

NAZARENE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

TRANSITIONS IN MINISTRY:  
A PLAN OF SUCCESSION FOR  
WANAMAKER WOODS CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE

A THESIS IN THE PRACTICE OF MINISTRY  
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MICHAEL J. DE HAAN

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## **ABSTRACT**

Michael J. De Haan

Transitions in Leadership:  
A Plan of Succession for Wanamaker Woods Church of the Nazarene

This dissertation explores the difficulties and challenges pastors and local churches often experience with a transition of leadership between a tenured lead pastor and a new lead pastor. This study aims to clarify how a plan of succession is a viable alternative to current practices of transition in pastoral leadership in the Church of the Nazarene. Based on the research of succession models in local churches and businesses, this project aims to reveal why a local church will significantly benefit from a plan of succession. This study is the lens for analysis at Wanamaker Woods Church of the Nazarene, Topeka, Kansas. This project concludes with a handbook that outlines the essential questions, processes, and procedures necessary for planning for succession at Wanamaker Woods Church of the Nazarene.

### **PART I**

#### **CHAPTER ONE:**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

##### **The Sad, Familiar Story**

Long-term pastors hold a special relationship with their congregation. Churches who deeply love their pastor will often find themselves with the same pastor for twenty,

thirty, or even forty years. It is often during these lengthy tenures that churches experience growth and stability. The relationship between a tenured pastor and his or her congregation is unique—perhaps described as irreplaceable. However, churches will often find themselves at a crossroads when that pastor leaves or retires. Many transitions following long tenured pastors have resulted in decline or upheaval. In some cases, the leader following a tenured pastor becomes a “sacrificial pastor.” According to a study conducted by William Vanderbloemen and Warren Bird, in the nine years following a predecessor whose tenure averaged thirty-five years, churches experienced an average of three different successors. Simply put, transitions are delicate and can often bring about significant struggles for local churches. The critical intersection between the old and new, the past and future can ironically be unsettling on the one hand and exciting on the other. When a transition goes poorly, ministries fall apart, and the church is often left wondering who is to blame. Unfortunately, one does not have to look far to find example after example of churches who have struggled to overcome the challenges associated with a failed pastoral transition.

It is a sad, familiar story which goes something like this. Three years ago, Bible Church was growing and thriving with new people coming to faith weekly. Children, students, and family ministries were active and energetic. Worship was powerful and engaging. The preaching was biblical, relevant, and helpful. The church board was supportive and engaged, and the pastoral staff was seasoned and leading well. The church was doing well financially, free of debt with money in savings—all under the leadership of a senior pastor of twenty-eight years, who was nearing retirement. Once the senior pastor retired, the church board, under the direction and leadership of a District



Superintendent, found a young pastor who seemed promising and full of potential to lead Bible Church into a bright new future. However, over the course of two years, the new pastor did quite the opposite. Instead of growing, the church shrank. The future was not bright, but rather dark and difficult. The leadership became divided, which resulted in a large exodus of people. The new pastor's vision for the church was not well communicated. The little bit of vision that was communicated did not fully capture the people's hearts and imaginations, leaving many to wonder what was going on or to arrive at their own conclusions. Worship became mechanical and the preaching became irrelevant to many in the congregation. Many people became dissatisfied and began to look for a new church home. Because people were leaving, the children, student, and family ministries began to dwindle to a faithful few. Moreover, because so many people left, the church saw significant revenue losses, which resulted in budget cuts and staff losses. It seemed as if everything was falling apart. People were hurt and left wondering what would become of Bible Church. At one time, it was growing and thriving, but now, Bible Church was quickly declining.

Unfortunately, far too many churches find their lead pastors' transitions mirroring this sad story. Shifts in leaders present a unique challenge for any organization—particularly those with long-term leaders. Dan Ciampa and David Dotlich describe long-term leader-shifts well:

Leadership transitions are complex, seminal events that herald a new era in the life of a company [or church], and too many of them fail... When they fail, the costs are enormous—financially in lost revenue, strategically in misguided direction, operationally in loss of stability and predictability, culturally in damage to relationships and coalitions, and perhaps most tragic,

personally in derailed careers. Transitions are big deals, and when they go wrong it is a setback for everyone involved.

The complexity of leadership transitions calls for a unique strategy that can quickly identify the prerequisites for transitions, fully implement a well-constructed, strategic plan, and demonstrate high-capacity leadership amidst the problems that arise from a transition between the exiting leader and the incoming leader. However, the difficulty for the Church of the Nazarene is that the current protocols designed to assist churches facing a pastoral transition are problematic at best.

### **Overview of Current Transition Practices**

The Church of the Nazarene has a protocol and specific guidelines for calling a new pastor when a lead pastor resigns or retires (see Appendix B for the *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene's statements on calling a new pastor). The most common protocol for the Church of the Nazarene involves several steps and will vary slightly depending on the congregation and the presiding District Superintendent. In general, the steps for replacing a pastor according to the *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene and several district leaders are outlined in Table 1.

Step 1	Say Goodbye to the Exiting Pastor
Step 2	Establish Interim Arrangements
Step 3	Assess of Church Status
Step 4	Develop Profile of Pastor
Step 5	Identify Potential Candidates
Step 6	Interview Process
Step 7	Board Nominates Candidate
Step 8	Congregational Vote
Step 9	Response of the Candidate

*Table 1 - The Ten Step Process for Calling a New Pastor*

The first step in the process is saying goodbye to a pastor and the pastor's family. This step usually comes shortly after the announcement of the resignation or retirement of a pastor who is ready to transition. The congregation's ability to express appreciation for the beloved pastor is an essential step in the process for a church to move on and seek closure for one's season of ministry. Allowing the opportunity for a congregation to say good-bye in meaningful ways helps the congregation internally process their sense of loss and the grief associated with a beloved pastor's absence. It furthermore allows the congregation to externally demonstrate an appreciation for the pastor's service.

The second step in the process is establishing interim assignments. To ensure ministry continuity, the church board and the District Superintendent work cohesively to establish interim arrangements—including the responsibility of preaching and the roles for associate ministers. If a church is fortunate to have associate pastors, all pastoral staff must submit resignation letters when a senior pastor retires or resigns. The District Superintendent conducts a review of the pastoral staff with the church board to determine eligibility and effectiveness, as well as the church's financial health. Should the church board and the District Superintendent agree to continue to employ pastoral staff, the staff can be guaranteed employment for up to ninety days following the hire of the new pastor. After the initial ninety days, the new pastor will have the opportunity to either hire staff back or let them go. If, however, the church board and District Superintendent determine an associate minister cannot continue service, the associate's ministry will conclude

according to the terms agreed upon by the board and the District Superintendent.

The third step in the process is an assessment of the status of the local church. Here the District Superintendent and the church board review financial, membership, and attendance records. They may also inspect the church's facilities. The District Superintendent may interview people from the congregation, board members, and staff to understand the church's needs and ministry context. This step is essential for the District Superintendent to understand the local church's needs and context adequately.

The fourth step is to develop a profile of the potential pastor. Based on the data collected from Step Three above, the District Superintendent and church board draft a description of the ideal candidate. This profile becomes the lens through which to analyze potential candidates. This step draws a clear profile of the future candidate by considering the church's mission and vision, needs and current situation.

The fifth step in calling a new pastor is to identify potential candidates. If the church board has an individual they would like to consider, the District Superintendent will screen the individual to ensure that they are qualified and suited for the position. To nominate an associate pastor who served the church under the previous pastor's leadership, the District Superintendent must approve and obtain written permission from the District Advisory Board. The District Superintendent might identify potential candidates from a list on file at the district office. In this step, the District Superintendent can evaluate each candidate before giving the list to the church board. Normally, the District Superintendent narrows the qualified candidates down to the final list and presents one profile at a time to the church board. The District Superintendent continues presenting qualified candidates to the church board until they have identified a candidate

they would like to nominate. Occasionally this process may include initial phone interviews. If the church board likes one of the candidates, they elect to proceed to the next step. Before this step, communication with the congregation is generally open and frequent. However, in this step, communication with the congregation tends to be highly confidential. A significant factor necessitating the confidential nature of the selection process is that the pastoral candidate often serves in ministry at another church. In order to be sensitive to the potential candidate's current ministry setting, confidentiality is critical.

The sixth step is the interview process. After the District Superintendent has approved and identified potential candidates, the church board may begin conducting confidential interviews. The District Superintendent contacts and extends an invitation for the first candidate the board would like to interview. Again, during this step, the process is remarkably confidential. If the board chooses not to move forward with a candidate, the District Superintendent continues down the list of qualified candidates until the board interviews a favorable candidate.

In the seventh step, after the church board conducts the interview and chooses to move forward with the candidate, the candidate must receive a favorable two-thirds vote by ballot of the church board to be nominated to the congregation for approval. If the candidate does not receive a favorable vote, the board does not nominate a candidate, and the District Superintendent continues down the list of candidates until the board officially nominates one. Additionally, the candidate may choose to decline a nomination, in which case the process of interviews begins again.

