



NAVIGATING PASTORAL TRANSITIONS

A FIELD GUIDE SERIES FOR CONGREGATIONS AND PASTORS

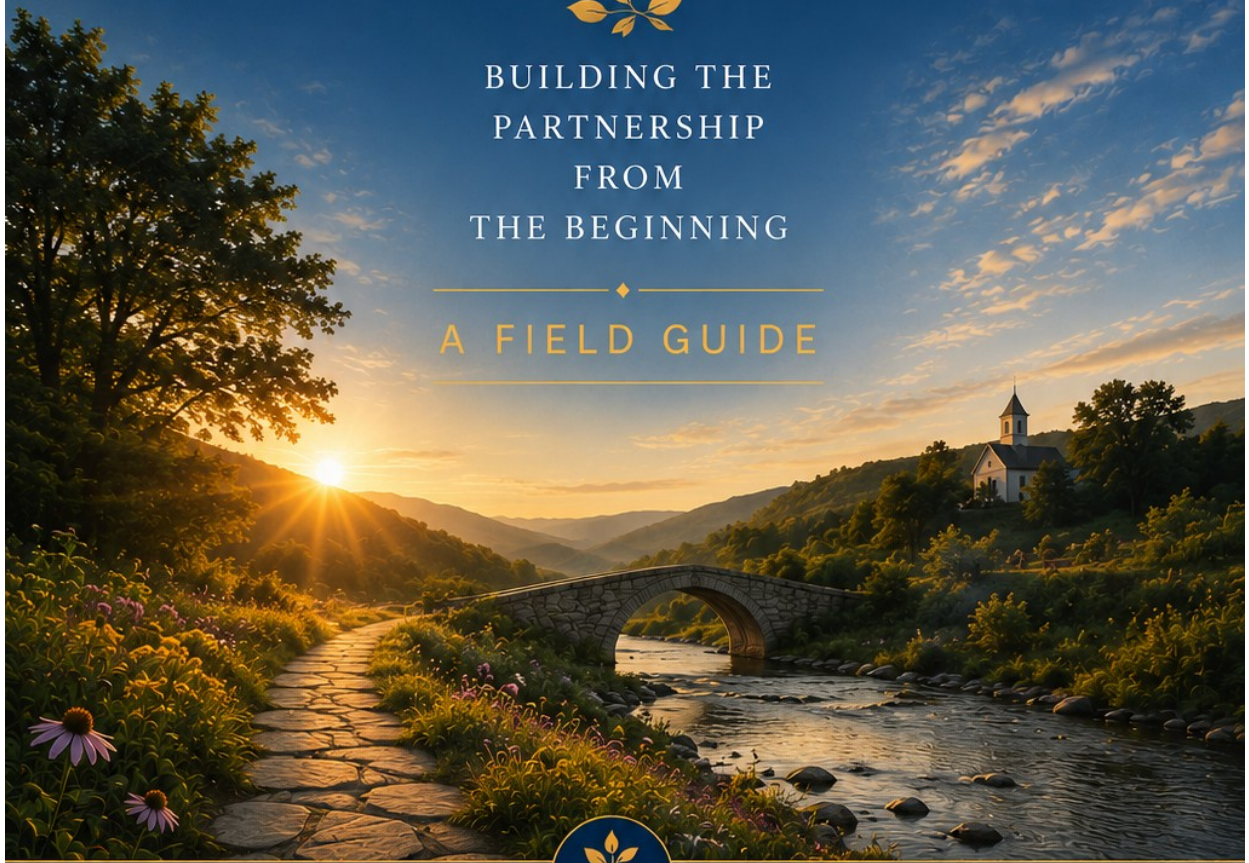
BEGINNING MINISTRY TOGETHER

— A FIELD GUIDE —



BUILDING THE
PARTNERSHIP
FROM
THE BEGINNING

— A FIELD GUIDE —



HELPING PASTORS AND CONGREGATIONS
DISCERN THE WAY FORWARD—TOGETHER

Beginning Ministry Together Field Guide

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Building the Partnership from the Beginning

A Field Guide in the *Navigating Pastoral Transitions Series*

About This Field Guide

The vote has been taken.

The call has been extended.

The pastor has said yes.

After months—and sometimes years—of transition, searching, conversation, prayer, and discernment, there is understandable relief.

The congregation has a pastor.

The pastor has answered a new call.

The search committee has completed its work.

And yet the transition is not quite over.

Calling a pastor and beginning ministry together are two different things.

A search process can help the pastor and congregation discern whether their stories, gifts, theology, and sense of vocation might belong together. It can create familiarity. It can begin to build trust. It can open a shared imagination for the future.

But it cannot create the relationships in which that future will actually be lived.

Those begin now.

The first months of ministry establish patterns that can shape years of life together. Expectations take form. Relationships begin to deepen. Staff members are learning a new leader. Congregational leaders are learning a new pastor. The pastor is encountering traditions, personalities, histories, and unwritten rules that no Ministry Discernment Profile could possibly contain.

If the pastor is moving, another transition is unfolding at the same time. Boxes must be unpacked. A new community must slowly become home. A spouse or partner may be adjusting. Children may be entering new schools. Doctors, dentists, grocery stores, restaurants, mechanics, neighborhoods, and daily routines all have to be discovered.

Meanwhile, Sunday keeps coming.

This Field Guide is about that beginning.

It is not a manual for evaluating the new pastor.

It is not a hundred-day plan for demonstrating leadership.

And it is certainly not a strategy for getting the new pastor “up to speed” as quickly as possible.

It is about something deeper:

learning how to become partners in ministry.

The congregation has work to do.

The pastor has work to do.

They have work to do together.

Part One — The Field Guide explores that relational work: preparing for arrival, welcoming the pastor and family, building relationships, introducing the pastor to the community, learning congregational culture, developing healthy staff and leadership relationships, clarifying expectations, resisting premature change, and establishing practices of mutual reflection.

Part Two — The Field Manual provides practical resources for doing this work: arrival checklists, transition-team resources, first-month and first-90-day planning tools, community introduction guides, staff and leadership conversation resources, expectation exercises, and first-year reflection tools.

The conviction beneath both is simple:

A call begins a relationship. It does not complete a transition.

The first work of that relationship is learning one another.

Introduction

The Call Is Accepted. The Transition Isn't Over.

There is a moment in almost every pastoral transition when the congregation exhales.

The candidate has preached.

The congregational meeting has been held.

The vote is announced.

Applause breaks out.

The pastor accepts the call.

After so much uncertainty, the future suddenly has a name and a face.

People celebrate.

Someone says:

“We made it.”

Yes.

And no.

You have reached an important destination.

You have also arrived at a new beginning.

Discernment Has Led to Covenant

Throughout this transition, the congregation has been learning to discern.

You prepared.

You ended a previous ministry.

You remembered the stories that shaped you.

You listened to one another and to the community around you.

You tried to give language to identity, vocation, and hope.

You encountered pastoral candidates and entered mutual discernment.

Eventually, the congregation and pastor arrived at the same tentative, faithful conclusion:

We believe God may be calling us into ministry together.

That conclusion matters.

But notice what it says.

It does not say:

We now know exactly what our ministry together will become.

It says:

We are willing to enter covenant and discover the answer together.

That is what begins now.

Everyone Arrives with a Story

The congregation has a story.

So does the pastor.

The congregation has just experienced transition.

So has the pastor.

Perhaps the pastor is leaving a congregation deeply loved.

There may have been farewells, tears, celebrations, regrets, and relationships that will be deeply missed.

Perhaps the pastor's family is leaving friends, schools, jobs, routines, and a community that felt like home.

Even when a new call is joyful, a leaving is still a leaving.

The congregation should remember what it learned in *Ending Well*.

Your new pastor may still be ending while you are eager to begin.

Give that ending room to breathe.

Expectations Arrive Before the Moving Truck

Congregations have expectations.

Some were discussed during the search.

Many were not.

The pastor has expectations too.

Some are realistic.

Some are based on previous experience.

Some are hopes.

Some are fears.

Some have not yet become conscious enough to name.

Those expectations will begin meeting one another immediately.

One member hopes the new pastor will restore something lost.

Another hopes everything will change.

A staff member wonders what the new pastor will think of their work.

A governing-board member wants stronger leadership.

Another hopes the pastor will not change anything too quickly.

The pastor is trying to remember two hundred names.

Everyone is arriving at once.

That is why the first season should not be organized around proving anything.

It should be organized around **relationship**.

The First Question

Soon enough there will be questions about vision, priorities, programs, worship, staffing, mission, and change.

For now, begin somewhere simpler:

How will we learn one another well enough to become partners in ministry?

Let that question carry you through the first months.

Chapter One

Before the Pastor Arrives

Preparing to Receive, Not Just Welcome

There is usually a period between accepting a call and beginning ministry.

Use it well.

The obvious work is practical.

Prepare the office.

Make sure the computer works.

Arrange email and necessary accounts.

Gather keys.

Clarify the calendar.

Prepare staff information.

Provide governing-board rosters and contact information.

Make important policies easily accessible.

Identify upcoming commitments the pastor needs to know about.

If relocation is involved, offer useful information about the community.

All of this matters.

But receiving a new pastor asks more of a congregation than preparing a workspace.

The congregation needs to prepare itself.

Clear the Landing Zone

Transitions have a way of accumulating unfinished business.

A decision has been postponed because:

“We’ll let the new pastor deal with that.”

A personnel issue has lingered.

A committee has stopped functioning.

A building problem has been ignored.

A disagreement has been deferred.

Soon a pile of unfinished business is waiting at the office door.

Be careful.

Some matters legitimately belong with the new pastor.

Others should have been addressed before arrival.

Do not greet someone with flowers on Sunday, then deliver a wheelbarrow of unresolved problems on Monday.

Ask:

What can we responsibly resolve before the pastor arrives?

What truly needs the pastor's participation?

What can wait until relationships and understanding have developed?

Tell People What the First Months Are For

Congregations can help by establishing expectations before arrival.

Say publicly:

Our new pastor's first work will be getting to know us.

We want the pastor to meet people.

Learn our story.

Meet our community.

Build relationships with staff and leaders.

Listen.

Observe.

Ask questions.

We are not expecting a new vision statement in thirty days.

That permission matters.

It protects pastor and congregation alike from the pressure to perform.

Don't Write the First-Year Agenda Without the Pastor

The congregation has done important discernment.

It has identified hopes and priorities.

Those should not disappear.

But neither should they become a detailed plan handed to the pastor on arrival.

You called a partner.

Leave room for partnership.

The discoveries made during *Remembering* and *Listening* become part of the conversation.

They are not instructions issued by the past to the future.

Hospitality Begins Before Arrival

Ask the pastor what would actually be helpful.

That last part matters.

Hospitality that does not listen can become a burden of its own.

Some people love a large welcome.

Others would rather unpack quietly.

A family with young children may need something very different from a single pastor.

Someone moving across town has different needs from someone moving across the country.

Ask.

Then prepare to receive the person who is actually coming—not merely to offer the welcome you most enjoy giving.

For Conversation

What practical matters need to be ready before the pastor arrives?

What unfinished business should we address ourselves?

What are we tempted to hand immediately to the new pastor?

What expectations should we help the congregation establish about the first few months?

How can we prepare ourselves—not merely the building—to receive a new partner in ministry?

Chapter Two

Welcome the Person, Not Just the Pastor

Arrival, Hospitality, and Belonging

A congregation has called a pastor.

A human being arrives.

Remember the order.

Before this person becomes the preacher in your pulpit, moderator of meetings, supervisor of staff, visitor at hospital beds, teacher of classes, community representative, conflict mediator, and the person everyone expects to know what is happening, they are someone entering a new place.

Welcome that person.

Make Arrival Humane

Small acts matter.

If the pastor is moving into a new home, a few groceries in the refrigerator can communicate:

We thought about what tonight might be like for you.

A meal can help.

So can knowing where to find a good cup of coffee.

Or which grocery store is closest.

Or the name of a reliable plumber.

Or where to take a sick child on Saturday morning.

Offer help unpacking if it would be useful.

Provide information without drowning the pastor in it.

Make introductions.

Then give them room to settle.

The goal is not impressive hospitality.

It is thoughtful hospitality.

Remember the Family

If the pastor arrives with a spouse, partner, or children, they are experiencing transition too.

They deserve particular care because congregations sometimes treat pastoral families as extensions of the pastor's employment rather than as people living through a transition of their own.

A spouse may be asked immediately:

Will you sing in the choir?

Teach Sunday school?

Join this group?

Help with youth?

A child may discover that everyone knows who they are before they know anyone else.

Welcome them.

Do not recruit them.

The congregation called the pastor.

It did not call the family to unpaid positions.

Let them discover relationships and involvement in their own time.

Let People Be People

Pastors need grocery stores.

Haircuts.

Friends.

Days off.

Restaurants where no one needs to discuss the church budget.

Children need to have bad days without someone interpreting them as evidence of pastoral-family dysfunction.

Spouses need their own identities.

Pastors need relationships in which they are not always functioning as the pastor.

A congregation that respects this humanity is giving its pastor an extraordinary gift.

A Story from the Field

A newly called pastor and their family arrived after a long drive to find a refrigerator containing milk, eggs, fruit, bread, coffee, and a few simple meals.

There were no casseroles for thirty.

No welcoming committee waiting in the driveway.

Just a note:

“We thought you might want to eat breakfast before figuring out where the grocery store is. Welcome home.”

Years later, the pastor still remembered it.

Not because of the groceries.

Because the congregation had imagined what arrival might feel like.

That is hospitality.

For Conversation

What would make arrival easier for this particular pastor?

If family members are coming, how can we welcome them without placing expectations on them?

How can we offer practical help without overwhelming people?

What boundaries will help the pastor and family develop lives of their own in the community?

What would communicate, “We are glad you are here,” before asking anything in return?

Chapter Three

Let the Search Committee Change Jobs

From Discernment Team to Transition Team

The pastor arrives knowing a handful of people better than anyone else in the congregation.

The search committee.

They have spent hours together.

They have talked about theology.

Leadership.

Ministry.

Family.

Community.

Hope.

Challenges.

They have shared meals.

Asked difficult questions.

Prayed.

Perhaps laughed together.

Perhaps disagreed.

They have imagined ministry together before most of the congregation has had a conversation with the new pastor.

Then the pastor arrives—and in many congregations, the committee disappears.

That abandons an important relationship too soon.

The Bridge Is Already Built

For a defined period after arrival, the search committee can become a **transition team**.

Its role changes.

The committee is no longer discerning whether to call the pastor.

It is not supervising the pastor.

It is not protecting the pastor from the congregation.

It is not an inner circle with privileged access.

It becomes a bridge.

Members know the congregation.

They know the pastor.

They can help pastor and congregation learn one another.

Meet Regularly at First

For the first weeks, a brief weekly meeting can be invaluable.

Ask:

What is going well?

What has surprised you?

What is confusing?

What do you need to know?

Who do you need to know?

Then help.

Someone mentions a name repeatedly in meetings and the pastor has no idea who it is.

Explain.

The pastor hears that “we tried that before.”

Tell the story.

A community issue keeps appearing.

Arrange a conversation with someone who understands it.

The pastor needs to meet a particular leader.

Make the introduction.

The purpose is not to interpret the congregation for the pastor.

It is to make learning easier.

Open Doors

The transition team can arrange small gatherings with congregants.

It can introduce the pastor to community leaders.

It can accompany the pastor to early meetings with key congregational leaders.

It can help prepare a press release.

It can introduce the pastor at civic or community meetings.

It can arrange meetings with school administrators, nonprofit leaders, neighboring clergy, and community partners.

It can pray with the pastor.

These are simple things.

Taken together, these gestures say:

You do not have to enter this place alone.

Don't Become a Political Base

There is danger here.

Because search committee members know the pastor well, others may assume they have special influence.

Committee members may begin feeling responsible for defending the pastor.

The pastor may rely on them instead of building wider relationships.

Avoid this.

The bridge exists so relationships can cross it.

Not so everyone stays on the bridge.

Know When to Finish

The transition team should have a defined life.

Perhaps three months.

Perhaps six.

Its work succeeds when the team is no longer needed.

Relationships have widened.

The pastor knows leaders.

The community is becoming familiar.

Other support systems are functioning.

Then celebrate the work.

Pray.

Release the team.

A search committee began by helping the congregation and pastor find one another.

It completes that work by helping them begin to belong to one another.

For Conversation

How might the search committee's role change after the call?

What would be helpful for the pastor during the first weeks?

Which introductions can the team facilitate?

How will we prevent the transition team from becoming an inner circle?

How will we know when its work is complete?

Chapter Four

Begin with Relationships

People Before Programs

The new pastor will immediately encounter things that could be improved.

The congregation will immediately identify things it wants the pastor to address.

Wait.

There is deeper work.

Learn the people.

Create Small Places for Conversation

Large receptions are useful for saying hello.

They are a poor setting for truly getting to know anyone.

Create smaller spaces.

Eight people in a living room.

Lunch with a few members.

Coffee after worship.

Dinner around a table.

A gathering with young adults.

A conversation with parents.

Time with older members.

Meetings with youth.

Don't turn these into question-and-answer sessions about the pastor.

Let the pastor listen.

Ask people:

What do you love about this congregation?

What gives you hope?

What should I understand about this church?

Where have you experienced God here?

What are you praying for?

Stories create relationship more readily than organizational charts.

Meet the Leaders

Early in the transition, arrange individual conversations with members of the governing board.

These do not need to be formal.

The purpose is relationship.

Who are you?

What brought you here?

What do you care about?

How did you become a leader?

What gives you joy?

What concerns you?

What do you hope for our ministry together?

Initially, a member of the transition team might help arrange or even accompany the pastor to make the introduction, particularly where that would make the meeting more natural.

Then step away.

The pastor and leader need space to form their own relationship.

Learn the Informal Congregation

Every church has an organizational chart.

Every church also has another chart—one no one has written down.

Who do people trust?

Who carries history?

Who brings people together?

Who can calm a room?

Who knows the community?

Who notices when someone is missing?

Who has influence without holding office?

Who is carrying grief?

Who has ideas no one has asked about?

Learning the congregation means learning both charts.

Relationship Is Not a Delay in Ministry

Some people will become impatient.

“When are we going to get started?”

You already have.

Relationships are not what happens before ministry.

They are ministry.

They create the trust through which future leadership becomes possible.

Trust built before difficulty becomes relational capital when difficulty arrives.

There will be difficulty.

Begin building that capital now.

For Conversation

What small-group settings would help the pastor hear people's stories?

Which leaders should the pastor meet early?

Who carries important informal leadership?

Whose story might otherwise be missed?

How can we protect time for relationship-building from the pressure to produce immediate results?

Chapter Five

Introduce the Pastor to the Community

The Call Is to a Place

No congregation exists in the abstract.

It lives somewhere.

This particular neighborhood.

Town.

City.

Region.

During *Listening*, the congregation learned to pay attention to that place.

Do not ask the new pastor to begin that learning from the beginning.

Introduce them.

Take the Pastor With You

If the congregation has a relationship with a school principal, go together.

If members know community leaders, introduce them.

If you partner with a nonprofit, visit.

If local clergy meet regularly, make the connection.

If members participate in civic organizations, take the pastor along.

Meet business owners.

First responders.

Healthcare leaders.

Social-service providers.

Neighborhood leaders.

People doing interesting things.

Don't hand the pastor a list of names.

Relationships are carried through people, not lists.

Tell the Community Too

A new pastoral call can be a community event.

Prepare a thoughtful press release.

Let community partners know.

Introduce the pastor at appropriate meetings.

If the congregation has relationships with local media, use them.

Not as publicity for the church.

As an introduction.

“This is our new pastor. We wanted you to meet.”

That communicates something about how the congregation understands ministry.

Don’t Introduce Only Powerful People

Community leadership is not limited to people with titles.

During *Listening*, you may have discovered people who connect neighbors, care for children, organize informal networks, create art, advocate for overlooked people, or quietly make the community better.

Introduce the pastor to them too.

If you learned anything from Listening, it should be this:

Wisdom is scattered widely through a community.

The Place Is Part of the Call

The pastor was not called merely to an institution.

The pastor was called to share ministry with a congregation **in a place**.

This is why these introductions matter.

The congregation is not merely introducing its new pastor to the community. It is introducing the pastor to a place where Christ is already at work.

That is part of pastoral formation.

For Conversation

Which community relationships should we share with the new pastor?

Who helped us understand our community during Listening?

Which people and organizations should the pastor meet early?

Who might be overlooked if we introduce only formal leaders?

How can we help the pastor experience the community rather than merely learn facts about it?

Chapter Six

Learn Before You Lead

The First Months as an Apprenticeship

New pastors often feel enormous pressure to prove their leadership.

People ask:

What is your vision?

What are your priorities?

What are you going to change?

What do you think of our worship?

What should we do about membership decline?

The healthiest answer to many of these questions may be:

“I don’t know yet.”

That is not weakness.

It may be wisdom.

Become an Apprentice

The first months are an apprenticeship—to a congregation and to a place.

Learn names.

Stories.

Relationships.

Worship rhythms.

Staff dynamics.

Traditions.

Conflict patterns.

Community relationships.

Sources of pride.

Places of grief.

Theological language.

How decisions are formally made.

How decisions are actually made.

What people celebrate.

What they fear losing.

What they are tired of.

What they hope might happen.

No profile could possibly teach you all of this.

You learn it by living among the people.

Ask Why Before Asking Why Not

A new pastor encounters a practice that makes no sense.

Why do we do this?

Someone answers:

“We’ve always done it that way.”

That sentence is frustrating.

It is also incomplete.

Something gave rise to it.

Ask.

Perhaps there is a story.

A value.

A conflict.

A former leader.

A painful experience.

A practical reason whose relevance disappeared years ago.

Before trying to change a system, learn what that system has been trying to protect.

You may still change it.

But you will better understand what the change means.

The Congregation Must Allow Learning

Apprenticeship is not only the pastor’s responsibility.

The congregation must permit it.

Do not interpret questions as criticism.

Do not expect the pastor to remember every name immediately.

Do not demand opinions on every controversy.

Do not force quick decisions simply because everyone is relieved to have permanent leadership again.

Give the pastor room to say:

“Help me understand.”

Those may be among the most fruitful words spoken in the first year.

Learning Is Leadership

A leader who listens is already leading.

A pastor who asks good questions teaches the congregation to ask them too.

A pastor who resists premature certainty models discernment.

A congregation that allows its pastor to learn may discover that it, too, is learning again.

For Conversation

What does the pastor need to learn about this congregation?

What might be difficult for a newcomer to understand?

Which practices have stories behind them?

How can congregational leaders make questions safe?

What would it look like for the first months to be treated as apprenticeship rather than performance?

Chapter Seven

Beginning Well with Staff and Leaders

Building the Working Relationships

Pastor-congregation relationships matter enormously.

So do the relationships that sustain the daily work of ministry.

Staff.

Governing-board members.

Committee leaders.

Treasurers.

Clerks.

Musicians.

Educators.

Administrators.

Custodians.

Volunteers.

A new pastor enters a network of working relationships already moving.

Begin carefully.

Start with Curiosity

Meet individually with staff members.

Ask:

What do you do?

What part of your work gives you energy?

What is difficult?

What do you wish I understood about your role?

What do you need from a pastor or head of staff?

What don't you need?

How do you prefer to communicate?

What would help us work well together?

Listen before reorganizing.

A staff member may have worked through several pastoral transitions.

They know things.

Receive that knowledge as a gift.

Clarify Roles

Kindness does not substitute for clarity.

Who supervises whom?

Who makes which decisions?

What requires governing-board approval?

What belongs to staff discretion?

How are conflicts addressed?

How is information shared?

How are evaluations handled?

What are expectations around work hours and days off?

What belongs to volunteers?

Ambiguity may feel gracious at first.

In time, it becomes frustrating.

Clear roles create room for healthy relationships.

Learn the Governing Board

A governing board is more than a monthly meeting.

It is a community of spiritual leaders.

The pastor and board must learn how to work together.

How do these leaders make decisions?

Do they deliberate?

Avoid conflict?

Rush?

Need extensive information?

Prefer conversation?

What do they understand their spiritual role to be?

What do they expect from the pastor?

What does the pastor expect from them?

These questions are worth discussing before a difficult decision exposes every difference at once.

Pray Together

This sounds obvious.

It is surprisingly easy for church leadership to become almost entirely organizational.

Pray.

Not merely to open the meeting.

Pray about ministry.

Pray for one another.

Pray for the community.

Pray about difficult decisions before solving them.

Remember why you are gathered.

The pastor and leaders are not simply running an organization together.

They are trying together to recognize and join the work of God.

For Conversation

What conversations should the pastor have with staff early?

Where are roles or authority unclear?

What does the governing board expect from the pastor?

What does the pastor need from the governing board?

How can prayer become part of the working relationship rather than merely part of the agenda?

Chapter Eight

Talk About Expectations Before They Become Disappointments

Making the Invisible Visible

Every new pastoral relationship contains expectations.

Most of them are invisible.

Until someone crosses one.

A member says:

“The pastor never visits.”

The pastor says:

“No one told me she was in the hospital.”

A leader says:

“We expected the pastor to be at that event.”

The pastor says:

“I didn’t know that was expected.”

A staff member says:

“Our last pastor always...”

Now the expectations are visible.

Unfortunately, they have surfaced as disappointment.

Talk While Things Are Going Well

Ask early:

What does good pastoral care mean here?

How do people communicate pastoral needs?

What are expectations about hospital visits?

Office presence?

Community involvement?

Worship preparation?

Staff leadership?

Committee meetings?

Emergencies?

Days off?

Vacation?

Email?

Text messages?

Social media?

How quickly do people expect responses?

What constitutes an emergency?

Some expectations will need adjustment.

On both sides.

That is normal.

The Pastor Has Expectations Too

Mutuality matters.

What does the pastor expect from governing-board members?

Will leaders protect days off?

Will people communicate concerns directly?

Will the board share responsibility for ministry?

Will members understand that the pastor cannot attend every event?

How will staff disagreements be handled?

How will criticism be communicated?

The congregation is not the only party with expectations.

Partnership requires both parties to speak.

Beware the Previous Pastor

Comparisons are inevitable.

“Our last pastor always visited before surgery.”

“Our previous pastor didn’t attend committee meetings.”

“Pastor Smith always preached without notes.”

Some comparisons provide useful information.

Others keep the new relationship from becoming itself.

The new pastor is not the previous pastor with different hair.

Let this ministry develop its own patterns.

Expectations Become Covenants

The goal is not a giant list of rules.

It is shared understanding.

When expectations are discussed, people can make choices.

Yes, that is reasonable.

No, that is not sustainable.

We need another way to handle that.

That responsibility belongs to all of us.

This is what I can promise.

This is what I need from you.

Unspoken expectations do not remain silent. Eventually, they become disappointments.

Speak before disappointment has to speak for you.

For Conversation

What expectations are people likely carrying about the new pastor?

Which expectations were never discussed during the search?

What expectations does the pastor have of leaders and the congregation?

Which expectations may be unrealistic?

How can we turn assumptions into shared agreements?

Chapter Nine

Resist the Rush to Change

Discern Before You Fix

A new pastor notices things.

That is one of the gifts of being new.

Longtime members no longer notice them.

Why do we do this?

Why is that meeting necessary?

Why does worship work this way?

Why is no one using that room?

Why are these two ministries doing almost the same thing?

Why does this decision require four committees?

Fresh eyes matter.

But noticing something is not the same as understanding it.

Curiosity Before Correction

Begin with:

Tell me how this developed.

What purpose does it serve?

Who cares deeply about this?

What have you tried before?

What happened?

What would we lose if we changed it?

You may discover that the practice is obsolete.

You may also discover that it carries a meaning you could not yet see.

Curiosity is usually a better first intervention than correction.

Some Things Cannot Wait

This is not an argument for doing nothing.

Serious ethical problems require action.

Safety issues require action.

Financial irregularities require action.

Abuse cannot wait for a year of relationship-building.

Serious personnel problems may require timely attention.

Leadership includes knowing when patience becomes avoidance.

But most congregational peculiarities are not emergencies.

You do not have to reorganize the committee structure in month two.

Congregations Should Resist the Rush Too

The pressure for change does not always come from the pastor.

Sometimes the congregation says:

“We called you to lead us.”

What they mean is:

“Please fix what we couldn’t figure out during the transition.”

Be careful.

You did not call a mechanic.

You called a partner.

The pastor needs to participate in discerning the future, not merely implement a list of repairs.

Change at the Speed of Trust

There is no universal timetable.

But healthy change usually moves at the pace of relationship.

People need to understand why.

Leaders need to participate.

Stories need to be heard.

Losses need to be acknowledged.

Alternatives need to be imagined.

Trust makes this possible.

That is why the earlier chapters mattered.

Small groups.

Meals.

Introductions.

Listening.

Learning.

Those were never delays.

They were preparing the ground.

For Conversation

What genuinely requires early action?

What can wait?

Where might the new pastor see something we no longer notice?

Where might the pastor need more history before reaching a conclusion?

How can we distinguish faithful patience from avoidance?

Chapter Ten

Let the First Year Be a Conversation

Reflect, Learn, Adjust

Many congregations wait until the end of the first year to ask how things are going.

By then, small misunderstandings may have hardened into habits.

Don't wait.

Keep talking along the way.

Ask Early and Often

Perhaps after six weeks:

What has surprised you?

What has helped you feel welcomed?

What is confusing?

What do you need?

Perhaps after three months:

What relationships are developing?

What are you learning about the congregation?

What are we learning about you?

What expectations need clarification?

Perhaps after six months:

What is going well?

Where are we experiencing difficulty?

What are we beginning to recognize about ministry together?

What needs adjustment?

And around the first year:

What have we learned?

Where has trust grown?

What has been difficult?

What are we ready to explore together now?

This Is Not Evaluation

At least not primarily.

The question is not:

How is the pastor doing?

The question is:

How are we doing together?

That question changes the conversation.

The congregation has responsibilities.

Leaders have responsibilities.

Staff have responsibilities.

The pastor has responsibilities.

Shared ministry should produce shared reflection.

Name What Is Going Well

Churches often wait until something is wrong to talk about relationships.

Don't.

Say what is working.

That sermon helped us.

The way you handled that meeting built trust.

Thank you for asking before making that change.

I appreciated the way the Session supported me when that happened.

That community introduction opened an important relationship.

Positive feedback is not flattery.

It teaches people what strengthens the partnership.

Address Difficulty While It Is Small

The same is true of problems.

A concern discussed after two weeks may require a conversation.

If ignored for nine months, it may require conflict mediation.

Speak directly.

Speak kindly.

Ask questions.

Assume good intent until there is reason not to.

Do not recruit allies before talking with the person involved.

Healthy ministry depends less on avoiding every disappointment than on learning what to do when disappointment comes.

For Conversation

What rhythm of reflection would serve us during the first year?

How will both pastor and congregation receive feedback?

How will concerns be raised directly?

What is already going well that deserves to be named?

What are we learning about the partnership?

Chapter Eleven

From Transition to Shared Ministry

Now the Partnership Begins to Lead

At some point, something changes.

The pastor no longer needs directions to every hospital.

Names come more easily.

The governing board has developed its own rhythm.

Staff relationships have begun to settle.

Community leaders recognize the pastor.

The transition team meets less often.

The pastor has heard enough stories to understand why certain things matter.

The congregation has experienced the pastor beyond the candidating weekend.

You are no longer merely at the beginning.

You are beginning **together**.

Return to What You Discerned

During the transition, the congregation did significant work.

Remembering.

Listening.

Recognizing gifts.

Understanding community.

Naming vocation.

Writing the Ministry Discernment Profile.

Return to it.

Not to hold the pastor accountable to a document written before arrival.

Ask:

What still seems true?

What do we understand differently now?

What has the pastor noticed that we missed?

What has the congregation helped the pastor understand?

What new relationships have changed our thinking?

Where do we see energy?

Where might the Holy Spirit be inviting our attention now?

The discernment that preceded the call now becomes shared discernment.

Release the Transition Team

If the search committee became a transition team, its work should now be nearing completion.

Celebrate it.

These people helped the congregation navigate an extraordinary season.

They helped the congregation discern the call.

Then they helped the pastor and congregation begin their relationship.

Thank them.

Pray over them.

Release them.

The ministry now belongs where it always belonged:

to the pastor and congregation together.

Stop Saying “Our New Pastor”

Eventually, the pastor is no longer new.

There is no official date.

You will know.

The pastor begins referring to the congregation as “we” without thinking.

Members stop explaining every tradition.

People have shared enough ordinary life that the relationship is no longer built primarily on first impressions.

You have disagreed about something and survived.

You have laughed.

Grieved.

Worshiped.

Made decisions.

Made mistakes.

Forgiven.

Learned.

The partnership has begun to develop a history of its own.

Now Ask the Question Together

The search process asked:

Is God calling us into ministry with one another?

Now the question changes:

What is God calling us to do together?

Neither the pastor nor the congregation answers alone.

