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## Chapter 1

### Times of Transition: The Good

The categories that I have chosen to explain the different case studies range from ‘Good’ to ‘Bad’ to ‘Ugly.’ Within this first chapter, I will be examining ‘good’ types of transitions: *Retirement*, *Moving on to another church* and *theological concerns*. To define each of these transitions as ‘good’ is not to say that each didn’t carry difficult or problematic circumstances; even the best of transitional situations can and often times do have their own set of problems. But I define them as good in that they are not necessarily nor generally brought on by scandal or moral/ethical failure. They are ‘good’ in that they are ‘safe’ forms of transitions. For instance in the first case study, retirement is arguably the safest (and rarest) type of transition that churches will encounter. But as this case study reveals, unless churches prepare, even the retirement of a pastor can be problematic.

## **Case Study #1: *Retirement* – (Don)**

Don had been pastoring part-time and in lay-ministry roles since the mid 1970's. Meaning, he did not follow the traditional path from seminary to church ministry. His background was mostly in business with an emphasis on sales. He worked various jobs in the business sector all of his life while also serving faithfully in whatever ministerial role needed filling. Don came into full-time pastoral ministry almost by accident and at a stage of life when most men begin thinking about retirement not full-time vocational work. It was soon after his 56<sup>th</sup> birthday and the large Northeastern church he was a part of found itself embroiled in a church split. Three of the men in leadership had a vote of no confidence in their pastor and opted to separate from the current leadership. Forty other members went with them—Don and his family were in that group. Leaderless and lacking any real direction, the small but tight-knit group began meeting for prayer and Bible study. It became quickly apparent to all forty that Don possessed both the heart of a pastor and the gift to teach and he was set in place to serve as their de-facto shepherd.

After making his initial foray into full-time pastoral ministry, his bible study began to grow and within a very short time the original group doubled in size. A church began to form and Don's call to preach fulltime was realized. Over the next many years, the church grew, the leadership structure was solid and a healthy witness was established to reach the small northeastern town where the church was located.

Don nurtured the church and her original vision through good times and bad. But all in all the church remained steady, continued to produce good fruit, and community life was solid. Attendance numbers were never terribly high but over the next eight years, the church averaged between 150 and 200 on any given Sunday. By now, in his mid-60's,

age was catching up with Don. He found himself more tired than usual. He wasn't able to keep up with the workload as he did back when the church was formed. Details were getting missed and ministry opportunity began to fall through the cracks. His session of elders recognized the need to lessen the daily grind of work and stress that their pastor was obviously carrying. The talk of looking for a pastor who could eventually replace Don was now being whispered about but never with him in the room. Nonetheless the questions needing to be asked by leadership were important for the future of their church—now more than ever. For instance, how would the current congregation that loved Don respond to another pastor? Could the church survive without a *new* pastor? When would retirement from the pulpit happen and who would be the one to initiate that conversation with Don? For Don, what would retirement look like? Could he even afford to retire? Did the church have a financial responsibility to Don as he did retire? To say nothing of the fact this church had never gone through a pastoral transition. How would they even begin? These were just some of the questions that needed to be answered and no one was looking forward to broaching the conversation or doing the hard work that was not only necessary but was fast approaching.

### **Dealing with the Reality**

Getting older is all part of life. At some point, yes, even pastors can no longer do the work of pastoral ministry on a full-time basis. So even for members of the clergy, retirement is inevitable. No matter what his current age may be, for any pastor, retirement or even partial retirement (from fulltime pastoral ministry to a more limited role) at some point becomes a reality. For many, like Don and the church he pastored, it

was a reality that was rapidly approaching and a reality they were finding out in many ways they were ill prepared.

A pastor retiring from the ministry is probably the most ‘safe-landing’ form of transition a church can experience. There is probably no scandal involved and the church is experiencing the natural progression of one generation to the next. But even retirement can be a difficult situation to navigate. In many ways, retirement can resemble a death. Unless one prepares for the passing on of a loved one before it occurs, problems can arise.

