to accomplishing the task. The primary ingredients for effective bridge building are love and forgiveness which are not passive, but active qualities. They are not optional, but standard equipment for the Christian. They are not qualities that can be employed at the discretion of the believer, they are biblical mandates. It should be noted that adversity and unforgiveness can take root in the heart of a person or congregation. When unforgiveness or adversity grips the heart of a congregation the results can be disastrous. Pride begins to swell and an attitude of self-righteousness becomes the dominate driver of people’s emotions. The role of the transitional pastor is to display Christlike grace and mercy. He or she must begin to lead the church through the process of forgiveness. This will be one of the critical leadership challenges facing the transitional pastor during the interim period. Transitional pastors can use adversity and forgiveness as teachable moments for people of faith. Gilbert R. Rendle makes an important observation: “Congregations are faith communities. Their ongoing purpose is to introduce people to a relationship with God through the disciplines of their faith tradition, which can be life changing.” What greater way of leading people through change than to allow them the


21. Rendle, 22.
opportunity to see it and experience it? The question is not, “Why did God allow this?” The question is, “What would God have us to know through this and what is God trying to teach us?” Faith based churches and organizations must have the ability to express unconditional love and unconditional forgiveness if they are to have any impact on the Kingdom of God. Challenges and adversity within the church give modern-day Christians the opportunity to experience first century teachings. The church was never designed to be a social club. It is a spiritual hospital charged with the responsibility to restore the spiritual health of sinful people. Rick Warren makes the statement, “The command to love is the most repeated command in the New Testament, appearing at least fifty-five times. If we don’t love people, nothing else matters. “Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love” (1 John 4:8).” Warren highlights an important concept related to people of faith. Love and forgiveness are the triumph cards in the Kingdom of God and every church member must have them and use them liberally.

How to “Build Spiritual Bridges” to the Congregation

The transitional pastor will need to employ an “all of the above” approach when building bridges to the congregation. Every defensive and offensive weapon in their arsenal must be utilized if they are to be successful. Listed below are several suggestions:

1. **Sermons.** After evaluating the church and developing an idea about where the ministry is spiritually, the transitional pastor along with the directing of the Holy Spirit should implement a sermon series designed to address weaknesses and provide encouragement. Professor Hershael W. York of Southern Seminary says, “The sermon is the bridge we build between the text and the congregation. With Bible-based truth and listener-based

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delivery, the sermon carries God’s Word to man’s ears and on to his heart.”

The important task for the transitional pastor is to get God’s message into the heart of His people and let God speak to the heart.

2. **Interpersonal Communication.** Blake Neff provides what he calls **Pastoral Interpersonal Communication Concepts (PICCs).** He says they are the pastor’s rules of engagement concerning interpersonal communication with the congregation:

- **Motivation.** Motivations make a profound difference, and understanding one another’s motivations set the stage for effective interpersonal communication.
- **A Meeting of the Minds.** The more effective the communication becomes between participants, the greater the overlap in thinking.
- **Inevitable, Irreversible, and Unrepeatable.** Communication is inevitable, sometimes irreversible and often unrepeatable. Once you say something, you cannot take it back. Words should be chosen carefully and use constructively.
- **Content as well as relationship.** Each interaction includes both content and relationship. Relationships alter meaning. When people are known the content of their words are better understood.

Transitional pastors must be able to interact and connect with a variety of people in the congregation if they are to be effective in leading the church through change.

Maxwell adds, “Connecting is the ability to identify with people and relate to them in a way that increases your influence with them.” This is a critical element in leading a church through change and into the future. Connecting with people and having them commit to making the best corporate decisions for the church during a period of transition is an effective strategy for building internal bridges. People will follow leadership that they believe in.

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3. **Bible Study.** One of the best ways of building bridges is to have Bible studies that highlight the teaching and the interaction between God and His people. The Bible is filled with examples and illustrations of how God spoke to His people and worked to accomplish His will.

4. **Encouragement.** Barnabas was one of the best encouragers recorded in the New Testament. His ability to encourage nearly everyone he came into contact with allowed him to become very influential in the early church. The Apostle Paul loved ministering with Barnabas because of his unique gift to get along with people. Congregations respond positively to pastors that have an encouraging spirit. Max DePree, speaking on the topic of leadership says, “Effectiveness comes about through enabling others to reach their potential—both their personal potential and their corporate or institutional potential.”

   By encouraging church members to be everything that God intended them to be and then showing them how to do it through servanthood builds internal bridges to one another.

5. **Be a Peacemaker.** The Bible is established on the fact that God sought to reconcile Himself to man. From Genesis to Revelation God pursues man with the intention of providing a plan of reconciliation. Ken Sande says, “Reconciliation is the final step to resolving a conflict. To be reconciled means to replace hostility and separation with peace and friendship.”

   Forgiveness and reconciliation are not optional qualities for the Christian; they are mandatory. The Apostle Paul instructs,

   > Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one

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another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.\textsuperscript{28}

There is no spiritual flexibility for the Christian around this passage. God expects forgiveness and love to dominate the attitude and behavior of His people. The transitional pastor must be diligent in carrying this message from God’s Word to the church.

6. **Through Counseling.** In many crisis situations individual counseling will be required. Some people will be more private in the way they handle grief, separation and new beginnings. It is important for the transitional pastor to be aware of church members silently trying to deal with major issues of change and transition on their own. Suggesting and recommending counseling is one of the best ways to help individuals that need more than just a gentle push in the right direction. Spiritual counseling can strengthen difficult concepts to come to terms with as the church evaluates the past and prepares for the future.

**Build Denominational Bridges**

Many churches have denominations that furnish and provide transitional pastors to local churches going through the process of transition. The Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Methodist denominations are a few denominations that offer exceptional support in this area. There are organizations such as the Alban Institute, the Interim Pastor Ministries, Center for Congregational Health, and the Interim Ministry Network that have been instrumental in training and developing transitional ministers. Many of the organizations have adopted Loren Mead’s five developmental tasks of transitional ministry. Task number four in his five developmental tasks is the process of “rediscovering linkages to the denomination.”\textsuperscript{29} This can be an important

\textsuperscript{28} Col. 3:12-14.

\textsuperscript{29} Mead, *A Change of Pastors*, 57.
resource for any church if they are supported denominationally. It is certainly recommended to make denominational contact with the responsible denominational headquarters and use their resources to help facilitate the transitional process. However, there are a number of churches that do not have the benefit of denominational support. They may be non-denominational churches or independent churches or small denominational churches that do not have a large enough membership to garner much denominational support. Even with little support most churches would benefit by following the steps outlined in this project. The steps are designed to help churches and transitional pastors through the process of transition regardless of the size. The recommendation to the smaller denominational church is to contact the denominations headquarters, even if you find that denominational support is weak. Seek direction, support, and ask about resources or contacts that might prove beneficial. Often by making contact with someone within your denomination it leads to a recommendation or a course of action that will prove advantageous to your church. Remember, you can never have too much information, only too little information.