Listen again.

Look again.

Remember.

Pay attention to the community.

Notice what is emerging.

Recognize what Christ is doing.

Then respond.

This is no longer transition work.

It is ministry.

For Conversation

What have we learned about one another?

What discoveries from the transition still guide us?

What do we understand differently now?

Where do we see signs of shared vocation emerging?

What are we ready to begin discerning together?

Epilogue

The Journey Continues

A pastoral transition begins with an ending.

Someone announces a departure.

Suddenly the congregation enters uncertainty.

Who will lead us?

What happens next?

How long will this take?

Who will our next pastor be?

Those questions are understandable.

But they were never the deepest questions.

The deeper questions concerned the congregation itself.

Who are we now?

What has God been doing among us?

What have our stories taught us?

What do we need to release?

What do we need to remember?

What is happening in the community around us?

Who have we not been hearing?

Where is there pain?

Where is there abundance?

What gifts has God entrusted to us?

What vocation may be emerging where our gifts meet this place?

What kind of pastoral partnership might help us live faithfully into that vocation?

And finally:

With whom might God be calling us to share this ministry?

You have traveled a long road.

Preparing

You learned that transition should not begin with a search.

It begins by making room.

By becoming ready.

By recognizing that something is changing and allowing the congregation to become spiritually prepared for the journey ahead.

Ending Well

You learned that beginnings require endings.

You honored relationships.

Grieved.

Celebrated.

Blessed.

Released.

You tried to let one ministry come to completion before asking another pastor to live in its shadow.

Remembering

You returned to your stories.

Not to live in the past.

To interpret it.

You remembered courage.

Failure.

Faithfulness.

Conflict.

Generosity.

Adaptation.

Grace.

You asked what those stories revealed about the people God had formed you to be.

Listening

Then you turned around.

You listened to one another.

To voices easily missed.

To neighbors.

To community leaders.

To data.

To pain.

To gifts.

You walked outside the building.

You became curious.

You discovered that the community was not simply a collection of needs waiting for your church to solve.

It was already alive with people, relationships, wisdom, resilience, creativity, and signs of God's activity.

Giving Language to Vocation

Then you tried to speak.

You developed a Ministry Discernment Profile.

Not merely an advertisement.

Not simply paperwork.

You tried to tell the truth.

This is who we are.

This is where we live.

This is what we have learned.

This is where we struggle.

This is what gives us hope.

This is what we think God may be calling us toward.

This is the partnership we are ready to discern.

Calling New Leadership

Then another story entered the congregation's story.

A pastor's story.

You read.

Talked.

Asked questions.

Listened to questions asked of you.

Interviewed.

Prayed.

Perhaps experienced disappointment.

Perhaps started again.

You learned that calling pastoral leadership is not recruitment.

It is mutual discernment.

Eventually, the congregation and pastor recognized something together.

Perhaps cautiously.

Perhaps joyfully.

Perhaps with trembling.

We believe God may be calling us into ministry together.

And a call was extended.

Beginning Ministry Together

Then the pastor arrived.

And you discovered that the call had not completed the transition.

A relationship had to be built.

You welcomed.

Introduced.

Listened.

Learned.

Clarified expectations.

Developed trust.

Made mistakes.

Adjusted.

The congregation learned the pastor.

The pastor learned the congregation.

And slowly, the pronouns began to change.

Not:

you and us.

But:

we.

That is when pastoral transition has done its work.

Not when the position is filled.

When shared ministry begins.

The Transition Ends. Discernment Does Not.

There is no final state in which a congregation has everything settled.

The community will change again.

The congregation will change.

The pastor will change.

People will arrive.

People will leave.

New pain will appear.

New gifts will emerge.

Ministries will begin.

Others will end.

Questions answered confidently today may need to be asked differently ten years from now.

That is not failure.

It is life.

The great gift of a healthy pastoral transition is not simply a new pastor.

It is a congregation that has learned once again how to discern.

You know some practices now.

Remember.

Listen.

Become curious.

Tell the truth.

Recognize gifts.

Attend to pain.

Notice relationships.

Look for Christ.

Ask better questions.

Pray.

Respond.

Then listen again.

These practices belong to the ordinary life of the Church.

You Will Travel This Road Again

Someday another transition will come.

Perhaps years from now.

A pastor will announce a retirement.

Accept another call.

Experience a life change.

The congregation will once again face uncertainty.

When that day comes, perhaps you will remember this journey.

And perhaps the first question will no longer be:

“How quickly can we find another pastor?”

Perhaps you will know to ask:

“What is God inviting us to notice now?”

That question changes everything.

Because the Church’s future has never depended on predicting what comes next.

It depends on becoming attentive enough to recognize the One who is already there.

Christ is at work before the transition begins.

Christ is present in the ending.

Christ is present in the remembering.

Christ is already moving through the community while we are learning to listen.

Christ is present in the questions.

Christ is present when two vocations begin to recognize one another.

And Christ is present when the pastor and congregation begin their ministry together.

The work was never ours alone.

The future was never ours to control.

Our calling has always been simpler—and harder:

to pay attention.

to trust.

to discern.

and then to participate.

Throughout this journey, we have returned again and again to a simple conviction.

It is an appropriate place to end.

And an even better place from which to begin:

God acts.

We recognize.

We join.

Beginning Ministry Together Field Manual

Building the Partnership from the Beginning

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Introduction

Using This Field Manual

The call has been extended.

The pastor has said yes.

The congregation has celebrated.

Perhaps the moving truck has arrived. Perhaps boxes are still being unpacked. Perhaps the pastor is learning the route to the church while members are already wondering what the first sermon series will be.

Everyone is ready to begin.

But beginning ministry together is not the same thing as beginning a job.

A congregation has not simply hired a new professional. A pastor has not simply accepted a new position. Pastor and congregation have entered a covenant whose shape they have only begun to discover.

The search process helped them ask an important question:

Is God calling us into ministry with one another?

Now another question begins:

How will we learn to become partners in that ministry?

That is the work of this Field Manual.

The Beginning Ministry Together Field Guide describes the first months as a season in which pastor and congregation learn one another: preparing for arrival, offering thoughtful hospitality, building relationships, introducing the pastor to the community, learning congregational culture, forming healthy staff and leadership relationships, clarifying expectations, resisting premature change, and establishing habits of mutual reflection.

This Manual provides the tools for doing that work.

It is not a hundred-day plan.

It is not an onboarding program.

It is not a performance-management system.

And it is not a disguised evaluation process for determining whether the congregation made the right choice.

It is a collection of practical resources for helping a new pastoral relationship take root.

The Transition Is Not Quite Over

One of the easiest mistakes in a pastoral transition is assuming that the transition ends when the pastor arrives.

It does not.

The congregation has lived through its own transition. It has experienced an ending, remembered its story, listened to its community, discerned its emerging vocation, developed a Ministry Discernment Profile, encountered candidates, and finally called a pastor.

The pastor has also been living through a transition.

There may have been a congregation to leave.

Relationships to release.

A home to sell.

A spouse or partner making changes of their own.

Children leaving friends or entering new schools.

A new community to learn.

New routines to establish.

Even a joyful beginning contains an ending.

As the Field Guide reminds us, the new pastor may still be ending while the congregation is eager to begin.

Then, almost immediately, ordinary ministry begins.

Sunday is coming.

Someone is in the hospital.

A staff meeting is scheduled.

The governing board has an agenda.

A funeral may occur.

People want appointments.

Names need to be learned.

Community leaders want to meet.

Members begin asking what the new pastor thinks about worship, staffing, programs, finances, mission, and the future.

Everyone is arriving at once.

That is precisely why this season deserves intentional care.

The First Work Is Relationship

There will be plenty of time for plans.

There will be decisions to make.

There will be programs to evaluate, budgets to develop, structures to reconsider, conflicts to address, and new ministries to imagine.

Some matters may even require immediate attention.

But most do not.

The first work is relationship.

Pastor and congregation need to learn one another.

The pastor needs to hear stories that never appeared in the Ministry Discernment Profile.

The congregation needs to discover the person behind the candidate it interviewed.

Staff members need to learn a new colleague or supervisor.

Governing-board members need to discover how they and the pastor will lead together.

The pastor needs to encounter the formal congregation—and the informal one.

Who carries history?

Who brings people together?

Who is trusted?

Who knows the community?

Who has influence without holding office?

Who has been hurt?

Who is carrying hope?

The pastor also needs to learn the place to which they have been called. The Field Guide insists that the call is not simply to an institution but to ministry with a congregation in a place. The community relationships discovered during Listening should therefore become relationships into which the congregation introduces its new pastor.

None of this is preliminary to ministry.

It is ministry.

The relationships built during these first months become relational capital for the ministry ahead.

And later will come.

There will eventually be disagreement.

Someone will be disappointed.

A decision will be unpopular.

A change will be proposed.

A sermon will land badly.

A meeting will become tense.

A staff relationship will need attention.

Pastor and congregation will discover things about one another that did not emerge during the search.

When those moments come, the question will not simply be whether everyone agrees.

It will be whether enough trust has been built to remain in relationship when they do not.

That trust begins now.

The First Months Are an Apprenticeship

New pastors often feel pressure to demonstrate leadership immediately.

What is your vision?

What are your priorities?

What are you going to change?

What are you going to do about declining attendance?

How will you attract younger people?

What do you think of our worship?

Sometimes one of the wisest answers a new pastor can give is:

“I don't know yet.”

The Field Guide describes the first months as an apprenticeship—to a congregation and to a place.

An apprentice pays attention.

An apprentice asks questions.

An apprentice notices.

An apprentice learns why things are done before deciding they are foolish.

An apprentice discovers that organizational charts explain only part of an organization.

An apprentice asks not only:

Why do you do this?

but:

What story is behind this?

What value has this protected?

What happened the last time someone tried to change it?

Who cares about this?

What might be lost if it disappeared?

Learning does not mean the pastor refuses to lead.

Learning **is** leadership.

A pastor who listens before announcing answers models discernment.

A pastor who asks good questions teaches a congregation to become curious about itself.

A pastor willing to say, “Help me understand,” creates room for people to tell stories that may eventually help everyone understand.

But apprenticeship requires something from the congregation too.

The congregation must allow the pastor to learn.

Do not demand immediate opinions about every longstanding issue.

Do not interpret questions as criticism.

Do not confuse uncertainty with incompetence.

Do not hand the pastor every unresolved problem that accumulated during the transition.

Do not say, in effect:

“We waited a long time for you. Now fix this.”

You did not call a mechanic.

You called a partner.

Both Parties Have Work to Do

This Manual deliberately resists treating the pastor as the primary actor and the congregation as the audience.

Pastor and congregation are beginning ministry together.

The congregation therefore has work to do.

The pastor has work to do.

Staff and leaders have work to do.

And there is work they must do together.

That is why many resources in this Manual are not labeled simply “For the Pastor.”

Some are for the governing board.

Some are for staff.

Some are for the transition team.

Some are for congregational leaders.

Some are for the pastor and congregation to complete separately and then compare.

Some are designed for conversation around a table.

That mutuality becomes especially important when expectations are discussed.

Every new pastoral relationship contains expectations.

The congregation has them.

The pastor has them.

Staff members have them.

Some were discussed during the search.

Many were not.

Some are reasonable.

Some are impossible.

Some were inherited from a previous pastor.

Some arise from experiences in a pastor's previous congregation.

Some are hopes.

Some are fears.

Some remain invisible until someone violates them.

Then an expectation becomes a disappointment.

One of the most important tasks of the first year is therefore to make the invisible visible while people still trust one another enough to talk about it.

What does the congregation expect?

What does the pastor expect?

What does the governing board expect?

What do staff members need?

What does the pastor need from staff?

How will people communicate concerns?

What does pastoral care mean here?

Who is responsible for what?

How are decisions made?

What happens on a day off?

How quickly should an email receive an answer?

What constitutes an emergency?

How will disagreements be handled?

Clarity is not the enemy of grace.

Often it makes grace possible.

How to Use This Manual

This Manual is intentionally larger than the Field Guide because it is not meant to be read straight through and then placed on a shelf.

It is a working resource.

Use what you need when you need it.

The chapters follow the movement of the Field Guide:

Prepare.

Receive.

Build relationships.

Learn the congregation and community.

Form working relationships.

Clarify expectations.

Discern before changing.

Reflect together.

Move from transition into shared ministry.

Some resources are simple checklists.

Others are conversation guides.

Some are individual reflection exercises.

Others require a group.

Some may take fifteen minutes.

Others may shape a Session retreat or extended staff conversation.

Do not try to complete everything.

That would turn a resource designed to reduce pressure into another source of pressure.

Instead ask:

What would help us now?

Then use that resource.

Return later when another question emerges.

A Suggested First-Year Rhythm

The resources will generally fall into five seasons.

Before Arrival

Prepare the physical and organizational environment.

Clear unnecessary unfinished business.

Establish healthy congregational expectations.

Ask what would actually help the pastor and family arrive.

Prepare the transition team for its new role.

The First Month

Welcome.

Listen.

Introduce.

Help.

Create small spaces for conversation.

Begin staff and leadership relationships.

Introduce the pastor to the community.

Resist filling every hour.

Let the pastor unpack—literally and figuratively.

The First Ninety Days

Widen relationships.

Learn congregational culture.

Explore formal and informal leadership.

Clarify roles.

Talk about expectations.

Continue community introductions.

Ask questions before proposing answers.

Allow the pastor to become an apprentice to congregation and place.

Three to Six Months

Reflect.

What is going well?

What is confusing?

Where are expectations becoming clearer?

Where are misunderstandings emerging?

What relationships still need attention?

What has the pastor begun to notice?

What has the congregation begun to learn about the pastor?

What might need adjustment?

Six to Twelve Months

Return gradually to the discernment that preceded the call.

What still seems true?

What do we now understand differently?

What has the pastor helped the congregation see?

What has the congregation helped the pastor understand?

Where is energy emerging?

What might God now be inviting pastor and congregation to explore together?

The sequence matters.

Notice that **vision does not come first**.

Relationship does.

The Transition Team

One distinctive recommendation of the Field Guide deserves particular attention.

Do not allow the search committee simply to disappear when the pastor arrives.

For a defined period, allow it to change jobs.

The people who served on the search committee know the pastor better than almost anyone in the congregation. They also know the congregation.

They can become a temporary bridge between the two.

The Manual provides resources for helping the search committee become a transition team: regular check-ins, introductions, relationship mapping, community connections, and eventually a deliberate process for completing its work.

But the transition team must remain a bridge.

It must never become the pastor's political base.

It is not a private advisory council.

It does not protect the pastor from the congregation.

It does not interpret every congregational experience for the pastor.

It does not become the group with special access.

The bridge exists so relationships can cross it.

Eventually, the bridge has done its work.

The team should then be thanked, blessed, and released.

This Is Not Evaluation

Several resources in this Manual invite pastor, leaders, staff, and congregation to ask:

How are things going?

That question can easily become:

How is the pastor doing?

Resist that move.

At least during this formative period, the more important question is:

How are we doing together?

The difference is theological as well as practical.

Ministry belongs neither to the pastor nor to the congregation alone.

The congregation has responsibilities.

The governing board has responsibilities.

Staff members have responsibilities.

The pastor has responsibilities.

When something is going well, ask what **we** are doing that is strengthening ministry.

When something is difficult, ask what **we** need to understand or change.

Mutual reflection does not eliminate accountability.

It places accountability inside covenant.

Do Not Rush Toward Change

The new pastor will see things.

Fresh eyes are a gift.

The congregation will also have a list of things it hopes the new pastor will address.

Some things cannot wait.

Ethical violations cannot wait.

Abuse cannot wait.

Serious safety concerns cannot wait.

Financial irregularities cannot wait.

Some personnel situations require timely action.

But most congregational peculiarities are not emergencies.

The first question does not always need to be:

How do we fix this?

Try:

Help me understand this.

Then:

How did it develop?

What purpose has it served?

What value does it protect?

Who cares about it?

What have we tried before?

What happened?

What might be lost if it changed?

You may still decide to change it.

But now you will understand what you are changing.

The Field Guide offers a helpful principle:

Change at the speed of trust.

The tools in this Manual are intended to help build that trust.

When the Pronouns Change

There is no official moment when a pastoral transition ends.

It probably will not happen at the installation.

It will not happen automatically at six months.

It may not happen precisely at the first anniversary.

But eventually something changes.

The pastor stops being introduced as “our new pastor.”

Members no longer explain everything.

The pastor knows the stories behind the names.

The congregation has seen the pastor beyond the carefully prepared candidating weekend.

Pastor and leaders have made decisions together.

Perhaps they have disagreed and discovered that disagreement did not destroy the relationship.

They have worshiped.

Worked.

Laughed.

Grieved.

Made mistakes.

Adjusted.

Forgiven.

The relationship has begun to accumulate a history of its own.

And almost unnoticed, the language changes.

Not:

you and us.

But:

we.

That is where this Manual is trying to take you.

Not toward a perfectly executed first year.

Not toward a pastor who has mastered the congregation.

Not toward a congregation that has successfully assimilated its new leader.

Toward partnership.

The search process asked:

Is God calling us into ministry with one another?

The first year begins teaching pastor and congregation how to ask the next question together:

What is God calling us to do together?

When that question genuinely belongs to both pastor and congregation, transition is giving way to ministry.

And the familiar rhythm that has carried this congregation through the entire journey can carry you from here:

God acts.

We recognize.

We join.

Chapter One

Chapter One Resources

Before the Pastor Arrives

Preparing to Receive, Not Just Welcome

The congregation has called a pastor.

There will be a beginning date.

A first Sunday.

Perhaps an installation service.

There may be a reception, name tags, photographs, food, flowers, and a great deal of excitement.

But before the pastor arrives, there is quieter work to do.

The question is not simply:

How will we welcome our new pastor?

The better question is:

What kind of place are we preparing for this new relationship to begin?

A congregation can offer a beautiful reception and still leave a new pastor without a functioning computer.

It can fill the refrigerator with food while filling the first week's calendar with meetings.

It can publicly promise a fresh beginning while privately maintaining a list of unresolved problems everyone expects the new pastor to solve.

It can tell the pastor to take time to settle in while asking on the second day:

“So, what is your vision for us?”

Preparing well means more than hospitality.

It means preparing the congregation itself.

The first chapter of the *Beginning Ministry Together Field Guide* asks the congregation to create a practical landing zone before the pastor arrives, resolve what can be resolved without the new pastor, prepare expectations, and avoid beginning the relationship with unnecessary confusion. It also reminds the congregation that the pastor may still be ending a previous chapter of life while everyone else is eager for the new one to begin.

That is the work of this chapter.

For most congregations, **FM-1.1, FM-1.2, FM-1.3, FM-1.4, FM-1.5, and FM-1.8** provide the core process.

FM-1.1

Before the Pastor Arrives Master Checklist

Clear the Practical Obstacles Before the Relationship Begins

Purpose

A new pastor should not spend the first week discovering that no one knows the church Wi-Fi password.

Small practical failures communicate something.

So does preparedness.

The purpose of this checklist is not to create perfection. It is to remove avoidable frustrations so the pastor's attention can be given to people rather than administrative scavenger hunts.

Time

Begin four to six weeks before arrival.

Assign responsibility for every item.

Do not assume “someone” is taking care of it.

Office

- ☐ Office cleaned.
- ☐ Unnecessary materials from previous pastor removed.
- ☐ Personal items belonging to previous pastor returned.
- ☐ Desk and workspace usable.
- ☐ Comfortable chair available.
- ☐ Adequate lighting.
- ☐ Bookshelves cleared sufficiently for use.
- ☐ Filing space available.
- ☐ Basic office supplies stocked.
- ☐ Private space available for confidential conversations.
- ☐ Appropriate sound/privacy issues addressed.
- ☐ Office keys prepared.

Ask

Does the office communicate:

“We prepared a place for you”

or:

“Here is what the last person left behind”?

Technology

- ☐ Computer available and functioning.
- ☐ Monitor available.
- ☐ Printer access established.
- ☐ Internet connection tested.
- ☐ Wi-Fi information provided.
- ☐ Church email account established.
- ☐ Email tested before first day.
- ☐ Necessary shared drives or cloud folders accessible.
- ☐ Calendar access established.
- ☐ Church management software access established if applicable.
- ☐ Worship-planning software access established if applicable.
- ☐ Video-conferencing capability tested.
- ☐ Password transfer process completed securely.
- ☐ Website administration responsibilities clarified.
- ☐ Social-media responsibilities clarified.
- ☐ Technical support person identified.

Technology Contact

Name: _____

Phone/email: _____

Building Access

- ☐ Exterior keys.
- ☐ Office keys.
- ☐ Sanctuary keys if needed.
- ☐ Alarm code.
- ☐ Alarm instructions.
- ☐ Building-access procedures.
- ☐ After-hours procedures.
- ☐ Emergency contacts.
- ☐ HVAC instructions if needed.
- ☐ Lighting instructions.
- ☐ Parking information.
- ☐ Building-use calendar.
- ☐ Room reservation process.

- ☐ Fire/security procedures.
- ☐ Custodial contact.

Building Contact

Name: _____

Phone/email: _____

Administrative Information

- ☐ Current staff roster.
- ☐ Staff contact information.
- ☐ Governing-board roster.
- ☐ Committee/ministry-team roster.
- ☐ Current church calendar.
- ☐ Membership directory.
- ☐ Constitution/bylaws if applicable.
- ☐ Current policies.
- ☐ Personnel policies.
- ☐ Financial policies.
- ☐ Building-use policies.
- ☐ Child/youth protection policies.
- ☐ Sexual misconduct/safe-church policies.
- ☐ Emergency procedures.
- ☐ Current budget.
- ☐ Most recent financial reports.
- ☐ Current organizational chart.
- ☐ Recent governing-board minutes.
- ☐ Current ministry calendar.
- ☐ Denominational/presbytery contact information.

Important

Do not put all of this in an enormous binder and announce:

“Everything you need is in here.”

Organize it.

Identify what the pastor actually needs first.

Compensation and Benefits

- ☐ Salary arrangements confirmed.

- ☐ Payroll beginning date confirmed.
- ☐ Housing arrangements completed if applicable.
- ☐ Benefits enrollment completed.
- ☐ Pension/retirement paperwork completed.
- ☐ Health insurance arrangements confirmed.
- ☐ Reimbursement procedures explained.
- ☐ Professional expense account established.
- ☐ Continuing education provisions explained.
- ☐ Vacation policy reviewed.
- ☐ Study leave policy reviewed.
- ☐ Moving expense reimbursement completed.
- ☐ Mileage reimbursement process explained.

Responsible Person

Worship

- ☐ First Sunday's expectations discussed.
- ☐ Worship schedule provided.
- ☐ Current order of worship provided.
- ☐ Worship-planning process explained.
- ☐ Music staff introduced.
- ☐ Worship leaders identified.
- ☐ Sacramental schedule provided.
- ☐ Upcoming special services identified.
- ☐ Preaching expectations clarified.
- ☐ Bulletin deadlines explained.
- ☐ Scripture/sermon submission deadlines explained if applicable.
- ☐ Livestream procedures explained.
- ☐ Robing practices discussed if relevant.
- ☐ Worship traditions that might surprise the pastor identified.

Ask

What does the pastor genuinely need to know before the first Sunday?

What can be learned later?

People

- ☐ Staff introductions scheduled.
- ☐ Clerk or equivalent officer introduction scheduled.
- ☐ Treasurer introduction scheduled.
- ☐ Governing-board leadership introduction scheduled.
- ☐ Transition-team contact identified.
- ☐ Administrative support person identified.
- ☐ Emergency pastoral-care contact information available.
- ☐ Community introduction process planned.
- ☐ First-month relationship-building process planned.

Final Walk-Through

Two or three days before the pastor arrives, have someone enter the building as though it were their first day.

Can they get in?

Can they find the office?

Does the computer work?

Can they make a phone call?

Can they print?

Can they find the restroom?

Do they know whom to call when something does not work?

Problems Discovered

Person Responsible

Completion Date

FM-1.2

Clear the Landing Zone Audit

Do Not Welcome the Pastor with a Pile of Unfinished Business

Purpose

During a pastoral vacancy, issues accumulate.

Some genuinely require the next pastor's participation.

Others do not.

Congregations sometimes postpone decisions because:

“We should let the new pastor decide.”

Sometimes that is wise.

Sometimes it means the congregation is avoiding responsibility.

This exercise helps distinguish the two.

Time

60–90 minutes with the governing board or appropriate leadership group.

Gather the Unfinished Business

Do not evaluate initially.

List everything people have said should wait for the new pastor.

For Each Item, Ask

Does this decision legitimately require pastoral leadership?

Yes / No / Unsure

Could the congregation make this decision now?

Yes / No

Would delaying it create unnecessary difficulty?

Yes / No

Is the issue primarily operational?

Yes / No

Is it primarily theological or pastoral?

Yes / No

Are we postponing it because we are afraid of disagreement?

Yes / No

Are we hoping the new pastor will take responsibility for an unpopular decision?

Yes / No

Sort the Issues

RESOLVE BEFORE ARRIVAL

These do not require the new pastor.

PREPARE NOW, DISCUSS WITH PASTOR

Background work can be completed before arrival, but the pastor should participate in the final decision.

WAIT FOR THE PASTOR

These legitimately involve pastoral leadership and should wait.

STOP DOING

Some unresolved matters may not need resolution.

They may simply need release.

The Hard Question

What are we tempted to hand to the new pastor because we do not want to take responsibility for it ourselves?

Complete

Before the pastor arrives, we will resolve:

We will prepare:

We will intentionally leave for later discernment:

We will release:

FM-1.3

What the New Pastor Needs to Know

Curate the Information

Purpose

The congregation possesses enormous amounts of information.

The pastor does not need all of it on Monday morning.

This exercise creates a curated pathway.

Time

45–60 minutes.

Sort Information into Four Categories

NEED BEFORE ARRIVAL

Examples might include:

first-week schedule;

first-Sunday information;

staff contacts;

building access;

payroll and benefits;

housing information;

immediate pastoral-care situations.

Our list:

NEED DURING THE FIRST WEEK

NEED DURING THE FIRST MONTH

CAN LEARN LATER

Identify the Human Guide

Documents do not replace people.

For each area, identify someone who can explain the information.

Area	Person
Building	_____
Administration	_____
Finance	_____
Worship	_____
Staff	_____
Governance	_____
Pastoral care	_____
Community	_____
Denomination	_____

The Archive Test

Before handing the pastor a document, ask:

Why does the pastor need this now?

If no one can answer, do not put it in the first-week packet.

First-Week Packet

Limit this to what is genuinely useful.

Contents:

FM-1.4

First 30 Days Calendar Builder

Protect the Beginning from the Calendar

Purpose

A new pastor's calendar can fill before the pastor arrives.

Every committee wants a meeting.

Every group wants an introduction.

Members want appointments.

Community leaders may want meetings.

The pastor also needs time to unpack, learn, prepare worship, meet staff, remember names, understand systems, and simply recover from transition.

A full calendar is not necessarily a productive beginning.

Time

45–60 minutes with the pastor and transition-team representative.

First Establish the Essentials

What must happen during the first month?

Then Identify the Important but Flexible

Then Identify What Can Wait

Protect Time for

- ☐ Worship preparation.
- ☐ Staff relationships.
- ☐ Governing-board relationships.
- ☐ Congregational conversations.
- ☐ Community introductions.
- ☐ Pastoral care.
- ☐ Administrative learning.
- ☐ Unscheduled learning.
- ☐ Personal settling-in time.
- ☐ Days off.

Calendar Warning Signs

Watch for:

meetings scheduled simply because they normally occur;
multiple evening commitments in the same week;
every group requesting its own “meet the pastor” session;
unnecessary ceremonial appearances;
back-to-back appointments;
expectation that the pastor attend every congregational activity;
failure to protect days off.

Ask

What would we schedule if our goal were to help the pastor **learn**, rather than demonstrate productivity?

First Month Priorities

Things We Are Deliberately Not Scheduling Yet

FM-1.5

Congregational Expectations Before Arrival

Prepare the Congregation, Not Just the Office

Purpose

The congregation has had months to imagine the new pastor.

The pastor has not yet had a day to become part of the congregation.

That imbalance can create unreasonable expectations.

This exercise helps leaders establish a healthier understanding of the first months.

Time

60 minutes with Session/governing board, followed by communication with the congregation.

Individually Complete

During the first three months, I hope the pastor will...

Share Responses

Record them without debate.

Then sort.

RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING

LEARNING

LEADERSHIP

CHANGE

PROBLEM-SOLVING

PERSONAL EXPECTATIONS

Now Ask

Which expectations are appropriate for the first three months?

Which could wait?

Which belong to the congregation rather than the pastor?

Which are unrealistic?

Which are reactions to the previous pastor?

Which expectations have never been discussed with the new pastor?

Finish This Sentence

The first months of this pastoral relationship are primarily for...

A Suggested Congregational Message

The governing board might communicate something like:

Our new pastor's first months among us will be a season of listening, learning, relationship-building, and beginning ministry together. We encourage you to introduce yourself, tell stories, invite conversation, and help our pastor learn both our congregation and our community. We also ask everyone to resist expecting immediate answers to longstanding questions. We have called a pastor to share ministry with us, and learning to become partners will take time.

FM-1.6

Preparing the Congregation for the First Months

Communication Planner

Purpose

Expectations are shaped by what leaders say before the pastor arrives.

Do not allow the congregation to invent the first-year agenda through rumor.

Identify the Core Messages

We want the congregation to understand:

Consider Communicating About

the pastor's arrival date;

first Sunday;

appropriate welcome;

the purpose of the first months;

relationship-building;

the transition team's continuing role;

respect for personal/family boundaries;

how appointments will be scheduled;

why immediate change should not be expected;

how the congregation can help introduce the pastor to the community.

Communication Channels

☐ Worship announcement.

☐ Newsletter.

☐ Email.

☐ Website.

☐ Social media.

- ☐ Governing-board communication.
- ☐ Small-group leaders.
- ☐ Printed letter.

Who Will Communicate?

When?

Watch the Language

Avoid:

“Our new pastor is finally here to lead us into the future.”

That places the future on the pastor.

Prefer language such as:

“We are beginning a new season of ministry together.”

The pronouns matter from the beginning.

FM-1.7

Relocation Support Planner

Make Arrival More Human

Purpose

If the pastor is relocating, the transition begins before the first day at church.

The congregation can help without becoming intrusive.

First Ask

What would actually be helpful?

Do not assume.

Possible Needs

- ☐ Moving assistance.
- ☐ Temporary housing.
- ☐ Local housing information.
- ☐ Utility information.
- ☐ Internet providers.
- ☐ Grocery stores.
- ☐ Pharmacy.
- ☐ Physicians.
- ☐ Veterinarians.

- ☐ Schools.
- ☐ Childcare.
- ☐ Transportation.
- ☐ DMV/licensing information.
- ☐ Banking.
- ☐ Restaurants.
- ☐ Home-repair contacts.
- ☐ Recreation.
- ☐ Local organizations.
- ☐ Community orientation.

Who Will Coordinate?

What Has the Pastor/Household Requested?

What Have They Declined?

Respect that answer.

Hospitality Boundary

Helping is not the same as taking over.

Do not assume the pastor wants:

people unpacking personal belongings;

an open-house immediately after moving;

daily visits;

meals every night for three weeks;

unsolicited advice about neighborhoods, schools, parenting, finances, or family life.

Ask.

Listen.

Respond.

FM-1.8

Preparing the Landing Zone

A Governing Board Conversation

Purpose

This exercise brings the practical and relational preparation together.

Time

60–75 minutes.

Use at the final governing-board meeting before the pastor arrives.

Question One

What have we done to make arrival easier?

Question Two

What unfinished business have we resolved rather than handing it to the pastor?

Question Three

What are we intentionally leaving unresolved because the pastor should participate?

Question Four

What expectations are we carrying into this relationship?

Question Five

Which expectations have we never discussed with the pastor?

Question Six

What pressure might the pastor feel to prove themselves quickly?

Question Seven

What can we do to reduce that pressure?

Question Eight

What does the congregation need to hear from us before the pastor arrives?

Question Nine

What does the pastor need from us during the first month?

Question Ten

What do we need from the pastor?

Do not assume the answers match.

That conversation will come later.

FM-1.9

The “Don't Hand This to the New Pastor” Exercise

Returning Responsibility to the Congregation

Purpose

Every congregation has a list.

Sometimes it is spoken aloud.

Sometimes it exists only in people's heads.

When the new pastor gets here...

they can fix the staff problem;

they can get the young people back;

they can improve worship;

they can increase giving;

they can deal with the difficult member;

they can restructure committees;

they can decide what to do with the building;

they can resolve the conflict;
they can get people volunteering again.
This exercise makes the list visible.

Time

45–60 minutes.

Complete

When the new pastor gets here, we hope they will...

Write everything.

Now Examine Each Item

Who actually owns this responsibility?

Pastor?

Governing board?

Staff?

Congregation?

