

THINKING ABOUT THE FOCUS POINTS

"Heritage"

B. Leslie Robinson, Jr.

Definition

Heritage is synonymous with birthright, inheritance, legacy, and tradition. The congregation has been shaped and formed by what went on before it, and the congregation needs to know, appreciate and celebrate that heritage. On the other hand, members must recognize those parts of the past that are best not to carry into the future. In other words, the congregation should not be held hostage to the past, or feel that they are strapped or hemmed in by the mission and ministries of the church from an earlier era. Here is an opportunity to take an objective look at the church's history, discuss the lessons learned from that review, and establish clarity about what will move forward and what will be left behind.

It also is vital during this time to provide an opportunity for grieving and healing within the congregation. There must be a time of letting go of the former minister(s) and for discarding old expectations, wounds, patterns, and baggage of the past. Only when this has been accomplished, can a new minister be fully accepted.

This focus point is foundational and is usually the first one through which the Transition Team leads the congregation.

Major Issues to Consider

- Developing a healthy perspective on the service, leadership, and personality of the former minister(s). Putting the tenure of the last pastor in perspective
- Exploring in an open manner the total history of the congregation
- Learning from previous "watershed" events (both highs and lows) in the life of the congregation. Admitting what has not worked and honoring and celebrating what the church has accomplished
- Deciding what is important from the past that needs to be carried into the future, and what "excess baggage" should be left behind
- Encouraging an appropriate expression of feelings about the past that allows for grieving, accepting, and moving on

Various Methods of Engaging the Congregation

- Tell individual and corporate stories that reveal the church's story
- Develop a timeline or wall of memory
- Update the written history
- Identify and celebrate significant moments and accomplishments in the congregation's life
- Teach the grief process
- Establish an environment for the safe expression of feelings
- Conduct small-group listening sessions with or without focus questions

- List the strengths and weaknesses of the ministry of the previous pastor(s)
- Maintain healthy traditions while questioning those that create problems
- Offer seminar workshop on the dynamics of change
- Video tape interviews with members sharing their memories play at the beginning of the worship services for several months
- Build a time capsule with a designated time for another generation to open
- Make a history quilt with blocks done by families
- Develop a wall hanging with historical episodes of the church
- Obtain proclamations from city councils, mayor, governor

Healthy Signs

- The congregation lives in the present while accepting the past
- There is movement through the grief process
- Closure is brought to the ministry of the last pastor
- Attendance, contributions, and member participation in the ministries of the church are stable
- There is openness to change and readiness to try new ideas
- People are asking the process questions: “Where are we going?” “What do we do now?”
- Humor is a part of congregational life

Caution Signs

- There is a tendency to dwell on the past
- Many members are stuck in grief, anger, denial, guilt, and alienation
- There is a decline in membership, contributions, attendance and member participation in the ministries of the church
- People are unwilling to explore the reason(s) certain traditions are maintained
- The ghost(s) of previous pastor(s) block openness to new and different leadership
- Members attempt to either clone the previous pastor or find an exact opposite

Things to Keep In Mind

- Focus on, and celebrate, the positive - but do not ignore the negative
- Scripture is constantly reviewing the history of the people of God. Therefore, even if the congregation has made a review of their history, there is no reason why it cannot be done again
- Dealing with history is not simply writing or revising a history book or updating the history room. Rather, history is what is in the hearts of the people. Therefore, this focus point requires the active participation of the membership in talking about the past. Be prepared to encounter objections and resistance such as: “We do not need to dig up old bones,” “Don’t open that can of worms.” “Let sleeping dogs lie”
- The Team should use multiple methods of involving the congregation.

- Let the Transition Team do the work – the intentional interim minister should be pastor to the people and process consultant to the Team

References: Portions of this material are adapted from Mead, Loren B. *A Change of Pastors . . . And How it Affects Change in the Congregation* Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute, 2005; and Nicholson, Roger S., editor. *Temporary Shepherds: A Congregational Handbook for Interim Ministry* Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute, 1998.

THINKING ABOUT THE FOCUS POINTS

“Leadership”

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Definition

Every congregation today must be conscious of developing new leadership for ministry and for incorporating younger and newer members into its body. The interim period is a prime time for reviewing the membership, its needs, and its ways of organizing.

It is not unusual at this time in the church’s life that longer-term leaders are burned out or ready for a break. Some of those who have been cultivated into leadership by the pastor often feel hurt and are not sure if they want to expose themselves to more traumas by staying in leadership. Consequently, these persons often move out of leadership roles.

Likewise, it is not uncommon for folks who have tended to stay away from key leadership positions during the last pastor’s tenure, to see the interim time as an opportunity to influence the future of the church. They are energized by that idea and are both ready and willing to accept leadership roles.

