

UNHEALTHY CHURCH BOARDS

BRINGING HEALTH TO UNHEALTHY MINISTRIES

For Churches in Transition

#2 in a series

INTERIM PASTOR MINISTRIES

STRENGTHENING CHURCHES DURING PASTORAL TRANSITION FOR GREATER EFFECTIVENESS

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PREFACE

IPM is grateful for the difficult, honest and necessary work of Dr. Dennis Baker, Dr. David C. Fisher and Dr. John Vawter on this training manual to help interim pastors navigate and minister to unhealthy church boards. We asked the three men to develop this material because of the need among our interim pastors and because the first manual Dennis and John did for us on the training of church boards proved to be so very helpful to our IPM ministry. Dennis is a long-time friend and networking associate of IPM. David is an experienced and well-respected interim pastor for IPM. John is an IPM certified interim pastor. All three are seasoned veterans and effective ministers in the arena of transitional church ministry.

Dennis has his MDiv from Western Seminary, MA from Denver Seminary and DMin from Talbot School of Theology. In addition to pastoring in Oregon, Colorado, Massachusetts and Minnesota, he ministered as a Regional Executive Director and the National Director of CBAmerica. He has consulted and coached nearly 500 churches in transition with 15 different denominations plus serving as the intentional interim pastor in four churches.

David earned his MDiv from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and his PhD from Southern Seminary. He has pastored since 1970 in Washington, Indiana, Minnesota, Boston and Brooklyn. His pastoral experience is vast in that churches he pastored ranged from 300 to 2000. He has become a trusted interim pastor for IPM. His book, **The 21st Century Pastor** (Zondervan), is a bestseller and often a text book for seminary pastoral theology classes. He has been an adjunct professor at seven seminaries.

John has his MDiv from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and DMin from Bethel Seminary. After serving with CRU for ten years in England and the Pacific Northwest, he pastored in Minnesota and Arizona. He served as President of Western Seminary and Phoenix Seminary. He was the intentional interim pastor in nine churches and consulted with many others. He is also the author/co-author of six books and a number of published articles in Christian journals. He has taught DMin classes on leadership at seven seminaries.

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INTRODUCTION

Jesus' promise, "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18), is the foundation upon which all reflection on the church and the work of the church must be grounded. The Church is Christ's, not ours. Leadership in His Church must be grounded in His character and teaching.

It is also clear that Jesus entrusted His disciples, soon to be Apostles, with leadership in His church. "You [Apostles] will be my witnesses..." (Acts 1:8). Wherever the Apostles founded churches, they appointed qualified converts who were entrusted with the life and health of Christ's Church. The Pastoral Epistles are a manual for leadership in Christ's Church. The work of church leadership is a high office requiring Christ's character. The work of Christ's leaders must always reflect the excellence required for anything done in His name.

Unfortunately, too many church leaders and church boards fail to lead in a way that reflects Christ's character or the excellence God's work requires. Almost always, such failure is a consequence of not understanding or obeying Biblical leadership. Central issues like the unity of the Spirit and Fruit of the Spirit get lost in the details of management, personal agendas and conflict. More than one effective leader in business has come to recognize that leadership in the church is fundamentally different from leadership in the secular world. The Church is Christ's and everything done in leading His Church must be done Christ's way and in the spirit of Christ.

Interim Pastor Ministries (IPM) has identified this failure of leadership. In fact, many, if not most, of the churches IPM serves suffer from church conflict that usually is the result of leadership failure.

Much of the work of the Interim Pastor is training church boards and healing church conflict. IPM asked Dennis Baker and John Vawter to produce a manual for effective board leadership. That manual is titled, **Church Board Training Manual for Churches in Transition** and is available by request from IPM.

This manual flows out of the first manual and addresses the problem of unhealthy church boards. Interim Pastors work closely with the board of the church and, often, that board is an unhealthy part of an unhealthy church.

- ***Note: We will use the word "board" for sake of clarity. Your governing "board" may be named the elder board, the board of deacons, the session, the vestry, the council, the overseers, the stewards, the pastor parish committee, leadership council/board/team, etc.***

This manual begins with the value of and critical need for trained and competent intentional interim pastors. The manual then moves to an analysis of unhealthy church boards, identifying

12 types of unhealthy boards along with specific strategies for working with and transforming such boards.

Part Two of the manual is a toolkit of resources that will help interim pastors in their work with church boards.

It is an honor to collaborate with IPM as a facet of their training process. We believe that under the Lordship of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit this manual will help produce healthier church boards and therefore healthier churches that pursue the mission of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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1. THE VALUE OF AND CALL TO INTERIM MINISTRY

The role of interim pastor is a high, strategic, honorable and necessary calling. Often the interim pastor is called “Transitional Senior Pastor.” All interim work is “transitional,” bridging the gap between pastors, while preparing the congregation for the next chapter in its life of ministry. Such work requires keen diagnostic skills in order to assess the spiritual and corporate condition of the congregation. The assessment of the history, current and past issues and potential lays the foundation for a new positive chapter of refocused and revitalized ministry.

Transitional work also requires the ability to discern what needs to be done in the short-term to prepare the congregation for its next pastor. The transition is also an opportunity to make changes necessary for the church to repair damage, change behaviors and alter non-productive ministries. Board leadership is critical for moving a congregation forward during the interim period. Interim pastors must be willing to move the board toward that healthier God-honoring ministry future.

Interim ministry is not for everybody. Specific skills are required and a call to such courageous ministry is necessary. Spiritual, emotional and physical resilience are prerequisites. It is a high, holy calling but it is not easy work. As Carey Nieuwhof declared, “Please understand, I know the local church is not perfect. But I honestly do believe the promise of the local church is greater than the problems of the local church.” We agree!

Interim pastors inherit a congregation’s past and live with its present. While most churches begin in healthy ways, occasionally churches are started for the wrong reasons. We have seen strong-willed people disagree with their pastor or church leaders and instead of working to resolve the conflict go start a new church. We are convinced this is not systemically healthy. But it is reality. And, as Peter Wagner used to say, “God loves His illegitimate children as much as He loves His legitimate children.” Too often congregations experience internal strife and division. Such unaddressed conflict is unhealthy – and unbiblical. These realities affect church board behavior and make the work of the interim pastor difficult. Churches that start in conflict have control issues. Such division creates a toxic corporate culture that is baked into its behavior. It becomes part of the church’s corporate DNA/culture. Conflict and division, along with anger and unresolved relational issues, continue in the church’s ongoing life as a default behavior. Thus, unresolved anger, conflict, division, bad board/congregational behavior, etc., negatively affect congregational life and board behavior. Such churches need a dramatic intervention led by the interim pastor that results in genuine repentance.

Even then the church often reverts to that default position when the next crisis occurs. A very experienced and successful interim pastor used to remind the board at a strong and large church that past conflict/blame default behavior was a present danger lying just under the surface. That is how they learned to behave. They had to change their behavior and develop a game plan in order to prepare for their next pastor and ministry future.

Most churches start for the right Biblical reasons – to help people grow in faith in Christ and to come to faith in Christ. Nevertheless, the reality is that many churches lose their “ministry-edge” and their faith-walk, and, thus, begin to lose core ministry effectiveness. Sometimes board members get at odds with one another. Then their discussions, treatment of one another and their decisions do not reflect the Golden Rule, do not honor Christ and do not lead the church to greater ministry effectiveness.

Such unhealthy churches will devolve into ever deepening conflict and division. In extreme cases the conflict leads to the pastor leaving or being forced to leave. The results of conflict and pastoral separation have deep, unhealthy consequences. We have experienced the left-over anger, conflict and division along with the demoralizing effect such conflict has on church boards and congregations. These consequences must be recognized by the interim pastor and dealt with during the transition period. Interim ministry stretches and enlarges the soul of the interim pastor. It may become draining and painful. But it is worth it because she is Christ’s Church, His Bride.

Any church board can grow stale, egos can get in the way and faith-growing ministry is set aside. In some cases the past becomes an idol and leaders will hold onto it even though present ministry is ineffective. Dennis Baker says it this way: “Every social system breeds its own set of sins. You have to be strong to swim against the current they generate. And if you get healthy enough to recognize what is happening and refuse to go along with it anymore, the system will turn and attack you. You will be left with the choice of either leaving the group and its dysfunctional system or being victimized by it.” (Quoted by John Vawter in **Uncommon Graces: Christlike Responses to A Hostile World**, NavPress, p. 26).

We have seen church leaders, pastors, and boards create such an idol of the past. Decisions suggested were rejected and these leaders turned on the one who suggested ministry changes. The ministry that honors Christ is not based on fear – fear of the past or fear of the future. Fear of the past includes retrenching and making certain a group does not make the mistakes it made in the past. Speaker Les Brown says it well: “Too many of us are not living our dreams because we are living our fears.” A life of faith for the future is not controlled by past mistakes—although we should learn from them. The Apostle Paul summarizes his journey and God’s framework in Philippians 3:12-16, *“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me....But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”*

2. KNOW YOURSELF

Interim pastoring is not for the timid or faint-hearted. Intentional interim pastors need to have the capacity, spiritual maturity and emotional depth for such a work, especially when that work involves a difficult board. It is exhausting and spiritually draining work. It is VERY important that the interim pastor know himself. If the interim pastor is conflict averse or reluctant to do intervention, he cannot succeed in many, if not most, interim ministry positions.

Interim pastoring also is not for those who lack patience. We think of the three of us writing this manual. One is very patient, understanding and forbearing. One is less so but sizes up situations very quickly and intentionally endeavors to help both people and churches grow. The third is the most impatient, gives less rope to difficult people and is quicker to give up on people and solve the problem by getting them off the board and out of the church. He has discovered this does not help those problem board members grow in the Lord at all. But we have all seen board members change or decide they should not be on the board. Thus, it is VERY important for the interim pastor to know what he can tolerate, handle, etc. And, it is important to know how to handle problem board members in a Christ-like manner. We agree with the philosophy of IPM that the interim pastor remain in the position until the new pastor arrives. In this spirit, we know of one successful interim pastor who was advised never to stay more than six to eight months because his impatience level was too high. Thus, with his lack of patience he might not qualify for IPM ministry.

In addition to knowing what he can tolerate, handle, etc. it is important for the interim pastor to know his level of discernment and be sensitive to the real meaning that lies beneath words and behavior. This includes the ability to “read” groups. Dan Reiland says, “If you can’t read the room, then you can’t lead the room.” Therefore, the interim pastor needs to be aware of personality types, idolization of the past, personal conflict, board history and an unwillingness to follow the Spirit’s leading into the future. For some people any suggested change is interpreted as a negative commentary on what they or the church have done in the past. Therefore, they are unable to ask if the Spirit of God is leading toward a refocused ministry; they respond with a totally emotional response. They will resist any suggested changes. (See Dan Reiland’s most helpful article, “If You Can’t Read the Room, You Can’t Lead the Room” in the **Important Training Resources** section.)

The role of the interim pastor is more that of an internist or surgeon rather than a chaplain or ministry maintainer. Issues in the church and on the board can paralyze the growth of the ministry and the blessing of God. Part of the interim pastor’s assignment and responsibility is to get the church back on the ministry track of Christ’s Great Commission. We remember the words of a wise and experienced pastor who told a friend who was a church member but in deep trouble, “I can be your friend or I can be your counselor. But I cannot be both because if I am your counselor, I have to hurt you. So, you decide which role you want me to play.” So it is with the interim. God does not call interim pastors to placate people but to move churches

forward, to heal hurts, reset vision and make a way for the Spirit of God to flow freely in the future. That means working with the existing board of the church. Sometimes that means the interim pastor has to deal with unhealthy boards and toxic board members. Thus, the interim pastor must know himself well enough to know if he is willing to be a spiritual surgeon if it takes “cutting” to get the board and church back on track.

While demanding, interim work is rewarding labor. We are reminded often of Paul’s reflection on ministry in 1 Corinthians 15:54, “...*your LABOR is not in vain in the Lord.*” We have experienced the joy that accompanies an effective interim pastorate. It is worth it!

3. THE INTERIM PASTOR AND CHURCH BOARDS

Interim pastors inherit a board with which they work and minister. (Again, we use the word “board” as a generic term.) How to work and minister with a board in the interim period is complicated by a variety of “inherited” issues: history, personality, church culture, local culture, church location, worship styles, teaching styles, type of governance – and more. These factors need to be identified and taken into account. Much interim work lies under the old saying, “*It all depends....*” How we do our work depends on what we inherit. The work includes:

1. The interim pastor needs to set a Biblical foundation for the board. Teach and emphasize the proper function of the board as church leaders. We strongly suggest the interim pastor take the board through a study of:
 - a. Biblical Leadership.
 - b. Discernment and the work of the Holy Spirit.
 - c. The **Church Board Training Manual** (Volume #1 in this series).
2. Initial Strategies
 - a. First, listen patiently and learn during Phase One of your IPM work. This is called “Connection.”
 - b. What is the state of the church and the board?
 - i. Relationship with the last pastor? Other previous pastors? Why did they leave?
 - ii. Was the last pastor, or were previous pastors, trusted by the congregation?
 - iii. Is the board trusted by the congregation?
 - iv. To whom is the board accountable?
 - v. Who holds power on the board or outside the board in the congregation?
 - vi. What is the congruence of the formal church structure and the informal structure of how ministry happens?
 - vii. Is the board in denial regarding the problem(s) in the church or on the board? Thom Rainer writes about the common leadership malady of denial in his article, “10 Dangers of Denial in Dying Churches.” Not only have we

seen this in dying churches but we have also observed it in declining churches where the board does not seem to know the steps to take to reverse the trend. Rainer also writes about “Seven Traits of Toxic Leaders.” Although the article is not about denial, it certainly does list common issues over which board members are often in denial and which cause the lack of faithful and fruitful ministry in the church. (See both one-page articles in the **Important Training Resources** section.)

- viii. How can I establish and accelerate trust with board, staff and congregation?
 - ix. What changes need to be made on the board or in the church structure?
 - x. What are the systemic and spiritual issues?
- c. Identify the church and board “culture.” Is it healthy? Productive? Mature? Wise? Etc. Every church has a “culture” and lives in a larger societal culture. These overlapping cultures affect pastoral ministry and the congregation’s life. The larger culture in which we live affects and impacts the culture of the church. A church in the Deep South thinks and behaves differently than a church in the Pacific Northwest. Urban churches “feel” and behave in ways unlike suburban churches. Blue collar churches are different than churches of professional men and women.

An interim pastor needs to “know the address” of the congregation he serves. The culture of the congregation affects interim ministry and church life. This is the DNA spoken of earlier. Every church creates its own culture which the interim pastor must interpret. Some churches are compassionate, forgiving and encouraging; but some are not. Churches can have a “doctrinal” culture and very carefully vet their leaders/pastors – sometimes with a bit of hostility that creates mistrust of the interim pastor and complicates the interim process. The history of the church is part of its culture. Figuring out “who” the church is and “how” it got to where it is today is a critical part of the assessment process of interim work.

- d. How do things get done in this church? Are there processes for decision making? Are those processes Biblical, effective and ethical? What is the board’s role in decision making? Are there power/influence groups that stop decision making? Are there church bosses -or families - who have to “sign off” on every decision? (Dennis Baker has created a foundational resource to work through entitled, “Who Leads?” in the **Important Training Resources** section.)
- e. Teach the board the importance of and process for discernment as a primary function of a church board. The vital work of discernment cannot be overemphasized. It is the essential and foundational function of a church board. Determining God’s will for the congregation must be determined by

Godly discernment under the direction of the Holy Spirit. (See David C. Fisher's very important descriptive outline, "Discernment," which discusses the critical process of discernment in the work of a church board, in the **Important Training Resources** section.)

- f. An essential part of the work of discernment is sensitivity to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Board members need to listen carefully to hear the Spirit working in the conversation. The interim pastor is well-advised to determine the board's ability and willingness to listen to, hear and fulfill the voice of the Spirit. Boards, made up of good Christian people who love God but do not follow the Spirit, are more common than any of us want to believe. A major function of the interim pastor's ministry is to help the board learn to listen to, hear and obey the Spirit. Reggie McNeal put it this way. "The Spirit is at work in the world, and it's the job of the church to get on the same page as the Spirit, not the job of the Spirit to get on the same page as the church." (See the article, "Listening to, Hearing and Obeying the Spirit of God" in the **Important Training Resources** section.)

4. KNOWING THE BOARD AND CHURCH AHEAD OF TIME

Evaluating Church Boards

It is a foundational imperative of the interim pastor to make evaluations of the church board. It is important to realize that evaluating is different from judging. Judging is God's job. Interim pastors are not judging; they are evaluating. Evaluating started with God. We see it in Genesis 1. As God was creating, a number of times Genesis tells us, "And God saw that it was good." He was evaluating what He had created.

