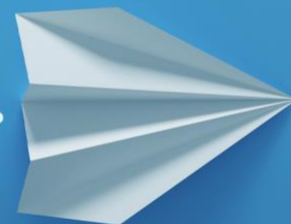


# MENTORED SUCCESSION

**A SMARTER WAY**

FOR PASTORAL TRANSITION

*BY GENE RONCONE*



"May the Lord, the God who gives breath to all living things, appoint someone over this community to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the Lord's people will not be like sheep without a shepherd." Numbers 27:16-17

# Mentored Succession

## A Smarter Way for Pastoral Transition

10/19/2022 Edition

by Gene Roncone

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*May the LORD, the God who gives breath to all living things, appoint someone over this community to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the LORD's people will not be like sheep without a shepherd (Numbers 27:16-17 NIV).*

*From the tribe of Issachar, there were 200 leaders that understood the signs of the times and knew the best course for Israel to take (1 Chronicles 12:32 ).*

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## 1. FROM SUPERINTENDENT GENE RONCONE ([back to table](#))



I never worried about Highpoint Church's future that much until Geno, my 23-year-old son and Highpoint's youth pastor, died from cancer in 2016. Neither I nor the board ever spoke formally about him as my successor. Yes, there were hypothetical comments made on the wings of appreciation, but nothing formal. However, Geno grew up in the church and was respected, trusted, and loved by all generations. I guess I just figured if something ever happened to me, he would be there to help the church through the storm. I never imagined he would beat me to heaven.

Geno's early death made me more aware of my own mortality and the need to prepare Highpoint for something they did not have a lot of experience in—finding a pastor. In over 86 years, Highpoint only had seven pastors. The last two of us led since 1975 which means in the last 43 years, the church had only assembled a pastoral search committee once. Highpoint might be good at a lot of things, but it just did not have the opportunity to become skilled at pastoral transitions.

I found myself praying the same prayer Moses whispered in the mid seasons of his own life.

*"May the LORD, the God who gives breath to all living things, appoint someone over this community to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the LORD's people will not be like sheep without a shepherd" (Numbers 27:16-17 NIV).*

If you are reading this, you are probably a pastor sensing that something is wrong or outdated with our current pastoral selection process. You know all leaders, including yourself, will one day move on. You are becoming anxious about tossing all your hard work, sacrifice, and prayer on the gambling table of chance. You sense there must be a better way. Like the sons of Issachar during Israel's first leadership transition, you know it is time for a new approach to keep your community of faith moving forward in a health and growth (1 Chronicles 12:32). I know because I have been there. That is why I have spent many years studying transition models and preparing this resource. It is my hope that it will help you consider a different model that can help your church avoid the normal declines in morale, attendance, and giving associated with most leadership transitions. It is also my prayer that our network will be stronger because healthy churches are remaining healthy through the entire leadership transition.

Even healthy churches in pastoral transition experience a 10-15 percent decline in attendance and a slightly lower decrease in tithes and offerings. In nearly all cases, it will take the new pastor one to three years to regain these losses. However, there are a few churches that defy gravity and actually grow in morale, attendance, and income during a leadership transition. These churches have three things in common. First, they have a transition plan in written form. Second, they know who the successor is before the vacancy occurs. Third, the outgoing pastor is emotionally ready, supportive of the transition, and committed to its success. That third ingredient is the deal breaker. Without it, the church will experience decreased morale, attendance, and income despite possessing the first two.

Bestselling author and business consultant, Peter Drucker, once said, “The ingredient most missing in churches today is a plan of succession.”<sup>1</sup> However, having a plan is only half the battle. It is important to note that despite the many hours it took to create this resource, it does not—in and of itself—guarantee success. Pastoral transition specialists William Vanderbloemen and Warren Bird confess that the existence of a transition plan is not a guarantee that it will succeed. Their experience brought them to conclude that “In the end, most of the success of a pastoral transition rises and falls on the shoulders of the outgoing pastor.”<sup>2</sup> However, knowledge is power and this resource can give you a strategic advantages and a greater likelihood for success in your journey.

The best place to start is to read this document in its entirety and then ask the Holy Spirit to give you wisdom in how to vet a plan with a small advance team from your own leadership community. Because each situation is different, it would be impossible to produce a template that would fit your own context. However, this short document will help you get the wheels turning and give you a place to start.

Not only have I lead my own mentored succession while pastoring but I have coached several churches in the process. Having been down this path before, I stand ready to help and am only one call away. With the Lord’s help and the Spirit’s leading, history will find you ready and prepared for what can be your finest hour. As always, I remain . . .

Committed to your success,

Gene Roncone  
District Superintendent/Network Pastor  
Rocky Mountain Ministry Network

## 2. WHY LEADERS NEGLECT SUCCESSION PLANNING [\(back to table\)](#)

Some things are easier said than done, and succession planning is one of the hardest. Moses trained, empowered, and released Joshua. The Bible mentions the names of 19 of King David's sons, but God chose Solomon to succeed him. Elijah mentored Elisha, Paul mentored Timothy, and Barnabas mentored John Mark. Even Jesus prepared His disciples to succeed him; yet despite the biblical precedence for mentored succession, the process is difficult for most leaders to begin. Why might seasoned ministers neglect this noble task?

- 1. Fearful procrastination.** Unfortunately, some ministers allow fear to suffocate their faith. They worry that succession planning means they are no longer relevant or that they will exist in a lame-duck status. Some are afraid it will deprive them of the joys of ministry or the opportunity to depart on their own terms. Others dread a future where they are not in control, leading the charge, financially stable or no longer possess the title of "Lead Pastor". However, time never relieves us of the obligation to live by faith. Abraham understood this in his senior years and *"obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going"* (Hebrews 11:8 NIV). Waiting until you are certain all your questions are answered is not faith. The same God who cared for and directed us in the early days of our calling will continue to do so in our golden years as well.
- 2. Unreasonable prerequisites.** Sometimes ministers neglect succession planning because they are waiting for the perfect situation to materialize. Often these triggers are as unreasonable as they are unlikely. They may wait for the perfect season, the perfect person, or the perfect opportunity. Other times they hold out for assured financial stability, a convenient timeline, or a promised severance. A few wait so long for an ideal scenario that time melts like an ice cube in the desert. There is no better day than today to start prayerful planning. Scripture encourages us to *"not despise these small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin"* (Zechariah 4:10 NLT).
- 3. Surrender of critical mass.** Critical mass is the lowest amount of resources required for an organization to grow and thrive on its own. The saddest stories about planned succession are those of ministers who allow the church to decline numerically, financially, and spiritually to the point where planned succession is either unattractive to a qualified successor or impossible for the church to accomplish. If they are not careful, these communities of faith may find themselves echoing the regret of God's people who said, *"The harvest is past, the summer has ended, and we are not saved"* (Jeremiah 8:20 NIV).
- 4. Deferred opportunity.** Some effective leaders enjoy a long tenure of stable leadership that may last decades. However, if they are not intentional about planned succession, they can outlive their ability to be change agents. The lack of strategic planning and mentoring can result in the next generation aging out while waiting on the bench. As a result, the church is not able to benefit from those who could have kept it relevant, current, and multigenerational. Consequently, the church must now jump two generations in a single bound. "Carpe diem" is a popular Latin phrase that means "seize the day." In this case, however, some ministers defer opportunity.

5. **Absence of release.** Some ministers have a philosophical belief that succession planning should only be started after they feel a release from their current ministry. They are not against succession planning but do not see a need for it because they still possess a strong call, vision, energy level and mandate to lead the church.
6. **Misplaced identity.** A few ministers have allowed their current title or ministry to become the centerpiece of their identity. Their sense of status, belonging, and self-esteem are derived from their work rather than their relationships with God and family. To them, succession planning means the loss of self-worth, fulfillment, and happiness. Because they cannot imagine being or doing anything else other than their current role, they hold on with white knuckles until misfortune pries them loose.
7. **Emotional anchors.** All of us journey through life with emotional baggage—even ministers. Whether it is fear, insecurity, disappointment, deferred hope, or sadness, some ministers allow their emotional anchors to keep them and their churches close to the harbor. In Numbers 27:15-17, Moses prayed that God would send a successor to lead the nation; but when God took him up on the offer, Moses struggled with letting go, complained, and lashed out at others (Deuteronomy 3:23-27). In the end, however, Moses prevailed over his dark emotions and ended up obeying God (Numbers 27:27). You can also.
8. **Disobedient existence.** God told Moses to prepare for a leadership transition by mentoring Joshua to be his successor. Numbers 27:12-23 and Deuteronomy 3:23-28 record this command that is punctuated with the phrase, *“Moses did as the Lord commanded him”*. Many leaders know God has told them to start preparing a successor. They can feel it in their heart, may even long to be released from the heavy burden, and feel the tide turning in their ministries, but they just cannot bring themselves to obey. As a result, they choose to embrace convenient disobedience rather than joyful adventure.

Good and wise succession planning need not limit a leader’s options or stamp an expiration date on their forehead. Moses continued to lead the people of Israel and prepare his successor for several decades after God told him to equip Joshua. The important thing was that he started; and once he started, momentum carried him along and the Spirit filled in the blanks.

### 3. COURAGEOUS INTENTIONALITY ([back to table](#))

I believe fear is the primary reason pastors fail to involve their boards in transition and succession planning. In their book, *The Elephant in the Boardroom: Speaking the Unspoken About Pastoral Transitions*, authors Weese and Crabtree seem to spread blame a bit farther saying, “Leaders on both sides of the board table must face the unhealthy part of themselves that threatens a successful pastoral transition . . . Although we would like to assume that a strong commitment obviates a shadow side to the Christian leader, all the evidence shows it does not.”<sup>3</sup> However, there are often justifiable reasons for these unsettling emotions. Every situation is different and will require a leader to courageously strike a balance between Spirit and flesh. I will share how I navigated my way through this minefield in a larger church setting in hopes that it may help you find God’s will in your own context.

- A. Why risk is justified.** These kinds of discussions have legitimate risks, and not all board members are spiritually or emotionally mature enough to handle them. These risks include:
- **Impatience.** Instead of a succession plan being considered a strategic plan for the future, its existence has the potential of becoming an “outstanding task” in need of execution dates, progress, and constant attention.
  - **Disunity.** Those who have their own agenda can use succession planning as a way to expedite their pastor’s departure. In this case, the plan becomes a “coup” in disguise. Every church has a few spiritually immature leaders who choose to be activists, critics, and pursuers of greater influence. Succession planning can become a playground for the immature and divisive.
  - **Instability.** Rumors of attention being given to a succession plan can create a culture of apprehension and uncertainty in the church. A perceived sense of insecurity can cause valuable staff members to secretly start looking for employment elsewhere. Large givers can feel unsure and restrain or insulate themselves from generosity, capital campaigns, or needed initiatives. Volunteers can be cautious about making commitments, and fringe attenders and members who feel connected to the lead pastor may start shopping for a new church home.
  - **Fear and insecurity.** Statistics show that nothing influences the success of a pastoral transition or succession plan more than the support and enthusiasm of the outgoing pastor. Author Gary Smith is convinced that “most of the success of a pastoral transition rises and falls on the shoulders of the outgoing pastor.”<sup>4</sup> Succession expert Jerry David claims many transitions are unintentionally sabotaged by insecure leaders who undermine their successors in a way that contributes to their failure.<sup>5</sup> If a transition is dependent upon the outgoing pastor’s support, the pastor and their spouse must be ready emotionally, financially, intellectually, and spiritually. Some may be more ready to be relieved of their responsibilities than they are of their influence.
- B. Why courageous intentionality is needed.** It sits on my desk and reminds me that I am part of something bigger than myself. It is a trunk slice from a tree that gave my family shelter in the national forest. After 109 years, the mighty tree finally fell. A friend was kind enough to make the journey, cut a timber slice, and use a high-powered magnifying glass to count its rings. Knowing it was my son Geno’s favorite camping spot, he and his wife gave it to me as a gift. This



pillar of the forest lived from 1909 until 2018. Much like my son's premature death, it reminds me that everything in this world is temporary. Even pastors.

Outside of its sentimental value, the tree slice speaks to me about my role and contribution as a pastor. The tree is like a church and its rings are like seasons of its lifespan. Seasons of growth produced rings with larger spaces between them. This was a result of the tree being blessed with favorable temperatures and rain. Seasons of dormancy created rings that are tight and close together. These were years the tree suffered through drought, long winters, or limited sunlight. Rings scarred by burn marks reflect fires the tree endured, and dark discoloring reveals a temporary infestation of insects or fungus. The older the tree, the slower it grows because its roots have grown deep enough to have to compete with other trees for nutrients, resources, and water. Though older, the tree is more stable and may, like this one, provide shelter for over a hundred years.

However, the most profound story the rings tell is one of perseverance. The rings remind us that our role in the tree's life cycle is temporary. Some pastors ignore preceding rings and mistakenly think the history of the tree began the day they arrived. Others think the tree's sole purpose is to build their personal legacy or feed their voracious egos. Unfortunately, some leave the tree in distress while others leave rings that are wide and healthy. Most leave rings of modest but consistent growth. In the end, the fires, floods, or growing seasons are not as important as the question: "Will our contribution cause the tree to outlive us?"



I pastored Highpoint for nearly 17 years. At the time of my departure, the church was 86 years old and had only had seven pastors. The last three pastors alone made up 62 years of the church's history. That is why I framed the tree slice and hung it on the wall in my office. The tree impressed upon me that it is not about me, but the tree's survival. It reminded me that although we will face storms, droughts, and fires, the tree must survive! It reminds me that there were rings before me and rings that will follow me; but it is our stewardship of the tree, not our rings, that tell the truest story. Therefore, I concluded that for Highpoint, need outweighed the risks when it came to succession planning.