Shared?

Ask

What have we already tried?

What have we avoided?

What responsibility have we transferred to the imagined new pastor?

Rewrite the List

Instead of:

The new pastor needs to...

write:

Together, pastor and congregation may need to explore...

or:

Before the pastor arrives, we need to...

Our Revised List

Remember

A new pastor is not God's way of relieving the congregation of its vocation.

FM-1.10

What Should the Pastor Not Have to Discover Accidentally?

The No-Surprises Inventory**Purpose**

Hospitality includes truthfulness.

Some information may not have belonged in the search process in detail but should not be discovered accidentally after arrival.

Time

45–60 minutes with appropriate leadership.

Consider

Are there significant:

staff tensions?

financial concerns?

building problems?

legal matters?

leadership conflicts?

pastoral-care crises?

community controversies?

unfinished decisions?

major upcoming expenditures?

membership concerns?

denominational matters?

calendar commitments?

known congregational conflicts?

List**For Each, Ask**

Does the pastor need to know this:

Before arrival?

First week?

First month?

Later?

Who Will Explain It?

Important

This is not an invitation to overwhelm the pastor with every complaint anyone has ever expressed.

Ask:

Does knowing this help the pastor enter the congregation truthfully?

If yes, make sure someone tells them.

FM-1.11

Protecting the Pastor's First Days

A Transition Team Guide

Purpose

Excitement can become pressure.

The transition team can help protect the beginning without becoming a gatekeeper.

During the First Week

Help the pastor know:

where to be;

who matters immediately;

what genuinely requires attention;

what can wait;

who can answer practical questions.

Watch For

people demanding immediate appointments;

unnecessary meetings;

pressure to take sides;

longstanding grievances presented as emergencies;

members asking the pastor to reverse decisions;

comparison with the previous pastor;

questions requiring knowledge the pastor does not yet have.

Helpful Transition-Team Responses

“That’s an important question. Let’s give our pastor some time to learn the congregation.”

“Have you spoken directly with the person involved?”

“That issue existed before the pastor arrived. We should not make it their emergency on the first week.”

“Let’s make sure the pastor gets the background before asking for an opinion.”

But Remember

The transition team is not a wall around the pastor.

People should have access.

Relationships should form.

The team’s task is not to control access.

It is to help create a humane beginning.

FM-1.12

First-Day Information Sheet

What the Pastor Actually Needs on Monday Morning

Purpose

Create one sheet.

Not a binder.

Not a manual.

One sheet.

Include

Church address

Office phone

Church email

Wi-Fi

Administrative contact

Building contact

Technology contact

Treasurer/finance contact

Clerk/governing-board contact

Transition-team contact

Emergency pastoral-care information

Today's schedule

This week's essential commitments

First Sunday information

Where to find everything else

At the Bottom Write

You do not need to learn everything this week.

Chapter One Discernment Harvest

The Place We Are Preparing

Practical Preparations Still Needed

Unfinished Business We Will Resolve Before Arrival

Matters We Will Intentionally Leave for Later Discernment

Information the Pastor Needs Immediately

Information That Can Wait

Expectations We Need to Release

Expectations We Need Eventually to Discuss with the Pastor

Responsibilities We Have Returned to the Congregation

Ways We Will Protect Time for Relationship-Building and Learning

What We Want the Congregation to Understand About the First Months

Complete

We are preparing not simply for a pastor to begin working here, but for...

The most important gift we can offer before the pastor arrives is...

The responsibility we must resist handing to the pastor is...

A Prayer Before the Pastor Arrives

Leader

God who prepares the way,
we have spent many months
waiting for this beginning.

People

Prepare us to receive it well.

Leader

We have searched,
discerned,
prayed,
questioned,
and finally called.

People

Now teach us how to welcome.

Leader

Not only with food and celebration,

People

but with room to breathe.

Leader

Not only with keys and passwords,

People

but with patience.

Leader

Not only with information,

People

but with stories.

Leader

Not only with expectations,

People

but with curiosity.

Leader

Forgive us for the problems
we are tempted to place
at the pastor's feet.

People

Return our responsibilities to us.

Leader

Forgive us when our excitement
becomes pressure.

People

Teach us to give time.

Leader

Forgive us when we expect answers
before relationship.

People

Teach us to listen together.

Leader

The pastor who comes to us
is also leaving somewhere.

People

Honor what they are leaving behind.

Leader

There may be people they love
whom we will never know.

People

Bless those goodbyes.

Leader

There may be grief mixed with joy.

People

Make room for both.

Leader

There may be a spouse, partner, children,
family, or friends whose lives
are also changing.

People

Help us welcome without assuming.

Leader

There will be much to learn.

People

Give us patience.

Leader

There will eventually be much to do.

People

Give us wisdom about when.

Leader

There will be things we hope will change.

People

Give us curiosity before judgment.

Leader

There will be things the pastor sees
that we no longer notice.

People

Give us courage to see them too.

Leader

And there will be gifts among us
the pastor has not yet discovered.

People

Help us offer them freely.

All

Christ, who calls people into ministry together,
prepare more than an office.

Prepare us.

Clear away what does not need
to be carried into this new relationship.

Give us honesty about our expectations,
responsibility for our own work,
patience for what must be learned,
and gratitude for the person
who is coming to live and serve among us.

May the place we prepare say:

There is room for you here.

There is time to learn us.

There is work we will carry with you.

There is ministry we have not yet imagined.

Come.

Let us begin.

Amen.

Carrying the Work Forward

The office is ready.

The keys work.

The computer turns on.

The first week's calendar has room in it.

The congregation has begun examining what it expects.

Unfinished business has been sorted.

Some matters have been resolved.

Some have intentionally been left for later.

The pastor is arriving in a congregation that has begun to understand an important distinction:

Preparing for a pastor is not the same thing as preparing for a pastoral relationship.

Now the door opens.

Perhaps the pastor arrives alone.

Perhaps a spouse or partner arrives too.

Perhaps there are children.

Perhaps there are boxes everywhere and no one can remember which box contains the coffee maker.

The congregation is excited.

That excitement is a gift.

But the person crossing the threshold is more than the role the congregation has spent months trying to fill.

A human being has arrived.

The next work is hospitality without possession, welcome without assumptions, and belonging without recruitment.

That is the work of Chapter Two:

Chapter Two

Welcome the Person, Not Just the Pastor

Arrival, Hospitality, and Belonging

Chapter Two Resources

Welcome the Person, Not Just the Pastor

Arrival, Hospitality, and Belonging

The pastor has arrived.

That sentence sounds simple.

It is not.

A congregation has spent months thinking about the arrival of **the pastor**. Members have read profiles, participated in conversations, voted, prayed, prepared an office, made announcements, and anticipated the first Sunday.

But the person who arrives has been living a very different story.

They may have just preached a final sermon to people they love.

They may have watched a moving truck pull away from a house filled with memories.

They may be leaving friends, colleagues, physicians, favorite restaurants, familiar roads, children's schools, neighbors, and routines.

They may be excited.

They may also be exhausted.

They may feel confident one hour and disoriented the next.

They may be eager to begin ministry while still grieving the ministry they just ended.

If a spouse or partner has moved with them, that person is also undergoing a transition—but without having received the call that initiated it.

Children may be entering schools they did not choose, leaving friends they did not want to leave, and encountering a congregation full of people who already know who they are before they know anyone's name.

Even when the move is deeply desired, arrival carries loss.

That is why the governing principle of this chapter is simple:

Welcome the person, not just the pastor.

Hospitality asks:

What would help you arrive?

Possession assumes:

We know what you need because you are our pastor now.

Those are very different postures.

The congregation's task is not to manufacture instant belonging.

Belonging cannot be organized that quickly.

The task is to create enough room, care, information, respect, and human connection for belonging to begin.

For most congregations, **FM-2.1, FM-2.2, FM-2.3, FM-2.4, FM-2.5, and FM-2.7** provide the core process.

FM-2.1

What Would Actually Be Helpful?

The Arrival Conversation

Purpose

Congregations often prepare hospitality by imagining what they themselves would appreciate.

That is generous.

It can also be wrong.

One household may welcome meals every evening.

Another may desperately want privacy.

One pastor may appreciate volunteers helping unpack the church office.

Another may want to organize it personally.

One family may want immediate introductions to other families.

Another may need a week without social commitments.

The simplest solution is also the most hospitable:

Ask.

Time

20–30 minutes, preferably two to four weeks before arrival.

Who Should Ask?

One designated transition-team member.

Do not have five different people call the pastor asking the same questions.

Begin

We are excited about your arrival and want to be helpful without overwhelming you. Rather than guessing what hospitality should look like, we would like to ask what would actually make the transition easier.

Ask

Would meals during the first few days be helpful?

Yes / No / Maybe

If yes, how often?

Any dietary considerations?

Would grocery delivery or a stocked refrigerator be useful?

Would help unloading be useful?

Would help unpacking be welcome?

Would you prefer that people not come into the house during unpacking?

Would childcare be useful during the move?

Would pet care be helpful?

Are there local services you need help locating?

Would you like someone available for errands during the first few days?

How much social activity would feel helpful during the first week?

What would feel overwhelming?

Ask the Most Important Question

What have we not asked that would make arrival easier for you?

Record What They Declined

A gracious no is still a no.

Do not turn it into:

“They probably didn't want to impose. Let's do it anyway.”

That is not hospitality.

FM-2.2

Humane Arrival Checklist

Reduce Friction Without Taking Over

Purpose

This checklist attends to the ordinary things that become surprisingly difficult when someone is new to a place.

Use only what is appropriate.

Before Arrival

- ☐ Confirm moving date.
- ☐ Confirm arrival date.
- ☐ Confirm first official workday.
- ☐ Confirm first Sunday.
- ☐ Provide one primary congregation contact.
- ☐ Provide one emergency contact.
- ☐ Confirm housing readiness if congregation is involved.
- ☐ Confirm utilities if appropriate.
- ☐ Provide directions and parking information.
- ☐ Provide information requested by the pastor or household.
- ☐ Confirm any requested moving assistance.
- ☐ Arrange requested meals.
- ☐ Check whether children or pets create particular moving-day needs.

On Arrival Day

- ☐ Designated person available by phone.
- ☐ Requested help arrives when promised.
- ☐ Water/cold drinks available if useful.
- ☐ Basic food available if requested.
- ☐ Moving assistance does not become a welcoming crowd.
- ☐ People leave when their work is finished.

First Few Days

- ☐ Check once—not repeatedly—whether additional help is needed.
- ☐ Provide local information.
- ☐ Keep unnecessary church business away from the household.
- ☐ Protect personal time.
- ☐ Avoid scheduling social events unless requested.
- ☐ Make sure pastor knows whom to call with practical questions.

Ask

Are we reducing the work of arriving?

Or adding to it?

FM-2.3

The First Week

What to Do and What Not to Do

Purpose

The first week establishes patterns.

A congregation does not need to disappear.

Neither should it surround the pastor every waking hour.

Helpful

Invite without requiring.

Provide information without overwhelming.

Answer questions without expecting the pastor to remember everything.

Introduce people more than once.

Explain traditions without defending them.

Offer help without assuming it is wanted.

Give directions without saying:

“Oh, everybody knows where that is.”

Protect days off from the beginning.

Allow empty space in the calendar.

Less Helpful

Scheduling every committee.

Expecting the pastor at every church activity.

Creating a receiving line everywhere the pastor goes.

Asking for immediate opinions about longstanding controversies.

Telling long stories about the previous pastor in order to communicate expectations.

Bringing unresolved complaints to the pastor during the first week.

Assuming the pastor remembers everyone after one introduction.

Dropping by the pastor's home uninvited.

Expecting the spouse or partner to attend everything.

First-Week Priorities

Choose no more than five.

Things We Will Deliberately Postpone

Complete

If the pastor finishes the first week understanding _____, feeling _____, and having begun relationships with _____, we will consider that a good beginning.

FM-2.4

Welcoming a Spouse or Partner

Hospitality Without Recruitment

Purpose

A congregation calls a pastor.

It does not call the pastor's spouse or partner.

That distinction needs to be explicit from the beginning.

A spouse or partner may eventually participate deeply in congregational life.

They may sing in the choir.

Teach.

Attend worship regularly.

Join a small group.

Serve in mission.

Or they may not.

Those choices belong to them.

Congregational Commitments

- ☐ We will learn the spouse's or partner's name.
- ☐ We will treat them as a person rather than an extension of the pastor.
- ☐ We will not assume they will attend every church function.
- ☐ We will not assign them a traditional “pastor's spouse” role.
- ☐ We will not assume their gifts should be donated to the congregation.

- We will not use them as an informal route for communicating with the pastor.
- We will not ask them to explain the pastor.
- We will not expect them to carry congregational confidences.
- We will respect their vocation, work, friendships, and interests outside the congregation.
- We will allow their relationship with the congregation to develop at its own pace.

Conversation

If appropriate, a transition-team member might simply ask:

What would help you feel welcomed here without making you feel that the congregation has expectations of you?

If They Want Community Connections

What interests have they identified?

What professional connections might be helpful?

What community groups might be relevant?

Who can make an introduction without recruiting them into church work?

Watch For

“Wouldn't you be wonderful with our children's ministry?”

“The last pastor's husband always...”

“We assumed you would be at...”

“Could you remind the pastor...”

“You probably know what the pastor thinks about...”

Stop.

The spouse or partner is not auxiliary pastoral staff.

Complete

We will communicate welcome to the pastor's spouse or partner by...

We will communicate freedom by...

FM-2.5

Welcoming Children and Youth

Let Them Be Children

Purpose

Children of pastors can enter a congregation under a peculiar spotlight.

People know who they are.

They may know almost no one.

They can be expected to behave better, participate more, attend everything, and somehow represent their parent.

That burden does not belong to them.

Congregational Commitments

- ☐ Children will not be treated as public property.
- ☐ They will not be used as evidence of the pastor's success.
- ☐ They will not be expected to participate in every youth or children's program.
- ☐ Their behavior will not be interpreted as commentary on the pastor.
- ☐ Their friendships will be allowed to develop naturally.
- ☐ Photographs will follow the same permissions and practices used for other children.
- ☐ Their privacy will be respected.
- ☐ Their school life will not become congregational conversation.
- ☐ Adults will not question them about church matters.
- ☐ Adults will not use them to carry messages to the pastor.

Before Arrival, Ask the Parent

Would introductions to families with similarly aged children be helpful?

Would information about schools or activities be useful?

Would the children appreciate knowing another young person before the first Sunday?

Is there anything the congregation should understand that would make arrival easier?

A Possible Peer Welcome

If the family wants it, identify one or two age-appropriate young people who can:

show where things are;

sit with them;

introduce friends;

explain youth activities;

answer ordinary questions.

Do not assign an adult committee to manage their social life.

Ask

What would we want for our own child entering a room where everyone knew who they were?

Complete

The best gift we can offer the pastor's children is permission to...

FM-2.6

Community Survival Guide

Help Them Live Here Before Asking Them to Lead Here

Purpose

People cannot learn a community entirely from websites.

Locals carry practical knowledge.

Create a short, useful guide.

Do not attempt to create the definitive guide to the community.

Essential Services

Grocery stores

Pharmacies

Urgent care / hospitals

Physicians

Dentists

Veterinarians

Auto repair

Hardware/home repair

Banks/credit unions

Everyday Life

Coffee / informal meeting places

Restaurants

Parks

Walking/biking

Libraries

Recreation

Arts/culture

Families If Relevant

Schools

Childcare

Youth activities

Community Life

Local news sources

Community organizations

Civic organizations

Important annual events

One Important Rule

Do not confuse:

“Places we like”

with:

“Places everyone should like.”

Offer options.

Let newcomers discover their own community too.

FM-2.7

Boundaries of Hospitality

Helpful, Intrusive, or Possessive?

Purpose

Warm congregations can sometimes overwhelm people precisely because they care.

This exercise helps distinguish hospitality from intrusion.

Time

45 minutes with transition team or governing board.

Sort Each Practice

Use:

H — Helpful

A — Ask First

I — Intrusive

- ☐ Delivering a meal.
- ☐ Entering the house to unpack boxes.
- ☐ Providing grocery-store information.
- ☐ Scheduling a welcome dinner.
- ☐ Dropping by without calling.
- ☐ Inviting the pastor's children to youth activities.
- ☐ Enrolling the children in youth activities.
- ☐ Offering local school information.
- ☐ Asking which school the family selected.
- ☐ Sharing physician recommendations.
- ☐ Asking about private medical needs.
- ☐ Inviting the spouse or partner to a ministry.
- ☐ Assuming the spouse or partner will lead a ministry.

- ___ Providing a list of restaurants.
- ___ Taking the family on a community tour.
- ___ Scheduling the tour without asking.
- ___ Offering help with pets.
- ___ Posting arrival photographs online.
- ___ Asking permission before posting photographs.

Discuss

Where did we disagree?

Why?

Develop a Rule

When we are unsure whether hospitality will feel helpful, we will...

The answer should probably be:

Ask.

FM-2.8

Welcome Without a Performance

Planning the First Sunday

Purpose

The congregation wants to celebrate.

Celebrate.

But remember that the pastor's first Sunday is already demanding.

There is a sermon.

New worship patterns.

New names.

New staff relationships.

New physical space.

New expectations.

A celebration should not become another performance the pastor must manage.

Plan

What Should Worship Communicate?

What Should the Congregation Communicate?

What Would Make the Day Feel Welcoming?

What Might Make It Exhausting?

Consider

- ☐ Brief congregational welcome.
- ☐ Prayer for pastor and congregation.
- ☐ Name tags for everyone.
- ☐ Reception after worship.
- ☐ Simple food.
- ☐ Clear ending time.
- ☐ Someone helping pastor remember key names.
- ☐ Opportunity for people to introduce themselves.

Avoid

An endless receiving line.

Multiple speeches.

Public surprises.

A long list of gifts requiring responses.

Expecting the pastor's household to remain for hours.

Using the occasion to announce expectations for the new ministry.

Name Tags

Yes.

Even if:

“We all know each other.”

The pastor does not.

And the pastor may need name tags for months.

Complete

Our first Sunday will communicate:

We will keep it humane by:

FM-2.9

The Name-Learning Plan

Give Grace to a Human Brain

Purpose

Members may have known one another for decades.

The pastor may meet 150 people in ninety minutes.

Then someone may say the following Sunday:

“You don't remember me?”

Do not do that.

Congregational Practices

- ☐ Wear name tags.
- ☐ Wear them for several months.
- ☐ Introduce yourself again.
- ☐ Include your name when leaving voicemail.
- ☐ Identify family relationships when relevant.
- ☐ Do not quiz the pastor.

Helpful Introduction

“I'm Maria Lopez. We met after worship last week. I serve on the food ministry team.”

Less helpful:

“Remember me?”

Pastor's Practices

Use whatever works:

photographs;

directory;

notes;

relationship maps;

flashcards;

seating charts;

small gatherings.

Transition Team

Identify people whose names and roles are especially important early.

Not because they are more valuable.

Because knowing their role helps the pastor navigate the congregation.

First-Month Goal

Not:

Know everyone's name.

Instead:

Keep learning names while communicating that people matter even when memory is imperfect.

FM-2.10

Welcoming a Pastor Who Already Lives Here

Arrival Without a Moving Truck

Purpose

Not every new call involves relocation.

The pastor may already live nearby.

They may already know the community.

They may even know some members.

Do not assume that means no transition is occurring.

Ask

What is actually new?

What relationships are changing because the person is now pastor?

What community knowledge do they already possess?

What congregational knowledge do they lack?

What boundaries may need to change?

Existing Relationships

If the pastor already knows members socially or professionally, ask:

How will those relationships change?

What confidentiality issues may arise?

What assumptions might others make about access or influence?

Remember

Geographical familiarity is not congregational familiarity.

The pastor still needs permission to learn.

FM-2.11

Hospitality Across Difference

Do Not Assume Everyone Arrives the Same Way

Purpose

Hospitality becomes less hospitable when it assumes that everyone shares the congregation's customs, family patterns, social preferences, or ways of receiving care.

Consider

A new pastor may differ from many members in:

generation;

culture;

race or ethnicity;

regional background;

family structure;

economic background;

communication style;

food traditions;

social habits;

experience of church life.

The task is not to create a checklist of differences.

It is to practice curiosity.

Ask

What assumptions might we be making about what “welcome” looks like?

What traditions might feel obvious to us but unfamiliar to someone else?

How can we explain without implying:

“This is the normal way”?

Practice

Instead of:

“Of course we’ll have everyone over to your house.”

Ask:

“Would having people in your home feel comfortable, or would another setting work better?”

Instead of:

“We always give the pastor...”

Ask:

“Would this be useful to you?”

Complete

Our hospitality will begin with curiosity by...

FM-2.12

The Welcome Team Check-In

After the First Two Weeks

Purpose

Hospitality should respond to actual experience.

Do not assume that because no one complained, everything worked.

Time

20–30 minutes.

Ask the Pastor

What has been especially helpful?

What has been more than you needed?

What practical questions remain?

What has surprised you?

Is the calendar manageable?

Are there people you need help meeting?

Is there anything we could stop doing?

Is there anything you wish someone had thought to tell you?

Ask

What would be helpful during the next two weeks?

Then Adjust

Do not defend the original plan.

Hospitality listens.

FM-2.13

Welcome Home — Congregational Practices

Small Things That Build Belonging

Purpose

Belonging grows through ordinary practices more than elaborate ceremonies.

Choose what fits your congregation.

Possible Practices

Wear name tags for three months.

Create several small meals rather than one enormous reception.

Invite the pastor to existing community activities without requiring attendance.

Give a map marked with members' favorite local places.

Ask members to write one short note:

“One thing I love about this congregation is...”

Create a photo directory with names and roles.

Introduce the pastor personally to neighbors around the church.

Provide restaurant gift cards rather than scheduling another dinner.

Give the pastor a blank community map and invite members gradually to mark places that matter to them.

Invite members to answer:

“If you want to understand our community, you should meet...”

Our Practices

Ask

Do these practices help the pastor belong?

Or demonstrate how welcoming we are?

Keep the focus on the recipient.

FM-2.14**When Welcome Becomes Expectation****Catch It Early****Purpose**

Gifts sometimes acquire invisible strings.

“We helped you move.”

“We stocked your refrigerator.”

“We gave you a wonderful reception.”

“We have been so welcoming.”

None of those statements should become currency later.

Discuss

Have we ever expected gratitude to look a particular way?

Do we expect the pastor to respond enthusiastically to every congregational gesture?

Could hospitality create a sense of indebtedness?

Remember

A gift stops being a gift when repayment is expected.

The pastor does not owe the congregation:

constant availability;

agreement;

participation in every activity;

access to private family life;

a particular leadership style;

because the congregation welcomed them warmly.

Complete

We offer hospitality freely because...

FM-2.15

The Pastor's Arrival Reflection

What Am I Experiencing?

Purpose

Arrival can become so busy that the pastor has little space to notice what is happening internally.

This private resource is for the pastor.

It need not be shared.

After the First Week

What has brought joy?

What has surprised me?

What am I grieving?

What am I missing?

Where do I feel welcomed?

Where do I feel pressure?

What expectations am I already sensing?

What assumptions am I making about this congregation?

What am I tempted to judge too quickly?

Who has helped me?

Who am I curious about?

What do I need?

What do I need to say no to?

Prayer Question

God, what are you inviting me to notice before I decide what it means?

Chapter Two Discernment Harvest

The Welcome We Are Creating

What the Pastor or Household Told Us Would Be Helpful

What They Told Us They Do Not Need

Practical Needs Still Unresolved

Boundaries We Need to Respect

How We Will Welcome a Spouse or Partner Without Recruiting Them

How We Will Allow Children or Youth to Be Themselves

How We Will Protect the First Week from Overload

Practices We Will Use to Help the Pastor Learn Names

Community Information We Will Provide

Assumptions About Hospitality We Need to Release

What We Learned from the First Two Weeks

Complete

We will know our welcome is becoming hospitality when...

We will know hospitality is becoming belonging when...

The person who has arrived needs from us...

A Prayer of Welcome and Belonging

Leader

God who makes a home among us,
someone new has crossed the threshold.

People

Teach us to make room.

Leader

We have called a pastor.

People

Help us welcome a person.

Leader

A person carrying gifts,

People

we receive them with gratitude.

Leader

A person carrying limits,

People

we release our expectations of perfection.

Leader

A person carrying hope,

People

may we share it.

Leader

A person carrying questions,

People

may we make room for them.

Leader

A person carrying stories
we have not yet heard,

People

teach us to listen.

Leader

A person carrying goodbyes
we did not witness,

People

honor what has been left behind.

Leader

If a spouse or partner comes too,

People

help us welcome without recruiting.

Leader

If children come too,

People

let them be children.

Leader

If family and friends remain far away,

People

bless the relationships distance now changes.

Leader

When our excitement becomes too much,

People

teach us restraint.

Leader

When our hospitality becomes expectation,

People

teach us generosity.

Leader

When our curiosity becomes intrusion,

People

teach us respect.

Leader

When we want the pastor
to belong immediately,

People

teach us patience.

Leader

For belonging cannot be assigned.

People

It grows.

Leader

It grows through meals and names,

People

through stories and laughter,

Leader

through ordinary conversations,

People

through showing up,

Leader

through learning one another,

People

and through time.

All

Christ, who came and dwelt among us,
teach us the holy practice of welcome.

Let our care be generous
without becoming possessive.

Let our curiosity be warm
without becoming intrusive.

Let our expectations make room
for another person's humanity.

Give this pastor time to arrive.

Give those who arrive with them
freedom to become themselves among us.

And give all of us patience
for the slow miracle of belonging.

May strangers become neighbors,
neighbors become companions,
and companions become partners
in the ministry you have already begun.

Amen.

Carrying the Work Forward

The pastor has arrived.

The boxes may not all be unpacked.

The names are certainly not all remembered.

The community still feels unfamiliar.

The congregation is learning how to welcome without overwhelming.

The pastor is learning how to receive hospitality while beginning to inhabit a new role.

But another transition is already underway.

The people who carried the search have completed the task for which they were originally commissioned.

They found the pastor.

Ordinarily, this is the moment when the search committee celebrates, submits its final report, and disappears.

But these people now hold something unusually valuable.

They know the congregation.

They know the search story.

And among the congregation, they probably know the new pastor better than anyone else.

For a little while, those relationships can serve the beginning.

Not as an inner circle.

Not as the pastor's defenders.

Not as gatekeepers.

As a bridge.

Their job is about to change.

And eventually, if they do that new job well, they will make themselves unnecessary.

That is the work of Chapter Three:

Chapter Three

Let the Search Committee Change Jobs

From Discernment Team to Transition Team

Chapter Three Resources

Let the Search Committee Change Jobs

From Discernment Team to Transition Team

The search committee has finished its work.

And it has not.

Its original assignment is complete. The committee helped the congregation discern whom God might be calling into ministry with them. It reviewed candidates, conducted conversations, listened, prayed, wrestled with questions, made a recommendation, and accompanied the congregation toward a call.

Now the pastor is here.

The temptation is to celebrate, turn in the committee's files, and dissolve the group.

But the *Beginning Ministry Together Field Guide* suggests another possibility: for a limited period, the search committee can change jobs.

These people occupy a unique position.

They know the congregation.

They know the story of the search.

They know what the congregation said about itself.

They know what the pastor heard during the search.

And they have probably spent more time in substantial conversation with the new pastor than anyone else in the congregation.

That makes them potentially valuable during the first months.

But it also makes them potentially dangerous.

The same relationships that can help the pastor enter the congregation can become an inner circle around the pastor.

The people who helped call the pastor may become protective.

They may begin explaining the congregation to the pastor.

They may explain the pastor to the congregation.

They may decide who the pastor should meet.

They may become informal interpreters of every conflict.

Members may conclude that access to the pastor runs through them.

The pastor may continue depending on them because they are familiar faces in an unfamiliar place.

Before long, a bridge has become a gate.

That is not the purpose of a transition team.

A transition team exists to help create relationships beyond itself.

Its success is measured partly by how quickly the pastor no longer needs it.

Its governing question is:

What connections can we help make so that pastor and congregation can begin knowing one another directly?

For most congregations, **FM-3.1 through FM-3.6 and FM-3.9** provide the core process. The remaining resources can be used where particular needs emerge.

FM-3.1

Search Committee to Transition Team Covenant

A New Job Requires a New Agreement

Purpose

Do not simply announce that the search committee will now become the transition team.

The work is different.

Pause.

Mark the change.

Clarify the new purpose.

Set boundaries.

Establish an ending.

Time

60–75 minutes before or shortly after the pastor arrives.

Our Former Purpose

As a search committee, we were responsible for:

That work is now complete.

Our New Purpose

As a transition team, our purpose is to:

help pastor and congregation establish direct relationships with one another and help the pastor become oriented to the congregation and community during the first months of ministry.

We Will

- ☐ Check in regularly with the pastor during the first months.
- ☐ Help answer practical questions.
- ☐ Make introductions.
- ☐ Connect the pastor with people across the congregation.
- ☐ Help the pastor learn the community.
- ☐ Notice people or groups the pastor has not yet encountered.
- ☐ Help interpret systems and practices when asked.
- ☐ Encourage direct communication.
- ☐ Help protect the pastor's early learning period from unnecessary pressure.
- ☐ Notice when our assistance is no longer necessary.

We Will Not

- ☐ Become the pastor's private advisory group.
- ☐ Make decisions for the governing board.
- ☐ Speak for the pastor.
- ☐ Speak for the congregation.
- ☐ carry complaints anonymously to the pastor.
- ☐ Protect the pastor from appropriate disagreement.
- ☐ Decide who may have access to the pastor.
- ☐ Become the pastor's political base.
- ☐ Assume our search relationship gives us permanent privileged access.
- ☐ continue indefinitely.

Our Covenant

We covenant to use the trust formed during the search not to remain close to the center, but to help widen the circle.

We will build connections rather than dependence.

We will encourage conversation rather than interpretation.

We will open doors rather than guard them.

We will tell the truth without becoming brokers of confidential information.

We will help the pastor know the congregation and help the congregation know the pastor.

And when those relationships have begun to stand on their own, we will release this role with gratitude.

Members

Approximate Beginning Date

Expected Completion Window

FM-3.2

Transition Team Role Description

What Is Our Job Now?

Purpose

Ambiguous roles create unnecessary authority.

Give the transition team a written role description approved by the governing board.

Primary Function

The transition team is a **temporary relational bridge** during the first months of the new pastoral relationship.

The Team Helps With

Orientation

How does this congregation actually work?

Who knows what?

Where are things?

What traditions need explanation?

Relationships

Whom should the pastor meet?

Whose voices may be easy to miss?

What small gatherings might help?

Community

Who can introduce the pastor to people and organizations beyond the congregation?

Communication

What does the pastor need to understand?

What does the congregation need help understanding about the first months?

Reflection

How is arrival going?

What is surprising?

Where is confusion emerging?

What relationships need attention?

The Team Does Not Have Authority Over

personnel;

worship;

staff supervision;
governing-board decisions;
pastoral evaluation;
pastoral priorities;
congregational complaints;
pastoral scheduling.

Unless separately authorized, these remain where they ordinarily belong.

The Team Reports To

Team Convener

Pastor's Role

The pastor participates as a partner in the transition process, not as the team's supervisor.

Expected Duration

Approximately:

- ☐ Three months
- ☐ Four months
- ☐ Six months
- ☐ Other: _____

The date is not sacred.

The team ends when its transitional purpose has been fulfilled.

FM-3.3

Suggested Three-to-Six-Month Transition Timeline

A Bridge with an Ending

Purpose

A transition team should know where it is going.

This is not a rigid schedule. Adapt it.

Before Arrival

Complete:

- ☐ Transition-team covenant.
- ☐ Arrival planning.
- ☐ First-month calendar.
- ☐ Initial relationship map.

- Community introduction plan.
- Communication with congregation about team's new role.

Weeks One and Two

Primary task:

Help the pastor arrive.

Focus on:

practical questions;

staff and leadership introductions;

immediate congregational relationships;

orientation;

calendar;

community basics.

Check in briefly each week.

Weeks Three and Four

Primary task:

Widen the relationships.

Focus on:

small gatherings;

people beyond formal leadership;

community introductions;

congregational stories;

questions emerging for the pastor.

Month Two

Primary task:

Help the pastor encounter the congregation beyond the obvious.

Ask:

Who has the pastor met?

Who is missing?

What groups remain unfamiliar?

What parts of congregational culture are confusing?

What community relationships should begin?

Month Three

Primary task:

Reduce dependence on the transition team.

Ask:

What does the pastor now handle directly?

What introductions remain useful?

What are we doing that is no longer needed?

Have we become involved in matters that belong elsewhere?

Months Four to Six, If Needed

Primary task:

Finish.

Use only if there is still legitimate transitional work.

Do not invent tasks to justify continuation.

Our Anticipated Completion Date

We Will Review This Date On

FM-3.4

First-Month Weekly Check-In

Keep It Simple

Purpose

The pastor does not need another meeting.

