



5 Common Mistakes Churches Make During Pastoral Transition

Be deliberate during the interim. And you'll be ready for your next season of ministry.

It's tempting to rush your pastoral transition. Transitions are uncomfortable. Your church is letting go of the familiar while facing the indefinite future.

But transitions also present a powerful opportunity for your church to reframe your thinking, refocus, and find renewed energy for what's next.

Instead, churches often waste this opportunity to embrace an interim pastor and slow down the process of finding their next permanent pastor. Here are five common mistakes churches make when they rush the pastoral transition.

1. The church forms a search committee too early.

No one walks up to a widow at her husband's funeral and asks her if she is thinking about marrying again soon. The church needs a season to grieve, refresh, retool and refocus. When a pastor leaves, the congregation needs time to grieve and let go of its spiritual, relational, and emotional ties to that pastor.

The season between pastors is a unique time to prepare the church for its future. Do your house cleaning. Settle issues. Discern God's future for your church—and then begin a pastoral search.

2. The church fails to recognize and address church health issues.

In their eagerness to move forward, many churches ignore existing challenges and congregational needs. When a beloved

pastor leaves, people need a season to grieve and prepare themselves for the pastor next. When a pastor has a rough departure, there may be residual division in the congregation, and often the congregation is confused and critical of the leadership. People may be at odds with one another and take sides. In such cases, there needs to be organizational and relational renewal.

Instead of tending to these issues, churches drag them into a new marriage with the next pastor. Under stress, these problems will surface again. They will create conflict and stifle the ministry. Unresolved issues cause frustration, paralysis, and, in all likelihood, a short tenure for the new pastor.

If the pastor had a rough departure, your problems did not necessarily walk out the door when your pastor left. Use the time between pastors to address issues as you prepare the church for its future.

3. The church doesn't clarify its values or discover its vision.

Before it begins a pastoral search, the church must clarify its core values, discern its God-given vision, and start living into it.

Values go beyond a church's doctrinal belief. Values are what matters most to your church, what's important. Values motivate vision, the picture of what you believe God is calling your church to be and to do in the future.

If a church and a pastoral candidate have similar values and visions, there is a good chance they will work together in harmony. So, clarify your values and seek God and find His vision for the future.

4. The Pastoral Search Team recommends the wrong pastor.

To compensate for the prior pastor's weaknesses, churches often call a new pastor opposite the preceding pastor. They swing the pendulum too far, and their new pastor doesn't fit the church's culture, needs, values, and vision.

Sometimes the search team has no outside help, and without training and guidance, they overlook key search steps. They may not communicate to the pastoral prospect the church's vision and actual values. At times like these, there is often a powerbroker on the search team who has an agenda. He pushes hard and maneuvers to get his way. The search team misleads the candidate to believe the church wants to change when only a few want such innovation.

The new pastor arrives and finds out the majority are happy with the way things are, and his new ideas and actions get him a smack on the hand. The new pastor feels misled, and the congregation is angry with the changes that the pastor spearheaded. A year into it, the new pastor is frustrated and has lost favor. He resigns.

Some search committees get impatient and fall in love with a smooth-talking candidate. They may be so enamored that they fail to ask him the hard questions and check references. They then recommend him to the leadership, and the church issues a call. When the pastor's character flaws or lack of people skills comes out, the leadership fires him. Often, the pastor leaves, splitting the church and taking half of the people with him.

5. The church doesn't hire a professional intentional interim pastor.

There is an excellent benefit in hiring an interim pastor. He is a seasoned pastor – mature, experienced, wise, and proven, skilled and trained, to address transitional issues, including relational, leadership, staff, and other organizational challenges. The interim pastor is also strategic. He follows a roadmap, a tried-and-true process to prepare the church for its future.

Beyond helping your church address issues, the intentional interim pastor can help your church clarify its values and vision so you can successfully call a pastor that fits your congregation.

The church becomes stronger during the transition. It has regrouped, renewed spiritually, clarified its values, and refocused its vision. Consequently, it is in the best position to call a pastor best suited for the church, who will have a long and fruitful ministry.