

MAKING THE CHANGE



He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. -1 Corinthians 1:8-9 NRSV

Coping Strategies

Defining Grief⁴

Grief is a process inherent in transition or change. Any pastoral change and move will bring on feelings of grief and loss among the pastor and family, church congregation and community. Understanding how grief may feel to us and how it may express itself in our lives may help us cope with the emotions we will experience.

Types of Grief

Preparatory Grief: Sometimes also referred to as “anticipatory grief,” i.e. “in anticipation of an event which means loss/separation.” Preparatory grief references the possibility of an event—a move—that is likely to be known early in the process only by the pastor, pastor’s family, SPR team, District Superintendent, and Bishop. It is a time of “wondering” if it will happen and if so, what it will be like if and when it does happen.

Intense Grief: An announcement of the event “expected to happen” has occurred. That means loss/separation begins to occur and the pastor, pastor’s family and parishioners’ behavior is affected by the event. There may be open expression of feelings and thoughts which may be positive or negative or of mixed emotions. There may be withdrawal and avoidance as one begins the “grief process” and feelings begin to intensify.

Acute Grief: Experienced during the short time before and after the event of loss/separation. Most of all experiences are for a first or last time, i.e. the last council meeting, last baptism, last worship service, or the first worship service, first meetings. This time and experience is unique in that it overlaps the time before and after the move.

Subsequent Grief: The experience of “mourning” that follows the event of loss/separation. “Mourning” refers to a process of recovery and adjustment to the loss of significant relationships/experiences in one’s life. “Mourning” is a time of regaining control of and stability in emotions. This is an experience of “bringing to closure,” of letting go of what has been and welcoming what is to be.

Grief Work: The “work of grieving” any and all dynamics that inhibit or facilitate those experiences which make for grief resolution.

⁴ Adapted from East Ohio Conference of The United Methodist Church Commission on Pastoral Care & Counseling, “Move Pack: A Guide for a Good Move for Pastors & Families,” (2001).

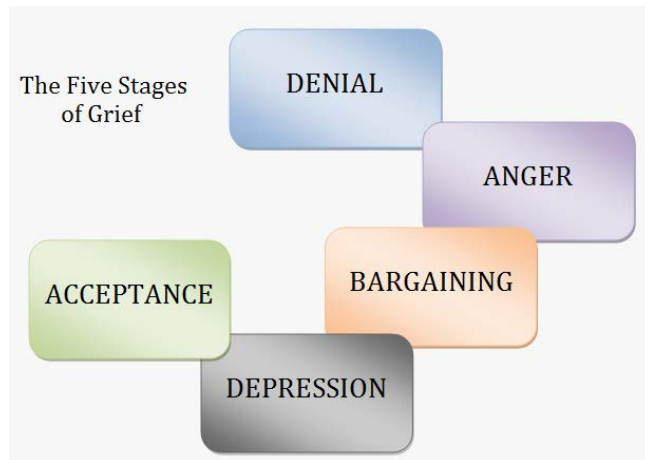
The Stages of Grief by Kübler-Ross

Denial: Characterized by phrases such as, “It’s not true. There must be some mistake!” Even when the pastor has requested the move, some of the dynamic of denial prevails.

Anger: Characterized by phrases such as, “Why me? How could this be happening?” Even when a pastor requests a move, anger is often present in the form of: “How come it had to happen this way?” “Why couldn’t something be done to make it different or better?”

Bargaining: Characterized by phrases such as, “Yes, but...” or “If only I had...” This stage involves the attempt to postpone in our mind the inevitable and may include bargaining with God and with each other. There may be wishful thinking.

Depression: Characterized by phrases such as “Yes, me.” “It really is happening,” and strong feelings of sadness, despair, sense of helplessness. This stage is likely to occur even when people are faced with a change that is positive and perhaps even exciting as well as with a change that is sad and brings clear feelings of loss.



Acceptance: Characterized by words such as, “Yes, me. It’s a real part of life.” This is the time when we have come to terms with the reality of our situation—the reality of saying goodbye in order to say hello.

