



# Creating a Transition Team for Pastoral Transitions

The importance of starting well cannot be overstated: the first three months of a pastor's appointment to a new congregation often set the tone for that pastor's whole ministry in that church. A crucial aspect of this transition is the relationship between the pastor and the lay leaders of the church. One way to build this relationship is by creating a Transition Team made up of church members whose purpose is to strengthen the pastoral transition by providing insight, advice, and support to the pastor through the first year of ministry in a new congregation. The Transition Team will meet at least monthly for six to nine months and will serve as a focus group for the pastor to review plans, share ideas, and test changes before they are implemented.

## What are the Essential Functions of a Transition Team?

- Aid in the transition:
  - Hospitality
    - Introductions to "key people" in the church or community
    - Introducing the Pastor to the community
  - Communication with the congregation about the pastor and vice versa
  - Organize Home Gatherings/Listening Sessions (p. 27-31 of *Your Best Move*)
- Diagnose the situation
  - Provide feedback on how the Pastor is being received
  - Clarifying expectations of the congregation/community
  - Navigating potential pitfalls
  - Sharing "traditions" of the church
- Creating conditions for a successful transition
  - Navigate potential problems
  - Helping define early wins

### *Note to the Pastor:*

The Transition Team (TT) could become a bridge to forming a Leadership Team for your church, if one is not already in existence.

## Who should be on the Transition Team?

"A Transition Team (TT) consists of seven to twelve people selected by the church's leadership team or personnel committee. The members of the team should represent a wide cross-section of the church, including people of different ages and with various lengths of time at the church. The team should include several people who have the respect of most of the congregation, whether they serve in formal leadership positions or not. They should be positive people who have invested their time, talent, and treasure in the church and are excited about its future. The Transition Team should include one member of the [SPRC,] but the [SPRC] itself should not try to become the Transition Team...The TT is an open group that solicits input from the congregation and communicates freely about the transition."

*Your Best Move*, by Robert Kaylor, p. 19

The committee could be comprised of the following:

- **Strategic Leaders:** The Lay Leader, a member of SPRC, opinion leaders of the church
- **Recruiter:** Someone who is a connector within the community and is able to convince others to take the next step in their faith. They could perhaps serve as the designated volunteer recruiter for Home Gatherings.
- **Historian:** Someone who knows the DNA of the church and can play the role of venerable veteran.
- **Local Leader:** Someone who are people already following and can give insight into where the culture is going next.
- **Recent Member:** Someone who is newer church member could offer a different perspective to the perceptions of the congregation, both within the church and in the community.
- **Key Committee Leaders:** Not all committee chairs need to be included in the TT, but keep in mind ones that may be most crucial to set the transition up for success.

While it is important to keep in mind a range of ages as well as gender and other kinds of diversity that is represented in your church, the TT ought to primarily include those people who can contribute feedback and the best cultural introduction to the church and community.

## How long should the TT Meet?

The TT should assemble in May or June prior to the new pastor's arrival to begin to discuss the essential functions for hospitality and to coordinate a plan for Home Gatherings. Ideally, the incoming pastor and the TT are able to connect by phone about the plan for Home Gatherings prior to July 1. Meetings will likely happen monthly and can wrap up within 4-6 months, though by the end, the purpose of the team will likely shift and could potentially transition into a Vision Team or a Leadership Team led by the Pastor.

## What are the First Steps?

- Plan a welcome gathering for pastor, and if applicable, his or her family (this may be done in conjunction with or in place of plans made by the SPRC)
- Schedule Home Gatherings for the month of July and August
- Offer hospitality to the incoming pastor
- Find ways for the TT and the incoming pastor to share vision prior to July 1
- Schedule the first "official" TT meeting for early July

## Do you want to know more?

- These ideas mostly taken from *Your Best Move: Effective Leadership Transition for the Local Church* by Robert Kaylor, Seedbed Publishing. Copies of this book will be available by the DS.
- Resources compiled on Pastoral Transitions for clergy and congregations: <http://www.greatplainsumc.org/pastoraltransitions>
- Free download for pastors in Transition <http://store.seedbed.com/products/so-youre-moving-guidance-for-pastors-and-churches-in-leadership-transition>

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