Most church board members are good people. They love the Lord. They joined the board for the right reasons. They love the church of Christ in general and their local body in particular. They want to do right. But boards can lose their way, become ineffective and sometimes function outside the will of God. Such realities cannot be ignored. And, board members can step off the "straight and narrow" over time and become ineffective, egotistical and unchristian in their behavior and leadership if they are not careful and aware of themselves. The most frequent reasons we have seen for less than good board function, whether as individuals or as a group of board members, are:

1. Not knowing what the Bible says about church leadership
2. Lack of perspective and understanding of what it means to work/minister together as a team
3. Unwillingness to look at one's own shortcomings and lack of personal holiness
4. Lack of positive relationships on the board and/or with the congregation

5. Pride and its constant companion, arrogance, destroy effective board leadership. Success often creates pride in the past that blinds the board to ministry in the present and negatively affects any clear vision for future ministry. Arrogance is very subtle and often creates an inability to hear the truth or to listen to the wisdom and experience of an interim pastor. Proverbs 8:13 says, "*Pride and arrogance...I hate....*" and James 4:6 says, "*God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble.*" (See "The Destructive Power of Arrogance" in the **Important Training Resources** section.)
6. Lack of honesty with fellow board members
7. Talking behind the backs of other board members and staff members
8. No set guidelines for board behavior
9. Projecting one's past experience on the present board
10. Allowing a board bully (church boss) to dominate the group
11. The need to be liked by people in the church
12. Unwillingness to make hard decisions, including staff that need to be transitioned and/or terminated
13. New members coming onto the board with personal, old and/or church faction agendas
14. Lack of church board experience and/or experience on a healthy church board
15. Bringing a corporate mindset to the church board. (We are quick not to criticize secular, business and non-profit boards. Church boards have much to learn from some of them and their members.) However, a corporate mindset can easily replace Biblical norms and values. The church is a business but it is unlike secular or other non-profit boards. The church has a Lord and Scripture. Church board members are Godly shepherds not just corporate directors. Board culture and behavior must be informed and evaluated by the Fruit of the Spirit found in Galatians 5:22-23. Wil Regier, a former key administrator/project manager and leader for an aerospace company, said it best: "The Spirit of God in church board meetings was not something I ever experienced with _____". Those experiences with the Holy Spirit were very special moments."
16. Tiredness, brittle spirits, old in attitudes, together too long.
17. Not living in and ministering by faith as it relates to ministry endeavors. Boards are ineffective for one or more of the reasons stated above. Sometimes they are simply incompetent. Whatever the reasons, an unhealthy board is precluded from effective, Christ-honoring and growing ministry. Such boards are saddled with contention, distrust, enmity, Christ-dishonoring attitudes, gossip, dishonesty, bullying and arrogance among a host of other reasons. Thus, it is a demanding task the interim pastor undertakes to reprove the board, remake it in some instances, remove board members in some situations and ask for repentance in others. It is a tough assignment but a necessary one if the ministry of that particular church is going to move forward in the power of the Holy Spirit. Again, such ministry is very rewarding and fulfilling as the interim pastor has the sense that God is pleased with the ministry that gets the church and board back on track and is moving "in the unity of the Spirit" toward that new ministry future.

Evaluating and Knowing the Church

Knowing as much as one can about the church before starting the interim ministry is of highest importance. For example, some churches have micro-managing congregations which must approve every decision the board makes. Other churches have two boards: one for spiritual matters and one for administrative and financial matters. Other churches have a multi-board system where the pastor serves as an ex-officio member of every committee and board. And, sometimes, especially in the smaller or rural church, there is a distrust of staff members among congregational members. Not every one of these issues is in the area of responsibility of the interim pastor to resolve. When it is a matter of polity, particularly in a congregational church, the interim pastor should not touch the issues—unless specifically asked to do so. When it is a matter of spiritual tone such as distrust, the issue must be addressed.

Understanding the uniqueness of a church's size is important, too. For example, smaller church boards tend to fear making decisions for fear of offending – wanting to keep the peace. Often large (successful) church boards are proud and resistant to change. The interim pastor must discern if the board wants to lead and if its members are willing to be trained and make leadership decisions. However, a major crisis can create a willingness to change and be taught by the interim pastor. It cannot be stressed strongly enough that the prospective interim pastor must read the church's preliminary self-evaluation (in the IPM application) carefully and with discernment – and in the interview process ask the right questions to ferret out misbehavior. (Please study carefully the article by Dennis Baker “How to Assess a Church Board When Considering Becoming the Interim Pastor” in the **Important Training Resources** section.)

A wise experienced interim pastor says one of the most common reasons for pastoral leadership mistakes is a lack of understanding of the significance of church size. He says, “The differences among churches are more than denominational or theological. Size impacts the way a church operates. Church size ethos affects how decisions are made and how church leaders and staff perform their responsibilities. A large church is not simply a bigger version of a small church. The differences in communication, community formation, and decision-making processes are so great that the leadership skills required in each are of almost completely different orders.” Thus, an interim pastor must know his own uniqueness and skill set; if God built him to lead a small church he should not go to a large church and vice versa. A church's functional style, its strengths and weaknesses, and the role of its lay and staff leaders will change dramatically as its size changes. Interims must understand the dynamics of size and how this affects his approach to leading the church during pastor transition. (For further insights into how different size churches operate it is recommended that the interim pastor study carefully the two fine sets of wisdom done by Tim Keller, “Leadership and Church Size Dynamics: How Strategy Changes with Growth” and by Lyle E. Schaller, **Looking in the Mirror: Self-Appraisal in the Local Church** with further commentary and insights by Dan Reiland. These documents can be found in the **Important Training Resources** section.)

Evaluating Healthy Board Practices

It is important to see if the board is monitoring the following practices:

1. Annual reviews of board and staff
2. Continual, thorough and honest appraisal of the board and its work
3. High expectation of faith, honesty and evaluation
4. Guarding against self-deception as individuals and as a group
5. Guarding against a critical or cynical spirit and spiritual pride

5. GENERAL STRATEGIES

General Transition Strategies for the Connection and Inspection Phases:

- a. Get to know the board members, their history with the church, their hopes, dreams, fears, personality types, strengths and weaknesses. Look for healthy, mature members to become trusted co-workers on the board and in the congregation. In the first months an interim pastor should be spending time with board members, getting to know them and building trust. Get to know their history, their view of the board and their vision for the interim process. And, all through the interim process, the interim pastor continues to evaluate the board and board members to see how he can work with them, encourage them, strengthen their role in leadership and create a strategy for marginalizing those who are not qualified to be Godly leaders.
- b. If the board is part of the problem in the church, establish a Transition Team of trusted, mature, perceptive and wise members. If some have board experience that is a plus. It is also important and essential that some members of the team have no board experience. This gives the Transition Team a more objective view of the issues and of the board. Effective interim pastors have noted that often, if not always, the congregation's view of the board is different from the board's perception of itself. Our experience validates that it is wise for the Transition Team to have a current board member. It is important to make board reform or restructuring a priority in the work of the Transition Team.
- c. If the board is healthy, make board/leadership training a priority so that the board, the processes and church are more healthy
- d. If a board member is a "rogue," a troublemaker, divisive or carnal:
 1. Marginalize him, if possible.
 2. Confront him, if possible. It is wise to take along a trusted board member and friend of the "rogue" to that meeting. Never do it alone.
 3. In the meantime, work with the board to put accountability policies in place.

- e. Create a “Board Covenant” by which board members hold each other accountable. Without board discipline bad things are certain to occur. (See samples of Board Covenants in the **Important Training Resources** section.
- f. Insist on taking the first 15 minutes of each board meeting to conduct a Bible study led by you. Use Scripture that emphasizes leadership principles and the character of Christian leaders. Do not underestimate the power of the Word to change minds, hearts, lives and board culture. It is our experience that this practice changes the tone of the meetings. And, more than once, a board member has said this practice radically changed their personal outlook and attitude.
- g. We suggest that early in the interim process the interim pastor lead a Saturday board retreat.
 - 1. Explain the interim process and the board’s role in the journey.
 - 2. Study the **Church Board Training Manual** (#1 in this series). Make sure the board understands and agrees with the “10 Core Essentials “of board life.
- h. In the meantime, use your Sunday sermons to emphasize basic Christian character. Point out how Christians are called to treat each other in the Body of Christ. Faithful teaching of the Word does work. For example, the leader of a dissident group told his interim pastor toward the end of the interim process that because of the interim pastor’s preaching and teaching he realized he was wrong and he’d had a major change of heart, namely how to treat others and solve conflict in a Biblical way.

Suggested texts are: The Beatitudes, the entire Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), the Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22), Ephesians 4:25-5:2, Romans 12-14 and the Epistle of James. Do not underestimate the efficacy of Scripture! Please note David C. Fisher’s sermon notes and annotated outline for an “interim ministry” sermon in the **Important Training Resources** section.

6. TWELVE BOARD SCENARIOS AND STRATEGIES FOR EACH

Introduction: A Biblical and Healthy Church Board

It is important for the interim pastor in his initial evaluation to discern what type of board with which he is ministering and working. Here is our breakdown of unhealthy church boards. It is a fairly comprehensive framework of what any interim pastor might experience. During the interim process it is important to teach and model Christian maturity and relentlessly, patiently move toward developing a healthy board of committed Christ followers.

A helpful tool in discerning the health of the board is found in the **Church Board Training Manual** (Volume #1 in this series). A healthy board is described as follows:

1. Christlikeness
2. Faith in God
3. Honesty and Integrity
4. Humility
5. Unity of the Spirit
6. Self-awareness
7. Kingdom Vision People – Seeing the Big Picture
8. Shepherd Leaders not just Directors
9. Clearly Defined Roles
10. Communication, Communication, Communication

Twelve Types of Unhealthy Church Boards

Board #1

The Board without Biblical Standards, A Statement of Purpose, A Specific Function or Expectations for Behavior. The lack of standards can mean the board has never taken the time to analyze the Biblical theology or thought behind how they operate, how decisions are made and what is proper and Christ-honoring behavior. The lack of standards can also mean a lack of looking at the history of the board. Possibly (and we have seen this) the church was started by a strong leader who only put “cronies” on the board. Thus, over the years, even though the founding pastor has been gone for years, the same “laisse faire” attitude about board process and members persists. With this lack of standards, we have observed board members not being honest with one another, board members having no ministry perspective or personal ministry, chairs who did not lead and board members who are chosen without any Biblical standards or training. (The church can grow even though there is not strong leadership.) Standards and policies on board behavior were never put into place. When this happens a leadership vacuum is created. People join the board with no clear expectations. As someone said, “If you do not aim you are sure to hit your target every time.”

Specific strategies to correct the error:

- 1. The principle of being in a rut applies here. A board can be in a rut and is not able or willing to see it. The interim pastor can produce the evidence of the rut; and, if the board is unwilling to admit the truth, it will stay in a rut and the ministry of the church will not increase.**
- 2. Being comfortable is similar. When the interim pastor shares the truth with the board, the members have to decide if they are going to be uncomfortable and accept the wisdom of what the interim pastor says and make necessary corrective changes.**
- 3. There are probably no rebels or rogues on this board – just lazy thinkers. Or, they are “nice” people who do not want to offend, hurt or embarrass other members or their**

pastor. But, good leadership is evaluating the mission, purpose, goals and ministry effectiveness and making necessary changes, not avoiding reality.

4. **Solid Biblical teaching on leadership, the basis for evaluation of ministry and heart-to-heart and candid talks about where the church wants to go in the future are very important. The issue is often common in small and/or rural churches. The interim pastor can speak to this issue by teaching on a Biblical perspective of standards, responsibilities and evaluation.**

Board #2

The Dominating Pastor Board is a board often chosen by the pastor. Often members are not screened according to Biblical or procedural guidelines. They are chosen by the pastor. We know of one church where the pastor did not even know all the board members' names and another where assistant pastors did not know who board members were. These board members are expected to be in sync with the pastor and support ideas initiated by the pastor. The extreme of this board was the strong-willed, dominating pastor who said, "The board will do what I say or I will fire them." We know of an interim pastor who inherited a situation where the former pastor often went around the board to get his own way—disabled the board and made them "yes men" at the same time. The pastor was so skilled at this unholy behavior that the board members did not even know it had happened. The pastor was untouchable.

Specific strategies to correct the error:

1. **The interim pastor must honestly tell the board this way of leadership is unbiblical and unproductive. It cannot be minimized in any way. Restructuring the board along Biblical standards should be a high priority during the interim process.**
2. **Board members must accept the accountability for what they let happen; they must repent. One board member said to an interim, "I know you are disappointed in us that we did not control our pastor but you do not understand. He would have fired us." Such rationalization cannot be accepted. Boards must insist on accountability from the pastor. The interim pastor needs to help the board put such a process in place before the new lead pastor arrives.**
3. **Teaching and leading discussions on acceptance of responsibility are vital.**
4. **Repentance on the part of board members is crucial. Honesty is tough; admitting wrong-doing is even tougher. But, for the sake of the Spirit having the freedom to flow freely, the interim pastor must lead the board in such exercises.**

Board #3

The No Term Limits Board is composed of board members who are appointed without an end date for their service. In some cases members have "life-time" board privileges. Often, these

board members have no real accountability. What can develop is an attitude of “knowing it all,” not walking and ministering in dependence on the leading of the Spirit and not growing and learning as a board and as individuals. We have seen a “spiritual atrophy” happen where the board begins to function poorly because no one is monitoring performance because of the lack of accountability. This results in a lack of evaluation, a lack of peer review and a lack of board performance reviews. In the end, the Holy Spirit is eased out of decisions and out of the ministry. Ministry becomes routine and rote without spiritual vitality and life.

As one man said after he left such a board, “We had been together too long. Some on the board had served for 20+ years. Newer and/or younger men in our church were reluctant to join the board due to the veteran status of us ‘old timers.’ We had a wonderful commitment to our church but had become tired and had lost some of our leadership edge. We needed some ‘fresh eyes and legs’ with creative ideas to help move our church forward. A board with term limits would promote regular addition of new members and provide such an atmosphere.” At one church over the years, the board became a “gentlemen’s club” and spent board time in genial conversation, not leadership. They did not make decisions for more than a decade. In their comfort zone they resisted change and refused self-evaluation. In their commitment to the status quo, they became what the staff called a “Preservation Society.” No lasting progress was possible until reform and restructuring took place under the guidance of a skilled and gifted interim pastor.

Specific strategies to correct the error:

- 1. Honest evaluation and assessment with the interim pastor pointing out to the board the dangers of the no term limits board.**
- 2. Work to restructure the board during the interim process so the accountability and rigorous Biblical standards and processes are enforced.**

Board #4

The Untouchable Pastor Board can be a strange mixture of a long-tenured pastor, founding pastor, super-star pastor or very overbearing, domineering pastor. In any of the scenarios, such pastors are not generally open to any constructive criticism or evaluation. There are no annual reviews. The board might not approve of what they see but they approve of the pastor’s actions by silence. “Silence is assent” was wisely stated about such a situation. This unhealthy loyalty (and maybe blindness) to the pastor’s excesses can mean that people in the church and staff members are not treated in a Godly and humble manner, the board does not function as a team, no one tells the pastor when the pastor is wrong and the pastor has a stronger presence in the church than does the Holy Spirit. It cannot be documented but it is possible that “the ride is so exciting” that board members get “intoxicated” with the excitement of all that is happening and do not want to miss being a part of it.

When the pastor leaves he leaves a large leadership vacuum. Often the board does not know how to lead. And, too often, unqualified leaders step in to fill the vacuum with negative consequences.

Specific strategies to correct the error

- 1. The interim pastor should identify, describe and define the leadership vacuum.**
- 2. The interim pastor should boldly and forthrightly help the board come to terms with its failure to lead and help the board members restore or institute Biblical leadership.**
- 3. The newly structured board should work with the Pastor Search Team to ensure the same problem is not repeated.**
- 4. Sometimes an outside consultant has to be brought in to help the board see and admit the error of its ways.**
- 5. The interim pastor has to help the board members repent of their lack of leadership. This will require some heavy lifting. Some will want to blame the former pastor rather than accepting responsibility. The interim pastor has to be firm; there can be no indulging, enabling or placating past sins, behavior and omissions.**

Board #5

The Strong Teaching Pastor Board describes a church that grew because a strong and gifted teacher (but maybe not a strong leader) started or came to the church. Consequently, in the excitement of the growth, standards were never set, board training was never put into place and people were able to get onto the board without meeting the Biblical qualifications for eldership. In one case we watched an arrogant man who was a “political manipulator” church boss type do huge damage to the church. He manipulated spending for his own department. He answered to no one, he manipulated and he expected the pastor to answer to him. Sadly, he knew little about church; rather, he seemed addicted to power. Consequently, with no qualifications in place people just joined the board without expectations. They did not know one another or get to know one another. They just met once a month. One person even said he was considering “joining the board of directors” instead of the elder board. Another member said he represented the seniors.