The eighth step is a congregational vote. Typically, the pastoral candidate visits

and preaches at a worship service, with a special meeting of voting members following the service. According to bylaws, this special meeting must be announced two services in advance—typically two Sundays prior to the special meeting. Members of the congregation, ages fifteen and older, vote to extend a call to the pastoral candidate. The candidate must receive a favorable two-thirds vote. If the vote is not favorable, the District Superintendent and board begin the process of interviewing and nominating a candidate again.

The ninth step in calling a new pastor involves the response of the candidate. Once the vetting process has occurred, interviews have been conducted, ballots have been cast, and the call extended, the pastoral candidate has fifteen days to accept or reject the call. An acceptance generally reveals confirmation of the process and God's work in calling a new pastor.

The final step is to welcome the new pastor and their family. If the new pastor serves at another church, one's start-date will typically be at least thirty days following the candidate's resignation at his or her previous church. As a way of celebrating God's work and the call of a new pastor, the District Superintendent presides at an installation service where the candidate is officially appointed and installed as the new senior pastor.

### **The Problems Associated with Current Transition Practices**

Simply put, the Church of the Nazarene's current transition practices can significantly contribute to failed transitions—especially among those with lengthy pastorates. While the steps listed above have served the denomination for years, the process contains several flaws which significantly correspond with failed pastoral

transitions. What follows are several problems associated with the Church of the Nazarene's current pastoral transition practices.

First, with the current transition protocol, the exiting pastor has little or no say in the church's future direction. The future of the church remains in the hands of board members or the District Superintendent. Pastors tend to know the heart of a congregation better than a church board or the District Superintendent. The pastor ministers to a congregation in moments of tragedy as well as triumph. Often pastors are present at critical life events, such as births, graduations, marriages, illnesses, and deaths. Typically, a church board does not have the privilege of this ministerial experience, yet the board will often speak on behalf of the entire congregation. Many times, the loudest voices on the board receive the most attention. Unfortunately, the potential candidate's profile can be steered heavily by personal preferences when vetting candidates. One is left to wonder if the loudest voice has what is best for the church in mind. It is not uncommon to find a church board seeking a potential candidate who is strong in the areas the exiting pastor was weak, and weak in the areas the exiting pastor was strong.

As with the case of a retiring pastor, the inability to have a voice in this process can be quite disheartening. In many cases, the District Superintendent may even ask the retiring pastor to leave the church so that the incoming pastor has room to establish themselves in leadership. This protocol can be a safeguard that permits freedom for the new pastor to lead, absent of the one's predecessor. Yet for those who have spent twenty or more years in the same place, saying goodbye to life-long friends and ministry partners is very difficult.

Exiting pastors do not want to appear controlling and tend to stay out of the way

when selecting a new pastor. Wishing to be humble, many exiting pastors act according to what seems best for the future of the church and therefore, remain in the background. But where does the idea of the exiting pastor's disinvolvement come from? James Flowers suggests that churches have adopted an older, secular business model of leadership transitions. Because this model dominates current practices, it seems unnatural to approach transitions any other way. If finding a replacement was the only goal, the current protocol gets the job done.

James Flowers notes that some denominational leaders think pastors are not capable of selecting their successors. Flowers says many denominational leaders referred to pastors as “not very strategic,” “not self-aware,” and “not able to develop leaders.” Essentially, Flowers discovered that denominational leaders generally thought of pastors as effective at teaching and preaching, but not at selecting a replacement. Flowers contends, “It’s like saying that most pastors can’t effect positive change in their church, or proclaim the Great Commission, or influence people to deeper spiritual growth, or shepherd through tragedy. A pastor is called to be a leader! They can and do lead well in dozens of different ways.” Removing the voice of the exiting leader not only diminishes the leadership of a tenured pastor, but also eliminates the wisdom of several years of shared ministry with a congregation.

Second, a compounding problem with current protocols is that all pastoral staff must resign. According to the *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene, pastoral staff must submit their resignation “effective concurrently with the pastor” (see para. 159.9). This requirement aims to “allow the new pastor freedom to develop his/her own team of associates, if desired” (see para. 159.5). To assist with the local church’s stability, unity,



and ongoing ministry, the church board and District Superintendent may approve the continued service of associate pastors for up to ninety days after the new pastor assumes responsibility. At that point the new pastor may nominate staff for continued service or honor the staff's resignation.

While attempting to provide stability, this protocol ultimately leaves the ministries of the church disoriented. The protocol often renders staff unsure of future employment within the organization. An associate's sense of security and connections made in ministry can quickly morph into ambiguity. When an associate pastor senses insecurity regarding future employment, one may regain a sense of security by finding new employment elsewhere. In turn, this creates a domino effect of needing to replace staff, often from other churches. Furthermore, the volunteers who serve regularly may become anxious when staff resign. Important ministries vital to the life of the church lose leadership. If staff are not re-nominated for service by the new pastor, as can be the case with the Church of the Nazarene's current model of pastoral transitions, the ministries staff lead can quickly face turmoil, resulting in dwindling participation.

Third, the Church of the Nazarene's current methodology for replacing a senior pastor is a lengthy process, prone to disruption and reset. The process of finding a replacement pastor can often demand lots of time, where the majority of people are left to guess what is happening next. Because of the confidential nature of the interview process, the congregation can only be informed a few of the details at a time. A lack of communication invites one to make their own assumptions. Unfortunately, many people come to the wrong conclusions. If the transition gets disrupted because a candidate chooses not to accept a call, the lengthy interview process begins again. The uncertainty,

potential for confusion, and spread of misinformation are major contributing factors to the problems of current transition protocols in the Church of the Nazarene.

Fourth, current methodologies rely on favorable votes from two different entities. While this process gives both the leadership and the congregation opportunities to voice concerns, the voting process presents substantial problems. One question to consider is how much of a favorable vote is sufficient for a candidate to feel confident in the congregation's approval? For instance, suppose a candidate receives a seventy percent favorable vote from the congregation—the thirty percent who said no could be a significant challenge. The challenge of a favorable vote lies in the sufficiency quotient. Unless a vote is unanimous, one side loses. In the church—where Christ's prayer was that followers would be one, as the Father and Jesus are one (see John 17:20-23)—congregational votes can lead to just the opposite. Furthermore, the nature of voting is significantly more democratic rather than biblical. Throughout Scripture, godly leaders were mostly chosen by other leaders rather than by the people's vote. Often in Scripture, when the people selected their own leaders, the results were pain and turmoil.

The fifth problem is that the incoming pastor's future with a church depends on a single interaction with the congregation. The Sunday the potential candidate is invited to preach (typically with a congregational vote to follow) is often highly stressful and challenging for the candidate and the candidate's family. In many ways, the interaction becomes a showcase of talent rather than a message from the Lord for the people. The potential candidate will often feel the need to perform one's best in order to win the favor of the congregation. Ironically, one's message functions as a campaign for votes. A significant problem presented here is that the pastor and congregational relationship is

considerably more than the task of preaching. Pastor and congregation relationships develop through shared experiences over time. First impressions rarely reveal either party's identity or true heart.

Sixth, the incoming pastor does not know the church's history or culture if the candidate comes from a different congregation. When the new pastor finally arrives, sometimes one will come with a very different vision and attempt to change things. Too often, the new pastor knows nothing or very little of the church's history. Learning a church's history requires significant time and effort. One cannot learn the events and moments that shaped the congregation in a few weeks or months. The failure of incoming pastors to learn and embrace the new church's story and culture often leads to hurt and mistrust. Sometimes the new pastor will speak ill of the predecessor and the "old" way of doing things. When this happens, congregations quickly lose trust in leadership, and the onset of a struggling or failed transition begins. Transitions inevitably thrust a church into instability. Add issues of mistrust in leadership, and one has significant problems on the horizon. Weese and Crabtree call this the triple whammy: "The end result is that the congregation is left with no alternative but to experience the triple whammy of emotional, 'organic,' and organizational change all at the same time."

Seventh, this process tends to create a domino effect by "stealing" a different church's pastor, thereby thrusting a sister congregation into this same process of finding a new pastor. When this happens, a chain reaction begins, often reaching far across the denomination. Furthermore, this practice sadly mirrors a system that tends to follow a corporate promotional scheme. In a similar fashion where individuals work up a corporate ladder through promotions, one church entices a pastor to a position more prominent and

better than before. For example, a church of one thousand attendees recruits and promotes a pastor from a church of eight hundred, who promotes a pastor from a church of five hundred, who promotes a pastor from a church of two hundred, and so forth. The result is several vacancies because one church offered a promotion to (or stole) another church's pastor.