- C. How I found balance between justified fear and courageous intentionality.** Even though I was only 50 years of age with no intention of leaving or retiring soon, I decided to start leading differently. The thought occurred to me that every pastor, no matter how long their tenure, is an interim pastor. I started leading as if I were a long-term interim pastor. Our governance did not give me the right to select my successor. However, I could certainly lead in a way that an eventual transition would be staged for success. I could prepare and resource those who would be charged with finding the next pastor. I could even mentor in a way that presented the possibility of both internal and external candidates.



Churches can be like garages in that they can accumulate “stuff” and unfinished projects. Mine was the same. Without others knowing it, I decided to make a list of problems I knew a future successor would have to tackle. Then I took every one of them on in a patient and methodical manner. After being at Highpoint for nearly 17 years and led the church through the construction of a new campus across town, I felt I had earned enough trust to absorb any fallout fighting these battles might bring. The list consisted of things such as:

1. **Governance.** Addressing governance issues and totally rewriting the church bylaws. This took me two years.
2. **Policy.** Updating financial policies, board etiquette, and operating procedures.
3. **Neutralization.** Diplomatically neutralizing the influence of problem, divisive, or high maintenance leaders.
4. **Accountability.** Confronting and realigning committees or ministries that had drifted from their mission and/or accountability structure.
5. **Board.** Training my board about how difficult pastoral ministry really is and helping them become more supportive and helpful to spiritual leadership in the future.
6. **Planned abandonment.** Giving a few ministries I started a decent burial. God had given me the vision and energy to lead them, but I felt sustaining them would become a burden to someone who did not share my sense of divine mandate.
7. **Exit strategies.** Formulating exit strategies for large pledges and stale partnerships that no longer brought life and energy to our missions and outreach ministries.
8. **Empowerment.** Expressing financial faith to engage highly gifted and diverse staff pastors and then ushering them into the “inner circle” of our leadership structure.
9. **Tribal storytelling.** Mentoring promising staff and volunteers to become organizational DNA carriers for Highpoint’s future.
10. **Strategic planning.** Writing a 140-page manual on how the church would find a new pastor in the event something unexpected ever happened to me.

All these things created new margin and opportunity for whoever would one day follow me. However, the most surprising result from this process was that Highpoint started experiencing another wave of numerical and financial growth. Please do not misunderstand; there is never one reason a church is growing. If a church is growing, it is always the result of several factors. However, the checking account and attendance records seemed to confirm that God was honoring this courageous outlook.

However, there still was one mountain to climb. I had enjoyed working with a large board of 12 people (including myself). Although I desperately wanted to work arm in arm with my full board to develop and train them for an eventual pastoral transition, I could not get a release from the Lord to do so. I felt some of our leaders may lack the spiritual sensitivity to deal with this issue in a way that would honor the Lord. Two had already exhibited an inability to keep confidence regarding board decisions. Their desire to be liked often blinded them from Kingdom opportunities. I felt their lack of self-control was a predictor of what I could expect in addressing more significant issues. Paul seems to confirm my sense of pause when he told the Corinthians, “*There must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized*” (1 Corinthians 11:19 ESV).

I asked the Lord in prayer for two years to either grow them or remove them so I could have a peace about revealing the 140-page transition manual to the entire board. The Lord chose to take a couple years to grant my request. Until He did, I decided to engage a small team of board officers and one alternate who already had my unequivocal trust. I asked them to pray about signing a strict confidentiality agreement and serve as an advance team that would train and coach the board in the event anything ever happened to me. We met several times in my home to work our way through the manual, pray, and discuss applications. I will forever cherish the memories, tears, prayers, laughter, and wisdom that converged in those meetings! When God called me to serve as district superintendent, Highpoint already had a team of valuable coaches to get the process started and keep things on track. Following are a few talking points from the memo I gave the advance team after opening our first meeting in prayer:

**SIGNIFICANT CONCERNS.** *Allow me to begin our meeting by bringing to you a few concerns I have regarding this risky process of introducing you to a succession plan in the event anything ever happens to me.*

1. **Confidentiality.** *Having a good succession plan is no guarantee it will work. I have not shared this with the full board because of my concern about a few who may lack self-control and the ability to keep confidence. Our church is growing, and I do not want to risk losing momentum because a few people have loose lips.*
2. **Respect.** *I do not want to be penalized for being proactive and putting these things in writing. Some consultants advise against sharing a succession plan with the board before it is needed. Even churches that have plans only have a 50 percent success rate for the following reasons:*
  - **Impatience.** *Instead of the plan serving as a contingency, it is considered an outstanding task in need of execution dates, progress, and constant attention.*
  - **Disunity.** *Those who oppose the pastor or have a different agenda can use the plan as a way to expedite his/her departure.*
  - **Instability.** *Rumors of attention being given to a succession plan can create a culture of apprehension, fear, and uncertainty in the church. The perceived sense of insecurity can cause sharp staff members to secretly start updating their résumés and shopping for employment elsewhere. Givers can feel unsure and start withholding offerings, restraining their generosity, or insulating themselves from visionary appeals. Volunteers can be cautious about making commitments, and people who feel connected to the lead pastor may start looking for a new home church.*
  - **Fear.** *Statistics show that nothing influences the success of a succession plan more than the support and enthusiasm of the outgoing pastor. If a transition is dependent upon the outgoing pastor's support, the pastor must be ready emotionally, financially, intellectually, and spiritually.*

*I can trust our board officers. We have served together for nearly two decades. You love me and I love you. Unless I disqualify myself or am ineffective, I want to decide when I leave and not be pressured to establish a timeline. I am confident we can overcome all four of these potential threats.*

3. **Transition fund.** *The fact of the matter is that EVERY pastor, whether they realize it or not, is an interim pastor. Because transition is inevitable, expenses related to it are also*

unavoidable. Any transition is going to involve a “best case,” “likely case,” and “worst case” scenario. For various reasons we will discuss later, I believe Highpoint will need to plan for a healthy transition fund. Over a year ago, I used an existing but empty church bank account to start a pastoral transition fund. I envision this fund being used to help underwrite expenses related to the transition and to finance a new pastor’s early initiatives. Rhonda and I have already made the first significant donation to this fund, and we are asking you to consider taking eight weeks to match ours and do the same. In the Old Testament, the waters of the Jordan did not part until the leaders walked in first (Joshua 3:13). Would you talk with your spouse about matching our gift in the next eight weeks?

4. **Inexperience.** Pastoral departures are usually unpredictable. By the time a board learns the pastor is leaving, there is little time to educate oneself, develop systems, and learn from experts. In over 86 years, Highpoint has been pastored by only seven men. The last two of Highpoint’s pastors have led since 1975 which means that in the last 43 years, the church has only assembled a pastoral search committee once! **Highpoint may be good at a lot of things, but we just do not have enough experience to be skilled at pastoral transitions.** That is why I have spent many months reading, researching, and writing a board-led succession plan that gives the church options and direction. I have educated myself on the greatest obstacles and best practices of pastoral transitions. I have interviewed wise leaders, district officials, and peers regarding board-led succession plans. I have also considered how Highpoint’s unique needs, culture, and history will shape our needs in a successful transition. That is why I wrote a 13-stage plan to serve the board as a guide but not necessarily as a rule. I want to coach our board officers and one alternate on the contents of this manual so they can serve as guides to the board if it should ever be needed.

**COACHING PLAN.** I would like to take this group on the following journey to provide an advance team that can usher the board and church through pastoral transition when it occurs. This would involve the following:

1. **A Commitment of Confidentiality.** Have all four of us sign a mutual and binding nondisclosure agreement.
2. **Meeting #1: Clarification.** Discuss these concerns, come to agreement about how to proceed, and introduce six chapters in what I will call a “partial reveal.” I know this will be a lot for you to take in all at once, so I want to unveil it in small amounts starting with six critical chapters.
3. **Partial reveal.** Introduce the critical six select chapters of the manual and allow you to read it independently before our next meeting.
4. **Meeting #2.** Discussion of the first six chapters of the partial reveal.
5. **Full reveal.** Introduce the entire 140-page manual and allow you to read it independently.
6. **Meeting #3.** Discuss the first half of the manual consisting of Chapters 1-19.
7. **Meeting #4.** Discuss Appendixes A-Z.
8. **Full release.** Distribute the full electronic version to the officers and alternate with the understanding that we are all under the obligation of the nondisclosure agreement until I decide to give the full board access, die, leave, or become unable to pastor.

Each meeting ended up being about three hours in length. I have never regretted doing this and, in fact, found each member of the advance team to have elevated their level and distinction of service. They became more sensitive, wise, supportive, and willing to lead their peers in discerning between better and best. Ecclesiastes 3 teaches us that all things have a time and season. It was the Spirit's timing. You will need to discern your own time for courageous intentionality. When you do, this resource can serve as a springboard to develop your own plan with your own leadership community.

## 4. FOUR SUCCESSION MODELS ([back to table](#))

Many transition specialists, denominational leaders, and local churches are starting to question whether the traditional method of pastoral selection is effective. The model of bringing in outsiders with no understanding of the church culture, community, and congregation seems to be creating a continuing cycle of short-term pastorates. Andrew Flowers' research and book entitled, *Leading Through Succession: Why Pastoral Leadership Is Key to a Healthy Transition on Pastoral Transition* sounds the alarm:

*"Something seems to be horribly wrong with the process of appointing pastors. It's the epidemic no one wants to talk about and it's not uncommon for churches to go through two or three sacrificial lambs before someone is able to stick."*<sup>6</sup>

Transition experts Carolyn Weese and Russell Crabtree complain:

*"The current model of pastoral transition, left over from a time when organizational learning was not as important, does not help congregations protect what is healthy and retain what they have learned. It is the organizational equivalent of burning down the community library every time a new mayor is elected."*<sup>7</sup>

Mark Moore of Christ's Church of the Valley in Peoria, Arizona cries out:

*"There is a black hole in church leadership transition strategy. What we don't know how to do is transition from first generational leaders to second generational successors. It's not that we have no theory; it's that we have few models to follow in churches where the stakes are the highest because of the church's influence and visibility."*<sup>8</sup>

This frustration has resulted in a growing popularity of other succession models. Author Terry Roberts says:

*"There is no one-size-fits-all model. Plans differ just as the churches they serve differ. However, the best plans have one thing in common: They combine the wisdom and stability of a seasoned leader and the vision and energy of a young leader. As such, they help the church not only go through the challenge of change but also grow through it."*<sup>9</sup>

The results of a 2019 Barna research project found that *"while the majority of church transitions occur because a pastor initiates their departure, planning ahead for an inevitable transition makes a big difference in congregants' experiences."*<sup>10</sup>

With that said let me comment on the four most common succession models and why two are gaining in popularity.

**A. Four common succession models.** The bylaws of most Assemblies of God churches embrace a traditional search committee driven succession plan. However, there are several other models

of strategic succession that are gaining popularity and proving effective. They are listed briefly for the sake of information.

1. **Board-driven succession.** The board alone, acting as the search committee, interviews prospective candidates and recommends one of them to the congregation for a vote.
2. **Relayed succession.** When the pastor resigns, the board selects an interim pastor to serve for one to two years while an extended search process is undertaken. The interim pastor is not considered as a candidate but tasked with preparing the church for the future pastor. In this model, the interim pastor could best be described as a relay runner in a short leg of a long race. This model tends to be more popular in liturgical churches.
3. **Mentored succession.** The lead pastor and the board collaborate to select a person (current staff or future staff member) who is mentored and trained with the intention of one day leading the church. There is a focus to identify a divinely called “DNA carrier” who understands the church, has proven themselves effective, is mentored by the outgoing pastor, and loved and trusted by the people. This model is becoming increasingly popular in churches with over 500 attendees.
4. **Scheduled succession.** The lead pastor informs the board one to two years before they intend to step down or retire. The first year is spent searching for a successor and the second year mentoring that person to lead. These plans work best when the lead pastor is very near retirement age and has a specific start and end date that is agreed upon by all (pastor, successor, and board).

**B. The gaining popularity of mentored succession.** In mentored succession the lead pastor and the board collaborate and select a person (current staff or future staff member) to be mentored and trained with the intention of one day leading the church. This model has proven successful and is gaining popularity in larger churches where the outgoing pastor has had an effective, long-term ministry of over ten years. There are several books authored by transition specialists and pastors who have successfully navigated the uncertain waters of mentored succession. Author Terry Roberts has documented the fact that the model has been the cultural norm in many large churches in Asian cultures.<sup>11</sup> Glen Wolf is one of the first millennials to have made an academic and thoughtful contribution to this body of work. In his doctoral thesis he sounds the alarm and gives the following four reasons why succession planning must become a priority.<sup>12</sup>

- Succession is inevitable in every church.
- Succession is generationally urgent.
- Succession is most important in ministry.
- Succession is a topic most pastors are unprepared and uninformed about.

Although the entire process takes longer than a traditional search, when done right, it has proven to insulate the church from declines in attendance, engagement and giving. Many churches who have used the mentored succession model have actually grown on the other side of the transition.