Specific strategies to correct the error:

- 1. This is a tough one. The interim pastor must be honest to tell the board and the church they are probably involved in a 3-to-7 year turn around. The interim pastor must explain that the DNA is “baked in” very deeply. Some people will not like the interim pastor; they will want to remain in their comfort zones.**
- 2. The 50% principle will be important to explain here. Many doctors explain that 50% of their patients will not do the work they prescribe for them—to their detriment. The reality – people love the comfort zone.**

- 3. The interim pastor will be well advised to remember the words of many addiction counselors: “Until the addict wants to get sober there is nothing we can do to help them.”**

Board #6

The Passive and Ineffective Board does not know how to lead or simply won't lead. This board often refuses or is afraid to confront sin and destructive behavior in the church or on the board.

This pattern of ineffective leadership inevitably results in multiple conflicts in the church and the board. Though not limited to any specific church size, Wil Regier believes this is most prevalent in the smaller to medium sized church. Wil names this phenomenon, "The Church Club Board," because the church is behaving like a civic club. He writes, "They are no different from other clubs in the area with their own culture, patterns of decision-making and emphasis on guarding the past. They have become spiritually lethargic museums where the board focuses on preserving the past, and guarding the door. The main reason people come is because that is where their friends are and non-friends are not welcome. They do not care about evangelism or making disciples. They have forgotten that this is God's Church and His mission!" This is a painful indictment.

We are thinking of the perpetually angry board member. Other members must love him enough to confront his sinful behavior. We are thinking specifically of the malicious gossip, the church boss or the person who has no formal leadership role in the church but is "politically savvy" enough that he or she controls everything anyway. The interim pastor needs to create space for change, restructuring, creating a new board, etc. In the experience of a number of interim and full-time pastors it was necessary to restructure and rebuild the board. The work of a good Transition Team facilitates such change. Their "evaluation" phase looks at structure, systems, life-cycles, leadership, etc.

We have also seen the churches that had no board but instead a committee which worked with the pastor. In such cases the committee had no authority over the pastor. If the pastor was not a Godly, hard-working and effective leader, then there was no accountability or system in place for evaluation and improvement. The work of the interim pastor was very difficult because the culture had to be changed and accepted by the congregation before the new pastor could be put in place. This was not an enjoyable task but a necessary one.

Specific strategies to correct the error:

- 1. The interim pastor must understand this kind of board will take tenacity and patience.**
- 2. Honesty and humility on the part of the board is an absolute necessity.**
- 3. The interim pastor must remember that it is tough for board members to be honest and admit errors.**

4. This board is often beset with significant levels of incompetence on the part of the chair and members.
5. The interim pastor must set things in play for the future but realize it will take 3-to-5-to-7 years for the total turnaround. Nevertheless, he can get things started and moving in a positive direction with accountability benchmarks.
6. Some board members will need to be removed; some will have to be “waited out.”
7. Because this weakness is often seen in smaller and rural churches it is incumbent on the interim pastor to teach specifically from the Bible how Biblical leaders make decisions and how the Holy Spirit expects decisions to be made.

Board #7

The Dominant Voice(s) Board is the church with little, if any, “social” accountability. Loud voices and strong wills tend to dominate without listening. This is often the case of the smaller church where the church is “held hostage” by a person whose giving keeps the church alive. It has been seen where the quieter and wiser (gift of wisdom) people are not heeded because they do not beat their chests like apes in the jungle before they talk. We specifically think of a church where a board member came from another theological perspective. He did not listen. He was a bully. Only a few would dare to cross him. Another man said, “I am president of my company. People listen to me and do what I say. I expect the same thing to happen at church.” That bullying behavior had to be dealt with. It was and the bully left and the congregation and the board were much healthier.

It is hard to accept the truth about ourselves. Most get defensive and say, “You did it, too” or “What makes you so smart?” Unfortunately, we carry our humanity and brokenness into board meetings. Dr. Jim Wetherbe says, “The more you are in the right the more you are apt to cause a process problem.” His example was correcting the boss to tell him Jack had not scored any overtime that week. The boss does not like to be corrected. He wants to win the argument on overtime.

Nevertheless, these strong-willed people must be confronted for the sake of Christ’s church. It is not easy but it is necessary. (For a painful but honest confession of a pastor who did not do this see “An Admission about Thwarting the Voice of God” in the **Important Training Resources** section.)

Furthermore, there is a subtype of this strong-voiced person that undermines pastoral and board leadership and ministry. In this sense he undermines the unity of the Spirit, the unity among board and staff and collectively hearing and obeying God’s voice. Specifically, this is the board member who makes decisions, large or small, that are not his to make; he has never been assigned such authority. He moves without the permission of the board and without consulting the board or staff. This is blatantly wrong. One interim pastor told us of suggesting

to the staff a certain ministry to help recruit lay ministers with the gift of mercy, expand the care ministry and relieve some pressure on staff members. He was told that specific ministry had been considered and was turned down by the elders. As he probed, he discovered the board had never heard the option. Rather, the pastor in charge of that area had discussed it with a couple of elders. They said they did not like it and told him to drop the idea. The interim pastor told the board this happened and should never happen again. Those 2-3 members are no longer on the board. Sadly, the board did not know anything about it. (It will be important to read the article, “The Distinguishing Marks of a Quarrelsome Person” by Kevin DeYoung in the **Important Training Resources** section.)

Specific strategies to correct the error:

- 1. “The issue is not the issue” as Carl George used to say. The issue is control. And, control is a form of power. Make a list of control and power issues that you encounter and your perceptions of the roots of those issues.**
- 2. The interim pastor must move the board to the place of personal and spiritual maturity where members can evaluate the ministry against Biblical objectives such as the Great Commission, discipleship and the Fruit of the Spirit.**
- 3. It cannot be emphasized strongly enough; the interim pastor must urge the board to understand the error of its way of having one or two strong voices/personalities that do not listen to other members.**
- 4. If possible, marginalize the “controlling” members. This is best done by working with the other board members to force the board to make each member accountable to the whole. Remember, it is a process.**
- 5. The interim pastor cannot let the church be held hostage by one large donor. He must help the church understand what Biblical and Holy Spirit directed ministry is. The church must decide if it wants to be a Biblical, Spirit-led church or an organization that calls itself a church. No doubt this assignment is not for the faint-hearted; but it must be done for the sake of Christ’s church.**
- 6. A veteran interim pastor shared the following wisdom and experience relative to confronting the strong-willed, dominant voiced person:**
 - a. It is important to accept that confrontation is never easy so one has to go in faith and in the power of the Spirit.**
 - b. Go in private in the spirit of Matthew 18:15-17.**
 - c. Go in the truth of Ephesians 4:15.**
 - d. Galatians 6:1 is an imperative. Before meeting with the individual carefully review this verse and evaluate yourself in light of it so that you go spiritually prepared and with the right motivation which is restoration and preservation of the unity of the Spirit on the board.**
 - e. It is important to “rehearse” what will be said and how to respond if the dominant person is defensive.**

- f. **It is important to be positive: “I know you want what is best for the church.” “I know you want to honor Christ with your life.” “I doubt you realize how you are coming across to the group.” “As a wise person said, we all have blind spots and everyone sees them but us.”**
- g. **If the dominant voiced person will not respond and chooses to leave the church we have to leave that person in God’s hands.**

Board #8

The No Unity Board is one with no unity, no vitality, no standards and usually an arrogant controlling person with a strong voice—even though that member is often wrong. This is common in rural churches, smaller churches and churches that are declining. We think of the church where an elder had done some Bible college/seminary classes and thought that qualified him to run a church. There was no sense of outreach or living by faith. The church had a poor reputation in the immediate neighborhood because it started a building program on an auxiliary building. They did not finish it while leaving construction clutter, lumber and rolls of tar paper lying around for months. The interim pastor did not know how the board members could be so blind to what the neighbors hated seeing every day as they drove in and out of their neighborhood. That lack of sensitivity found its way into relationships because the board members did not treat one another with respect or the Golden Rule.

Often these boards have members who have the glaring immaturity of needing to be heard and seen. Ministry is not the issue; being recognized is the issue; being in control is the issue. Some of these people never ask questions, listen to anybody or learn from anyone; they just make pronouncements as though they know everything. In some cases doing this in board meetings is enough; in some cases they manipulate their way in front of the congregation. In another case, it was being in control by always asking questions—even when they were contradictory questions. The issue is control; it is like an addiction; the person has to be in control. Recovering addicts explain “addict logic” as, “I will do anything, say anything, take anything or think anything to get my next fix.” The control freak is just the same. However, the issue is control of a church board and/or church instead of alcohol or other drugs.

We have also seen this lack of unity in multiple boards. There are not many left but we have seen situations in churches with several boards with uneven power and responsibility. They tend to cancel real progress. In one church the Mission Board had its own budget and its members were internally appointed. They were not accountable to anyone but themselves. That same church had a Trustee Board which made all the financial decisions for the church. Because money is power, the Leadership Board of the church had no real authority.

Specific strategies to correct the error:

- 1. Teach the board the Biblical necessity of board unity.**

2. Spend time with each board member teaching them “how” to work toward muscular consensus and Biblical relationships. Muscular consensus is “robust dialogue saturated with prayer by the board.” “One accord” (*Homothumadon*) is the Biblical word used for this concept throughout the book of Acts and in Romans 15:25.
3. Use a “Board Covenant” to create accountability and to pursue Biblical unity. A sample is in Manual #1 as well as the Important Training Resources section of this manual.
4. Remind the board regularly the importance of discernment and the necessity of Spirit-led decision making.
5. It is important to remember that good relationships don’t “just happen.” We have to work at them. So it is with good board relationships. As evidence the Apostle Paul writes about not being complacent about living in faith. His words, “you must *work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*” and I “*press on*” are evidence of this (Philippians 2:12, 3:12). Plus, Jesus declared this in a different way when He said in John 17:4, “*I completed all You gave Me to do.*”
6. We have 150+ years of marriage among us and yet we press on toward better and more understanding relationships with our wives. Why would it be any different in board relationships?
7. These immature boards just exist; they coast; they do not ask hard questions and do not do any solid and deep evaluation.
8. The interim pastor needs to teach on and explain the unity of the Spirit.
9. The interim pastor needs to communicate that unity comes about when we discuss our differences in a spirit of collegiality and in the Spirit.

Board #9

The Details Focused Board never talks about or discusses ministry. Members just want to know all about the minutia, spend all their time focused on the details and do the staff’s work on those details. Such boards are dominated typically by one or two people who do not listen to others. They act as though they know more about ministry than anyone else in the room during meetings. It is hard to get anything done because they are like the gatekeeper; if they are not happy, discussions do not proceed. Consequently, ministry happens in spite of them not because of them.

Specific strategies to correct the error:

1. This is a common issue and practice among boards so the questions of purpose, mission and vision are foundational to create a framework for healthy ministry discussion.
2. The interim pastor must help the board members see they are not bad people but their behavior is wrong.

3. The interim pastor needs to help the board realize the chair was wrong to let such a dynamic happen.
4. The interim pastor must help the board and the staff, establish and agree on new spans of control, authority and responsibility. Utilize “Who Leads?” from the “Important Training Resources” section.
5. The interim pastor needs to show the board members how to discipline themselves to stay out of areas where they are not assigned responsibility or authority. This is an issue of boundaries and boundary principles.
6. The interim pastor needs to help the board members be “big-picture people.” Because board members may not be “big-picture people” they will try to involve themselves in the day-to-day operations of the church. Some say this helps fill their board time. It takes the committed, courageous and principled interim pastor to tell board members they are out of place and to tell the chair that discipline in meetings must be practiced so that healthy patterns can be established.

Board #10

The Post Conflict Board is very sensitive and guarded, not willing to trust quickly or easily. We know interim pastors who have followed several “fired” pastors. We have worked with churches in interim situations (either consulting or doing the actual interim pastoral work) in the aftermath of that chapter of a church’s life. It is traumatic and grief-filled. Boards are sad, frustrated, blamed, accused, weary, traumatized and, often, wary of leading again. It seems the conflict always leaves conflict and mistrust in the congregation and/or board. One board was intractably divided. The board chair said, “What can we do? We are not trusted and don’t trust each other.” In another church, a board member was a lightning rod for blame and needed to resign. He did. It was the wise and right decision.

Specific strategies to correct the error:

1. Honest and extended conversation about the past.
2. Public repentance before the congregation asking the church for forgiveness. (Board members who will not repent must leave the board.)
3. Teach relational forgiveness and unity of the Spirit at board meetings and in the sermons.
4. Emphasize, model and teach on teamwork.

Board #11

The Disconnected Board is the board whose members do not see the importance of communicating regularly with the congregation or each other. This malady is common in larger churches. Regular communication on the part of the board does not take the place of the lead

pastor and other staff members communicating regularly. Rather, it gives the congregation the sense that board members have the spiritual welfare of church members in mind, in their hearts and in their prayers. Furthermore, if problems arise, the board already has a relationship of confidence with the congregation for more vital communication. This malady is common in the larger church.

We think of a church where this trust relationship was deficient. When the pastor surprised everyone (staff, elders and the congregation) by announcing his immediate departure in a sermon, the elder board not only did not know what to communicate to the congregation but did not communicate. In the next six months the board only communicated twice. There are a number of reasons why a board disconnects from the body. Probably the most common one is that the board forgets (or, never knew) it is supposed to be a board of shepherds not just a board of directors. The role of the interim pastor is to address and correct this issue. It is a vital for renewed church health for the Lord's glory.

Specific strategies to correct the error:

- 1. It is vitally important for the interim pastor to have "listening posts" and/or "town hall meetings" with the congregation so he knows first-hand what the congregation is thinking about board leadership and communication.**
- 2. The interim pastor must begin training and teaching the board Biblical principles on what a board is and how it functions. Again, board members are shepherds; this cannot be emphasized enough.**
- 3. The interim pastor must embrace this task. He must be alert to any arrogance, ignorance or comfort zone attitudes on the board. It is important to know those attitudes before he begins to reveal to the board members the error of their ways.**
- 4. The interim pastor must be willing to accept the resignations of any board members who do not think communicating with the congregation is important, are unwilling to change or are unwilling to repent.**
- 5. A good rule of thumb for the interim pastor is to help the board members see that church members are like stock-holders in a company. They invest their tithes, gifts and time in the church ministry and they have a right to know.**
- 6. The Golden Rule applies here---the board members would want to know if they were not board members. Therefore, they should be communicating with the congregation. Communicate to the point of redundancy is the principle to practice.**
- 7. An experienced pastor and church consultant shared some "wisdom and random thoughts" on the subject. He said: "Disconnected boards may be a result of an autocratic dominant lead pastor, who may chair the board and set the agenda. Inexperienced or passive elders may have been chosen on that basis and/or groomed so that elder involvement in decisions is minimal. A very large church where elders just don't know the people and don't know what's going on creates a nasty vacuum. It is incumbent on the interim pastor to discern if these are the reasons the board is**

disconnected and speak to the issues and lead/help the board to rectify those destructive issues.”

Board #12

The Individualistic Board cannot be identified by one single description that has been used thus far. Rather, it might be a board that is a mixture of the different descriptions above. Thus, it is even harder to reach consensus on what the Spirit of God is saying because not only are individual board members trying to direct the board to their way of thinking instead of hearing God’s voice – they are all working and walking in different directions.

Also, this “individualistic board” is sometimes influenced by someone who is not on the board but works behind the scenes against the board or to get a certain agenda pushed. The Lordship of Christ is unknown or at a minimum not obeyed. People of influence who support the board are needed. But, people of “negative influence” who have no official position in the church and who work against the board must be confronted and neutralized. The interim pastor needs to know who these “individualistic” and “negative influencers” are and determine a Biblical and gracious way to counter and neutralize their influence.

Specific strategies to correct the error:

- 1. It must be accepted that this is not an easy fix. Effective solutions and strategies are elusive. All of us have a difficult time being honest about the weaknesses and downsides of our personalities. So, the interim pastor must accept the reality of some pushback and the need to address the issues over time.**
- 2. The interim pastor must have confidence in his “outside eyes.” He must not be making impetuous decisions. He must test and confirm his intuition and perceptions.**
- 3. A good way to start is by talking about the unity of the Spirit with the board and in sermons. The interim pastor can explain what the Apostle Paul meant when he wrote these words about the unity of the Spirit. Then the interim pastor will explain how he observes the lack of the unity of the Spirit because of the conflicting motivations and personalities among board members and in the church.**
- 4. Hopefully, the board members will listen to the compassionate and direct talk from the interim pastor and take the necessary steps toward maturity.**

CONCLUSION

1. Interim work, by its nature, is perplexing, challenging and faith-stretching. It can be difficult and often painful. Churches that contract with IPM for an intentional interim pastor are often churches in some kind of trouble. Church trouble always includes division, conflict, and a stalled sense of mission. Dealing with angry, hurt and conflicted people (and boards) is part of this specialized ministry. That is why a call from God to interim ministry is necessary. Being a Biblical peacemaker while dealing with wounded people and groups of people is consistently frustrating. Rewarding and fulfilling? Absolutely!
2. The Five Stage Interim Process developed by IPM creates a pathway and plan for the interim pastor to do the kind of interventional work necessary in such churches.

For one thing, the leaders of the congregations ask IPM for an interventional leader. The self-evaluation work required by IPM before the arrival of the interim pastor lets the leaders (and hopefully the congregation) know what the interim process will look like. It is a roadmap for this journey.