Grief Awareness

- Moving is a tangible loss so allow yourself to grieve.
- The experience is cyclical and goes back and forth, in and out of the various stages.
- Grief or loss connects us to other times in our lives when we experienced loss. Pay attention to old losses as they may compound your experience of grief.
- How we experience grief can be compared to the waves of the ocean in that we cannot always anticipate how strong or how gentle each wave may be. During this ongoing process of letting go and moving forward, our emotions may be unpredictable to us.
- Goodbye rituals can help you feel and acknowledge the sadness.
- Talk with others about your grief.
- Appreciate and allow for individual styles and timing as members of our personal family and church family process their own grief. This will prevent additional stress and unnecessary pressure. Be careful not to shame anyone in your family system who may not work through the grief as quickly as others might.
- Recognize your busyness is an attempt to avoid dealing with the loss you feel. Be mindful of your grief.
- Healing from a loss or significant change requires time and compassion. Try to be patient with yourself and those around you.

Transition Strategies for Pastors⁵

Take time to process the change and all its pros and cons, real, possible and imagined. Identify possible supports for this journey. Consider the use of a journal to capture feelings, thoughts, and experiences. Give special attention to your spiritual disciplines. Access your support network to help your process grief, feelings and experiences during this transition.

Take time to reflect on your service within your current appointment. Identify areas that you think went well and areas you wish had gone differently. Identify any areas that you would like to grow in during your next appointment.

Provide opportunities to acknowledge the change in your sermons, conversations and in meetings.

- Acknowledge that a change external as in a pastor leaving or the next pastor arriving. A transition is internal, a process that occurs more slowly.

Prepare the congregation for the transition.

- A pastor can utilize some of his or her remaining time to recall some of the high points of ministry.
- A pastor can remind the local church about their focus on the mission of the church that must continue during this transition time as guests will continue to attend.
- Spend time publicly educating the congregation regarding your involvement in the lives of church members after you leave the appointment. Be clear that you will not be returning to the church for visits, weddings, funerals, or other events. By addressing this topic publicly through your words or in notes from you in a newsletter or bulletin, all will be prepared to make a place to welcome their next pastor.
- Educate and support the congregation in the grief process.

Acknowledge the grief process for yourself and your family members.

As you enter your next setting establish clear boundaries related to your schedule, renewal and self-care. Communicate these boundaries with the PPR team.

Additional resources for transition support:

- Utilize the “Good Ideas for a Move” found in this packet on pg. 17-19.
- Utilize “50 Ways to Improve Pastoral Transitions” found in this packet on pg. 24.

⁵ Adapted from East Ohio Conference of The United Methodist Church Commission on Pastoral Care & Counseling, “Move Pack: A Guide for a Good Move for Pastors & Families,” (2001).

50 Ways to Improve Pastoral Transitions⁶

Pastors moving from one church to the next need to focus on how they can effectively conclude their ministry in the church they are leaving, paving the way for their successor, and on how they can get off to a good start in their next church.

Concluding Ministry in One Setting:

Maintain good successor relations

1. Work with the congregation to prepare the way for your successor.
2. Work with your successor to provide good information about the congregation.
3. Spend significant time with your successor with an agreed-upon agenda.
4. Talk about your successor only in positive terms.
5. Avoid making comparisons between yourself and your successor.

Approach the move with a generous and graceful spirit

6. Share ownership for the move, and avoid blaming others.
7. Avoid making inappropriate use of closure to address unresolved problems.
8. Be gracious to everyone, especially those with whom you have had difficulty.

Provide good records and administrative wrap-up

9. Prepare essential lists for your successor, and be sure important files are up to date.
10. Make sure church bills are paid through the month you leave.
11. Ensure that denominational giving is up to date.
12. Never leave any unpaid personal bills in the community.
13. Do not take church records with you.

Plan for appropriate goodbyes, grief, and closure rituals

14. Provide adequate rituals to mark your leaving and the coming of your successor.
15. Find appropriate ways to say goodbye and grieve with the congregation.
16. Encourage loved ones to grieve the transition, and grieve with them.
17. Grant and ask for forgiveness where needed, and tell the people you love them.
18. Arrange personal visits and write personal notes where appropriate.