**Building Bridges toward Change**

One of the most challenging areas of transitional ministry is managing change. Normally, people and congregations desire to hold on to things that are familiar. Holding on to the familiar when going through a period of crisis represents stability and security. On the topic of congregational change Gilbert R. Rendle says, “One of the dilemmas of leading change in a congregation is that it naturally engages negative and angry feelings. These negative feelings develop as general anxiety begins to increase because of the awareness of change that faces the congregation.”³⁰ The transitional pastor can bring a sense of calm to the church by reassuring it

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³⁰ Rendle, 107.
that God desires to change it for the better. One of the key considerations for the seven churches in Revelation was Christ’s desire for them to be stronger as a result of change He recommended. Christ did not recommend change for the sake of change. He recommended change because change was spiritually needed. In John chapter 15, Jesus uses the agricultural analogy of being the vine and God the Father being the vinedresser. Jesus makes this statement, “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit he takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.” Jesus is drawing the parallel that both healthy and unhealthy situations may require change. In unhealthy situations, change is required to remove dead wood. In healthy situations change is required to stimulate even healthier growth for more productive fruit. God can use crisis situations to do some spiritual pruning within a congregation and the church needs to be patient with the pruning process. What seems painful may prove to be fruitful for future ministry. A transitional pastor is responsible for making the church aware of the need to be open and receptive to God’s direction. By opening the hearts of the congregation and seeking God’s direction, they become sensitive to hearing God’s voice. By desiring change and embracing change, the transitional period becomes more spiritually productive.

This is an appropriate place to insert a word of caution regarding “boundaries” within a church for the transitional pastor. Mead writes concerning his research on boundaries:-

In 1976, The Alban Institute was attracted to the concept that has become foundational for us in understanding and searching for the meanings of change. The concept was the “boundary.” We believe the concept has broad usefulness for those seeking to build the future church. The concept of the boundary came to us as we studied what happened when a seminary student move from the seminary into her or his first assignment. We wanted to find out why the dedicated efforts of seminaries across the country to help their graduates become better prepared for ministry in congregations all had the same result—graduates, with varying degrees of anger, saying “Why didn’t the seminary prepare me for this?” We discovered that the problem was not a lack of information or anything of that sort.

Nor was it a lack of imagination or effort on the part of seminaries. It was a matter of two cultures, seminary culture and congregational culture. They were different, including different ways of thinking and working, different reward systems and values, even different languages.32

Being aware of boundaries within a respective church will help transitional pastors navigate the rough seas of change and prevent unnecessary heartache and distraction from the mission. Having a knowledge of where the church is spiritually (reviewing the history/Step two) and where the church needs to go (developing a Christ-centered mission/Step four) is instrumental in working through Step three, building bridges.

Transitional pastors are both, pastors and facilitators. In fact, transitional pastors will find themselves wearing many different hats throughout the transitional process. Gilbert R. Rendle suggests that transitional pastors or leaders may not be able to provide a solution or a direction that will satisfy all the parties concerned, but they can provide, and are responsible for providing, a safe environment in which people can search for solutions and directions.33 The key is to follow the direction of the Holy Spirit first, and guide the church in becoming strong and healthy, and then you will be able lead the church through the transitional process.

Build Bridges to the Community

No church impacted the world without first impacting its community. The community is where the church lives and the church must maintain a strong and effective witness for Christ. One of the major ways this occurs is for the members to remain upbeat and positive throughout the transition process. The community knows more about what is happening inside the church than most members realize. The transitional pastor must reiterate to the staff and membership that people in the community will watch to see how they respond to their crises. If people see the

32. Mead, The Once and Future Church, 75.
33. Rendle, 164.
church moving forward, being positive, and continuing to invite and minister to the community, they will be drawn to the church. If the church has a local ministry to a retirement home, meals on wheels or any other community program that increases their influence or their spiritual outreach, they should continue that ministry. Christians are to be insulated, but not isolated from the world and their community. The way that churches handles crisis situations in the community will speak volumes regarding their commitment to Christ. Building bridges to the community and showing the love of Christ in all that is done will always be testimonial. Jesus made this statement just before His own crisis on the cross: “A new command I give to you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

When Jesus said, “by this all will know,” He was referring to the community that the disciples lived in. The love that radiates from believer to believer becomes a sign to the outside world that Jesus is real and authentic. It represents the hope of a changed life, which is something the community is in desperate need of. Seek to build bridges to the local community and impact them for Christ in every opportunity.

Step Four—Develop a Christ Centered Mission

When Christ addressed the seven churches in Revelation, the whole purpose was to strengthen them and refocus them on mission. They were to have a Christ-centered ministry designed to impact the culture around them. Rick Warren of Saddleback Community Church says, “The secret of effective evangelism is to not only share Christ’s message but to follow Christ’s methodology. I believe Jesus gave us not only what to say but also how to share it. He had a strategy.” One of the most important elements in transitional ministry is to have a biblical strategy designed to fulfill the mission of Christ. Developing a Christ-centered strategy for

35. Warren, 186.
reaching others with the Gospel must be at the very heartbeat of the church if the church expects to honor God.

One of the ways a transitional pastor can explore the mission of a church is to check and see if the church has a mission statement. In the event that the church has a mission statement, the transitional pastor can reflect and build on what the church has developed in the past. The church may elect to revisit and renew the mission statement or even add to it. If the church does not have a mission statement, this presents an excellent opportunity to develop one with the participation of the church.

Thom S. Rainer, Dean of the Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Church Growth provides excellent insight in developing a strategy: “In my roles, past and present, as pastor, interim pastor, and church consultant, I have seen church members focus their energies on some of the most insignificant issues,” and Rainer goes onto say:-“And in the meantime, tens of thousands die to face a Christless eternity.” Thom Rainer goes on to suggest fifteen ways that a ministry is able to refocus the ministry on mission:

1. **Major on Majors.** Set priorities and seek to keep the goals in clear view.
2. **Be Biblical, Conservative and Convictional.** Christ is King and scripture bears this out. Churches must have a high view of scripture.
3. **Give Evangelism Priority and Passion.** This is the mandate of the Great Commission.
4. **Provide Deep Biblical Teaching.** Remember that seekers are hungry for God. Dr. Harold Wilmington of Liberty University used to say, “witnessing is simply one beggar, telling another beggar, where he found food.”
5. **Develop an Effective and Comprehensive Small-Group Ministry.** Sunday school was the dominant expression of small groups, but many churches have small-cells that meet in homes.
6. **Discern Patterns of Relationships in Your Own Church.** People desire to be connected; relationships are an important part of reaching out to others.
7. **Check Your Facilities.** Facilities must be clean, neat and updated in order to reach people.
8. **Cultivate a User-Friendly Greeter Ministry.** Do not just give directions, give an escort. Go beyond what is expected, by exceeding expectations.

36. Dr. Harold Wilmington, Liberty Home Bible Institute Lectures, 1996.
9. **Keep the Friendliness Issue Before the Church.** Remind members to greet others warmly.

10. **Seek Excellence.** People will expect it and they should see it in the church.

11. **Provide an Inquirer’s/New Members’ Class.** This helps build on the appetite of the new attendee to know more.

12. **Expect Much/Receive Much.** Expecting creates excitement and excitement creates energy. Excitement and energy will help motivate church members and attract new people.

13. **Know Your Church’s Purpose.** This is mission according to Acts 2:42-47: worship, evangelism, ministry, prayer, fellowship and discipleship/equipping.

14. **Foster Ministry Involvement.** Encourage others to participate in ministry.

15. **Never Forget the Power of Prayer.** Evangelizing the unchurched is spiritual warfare. Remember the battle.\(^{37}\)

A church may not be able to incorporate each suggestion listed, but the list is designed to motivate the thinking of the transitional pastor. The transitional pastor must create an atmosphere that helps renew the church’s sense of mission and provide adequate direction. George Martin, a contributing writer in *Transitional Ministry* says, “The great danger in any organization, including a church, is complacency—seeking some level of equilibrium in which no one ever rocks the boat....Change, of course, is inevitable.”\(^{38}\) Mentioned earlier in this paper is the fact that all churches will find themselves with the reality of replacing their pastor at some point. The church that has prepared the best for change normally makes the best transition in weathering the crisis. Having a purpose or mission as the number one goal of the church rather than a person or personality is extremely beneficial for churches in transition. Robert E. Friedrich, Jr. writes, “Strategic planning is a carefully defined process of preparation for the future. Businessdirectory.com defines strategic planning as the “systematic process of envisioning a desired future, and translating this vision into broadly defined goals or objectives and a sequence

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\(^{38}\) Smith, *Transitional Ministry*, 49.
of steps to achieve them.”