Hence, the interim pastor comes not just with leadership tools, but with the expectation that things will change. And that change will come within 18-24 months. This gives the interim pastor leverage to do the hard and necessary work quickly. This work is good but difficult – after all it is “work.” And it is work in a challenging, sometimes hostile, environment. But the process, when followed, creates the changes necessary to prepare the congregation for the new pastor and a new more effective Christ-honoring chapter in the church’s ministry.

3. By the end of the IPM process, the major issues discerned by the interim pastor and the board have been dealt with; goals, objectives and a renewed articulated vision have been established. The new healthy chapter is ready to launch.

Few things in pastoral ministry are more satisfying than watching a church turn around and welcome a new chapter in ministry. The difficulty and pain are worth it. As Paul puts it in Galatians 4:19, *“My little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ be formed in you....”* When we see Christ re-formed in a congregation, it is a joy often beyond words.

After concluding an interim pastorate, one colleague recently took a call from the new pastor. The interim process had been a complex and dysfunctional assignment. Division and conflict followed the firing of the senior pastor. Gratefully the interim process went well. The issues were resolved and the peace of Christ returned. Now, the church is growing so rapidly, they have to build a new building. They had a very successful capital fund campaign and construction work is underway. They asked the former interim pastor to come to preach at a celebration service marking their recent success. This public affirmation made the interim pastor’s ministry more than worthwhile!

The late Dr. Kenneth Kantzer, the Dean of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, had a wonderful way of handling his students' complaints about the failures of the local church. "Men," he would say, "if Christ loved His church enough to die for it, why can't you love it enough to serve it?" That, brothers, is our calling.

4. Finally, and to reiterate; it is not easy but it is necessary. It is challenging and imperative. And, God gifts certain people and gives them certain experiences to allow them to be used to glorify Christ in such an important ministry.

FINAL WORDS

Interim pastoring is a vital ministry to the body and church of Jesus Christ. As Interim Pastor Ministries has learned from experience, the interim pastor (most often) is not a “stop-gap” between pastors but the one the Lord uses to get the church back on track to a vital, Christ-honoring and spiritually productive ministry. That is the focus of this manual because the interim pastor’s ministry includes leading, training and discipling the board to get back to being a healthy and ministering board. There are five essential truths and principles that the interim pastor must follow to make sure the goal of spiritual health occurs. They are:

- 1. Understand the value of God’s call on the life of the interim pastor** because that interim pastoring is not for the faint-hearted. The interim pastor not only bridges two chapters of the church’s history but often he is called to make tough decisions, help leaders in the church understand they have been roadblocks to spiritual growth in the church and help people accept that they must step out of leadership for the sake of the church’s health and the Lord’s reputation.
- 2. Interim pastors** must know who they are, how God built them, their strengths and weaknesses and if they are willing to live with tension as they confront sin and sinful people in leadership. There is nothing wrong with a person recognizing they are not “wired “or gifted to handle confrontation. Being a change agent in difficult circumstances or being a “spiritual plumber” is not for every interim pastor. The interim pastor who cannot confront but does not admit it to himself does more harm than good for the church.
- 3. Understanding church boards** and how they can get off track is a necessity for interim pastors. Interim Pastor Ministries understands this. This is one of the reasons for the application and interviewing process. Thus, the potential interim pastor must know the church and the situation before he accepts the call to the ministry at a specific church. Successful interim pastoral ministry is a combination of the interim pastor knowing himself and knowing the church.
- 4. Strategic thinking** is a must for the successful intentional interim pastor. Successful interim ministry is more than “preaching the Bible.” It is using the Bible to discern, lead, confront, strategize and develop solid leadership in the church. It is important to remember the interim pastor is not struggling against “flesh and blood but against the rulers, powers and rulers of darkness” (Ephesians 6:12). Thus, the ability to think strategically and rely on the wisdom of God is a necessity.
- 5. Spiritual maturity** is not a given but a privilege. There are 12 unhealthy board types. The interim pastor has the privilege of helping lead unhealthy boards to a state of solid spiritual health. It is not easy work but fulfilling work. It gives the interim pastor the privilege of knowing God is pleased with him, his ministry and his gifts.

APPRECIATION AND AFFIRMATION

We are great believers in the mission of Interim Pastor Ministries. Wil Regier, a lay leader and church consultant says, "IPM is a great organization with a wonderful purpose, training pastors to be effective as Intentional Interim Pastors. I have helped train at three of the IPM training sessions." As three experienced intentional interim pastors who have trained at IPM conferences, we underscore and affirm Wil's comments. We deeply respect IPM for acknowledging that not all church boards are healthy and being willing to tackle such situations. IPM is to be commended for how it provides ongoing training to its interim pastors.

IPM is committed to helping unhealthy boards become healthy so unhealthy churches get healthy. This will help them fulfill what the Spirit of God has planned for them.

We believe the office of church leadership is sacred and a sacred trust. There is simply no room for church boards that are unhealthy. Boards, and board members, serving their own ego needs rather than His plan for His Church are in violation of Scripture. His plan includes, making "every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" and doing "nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others" (Ephesians 4:3 and Philippians 2:3-4).

We cannot emphasize strongly enough the need for healthy boards. Healthy boards honor Christ. Healthy boards remember it is His Church not their church. And, healthy boards do not happen automatically. They happen by intentionality.

We reiterate the value of coaching, mentoring, consulting, evaluating and sharing of experiences with other seasoned intentional interim pastors as IPM requires. Many effective experienced pastors are now interim pastors with IPM. They declare that intentional interim pastoring is far too important to go it alone. The ministry requires consultation and collaboration with colleagues of wisdom and experience. Both attest to the value of talking regularly with a coach provided by IPM.

We give major thanks to Mike Johnson, Tom Hagen, Fred Campbell, Dennis Beatty, Bill Bjork, Bill Yarger, Dennis Kizziar, Don Goehner, Wil Regier, Mike Fast, Bill Gillis, Tom Nelson and Daniel Holmquist for reading this document and giving their candid comments and feedback. Tami Johnson and Carol Stewart were our grammarians and producers. The errors and omissions that remain are solely ours.

It was an honor and privilege to create this training resource for IPM. We hope you will put it to work in the great calling of intentional transitional ministry.

Dennis Baker
David C. Fisher
John Vawter

IMPORTANT TRAINING RESOURCES

This resource section contains articles, wisdom and experience that will help the interim pastor in knowing how to deal with an unhealthy board, how to deal with problem board members and how to move the church and the board back to health and forward in productive ministry.

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A STRATEGIC INTERIM SERMON

The point has been made that sermons are a very important part of the interim ministry process. We have chosen to include a sermon (an annotated outline of the sermon) that David C. Fisher delivered in a troubled church. This sermon will show the insights he had into the life of the church and how people needed to change. We suggest this sermon as a model for your own preparation of sermons you need to preach in the context of your interim ministry.

PREACHING AS A TOOL IN INTERIM MINISTRY

While some would minimize sermons as an effective tool in interim ministry, I am convinced by Scripture and experience that preaching and teaching are powerful tools in interim ministry. God's Word proclaimed carries inherent power and changes lives and behavior. I have seen congregations and persons change dramatically, in large part, because of preaching directed at the conflict, bad attitudes, and hostility present in the persons and in congregation.

Interim preaching should be aimed at the particular needs of the congregation. Most churches that call IPM for an interim pastor are in some sort of difficulty. Often the church is broken by conflict and/or bad decisions. Sometimes the congregation is broken by good decisions that were necessary, but not well executed. When people in the church act more like fallen human beings than sons and daughters of Jesus, the ministry price of such sinful behavior is high.

Effective interim preaching begins with careful listening to the congregation to determine the specific and general needs that need to be addressed. It is equally important to determine which Scriptural texts are appropriate for the needs of that congregation.

For example, any time a congregation fires a pastor, for cause or unjustly, the consequences are devastating: division and conflict, hurt feelings, anger, grudges, broken relationships, loss of morale, loss of momentum, loss of mission, loss of spiritual vitality, and, often, loss of income and attendance. Five times I have followed pastors that have been fired. I know firsthand how difficult it is to weave and repair broken people and congregations back together.

Interim preaching needs to begin with the ethical and relational demands of the Bible. Broken relationships need to be restored; unchristian behavior must be reformed. Repentance, personal and corporate, needs to occur. And, of course, Christ's name and the church's reputation need to be restored. Jesus' Great Commandment (John 13:34-35) "*love one another*" (no exceptions!) is often the first casualty of church conflict or church decline.

This is no small matter. Eternity hangs in the balance. Jesus' love command includes consequences, good and bad. By this love, Jesus said, "*they [the watching world] may know you are my disciples.*" Godly and positive relationships are absolutely critical in the restorative work of interim ministry. Few things are more powerful than an entire congregation repenting in public and reconciling broken relationships.

A good place to begin this restorative work is Jesus' teaching, especially the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus' Great Commission instructs us to "*teach them everything I taught you*" (Matthew 28:18). Jesus' teaching is the beginning of Christian discipleship, healthy relationships and effective church life.

Note that Jesus ends this sermon with the promise that if we build our lives on His teaching, nothing can prevail against us or His church (Matthew 7:24-27).

“The Things That Make for Peace” is an annotated sermon outline on one of the Beatitudes (peacemaking).

Helpful books for preaching from the Sermon on the Mount come from John Stott, Martin Lloyd-Jones and R.T. Kendall. Each of these books is titled **The Sermon on the Mount**. We also recommend a new release by Robert Watson with John Vawter, **Upside Down Crown**, Amazon.

“THE THINGS THAT MAKE FOR PEACE”

Matthew 5:9

Introduction: A powerful, vivid picture (Luke 19:41)

- A. Weeping Jesus riding into Jerusalem – the city of peace
- B. *“If only you know the things that make for peace”*
- C. Instead, conflict, war, injustice and terrible defeat
- D. Transition: but, it seems humanity doesn’t know the things that make for peace.

1. The Biblical Promise of Peace

- a. Conflict: it is not supposed to be this way.
 - i. In the beginning: Eden and the perfect shalom of God – peace, tranquility, wholeness, no conflict.
 - ii. Sin destroyed God’s ideal – and continues that destructive work.
 - iii. Family conflict: Adam and Eve - Cain and Abel: murder at the altar of God.
- b. The Bible is a long story of conflict and loss of God’s shalom.
- c. And we long for Eden.
- d. The Prophetic promise of restored peace.
 - i. Isaiah 2:4; 9:5; 11:6; 25:6
 - ii. Luke 2:14; 24:36
 - iii. Ephesians 2:13

2. And yet the reality of conflict

- a. Human nature/original sin tends toward conflict.
- b. The world tends toward conflict.
- c. Families tend toward conflict.
- d. Churches tend toward conflict.
- e. Jesus calls His people to be peacemakers in the world (peacemAKERS not peace keepers).
- f. He also offers a way toward the Biblical ideal.

3. The Things That Make for Peace.

- a. This Beatitude follows eight previous Beatitudes.
 - i. It is likely the beatitudes build on each other.
 - ii. Peacemaking happens when our character matches the rest of Beatitudes.
 - iii. Note: Jesus embodied the Beatitudes – dozens of examples
- b. Peacemakers:
 - i. Are humble – *“poor in spirit”* - *“I am gentle and humble in heart”* (Matthew 11:29)
 - ii. Mourn – devastating consequences of sin in the world (Luke 19:41)
 - iii. Meek – gentle (Matthew 11:29)
 - iv. Hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matthew 26:39)

- v. Merciful (James 2:12)
- vi. Pure in heart (James 1:27)

Conclusion:

Jesus is describing His community as a place of peace filled with peacemakers.

- A. Are you a peace maker?
- B. Is our church a “peaceful” community that offers “rest for souls”? (Matthew 11:28)

CHURCH DYNAMICS

The purpose of this priority foundational exercise is for the board team, the interim pastor and staff to work through their different perceptions on leadership and how decisions are made in their respective church. Until there is essential, substantive agreement on how decisions are made, it is difficult to determine how to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. Clarification is imperative for the calling of PastorNext, as alignment is foundational to effective Kingdom ministry.

“WHO LEADS THE CHURCH?”

Responsibility Grid for Your Local Church

Your Personal View <i>Check only one in this column</i>	Church's View <i>Check only one in this column</i>	Board's View <i>Check only one in this column</i>	Previous Pastor's View <i>Check only one in this column</i>	How Things Get Done
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The Senior Pastor is responsible to establish the vision for the church and to lead the church in its implementation
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The Senior Pastor is responsible to establish the vision for the church, and with the concurrence of the Board, lead the church in its accomplishment.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The Senior Pastor is responsible to establish the vision for the church, and with the concurrence of the Board and the Pastoral Staff, lead the church in its accomplishment.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The Senior Pastor and the Pastoral Staff are responsible to establish the vision for the church, and with the concurrence of the Board and Congregation, lead the church in its accomplishment.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The Senior Pastor, Pastoral Staff and the Board are responsible to establish the vision for the church and to lead the church in its accomplishment.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The Senior Pastor, the Pastoral Staff, and the Board are responsible to establish the vision for the church, and with the concurrence of the Congregation, lead the church in its accomplishment.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The Board is responsible to establish the vision for the church, and the Senior Pastor (with the Pastoral Staff), under the Board's direction, leads the church in its accomplishment.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The Board is responsible to establish the vision for the church, with the Congregation's concurrence, and the Senior Pastor (with the Pastoral Staff), under the Board's direction, leads the church in its accomplishment.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The Congregation is responsible to establish the vision for the church and, with assistance by the Board and the Senior Pastor (and the Pastoral Staff), the process by which it is accomplished.

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SIZE OF CHURCH – KELLER AND SCHALLER/REILAND

Every church has its own personality and unique distinctive. The interim pastor will be wise to ascertain and articulate that personality and distinctive. Also, size of the church is important. Ministry is very size specific. A church of 100 is different from the church of 500 which is different from the church of 1000 which is different from the church of 3000. One person might be uniquely gifted to lead a church of 100, while another is uniquely gifted to lead a church of 500 and another to lead a church of 1000. In addition to needing specific gifting among leaders, different sized churches also have uniqueness traits and needs. The interim pastor is strongly advised to study the wisdom of the following perspectives and insights so as to know more about the church you are leading.

“CHURCH LEADERSHIP AND CHURCH SIZE DYNAMICS”

How Strategy Changes with Growth

HOUSE CHURCH: UP TO 40 IN ATTENDANCE

- A “storefront church” in urban areas and a “country church” in rural areas.
- Operates essentially as an extended small group. It is a highly relational church in which everyone knows everyone else intimately.
- Lay leaders are extremely powerful, and they emerge relationally—they are not appointed or elected. They are usually the people who have been at the church the longest and have devoted the most time and money to the work.
- Decision making is democratic and informal and requires complete consensus. Decisions are made by an informal relational process.

SMALL CHURCH: 40–200 ATTENDANCE

- The range of this category goes from churches that are barely out of the house-church stage up to churches that are ready for multiple staff. But they all share the same basic characteristics.
- While the relational dynamics are now less intense, there is still a strong expectation that every member must have a face-to-face relationship with every other member.
- There are now appointed and elected leaders, but the informal leadership system remains extremely strong. There are several laypeople—regardless of their official status—who are “opinion leaders.” If they don’t approve of new measures, the rest of the members will not support the changes.
- Communication is still informal, mostly word of mouth.
- The lay leaders have been there longer and thus have more knowledge of the past; more trust from the members; and more knowledge of the members’ abilities, capacities, interests, and opinions.
- The lay officers’ board or elders will no longer be able to sign off on absolutely everything and will have to let the staff and individual volunteer leaders make many decisions on their own.

MEDIUM-SIZED CHURCH, 200–450 ATTENDANCE

- Since the medium-sized church has far more complexity, the leaders must represent the various constituencies in the church (e.g., the older people, the young families).
- There is too much work to be handled by a small board. There are now influential leadership teams or committees, such as the missions committee or the music/worship committee that have significant power.
- Leaders begin to be chosen less based on length of tenure and strength of personality and more based on skills and giftedness.
- The role of the lay officers or board begins to change. In the smaller church, the officers basically oversee the pastor and staff, giving or withholding permission for various proposals. The pastor and staff then do the ministry. In the medium-sized church, the officers begin to do more of the ministry themselves, in partnership with the staff.

- Rather than doing the entire ministry himself, the pastor becomes a trainer and organizer of laypeople doing ministry. He also must be adept at training, supporting, and supervising ministry and administrative staff.
- While in the smaller church change and decisions come from the bottom-up through key laypeople, in the medium-sized church change is led by the pastor and the board.

LARGE CHURCH, 400–800 ATTENDANCE

- In the smaller church, leaders were selected for their tenure; in the medium-sized church, for their skills and maturity. Both are still very desirable! But in the large church, these qualities must be combined with a commitment to the church’s distinct vision and mission. The larger the church becomes, the more it develops certain key ministries and strengths that it emphasizes, and the common vision is an important reason that members join. So, leaders need to be screened for vision as well as other qualifications.
- In the small church, the board gave or withheld permission to the pastor(s), who did the ministry. In the medium-sized church, the board is made up of lay leaders and committee chairs who share the ministry work with the pastors and staff. But in the large church, the board must work with the senior minister to set overall vision and goals and then to evaluate the overall ministry. Unlike the small church board, they don’t oversee all the staff—they let the senior minister do that. Unlike the medium church board, they may not necessarily be the lay leaders of ministry. Instead they oversee how the church and ministries are doing.