Clarify your new relationship with the church

19. Clarify in spoken and written communication your new relationship with the people.
20. Be clear that you will not be returning for pastoral roles.
21. Take time to teach the congregation about closure and boundaries.
22. Affirm love and friendship while releasing persons from pastoral relationships.

Keep working

23. Continue vital ministry, avoid emotional withdrawal, and do not initiate major new programs in the closing months.
24. Settle as many hanging difficulties as possible, including (and especially) staff difficulties.
25. Leave the parsonage and office clean and in order.

⁶ Originally found at Lewis Center's Leading Ideas: <https://www.churchleadership.com/50-ways/50-ways-to-improve-pastoral-transitions-2/>. © Copyright 2015 Lewis Center for Church Leadership. See also: The Right Start video-based training resource for clergy preparing to begin ministry in a new setting. Visit <https://www.churchleadership.com/tag/pastoral-transitions/>.

Beginning Ministry in a New Ministry Setting:

Learn about the new church and community

26. Allow 6–18 months to get to know the people and community.
27. Demonstrate willingness, and make the effort, to learn the history of the congregation.
28. Learn the mission and vision of the congregation and their place in the life of the people.
29. Study data (worship and financial statistics, community demographics, etc.) to understand the church and community.
30. Make careful assessments of strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and opportunities.

Spend time with people and build relationships

31. Make building relationships your highest priority, visiting as many people as you can.
32. Visit people with pastoral needs and also those with key leadership responsibilities.
33. Ask everyone you visit to suggest others with whom you should be talking.
34. Meet with the pastoral relations/personnel committee early and regularly.
35. Pay particular attention to pastoral care and preaching.
36. Meet community leaders including other clergy. Be visible in the community.

37. Develop a plan to get to know the people, communicate that plan, and stay faithful to it.

Be cautious about making immediate changes

38. Do not change things at first, especially worship.
39. Listen and observe with an open mind to discover strengths and needs.
40. Earn the right to change things before initiating changes.

Build trust

41. Express joy in being in your new ministry setting.
42. Be authentic, honest, and genuine.
43. Let people get to know you, and allow the congregation time to learn to trust you.
44. Focus on the congregation and its future, not your agenda.
45. If you introduce yourself in writing, have others read what you write to make sure you are not communicating unintended signals.

Honor your predecessor's ministry

46. Do not criticize the former pastor, even if criticism is warranted.
47. Honor the progress and achievements accomplished before you arrived.
48. Assure people it is all right to grieve the loss of their former pastor.
49. Honor traditions long enough to understand the positive motivation behind them.
50. Throughout it all, keep in mind: Avoid talking about your previous congregation. Do not complain, criticize, or make excessive demands. And be patient.

Single Pastor on the Move⁷

As a single person the details related to moving are for you to decide. For some, this may feel overwhelming so identify ways you can manage the possible stress by adequately planning and preparing ahead of time. You may be the first single pastor to your new church or you may be one of several single pastors to serve the church. If you are the first single pastor, be prepared to educate the congregation about the needs of a single person rather than a pastor with a spouse or family. Recognize that some congregations may need time to adjust to not having things the way they were before.

Leaving

- Acknowledge your grief as legitimate and allow space to work through the process. Face all the feelings of saying goodbye to people, places, and things in your current environment.
- Good bye rituals can help you acknowledge the loss and sadness.
- Get acquainted with the new area prior to the move by exploring online articles of the town, subscribing to local newspaper, viewing school websites, identifying local places of interests.
- Invite friends or family members to help you pack.

Arriving

- Invite individuals to help you get settled in your new setting.
- Invite people when you are ready to visit or meet for coffee or dinner. Building relationships and becoming familiar with your surroundings will increase your comfort in your new surroundings.
- Create good boundaries for your life. Ministry is a people business but save a piece of life for yourself. Remember to nurture and care for yourself.
- Create social outlets and support networks outside of the church. Building relationships and friendships outside the church is important for all clergy.
- Educate the church members that not every single person is looking for a date. Help your members realize privacy and a personal life is a vital part of an individual's life.

⁷ Ibid.