The important thing is to keep a balance between the experienced and inexperienced leaders, and to keep the congregation engaged and informed.

Major Issues to Consider

- Being explicit about lay leadership shifts. Recognizing burnout and dropout of leaders, honoring past leaders and finding ways to keep them involved
- Considering future lay leadership needs and potentially expanding the leadership base
- Looking at professional staffing needs
- Learning about healthy, realistic and open decision-making processes and structures
- Considering expanding the methods by which a congregation makes decisions.
- Creating an atmosphere that honors and maximizes the opportunities of diversity in the congregation
- Updating governing church documents such as constitution, bylaws, covenants, job descriptions, policies and procedures
- Recognizing power and control of decisions and directions of congregation.
- Managing conflicts in productive ways

Various Methods of Engaging the Congregation

- Affirm the different styles and talents of the leaders
- Teach conflict management and resolution skills and processes
- Rethink the procedure for developing leadership and the length of terms of office
- Recognize and celebrate the leaders who are going out of office; hold closure ceremonies
- Assess leadership needed to reach interim goals and recruit leaders to meet those needs

- Use older leaders as mentors
- Conduct a seminar on decision-making methods
- Open the decision-making process
- Begin new member orientation
- Develop a new covenant with broad member participation
- Clarify personnel policies and procedures
- Train the chairs of the various organizations and committees
- Practice open communication
- Conduct “Time and Talent” survey
- Conduct a Spiritual Gifts inventory
- Commission new leaders – including the Transition Team and Pastoral Search Committee
- Review governing documents and determine congruence with current practice

Healthy Signs

- Open leadership and decision-making structures
- Interdependency
- Win/win decisions
- Clear decisions are made, with follow-through
- Shared leadership
- Election, acceptance, and support of new leadership
- People are asking the process questions: “How do we make decisions?” “What kind of lay leaders do we need?”
- Inclusiveness: both old and new leaders are involved in the work of the church
- Conflicts and differences are dealt with openly and in a timely manner

Caution Signs

- Division and destructive sub-grouping
- Competition and avoidance
- Counter-dependency
- Power plays
- Win/lose decisions
- Decisions are not clear, are not carried out, or fall apart
- The Pastoral Search Committee becomes a power center
- Secret meetings
- Self-authorized decisions
- Gossip and rumors
- Exclusiveness in leadership positions
- Blaming
- Avoidance of conflict

Things to Keep In Mind

- If revision is needed on the governing documents it should be worked on after the church has established the principles of decision-making

- The Transition Team should not spend its energy in the area of governing documents, for it potentially can drain the life out of the Team. This kind of work is very tedious and will distract the Team from focusing on the major issues. A viable approach is to assign it to a small task force that is separate from the Transition Team
- The Team should use multiple methods of involving the congregation.
- Let the Transition Team do the work – the intentional interim minister should be pastor to the people and process consultant to the Team

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THINKING ABOUT THE FOCUS POINTS

“Connections”

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Definition

Connections refers to all the relationships a congregation builds outside of itself, beginning with its relationship to a denomination. In Loren Mead’s original research on the interim time he writes, “the ordinary life of the church goes on in the congregation with little or no relationship to the denomination.”

Rich resources, however, are available through denominational offices, and congregations that stay in touch with their outside resources are generally healthier. The interim time, therefore, provides a chance for the congregation to reconnect or connect with the denomination at all levels. Lay leaders can see for themselves who and what these resources are, irrespective of how the last pastor related to them.

In addition to denominational connections, the congregation also interacts with other entities in the community – both religious and secular. As the members review the relationships with other mission enterprises that are not directly related to the denomination, they need to ask such things as: Does the passion for these ministries lie with the current members, or were they kept alive by the former pastor? How is the church seen as a local citizen? How do we interact with community initiatives that enhance the lives of the community? Do we think it is important to interact with other churches of the same and/or different denominations? What organizations does the congregation partner with financially and why? How are mission monies collected and where do they go?

It is important that the new pastor fits theologically with the congregation and views social issues in the same light. Consequently, exploring their “connections” may be one of the most important things a congregation does to bring clarity for the calling of the next pastor.