The purpose of this paper is to outline a strategy that provides a sequence of steps that leads to effective transitional ministry. There is no singular way this is accomplished in transition. Churches have personalities much like people and each can be a little different than the one before it. The mission is still the same for each church; to reach, teach and touch others with the Gospel of Christ. The challenge that each church must face is defining their purposes and developing a strategy that is effective for their church. Rick Warren offers helpful insight into defining the purposes of the church:

It isn’t our job to create the purposes of the church but to discover them. Remember, its Christ’s church, not ours. Jesus founded the church, died for the church, sent his Spirit to the church, and will someday return for his church. As the owner of the church, he has already established the purposes, and they’re not negotiable. Our duty is to understand the purposes Christ has for the church and to implement them.

God has designed each church with a unique design and purpose that only it can fulfill. The goal for each church should be to find the will of God for its church and fulfill the calling that God has placed on it in the community. Churches need to be reminded that God will hold them accountable for the ministry of the church, just like He will hold individuals accountable. We see this in the rebuke and the admonishment of the churches in Revelation. Churches are stewards of what God has provided and given to them and the expectation of God is that the church will fulfill their mission and their purpose. George Barna provides insight into spiritual success by outlines six core components or competencies of his Missional Model:

1. Being passionately committed to Jesus Christ.
2. Evaluating everything in their lives according to biblical standards.
3. Being deeply committed to having healthy families.

39. Smith, Transitional Ministry, 89.
40. Warren, 98.
4. Being morally pure.
5. Being evangelistically bold.
6. Being socially responsible and impactful to the community.  

The development of mission for a church during the transitional time is a key task for the transitional pastor. It will require a major amount of time, energy and effort to return the church to its primary function of reaching the world for Christ, but the transitional pastor must not lose sight of the goal. God uses transitional pastors as instruments of His grace and mercy to help transform the church into Christlikeness. Like Mordecai said of Esther in the Old Testament, “And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?”  

The transitional pastor must look at his or her opportunity to serve Christ in the church as God’s initiative to revitalize the mission, using the words of Mordecai to Esther, “for such a time as this.”

Step Five—Prepare the Church for New Ministry

Step five is the one step that a transitional pastor must begin to plan as he or she begins transitional ministry. Step five is the final step, but it requires special attention from the beginning. It seeks the final outcome with a dual purpose—a revitalization of mission and the successful preparation of ministry for a new pastor. As a transitional pastor begins to gather information and develop their strategy for ministry renewal, he or she must also factor in an eventual departure. The advantage of a transitional pastor is knowing his or her time is relatively short and it allows them to be upbeat and not easily discouraged when experiencing resistance in the congregation. The disadvantage is moving more quickly than a permanent pastor would normally have to. In most cases, the church understands the sense of urgency and allows the
transitional pastor a greater degree of flexibility.

Prior to the ministry of Jesus, the ministry of John the Baptist had been prophesized by Isaiah saying, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight.” John the Baptist had the responsibility for preparing the people for the ministry of Jesus Christ. He developed an awareness of what was to come and generated excited concerning the ministry and the prophecy surrounding Christ. The transitional pastor functions in a similar way in preparing for the incoming ministry. One of the major ways this is accomplished is by communicating to the church that pastors vary in their ministry style. They are unique individuals that are gifted according to God’s plan and desire. Philip G. Porcher makes the point that “the new pastor will not be like the former pastor or like the interim pastor, but will be a unique individual whom God and the congregation have called to lead in this community.” It must be highlighted and repeated to the congregation that God is responsible for the uniqueness within each pastor. God uses the Holy Spirit in the life of a pastor to develop his or her own special giftedness in ministry. Part of the responsibility of the transitional pastor is to educate the congregation so that they expect to see differences. Each ministry will be unique in God’s plan for the church. High expectations and anxiety are reduced at the beginning of a new ministry through an understanding that each pastor will be slightly different in his or her approach to ministry. The responsibility on the part of the congregation is to embrace a new ministry and seek to serve in whatever capacity the new pastor desires and needs. Some people may find their roles changing within the context of new ministry and the question for church members is, “What would God have me do to promote the mission of Christ within the local church?”

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43. Matt. 3:3b.
adds congregational insight: “From the moment you discover your pastor is leaving until well after the new pastor is in place, you are journeying toward that common commitment to new life and new mission. You are not in a ‘hiring process.’ You are in a transformation process.”

This is truly the role of transitional ministry. Transitional ministry is designed to use the opportunity of transition to revisit and renew the mission of the local church and prepare for new ministry. There should be several outcomes for successful transitional ministry:

1. The congregation should be more united in its work together in new ministry.
2. The congregation should increase its understanding and commitment to its work.
3. The congregation should develop a clear vision, mission and identity.
4. The congregations should desire to get off to the best possible beginning with the new pastor.

Permanent pastors participating in the research for this paper unanimously felt their church could have been better prepared for new ministry. Having a ministry strategy and working to implement a strategic plan throughout the transitional period provides for a high degree of success and is the goal of the transitional pastor.

Once the permanent pastor begins the new ministry, the congregation engages in what is known as the “honeymoon period.” The honeymoon period is a period of grace that is extended to each pastor as they begin new ministry. This period is designed to allow the pastor to become better acquainted with the congregation and the congregation with them. It is similar to the union between husband and wife as they enter into a new marriage. Things are not too testy or confrontational in the beginning and people begin to learn how to work together in new ministry. An important thing to remember is this period will not last forever. The new pastor must make an effort to learn as much as possible in the shortest amount of time in the introduction to the church.

45. Mead, A Change of Pastors, 60.
Roy Oswald says, “Normally, however, the congregation and pastor decide to accept themselves and each other with all their faults and limitations, as well as their real virtues, and build a relationship on the basis of this acceptance.” This represents the desired outcome for each pastoral vacancy for both the church and the pastor.

**Assisting the Pulpit Committee**

Assisting the Pulpit Committee is an area of transitional ministry that is delicate and controversial. There are some that say that it is alright to play a limited role in assisting a Pulpit Committee and some that say the transitional pastor should not play a role at all. Both views have merit for holding such a view. This paper is not promoting one view over the other. The purpose of addressing this issue is to point out several things that need to be considered. Each transitional situation will be different with varying degrees of experienced people participating on the Pulpit Committee. Some committees will be better equipped to handle the pastoral searches than others. They may have experienced members that are familiar with the process and know what to look for and what questions to ask, while other committees may have little experience and have not been in a search for a pastor in quite a while. It should be remembered the primary role of the transitional pastor is to strengthen the spiritual condition of the church and prepare the church for new mission and ministry. Their secondary concern should be that of a consultant to the search committee. The transitional pastor should not seek out an active role on the Search Committee. Their role should be limited to providing advice and direction concerning general information as requested. Mead says, “The primary work of the interim consultant is to help the people appointed to the search committee become an effective work team that helps manage the procedures (the sequential steps) of a pastoral search so the processes (the process

47. Oswald, Heath, and Heath, 128.
steps) of development can occur in a congregation that is searching for a pastor.” Specific areas that Mead identifies:

1. How the individual members can become a team and learn to work together to develop a work plan.
2. How to organize complex tasks and see that they are kept on track with the work plan.
3. How to facilitate communication.
4. How to assure that the church board and search committee develop trust in one another.
5. How to train search committee members in gathering data, analyzing it, conducting interviews, keeping records, reviewing references, developing job descriptions, and guidance in the process of making complex choices and decisions.
6. How to make and complete contracts.
7. How to maintain liaison with denominational associations (if applicable).  

