

**Tips for the Pastor Search Committee**  
**Ken Geren**

“Preacher, did you know a pastor search committee is seated in the auditorium?” a church member asked me. “No, I didn’t,” I replied with sincerity. In our small country church five visitors were extremely obvious. While I am sure the church member believed me, the situation was awkward for me.

Since that day, I have dealt with several pastor search committees. Some experiences have been good, some not so good. From my perspective, here are six tips for this committee to consider.

***Study First***

The director of missions would be delighted to meet with any pastor search committee on request. Many state convention offices have a person on staff who can assist the pastor search committees. Numerous printed resources are available for the committee to use in their work.

Use the advice of others and printed materials to decide in advance what kind of pastor the church wants and then seek to find such a man.

***Call Ahead***

Many committees believe that if they show up unannounced they will find the pastor in his more natural setting. I get discouraged when a committee shows up unexpectedly. If the committee had called ahead, I would have had time to have learned helpful information about their church. They, too, would have had the time to have learned about me. That knowledge might have saved them an unnecessary trip.

***Be Open***

I remember an earlier experience with a pastor search committee. The committee had come unexpectedly, and following the service, asked to meet with me in my office. After we were seated and introduced to one another, a member of the committee asked, “Where is your wife?” I told him that she had been in another building leading the children’s worship time and had gone home to prepare lunch. If we had known the committee was coming and what they expected, we could have been better prepared to meet with them.

Sometimes a committee will visit without prior notice and then will depart without saying a word. Sometimes you hear from them later – sometimes not. But the relationships among pastor and people have been disturbed by the committee’s presence. Keep the lines of communication open. If a pastor is no longer under consideration, let him know.

***Be Honest***

My first experience with a pastor search committee came through correspondence. The chairperson wrote describing the evangelistic opportunities open to this, the only Southern Baptist church in a city of 40,000 people.

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I accepted the church's call and went with the expectation of reaping an evangelistic harvest. During one of our early deacons meeting, I was told, "Some of our elderly members are unhappy because you don't visit them often enough." I had been concentrating on evangelism because that is what I thought the church wanted. Needless to say, that was a short pastorate.

Another area for honesty concerns the harmony in the church. If the church is split or a conflict is brewing, this knowledge should be shared with the prospective pastor. Also, the prospective pastor should be told why the last pastor left.

### *Provide Information*

A church should provide an information packet to the prospective pastor. Such items as a ten-year statistical summary, constitution and bylaws, financial reports, operations manual, policy manual, goals and objectives, and other items can be included in such a packet. Copies of recent bulletins and newsletters could be helpful, too.

Information about the city, schools, major employers, and the community would be of real help. The more information a pastoral candidate has, the better decision he can make.

### *Follow Through*

Many committees feel their job has ended once the pastor is on the field. I believe the committee should remain intact for at least two months. At that time they could meet with the pastor (and possibly his spouse) to see if their expectations had been met. In the meantime, the committee should do everything possible to help the pastor and his family get settled.

On the whole, my experience with pastor search committees has been good. I have found them to represent the best leadership in the church. The committee members care deeply for their church. With prayer and planning, the search for a new pastor can be a meaningful experience for the committee, for the church, and for the candidate.

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## **What to Expect When the Pastor Leaves** **Ray Pollard**

Sooner or later every church finds itself without a pastor. Some church members are surprised by issues and emotions that arise during this interim period. However, fairly predictable factors will surface in virtually every instance in which a pastor leaves his place of ministry. Understanding what to expect can help churches plan for an orderly transition.

### ***Grief***

The most obvious occurrence will be an experience of grief in all of its many stages and expressions. Grief follows a pattern in which people experience disbelief and denial; emotional outpourings such as anger, guilt, and sorrow; resignation and inactivity; and finally, acceptance and adjustment. Grief is the reaction to a loss. When a pastor leaves, the congregation loses a person who has been intimately involved with families in compassionate and caring ways through some of their most difficult life experiences. The response to this leaving will be grief as surely as if there has been a death.

