

A Guide to Pastoral Endings

**For QB Ministers
and Churches**

**Assisting local QB churches
to facilitate a healthy pastoral
ministry ending.**



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*Permission is granted for local QB churches to
reproduce this book in its entirety.*

INTRODUCTION

When a Pastor resigns or has given notice of a resignation, often the immediate thoughts of the congregation and the leadership are consumed with how they will find a new pastor. This is natural and important and is the subject of our QB Guide to Pastoral Transitions. However, there is another important consideration that leadership and indeed the exiting pastor should make and that is concerning ensuring a healthy conclusion.

In this guide, there are a number of suggestions, to assist local church leaders develop healthy processes during these concluding stages.

At the outset we want to emphasise a number of highly important elements.

1. The weeks and months leading up to the conclusion of a pastor will be accompanied by high levels of anxiety for members of the congregation, leadership, staff as well as the pastor. In some cases, these may be as a result of unfulfilled expectations, disappointments, regrets, conflicts or even feelings of failure. It is important to seek to minimise this anxiety and consider the fears and emotions of all those involved.
2. Trusting the Lord is central throughout these times. For the future of the pastor leaving and for the future of the church that remains.
3. Time of transition require an intentionality to capture important information and organisational history and knowledge that could otherwise be easily lost.
4. Times of transition provide a wonderful opportunity to look back and celebrate what God has done in the past.
5. In looking back, there is also an opportunity to capture important learnings that will assist the church into the future by becoming the best expression of Christ's local body that it can be.
6. We recognise that not all endings are celebrations or filled with joy. Sometimes, endings are hard and filled with disappointment and even conflict. In these situations, it is important to seek reconciliation and to work towards amicable endings. We are all part of one body in Christ and will continue to serve our Lord together in this life and the next.

Some of the contents and ideas for this manual have been sourced from:
Presbytery of New Hope, Presbyterian Church (North Carolina, USA)
Jim Baker, Sacred Structures at www.sacredstructures.org

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UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES IN THIS PROCESS GUIDE

1. *The Local Church will benefit by good concluding processes.*
The local church is the main beneficiary of the processes in this guide by capturing important information about the church that would otherwise be lost when their pastor leaves. They are the ones who should direct the processes described.
2. *The Pastor concluding pastor will benefit from good concluding processes.*
Good processes will allow the Pastor to plan well for their conclusion. This will ensure that proper handovers are completed and the pastor will leave without regrets or loose ends. With a good final review, they will be provided with useful information that can help them continue to develop.
3. *Other QB churches will also benefit by good concluding processes.*
When a pastor finishes well, they are optimally positioned to start at another church in a positive and healthy way. The work that a local church does in reviewing a pastor who is finishing can provide useful information to help other churches discern whether the pastor is the right pastor for them.
4. *The best time for pastors to share concerns is when they occur.* Churches should make sure that they provide regular and multiple opportunities engage with staff through reviews, feedback and surveys and not wait till an exit interview.
5. *An exit interview process should be voluntary and willingly entered into by both the local church leadership and the pastor.* While it is acknowledged that there are specific benefits for churches and pastors in carrying out a healthy exit interview process, this should be a process that is entered into voluntarily and without compulsion. There may be occasionally situations where conclusions are not healthy and to undertake an exit interview may cause more damage than good. In these cases, both parties should come to an agreement about an appropriate exit process and may choose to engage an external party to conduct such an interviews if relationships are not healthy.

LOCAL CHURCH EXIT INTERVIEW WITH THE PASTOR

There are a number of benefits of the local church leadership conducting an exit interview with a departing pastor including

- Enabling the local church leadership to identify opportunities for improvement within the church and staff culture.
- Helping to capture a vision for the church and its ministry that the pastor had curated over their tenure.
- Providing an opportunity to affirm the pastor and thank them for their faithful service and celebrate God's goodness.
- Identifying any relationships that may require restoration or reconciliation before the pastor's departure.
- Identifying any disappointments, hurts or offenses that the pastor or his family may be carrying and seek to heal these hurts in appropriate ways.
- Affirming the pastor's strengths and identifying areas that the Pastor should seek to grow further in to ensure future ministries are even more fruitful than their current one.
- Helping the Pastor, their spouse and family to reflect on their ministry and bring a healthy closure for them.
- Setting some boundaries for future involvement in church activities by the departing minister.

An exit interview may be conducted by the leadership team as a whole or by a subcommittee of the leadership team at a place and time that has been mutually agreed upon. If it is expected that there will be some challenging things raised in the interview, a third party (such as the QB Regional Minister or the QB Director of Pastoral Services or QB Director of Church Health Services) can be invited to come in to conduct the interview. It should be undertaken a few weeks prior to the date of conclusion.

While interviews should be informal and pastoral in nature, the salient points should be recorded and a report of the interview should be written and placed in pastor's file at the local church. It is suggested that one member of the interview committee be delegated the task of taking detailed notes and writing the report.

