

# Transition Summary

There are a number of transitional tasks that must be accomplished as a church makes the journey from the leadership of one pastor to the leadership of its next pastor/rector. Every church is different in how they experience a pastoral transition. Therefore, the way these transitional tasks will be accomplished also varies. Information found in your *Vital Signs* report can provide guidance to leaders in developing a transition approach that is geared specifically to your church. The suggestions below are intended to serve as a starting point for developing a transition plan. As always, survey data is the beginning of a conversation not the end.

## I. Identity and Direction

The priorities in the *Vital Signs* report are a step in the direction of the congregation establishing a vision independent of the previous pastor. In the transition period it can be important to prepare the congregation for what these priorities will require. In your particular church the following steps may be helpful:

- Introducing best practices in family ministry that encompass parents, youth, and children.
- Exploring best practices related to reaching people with the message of God's love in Christ.
- Offering different models for education and spiritual formation that are a good fit for the church.
- Helping leaders and members explore different options for building relationships in congregations today.
- Renewing a vision for leadership by offering one or two high quality training experiences that increase confidence and effectiveness.

## II. Remedial Issues

In most churches there are issues, including conflict, that can be addressed in the transition period that will help the next pastor/rector get a stronger start. Your *Vital Signs* report suggests that the following issues should be considered for action in the transition:

- The degree to which leaders are representative of the congregation
- The concern that leaders show to know what people are thinking
- The quality of education provided for every age and stage of life
- The church adapts worship to meet the needs of the community

At least one of these factors may be important enough to require attention in the transition.

In addition, the conflict level in your church is high enough that it could make the recruitment and start-up of your next pastor/rector difficult. Leaders may need some outside resources in dealing with the conflict in the transition and should consider the services of a trained interim pastor.

## III. Administrative Issues

There are a range of administrative issues that typically need to be addressed in a transition but two of the most important regard the staffing of the church (especially if you are a multiple staff church) and church records.

- During the transition leaders should conduct an overall review of the personnel policy of the church to make sure that it is up-to-date and consistent with the most recent changes in the law.
- In multiple-staff churches, it is important to review the staffing rationale to make sure that it is appropriate to the vision and size of the church. If the conflict management or morale scores are low, the leadership should assess the alignment, performance, and size of the staff and make changes if necessary.
- Your membership roll is significantly larger than your average worship attendance. This suggests that you may have some work to do to bring it up-to-date in the transition.

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## IV. Change

Your Vital Signs report indicates that your church is very settled in its approach to change. If reaching new persons or improving the morale of your church are important priorities, it will be essential that steps be taken in the transition to help the church become more open to change. However, you should also consider the following:

- Members do not want to see a significant change in the direction of the church compared to the recent past. Any significant changes made during the transition risk creating conflict.
- Members do not want to see a significant change in the skills and responsibilities of the next pastor/rector compared to the last pastor. Any significant change risks conflict.

## V. Opportunities and Vulnerabilities

- Members indicate that their level of involvement during the transition will be high compared to other churches. You will want to make sure that you take steps to meaningfully involve those who are offering their gifts and time to the church.
- Members indicate that their availability for transition tasks will be average compared to other churches. You should be able to cover key transition functions without too much difficulty.
- Members indicate that their giving to the church in the transition tasks will be average compared to other churches. In order to sustain your current income level, you may need to make a good case for additional giving during the transition.
- Members indicate that their likelihood of visiting other churches during the transition is average. There may be a drop in worship attendance and involvement in other activities. You may want to monitor involvement to quickly respond to those who are not present.

## VI. Dealing with Loss

Members experience feelings of loss at different levels during transitions depending upon the church. Your members are very uncomfortable with the transition and are experiencing a high level of loss and anxiety. They will not be able to embrace the next pastor/rector until they have dealt with their grief.

## VII. Trust in the Leadership

Members indicate a high level of confidence that the leadership is representative of them. During the transition, leaders may want to take steps to sustain this level of confidence.