

## TRANSITIONS IN MINISTRY

### When Pastors and Congregations Say "Goodbye"

*"...for the sake of His body,  
which is the church." Col 1:24*

Few circumstances in their ministry lives challenge pastors to exercise more wisdom and judgment than the ones raised when leaving a congregation. The relationship between a pastor and congregation is often deeply personal, built on an accumulation of shared transitional and transformational times in private and corporate lives. It has evolved through teaching, preaching, ordinances, weddings, funerals, presence in times of crisis, praying with and for members, counseling, and shared leadership. The pastor has encouraged people in worship, equipped them for tasks, helped bring forth gifts, and prepared them for mission. From these times, there has accumulated elements of trust, confidence, admiration, affection, fondness, respect, and love. Ending such a relationship can be a trying and traumatic experience for both the pastor and members of the congregation. It means CHANGE, which can often be difficult to accept and integrate.

However, such transitions and changes are inevitable. It is the cooperative effort of the departing pastor, and the local body that ensures a healthy transition takes place, and that an incoming pastor has every opportunity to experience love and support in his/her new ministry.

The following guidelines are intended to help all parties say "goodbye."

### Guidelines for Healthy Transitions

**A.** The words from a pastor are powerful. Therefore, great care should be given to words that are spoken privately and publically regarding a transition. Words that affirm the leadership of the church, the process, and the desire for the congregation's future ministry and health are impactful. Likewise, words that communicate support for the next pastor (whoever that may be) can go a long way toward helping separation.

**B.** When a pastor leaves his/her pastoral position, their relationship as "pastor" has effectively ended. Only the duly installed pastor is authorized to perform pastoral duties within a particular congregation. Social contacts may be maintained between former pastors and former church members as long as Guideline D is followed.

**C.** Departing pastors should not participate in any funerals, weddings, etc., of his/her former church, unless invited to do so by the current pastor. Should a church family desire the involvement of a previous pastor in a funeral or wedding, consultation should be made with the current pastor.

If an opportunity or need arises when the services of the former pastor are requested, the current pastor should be consulted before agreeing to do so.

**Note:** An appropriate response from the former pastor would be: *"I am honored that the family has asked me to serve, but since you have a new pastor, it is important that he is consulted before we make any arrangements."*

**D.** In cases where the departing pastor may remain in the same community, care must be given not to communicate with members of his/her previous congregation in a way that may be seen as subversive or unsupportive to the current pastor or church leadership. One should always be conscientious of how his/her words may impact his/her former church.

**E.** In the case of a pastor who retires within the same community, it is strongly recommended that the former pastor and family become active in the life of another church. Remaining in the same congregation can lead to tensions and difficulties which no one intends, but nevertheless cannot be avoided. A period of separation from former members is highly recommended.

**F.** Simple sensitivity and courtesy ought to rule. Pastors who violate the guidelines and return to a previous congregation without the permission of the current or interim pastor are showing disregard for that minister. In addition, individual members who insist that a previous pastor must perform certain duties are either knowingly or unknowingly undermining the ministry of the current pastor.

**G.** One of the greatest ways to honor the ministry of a former pastor is to honor the ministry of a current pastor. Pastors are called by the Lord to serve as He served. They are called to lead, as He led, and as such, their highest desire is for the ongoing health and ministry of the church that they served.

The former pastor, who works to make a good and positive transition, leaves the congregation with a final and selfless example of the love and care of the Good Shepherd for the beloved flock.



*“To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: 2 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; 3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. 4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.”*  
1 Peter 5:1-4



*Saying “Goodbye” is always difficult when there is a bond of love.*

*Transitions are rarely easy, but the congregation and pastor who hold to these guidelines of courtesy go a long way toward ensuring a mutual respect, and ongoing success in upholding the “Bond of Peace” and the “Unity of the Body”.*

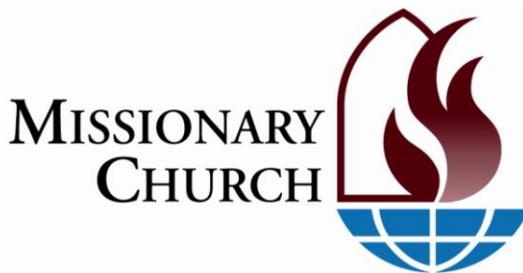


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