The key to a successful exit interview is adopting a listening posture. This is not a time for debating or dumping on individual people, but about hearing, listening and understanding. The departing pastor is sharing opinions, but it is important to guard against encouraging negativity or feeding existing hurt. Specifically, the interview team should avoid

- Avoid asking questions about specific people, instances, or issues. Keep the conversation professional and work-related. Avoid personal issues.
- Avoid offering your own opinions. While the departing pastor may have some negative things to say, the interviewing panel should listen without agreeing or disagreeing with the perspective offered. Defensiveness will not contribute to the process in a healthy way.
- Avoid gossip and slander. The conversation should focus on the church and the pastor's ministry.
- Avoid any discussions about potential future terminations or reviews of other staff members.
- Avoid trying to convince the employee to change their mind and stay in their current job.

The leadership team conducting an exit interview should prepare themselves to hear criticism and should not become defensive. Remember that the purpose of the interview is to capture things that might help the church become better in the future. Remember also that what is being heard is an opinion and is probably not the entire story. Work to end the exit interview meeting on a positive note by wishing your pastor success in their new endeavour and closing the interview graciously in prayer.

It is important to also agree that the information shared is shared in confidence and that in the interests of honest and open sharing, the information gleaned from this interview will not be shared in a future reference check and that no feedback shared will be used against them.

It is also worth inviting the pastor's spouse to be involved.

Some questions that may be asked in an exit interview are included in Appendix 1

FINAL REVIEWS WITH THE PASTOR & CHURCH LEADERSHIP

QB is positioned to support the local church in the transition period between pastorates and support the departing pastor in their own personal and ministry transition.

When becoming aware of a transition, QB will request that the local leadership and the departing pastor reflect on their previous pastoral tenure by way of two simple reports completed by the departing pastor and the leadership team respectively. These are normally completed prior to the conclusion of the pastor. They should be returned to QB and if deemed necessary, they may be followed up by an interview to garner further information.

These reports help to identify when further support or assistance may be required for either party to process the conclusion and transition in a healthy way. They also help to inform recommendations that QB might make to local churches who are seeking a new pastor and to pastors who are seeking a new appointment in a church.

The information received can help support to churches by

- giving an opportunity to debrief about the previous pastoral appointment and consider what the church requires in the next season.
- helping the church leadership to process difficult endings.
- providing an opportunity to receive feedback about a pastor's ministry from those who have been its recipients.
- helping churches develop a vision for the future through church reviews and interim processes.
- clarifying what are the priorities and opportunities for the next season of ministry at the local church.
- providing support and advice in choosing a transition pathway for the church.
- guiding churches and their search teams through transition processes
- recommending pastors for consideration for interim and future pastoral roles at the church.
- bringing a sense of closure for the church (and the pastor) with respect to that pastoral call.

The information received can help support for pastors by

- helping debrief the previous pastoral appointment.
- helping departing pastors to process difficult endings.
- helping pastors to identify development opportunities that would be helpful before future appointments.
- helping pastors to find new ministry appointments that are suited to their giftings, personality and capacity.
- bringing a sense of closure for the pastor (and the church) with respect to that pastoral call.

The reports for the Local Church Leadership and the Departing Pastor are contained in Appendix 2 and Appendix 3 respectively.

APPENDIX 1 – TYPICAL QUESTIONS AND CONVERSATIONS FOR THE LOCAL CHURCH LEADERSHIP EXIT INTERVIEW WITH A DEPARTING PASTOR.

Below are some questions that may be explored in an exit interview with a departing pastor.

Questions about the Pastor's Ministry

1. What were your hopes and dreams for this position when you came into this ministry position? How have they been met? How have you been disappointed?
2. What has been the high point of your ministry here?
3. What have been the biggest challenges? Disappointments?
4. What caused you to start looking for a new job, or caused you to be receptive to a new offer?
5. If you could begin this ministry again, what would you do differently?
6. What have you learned – about God, about yourself, about ministry? How has this ministry refined your ministry calling?
7. Are there any fractured relationships which need to be restored?
8. How is your spouse and family feeling about the changes?

Questions about the Pastor's relationship with the Church

9. How would you describe the health of this church? What positive and / or negative patterns exist in this church that need to be changed.
10. What are the strengths and the areas for growth in the present lay leadership team?
11. What are the strengths and the areas for growth in the present Pastoral / Staff team?
12. How would you describe the congregation's relationship to the denomination? Positive and fruitful? Neutral and indifferent? Negative and resentful? Why?
13. What issues and challenges continue to face the congregation you are leaving?

Questions about the future

14. What goals do you think the leadership team or interim minister might have for working with the church after you leave?
15. What do you believe God's plans are for this church?
16. What are the things that need to be done to realise these things?
17. What sort of pastoral giftings will be helpful to achieve these things?
18. What advice would you give to the next pastor?
19. What advice would you give to the this leadership team?
20. How can we make this church a better place to minister for the next pastor?
21. What help could QB provide to the church into the future?
22. What key pieces of information need to be handed over to the leadership and staff before you leave?