Finally, the current protocol in the Church of the Nazarene's leadership transition does not appear to follow a biblical model. The practice of silencing the exiting leader's voice and electing new leaders through democratic votes reflects models not found in Scripture. In fact, throughout Scripture, one can see the dominant model of succession-driven transitions when replacing godly leaders. Additionally, in Scripture the voices of successors are crucial to the conversation of who leads next. Flowers warns, "It has become such an ingrained part of church methodology for so long that it has started to feel like a biblical mandate. But the idea that the pastor should not be involved in the succession process is not found anywhere in the Bible!" Because pastors know the congregation's heart, past stories, and the vision for the future, the exiting pastor is a crucial voice in the selection process. Flowers says, "The old rule that says pastors shouldn't be involved wrongly views succession as an event. Instead, [exiting] leaders are needed to help guide the whole process." The Church of the Nazarene's current protocol reflects practices and methods that originate in the business world rather than Scripture. This reflection is a tragedy. It is time to review and renew the denomination's approach to leadership transitions in the local church.

### **Transitions are Inevitable**

This problem is not going away any time soon. In fact, the growing number of aging pastors is on the rise, leaving one to ask who will replace them? According to a study conducted by Ron Benefiel and Greg Crow, the rise of pastors nearing retirement is a significant factor that must be addressed. Their study revealed that in the USA/Canada Region in 2019, 65.3% of clergy are age fifty or over (29.3% ages 50-59, 26.4% ages 60-69, and 9.6% ages 70+). (See Table 2). This trend is up from 58.1% a decade ago. In other words, the Church of the Nazarene is going to need a significant strategy to replace their aging pastors in the coming decade.

	2000	2008	2011	2014	2017	2019
Under 30	2.6	2.1	1.8	2.5	2.3	1.6
30-39	17.7	12.7	11.8	11.9	12.0	12.3
40-49	36.2	27.0	22.9	21.4	20.7	20.8
50-59	29.0	34.2	36.1	34.1	31.0	29.3
60-69	13.1	19.6	22.0	23.8	25.7	26.4
70+	1.4	4.3	5.4	6.4	8.4	9.6

*Table 2 - Age of Senior Pastors in US/Canada Region (Percentage)*

The staggering point that makes this aging trend even more challenging is that the number of younger clergy is shrinking. In 2019, those under age thirty-nine made up 13.9% of all clergy in the USA/Canada Region. A decade ago, that number was 14.8%. This reveals a significantly growing gap between younger and older clergy. While pastors are growing older, fewer younger pastors are rising to lead the future church. Benefiel and Crow note:

This raises some questions for future consideration. For example, how will this affect the pool of potential candidates for churches in pastoral transition? To the degree that older pastors/leaders are replaced by those who are younger, there could be a loss of institutional memory.

At the same time, younger leaders may bring new ideas of how to develop approaches to ministry that resonate with the changing cultural context. Possibly, this could represent a tradeoff between institutional identity/loyalty on the one hand and innovation on the other.

Pastoral transitions are inevitable. In order for ministry to continue beyond the life of any pastor, every pastor must become a predecessor—handing the baton of leadership to someone else to carry. While transitions in ministry are common, they are not without unique challenges. Passing the baton of leadership to a successor is challenging, but essential and necessary. David McKenna says it this way: “Succession is the ultimate test of Christian leadership.”

If McKenna is right, should not the ultimate test of one’s leadership require one’s considerable time, energy, and attention? What if church leaders engaged in discussions about crafting plans of transition long before they became necessary? What if pastors captured the importance of handing off leadership in ways that prepared everyone involved—the incoming pastor, the congregation, as well as themselves—so that the sad and familiar story above does not happen? How can one prepare for the passing the baton? How can a church thrive in the midst of the next pastoral transition? Furthermore, is there an alternative model to the current methodology for the Church of the Nazarene when a transition occurs? That is the intent of this project.

### **The Setting and Context of Wanamaker Woods Church of the Nazarene, Topeka, Kansas**

Wanamaker Woods Church of the Nazarene, Topeka, Kansas, (hereafter, Wanamaker Woods) is gearing up for a pastoral transition. In 2015, Pastor L.D. Holmes

began a search for a new Youth Pastor. Within a few weeks, a young pastor with a few years of ministry experience was visiting and interviewed. However, this interview was not only to fill the vacancy of the youth pastor, but also hopeful in finding a potential successor for the senior pastor. Pastor Holmes was already beginning to sense the need to pass on leadership to the next generation.

### **Early Years**

In 1983, Wanamaker Woods Church of the Nazarene formed after a group of forty families felt alienated at a sister Nazarene church in Topeka. Discerning a gap between ministry priorities and the families' needs, the group felt unheard. Dissatisfied, this group split off in order to start a new church. Shortly after splitting off, the small congregation called Pastor Roy Rotz to be their pastor. This church-planting pastor came intending to assist the congregation in becoming an organized church. However, Pastor Rotz discovered the congregation was not a church plant, but a congregation ready to thrive. Pastor Rotz resigned within a few months and the small congregation called Dr. L.D. Holmes to become the pastor. In 1985, Pastor Holmes came to Topeka and has served since, leading the congregation of Wanamaker Woods into an organized and thriving congregation for more than thirty-five years.

### **Growth Years**

Those early years proved to be challenging yet rewarding. As the congregation grew from its original forty families, the church needed a more permanent place to call home. The new congregation moved from a back-yard gazebo, to the basement of the

Topeka YWCA, to a chapel at Forbes Field Airbase. Eventually the congregation purchased a plot of seven acres on which the congregation built its first building in 1986. Within one year of moving into their new building, Wanamaker Woods had an average worship attendance over two hundred. A decade later, attendance had doubled.

Pastor Holmes led Wanamaker Woods through multiple building campaigns to help accommodate the growing congregation. In the first campaign, the church added a full-size gymnasium to accommodate a significant sports ministry called Upward. The second expansion added a new office complex and additional Sunday School classrooms, as well as a Student Ministry Center. The final campaign divided the gym in half to establish a permanent Children's Ministry Center. Through each of these building campaigns, the church saw new ministry and numerical growth.

The church currently holds two worship services—each designed with a specific worship style. The early service is a traditional hymn service with piano and organ, while the second service is a modern worship service with a modern worship band. During the “worship wars” Pastor Holmes wanted to ensure that the church ministered effectively by ensuring people's needs and desires were met. Pastor Holmes often notes that ignoring either those with a preference for hymns and choruses or those with a desire for drums and guitars would result in choosing a losing side. The move to two services, each practicing a specific style and feel, created a win for the congregation.

Additionally, through the years, the ministry staff has grown. In the early years, Pastor Holmes was the only paid employee. Eventually the church hired office personnel, a worship pastor, a youth pastor, and a children's pastor. Each position added new avenues for ministry. Some staff have been working for over twenty years. New roles and



positions have been added through the years. Currently, Wanamaker Woods employs eight pastors, and ten staff positions. The congregation is averaging 525 in worship attendance between the two services. Furthermore, Wanamaker Woods launched a second campus in 2017 and broadcasts services on a local television channel, adding to the church's influence and reach in the community.

### **Ripe for Transition**

As Wanamaker Woods grew, it became apparent to several that questions of the future were necessary to ask and, more importantly, answer. There were questions lurking in the congregation, such as, “What will happen when Pastor Holmes retires?” And “Who will take Pastor's place?” Rather than ignore those questions, Pastor Holmes sought God in prayer and began to ask that God would assist in a pastoral transition before it became necessary.

Pastor Holmes has served Wanamaker Woods for more than thirty-five years. While there is great potential to continue to lead, Pastor Holmes has recognized the limitations of his leadership. For example, Pastor Holmes has stated that his ability to minister effectively to younger families is diminishing. There is what some have called a growing relevancy gap for older pastors. As leaders get older, their ability to remain relevant to the next generation diminishes—particularly in a rapidly changing culture. As culture continues to change, most churches find themselves reluctant to change as well. Pastor Holmes, recognizing this dilemma, refuses to let his leadership be the reason the church remains stuck in an irrelevant decade of ministry.

Pastor Holmes has also seen the need to engage younger leadership. Every living

organism faces a lifecycle. All living things have beginnings and endings. Pastor Holmes has often said that he refuses to be a pastor who simply cannot let go. In some of the sad, familiar stories of failed pastor transitions, many pastors hold on to their leadership, influence, and power for too long. Reluctant to let go, many pastors stay on longer than they should. Like a relay race runner refusing to hand off a baton, some try to run further than they really can or should. Rather than allow new leaders with fresh ideas and energy to carry the baton, reluctant pastors hold on. This type of thinking ultimately hurts the organization by stifling those capable and willing to carry the reins of leadership. Pastor Holmes has recognized that he is not getting younger and that it is time to enter a new phase of ministry—one not at the helm of the organization.

Finally, Pastor Holmes recognizes that his hard work will end if the church faces a failed transition. Instead of being another sad, familiar story, Pastor Holmes wants to see the church led to new places—places he could never take the congregation because of his timing, fears, leadership limitations, or style. Pastor Holmes desires to see new leadership succeed and prosper. Like McKenna said above, Pastor Holmes sees the ultimate test of leadership residing in the ability to pass it on to the next person. Wanamaker Woods is ripe for transition.