For instance, in a church the pastor commands such a major place in the everyday life and operations of the community that there are consequences when he or she departs for whatever reason; issues of grief and loss, issues of uncertainty and reorientation, healing and new direction. The church going through this kind of transition needs to remain sensitive to a whole host of emotions that will surface. Answering several questions will also go a long way in working through this crisis. One such question: *Should a pastor remain at the church he once led?* On the surface this would seem like an easy question to answer. But if you press in just a little, you find the complexities that reside just beneath the surface. The case against letting pastors remain with their congregations after they stop getting a paycheck largely focuses on not letting church people take sides and not letting them hang on to loyalties and friendships that could hinder or compromise the church’s work under a new pastor.

*What about Sunday weekly worship?* There is the question of when the pastor steps down, and should he be allowed to take a seat in the pews each Sunday and be a bystander to observe his replacement? Should he be permitted to mingle with the

congregation during coffee hour afterwards and hear members fawn over him and tell him how much he is missed? We hear of companies that let the old boss keep a desk in the office or be given some emeritus role that take use of his experience. Does that work with pastors in ministry?<sup>1</sup> What about the pastor's sense of loss and abandonment that can result from stepping out of the pulpit limelight? Does he not merit counsel and support or is that forfeited when he steps down? These doubts can be compounded depending upon how the church responds. Sensitivity to both the replacement and former pastor must be pursued.

There is no question that to intentionally plan for the future (or not-so future) departure of someone who is known and loved carries with it immense difficulty. The problems can only intensify the larger and wider reaching a pastor's ministry and reputation extend. But the difficulty that comes with wrestling through such problems is small when compared to churches that do not intentionally plan for the inevitable.

The only situation more tragic is to just ignore the reality of a looming retirement altogether until it is too late. This carries with it even more hardship and can result in even more collateral damage for a local church. Add to that mix a culture that places more and more importance on keeping the church young, hip and relevant and 'retirement' is not even a word that comes to mind. As a result churches that do not plan for a pastor's retirement will find themselves in crisis transition. So how can churches plan for the pastor's retirement?

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<sup>1</sup> Lawn Griffiths, *Retired Pastors Usually don't get to hang around*, [Article On-Line], accessed 30, March, 2012, <http://blogs.evtrib.com/spirituallife/2010/07/20/retired-pastors-dont-usually-get-to-hang-around/>

## Preventing the Crisis

Retirement by its nature is not something that can ultimately be prevented. Obviously everyone gets older and eventually can no longer do the job required. But even a ‘safe-landing’ transition such as retirement can become a crisis if everyone involved is not prepared.

Consider the following general pastoral profile offered up by The Barna Group: The demographic profile of Protestant pastors has changed little during the past decade. Most pastors are male (95%), married (94%), have graduated from seminary (60%). Relatively few (13%) have ever been divorced – half the rate among their parishioners. The **median age of pastors is 49**. On average, **they have been in full-time ministry for 17 years**, and have been pastoring their current church for 5 years.<sup>2</sup> Those are numbers that indicate some serious investment of time—but is it time that is being rewarded financially? Pastors retiring from ministry in the same vain as an insurance agent or teacher retiring from his or her field of work is not something that is readily considered by the local church and in many cases by the pastor himself. This is especially true for independent and non-denominational churches that don’t generally have the polity in place like that of a traditional mainline denomination to even provide a retirement package.

When it comes to preparing for transition, pastors and churches could go a long way by thinking about the future in financial terms. A June 2010 article in USA Today shows that most pastors are financially ill-prepared for retirement. Churches will

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<sup>2</sup> The Barna Group, “*Pastors Paid Better, But Attendance Unchanged*” (The Barna Group, March 29, 2001)

modestly pay pastors enough to get by on but the investment is for the ‘here and now’ and not enough to plan for the future.

