

The Ministry Relay

5 Essential Conversations for Pastoral Transitions

Congregation:

Conversation 1: Worship and Congregational Life

1. What are the traditions and styles of each worship service?
2. What are the attendance trends for each service?
3. Have there been any recent controversies related to worship?
4. What important worship traditions should be maintained?
5. How does worship vary seasonally or for special services?
6. Who is involved in planning worship and selecting music?
7. What is the role of clergy and laity in each service?
8. How are children and youth involved in worship?
9. How would you describe the congregation's warmth to one another and newcomers?
10. What is the current morale of the church?
11. How open is the congregation to change?
12. What is the theological and political diversity of the congregation?

Conversation 2: Spiritual Formation and Pastoral Care

1. What adult education programs are offered, and who leads them?
2. Describe the children's education program (Sunday school, children's church, midweek programs).
3. What is the status of the youth program?
4. What are the congregation's expectations for pastoral care and visitation?
5. Is there a lay care or visitation team, and how does it function?
6. Who are the current homebound or shut-in members?
7. Who are the members who have died in the past year?
8. Which families are currently experiencing significant loss, illness, or needs?
9. Are there any unusual expectations of the pastor?
10. Who are likely to be important allies for a new pastor?
11. Are any key volunteer leaders in danger of burnout?
12. Who may have gifts that are being underused?

Conversation 3: Stewardship, Finance, and Administration

1. What are the church's fundraising approaches?
2. What are the current financial trends and issues?
3. Describe the normal stewardship process and the pastor's role.
4. How many pledging and non-pledging households are there?
5. Does the church have an endowment fund, and how is it used?
6. What is the role of the church board/council?
7. Describe the committee structure and any recent changes.

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8. Are there any facility usage policies or issues to be aware of?
9. How are keys and building access handled?
10. How are maintenance issues reported and supplies ordered?
11. What are the current custodial arrangements?
12. Which community groups use the church building?

Conversation 4: Staff, Technology, and Communications

1. What is the current staff structure, and what are the job descriptions?
2. Are there any staff evaluation processes in place?
3. Have there been any recent hires or terminations?
4. Are any staff positions currently vacant or expected to change?
5. Describe the church's computer network and hardware.
6. Is there a church website, and who maintains it?
7. What critical passwords and accounts need to be transferred?
8. What are the primary internal communication methods, and what percentage is electronic?
9. How often is the church newsletter published and distributed? What is the pastor's role?
10. How does the church advertise and communicate with the community?
11. Who are the most influential members, officially and unofficially?
12. Who are the "saints" who will go above and beyond to support the church?

Conversation 5: Transitions and Looking Forward

1. Are there any potential "landmines" or sensitive issues from the church's history?
2. Is anyone openly angry with the church or previous pastor?
3. How can the incoming pastor navigate relationships with staff and lay leaders?
4. What is the church's mission and vision?
5. Are there any new initiatives or programs on the horizon?
6. What personal lessons have you learned during your tenure?
7. What advice would you give for a successful transition?
8. How can the incoming pastor best support the congregation during this change?
9. What are your hopes for the future of this church?
10. What are the most important things for the incoming pastor to focus on in their first 90 days?
11. Are there any specific challenges or opportunities you foresee for the incoming pastor?
12. How can the outgoing and incoming pastors maintain a healthy relationship during and after the transition?