Once the Pulpit or Search Committee has developed a list of candidates, it is wise for the transitional pastor to restrict his or her role in the search process. While some organizations list the general duties of a transitional pastor as attending pastoral search committee meetings and helping interview potential candidates, this should be done on a limited basis. The transitional pastor should avoid placing himself or herself in a position that affects the selection of a candidate or pastor. The church will be responsible for its selection of a new pastor and it needs to be in charge of its own destiny. A transitional pastor will not be involved in the ministry after the transitional period is over. Therefore, it is wise to avoid placing oneself in a position of blame if for some unforeseen reason the new pastoral candidate does not work out.

**Encouraging the Congregation**

One important ingredient that a transitional pastor brings to a congregation during their moment of crisis is the gift of encouragement. From the moment they arrive until the time they look back in the rearview mirror, the transitional pastor needs to have the ability to be encouraging. To “encourage” means to inspire with courage, spirit or hope; to spur on or

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stimulate. 49 One of the major attributes of Barnabas in the New Testament was his ability to encourage others. He was uplifting, positive and full of the Holy Spirit. This is seen in the Book of Acts:

Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. 50

Barnabas encouraged the people with purpose of heart so they continued with the Lord. That is the role of the transitional pastor; to encourage the congregation with purpose of heart so they continue with the Lord. There are three important ways of encouraging the church:

1. **Through assurance.** Letting people know that everything will work out. People in the midst of a crisis are interested in one thing—“How will this turn out?” People are looking for a positive outcome. The transitional pastor can bring assurance that everything will work out according to the promises of God. “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose.” 51 When congregations realize that every church experiences the loss of a pastor sooner or later, they settle in to allow the process to unfold. The transitional pastor is there to provide assurance throughout the process.

2. **Offer support.** The transitional pastor can inform the church that God is interested in doing a new work in the church. A creative God is not going to be stimulated by doing the same old things. God has created seasons that change, people that change and life

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51. Rom. 8: 28.
that changes. It stands to reason that He would welcome change in the church.

Nicholson says, “This task of discovering a new identity can be one of the most exciting components of your interim time as a congregation.”\textsuperscript{52} The church must seek to embrace the new work that God is calling it to do and look forward to an exciting journey.

3. \textbf{Let them know they are called to make a difference by their faithfulness.} Christians are called Ambassadors for Christ because they represent His interests. One day Christians will give an account of their stewardship to Christ. The Apostle Paul said,

\begin{quote}
I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith: in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.\textsuperscript{53}
\end{quote}

Not only does God love and protect His children, He also rewards them for their faithful service in keeping the faith.

A transitional pastor provides a tremendous benefit to a church by modeling the ministry of Barnabas and giving constant encouragement during their time of need.

\textbf{Planning Departure}

Beginning a ministry and departing a ministry are the bookends of transitional ministry. What happens between those bookendings can be referred to as “the journey.” The hope and prayer of every transitional pastor is that God has moved in a significant way to strengthen the church through their journey. When asked whether they expect to see change in a congregation one transitional pastor responded, “Absolutely. Among things I look for are:

- Willingness to accept objective assessment
- Openness to a different leadership and ministry style

\textsuperscript{52} Nicholson, 85.
\textsuperscript{53} 2 Tim. 4: 7-8.
• Improved morale and hope for the future God has in store for them
• Increased support for church leadership through giving and ministry participation
• Enough confidence in the overall ministry to invite and assimilate newcomers
• Availability for training to improve their ministry effectiveness”

If transitional pastors see these types of changes occurring within a congregation, chances are they will consider ministry successful and departure is the final stage of ministry. Not much is written concerning the final departure of a transitional pastor, so it becomes an important issue to cover. Excitement begins to build with the selection of a new pastor and there is much preparation that needs to be done for their arrival. Departing the ministry might not get the attention that beginning the new ministry did. Therefore, several things need to be remembered by the transitional pastor as he or she completes ministry:

1. **Always be gracious.** Last impressions may well be what people remember most. Try to find a kind word for everyone in the final days—even those that might not have been as supportive or as faithful as they could have been during the transitional process. Much of what the transitional pastor does in the final days will transfer to the new pastor coming in. Leaving a little grace in the pastor’s office and with the pastor’s people will always be needed and appreciated.

2. **Take the time to say “thank you.”** It takes much work to move a church to God’s agenda. Many people will play various roles in many different areas of ministries within the church. The final thirty to sixty days is a good time to reflect on each position and say “thank you” to those who served Christ and the church faithfully under your leadership. Maxwell states, “People will not always remember what you said, but they’ll always

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remember how you made them feel.”

3. Be humble. The job of the transitional pastor is to help assess the current ministry, strengthen the church in the area of mission and prepare the ministry for new leadership. Modeling the ministry of Christ and performing ministry with a Christlike attitude is the goal. Christ said, “The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” While it is doubtful that a transitional pastor will be called upon to give his or her life, it is conceivable that he or she would have to sacrifice personal time, talents, energies, abilities, and resources in able to influence others in a positive way. The transitional pastor must die to self in order to promote the cause of Christ in a church.

Challenging the Ministry

Before Christ left His earthly ministry in the hands of the disciples, He prepared them and challenged them to continue the work He had begun. In chapter thirteen of John’s gospel, Christ demonstrates the role of servant by washing the feet of the disciples. He spends time fellowshipping and sharing a last meal with them. He then announces His departure and He gives them a commandment that is still applicable: - “That you love one another; as I have loved you that you also love. By this all will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.” Their commitment and love for each other was to be a sign to the outside world of their message of Christ. It was a testimony of what they believed was real and authentic, not superficial or false. The world desires to see people that are authentic and real. People who have


a devotion and commitment to the mission of Christ send a message that they are engaged and want to make a difference in the culture.

Jesus also took the time to prepare the disciples for His absence with words of encouragement: - “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”

Packed in these couple of verses are three important lessons for transitional pastors: - leave the church with encouragement, reassurance, and a commitment of a bright future. These are qualities that leave a lasting impression on people. Max DePree says, “Much of a leader’s performance cannot be reviewed until after the fact.”

Certainly this is the case for many transitional ministries. The full story of what God has done within a congregation is incomplete until after the permanent pastor has arrived and engaged the church in new ministry.

- Encouraging the members to embrace the new pastor and support their ministry.
- Letting the congregation know you are proud of their spiritual growth during the transitional process.
- And share with the congregation that you are looking forward to hearing victory stories of them reaching others for Christ as they launch into new and exciting ministry opportunities. They will be able to do all things through Christ who provides their strength and motivation.

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59. DePree, Leadership is an Art, 114.
Jesus said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father.” Jesus was speaking of the extent of the disciple’s ministry being greater than His. They would become witnesses empowered by the Holy Spirit to reach an even larger audience with the gospel message. The same is true of the church. The church was not designed to run on just one engine. The church is to have as many engines as it has church members. A church of people committed to ministry can do more than a single pastor ever could. When the pastor equips the saints for ministry, the church becomes a mighty force for spiritual transformation in the twenty-first century America.

The transitional pastor should challenge the church and reaffirm the Great Commission as they conclude their local ministry with the church.