‘Pastors...typically are provided with housing during their careers. Yet many find themselves in a financial quandary as they approach or reach retirement, squeezed by challenges that sometimes exceed those of other professionals. Often lacking home equity and a pension, some are struggling to get by and others are staying on the job longer.’<sup>3</sup>

The article points out that most pastors either do not have a home equity investment to fall back on nor have churches offered a pension or retirement fund. Some of this trend is changing however. Some larger churches and denominations recognize these financial factors and have started offering 403(b) retirement savings funds for their pastors (some even provide matching funds). While other churches have at least encouraged their pastors to buy their own homes in order to build up equity, while taking full advantage of the minister’s housing allowance.<sup>4</sup>

But preventing ‘crisis’ goes well beyond a financial obligation. How are pastors preparing their churches for life beyond their ministry? How are churches preparing themselves for life without their pastor? If the retirement of a beloved pastor can in many ways resemble the death of a loved one, there may be wisdom in working through some of the similar questions that can come up in grief counseling. Processing through those emotions *before* the ‘passing’ of a pastor will not only help the congregation who have grown attached to the man (more than the Gospel) but also will help the pastor who may experience his own loss of self and/or identity, especially an identity that is wrapped up in his work. Pastor Don illustrated his own emotional response by describing it as a ‘hand in a water bucket.’ He pointed out that when you remove your hand from the water

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<sup>3</sup> Dave Carpenter, *Many Clergy Ill-prepared for Retirement* [Article on-line], accessed, 19, February, 2012  
[http://www.usatoday.com/news/religion/2010-06-05-clergy-retire\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/religion/2010-06-05-clergy-retire_N.htm)

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*

bucket you recognize that there is no void. The water simply flows freely where the hand once was. He explained that this is how many ministers can feel (he certainly felt this way) when they step out of ministry. Secretly they hope that there will be a void but ultimately the church can and should go on.<sup>5</sup> The self-doubts that follow are difficult (i.e. What difference did I even make?). The most loving and responsible thing churches (and the pastors themselves!) can do is to prepare for the retirement of their pastor—long before retirement is seen on the horizon.

Listed at the end of each case study are application questions that can serve as a basic guide for a church that is working through the different case studies. Hopefully these questions will work as a catalyst that can spur on further conversation in an effort to not only ‘prevent’ a crisis transition but also to help a church wrestle through the questions that surface when in the midst of crisis transition.

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<sup>5</sup> *Pastor Don Interview*, phone interview, January 2012.

## **Case Study #2: *Moving On* – (Jim)**

When Pastor Jim presented his vision for a church plant, he laid out a ten-year plan. But in just under seven years his original plan was being realized—three years ahead of schedule! This small independent church-plant in rural Kansas had quickly turned into a life-giving congregation that was easily running 150 on a Sunday morning. The attendance was especially strong considering the church was in a community with a population of less than 2,000 people. But the attendance wasn't the only achievement for this solid work. Pastor Jim, who planted the ministry, also oversaw the purchase, construction and paying off of the new 300-seat sanctuary that now housed his church. Tithes were running high, and the church demographics were young and there were yet *more* tangible signs of growth happening.

Small groups were being re-produced, disciples were now discipling new and non-believers, a church youth program was taking shape and they were even able to afford to bring on additional staff as well as college-age interns from the seminary located nearby. Everything that Pastor Jim had set out to do for this church was happening ahead of schedule and there was no end in sight. That's when he received the phone call.

A friend, someone Jim had not spoken to in a few years called to inform Jim of some problems happening in a church 1,000 miles away. The church was without a pastor, on the verge of collapse and this friend wanted Jim to candidate for the position. Jim turned him down cold. He had no intentions of candidating for any position and was quite content in his rural Kansas church. The friend thanked Jim for his time and they hung up. Over the next month, Jim's friend called him back two more times and finally

convinced him to at least come out one weekend to minister to the church. Jim offered to come under one condition. He would not come as a candidate for the pastoral vacancy. He would only come to minister. The friend agreed and they scheduled Jim's visit at the next available date. Jim informed his session of his trip and assured them that he had no intentions of candidating for the position but was going to strictly help minister. Jim and his wife made their plans and travelled west not knowing what was about to happen.

Upon arrival, Jim surveyed the congregation. Everything his church had back home—this church lacked. They had no sense of identity, no leadership, the church was bleeding members, they were virtually broken and had no vision for the future. Following the weekend, as he and his wife travelled home, Jim really sensed that perhaps God *was* opening a door—one that Jim did not want to walk through. For the next two weeks he and his wife talked about all that would be required if they were to take this step of faith. When they realized this was what God had for them, Jim approached his leadership team. The initial response was both shock and sadness. Jim was not only their pastor but he founded and nurtured the work—the vision was his from the beginning. Who would replace Jim? Who *could* replace him? Their church was thrown into a transition that they had not planned for and admitted they were not readily equipped to handle. Jim did the best he could to work with the congregation as they sought out their next pastor. But responsibility to his new church was taking root. Four months later, with the church still in the midst of their search, he had to leave in order to take on this new church on the other side of the country. His now former church had to muddle through the best they could.