Family on the Move⁸

Members of the family may have similar or different feelings about moving. It is important to be aware that reactions to a move may surface upon hearing the news, during the move or months after the move. While you may have no experience or multiple experiences in moving, each time you move is unique as it occurs in this season of your life. You may be newly married, with children or children have grown and aren't making the move with you. You may be moving from rural setting to the suburbs. As a family. You may be searching for a home or moving into a parsonage. Whatever the case, significant change is ahead of you. Pay attention to feelings and encourage one another. Be empathetic to one another as this can be a stressful time for all family members. Remember that all members of a family grieve but do not all grieve in the same way and in the same time frame. It is important to allow each member to grieve in his or her own way about the move.

Supportive Suggestions for Supporting Spouses

- Acknowledge your spouse's feelings about the move and provide time for conversations about the upcoming changes for the family. Feelings about the move may differ between pastor and spouse.
- Support your spouse in feelings associated with leaving a job or finding a new job.
- Spouses will need space for grief work related to leaving a familiar space, leaving friendships and possibly leaving a job.
- After the move, continue conversations with your spouse to explore reactions to the move.
- Acknowledge any anxiety your spouse may experience about finding a place in the new church.
- As a pastor in a new appointment you will be filled with anticipation and will want to get involved quickly. Take time to build a home with your spouse and/or family. In the first few months be intentional in spending time at home and engaged in activities with your family to support the transition.

Supportive Suggestions for Moving with Children and Teens

- Have family meetings to talk through feelings, details of the move. Children may not voice many feelings but still provide them a space to share. Teens may be more vocal about their feelings. Listen without trying to fix things.
- Be patient and supportive through your words, gestures and actions.
- Share with the personnel at school that you will be moving so they can provide support to your children/teens and inform you of any changes in behavior.
- Visit the local library for resources about moving if you have children. Reading books together about moving can help family members identify feelings and can also initiate helpful family discussions.
- Be aware that children and teens vary in their reactions to grief and change.
 - Some possible reactions include: Behavioral changes, irritability, isolation, withdrawal, sadness, crying, clingy, inattention, somatic complaints, disrupted sleep or appetite
- Provide education about using coping skills and encourage your children/teens to use them.
- Give the children/teens an opportunity to help pack and create travel plans for any family pets.
- Provide a space for children/teens to celebrate friendships and say goodbye. Identify a plan for staying in touch with friends.

⁸ Ibid.

- Moving during middle school and high school brings its own unique challenges. This time in a teen's life is typically full of changes due to social maturity, puberty and emotional development. These typical challenges along with grief related to moving can increase stress levels for everyone.
- Visit the new school as soon as possible. Request a tour of the building and meet some of the staff. Identify the activities, sports, and clubs that are available to participate in. Allow your children/teens to ask questions.
- Help your children/teens get engaged in activities that he/she enjoy by researching prior to the move. On a visit to the new community, plan a visit to observe or participate in the activity to help with the transition.
- Provide social support in meeting new people. Practice a social interaction of meeting and greeting. Teach them questions to ask in getting to know another person. If you have shy child/teen this suggestion is especially important.
- Be mindful if your family has made multiple moves. Family members will associate previous experiences of moving to the current situation. Encourage them to be open to this experience and that the preparation for the move will support a smoother transition.
- Seek professional counseling if depression, withdrawal, or family problems begin to feel unmanageable.

Healthy Ways to Care for Self⁹⁹

During this time of transition, as a pastor you will experience many areas that can seem overwhelming at times and your ability to maintain healthy coping skills will influence your well-being. You will experience the general stress related to moving yourself and/or family. You will feel the pressure to prepare your congregation for the pastoral change. You will exhibit concern about your family members and their reactions to the move. And finally your own excitement and anticipation about the next appointment will be present. Maintaining a focus on healthy coping skills will be important during the transition time.

Physical

- Maintain good patterns for eating, sleeping, exercise and movement
- Maintain your daily or weekly routines during the transition time
- Identify and use stress reducers and if you don't have any create some
 - i.e. walking, journaling, listening to music, meditation

Emotional

- Acknowledge any and all feelings as they occur
- Identify a safe support network that you can have regular interactions with during the transition time

Psychological

- Identify thoughts about self and the work you have accomplished
- Identify expectations that you are setting for yourself in your next appointment

Spiritual

- Identify your spiritual practices and maintain them even when there are extra demands on your time
- Have regular conversations with a colleague, mentor or coach

⁹⁹ Amy Thompson, LCSW.