A weekly check-in during the first month can often be 20–30 minutes.

The purpose is orientation, not supervision.

Begin With

How are you arriving?

What Has Gone Well This Week?

What Has Surprised You?

What Has Been Confusing?

What Practical Question Keeps Coming Up?

Is There Anything You Were Told That Now Seems Different in Practice?

Who Have You Met That You Want to Know Better?

Who Do You Need Help Meeting?

Is Anyone or Any Group Taking More of Your attention than seems healthy this early?

Is Anything Being Presented as an Emergency That May Not Be One?

What Would Be Helpful From Us This Week?

What Should We Stop Doing?

End With

What is one thing you are noticing that you do not yet understand?

Do not rush to explain it.

Sometimes the pastor needs to keep noticing.

FM-3.5

Monthly Transition Conversation

Moving Beyond Logistics

Purpose

After the first month, check-ins should begin moving from practical orientation toward relationship and culture.

Time

45–60 minutes monthly.

Looking Back

What has given you energy?

What has taken more energy than expected?

What is becoming easier?

What remains confusing?

Relationships

Where are relationships forming naturally?

Where do relationships still need attention?

Are you meeting mostly formal leaders?

Yes / No

Whose voices have you not yet heard?

Congregational Culture

What patterns are you noticing?

What traditions are you curious about?

Where have stated practices and actual practices differed?

What do you want to understand before drawing conclusions?

Community

Who have you met beyond the congregation?

What part of the community remains unfamiliar?

Who might help make the next introductions?

Transition Team

What are we doing that remains helpful?

What are we doing that you no longer need?

One Question to Carry

Where do you need a relationship rather than an explanation?

That distinction matters.

FM-3.6

Relationship Mapping Tool

Widen the Circle

Purpose

A pastor can spend the first months surrounded by the most visible people in the congregation and still know very little about the congregation.

Formal authority and relational influence are not identical.

The purpose of this exercise is not to identify “important people.”

It is to notice the breadth of relationships the pastor needs to begin understanding the congregation.

Create a Large Map

Place **Pastor** in the center.

Around the center create the following circles.

Staff and Formal Leaders

Who belongs here?

Longtime Members and Historians

Who carries important congregational memory?

Connectors

Who seems to know everyone?

Quiet Influencers

Who may not hold office but is widely trusted?

Caregivers

Who knows where people are hurting?

Emerging Leaders

Whose gifts are becoming visible?

Newer Members

Who can tell the pastor what it feels like to enter this congregation?

Young Adults

Youth

Children and Families

Older Adults

People at the Edges

Who participates less often?

Who may feel overlooked?

Community Connectors

Who has relationships beyond the congregation?

Now Look at the Map

Where are there many names?

Where are there almost none?

What does that tell us?

Ask

Who is easiest for the pastor to meet?

Who will require intentional introduction?

Whose absence from the map concerns us?

Next Three Introductions

Important

This is not a list of people the pastor must impress.

It is a map of relationships through which the congregation can become more fully visible.

FM-3.7

Opening Doors Without Becoming Gatekeepers

A Transition Team Self-Assessment

Purpose

The difference between a bridge and a gate can be subtle.

Use this assessment monthly.

Rate Each Statement

- 1 = Never
- 2 = Rarely
- 3 = Sometimes
- 4 = Often
- 5 = Very Often

- ☐ Members bring complaints to us expecting us to tell the pastor.
- ☐ We tell the pastor what particular members “really mean.”
- ☐ We warn the pastor about people before the pastor has met them.
- ☐ We decide which people the pastor should avoid.
- ☐ We find ourselves defending the pastor to others.
- ☐ We defend the congregation to the pastor.
- ☐ The pastor asks us what the congregation thinks rather than asking the appropriate people.
- ☐ Members believe we have special access to the pastor.
- ☐ We know information about the pastor that others do not need to know.
- ☐ We are involved in matters that belong to the governing board.
- ☐ We are involved in matters that belong to staff.
- ☐ We are becoming indispensable.

Discuss Any Score of 4 or 5

What is happening?

Ask

Are we opening relationships?

Or managing them?

Corrective Action**Remember**

A healthy transition team repeatedly redirects communication toward the people who need to have the conversation.

FM-3.8

Direct Conversation Guide

Refusing to Become the Messenger**Purpose**

Because transition-team members are trusted, people may bring concerns to them.

The team needs a consistent response.

When Someone Says

“Could you tell the pastor...”

Try:

“I think that would be better coming directly from you. Would you like help thinking about how to have that conversation?”

When Someone Says

“The pastor needs to know that people are upset...”

Ask:

“Which people?”

If the answer is:

“Everybody.”

Ask:

“Who specifically has spoken with you?”

Then:

“Have they spoken directly with the pastor or appropriate leader?”

When the Pastor Says

“What do people think about...?”

Avoid pretending to speak for the congregation.

Try:

“I can tell you what I think, but I don't know that I can tell you what the congregation thinks. Who would be helpful for you to hear from?”

When Someone Has a Legitimate Concern

Do not dismiss it in the name of direct communication.

Ask:

Is there a safety issue?

An ethical issue?

A power imbalance?

A personnel process?

A confidentiality concern?

If so, use the appropriate structure.

Our Standard Transition-Team Response

FM-3.9

Warning Signs of an Emerging Inner Circle

Protect the New Relationship from Dependency

Purpose

The search committee and pastor have already formed relationships.

That is good.

Those relationships should continue as genuine human relationships.

But the group itself should not become the pastor's permanent circle.

Warning Signs

- ☐ The pastor eats primarily with transition-team members.
- ☐ The pastor asks the team before making routine decisions.
- ☐ Members refer to the team as “the pastor's people.”
- ☐ The team receives information before the governing board.
- ☐ Team members defend the pastor reflexively.
- ☐ The pastor relies on the team to interpret other leaders.
- ☐ Staff members feel excluded from conversations.
- ☐ Governing-board members are unclear about the team's authority.
- ☐ Congregational concerns are routed through the team.

- The team meets privately without a clear transitional purpose.
- Members enjoy being “in the know.”
- No one has discussed when the team will end.

Ask

What legitimate need is creating this pattern?

How can that need be met through the congregation's normal relationships and structures?

Relationship Transfer

What does the pastor currently receive from the transition team?

Who should eventually provide that?

Example

If the team provides information about governance:

Connect the pastor directly with the clerk and governing-board leadership.

If the team provides community introductions:

Connect the pastor directly with members who hold those relationships.

If the team provides emotional support:

Encourage the pastor to develop friendships, colleagues, mentors, coaches, or other support outside the team's formal role.

Complete

Our job is not to remain necessary. Our job is to...

FM-3.10

Who Might We Be Missing?

A Transition Team Listening Exercise

Purpose

Every transition has a center.

Search committees usually hear most from active members, formal leaders, and people comfortable speaking.

Beginning ministry together provides another opportunity to widen the circle.

Ask

Whose experience of this congregation may differ from the dominant story?

Who participates but rarely speaks?

Who attends irregularly but still considers this their congregation?

Who has joined recently?

Who has returned after being away?

Who has stepped back from leadership?

Who may have experienced hurt here?

Who has gifts we rarely notice?

Who represents a generation we hear from less often?

Who sees the community differently from us?

Choose Three People or Groups

Ask Them

Would you be willing simply to have a conversation with our new pastor and tell some of your story?

Do not coach their answers.

Do not ask them to represent a category.

Invite a person.

FM-3.11

The Transition Team's Community Bridge

Connect Relationships, Not Just Organizations

Purpose

The congregation already has relationships throughout the community.

The transition team can help identify them, but it should not merely hand the pastor a list of institutions.

Complete

Person or organization

Why might this relationship matter?

Who in the congregation already knows them?

Who can make a personal introduction?

Repeat

Person or organization

Why might this relationship matter?

Congregational connection

Person who will introduce

Prioritize

Do not schedule twenty introductions in the first month.

First three:

Remember

“Here is the mayor's phone number”

is information.

“I know the mayor. Let me introduce you”

is relationship.

The second is far more useful.

FM-3.12

What Did We Learn During the Search?

Sharing Without Predetermining

Purpose

The search committee learned things about the congregation during the search.

Some of those observations may help the pastor.

But be careful.

The transition team should not give the pastor a set of conclusions that predetermine what the pastor will see.

Individually Complete

During the search, I learned something about our congregation that surprised me:

I noticed a strength I had previously underestimated:

I noticed a tension or question we still need to explore:

I became more curious about:

As a Team Ask

What observations would genuinely help the pastor?

What are merely our interpretations?

What should the pastor discover independently?

Use This Language

Prefer:

“One question that emerged for us was...”

over:

“The real problem here is...”

Prefer:

“You may want to hear several perspectives about...”

over:

“Let us tell you what happened.”

Prefer:

“We became curious about...”

over:

“We figured out that...”

Remember

The search committee's discernment was important.

It was not omniscient.

FM-3.13

Confidentiality After the Search

What Happens to What We Learned?

Purpose

The committee's formal work has ended, but its ethical responsibilities have not.

Search committee members may possess information about candidates, references, personal circumstances, and conversations that should not become congregational knowledge.

Discuss

What information remains confidential?

What documents should be retained?

What documents should be destroyed?

Who is responsible for that process?

What information about unsuccessful candidates must remain private?

What information about the called pastor was shared in confidence during discernment?

Covenant

We will not use stories from the search process as entertainment.

We will not tell members:

“You should have heard what happened in the interview...”

We will not compare the called pastor publicly with other candidates.

We will not reveal reference conversations.

We will not use confidential information to establish our closeness to the pastor.

Complete

Records will be handled by:

By this date:

According to these congregational or denominational policies:

FM-3.14

Is Our Work Finished?

Transition Team Completion Discernment

Purpose

Do not end simply because the calendar says six months.

Do not continue simply because everyone enjoys meeting.

Discern whether the transitional function is complete.

Time

60 minutes.

Complete separately, then discuss.

Relationships

The pastor has established direct working relationships with staff.

Yes / Mostly / Not Yet

The pastor has established direct relationships with governing-board leadership.

Yes / Mostly / Not Yet

The pastor is forming relationships across the congregation.

Yes / Mostly / Not Yet

The pastor has begun community relationships.

Yes / Mostly / Not Yet

Orientation

The pastor understands basic congregational systems.

Yes / Mostly / Not Yet

The pastor knows where to find information.

Yes / Mostly / Not Yet

The pastor knows whom to ask when questions arise.

Yes / Mostly / Not Yet

Independence

The pastor no longer relies on this team for routine interpretation.

Yes / Mostly / Not Yet

Members communicate directly with the pastor.

Yes / Mostly / Not Yet

The congregation no longer sees us as the route to the pastor.

Yes / Mostly / Not Yet

Continuing Need

What work remains that only this team can reasonably do?

If the answer is unclear, ask:

Are we identifying real work or reasons to continue meeting?

Discern

- ☐ Our work is complete.
- ☐ We need approximately one more month.
- ☐ A specific task remains.

Task:

Completion date:

Final Question

If we stopped meeting today, what important transitional work would not happen?

If there is no compelling answer, it may be time to finish.

FM-3.15

Transition Team Handoff

Return Work to the Ordinary Life of the Congregation

Purpose

Some functions performed temporarily by the transition team need to continue.

The team should deliberately return them to the appropriate people.

Function

Pastor check-ins

Future home:

Staff relationship concerns

Future home:

Governing-board partnership

Future home:

Community introductions

Future home:

Congregational relationship-building

Future home:

Pastoral support

Future home:

First-year reflection

Future home:

Ask

Is any responsibility about to disappear simply because the team ends?

Who should carry it?

Important

The transition team does not hand the pastor back to the congregation.

The pastor already belongs in relationship with the congregation.

The team simply releases its temporary role.

FM-3.16

A Final Conversation with the Pastor

Before the Team Ends

Purpose

The transition team and pastor have shared an unusual journey.

Do not allow the relationship simply to evaporate.

Ask the Pastor

What was most helpful about this team?

What could we have done differently?

When did you begin feeling less dependent on us?

What relationships have become especially important?

Where do you still need connection?

What have you learned about this congregation that you did not know during the search?

What do you hope we will now do as ordinary members of the congregation?

Ask the Team

What have we learned from accompanying this beginning?

What surprised us?

What do we need to release?

How will our relationship with the pastor change when we are no longer a transition team?

Complete

The best evidence that our work has succeeded is...

Chapter Three Discernment Harvest

From Bridge to Belonging

Our Transition Team's Primary Purpose

What the Pastor Currently Needs From Us

Relationships We Have Helped Begin

People or Groups Still Missing From the Pastor's Relational Map

Community Connections Still to Be Made

Congregational Patterns the Pastor Is Curious About

Places Where We Need to Encourage More Direct Communication

Ways We May Be Becoming Too Important

Responsibilities We Need to Transfer Elsewhere

What We Learned During the Search That May Still Be Helpful

What We Need to Keep Confidential

Signs That Our Work Is Nearly Complete

Our Expected Completion

Complete

We have served as a bridge by...

The relationships that can now stand without us are...

Before we finish, we still need to...

When this team ends, we hope pastor and congregation will...

A Liturgy for Releasing the Transition Team

From Searching to Beginning

This may be used in worship, at a governing-board meeting, or at a gathering of the transition team and pastor.

Leader

There was a time when we did not know
who would come.

People

We prayed and listened.

Leader

We wondered whom God might be calling.

People

We searched and discerned.

Leader

We asked questions.

People

We listened for stories.

Leader

We encountered people
whose journeys crossed ours
for a little while.

People

We received them with gratitude.

Leader

And eventually,
a name became a conversation,

People

a conversation became possibility,

Leader

possibility became discernment,

People

and discernment became call.

Leader

The work of searching ended.

People

The work of beginning started.

Leader

To those who served on the search committee
and then became a transition team:

you carried knowledge, trust, and relationships
across the threshold.

People

We give thanks for your service.

Leader

You helped prepare a place.

People

We give thanks.

Leader

You answered questions.

People

We give thanks.

Leader

You made introductions.

People

We give thanks.

Leader

You opened doors.

People

We give thanks.

Leader

You helped pastor and congregation
begin to know one another.

People

We give thanks.

Leader

And now the work you were asked to do
is becoming unnecessary.

People

Thanks be to God.

Leader

For a bridge fulfills its purpose
when people have crossed it.

People

Release the bridge from carrying us.

Leader

The pastor belongs not to a committee,

People

but in ministry with the whole congregation.

Leader

The congregation belongs not to its search committee,

People

but to Christ.

Leader

And the future belongs neither
to pastor nor congregation alone.

People

It belongs to the God who calls us forward together.

To the Transition Team

Do you release the role
you have carried during this season?

Transition Team

We do.

Leader

Will you now take your place again
among the congregation—not as gatekeepers,
interpreters, or guardians of the pastor,
but as companions in the ministry we share?

Transition Team

We will.

To the Pastor

Will you receive their friendship
without requiring their former role,
and continue widening your relationships
throughout this congregation and community?

Pastor

I will.

To the Congregation

Will you receive responsibility
for the relationship you are building
with your pastor?

Will you speak directly,
listen generously,
offer your gifts,
and share the work of ministry?

People

We will, with God's help.

All

God of every beginning,
we thank you for those who searched,
those who listened,
those who discerned,
and those who helped us cross
from calling a pastor
to beginning ministry together.

Release what has completed its purpose.

Strengthen the relationships that have begun.

Widen the circle.

Deepen the trust.

And lead us beyond the question,
“Who will our pastor be?”

toward the question
you now place before all of us:

“What are you calling us to do together?”

Amen.

Carrying the Work Forward

The transition team has done something important when it begins to disappear.

That may sound strange.

But the goal was never to create a permanent structure around the new pastor.

It was to open relationships.

Now those relationships need room to grow.

The pastor needs conversations with people who never served on the search committee.

With the longtime member who remembers why a tradition began.

With the teenager wondering whether adults in the church are interested in anything young people actually think.

With the person who joined six months ago and still remembers what it felt like to walk through the doors for the first time.

With the quiet member who rarely speaks in meetings but whom everyone seems to call when life falls apart.

With the volunteer who knows half the town.

With the member who has stepped away.

With the person who loves this congregation.

And with the person who loves it enough to tell the truth about where it has caused pain.

Those relationships cannot be delegated to a committee.

They have to be formed.

One conversation.

One meal.

One story.

One name at a time.

The next stage of beginning ministry together therefore moves beyond orientation and into the fundamental work upon which nearly everything else will depend:

relationship before program.

That is the work of Chapter Four:

Chapter Four

Begin with Relationships

People Before Programs

Chapter Four Resources

Begin with Relationships

People Before Programs

The pastor has arrived.

The office works.

The first Sundays have happened.

The transition team has begun opening doors into the congregation.

Now comes work that cannot be completed with a checklist.

The pastor needs to know people.

Not simply names.

Not simply offices.

Not simply which committee they chair.

People.

This sounds obvious, but the first months of ministry make it surprisingly difficult.

The machinery of congregational life begins moving immediately. Worship must be planned. Meetings appear on the calendar. Pastoral-care needs arise. Emails accumulate. Staff need decisions. Committees want attention. Members begin mentioning programs that should be strengthened, ministries that should be started, and problems that have waited long enough.

Activity can create the appearance that ministry has begun.

But activity and relationship are not the same thing.

A pastor can become extremely busy while remaining largely unknown.

A congregation can become pleased with its new pastor while knowing mostly the public person who preaches, leads meetings, and appears at church events.

The *Beginning Ministry Together Field Guide* places relationship-building ahead of programmatic leadership because the first months are a season for pastor and congregation to accumulate a history together.

That history cannot be hurried.

It grows through ordinary encounters.

A conversation after worship.

Coffee with a longtime member.

Lunch with a young adult.

A visit with someone who no longer attends regularly.

A conversation with a teenager.

Sitting beside someone in the hospital.

Listening to a member explain why a particular ministry matters.

Hearing the story behind a memorial plaque.

Learning who always arrives early and who quietly cleans up after everyone leaves.

Discovering who people trust when they are frightened.

Hearing the same story told by three people—and noticing that it becomes three different stories.

These encounters begin revealing something no organizational chart can show:

the congregation as a network of relationships.

And those relationships will matter later.

There will be decisions.

There will be disagreement.

There will be change.

There will be disappointment.

There will be moments when pastor and congregation misunderstand one another.

When those moments arrive, the most important resource may not be a policy or strategic plan.

It may be the history of trust already accumulated between people.

That is why relationship-building is not what the pastor does before beginning the real ministry.

Relationship-building is ministry.

For most congregations, **FM-4.1, FM-4.2, FM-4.3, FM-4.4, FM-4.7, and FM-4.10** provide the core process.

FM-4.1

First 90 Days Relationship Map

See the Congregation Beyond the Organizational Chart

Purpose

The goal is not to create a list of important people.

It is to help the pastor encounter the breadth of the congregation.

A new pastor naturally meets the most visible people first.

Staff.

Officers.

Committee chairs.

Frequent volunteers.

People who attend everything.

Those relationships matter.

But they do not constitute the whole congregation.

Time

Initial mapping: 60 minutes.

Review monthly during the first 90 days.

Create the Map

Place the pastor in the center.

Then identify people in each area.

Formal Leaders

Governing-board members:

Committee/ministry leaders:

Staff:

Story Keepers

Who carries congregational history?

Who remembers significant transitions?

Who knows why particular traditions matter?

Connectors

Who knows people across groups and generations?

Who naturally introduces people?

Caregivers

Whom do people call when life becomes difficult?

Who notices when someone disappears?

Quiet Influencers

Who holds trust without holding office?

Emerging Leaders

Whose gifts are becoming visible?

Newer Members

Who can still remember what entering this congregation felt like?

Young Adults

Youth

Children and Families

Older Adults

People at the Edges

Who attends irregularly?

Who has stepped away?

Who may feel overlooked?

Community Connectors

Who has significant relationships outside the congregation?

Look at the Whole Map

Where are there many names?

Where are there few?

Whose absence surprises us?

Choose the Next Five Relationships

Remember

The purpose is not to complete the map.

The purpose is to keep widening the circle.

FM-4.2

Who Should the Pastor Meet?

Beyond the Usual Suspects

Purpose

Ask several people this question and you will receive different answers.

That is useful.

Time

30–45 minutes with transition team, governing board, or other leaders.

Round One

Without discussion, each person writes five names in response to:

If the pastor wants to understand this congregation, who should they know?

Compare lists.

Notice

Which names appeared repeatedly?

Why?

Round Two

Now ask:

Who probably will not appear on anyone's first list but should?

Round Three

Ask more specifically.

Who can tell the pastor about:

our history?

our joys?

our conflicts?

our community?

our mission?

our worship life?

our children and youth?

our older adults?

our newer members?

people who have left?

The Missing Voice Question

Who understands this congregation differently from the people currently in this room?

That person may be especially important to meet.

FM-4.3

Small Gathering Host Guide

Create Places for Stories

Purpose

Large “meet the pastor” events are useful for welcome.

They are usually poor places for relationship.

Small gatherings create different possibilities.

Six to ten people around a table can begin telling stories.

Suggested Size

6–10 people.

Suggested Time

60–90 minutes.

Possible Settings

a home;

church fellowship space;

restaurant;

coffee shop;

community room;

park;

backyard.

Host Responsibilities

The host:

welcomes;

provides simple hospitality;

makes introductions;

protects the time;

encourages everyone to participate;

does not dominate the conversation;

does not turn the gathering into a meeting.

Do Not Create a Presentation for the Pastor

The pastor is not there to explain a vision.

The congregation is not there to ask for a ministry plan.

The purpose is relationship.

Suggested Opening

We are here simply to begin knowing one another. There is no agenda to solve and no decision to make. We are going to tell some stories.

Possible Questions

What brought you to this congregation?

What has kept you here?

Tell about a time when this congregation mattered deeply to you.

Who helped you feel that you belonged?

What is something about this congregation a newcomer might not notice?

What gives you joy here?

What do you hope we never lose?

What are you curious about as we begin this new season?

For the Pastor

The pastor should also answer.

This is not ethnographic fieldwork.

Mutual relationship requires mutual disclosure.

Closing Question

What is one thing you heard tonight that you want to remember?

Host Reflection

Did everyone have room to speak?

Yes / No

Did the gathering remain conversational?

Yes / No

What story stayed with us?

FM-4.4

Around the Table

A Story Conversation Guide

Purpose

People often respond to abstract questions with abstract answers.

Ask:

What are our values?

and someone may say:

“Faith, family, fellowship, mission.”

Ask:

Tell me about a time when this congregation was at its best,

and a story appears.

Stories reveal lived values.

Time

60 minutes.

Opening

Invite each person to answer:

How did you first come into relationship with this congregation?

Then Choose Three or Four Questions

Tell about a Sunday you still remember.

Tell about a time this congregation surprised you.

Tell about a time people here cared for you or someone you love.

Tell about a time the congregation had to make a difficult decision.

Tell about something we do that makes more sense once you know the story behind it.

Tell about a person who shaped this congregation.

Tell about a time we took a risk.

Tell about a time we got something wrong.

Tell about a ministry that changed how you understand this church.

Tell about a moment when you recognized God at work here.

Follow-Up Questions

What happened next?

Why did that matter?

What do you remember most?

Who else was involved?

What did the congregation learn?

How did that change things?

Avoid

Turning every story into a lesson.

Correcting someone's memory.

Arguing about details.

Explaining what the story “really means.”

Listen For

values;
 patterns;
 losses;
 gifts;
 conflicts;
 heroes;
 assumptions;
 theology;
 hope.

Complete

A story I want to hear more about is...

FM-4.5

Congregational Story Question Bank

Questions for Ordinary Conversations

Purpose

Not every relationship needs a formal gathering.

Keep a few good questions available for coffee, lunch, visits, and conversations after worship.

Belonging

What brought you here?

When did this begin feeling like your church?

Who helped you belong?

History

What has changed most since you came?

What do you miss?

What change are you glad happened?

Gifts

What do you think this congregation does especially well?

When have you been proud of this church?

Challenge

What has been hard for this congregation?

What do we have difficulty talking about?

Worship

What part of worship matters most to you?

Is there a worship tradition with a story behind it?

Community

How has this community changed?

Where do you see people struggling?

Where do you see life and hope?

Leadership

Who taught you something about faith here?

Who do people trust?

Future

What do you hope we carry with us into the next season?

What are you curious about?

Discernment

Where do you notice God already at work?

What might we be invited to join?

Use Sparingly

Do not turn ordinary conversation into an interview.

One good question may be enough.

FM-4.6

Governing Board One-to-One Conversation Guide

Know the People Behind the Office**Purpose**

The pastor needs working relationships with governing-board members.

Those relationships should not begin only around an agenda table.

Time

45–60 minutes with each member during the first few months.

Begin Personally

Tell me something about yourself that would not appear in a church directory.

Faith

What has shaped your faith?

Congregation

What brought you here?

What keeps you here?

Leadership

How did you come into leadership?

What part of serving gives you energy?

What part is difficult?

Congregational Life

What do you think we do well?

What do you think we avoid?

Partnership

What do you hope for from our working relationship?

What would help you work well with me?

Pastor Shares Too

The pastor should answer similar questions.

Mutual leadership requires mutual knowing.

Close

What is something you hope I understand about you before we begin making difficult decisions together?

FM-4.7

Learning the Informal Congregation

How Things Really Work

Purpose

Every congregation has two organizational charts.

One is written.

The other is lived.

The written chart identifies:

officers;

committees;

staff;

reporting relationships;

terms of service.

The lived chart reveals:

who people trust;

who carries history;

who gets called before a difficult meeting;

who can calm a room;

who can inflame one;

who knows everyone;

who gets things done;

who has influence without title.

The pastor needs to understand both.

Important Caution

This is not an exercise in identifying who must be “managed.”

It is an exercise in understanding relationships.

Ask

When something needs to happen quickly, who usually gets called?

When someone is hurting, who notices?

When conflict develops, whom do people trust?

Who can bring different groups together?

Who carries institutional memory?

Who asks questions others are thinking?

Who rarely speaks but is listened to when they do?

Who welcomes newcomers naturally?

Who has relationships across generations?

Who has strong community relationships?

Compare with Formal Leadership

Where do formal and informal leadership overlap?

Where do they differ?

Ask the More Important Question

What gifts become visible when we stop equating leadership with office?

FM-4.8

Whose Voice Are We Missing?

Widening the Story

Purpose

A pastor can listen diligently and still hear a narrow version of the congregation.

The people most available for conversation are not necessarily representative.

Review the Last Month

Who has the pastor spent significant time with?

Mark Categories Well Represented

- ☐ Staff.
- ☐ Governing-board members.
- ☐ Longtime members.

- Retired members.
- Regular volunteers.
- New members.
- Young adults.
- Parents.
- Youth.
- Children.
- People living alone.
- People who attend irregularly.
- People who participate online.
- People who have stepped back.
- People involved primarily in community ministries.

Ask

Which voices dominate?

Which voices are missing?

Why might they be missing?

Do Not Ask Someone to Represent a Category

A teenager does not speak for “the youth.”

A newcomer does not speak for “new members.”

One person does not represent a generation, race, neighborhood, family structure, or social location.

Meet people as people.

Next Steps

Three relationships we will intentionally widen:

FM-4.9

Pastor's Relationship Journal

Notice Without Turning People into Data

Purpose

The first months contain more names, stories, relationships, and observations than anyone can remember.

A simple journal can help.

This is not a dossier.

Do not record gossip, confidential pastoral information, diagnoses, judgments, or material that would violate trust if someone read it.

Record what helps you remember people and relationships.

After a Significant Conversation

Name

Where we met

Something about their story I want to remember

Something that matters to them

A person or ministry they mentioned

Something I want to ask about later

A connection I might help make

Weekly Reflection

Whom did I enjoy getting to know?

Who surprised me?

Whose story challenged an assumption I was forming?

Who do I want to see again?

Whose name do I keep forgetting?

Where am I spending too much relational energy?

Who is absent from my week?

Prayer

God, help me remember that every name belongs to a story I have only begun to hear.

FM-4.10

Ninety-Day Relationship Reflection

What Is Beginning to Grow?

Purpose

After approximately three months, pause.

Do not evaluate how many people the pastor has met.

Reflect on what kinds of relationships are forming.

Time

60–75 minutes with pastor and transition team or appropriate leadership.

Pastor Reflects

Where do I already feel relationally at ease?

Where do I still feel like a visitor?

Which relationships are becoming important?

Who has helped me understand the congregation?

Who has helped me understand the community?

What assumption have I changed?

Whose story do I need to hear?

Congregational Leaders Reflect

Where do we see relationships forming?

Where might the pastor need more connection?

Have we expected relationships to form too quickly?

Are particular people or groups receiving disproportionate access?

Together Ask

What are we beginning to trust one another with?

Where do we still need patience?

What relationship deserves attention during the next 90 days?

Complete

The most important relational development of these first months has been...

FM-4.11

Listening Across Generations

Different Stories of the Same Congregation

Purpose

People who entered the congregation in different eras may inhabit different versions of its story.

That is not a problem to solve.

It is something to hear.

Gather

Invite people from several generations or eras of congregational involvement.

Do not ask them to represent everyone their age.

Ask Everyone the Same Questions

What was this congregation like when you first knew it?

What seemed most important then?

What has changed?

What change has been good?

What do you miss?

What gives you hope now?

Listen for Differences

One person may remember the church's "best years" as another person's years of exclusion.

One generation's beloved tradition may be another generation's obstacle.

One person's decline may be another person's simplification.

Do not force agreement.

Ask

What do we understand better because we heard these stories beside one another?

FM-4.12

Coffee with the Pastor

A Simple Conversation Format

Purpose

Not every relationship-building practice needs to be elaborate.

This can be used for a series of informal gatherings during the first three months.

Size

4–8 people.

Time

45–60 minutes.

Opening

Everyone gives:

name;

how long they have been connected to the congregation;

one thing they enjoy outside church.

Choose Two Questions

What is something about this congregation you hope I come to understand?

What is one story that says something important about who we are?

What do you love about this community?

What gives you hope for the ministry ahead?

Then Turn the Conversation

Participants may ask the pastor questions too.

Boundary

The gathering is not a forum for:

personnel complaints;

anonymous criticism;

campaigning for a program;

reopening the search;

interrogating the pastor's theology.

Those conversations belong in appropriate settings.

Close

What did we learn about one another that we did not know when we arrived?

FM-4.13

The People Who Stepped Away

Listen Without Recruiting

Purpose

Some people remain emotionally connected to a congregation while participating less frequently or not at all.

Their stories may matter.

Approach carefully.

The purpose is not to create a campaign to “get them back.”

Identify

Who has stepped away but remains in relationship with members?

Who might welcome a conversation?

Who should make the initial contact?

Invitation

“Our new pastor is spending time listening to people's experiences of the congregation. If you would ever be comfortable having a conversation, your perspective would be welcome. There is no expectation that you return or become involved.”

If They Say No

Thank them.

Stop.

If They Say Yes

Ask:

What mattered to you here?

What changed?

What do you wish people understood?

What was difficult?

What do you still value?

Do Not

defend;

correct;

explain;

promise;

recruit.

Listen.

Pastor Reflects

What did I hear that people at the center of congregational life might not be able to tell me?

FM-4.14

When a Story Contains Pain

Listening Without Trying to Fix the Past

Purpose

Relationship-building will eventually uncover hurt.

Some of it may involve the congregation.

Some may involve former pastors.

Some may involve current members.

The new pastor may feel pressure to explain, repair, judge, or promise.

Often the first task is simply to hear.

When Someone Tells a Painful Story

Try:

“Thank you for trusting me with that.”

“What was that like for you?”

“What do you wish had happened?”

“What would you want me to understand?”

Avoid

“I’m sure they didn’t mean it that way.”

“That doesn’t sound like the church I know.”

“There are two sides to every story.”

“I’ll take care of it.”

You may not yet know what “it” is.

Ask Yourself

Am I being asked to listen?

Is action actually required?

Is there a safety, ethical, abuse, or legal concern requiring appropriate action?

If action is required, follow the appropriate policies and processes.

If not, do not turn every painful story into a case to solve.

Remember

Sometimes the first repair is that someone finally feels heard.

FM-4.15

Relational Overload Check

The Pastor Cannot Know Everyone at Once

Purpose

Relationship-building can itself become another impossible performance standard.

The pastor is not failing because everyone has not received equal time during the first three months.

Pastor Reflects

How many evenings have I been away this week?

How many one-to-one conversations?

How much unscheduled time remains?

Am I keeping a day off?

Yes / No

Am I beginning to resent conversations?

Yes / No

Am I scheduling relationships rather than inhabiting them?

Yes / No

Congregational Leaders Ask

Are we celebrating the pastor for being constantly available?

Are we unintentionally rewarding overwork?

Are members keeping score about who has received attention?

Remember

The goal is not maximum contact.

The goal is sustainable relationship.

