

Core tasks of facilitating healthy pastoral transitions

A checklist for consultants guiding a church through a pastoral transition

Ensure the church is confident in the basic values which give cohesion to a transition consultancy process.

Process values: Honouring the past, careful spiritual discernment around the present, creating vision for the future, open and honest communication to all, a purposeful and transparent processes of transition.

1. Saying goodbye well

- a. Make sure there is a healthy completion plan for the leaving pastor
(See ***Leaving Well***)
- b. Celebrations and farewells (There needs to be a range of appropriate processes for different circles of relationship). Sometimes in their grief parishioners do not organise a farewell thoughtfully. It seems inappropriate for the minister to do it him/herself, so it commonly is a last minute rushed process which does not work well. If you are consulting with the church at this point, make sure it happens and is well planned.
- c. Make sure some small group does an appropriate exit interview
(See ***Exit Interviews***)
- d. Allow for a natural grieving process – the church is an emotional system and needs time to grieve. Be aware it is generally harder for those that are left than the minister who is leaving.
- e. Clarify the future relationship of the church with the leaving minister. It is always important to make sure there is a clear understanding here. The ***farewell letter*** goes a long way to making this explicit.

2. Helping the church reflect on the past season of leadership

Churches have part of their identity shaped through the eyes of their senior minister. When the minister leaves, the church needs to find itself again. This reclaiming of its own identity is made much easier when the leaving has been healthy and done well. It is a normal and natural process.

Some of the tool we use:

- a. A SWOT analysis: (This is an objective informed assessment of the whole minister – church partnership. It is not a critical assessment of the past leader). What have been the strengths and the weaknesses that have been part of the leaving minister's tenure. What external opportunities now exist, what external threats need to be navigated?
- b. A storytelling evening.
Gather the stories. Produce a timeline narrative of the last ?? years. Maybe include the last 2 or 3 ministries. Let key leaders walk the timeline in a workshop and reflect

on the positive and challenging, healthy and unhealthy parts of the history of the church. Draw out lessons and reflections.

- c. Discern the changes that have occurred in the church and the community. How the context of leadership is different now than it was when the last minister began. What are the key parish profile changes during the tenure of the last minister. Run a discussion on the changing missiological challenges on ministry in the locality.
- d. Run a workshop on “What elements of the previous minister’s leadership need to: 1) live on, 2) be left to die naturally, 3) be intentionally transformed into something new”.

3. **Rebooting the church system – “resetting to system defaults (with a few upgrades applied)”**

- a. Revisit the identity, vision and values
 - i. Who are we now as God's people in this place?
 - ii. What unique challenges or tasks have been becoming clear to us as a community of his people?
 - iii. Who is God calling us to serve and disciple?
 - iv. What values is God calling us to embrace in living and reaching out as kingdom people in this locality?
 - v. What is unique about the way we do church?
- b. Do a 'gaps and overlaps analysis' projection based on the 12 roles of a senior minister / priest.
See Gaps and Overlaps / 12 Roles of a Priest / Pastor
- c. Allowing a leadership reset
Ministers simply by their natures, personalities and perspectives end up encouraging some members into roles, involvement and leadership and others less so. Again, this is simply normal. Use the time between ministers to allow a bit of a leadership reset.
 - i. Explore the governance – minister partnership. What worked well, what not so well that could be improved.
 - ii. Look again at leadership and ministry structure. Is it working as well as it could? This is not the time to bed down a new system but to loosen everything up so that it can fit around the style of a new minister.
 - iii. Reflect on the needs for any specific leadership empowerment around roles or positions.
- d. Reshaping key relationships and partnerships
Again ministers have their own links and partnerships. This is a great time to reconnect and reshape key networking relationships.

- i. Denominational linkages
 - ii. Mission partnerships
 - iii. Organisational networking
 - iv. Community connections
- 4. Conduct a general church health review
 - a. Use a standard set of reflection questions to reflect on areas of health in the whole church community and also areas which might need to be addressed.
- 5. Walking the transition journey
 - a. “So you want to go back to Egypt”, know your Egypt (some conflict and anxiety is normal)
 - b. Unexpected gifts of provision in the neutral zone (Manna)
 - c. Send out the spies
 - d. Believe the promise (Promised Land)
 - e. Communicate, communicate, communicate
 - f. Pray, pray, pray
- 6. Transitioning to new leadership
 - a. Reviewing and sharpening the selection process
 - b. Finalising the church profile
 - c. Finalising the discernment / selection criteria (preferred pastoral profile)
 - d. Discerning God's leading (allowing the unexpected)
- 7. These tasks are best co-ordinated and overseen by a transition team (4-7 members). Set up a medium-term team to work with you through the design of a transitional process and

This transition task and team needs to be separate from the normal operational management / interim leadership team.