

Critical Conversation Questions for Pastors in Transition

This question bank is designed for transition conversation meetings between the incoming and outgoing pastors, along with key lay leaders, such as the SPRC Chair.¹

COVID-19 has greatly impacted the church so certain questions will need to be adapted for our unique season.

COVID-19 RESPONSE QUESTIONS

1. How did the church respond to COVID-19 when in-person events were suspended?
 - a. Worship
 - b. Staying Connected/Discipling
 - c. Serving the community (e.g. food ministries, sewing masks)
2. Current plans or processes for relaunching worship and ministries, post-quarantine:
 - a. Worship & Sacraments adjustments for sanitation and social distancing
 - b. Plans for sanitation of church facilities
 - c. Children's Ministries
 - d. Day Care Ministries
 - e. Ministries to older adults and those most vulnerable
 - f. Continuation of online ministries
3. How has financial stewardship been impacted by the COVID shutdown?
4. Does the congregation have a plan on capitalizing on any digital engagement? How is that plan progressing?
5. The COVID Crisis has created enormous barriers for pastors as they seek to get to know congregation members. What is the best way for a new pastor to build relationships in the church & mission field during this unprecedented season? Think in terms of:
 - a. Elected church leadership
 - b. Staff and key unpaid ministry team leaders
 - c. "Pillar saints" or unofficial leaders of the congregation
 - d. Tenured members and those new to the congregation
 - e. Homebound and members in care facilities
 - f. Families with youth and children
 - g. Community leaders
 - h. What media platforms technological tools, newsletters, etc., can the new pastor use to relationally engage different subsets of the church and community?
6. What decisions have been made to adapt or cancel summer ministries, such as in-person VBS?
7. The "pause" to in-person ministries offers an opportunity for reflection as assessment. What ministries, events, or ministry teams will need to be discontinued permanently, post-COVID?
8. What ministries and leaders thrived during the quarantine period?
9. What families have experienced job loss due to these COVID-related economic conditions?
10. What families lost loved ones due to COVID-19?
11. Have any memorial services been delayed and the new pastor will need to make arrangements with the family?

¹ This resource has been adapted and expanded upon from the excellent appendix found in *Your Best Move: Effective Leadership Transition for the Local Church* by Robert Kaylor, Asbury Seedbed Publishing.

ORGANIZATION

1. Describe any organizational process or structure that is unique to this congregation.
2. How have Charge Conference documents historically been completed and processed?
3. Are any staff positions currently vacant?
4. Are any staff changes needed or expected?
5. What agencies or resources are available for those who may call with needs for emergency food, clothing, shelter, or assistance?
6. Is there a ministerial association in the community?
7. Provide contact information for leaders.

FINANCIAL

1. What is the normal annual stewardship process at this church?
2. Who is in charge of promoting stewardship in the church?
3. What is the number of pledging and non-pledging households?
4. What is the average financial contribution of each member family to the church?
5. What are the purchasing restrictions and policies for pastor/staff/committees?
6. What is the pastor's historical role in stewardship campaigns?
7. Does the church have a permanent endowment fund? What is it used for and how is it funded?
8. Are there any upcoming significant financial issues or significant facility needs?

TECHNOLOGY

1. Describe the church's computer. Does the church have internet and wireless capability?
2. Is the pastor provided with a computer? What kind?
3. Does the church communicate with the congregation primarily by email?
4. Does the church have a web page & social media accounts and, if so, who maintains them?
5. What are the appropriate passwords the pastor needs to know?
6. How will the pastor's email be set up?
7. Who knows about the church's membership and financial software?

COMMUNICATIONS

1. What is the church's primary method of communication with its members?
2. What percentage of the church membership uses electronic communication (email, text, internet, etc.)?
3. How often does the church newsletter come out? How is it distributed? What does the pastor need to prepare for the newsletter? What are the deadlines?
4. How does the church communicate with the community? What kind of outside advertising does the church do?

MISSION FIELD ENGAGEMENT

1. Are there any significant church controversies?
2. Are there any significant community/neighborhood controversies? How is the church currently involved or not involved?
3. How would you describe the congregational culture and "DNA":
 - a. Understanding of and relationship to the mission field
 - b. How the congregation makes decisions
 - c. Use of the church facility by members and the community
 - d. Unique ministry niche or narrative in the community

COMMUNITY / NEIGHBORHOOD COTTAGE MEETINGS FOR THE NEW PASTOR

1. What is the best way for a new pastor to build relationships in the congregation and community?
2. What is the status for planned cottage meetings or other gatherings for the intentional forming of relationships?
3. Who are the point people on SPRC (or other group) gathering the meetings and what is their contact information?

WORSHIP

1. Who is historically involved in planning weekly worship?
2. What are the times of all the worship services?
3. Are any new services being planned?
4. What is the role of clergy and laity at each service?
5. What is the average worship attendance at all services? Is it increasing or decreasing? Why do you think that is happening?
6. What is the role of children and youth in worship? Is there children's worship during the main worship services? Is there a children's message in the service? Who does the children's message?
7. What styles of worship are currently being offered?
8. How is the bulletin prepared? Who is involved? What is the timeline for completion of the bulletin each week?
9. How does the church conduct the sacraments? When is communion offered and by what means?
10. Are there annual ecumenical community worship events? When?
11. Who completes copyright licensing reports?

PASTORAL CARE

1. What families are currently experiencing loss, illness, or special needs?
2. Who are the homebound members? Is there a regular ministry in place for them?

BUILDING

1. How are building items and maintenance handled? Who orders supplies?
2. Is there a custodian? Contract or staff? What are his/ her hours?
3. What community groups regularly use the building? When?

CHILDCARE OR RELATED NONPROFITS

1. How does the childcare ministry relate to the church (operates under church's taxpayer ID, separately incorporated)? Share about the relationship, funding, and how it is managed.
2. Are there any nonprofits "run" or attached to the church? Share about the relationship, funding, and how it is managed.