**C. Stages of mentored succession.** Although each mentored succession story is different, I did notice common denominators and intentional processes that were employed in the handoff. I have summarized them in the following seven stages of varying length:

**Stage 1: Embracing change.** This stage involves the current pastor becoming ready, willing, and able to let go. This stage may be the most critical step because it requires the leader to be able to let go of responsibility and influence. Some can let go of one of those, but a smooth transition requires a person to be able to gracefully release both. Honest self-reflection, repeated years of plateauing or declining ministry, waning vision, a prolonged period of being in maintenance mode, and decreasing energy and physical ability all play a part in coming to grips with reality. One leader told me his moment of enlightenment was when he realized he had not killed or birthed a new ministry in over five years. However, at the end of the day all leaders must be open to hearing God's voice and moving forward with the same faith and surrender they possessed in their early days of ministry. After revealing a succession plan to Abraham when he was 75 years old, God instructed him to *"go from your people and your father's household to the land I will show you"* (Genesis 12:1). Even in the twilight years of his life God required Abraham to walk off the map and enter an unknown season without promises or certainty. Age never relieves us of our obligation to live and transition by faith.

**Stage 2: Finding Joshua.** This stage involves the lead pastor and board to collaborate in identifying a person (current staff or future staff member) who is mentored and trained with the intention of one day leading the church. There are many ways leaders have achieved this, but God's Word gives us a wonderful model. After Moses was told that he would not be leading the children of Israel into the Promised Land, he prayed that God would appoint a new leader for the nation (Numbers 27:16-17). The Lord instructed Moses to mentor Joshua to succeed him in leadership. *"Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit of leadership and lay your hand on him"* (Numbers 27:18 NIV, emphasis added). What is the "spirit of leadership"? Scholars are not entirely sure, but the context suggests five characteristics successors should have.

- **History of faithfulness.** Joshua had already proven himself faithful to God, Moses, and the nation's mission. He had served faithfully as Moses's assistant since Mount Sinai (Exodus 33:11). He was not influenced by negative peer pressure and was willing to be among the courageous minority (Numbers 14:5-9). He won battles, raised up military commanders, and constantly grew into his calling. He had already proven himself to be faithful in leadership positions, was loyal to Moses and attuned to where God was leading the nation.
- **Successful followership.** As strange as it may sound, the best leaders are those who have been successful followers in prior seasons of their development. The capacity to follow reveals that a potential leader is capable of being loyal to something other than themselves, their own ideas, or personal passions. It also shows they know how to lead while on the implementation side of the leadership equation. Anyone can dream dreams that others must implement, but successful followers know how the parts are connected in order to get things done. Not all followers are leaders, but all outstanding leaders have a history of faithfully following in different contexts.
- **DNA carrier.** The successor understands and appreciates the culture of the church and is able to be a "DNA" carrier of the church's values and vision.
- **Proven results.** Joshua had more than God's confidence; he also had Moses's confidence and the trust of clan leaders from each of Israel's tribes. Why? He won battles, brought wins to the table, and had a track record of success (Exodus 17:8-13). If something was entrusted to Joshua, it became effective, grew, and contributed to the nation's overall success. Unfortunately, we live in a day when optics are valued more than results. Leaders



are often judged more by their trendy vocabulary and slick appearance than their track record. There is a difference between faithfulness and results. A leader without results is nothing more than an untested theoretician. Theoreticians usually have ideas, vocabulary, and speech that is more impressive than the results column on their résumé. However, Joshua could deliver wins, raise up leaders and inspire others to follow.

- **Divine giftings.** The Lord said Joshua had “*the spirit of leadership*.” Scholars are uncertain as to what that may mean. There appears to be two options. The original Hebrew word used for “spirit” could be applied to mean either “courage to lead” or a “God-given gift of leadership.” Either way, it appears Joshua was anointed by God in a way that empowered him with courage and leadership. I personally think it implies the overlapping of natural talent and supernatural anointing. Joshua was blessed to have both.

When it comes to finding the right Joshua, Bryant Wright compares the process to knowing when someone has found the right person to marry. “You just know,” says Wright.<sup>13</sup>

**Stage 3: Wading into culture.** This stage involves a testing time where the potential successor is given a portfolio, placed on the teaching team, and then works on staff to determine if they are compatible with the church, mentoring pastor, board, staff, and local community. At the end of this time, the lead pastor and board decide if the potential successor can advance to the next stage or if they need to keep looking.

**Stage 4: Testing compatibility.** This step involves the potential candidate’s continuing in a determined portfolio while being exposed to every major facet of the church’s administration, financial structure, ministries, neighborhood, and community at large to develop cultural and organizational mastery. The goal of this important step is to determine cultural, philosophical, theological, and stylistic compatibility. The prophet Amos warns about ignoring this season: “*Can two people walk together without agreeing on the direction?*” (Amos 3:3 NLT). Glen Wolf summarizes this process as a hands-on four-stage progression. First, the mentor does it and the mentee watches; second, the mentee helps the mentor do it; third, the mentor helps the mentee do it, and fourth, the mentee does it and the mentor watches.<sup>14</sup>

**Stage 5: Organizational confirmation** involves the potential candidate being interviewed and considered by the board as “pastor-elect.” To gain organizational confirmation, some may even present this plan to the voting members and ask them to endorse the board’s sentiment through a vote. If selected, the pastor-elect continues to serve as the second in command and right arm to the lead pastor until a predetermined date or the lead pastor resigns, retires, or dies.

**Stage 6: Facilitating success.** This stage is a scheduled season where the lead pastor employs their authority, credibility, and trust to implement changes the successor will need to be successful. This may include alterations in staff, structure, and finances that play to the successor’s strengths and backfill their weaknesses. It also may involve giving ineffective, outdated or leader dependent ministries a graceful funeral. This allows the board and pastor to help the pastor-elect by giving them the highest likelihood of future success. Walter Harvey’s book compares this stage of mentored succession to an alley-oop pass in basketball. Harvey claims mentored succession requires the predecessor to set up plays that selflessly allow their successor to slam dunk the ball and energize the team and the crowd at the same time.<sup>15</sup>

**Stage 7: The handoff.** This stage occurs when the lead pastor resigns, retires, or dies. At that time, the pastor-elect is immediately presented to the church as a candidate to be voted upon. The previous pastor's role is to transition into a new phase of ministry while lending influence to their successor. Jeff Adams pastored Graceway Church in Kansas City, Missouri for 33 years. After a successful handoff to his successor, Jeff said, *"My success is inseparable from that of my successor... I was to use my influence to be the bridge for him to the congregation. I was to withdraw all of the funds from my credibility bank and use them to pave his road to success."*<sup>16</sup>

Most succession specialists agree that every church is different and although steps are helpful each plan must be customized to fit the needs and realities of their unique situation. In their book on the succession process, William Vandebloemen and Bird warn, *"While succession is uniformly important and urgent, there is no uniform approach that works for all churches."*<sup>17</sup> The seven stages above are only a suggested springboard to help you determine your own plan with practical action steps.

**D. Mentored succession and church governance.** At first glance, it may seem that mentored succession favors independent churches and poses problems for churches with congregational forms of governance where members elect the lead pastor. However, contemporary examples can be found where each model of church governance is able to embrace the mentored succession model through increased collaboration.

- **Presbyterian** forms of governance require the least amount of organizational-wide collaboration since the governing body is empowered to act on behalf of the members.
- **Episcopal** forms of governance can embrace mentored succession by planning ahead and seeking the blessing and cooperation of the appointing bishop or organizational overseer.
- **Congregational** forms of governance require the most methodical amount of collaboration because the voting members must be persuaded to pre-approve the concept because they see it as in the best interest of the church.

Most Assemblies of God churches embrace a hybrid presbyterian/congregational form of church government. While this form requires more collaboration, it allows the membership to approve the process and provide additional confirmation if needed.

Pastor Dick Iverson of City Bible Church in Portland, Oregon chose to use this method in what he called "a three-fold witness."<sup>18</sup> After much prayer and deliberation, Iverson believed Frank Damazio was to be his successor. City Bible Church is an independent Charismatic church with a pastor-led governance, thus not requiring the vote of the church members. However, Iverson saw wisdom in taking the matter to the congregation for their approval or affirmation. The three-fold witness ended up being experienced in the heart of the outgoing pastor (first confirmation), the conviction of the official board (second confirmation), and confirmed a third time through a vote of the church members.

Jeff Harlow pastored Crossroads Community Church in Kokomo, Indiana for 35 years before investing three years mentoring outsider Chris Duncan into a strategic succession. Harlow embraced their congregational form of government as a way to provide a "safety net" and

designed three congregational votes at different stages of the succession process. Harlow gave the rationale for this procedure in his book:

*“At some point in my leadership career, I decided to make voting my friend. I used votes to gain ownership and measure buy-in, not just to grab permission. If you don’t have the people’s approval of the new leader, you’re fighting a battle you will not win. A power play at this point will put the very team and stakeholders you love and appreciate at risk as well as jeopardizing the very mission you’re working to extend beyond your tenure.”<sup>19</sup>*

Harlow already knew what the Barna Group would confirm in their 2019 research project entitled, *Leadership Transitions: How Churches Navigate Pastoral Change and Stay Healthy*, where they reported, “As a general rule, the higher the degree of congregants involvement, the more positive they feel about the final outcome.”<sup>20</sup>

- E. Minimal requirements of mentored succession.** Although this model is new and proving to have great success, it does require the following ingredients that not all situations can provide.
- 1. The full commitment, willing involvement, and enthusiastic leadership of the outgoing pastor.** Gary Smith’s book outlines the following five things the departing pastor must bring to the table if the transition is to work.<sup>21</sup>
    - **God’s will.** The outgoing pastor must be convinced that the transition for them, the church, and the new leader is God’s will and be willing to devote the time and effort needed to ensure its success.
    - **Financial security.** The outgoing pastor must have a financial plan to provide for their family without reliance upon the church.
    - **Marital unity.** The outgoing pastor’s spouse (and family) must be fully supportive of helping the incoming pastor succeed.
    - **Future ministry.** The outgoing pastor must have clear direction on what their next stage of ministry will be.
    - **Humility.** The outgoing pastor must be prepared to meet the challenge with humility and see the church’s success as more important than their own. Without humility on both sides of the equation, there will be no successful succession.
  - 2. The collaboration and participation of the governing board.**
  - 3. Patience and respect for the outgoing pastor and the teachability of the successor.**
  - 4. The successor’s proven track record in the church, the affection of the people, and the ability to be a “DNA” carrier of the church’s culture and vision.**
  - 5. A written plan that clearly outlines a process, roles, dates, and “triggers” that start the gradual transfer of authority in several different areas.**
  - 6. Fiscal health of the church to finance the transition.**
- F. Stand-out literature and best practices.** Of all the material I have read on mentored succession, the following are standouts:
- 1. Lee Kricher’s book, *Seamless Pastoral Transition, 3 Imperatives – 6 Pitfalls*, is an excellent work focusing on the leadership the outgoing pastor must give to mentored succession. His transparency and practical examples from his own story are thought provoking.<sup>22</sup>**

2. **Will Heath's book**, *Embracing Succession, Helping Ministry Leaders Confront the Personal Side of Transition*, is a must read for any minister considering retirement.
3. **Gary Smith's book**, *Pastoral Transitions, A Seamless Handoff of Leadership*, may be the best on the practical, emotional, and spiritual maturity that will be required of the outgoing pastor.<sup>23</sup> It is a must read for any minister transitioning out after a long pastorate.
4. **Glen Wolf** is one of the first millennials to make an academic and thoughtful contribution to this body of work. Not only is he part of City Church in Sanford Florida's succession plan, but he got a doctorate in the subject because he wanted to get it right. His doctoral thesis is an outstanding read that maintains a wonderful balance between academic study and practical application. Chapter five recommends a list of things both the outgoing and incoming pastor must do to contribute to a successful succession. The entire work is outstanding, but chapter five alone is gold.<sup>24</sup>
5. **Tom Mullins' book**, *Passing the Leadership Baton: A Winning Transition Plan for Your Ministry*, is one of the finest books I have read concerning strategic succession.<sup>25</sup> Mullins is the founding pastor who led Christ Fellowship Church, a nondenominational, multisite church with more than 20,000 members. He and his board collaborated in one of the most successful planned successions in megachurch history. Although his book focuses on the mentored succession model, it is filled with wise, seasoned, and practical advice for pastors, boards, and successors.
6. **Jeff Harlow's book**, *Dancing with Cinderella: Leading a Healthy Church Transition*, outlines the wise integration of the mentored succession plan while being true to the congregational/presbyterian model of church governance.<sup>26</sup> His book is a practical and transparent example of how a strong leader can transition a church without being autocratic.
7. **Terry Roberts' book**, *Passing the Baton: Planning for Pastoral Transition*, gives an excellent perspective of the mentored success model from an Assemblies of God perspective. Roberts gives practical advice and examples of AG churches that have used this model with success.<sup>27</sup>
8. **Gary L. Johnson's book**, *Leader Shift: One Becomes Less While Another Becomes More*, offers several convincing arguments for this model.<sup>28</sup> Johnson gives some of the best scriptural applications as well as good and bad examples of mentored succession in leading corporations. He also recognizes that each plan must be tailor-made for the church while also outlining important pieces that must be present in all applications.
9. **Bob Russell's** 2010 groundbreaking book, *Transition Plan: 7 Secrets Every Leader Needs to Know*, was among the first to highlight the success of the mentored succession plan.<sup>29</sup> Russell served as the lead minister of Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky for 40 years until he retired in 2006. It is the sixth largest church in America with more than 26,000 members. Amazingly, four years after leaving, his transition plan has resulted in continued growth. The outline of Russell's plan has become a template for organizations of all kinds.
10. **Barna Group's** 2019 study entitled, *Leadership Transitions: How Churches Navigate Pastoral Change and Stay Healthy*, offered the following five goals for outgoing leaders:<sup>30</sup>
  - Communicate clearly, honestly, and often.
  - Target unity. Remember, it's about the Kingdom.
  - If you can, plan! Don't coast out but leave with intentionality.
  - Aim for a graceful exit. Make a hard thing easy for others.

