

STEP 1 | RECEIVE THE NEWS THAT THE PASTOR IS LEAVING

Helpless. That is how many feel when they hear the news that their pastor is leaving. It is no mistake that this step of receiving the news that a pastor is leaving sounds so passive. The challenge at this moment is to rise above the surface of that helplessness and embrace the opportunities to shape how this step transpires.

The Ministry Partnership Team (MPT) of your presbytery has been through pastoral transitions with other congregations and has the experience to help you. To locate your local ECO presbytery, [click here](#). Contact them right away to find out what needs to be done as your pastor leaves so they can support your church in this important time of leadership transition.



Pastoral ministry often involves a web of connections throughout a community that extends far beyond the church. Think well about how this transition affects the wider community beyond the church. Churches are tempted to turn inward during a pastoral transition. This is your chance to rise above that tendency and look for ways to keep the church's focus on our main goal: making disciples of Jesus Christ.

A session ought to consider:

EXIT INTERVIEW

- When employees have contributed to the thriving of an organization, it makes sense to glean their insights as they leave employment with the organization. This is especially true of the unique nature of how pastors lead churches. An exit interview is an extended conversation about missional goals, successful seasons of discipleship, and areas of disappointment or failure.
- A structured interview in a formal setting for an exit interview is not necessarily best. Instead, the session may want to take the pastor out to dinner and spend an extended evening listening and sharing stories about what went well, what went poorly, and how the pastor sees the current health of the congregation.

INVENTORY OF KNOWLEDGE

- Often the departing pastor has moved onward to his or her new call before the new transitional leader arrives. Pastors carry around a great deal of knowledge — everything from specific pastoral concerns to mundane details like where the light switch is located in the closet behind the sanctuary. It makes sense to create a running list of various pieces of information in the time frame allotted before the pastor actually leaves.

WRITTEN CLOSING OF CALL DOCUMENT

- Many things need to be in writing as the pastor's call is concluded. Your presbytery's MPT will have policies about the separation and the details that need to be put in writing and signed by the appropriate parties. Though it might not be easy to discuss, questions of compensation for unused vacation time, the termination of health care and retirement payments, and a multitude of other issues should be addressed and put in writing. Again, your MPT will have guidance pertaining to these matters available for you to use. [Click here](#) to see what should be included and/or considered.



DISSOLUTION OF A CALL

It is vital that the pastoral transition is done as well as possible given your circumstances. You will want to have your presbytery's Ministry Partnership Team involved in this process. Your presbytery MPT wants to provide you assistance throughout the transition and search process. To be abundantly clear, the MPT should be involved in both the dissolution of a pastoral call and the search and installation of a new pastor (whether that be Head of Staff or Associate). [Here is a sample agenda](#) for a congregational meeting to dissolve the call of your current pastor. In ECO, Terms of Call and Terms of Separation do not need to be voted on by a congregation unless required by church policy and/or the church bylaws.