Self-Care Considerations

My Covenant for Balancing Ministry and Family/Friendships

- 1.) I will reserve time each day for personal devotions and exercise.
- 2.) I will be attentive to my own feelings of grief and possible disappointment that accompany the transition into my new ministry setting.
- 3.) I will have regular family meetings or discussion with significant friends about the ongoing transitions in our daily life.
- 4.) I will identify helpful resources and spiritual counseling needed for dealing with personal issues and stresses on the journey.
- 5.) I will schedule a time for rest and renewal with loved ones, both planned and unplanned.
- 6.) I will develop clear expectations with my ministry setting about what I need as a single person or married person for good self-care.
- 7.) I will remember that my family/friends are not appointed to the church: I will plan sacred times for myself and others. If I have a spouse/children, I will plan key times to be attentive to them. I will be aware of what seasons will require more of my time.
- 8.) I will look for ways to show my love and appreciation to my family and friends who know me best.
- 9.) I will build and surround myself with healthy friendships that help me to reflect “best practices.”
- 10.) I will laugh a lot with those dear to me and enjoy silent moments. I will not lose sight of opportunities with them, even with limited finances, and seek to grow spiritually together inwardly and outwardly.
- 11.) I will be the first to say “I am sorry” and “forgive me” when I have laid all my stuff on someone else because I am mad at the church or the system.
- 12.) I will reclaim continually my call to serve with visions and dreams and to respond to the needs of loved ones and the church with excellence.

The Church's Responsibility for Pastoral Care

The local church, beginning with the Board, needs to recognize their own responsibility in protecting the mental, emotional, and spiritual health of their pastor. Consider exploring additional training on Clergy Professional Boundaries at www.moumethodist.org/boundariesPPRC.

- The budget should include provision for him/her to attend one or two conference or retreats each year where the pastor can find refreshment and renewal. This should be in addition to regular vacation time, not part of it.
- Respect of the pastor's study time. Apart from an emergency, she/he should be allowed to have undisturbed blocks of time to prepare for preaching and teaching. If the pastor is weak in preaching the whole church will suffer.
- Don't demand more from the pastor than she/he can give. Pastors are human and imperfect. Pastors need your prayers and encouragement as much as you need theirs. Understand that she/he can't please everyone, and sometimes the person the pastor won't please will be you!
- Consider granting the pastor a formational and spiritual growth leave or a sabbatical (See ¶¶350, 352). Associate members or clergy members in full connection who have been serving in a full time appointment for six consecutive years, or in a less than full-time appointment equivalent to six consecutive full-time years, may be granted time away (not including regular vacation time) to seek spiritual and mental refreshment, do research or writing, travel, or pursue other activities that will "disconnect" for a time from the routine demands of ministry and provide a time for renewal. Whenever possible, the compensation level of the last appointment served before the leave should be maintained. Even Jesus realized the importance of stepping away from the ministry for a time.
- It is important for the Pastor Parish Relations team to know the pastor's schedule and support the pastor in maintaining the schedule. The pastor should have time in the schedule for sermon preparation, time in the office, time in the community and Sabbath time. Support your pastor in having some evenings during the week at home with family or with self. See also the Pastor Parish Relations Guide found in this packet on pg. 69.
- Have conversations with the pastor about self-care habits. Supporting these practices helps protect the mental, emotional and physical well-being of the pastor. A healthy pastor is essential for having a healthy congregation.

Suggestions for the First Week

- Show Up and Move In! Live in the mission field.
- Dedicate one day **during the first week** to visiting the most critical homebound or ill parishioners.
- Hold initial meeting with the Transition Team.
- Finish preparations for the listening tour (“get acquainted meetings”) – coordinating your calendar with the plans the transition team or PPRC has made for in-home listening sessions.
- Work with PPRC to organize the listening tour organize; meet the pastor, coffee’s etc. Consider the following questions to ask:
 1. What do you like best about your church?
 2. What are your dreams for the future?
 3. What would you not want changed?
 4. What do you like least about your church?
 5. If you were the new pastor, what would you do in the first three months?
- Meet with governance board and/or individual church leaders to begin learning their roles in the church.
- Set a regular pattern of staff meetings. Discover their current learning pathway and commit to regular time for prayer and scripture study together.
- Work with staff to or prepare order of worship for the next Sunday.