THE VERY LARGE CHURCH

In general, smaller churches give members a greater voice, and thus the concerns and interests of members and insiders tend to trump those of outsiders. On the other hand, the larger church gives the staff and executive leaders a greater voice. The more staff-driven a church is, the more likely it is to concentrate on ministries that will reach nonmembers and that don’t directly benefit its own constituents—that is, church planting, mercy and justice ministries, and other new services and programs.

**We highly recommend a careful study of “Church Leadership and Church Size Dynamics” by Tim Keller. It is an excellent update of the pioneer work by Lyle Schaller.

<https://sermoncentral.com/pastors-preaching-articles/tim-keller-leadership-and-church-size-dynamics-737?ref=PreachingArticleDetails>

Tim Keller
www.timothykeller.com

ADAPTED FROM LYLE SCHALLER'S LOOKING IN THE MIRROR: SELF-APPRAISAL IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

A Discussion of Church Size

- **Cat** Less than 35 Family Driven
Led by: One family or extended family
Pastor's role: may care for, feed, and love the congregation, but it's not his church
Board meetings: informal
Policies: unwritten but understood by all
- **Collie** 30-75 Pastor Driven
Character of the church: friendly
Character of the people: love to be loved
Led by: Pastor who initiates
Pastor's role: benevolent father, key member
Board meetings: semi-formal; holds pastor accountable; decisions by consensus
Policies: unwritten or buried in board minutes but known and quoted when necessary
- **Garden** 65-100 Board Driven
Character of the people: some get by with little care while others are high maintenance
Led by: Church board who oversees
Pastor's role: respond to needs
Board meetings: formal and informal
Policies: mostly written and in detail
- **House** 75-250 Pastor/Board Driven (the term "house" is not in the sense of the book of Acts where meeting in homes was the norm)
Character of the church: in-between; too large for one pastor-too small for staff; too large not to be "full service" and too small to do "full service" well
Character of the people: a "family" that is inclusive but may feel exclusive to outsiders
Led by: Pastor and board, cooperatively
Pastor's role: managing; focusing on strengths and gifts
Board meetings: formal agenda; informal conversation; reports from specialized areas
Policies: written, but more general

- **Mansion** 200-400 Committees/Leader Driven
 Character of the people: comfortable in small groups; miss the intimacy of the whole; love the quality
 Led by: Committees with a leader who gives prime leadership
 Pastor's role: public face of the church; professional; leads through others
 Board meetings: very formal; detailed agenda; mostly advisory with decisions made at lower levels of the organization
 Policies: few written; handbook
- **Ranch** 300-1500 Committees/Leader Directed
 Character of the church: multi-venue; small groups resemble smaller churches
 Character of the people: focus on their own small group; build intimacy there
 Led by: Structured committees directed by a leader and ministry is increasingly led by paid staff
 Pastor's role: leader of leaders; chief vision-caster and interpreter of mission
 Board meetings: executive board chaired by pastor
 Policies: few; decisions made at ministry level
- **State** Over 1000 Multiple Boards/Leader Directed
 Character of the people: extremely diverse; expect high level of quality and service
 Led by: Multiple boards reporting to executive board; not always chaired by the pastor
 Pastor's role: communicates vision; specializes as preacher
 Board meetings: receive reports from other boards; set policy
 Policies: legal; crisis-management
- **Nation** 1800-2400 Staff must develop and empower
 Few staff can succeed at this level
 Stagnation is probable
 Staff are key
- **World** 2400-3000+ Staff are recruiters, trainers and can and do empower others
 Excellence in execution is key
 Excellence in every area is key
 Focus, understandable ministry and constant evaluation are necessary
 The senior or executive pastor must keep staff and the ministry focused
 Colossians 3:23 is key

Lyle Schaller, **Looking in The Mirror: Self-Appraisal in The Local Church** (Abingdon Press) with additional comments and insights from Dan Reiland

ASSESSING A CHURCH WHEN CONSIDERING BECOMING THE INTERIM PASTOR

The interim pastor or the prospective interim pastor must understand his gift mix, skills and interests. In the same way it is important to do research and an assessment of the church one is considering serving as an interim pastor. The following exercise will help the one considering a specific church to know that church, know its needs, know its strengths and weaknesses and know if it will be a good “fit.”

“HOW TO ASSESS A CHURCH BOARD WHEN CONSIDERING BECOMING THE INTERIM PASTOR”

Assessing Reality When a Church is in a Pastoral Transition

Understanding the board and church where you are considering being the intentional interim pastor is not all that simple. How do you assess reality and what is genuine? Here are a few Strategic Core Questions for a potential interim pastor to explore, know, assess and address. It is imperative that you do your spade work and your homework. Ask “WWTD?” What would Titus do? After all, Titus is a Transitional Pastoral Epistle. Sure... we all know that we are all Transitional Pastors... but what about this particular church you are considering?

It is important to remember there is “No Perfect Church ~ No Perfect Pastor ~ No Perfect Process ~ No Perfect Interim Pastor.”

What follows is a foundational series of questions, observations and insights forged and developed over the last 30 years of consulting and coaching nearly 500 hundred churches in pastoral transition. These assessments are slanted to a church facing “real issues” just like Paul’s letter to the Philippians. The lists are for interaction between the prospective interim pastor, the board and other church leaders.

1. During the Transition Season, who makes decisions?
 - a. As the interim pastor, what do I need to clear through the board and what can I decide?
 - b. Will you trust me to lead and make the difficult decisions?
 - c. How do you rate yourself as a board in the area of trusting your pastor?
 - d. How will we “process together” those issues and decisions?
2. During the Transition, who establishes the vision and strategic ministry initiatives for the church? Specifically, since the pastor is the point person for vision and strategic ministry, are there any reasons why you would not want your interim pastor to fulfill this role? Please note the resource “Who Leads?” in the **Important Training Resources** section.
3. For the interim pastor, what are the written expectations, the unwritten wish list, and the perfect world dream list?
4. What is the highest expectation of the interim pastor? Is he one with primarily a shepherd's heart leading to healing, OR a seminary level Bible teacher leading to right thinking, OR a strong leader capable of making difficult decisions leading toward reconciliation and authentic Kingdom ministry effectiveness?
5. What is needed in your church to become healthy and move forward toward authentic ministry effectiveness?

6. Is the controversy over the _____ (name the issue or issues that have adversely impacted your church) really resolved or has it just gone underground?
 - a. Are there any renegade or rebel groups or Bible studies that now exist?
 - b. What steps have been made toward reconciliation and uniting the divisive persons and groups at your church?
 - c. Do you understand this is a process that cannot be rushed?
7. Does the former Senior Pastor still continue to attend your church?
 - a. Is that healthy or unhealthy as the church moves forward? Why?
 - b. If your former Senior Pastor does attend your church but PastorNext would be uncomfortable with his attending, would he be willing to leave the church without causing any trouble?
 - c. Is there an Official Covenant Agreement with your former Senior Pastor?
8. What is the Trust Relationship between the Staff and Elder Board at this time?
 - a. Adversarial or collaborative?
 - b. What does each group say when the other group is out of the room?
 - c. If you as board members do not know what the staff thinks of and says about you, why not? How will you find out?
 - d. How supportive is the staff of the board and the individual elders?
 - e. How supportive is the board of the staff?
9. Are there any "unofficial" Board/Staff relationships or alliances where two, three or four persons are talking privately instead of having open, honest discussion and deliberation with the entire group? Have you ever charted and diagrammed the Informal Leadership Structure and Organization of your church? If yes, what have you done about it? If not, why not?
10. Has there been any attempt from the Church Leaders (board, board members & pastors) toward a reconciliation process and asking of forgiveness between the many factions identified in the one external assessment study you have done?
 - a. Have the Leaders (board and pastors) been willing to call out divisive behavior and call it sin?
 - b. Has there been any attempt from the Leaders (board, board Members & pastors) for reconciliation with the people who have already left the church?
 - c. What will be the role of the interim pastor in helping resolve any of these issues?
11. As you now understand the reality in your church... does the larger church body recognize the need to repent and ask for forgiveness of one another? How would you gauge the spiritual receptivity of the body?
12. How has the church struggled with spiritual arrogance in the past? Does it currently? Has it ever been identified and addressed at a systemic level?

13. Does the Board believe that all the Staff are "A" players/keepers and should remain on Staff before the new Senior Pastor comes?
- Or, are there staff persons that should be graciously asked to leave and cared for during their transition, including out placement and coaching? Why or why not?
 - What will be the role of the Transitional Senior Pastor in this arena?
 - Different sized churches require differently skilled and gifted people. A church of 200 needs different gifts than a church of 1000. Is your staff gifted for the size of church you have? If you are uncertain of the ministry differences among different sized churches, see the fine work by Tim Keller, Lyle Schaller and Dan Reiland in the **Important Training Resources** section.
14. To whom does the church listen – really listen – hear and understand?

I use the following Core Consulting Questions in my assessment from the initial contact with any church/or church leader

1. Where am I? What year is it? What is the context of this church?
2. Who is in charge in this church? Who thinks they are in charge?
3. How did this church 'get here'? Why does it exist? How does it exist?
4. How did these people 'get here'? Why do they 'stay here'?
5. Who are these people?
6. Where are they going?
7. Do they have any clue or plan as to how to get there?
8. Whose church is this? What evidence is there?
9. Is the "Life of God" in this place? Are they "Following THE Leader, the Lord Jesus Christ?"
10. What does the Lord want to see happen in this church, but cannot because they are not listening to Him?
11. What is 'reality' and has 'reality' been defined?
12. Is there 'hope'? Who are the 'hope bringers'?
13. Are their best days ahead of them - or behind them? Their outlook?
14. Is there a "spirit of faith and worship" in this place?
15. How do they make decisions?
16. What are the 'real values' in this place?

17. What do they want to maintain and keep?
18. What do they want to/need to eliminate?
19. What do they want to avoid?
20. What do they want to/need to add?
21. If “this ministry” did not exist, would it have to be invented? If “Yes,” Why? If “No,” Why not?

Essential Search Profiling Questions: I Am Asking Them and Myself

1. What about PastorLast and his gifts, skills, styles and strengths that must be found in PastorNext so that PastorNext will have an excellent ministry launch and be successful in ministry?
 2. Where does PastorNext have to have strengths and gifts that PastorLast did not have?
 3. Are they seeking a “Messianic Robo Pastor” that does not exist?
- Note: The training and equipping process for a Pastor Search Team addresses 100s of questions. These three questions help construct an additional grid of assessment.

Five Rules for Organizational Renewal

1. The organization must operate from a commonly held sense of mission/purpose... and vision is also essential.
2. The organization must have an effective plan for the recruitment and development of new leadership. It must be intentional.
3. The organization must have fluidity of internal structure and systems. Most/many have a structure and systems that were designed to solve problems that no longer exist.
4. The organization must have some means of combating the process by which leaders become the prisoners of their procedures. The rule book grows fatter as the ideas grow fewer.
5. The organization must be more interested in what it is going to become than what it has been. Check the vision component! This is about the “Real Values” of a Ministry.

Conclusion:

The present success of an organization does not necessarily constitute grounds for optimism. Most ailing organizations have developed a functional blindness to their own deficits and dysfunction. Remember and review these simple principles:

Reflect ~ Repent ~ Refocus ~ Recalibrate ~ Resolve ~ Recommit ~ Reboot ~ Resume ~ Review....

Dennis Baker

FOUR IMPORTANT INSIGHTS INTO LEADING THE CHURCH TO HEALTH

The following four articles are foundational to successful interim pastor ministry. These articles provide a framework to help the interim pastor discern and understand the context of the church he is leading. He must know how to proceed as he encounters difficult people and situations and grasp how to minister to them or neutralize them as he leads the church back to spiritual health.

“DISCERNMENT”

Discerning God’s will is a central and essential work of church boards. Board members must be qualified and trusted leaders appointed to lead Christ’s church (1 Timothy 3:1-7; 5:17). And, it is crucial to note that leading Christ’s Church is discerning God’s will for HIS Church (not our own). Discerning God’s will is possible because Jesus Christ is the Lord of the church and He promised that when two or more gather in His name, He is present (Matthew 18:20). If Christ is present in the work of the board, His voice can and will be discerned. And, Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit will lead His followers into the truth (John 14:26). A core facet of discerning God’s will is the full use of what James calls “the wisdom from God” (James 3:17-18).

Discernment in the Early Church

- a. Acts 6:1-7 – Choosing the Seven
- b. Acts 15 – First church council: determining essential doctrine
- c. Acts 13:1-3 – Choosing and sending the first missionaries
- d. Acts 15:36ff – Paul and Barnabas part ways; two missionary teams formed
- e. Philippians 1:9 – Discernment promised to a congregation
- f. 2 Timothy 2:20-26 – Advice for wise church leadership

Listening for the Will of God

- a. Listening to Scripture. That means, of course, board members must know the content and themes of the Bible. It is important to add that conversations about God’s will be conducted in the context of Christlikeness and humility. (See chapters 1-5 of the first volume of this series, **Church Board Training Manual**.)
- b. God’s will is often heard in the voices of board members. Therefore, it is wise to listen carefully to each other even when that seems difficult. See Acts 15:5ff, a long and difficult conversation ends in a wise decision. (See article in the **Important Training Resources** section on “Listening to, Hearing, and Obeying the Spirit of God.”) It is also wise to listen to the board and church members who have the gift of discernment. Often the Spirit speaks His will through them.
- c. Wise church leaders listen to the voice of the congregation they are called to lead. See Acts 15:22 where the entire church was involved in implementing the wise decision made earlier.
- d. The entire process in Acts 15 is a conversation leading to discernment and the engagement of the congregation. The process is called the work of the Holy Spirit in verse 28.

The Process of Discernment

- 1. **Prayer:** asking and listening
- 2. **Scripture:** does the Bible speak to this issue? What Biblical principles help us decide this issue? Does the example and teaching of Jesus speak to this issue?

3. **Conversation:** speaking and listening to Scripture, one another, the congregation, the Holy Spirit – and coming to consensus. Some leaders are more gifted with wisdom than others; their words carry “weight.”
4. **Silence and reflection**
5. **In the end, genuine consensus**

“IF YOU CAN’T READ THE ROOM, YOU CAN’T LEAD THE ROOM”

First, a shout out to Dan Vander Wal, one of our sharp campus pastors at 12Stone Church, for giving me this idea for a title. We were in the monthly leadership development huddle I lead for our campus pastors, and this subject came up. It was a great conversation and got me thinking about a post to share with you.

The reflexive thought when talking about reading the room is often limited to when you are preaching or teaching. That’s important, but only represents a small percentage of the nearly limitless moments to “read the room.”

The examples include a wide variety of things such as; board meetings, walking across the lobby on Sunday morning, staff meetings, training sessions, and one-to-one conversations.

A church asked me to consult with them. As I sat in a staff meeting, a big part of the problem they faced became immediately apparent. The pastor could not read the room. The staff wandered in late, looked at their phones for an awkwardly noticeable amount of time and the energy in the room was almost non-existent. The pastor cheerfully talked about last Sunday and cast the vision for the next weekend. No one chimed in other than for a few necessary details like what announcements would be made. Honestly, it was a painful experience.

A worship leader asked me to coach his ability to read the room. He was gifted, passionate, sincere and loved Jesus. But something was off. He didn’t connect. My most helpful thought for him was “You seem to do worship to the people rather than participate with the people.” You can only participate with the people if you can read the moment. It was more than moving out of performance mode. He didn’t connect with how the people were responding. When we talked about it, he got it instantly. It took some time to learn the skill, but he got it.

If you’re married, you can probably relate to moments that you didn’t “read the room” with your spouse. Maybe you said something that made it appear like you were clueless, insensitive, distracted, or possibly hurting or tired and therefore thinking about yourself; or any number of options other than connecting and paying attention.

When it comes to leadership in the church, the same idea is in play. The bottom line is that it is possible for you to misread, or not read, the environment in the moment.

Sometimes you and I can get stuck in our heads and not be freed up enough to see and sense what is going on around us.

That has a tremendously negative impact on your leadership.

You’ve probably been in a room where you felt the leader was just unaware, he or she had no idea that what they were doing wasn’t working. That’s not an indictment upon them personally; they just couldn’t read the room.

How does that happen? It's easy. They might be:

- Distracted
- Emotionally detached
- Inexperienced and don't know what to look for
- Insecure
- Lacking of focus or purpose
- Misreading social cues

Seven questions to help you read the room:

1. Can you establish a heart level connection?

Reading the room does not work with a detached approach. The image of a scientist observing people for a study is not the right idea. It's about you as a human being in full participation.