**Conclusion**

Scripture clearly points to the concept of the church belonging to Christ. “I will build My church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” As the Builder and the Creator of the church, Christ has commissioned the church to be the guardian of the culture. His plan included reaching out to others and impacting them in a godly way. Christ commanded, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.” Jesus also knew the church would come under attack from internal and external forces. Christ realized that church health would become a concern for the church. His last message to the church had to do with strengthening the church and preparing it for mission. Jesus did not

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60. John 14:12.
61. Matt. 16: 18b.
leave the church the same way He found it. He transformed it. He provided a spiritual
prescription by developing a paradigm for church health that has been reviewed within this
project. Church health and church mission is also the goal for transitional ministry. The loss of a
pastor disrupts the flow of normal ministry and can have devastating consequences on a church.
Transitional ministry offers many advantages and it is designed to stabilize the ministry and
place the church in a position for the best possible outcome it can have. The transitional pastor is
trained and has special skills to help identify special problems or concerns that a congregation
needs to work through. One of the major benefits transitional pastors have is the ability to be
objective and honest with a congregation in evaluating its needs. Gripe says, “A key advantage
of the interim pastor’s work is objectivity and opportunity. The interim pastor has the freedom to
address concerns of the previous ministry and avoid projecting past difficulties into the new
ministry.” The transitional pastor does not have to worry about local politics within a local
congregation or some of the baggage of the previous ministry. The transitional pastor is able to
remain objective and impartial and it gives him or her greater leverage in seeking to transform
the ministry.

Another benefit of a transitional pastor is that it provides immediate pastoral leadership to
the congregation. When an experienced transitional pastor agrees to accept the call the church
immediately receives pastoral leadership. An experienced transitional pastor can facilitate the
healing of the people even in light of conflict or anger. Perhaps the greatest advantage of having
a transitional pastor is that he or she can become agents for effective change in a congregation.
He or she has a fresh set of eyes, and bring a fresh ministry perspective to the church.
Transitional pastors have a desire to help the local church. This Thesis project recommends that a

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ministry. It is designed to stabilize the church, provide encouragement and understanding regarding the transition process and prepare the congregation for a new pastor and renewed ministry. It is good to remember the words Jesus spoke to the churches in the final chapter of Revelation:

> And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work. I am the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.’ Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.\(^{64}\)

The church has a great calling and a great mission. Everyone who professes the name of Christ shares individually and corporately in helping the church succeed. Transitional ministry is an important resource that God uses effectively in ministering to the church in times of crisis. When churches are healthy, the message and mission of reaching the world for Christ can be realized. Transitional ministry helps the Church remain faithful to the commandments of Christ and its mission for God.

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\(^{64}\) Rev. 22:12-14.
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Dear Pastor,

I am a Doctoral student with Liberty University currently conducting research for a thesis project, Effective Transitional Ministry: Pastoral Leadership in the 21st Century Church. I am seeking to learn how interim or transitional pastors can help prepare the Twenty-first Century church for change and transition. I would like for you to take a couple of minutes to complete a survey designed to measure the spiritual climate in today’s congregation. The information is completely anonymous and the results are factored in so that no church or pastor is identifiable. I am looking for general information as it relates to church health that can be transformed into percentages for analysis. I believe that by identifying today’s spiritual deficiencies in our congregations an effective strategy can be developed to strengthen today’s church. I also believe the short term nature of a transitional pastor is suited to provide the tools necessary for congregations to renew their mission and fulfill their calling in Christ. Additionally, the transitional pastor has opportunity to prepare the ministry for the incoming pastor. I seek to identify the most effective way this can be done. I would like to “thank you” in advance for your participation and helping find ways to strengthen the church. If you have any questions regarding this request, please feel free to contact me personally.

God bless,

Keith R. Gardner
Liberty University: Baptist Theological Seminary

Contact Number: 252-341-5551
Email: krgardner@suddenlink.net

Mentor: Dr. Charlie Davidson
Reader: Dr. Ron Hawkins
APPENDIX B

Pastoral Survey Questionnaire

1. What would you consider to be the weakest area of your church’s ministry prior to your ministry there?
   a. Finances/stewardship
   b. Evangelism/Outreach
   c. Mission/Vision
   d. Leadership/Faithfulness

2. During the pastoral search process, as you evaluated your present ministry, what area did you feel represented the most challenging pastoral task that needed your immediate attention?
   a. Leadership
   b. Weak faith
   c. Commitment
   d. Finances

3. At the beginning of your present ministry would you consider the spiritual climate of your congregation to be:
   a. Over-flowing
   b. Neither cold or hot
   c. Weak/stagnate
   d. Deprived

4. When considering a proper biblical World view would you consider your church to have a:
   a. Strong view
   b. Weak view
   c. Average view
   d. No view at all

5. If you had to categorize the fellowship aspect of your church, prior to beginning your ministry, would you say that it was most like:
   a. Country club
   b. Network
   c. Service industry
   d. Resource provider

6. Would you consider your church to be:
   a. Traditional
   b. Contemporary
   c. Mainline
   d. Target driven
7. If your church is associated with a denomination would you consider the denominational affiliation of your church:
   a. Strong
   b. Weak
   c. Moderate
   d. No affiliation

8. When considering the scripture versions of the Bible does your church subscribe to:
   a. KJV, Kings James Only
   b. Pastor’s preference
   c. Prefer several versions for contrast
   d. Non-issue

9. From your first observation how would you rank the needs that your people had as you began your ministry with 1 being the most important and 4 being the least:
   a. Healing_______
   b. Forgiveness_______
   c. Administration_______
   d. Faith_______

10. If you could have suggested a series of messages prior to your call, rank in order with 1 being the most important and 5 being the least, the priority that you would have placed on the following topics:
    a. Commitment________
    b. Discipleship________
    c. Preparing for Change____
    d. Finances________
    e. Exposition/Book of the Bible____

11. List, in order of their importance with 1 being the most important, qualities of the Fruit of the Spirit that would have been most effective in ministering to your congregation prior to your arrival:
    a. Love________
    b. Joy________
    c. Peace________
    d. Patience____
    e. Kindness____
    f. Goodness____
    g. Faithfulness____
    h. Gentleness____
    i. Self-Control____

12. If you had to describe one negative quality that you had to deal with as you began your ministry that you wished had been dealt with previously, what quality would that be: ____________________
13. If you had to describe one positive quality that you encountered that pleasantly surprised you, what quality would that be: _____________________

14. How well do you feel that your congregation had been prepared for the beginning of your ministry?
   A. Exceptionally Prepared
   B. Prepared
   C. Somewhat Prepared
   D. A Little Prepared
   E. Unprepared

15. If there were only one thing that a previous pastor could have done for you to make your transition smoother, what would that one thing be?
   ______________________________________
APPENDIX C

Transitional Pastor Questionnaire

1. If “mission” is the primary purpose of transitional or interim ministry, how do you determine the level of “mission” with a local congregation?

2. What do you consider to be the most challenging aspect of transitional or interim ministry?

3. Do you enter into a new transitional or interim appointment with the expectation of seeing change in a congregation? Are there indicators that change is occurring?

4. How do you measure the “spiritual health” within a local congregation?

5. Why did you choose transitional or interim ministry over permanent ministry in a church?
APPENDIX D
Pastoral Interviews

1. Was there a transitional or interim ministry that preceded you in your current ministry? If so, how do you feel that it impacted your entry into a new ministry?

2. In your estimation, how important do you think it is for all churches to consider using a transitional or interim pastor during their pastoral vacancy?

3. Do you think the use of a transitional or interim pastor for a congregation can have a downside or negative impact on a ministry?

4. What preparatory advice would you give to a transitional or interim pastor that you think would assist them in preparing for a smooth and seamless transition to the permanent pastor?