### ***Anxiety***

Another experience during an interim period is anxiety. Persons begin to give voice to such questions as, “What will happen in the future for our church?” “What if I need a pastor in some crisis now?”

“What if the church calls a new pastor with whom I cannot relate?” The experience of the unknown leaves most of us anxious. It is one of the most frequent experiences of church members when the pastor has left.

### ***Confusion***

A third area of experience might be described as confusion. Things people formerly haven't had to think about suddenly become their responsibility. Worship services which have seemed so effortless when the pastor was there to lead them become exercises in chaos as laypersons attempt to do the unfamiliar. People can't find out how to turn on the sound system or the air conditioning because the pastor “always took care of it.” Confusion reigns when there is a change of leadership. Fortunate is the church whose pastor learned to delegate and whose members were willing to do such tasks so that they could carry on in his absence.

The circumstances of the pastor's leaving may exaggerate or shape the congregation's response. If a pastor leaves through forced termination, for example, there are often feelings of guilt that touch many members. Even persons who wished to see the pastor leave find themselves experiencing guilt at the manner of his leaving. One church's pastor determined to leave vocational ministry. Many in that congregation felt personal failure at this decision. Their feeling was that perhaps they had done something which caused him to leave, or that they might have been more supportive and encouraging. On the other hand, when a pastor of many years retires, a different level of response might be anticipated.

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How does a church make it through the interim period? Its members need to have a good sense of humor; a great deal of patience; a new willingness to accept positions of responsible leadership; and above all, faithfulness to God, to the church, and to duties which one has accepted. An interim period affords the church an opportunity to draw more closely together, to pray for guidance and wisdom, and to recall the mighty acts of God in its history. During the interim the church needs to remember its vision and restate its purpose and mission.

It is important to draw on the best experience of other churches which have gone through a search process. The director of missions is a key resource person during transition times. The director of church-minister relations of your state Baptist convention can be another helpful consultant when the church finds itself without a pastor.

Above all, the congregation should covenant to pray for God's guidance in this shared experience. The same Lord who led a pastor to a new place of service will not leave the old congregation without His power and presence. The words of Jesus can take deep new meanings: "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you: (John 14:18, NIV) ©

## How to Prepare a Church for a New Pastor Ernest D. Standerfer

With a look of dejection, the deacon said, “I really dread going through this again.” I listened briefly as he recounted past experiences when their church had been without a pastor.

My comments may or may not have struck a responsive chord even though he agreed. But his love for his church and commitment to Christ enabled him to accept the fact that perhaps this time could be different. Maybe the painful memories of the past would be replaced with more enriching ones in the weeks ahead.

The history of your church during a time without a pastor may be different than the one cited. Paul Rees told of a woman who was being questioned by a community canvasser. The questioner asked her how many children she had. She began calling their names. He impatiently interrupted and said he only wanted the number. She protested by telling him that they didn’t have numbers. Every one of them has a name.<sup>1</sup> Churches have names and their own experiences.

During this interim period church leaders have a great responsibility. Though some do not feel it necessary, it is wise for most churches to elect an interim pastor. William De Wysockie pointed out that an interim pastor can share the administrative burden, provide backup for deacons in their ministry to families, meet the needs of the church through preaching, provide continuity, bring assurance of sound teaching, and contribute to increased attendance.<sup>2</sup> Lyle Schaller also has some good insights on the wisdom of securing an interim pastor.

The intentional interim minister can facilitate the process of redefining the role and of formulating new operational goals to fulfill that role. This effort can provide a context for an informed interview between parish leaders and the person(s) who has been identified as the probable next pastor. The definition of a new role and of the operational goals enable the leaders to articulate the gifts and special characteristics that will be needed in the next pastor....