You need to be personally engaged and connected with your emotions. An emotionally vital connection includes vulnerability, authenticity, honesty, and risk. Essentially, being the real you. Above all, it's about being fully present in the moment.

2. Are you secure enough to focus on the needs of others?

Insecure leaders are not bad people. We all have some insecurity. But depending upon the extent of your insecurity in general, or in the moment, you can be so focused on yourself that you don't have the headspace to focus on the needs of others. That always gets you in trouble.

Your ability to trust yourself, relax in who you are and tap into some confidence is a big part of what frees you up to be able to read a room.

Reading social and emotional cues is a good example here. Do you know if someone is upset with you or someone else in the room? Not the more obvious cues like a raised voice, but the subtle kind, like withdrawn or quiet.

3. Do you have a specific purpose?

I was coaching a pastor who read the room brilliantly as he delivered the Sunday message. He was on purpose; he knew where he was going and what he wanted to say. But when it came to the altar call, it was as if he just checked-out. He finished his message, so in his mind, he was "done" and went into a mechanical mode.

He made his primary purpose the message rather than the actual point of the specific message and how he had prayed the people would respond. So, when he delivered an invitation, he no longer had a purpose, and it was apparent. He was closing the service, not inviting people to change.

4. Do you pay attention to the physical elements?

Have you ever led a meeting in a room that was freezing? Or so hot you were sweating? Me too.

Reading the room means you know how the people are doing and what they're probably feeling. And, for example, if it's bad enough, you may need to shorten the meeting or move to another room regardless of the hassle. How about lighting, noise or clutter? A messy room reflects on how you value the meeting and the people in the meeting.

5. Do you know what the people are saying non-verbally?

Let's pick up on the last point and, for example, say the room is too hot. Do you pick up the cues like the people are fanning themselves? Get someone to turn up the air-conditioning. If they are uncomfortable, they're not with you anyway. This may seem like "Well, Duh." But how many rooms have you been in where no one did anything?

If people are reading their phones, nodding off, or leaving the room early, they're telling you something. In contrast, if they are taking notes, laughing, asking questions, and nodding in affirmation, they too are telling you something, but much more positive. Either way, reading the room right allows you to respond appropriately.

6. Is the energy level obvious to you?

Is it an evening meeting for volunteers? Are they tired or is the morale low? On Sunday morning, can you mentally and emotionally compare one service's energy level to the next? Do you know what to do in the moment to correct it?

Some leaders panic and overreact. They just try to hype up the room when they think the energy is low. But that's inauthentic, and temporary. As soon as you end the prompt for some kind of response, they stop. Instead, consider the more authentic ways to change the energy level. Such as genuine humor, a heartfelt story, stirring vision, a creative moment, or interaction, etc.

7. Do you sense the presence of the Holy Spirit?

I saved the most important for last. As a spiritual leader, few things will trump the significance of God's presence in the room. We know He's always with us, but that's not the same as a present moment sense that God's spirit is engaged and part of what you are leading.

A solid grasp of reading God's presence in the room is directly connected to your intimacy with Him. In other words, God is with you, so sometimes His presence is more about your sensitivity to what He wants to do, rather than whether or not God will be there.

I don't want to get overly theological here, that's not my point. The important thing is, without God in the room with you, and you remaining attentive to what He wants, not much else matters.

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“LISTENING TO, HEARING AND OBEYING THE SPIRIT OF GOD”

We thought it important to add a few words to help the interim pastor in his training of the board to ensure that the board knows how and is willing to listen to, hear and obey the Holy Spirit. Our initial thinking was that this would be a “how-to” presentation.

We asked a number of Christian leaders, pastors and consultants for their 3-5 most important principles on the subject. There was not one “how-to” principle in their multiple answers. Rather, all the answers were about humility, the heart over mechanics, spiritual maturity and personal holiness over talent and unity over experience and giftedness. We have broken their insights into three categories: 1) Attitude toward God, 2) Attitude toward Others and 3) The Treatment of Others. As someone said, “God is speaking but are we listening?” As a leader said in the past, “God speaks at 500 rpms but we are moving at 5000 rpms.” And, as someone said to simplify his understanding of all of this: “Love, Listen, Discern and Obey.”

The first category is: It is Christ’s church not ours, a reliance on the Spirit and the Word of God and the unity of the Spirit. The second category is: absolutely no arrogance and the willingness to learn from others. The third category is: honesty, humility, kindness and a willingness to listen. And, finally, it is important to evaluate to make sure the board is living out those qualities. Such constant evaluation undergirds and protects the living out of all of the principles

We have discovered that many boards do not listen to the Spirit of God as well as they think they do. We think of one declining church where the board would not “face the facts” but kept focusing on non-ministry issues. Meanwhile, a church just a few miles away was planted and in the course of a very few years grew to a size of 1/3 larger than the church which considered itself to be the mature church. We think of the church whose attendance decreased by 75%, but the board members would not listen to a group of experienced advisors supplied by the regional denominational office.

The issue is not board members with bad hearts; rather, the issue is board members with hearts that are not growing and not as responsive to leadership, change and the voice of God as they should be or think they are. We think of one board and board chairman who resisted the wisdom of their interim pastor. Indeed, the chairman simply refused to listen in a few instances. He was probably glad when the interim pastor’s assignment was completed. He wept tears of joy at the initial sermon of the new pastor. Then the new pastor told the board and the chairman the exact same things the interim pastor had said. They were confronted with the fact that they had not listened to the voice of God speaking through their interim pastor. It is a fairly simple principle: If we do not listen to our brothers and sisters, we probably do not listen to God as completely as we should. For example, as we were finishing this article John had lunch with a pastor friend. The friend said he needs to make a staffing change but an elder for whom he has immense respect disagrees with him. The pastor friend said words to the effect, “I respect this elder so much that even though I think he is wrong I am going to slow down to consider what he is saying. It is possible that God is speaking through him.” This is

exactly the type of leader who will hear God's voice because he is willing to listen to the voice of his brother on the board.

The principle of listening is "easy said, hard done" as the old wisdom says. Genuine listening seeks to understand, asks questions of the one speaking and focuses attention on the one speaking. It is true that it is sometimes hard to listen when we think we are right and the other person is wrong. But, shutting down someone else and being bullish in what we say do not honor God.

So, the board that listens to the Lord is "still and knows that He is God." It believes and behaves in such a way that says it is His church not theirs. It has reliance on the Spirit and the Word of God over members' experience and wisdom. It manifests a unity of the Spirit, honesty, humility, kindness, is quick to listen and tolerates no arrogance. This board "loves, listens, discerns and obeys." And, it constantly evaluates itself against these principles.

“THE DESTRUCTIVE POWER OF ARROGANCE”

Part 1

Theological and Descriptive

“Captain Obvious” knows that pride and arrogance are divisive and destructive. Relational, organizational and ministry conflict are the standard pattern. The results of these root sins in the life of a church board are the tragic loss of church health and effectiveness. This is the rugged reality, not the exception. Sadly, the sin of arrogance can be in the life of a board member, some individual board members or the senior pastor. No matter where it is, it is wrong and antithetical to the holiness and character of God. Furthermore, if it is in the life of a board member, the other members and the pastor are wrong to tolerate it. And, if it is in the life of the pastor, the board is wrong not to have an evaluation/review process that addresses the sinful issue with him.

The pattern of dysfunction is true across every denomination and/or unaffiliated church. Some churches breed systems that can break any pastor. Others allow the pastor to continue in such sinful patterns and behaviors. Regardless, this lurking force can undermine, weaken and destroy any church. The interim season in the life of a church provides an opportunity to assess and address this facet of board life and practice.

The destructive power of pride and arrogance in the church cannot be overstated. Scripture is filled with warnings against pride and its extreme form, arrogance. And, the Bible offers living examples of arrogant pride.

Uzziah, for example, was one of Israel’s greatest kings. A glowing record of his administration is given in 2 Chronicles 26, and he became famous and increasingly powerful (v. 15). But, the Chronicler adds, *“After Uzziah became powerful his pride led to his downfall”* (v. 16). The consequence was devastating for Uzziah and for Israel.

Later in 2 Chronicles, the same pride led to Hezekiah’s downfall. *“Hezekiah’s heart was proud and he did not respond to the kindness shown him; therefore, the Lord’s wrath was upon him and on Jerusalem”* (32:24).

Both kings suffered from the same humility deficit as Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 5:18-20). Given great gifts and glory and splendor...*“his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride. He was deposed....”*

From beginning to end, the Bible warns against pride and arrogance. Proverbs 16:5 puts it powerfully, *“Everyone arrogant in heart is an abomination to the Lord.”* Jesus declared *arrogance is evil and comes from an unclean heart* (Mark 7:22). Paul lists arrogance as a characteristic of the *“depraved mind”* (Romans 1:30). Twice the New Testament quotes

Proverbs 3:13, “God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5).

The antidote to pride and arrogance is humility. Humility is the first word of Christian character (Matthew 5:3). Humility is also the fruit of the “*wisdom that comes from above*” (James 3:17-18). Such humility and lack of pride should be at the heart of every church board. “*Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem the other better than himself*” (Philippians 2:3).

Sadly, church board members and pastors often act more like fallen humans than children of God. Pride and arrogance enter the human heart and the consequences are never good.

This is a challenging assignment for the interim pastor but it is very rewarding and fulfilling ministry when one realizes the Lord of the Church has used him to be the catalyst to confront the devious sin, see its grip broken, repented of and the church back on the right Kingdom track that Jesus expects for His Church.

THREE FACES OF ARROGANCE

1. **Arrogant Pastors.** Pastor X was a gifted pastor and a visionary leader. His church grew rapidly and its impact on the community was profound. For years, neither he nor the church failed at anything they did. After years of ongoing success, pride in his achievements triumphed over Godly humility. He began to make unilateral decisions without consulting his board. When the board said “no” to some of his large ideas, he went around the board and started ministries independent of the board and the church. He determined that a very large, new ministry was the will of God and tried to impose that vision on the church. When most people resisted, he often demonized them. He used the pulpit to scold the church, the board and those who didn’t agree with his new vision. Conflict began to affect the church and board in negative ways. Ministries that once flourished began to fade. Attendance and giving began to decline. The pastor refused to be accountable to either the board or congregation. In the end, after decades of grand success, he was forced to take early retirement. The long-term consequences still affect that smaller but wiser congregation.
2. **Arrogant Churches.** Church Y was thankful for and appropriately proud of its great history and powerful ministry. But, that pride became toxic. Attention was focused on past glory. Resistance to any change began to strangle present ministry opportunities. Pride blinded the church leaders to their own arrogance and the many new opportunities for ministry. Instead, the leaders insisted on propping up old, declining ministries and resisted any self-evaluation and assessment of ministries or themselves. The consequence was conflict between old-timers and new-comers and conflict with the pastoral staff who desired what they believed were necessary changes. It took a

dramatic change in pastoral leadership with accompanying personal pain to finally force the needed changes.

3. **Arrogant Board Members.** A very sad expression of such arrogance is told by a trustee and member of an assessment team for his association. The team recently has been involved with a church whose attendance is plummeting “like the fuel gauge on my oversized pickup” he says. He continues: “The association’s leadership board reluctantly asked us to intervene with this church leadership team. We conducted visits, interviews and surveys. We regularly witnessed the elder board’s aversion to our input and counsel, visible with their arms crossed. They were a group of business leaders and CEO’s who proceeded to hire a man to mediate with us so that they were not bothered by our intrusion. Their self-importance was reflected in comments like, ‘We don’t need an assessment. We know our strengths and condition.’ When they wanted their way, the church bylaws didn’t stop them. Attaining the direction or goals they desired was more important to them than acquiescing to any standards to which the church had formerly (and legally) agreed.”

John R. W. Stott said, “There is something essentially obscene about arrogance in Christian people and something authentic about humility. We shall not be able to strut round Heaven like peacocks, flattering ourselves as if we got there by our own achievement. Instead, we shall spend eternity ascribing salvation to God and to the Lamb.”

Stott’s declaration is a wise foundation for every Church Board to affirm and embrace in how they “Do Church Board” in their context.

Part 2

Reality and Prescriptive

You ask, “What are the symptoms of arrogance of which we need to be aware as we assess our own church board?” “How does the interim pastor discern these sinful symptoms as he endeavors to fulfill his duties to the church he is serving?” The following “AARPS” acrostic captures a snapshot of what we have experienced, observed and encountered. It happens in many churches and from every theological and ecclesiological ecosystem.

AARPS: A List of What We Have Experienced, Observed and Encountered

- Arrogant
 - Angry
 - Attitude and Avoidant
- Agenda manipulation
 - Approach of Arrogance, etc.
 - Accusatory and Argumentative

- Rigid
 - Rude and Relationally Challenged
 - Resistant
- Prideful and Pharisaical
 - Pretense with No Humility
 - Pushy
- Selfish
 - Sarcastic
 - Self-Centered

Other descriptive words that come to mind that are road signs of arrogance in church boards include:

- “Demeaning, Condescending and Dismissive”
- “Polemic, Proud and Harsh”
- “My Way or Else”
- “Judgmental, Narrow and Controlling”
- “Bullying with the Bible”
- “Spiritually Abusive and Manipulative Coupled with Covert Narcissism”

Under the leadership of the intentional interim pastor:

1. Reality is faced. Generational sin and failure are addressed. Spiritual brokenness occurs and integrity coupled with humility is restored.
2. Reality of behavior is dealt with ruthlessly with Biblical grace, love and mercy.
3. The church faces personal and corporate “Family of Origin Generational Issues” with a ministry professional who knows how to work with church boards.
4. The church board is coached by another church that is emotionally healthy. The members are retooled because they are coachable learners. This is an ongoing process that carries into the coming of PastorNext.
5. This is a “Covenant Commitment” to address the systemic issues which cannot be denied, dismissed and rejected.
6. The interim pastor helps the board understand the wisdom of Proverbs 27:2 “*Let the lips of another praise you and not your own....*” Psychologists help us understand that when a person is talking about himself and his accomplishments, he is covering a deep insecurity instead of finding his security in Christ. Experienced church consultants have observed arrogance used as a tool to avoid accepting the fact that the church’s ministry is ineffective.

SOME REMARKS IN CONCLUSION

We three are undecided among ourselves on the following discussion. But, it is one which we think is important. The Apostle Paul writes in Galatians 6:7, *“Do not be deceived. God is not mocked. What a man sows, he reaps.”* Though we cannot conclusively prove this with empirical evidence, we believe there are churches that lose all ministry and Gospel effectiveness even though they continue to function. And, we think there are churches that close after suffering great atrophy. In both cases there does not seem to be a plausible answer for why the church has lost its effectiveness or the other has closed.

We think (one of us stronger than the others) it is the Lord quietly saying to those churches, *“I am not mocked. You were doing your ministry in arrogance and to bring credit to yourselves rather than doing ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit and to bring glory to My Son. So, I have let you continue your little game but I have moved the power of My ministry down the street to another church. Or, I grew tired of your games so I let you die.”* Again, the three of us do not agree on all of this nor do we say we have figured it out. We are thinking it through. But, the issue certainly should cause us to be thinking about whether our ministries are bringing credit to Jesus Christ or to ourselves.

In Isaiah 42:8 the Lord says, *“I am the Lord. That is my name. I will not share my glory with anyone.”* The Lord is clear; He does not share His glory. In John 17:4 Jesus prayed, *“I have brought You glory on earth by finishing the work You gave Me to do.”* The Scripture is clear: He is God and we are not. Therefore, our ministries need to be bringing Him glory; we are not to be focusing glory and adulation on ourselves. In this section we have presented both the theological/descriptive view of arrogance and the prescriptive insights as to how the interim pastor can recognize it in the church he is serving and how to deal with it. It is our experience that this change in direction of ministry is not easy; but it is necessary to get the church back on track. So, we honor you as interim pastors. You will be given insight by the Holy Spirit to discern who those arrogant church leaders are and how to address those toxic members. It is worthwhile and productive ministry.

Dennis Baker, David C. Fisher and John Vawter

COVENANTS DEMONSTRATING BIBLICAL WISDOM

These sample board covenant models show how different churches carefully expressed their commitments to a Biblical selection process, behavior in meetings, ministering to the flock, communication at all levels and board life together. Church boards and staff teams are encouraged to use these forms as a basis for creating their own leadership selection and covenant process.