5. Do you think you would ever consider doing transitional or interim ministry? Why?
IRB Exemption Letter

From: IRB, IRB  
Sent: Wednesday, January 25, 2012 9:57 AM  
Subject: IRB Exemption 1244.012512: Effective Transitional Ministry: Pastoral Leadership in the 21st Century Church

Dear Keith,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and that no further IRB oversight is required unless your data collection extends past the one year approval granted by this memo, in which case you would submit the annual review form attached to your approval email.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101 (b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:

(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless:
(i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and that any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption, or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.  
IRB Chair, Associate Professor  
Center for Counseling & Family Studies

(434) 592-5054  
40 Years of Training Champions for Christ: 1971-2011
APPENDIX E

POWERPOINT PRESENTATION

Effective Transitional Ministry Plan

Pastoral Leadership in the 21st Century Church
Introduction

Every church in existence will one day find themselves with a need to replace its pastor. The short term nature of the role of a transitional pastor allows he or she to address spiritual deficiencies, provide spiritual corrections and prepare the congregation for change in the absence of a permanent pastor. Pastoral vacancies can occur when:

- Pastors accept a calling to another ministry
- Pastors complete their ministry and retire
- Pastors have their ministry terminated by the church
- Pastors reach their life expectancy
- Pastors become disabled and are no longer able to function in ministry

Each scenario creates a pastoral crisis requiring the church to seek a new spiritual leader. Churches that prepare and plan for pastoral succession generally emerge with the best results. Transitional pastors and transitional ministry can be very effective and very beneficial to churches seeking to replace its pastor.
Statement of the Problem

Across America churches are in need of spiritual nurture and pastoral adjustments that bring them in line with biblical and scriptural mandates. A prime time to assist churches in revitalizing their biblical mission is during the transition time between pastors. Churches are more receptive towards evaluating their ministries, and during the necessary time, it relates to the primary mission of the church. The first step towards overcoming deficiencies or spiritual barriers is to identify them and develop a plan for resolution. Many churches today resemble museums rather than spiritual hospitals for the sick. Jesus said, “I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” The church has an important role to play in transforming the lives of people in the world. The mission for the church is to proclaim the message and gospel of Jesus Christ and to fulfill the Great Commission, Matthew 28: 19-20, “Therefore go and make disciples of all Nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” This is the Christian’s biblical mandate!
Statement of Limitations

The primary goal of this project is to help local churches develop a transitional plan that assists them in rediscovering their mission, strengthening their spiritual condition and supporting them through a pastoral vacancy. It should be understood that the principals that are developed and forth in this paper have been used successfully in other churches, but there is no single method that works in every church. Take what is offered in this paper and modify it to meet the needs of the church in transition. This paper does not address deeply rooted problems that may require the services of a skilled counselor or advisor such as moral failures, sex abuse, embezzlement or fraud. These types of issues require someone who specializes in a particular field and are beyond the scope of this project. There are some fine organizations such as the Interim Ministry Network, Center for Congregational Health, Interim Pastor Ministries and the Alban Institute that have trained specialists and resources available to assist in this area.
The Church belongs to Christ. It was His concept, His idea, His creation and it was the Church that He died for. Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, “I will build My church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” As the Architect and Builder of the church, His primary motivation for the church should be to do His will. The final words of Christ in the New Testament Book of Revelation is instructions to the church. Christ addresses deficiencies, problems, lack of mission and other issues with the seven churches. His desire was to strengthen the church and prepare them for ministry during difficulties, transitions and crises. Jesus gave a prescription to each of the seven churches designed to restore their spiritual health. In a similar way this paper provides an outline for restoring the health of the church. When a church goes through a pastoral crisis and a period of transition, the time spent can be beneficial and fruitful in reclaiming and renewing the mission of the church.
Statement of Methodology

This project was designed to examine the role of a transitional pastor and provide an overview of what transitional ministry looks like and how it impacts the local church. Pastoral information was obtained through a survey of fifteen questions that was submitted to over a 132 full-time pastors from all over the United States of America. In addition to the survey, specific questions were posed to a number of pastor soliciting personal feedback surrounding their introduction into their present ministry. A questionnaire was submitted to a number of intentional transitional pastors from various professional organizations to record their personal experience in transitional ministry and provide real life experience with transition and the issues encountered. Books on interim and transitional ministries were consulted, thesis's and dissertations were reviewed for current issues and data available. The end result is the development of a five-Step program designed to strengthen and assist the church through transition.
Literature Review

Books:

A Change of Pastors: And How it Affects Change in the Congregation. Loren Mead

The Once and Future Church: Reinventing the Congregation for a New Mission Frontier. Loren Mead


Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual Organizational Tools for Leaders. Gilbert R. Rendle

The Interim Pastor's Manual. Alan Gripe


Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God’s Agenda. Henry and Richard Blackaby

Leadership is an Art. Max DePree

The Leadership Challenge. James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner

Leadership Handbook of Management & Administration. James D. Berkley

A Pastor’s Guide to Interpersonal Communication: The Other Six Days. Blake Jeff

Firestorm: Preventing and Overcoming Church Conflicts. Robert Susek


The Emotional Healthy Church. Peter Scazzero

Perimeters of Light: Biblical Boundaries for the Emerging Church. E. W. Towns, Ed Stetzer


The Pharisees’ Guide to Total Holiness. William L. Coleman

Who Stole My Church? What to Do When the Church You Love Tries to Enter the 21st Century. Gordon MacDonald

11 Innovations in the Local Church: How Today’s Leader’s Can Learn, Discern and Move Into the Future. Elmer Towns, Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird

The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message & Mission. Rick Warren
Today’s church is in danger of losing its primary and original mission of reaching the lost for Christ. It is being substituted by a networking and Country Club atmosphere. Notice the results of a recent survey of 132 pastors describing their congregations. Over sixty-six percent listed the spiritual climate of their church as a network or club setting rather than a ministry.

If you had to categorize the fellowship aspect of your church prior to beginning your ministry, would you say that it was most like:

- Country club: 23.3% (27)
- Network: 37.2% (40)
- Service industry: 11.6% (14)
- Other: 38.5% (45)
Why Transitional Ministry Is Important to the Church

The period of time between two permanent pastors is known as “transitional ministry.” The role of a transitional pastor is designed to lead a congregation through the various processes needed to work on issues arising out of a change. When a church finds itself in a pastoral leadership crisis, entering a leadership transition is inevitable. Churches having a transitional plan in place stand the best chance of having a favorable outcome of replacing their pastor and strengthening the church. Many times the local leadership of a church will feel tremendous amount of pressure to move quickly, but moving quickly can be a mistake. There are processes that require a reasonable amount of time to complete in transitional ministry. Finding a new permanent pastor is more like finding a spouse rather than hiring an employee. A church must seek to place itself in the center of God’s will and conform its purposes and desires to that of God’s. The church must line up its mission with the gifts and abilities of a pastor. Effective transitional ministry brings the spiritual elements together so the best possible outcome is realized.
Benefits of Working With a Transitional Pastor

In the absence of a permanent pastor the church needs continuity, leadership and someone with a clear direction of where the process needs to go. Transitional ministry provides the following benefits:

- The transitional pastor brings objectivity and honesty to the evaluation process of ministries within the church.
- The transitional pastor brings immediate pastoral leadership and experience to a congregation.
- Transitional pastors are afforded a degree of flexibility that helps make needed spiritual changes within a congregation.
- Transitional pastors help reduce the anxiety within a congregation as their presence produces a calm and healing atmosphere.
- Transitional pastors help encourage and facilitate the involvement of new people into leadership positions because they do not carry the baggage of having the politics of the church dictate their decisions.
- The greatest advantage of having a transitional pastor is that it allows the church the time necessary to do a thorough search and select the right pastor for its ministry.
The Challenges Presented in Transitional Ministry

Churches are struggling to hold on to members and church membership is getting older. Members become comfortable with their own personal worship styles and lose the primary focus of mission within their communities. Churches tend to look inward at meeting their internal needs and often fail to look externally at spiritual needs in society. Consequently, they lose their spiritual equilibrium and are unable to fulfill the Great Commission. One of the major challenges in transitional ministry is to help the church rediscover its mission and to become aware of its purpose within culture.