## Dealing with the Reality

Pastors move from one church to another. This is the current reality of the American Church and most do not have the opportunity to have their 'former' pastor, like Jim's church, help guide them through the difficult process of finding a new pastor. According to the *2006-2007 National Congregations Study* led by Duke sociologist Mark Chaves, 50% of congregations have had a new senior pastor in the last seven years!<sup>6</sup> It happens all the time and regardless as to the *reasons* for pastors moving on to other churches, pastor's 'moving on' remain the most common example as to why churches find themselves in transition.<sup>7</sup> But what happens when a church is not prepared for their pastor to leave?

Generally speaking, this 'coming and going' happens enough that the motivation behind this mentality needs to be examined. Plus, when a pastoral vacancy opens up it can and does have a ripple effect that goes deeper than just one church. Take, for example, a garden-variety pastor moving up from a smaller church to larger church. Jim Elliff of Christian Communicators Worldwide, points out that pastors leave this ripple effect. He writes,

Since most pastors interpret God's will as leading them to a church of a larger size than the last church, the chain of disruption might look something like this: A pastor of a mega-church ends his ministry there. The church then finds a pastor of a church of 3000 to take his place. The remaining church searches for a pastor from a church of 2500 to take their church's leadership role; which church finds another pastor of a church of 2000 to come; which church finds a pastor of 1500 to come; which church finds a pastor of a church of 1000 to come; which church finds a pastor of a church of 500 to come; which church finds a pastor of a church of 250 to come; which church finds a pastor of a church of 150 to come; which church in turn finds a pastor of a church of 100 to come; who in turn finds

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<sup>6</sup> Dr. Mark Chaves, Principle Investigator, *2006-2007 National Congregations Study* (Duke University Department of Sociology)

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*

a pastor of a church of 50 to help them; which church finds a student in a college or seminary who is not currently a pastor to come as their leader.<sup>8</sup>

Using Ellif's model as an example, in theory one pastoral search could easily turn into many leaving over 16,000 parishioners without a lead pastor! He points out that, "The whole process of filling all the vacancies in *all* the churches might take as long as three years, or even five. By this time the cycle is going again, perhaps turning many of those pastors away from their present responsibility to another."<sup>9</sup> With the real victims in the smaller works which more and more serve as 'training ground' for larger works. Of course all of this assumes that the 'hired' pastor is the right man for the job he is taking. Often churches find themselves regretting the new pastor they chose—sometimes within months of the hire!

I personally recall a friend of mine who was sought to pastor a church and within the initial contract there was a 90-day trial clause that said if the church was not satisfied with their new pastor within the first three months, they could fire him—without cause! But doesn't that take away from the idea that both the church and the pastor (to say nothing of the pastor's family!) believed he was *called* to the pastorate he was seeking to fill?

But the problem of moving from one church to another is even more complex. In a recent article, *Christianity Today* pointed out that within American Christianity, the local church is starting to be treated more like a 'farm-team' that provides pastors a platform to build a brand to launch a career away from the local church. That once pastors achieve 'national recognition' they leave the churches they once pastored in order

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<sup>8</sup> Jim Elliff, *Pastors Moving to Other Churches: Why?* [Article on-line], accessed, 15, February, 2012  
[http://www.ccwtoday.org/article\\_view.asp?article\\_id=133](http://www.ccwtoday.org/article_view.asp?article_id=133)

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*

to pursue full-time conference and book ministry.<sup>10</sup> In Ellif's model this 'farm-system' process is exactly what happens where smaller churches train up ministers for larger churches. Since rare is the man, like Pastor Jim in our case study, who feels 'called' to move from a larger work to a much smaller and/or troubled congregation.