Important conversations to have with the departing pastor about healthy boundaries

- The QB Code of Conduct defines some expectation for departing pastors. All parties should be made aware of these expectations.
- The Departing pastor should not attend the church for an agreed period (suggestion of at least 12 months) after the start of the new pastor to allow them to establish their ministry. They should not return as regular attendees without a conversation with the new pastor.
- The Departing pastor should not return to perform pastoral functions (e.g. weddings, funerals, etc) without the permission of the new pastor.
- The Departing pastor should seek to loving put boundaries in place to ensure that congregation members do not seek pastoral care or other ministry from them.
- All financial obligations must be fulfilled before the date of conclusion with an agreement about how long exempt benefits accounts will be accessible.
- The Pastor should archive all relevant files, email correspondence including key personal and pastoral care files for the use of future staff.
- The Pastor should provide handover documentation to key leaders that are assuming ministry responsibilities, login credentials for email and other accounts, as well as handing back keys, etc.
- The departing pastor should refrain from negative conversations about what has happened in their previous ministry, about past or future church leadership or leadership decisions or about the leadership of the future interim or pastor.
- Decisions should be made about how long the Pastor's exempt benefits account, email account and other account access is to be made available to the departing pastor.

APPENDIX 2 – CONCLUDING MINISTRY REPORT - LOCAL CHURCH LEADERSHIP’S REFLECTION.



When a pastor has indicated they will be resigning, the local church leadership should complete this preliminary report as part of their reflection on the previous season and return this to QB at registration@qb.org.au. This report will not be shared with the departing pastor, but if it raises issues that are worth discussing with the pastor, the leadership team is encouraged to seek an opportunity to raise these with their pastor before they departs.

The information received will be used to evaluate the previous pastoral tenure for the purposes of supporting the church through the transition and into the next season of ministry as well as providing information that can help QB support the departing pastor on appropriate next steps for their ministry.

There is an option that can be initiated by either the leadership or QB to follow this report up with a face-to-face conversation if deemed appropriate.

Church : _____

Name of Concluding Pastor : _____

Church Leadership Team Members contributing to this report : _____

Key contact on the Church Leadership Team :

Name : _____

Phone : _____ Email : _____

Key contact on the Search Committee (if known):

Name : _____

Phone : _____ Email : _____

Date of Conclusion of Pastoral Ministry : _____

Date of Report : _____

We, the leadership team would appreciate a face-to-face meeting with a representative of QB to discuss this report.

We, the leadership team would appreciate assistance from QB in the transition period and the process of appointing a new pastor

5) Please provide an overview of what you envisage your call process to look like at this stage.

Please reflect on the following questions related to the ministry of your departing pastor ...

1) What have been the main contributions of your departing pastor to the ministry of your church?

2) What are the ministry giftings and strengths of your departing pastor?

3) What would you envisage would be the perfect role or ministry appointment as the next step for your departing pastor? Why?

(Continued over)

4) Have there been any notable difficulties in the relationship between the pastor and leadership or congregation in the last season? Please describe these and what you would desire to be an appropriate response.

5) Do you have any ongoing concerns about the concluding Pastor continuing in ministry? If yes, please elaborate.

Other Comments / Notes ...

APPENDIX 3 – CONCLUDING MINISTRY REPORT - CONCLUDING PASTOR’S REFLECTION .



When a pastor has indicated they will be resigning, they should complete this preliminary report as part of their reflection on the previous season and return this to QB at registration@qb.org.au. This report will not be shared with the leadership of the local church, but if it raises issues that are worth discussing with the leadership, the departing pastor is encouraged to seek an opportunity to raise these with their church leadership team before they depart.

The information received will be used to evaluate the previous pastoral tenure for the purposes of supporting the pastor through the transition and into the next season of ministry as well as providing information that can help QB support the local church on appropriate next steps for their ministry future.

There is an option that can be initiated by either the departing pastor or QB to follow this report up with a face-to-face conversation if deemed appropriate.

Church : _____

Name of Concluding Pastor : _____

Key contact on the Church Leadership Team :

Name : _____

Phone : _____ Email : _____

Key contact on the Search Committee (if known):

Name : _____

Phone : _____ Email : _____

Date of Conclusion of Pastoral Ministry : _____

Date of Report : _____

I would appreciate a face-to-face meeting with a representative of QB to discuss this report.

5) What boundaries are you planning to put in place to help you disengage from your pastoral responsibilities and the congregation disengage from their reliance on you in a healthy manner?

6) How might QB support your church better in the transition period? In the next season of ministry?

7) Do you have any ongoing concerns about the future of the Church you are leaving?

Please reflect on the following questions related to your ministry ...

1) What have been the main contributions you have made to your church over your tenure?

(Continued over)

2) What are your ministry giftings and strengths?

3) How have you seen God grow and develop you and your ministry over your pastoral tenure?

4) What is the reason you feel led to step away from ministry at this church at this present time?

5) What would you envisage the perfect role or ministry appointment be as you consider your next step in ministry? Why?

6) What concerns do you have about the transition period?