- Keep asking why. Be aware of your emotions, motives, and insecurities.
11. **Dr. Jerry David's** book, *Honorable Design: The Art and Order of Generational Transition*, is unique in addressing the need for a culture of honor and how the outgoing pastor must take the lead in creating this needed culture.<sup>31</sup>
  12. **Expand Consulting Partners'** book entitled, *Tsunami, Open Secrets to Pastoral Succession & Transition* is more of an introduction to their paid consulting services and philosophy than a how-to resource. However, the book's three appendixes offers outstanding questions and checklists to help identify the needs and expectations of the outgoing and incoming pastor.<sup>32</sup>

**G. Application to your church.** The latest literature and study seem to confirm that planned succession is one of the best ways to sustain health in churches that have had a long-tenured lead pastor with community-wide influence. Every church needs two plans. The first is an "if our leader dies tomorrow" plan. The second is an intentional transfer of leadership to a qualified and divinely called successor. While pastoring a large church, I recognized that our bylaws did not give me the authority to determine either. That is why I tried to lead in a way that provided both options and would recommend the following for your own consideration.

1. **Plan A—Mentored Succession:** If possible, the lead pastor and board seek to mentor a successor using the seven stages above under the section entitled, "Stages of Mentored Succession." Provided the lead pastor continues to be effective, the successor would serve until the lead pastor's resignation, retirement, removal, or death. At that time, the successor would immediately become the board's candidate for the office of lead pastor.
2. **Plan B—Traditional Transition Plan:** Should your church ever experience a sudden and unexpected vacancy in the office of lead pastor and not have identified a qualified successor, the board would appoint an interim pastor and implement a board-driven transition plan. I would recommend the 13-step transition plan outlined in the *Rise Up* family of pastoral search resources available for free at [www.generationcone.org/riseup](http://www.generationcone.org/riseup).

Should the lead pastor and board desire to create a mentored succession plan, they should work together to formulate a written strategy. I am willing and able to offer any advice or coaching along the way.

## 5. THE IMPORTANCE OF AG CREDENTIALS [\(back to table\)](#)

Why is it important for a pastoral candidate to hold a General Council issued credential with the Assemblies of God? That is an honest question that deserves a thoughtful answer. The current leadership of the Assemblies of God in our network and on the national level values flexibility and freedom to lead the local church in the power of the Spirit.<sup>33</sup> To accomplish this, we lean toward a pastor-led model while affirming the autonomy of the local church to select a credentialed leader and a system of governance that works best for them. With these principles in mind, our Movement has chosen to embrace minimal requirements for a General Council affiliated church as it applies to their selection of a credentialed minister. One of the agreements that occurred when your church was granted the privilege of self-governance as a General Council church was the selection of a credentialed AG minister to serve as your lead pastor.

As the church is beginning the search process, allow me to share some combined wisdom from other district leaders in addressing this subject.<sup>34</sup> I would like to answer four practical questions:

- **Theological preparedness.** What levels of credentials are there in the Assemblies of God, how are they different, and why are they important?
- **Contributing factors.** What factors most often contribute to a church being out of compliance regarding this issue?
- **Potential risks.** What are the risks a church exposes themselves to when considering a lead pastor who does not have credentials with the Assemblies of God?
- **Possible solutions.** What are some practical ways to resolve this tension should a church's search committee feel drawn to a minister who is not credentialed with the Assemblies of God?

**A. Theological preparedness.** Although your church may appreciate and want your new pastor to be theologically prepared, most search committees are unfamiliar with the different levels and requirements of an Assemblies of God credential. Ministerial credentialing is the method by which an ecclesiastical authority acknowledges the divine call and qualifications of a person to serve in ministry. In most denominations, credentialing is only available to men or women who meet the biblical qualifications outlined in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. These people fulfill one of the types of equipping ministries described in Ephesians 4:11. In the Assemblies of God, this endorsement is usually in the form of certification, licensing, or ordination.

If an applicant has graduated from an accredited Assemblies of God school with a degree in Bible, theology, ministerial studies, or other church-related major, they may have already satisfied some or all the educational requirements. There are also some cases in which life experience or the transfer of a ministerial credential from another denomination may meet some or all the Assemblies of God requirements. In most cases, however, those achieving these levels will have fulfilled the following requirements:

1. **Certified.** The entry level credential in the Assemblies of God is called certified. Those who are granted certification have met the minimal educational requirements for that level, shown promise of usefulness for gospel work, exhibited evidence of a divine call, and been

actively engaged in some aspect of ministry. Those who are certified have successfully completed the following classes:

- New Testament Survey
- Old Testament Survey
- Christ in the Synoptic Gospels
- Introduction to Hermeneutics
- Relationships and Ethics in Ministry
- Beginning Ministerial Internship
- Introduction to Pentecostal Doctrine
- Intro to Theology: A Pentecostal Perspective
- Assemblies of God History, Missions, and Governance
- A Spirit-Empowered Church

In addition, they have also passed the Bible Knowledge and Doctrine exams as well as credit and background checks and have been interviewed by their local presbyter and sectional committee, recommended by the Network Presbytery, and approved by the General Council of the Assemblies of God. Certified ministers holding current ministerial credentials are not eligible to vote in the business meetings at District and General Councils or to serve as district officers, General Council officers, executive directors, Executive Presbyters, and General Presbyters. However, they are authorized to perform the ordinances and ceremonies (sacerdotal functions) of the church. In the Rocky Mountain Ministry Network, certified ministers are eligible to participate in most of the normal resources, training and seminars provided by the Network office.

**2. Licensed.** The intermediate level credential in the Assemblies of God is called licensed. Those who are granted this credential have met the minimal educational requirements; shown clear evidence of a divine call, character, and preparation suitable for that calling; have practical ministry experience; and shown an evident commitment to devote their life in service to the proclamation of the Gospel. Those who are licensed have also successfully completed the classes for the certified level as well as the following classes:

- Acts
- Prison Epistles
- The Local Church in Evangelism
- Romans
- Introduction to Homiletics
- Effective Leadership
- Intro to AG Missions
- Conflict Management
- Intermediate Ministerial Internship
- Eschatology

In addition, they have also passed the Bible Knowledge, Doctrine, and AG Polity exams as well as credit and background checks and have been interviewed by their presbyter and sectional committee, recommended by the Network Presbytery, and approved by the General Council of the Assemblies of God. Licensed ministers holding current ministerial



credentials are eligible to vote in the business meetings at District and General Councils but ineligible to serve as district officers, General Council officers, executive directors, Executive Presbyters, and General Presbyters. However, they are authorized to perform the ordinances and ceremonies (sacerdotal functions) of the church. In the Rocky Mountain Ministry Network, licensed ministers are eligible to participate in most of the normal resources, training and seminars provided by the Network office. In addition, they are also eligible for free admission into our 16-week cohort on how to prepare for a lead pastorate. More information on the Charles T. Crabtree School of Pastoral Ministry is available at [this link](#).

**3. Ordained.** Ordination is the highest and most coveted level of credential. Those who are granted ordination have met the minimum educational requirements for that level, shown evidence of a divine call, possessed a ministerial license, and been observed for a period of at least two years and found to have met the biblical qualifications outlined in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:7-9. Those who are ordained have successfully completed the classes for the certified and licensed level as well as the following classes:

- Corinthian Correspondence
- Pentateuch
- Poetic Books
- Preaching in the Contemporary World
- Church Admin, Finance, and Law
- Pastoral Ministry
- Advance Ministerial Internship
- Prayer and Worship

In addition, they have also passed the Bible Knowledge, Doctrine, and AG polity exams as well as credit and background checks and have been certified and licensed, interviewed by the Executive Presbytery, recommended by the Network Presbytery, approved by the General Council of the Assemblies of God, and recognized in a formal ordination service involving an ordination charge and the laying on of hands by the Network's eldership. Ordained ministers holding current ministerial credentials are eligible to vote in the business meetings at District and General Councils and eligible to serve as district officers, General Council officers, executive directors, Executive Presbyters, and General Presbyters. They are also authorized to perform the ordinances and ceremonies (sacerdotal functions) of the church.

In the Rocky Mountain Ministry Network, ordained ministers are eligible to participate in most of the normal resources, training and seminars provided by the Network office. In addition, they are eligible for the following leadership development opportunities.

- **CTC School of Pastoral Ministry.** This is a free 16-week cohort on how to prepare for a lead pastorate. More information on the Charles T. Crabtree School of Pastoral Ministry is available at [this link](#).
- **Trinity Ordination Scholarship.** This is a 50% discount on all Masters and PhD programs at Trinity Bible College and Graduate School. More information on the Trinity Ordination Scholarship is available at [this link](#).

On another note, don't be shy about informing promising candidates about these benefit that would be available to them should they relocate to the Rocky Mountain Ministry Network!

When selecting a candidate, your team will want to know what level of ministerial credential is needed to pastor your church, what level of credential your candidate has, and what plan they may have to advance in ministerial training. You will also want to check your bylaws to see if they prescribe a specific level of credential your lead pastor will be required to have. For additional information concerning how to apply, advance, transfer, or renew a ministerial credential, click [this link](#).

**B. Contributing factors.** There are several reasons why an AG church may seek to elect a non-AG minister to serve as their lead pastor. It is usually the result of one or more of the following factors:

1. **Neglect.** A church may either fail to consult or overlook the legal requirements and/or qualifications prescribed in their bylaws or that of the General Council.
2. **Endearment.** A church may have a current associate pastor, a minister who has a history with the church, or a respected lay leader who does not currently have an AG credential who has endeared themselves to the church. Those endeared to these individuals may want them considered as an exception and a favored candidate when filling a pastoral vacancy.
3. **Convenience.** A church may have a respected minister within the church or community who does not have an AG credential but has offered their services and/or expressed interest in pastoring the church. The offer may seem like a quick and convenient way to fill a vacancy.
4. **Disappointing experiences.** A church, pastor, network, or denominational official may have allowed a disappointing or painful experience to create a culture of mistrust. Fault in these cases may have been shared on both sides of the equation, or one side might have allowed the relationship to deteriorate.
5. **Poisoned well.** A church may have been influenced by a disgruntled pastor or potential candidate who has had a strained relationship with their credentialing body and chosen to speak critically of the Assemblies of God.
6. **Overconfidence.** A church board may feel their intimate knowledge of their church or corporate hiring procedures automatically qualifies them in the area of pastoral selections. They may mistakenly think that hiring people in one specific field of business qualifies them to hire a spiritual leader in an entirely different "industry." As a result, they may fail to seek professional advice or take time to educate themselves.
7. **Good intentions.** A church may make an unwise exception, believing the candidate will pursue a credential once elected. In some cases, the candidate may have even committed to pursuing an AG credential if elected; however, the busyness of ministry or lack of personal initiative often prevents progress toward a credential after the election.
8. **Geographic or financial challenges.** A church may be small and/or located in a remote area that requires a bivocational pastor, and there are no credentialed ministers available to serve as the pastor.
9. **Inability to qualify.** A church's search committee may unknowingly decide on a candidate who is unable to qualify for an AG credential due to the candidate's past. This usually involves something that would disqualify them from receiving an AG credential such as a previous divorce that cannot be recognized, documented abuse, lack of personal experience

regarding Spirit baptism, dismissal, being under discipline by a credentialing organization, or other disqualifications.

- 10. Refusal of candidate or board.** A church may elect a lead pastor who, for personal reasons, refuses to seek an Assemblies of God credential. On the other hand, a few boards have favored noncredentialed AG pastors so the church can retain the minister's tithe instead of sending it to the district/network and General Council.

**C. Potential risks.** There are considerable risks a church exposes themselves to when electing a minister that does not have credentials with the Assemblies of God. Although unknown to most pulpit committees, district officials have witnessed the realities of unpleasant consequences resulting from an Assemblies of God church electing a non-AG minister to serve as their lead pastor. Please understand that non-AG ministers are not bad, substandard, or even dangerous in and of themselves. However, in many cases, there are undeniable and unintentional consequences with electing a non-AG pastor to lead an AG church. These would include the following possibilities:

- 1. Decreasing exposure.** As the new pastor introduces the church to their own preferred associations and culture, the church will gradually experience less and less AG associations through theology, governance, guest speakers, missionaries, ministry programs, regional events, and interchurch activities.
- 2. Organizational drift.** When it comes to pastoral transitions, churches are a lot like wood chips in a river. They tend to go with the flow, force, and direction of the current. In the same way, churches led by non-AG pastors will slowly start to be carried downstream by the new leader's past associations, preferences, governance, relational circles, and doctrine. As an extreme application of decreasing exposure mentioned above, the worst-case scenario of this consequence can result in disaffiliation. Investing time and prayer is important for the church to make sure they want and need to go where the current will carry them.
- 3. Irreconcilable incompatibility.** Every church culture involves a triad of doctrine, governance, and vision. A few Spirit-filled denominations have similar doctrine, governance, and visionary structures that can make interdenominational ministry possible. However, disparity in any of these three components can create polarizing incompatibility. The likelihood of incompatibility increases exponentially when interdenominational and independent crossbreeding occurs. A minister may share similar doctrinal beliefs with an Assemblies of God church but embrace a very different leadership style and governance structure. It is also possible that a noncredentialed candidate may share the church's preferred governance but have very dissimilar doctrinal beliefs. For example, the Assemblies of God and Foursquare have nearly identical doctrinal statements but very different governance structures and convictions about the sovereignty of the local church. On the other hand, the Seventh Day Adventist and the Assemblies of God share a common governance structure and respect for the sovereignty of the local church but have diametrically different doctrinal beliefs. Spirit-filled ministers from independent/nondenominational churches may share similar Pentecostal doctrines but prefer systems offering less accountability when it comes to finance, membership, and decision making. That is why the likelihood of doctrinal, structural, and cultural compatibility is greatest when a candidate holds an Assemblies of God credential.