### **Research Methodology**

With the problems of current denomination practices in pastoral transitions mentioned above, Wanamaker Woods is asking the significant question: *Is there a better method to replace a highly esteemed and tenured pastor rather than the traditional protocol in the Church of the Nazarene?* The research methodology used in this study

was a formative evaluation method. In the midst of an on-going pastoral transition, the researcher is seeking to investigate the current model of pastoral transitions in order to offer a formative evaluation of its protocols, and thereby propose an alternative strategy. At the time of this writing, the strategy outlined in this project is not concluded. Therefore, the project offers a formative evaluation rather than a summative evaluation. The objective of this project is that, given the immense investment of churches in their clergy and the special relationship that develops between a congregation and pastor over several years, it is in the best interest of the local church to identify and deliver strategies to help mitigate the problems that arise in such high-stake transitions. Essentially, the researcher is asking the question: *How can the Church of the Nazarene's current protocols for pastoral transition be adjusted to enhance effectiveness?*

### **Project Limitation**

This study was conducted in a large (525 average weekly worship attendance), mono-ethnic, suburban congregation, located in the Mid-West. As such, the implications of this research may not correspond well in other congregations. This study was not conducted with smaller, urban, rural, or multi-ethnic congregations in mind. While the research reveals certain leadership principles that may undoubtedly cross these barriers and could certainly benefit a local church facing a tenured pastoral transition, the researcher feels it is necessary to acknowledge the limitations of the research findings presented in this project due to the limited scope of the congregational context.

### **Description of Project**

This study is the lens of analysis for Wanamaker Woods. As Wanamaker Woods is ripe for a pastoral transition, the leadership of the local church is seeking to mitigate many of the problems associated with failed transitions that often occur following a long-term pastorate through a plan of succession. This project outlines the essential strategy necessary for such a plan to occur. Chapter Two reviews literature on the topic of succession and offer an overview of central principles found in models of succession both inside and outside a local church. The chapter details core findings related to the key participants in a pastoral succession. Chapter Three provides a detailed description of the study as well as its limitations. Chapter Four offers details on the proposed solution and methodology. Chapter Five summarizes the findings and reflects on the importance of the findings to the local church. The project concludes with some supplemental appendices. Appendix A is a handbook outlining the essential questions, processes, and procedures being utilized for the plan of succession at Wanamaker Woods. Appendix B contains statements from the *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene on the process of calling a new pastor. Appendix C contains correspondence letters between Wanamaker Woods and the District Superintendent and the District Advisory Board. And finally, Appendix D offers biblical and theological themes for succession from three examples from Scripture.

## **CHAPTER TWO:**

### **RESEARCH AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

Developing a model of succession for a local church must involve examining the literature on the topic of transitions. In recent years, succession has become a significant conversation among leaders, both inside and outside the church. In pastoral ministry, books and articles have been published, and whole organizations have formed, like the Vanderbloemen Executive Search Group, dedicated to helping churches facing transitions. This chapter will offer an overview of the literature and resources on leadership transitions and examine central principles concerning the key participants in a pastoral succession. For this study, the researcher narrowed research to dynamics relating to the predecessor and successor. Both have unique roles and responsibilities in a succession. What a predecessor and successor do before, during, and after a transition are critical dynamics for a successful leadership transition. The following is an overview of the literature on the subject of leadership succession both inside and outside the local church.

#### **Dynamics Relating to the Predecessor**

Many authors on succession contended that the most crucial factor in every pastoral transition is the exiting leader. Vanderbloemen and Bird assert, “In the end, most of the success of a pastoral transition rises and falls on the shoulders of the outgoing pastor.” The success of the transition is deeply rooted in the pastor’s view of the church.

Pastors who understand that the church is not their own, but is the Bride of Christ, pave the way to success in handing off the baton of leadership. Bob Russel and his successor, Dave Stone, who successfully transitioned leadership at Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky, frequently asked themselves, “Why are we here? Are we here to build our own kingdom or to advance the Kingdom of God?” Humanity has struggled with this question since the fall. As early as Genesis 11, this same question was asked. “Let us make a name for ourselves,” became the cry of the people (Genesis 11:4, NRSV). One does not need to look far to find the desire to seek significance. However, when a pastor assumes the view of advancing the Kingdom of God, they understand their role is temporary, not permanent. Antonio Settles asserts that when a leader is “uncertain about his or her role in the church, the results will bring confusion and chaos, and the church will suffer. This can set the church up for unhealthy power to take hold.” Pastors must remember that they are stewards of the church and must one day account for how they managed what God had entrusted to them.

On the other hand, the pastor who treats the church as their own bride, rather than the bride of Christ, will long for permanence. The pastor who becomes possessive of the church builds a personal kingdom of their own, particularly by gaining the loyalties of those they were called to serve. In this case, the church focuses on the pastor, not Christ. McKenna warns that pastors “may confuse their personal identity with the destiny of the institution, gather to themselves dictatorial power, become complacent on critical issues, or simply get tired of the job and coast into retirement.” A pastor who has turned the church toward oneself rather than Christ will struggle greatly when no longer in the spotlight. Understanding one’s role as a humble servant of God called to a season of

ministry will help leaders let go when it is their time. James Kouzes and Barry Posner note, “When leaders accept that they are servants first, then they clearly know where they stand. And it’s not at the head of the line.”

When pastors near the end, it is often a sobering time. Russel says, “One of the things that surprises me about getting older is that I don’t feel any older. Aging happens so gradually that the physical and mental changes that take place are almost imperceptible.” Steve Harper agrees, “My dad described his aging process this way: ‘It took me fifty years to be fifty, but it only took me fifteen minutes to be eighty.’” Everyone is getting older and will face death at some point. This morbid statement is often avoided in conversation; however, its reality remains. No one lives forever. Ambition will soon fade, passion will dwindle, bodies will eventually deteriorate. Ignoring this fact is foolishness. Russel reminds us that “No one lives forever. A wise person faces his [or her] mortality and a loving person thinks of the next generation. To fail to do both is folly and selfish.” Simply put, everyone will face some transition—how one faces that transition is up to them.

### **Barriers to Exiting Well**

There is a temptation to conclude that since God is sovereign and that the church belongs to God, no succession plan is needed. While followers of Christ certainly affirm that God is in control, God has placed the church under the care of human agents. Those called by God to lead the church are entrusted with Christ’s Bride. Russel points out that God can (and will) bless all kinds of transitions, yet the best transitions still tend to be those with intentional planning. When one assumes that transition planning is not

essential, one takes the same line of thinking that assumes seatbelts are unnecessary, or that doctors and medical exams are unimportant. It *might* go well, and God is still on the throne. However, *not* preparing or planning for the future is unacceptable for God's people. Not preparing is also unbiblical. Jesus' command to "worry not" was in no way a dismissal of planning or preparation. Rather it was a reminder that God takes care of God's people (see Matt. 6:25-24). As God's people, one participates *with* God by planning and preparing in a unique partnership within God's ultimate goal of final redemption.

Still, there remain several barriers that prevent pastors from exiting well. Perhaps the largest barrier is that of fear. Weese and Crabtree note that pastors are afraid that:

If we talk about pastoral transition, we might put the idea in someone's head and make it more likely to happen. We will create a lame duck situation in which effective ministry becomes impossible. A discussion about pastor transition will have unintended consequences that we do not know how to manage. We don't have the resources to deal with transition planning and be successful. Our peers and colleagues won't support us in doing it a different way, and we are not sure we want to be pioneers on the road of better pastoral transition if this means going it alone.

More could be added to this list, but it is sufficient to say that fear of the unknown is a major barrier for planning for succession. Obviously, several factors are outside the pastor's control; however, beginning the conversation early will minimize many of these fears. Allowing oneself permission to dream about and begin the difficult conversation with a trusted friend or colleague can mitigate some of the fears associated with leaving the senior pastor role.

Another barrier is that the pastor's identity is tied so intricately to one's role.



Vanderbloemen and Bird ask,

What other job coincides with more key parts of life? Who else performs their daughter's wedding at work? Who else buries longtime friends as part of their job? What other career ties personal spiritual formation to career performance? The same things that make the pastorate the best job on the planet can also make it the hardest type of work to leave.

A pastor's role is quickly wrapped up in one's identity. Pastors have significant responsibility and a meaningful role that adds value to one's life. Ask any number of longtime pastors about the joys of serving in ministry, and one will hear story after story of God's powerful movement among people. To leave that kind of work behind and give it to another could result in not only a loss of income, but also a loss of identity and self-worth.

Furthermore, a leader's God-given talents and gifts can too easily become a barrier to exiting well. The leader's strengths can quickly turn into an obstacle.

Vanderbloemen and Bird put it this way:

A person's greatest strength, when unguarded, can become that same person's greatest weakness. . . In ministry, a pastor's confidence—one of the qualities God uses to build a church—can become one of the biggest obstacles to pastoral succession. The very voice of confidence that overcame a fear of public speaking and enables a pastor for years to get up in front of the congregation and boldly proclaim God's Word—that voice, if unchecked, can also whisper in the pastor's ear, "You've got another good year or two in you."

