



**First Five Steps for a Church Facing a Transition**  
A Resource Paper Provided by Interim Pastor Ministries  
for Churches in Transition

## 1. Pray for the Transition

Minister S.D. Gordon (1859-1936) said “You can do more than pray after you have prayed but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed.”

As your church enters a transition period, your church will want to strengthen its prayer emphasis and focus its prayers on the changes and challenges ahead. This means adding to the prayer requests of every group or committee that already meets requests that are specific to the transition season, its accompanying emotions, the transitional leadership team and the search process. It also means considering holding special times of prayer – weekly, Sundays after church, signing up for 24-hour prayer in 10-15 minute segments, 40-days of prayer, prayer walks around the church, or other opportunities for the people of the church to pray together or on their own.

Our spiritual enemy is ever alert for a chance to trouble a church and upset its testimony. The time between pastors can make a church vulnerable to his attacks. Prayer is our first weapon of choice.

## 2. Get Help

The second step is not to immediately begin a pastoral search but to contact your regional church leader (known by various titles: district superintendent, regional minister, etc.). They can help you with your journey of transition.

It is a common temptation for a church whose pastor has recently left to either assume they can handle the transition by themselves or to feel like they are all alone as they face an unknown time period before they can find their next pastor. The truth is, there are ministry leaders who have worked with any number of churches that have gone through a similar transition who are ready and willing to come alongside a church that is between pastors.

A second call you can make (with the knowledge of your regional church leader) is to Interim Pastor Ministries (IPM) 800-501-7117. IPM will work with your regional and local church leadership in placing an intentional interim pastor in your church to love and lead your church through the interim period until your new pastor arrives. While you are making these calls, it is suggested that, if possible, your church leadership conduct an exit interview with the outgoing pastor.

## 3. Plan a Brief Period of Pulpit Supply

While it is recommended that a church contact their regional church leader (or IPM) as soon as they are aware that their pastor is leaving to get a head start on developing a plan for the church's interim period, it may take a brief period after the pastor leaves before an interim pastor can be in place. This is why it is a good idea to plan for some pulpit supply until the interim arrives. While planning for some initial pulpit supply, it is important to remember that a church in transition needs more than just pulpit supply, more than likely they will need the ministry of an interim at some level. There are tools available to assist a church in determining the type of interim (known as the “level of intentionality”) they may need.

#### **4. Communicate Regularly with the Congregation**

In any group of people, including the church, information helps people feel included. Lack of information can make people feel excluded, breed mistrust and fuel suspicion. Information can also help the church know what to be praying about.

This is why it is important for a church's leaders to set up a plan for regularly communicating with the congregation. This includes (without violating confidences or appropriate protocol) regular communication about general church plans, identification of who are in charge, and updates from the pastoral search committee.

One more thought: regardless of the circumstances surrounding the departure of the previous pastor, the church leadership needs to figure out how to acknowledge the pastor's leaving. It is healthy for the church to know what farewell is planned for the outgoing pastor and to know, in more difficult departures, in general, how the church leadership is responding in a Christ-like way to the situation.

#### **5. Read a Book about Church Transitions**

It is helpful for as many church leaders as possible to read and discuss a book that addresses the situations a church in transition may face. While this will not make them experts of the subject, it will help them know what might be ahead for them, and to learn from the experiences and lessons of other churches' transitional journey.

Recommended: *Help – We Just Lost Our Pastor* by Dr. Ken Moberg or *The Changeover Zone* by Jim Ozier and Jim Griffith. Books like these will assist the church leadership in holding the exit interview, congregational communication, and other transitional tasks.

Interim Pastor Ministries - [interimpastors.com](http://interimpastors.com) - 800-501-7117

Or contact the appropriate IPM representative below:

Dr. David Jenkins: National Director of Pastor and Regional Relationships  
608-886-0728

[dave@interimpastors.com](mailto:dave@interimpastors.com)

Dr. Rich Brown: Western Director of Pastor and Regional Relationships  
530-524-2078

[rich@interimpastors.com](mailto:rich@interimpastors.com)

Don Price: Southeastern Area Rep of Pastor and Regional Relationships  
502-552-2513

[don@interimpastors.com](mailto:don@interimpastors.com)