4. **Negligent governance.** If a church's bylaws require the lead pastor to have an AG credential, the church must comply. Most church bylaws prescribe *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* as their parliamentary authority. That means the bylaws must be followed implicitly regarding procedures for pastoral elections.

*When a society or an assembly has adopted a particular parliamentary manual—such as this book—as its authority, the rules contained in that manual are binding upon it in all cases where they are not inconsistent with the bylaws (or constitution) of the body, any of its special rules of order, or any provisions of local, state, or national law applying to the particular type of organization.*<sup>35</sup>

According to *Robert's Rules of Order*, the bylaws cannot be suspended without that option being prescribed in the church's bylaws:

*The Bylaws “cannot be suspended (with the exception of clauses that provide for their own suspension under specified conditions)”.*<sup>36</sup>

*Rules contained in the bylaws (or constitution) cannot be suspended—no matter how large the vote in favor of doing so or how inconvenient the rule in question may be—unless the particular rule specifically provides for its own suspension.*<sup>37</sup>

If the search committee ignores the bylaws, what kind of example is being set for the members when they want to do the same thing in other areas? A lack of organizational integrity will only create a culture of negligent governance.

5. **Inadequate accountability.** Accountability is greater and most effective on all fronts when a church and its lead pastor share the same credentialing authority, ecclesiastical governance, and doctrinal statements. When the lead pastor is not under the same ecclesiastical authority as the church they pastor, there is a greater propensity for a lack of accountability, doctrinal deviation, abuses in authority, and financial indiscretion. In addition, should there be any impropriety on the part of the church's future leadership, the district/network or General Council will have no way of addressing the church's concerns, disciplining, or restoring the pastor to ministry.
6. **Legal exposure.** If the church's Articles of Incorporation, constitution, or bylaws require that the lead pastor be credentialed with the AG, those in authority cannot ignore them without being complicit in an illegitimate election. No vote, no matter how large, can suspend, ignore, or conflict with the bylaws regarding the election of the lead pastor, chair of the board, or president of the corporation. Again, *Robert's Rules of Order* says:

*Rules contained in the bylaws (or constitution) cannot be suspended—no matter how large the vote in favor of doing so or how inconvenient the rule in question may be—unless the particular rule specifically provides for its own suspension.*<sup>38</sup>

Should any member of the church at any time feel disillusioned, misled, or concerned enough to challenge the validity of the election, the decision may cause a lack of trust in the leadership community, unnecessary conflict within the church, and potential litigation regarding the legitimacy of the election. Should the election be contested legally, the courts

will most certainly examine compliance with the church's bylaws as well as the previous consent to be governed by the Assemblies of God's criteria for all General Council affiliated churches. Furthermore, if the insurance company's investigation reveals that the church ignored or violated their own bylaws or those outlining criteria for the church's affiliation (General Council bylaws), they will most likely decline to cover expenses related to the church's claim.

7. **General Council status.** The only body authorized to grant a church a Certificate of Affiliation with the Assemblies of God is The General Council of the Assemblies of God. The General Council has outlined a short list of minimal governance requirements for all churches affiliated with the Assemblies of God. This document has only seven minimal governance requirements of which the second reads:

*A General Council affiliated church must accept the Assemblies of God tenets of faith and be amenable to applicable General Council and district council constitutions and bylaws to include the provision for a lead pastor who is credentialed with the Assemblies of God.<sup>39</sup>*

In addition, the General Council constitution requires all affiliated churches to be led by lead pastors who are credentialed when it requires each church to:

*Make provision for a pastor who is a credentialed minister in good standing with the General Council and a district council.<sup>40</sup>*

In the event the "minimal requirements" have not been attained, the General Council Constitution requires the church to:

*Revert to district affiliated status until the minimal requirements for General Council affiliation have been attained, unless an exception has been granted by the district in accordance with the provisions of the General Council Constitution.<sup>41</sup>*

In addition, should the pastor, a majority of the official board of the church, or a petition signed by 30 percent of the voting members challenge the validity of the election based upon the qualifications of the pastor, the district and/or General Council:

*May act to bring the church under district supervision and, when necessary, revert it from General Council status to district affiliated status until the governing entity considers the problem resolved.<sup>42</sup>*

8. **Loss of assets.** As a district superintendent/network pastor, my service enables me to view the network from the "top of the mast," so to speak. I see a trend growing larger on the horizon, and I am deeply concerned. We are losing sacred space, hard-won property, and critical beachheads in strategic communities for the following three reasons:

- Patterns of declining attendance may result in a church's inability to maintain staff and remain current on mortgage payments and maintenance, causing the property to be sold in the name of downsizing.

- The assimilation of smaller churches that merge with larger works has also resulted in the liquidation of the smaller church's property only to have the proceeds absorbed into the bank account of the larger work. In these cases, we lose property and presence that took decades to acquire.
- A district and General Council may also lose property purchased by those associated with the organization should it disaffiliate with the Assemblies of God and take the assets with them. In many cases, this drift and departure was driven by a lead pastor who was either disgruntled or lacked an Assemblies of God credential.

In nearly every case, a mournful and regretful deacon board wished they had not ignored the early warning signs. The unintended cost was the loss of property won by a generation who generously gave of their time, talents, and treasures, believing those who followed them would honor their sacrifice.

**D. Possible solutions.** Following are some ways (listed in prioritized order) to collaborate with the district and work towards a possible solution should the board or search committee find themselves wanting to consider a non-AG lead pastor:

- 1. Seek seasoned advice.** Any small, medium, or large church considering a non-AG pastor should seek the advice of the district superintendent/network pastor. For example, small, remote, and rural churches can find it difficult to identify healthy, available, and qualified ministers. The superintendent/network pastor can help explore creative solutions such as a provisional credential, PAC (Parent Affiliated Church) cohort under the pastoral supervision of a presbyter, or even a collaborative partnership with other churches and leaders in the network. They have navigated these waters before, can give practical advice, help with an interview of a non-AG candidate, and assist in finding a win/win solution for the situation.
- 2. Check the bylaws.** Most church bylaws prescribe *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* as their parliamentary authority. That means that the bylaws must be followed implicitly regarding procedures for pastoral elections. Any procedure not outlined in the bylaws must not conflict with the rules contained in the latest edition of *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*, so be sure to check the bylaws concerning issues related to the lead pastor's election. This would include but not be limited to the specific level of credential required (certified, licensed, or ordained), how they are nominated, term of office, form of voting, type of vote, scope of meeting notice, requirements of prior notice, agenda prescriptions, minutes, and notification to the district/network office.
- 3. Explore compatibility.** When considering the question of non-AG leadership, take the time to collaborate with others to create a list of subjects that must be vetted. This may include things like the non-AG candidate's:
  - Previous experiences with AG doctrine, position on spiritual gifts, and other topics of relevance to the church's history as an AG work.
  - Personal preferences regarding governance; accountability; and the role of pastors, boards, and staff.
  - Compatibility with the church's existing bylaws, doctrinal statements, and culture.
  - Current mentors, preferred conferences, favored resources, and past denominational associations.

- References, history, denominational affiliations, collaborative skills, ministry track record, and background check.
  - Other items that are important to the board and official members of the church.
- 4. Create time to qualify.** The average pastoral search process in the Assemblies of God is between three and eight months, depending on the size of the church. Even the shortest side of that timeline is sufficient for a candidate to acquire the lowest level of credential with the Assemblies of God through online courses.<sup>43</sup> If the minister the board is seriously contemplating is not credentialed with the AG, inform the candidate that they have three months to acquire the lowest level of credential. This level is called “Certificate of Ministry” and can be completed in about three months if assertively pursued through online correspondence courses with Berean School of the Bible.<sup>44</sup> In the meantime, the board can continue exploring other candidates in the event the primary candidate is unable to acquire the needed credential. The district/network may be able to assist in fulfilling the requirements in an accelerated timeframe. Whatever the candidate’s response may be to this option, the board will have an opportunity to see what they can expect in the future.

Don Popineau is an example of this kind of collaborative approach. After retiring from a career as a residential painter, Don was asked by his pastor to join his church’s pastoral staff. Believing every minister should hold a credential, his pastor’s only requirement was that Don acquire a credential. Despite only having an eleventh-grade formal education, this dedicated 55-year-old man enrolled in Berean School of the Bible correspondence courses and studied every night. In only three months, Don completed the minimal requirements and was granted the Assemblies of God’s lowest level of credential (certified minister). Three months later, he finished the second level of credential (licensed minister) and went on to successfully serve his pastor and church for many years as an associate pastor.<sup>45</sup>

- 5. Seek a provisional credential.** If the church is small, in a rural area, or has already elected a noncredentialed lead pastor, they may request the district/network to grant a provisional credential that will allow the candidate to serve while pursuing a conventional credential. A Certificate of Ministry may be issued on a provisional basis to a person who has not met all the credentialing requirements but who is deemed by the district Credentials Committee to be essential to the continuity of a church or a ministry. The provisional certificate has less requirements than the certified level for the person working on educational requirements and is an option for getting a minister into the credentialing pipeline. Life experience and exception requests are looked at favorably when the minister is being sought after or already in place as a lead pastor yet needs credentials. However, the reason for such a provisional issuance must be ministry driven; and the justification for its use is terminated when the minister ceases to be involved in the ministry for which it was initially granted unless the minister accepts another qualifying assignment.<sup>46</sup> It should be noted that this option is not a permanent substitute for a credential but only creates the potential for a three-year window by which a candidate must acquire a Certificate of Ministry.
- 6. Seek district affiliated status.** Because the church does not have an AG credentialed lead pastor and thus is unable to meet the minimal requirements of a General Council affiliated church, a majority of the board can vote to request the district/network to revert the church to district affiliated status until they are able to qualify as a General Council affiliated church.<sup>47</sup> While under district affiliated status, the existing board becomes an advisory



committee under the supervision of the district council until the church is able to qualify again for General Council affiliation.

7. **Become a PAC church.** A PAC (Parent Affiliated Church) is an assembly that is under the supervision of a parent church in accordance with the parent church's constitution and bylaws.<sup>48</sup> Although PAC churches do not require General Council credentialed ministers, they do require an Assemblies of God local church-based credential for all parent affiliated church pastors, including background checks. PAC churches are not autonomous and submit themselves to the leadership, governance structure, and vision of the parent church. Should the church later qualify for General Council status, they can apply for sovereignty after securing the approval of the parent church.
8. **Rectify quickly.** If the church elected a non-AG minister and is not compliant with the General Council's affiliated church standard that lead pastors be credentialed, notify the district superintendent/network pastor immediately.<sup>49</sup> They can help identify and explore solutions to this unique situation.

Pastoral transitions are a lot like heart transplants. Although there can be some variance in blood type, group compatibility between the donor and the recipient is required to reduce the risk of rejection. If that minimal compatibility is not there, the recipient's immune system will recognize the donor organ as foreign and reject it. This results in trauma to the entire body in the form of chest pains, chronic fatigue, fever, shortness of breath, drops in blood pressure, aches, pains, fainting, and even death. The same principle holds true with churches. It is important to note that there are success stories of non-AG pastors effectively leading AG churches. In nearly every case, however, some level of minimal compatibility existed beforehand and full disclosure occurred between the candidate, search committee, district/network, and church members. If a board feels pushed by a non-AG candidate's deadline or pressured by church members to rush the process or ignore the bylaws, chances are they are moving too fast. Slow down, consult the General Council bylaws, seek district/network advice, and wait for God's will to be revealed and confirmed.

## 6. MENTORING INTERNAL CANDIDATES [\(back to table\)](#)

When doing an organ transplant, doctors look first at family members who share the same genes. Why? Because they already possess the same DNA—a molecule in the body that carries all the genetic information about a person. Proven internal candidates can be organizational DNA carriers who are more easily able to translate and transfer the vision, values, and culture of your church. That is why more and more churches of over 500 are embracing succession plans that either pre-appoint, groom, or elect internal candidates already serving on staff. They have the church's culture in their blood and already know what it takes outsiders two to three years to learn.

However, dealing with internal candidates can be a high-stakes game. Once an internal candidate throws their hat in the ring, things can get very complicated. They may be respected but not qualified or qualified but not respected. They may even be both but not desirable or lack both respect and qualifications. Once rejected, they can become hurt, difficult, and divisive. Some may even stick around to make things difficult for the new pastor who they perceived robbed them of a perfect opportunity.

In this chapter, we will talk about all things related to internal candidates and tackle some of the toughest questions.