One Thing to Reduce

One Relationship to Give More Attention

FM-4.16

Building Relational Capital

Trust Before You Need It

Purpose

Relational capital is the trust accumulated through repeated experiences of attention, honesty, dependability, care, and shared life.

You cannot manufacture it during conflict.

You draw upon what already exists.

Reflect

A relationship gains trust when people experience:

- ☐ being heard;
- ☐ promises kept;
- ☐ confidentiality honored;
- ☐ disagreement tolerated;
- ☐ mistakes acknowledged;
- ☐ questions welcomed;
- ☐ boundaries respected;
- ☐ care offered;
- ☐ humor shared;
- ☐ work shared;
- ☐ grief shared;
- ☐ gratitude expressed.

Ask

Which of these are already becoming visible?

Which need attention?

Imagine a Future Disagreement

If we disagreed seriously six months from now, what relational experiences would help us remain in conversation?

Complete

The trust we are building now will matter later because...

Chapter Four Discernment Harvest

The Relationships That Are Beginning to Form

People the Pastor Has Begun to Know Well

People Who Have Helped the Pastor Understand the Congregation

Story Keepers We Still Need to Hear

Quiet or Informal Leaders We Are Beginning to Recognize

Newer or Less-Connected People Whose Voices We Need

Generations or Groups Underrepresented in Our Conversations

Stories That Keep Appearing

Stories That Challenge the Dominant Story

Pain We Have Heard That Deserves Attention

Assumptions the Pastor Has Already Revised

Assumptions the Congregation Has Revised About the Pastor

Relationships That Need More Time

Signs That Trust Is Beginning to Grow

Complete

The congregation is becoming more than an organization to the pastor because...

The pastor is becoming more than a role to the congregation because...

The relationships we most want to deepen during the next three months are...

One thing we are learning about beginning ministry together is...

A Prayer for the Relationships Between Us

Leader

Christ who called disciples by name,
teach us to know one another.

People

Not as roles, but as people.

Leader

We know titles.

People

Teach us stories.

Leader

We know offices.

People

Teach us gifts.

Leader

We know responsibilities.

People

Teach us hopes.

Leader

We know names we may quickly forget.

People

Teach us to keep learning them.

Leader

Among us are stories
that have been told many times.

People

Help us hear them again.

Leader

Among us are stories
that have rarely been told.

People

Give them room.

Leader

Among us are people
who stand near the center.

People

Let us receive their wisdom.

Leader

Among us are people
who live nearer the edges.

People

Help us notice them.

Leader

Among us are people
whose influence carries no title.

People**Help us recognize their gifts.****Leader**

Among us are people carrying joy.

People**Let us rejoice together.****Leader**

Among us are people carrying pain.

People**Give us courage to listen.****Leader**

Keep us from rushing toward usefulness.

People**Teach us the ministry of presence.****Leader**

Keep us from turning people into problems.

People**Teach us curiosity.****Leader**

Keep us from turning stories into data.

People**Teach us reverence.****Leader**

Keep us from confusing busyness with ministry.

People**Teach us attention.****Leader**

For one day disagreement will come.

People**Let trust already be waiting for us.****Leader**

One day difficult decisions will come.

People**Let relationship already be strong enough to carry them.**

Leader

One day we will need to tell one another hard truths.

People

Let love make truth possible.

All

God who gathers strangers
and calls them the Body of Christ,
make us more than people
who occupy the same building.

Give us patience for the slow work
of knowing one another.

Let meals matter.

Let conversations matter.

Let stories matter.

Let names matter.

Let laughter matter.

Let silence matter.

Let showing up matter.

Build among us the trust
we will one day need.

And through these ordinary relationships,
teach pastor and congregation
the deeper meaning of the word:

we.

Amen.

Carrying the Work Forward

Relationships are beginning.

The pastor is learning names.

Stories are accumulating.

The congregation is becoming more than the version described in the Ministry Discernment Profile.

The pastor is becoming more than the candidate the congregation called.

But the congregation does not exist in isolation.

Neither does the pastor's call.

Throughout the transition, the congregation has been learning that ministry begins not merely with the church's needs, but with attention to the place where God has planted it.

During *Listening*, members walked streets, talked with neighbors, encountered community leaders, noticed assets and pain, and began recognizing where Christ might already be at work.

The new pastor should not have to begin that work from scratch.

The congregation already has relationships.

Members know teachers, business owners, nonprofit leaders, neighbors, coaches, librarians, public servants, artists, advocates, clergy, caregivers, and people whose names may never appear on a list of official community leaders.

Now those relationships can become bridges.

Not:

“Pastor, here is a list of people you should call.”

But:

“Pastor, I know someone I would like you to meet. Let me take you with me.”

The pastor has begun learning the congregation.

Now the congregation can begin introducing the pastor to the place where their shared ministry will unfold.

That is the work of Chapter Five:

Chapter Five

Introduce the Pastor to the Community

The Call Is to a Place

Chapter Five Resources

Introduce the Pastor to the Community

The Call Is to a Place

A congregation does not exist at an address.

It exists in a place.

An address tells the pastor where the church building is.

A place has stories.

It has neighborhoods and schools, businesses and parks, apartment complexes and subdivisions, hospitals and nursing homes, shelters and restaurants, libraries and ballfields, government offices and gathering places.

It has people who have lived there for generations and people who arrived last month.

It has beauty.

It has wounds.

It has assets.

It has inequities.

It has histories people celebrate and histories people would rather forget.

And long before the new pastor arrived, God was already there.

That conviction has accompanied this congregation through the transition:

God acts. We recognize. We join.

The pastor's task is therefore not to arrive with a mission for the community.

The first task is to learn the place well enough to recognize the life already present there.

Fortunately, the pastor does not have to begin alone.

During the earlier work of *Listening*, the congregation paid attention to its community. Members walked neighborhoods, had conversations, noticed assets and pain, encountered community leaders, and began asking where God might already be at work.

Those relationships should not disappear into a transition report.

They can become one of the congregation's first gifts to its new pastor.

The best introduction is often not:

"You should call this person."

It is:

“I know someone I would like you to meet. Come with me.”

That difference matters.

A directory provides contacts.

A congregation provides relationships.

And members possess far more community relationships than they may initially realize.

The teacher knows the school.

The nurse knows the hospital.

The parent knows the soccer league.

The volunteer knows the food pantry.

The business owner knows other business owners.

The musician knows the arts community.

The retiree knows the neighborhood association.

The teenager knows a part of the community most adults never see.

The person who has lived in the same neighborhood for forty years knows stories no demographic report can tell.

The congregation is already woven into the community.

Beginning ministry together means helping the pastor enter that web of relationships.

For most congregations, **FM-5.1 through FM-5.7 and FM-5.10** provide the core process.

FM-5.1

Recovering the Listening Work

Do Not Make the Pastor Start Over

Purpose

The congregation has already learned things about its community during the transition.

Before creating new surveys, studies, or listening projects, recover what has already been learned.

Time

60–90 minutes.

Gather

Bring together materials from the congregation's earlier Listening work.

These might include:

community maps;

neighborhood-walk notes;

interviews;

community demographic information;

asset maps;
conversation notes;
community-partner information;
congregational reflections;
photographs;
reports;
stories.

Do Not Begin by Explaining Everything to the Pastor

Let the pastor first encounter the material.

Then ask:

What catches your attention?

What surprises you?

What makes you curious?

Where do you want to know more?

What seems to have generated energy in the congregation?

Congregational Leaders Reflect

What did we learn during Listening that we do not want to lose?

What relationships began?

What assumptions changed?

What questions remained unanswered?

What did we say we wanted to explore further?

Now Ask

What needs to be **read**?

What needs to be **seen**?

What needs to be **heard**?

Who needs to be **met**?

Choose Three Starting Points

Remember

The goal is not to brief the pastor on everything the congregation knows.

The goal is to invite the pastor into the congregation's continuing curiosity about its place.

FM-5.2

Community Relationship Map

Who Do We Already Know?

Purpose

Congregations often say:

“We don't really have many community connections.”

Then someone begins asking questions.

Twenty minutes later, the paper is full.

Time

60 minutes with governing board, transition team, or a diverse group of members.

Place the Church in the Center

Around it create categories.

Education

Schools:

Teachers:

Administrators:

Colleges/training programs:

Health and Care

Hospitals:

Clinics:

Mental-health organizations:

Care facilities:

Human Services

Food ministries:

Housing organizations:

Homelessness services:

Family services:

Recovery ministries/services:

Civic Life

Local government:

Libraries:

Neighborhood associations:

Public safety:

Civic organizations:

Business

Business owners:

Chamber/business organizations:

Major employers:

Arts and Culture

Artists:

Musicians:

Theater:

Museums/historical organizations:

Recreation

Sports:

Parks:

Clubs:

Faith Communities

Churches:

Other faith communities:

Ecumenical/interfaith organizations:

Informal Community Connectors

Who seems to know everyone?

Who brings people together?

Who is trusted without holding an official title?

Now Add the Most Important Information

Beside every name or organization, write:

Who in our congregation already has this relationship?

That changes the map.

Ask

Where do we have strong relationships?

Where are relationships weak?

Where are we connected only institutionally?

Which connections could become genuine relationships?

Choose Five Relationships Worth Sharing with the Pastor

FM-5.3

Community Introduction Planner

From Contact to Relationship

Purpose

Do not schedule thirty introductory meetings simply because thirty names appear on a map.

Choose thoughtfully.

Person or Organization

Why Might This Relationship Matter?

What Might the Pastor Learn?

Who Already Knows This Person?

Who Will Make the Introduction?

Best Setting

- ☐ Coffee.
- ☐ Lunch.
- ☐ Visit their workplace.
- ☐ Community event.
- ☐ Walk.
- ☐ Church visit.
- ☐ Other: _____

What Should the Pastor Know Beforehand?

What Should the Pastor Not Assume?

Afterward

What did we learn?

What question emerged?

Is there a natural next step?

Important

Not every introduction needs a follow-up project.

Sometimes a relationship is enough.

FM-5.4

Beyond the Powerful

Who Knows the Community from the Ground?

Purpose

When someone says:

“You need to meet the community leaders,”

the list often includes:

the mayor;

school superintendent;

police chief;
hospital administrator;
business leaders;
nonprofit executives.

Meet them.

But do not confuse positional authority with complete community knowledge.

The person who understands a neighborhood may have no title at all.

Ask

Who knows what families are struggling with?

Who knows where teenagers gather?

Who knows people experiencing homelessness?

Who knows immigrant or newcomer communities?

Who knows what older adults are experiencing?

Who knows what young parents are facing?

Who knows the arts community?

Who knows local small-business owners?

Who knows what happens after most offices close?

Who is trusted by people who distrust institutions?

Who knows the community's informal gathering places?

Add to the Map

Names we had overlooked:

Ask

What part of the community becomes invisible if we meet only people with titles?

FM-5.5

Take Me With You

A Congregation-Wide Community Connection Exercise

Purpose

This may be one of the simplest and most effective ways to introduce a pastor to the community.

Instead of asking:

“Who should the pastor meet?”

ask members:

“Whom could you introduce the pastor to?”

That changes the congregation from adviser to bridge.

Use

This can be introduced:

during worship;

at a congregational gathering;

through the newsletter;

at a governing-board meeting;

in small groups.

Invitation

Think about your ordinary life outside the congregation.

Where do you already have relationships?

At school?

At work?

In your neighborhood?

Through volunteering?

Through recreation?

At a coffee shop?

At a community organization?

Through the arts?

Through caregiving?

Through local government?

Through another faith community?

Complete

Someone in this community I would like our pastor to know is:

I know this person through:

I think this relationship matters because:

Something our pastor might learn from them is:

I would be willing to:

- ☐ Make an introduction.
- ☐ Invite the pastor to come with me.
- ☐ Arrange coffee or lunch.
- ☐ Invite both of them to something I already attend.
- ☐ Provide contact information with permission.

One Important Rule

Do not volunteer another person's time without asking them.

Transition Team

Collect the responses.

Look for patterns.

Do not schedule everything.

Ask:

What relationships offer the pastor different windows into the community?

First Five

Remember

“Here is someone you should call” gives the pastor a task.

“Come with me” shares a relationship.

FM-5.6

Community Walk or Drive

See the Place Through Someone Else's Eyes

Purpose

The pastor can drive through the community alone.

That reveals geography.

Driving or walking with someone who knows the place reveals stories.

Time

60–120 minutes.

Choose Different Guides

Do not take only one tour.

Consider:

a longtime resident;

a teenager;

a teacher;

a social-service provider;

a business owner;

a newer resident;

a community activist;

a person from a different neighborhood.

They will show you different communities occupying the same geography.

Ask the Guide

Show me a place you love.

Show me a place that has changed.

Show me where people gather.

Show me something visitors rarely notice.

Show me where children spend time.

Show me where teenagers go.

Show me where people struggle.

Show me a place of hope.

Show me a place with an important story.

Show me where you think the church should pay attention.

Pastor's Notes

What did I see?

What story changed what I saw?

What surprised me?

What assumptions did I bring?

Where did I notice abundance?

Where did I notice pain?

What do I want to revisit?

Do Not Ask Yet

“What ministry should we start here?”

First learn to see.

FM-5.7

Community Conversation Guide

Listen Before Explaining the Church

Purpose

When pastors meet community leaders, they may feel pressure to explain the congregation.

Resist making the meeting a church presentation.

Ask questions.

Opening

I'm new to the congregation and am trying to learn this community from people who know it. I'm grateful for the chance simply to listen.

Possible Questions

What do you appreciate most about this community?

What has changed?

What do people who do not live here misunderstand about it?

What gives you hope?

Where do you see people struggling?

What concerns do you think receive too little attention?

Who else should I learn from?

What organizations or groups are doing especially good work?

Where do people naturally gather?

What community strengths are easily overlooked?

How are churches perceived here?

What have churches contributed well?

Where have churches been less helpful?

If you were helping a new pastor understand this community, what would you want them to notice?

Follow-Up

Tell me more about that.

What makes you say that?

Who experiences that most?

Where would I see that?

Who else understands this well?

Avoid

“Our church could solve that.”

“We have a program for that.”

“What do you need from us?”

Those questions may come later.

Close With

Who is one person you think I should meet next?

FM-5.8

Neighboring Clergy and Faith Communities

Learn the Religious Ecology of the Place

Purpose

The new pastor is entering not only a congregation but a community of faith communities.

Some cooperate.

Some barely know one another.

Some carry histories together.

Some carry histories of conflict.

Learn before assuming.

Identify

Neighboring congregations:

Other faith communities:

Ecumenical organizations:

Interfaith organizations:

Ask Congregational Leaders

Which relationships already exist?

What cooperative ministries exist?

What history should the pastor know?

Are there relationships that need repair?

Conversation with Clergy

How long have you served here?

What have you learned about this community?

What do you value about ministry here?

What challenges do local faith communities share?

Where do congregations cooperate?

What history should I understand?

Who else should I meet?

Important

Do not enter assuming either competition or instant collaboration.

Begin with relationship.

FM-5.9

Introducing the Pastor Publicly

Tell the Community Without Advertising at It

Purpose

A congregation may want to announce its new pastor through local media, community organizations, social media, or neighborhood networks.

Keep the communication relational.

Include

Pastor's name.

Congregation.

Beginning date.

A brief description of ministry background.

A sentence about the congregation.

An invitation to community relationship.

Avoid

Grand claims.

“Dynamic new pastor will transform...”

“Exciting new era...”

“The answer to...”

The pastor has barely unpacked.

Better Emphasis

First Presbyterian Church welcomes the Rev. _____ as its new pastor. During the coming months, Pastor _____ and the congregation will be spending time listening, building relationships, and learning more deeply from the community they serve together.

Local Adaptation

Places We Might Share This

- ☐ Local newspaper.
- ☐ Community newsletter.
- ☐ Neighborhood association.
- ☐ Chamber.
- ☐ Community organizations.
- ☐ Website.
- ☐ Social media.

- Denominational communications.

FM-5.10

First 90 Days Community Learning Plan

Give Curiosity a Rhythm

Purpose

Community learning needs intention without becoming another impossible calendar.

Month One

Orientation

Focus:

basic geography;

existing congregational relationships;

nearby institutions;

immediate neighborhood;

community history.

Three Experiences

Month Two

Relationships

Focus:

community partners;

informal leaders;

schools;

nonprofits;

businesses;

faith communities.

Three Conversations

Month Three

Widening the View

Focus:

voices not yet heard;

neighborhoods not yet visited;

people outside formal leadership;

places of both pain and possibility.

Three Experiences

At Ninety Days Ask

What part of the community do I understand better?

What remains largely invisible to me?

Who has become a relationship rather than a contact?

What assumptions have changed?

Where do I want to keep listening?

FM-5.11

The Community Through Different Eyes

One Place, Many Experiences

Purpose

There is no single community story.

People experience the same place differently.

Choose One Location

A downtown district.

A neighborhood.

A park.

A school area.

A commercial corridor.

An area near the church.

Visit It with Three Different People

Possible guides:

longtime resident;

young person;

business owner;

parent;

person experiencing poverty;

community organizer;

new resident;

teacher;

retired person.

Ask Each

What do you notice here?

What do you know that I would not know by looking?

What has changed?

Who feels at home here?

Who may not?

What is good here?

What is difficult?

Compare

What did everyone notice?

What did only one person notice?

What contradictions appeared?

Reflection

The community looks different depending on where you stand because...

FM-5.12

Asset Before Need

Learn What Is Strong

Purpose

Churches often enter communities asking:

What is wrong?

That question can make the community appear as a collection of deficits awaiting church intervention.

Ask another question first:

What is strong here?

Identify

People with gifts:

Strong organizations:

Healthy relationships:

Community traditions:

Gathering places:

Creative people:

Local knowledge:

Sources of resilience:

Places of beauty:

Stories of neighbors caring for neighbors:

Ask

Where is the community already solving problems?

Who is already doing good work?

Where is generosity already visible?

Theological Reflection

Where might we recognize God at work before our congregation does anything at all?

Remember

The church does not bring God into the neighborhood.

God got there first.

FM-5.13

Pain Without a Project**Learn to Notice Without Immediately Fixing****Purpose**

The pastor will encounter pain.

Homelessness.

Loneliness.

Hunger.

Addiction.

Violence.

Racism.

Isolation.

Family stress.

Economic insecurity.

Mental-health struggles.

Educational inequities.

The church may eventually respond.

But immediate program creation can prevent deeper listening.

When You Notice Pain, Ask

Who experiences this?

Who understands it firsthand?

Who is already responding?

What do they say is needed?

What assumptions are we making?

What assets already exist?

What relationships do we need before imagining a response?

Resist

“We should start a ministry.”

Long enough to ask:

“Who is already here?”

“What are they doing?”

“What have they learned?”

“Could we join them?”

Complete

One place where we need more listening before acting is...

FM-5.14

The Church's Reputation

Hear How the Community Experiences You

Purpose

The congregation knows what it intends to communicate.

The community knows what it experiences.

Those may not be identical.

Ask Community Conversation Partners

When you think of this congregation, what comes to mind?

What do you think people in the community know about us?

Where have you seen us involved?

What do you think we care about?

Is there anything you wish we understood about how churches are perceived here?

Do Not Defend

If the answer hurts, listen.

Compare

How we describe ourselves:

How others describe us:

Ask

Where do these descriptions align?

Where do they differ?

What might we learn from the difference?

FM-5.15

A Teenager's Tour

See What Adults Miss

Purpose

Adults often describe communities through institutions.

Young people may describe them through experience.

If appropriate and consistent with your congregation's child/youth protection policies, invite several youth to help adults see the community through their eyes.

Ask

Where do people your age actually go?

Where do you feel welcome?

Where do you avoid?

Where do you go when you want to be with friends?

What do adults misunderstand about being young here?

What is good about living here?

What is difficult?

What do you wish churches understood about young people?

Ask the Adults

What did we hear that we would not have discovered on our own?

Important

Do not finish by asking youth:

“So what youth program should the church start?”

Let their experience matter even when it does not become a program.

FM-5.16

The One-Mile Question

What Is Near Us That We No Longer See?

Purpose

Familiarity makes things invisible.

Study the area immediately surrounding the church.

Draw or Print a Map

Mark approximately one mile around the congregation.

Identify

Housing:

Schools:

Businesses:

Parks:

Healthcare:

Government:

Nonprofits:

Other congregations:

Gathering places:

Vacant or neglected spaces:

Then Walk

Do not only study the map.

Notice

What do people advertise?

Where are people?

Where are there benches?

Where are there no places to sit?

What languages appear?

What looks cared for?

What looks neglected?

Where are children?

Where are older adults?

Ask

What is within a mile of our church that we have somehow stopped seeing?

FM-5.17

From Networking to Neighboring

Check the Motive

Purpose

Community engagement can quietly become institutional networking.

The pastor begins collecting contacts because those relationships might benefit the church.

That is not the same as neighboring.

Reflect

When I meet someone in the community, am I primarily wondering:

How can this person help the church?

How can we get them involved?

Could they send people to us?

Could this improve our visibility?

Or am I wondering:

Who is this person?

What do they care about?

What are they learning?

What gifts do they bring to this place?

Where might God already be at work in their life and work?

Complete

Networking asks...

Neighboring asks...

A Practice

For the next month, have at least three community conversations in which you make no request and offer no program.

Simply learn.

FM-5.18

Where Did We Notice Christ?

Community Reflection

Purpose

Community learning is not merely sociological.

It is theological.

We are learning to recognize God's activity.

Use

After a community walk, tour, conversation, or month of introductions.

Ask

Where did we encounter generosity?

Where did we encounter courage?

Where did we encounter healing?

Where did we encounter creativity?

Where did we encounter people crossing boundaries?

Where did we encounter care for people easily overlooked?

Where did we encounter grief?

Where did we encounter longing?

Where did we encounter hope?

Then Ask

Where did we recognize something that looked like the work of Christ?

And Finally

What might it mean simply to draw near?

Do not require an action plan.

Recognition comes before response.

Chapter Five Discernment Harvest

The Place We Are Beginning to Know Together

What We Recovered from Our Earlier Listening Work

Community Relationships We Already Possess

People Members Have Personally Introduced to the Pastor

Informal Community Leaders We Had Previously Overlooked

Places the Pastor Has Begun to Understand

Places Still Largely Unknown

Community Assets We Have Noticed

Pain We Have Encountered

People Already Responding to That Pain

Assumptions About the Community We Have Revised

What Young People or Other Less-Heard Voices Helped Us See

What We Heard About the Congregation's Community Reputation

Relationships That Are Becoming More Than Contacts

Places Where We Need More Listening Before Acting

Signs of God's Activity We Have Recognized

Complete

We used to think this community was...

Now we are beginning to see...

The person or relationship that most changed our understanding was...

The place we most need to keep paying attention to is...

One place where we suspect God may already be inviting us to draw near is...

A Prayer for Learning the Place

Leader

God of this place,
you were here before us.

People

Teach us to notice.

Leader

Before this congregation was organized,

People

you were here.

Leader

Before this building was raised,

People

you were here.

Leader

Before this pastor arrived,

People

you were here.

Leader

In streets we know well,

People

teach us to notice.

Leader

In neighborhoods we rarely enter,

People

teach us to notice.

Leader

In schools and businesses,

People

teach us to notice.

Leader

In hospitals and shelters,

People

teach us to notice.

Leader

In parks and restaurants,

People

teach us to notice.

Leader

In homes and gathering places,

People

teach us to notice.

Leader

Among people with titles,

People

let us recognize wisdom.

Leader

Among people without titles,

People

let us recognize wisdom there too.

Leader

Where there is pain,

People

keep us from rushing to fix.

Leader

Where there is strength,

People

keep us from overlooking it.

Leader

Where others are already serving,

People

keep us from assuming we must lead.

Leader

Where relationships already exist,

People

teach us to enter with humility.

Leader

Where the community sees us differently
from the way we see ourselves,

People

give us courage to listen.

Leader

Where our assumptions are wrong,

People

make us curious rather than defensive.

Leader

Where neighbors are caring for neighbors,

People

help us recognize your grace.

Leader

Where strangers are being welcomed,

People

help us recognize your kingdom.

Leader

Where wounds are being tended,

People

help us recognize Christ.

Leader

Where hope is taking root,

People

help us draw near.

All

God of every street and neighborhood,
every school and workplace,
every kitchen table and gathering place,

teach us to love this place
before trying to change it.

Give us eyes to see its gifts,
ears to hear its stories,
humility to learn from its people,
and patience to build relationships
before creating answers.

Save us from imagining
that we bring you with us.

You are already here.

You are already acting.

Teach us to recognize.

And when the time comes,
give us courage to join.

Amen.

Carrying the Work Forward

The pastor is beginning to know the place.

A map is becoming a collection of stories.

An organization on a contact list is becoming a person.

A neighborhood is becoming a relationship.

The congregation is beginning to share its community connections rather than merely tell the pastor whom to call.

And the pastor is beginning to see something important:

The church's community is not a problem to be solved.

It is a place to be loved.

But learning the community is only half of the apprenticeship.

The pastor is also entering a culture.

Every congregation has one.

Some of it is visible.

Much of it is not.

There are written rules and unwritten rules.

There are official procedures and the ways things actually happen.

There are traditions everyone can explain.

There are traditions no one can explain but everyone knows should not be touched.

There are stories behind practices.

There are old adaptations that became permanent customs.

There are values expressed in mission statements and values revealed by what happens when the congregation is under pressure.

The new pastor will notice things.

Some will seem puzzling.

Some inefficient.

Some wonderful.

Some maddening.

And fresh eyes are a gift.

But before asking,

“Why do you do it this way?”

with the unspoken ending,

“because this makes no sense,”

there is a better question:

“Help me understand how this came to matter.”

The first months are not merely an orientation.

They are an apprenticeship to congregation and place.

That is the work of Chapter Six:

Chapter Six

Learn Before You Lead

The First Months as an Apprenticeship

Chapter Six Resources

Learn Before You Lead

The First Months as an Apprenticeship

A new pastor arrives with experience.

That experience matters.

The pastor has studied theology, Scripture, leadership, worship, pastoral care, and the life of the church. Perhaps they have served other congregations. They have developed instincts about what works and what does not. They have seen healthy practices and unhealthy ones. They bring gifts, convictions, questions, and ideas.

The congregation called them in part because of those gifts.

But experience can become a problem when what worked somewhere else becomes the answer here before the pastor understands **here**.

Every congregation has a culture.

Some of it is visible.

Worship begins at a particular time. Committees meet on particular nights. Decisions follow certain procedures. Staff have written job descriptions. The governing board has bylaws. The annual calendar contains familiar events.

Much of congregational culture, however, has never been written down.

People know which decisions require extensive conversation even when the bylaws say a simple vote is sufficient.

They know which traditions are flexible and which ones carry stories outsiders cannot see.

They know who will speak first in a meeting and whose silence matters more.

They know when a formal meeting is really where the decision will be made—and when the real conversation will happen in the parking lot afterward.

They know what “we’ve always done it this way” means in this congregation.

The pastor does not.

Not yet.

That is why the *Beginning Ministry Together Field Guide* describes these first months as an **apprenticeship to a congregation and a place**.

An apprentice does not arrive empty-handed.

An apprentice arrives ready to learn.

That distinction matters.

The pastor is not pretending to know nothing. Nor is the congregation declaring that nothing can change until the pastor has passed some invisible test.

Instead, pastor and congregation agree that understanding should usually precede judgment.

The new pastor will see things the congregation no longer sees.

That is one of the gifts of fresh eyes.

But fresh eyes do not always understand what they see.

The governing practice of this chapter is therefore simple:

Ask why before asking why not.

Why does this matter?

How did this begin?

What purpose did it once serve?

What purpose does it serve now?

What value does it protect?

Who cares about it?

What happened the last time it changed?

What might be lost?

Then, eventually:

Does it still serve us?

The first question is not:

Why do you people do this?

It is:

Help me understand.

For most congregations, **FM-6.1 through FM-6.8 and FM-6.10** provide the core process.

FM-6.1

The Pastoral Apprenticeship Covenant

Learning as an Act of Leadership

Purpose

The pastor needs permission to learn.

The congregation needs to understand that learning is not avoidance of leadership.

This covenant makes that expectation explicit.

Time

45–60 minutes with pastor and governing board.

Pastor's Commitments

During these first months, I will:

- ☐ Ask before assuming.
- ☐ Listen for stories behind practices.
- ☐ Distinguish observation from interpretation.
- ☐ Learn both formal and informal systems.
- ☐ Notice strengths as carefully as problems.
- ☐ Resist importing solutions simply because they worked elsewhere.
- ☐ Ask people with different perspectives.
- ☐ Remain curious when something initially makes little sense to me.
- ☐ Say “I don't know yet” when I do not know yet.
- ☐ Share what I am noticing without pretending my first interpretation is necessarily correct.

Congregation's Commitments

During these first months, we will:

- ☐ Allow the pastor to ask questions.
- ☐ Resist interpreting questions as criticism.
- ☐ Explain without demanding agreement.
- ☐ Tell stories behind practices.
- ☐ Avoid requiring immediate opinions about every longstanding issue.
- ☐ Resist using the pastor's fresh perspective to settle old arguments.
- ☐ Allow time for the pastor to understand our culture.
- ☐ Be honest about both strengths and difficulties.
- ☐ Introduce the pastor to people who understand the congregation differently from us.
- ☐ Receive the pastor's fresh observations without immediate defensiveness.

Together We Will

practice curiosity before judgment.

Our Apprenticeship Period

We will give particular attention to learning during approximately:

This is not a prohibition against leadership or necessary action.

It is a commitment to lead from understanding.

Signatures

Pastor: _____

Leader: _____

Date: _____

FM-6.2

What I Need to Learn

The Pastor's Learning Map

Purpose

There is too much to learn.

Organizing curiosity helps.

Congregational Story

What major events shaped this congregation?

What stories are told repeatedly?

What losses remain important?

Worship

What traditions matter?

What theological convictions become visible in worship?

What creates anxiety when changed?

Governance

How are decisions formally made?

How are they actually made?

Staff

How does the staff function together?

Where are roles clear?

Where are they ambiguous?

Conflict

How does this congregation handle disagreement?

What happens when tension rises?

Pastoral Care

How do people expect pastoral care to happen?

Who else provides care?

Money

How are financial decisions made?

What stories shape attitudes toward money?

Mission

What ministries carry energy?

What ministries continue mostly from habit?

Theology

What theological convictions are lived here?

Where is there significant diversity?

Community

How does the congregation understand its place?

Where are its strongest relationships?

Informal Culture

What do people “just know”?

My Three Most Important Learning Questions Right Now

FM-6.3

“Help Me Understand” Question Bank

Questions That Keep Curiosity Open

Purpose

The tone of a question can determine whether people become curious or defensive.

Compare:

“Why are we still doing this?”

with:

“Help me understand how this became important.”

Both may eventually address the same practice.

Only one begins with curiosity.

History Questions

How did this begin?

How long have you done it this way?

What was happening when this started?

Who helped create it?

Meaning Questions

Why does this matter?

What do people value about it?

What would people miss if it disappeared?

What does this communicate about who we are?

Change Questions

Has this ever been done differently?

What happened?

What have people tried?

What did you learn?

Relationship Questions

Who cares most about this?

Who is affected by it?

Whose perspective should I hear?

Culture Questions

What would a newcomer not understand about this?

Is there an unwritten rule here?

What would surprise me?

Discernment Questions

Does this still accomplish what it was created to accomplish?

What gift are we trying to preserve?

Could the gift remain even if the practice changed?

Pastor's Favorite Learning Question

FM-6.4

Ask Why Before Why Not

Understanding the Story Behind a Practice

Purpose

Use this worksheet when the pastor encounters a practice that seems puzzling, inefficient, outdated, unnecessary, or simply strange.

The Practice

My Initial Reaction

What Am I Assuming?

Before Asking Whether It Should Change

How did this practice begin?

What problem was it originally trying to solve?

What value did it protect?

Who helped establish it?

Who values it now?

What meaning does it carry?

Has anyone tried to change it before?

What happened?**What might be lost if it disappeared?****Now Ask**

Does the original need still exist?

Does the practice still serve its purpose?

Is the value still important?

Could that value be preserved another way?

My Thinking Now**Important**

Understanding why something exists does not obligate the pastor to preserve it forever.

It allows any future conversation to begin with respect rather than contempt.

FM-6.5

Congregational Culture Observation Journal

Notice Before Naming**Purpose**

Culture is often easier to observe than define.

For the first several months, the pastor can record observations without immediately deciding what they mean.

What Happened?**What Did I Notice?****What Did People Seem to Value?****What Created Energy?**

What Created Anxiety?

Who Spoke?

Who Did Not?

How Was a Decision Made?

What Happened When People Disagreed?

What Was Said Explicitly?

What Seemed to Be Understood Without Being Said?

My First Interpretation

Another Possible Interpretation

Who Could Help Me Understand?

Question I Want to Carry

Remember

Observation is not yet interpretation.

And interpretation is not yet truth.