## **Preventing the Crisis**

The reality is that pastors move on to other works. But why? Why do pastors move from one church to another? Some do legitimately find themselves called to a new work. Much like Pastor Jim, moving to another church wasn't even on his radar. By his own testimony he was satisfied where he was, felt called there, 'for a lifetime' but in a burning bush moment uprooted his family and moved across the country. Much like retirement, preventing a pastor from moving from one church to another is not something that can always be prevented. But helping mitigate the reasons why pastors leave could be at least part of the solution.

But perhaps more than we are willing to admit, pastors move from one church to another and it has little to do with 'God's calling them to a new work.' It could be that pastors leaving churches has more to do with not wanting to be at their current work.

Ellif explains,

“...because of a mixture of frustration coupled with the desire to find the place where his gifts can be most effective...and that he is “willing to leave” if God should open the door (one that quite often is being heavily leaned on). He lets a few people know that he is “willing” to leave if God should provide something else for him.”<sup>11</sup>

Again, this does not imply that all who leave one church and go to another do so with nefarious reasons. In fact there is nothing wrong and everything right for pastors to

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<sup>10</sup> Andy Rowell, *Jim Belcher, Francis Chan, N.T. Wright, and Others Leave the Pastorate to Write and Speak* [Article on-line], accessed, 19, February, 2012 <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/mayweb-only/28-41.0.html>

<sup>11</sup> Jim Elliff, *Pastors Moving to Other Churches: Why?*

consider (and re-consider) where their giftings can best be used in providing pastoral ministry. Churches should also be open and gracious to pastors who are wrestling with their calling and remember that graciousness even if it means their current pastor can better serve in another location. We can also agree that when church environments become toxic, some pastors *should* leave for the sake of the Gospel and for the same reason some churches need to be left behind!

### **Case Study #3: *Theological Reasons* – (Jack)**

The growing dissatisfaction Pastor Jack had with the Assemblies of God began about a year prior to his joining the small south Texas congregation. His theological studies left him with more and more questions about his understanding of eschatology to say nothing of the overall framework of interpreting scripture. The more he read the doctrines of grace, the more he questioned his Dispensational Premillennialism.

As an example, Pastor Jack wrestled with the ‘gifts of the spirit’ and their role in the life of a believer. The Assemblies of God taught that ‘speaking in tongues’ was *the* evidence that one had been baptized in the Holy Spirit. This was a belief that Jack had not only come to question, he was now at a point ready to reject that teaching outright. The more study he did the more questions he had on these and other fundamental Assemblies of God doctrine. But the consequences of finding himself in a theological wilderness went well beyond his own personal epistemology. As the pastor of an Assemblies of God church, Pastor Jack understood his responsibilities to the flock he was shepherding. A flock that was now hearing more and more teaching that did not walk lockstep with the AG denomination. What made matters even more difficult was that Jack’s yearly ordination vows were rapidly approaching and he knew in good conscience that he could not sign the Assemblies of God Statement of Faith that was required of all AG ministers.

His first course of action was to approach his bishop directly for counsel and guidance. The counsel offered by the man over him was for Jack to simply sign the Statement of Faith and move on with life. Jack was told that all ministers in the AG take exception with some theological point and as long as he wasn’t denying one of the

essentials of the Christian faith (i.e. Jesus as the risen Son of God) then the concern was minimal. This was not sufficient for Jack's own conscience. He knew that the questions he had went beyond a simple signature on a piece of paper. He knew that his overall theological framework was no longer 'Assemblies of God' specific and that to remain as an AG minister would be troubling at best and dishonest at worst.

When he arrived at his conclusion that he could no longer in good faith pastor his church through Assemblies of God theology, his choices were limited. He met with his leadership team and after many lengthy conversations, all involved thought it best for Jack to move on. Being a part of the Assemblies of God denomination made it easier for their church to handle the transition, but everyone remembered just how draining their last pastoral search was when they had finally settled on Jack. But now with his leaving, they found themselves in the same situation they were in just one year ago. What would they say to their congregation and how could they avoid the same mistake twice?