This scenario offers several advantages including (a) it reduces the chances of placing the new minister in the role of “the rescuer” who is called (or sent) to rescue that goalless congregation, (b) it reduces the chances of a mismatch between the congregation and the next minister, (c) by definition of the process, it requires a strong lay role in the redefinition of role, and (d) it greatly enhances the chances that the new minister will be greeted by an active, rather than a passive, congregation.<sup>3</sup>

The interim period may follow a long pastorate, leaving many people feeling that their pastor will be impossible to replace. Or strained interpersonal relationships between the congregation and the former pastor could result in a divided congregation.

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<sup>1</sup>Paul S. Rees, *Stand up in Praise to God* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1960), p. 34.

<sup>2</sup>William De Wysockie, “A Church Needs an Interim,” *Church Administration* (January 1984), pp. 30-31.

<sup>3</sup>Lyle B. Schaller, *Activating the Passive Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981), pp. 88-89.

Another possibility is that the previous pastor may have stayed only briefly, leaving the congregation somewhat puzzled about God's leadership. Even more likely is the possibility that the interim period follows the ministry of a conscientious pastor who served the congregation well and has responded to another congregations' call to serve.

Whatever the cause of the pastor's leaving or the number of years served, the interim or transition period is a time of change and deep feeling." A change of pastorates often tends to be a far more disruptive and traumatic experience for (a) the congregation and (b) the pastor's family than it is for the minister."<sup>4</sup>

This article has been written with two assumptions. I assume that a church without a pastor has a committee elected and functioning for the purpose of seeking a pastor. Encourage both the committee to maintain clear and regular communication with the church and the church to prayerfully support the committee.

The second assumption is that work needed on church property related to the pastor (his study or the parsonage) would be determined and completed prior to his arrival.

What else can church leaders do effectively to help the church prepare for a new leader and to carry on its work during the interim period? The following suggestions may offer some help in answering that question.

**Reflect on a good biblical model for leadership during an interim period.** – Acts 11:22-30 recounts a fascinating chapter in the life of the Antioch church. Believers there were fortunate to have had Barnabas sent by the Jerusalem Christians to “check them out.” Barnabas was quick to find the strengths of the Antioch church and perceived the evidence of Gods' work among them (see v. 23). The success of his leadership can be traced to his character and commitment. He “was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and faith” (v. 24). He made no selfish claim on his role as a church leader. He even knew of one who could more effectively minister to them and went and brought Paul to the city. Barnabas had a sound view of stewardship and a magnanimous spirit. He lifted the mood and spirit of people. Rather than a scolder, he was an encourager. He was not hung up on tradition, yet he respected it.

Church leaders would do well to ponder this passage and the approach Barnabas made. We can learn from him.

**Recognize your limitations.** – Be cautious about yielding to the temptation to “fix things” or “straighten everything out.” Opportunities will abound for influencing needed changes, but changes will be short-lived if not genuinely accepted and believed by the congregation. Take time to assess what should be done with interim pastoral leadership to enhance the ministry opportunities under the new pastor. Do those things well, but recognize that “everything” can't be changed.

**Maintain a vital interest in the welfare of the church and its spiritual health.** – I once listened to an interim church leader make announcements during a worship service and

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<sup>4</sup> Lyle B. Schaller, When Shall a Pastor Move?" *The Christian Ministry* (July 1980), p. 28.

was struck by his sense of detachment from what he was encouraging the church members to do. If a leader, however temporary in his responsibilities, is not vitally interested in the church's life and work, be prepared for widespread indifference among the congregation. A vital interest cannot be maintained apart from daily prayer for the church and the people who are ministering and being ministered to.

**Keep the work of the church moving forward as much as possible.** – During an interim period a church tends to become preoccupied with itself and its perceived problems. Lift up the mission of the church. Let the theme be, “Get on with the work.” Plan carefully, but not too far in advance so as to fence in the future pastor. Also, planning should not be projected so far that events could not be completed in the interim period.

