

# Transitioning into a New Pastorate

The transition from one pastorate to another is challenging and can be very stressful for the pastor, his or her family, and both congregations. There are several levels of connectivity that must be considered, properly addressed, and maintained to ensure a healthy pastoral transition. Because every local church and every pastor are unique (i.e., each having its own DNA) there are no “cookie cutter” approaches to pastoral transitions. This lecture and handout is a compilation of experience and education. It is not comprehensive and neither includes all facets of pastoral transitioning. It is essential that the pastor seek the leading of the Holy Spirit as he or she contemplates and pursues a pastoral transition.

## I. Contemplating a Pastoral Transition

- A. **God** - Since it was God that called and provided the open door for your present assignment. Have you heard from God concerning the transition? Pray, pray, pray... listen, listen, listen! Make sure your season of ministry is complete at your present assignment before opening a door to another.
- B. **Family** - The transition will affect all members of your family. Have you spoke openly about the changes that the transition will bring to the family? Have you and your family prayed together, attended a worship service, toured the facilities, and spent time in the community? What about schools, doctors, hospitals, and recreation opportunities? Is everyone at peace with the transition? If not, what can be done to where all members of your family can accept the changes?
- C. **Denominational Leadership** - Many denominations are structured to include conference and district leadership as resources and accountability for the pastor. Have you contacted the leaders to whom you are accountable? How do the leaders to whom you are accountable feel about the transition? Are they available to assist you and your family? Have you provided them your revised resume? Have they spoke to you about the opportunities are available to you?
- D. **Former Congregation** - You have given part of your life and ministry to the congregation you are now leaving. Can you leave the congregation with a positive attitude? Is there a healthy closure? If not, what steps are you going to take in order not to bring “baggage” into your new assignment? Are you able to leave the congregation and no longer serve as their pastor? Have you considered how clergy ethics will dictate your relationships if you are no longer the pastor of the congregation (i.e., when you leave you must leave in order for the new pastor to succeed)? Have you developed a time table of transition that will ensure a positive conclusion of your ministry with the former congregation?
- E. **New Congregation** - This is a new relationship that is intended to be a blessing to both the pastor and the congregation. How did you find out about the congregation? What research have you done to find out about the congregation and the community (i.e., history of the church, reputation of the congregation from denominational leaders and former pastors)?

## II. Things to Consider and Review as One Accepts a New Pastorate

A. **Establish Boundaries** - The relationship between a pastor and congregation is similar to that of a marriage. If the relationship is going to be successful there has to be communication and commitment. The pastor must set the boundaries on these two in the beginning. How accessible are you going to be? How transparent are you and your family going to be? Remember.... "You have the right to remain silent..." How committed are you and how will you respond when needs arise? Keep in mind that though the relationship is similar the pastor does not marry the church! Boundaries must be established and maintained.

1. **Spiritual Warfare** - Don't forget that you have an enemy that is very deceitful and powerful. It is essential that you remain in God's Word, are connected to Christ, and have on the Whole Armor of God! Beware of those that come to you or your family and flatter you in the beginning of your new pastorate.
2. **Assuming Roles** - The pastor doesn't have to look like the congregation but he or she must be willing to be where the members are and to love them. The pastor is expected to wear many hats (i.e, prophet, priest, teacher, administrator, janitor, host, entertainer, politician, golfer, etc.). Which roles are you going to assume? What roles are you willing to assume?

### **Five Biblical Roles of a Pastor:**

- a. **Teacher (Rabbi)** - The pastor is responsible to bring the Word to the congregation. Before anything else the pastor is charged to "Preach the Word." Remember that pastors are fallible and are not the final authority on the Scriptures. The pastor must be a student of the Bible and teach the congregation how to be students of the Bible. The pastor must adhere to and teach sound doctrine.
- b. **Priest (Ritual Function)** - The pastor administers God's mercy to God's people. The veil is no longer present but there remains the need to represent God before the people especially individually. Protestants believe in the priesthood of all believers and the pastor is the lead priest in the local church. In this role the pastor administers the ordinances of water baptism, communion, prays for the people, visiting the sick. A pastor that is strong in pulpit ministry but lacks in presence ministry will lose influence.
- c. **Shepherd** - The pastor is someone who cares for a looks after his or her flock. This is the least glamorous of the pastorate. In this role the pastor gets to know the members of the congregation by being with them, caring for them, and leading them. He or she guards them and keeps them from being hurt.
- d. **Prophet (Spiritual Function)** - The role of prophet in the New Testament is not the same as in the Old Testament (1 Cor. 14:29-32). The pastor speaks the Word of God in order to influence the congregation. Sometimes this is done through rebuke and sometimes through gentle prodding. The pastor corrects the members when they go astray.