### **Dealing with the Reality**

When it comes to transition, a pastor leaving a church over theological differences is not as common as other reasons why pastors would leave a particular church. In the case study given above, the fault was not with either party. The church, self-consciously an Assemblies of God congregation, went after what they thought was an Assemblies of God minister. To Pastor Jack's credit he certainly was in the AG camp when called to this congregation a year prior. He also did right by trying to work the best he could within the theological paradigm of the AG denomination as he continued to wrestle privately with his own theological questions. Only when it became obvious that this was not healthy for himself or his congregation, action was taken. In this case, the transitional

difficulties were minimal due to both the lack of time Jack had been in place (about one year) and that the church itself had a denomination they could fall back on. For this church, an interim minister was brought in within weeks (one who had an already established relationship both with the church and within the denomination) and following a two-year period, the congregation was able to settle on a more-long term solution. They were blessed.

Many independent churches (if not most) do not have the luxury of having outside relationships that could just pick up the slack when a local congregation is without a pastor. Churches who are a part of larger networks (*i.e.* denominations and trans-local fellowships) will usually have outside help to come along side should a church find itself without a pastor for whatever reason. This could also prove helpful when pastors find themselves in theological wildernesses. Outside relationships always are a boon to both personal and spiritual health. But even when there are outside relationships to help (for whatever reason), it is even more rare for a church that is relying upon outside pulpit supply to find that the temporary situation can result into something that produces long-term health. In other words, should a pastor leave a work, and an interim replacement is brought in, rarely does that interim stay on for a long period of time. Even in churches that look in house for pulpit supply from an elder or deacon or (usually) an associate or youth pastor, its not often that one of these men are promoted to the senior pastor role. Dealing with the reality of the situation is probably going to be most profitable when pastors and their leadership keep open lines of communication so that when theological ‘wrestling’s’ do occur, the pastor has a safe space to study and explore the scripture. Pastor Jack opined that while in his situation, he still would have found himself leaving

his Assemblies of God congregation. It would have at least prepared the church enough to know what he was wrestling with, and they may have been a sympathetic ear as he worked through his own framework.

## **Preventing the Crisis**

Now generally speaking, a pastor like Jack who gets called to a local church while in the midst of a ‘theological identity-crisis’ is a somewhat easily avoidable scenario. This is not something that most pastors deal with in an on-going basis in such extreme ways. Of course pastors do wrestle theologically but usually in much finer or nuanced points of doctrine. They may nuance a position on a particular verse or secondary theological issue but rarely do pastors find themselves swinging in such an extreme form as Pastor Jack did from Dispensational Premillennialism to historic covenantal reformed theology.

Going back to what Reverend Marion Clark pointed out in the introduction, “If a local church has a clear sense of who they are...The church will succeed because of the clear congregational and ministerial identity that should be already established. Churches who lack that identity are the ones that suffer.”<sup>12</sup>

An extreme (and yet all-too-common) example of churches who lack the kind of identity that Reverend Clark is talking about is found in the on-going cultural battles that main-line denominations find themselves embroiled in. For instance the Presbyterian Church-U.S.A. is currently experiencing a mass exodus of pastors due to their wrestling with what the Bible says about sexuality and gender issues. For instance, many PCUSA pastors are being asked, ‘Can an individual who identifies himself as a practicing

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<sup>12</sup> Rev. Marion Clark, Associate Minister, Tenth Presbyterian Church, phone interview, December 2011.

homosexual serve faithfully in the role of an ordained minister?’ Depending upon the answer to that question (to say nothing of the question itself) many pastors (to say nothing of their churches) are walking away from the PCUSA en masse.<sup>13</sup> But now PCUSA *churches* that are comfortable within the denomination are also finding themselves with a shortage of well-trained and qualified pastors. Because of their theological conviction, these men (and women) cannot remain.<sup>14</sup> But regardless of what theological questions (or any questions!) that a pastor may be wrestling through, this question remains: How do churches and pastors respond to these theological wrestlings and how will a church prepare should their pastors leave over such questions?