Robert McPherson suggested that an “environment of newness” be created so that the new pastor could be as innovative as possible. This climate could be expressed in small ways – midweek services, lay participation, special-interest programs, and new worship approaches.<sup>5</sup>

**Provide pastoral care.** – This may involve negotiating differences, helping heal misunderstandings and hurts, explaining why pastors move, and being approachable so that people of all ages may feel free to discuss their concerns. Arthur Teikmanis believes that “what our people want to know is whether or not we are really concerned with their needs, whether or not we are the same in life as in the pulpit...the same in listening to their problems as we are in listening to their joys.”<sup>6</sup>

Some issues may be more than personal; they may involve the whole membership. Listen carefully, advise cautiously, and support as much as possible the decision made by the church. When controversial matters can be resolved in the interim period, this will help clear the air for the new pastor.

**Preach biblical sermons.** – Paul commended the Ephesian elders to God and His Word which was able to build them up. That still is true.

An interim period is a good time to deal with biblical themes that are often neglected – what does the Bible say about the role of the pastor, the importance of Christlikeness in personal relationships, the financial support of the pastor and other staff leaders? Sound biblical sermons will help as much as anything to stabilize the congregation and prepare them for a new leader.

**Be positive about the new pastor.** – Highlight the possibilities for a fresh start with a new pastor. One person who served as an interim pastor said, “I also tried to discover as many positive things as possible about the person and to be the best PR agent I could be for the new leadership.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Robert H. McPherson, “On Being an Interim Pastor,” *The Christian Ministry* (March 1983), p.34.

<sup>6</sup> Arthur L. Telkmanis, *Preaching and Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), p. 30.

<sup>7</sup> McPherson, p.33.

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Preparing the way for another calls for patience and commitment to the church and its mission. Helping a church prepare for new pastoral leadership is an important ministry. When done wisely, this time in the church's life can be productive and strengthening.

Remember the deacon I mentioned at the beginning of this article? The interim period he entered into called for some serious decisions the church needed to make before calling a new pastor. It wasn't easy, but the decisions were made. The congregation continued to move, and a new pastor was called. His experiences still could not be called enjoyable, but they were much better and more fulfilling than before. The next time your church faces an interim situation or you assist a church in an interim period, ponder and pray about how you can profitably use the opportunity to prepare the congregation for its greatest days of ministry.



## *FINDING AN INTERIM PASTOR*

With the leaving of a pastor, deep emotions are inevitably involved, and feelings are highly sensitized. Seldom does the church need to call a new pastor immediately. An interim time allows the church to evaluate itself, refocus, and work through any remnants of the past. This does not apply only to the close of an unhappy pastoral era. Often, when a pastor's tenure has marked a very good time in the life of the church, an interim is needed even more. The previous pastor may have retired, died, or moved to another church. The church may feel that it is giving up a large portion of its life if the pastor's stay has been long and/or his impact has been substantial. The church may feel rejected if the stay were short or the pastor went to a larger church. Dreams for the future may be shattered by the pastor's leaving. The church may feel guilty over treatment of the former pastor. All sorts of situations, as unique as each individual church, exist. Even among the best of these, an interim pastor is often a good idea.

**ELEMENTS IN A COVENANT  
BETWEEN A CONGREGATION AND AN INTERIM PASTOR  
David L. Odom**

Goals for the interim period

Does the church hope something will happen in the interim time?

What are the tasks of an interim time on which the congregation will be working?

The Principle that the interim pastor will not be permanent pastor.

What are the responsibilities to be performed by the interim pastor and what is the priority these tasks have for the congregation? A list of the interim pastor tasks might include:

- \_\_\_\_\_ preparing for and leading worship
- \_\_\_\_\_ teaching responsibilities in Sunday School, on Sunday or Wednesday evenings
- \_\_\_\_\_ visiting...
  - \_\_\_\_\_ in hospitals
  - \_\_\_\_\_ with prospective members
  - \_\_\_\_\_ with members in crisis
  - \_\_\_\_\_ with homebound members
- \_\_\_\_\_ leading any boards or committees
- \_\_\_\_\_ attending meetings of congregation, deacons, trustees, church council, church staff committees, etc.
- \_\_\_\_\_ preparing for and leading funerals and weddings
- \_\_\_\_\_ counseling troubled individuals and families
- \_\_\_\_\_ supervising of church employees

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What are the responsibilities of the congregation during the interim? A list of these might include:

Participating by being present and involved....