FM-6.6

Written Rules / Unwritten Rules

Learning the Congregation Beneath the Policies

Purpose

Every congregation has written rules.

Every congregation also has unwritten ones.

Unwritten rules are not necessarily unhealthy.

They become difficult when everyone assumes newcomers already know them.

Time

60–75 minutes with governing board or staff.

Written Rules

Examples:

Committee chairs are elected annually.

Staff report to particular supervisors.

Meetings begin at a stated time.

Financial expenditures require authorization.

Our Written Rules

Now Complete

Around here, everybody knows that...

Try These Prompts

Before changing worship, you should...

If you want something approved, it helps to...

When conflict happens, people usually...

If someone is upset, they tend to...

A pastor should never...

A pastor is expected to...

The people you should talk with before a major decision are...

Something we say is flexible but really is not is...

Something that looks important but actually is flexible is...

Ask

Which unwritten rules help us function?

Which create confusion?

Which may need to become explicit?

Which might need to change?

Pastor Reflects

Which unwritten rule surprised me most?

FM-6.7

How Decisions Really Get Made

Formal Process and Lived Process

Purpose

An organizational chart tells the pastor who has authority.

It may not reveal how decisions actually develop.

Choose a Recent Significant Decision

Formal Process

Who officially had authority?

What process was supposed to occur?

Actual Process

Where did the idea originate?

Who shaped it?

Who needed to be consulted?

Where did most of the discussion happen?

When was the decision essentially made?

Who needed reassurance?

Who could have stopped it?

Compare

Where did formal and informal processes align?

Where did they differ?

Ask

Was the informal process relational wisdom?

Or was it an unhealthy workaround?

What Should the Pastor Learn?

What Might the Congregation Need to Examine?

FM-6.8

What Are We Protecting?

Finding the Value Beneath Resistance

Purpose

Resistance is information.

It may indicate fear.

It may indicate fatigue.

It may indicate grief.

It may indicate a legitimate value that people fear losing.

Before dismissing resistance, ask what it protects.

The Issue

What Are People Resisting?

What Do They Say They Are Concerned About?

What Might Be Beneath That Concern?

- ☐ Identity.
- ☐ Memory.
- ☐ Relationships.
- ☐ Theology.
- ☐ Belonging.
- ☐ Control.
- ☐ Safety.
- ☐ Familiarity.
- ☐ Grief.
- ☐ Previous bad experience.
- ☐ Financial concern.
- ☐ Fear of exclusion.
- ☐ Other: _____

Ask

What good thing might people believe is threatened?

Is that good thing actually threatened?

Could it be protected another way?

Example

The congregation may appear to be protecting:

a particular annual dinner.

But underneath it may be protecting:

an experience of intergenerational belonging.

Those are not the same thing.

Once the deeper value becomes visible, the conversation changes.

Complete

The practice may be negotiable. The value underneath it may be...

FM-6.9

The Tradition Archaeology Exercise

Dig Beneath “We’ve Always Done It This Way”

Purpose

Some traditions have histories everyone knows.

Others survive long after anyone remembers why they began.

Rather than mocking “we’ve always done it this way,” become curious.

Choose a Tradition

Find Three People Who Remember Different Eras

Person One: _____

Person Two: _____

Person Three: _____

Ask Each

When do you remember this beginning?

Why did people do it?

What did it mean then?

How has it changed?

What do you value about it?

Compare the Stories

What is consistent?

What differs?

What has been forgotten?

Ask

What does the tradition mean **now**?

Discern

- The tradition remains life-giving.
- The tradition remains meaningful but needs adaptation.
- The value remains important but the practice may not.
- The tradition has largely completed its purpose.
- We need more conversation.

Remember

A tradition is not automatically sacred because it is old.

Nor is it automatically foolish because its origin has been forgotten.

Learn first.

FM-6.10

Congregational Guide to Letting a Pastor Learn

The Congregation Has an Apprenticeship Role Too

Purpose

The pastor cannot practice curiosity if the congregation demands immediate certainty.

This resource can be shared with the whole congregation.

During the First Months

Help your pastor learn.

Tell Stories

Instead of:

“We always do this.”

Try:

“Would you like to hear how this started?”

Explain Without Demanding Agreement

The pastor can understand a tradition without promising to preserve it forever.

Introduce Yourself Again

Yes, again.

Answer Questions Honestly

Do not tell the pastor only what you think they want to hear.

Resist Testing

Do not ask difficult questions simply to discover whether the pastor gives the “right” answer.

Avoid the Phrase

“You'll find out.”

If there is something important to understand, help the pastor understand it.

Do Not Recruit the Pastor into Old Sides

If a conflict existed before the pastor arrived, resist using the new pastor as reinforcement.

Allow This Answer

“I don't know yet.”

It may be evidence of wisdom.

Ask Yourself

Am I helping the pastor learn us?

Or trying to teach the pastor to agree with me?

Our Congregational Commitment

We will give our pastor permission to learn by...

FM-6.11

The “I Don't Know Yet” Practice

Making Room for Discernment

Purpose

Leadership culture often rewards quick answers.

Pastoral leadership sometimes requires a slower response.

When Asked

“What do you think we should do?”

Try:

“I don't know yet. I'd like to understand more first.”

Then Name the Learning Needed

I need to know:

I need to hear from:

I need to understand:

I need time to:

Give a Return Point

“I don't know yet” should not become indefinite avoidance.

We will return to this question:

Governing Board Reflects

How do we respond when the pastor does not answer immediately?

Do we interpret uncertainty as weakness?

Can we distinguish thoughtful delay from avoidance?

Complete

A question we should intentionally leave open for now is...

FM-6.12

Fresh Eyes Inventory

What Does the New Pastor Notice?

Purpose

Apprenticeship does not mean suppressing fresh observations.

The pastor's unfamiliarity is temporarily a gift.

Things that will become invisible in a year are visible now.

Capture them.

Pastor Completes Privately

What feels especially healthy?

What has surprised me positively?

What seems unnecessarily difficult?

What is confusing?

What appears inconsistent with stated values?

What do people here seem not to notice anymore?

What physical-space issue catches my attention?

What does a newcomer encounter?

What language would an outsider not understand?

What practice seems to carry more meaning than I understand?

Sort Observations

Appreciate Now

Ask About

Learn More

May Eventually Need Attention

Important

Do not convert every fresh observation into an early initiative.

Preserve the observation.

Keep learning.

FM-6.13

Newcomer's Eyes

Borrow Someone Else's Fresh Perspective

Purpose

The pastor is not the only person who can reveal what longtime members no longer see.

Talk with people who joined recently.

Ask

What confused you when you first came?

What helped you feel welcome?

What language did you not understand?

What did everyone else seem to know?

What surprised you?

What nearly kept you from returning?

What made you want to stay?

Pastor Reflects

What did the newcomer see that I also noticed?

What did they see that I missed?

Congregational Reflection

What have we normalized because we have been here too long to notice it?

FM-6.14

The Meeting Culture Observation

Meetings Reveal More Than Agendas

Purpose

A congregation's meetings reveal its culture.

Observe several before trying to redesign them.

Meeting

Notice

Who arrives early?

Who arrives late?

Who speaks first?

Who speaks most?

Who asks questions?

Who summarizes?

Who lowers tension?

Who raises tension?

How is disagreement handled?

How are decisions reached?

What role does prayer play?

Does the formal agenda reflect the real concerns?

What happens after adjournment?

Ask

What does this meeting reveal about how this congregation understands leadership?

One Thing to Appreciate

One Thing to Remain Curious About

FM-6.15

When “That's Not How We Did It Before” Appears

Listen for the Story Inside the Comparison

Purpose

Sooner or later the new pastor will hear about the previous pastor.

That is normal.

Comparison is part of transition.

Do not automatically become defensive.

When Someone Says

“Pastor _____ always...”

Try:

“It sounds like that mattered to you. Tell me what you appreciated about it.”

Listen For

Is this:

grief?

preference?

expectation?

anxiety?

a legitimate practice worth continuing?

a request for predictability?

a way of resisting the new pastor?

Pastor Reflects

What am I hearing beneath the comparison?

Then, If Needed

“I'm grateful to understand why that mattered. I may not always do things in exactly the same way, but knowing the story helps me understand what you value.”

Avoid

Competing with the previous pastor.

Criticizing the previous pastor.

Promising to replicate the previous pastor.

Refusing every previous practice simply to establish independence.

Remember

The congregation does not need the former pastor back.

But it may need permission to tell you what it valued.

FM-6.16

Learning from a Mistake

When the Apprentice Gets It Wrong

Purpose

The pastor will misread something.

The congregation will misread the pastor.

This is inevitable.

The question is whether mistakes become defensiveness or learning.

What Happened?

What Did I Think Was Happening?

What Was Actually Happening?

What Did I Not Know?

Who Helped Me Understand?

Was Harm Done?

Yes / No

If yes, what repair is needed?

What Did I Learn About the Congregation?

What Did I Learn About Myself?

What Will I Do Differently?

A Simple Repair

Sometimes the appropriate response is simply:

“I misunderstood. I'm sorry. Thank you for helping me see it.”

No leadership theory required.

FM-6.17

What Are We Learning About One Another?

A Three-Month Apprenticeship Conversation

Purpose

Learning is mutual.

The pastor is learning the congregation.

The congregation is learning the pastor.

Time

60–75 minutes with governing board.

Pastor Completes

Something I understand now that I did not understand when I arrived:

A congregational strength I appreciate more deeply:

A practice I initially misunderstood:

A question I am still carrying:

Something I want to learn next:

Leaders Complete

Something we understand about our pastor now that we did not understand during the search:

A gift we are beginning to see:

A difference we are learning to navigate:

An expectation we have reconsidered:

Something we hope the pastor continues learning about us:

Together Ask

Where has curiosity helped us?

Where have we judged too quickly?

Where do we need more conversation?

Complete

The most important thing we have learned about one another so far is...

Chapter Six Discernment Harvest

What We Are Beginning to Understand

Stories Behind Practices We Have Learned

Congregational Strengths the Pastor Has Discovered

Unwritten Rules We Have Identified

Informal Leadership Patterns We Have Noticed

Things That Initially Seemed Strange but Make More Sense Now

Things That Still Do Not Make Sense

Values We Have Discovered Beneath Traditions

Patterns in How Decisions Are Made

Fresh-Eyes Observations We Want to Preserve

Questions We Are Intentionally Leaving Open

Places Where the Pastor Has Revised an Initial Judgment

Places Where the Congregation Has Revised an Assumption About the Pastor

Things We May Eventually Need to Change

Things We Have Learned to Appreciate More Deeply

Complete

One thing we understand now that we did not understand three months ago is...

One practice whose story changed the way we see it is...

One question we should keep asking is...

We are learning before leading when...

A Prayer for the Apprenticeship

Leader

God of wisdom,
we have entered a place
filled with stories we do not yet know.

People

Teach us to learn.

Leader

Some things are written.

People

Help us read them.

Leader

Some things are unwritten.

People

Help us notice them.

Leader

Some traditions make immediate sense.

People

Let us receive their gifts.

Leader

Some traditions puzzle us.

People

Make us curious.

Leader

Some practices may need to change.

People

Teach us first to understand.

Leader

Some practices may carry wisdom
we cannot yet see.

People

Teach us humility.

Leader

When the pastor wants to answer too quickly,

People

give patience.

Leader

When the congregation demands certainty too quickly,

People

give patience.

Leader

When questions sound like criticism,

People

give us generosity.

Leader

When explanations sound like resistance,

People

give us generosity.

Leader

When we encounter something strange,

People

teach us to ask why.

Leader

When we encounter resistance,

People

teach us to ask what it protects.

Leader

When we hear,
“We’ve always done it this way,”

People

teach us to listen for the story.

Leader

When we hear,
“We didn’t do it that way before,”

People

teach us to listen for what was valued.

Leader

When fresh eyes see something clearly,

People

give us courage to look.

Leader

When fresh eyes misunderstand,

People

give us grace to learn.

Leader

When we are wrong,

People

make apology easier than defense.

Leader

When we do not know,

People

give us freedom to say, “Not yet.”

All

Christ our teacher,
make us apprentices to one another
and to the place where you have called us.

Give the pastor curiosity
without timidity.

Give the congregation patience
without avoidance.

Give us questions better than our assumptions,
stories deeper than our first impressions,
and humility stronger than our need to be right.

Teach us what should be cherished.

Teach us what should be released.

Teach us what should be repaired.

Teach us what should be changed.

But before all of that,
teach us to understand.

For you are already at work
in what we know
and in what we have yet to discover.

Give us eyes to recognize.

Amen.

Carrying the Work Forward

The pastor is beginning to understand the congregation from the inside.

The strange custom now has a story.

The confusing decision process has become more visible.

The names on the organizational chart have become people.

The informal leaders are beginning to emerge.

The pastor is discovering which traditions carry deep meaning and which ones continue mostly because no one has asked about them for twenty years.

The congregation is learning too.

It is discovering how the pastor asks questions.

How the pastor makes decisions.

What gives the pastor energy.

Where the pastor needs clarity.

How the pastor responds when something goes wrong.

This mutual learning matters because pastor and congregation do not begin ministry together in an empty room.

There are already people working here.

Staff members have carried ministry through the transition.

Governing-board members have held responsibility.

Musicians have prepared worship.

Administrators have kept systems functioning.

Educators have taught.

Treasurers have watched finances.

Custodians have opened buildings.

Committee leaders and volunteers have kept ministries alive.

The new pastor enters that existing network.

Soon questions will arise:

Who decides?

Who supervises?

Who communicates what?

What does the pastor expect from staff?

What do staff expect from the pastor?

What does the governing board need from the pastor?

What does the pastor need from the governing board?

Where does responsibility begin and end?

Good intentions will not answer those questions.

Kindness will not answer them either.

Healthy working relationships need both grace and clarity.

That is the work of Chapter Seven:

Chapter Seven

Beginning Well with Staff and Leaders

Building the Working Relationships

Chapter Seven Resources

Beginning Well with Staff and Leaders

Building the Working Relationships

The pastor does not arrive at an empty church.

Ministry has been happening.

Staff members have been answering phones, preparing worship, caring for people, managing finances, teaching children, maintaining buildings, coordinating volunteers, solving problems, and carrying responsibilities through the transition.

Governing-board members have made decisions.

Committee leaders have kept ministries functioning.

Volunteers have filled gaps.

Some people have carried far more than anyone knows.

During a pastoral transition, roles often stretch.

A staff member begins doing something because someone has to do it.

An officer takes responsibility that once belonged to the pastor.

A volunteer becomes the unofficial keeper of a system.

Temporary arrangements become normal.

Then the new pastor arrives.

Everyone may be delighted.

Everyone may also be wondering:

What happens now?

Staff members may wonder:

Will the new pastor trust me?

Will my job change?

Will the pastor understand what I have been carrying?

Will I be compared with staff from the pastor's previous congregation?

Will the pastor take back responsibilities I have learned to carry?

Will the pastor expect me to work differently?

Will I still have a job?

Governing-board members may wonder:

How much leadership will the pastor assume?

What decisions belong to us?

What decisions belong to the pastor?

How will we disagree?

Will the pastor tell us what to do?

Will the pastor expect us to lead?

The pastor has questions too.

Who actually does what?

What does this job description mean in practice?

Who supervises whom?

Why is this staff member responsible for that?

Why does this committee think it has authority over this?

Which arrangements were temporary?

What promises were made during the transition?

Who has been carrying too much?

These questions cannot be answered simply by saying:

“We’re all on the same team.”

Healthy teams need more than goodwill.

They need trust.

They need clarity.

They need communication.

They need appropriate authority and boundaries.

They need room for disagreement.

And they need enough humility to recognize that the new pastor is entering work already underway.

The governing principle of this chapter is:

Begin with appreciation and curiosity before restructuring relationships.

That does not mean leaving dysfunctional systems untouched.

It means understanding what people have been carrying before deciding what they should carry next.

For most congregations, **FM-7.1 through FM-7.7, FM-7.9, and FM-7.12** provide the core process.

FM-7.1

Before We Start Changing Things

Honoring What Was Carried Through the Transition

Purpose

Before discussing roles, responsibilities, or changes, acknowledge what staff and leaders have carried.

Time

45–60 minutes with staff and key leaders.

Ask Each Person

During the transition, what responsibilities did you carry?

What responsibilities were added?

What became more difficult?

What became easier?

What did you learn?

What are you proud of?

What exhausted you?

What temporary responsibility are you still carrying?

What responsibility would you be glad to release?

What responsibility have you discovered you are good at and would like to continue?

Pastor Listens

Do not begin by deciding what will stay or change.

First understand.

Then Say Clearly

Thank you.

People who carried a congregation through transition should not experience the arrival of the new pastor as though nothing happened before the pastor walked through the door.

Record

Responsibilities that appear temporary:

Responsibilities that may need clarification:

Responsibilities worth reconsidering:

Gifts we discovered during the transition:

Complete

One thing we do not want to lose from the transition is...

FM-7.2

Staff One-to-One Conversation Guide

Know the Person Before Revising the Position

Purpose

The pastor should meet individually with each staff member early in the relationship.

The first conversation is not a performance review.

It is the beginning of a working relationship.

Time

60–90 minutes.

Begin with the Person

Tell me about yourself.

What brought you to this work?

What do you enjoy outside the congregation?

Their Work

What part of your work gives you the most energy?

What part takes the most energy?

What do you think you do especially well?

What do you wish you had more time to do?

What part of your job is least clear?

During the Transition

What changed in your work?

What additional responsibilities did you assume?

What did you learn?

Working Relationships

What helps you work well with a pastor?

What makes working relationships difficult?

How do you prefer to receive feedback?

How do you usually raise a concern?

Expectations

What are you expecting from me?

What do you think I may be expecting from you?

What should we clarify?

Pastor Shares Too

The pastor should answer comparable questions.

A healthy working relationship cannot be built entirely by interviewing the staff member.

Close

What is one thing you hope I understand about you and your work as we begin?

FM-7.3

Role Clarity Worksheet

What Does the Job Description Say—and What Actually Happens?

Purpose

Written job descriptions and lived jobs often diverge.

That does not necessarily indicate a problem.

But the difference needs to be visible.

Position

Job Description Says

Person Actually Does

Responsibilities Added During Transition

Responsibilities No Longer Being Performed

Responsibilities Shared with Others

Areas of Ambiguity

Ask

Which differences are sensible adaptations?

Which create confusion?

Which create overload?

Which create gaps?

Which create duplicated work?

Do Not Immediately Rewrite the Job Description

First ask:

Why did the role evolve this way?

Possible Next Step

- ☐ No change needed.
- ☐ Clarify verbally.
- ☐ Clarify workflow.
- ☐ Review supervision.
- ☐ Revise job description later.
- ☐ Governing-board action needed.
- ☐ Personnel process needed.

FM-7.4

Who Decides?

Responsibility and Authority Map

Purpose

Many staff conflicts are actually authority conflicts.

People do not know who has responsibility, authority, consultation rights, or communication responsibility.

Choose a Recurring Decision

Examples:

worship planning;

building use;

communications;

calendar;

purchases;

staff scheduling;

pastoral care coordination;

program decisions;

volunteer recruitment.

Decision

Who Has Primary Responsibility?

Who Has Authority to Decide?

Who Must Be Consulted?

Who Needs to Be Informed?

Who Implements?

Who Evaluates?

Where Is This Defined?

- ☐ Policy.
- ☐ Job description.
- ☐ Bylaws.
- ☐ Governing-board action.
- ☐ Staff practice.
- ☐ Tradition.
- ☐ Nowhere.

Ask

Is responsibility aligned with authority?

Yes / No

If not:

Repeat for Major Areas

Do not attempt to map every decision in the congregation.

Begin where confusion actually exists.

FM-7.5

Expectations Exchange

What I Need from You / What You Need from Me

Purpose

Unspoken expectations become future disappointments.

Speak them.

Pastor Completes

From staff, I need:

I expect communication about:

I need to know when:

I prefer decisions to be:

I need staff to challenge me when:

Something that makes working with me easier is:

Something that may make working with me difficult is:

Staff Member Completes

From the pastor, I need:

I expect communication about:

I need clarity when:

I need feedback about:

I need permission to challenge the pastor when:

Something that helps me work well is:

Something that makes work difficult for me is:

Compare

Where do expectations align?

Where do they differ?

What needs negotiation?

Complete

One expectation we need to make explicit is...

FM-7.6

Communication Covenant

Do Not Make People Guess**Purpose**

Staff relationships deteriorate quickly when people must guess what others know, expect, or intend.

We Agree That

Urgent matters will be communicated by:

Routine matters will be communicated by:

Schedule changes will be communicated through:

Shared documents will be kept:

Calendar responsibility belongs to:

Staff meeting materials will be distributed:

Email

What belongs in email?

What should not be handled by email?

Text

When is texting appropriate?

After Hours

What constitutes an actual after-hours need?

Conflict

If I am concerned about another staff member, I will:

Questions

If I do not understand a decision, I will:

Mistakes

If I make a mistake affecting someone else's work, I will:

Complete

Our communication will be healthiest when...

FM-7.7

Designing the Staff Meeting

A Working Meeting, Not a Weekly Ritual

Purpose

Staff meetings should serve the ministry.

They should not exist merely because churches have staff meetings.

Ask First

What does this staff need to accomplish together?

Possible Purposes

- ☐ Coordinate calendars.
- ☐ Share information.
- ☐ Plan worship.

- ☐ Identify pastoral-care needs appropriately.
- ☐ Coordinate ministries.
- ☐ Solve operational problems.
- ☐ Make decisions.
- ☐ Build relationships.
- ☐ Reflect spiritually.
- ☐ Anticipate upcoming work.

Frequency

Length

Suggested Rhythm

Opening / Prayer

5–10 minutes.

What do we need to know?

10 minutes.

What requires coordination?

15 minutes.

What requires conversation or decision?

20–30 minutes.

What is ahead?

10 minutes.

What did we decide?

5 minutes.

End Every Meeting With

Who is doing what?

By when?

Who needs to know?

Evaluate After Two Months

What is useful?

What wastes time?

What belongs elsewhere?

What is missing?

FM-7.8

Staff Gifts and Energy Map

More Than Job Descriptions

Purpose

Job descriptions tell what people are employed to do.

They do not tell everything people bring.

Each Staff Member Completes

Three things I do especially well:

Work that gives me energy:

Work that drains me:

A gift I use here that may not be obvious:

Something I would enjoy learning:

Something I could teach others:

As a Team

Where do gifts complement one another?

Where are there gaps?

Where are people doing work that consistently fights their gifts?

Where are hidden gifts being underused?

Important

This exercise does not mean everyone gets to do only work they enjoy.

It helps leadership understand the human resources already present.

FM-7.9

Pastor and Governing Board Working Covenant

Partners in Leadership

Purpose

Pastor and governing board need a shared understanding of how they will work together.

Polity defines authority.

Policies define some responsibilities.

Neither automatically creates partnership.

Time

90 minutes.

We Expect the Pastor To

The Pastor Expects the Governing Board To

We Will Make Decisions By

We Will Prepare for Meetings By

We Will Handle Disagreement By

We Will Communicate Between Meetings By

We Will Avoid

- ☐ Surprising one another in meetings.
- ☐ Using email to conduct complicated conflict.

- Forming factions before conversation.
- Asking the pastor to decide matters belonging to the board.
- Asking the board to manage matters belonging to staff.
- Treating disagreement as disloyalty.
- Allowing unresolved tension to accumulate indefinitely.

We Give One Another Permission To

ask questions;

disagree;

request clarification;

say “I need more time”;

admit mistakes;

change our minds;

name concerns;

ask for help.

Complete

When we disagree, we want our relationship to be characterized by...

FM-7.10

Governing Board One-Year Learning Agenda

Learn to Lead Together

Purpose

The governing board and pastor are not merely continuing the same leadership system with a different person occupying the pastoral chair.

They are becoming a new leadership body.

That takes time.

During the First Year We Want to Learn

How we make decisions together.

How we handle disagreement.

How we use meeting time.

How we communicate.

How we pray and discern.

How we distinguish governance from management.

How we hold pastor and leaders accountable.

How we respond when something does not work.

Our Three Leadership-Learning Goals

Practices We Will Try

We Will Review Our Partnership

- ☐ Monthly for first three months.
- ☐ At three months.
- ☐ At six months.
- ☐ At one year.

Ask at Each Review

Are we becoming better partners in ministry, or merely more familiar with one another?

FM-7.11

Staff Anxiety During Pastoral Transition

Name What Everyone Already Knows Is There

Purpose

The arrival of a new pastor creates uncertainty for staff.

Pretending otherwise does not reduce it.

Staff Reflect Privately

Something I am excited about:

Something I am uncertain about:

Something I am afraid may change:

Something I hope will change:

Something I need clarified:

Pastor Reflects

What anxiety might my arrival create even if no one says so?

What signals might staff be watching for?

What can I clarify now?

What can I not honestly promise?

Conversation

Use language such as:

“I know the arrival of a new pastor can create uncertainty for staff. I do not want to pretend that nothing will ever change, and I do not want you spending months trying to guess what I am thinking. Let's talk about what we know, what we do not know, and how we will communicate.”

Important

Do not offer false reassurance.

“Nothing is going to change.”

You do not know that.

Offer trustworthy process instead.

FM-7.12

The First Difficult Conversation

Practice Before the Stakes Become High

Purpose

A healthy working relationship is not one without difficult conversations.

It is one capable of having them.

Use This Structure

1. Name what you observed.

“When _____ happened...”

2. Describe the effect.

“The result was...”

3. Ask rather than assume.

“Help me understand what happened.”

4. Listen.

What did I hear?

5. Clarify what is needed.

“Going forward, I need...”

6. Invite response.

“What do you need from me?”

7. Agree on next steps.

Avoid

“You always...”

“You never...”

“Everyone thinks...”

“I heard that you...”

“That's just how you are.”

Afterward Ask

Did we address the issue?

Did we preserve the relationship?

What needs follow-up?

Remember

Conflict avoided early often returns later with interest.

FM-7.13

Triangles at Work

Keep the Conversation Where It Belongs

Purpose

A triangle forms when tension between two people is managed through a third.

Congregations are exceptionally good at this.

Example

Staff Member A is frustrated with Staff Member B.

Instead of speaking with B, A tells the pastor.

Now the pastor holds the tension.

Ask

Who has the concern?

Who needs to hear it?

Who is currently carrying the message?

Before Carrying It, Ask

Is there a legitimate reason these people cannot speak directly?

- ☐ Safety.
- ☐ Power imbalance.
- ☐ Personnel policy.
- ☐ Harassment or misconduct concern.
- ☐ Formal supervisory responsibility.
- ☐ Other: _____

If not:

encourage direct conversation.

Helpful Response

“It sounds as though this matters. Have you spoken with them directly?”

If no:

“Would it help to think together about how you might begin that conversation?”

Do Not Use Direct Communication to Avoid Supervision

A supervisor still has responsibility to address performance, conduct, safety, and workplace concerns appropriately.

Complete

One triangle we should avoid creating is...

FM-7.14

Pastor as Supervisor

Pastoral Care and Employment Are Not the Same Relationship

Purpose

Pastors often care deeply about staff.

That does not eliminate supervisory responsibility.

In fact, confusing pastoral care with supervision can make both less trustworthy.

Ask

Who supervises each staff member?

Is that clear to the staff member?

Yes / No

Supervision Includes

clarifying expectations;

providing feedback;

supporting development;

addressing performance;

maintaining accountability;

recognizing good work;

following personnel policies.

Pastoral Care Includes

listening;

compassion;

prayer;

support during personal difficulty.

The Problem

If a pastor knows highly personal information through pastoral care, that information should not casually become employment information.

Likewise, avoiding a necessary performance conversation because the pastor cares about the employee is not pastoral kindness.

Discuss

Where could these roles become confused?

Clarify

When might another pastor, counselor, chaplain, or support person be more appropriate for personal pastoral care?

Complete

We can care for one another while maintaining clear professional responsibilities by...

FM-7.15

Volunteer Leaders and Staff

Clarifying Partnership Without Creating Rivalry

Purpose

Churches depend upon volunteers.

Staff exist partly to equip ministry, not to own it.

But unclear roles create predictable frustration.

Choose a Ministry

Staff Responsibility

Volunteer Leader Responsibility

Shared Responsibility

Who Makes Decisions?

Who Controls Budget?

Who Recruits Volunteers?

Who Communicates with Participants?

Who Evaluates the Ministry?

Ask

Where does staff support become control?

Where does volunteer leadership become staff supervision?

Where are expectations unclear?

Complete

This partnership will work better if...

FM-7.16

Staff Confidentiality and Information Boundaries

Who Needs to Know What?**Purpose**

Church staff encounter sensitive information.

Not everyone needs to know everything.

Discuss Categories**Pastoral-care information**

Who needs to know?

Personnel information

Who needs to know?

Financial information

Who needs to know?

Member contact information

Who needs access?

Security concerns

Who needs information?

Ask Before Sharing

Does this person need this information to fulfill their responsibility?

Yes / No

Do I have permission to share it?

Yes / No / Not Applicable

Is there a policy governing it?

Yes / No

Avoid

Using staff meetings as places for unnecessary personal disclosure.

Sharing confidential information merely because staff are “like family.”

Assuming prayer requests eliminate confidentiality.

Complete

Our standard for sharing sensitive information will be...

FM-7.17

When the New Pastor Wants to Change the Staff Structure

Slow Enough to Understand, Clear Enough to Lead

Purpose

Sometimes staff structure genuinely needs attention.

The apprenticeship principle does not require indefinite delay.

But significant change should come from understanding rather than first impressions.

Before Proposing Change, Ask

What problem am I trying to solve?

What evidence do I have?

How long have I observed it?

Who understands this system better than I do?

What history shaped the current structure?

What personnel policies apply?

Who has authority to make this change?

Who will be affected?

What unintended consequences are possible?

Distinguish

Immediate issue requiring action

from

Structural issue requiring study

Ask

Can the current arrangement function safely and responsibly while we learn more?

Yes / No

If Change Is Needed

What process will we use?

Who needs consultation?

How will we communicate?

Remember

“Don't change anything for a year” is not a universal rule.

Neither is:

“I was called to lead, so let's reorganize.”

Wisdom requires discernment.

FM-7.18

Appreciation as a Leadership Practice

Notice the Work

Purpose

Staff and volunteer leaders should not hear from the pastor only when something needs correction.

Once Each Week, Ask

Who did something worth noticing?

What specifically did they do?

Why did it matter?

Tell Them

Not:

“Great job.”

But:

“I noticed how carefully you welcomed that family when they arrived late. You helped them feel that they belonged instead of making them feel embarrassed. Thank you.”

Specific appreciation teaches a team what it values.

Staff Meeting Practice

Once a month, ask:

Where did you see someone on this team make ministry better?

Caution

Appreciation should not become manipulation.

Do not praise people merely to make them more willing to do more work.

Notice because their work matters.

FM-7.19

Six-Month Staff Partnership Review

How Are We Learning to Work Together?

Purpose

Do not wait for an annual performance review to discuss the working relationship.

This is a mutual partnership review.

It does not replace any required personnel evaluation.

Pastor Reflects

What is working well?

What have I learned about this staff?

Where have I contributed to confusion?

What do I need from staff that I have not communicated clearly?

Staff Reflect

What is working well with the pastor?

What have we learned about the pastor's leadership?

Where do we need more clarity?

What has improved since the beginning?

Together

What communication practice is working?

What needs adjustment?

Where are roles clearer?

Where are they still unclear?

What conflict have we handled well?

What have we avoided?

Complete

During the next six months, we want to strengthen...

Chapter Seven Discernment Harvest

The Working Relationships We Are Building

What Staff and Leaders Carried During the Transition

Gifts We Discovered

Temporary Responsibilities That Need to Be Released

Roles That Need Clarification

Places Where Responsibility and Authority Do Not Align

Expectations We Have Made Explicit

Communication Practices We Have Agreed Upon

Working Relationships That Are Growing Stronger

Relationships Requiring More Attention

Difficult Conversations We Need to Have

Triangles We Need to Avoid

Personnel or Governance Questions Requiring Formal Process

Things the Pastor Has Learned About the Staff

Things Staff Have Learned About the Pastor

Things the Governing Board and Pastor Are Learning About Partnership

Complete

Our staff will work most effectively together when...

Our governing board and pastor will work most effectively together when...

One expectation we have clarified is...

One conversation we should not postpone is...

One gift already present among our staff and leaders that we want to strengthen is...

A Covenant for Staff and Leaders

The Ministry We Share

Leader

Christ calls people with different gifts.

People

And joins them in one ministry.

Leader

Some preach.

People

Some teach.

Leader

Some organize.

People

Some care.

Leader

Some lead publicly.

People

Some make ministry possible quietly.

Leader

Some carry responsibility by office.

People

Some carry influence through trust.

Leader

Some are paid for their work.

People

Many offer their work freely.

Leader

None carries the ministry alone.

People

We belong to one another.