THE CHURCH BOARD COVENANT

As board members (Acts 20:28-10; I Peter 5:1-4) we pledge ourselves to:

1. Watch our relationships with God carefully, knowing that we are only as useful to each other and our church as we are close to the Lord. Acts 20:28
2. Make sure our relationships with our spouses and children are kept as our next priority. God does not want us to sacrifice our families on the altar of our ministries. Ephesians 5:25-6:4
3. Love each other, endeavor to know each other well, pray for each other, defend each other – giving each other the benefit of the doubt (as we would desire for ourselves) when anyone criticizes a fellow board member. I Timothy 5:17-22; I Thessalonians 5:12-15
4. Tell each other the truth, in love, knowing that withholding the truth from each other is not loving; it is selfish. It is our calling to grind with love and grace the rough edges off each other. Church leaders who do not challenge each other remain spiritually stunted and unable to lead their congregations to godliness. Ephesians 4
5. Never gossip about each other. Gossip is saying negative things about a person, which the hearer does not need to hear. We will “speak to, not about.” We will gladly serve as “conflict coaches,” who counsel and guide church members to do the right thing, speaking directly and respectfully to board members with whom they have disagreements. Philippians 4
6. Settle issues with each other as quickly as possible, knowing that relational, doctrinal and philosophical unity at the level of the board is vital for church health and effectiveness. Ephesians 4:1-6; Matthew 5:23-26; Matthew 18:15-20; Galatians 6:1-5
7. Begin our meetings on time and end our meetings at a reasonable time, occasionally scheduling a special meeting if necessary to resolve an issue or complete a task.
8. Not procrastinate on difficult issues, but deal with them openly and honestly. We will always speak the truth in love in our board meetings, knowing that true unity and godly leadership require our honesty with each other.
9. Disagree graciously in private and agree to speak as one voice in public. It is vital for our church that we discern the will of God and lead the congregation with one, united voice.
10. Not betray the confidence of our fellow board members. We will agree together on which decisions and discussions will be shared with the church and what information will be kept confidential.
11. Always seek to honor the only True Owner and Lord of the church (Acts 20:28-20; Ephesians 1:22-23) with our decisions. We will not shirk from difficult decisions because of the “fear of persons... male or female.”
12. Pause for serious prayer, asking for God’s promised guidance (James 1), when, in our meetings, we encounter especially difficult matters.
13. Always seek to lead our church so that it fulfills its purpose (glorifying God, as in Ephesians 1), accomplishes its mission (making disciples, as in Matthew 28:18-20) and achieves its God-given vision. Romans 12:1-2; Jeremiah 29:11; Romans 15:5-6; Philippians 1:27-2:4

14. Stay on task in our meetings, (normally) following the agenda prepared by the Senior Pastor and Board Chair. Any board member may request subjects for discussion but these items will be scheduled for discussion by the Pastor and Chair. I Corinthians 14:33, 40
15. Deal with decision items once and decisively, if at all possible. Many decisions will be turned into policies (e.g., use of the building, wedding policies) so that matters do not need to be revisited.
16. Focus on the “Big Picture... the Big Rocks”... the items of purpose, mission, values, vision, and policy.
17. Meet at unusual times and places, if necessary, in times of crisis. We will handle crises with faith, unity, humility, and godliness. II Timothy 4:5
18. Refer potential board meeting guests to the Senior Pastor or Board Chair.
19. Review, discuss, and potentially update this document annually.

Source: Brian Thorstad
www.churchwhisperers.org

ELDER COVENANT

Covenant: A Solemn Agreement

We believe the aspiration to serve as an Elder is a covenant to serve the Lord in a role of spiritual leadership of the local body of Christ. It is a commitment to seek to walk in the power of the Holy Spirit, to seek to grow in your relationship with Jesus; to help others choose to receive and know Him; to follow Him; and then to grow and flourish together so that we may participate in the fulfillment of the Great Commission given to us as our marching orders by our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ. (Matthew 28:18-20).

The Bible teaches that when you placed your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ you became a part of the Body of Christ. We believe that God has plans for our church, as part of His worldwide body of believers, plans He wants to accomplish uniquely through us. We believe He reveals these plans through the inspiration of His Word, the influence of His Spirit and the leadership and effort of our Pastors, Elders and members.

Our Vision: We use our Church's Vision Statement

Our Mission: We use our stated Church Mission Statement

Culture, Character, Commitment: We developed a document expressing our "Three Cs"

Guiding Principles: We adapted a proven template from our denominational consultant

This is Expected of me as an Elder

1. I acknowledge that I have placed my faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as my Savior and want to develop a growing personal relationship with Him.
2. I will be a functioning church member. Because I am a member of the body of Christ, (1 Cor. 12:27) I have been given a spiritual gift(s) to utilize for the building of His Kingdom. I will give my time and financial resources. I will serve, minister, study Scripture and share the gospel with others. I will seek to be a messenger of God's love and truth to others. I will remember that, if one member suffers, all members suffer along with him or her. If one member is honored, all members rejoice with him or her. (1 Cor. 12:26)
3. I will be a unifying church member. I will seek to be a source of unity in my church. I know there are no perfect pastors, staff, elders or other church members. No one is perfect and neither am I. I will not be a source of gossip or dissention. I will seek to forgive. One of the greatest contributions I can make is to do all I can in God's power to help keep the church in unity for the sake of the gospel. (John 17:23, Ephesians 4:1-3, Colossians 3:12-14, Matthew 6:14-15)
4. I will not let service as an Elder be all about my personal preferences or desires. Personal preferences can be self-serving. I will focus my energy to serve Christ and to

serve others. I will be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger. (James 1:19, Mark 9:35, Phil. 2:5-11)

5. I will pray for my fellow church leaders. I will pray for our pastor(s), fellow elders, members and attenders regularly. I will ask God to lead us clearly as He wants us to go and to give us strength and wisdom to accomplish His work. (1 Tim. 3:2-5)
6. I will lead my family to honor the Lord. We will pray together, worship together and serve the Lord together in our church. We will ask Christ to help us fall deeper in love with Him because He gave His life for us. (Eph. 6:1-4)
7. The opportunity to serve as an Elder is a gift. When I received the free gift of salvation through Jesus Christ, I became a part of the Body of Christ. I am now humbled and honored to serve and to love others. I will endeavor to respect the office of an Elder as a gift and an opportunity to serve the Lord, to serve others and be a part of something much greater than myself. (Eph. 2:8-9, I Cor. 12:27-28)

I enter into this Elder Covenant understanding that these expectations require much more than human effort alone. I will ask God's Spirit to be my counselor and guide and I will look to Him every day for His leadership and wisdom in my life. When I become aware of sin in my life, I will confess my sin to God and thank Him that Jesus died on the cross so that I am forgiven. Where appropriate, I will go to the person I have wronged and ask forgiveness. I will look to others for guidance and friendship to help me on my journey with the Lord and I will seek to offer the same to those who come after me.

Counting on God for His wisdom and guidance, I enter into this Elder Covenant.

Printed Name _____ Date _____

Signature _____

COMMUNITY CHURCH OF YOUR TOWN

Elder Board Mission and Ministry Covenant

Document Purpose

This document is intended to clearly articulate, to both current and future elders, the mission and ministry of Community Church's Elder Board. It will serve as a reference, and as our Board Covenant, to help us accomplish all responsibilities, obligations, and duties of the Elder Board. Note: This document uses "Elder Board" as the terminology. Your church nomenclature is easily substituted.

Mission Statement

We, the elders, remember we serve the God and Creator of the universe for the purpose of advancing His Kingdom. We understand both God and this church have entrusted us to lead this church. Thus, we must constantly seek to advance God's agenda, not our own (Phil. 2:3). We must constantly ask ourselves: "What does God want for Community Church?" instead of "What do I want for Community Church?" Community Church is God's church. We will strive to accomplish the goals in this document, not out of a sense of duty or obligation, but rather out of an overflow of love for the Lord, His Church, and His people.

Roles and Responsibilities of Elders:

1. **Guard the spiritual health of the Elder Board.** The Church is about Jesus! He is its leader (Col. 1:18). We, the elders, serve as leaders under Him. Therefore, only those with a passion for the Lord Jesus Christ are qualified to lead. Our passions will influence the congregation's passions. We are to serve together as a united team, sharing responsibility for the leadership and oversight of Community Church. We must be able to work graciously in a team setting. We will be honest with each other and hold each other accountable. When disagreements occur within the Elder Board, the minority shall defer to the majority and support the majority decision both publicly and privately (Eph. 5:21). We will do this to avoid dissensions within the congregation. Those who cannot function as a healthy member of a team will destroy the unity necessary for the Elder Board to function effectively. We as an Elder Board are accountable to God and to the congregation as a whole, not to any individual congregant.
2. **Maintain a spiritual-accountability partner.** We elders are the spiritual leaders of the congregation (1 Peter 5:1-4). Therefore, our spiritual lives, both individually and as a group, impact the entire congregation. The congregation cannot be expected to grow spiritually if we as elders are not growing, or to live in harmony if we elders do not. Therefore, we need accountability in these areas, specifically related to our roles as elders and leaders. We must, with genuine love, ensure that each of us continually strives to grow. Therefore, each elder will have at least one other elder to serve as his accountability partner, to ensure ongoing spiritual transformation. This accountability relationship is to:
 - a. Serve as a place for elders to be privately held accountable for each responsibility in this document.

- b. Help each elder identify areas where he needs to grow spiritually and emotionally, and encourage him on these journeys.
- c. Help each elder identify areas of weakness, where the partner will suggest possible ways to address the weakness.
- d. Serve as a place where matters of individual, emotional and spiritual well-being are discussed, so each elder may lead from a strong and healthy place.

This relationship will not be a place where the accountability partners deal with Elder Board business, but rather a place to nurture individual spiritual growth.

3. Guard and love the senior pastor. We elders are to love, care for and empower the senior pastor not only as a professional, but also as “family”—treating him with kindness, patience and affection (1 Cor. 13). He has significant responsibility and oversight; and we will watch over him to ensure he is encouraged and rested, both emotionally and spiritually. We can do this practically when we:

- a. Regularly pray for the senior pastor.
- b. Regularly ask the pastor how the elders might encourage or help him make time for rest and spiritual renewal.
- c. Regularly offer clear, honest, gracious feedback, both encouraging and constructive.
- d. Regularly communicate our love and support to the pastor.
- e. Share in the work God has called the pastor to do, not by doing it, but by helping him be the minister God has called him to be.
- f. Assist and support the pastor by loving and supporting the staff he secures.

As the senior pastor is responsible to the entire Elder Board and not just an individual elder, so the entire Elder Board is responsible to love and support that pastor.

4. Discern and guard the *vision* of Community Church. To lead is to be out in front of others. True leadership is primarily about the future, and secondarily about the present. We elders will spend most of our time focusing on future issues, rather than present-day issues. In conjunction with the senior pastor, we are to intentionally pray and seek God’s will for the mission and vision of Community Church. We will routinely ask if Community Church is moving in a direction most pleasing to God. We will think conceptually and dream God-sized dreams, without immediately dismissing any such ideas as impractical. We will regularly seek to understand which ministries God is blessing and moving in, and will challenge all ministries to work together to achieve the church vision. We will accomplish this when we:

- a. Clearly define the goals and desired results for each ministry as it relates to the overall church vision.

- b. Delegate to, encourage, and empower staff, ministry leaders and deacons with the freedom to determine how to achieve the desired results.
 - c. Hold the senior pastor, ministry leaders and deacons responsible for the desired results.
 - d. Regularly evaluate the church's ministries to ensure they are meeting not only the specific goals of the ministry, but are also converging with the overall church vision. When considering new actions or ministries, we elders will ensure the new items fall within and complement the overall church vision.
 - e. Give close attention to small-group teachings and the pulpit preaching, being sure to compare the teachings to Biblical principles and ensuring they support the church vision. Perceived inconsistencies will be discussed with the other elders.
- 5. Honor the Word of God.** We elders will be examples of growth and maturity for the congregation. Each of us will constantly strive to set such an example, and thus:
- a. Read the Bible regularly. This can include private or public reading or listening.
 - b. Study the Bible regularly. This can be private study, group study, family study, memorization, discussion group, or any other approach that encourages deeper knowledge and understanding of God's Word and His truth.
- 6. Pray "without ceasing"** (1 Thess. 5:17). We elders will consider prayer one of our primary responsibilities. An elder's prayer life and relationship with God are critical aspects of his ministry; we must keep these as high priorities. We are also expected to look for opportunities to pray with and for members of the congregation—especially those who are ill or confined to their homes or hospitals. We will accomplish this when we:
- a. Prioritize private prayer times, and accountability on this with our accountability partner.
 - b. Develop and maintain a rotating schedule, so all elders take turns visiting those who are ill or confined to their homes or hospitals.
 - c. Develop and maintain a method by which at least one elder personally communicates with each person who requests prayer.
 - d. Are willing to pray aloud with individual members of the congregation and in group settings.
- 7. Shepherd the flock.** We elders are to lead the church as overseers, supervising and managing the church well, ensuring all things are done with integrity, and constantly striving to be the leaders God would have us be (1 Tim. 3, Titus 1). We are to shepherd (guard, guide, tend and feed) the flock of Community Church as those who are held accountable (Heb. 13:17). We are to serve the church as examples of Christ-like character. As a result, we will:

- a. Make an effort, at each church event, to greet and engage people we do not know and do our best to remember, call them by name, and introduce them to others.
 - b. Be available to listen to requests, concerns, and prayer needs, whether it is at a church event or through other communications throughout the week.
 - c. Make an effort to thank and encourage staff and volunteers who serve in the church services and other ministries.
- 8. Identify and develop future elders.** We elders will be on the lookout for Godly men who possess the basic Biblical qualities desired in elders. We will encourage these men to pursue being an elder and to be mentored by current elders. This way they can grow and understand what is required of an elder. In considering a man for a leadership role, we will ask questions like: Do they already have a positive influence over others? Do people look to them for leadership? Do they lead people closer to Christ and in positive ministry directions? We will encourage and disciple potential future elders when we:
- a. Pray for leaders to emerge from within the congregation.
 - b. Provide opportunities for potential leaders to serve and grow, via leading small groups or emerging ministries, taking on deacon leadership, working in existing ministries, etc.
 - c. Encourage spiritual growth through our structured leadership development ministries, individual discipleship, accountability, etc.
- 9. Fulfill the requirements of the Bylaws.** Elders will be familiar with and fulfill the Community Church bylaws, particularly where they address the responsibilities of the Elders. Article 4.2 of the bylaws states:

“The Elder Board, in conjunction with the Senior Pastor and guidance of the Holy Spirit, shall be responsible for establishing the overall vision and values for the church and for leading the church in its accomplishment. The Elders will constantly seek the wisdom and leading of Christ, the Head of the Church. They are to monitor and periodically evaluate the performance of the Senior Pastor. They are to model Christlike behavior (1 Pet 5:3, 1 Tim 4:12), teach and preach the Word of God (1 Tim 3:2, 2 Tim 4:2, Titus 1:9), protect the church from false teachers (Acts 20:17, 28-31), exhort and admonish the congregation in sound doctrine (1 Tim 4:13, 2 Tim 3:13-17, Titus 1:9), visit the sick and pray (James 5:14, Acts 6:4), judge doctrinal issues (Acts 15:6), watch out for the souls of the church (Heb 13:17) and exercise Biblical discipline within the membership when necessary (1 Thessalonians 5:12). The Elder Board will be responsible for the financial integrity of the church, the protection of its assets and for setting the salaries of the Senior Pastor and ministry staff. Ultimately, the Elder Board shall be accountable to Christ for all their responsibilities.”

Wil Regier, Church Ministry Consultant with www.churchassistanceministry.org, was the coach for this process.

COVENANT FOR MEETINGS

Board & Staff of Olde First Church

WHEREAS, we as members of the Board and Staff of Olde First Church have been selected for our position of highest trust, integrity and responsibility...

WHEREAS, we as members of the Board and Staff of Olde First Church recognize the potential influence and impact of our deliberations and decisions upon the church and our future mission and ministry together, the spiritual health and fitness of its fellowship, the teaching of its children, and the maturing of its membership in relationships characterized by grace, truth, peace, and love, and...

WHEREAS, we as members of the Board and Staff of Olde First Church acknowledge and confess that the discovery of God's will and direction can often end up being confused and complicated by human and supernatural factors that are not easily understood . . .

We solemnly enter the following Covenant together before the Lord:

A COVENANT OF PRAYER...We will uphold one another in prayer and seek, both individually and together, the clear leadership of the Holy Spirit.

A COVENANT OF HONEST COMMUNICATION...We will speak openly, directly, honestly and graciously with one another without taking offense. We will speak robustly and respectfully toward one another. We realize that we need the opportunity to think aloud in order to help sort out impressions and responses as we study our church's needs and evaluate courses of action during this season of pastoral transition.

A COVENANT OF CONFIDENTIALITY...We will treat with confidentiality our discussions and evaluations. We will deal responsibly with privileged information. We will agree on appropriate processes and communication with the congregation. We will not publicly criticize the perspectives or decisions of any other members.

A COVENANT OF ACCOUNTABILITY...We will proceed with Biblical ethics and execute our responsibilities faithfully. We recognize our accountability to our church and to God for our decisions.

A COVENANT OF UNITY...Where there are honest differences of opinion, we covenant to work these out to the best of our ability. Unanimity and uniformity are not the desired goals, but a humble and strong unity. We will publicly support all decisions of the group in unity.

Therefore, we enter into this Covenant with our Lord, led by the Holy Spirit, in order to discern faithfully His will in serving the church of Olde First Church.

Signatures:

DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE

It is important to accept the fact that not all board members are motivated by the Spirit of God nor does their behavior always reflect Christ-like qualities. The next four articles are very important relative to understanding difficult people in the church. The interim pastor must be able to discern the spiritual maturity of the board members with whom he is serving, be able to use discernment to identify difficult people, minister to them if they are willing to be repentant and neutralize them if they will not repent.