The First 100 Days

The first 100 days in a new appointment is a crucial time in the change-over zone. The Cabinet encourages all transitional pastors to set aside time prior to your move for a time of dedicated prayer about your new appointment. During your discernment, develop a 100-day plan.

How will you get to know your staff and your congregation?

How will you get to know your community (e.g., school superintendent, chamber of commerce officials, mayor, city council officials, police and first responders)?

What are you going to preach for the first 100 days? What are the key messages? Help your congregation get to know who you are and what you believe. Show some passion.

First 30 days: Learning and Building Personal Credibility (by: July 31)

- Get settled into your home and tending to your family's transition needs.
 - Get settled into your office and setting your routine work week.
 - Host an initial conversation with church leaders (PPRC, Lay Leader(s), Chairperson of the governance board/administrative board/church council, finance chair and/or trustee chair) regarding the current state of affairs of the church and their understanding of the immediate priorities.
 - Build high-priority relationships with leaders, influencers, those with immediate pastoral care needs, and those in the community.
 - Establish a 3-month preaching schedule.
 - Plan out the next year's PPRC schedule (it is suggested that the PPRC and pastor meet monthly for at least the first six months).
 - Begin the Listening Tour (re-read chapter 10 in *The Change-Over Zone* about establishing a listening tour). Bishop Farr's suggested questions for these meetings (See also pg. 10 in *The Necessary Nine*):
 1. What do you like best about your church?
 2. What are your dreams for the future?
 3. What would you not want changed?
 4. What do you like least about your church?
 5. If you were the new pastor, what would you do in the first three months?
 - Spend time with each staff member to get to know them personally, their ministry role, and hopes and challenges in their role. Review any staff evaluations or professional development plans (if none, begin work on establishing that process for each staff member).
 - Discover the church's stated and unstated vision for ministry.
 - Assess the style of leadership, you need to bring to the congregation.
 - Assess the congregation's health in the area of generosity. Learn the giving patterns of the church and the cultural approach to stewardship and giving. Set the period of time for a generosity campaign.
 - It's never too early to begin thinking about upcoming Invite Sundays (e.g., Promotion Sunday, Back-to-School kick-off Festival, Advent Season). What teams and leaders do you need to engage in this work?
 - Are there any "early wins" – areas that you can resolve to help cement your role as a leader? Early successes might include: _____
-

Other: _____

Second 30 Days: Seeking Some Early Wins (by August 31)

- Assess your first 30 Days. Discuss your progress with key lay leadership and submit a brief update to your DS as part of your “managing up” plan.
- Any items from the first 30 days that need to be carried over?
- Assess your team (Lay Leadership and Staff) and determining how you will lead them.
- Analyze your early judgments about the congregation for accuracy and adjusting your leadership style to your emerging understanding of the situation.
- Identify key leaders in the community. Set up times to meet with them for coffee as an introduction – ask them to assist you in learning the community. Bishop Farr’s suggested questions for these meetings:
 1. What are the needs of the community?
 2. What could our church do to be helpful?
 3. What do you know about the United Methodist Church?
- Identify an important issue that you can address that will have a tremendous impact on the congregation and their perception of your leadership if you deal appropriately with it.
- Work on ways to communicate the vision of the church and keep it before the congregation.
- Any other priorities for the second 30 days?
- Any other “early wins/successes”?
- Other: _____

Third 30 Days: Refine, Identify, Develop, and Assess (by September 30)

- Assess your first 60 days. Submit a brief update to your DS.
- Any items from the first 60 days that need to be carried over?
- Casual follow-up with the key leaders visited in the first 30 days. Ask for honesty from them in their assessment of how things are going? Any immediate concerns that need to be addressed?
- Identify resource challenges.
- Any strategies arising for finance, budgeting, connectional giving nominations, structure, and staffing?
- Have conversation with the PPRC re: personnel development.
- Establish another 3-month preaching schedule. Engage music and worship ministries in clarifying plans for Advent and Christmas worship. Set your Christmas Eve/Christmas worship times for evangelism and publicity purposes.
- Any other priorities from the second 30 days?
- Any other “early wins/successes”?
- Other: _____

First Year Priorities When Pastors Move¹⁰

By Ralph C. Watkins on April 13, 2011 [Leading Ideas](#)

How does a pastor gain a congregation's trust? How does a pastor warrant their respect? These are lessons I have learned through my own experiences with pastoral transitions.