\_\_\_\_\_ in worship

\_\_\_\_\_ in bible study

\_\_\_\_\_ stewardship of time and money

What are the responsibilities to be performed by the governing board?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What is the relationship between the governing board and the interim pastor?

What are the responsibilities to be performed by the personnel committee?

The church and the interim pastor need to negotiate several relationships related to issues of accountability.

Who will supervise the interim pastor?

Who will conduct evaluations of the interim pastor?

Who will negotiate any changes in the covenant with the interim pastor?

The nature of several relationships needs to be clarified

Between the interim pastor and the church staff.

Between the interim pastor and the Pastor Search Committee.

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What is the compensation for the interim pastor? Part of the answer to this question is determined by the number of “units” of time the interim is expected to work in performing the tasks identified above, A “unit” is a major section of the day (morning, afternoon or evening). If the interim is expected to work as many units of time as the permanent pastor then the compensation should be adjusted accordingly. Elements in the compensation package that need to be negotiated are:

Salary	_____
Housing Allowance	_____
Ministry Expenses	
Travel	_____
Continuing Education	_____
Insurance	_____
Retirement	_____
Continuing Education Time	_____
Vacation Time	_____

Amendments of the Covenant should be made in writing and have the agreement of all parties.

Issues which should be clearly addressed in the covenant include:

Length of the covenant.

Procedure for changing the covenant.

Who may void the covenant and how much notice must be given?

What happens if the covenant expires and no pastor has been called?

What happens if the pastor is called before the covenant expires?

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### WHAT IS THE COMPENSATION FOR AN INTERIM PASTOR?

Part of the answer to this question is determined by the number of “units” of time the interim is expected to work in performing the tasks which have been agreed upon in a covenant arrangement between the interim pastor and the congregation. A “unit” is a major section of the day (morning, afternoon, or evening). If the interim is expected to work as many units of time as the permanent pastor, then the compensation should be adjusted accordingly.

EXAMPLE: Slippery Rock Baptist Church’s Expectations of an Interim Pastor

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Morning	A.M. Service	Church Admin. Work	Study/ Preparation for Sunday AM Sermon	Study/ Preparation for Wed. Prayer Meeting	DAY OFF	DAY OFF	DAY OFF
Afternoon	Committee Meeting & Study	Visitation	Study/ Preparation for Sunday PM Sermon	Hospital Visitation	DAY OFF	DAY OFF	DAY OFF
Evening	P.M. Service	Deacons Meeting Once a Month; Church Evangelistic Visitation		Prayer Meeting/ Committee Meetings	DAY OFF	DAY OFF	DAY OFF

In the above example there are listed 15 units of time available for work in a five day work week. (18 units of time for a six day work week: 21 units of time available for a seven day work week.)

Slippery Rock Baptist Church desires that their interim pastor be available in ministry eleven (11) units of a five day work week (11/15 of the work week) or 73.33 % of the time. If the salary and housing allowance for the previous permanent pastor was \$24,000, then a potential interim salary would be \$17,600 annually or \$338.46 weekly. In addition, Slippery Rock Baptist Church would reimburse the interim pastor for travel, lodging, and meal expense.

If Slippery Rock Baptist Church only required the interim pastor to be present on Sundays and Wednesdays for the three worship services, then seven (7) units of time (worship services plus preparation time) would be required of a fifteen unit work week or 46.66% of the work week. If the salary and housing allowance for the previous permanent pastor was \$24,000, then a potential interim salary would be 46.66% of \$24,000 or an annual salary of \$11,200 or \$215.38 weekly. In addition, Slippery Rock Baptist Church would reimburse the interim pastor for travel, lodging, and meal expense.