Additionally, knowing when it is time to go can be a significant barrier for the exiting leader. McKenna notes that exceptional leaders have a remarkable sense of timing and know when it is time to exit. Bob Russel agrees and suggests, "the departing leader should be the initiator of the transition plan, and not the organization." When it comes to

knowing when to go, it is better if the predecessor can begin the conversation early. When the predecessor is ready to begin the conversation, the transition can go smoother.

However, Vanderbloemen and Bird point out that sometimes the conversation will need to begin with someone else. If this is the case, they suggest a trusted friend or board member. This was the case for Bill Hybels, pastor at Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois. Mike LaMonica was a longtime elder and close friend of Hybels, who did not try to lecture, but rather gently broached the subject and led the conversation.

These barriers prevent leaders from exiting well. But leaders will exit. The question is, *how*? How will a predecessor pass the baton of leadership to the next leader? What follows is a synopsis of best practices pertaining to a predecessor facing succession.

### **The Profile of the Predecessor**

Far too much is at stake to fail at handing off the baton of leadership well. Upon reviewing the literature on the subject of succession, implementing the following principles and practices before, during, and after a succession will help overcome the barriers mentioned above and formulate success for the pastoral transition.

#### *The Predecessor: Prior to Succession*

Perhaps one of the largest factors to consider is the emotional challenge pastors will face near the end. When one has been shepherding and caring for the people of God, it is very difficult—if not impossible—to remain emotionally unattached. Some have compared a transition to performing a wedding and funeral at the same time—containing

both emotions of joy and grief. Even if the future is well planned, emotions can run wild. The congregational tone can add to emotions as well. When members are sad that their beloved pastor is leaving or no longer in charge, it can fuel a pastor's own emotional state. If a transition has been kept secret or is abrupt, it adds to the confusion and frustration. Additionally, if the pending transition fails, it could be perceived as a failure on the exiting pastor and his or her leadership. To help with the emotional side of transitions, Russel contends that his own retirement was much easier for him emotionally, primarily because of the vast amount of planning he put into it. Fear can be greatly reduced when people know what to expect. Therefore, spending time talking about and putting together a plan that includes coping with and managing emotional reactions can help remove much of the emotional frustration so that people know what to expect.

Knowing the exiting pastor's new role before exiting can greatly help with emotional challenges. Exiting pastors must wrestle their identity. Will the predecessor remain on staff at the church in a new role? Will he or she move away from the area? Are they starting a new ministry? These are significant questions that would be better answered well before the process begins. The key is to find something meaningful. Gene Williams asks, "When you retire and lose that identity [as the senior pastor], what happens? How much golf can you play, and how many fish can you catch before it gets old and boring?" Williams notes that the most meaningful identity is one rooted in work for the Kingdom of God. Vanderbloemen and Bird say, "To put it bluntly, too often pastors stay at a church not because they're thriving there, but because their identity is tied too much to their present role and they don't have anything else to put their passion into." The exiting leader has great potential to assume a new role in ministry, a new

chapter in their life, or a different assignment. For instance, many who step aside take on the role of coach or mentor. Many find time to write books on ministry that help inspire younger pastors. Some start non-profit ministries. The next chapter for many exiting leaders can be filled great joy and major significance. One essential practice is to begin preparing now for “what is next.”

A third consideration for preparation before succession begins deals with one’s family. Oftentimes, this can be overlooked, yet one’s family is an important factor in leaving well. Andrew Flowers notes that one’s spouse will often have their own set of questions and worries. Watching their loved one go through an emotional and identity changes often affects the family more than the pastor. Families, too, will need time to adjust to a new role, identity, and status. David McKenna did not expect his wife’s emotional strain because she was no longer the first lady. She greatly missed the status and recognition of being the spouse of the president of Asbury Theological Seminary. McKenna says, “Leaders cannot assume that they make career decisions in isolation; spouses and families are part and parcel of the decision.” Again, beginning the conversation early, before the transition begins, will aid in the succession process.

Another significant factor to consider prior to succession is the exiting pastor’s financial state. For pastors transitioning to another church, this is not as large of an issue. However, for pastors nearing retirement, far too many encounter retirement with little or no way to fund it. Few have the training needed to prepare financially for retirement. Some have the ability to save for retirement but choose not to. Others cannot because of their modest income. Thom Rainer says, “Many pastors are under extreme stress because they do not have adequate income to meet their financial obligations . . . The reality is

that, for a number of pastors, the issue of compensation is a major push from one church to another, or from the church to a secular vocation.” Pastors who want to retire may find themselves struggling because they do not have any other means to support themselves. Vanderbloemen and Bird challenge pastors of all ages to begin the practice of living on less than one earns so that one can save for the future when it is time to step aside. For pastors approaching retirement, Vanderbloemen and Bird suggest diligent prayer and honest communication with those on the church board about compensation and retirement. Pastors would do well to start early with creating a financial plan to prepare for a transition or future retirement.

Another significant responsibility in preparing for succession is to get the church in order. Predecessors must ensure everything is ready for the successor and must not leave looming or nagging issues. Sometimes the predecessor wants to make some hasty decisions that will unknowingly impede the successor. For example, promoting staff members, changing significant ministries, quickly spending cash reserves, or restructuring board and leadership teams are decisions that can potentially hurt the successor and damage the church. In an effort to gain loyalty or to avoid being a “lame-duck,” some will make hasty decisions. Predecessors will be wise to avoid such moves. McKenna puts it this way, “If the annals of leadership literature include a list of cardinal sins, a lame-duck leader who makes decisions that unfairly encumber a successor has to be close to the top.”

On the other hand, predecessors would do well to ensure major issues have been dealt with or taken care of. For example, significant debt or an insubordinate staff member can be challenges for a transition. A predecessor would do well to work through,

deal with, or arrange for rather than pass the challenge along to the successor. Avoiding hasty decisions and getting affairs in order will assist in the success of a transition.

The final and perhaps most significant element of succession planning for the predecessor is selecting the successor. Many congregations want a successor just like the predecessor. However, this is not probable. The future leader will be different. The successor's communication style, personality, temperament, and leadership will likely differ from the predecessor.

The views on how to go about selecting the successor vary greatly. Some believe the best approach is internal, while others affirm that it is best to seek a new leader externally. Both sides have valid points to consider. For instance, an internal search can offer someone who knows the church's past and history. An inside hire understands the DNA of the congregation. They tend to embrace the mission and vision of the church. Russel is an advocate of internal hires. He says,

Resumes, degrees, interviews, ordination papers, references, and trial sermons may tell us some things about a potential candidate for the ministry. But when it comes to really understanding that candidate—his [or her] character, work habits, personality traits, and family relationships—there is no substitute for working alongside that person over a period of time.

Additionally, there tends to be a greater sense of commitment from people one knows best. Kouzes and Posner point out that we are more likely “to trust people we know, work harder for people we know, to do our best for people we know, to commit to people we know, and to follow people we know.” If a congregation knows and trusts the individual, the transition can be several steps ahead of an outside candidate. In this case, a known pastor with a great reputation and track record in the church has incredible

potential to become the successor.

On the other hand, Vanderbloemen and Bird note that the successor will need to be external for some churches. However, they discourage this simply because of the benefits stated above. If an external candidate is preferred, they recommend having an external voice assist with the process, such as a search firm or denominational leader. Additionally, Vanderbloemen and Bird note that many pastors have been trained and prepared in other churches. This reality can be beneficial as it contributes to new ideas, practices, and approaches to ministry that could benefit the local church.

In all of these principles for pre-succession planning, the sooner the conversation begins, the easier the task of approaching succession will be. The earlier the pastor begins preparing emotionally for the day when he or she will no longer be in the top leadership role, the easier it will be when that day comes. The sooner the pastor has determined what they will be doing after succession, the easier it will be to know what to expect. The more time one has to prepare financially, the greater the possibility for retirement or transition. The sooner the conversation begins with family members, the easier it will be to accept change. The sooner one can develop a leadership pipeline for potential internal candidates, the easier it will become. Pastors would be wise to begin these practices right away.

### *The Predecessor: During Succession*

Training should begin shortly after a successor has been identified. If the successor is already on staff, this process is much simpler. Training is intended to help the successor run at full speed by the time they receive the baton of leadership. Flowers

asserts, “The idea of hiring someone without offering any level of training is absurd.” The successor will need to know the organization’s history. What brought the church together and why did the church start? What have been some of the most celebrated days or most tragic days? Who are the influencers in the church? Passing on the church’s history is essential for training one’s successor. The successor will also need to know the church’s vision and future hopes. Where should the church act in faith? What makes the church stand out in the community? These questions help the successor get a feel for the congregation’s culture and DNA. The predecessor is typically the most familiar with each of these. Predecessors know the people behind dearly loved ministries. They are familiar with the church’s past. When a successor is properly trained and familiar with the church’s culture, they can do a much better job at building on the past and adding to the future. This training gives successors an advantage. Kouzes and Posner add, “It also elevates your relationships from boss-subordinate to mentor-protégé.”