Secondly, churches are often hurt and damaged emotionally and spiritually when they lose a pastor. Intentional transitional pastors are trained to be sensitive to the hurt inside a congregation and to work towards healing in areas of forgiveness and betrayal that often surface in a pastoral crisis. Thirdly, the church must be willing to embrace change. The transitional pastor enters into a new ministry with the hope of seeing a ministry strengthened and improved. Change is required in most cases for this to become a reality.
Duties Associated with a Transitional Pastor

Loren Mead and Molly Dale Smith both list the Developmental Tasks that were developed by the Alban Institute regarding the duties of a transitional pastor. They are:

1. Examining the history of the church and coming to terms with the past.
2. Claiming the current identity of the church and knowing who you are.
3. Encouraging new leadership while valuing the old.
4. Renewing and strengthening the relationship with denominational associations.
5. Preparing to welcome the incoming pastor.

Each one of these developmental steps will require a specific plan in order to facilitate a smooth transition period that meets the needs of a congregation. Having the proper balance cannot be overemphasized when implementing each aspect of the transitional pastor’s responsibilities.
Assessing the Needs of a Congregation

One of the great characteristics of the ministry of Jesus Christ was His ability to assess the needs of others and then put an action plan into place to fulfill the need. One of the first duties of a transitional pastor is to begin to assess the needs of a congregation and develop a plan.

When new pastors were asked about their climate as they entered into their ministry, 80% of the pastors responded that their ministry climate was indifferent, weak or stagnant. This indicates that many churches have drifted off from the original purpose of the church and needed to change. Transitional pastors are able to assess the spiritual climate of a church by evaluating attendance, congregational giving, membership participation and enthusiasm for the ministry and other activities. People desire to be a part of something that has purpose and is living. On the other hand, people will boycott activities they are not interested in and do not feel have value. Although Jesus had perfect knowledge of all of the events that surrounded His ministry, He asked questions. Similarly a transitional pastor will need to employ the same strategy of evaluating the needs of a church.
Healing the Broken

Assessing the needs of a church is like a doctor reading the vital signs of a patient. The doctor begins with the basics and builds towards more complex issues. Many congregational hurts are not visible from the outside but inwardly have severe consequences. Pastors who were surveyed for this project indicated that a major problem they faced as they began their new ministry was beginning their ministry with a hurting congregation. A transitional pastor becomes God’s representative to the church. Churches go through a pastoral crisis with the assurance and confidence that things are going to work out fine. A transitional pastor has the ability to help them realize Romans 8:28, “For we know that all things work together for good, to those who love God and are called according to His purpose.” This passage does not say, many things, most things, some things, a few things, it says, all things, work together for good.” It also does not say, “all things are good!” It says that, “All things work together for good.” The reality is that not all things will be good, but all things will work together so that good is the result.
Dealing with Conflict

In the life of a church where people interact on a regular basis conflict can and will occur. How conflict is handled is critical to the health of a church. An important task of the transitional pastor is to identify the type of conflict and work towards a solution. It should be noted that not all conflict is beneficial or healthy, but all conflict can provide opportunities if handled correctly. Ron Susek in his book, *Firestorm: Preventing and Overcoming Church Conflicts* says the role of the transitional pastor requires unique traits:

1. His or her focus of ministry is on the established church. Attention must be geared towards honor the history of the church.
2. He or she has a high-risk personality. Envision potential of others and confront sin, challenge the saints.
3. He or she has leadership training and gifts. A team player, a good reporter, a good investigator, and a shepherd.

It is important that divisions and conflict be dealt with during the transitional period so they do not carry over into the new ministry.
Preparing the Church for Change

In a research question pastors were asked, "How well prepared was your congregation for the beginning of your ministry?" Only 20 percent listed their church as prepared, while 80 percent were somewhat prepared or unprepared.
Preparing the Church for Change

Max DePree was Chairman of the Board of Directors for Herman Miller, Inc. He says, “Vision is the basis for the best kind of leadership. A vision exists somewhere when teams succeed. Instinctively, most of us follow a leader who has real vision and who can transform that vision into a meaningful and hopeful strategy. This is the role of a transitional pastor; to provide vision and direction for the church and assist them in preparing for change.

God uniquely gifts pastors and leaders in a variety of ways so they best express His desires in a given ministry. God does not make people or pastors alike. Each person in a church is a special creation designed to fit into God’s plan like pieces of a puzzle. The transitional pastor has the responsibility to educate the members of a church and set the expectations for change within the congregation. Seeking change requires two things: the opportunity to change and the willingness to change. God’s plan for the church may be something new and exciting they have never thought of. The condition is: Members have to be open and willing to let God direct them and they must be willing to follow.

Decisions made today, will affect ministry tomorrow.
One of the ways that transitional pastors help churches understand their need for change is to preach biblical sermons. The prophet Isaiah said, “So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.” God has a special interest in the success of every bible believing church. He has a plan and process designed to accomplish His purposes. The key aspect for the church is to be sensitive enough to hear the voice of God when He speaks. Preaching, is, by far, the most effective way of communicating truth to a large number of people in a congregation. It provides a platform of authority designed to seize God’s promises and communicate them to His people and the church. Dr. Hershael York of Southern Seminary says, “God has made us visual creatures. Pastors don’t mail printed texts of their sermons to parishioners. They deliver them in person.” Transitional pastors deliver God’s message personally and directly to the church through their preaching and teaching.
Purpose of a Ministry Plan

One of the fundamental reasons a plan is necessary is that it provides a roadmap for achieving success. A plan is a structured process of developing steps to reach the desired goal. Having a transitional plan helps the temporary pastor fulfill the requirements and expectations.

Each of the seven letters to the churches in the Book of Revelation, Jesus Christ reveals a plan for spiritual strength and church health. Even the churches with no rebuke received instruction designed to strengthen their congregations. The challenge for the local church is to discern God’s will and move toward God’s agenda. There are 5 steps that are included in this project that provides transitional pastors with an effective transitional plan.

1. Corporate and Individual Prayer
2. Evaluating the Ministry
3. Building Spiritual Bridges
4. Developing a Christ Centered Mission
5. Preparing the Church for New Ministry

The transitional journey begins where everything spiritual begins; with God.
Step One: Prayer—A Fundamental and Foundational Building Block

Prayer is the greatest resource available to the Christian, but is often the most overlooked and least used. It is true that most people pray when facing a crisis, both Christian and non-Christian alike, but to assume that everyone knows how to pray and everyone is praying for the same outcome would simply be a mistake.

Transitional pastors need to take the lead in promoting prayer and corporately lead people to seek God’s direction and guidance. Jesus, when facing the crisis of His life, death on the cross, sought to remain in prayer with God the Father until He was delivered to the Sanhedrin. The Bible says He was, “sorrowful and deeply distressed,” and the He, “fell on His face and prayed” not just once but at least three separate times. This example of Christ seeking the resources and the strength of God in His moment of crisis establishes a biblical precedent that should not be overlooked or taken for granted.

There are four important reasons why corporate prayer is listed as Step One in effective transitional ministry: Invitation, Incorporation, Interaction and Inclusion.
Step One: Prayer-Fundamental Building Block

1. **Invitation:** Prayer invites God into the transitional process. In Revelation, Jesus said, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in.” God enters the life of the believer through invitation.

2. **Incorporation:** Prayer incorporates God into the process. God has all of the resources the church will ever need. God desires to partner with people in ministry.

