

Current Church Field

How to Say "Good Bye" To Your Church: Seven Steps to Conclude Your Ministry

The Manner in Which You Leave Your Church Says a Lot About Who You Are.

Saying goodbye with grace brings the pastor to consider his relationships to God and others. Leaving a congregation is a grief process no matter the circumstances; therefore, use this time of departure as a time to grow.

1. Invest your remaining time wisely. Pastor, be intentional in using the time between announcing the resignation and the pastor's actual departure to bring closure to this ministry. Closure will be important for various individuals, shut ins, persons the pastor is counseling, groups in the congregation and other special relationships in the community. As pastor, decide who will need a visit, a letter, or a phone call, to enable the person to emotionally and spiritually enter into a new relationship.
2. Wrap up the pastor's responsibilities. This is the time to make good use of the deacons, giving them an orientation to the pastoral ministry so they can pick up and continue that ministry. Work in the interim time to turn over files, history, and assignments to appropriate persons in leadership roles. By the time the pastor is ready to leave, the pastor should no longer have any functions to perform. The pastor's desk will truly be empty.
3. It is time for reconciliation. Visit if possible, those people with whom the pastor has experienced difficulties. To the best of the pastor's ability, restore these relationships. The pastor's goal is to eliminate emotional baggage for the pastor, and congregation so each can enter into new relationships without fear.
4. Be graceful. Depending on the nature of the departure, the congregation may or may not be providing a formal time to honor the pastor. Nevertheless, grace requires the pastor to say thank you to the congregation. The pastor will especially want to thank those members who have loved and supported him and his family while serving the church. The pastor will decide how best to show appreciation by letter, card, visit or telephone call.
5. Be clear about the pastor's reasons for leaving. Many people in the congregation will not understand why the pastor is leaving at this time. Hearing the pastor affirm that God has called him to a new place of service

will be helpful to the congregation. Pastor, tell the congregation that you and your family are grateful for the time God has allowed you to serve the congregation. Certainly there are times when the reason for leaving is obvious such as retirement, etc.

6. What about unpleasant departures? Unfortunately, there may be a time when the departure is not pleasant; those times will require grace, skill and tact to honestly bring closure to the ministry. Pastor, ask the church leaders if you could invite the Director of Missions or Church Minister's Relationship (CMR) Director from the SBC State Office to meet with the church leaders. The CMR director will ask the church leaders to gracefully offer the pastor an appropriate departure process, including severance and insurance. The CMR director will work with leaders to identify issues that need to be resolved before calling a new pastor. The CMR director will encourage the church to call a transitional interim pastor. Pastor, do not make major decisions under times of stress. Pastor, do not use this time to attack persons or groups in the church. The grace the pastor demonstrates now will pay rich dividends later. The pastor's goal is to bring closure to his ministry and help the church prepare for their future. Pastor, be clear that you inform the members that you will not accept invitations for weddings and funerals unless you have first discussed it with the church's new pastor.
7. The pulpit ministry at this time should focus on hope. The messages should encourage the congregation to unite, grow, heal, and begin the transition for a new pastor.

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