

Ten Commandments for Churches in the Transition Time Between Pastors

DO

1. **Give people time and opportunity to grieve.** Assuming the previous pastor departed with good wishes, many congregants will miss them and will grieve the change as a “loss.” Find ways to tell stories about the church’s ministry under their leadership. Pray for them!
2. **Build up congregational unity.** Find things to celebrate! Volunteer recognition day? Featured interviews with members who are active doing service in the local community? A party thrown by the adults followed by one organized by the younger community members? Plan to have fun!
3. **Decide** if the interim (if you have one) can be a candidate for permanent pastor. What about a frequent supply pastor? The initial contract or covenant should clearly state whether the interim pastoral position is open for a permanent call or closed to a permanent call.
4. **Get reacquainted with your denomination.** Almost every congregation grows weary of demands from its denomination. Often pastors try to “shield” their congregation from too much information from their denomination. The time of transition is the right time to get more involved. Re-connect and see what help is available for your congregation.
5. **Recruit church members to explore outside your church.** The time of transition is a good time to “go to the other side of the mountain.” Visit neighboring churches, find out the good things they are doing or innovations they are trying. Interview the leaders of local not-for-profits about what their organizations do and how they can use help, and ask them what they see happening in the local area.

DON'T

6. **Take Shortcuts. Process matters.** Process is not about what happens, but how decisions are made. In panic mode, members tend to circumvent thoughtful conversations with other members and key denominational contacts. Planning for the next step in the congregation’s future takes prayer, wisdom, and buy-in from all stakeholders. Don’t rush decisions.
7. **Fight over small issues.** Long-time members especially may hold strong preferences about worship style and church programs. However, insisting on carrying over certain traditions can take the focus away from the church’s central mission and theology, and its focus on what it will try to do in the future.
8. **Neglect to clarify your values or (re) discover your vision.** Together as a congregation Clarify and restate your church’s core values, discern its God-given vision, and start living into it. Your core values help you discover vision, the picture of what you believe God is calling your church to be and to do. Take time to discuss these things.
9. **Delay crucial controversial decisions.** Members may so value stability and calm that they may put off any action that may generate conflict. For example, the interim period is the best time to deal with a problem with staff or a persistent conflict between two groups. Use the interim time to ask: what has been a problem that we really need to work on now?
10. **Forget to Pray!** Find things related to your church’s transition time, and then the search for a new pastor, to actively pray about as a community of faith. Pray for your congregation. While prayer doesn’t do or solve everything, few next steps will be really successful without prayer being an integral part of the process.