Regardless of the procedure utilized to determine the compensation of the interim pastor, it is important to discuss the rationale with the prospective interim pastor as well as share the

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information with the congregation. (Congregations who have experienced the Intentional Interim process or have called an experienced traditional interim pastor testify that the investment of compensation for an interim pastor reaped spiritual growth for their local church that far exceeded their expectations).

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*RECOMMENDATION ON INTERIM PASTOR*

Following preliminary study, investigation, discussion and unanimous action by the Deacon Fellowship, your committee recommends:

1. That we call \_\_\_\_\_ as our interim pastor effective \_\_\_\_\_.
2. As Interim Pastor, \_\_\_\_\_ will (1) Serve until a pastor is called and installed on the church field. (2) Provide the pulpit ministry for all stated services of the church. (3) Conduct a weekly staff meeting to correlate staff ministry during the interim period. (4) With the staff and Deacons, provide pastoral ministries, hospital and home visitation, and respond to emergency needs. (5) Meet with the deacons, standing committees, church council, and church leadership as needed and desired. (6) Be available to the pulpit committee as a resource person as and when requested by the committee. (7) Provide leadership in church planning, program implementation, and other church administration areas. (8) In the total ministry, seek to prepare for the most redemptive setting for the call and installation of the pastor to whom God leads for our church.
3. That the interim pastor's compensation be \$ \_\_\_\_\_ weekly, and allocated as follows: \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Base Salary; \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Housing and utilities; \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Car Allowance; \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Retirement.
4. It is understood by the interim pastor as well as the church body that the interim pastor will not be considered as a candidate for the vacant position of full-time pastor.
5. If for any reason the interim pastor is to be considered a candidate for the position of full-time pastor, he will agree to resign as interim pastor and submit his resume to the Pastor Search Committee for consideration as any other candidate.

**SIGNATURES:**

\_\_\_\_\_ Interim Pastor

\_\_\_\_\_ Chairman of Deacons

\_\_\_\_\_ Chairman of Pastor Search Committee

\_\_\_\_\_ Chairman of Personnel Committee

\_\_\_\_\_ Church Clerk

Date of church business and/or committee meeting authorized by the church to negotiate above expectations and agreements \_\_\_\_\_

## *DECIDING ON AN INTERIM PASTOR*

The matter of interim pastor is often decided by the congregation or groups other than the Pastor Search Committee. However, there are occasions when the Pastor Search Committee must also be responsible for securing the interim pastor – if there is to be one. In some instances, the Pastor Search Committee also takes care of the weekly pulpit supply. I feel this is too much to ask of the Pastor Search Committee. However, if no arrangements or initiatives are taken to determine the need for an interim pastorate, I would suggest that the Pastor Search Committee take such an initiative.

### **Advantages of an interim over merely a pulpit supply schedule:** (by Henry Virkler, p. 74-75)

- It helps to reduce pressure on the Pastor Search Committee to “rush and get a pastor”.
- It gives continuity to the preaching ministry.
- It relieves the church from having to search for a supply pastor week by week.
- It provides someone to fill the leadership gap left by the former pastor, which can stabilize the church.
- An interim pastor can give support and encouragement to the total program of the local church.
- The church can better identify with the role of the undershepherd by having the same person present week after week.
- The interim pastor will have a more sustained knowledge of the needs of the congregation than a different supply preacher each week.
- The interim pastor reduces the parade of different speakers the congregation must listen to during the selection process.
- He can serve as a “spiritual bridge” to help transfer affection from one pastor to another.

### **Three types of congregational situations where an interim would be helpful:**

1. Churches emerging from an intense crisis or conflict.
2. After a long tenured pastor.
3. Large congregations with multiple staff.

If your church would benefit from an interim pastorate or if you want to know whether or not it would and what an interim pastor does, consult the following resources. We also recommend that you contact the following for recommendations of individuals to serve as interim pastor.

- Director of Missions of your association.
- Missouri Baptist Convention, Jefferson City, MO 1-800-736-6227. Extension 202.