- A. Why is this model gaining popularity?** There are good reasons why this type of succession plan is gaining momentum. Even if they are extremely talented, it takes most outside candidates three to five years to learn the city, the unique culture of the church, and build enough credibility with the people to lead them into bold new adventures. The success rate of outside candidates who follow long-term predecessors is disappointingly low and the turnover rate high. If outside candidates are not careful, they can introduce change that feels so “imported” that people no longer feel comfortable in the church and end up leaving. A second level of staff and board changes in the months following can magnify the degree of “change trauma” to the church. Corporate America seems to have figured this out long before the church. In his bestselling book, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't*, Jim Collins set out to discover what makes some businesses great while others flounder and fail. Collins identified several common denominators that successful businesses share. Ten out of eleven businesses that went from good to great found CEOs from within the company.<sup>50</sup>
- B. What are the advantages of internal candidates?** Assuming the church has a qualified staff member with lead pastor potential, there are many advantages to this model. A qualified and respected internal candidate can lead with instant familiarity of existing leadership, people, culture, and community. Like veteran missionaries, they understand the culture, structures, and values of the church. In his book on pastoral transitions, Warren Bird warns search committees of what he calls the “rebounding effect.” This occurs when a church hires someone so opposite and unlike the previous pastor that it puts the church in culture shock.<sup>51</sup> Internal candidates, especially ones at least 20 years younger than the previous pastor, know the past but are also in touch with future trends and generations. They also understand the church's history, policies, and existing staff. The church also has a better chance of not experiencing the normal declines in attendance, giving, and momentum that an interim period can bring. Internal staff members

have the advantage of understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the church, its prior pastor, and existing workers. The transition can feel more like getting a new doctor than a heart transplant. Unlike outsiders who may need two to three years to transition, qualified internal candidates are able to maximize the months and years immediately after their election.<sup>52</sup>

- C. What are the disadvantages of this model?** Even though this model is becoming the norm in larger churches, there are some disadvantages that need to be addressed. Some succession plans get messy and political. Joseph Umidi cautions, “An associate pastor, for example, who may be well-liked and respected in their present role, may not make a suitable senior pastor in the same organization.”<sup>53</sup> The internal candidate may need different support staff than their predecessor to adequately shore up their weaknesses. The church can also run the risk of losing the internal candidate or staging a potential rivalry with an outside candidate if the internal candidate is not selected. The internal candidate already has a following that can be disappointed and hurt should they not be selected. It is also possible the internal candidate may lack an unbiased perspective of the sweeping change a church may desperately need to stay relevant. When an internal candidate takes the initiative to apply for the job, options seem fewer should they not be selected. However, if the board approaches an internal candidate and then does not select them, it presents a very difficult challenge for the new pastor. The situation requires sensitivity and wisdom.
- D. In what order should an internal candidate be considered?** Consultants have differing opinions about when a qualified internal candidate should be considered. Some say considering internal candidates in the beginning honors their commitment and deals with the most difficult decisions first. Others say considering outside candidates first and the internal candidate last gives everyone the peace of knowing they made the right choice. There are two possible approaches concerning how internal candidates who either apply or are formally approached by the search committee can be considered.
- 1. Considered first.** The internal candidate should be considered before external candidates with the understanding that should they not be selected; they will agree to resign and depart with a generous severance package BEFORE the new pastor arrives.
  - 2. Considered last.** The internal candidate is considered last after all qualified external candidates have been considered. Should they not be selected, they agree to resign and depart immediately with an agreed-upon severance package.

The purpose of securing their agreement to depart if not selected is not intended to be mean-spirited or insensitive. It is founded upon the wisdom that requiring a newly elected pastor to work with a person who believed they were called to lead the church would be unreasonable, unwise, and divide the loyalties and emotions of the people at a time when they need to be unified behind one leader.<sup>54</sup>

There is no easy answer to this question; and the best solution will depend upon the unique situation, the character of the internal candidate, and the strength of their following. The only thing consultants seem to agree upon is that a qualified internal candidate should be considered. William Vanderbloemen, CEO of the leading pastoral search firm wrote, “This is a valuable lesson for search committees. Do not overlook internal candidates.”<sup>55</sup> The board will need to give serious prayer and deliberation to this matter in the event a qualified candidate is already on your staff.

## 7. FUNDING THE TRANSITION [\(back to table\)](#)

Searching for a pastor or identifying a successor is a significant expense worthy of the benefits it brings. Cutting corners only results in depriving your church of the experiences and resources needed to make wise decisions and identify God's will. The Bible encourages us to be as strategic with our budgeting as we are with our process:

*"For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish'" (Luke 14:28-30 ESV).*

When anticipating expenses, it is important to distinguish between hard and hidden costs. Hard costs include expenses directly related to the search process while hidden costs include expenses indirectly related to the transition as a whole.

**A. Hidden costs.** Many churches fail to consider the indirect costs of a pastoral transition. Authors Carolyn Weese and J. Russell Crabtree dedicated an entire chapter of their book to warning church boards of the staggering financial impact of a pastoral search. As consultants specializing in pastoral transitions, they listed some of the following considerations among their list of hidden costs:<sup>56</sup>

1. **Attendance.** Nearly all churches in pastoral transition experience a 10-15 percent decrease in attendance that will take the new pastor one to two years to regain.
2. **Income.** Nearly all churches in pastoral transition experience a 10-15 percent decrease in tithes and offerings that will take the new pastor between one to two years to regain. The decrease in income is usually about 5% lower than the percentage of decreased attendance.
3. **New members.** Within the first six months of a pastoral transition, churches experience a 50 percent decrease in visitors, new members, and families deciding to make your church their new church home.
4. **Transition expenses.** Most churches experiencing a pastoral transition will end up spending at least 125% of the previous pastor's salary between decreased giving and expenses related to the entire transition process from beginning to end. The expenses include things like farewell expenses related to the exiting pastor, interim pastor, guest speaker costs, searching for candidates, interviewing candidates, salary realignments, relocating a new pastor, assimilating the new pastor into the work environment, and the possible loss of revenue related to decreased attendance and giving.
5. **Salaries.** Most churches experiencing a pastoral transition (especially those losing long-term pastors) find their current salary is around ten percent lower than the industry norm and needs to be increased to appeal to competent candidates.
6. **Staff adjustments.** Most churches with multiple staff members who experience a pastoral transition will also experience expenses related to additional staff turnover both before and after the placement of a new pastor. This second wave of change is normal and part of the transition process.

- 7. Momentum.** Most churches experiencing a pastoral transition will experience a drop in momentum during the search process. This momentum usually takes one year to totally recover.

Weese and Crabtree warn that unreasonable expectations of the new pastor during the vulnerable three years that follow a transition can also create a recurring cycle of transition and financial limitations. These unrealistic expectations commonly include things like launching new ministries, exceeding past attendance, income and ministry involvement levels, and launching capital/building campaigns before the church has recuperated from the three-year transition cycle. They estimate that the total financial cost between expenses and loss of income will exceed twice the annual compensation package of the lead pastor—10-15 percent of a church's total operating budget.<sup>57</sup> Another study reported that the hidden costs, unrealistic expectations, and transitional challenges alone result in 40 percent of new leaders failing within the first eighteen months of entering a new leadership role.<sup>58</sup> The takeaway seems to be three things:

- **Commitment.** The church's leadership must be willing to invest the time needed to do a pastoral transition right.
- **Initiative.** The church board and search committee must be willing to take the initiative in removing apparent obstacles before the new pastor arrives or is elected.
- **Patience.** The church must give the new pastor two to three years to help the church recover and navigate the learning curve of a new culture, city, and community.

Pastor Jeff Harlow said it best: "Our churches simply do not have the margins in missional momentum, money, and people to suffer a botched handoff."<sup>59</sup>

- B. Hard costs.** Because transition is inevitable, expenses related to it are also unavoidable. Any transition is going to involve "best case," "likely case," and "worst case" scenarios. Your team should spend time creating a transition budget and estimating transition expenses for your church. When doing so, I would suggest basing it off the following assumptions and a "worst case" scenario.

- 1. Feasibility study.** Research and bidding based on actual expenses at the time of your estimation.
- 2. Eight-month process.** This budget should assume the entire search process from start to finish will be approximately eight months. Although research reveals the national average for a pastoral transition is 12-24 months, I feel the use of the *Rise Up* family of resources can empower you to shave off time and do a very thorough job in or around eight months. The rationale for this projection is based on several factors. First, if you are like most churches, your bylaws have already charged the board to act as a pastoral search committee. That means you are months ahead of churches that require a separate pastoral search committee which needs to be nominated, vetted, selected, and educated concerning their role. Second, the compilation of best practices in this resource has the potential to shave 3-4 months off the learning curve. Third, your board already has experience and chemistry working with each other and deliberating as a group. The *Rise Up* family of transition resources are available at [this link](#).

3. **One-time expenses.** The Rise Up transition resources include an excel budget template. On the template, one-time expenses that occur all at one time are not listed in the monthly column but carried over to the column labeled “8-month total.”
4. **Economic variables.** Your budget should assume individual expenses will be on the higher end of available options at the time of your estimation. However, several factors may result in lower estimates. For example, the process may be shorter and actual expenses may be lower due to less travel, shorter distances, smaller family size, economic realities, cost savings, or the possibility of a strong internal candidate. There is also the possibility that the data used to determine your budget will become obsolete or that an unforeseen event may lengthen the process. Consequently, the budget would need to be increased.

A customizable Excel template of the transition budget can be downloaded from at [this link](#).

- C. **Transition fund.** As stated, your transition is going to involve a “best case,” “likely case,” and “worst case” scenario. I believe you should hope for the best but plan for the worst by facilitating a transition fund equal to at least one month of the church’s total income.

1. **Fund existence.** When I created Highpoint’s transition fund, I used an existing but empty church bank account to help underwrite transition expenses and finance a new pastor’s early initiatives. This helps isolated donations and expenses to a separate account.
2. **Faith deposits.** If you are the pastor, board, or search committee creating this fund for the unforeseen future, I would encourage you and your spouse to be the first ones to make a significant donation to the fund. If at some point you feel comfortable revealing the plan and training an advance team, I would also ask them to contribute as well. If you are a board member and just getting started, I would suggest you ask every deacon to do their very best to give something equal to a month’s tithes BEFORE you ask the church to support the fund later. In the Old Testament, the waters of the Jordan did not part until the leaders walked in first (Joshua 3:13).
3. **Church participation.** Members and adherents can then be asked to join the leadership community and contribute to the fund above their normal tithes and offerings as part of the sustainability initiative.
4. **Frugality encouraged.** *“The wise store up choice food and olive oil, but fools gulp theirs down”* (Proverbs 21:20 NIV). That is why I would encourage the board to use the fund moderately to ensure a significant amount is left to finance the new pastor’s first initiatives. That will be a great incentive for potential candidates or a blessing to an internal candidate.

- D. **Investing in future transitions.** Preparing your new pastor’s remuneration agreement is a wonderful opportunity to make an investment into future transitions. Transition and succession specialist William Vanderbloemen claims that one of the biggest obstacles to succession is the outgoing pastor’s failure to plan for retirement. Vanderbloemen believes one of the best things a board can do is to invest in future transitions by including \$2,000-\$3,000 each year in the annual budget for the current pastor to receive professional coaching for retirement planning. Vanderbloemen advises boards to set this up as a reimbursable expense requiring receipts from a certified financial planner of the pastor’s own choice. He also warns boards not to assign a consultant or use one from within the church. If a church is unable to afford that much on an annual basis, it would at least be wise to consider funding a small savings account of \$500 a year. This would then allow your lead pastor to access the balance every five years to evaluate

their retirement plan with a professional. You can download a customizable remuneration template in Microsoft Excel format at [this link](#).

I am convinced that having a budget and a transition fund is as important to this process as the Holy Spirit's direction. Proverbs 27:12 reminds us that *"A prudent person foresees danger and takes precautions. The simpleton goes blindly on and suffers the consequences"* (NLT).



## 8. SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVE ([back to table](#))

Statistics repeatedly reveal that churches in pastoral transition experience a decline in morale, momentum, attendance, and giving.<sup>60</sup> However, instead of just accepting the gravitational pull of transition, why not believe God to sustain or even increase resources and engagement during this time. Why not step out like Joshua and believe God to defy gravity and enable an anomaly of faith.

*“On the day the Lord gave the Amorites over to Israel, Joshua said to the Lord in the presence of Israel: “Sun, stand still over Gibeon, and you, moon, over the Valley of Aijalon.” So, the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, till the nation avenged itself on its enemies, as it is written in the Book of Jashar. The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day. There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the Lord listened to a human being. Surely the Lord was fighting for Israel!” (Joshua 10:12-14 NIV).*

That is why you should consider launching a sustainability initiative that teaches your people about God’s purpose for leadership transitions and encourages them to recognize that change is part of God’s growth process. It is important for them to understand that to benefit from this time, they should stick around and sustain current levels of giving and participation. It is a wonderful opportunity to be intentional about making your church stronger rather than weaker.

- A. Initiative purpose.** The purpose of a sustainability initiative is to be proactive in building faith to overcome the common declines in attendance, engagement and giving so common in pastoral transitions.
- B. Initiative benefits.** There are many powerful benefits of a sustainability initiative. Here are few.
  - 1. **Helping** your entire congregation understand the Biblical purpose for leadership transitions.
  - 2. **Giving** your people a powerful 40-day prayer guide with a daily focus to provide a 360° spiritual covering over everyone involved in the transition.
  - 3. **Fortifying** your church from the normal decreases in attendance, giving and engagement so often associated with pastoral transitions.
  - 4. **Empowering** your people by giving them practical things they can do to help the church thrive during the pastoral transition.
  - 5. **Teaching** your people to embrace biblical, healthy, and reasonable expectations.
  - 6. **Building** a new faith and willingness to embrace this new season God has ordained.
  - 7. **Learning** the reasons, requirements, and rewards of supporting the new pastor.
  - 8. **Encouraging** your people to make a one-year commitment to support your church through the entire transition.
- C. Initiative components.** The *Rise Up* sustainability initiative can include some or all the following eight components:
  - 1. A 40-day churchwide prayer focus.
  - 2. Churchwide podcast distribution on, “6 Ways to Support Your Church.”
  - 3. Independent reading by distributing copies of the short paperback book entitled, *Defying Gravity, How to Thrive in a Pastoral Transition*.
  - 4. Leadership modeling a positive and biblical transition.