Leader

When responsibilities are unclear,

People

give us courage to clarify them.

Leader

When expectations remain unspoken,

People

give us courage to name them.

Leader

When we disagree,

People

keep us in conversation.

Leader

When we are disappointed,

People

keep us from triangles and whispers.

Leader

When correction is needed,

People

let truth and respect travel together.

Leader

When work is done well,

People

teach us to notice.

Leader

When someone carries too much,

People

teach us to see it.

Leader

When someone needs to release a responsibility,

People

give us wisdom.

Leader

When a new gift emerges,

People

give us delight.

Leader

When authority is ours,

People

keep us from using it carelessly.

Leader

When authority belongs to another,

People

keep us from undermining it.

Leader

When we do not know who decides,

People

help us ask instead of assume.

Leader

When we make mistakes,

People

make repair more important than defense.

All

Christ, head of the Church,
the ministry belongs to you.

Free us from the illusion
that any one of us must carry it alone.

Teach pastors to honor staff.

Teach staff to trust without surrendering their voices.

Teach governing boards to govern faithfully.

Teach volunteers to offer their gifts freely.

Teach all of us to speak directly,
listen carefully,
clarify generously,
and disagree without becoming enemies.

Give us work worthy of our gifts,
boundaries worthy of our humanity,
and relationships strong enough
to carry honest conversation.

May the way we work together
bear witness to the gospel we proclaim.

Amen.

Carrying the Work Forward

The working relationships are beginning to take shape.

Staff members know more about what the pastor expects.

The pastor understands more about what staff have been carrying.

The governing board is learning how this pastor leads.

The pastor is learning how this board makes decisions.

Responsibilities are becoming clearer.

Some temporary arrangements from the transition can be released.

Some unexpected gifts discovered during the transition may deserve to remain.

There will still be confusion.

There will still be difficult conversations.

There should be.

A healthy ministry is not one in which everyone agrees all the time.

It is one in which people can tell the truth, remain in relationship, and keep discerning together.

But pastor and leaders are not the only people carrying expectations into this new ministry.

The whole congregation has them.

Some were spoken during the search.

Some appeared in the Ministry Discernment Profile.

Some were communicated during interviews.

Others were never spoken at all.

Members may expect the pastor to visit more.

Preach differently.

Attract young families.

Grow membership.

Fix the finances.

Keep everything they love exactly as it is.

Change everything they dislike immediately.

Be available whenever needed.

Protect beloved traditions.

Bring new ideas.

And somehow accomplish all of this without disappointing anyone.

The pastor has expectations too.

About participation.

Leadership.

Mission.

Generosity.

Decision-making.

Change.

Community engagement.

And what this congregation meant when it said it wanted a new season of ministry.

Unspoken expectations are especially powerful because no one can negotiate an expectation they do not know exists.

The next work, therefore, is not to eliminate expectations.

It is to bring them into the light.

That is the work of Chapter Eight:

Chapter Eight

Name the Expectations

Making the Invisible Visible

Chapter Eight Resources

Name the Expectations

Making the Invisible Visible

Every new pastoral relationship begins with expectations.

Some are explicit.

The Ministry Discernment Profile described what the congregation hoped for. Interviews included conversations about leadership, worship, mission, staff, theology, community, and the future. Terms of call established formal expectations. The pastor asked questions. The congregation answered them.

But those conversations did not uncover everything.

They could not.

Congregations carry hundreds of expectations that would never appear in a Ministry Discernment Profile.

The pastor should visit me in the hospital.

The pastor should know when I am in the hospital without my having to tell anyone.

The pastor should attend every church event.

The pastor should be visible in the community.

The pastor should spend more time in the office.

The pastor should work from home less.

The pastor should know everybody's name.

The pastor should bring in younger people.

The pastor should take care of the members who are already here.

The pastor should change worship.

The pastor should not change worship.

The pastor should lead.

The pastor should listen.

The pastor should fix the staff.

The pastor should leave the staff alone.

The pastor should preach about difficult issues.

The pastor should keep politics out of the pulpit.

The pastor should grow the church.

The pastor should deepen the church.

The pastor should be available.

The pastor should have healthy boundaries.

None of these expectations is automatically unreasonable.

The problem is that many remain invisible until someone violates them.

Then an expectation suddenly appears as disappointment:

“I thought the pastor would...”

Pastors carry expectations too.

They may expect the congregation to be ready for changes discussed during the search.

They may expect officers to lead.

They may expect members to communicate directly.

They may expect staff relationships to work as described.

They may expect the congregation's stated commitment to mission, inclusion, spiritual formation, or community engagement to appear consistently in congregational life.

Then the pastor discovers the same thing:

What was expected and what is experienced are not always identical.

The task is not to eliminate expectations.

Human relationships require them.

The task is to make enough of them visible for pastor and congregation to examine together.

Some expectations will be affirmed.

Some will be negotiated.

Some will be clarified.

Some will need to be released.

Some will reveal genuine commitments the congregation made during the search and should not casually abandon.

And some will turn out to be wishes no human pastor could possibly fulfill.

The governing question of this chapter is:

What are we expecting from one another—and have we actually said it?

For most congregations, **FM-8.1 through FM-8.7, FM-8.10, and FM-8.12** provide the core process.

FM-8.1

What Are We Expecting from the Pastor?

Congregational Expectations Inventory

Purpose

Bring invisible expectations into the open before they become disappointments.

This exercise works well with a governing board, transition team, or congregational gathering.

Time

45–60 minutes.

Complete Individually

I expect our pastor to...

Write quickly. Do not evaluate your answers yet.

Now Consider These Areas

Worship

I expect the pastor to:

Preaching

Pastoral Care

Administration

Staff Leadership

Governing-Board Leadership

Community Presence

Mission

Christian Formation

Congregational Growth

Conflict

Availability

Change

Personal Life

Now Ask

Where did this expectation come from?

- ☐ Ministry Discernment Profile.
- ☐ Search conversations.
- ☐ Terms of call.
- ☐ Congregational policy.
- ☐ Denominational understanding.
- ☐ Previous pastor.
- ☐ Personal preference.
- ☐ Tradition.
- ☐ Assumption.
- ☐ I am not sure.

Circle the Expectations You Have Never Actually Communicated

Those may be the most important ones on the page.

FM-8.2

What Is the Pastor Expecting from the Congregation?

The Other Half of the Covenant

Purpose

Expectation is mutual.

The congregation is not the employer evaluating whether the pastor fulfills everyone's wishes while remaining unchanged itself.

Ministry together requires expectations in both directions.

Pastor Completes

Worship

I expect the congregation to:

Leadership

I expect officers and ministry leaders to:

Mission

I expect the congregation to:

Decision-Making

I expect us to:

Conflict

When disagreement occurs, I expect us to:

Communication

I expect members to:

Pastoral Care

I expect members and leaders to:

Stewardship

I expect the congregation to:

Participation

I expect:

Change

I expect the congregation to:

Boundaries

I expect members to respect:

Partnership

I hope we will:

Now Ask

Which of these expectations did I communicate during the search?

Which have I assumed?

Which might surprise the congregation?

Which need conversation?

FM-8.3

Expectation Sorting Exercise

Promise, Preference, Hope, or Fantasy?

Purpose

Not all expectations have equal weight.

Sorting them changes the conversation.

Time

60–75 minutes.

Take expectations gathered in FM-8.1 and FM-8.2.

Place each under one of these categories.

A. Covenant or Formal Commitment

These are grounded in:

terms of call;

position descriptions;

governing documents;

polity;

search commitments;

explicit agreements.

Examples:

B. Reasonable Relational Expectation

These are appropriate expectations of healthy partnership.

Examples:

honest communication;

respect;

preparation;

accountability;

appropriate availability;

direct conversation.

Our examples:

C. Preference

These matter to someone but are not obligations.

Examples:

sermon length;

office hours;

communication style;

meeting preferences.

Our examples:

D. Hope

These describe desired outcomes that pastor and congregation may work toward but cannot guarantee.

Examples:

membership growth;

greater participation;

new ministries;
improved community engagement.

Our examples:

E. Fantasy

These require one person to accomplish what only a community, the Holy Spirit, or circumstances beyond anyone's control could accomplish.

Examples:

make everyone happy;
eliminate conflict;
restore the congregation to a previous era;
attract young families single-handedly;
be available to everyone all the time.

Our examples:

Ask

Which expectations changed categories once we discussed them?

Which preferences have been treated like covenants?

Which hopes have been placed almost entirely on the pastor?

Which fantasies need to be released?

FM-8.4

“The Pastor Should...”

Finish the Sentence

Purpose

This exercise quickly exposes inherited assumptions about pastoral identity.

Time

30–45 minutes.

Give each participant several slips of paper.

On each, complete:

The pastor should...

One expectation per slip.

Collect them anonymously.

Read them aloud.

Sort

Place each expectation under:

Pastor's Responsibility

Shared Responsibility

Someone Else's Responsibility

Preference

Unrealistic

Needs Conversation

Discuss

What surprised us?

What contradictions appeared?

Which expectations could no pastor satisfy simultaneously?

What expectations belong to an earlier model of ministry?

What expectations are still important?

Then Change the Sentence

Take several expectations beginning:

“The pastor should...”

and ask:

“What would this look like if the sentence began, ‘Together, we will...’?”

Example:

The pastor should make the church more welcoming.

becomes:

Together, we will create a congregation where people experience welcome and belonging.

Rewrite Three

Together, we will _____

Together, we will _____

Together, we will _____

That grammatical change can reveal a theological one.

FM-8.5

Expectations Inherited from the Previous Pastor

Gratitude Without Replication

Purpose

The previous pastor shaped expectations simply by being themselves.

Some practices may deserve continuation.

Others belonged specifically to that pastor's gifts, personality, schedule, or season of ministry.

Complete

Our previous pastor regularly:

Members particularly appreciated:

Some members may expect the new pastor to continue:

Ask

Which practices reflect the congregation's legitimate pastoral needs?

Which reflect one pastor's particular gifts?

Which became expectations simply through repetition?

Which may no longer fit?

Pastor Reflects

What can I authentically continue?

What would require me to imitate someone else?

Congregation Reflects

What do we need to grieve rather than reproduce?

Complete

We can honor what came before without requiring the new pastor to...

FM-8.6

Expectations About Pastoral Care

Who Cares for Whom?

Purpose

Pastoral-care expectations are among the most emotionally powerful and least clearly communicated expectations in congregational life.

Ask the Congregation

When someone is hospitalized, we expect:

When someone is homebound:

When someone is grieving:

When someone faces a crisis:

When someone has not attended for several weeks:

When someone simply wants to talk:

How Does the Pastor Learn About These Needs?

- ☐ Member calls.
- ☐ Family calls.
- ☐ Staff communicates.
- ☐ Deacon/care team communicates.
- ☐ Prayer list.
- ☐ Hospital notification.
- ☐ Someone assumes the pastor already knows.

Circle the Last One

If it happens.

Then discuss it.

Who Shares Pastoral Care?

Pastor:

Deacons/care team:

Governing-board members:

Other members:

Clarify

What requires the pastor personally?

What can be shared?

What communication system is needed?

Complete

No one should have to guess that care is needed. We will communicate pastoral-care needs by...

FM-8.7

Availability and Boundaries Conversation

Present Without Being Permanently On Call

Purpose

Pastors need to be accessible.

Pastors also need lives.

Healthy boundaries should be discussed before an unanswered text message becomes evidence that the pastor “doesn't care.”

Pastor Shares

My usual work rhythm is:

My day off is:

My preferred contact method is:

For genuinely urgent matters:

Congregation Discusses

What constitutes a pastoral emergency?

What can normally wait until the next workday?

Who should be contacted if the pastor is unavailable?

Examples

Sort as:

Urgent / Soon / Routine

Death.

Hospitalization.

Meeting schedule question.

Building problem.

Request for announcement.

Family crisis.

Newsletter deadline.

Someone upset about Sunday's hymn.

Pastoral-care request.

Personnel emergency.

Ask

Do we unconsciously equate availability with faithfulness?

Do we reward overwork?

Congregational Commitment

We want a pastor who can serve faithfully for the long haul. Therefore we will respect...

FM-8.8

Expectations About Growth

Who Is Supposed to Grow the Church?

Purpose

A congregation may have called a pastor partly because it hopes to grow.

That hope deserves examination.

Complete

When we say **growth**, we mean:

- ☐ More members.
- ☐ More worship attendance.
- ☐ More children.
- ☐ More young adults.
- ☐ Greater spiritual depth.
- ☐ More community engagement.
- ☐ Greater generosity.
- ☐ More leaders.
- ☐ More diversity.
- ☐ Something else: _____

Ask

What do we expect the pastor to do?

What do we expect members to do?

What do we expect leaders to do?

What conditions are beyond our control?

Then Ask the Theological Question

What kind of growth might God desire that would not appear on an attendance chart?

Rewrite

Instead of:

“We hired a pastor to grow the church.”

Try:

“Pastor and congregation will cultivate conditions in which faithful ministry, discipleship, hospitality, and mission can grow.”

Our Shared Responsibility

FM-8.9

Expectations About Change

“We Want Change—But Not That”

Purpose

Congregations frequently tell candidates they are ready for change.

That statement is usually sincere.

It is also incomplete.

People rarely mean:

Everything may change.

Individually Complete

Something I hope changes:

Something I hope does not change:

Something I could imagine changing eventually:

Something I would have difficulty losing:

Compare

What changes have broad support?

Where do expectations conflict?

Ask

When we told candidates we were “ready for change,” what did we mean?

What might the pastor reasonably have heard?

Pastor Shares

When I heard the congregation say it wanted change, I understood that to mean:

Compare

There may be an important conversation hiding here.

Complete

Our commitment is not to change everything or preserve everything. Our commitment is to discern...

FM-8.10

Return to the Ministry Discernment Profile

What Did We Tell One Another?

Purpose

Several months into ministry, return to the document that helped pastor and congregation find one another.

Do not use it as a contract.

Use it as a mirror.

Time

60–90 minutes.

Read the Ministry Discernment Profile Again

Mark:

✓ This feels accurate.

? We understand this differently now.

! This deserves conversation.

Ask

How did we describe ourselves?

What still feels true?

What now seems incomplete?

What did we emphasize?

What did we understate?

Pastor Reflects

What did I expect because of what I read here?

Where has my experience aligned?

Where has it differed?

Congregational Leaders Reflect

What did we hope the pastor would bring?

Did we communicate that clearly?

Most Important

Where is there a gap between the congregation described on paper and the congregation being experienced?

Do not assume deception.

Profiles are necessarily compressed descriptions of complex communities.

Use the gap for learning.

FM-8.11

Return to the Interview Conversations**What Did We Hear?****Purpose**

Pastor and congregation may remember the same interview differently.

That is normal.

Ask the Pastor

What conversations during the search most shaped your expectations?

What did you hear about:

leadership?

change?

mission?

staff?

worship?

community?

Ask Search/Transition Leaders

What did we hear the pastor say about those same areas?

Compare

Where did we hear one another clearly?

Where might we have heard what we hoped to hear?

Where does clarification help?

Important

Do not conduct a trial:

“But you said...”

The purpose is mutual understanding.

FM-8.12

Expectation Exchange

Pastor and Governing Board Conversation

Purpose

This is the central conversation of the chapter.

Time

90 minutes.

Round One

Each governing-board member completes:

One thing I need from our pastor in order to lead well is...

Pastor Completes

One thing I need from this governing board in order to lead well is...

Share.

Do not debate yet.

Round Two

Something I hope we can accomplish together is...

Round Three

Something I worry we may expect from one another unfairly is...

Round Four

Something I need permission to say when necessary is...

Round Five

Something I hope we will never make one another pretend is...

Discuss

Where do expectations align?

Where do they differ?

What needs clarification?

What needs negotiation?

What needs release?

Create Five Shared Expectations

We expect one another to _____

We expect one another to _____

We expect one another to _____

We expect one another to _____

We expect one another to _____

FM-8.13

Contradictory Expectations

When the Pastor Cannot Win

Purpose

Sometimes dissatisfaction with a pastor comes not from poor performance but from mutually incompatible expectations.

Make contradictions visible.

Complete Both Sides

We expect the pastor to:

Spend significant time visiting members.

AND

Be highly visible in the community.

We expect the pastor to:

Be available whenever people need care.

AND

Maintain healthy boundaries.

We expect the pastor to:

Lead boldly.

AND

Never move ahead of the congregation.

We expect the pastor to:

Attract younger generations.

AND

Keep worship exactly as we prefer it.

We expect the pastor to:

Develop new ministries.

AND

Personally support every existing ministry.

Add Our Own Contradictions

We expect:

AND:

We expect:

AND:

Ask

Can both expectations reasonably coexist?

If not, what tradeoff are we actually willing to make?

Important

Every yes consumes something:

time;

money;

attention;

energy;

calendar space.

Expectations without tradeoffs are fantasies.

FM-8.14

Expectations About the Pastor's Family

They Did Not Receive the Call

Purpose

Expectations can quietly extend beyond the pastor.

Return to a principle established at arrival:

The congregation called the pastor, not the household.

Ask

Do we expect a spouse or partner to:

attend worship?

participate in programs?

host?

volunteer?

befriend particular members?

attend social events?

Are These Expectations Explicit?

Are They Appropriate?

Children

Do we expect the pastor's children to:
attend every activity?
behave differently from other children?
participate in youth ministry?
be publicly available?
represent the pastor?

Congregational Commitment

We will allow the pastor's family to develop its own relationship with this congregation.

Complete

We will communicate freedom rather than expectation by...

FM-8.15

When Expectations Become Complaints

Listen for the Sentence Beneath the Sentence

Purpose

A complaint often reveals an expectation.

Complaint

"The pastor is never in the office."

Possible expectation:

A faithful pastor should be physically present in the church office.

Complaint

"The pastor doesn't visit."

Possible expectation:

Pastoral care should happen through personal pastoral visits.

Complaint

"The pastor is changing everything."

Possible expectation:

Important parts of congregational identity should remain recognizable.

Use with a Real Complaint

What was said?

What expectation might be underneath it?

Was that expectation ever communicated?

Is it reasonable?

Is it shared broadly or personally?

Does it require clarification, negotiation, or release?

Do Not Dismiss the Complaint

The expectation may reveal something important.

But neither should every complaint become a mandate.

FM-8.16

From Consumer Expectation to Ministry Covenant

What Are We Responsible for Together?

Purpose

Church culture can quietly become transactional.

Members expect religious services.

The pastor provides them.

That model is inadequate for ministry together.

Rewrite These Sentences

The pastor should visit our members.

Together, we will:

The pastor should bring in new people.

Together, we will:

The pastor should make worship meaningful.

Together, we will:

The pastor should get people involved.

Together, we will:

The pastor should solve conflict.

Together, we will:

The pastor should lead mission.

Together, we will:

Ask

What responsibilities genuinely belong particularly to the pastoral office?

What responsibilities belong to the whole body?

Complete

We called a pastor not to do ministry for us, but to...

FM-8.17

The Impossible Pastor

A Congregational Reality Check

Purpose

This exercise works especially well with humor.

Create the Perfect Pastor

Our perfect pastor would:

preach for exactly _____ minutes;

visit _____ people every week;

attend _____ evening meetings;

be in the office _____ hours;

spend _____ hours preparing worship;

spend _____ hours in community ministry;

personally know _____ members;

answer email within _____ hours;

attend every _____;
lead every _____;
and still maintain healthy spiritual, family, and personal life.

Estimate the Hours

Worship preparation: _____

Pastoral care: _____

Administration: _____

Staff: _____

Meetings: _____

Community: _____

Study: _____

Communication: _____

Programs: _____

Other: _____

Total: _____

Ask

What have we just learned?

Then Ask

What do we most need from our pastor?

What can others carry?

What can stop?

Remember

A congregation can burn out a pastor while praising the pastor's dedication.

Do not confuse unsustainable ministry with faithful ministry.

FM-8.18

Expectation Repair Conversation

When Someone Feels Let Down

Purpose

Disappointment will happen.

The goal is not to prevent it.

The goal is to make it discussable.

Person Naming Disappointment

What did I expect?

Where did that expectation come from?

Did I communicate it?

What happened instead?

Why did that matter to me?

Other Person

What did I understand the expectation to be?

What was happening from my perspective?

What do I understand better now?

Together

Was the expectation:

- ☐ Agreed upon.
- ☐ Reasonable but unspoken.
- ☐ A preference.
- ☐ Misunderstood.
- ☐ Unrealistic.
- ☐ Still unclear.

What Repair Is Needed?

What Will We Expect Going Forward?

FM-8.19

Six-Month Expectations Review

What Has Reality Taught Us?

Purpose

Expectations should evolve as relationships deepen.

Pastor Reflects

What expectation I brought has changed?

What has the congregation done differently than I expected—in a good way?

Where am I still experiencing pressure from unspoken expectations?

Leaders Reflect

What expectation of the pastor has changed?

What gift has appeared that we did not know to expect?

What are we asking the pastor to carry that should belong to others?

Together

What expectation has become clearer?

What expectation should be released?

What expectation should become an explicit covenant?

Complete

Six months into ministry, we understand partnership differently because...

Chapter Eight Discernment Harvest

What We Are Learning to Expect from One Another

Expectations the Congregation Has Named

Expectations the Pastor Has Named

Formal Commitments We Need to Honor

Reasonable Expectations We Need to Clarify

Preferences We Had Been Treating as Requirements

Hopes We Need to Carry Together

Unrealistic Expectations We Need to Release

Expectations Inherited from Previous Pastoral Relationships

Pastoral-Care Expectations We Have Clarified

Boundaries We Have Clarified

Expectations About Change That Need More Conversation

Expectations from the Ministry Discernment Profile We Have Revisited

Contradictory Expectations We Discovered

Responsibilities We Have Moved from “The Pastor Should” to “Together We Will”

Expectations About the Pastor's Household We Have Released

Complete

One expectation we had never spoken aloud was...

One expectation we now understand differently is...

One expectation the pastor should reasonably have of us is...

One expectation we need to stop placing on the pastor is...

One promise we want to make to one another is...

A Liturgy of Mutual Expectation

What We Ask of One Another

Leader

Christ has not called one person
to carry the ministry of the whole church.

People

We are the Body of Christ together.

Leader

We have called a pastor.

People

We have not hired someone to be the church for us.

Leader

We ask our pastor to preach the Word faithfully.

Pastor

And I ask you to listen, wrestle, question, and live the Word with me.

Leader

We ask our pastor to care for us.

Pastor

And I ask you to care for one another.

Leader

We ask our pastor to lead.

Pastor

And I ask you to share responsibility for where God leads us.

Leader

We ask our pastor to listen.

Pastor

And I ask you to speak honestly.

Leader

We ask our pastor to tell us the truth.

Pastor

And I ask you to tell me the truth.

Leader

We ask our pastor to respect our history.

Pastor

And I ask you to make room for a future we do not yet know.

Leader

We ask our pastor to help us change.

Pastor

And I ask you to remember that change is work we must do together.

Leader

We ask our pastor to help us engage our community.

Pastor

And I ask you to introduce me to the neighbors you already know.

Leader

We ask our pastor to be present when life becomes difficult.

Pastor

And I ask you to tell me when you need me.

Leader

We ask our pastor to work faithfully.

Pastor

And I ask you to let me rest faithfully.

Leader

We ask our pastor to offer gifts.

Pastor

And I ask you to offer yours.

Leader

We will disappoint one another.

People

Give us grace to speak before resentment grows.

Leader

We will misunderstand one another.

People

Give us curiosity before judgment.

Leader

We will sometimes expect too much.

People

Give us wisdom to release what no one can carry.

Leader

We will sometimes expect too little.

People

Give us courage to call one another toward faithfulness.

All

Christ, who calls the whole Church into ministry,
free us from the expectations
we have never spoken
and the promises we never actually made.

Teach us to distinguish
covenant from preference,
hope from demand,
leadership from control,
service from exhaustion,
and shared ministry from work
we simply expect someone else to do.

Let pastor and congregation
ask much of one another—

honesty,
courage,
faithfulness,
compassion,
curiosity,
forgiveness,
and love.

But keep us from asking
one another to be what only you can be.

You are the Savior.

You are the head of the Church.

You are the one who completes what we cannot.

Teach us therefore to carry together
the ministry you have entrusted to us.

Amen.

Carrying the Work Forward

The expectations are becoming visible.

Some have been affirmed.

Some have been negotiated.

Some have been laughed at when everyone finally realized how impossible they were.

Some have revealed grief from an earlier pastoral relationship.

Some have uncovered promises pastor and congregation did make to one another during the search.

And some sentences have begun changing from:

“The pastor should...”

to:

“Together, we will...”

That may be one of the most important changes in the entire transition.

But naming expectations does not guarantee that pastor and congregation will meet them.

They will disappoint one another.

The pastor will forget something.

A leader will fail to follow through.

A sermon will land badly.

A decision will be misunderstood.

Someone will say something in a meeting they wish they could take back.

An email will be read in a tone the writer never intended.

A promised conversation will happen too late.

A change will move too quickly.

Another will move too slowly.

The first disappointment can feel disproportionately important because the relationship is still young.

People begin wondering:

Is this what our new pastor is really like?

The pastor wonders:

Is this what this congregation is really like?

Those moments do not necessarily mean something has gone wrong.

They mean something very ordinary has happened.

People beginning to trust one another have discovered that none of them is perfect.

Now comes a more demanding form of beginning well:

learning how to repair.

That is the work of Chapter Nine:

Chapter Nine

Resist the Rush to Change

Discern Before You Fix

A new pastor arrives with fresh eyes.

That is one of the gifts of new leadership. The pastor notices things longtime members no longer see. Procedures may seem unnecessarily complicated. Worship practices may appear inconsistent. Meetings may accomplish little. Communication systems may be confusing. A ministry may consume considerable energy while producing little visible fruit.

Some of those observations will prove important.

Some will not.

The difficulty is that, during the first months of ministry, the new pastor usually cannot tell the difference.

Congregations also face a temptation during this period. After months of transition, members may be eager for the new pastor to fix things. Longstanding frustrations can quickly be handed to the pastor:

“Now that you are here, maybe you can finally do something about this.”

Beginning ministry together requires something more thoughtful than either immediate change or an arbitrary prohibition against change.

The better discipline is **discernment before correction**.

These resources help pastors and congregational leaders decide what requires immediate attention, what should be addressed soon, what needs to be understood more fully, and what may simply be part of the congregation's particular way of being church.

FM-9.1

Curiosity Before Correction

Purpose

To help a new pastor replace the first question—*“Why are they doing it this way?”*—with the more useful question—*“What do I need to understand about why this congregation does it this way?”*

Fresh eyes are valuable. They are not infallible.

Something that appears inefficient may carry an important congregational value. A strange tradition may preserve the memory of a significant event. An awkward procedure may have been created to solve a problem the new pastor has never encountered. A ministry that appears unsuccessful by one measure may be accomplishing something important by another.

And, of course, sometimes a practice really does need to change.

Curiosity does not mean refusing to make judgments. It means gathering enough understanding to make better ones.

A Practice of Curiosity

When you encounter something you are tempted to correct, stop before proposing a solution.

Write down what you have actually observed.

What happened?

What about it concerns or puzzles me?

Now separate observation from interpretation.

What do I know?

What am I assuming?

What questions would help me understand this better?

Ask Someone Who Knows the Story

Rather than beginning with:

Why do we do this?

which can easily sound like criticism, try:

Tell me how this practice developed.

What is important to people about this?

Has the congregation always done it this way?

What problem was this originally intended to solve?

Who understands the history of this best?

What would people worry about losing if we changed it?

Have people tried other approaches before?

What works well about the current practice?

What frustrations do people already have with it?

Before Suggesting Change

Complete these sentences:

I originally thought:

After listening, I learned:

I still wonder:

The issue now seems:

The goal is not to eliminate the pastor's first impressions.

It is to turn first impressions into better questions.

FM-9.2

Change Triage

Act Now / Address Soon / Learn More / Let It Be

Not every problem deserves the same response.

During the beginning of ministry, use this four-part framework whenever a concern arises.

1. ACT NOW

Some situations cannot responsibly wait.

These may include:

immediate safety concerns;
suspected abuse or misconduct;
serious financial irregularities;
legal or mandatory-reporting obligations;
violations of denominational policy;
significant personnel or boundary concerns;
threats to vulnerable people;
urgent building or property hazards;
circumstances in which delay could cause substantial harm.

Issue:

What makes this urgent?

Who needs to be involved?

What authority, policy, or expertise should be consulted?

Urgency does not mean acting alone. In serious situations, urgency often means involving the appropriate congregational leaders, presbytery personnel, professionals, insurers, attorneys, law enforcement, or other responsible authorities.

2. ADDRESS SOON

Some matters are not emergencies but should not be ignored for months.

Examples might include:

- a recurring communication failure;
- confusion about responsibilities;
- dysfunctional meeting practices;
- unresolved staff expectations;
- neglected administrative procedures;
- significant scheduling problems;
- patterns creating unnecessary conflict or frustration.

Issue:

What happens if we leave this alone for three months?

Who is affected?

Who should participate in addressing it?

What would a reasonable first step be?

3. LEARN MORE

This will probably be the largest category during the early months of ministry.

These are practices you do not yet understand well enough to judge.

Examples might include:

- worship traditions;
- committee structures;
- annual events;
- informal decision-making patterns;
- long-established ministries;
- use of particular rooms or property;
- relationships with community organizations;

ways information travels through the congregation;
traditions surrounding weddings, funerals, holidays, or fellowship.

Practice or concern:

What don't I understand yet?

Whose perspective am I missing?

What history might matter?

When will I revisit this question?

“Learn more” does not mean “never.”

It means **not yet**.

4. LET IT BE

Some things are simply not important enough to change.

Every pastor has preferences. Every congregation has quirks.

Not every difference requires leadership.

Ask:

Is anyone being harmed?

Does this interfere with the congregation's mission?

Does it violate an important theological, ethical, legal, or denominational commitment?

Is this actually a problem, or merely something I would do differently?

What would changing it cost in relational energy?

Is there a better use for that energy?

Something I may simply need to let be:

Why?

One mark of mature leadership is knowing which battles never need to become battles.

FM-9.3

Emergency or Irritation?

New leaders often experience small problems intensely because everything is unfamiliar.

An irritation can therefore feel like an emergency.

Use this worksheet before escalating an issue.

The Situation

What happened?

My Immediate Reaction

What did I feel?

What did I want to do?

Test the Urgency

Is someone in danger?

Yes / No / Uncertain

Could delay cause significant harm?

Yes / No / Uncertain

Is there a legal, ethical, financial, personnel, safeguarding, or denominational requirement involved?

Yes / No / Uncertain

Does a decision actually have to be made now?

Yes / No / Uncertain

Would waiting a week materially worsen the situation?

Yes / No / Uncertain

Now Ask a Different Set of Questions

Is this mostly frustrating because it is inefficient?

Is it different from the way I have done it elsewhere?

Am I embarrassed because I did not know how something worked?

Do I feel pressure to demonstrate leadership?

Has someone else told me this is an emergency because they want me to solve a longstanding conflict?

Would I see this differently after a night's sleep?

My Best Assessment

This requires immediate action.

This should be addressed soon.

I need more information.

This is primarily an irritation.

I can let this go.

Who Should I Talk With Before Acting?

What Is the Smallest Responsible Next Step?

Leadership is not demonstrated by reacting quickly to everything.

Sometimes leadership is demonstrated by refusing to turn anxiety into urgency.

FM-9.4

The Story Behind a Practice

Congregational practices rarely appear out of nowhere.

They accumulate history.

A new pastor may encounter a peculiar policy and discover that it was created after a painful conflict twenty years ago. A room arrangement may preserve the memory of a beloved ministry. A committee may exist because of a crisis no one remembers clearly anymore. An annual event may continue because it once carried enormous meaning, even though its purpose has gradually disappeared.

Understanding the story does not mean the practice must continue.

It means that change can address what the practice **means**, not merely what it **does**.

Choose One Practice

The practice, tradition, procedure, or ministry I want to understand:

Ask Several People

Do not ask only the person most invested in preserving it.

Whenever possible, talk with:

- someone who has been part of the congregation for many years;
- someone who joined more recently;
- someone directly involved in the practice;
- someone affected by it but not responsible for it.

Questions for Conversation

When did this begin?

Why did it begin?

What need did it originally address?

Who was important in establishing it?

How has it changed over time?

What does it mean to people now?

What works well about it?

What frustrations have developed?

Has anyone tried to change it before?

What happened?

What would people fear losing if it disappeared?

Listen Beneath the Practice

Sometimes what people defend is not the practice itself.

They may be defending:

- a memory;
- a relationship;
- a value;
- a sense of identity;
- a theological conviction;

gratitude for someone who came before;
a time when the congregation felt especially alive;
protection against an old wound.

What seems to live underneath this practice?

Discernment

After learning the story, I now believe this practice should:

Continue as it is.

Continue, but be strengthened.

Be adapted.