3. **Interaction:** Prayer interacts with God to find direction. When God’s people interact with Him, it places God where it needs to be with Him. The church that is God-focused and God-centered will outperform other ministries because God occupies His rightful place; the heart of ministry.

4. **Inclusion:** Prayer includes God in the solution. Jesus said, “Ask in My name and your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask.” It makes sense if God already knows the need before you ask, He would be instrumental in the solution if included in the problem.
One thing that each church develops through history is a spiritual heritage. Many churches have long and impressive histories with victories and successes. An important element in transition is to remind the church of its history and its heritage. Through remembering their history, church members can see how God has blessed them throughout their ministry. This can be very encouraging because it solidifies the Lord’s faithfulness to them and provides hope for the future. This is exactly how God moved in the Old Testament to assure His people of His desire to deliver them and churches can use history as a process map for their future. Loren Mead, a pioneer in transitional ministry, says, “Every congregation lives in dialogue with its past. Every congregation is strengthened immeasurably by its history......Congregations are not blank slates simply waiting for a new pastor to write a totally new story.”

Our past, both corporately and individually, is part of who we are. We must understand our past and how it influences us so we can process a transition plan that brings glory to God in the future.
Step Three: Build Spiritual Bridges

Merriam-Webster dictionary defines a bridge as: (a) a structure carrying a roadway over a depression or obstacle. (b) a time, place or means of connection or transition. One of the primary functions of a transitional pastor is to support and carry the church through the process of replacing their pastor. Not every situation or obstacle is going to fall into the category of being “easily resolved.” This can be the most difficult step of the 5 step process because it involves human emotions, human attitudes, and the willingness to change. But this step can also be one of the most rewarding because it plays a major role in the journey of transition.

Bridges must be built to:

- The congregation. Through sermons, lessons, interpersonal communications and encouragement.
- The Denomination. Through personal contacts, interpersonal communication, references and leads.
- Change. Managing change requires the ability to read people, motivate people and persuade people of differing backgrounds.
- The community. No church ever impacted the world that did not first impact their community for Christ.
Step Four: Developing a Christ-Centered Mission

When Christ addressed the seven churches in Revelation the whole purpose was to strengthen them and refocus on mission. Christ not only had a mission, He had a strategy designed to reach and accomplish His mission. George Barna provides insight into 6 core components of having a successful missional model:

1. Being passionately committed to Jesus Christ.
2. Evaluating everything in their lives according to biblical standards.
3. Being deeply committed to having healthy families.
4. Being morally pure.
5. Being evangelistically bold.
6. Being socially responsible and impactful to the community.

The development of a mission for churches in transition is one of the key tasks for the transitional pastor. The specific components can each individual church will differ based on their particular gifts and abilities. The transitional pastor must determine what type of mission the church needs to be involved with and encourage members to become active in reaching the community and ultimately the world for Christ.
Step Five: Preparing the Church for New Ministry

Step Five is the final step of the 5-step program and the one that has a dual purpose; a revitalization of mission and the successful preparation of ministry for a new pastor. The major benefits of a transitional pastor is his or her objectivity and flexibility to evaluate and suggest new ministry direction. In many cases, the church understands the sense of urgency that exists and becomes supportive and united in its work together in new ministry. Secondly, the transitional pastor becomes a modern day John the Baptist, preparing the church for new ministry based on how God has gifted and equipped their new pastor. The transitional pastor has the responsibility to develop awareness of what is to be expected in new ministry and help generate excitement.

No two pastors are identical and the church must be prepared to look beyond the past ministry and previous pastor toward the future. Each new day brings new ministry opportunities and churches must be aware of the changing cultural environment. Congregations that focus on impacting their community for Christ become influential in fulfilling the Great Commission.
Assisting the Pulpit Committee

Assisting the Pulpit Committee is an area of transitional ministry that is delicate and controversial. There are some who say that a transitional pastor should play a limited role and some that say the transitional pastor should not play a role at all. The purpose of addressing this issue is to put several considerations that are generally helpful to congregations. Loren Mead suggests:

1. Promote how individual members of a search committee can become a team and work together to develop a work plan.
2. How the committee can organize complex work tasks and keep on track with the work plan.
3. How to facilitate communication.
4. How to assure the church board and search committee develops trust in one another.
5. How to train committee members in gathering and analyzing data, conducting interviews, developing job descriptions, and the process of making complex decisions.
6. How to make and complete contracts.
7. How to maintain liaison with denominational associations (if applicable).
Encouraging the Congregation

Another important ingredient that transitional Pastors bring to a congregation is the gift of encouragement. To “encourage” means to inspire with courage, spirit and hope. There are several ways this is accomplished in the role as a transitional Pastor:

- **Through assurance.** Letting others know that everything will workout fine where God is involved. People are seeking positive outcomes to their crisis.

- **Through offering support.** God is interested in doing exciting and new things within a church. The church must seek to embrace the new work God has called the church to do and look forward to the journey. What God has called the church to do, He will equip them to do it. The role of the congregation is to be obedient in accomplishing His will.

- **By letting them know they are called to make a difference by their faithfulness.** Christians are called Ambassadors for Christ because they represent His interests in the world. Christians are the hands, the feet and the mouthpiece of God and must conduct themselves accordingly if they are to impact the world.

The benefit of a transitional pastor is the ability to model the ministry of Barnabas and give encouragement.
Planning for Departure

Beginning and ending a ministry are the bookends of transitional ministry. What happens between those book endings can be referred to as the “journey.” The hope and prayer of every transitional pastor is that God has moved in a significant way to strengthen the church through their journey. Several things have to be remembered when departing a ministry:

1. **Always be gracious.** Last impressions will be what people remember most. Much of what the transitional pastor does the final 30-45 days will transfer to the new pastor coming in. Leaving a little grace in the pastor’s office and with the pastor’s people is always needed and appreciated.

2. **Take time to say “thank you.”** It takes a lot of work to move a church towards God’s agenda. Many people will contribute and the final 30-60 days is a good time to reflect on individuals who have served the church. John Maxwell once said, “People will not always remember what you said, but they will always remember how you made them feel.”

3. **Be humble.** Modeling the ministry of Christ and performing ministry with a Christlike attitude is the goal.
Challenging the Ministry

Before Christ left His earthly ministry in the hands of the disciples, He prepared them and challenged them to continue the work He had begun. The full story of what God has done within a congregation is incomplete until well after the permanent pastor arrives. Therefore, the transitional pastor should:

- Encourage the members to embrace the new pastor and support their ministry.
- Let the congregation know how proud you are of them and what they were able to accomplish during their short tenure.
- Share with the congregation that you are looking forward to hearing victory stories of them reaching others for Christ and making a difference in kingdom work.

The church was never designed to run on just one engine. The church is made as many engines as the church members. A church of committed Christians can do more than just one pastor. When the pastor equips the saints for ministry, the church becomes a mighty force for spiritual transformation in today’s society.
Conclusion

As the Builder and Creator of the church, God has commissioned the church to be the guardian of the culture. His plan includes reaching out to others and impacting them in godly ways. Transitional ministry is designed to stabilize the ministry during a pastoral crisis and place the church in a position for the best possible outcome. A key advantage of having a transitional pastor is the objectivity and honesty they bring in evaluating congregational needs and providing leadership. They become agents for change in churches by leading them to:

1. **Prayerfully Seek God’s Involvement and God’s Direction.**
2. **By Evaluating the Ministry and Coming to Terms with the Past.**
3. **Building Spiritual Bridges to the Congregation, the Denomination and the Community.**
4. **By Developing a Christ Centered Mission for the Church.**
5. **By Preparing the Church for New Ministry.**

Every church will one day replace their pastor. Transitional ministry maximizes the opportunity.
VITA

Keith Gardner

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