5. Preaching series by Superintendent Roncone or his designee for three weeks to prepare the church.
6. Small group curriculum, with the companion resource (*Defying Gravity*), and interactive discussion questions.
7. Pastor-to-person meetings with the congregation.
8. Commitment Sunday where the church consecrates themselves for the journey.

Following are some suggestions on how that might look.

#### D. Initiative description.

1. **Purpose.** To prepare your church and be proactive in overcoming the common obstacles associated with pastoral transitions.
2. **Title.** *Rise Up. Growing and Thriving in a Pastoral Transitions.*
3. **Scriptural reference.**
  - *All the people came together as one* (Nehemiah 8:1 NIV).
  - *All the people assembled with a unified purpose* (Nehemiah 8:1 NLT).
  - *All the people gathered as one man* (Nehemiah 8:1 ESV).
4. **Length.** Three-week preaching series, four-week small group Bible study, companion book (*Defying Gravity*), and 40 days of prayer guide.
5. **Involvement levels.** Sunday morning services, small group meetings, one-on-one interactions, independent reading, and individual prayer focus.

#### E. Initiative strategy.

There is no “one way” or “silver bullet” when it comes to an effective sustainability initiative. Each church has a unique set of circumstances that will influence the strategy they adopt. Go through the list of options below and customize an intentional sustainability initiative that works for your church. I’m here to help make recommendations if you need me.

1. **A 40-day churchwide prayer focus.** The entire church is called to individual prayer. This can be accomplished by using a prayer guide that gives the entire church one practical thing to pray about each day. It can also be repeated as many times as needed throughout the duration of the transition. The prayer guide can be downloaded at [this link](#).
2. **Churchwide podcast distribution.** To help give hope, faith, and practical instruction to your church members the week after your pastor departs, I have recorded a special podcast interview with transition specialist Jason Lowe. In that podcast we discuss six things your people can do to help the church and board in this transition. You can send the link via email or text to all your church members; and by simply clicking a hyperlink, they can listen to the audio interview on their smart phone or computer. You can also print the link in your church bulletin. Following is an invitation you can copy and paste to an email or mass text to the members of your church.

Change is not always easy, especially when it involves a pastoral transition. To help our people at [insert church name] better understand this process and how to help, the board has provided an audio interview that addresses six positive things church members and attendees can do to grow through a pastoral transition. Click this link to listen: [www.agspe.org/RUready.mp3](http://www.agspe.org/RUready.mp3).

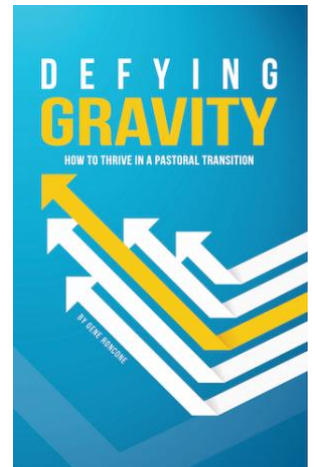
This is an opportunity for the board to show the church you are out in front of these issues and that they can count on your leadership.

**3. Independent book reading.** Another powerful way to prepare your entire church for this journey is to distribute copies of the short book, *Defying Gravity, How to Thrive in a Pastoral Transition*. The book is in a small paperback format with only 70 pages and very short chapters. It has been strategically priced to enable you to provide a copy to every adult in your church. I would recommend you purchase and distribute as many copies as you are able to the following congregants (in prioritized order):

- Availability to anyone who wants a copy.
- Every person on the membership roster.
- Every volunteer in the church.
- Every ministry/department leader in the church.

Following is a brief description of the book.

***Defying Gravity, How to Thrive in a Pastoral Transition by Gene Roncone.*** *Your church is experiencing a pastoral transition and you're unsettled about the potential changes coming to your church. You and others may even have different theories about why this change has occurred and want to avoid the normal decrease in attendance, giving and engagement associated with pastoral transitions. But God is up to something new and getting ready to take you and your church to the next level of spiritual growth. In this book, pastoral transition specialist Gene Roncone helps you understand the Biblical purpose for pastoral transitions and how they bring something good to our lives. Gene will also help you understand how to pray for your church, how you can thrive during a pastoral change, how to care for your new pastor and how to embrace God's new thing. After reading this book you will be ready and prepared for what can be one of the most exciting seasons of spiritual growth you have ever experienced!*



Although this book was created as a stand-alone resource, it can also be used in conjunction with the small group curriculum. Either way, it is a powerful tool that can be an encouraging resource to your people throughout the entire transition. You can learn more about how to order both small and large quantities of the book by [clicking this link](#).

- 4. Healthy modeling.** A healthy transition will require your leaders to model the traits of a biblical changeover with faith, optimism, honor and mutual respect. This would include having the board, staff, and outgoing pastor meet and be the first ones to sign a “member commitment”.
- 5. Teaching series.** Superintendent Roncone has written a three-week motivational sermon series designed to be used as soon after the departing pastor’s last Sunday as possible. It serves as the centerpiece of the church’s sustainability initiative and combines humor, common sense, and teaching about what the Bible has to say about pastoral transitions.
- **Part 1: How to Grow in Pastoral Transitions.** Practical teaching from biblical examples of leadership transitions explaining why God transitions leaders as well as giving your people practical ways they can grow and thrive in a pastoral transition.

- **Part 2: What Your New Pastor Needs.** A positive message giving 4-5 things every new pastor needs from your people to be successful in the long run.
  - **Part 3: Embracing God's New Thing.** The conclusion of the series is a motivational call to commitment. Superintendent Roncone focuses on the good things that come from God's "new thing" and the commitment required to experience them. A member commitment form is made available in people's seats, and the service climaxes with everyone signing them and bringing them to the altar as an offering to the Lord. The service is then concluded with a corporate time of prayer and consecration.
6. **Small group Bible studies.** For four weeks your entire church can go through the same small group curriculum entitled, *Defying Gravity*. The *Defying Gravity* small group resource contains four Bible study lessons (with discussion questions) on why God brings spiritual leaders in and out of our lives. The group interaction questions focus on how to apply the concepts from either the Sunday morning preaching series, companion paperback book, or Bible study. The small group study can also be used as a stand-alone resource. The weekly small group curriculum with discussion questions can be downloaded for free at [this link](#).
7. **Pastor-to-person meetings.** To leverage the influence and trust that people have in the outgoing pastor, the departing minister could host 2-3 evening meetings a week with 6-8 people at a time in his/her office to briefly explain God's purpose for pastoral transitions; identify common challenges; explain the plan to overcome them; outline their personal pledge; and ask people to sustain and increase their existing attendance, service, and giving. Participants could also be asked to donate to the church's transition fund. A brief time of questions and answers could also be provided. These meetings could occur in two ways:
- **Top 50 financial leaders.** Small group meetings with 6-8 individuals who are among your top fifty givers. It may also be wise to consider asking these leaders to make a designated offering to the "transition fund." A suggested goal could be to secure one month of the church's annual income within sixty (60) days. This can be achieved by asking each family to give an offering of what would be equal to one month's tithe to the transition account. Those who are not tithing can be scheduled separately and asked to begin tithing (instead of giving to the transition fund) during and through the transition.
  - **Members and adherents.** Small group meetings with 6-8 individuals who have been called and scheduled in one of the 2-3 slots in the evenings.
- This format will give anyone who desires face-to-face interaction with the lead pastor before their departure. It is a powerful way to harness their influence to increase people's commitment and ensure sustainability. If the lead pastor is unavailable due to death, a move, illness, or unwillingness, these meetings can be done with board members or key staff who will not be considered as candidates.
8. **Commitment Sunday.** The third week of the preaching/teaching series or conclusion of the small group study can consist of a shorter sermon with the board, staff, and outgoing pastor standing together on the platform and explaining the member commitment. The service will end by asking each member to personally sign the member commitment and walk forward to leave it at the altar as an offering to the Lord while the worship team leads in worship. The service will then conclude with prayer asking for God's blessing and favor on the church and the unknown person God has already appointed to be your new pastor. A customizable template of the member commitment in Microsoft Word format can be downloaded at [this link](#).

The *Rise Up* sustainability initiative has been a game-changing resource for our churches in Colorado and Utah. Every church that has used it has seen candidates get elected with stronger votes ranging from 93-100%. It was created by Superintendent Roncone and is unique to the Rocky Mountain Ministry Network. You can read testimonials from other search committees that have used this resource at [this link](#).

## 9. CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT ([back to table](#))

You and your leadership team's decision about a succession plan will shape the future of the church and its contribution to the kingdom. While your team explores this option, it will be necessary to honor each other with the highest levels of integrity.

In his book, *Your Next Pastor, Guidelines for Finding God's Person for Your Church*, Warren D. Bullock says nothing can destroy a pastoral search process more than a person with "loose lips." A breach of confidentiality will jeopardize a candidate's present ministry, spread distrust, politicize the process, and unleash "confusion, animosity, and contention."<sup>61</sup> If you or your board lack confidence in one of its members concerning this area, it would be wise to address it now for the sake of the church, the candidates, and the kingdom. That is why it is important for each member to sign a confidentiality agreement and for those agreements to then be scanned and provided to the entire board. This helps to prevent church people from asking inappropriate questions and to keep the board accountable to predetermined standards.

It may also help to prepare yourself for this challenge by understanding how the enemy will present opportunities for you to compromise confidentiality. Most breaches of confidentiality are the result of one of the following tactics of the enemy:

- **Social engineering.** This breach of confidentiality is the result of busybodies shopping for information like honeybees pollinating flowers. They may pretend to know a smaller piece of information and reveal it hoping to bait you into going deeper, or they may try to get twenty pieces of information from twenty different people in hopes of having enough to assemble the puzzle.
- **Relational leveraging.** This breach of confidence comes from people you love, trust, and admire. They may try to leverage your relationship by asking you to tell them more than they should know.
- **Prying eyes.** This violation of confidence occurs when people who have access to your office, computer, email, or home cross the line by helping themselves to your succession plan, email or copies of your meeting minutes.
- **Hacking.** This breach of confidentiality is the result of someone hacking into your computer, smart phone, text messages, or email because they dishonestly gained access.
- **User error.** This most common breach in confidentiality occurs for no other reason than a person has loose lips and lacks self-control. Personal insecurities, fear of rejection, the need for recognition, or the inability to deny inquisitive friends can cause them to cross the line and compromise the entire process.

Jesus warned his disciples to be preemptive and prepared saying, *You must be as shrewd as serpents and as innocent as doves* (Matthew 10:16 Version). This warning is good advice regarding this issue as well.

To help ensure confidentiality, each member must agree and commit to God and other members to hold one another accountable to the following agreements:

- **Prayer.** To pray earnestly for God's direction, the church, the board, and its work on a daily basis.

- **Confidentiality.** To keep confidential any and all information disclosed, discussed, or learned at its meetings from family and friends. This includes but is not limited to the identity and current ministry of potential candidates, comments, opinions, or votes of other committee members as well as the leanings or intentions of the group.
- **Sensitivity.** To protect all prospective candidates/successor by not jeopardizing their privacy, job security, current position, or other opportunities being presented at the same time.
- **Surrender.** To subordinate my own personal preferences, agenda, or priorities to the will of the committee as a whole and to support the team's final decision.
- **Transparency.** To not deprive the committee of context by trying to represent any "anonymous" opinions of people or groups in the deliberations.

I understand that a breach of these agreements, unintentional or otherwise, will be brought to the full board and disqualify me from continued service.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

It is also important that each member of the board and/or search committee sign a confidentiality agreement or covenant similar to the one above. Those agreements should then be scanned and provided to the entire board.

## 10. AUDIO RESOURCES ([back to table](#))

Following is a list of audio resources and interviews concerning topics related to pastoral transition and succession. Additional topics will be added as this resource is updated annually.

- A. Six Mistakes Outgoing Pastors Make:** In this episode, Gene Roncone talks with Dr. Jerry David about six mistakes outgoing pastors make that sabotage pastoral transitions. After founding and pastoring Lincoln City Church, Lincoln, Nebraska, for 25 years, Jerry is a partner in the Seira Group which specializes in working with local churches in transition and succession planning. He is also a coauthor of the newly released book, *Honorable Design: The Art and Order of Generational Transition*. This is a must-listen for any leader who wants to leave their church better than they found it. To listen [click here](#).
- B. The Why and How of Mentored Succession—Part 1.** In Part 1 of this miniseries, Gene interviews Terry Roberts about the why and how of mentored succession. Terry founded Trinity in Columbia, South Carolina, over 30 years ago and is the author of *Passing the Baton—Planning for Pastoral Transition*. Gene and Terry talk about how a lead pastor and board can collaborate together to select a person to be mentored and trained with the intention of one day leading the church. They discuss how to anticipate and overcome obstacles of turbulence and church governance. To listen [click here](#).
- C. The Why and How of Mentored Succession—Part 2.** In Part 2 of this miniseries, Gene continues the conversation with Terry Roberts about the how of mentored succession. In this episode, they create a hypothetical five-stage plan for mentored succession and talk about what each stage should include and who should be involved as well as the benefits and risks associated with each phase. To listen [click here](#).
- D. Succession Planning with William Vanderbloemen.** In this episode, Tony Morgan from the Unstuck Group sits down with William Vanderbloemen for a frank conversation about pastoral succession, the one cardinal rule of planning, and the most common roadblocks to a healthy transition (for both the pastor and the congregation). To listen [click here](#).
- E. Pastoral Succession Real Talk.** Tim Celek and Andrew Brownback have a rare shared experience: They have successfully navigated the passing of the baton from the founding pastor of a thriving, growing church to the successor who will lead that church for a new generation. In this episode, Tony Morgan from the Unstuck Group interviews the founding pastor, Tim, and current lead pastor, Andrew, to tell the story. This episode is packed with practical wisdom and recommended resources. To listen [click here](#).
- F. 7 Questions Needing Answers About Pastoral Succession.** Ryan Howell from Vision New England interviews William Vanderbloemen about issues surrounding pastoral succession. They address the following questions about pastoral succession: How long should the outgoing pastor and the incoming pastor overlap? Have we assessed the needs of the spouse? Is our governance structure ready? Should the outgoing pastor be involved in the succession



planning? What should be the outgoing pastor's new role be? Have we named our problems? What should we do about our multisites? Is our donor base ready? To listen [click here](#).