Another key step during the transition is letting go. One will need to disconnect from the lead pastor’s role and assume a new status. This is often the most difficult task for predecessors. Leadership decisions will need to be given over. Preaching and teaching will need to be passed on. Pastoral care and counseling will need to be handed off. Letting go is a way of decreasing so another can increase. This was John the Baptist’s mindset when his own disciples came to him questioning the loyalties of others (See John 3:23ff). Rather than fight for significance, John championed his successor. John moved out of the spotlight and pushed another into it. The best way to decrease is to champion the successor. Kouzes and Posner emphasize that “Exemplary leaders are interested more in others’ success than in their own.” How one champions their successor is vital to the



success of the transition process. Russel agrees:

Once you make the decision to take a step as serious as transitioning your leadership position to someone else, you need to throw everything you are into the process. Hold nothing back. Look for every opportunity to not only build up your successor, but also help pave his [or her] way. Willingly use the respect and authority you have earned over the years to help make the beginning of his [or her] tenure a success. If this means that for the good of the organization you make sacrifices you wouldn't ordinarily make, you need to do so.

Vanderbloemen and Bird use the term “parish poker” to describe the relationship of credibility for the predecessor and successor. They note that every pastor starts with a positive balance of “chips.” The pastor can then spend the chips as one chooses. Pastors gain chips through personal ministry and good sermons, but quickly lose chips for “yawner sermons, botched personal ministry, or leading the church on a big risk that doesn't pay off.” Exiting pastors who have a positive balance of chips can use that balance in favor of the successor. The exiting pastor's public endorsement pushes some chips in the successor's direction. Predecessors can spend some of the chips to help introduce change. The relational chips a long-term pastor has gained can be well spent endorsing and supporting the new pastor. On the other hand, leaders who do not recognize one's influence and status and who refuse to move out of the spotlight will hurt the transition process. Rather than passing chips to the successor, some hold on to them, or worse, attempt to gain more. McKenna points out, “Any efforts [for a predecessor] to retain influence are not only egotistical, but they are also unprofessional and unethical.” Russel agrees, “Leaders on their way out, if they aren't careful, can throw their weight around needlessly to show they are still in charge. Upcoming leaders can get agitated as they wait for power to be transferred.”

A good practice for the predecessor is to encourage the congregation to shift loyalties from themselves to one's successor. McKenna notes that this is very difficult to do not only because the temptation for many is to believe everything in ministry depends on the senior pastor, but also because pastors want to hold on to the security and satisfaction of loyal relationships. Transferring power and loyalty to the successor can come off as an attack on one's ego. Russel recounts shortly after retiring, a long-time church member called him by the wrong name and said it was good to see him again. Russel noted that it was a huge blow to his ego. At some point, the predecessor will go from a "who's who, to a who's he [or she]?" And it's frightening!" Nevertheless, moving from the "big man" to "biggest fan" helps the congregation transfer the loyalty from the predecessor to the successor. Predecessors must champion their successors and pass the responsibilities of leadership on.

#### *The Predecessor: Post Succession*

After the transition has taken place, the question remains: should the exiting pastor stay or go? Most of the research agrees that the exiting pastor should leave—at least for a season. Sometimes the absence needs to be geographically. Other times it means intentionally staying away from the church by having other arrangements in place or by finding a different place of worship. The rationale behind this strategy is related to control and influence. Settles notes that it is "important for the pastor to know his or her role as a pastor when it comes to leading the church. When that happens, unhealthy power plays will diminish." Vanderbloemen and Bird agree and shed light on a pastor's influence:

Outgoing pastors who continue to hang around usually remain much more in charge than they realize. They may have changed titles and may even have handed a symbolic baton at a transition ceremony at church, but their stature and shadow can remain immense. Even their nonverbal messages—what programs they attend, how long they applaud, whether they frown or smile—can carry great clout.

On the other hand, there have been many exceptions to this strategy. There are several examples where a predecessor remained on staff or became a lay-member, and the transition went very well. Successors will do well to note that the predecessor typically has the goodwill of the congregation, can ask financial favors of certain church members, can warn the successor of past points of tension, and usually has a good level of confidence with long-term members. The relationship between the predecessor and successor is extremely important. Trust and honest conversation must be a prerequisite for the relationship's health. If the exiting pastor does stay, a good practice is to have some form of a written agreement that outlines what the predecessor will do, will ask permission to do, and will not do. In either case, it is essential that both the successor and predecessor mutually honor one another—both privately and publicly.

Flowers notes that if the exiting pastor does leave, one should remain available to encourage the successor. Flowers says, “Your desire is to help him [or her] grow into the new role with a minimum of distractions. It will take the congregation some time to see him [or her] as the leader.” A great way one supports one's successor is in both private and public conversations. The overwhelming support for the successor shows appreciation. Kouzes and Posner note, “Showing appreciation ensures that everyone will realize that they aren't being taken for granted, that they aren't an assumption, and that they aren't ignored. They will know how important they are to the creation of something

meaningful.”

One final note consistent among the research is the importance of passing the baton of leadership to the successor through a ritual or ceremony. The exiting leader needs a formal goodbye. There is a significant void when a pastor leaves—especially a dearly loved, long-term pastor. Such a pastor has shared in the joys and sorrows of the members of the congregation. One has laughed with them, cried with them, and journeyed through life with them. Even if the leader plans to remain at the church, there will be a sense of loss for many in the congregation. Russel notes that this is one of the primary reasons there needs to be a formal goodbye. He says, “People need the opportunity to say thank you and understand that an old chapter is closing and a new chapter is opening.” Only when the itch to honor the exiting leader has been scratched will the congregation be ready to embrace the incoming leader. Vanderbloemen and Bird agree: “honoring the past unlocks the future.” Therefore, to value, appreciate, and honor a predecessor, a good practice is to celebrate the exiting leader in formal and informal ways.

### **Leaving a Legacy**

The predecessor has had one’s time in the spotlight. It is now time to step off the platform and cheer on one’s successor. The more one cheers for the successor, the more respect one will gain over time. People are watching. Russel points out that people want to know if one’s life is in one’s status or the Savior. If one’s life is rooted in one’s status, anything that threatens such status will be treated as an enemy to ensure the status is preserved. If, on the other hand, one’s life is secure in one’s Savior, anything that threatens one’s status will not matter. Russel says it best, “There comes a time to close a

chapter. You can go back and review it and enjoy it, but don't make the mistake of trying to live in yesterday's chapter." This will determine a leader's legacy.

Kouzes and Posner point out that "A leader's legacy is really the legacy of many. Leaders make unique contributions, but others play significant parts." One's legacy is really the sum of many people journeying together. When a leader can help others transfer loyalty from themselves to the church's greater mission, one leaves a gift of legacy. Russel adds to this idea by saying, "The ability [or] inability to pass the baton [of leadership] successfully determines the ongoing success of the organization and the leader's legacy." Russel goes on to say that leaders must practice what they preach—that the best days are ahead. In other words, pastors regularly teach that there is a future hope and glory that is far greater than what is present. This same principle can be true of one's transition. There are better days ahead for the church. Perhaps the future looks grim and despairing for a moment, but it is time for one to practice what one believes—that best days really *are* ahead. This truth impacts one's attitude toward a succession and one's worldview. A leader's legacy will come to light when they can leave the hope-filled promise of greater things yet to come.

### **Dynamics Relating to the Successor**

Attention must now be directed to the successor. How a leader enters a new ministry context will set the stage for future leadership. Congregations want to see pastors do well and succeed. Leaders want to do well too. However, many new pastors fail to plan accordingly. Gary Brandenburg notes that "Every pastor enters a new work with high

hopes of a glorious future, but few pastors have a strategy in mind for maximizing their influence during the first year.” The first few days of leadership are crucial. Therefore, how one plans the first days, weeks, and months can secure lasting benefits. Lawrence Farris agrees:

How one starts a ministry in a new setting sets the tone for how that ministry will unfold for years to come. Lackadaisical, casual beginnings that mostly repeat what has worked elsewhere often lead to years of drifting and unfocused ministry. On the other hand, high energy, overdrive beginnings often lead to burned-out pastors who soon leave, thinking a move to yet another field of service is their only hope of establishing a ministry of reasonable demands and expectations.

Perhaps one of the most crucial factors in starting well is the pastor’s understanding of one’s role in the church. Much like the predecessor, a successor who views oneself as a steward of the church rather than an owner will pave the way to successfully receiving the baton of leadership. One must remember that one is a caretaker of the church and must one day account for how one managed what God had entrusted. Successors must not confuse their identity with who is in charge. Understanding one’s role as a humble servant of God tasked with leading the people of God to be a more faithful community sets the stage for entering well.

The relationship of pastor and congregation is unique. Loren Mead describes the quality of a pastor and congregation’s relationship as one necessitating “religious authenticity.” Mead argues that religious authenticity only occurs *after* the pastor arrives and does not happen without several opportunities to grow, learn, and share together—something he describes as a “trajectory of ministry.” In other words, the role of pastor is something one lives *into*. A new pastor may arrive and have the title, the executive office

down the hall, and a dose of initial respect by virtue of his or her credentials. But a pastor must *become* for a congregation a trusted leader over years of faithful ministry together. It is only through a covenant-style relationship that a pastor and a congregation become strong together. Through conversations, interactions, and life together, religious authenticity is born, and a new, fruitful trajectory of ministry can be experienced. Ultimately, it is a process that takes time.