“DISTINGUISHING MARKS OF A QUARRELSOME PERSON”

Quarrels don't just happen. People make them happen.

Of course, there are honest disagreements and agree-to-disagree propositions, but that's not what the Bible means by quarreling. Quarrels, at least in Proverbs, are unnecessary arguments, the kind that honorable men stay away from (Prov. 17:14; 20:3). And elders, too (1 Tim. 3). These fights aren't the product of a loving rebuke or a principled conviction. These quarrels arise because people are quarrelsome.

So what does a quarrelsome person look like? What are his (or her) distinguishing marks? Here are twelve possibilities.

You might be a quarrelsome person if . . .

- 1. You defend every conviction with the same degree of intensity.** There are no secondary or tertiary issues. Everything is primary. You've never met a hill you wouldn't die on.
- 2. You are quick to speak and slow to listen.** You rarely ask questions and when you do it is to accuse or to continue prosecuting your case. You are not looking to learn, you are looking to defend, dominate, and destroy.
- 3. Your only model for ministry and faithfulness is the showdown with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel.** Or the only Jesus you like is the Jesus who cleared the money changers from the temple. Those are real examples in Scripture. But the Bible is a book, and sarcasm and whips are not the normal method of personal engagement.
- 4. You are incapable of seeing nuances, and you do not believe in qualifying statements.** Everything in life is black and white without any gray.
- 5. You never give the benefit of the doubt.** You do not try to read arguments in context. You put the worst possible construct on other's motives, and when there is a less flattering interpretation, you go for that one.
- 6. You have no unarticulated opinions.** Do people know what you think of everything? They shouldn't. That's why you have a journal or a prayer closet or a dog.
- 7. You are unable to sympathize with your opponents.** You forget that sinners are also sufferers. You lose the ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes.
- 8. Your first instinct is to criticize; your last instinct is to encourage.** Quarrelsome people almost always see others in need of rebuke, rarely in need of refreshing.
- 9. You have a small grid, and everything fits in it.** You view life through a tiny prism such that you already know what everything is about. Everything is a social justice issue. Everything relates to the regulative principle. Everything is Obama's fault. Everything is about Trump.

It's all about the feminists. Or the patriarchy. Or how my parents messed up my life. When all you have is a hammer, the rest of the world looks like a nail.

10. You derive a sense of satisfaction and spiritual safety in feeling constantly rejected. We don't want to blame the victim, but some people are constitutionally unable to exist except as a remnant. They must be persecuted. They must be maligned. They do not know how to live in peacetime, only in war.

11. You are always in the trenches with hand grenades strapped to your chest, never in the cafeteria with ice cream and ping pong. I remember years ago talking to a returning serviceman in my church who told me sheepishly that his job in Iraq was to drive an armed convoy for the ice cream truck. It was extremely dangerous, escorting the vehicle through bomb infested territory. This was brave, honorable work. And important: Even soldiers need ice cream once in a while. The amp doesn't have to be cranked to 11 all the time. Seriousness about God is not the same as pathological seriousness about everything. Remember G. K. Chesterton: "We have to feel the universe at once as an ogre's castle, to be stormed, and yet as our own cottage, to which we can return to at evening."

12. You have never changed your mind. If you haven't changed your mind on an important matter in several presidents, I wonder if you are a Christian or even alive. Of course, truth never changes, and neither should many of our convictions. But quarrelsome people stir up strife because, already knowing everything, they have no need to listen, learn, or ask questions.

Hit close to home? Look to Christ. He has the power to change us and has made provision to forgive. By the death of the Prince of Peace we can be at peace with God and at peace with one another.

Kevin DeYoung

www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/KevinDeYoung

June 13, 2019

“SEVEN TRAITS OF TOXIC LEADERS”

1. They rarely demonstrate the Fruit of the Spirit.
2. They seek a minimalist structure of accountability.
3. They expect a behavior of others they do not expect of themselves.
4. They see almost everyone else as inferior to themselves.
5. They show favoritism.
6. They do not allow for pushback or disagreement and surround themselves with sycophants.
7. They are self-absorbed.

Some highlights from the Rainer Report:

- Toxic leaders keep great things from happening in a church.
- Toxic leaders often avoid systems of accountability.
- Toxic leaders are only surrounded by those who tell them what they want to hear.
- Toxic leaders focus on three people: me, myself, and I.

“TEN DANGERS OF DENIAL IN DYING CHURCHES”

1. The problems will only worsen.
2. Future generations are forsaken.
3. Leaders will have regrets.
4. Churches will miss opportunities for solutions.
5. There is no urgency for change.
6. Maintenance ministries engender frustration and conflict.
7. Churches in denial are usually disobedient.
8. Many of these churches will tolerate open and flagrant sin.
9. The church will lose its best members.
10. Comfort becomes an idol.

Some highlights from the Rainer Report:

- If you don't deal with the present, you won't be a force for the future.
- The way to move forward in a church is to be proactive, not reactive.
- Successful change requires you to admit something is wrong and needs to be addressed.
- A church in denial of dying is often disobedient to the Great Commission because they don't see the need for living it out.

”AN ADMISSION ABOUT THWARTING THE WILL OF GOD”

We are pleased and grateful to share this article by an author whom we know well and for whom we have enormous respect. As always, the names of the church and pastor will not be mentioned. He had a long, effective and successful ministry at the church mentioned below. The church quadrupled during his ministry.

His unvarnished candor will be very helpful to interim pastors. His reminiscing and reflecting explain how different personalities can be responsible for a board not hearing God’s voice. On an even deeper level he underlines how the lack of covenant guidelines for listening to one another, being humble, treating each other with respect and corporately being quiet before the Lord can prevent a board from hearing God’s voice.

HIS REMEMBRANCE

It was a pleasure and privilege to return to the church and city where we raised our family and lived for many years. As one can imagine, it was a bag of emotions. I clearly recalled the wonderful days within the life of that church community. I remember the efforts that led to growth, evangelism and discipleship in the ministry as we raised Christ as our personal and congregational focal point. I rejoiced in the truly great days of our past. And yet in hindsight I experienced a bittersweet flavor to the couple of days on location.

As their former pastor and leader, I quickly realized I was disappointed with myself because I had left the church landlocked with no room to grow. My personal regret was in seeing and being reminded of two pieces of property next to the church property, either of which would have met space requirements for the future, but neither were owned by the church.

I remember when I was still the pastor a five-acre empty lot at the very back of the property became available. A church member was so convinced it was for the church that he paid for an option to buy it. We were blessed that he was going to give it anonymously to the church. A neighborhood group did not want the church to have the property even though we promised that visual modifications such as berms and special landscaping would be installed so that none of the offended would see the parking lot we needed to build. One neighbor in particular was so adamantly opposed and hostile that they met informally with city council members to sway their opinion against us. Interestingly, the state Civil Liberties Union said they would defend us in court.

As our board leadership was discussing how to move forward, one board member said he was a man of peace. He believed that God is not pleased if anyone is angry with us. That position carried the room. It was with great sadness and a heavy heart that I told the donor to release the option. I shake my head now but later many large homes were built on the property and the same antagonist complained that the privacy of their home was compromised.

But what followed was unexpected. Another more convenient and developable piece of property became available. In a board meeting that followed this discovery, one of the board members believed this piece of property was more than adequate for our needs. Using it would require us to negotiate with the city to give up part of a useless, dead-end street. This would be a much easier process than trying to satisfy the various neighborhood groups at the other location.

He had barely finished his thought when a very vocal and negative board member attacked the idea. He called it foolish and without merit, insisting it would be too expensive. Looking back, it was a tirade. When it was over, a shocked silence fell on the room. No one had the stomach to oppose him. The idea was dropped without further discussion or research.

Years later on my aforementioned trip back I was deeply saddened to see the church landlocked when one or both of the properties would have met all the church's needs for the future. In hindsight I realize the man of peace was as wrong as the bully. In both cases we did not genuinely seek God's heart on these matters as we should have. Neither the bully nor the man of peace listened to others. They spoke their words and were allowed to stand without bringing these situations before the Lord.

While I am sad about my lack of leadership on these issues, I now understand we violated many key principles of hearing God's voice that are discussed in this manual. It doesn't matter if one is a bully or a man of peace. If we do not calm and quiet our hearts before God so we can humbly hear and understand what others say and think, we probably will not find the mind of Christ.

So, not only were the bully and the man of peace wrong, I was wrong for not having guidelines for board life and ministry. Further, the board was wrong for not seeing this lack in my leadership.

Of interest, 25 years after I left for another ministry, the church added an addition by building on a side lawn and taking some parking spaces. Guess who lead the unsuccessful charge to stop the project? You're right...the same person who led the charge 35 years before. I shake my head and think, "You can't make this stuff up." Our show of grace and peace all those decades earlier didn't win their friendship at all. This person is as cantankerous and hostile as ever. My only hope is that others don't shrink back from the opportunities that we had all those years ago.

SPIRITUAL HEALTH AND CHRIST-LIKE BEHAVIOR

The following three articles are included to help the interim pastor understand how to lead the church board to better spiritual health and Christ-like behavior. The articles include “The Golden Rule Biblical Leadership Principles” that have proven helpful to churches that are adding board members, questions to ask of prospective board members and the important truth of kindness. We include the article “The Kindness Quotient” by Dr. Jim Kok because we think Dr. Kok has succinctly captured wisdom about and insight into kindness. Listening to someone is a manifestation of kindness. Listening honors and shows respect to the other person. Even though the article is not specifically about board leadership and behavior, it applies to board life and ministry. Dr. Kok’s “The Kindness Quotient” motivated us to think through questions that board members can be asking relative to being kind in board deliberations and ministry. Five starter questions are listed. We recommend your board write its own questions to encourage the growth of kindness as part of the Fruit of the Spirit in your board life.

“SEVEN BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES THAT LEAD TO HEALTHIER BOARD RELATIONSHIPS”

It is recommended that a board approve, commit to and evaluate itself against these Golden Rule Leadership Principles once per year. Good relationships do not preclude understanding and obeying the Biblical truths of the ministry responsibilities of board life.

1. *“Be quick to listen and slow to speak”* (James 1:19) and *“To answer before listening—that is folly and shame”* (Proverbs 18:13). The Bible is clear. Godliness includes treating one another well; in the context of board life that means listening to the other person. Listening includes paying attention, understanding, not interrupting and honoring the other person even when you disagree with them.
2. *“Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves”* (Romans 12:10), *“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves* (Philippians 2:3) and *“Love is patient, love is kind... it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others; it is not self-seeking...It always protect”* (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). To be a solid and Christ-honoring team requires that board members honor one another, respect one another, be candid with one another and give deep and complete consideration to what the other person is saying.
3. *“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience”* (Colossians 3:12). We conduct ourselves in a collegial manner. The Christ-honoring board listens well and respects the words of others. Members speak with candor but not with anger or unkindness. When unkindness happens, the board is self-policing and requires apologies when needed.
4. *“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness”* (2 Timothy 3:16). No other document stands alongside the Bible. So, *“unwritten policies”* on how things were done in the past do not govern the board today unless agreed upon. Board members say everything in front of one another at meetings, refraining from *“meetings after the meeting.”*
5. *“The Fruit of the Spirit is love...patience...kindness...goodness...gentleness....”* (Galatians 5:22-23). *“Let your gentleness be known to all”* (Philippians 4:5). The Christ-honoring board not only commits to this truth but insists on its manifestation in its treatment of one another. When the truth is violated rationalizations are not made; rather repentance is offered to the Lord.
6. *“The one who has knowledge uses words with restraint. Even fools are thought to be wise if they keep silent”* (Proverbs 17:27-28). The board member who wants to honor Christ comes to understand and live out these words of wisdom. Bullying, intimidating, interrupting and incessant talking by one or two members do not honor Christ.

7. *“Let your yes be yes and your no be no”* (Matthew 5:37) and *“A gossip betrays a confidence but a trustworthy person keeps a secret”* (Proverbs 11:13). Confidentiality is an absolute must among board members. As a wise lay minister said, “Everyone has a confidant.” And, our spouses are the ones with whom we share most and in whom we have the most trust. However, confidants and spouses were not chosen to be board members. So, regardless of how it is determined that a discussion is confidential, it must remain in the board room.

One strategy we recommend is this: Nothing is confidential unless a board member says, “This is confidential.” Then the chairman polls the room and every member once again commits to confidentiality. Then the discussion proceeds. A board member who violates the trust of other board members and violates their own sense of integrity when they break a confidence—no matter with whom the confidence is shared—is not qualified to be a board member. If a person cannot keep a confidence, they are disqualified from being a board member. Simply stated, breaking confidences is a violation of the Scripture verses above and other parallel verses.

“THE KINDNESS QUOTIENT”

In the book of Mark, the story is well-known of the woman who had been bleeding for many years—she reached through the crowd to touch the hem of Jesus’ garment. He felt power go out from Him and asked, *“Who touched Me?”*

Can you imagine the scene? People are pressed all around Jesus in the crowd that was following Him, but He was aware of the special need of one person. Many people were undoubtedly bumping against Him and thus the consternation of His disciples at His question, *“Who touched Me?”* Why would He ask such a question, when He was constantly being touched?

And yet there was something special about the touch of one person. He was aware of it. Everyone else was clueless.

When she touched His hem, she immediately felt a change in her body. His question probably frightened her somewhat, so she hung back. But when He asked again, she came forward and told her story.

This is an amazing part! She was already healed—Jesus’ power had touched her and ended her suffering. He had already performed the miracle. That could have been the end of it. But — He listened to her story. He gave His time to listen to her. He was already on His way to the house of Jairus, whose daughter had died. He was busy. He was on a mission. He was surrounded by the pressings of the crowd. And yet — He listened to her story.

That was another healing! Giving His time to her restored her dignity. This is the lesson for us! Giving people our time and our attention is healing medicine for them. We cannot do physical healings like Jesus can do, but we can give people our time. We can listen to them.

Listening is kindness. Interrupting our own busy schedule to give time to another person is a kindness. Some may think that all this talk of kindness sounds, well . . . it sounds a bit wimpy. But . . . it is powerful! It is healing! It is needed! Take some time for someone today. Be present for them. You will both be blessed.

Dr. Jim Kok

June 14, 2019

www.peoplekindness.com

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR BOARD MEMBERS TO ASK RELATIVE TO KINDNESS

1. Has your board done a corporate study on the deeper meaning of kindness and goodness in Galatians 5:22-23 where Paul discusses the Fruit of the Spirit? The two qualities actually are a couplet – with kindness being the expression of the good heart of the person speaking.
2. Has each of your board members made a commitment to manifesting kindness in board deliberations?
3. How do you as an individual board member respond when another board member says something you think is off the subject, out of order or not too bright or cogent?
4. How do you as an individual board member police yourself to make sure you are treating others with kindness?
5. As a board what steps have you taken to ensure that you correct a fellow board member when they are not manifesting kindness to other board members or staff in board meetings?

QUESTIONS FOR PROSPECTIVE BOARD MEMBERS

The purpose of these questions is to lay the groundwork to facilitate and protect the unity of the Spirit and to ensure the potential board member understands the spirit of “Love, Listen, Discern and Obey” and knows how and practices the truth of Philippians 2:3, “...*in humility value others above yourselves*”; Romans 12:10, “*Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves*”; and James 1:19, “*Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak....*”

Love of others is the proof of our followership of Christ; **Listen** to others is a spiritual value. Without listening to others, we cannot listen to God. **Discern** is the ability and willingness to listen to God’s voice. **Obey** is the willingness to obey God’s voice whether we agree with Him or not. This means we do not insist on our way, are willing to be flexible and do not let our personality style dictate how He will speak.

As you consider aspiring for the office of overseer, it is important to keep the words of the Apostle Paul in mind. He writes in 1 Timothy 3:1, “*Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task.*” This is not a board of directors. We do not own the church. It is the church of Christ. So, it is important that your life to this point has manifested a life style of proper behavior and a willingness to grow in the principle of “Love, Listen, Discern and Obey.” Thus, we ask you these questions:

1. How will you work/minister with other board members?
2. How will you respond to another board member when, in seeking the Lord’s mind, he says something that you think is not God’s will?
3. Have you demonstrated a history of being “quick to listen”? By this, we mean a willingness to ask questions of the one talking, show preference to the one talking and make certain you understand their position before you present your position—if you disagree with their position.
4. Please tell us of a time when you violated the principle of “Love, Listen, Discern and Obey,” how you rectified the fault and what you learned from the experience.
5. What is your definition of “team work” whether it is on a board of directors in the workplace or a church board doing the will of Christ?
6. Are there preconceived ideas, ministry methods, theological positions and biases against any staff member or our senior pastor that you would bring to the board if chosen to serve with us?
7. Which facets of the Fruit of the Spirit are difficult for you to manifest when the group with which you are serving and seeking God’s will finds itself in a difficult discussion or having a difficult time discerning God’s will?