Major Issues to Consider

- Clarifying the church’s theological position
- Assessing denominational commitments and involvement
- Examining the history of the relationship: dollars and trust
- Developing a healthy partnership with the denominational (judicatory) office and other external entities
- Addressing the relationship of the church and denomination as authority, dependency, interdependency, or counter-dependency
- Acknowledging the congregation’s tendency to see the denomination through the former pastor’s eyes
- Becoming acquainted with denominational resources at local, state and national levels

- Becoming acquainted with other external entities with which the congregation has ties

Various Methods of Engaging the Congregation

- Make use of denominational resources: staff, programs, facilities, literature, training and retreats
- Encourage denominational leaders to give clear information about their expectations of the congregation, and the resources and programs available from the denomination
- Identify common interests of the church and denomination
- Identify and affirm church members who hold denominational positions
- Allow for ventilation of feelings about the denomination
- Have denominational ministries and programs lifted up in newsletters or during mission moments in worship
- Enhance (or begin) commitment to a Missions/Ministry Giving Plan beyond the work of the local church
- Explore a plan for curriculum usage
- Develop a plan for member representation at all levels of denominational meetings

Healthy Signs

- Willingness to accept help and resources from the denomination
- Appreciation for the denomination's traditions and missions
- Denomination's resources and facilities are used
- Stable or increased giving to denomination: dollars and people
- Members are asking the process questions: "How can we better relate to our denominational leaders and offices?" "How can we link with the denomination to accomplish greater ministry?"

Caution Signs

- Members resist denominational requests or suggestions
- There is criticism of denominational personnel and programs
- The church fails to meet pledges and budgets for denominational support
- The persistence of a "we-they" outlook or language

Things to Keep In Mind

- The relationship between a congregation and the denomination and other external entities often is built around the leadership given by the installed pastor. Therefore, when the pastor leaves there potentially is confusion about those relationships.
- The intentional interim minister's job is not to superimpose a viewpoint upon the congregation.
- The interim time is an excellent educational opportunity for the congregation to learn about the purpose and value of being part of a denominational structure.
- The Team should use multiple methods of involving the congregation.
- Let the Transition Team do the work -- the intentional interim minister should be pastor to the people and process consultant to the Team

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THINKING ABOUT THE FOCUS POINTS

"Future"

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Definition

Typically, the last focus point for the interim congregation is "Future." This is a time of "synthesis" as the Transition Team finishes the church profile, engages the congregation in developing the pastoral profile, and writes their final narrative report to the congregation. The narrative report includes a summary of the work accomplished during the interim period and the status of any recommendations that have been made during the process.

If they do not already have one, many churches now establish and train a Pastoral Relations Committee that becomes an ongoing support group for the new pastor.

The Intentional Interim Minister begins making plans for the Reflections session.

Major Issues to Consider

- Developing wide ownership of, and excitement about, the shared vision for the future
- Finalizing the narrative for the church profile
- Developing and finalizing the pastoral profile (setting clear expectations about the desired personal, professional, and leadership traits and skills of the new pastor)
- Advising the church that it is time to establish and/or activate the Pastoral Search Committee
- Working on a clean exit for the intentional interim pastor or transition consultant
- Bringing good closure to the interim period
- Assuring meaningful installation and start-up plans

Various Methods of Engaging the Congregation

- Review the: "Termination Tasks of Pastors," "Exiting Checklist for Interim Pastors," and "Information 'Survival Kit' for a New Pastor"
- Plan ways of introducing the new pastor (and accompanying family) to the congregation and wider community
- Develop a special worship service that brings good closure to the interim time
- Have interim share insights with incoming pastor
- Establish a Pastoral Relations Committee
- Outside person trained by the Center for Congregational Health conducts a review with the Intentional Interim Minister and Transition Team, and reflects on the learnings of the transition period.

Healthy Signs

- Focus is on the future
- Enthusiastic preparations for the new pastor (housing, installation, start-up)
- Clarity and consensus on desired leadership style of the new pastor
- Increasing levels of involvement and ownership in the process
- Appreciation of the interim process and leaders
- Willingness to say goodbye to the intentional interim minister
- Asking the process question: “How can we make our new Pastor and family feel welcomed and needed by our community of faith?”
- Evident energy
- Humor

Caution Signs

- Anxiety and rushing the search process
- Trying to hire the intentional interim minister as the permanent pastor
- Unrealistic or unclear expectations of the new pastor
- Inability to agree on choice of an installed pastor
- Low energy level
- Lack of humor
- Failure to issue a call
- Discouragement with the pastoral search process

Things to Keep in Mind

- The way a new minister (and accompanying family) is introduced to the congregation and the surrounding community has a crucial impact on future relationships. The Pastoral Search Committee or other organized group such as the Pastoral Relations Committee may have the direct responsibility of carrying out some portions of this work. However, the Transition Team is responsible for not letting anything “fall through the cracks”
- This focus point includes saying goodbye to the intentional interim minister. Therefore, it is important that informed and trained leadership be left behind to guide the remaining work
- The Team should use multiple methods of involving the congregation.
- Let the Transition Team do the work – the intentional interim minister should be pastor to the people and process consultant to the Team

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