## 11. ENDNOTES [\(back to table\)](#)

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- <sup>1</sup>Bob Russel and Bryan Bucher, *Transition Plan—7 Secrets Every Leader Needs to Know*, Ministers Label Publishing, Louisville, KY, 2010, p. 18.
- <sup>2</sup>William Vanderbloemen and Warren Bird, *Next: Pastoral Succession That Works*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, 2015, p. 57.
- <sup>3</sup>Carolyn Weese and J. Russell Crabtree, *The Elephant in the Boardroom: Speaking the Unspoken About Pastoral Transitions*, Jossey-Bass Publishers, Hoboken, NY, 2004, p. 26.
- <sup>4</sup>Gary Smith, *Pastoral Transitions, A Seamless Handoff of Leadership*, EnGedi Publishing, Corpus Christi, TX, 2022, p. 41.
- <sup>5</sup>Jerry David, *Honorable Design: The Art and Order of Generational Transition*, Brookstone Publishing Group, 2019, p. 6.
- <sup>6</sup>Andrew Flowers, *Leading Through Succession: Why Pastoral Leadership Is Key to a Healthy Transition*, Published by Andrew Flowers, 2017, pp. 6, 8.
- <sup>7</sup>Carolyn Weese and J. Russell Crabtree, *The Elephant in the Boardroom: Speaking the Unspoken About Pastoral Transitions*, Jossey-Bass Publishers, Hoboken, NJ, 2004, p. ?.
- <sup>8</sup>Gary L. Johnson, *Leader Shift: One Becomes Less While Another Becomes More*, 2013, Published by Gary L. Johnson, Foreword.
- <sup>9</sup>Terry Roberts, *Passing the Baton: Planning for Pastoral Transition*, Published by Terry Roberts, 2015, p.7.
- <sup>10</sup>Barna Group, *Leadership Transitions: How Churches Navigate Pastoral Change and Stay Healthy*, Barna Group, PDF, 2019, p. 17.
- <sup>11</sup>Terry Roberts, *Passing the Baton: Planning for Pastoral Transition*, Published by Terry Roberts, 2015, pp. 27-36.
- <sup>12</sup>Wolf, Glen, (2020). *A Strategic Plan to Assist Pastors In The Succession Between A Mentoring Lead Pastor And His Or Her Mentee*, [Doctor of Ministry, DMin], Southwestern University, pp 1-4.
- <sup>13</sup>Bryant Wright, *Succession, Preparing Your Ministry for the Next Leader*, B&H Publishing Group, Nashville, Tennessee, 2022, p. 22
- <sup>14</sup>Wolf, Glen, (2020). *A Strategic Plan to Assist Pastors In The Succession Between A Mentoring Lead Pastor And His Or Her Mentee*, [Doctor of Ministry, DMin], Southwestern University, p 63.
- <sup>15</sup>Bishop Walter Harvey, *Alley-Oop, Keys to Pastoral Succession*, Walter Harvey Ministries, 2021.
- <sup>16</sup>Will Heath, *Embracing Succession, Helping Ministry Leaders Confront the Personal Side of Transition*, CrossLink Publishing, Rapid City, South Dakota, 2020, pp. 64-65.
- <sup>17</sup>William Vanderbloemen and Warren Bird, *Next: Pastoral Succession That Works*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, 2020, p. 31.
- <sup>18</sup>Frank Damazio, *The Vanguard Leader: A New Breed of Leader to Encounter the Future*, Bible Temple Publishing, Portland, OR, 1994, p. 309.

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<sup>19</sup> Jeff Harlow, *Dancing with Cinderella: Leading a Healthy Church Transition*, Epiphany Publishing, Indianapolis, IN, 2017, p. 68.

<sup>20</sup> Barna Group, *Leadership Transitions: How Churches Navigate Pastoral Change and Stay Healthy*, Barna Group, PDF, 2019, p. 24.

<sup>21</sup> Gary Smith, *Pastoral Transitions, A Seamless Handoff of Leadership*, EnGedi Publishing, Corpus Christi, TX, pp. 17-23.

<sup>22</sup> Lee Kricher, *Seamless Pastoral Transitions, 3 Imperatives – 6 Pitfalls*, Xulon Press, Maitland, FL, 2022, pp. 49-55 and 73-82

<sup>23</sup> Gary Smith, *Pastoral Transitions, A Seamless Handoff of Leadership*, EnGedi Publishing, Corpus Christi, TX., 2020.

<sup>24</sup> Wolf, Glen, (2020). *A Strategic Plan to Assist Pastors In The Succession Between A Mentoring Lead Pastor And His Or Her Mentee*, [Doctor of Ministry, DMin], Southwestern University.

<sup>25</sup> Tom Mullins, *Passing the Leadership Baton: A Winning Transition Plan for Your Ministry*, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN, 2015. Mullins and his board were wise enough to recognize that a seasoned and proven staff member had a better chance at succeeding him than a promising outsider. Mullins selected a successor and then systematically and strategically mentored him until he retired. The church continued growing through the transition.

<sup>26</sup> Jeff Harlow, *Dancing with Cinderella: Leading A Healthy Church Transition*, Epiphany Publishing, Indianapolis, IN, 2017.

<sup>27</sup> Terry Roberts, *Passing the Baton: Planning for Pastoral Transition*, Published by Terry Roberts, 2015.

<sup>28</sup> Gary L. Johnson, *Leader Shift: One Become Less While Another Becomes More*, Published by Gary L. Johnson, 2013.

<sup>29</sup> Bob Russell, *Transition Plan: 7 Secrets Every Leader Needs to Know*, Ministers Label Publishing; 1st edition, 2010.

<sup>30</sup> Barna Group, *Leadership Transitions: How Churches Navigate Pastoral Change and Stay Healthy*, Barna Group, PDF, 2019, pp. 95-101.

<sup>31</sup> Jerry David, *Honorable Design: The Art and Order of Generational Transition*, Brookstone Publishing Group, 2019.

<sup>32</sup> Expand Consulting Partners, *Tsunami, Open Secrets to Pastoral Succession & Transition*, Expand Publishing, 2022.

<sup>33</sup> "General Council Affiliated Church Governance Minimums," 2019, <https://ag.org/About/About-the-AG/Constitution-and-Bylaws>, accessed December 19, 2019.

<sup>34</sup> The content of this chapter was significantly improved by the advice of the following district and national leaders (listed in alphabetical order): Bret Allen (District Superintendent, Northern California and Nevada District), Donna L. Barrett (General Secretary, The General Council of the Assemblies of God), Glen Beaver (District Superintendent, West Texas District), James Braddy (Retired District Superintendent and General Council General Presbyter, Northern California and Nevada District), David

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Dillon (District Superintendent, Appalachian Ministry Network), Larry Griswold (Retired District Superintendent, Illinois District; and General Council Executive Presbyter), Gordon Houston (Secretary-Treasurer, SoCal Network), Jay Herndon (District Secretary-Treasurer, Northern California and Nevada District), Jeff Hlavin (District Superintendent, Michigan District), Lee McCloud (Pastor of Church Development, Oregon Ministry Network), Don Miller (District Superintendent, Southern Missouri District), Jim Palmer (Assistant Superintendent, Ohio Ministry Network), Randy Popineau (Secretary-Treasurer, Rocky Mountain Ministry Network), Phil Schneider (District Superintendent, Illinois District), Don Steiger (Retired District Superintendent and General Council General Presbyter, Rocky Mountain Ministry Network), Bill Wilson (Network Pastor, Oregon Ministry Network), and Bob Wine (District Superintendent, Nebraska Ministry Network).

<sup>35</sup> *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*, 12<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2:18, p. 15.

<sup>36</sup> *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*, 12<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2:8, p. 11.

<sup>37</sup> *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*, 12<sup>th</sup> Edition, 25:7, p. 248.

<sup>38</sup> *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*, 12<sup>th</sup> Edition, 25:7, p. 248.

<sup>39</sup> "General Council Affiliated Church Governance Minimums," 2019, <https://ag.org/About/About-the-AG/Constitution-and-Bylaws>, accessed December 19, 2019.

<sup>40</sup> "Constitution and Bylaws with Minutes," 2017, General Council Constitution, Article XI, Section 1, subsection a (6), <https://ag.org/About/About-the-AG/Constitution-and-Bylaws>, accessed on December 19, 2019.

<sup>41</sup> "Constitution and Bylaws with Minutes," 2017, General Council Bylaws, Article VI, Section 5, <https://ag.org/About/About-the-AG/Constitution-and-Bylaws>, accessed on December 19, 2019.

<sup>42</sup> "Constitution & Bylaws with Minutes," 2017, General Council Constitution, Article VI, Section 4, subsection c, <https://ag.org/About/About-the-AG/Constitution-and-Bylaws>, accessed on December 19, 2019.

<sup>43</sup> Information regarding online options to meet the educational requirements for a credential can be obtained at <http://www.agspe.org/Preparation.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> Information regarding how to become a certified minister through Global University's Berean School of the Bible can be found at [https://www.globaluniversity.edu/berean\\_index.cfm](https://www.globaluniversity.edu/berean_index.cfm).

<sup>45</sup> This inspirational story about Don Popineau was told to me in a December 26, 2019, email from his son, Randy. Don passed away in 2018 and left a powerful legacy. Four of Don's sons and one daughter would go on to become credentialed ministers and serve in full-time ministry. In addition, at the time of this writing, three of his grandchildren are in pastoral ministry, two are on church boards, one is a lay leader, and three others have served in a parachurch ministry.

<sup>46</sup> "Constitution and Bylaws with Minutes," 2017, General Council Constitution, Article VII, Section 3, subsection c(3), <https://ag.org/About/About-the-AG/Constitution-and-Bylaws>, accessed on December 19, 2019.

<sup>47</sup> "Constitution and Bylaws with Minutes," 2017, General Council Constitution, Article XI, Section 1, subsection a (6), <https://ag.org/About/About-the-AG/Constitution-and-Bylaws>; and "Constitution and Bylaws with Minutes," 2017, General Council Bylaws, Article VI, Section 5, <https://ag.org/About/About-the-AG/Constitution-and-Bylaws>, accessed on December 19, 2019.

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<sup>48</sup>“Constitution and Bylaws with Minutes,” 2017, General Council Constitution, Article XI, Section 1, subsection a (6), <https://ag.org/About/About-the-AG/Constitution-and-Bylaws>, accessed on December 19, 2019.

<sup>49</sup> “Constitution and Bylaws with Minutes,” 2017, General Council Constitution, Article XI, Section 3, <https://ag.org/About/About-the-AG/Constitution-and-Bylaws>, accessed on December 19, 2019.

<sup>50</sup> James C. Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don’t*, Harper Business, New York, 2001, p. 32.

<sup>51</sup> William Vanderbloemen and Warren Bird, *Next: Pastoral Succession That Works*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, 2014, p. 136.

<sup>52</sup> William Vanderbloemen and Warren Bird, *Next: Pastoral Succession That Works*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, 2014, p. 29.

<sup>53</sup> Joseph Umidi, *Matching Pastoral Candidates and Churches, A Guide for Search Committees and Candidates*, Kregel Publication, Grand Rapids, MI, 2020, p. 9.

<sup>54</sup> This recommendation came in an email from Dr. Tom Harris, Executive Director of Interim Pastor Ministries (IPM). IPM trains and places more interim pastors and works with more churches experiencing pastoral transitions than any other organization in the nation.

<sup>55</sup>William Vanderbloemen, *Search, The Pastoral Search Committee Handbook*, B&H Publishing Group, Nashville, 2016, p. 57.

<sup>56</sup> Carolyn Weese and J. Russell Crabtree, *The Elephant in the Boardroom: Speaking the Unspoken About Pastoral Transitions*, Jossey-Bass Publishers, Hoboken, NJ, 2004, pp. 29-40.

<sup>57</sup> Carolyn Weese and J. Russell Crabtree, *The Elephant in the Boardroom: Speaking the Unspoken About Pastoral Transitions*, Jossey-Bass Publishers, Hoboken, NJ, 2004, p. 31.

<sup>58</sup> Ira M. Levin, *New Leader Assimilation Process: Accelerating New Role-Related Transitions*, Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research 62.1, 2010, p. 61.

<sup>59</sup> Jeff Harlow, *Dancing with Cinderella: Leading A Healthy Church Transition*, Epiphany Publishing, Indianapolis, IN, 2017, p. viv.

<sup>60</sup> Carolyn Weese and J. Russell Crabtree, *The Elephant in the Boardroom: Speaking the Unspoken About Pastoral Transitions*, Jossey-Bass Publishers, Hoboken, NJ, 2004, pp. 29-40.

<sup>61</sup> Warren D. Bullock, *Your Next Pastor: Guidelines for Finding God’s Person for Your Church*, Gospel Publishing House, Springfield, MO, 2013, year, p. 40.