- e. King (Administrative Function) - The pastor is not a dictator but since the Body of Christ is not a democracy the pastor must represent God's vision and lead the congregation in the direction of His will.

Note: Depending on the size of the congregation the pastor may need to be stronger in one or more roles than others (i.e., smaller churches will require more shepherding where the pastor is with the people whereas a larger church may need the pastor to serve more in the kingly role administrating, leading, and delegating).

- B. Establishing Trust** - There will be a level of respect given to you just because you are a member of the clergy. It is important to realize that this is not earned trust but respect that the congregation has for you as you assume the role as their pastor.

**Negative Challenges:**

- 1. Bad pastoral experience(s);
- 2. Recovering from a split or financial Problems;
- 3. Congregation is nostalgic;
- 4. Former pastors have failed in leading change;
- 5. Different social/economic/ethnic backgrounds;
- 6. You name some...

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**Positive Challenges:**

- 1. The "honeymoon" period - (typically six to eighteen months). During this time the congregation usually showers the pastor and his or her family with much love and affection. It is wrong to assume this is trust. Trust must be earned and the "honeymoon" period is a period of grace in order for the pastor to begin earning trust. The congregation wants to trust the new pastor but it will likely take many years in order to gain the full trust of the majority of the congregation. When members of the congregation stop introducing you as their new pastor and begin introducing you as their pastor that is a sign of progress. After the third year, if the pastor is still being called "Brother", "Sister", or simply his or her first name that might be a sign that more work is needed in earning trust.

2. TIME management - The majority of the congregation will probably assume you have much work and are busy getting settled in. It is important to manage this time and set the tone so the congregation will know what to expect. If you start out strong on frequent visitation you might be expected to maintain that level of care. During this first year it is a good goal to visit every member in their home or meet them for lunch if more preferable. Shut-ins should be visited at least monthly. How much are you going to delegate to others?
  
3. Sermon Preparation - The pastor must first seek God concerning his or her messages. He or she must be relevant to the culture and the needs of the congregation. Keeping (saving) sermons and series will aid in future preparation. Proper sermon preparation is essential in order to have a successful pastorate. Never use the pulpit for bullying but never shy away from the prophetic when God directs. Ultimately, the pastor has the audience of One and will be held accountable.
  
4. You name some...
 

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**C. Three Basic Pastoral Leadership Styles:**

- a. Caregiver
- b. Manager
- c. Revitalizer (aka Transformational Leader)

**D. Responsibilities of the Pastor:**

- a. Receives Vision from God
- b. Manages the ministries
- c. Manages the Budget
- d. Preaches the Word

**E. Qualifications of the Pastor:**

- a. Called by God
- b. Committed
  - To study?
  - To be hated?
  - To be misunderstood?
  - To be fired?
  - To lose friends?
  - To not fight back?
  - To sacrifice?

## F. Four Essential Values of a Pastor:

- a. Walk
- b. Worship
- c. Witness
- d. Work

About the Presenter:



Ministering the grace and love of Jesus Christ, Rich Denning is a pastor, teacher, and leadership coach with twenty years pastoral experience. He holds his Associate of Arts in General Education and Bachelor of Arts in Pastoral Ministries from Emmanuel College, Franklin Springs, Ga. He completed his Master of Divinity at Erskine Theological Seminary in Due West, SC and earned his Doctorate of Ministry at Regent University, Virginia Beach, VA. For more information go to: [www.pastordenning.com](http://www.pastordenning.com).