### **Barriers to Entering Well**

When a new pastor enters a new church setting, one will face some barriers to entering well. If not handled appropriately, these barriers can significantly limit one's ability to engage in meaningful ministry. Ciampa and Dotlich note, "It is never a sure thing when someone takes on a job at the top. For one thing, the person chosen is often assuming more responsibility than he [or she] has ever had and facing strategic, operational, political, and personal challenges that are tougher and more complex than he [or she] has ever faced." Transitions can be quite difficult, but they are not without hope.

The trajectory of ministry that Mead lays out is quite helpful. A well-loved pastor can quickly develop religious authenticity with a congregation and a long trajectory of ministry. When a pastor leaves or retires, the congregation is left with a deep loss. The question with which to wrestle is not *who* will become the new pastor, but rather, will the new pastor "be someone who can enter into an authentic relationship with the congregation rather than settle for being a plastic figure-head playing at being a religious leader?" In other words, will the incoming pastor actually function as a pastor to the congregation? Will the new pastor listen to, love, and care for the congregation in a

manner similar to the predecessor? This has the potential to become a significant barrier to entering well. A pastor who fails to listen to, love, and care for the congregation well will significantly limit their trajectory of ministry. If the successor is perceived as someone with little or no religious authenticity, the road ahead may be very rough or short. On the other hand, if the successor can embrace a sense of religious authenticity, a new trajectory of ministry is possible. For this reason, the incoming pastor would do well to plan for succession by putting into practice many of the principles and practices outlined below.

### **The Profile of the Successor**

To create a new trajectory of ministry, certain practices and principles can help the incoming pastor ease into the transition and set one up for greater success. The following is a brief overview of research findings on dynamics relating to the successor. While there are other practices and principles that could be applied, what is outlined below is crucial to success and will help a successor before, during, and after a transition.

#### *The Successor: Prior to Succession*

The successor must study the congregation prior to succession in order to better understand the congregation and in order to be effective in ministry. A common cliché goes, “the grass is always greener on the other side.” The novelty of a new congregation, of being in charge, the potential for greater return, or the change of pace often allures one to a position bigger or better than before. However, a closer look at a congregation might reveal new information that can help a pastor decide if the new church is truly an



opportunity from God or a fantasized hillside with more succulent grazing.

To assist with this task, Farris helps by describing congregations as cultures. Congregations have unique histories, complete with plot twists, traditions, heroes, villains, and expectations. Each congregation has a rich history that cannot be ignored. For an outside hire, the congregation will be a different context—with a vastly different history than one's previous church. In the case of an internal hire, the new position might bring different responsibilities and connections than before. Ciampa and Dotlich agree with Farris but add that an organization's culture is very complex because of several layers. These layers make the organization function—sometimes effectively, other times poorly. What makes an organization work is often difficult to describe, even by significant leaders within the organization. They note:

Before joining and settling in, it is difficult to grasp these layers of behavior, politics, expectations, rituals, traditions, and beliefs. They're rarely explained to the new leader by the major players because they themselves do not recognize them well enough to articulate a description. But although invisible, they are always there, combining to shape the culture.

To minister effectively in a new setting, one must seek to understand these invisible layers that shape the culture of the congregation. Much like the Israelites entering the Promised Land, pastors will do well to scout out the new, unfamiliar land before entering to know how best to proceed. T. Scott Daniels agrees. He urges pastors to become cultural historians. Daniels says, "It is unfortunate, but many pastors entering into new ministry settings fail to become historians and ignore, to their own demise, the past patterns of a congregation." Even pastors who have been on staff would do well to understand the congregation from a different perspective. For example, a youth pastor

might be familiar with students and families but most likely has not had experience ministering to persons at end-of-life stages. The shift in these contexts can greatly influence one's understanding of the congregation's culture and, therefore, one's ministry trajectory. The pastor who studies a congregation will better understand the customs, communication patterns, leadership models, and expectations of one's new role.

There are several ways by which pastors can become cultural historians. One way is to review a congregation's written history. Many churches are proud of their roots and will often publish their history in various ways. These written histories can be quite helpful. Farris suggests that one read these written histories alongside annual reports and governing board records. While written histories tend to portray the greatest and most celebrated moments in a church's life, it is a simple way to gain an overview of the church. One can see what is important to the congregation, who is listened to most, or what motivated financial decisions. Farris further suggests one learns about the founders and why the church was formed. A great way to do that is to listen to the stories of a congregation's "old-timers." Farris goes on to suggest that one might consider asking folks to reminisce about the critical moments that made the church a special and sacred place. As the incoming pastor listens to these stories, a rich history can be learned. More importantly, as one listens, one will demonstrate that one cares about where a congregation has been and the journey it took to get there. It reveals a pastor's heart for the people, and that one values those who have been faithfully present in the congregation's life. It demonstrates an appreciation for the congregation's shared experiences. Interestingly, the role of cultural historian must be embraced throughout the whole process of succession—before, during, and after—in order to remain effective.

Furthermore, not only would the incoming pastor do well to study the congregation, but one would also do well to learn from former pastors (senior pastors or associates). In some cases, this is not possible, nor would it be wise. However, in good transitions, the incoming pastor may find the predecessor a priceless resource. The predecessor will typically have valuable information about the church's history or members of the congregation, which one might find helpful. Former pastors might have insight into situations to avoid or conversations that warrant further research. Richard Danielson discovered that successors who had healthy relationships with their predecessors could better lead their congregation because of the predecessor's knowledge and influence. Predecessors who go "beyond the normal call of duty in assuring the success of the next pastor" greatly increase the successor's chances of leading well into the future.

A word of caution is necessary, however. While the knowledge the predecessor holds could prove to be a valuable resource, Danielson also noted that the former pastors who could not release themselves from being a congregation's pastor typically hurt the congregation more than they realized. He notes that some "negative influencers either consciously or unconsciously undercut the work of the successor through actively interfering in the congregation's process of bonding with the new pastor." In other words, predecessors who were unable to disconnect from their previous roles tended to sabotage the new pastor's efforts, oftentimes without knowing it. On the other hand, those who found frequent ways to support their successor—especially through verbal endorsement and encouragement—helped the transition go well. In any case, successors might find valuable wisdom from predecessors but should seek that wisdom with caution.

Finally, prior to succession, the incoming pastor would do well to set clear expectations. First impressions make a big impact on people, and expectations tend to be set by first impressions. Daniels notes that expectations tend to be set by the incoming pastor within the first hundred days. While some expectations are built-in, most will be set by people's observations of the pastor. Because expectations are set early on, Daniels urges incoming pastors to establish appropriate patterns that will be sustainable. Congregations tend to place unrealistic expectations on pastors. Congregations want a pastor who:

Preaches exactly twenty minutes then sits down. Condemns sin but never hurts anyone's feelings. Works from eight in the morning until ten in the evening but never gets tired. Is 26 years old and has been preaching for 30 years. Has a burning desire to work with the teenagers but spends much time with senior citizens. Makes fifteen calls a day on church members, yet evangelizes the unchurched at a record pace. Does all of the above without ever being out of the office when you call!

These expectations may be unrealistic, but incoming pastors can help set clear and reasonable expectations from the start. Many pastors are people pleasers and do everything—preaching, mowing, maintenance, visitation, cooking, cleaning, teaching, and everything else. The question raised by this is one of sustainability—is it healthy or biblical? Daniels suggests that new pastors work with a church's board to establish a clear job description or what he calls, a “ministry covenant.” This may come from a denomination's manual or bylaws, but it would be good to review with the church board and new pastor in order to be clear about what is expected. A written ministry covenant realistically clarifies how one's strengths and gifts can be used to meet expectations and fulfill the leadership needs of a congregation. This written ministry covenant can cover

many items, such as financial expectations (i.e., Social Security payments, housing, parsonage, professional expenses, allowances, etc.), vacation, insurance, time management, and expectations of one's spouse. These are beneficial items to address prior to any agreement. Moreover, Daniels suggests new pastors develop a workable schedule that includes time for sermon preparation and Sabbath rest. This practice creates realistic boundaries for both the congregation and the pastor.

### *The Successor: During Succession*

Once the incoming pastor has agreed to the new ministry role, has taken the time to study the congregation, learned from the predecessor, and clarified expectations, the succession can commence. While in the midst of a transition, there are a few practices and principles to apply that can further enhance one's tenure. During a transition, it would be wise for the new pastor to secure some early wins and to remain focused on preaching well.

As leaders in the church, one of the pastor's responsibilities is to lead the congregation into a more faithful witness of the Christian life. This requires change. However, no culture changes overnight. While the new pastor's timing enables a congregation to be more sympathetic to change—as many come to expect and anticipate at least some change—too much change too quickly can be disastrous. To effect change, the incoming pastor would do well to make the *right* changes at the *right* time. As described above, Vanderbloemen and Bird's term "parish poker" helps describe the relationship of credibility between a congregation and the successor. Pastors start with a positive balance of "chips." One can spend, earn, or quickly lose chips those chips.