Be reconsidered later.

Be brought into a wider congregational conversation.

Be discontinued.

I still do not know.

Why?

FM-9.5

Whose Problem Is This?

One of the easiest mistakes for a new pastor to make is accepting responsibility for every problem brought through the office door.

Someone says:

“Pastor, you need to do something about...”

Before agreeing, determine whose responsibility the issue actually is.

The Concern

Who brought it to me?

Who is directly affected?

Who has responsibility or authority for this area?

Has that person or group been approached?

If not, why not?

Am I being asked to:

Listen?

Give advice?

Carry a message?

Resolve someone else's disagreement?

Make a decision?

Exercise pastoral care?

Exercise supervisory responsibility?

Interpret policy or polity?

Convene the appropriate people?

Take responsibility for something that belongs elsewhere?

What Is My Appropriate Role?

What Responsibility Should Remain with Others?

A pastor can be deeply responsive without becoming responsible for everything.

FM-9.6

Before We Change It

A Congregational Discernment Conversation

Use this resource when a pastor and congregational leaders believe an established practice may need to change.

Do not begin with the proposed solution.

Begin with the purpose.

1. What are we noticing?

Describe the situation without assigning blame.

2. Why does it matter?

3. What purpose does the current practice serve?

4. What is working well that we do not want to lose?

5. What is no longer working?

6. Who will be affected by a change?

7. Whose voices have not yet been heard?

8. What are we trying to accomplish?

Complete the sentence:

We are considering change because we hope to...

9. What options besides our first idea should we consider?

10. Could we experiment before making a permanent change?

If so, what would the experiment be?

How long would we try it?

How would we know whether it helped?

11. Who has authority to make this decision?

12. How will we communicate the decision?

Change becomes less threatening when people understand the problem, participate in the discernment, and know what the congregation is trying to accomplish.

FM-9.7

The Ninety-Day Learning List

The first months of ministry provide a rare opportunity.

A new pastor can ask questions that will become harder to ask later.

Instead of keeping a private list titled *Things I Need to Fix*, keep a **Learning List**.

Whenever you notice something interesting, confusing, concerning, or promising, write it down.

Do not assume it needs to change.

Worship

What am I noticing?

What do I want to understand?

Leadership and Decision Making

Staff Relationships

Communication

Congregational Care

Children, Youth, and Families

Mission and Community Relationships

Buildings and Property

Stewardship and Finances

Congregational Culture

Things That Are Working Better Than I Expected

Gifts and Possibilities I Am Beginning to Notice

At the end of approximately ninety days, review the list.

Mark each item:

Act now.

Address soon.

Continue learning.

Invite wider discernment.

Let it be.

Celebrate it.

Pay particular attention to that last category.

A new pastor should not spend the first months discovering only what is wrong.

FM-9.8

From Observation to Discernment

Ninety-Day Review

This resource can be used by the pastor, Session or governing board, and the support or transition team near the end of the first three months.

The purpose is not to evaluate the new pastor.

The purpose is to ask what everyone is learning about beginning ministry together.

What Has Surprised Us?

What Has Gone Particularly Well?

What Has Been More Difficult Than We Expected?

What Have We Learned About One Another?

What Have We Learned About the Congregation?

What Have We Learned About Our Community?

What Questions Are Becoming More Important?

What Issues Actually Need Attention?

What Seemed Important at First but No Longer Does?

What Should We Continue Watching Rather Than Trying to Solve?

Where Are We Seeing Energy?

Where Might God Already Be at Work?

What Is One Conversation We Need to Have Next?

What Is One Thing We Should Not Rush?

Closing Practice

From Fixing to Discernment

At the beginning of ministry, both pastor and congregation can be tempted by the same hope:

Now we can finally get things right.

But ministry together is not built by fixing one another.

It grows through attention, trust, curiosity, truthfulness, experimentation, and discernment.

Before changing something, learn its story.

Before accepting a problem, determine whose problem it is.

Before declaring an emergency, test the urgency.

Before protecting a tradition, remember its purpose.

Before preserving something simply because *we have always done it this way*, ask whether it still serves the life and mission of the congregation.

And before importing a solution that worked somewhere else, learn what God is already doing here.

The goal is neither **change** nor **no change**.

The goal is faithful response.

A Prayer for Discernment

Gracious God,

give us eyes to see before we rush to act.

Give us curiosity about what we do not yet understand,
patience with one another,
courage when action is truly needed,
and humility when our preferences masquerade as necessities.

Help us honor the stories that have shaped this congregation
without becoming captive to them.

Help us receive the gifts of new leadership
without expecting one person to fix what belongs to all of us.

Teach us to recognize what should be preserved,
what should be released,
what should be repaired,
and what is waiting to be born.

Above all, keep us attentive to you.

You are already at work among us.

Help us recognize your work
and join it faithfully.

Amen.

Chapter Ten

Let the First Year Be a Conversation

Reflect, Learn, Adjust

The first year of a new pastoral relationship should not be lived for eleven months and then evaluated in the twelfth.

By then, small misunderstandings may have become habits. Unspoken expectations may have hardened into disappointments. Questions that could once have been asked easily may have acquired emotional weight.

And good things may have gone unnoticed because no one stopped long enough to name them.

The Beginning Ministry Together Field Guide proposes another way.

Make the first year a conversation.

Not a continuous evaluation of the pastor.

Not a series of performance reviews.

Not a monthly opportunity for the governing board to ask whether the new pastor is meeting expectations.

A conversation.

How are we doing together?

What are we learning?

What is going well?

What is harder than we expected?

What are we discovering about one another?

What assumptions need correction?

What expectations need adjustment?

What relationships need attention?

Where are we seeing energy?

What might God be showing us?

Those questions belong to pastor and congregation together.

The pastor is learning the congregation.

The congregation is learning the pastor.

Staff members are learning new working relationships.

The governing board is discovering how it leads with this pastor.

The pastor is discovering how leadership actually works in this congregation.

Everyone is learning something about the community in which their ministry is taking place.

The first year is therefore not simply a period through which everyone must pass before “normal ministry” begins.

It is a learning season.

And learning requires reflection.

That is the work of this chapter.

For most congregations, **FM-10.1, FM-10.2, FM-10.4, FM-10.6, FM-10.8, and FM-10.10** provide the core process.

Chapter Ten Resources

Let the First Year Be a Conversation

Reflect, Learn, Adjust

FM-10.1

The First-Year Conversation Rhythm

Do Not Wait Until Something Is Wrong

Purpose

Healthy relationships do not talk only when there is a problem.

During the first year, establish a simple rhythm of intentional conversations among the pastor, governing board, staff, and transition team.

The purpose is not constant scrutiny.

It is regular attention.

A Suggested Rhythm

First Month

Ask:

What has helped the pastor arrive?

What has been confusing?

What practical matters still need attention?

What relationships should be developed next?

What does the pastor need that no one anticipated?

What does the congregation need to understand about this beginning?

Approximately Three Months

Ask:

What are we learning about one another?

What has surprised us?

What seems to be going particularly well?

Where have expectations differed?

What is still unclear?

What should we continue learning before acting?

Approximately Six Months

Ask:

How are our working relationships developing?

What expectations have changed?

What patterns are becoming established?

Where is trust growing?

Where is communication difficult?

What have we learned about our congregation and community?

What adjustments would help?

Approximately Nine Months

Ask:

What feels different now than when the pastor arrived?

What relationships still need attention?

What responsibilities have become clearer?

What questions about ministry are beginning to emerge?

What should we be talking about before the first anniversary?

Approximately One Year

Ask:

What have we learned?

What has changed?

What are we grateful for?

What have we learned about partnership?

What might God be inviting us to explore next?

Decide Now

Our first-year conversation rhythm will be:

Who will convene these conversations?

Who should participate?

Remember

A rhythm creates permission.

People do not have to wait for a crisis to say:

“There is something I think we should talk about.”

FM-10.2

How Are We Doing Together?

A Mutual Reflection Conversation

Purpose

The easiest question during a pastoral transition is:

How is the new pastor doing?

It is also often the wrong first question.

The better question is:

How are we doing together?

This resource helps keep reflection mutual.

The Pastor Reflects

What has helped me become part of this congregation?

What has made that more difficult?

Where have members been especially generous?

What am I beginning to understand?

What still confuses me?

Where have I communicated well?

Where could I communicate more clearly?

What expectations did I bring that may need adjustment?

What do I need from congregational leaders now?

Congregational Leaders Reflect

What has helped us develop a relationship with the pastor?

What are we learning about the pastor's gifts?

What are we learning about the pastor's working style?

Where have we communicated clearly?

Where have we assumed the pastor would simply know something?

What expectations have we discovered in ourselves?

Which of those expectations need adjustment?

What might the pastor need from us now?

Together Ask

What are **we** doing well?

What are **we** learning?

Where are **we** experiencing difficulty?

What conversation would help?

What adjustment would strengthen our partnership?

Complete

One thing we want to continue:

One thing we want to understand better:

One thing we want to adjust:

One thing we want to celebrate:

FM-10.3

Name What Is Going Well

Do Not Let Problems Become the Whole Story

Purpose

Reflection can become problem hunting.

Do not allow it.

A new pastoral relationship is forming through hundreds of ordinary moments that may never appear on an agenda.

Someone felt cared for.

A difficult meeting went better than expected.

A staff relationship became easier.

The pastor learned a name.

A member invited the pastor into an important story.

The governing board handled disagreement well.

A community relationship began.

Someone tried something new.

Trust grew.

Name those things.

Individually Complete

Something I have appreciated during these first months:

A moment when I thought, “We are beginning to work well together”:

A gift I am seeing in our pastor:

A gift I am seeing in this congregation:

A relationship that seems to be growing:

Something we are doing better than we were three months ago:

Share

Do not immediately turn appreciation into advice.

Let gratitude stand on its own.

Ask

What conditions helped these good things happen?

How can we strengthen those conditions?

A Practice

At each governing-board meeting during the first year, ask:

What is one thing happening in our ministry together for which we are grateful?

Pay attention to what accumulates.

FM-10.4

What Are We Learning?

A 90-Day Mutual Reflection

Purpose

Three months is long enough for first impressions to become more substantial.

It is not long enough to know everything.

Use this conversation to notice what everyone is learning without turning those observations into premature conclusions.

About the Congregation

What has the pastor learned about:

our history?

our culture?

our worship?

our leadership?

our decision-making?

our conflicts?

our strengths?

our community?

About the Pastor

What has the congregation learned about:

the pastor's gifts?

working style?

communication?

leadership?

pastoral care?

worship leadership?

decision-making?

need for rest and boundaries?

About One Another

What did we understand correctly during the search?

What have we discovered that we could not have known during the search?

What has surprised us pleasantly?

What has been more difficult?

About Ministry

Where are we seeing energy?

What seems life-giving?

What questions keep appearing?

What have we become curious about?

Where might God already be at work?

Do Not Ask Yet

What is the pastor's five-year vision?

What major changes should we make?

What programs should we eliminate?

How should we restructure the congregation?

Those questions may eventually matter.

For now ask:

What are we learning that we will need to remember when those conversations come?

FM-10.5

When Something Is Bothering You

Raise Concerns Before They Become Stories

Purpose

Small concerns rarely remain small when people discuss them everywhere except with the person involved.

A missed communication becomes:

“The pastor doesn't communicate.”

A confusing decision becomes:

“The Session never tells us anything.”

A disagreement becomes:

“They don't listen.”

One experience becomes a story.

Then the story becomes a reputation.

Interrupt that process early.

Before Raising a Concern, Ask

What actually happened?

What did I observe directly?

What am I assuming?

What have other people told me that I did not witness?

What expectation of mine may be involved?

Have I spoken directly with the appropriate person?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If not, why not?

Begin the Conversation With

“There is something I would like to understand better.”

Then describe the experience.

Avoid:

“You always...”

“You never...”

“Everybody thinks...”

“People are saying...”

Instead:

“When this happened, I understood it this way. Help me understand what was happening from your perspective.”

After the Conversation

What do I understand now that I did not understand before?

Is there still a concern?

What needs to happen next?

Important

Direct communication is not the same thing as confrontation.

Often it is simply curiosity practiced before judgment.

FM-10.6

Feedback Without Evaluation

Helping One Another Learn

Purpose

Pastor and congregation need feedback.

But feedback during the first year can easily feel like evaluation.

The difference often lies in the question being asked.

Evaluation asks:

How well are you performing?

Mutual reflection asks:

What are we learning that could help us work together more faithfully?

When Offering Feedback

Describe something specific.

Not:

“You need to communicate better.”

Try:

“When the meeting time changed, several of us did not know. It would help if we agreed on how schedule changes are communicated.”

Not:

“People don't feel cared for.”

Try:

“We may have different assumptions about how hospital visits are communicated. Could we talk about that?”

Use This Pattern

What I noticed:

Why it mattered to me:

What I may not understand:

What I would like us to consider:

The Person Receiving Feedback Asks

What am I hearing?

What needs clarification?

What part of this is useful?

What context does the other person not know?

Is there something I should change?

Is there something we should change together?

Complete

Because of this conversation, we will:

Remember

Feedback should increase understanding.

If people leave only knowing who was disappointed with whom, the conversation has not yet done its work.

FM-10.7

The Conversation We Are Avoiding

Name It While It Is Still Small

Purpose

Most congregations have conversations everyone knows need to happen.

Sometimes they wait.

Perhaps the issue will disappear.

Perhaps someone else will raise it.

Perhaps it is too early.

Sometimes waiting is wise.

Sometimes waiting merely adds interest to the debt.

Individually Complete

A conversation I think we may be avoiding is:

I hesitate to raise it because:

I am afraid that:

If we continue avoiding it:

If we handled it well, the result might be:

As a Group Ask

Is there a conversation several of us have named?

Who actually needs to participate?

Who does **not** need to participate?

What would make the conversation safe enough to begin?

What is the question we need to ask?

Before Beginning

Agree:

We are not here to win.

We are not here to collect allies.

We are not here to prove what someone intended.

We are here to understand what has happened and decide what faithful response requires.

Opening Question

What do we need to understand together that we have not yet been willing or able to discuss?

FM-10.8

Six-Month Partnership Conversation

What Has Reality Taught Us?

Purpose

Six months into ministry, the relationship is no longer theoretical.

Pastor and congregation have worshiped together.

Worked together.

Made decisions.

Experienced ordinary Sundays.

Handled interruptions.

Probably disappointed one another at least once.

They now know things they could not have known during the search.

Use that knowledge.

Return to the Beginning

What did we hope for when this ministry began?

What has happened as we expected?

What has been different?

Relationships

Where has trust grown?

Where does relationship still need attention?

Expectations

Which expectations have become clearer?

Which have changed?

Which need further conversation?

Leadership

What are we learning about how pastor and governing board work together?

What is working well?

What needs adjustment?

Congregational Life

What is the pastor beginning to understand that was difficult to see at first?

What is the congregation beginning to understand about the pastor?

Community

What relationships beyond the congregation are developing?

What is the pastor beginning to see about this place?

Discernment

Where are we noticing life?

Where are we noticing concern?

What question might God be placing before us?

Finish

During the next six months, we want to pay particular attention to:

FM-10.9

When the First Year Gets Hard

Difficulty Does Not Necessarily Mean the Call Was Wrong

Purpose

At some point, the newness wears off.

The pastor is no longer simply the exciting new pastor.

The congregation is no longer simply the wonderful congregation described during the search.

Real people have arrived.

That is good.

Partnership cannot form between idealized versions of people.

When Difficulty Appears, Ask

What actually happened?

What expectations were involved?

Is this primarily:

- ☐ a misunderstanding?
- ☐ a communication problem?
- ☐ a difference in working style?
- ☐ an unclear role?
- ☐ an unrealistic expectation?
- ☐ a decision disagreement?
- ☐ a congregational pattern?
- ☐ a pastoral mistake?
- ☐ a leadership mistake?
- ☐ a genuine ethical concern?
- ☐ something we still do not understand?

Then Ask

What conversation is needed?

Who should participate?

What repair is appropriate?

What do we need to learn?

What needs to change?

What does not need to become larger than it is?

Avoid

“This proves we called the wrong pastor.”

“This congregation will never change.”

“This is exactly what happened with the last pastor.”

“Everyone feels this way.”

“I knew this would happen.”

Those sentences convert an experience into a verdict.

Stay with the experience long enough to understand it.

Complete

The difficulty we are facing may be teaching us:

The next faithful conversation is:

FM-10.10

The First-Year Review

Looking Back in Order to Look Forward

Purpose

Near the first anniversary, gather pastor and governing-board leaders for an extended conversation.

This is not simply an annual review of the pastor.

It is a review of the beginning.

What has this first year taught us about ministry together?

Part One — Remember

When we began this year, what were we hoping for?

What were we anxious about?

What did we think would be difficult?

What turned out to be easier?

What surprised us?

Part Two — Give Thanks

What has gone well?

What relationships have formed?

What gifts have emerged?

What has the pastor brought that we are grateful for?

What has the congregation offered that the pastor is grateful for?

What have staff and leaders contributed?

Where have we experienced grace?

Part Three — Tell the Truth

What has been difficult?

Where have we misunderstood one another?

What expectations needed correction?

What conversations came too late?

What have we avoided?

What have we learned from mistakes?

Is there anything that still needs repair?

Part Four — Notice

What is different now?

What does the pastor understand now that was not visible a year ago?

What does the congregation understand about the pastor now?

What is happening in the community?

Where is energy emerging?

What concerns deserve attention?

What possibilities are becoming visible?

Part Five — Discern

Do not begin with:

What is the pastor's vision for us?

Ask:

What are we beginning to see together?

Where might God already be acting?

What have we learned that helps us recognize that activity?

What might we be ready to join?

Part Six — Choose

What deserves our attention during the coming year?

Choose no more than three.

For each, ask:

Why does this matter?

Who should participate?

What do we still need to learn?

What is one faithful next step?

Chapter Ten Discernment Harvest

What We Are Learning About Partnership

Before leaving this chapter, take a few minutes to gather what has emerged.

We Are Grateful For

We Understand Better

We Still Need to Talk About

We Have Adjusted

We Are Beginning to Notice

One Practice We Want to Carry Forward

One Question We Want to Keep Asking

A Practice for the First Year

Keep the Question Mutual

Whenever someone asks:

“How is the pastor doing?”

Try adding another question:

“How are we doing together?”

Whenever someone asks:

“What is the pastor going to do about this?”

Try:

“What might this require of us?”

Whenever the pastor asks:

“Why won't they change?”

Try:

“What do I still need to understand?”

Whenever the congregation asks:

“Why doesn't the pastor understand us?”

Try:

“What story have we not yet told?”

And whenever either pastor or congregation begins asking:

“Is this working?”

Ask something deeper:

“What are we learning about becoming partners in God's work?”

That question changes the conversation.

A Prayer for the First Year

Gracious God,

you have brought us together,
but we are still learning what together means.

Give us patience with one another
and curiosity about what we do not understand.

Give us courage to speak
before silence becomes resentment.

Give us humility to listen
before assumptions become judgments.

Help us name what is difficult
without allowing difficulty to become the whole story.

Teach us to notice what is good,
to give thanks for relationships that are growing,
to repair what has been damaged,
and to adjust when experience teaches us something new.

Keep us from measuring this beginning
only by accomplishments.

Teach us instead to recognize
the quieter work of trust,
understanding,
forgiveness,
friendship,
and partnership.

You were here before any of us arrived.

You are at work among us now.

Give us eyes to recognize your presence
and courage to join what you are doing.

Amen.

Carrying the Work Forward

Something has been happening while pastor and congregation have been having these conversations.

The pastor knows more names.

The congregation knows more than the pastor's candidating sermon.

Staff members have learned one another's rhythms.

The governing board and pastor have made real decisions together.

The community is becoming a network of relationships rather than a collection of locations on a map.

There have probably been mistakes.

There may have been disagreement.

Perhaps someone has been disappointed.

And pastor and congregation are still here.

That matters.

The relationship has begun to accumulate a history of its own.

The question that began the search process—

Is God calling us into ministry with one another?

—is slowly becoming another question:

What is God calling us to do together?

That shift marks something important.

The pastor is becoming less “new.”

The congregation is becoming less something the pastor is learning and more a community to which the pastor belongs.

The transition team is becoming less necessary.

The language is beginning to change.

From **you** and **us** toward **we**.

The beginning has done its work.

Now it is time to ask how pastor and congregation move from transition into shared ministry.

That is the work of Chapter Eleven:

Chapter Eleven

From Transition to Shared Ministry:
Now the Partnership Begins to Lead

There comes a point when a congregation needs to stop welcoming its new pastor.

Not because welcome ends.

Because the pastor is no longer a guest.

The boxes have been unpacked. Names are becoming familiar. The pastor knows which door everyone actually uses, who arrives early on Sunday morning, where the extra communion supplies are kept, which community relationships matter, and which congregational stories keep appearing in conversation.

More importantly, pastor and congregation have begun to know one another.

The search committee or transition team has played an important role in making that possible. Members have introduced the pastor to people and places, answered questions, interpreted congregational customs, noticed difficulties, offered encouragement, and helped the congregation make room for new leadership.

But a temporary structure must remain temporary.

If the team continues too long, it can unintentionally become a circle around the pastor rather than a bridge into the congregation. Members may begin functioning as interpreters, defenders, informal advisers, or gatekeepers long after those roles are needed.

Beginning ministry together eventually requires releasing the beginning.

This chapter helps pastor, congregation, governing board, and transition team recognize that moment and move deliberately from **arrival to partnership**.

FM-11.1

Are We Still Arriving?

Recognizing the Transition Toward Partnership

There is no single date when a pastor stops being new.

The transition usually happens gradually.

Use these questions to notice what has changed.

The Pastor

I know the names and responsibilities of key congregational leaders.

I understand the congregation's basic decision-making processes.

I know whom to ask when I do not know something.

I have begun developing relationships beyond the people who called me.

I am developing direct working relationships with staff.

I know significant community leaders and organizations.

I have experienced at least some of the congregation's ordinary rhythms.

Members increasingly approach me directly rather than through the search or transition team.

I am beginning to feel less like a visitor and more like the congregation's pastor.

The Congregation

We are becoming accustomed to our pastor's presence and leadership.

We are learning the pastor's gifts and working style.

We are learning to communicate directly with the pastor.

We no longer depend primarily on the search committee to interpret the pastor to us.

We are beginning to develop ordinary patterns of working together.

We can recognize differences without assuming something is wrong.

We have begun sharing responsibility for the ministry ahead.

The Governing Board

The pastor is functioning as part of the congregation's regular leadership structure.

Expectations and responsibilities are becoming clearer.

Important conversations are happening through appropriate relationships rather than through the transition team.

We have identified questions that still need attention.

We are ready to assume responsibility for supporting the continuing pastor-congregation relationship.

What tells us that the beginning is becoming a partnership?

What still feels unfinished?

FM-11.2

What Have We Learned About One Another?

Calling a pastor is an act of hope.

Living together replaces hope based largely on imagination with knowledge based on relationship.

That is healthy.

Neither pastor nor congregation turns out to be exactly what the other imagined during the search process.

Use this resource for a conversation among the pastor, governing board, and transition or support team.

What gifts of the pastor have become clearer?

What gifts of the congregation have the pastor discovered?

What has surprised us positively?

Where have differences appeared?

Which differences have turned out not to matter very much?

Where are we still learning how to work together?

What expectations have needed adjustment?

The pastor's expectations:

The congregation's expectations:

What have we learned about communication?

What have we learned about trust?

What are we grateful for?

Do not use this conversation to create a list of complaints.

Its purpose is to recognize that an imagined relationship is becoming a real one.

Real relationships contain gifts, surprises, differences, disappointments, affection, negotiation, and growth.

That is not evidence that the call has failed.

It is evidence that the relationship has begun.

FM-11.3

From Search Committee to Congregation

Releasing the Special Relationship

The people who participated in calling the pastor often develop a particularly strong relationship with the person they helped select.

That relationship matters.

But it must change.

The committee's work was to help the congregation discern a call and, during the beginning, help pastor and congregation find one another.

It was never intended to become the pastor's permanent inner circle.

For Search or Transition Team Members

Consider each statement.

I recognize that my formal responsibility is ending.

I do not need to explain the pastor to other members.

I do not need to explain the congregation to the pastor indefinitely.

I will encourage members to speak directly with the pastor when appropriate.

I will not become an informal channel for complaints about the pastor.

I will not assume privileged access because I served on the search committee.

I can remain a friend and supporter without remaining an intermediary.

I trust the pastor to form relationships I did not arrange.

I trust the congregation to develop its own relationship with the pastor.

I can release the work I was asked to do.

Something I am particularly grateful for from this experience:

Something I need to release:

A relationship I hope will continue naturally:

The end of the committee does not require the end of friendship.

It requires the end of a special role.

FM-11.4

Closing the Transition Team

Do not allow the transition or support team simply to stop meeting.

Close its work intentionally.

Before the Final Meeting

Review the team's original responsibilities.

Identify which responsibilities have been completed.

Identify any unfinished matters.

Determine where those unfinished matters properly belong.

Make sure the governing board understands that the team's work is ending.

Tell the congregation when appropriate.

Plan a final conversation with the pastor.

Make time for gratitude and prayer.

At the Final Meeting

Ask:

What did we hope to accomplish?

What did we actually accomplish?

What did we learn about the congregation?

What did we learn about pastoral transition?

What surprised us?

What was difficult?

What gives us hope about the ministry ahead?

Unfinished Business

Matter	Who Now Owns It?	Next Step
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Once responsibility has been transferred, let it go.

FM-11.5

The Partnership Conversation

A useful closing conversation can take place between the pastor and governing board as the formal transition period ends.

This is not a performance review.

It is a partnership conversation.

Looking Back

What has helped us begin well?

What has made beginning more difficult?

What have we learned that we could not have known during the search?

Looking at the Present

Where does trust seem strongest?

Where does trust still need time?

Where are responsibilities clear?

Where do we still need clarification?

Looking Ahead

What deserves our attention during the next six months?

What should we resist trying to accomplish too quickly?

What opportunities are beginning to emerge?

What relationships in the congregation or community need further development?

What support does the pastor need from congregational leaders?

What does the governing board need from the pastor?

Complete Together

During the next season of ministry, we want to pay particular attention to:

FM-11.6

From Honeymoon to Marriage

The language of a pastoral “honeymoon” can be useful if we remember what follows it.

Marriage.

Not literally, of course. But the metaphor names something important.

A honeymoon is sustained partly by novelty. Marriage is sustained by relationship.

During the earliest months, people may overlook differences. The pastor may receive unusually generous encouragement. Congregational leaders may protect the pastor from problems. Everyone may be especially careful with one another.

Eventually ordinary life returns.

That is not the end of a good beginning.

It is what the good beginning was preparing everyone for.

Signs That Ordinary Ministry Is Beginning

Which are you noticing?

People are more comfortable disagreeing.

The pastor is hearing concerns that were initially withheld.

Members are no longer treating every sermon or decision as evidence of whether the new pastor was the right choice.

The pastor is less concerned about pleasing everyone.

Differences in style are becoming clearer.

Leaders are discovering each other's strengths and limitations.

The congregation is beginning to expect ordinary pastoral leadership rather than newcomer behavior.

Pastor and leaders can have difficult conversations and remain in relationship.

Mistakes can be acknowledged without becoming crises.

Humor is becoming possible.

People are beginning to say “our pastor” without thinking about it.

What has become more real?

What has become more complicated?

What has become more trustworthy?

Healthy ministry is not a perpetual honeymoon.

The deeper goal is a relationship strong enough for ordinary life.

FM-11.7

Our Emerging Partnership

The first months have largely been about learning.

Now begin asking what pastor and congregation might do together.

Do not attempt to create a comprehensive strategic plan.

Simply notice what is emerging.

What seems to give this congregation life?

Where do we see energy among members?

What gifts of the pastor are beginning to connect with gifts already present in the congregation?

What are we noticing in our community?

What needs or possibilities keep appearing in conversation?

What might deserve further discernment?

What are we curious about?

Where might God already be at work?

What is one small thing we might explore together?

Do not rush to turn every possibility into a program.

Partnership begins not by deciding everything the congregation will do next, but by learning to notice together.

FM-11.8

A Covenant for the Next Season

The formal beginning is ending.

The ministry is not.

Pastor and congregational leaders may use this resource to name a few commitments for the next season.

We Will Practice Direct Communication

When concerns arise, we will speak with the people involved rather than about them.

What will this require from us?

We Will Remain Curious

We will ask questions before assuming motives or explanations.

What will this require from us?

We Will Share Responsibility

We will resist treating ministry as something the pastor performs for the congregation.

What will this require from us?

We Will Make Room for Difference

We will not expect pastor and congregation to agree about everything.

What will this require from us?

We Will Tell the Truth with Care

We will speak honestly without using honesty as permission to wound.

What will this require from us?

We Will Pay Attention to God

We will remember that the purpose of this partnership is larger than either pastor or congregation.

What practices will help us do this?

Our Particular Commitments

During the next season of ministry, we especially commit ourselves to:

FM-11.9

A Service of Thanksgiving and Release

The transition team may conclude its work during a meeting of the governing board or, when appropriate, in worship.

The service need not be elaborate.

Its purpose is simply to name what has happened:

A pastor was called.

A congregation prepared.

People helped them find one another.

Now the special work of beginning gives way to the shared work of ministry.

Words of Thanksgiving

Leader:

We give thanks for those who helped guide this congregation through discernment, calling, welcome, and beginning.

You prayed, listened, planned, introduced, encouraged, interpreted, accompanied, and served.

Your particular work is now complete.

Congregation or Governing Board:

We give thanks to God for your service.

To the Pastor

Leader:

You came among us as one newly called.

You have listened to our stories, learned our ways, shared our worship, entered our community, and begun to know us.

We receive you now not simply as the pastor who has arrived, but as a partner in the ministry we share.

To the Congregation

Pastor:

You welcomed me into a story that began long before I arrived.

You have taught me, encouraged me, surprised me, and trusted me with your lives and your ministry.

I receive you not simply as the congregation I was called to serve, but as partners with whom I will seek to follow Christ.

Release of the Transition Team

Leader:

Having completed the work entrusted to you, do you now release this particular responsibility, trusting pastor and congregation to continue the ministry they have begun together?

Team:

We do, with gratitude.

Leader:

And will you continue among us, not as a special circle around the pastor, but as members of Christ's church, sharing with all of us in its worship, fellowship, service, and mission?

Team:

We will.

Prayer

Faithful God,

you have accompanied us through endings and uncertainty,
through remembering and listening,
through discernment and calling,
through arrival and beginning.

We give thanks for those who have guided us along the way.

Receive the work they have completed.

Release them from responsibilities that no longer belong to them.

Strengthen the partnership now growing among pastor, leaders, and congregation.

When we misunderstand one another, give us curiosity.

When we disagree, give us grace.

When change is needed, give us courage.

When patience is needed, give us wisdom.

When we become anxious about our future, remind us that the future of this church does not finally rest in our hands.

Christ is already present among us.

Your Spirit is already at work.

Teach us to recognize what you are doing
and to join you there.

Through Jesus Christ,
who calls us not merely to work beside one another
but to become his body together.

Amen.

FM-11.10

Closing the Beginning

A Final Reflection

The beginning of ministry together cannot be reduced to a date on a calendar.

Still, there comes a time to say:

We have begun.

Use this final reflection individually and then, if useful, share portions of it with one another.

Pastor

Something I have come to love about this congregation:

Something I understand now that I did not understand when I arrived:

Something I am still learning:

A gift I hope to offer:

A gift I have already received:

Something I hope we will discover together:

Congregational Leaders

Something we have come to appreciate about our pastor:

Something we understand now that we could not have known during the search:

Something we are still learning:

A gift we want to offer our pastor:

A gift our pastor has already brought among us:

Something we hope we will discover together:

Together

Where do we see God at work among us now?

What might God be inviting us to notice next?

The Beginning Is Complete

Pastoral transition does not end when the pastor arrives.

Arrival is only another threshold.

The deeper transition occurs as strangers become acquaintances, acquaintances become colleagues, expectations encounter reality, trust develops, differences emerge, and pastor and congregation learn that neither exists simply to satisfy the expectations of the other.

Eventually, something quieter happens.

The congregation stops thinking constantly about having a new pastor.

The pastor stops thinking constantly about being new.

The search committee becomes simply part of the congregation again.

Questions change from:

How is the transition going?

to:

What is God calling us to do together?

That is the destination toward which all this work has been moving.

Not successful assimilation.

Not a perfectly satisfied congregation.

Not a pastor who has mastered the system.

Partnership.

The work ahead will include joy and disappointment, agreement and conflict, courage and mistakes, seasons of abundance and seasons when faithfulness is difficult to recognize.

That is ministry.

The beginning has done its work when pastor and congregation no longer need to be protected from that reality but are ready to enter it together.

The journey that began with a call now becomes a shared vocation.

God acts.

We recognize.

We join.

And now, together, we begin.