For the first year or so of ministry, the priority must lie in being active in the life of the church by being present and actively engaging in developing this new relationship.

Presence

As a pastor becomes a part of the congregation, the pastor must guard his or her schedule to make time for congregants. The community will call, denominational loyalties will call, but for the first year or so of ministry, the priority must lie in being active in the life of the church by being present and actively engaging in developing this new relationship. This may mean that there will be an imbalance during that first year as the pastor focuses on building a relationship with the congregation. The pastor has to schedule time to be with members; visit the older saints; conduct funerals, weddings, and baptisms; offer counseling; touch the people before and after worship. This is intense relationship work that can't be done if the pastor is absent. This is emotional work that takes time and energy. There are no short-cuts; there are no substitutions for the pastor's consistent and engaged presence.

Preaching and Worship

New pastors must make preaching a priority. A key role of the shepherd of any flock is feeding the flock. The new pastor should be the lead preacher and should have the right to decide who preaches and when. During that first year, the new pastor needs to preach as many Sundays as he or she can handle. As the pastor makes preaching a priority, the congregation must give him or her time to prepare. Study and preparation are critical to quality preaching. The pastor who is overbooked and doesn't have time to prepare will not be able to preach effectively. In the African American tradition, preaching is central to the role and duties of our pastors. We expect a well-prepared word and a word that is delivered well.

Teaching

New pastors must take time to teach God's Word outside of the Sunday worship experience. The weekly Bible study is not just about the Word of God; it is also about relationships. Bible study tends to be a much smaller group than most churches see on Sunday. It is a time for the pastor to touch the people outside the pressures of Sunday and get to know them. This act of relationship-building leads to the new pastor caring for the people, praying with them, visiting them, and walking with them through their good times and bad times. In addition to Bible study, the pastor can also think about other teaching moments. Pastors can visit choir rehearsals and ministry meetings and share a word.

Pastoral Care

During that first year, the relationship between the pastor and the congregation will intensify through intentional acts of love manifested via pastoral care. Pastoral care is simply caring for the people: calling and seeing about the people in times of tragedy, celebrating with the people in times

¹⁰ This article is adapted from *Leading Your African American Church through Pastoral Transition* by Dr. Watkins, copyright © 2010 by Judson Press. Used by permission of [Judson Press](#) and available from [Amazon](#) and [Cokesbury.com](#)

of joy. New pastors have to show the congregation that they care. It is one thing for a pastor to have a good heart and quite another for that pastor to let folk know he or she loves them. When a congregation knows that their new pastor loves them, and that pastor has shown that love through tangible acts of caring, it will go a long way in moving the transition along. The new pastor has to remember that what makes the former pastor's legacy so long is relationship.

Organization and Administration

The new pastor must be brought up to speed on where the organizational structure of the church is and where it is going. People are looking to the pastor to lead and order the church. A new pastor must first know what was and what is, and then must decide with his or her leaders what ought to be. A good administrator is not birthed, but rather is made by paying attention to what is going on, seeking answers to questions, and sharing leadership with knowledgeable people who can cover the new pastor's weaknesses and make the work of the ministry happen. The new pastor has to balance the administrative task of the church in such a way that it points the church toward its future.

Leave the Old Church Behind

New church pastors must accept that they are not the pastor at the old church anymore. A minister can't pastor two churches. The new pastor has to pour his or her energies into the new congregation. Let the old church go. Don't take calls or entertain complaints about the successor. Don't go back and do funerals. At some point, the new pastor needs to walk with the members through times of grief as part of pastoral care. The principle here is simple: move on, and let the people go, and help them move on. A pastor can't move on and the former congregation can't move on if the pastor doesn't move out.