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<sup>13</sup> *The Layman On-Line*, [http://www.layman.org/Resources/Churches\\_Leaving\\_the\\_PCUSA.aspx](http://www.layman.org/Resources/Churches_Leaving_the_PCUSA.aspx) [Article on-line], accessed, 19, April, 2012

<sup>14</sup> Ruth Campbell, *Pastor leaves First Presbyterian* [Article on-line], accessed, 19, April, 2012 <http://www.fstribune.com/story/1800699.html>

## **Questions for Consideration**

### **Case Study #1: Retirement – (Don)**

1. *When it came time for retirement, Pastor Don explained his own self-doubts with the 'hand in the water bucket' illustration. He talked about the void and feeling abandoned.*

Q. How is your church helping your pastor 'relationally' prepare for the future?

Q. How is your pastor helping prepare his church for a future without him?

2. *In any other industry, companies help their employees with 401(k) retirement plans. A good rule of thumb is to be as generous with your pastor as you would want your employer to be with you.*

Q. What sort of 'financial package' is in place for your pastor that not only decreases any economic concerns for the future but also helps to mitigate any economic concerns for him and his family currently?

Q. What is in place economically to help your pastor prepare for retirement financially?

3. *Companies plan for retirement by training up young executives in the company. This kind of 'proactive and intentional' leadership always has an eye on the future.*

Q. Who is currently available that could step into the pulpit, even on a temporary basis, should your pastor retire from full-time or even part-time ministry?

Q. What plan has your leadership team put into place on how to work with your retiring pastor when it comes to community and his role should he stay within the local church that he once pastored? How will that plan effect everyone involved (i.e. the pastor, his family, the church, his successor)?

### **Case Study #2: Moving On – (Jim)**

1. *In the second case study, while the circumstances surrounding Pastor Jim leaving one congregation to take on another are rare, a pastor leaving a church for another church is still very common.*

Q. What communication has the pastor had with the leadership of the church regarding both his personal short-term and long-term plans? Does he desire to use this smaller work as a rung on the vocational ministry ladder? Where does he see himself in 5 years? 10 years?

Q. What kind of ‘plan of accountability’ does your church have in place that both insures continuity for the church and demonstrates to the pastor that the church desires his leadership for a long period of time?

2. *In Ellif’s model of transition, when a pastor leaves one church there are repercussions that affect many churches. Turning smaller churches into a ‘farm system’ that trains up pastors for larger works.*

Q. According to the current size of your congregation, where do you fall in Ellif’s model of transition? Seeing how pastoral transition can affect other churches both larger and smaller than yours, how does that challenge your church in both keeping your current pastor but also preparing for a time when you may have to find a new pastor?

Q. Prior to your reading this case study, what was your general understanding of pastors leaving their current church and moving on to larger and better-resourced congregations? How has this particular case study challenged that previous understanding?

3. *This case study demonstrates that there are times when a pastor will legitimately leave one church because he believes he is called to another.*

Q. Knowing that transitions can occur at any time, how does that challenge your church to prepare for such transition?

Q. How would you have responded to Pastor Jim if he was leaving your church?

### **Case Study #3: *Theological Reasons* – (Jack)**

1. *In the third case study, Pastor Jack wrestled with his theological identity. He found himself drifting from his dispensational premillennialism and as a result he was at odds with his Assemblies of God training.*

Q. Make a list of doctrines that are non-negotiable. Are there any theological issues or ‘hot-buttons’ outside of that list that are off limits?

Q. How would your church respond should your pastor begin to teach something that was either out of step with your church’s theology or maybe just new to your ears?

2. *Denominations have within their framework the structure to hold their ministers theologically accountable. In the Assemblies of God, Pastor Jack was required to sign a yearly statement of faith.*

Q. What are your thoughts on how and why denominations do this? What do you see as some of the benefits? What are some of the negatives? Do you even agree that denominations should hold their ministers theologically accountable or is that primarily up to the pastor’s church? What about an independent church?

Q. Other than your own denomination, what sort of structure or framework does your church have in place to walk with your pastor theologically? What sort of environment exists within your leadership that would allow your pastor to wrestle with his theology in a safe space?

3. *Rev. Marion Clark pointed out, "If a local church has a clear sense of who they are...The church will succeed (through pastoral transition) because of the clear congregational and ministerial identity that should be already established. Churches who lack that identity are the ones that suffer."*

Q. Do you agree with Rev. Clark's statement? How clear is your church's theological identity to your membership? How clear is your church's theological identity to those on the outside?

Q. Apart from denominational affiliation, how would you sum up your church's theological identity? If someone were to ask you in conversation to explain your church's theology, what would you say?