Daniels encourages pastors to gain credibility with their congregations—a term he refers to as “social capital.” This capital can be spent to enact necessary change. Michael Watkins takes this idea and describes the necessity of “early wins.” Early wins help leaders gain trust right away. Watkins says, “Early wins excite and energize people and build one’s personal credibility. Done well, they help one create value for the organization earlier and reach the break-even point more quickly.” For Watkins, the break-even point is a point at which a leader has “contributed as much value to [the] new organization as one has consumed from it.” Gaining chips, social capital, or early wins will help boost the incoming pastor’s credibility.

Farris uses this same concept but limits a new pastor’s chip count to three. He suggests, “Congregations can only manage a few significant changes at a time. And so, how the initial opportunity for change is used is a matter of requiring considerable skill at discernment.” Farris goes on to say that successors should only make a few changes that really matter—particularly ones that expand God’s Kingdom, rather than one’s personal preferences. Personal preferences and Kingdom matters can oftentimes be difficult to distinguish because of a pastor’s motivating convictions and passions. This is why understanding the culture of the congregation is absolutely necessary. Farris notes, “The more such changes are grounded in a congregation’s cherished traditions and shared dreams, the more successful they will be.” Understanding the church’s cultural history benefits the successor in multiple ways.

Another practice to implement during a pastoral transition is to tend to one’s preaching well. Preaching is something Todd Bolsinger refers to as a “technical competence.” He says, “Before going into uncharted territory, the leader must ably

navigate the map while fulfilling the expectations he or she has been authorized to accomplish.” In other words, before one can lead well, one must prove to have the ability and the competency to perform basic tasks essential to that role. In the case of a pastor, preaching is an essential task. Daniels asserts the very act of speaking on behalf of God for the people of God will greatly impact how the people view a pastor as well as one’s other roles and responsibilities. Farris agrees and puts it this way:

Not only is preaching the way the new pastor (indeed all pastors) touches the most people at one time with the message of God’s grace and justice and compassion, it is the unique and distinctive function of the pastor... Most congregants will form their first impressions of a new pastor based upon [their] work as a preacher, so it is helpful to other aspects of a pastor’s ministry to preach and lead worship well. Many church members will assume that if [the pastor] does a good job leading worship, [they] will probably also do other ministerial tasks well.

Brandenburg asserts that “While there are a multitude of factors that shape the effectiveness of a pastor’s first year, preaching is one of the quickest and most effective ways to ensure success of a pastoral transition.” He notes that because most congregations meet once a week, pastors have a major advantage over leaders in other disciplines because they can consistently communicate with the entire organization. Through preaching well, a pastor can gain credibility, communicate regularly, and impart vision for the future.

Farris, Daniels and Brandenburg agree that adequate preparation is necessary to tend to one’s preaching properly. The temptation to sacrifice the time needed for sufficient sermon preparation to the work of other tasks (i.e., administration, pastoral care, counseling, etc.) is great. The time needed to tend to one’s preaching can quickly be

swallowed up by other activities. Farris suggests new pastors stick to the “oft-used rubric of one hour of preparation for each minute in the pulpit.” This creates for both the pastor and the congregation a respect for that special, even sacred, time of preparation. Farris recommends that pastors publicize their work schedule limit their disruption of sermon preparation time to emergencies. Protecting the time needed to prepare sermons will need to be part of one’s regular practice during a transition and a clear expectation set from the beginning. It will also need to be a regular practice tended to well after a transition.

### *The Successor: Post Succession*

Once the succession has taken place, a final step in the process is to care for oneself continually. Successors can quickly feel overwhelmed. In a similar way that predecessors need to tend to their emotional state, successors need to do the same. In the midst of ministry, pastors often give themselves away. Families, those who are sick, the elderly, youth, children—all members of the congregation need careful attention. However, too often neglected in pastoral care is the pastor. Pastoral ministry is often lonely. Watkins and Ciampa note,

Having left behind familiar support systems, the new leader does risk becoming isolated and losing perspective. Paradoxically, the same high personal expectations and confidence that enabled him [or her] to win the job can contribute to his [or her] downfall if they lead him [or her] to decide he [or she] can do it all alone.

Pastors must take care of themselves. As Daniels notes, “You are the temple of the Holy Spirit. You are God’s unique creation called to proclaim his good news. You have a divine obligation to take care of yourself.” Self-care can come in many forms, but among



them is emotional care.

Finding and nurturing a good friendship with a trusted advocate can aid in a succession significantly, particularly in one's emotional capacity. Friendships are essential to humanity's emotional well-being and often add significance to one's life. A friend's relationship is reflective of God's love for His children—love despite flaws or failures. Farris notes that the pastor will often keep hidden from the congregation feelings of “resentment, tiredness, sense of inadequacy, [and] fear of failure” because the congregation tends to be more concerned about what they can get out of the pastor than how their pastor is doing. True friends accept the pastor and their feelings. For this reason, it is advised to seek out friendships outside the congregation.

Daniels adds that friends can become incredible mentors. The mentors can help “not only in suggesting alternatives and sharing resources, but most essentially in bearing burdens, giving honest feedback, and being unabashedly in the new pastor's corner.” Watkins and Ciampa agree and note that mentors offer internal and external perspectives needed to counterweight the pressures of leading alone. They suggest that this advice is often best given privately. Watkins and Ciampa add, “Whether in government or in a corporation, the effectiveness of advisors and counselors depends on the leader's trust that they are loyal and seek only to help him [or her] make the best possible decisions.” Scripture declares that friends and wise counsel are far greater than leading alone. Solomon states, “Without counsel, plans go wrong, but with many advisors they succeed” (Proverbs 15:22 NRSV). Pastors who take care of themselves emotionally with the help of mentors and friends will find a greater opportunity for success in a transition.

## **Summary**

The research outlined above has sought to develop a model of succession for a local church. This chapter offered an overview of the literature and resources on leadership transitions. It examined and presented essential practices for the key participants in a pastoral succession—the predecessor and successor. Successful transitions involve dynamics before, during, and after a transition. The research above suggests that a strategic plan of succession can mitigate many factors that contribute to failed transitions. As is the case with all leadership transitions, pastoral transitions are complex and vary from church to church. The research reveals a significant correlation between the application of these principles and fruitful days of ministry when transitioning from one pastor to the next.

## **CHAPTER THREE:**

### **THESIS AND STUDY DESIGN**

#### **Introduction**

Pastoral transitions are among the most complex and challenging situations a church can face—particularly among long-term pastorates. In Chapter One, the researcher outlined eight significant problems with current practices for pastoral transitions in the Church of the Nazarene. The author proposes that a failed transition can be mitigated if the key participants work cohesively on an alternative model and succession strategy. This chapter describes how an alternative, strategic plan of succession can offer solutions to the problems of current practices of pastoral transitions mentioned in Chapter One. The chapter ends with an analysis of the limitations of the proposed solutions.

#### **Solutions to the Problems**

In Chapter One, the researcher outlined eight significant problems with current practices for pastoral transitions in the Church of the Nazarene. The problems are as follows:

- The exiting pastor has little to no say about the church's future direction.
- When a senior pastor leaves, all pastoral staff must resign, thereby thrusting staff-led ministries into instability and uncertainty.
- The protocol can be a lengthy process that can easily be disrupted and reset. This problem is further complicated by the highly confidential nature of the interview and search process, leaving many to draw conclusions

independently.

- Current practices rely on favorable votes of the church board and congregation, leaving candidates to wonder the about the sufficiency quotient a favorable vote.
- The process relies heavily on a single, campaign-style interaction between a potential candidate and the congregation.
- Current protocols tend to favor outside hires. This problem is further complicated because external hires do not know the church's history or culture, adding one more layer of complexity to the transition process.
- The current protocol creates a domino effect where one church steals and promotes one pastor, who in turn steals and promotes another pastor, causing a wake of churches to be thrust into transition.
- The current practices tend to be based on past business practices, rather than biblical examples.

In light of the problems mentioned above, the author proposes that an alternative model and strategy of succession will greatly mitigate these problems. The following is an overview of how an alternative model and strategy of succession substantiates this claim.

### **Predecessors Offer More than a Vacant Position**

In an alternative model and plan of succession, the predecessor is highly involved in the entire process of the pastoral transition. From initiation to long after the final handoff, the predecessor plays an influential role. In the traditional protocol, the exiting pastor has little or no say in the transition to the next lead pastor. The predecessor's participation allows for the pastor's wisdom, experience, and heart to have a voice in the

conversation. This voice is more than a vacant position needing to be filled.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, predecessors understand the congregation more than a church board or a denominational leader. Predecessors who care deeply about a congregation can add a significant perspective that aids in the transition process. As with the case of Moses and Joshua, or Paul and Timothy—the vital responsibility of selecting and training one’s replacement becomes abundantly clear (see Appendix D). If pastors are called to lead a congregation, one must effectively lead well even after a handoff has occurred. Succession must be the responsibility of the exiting pastor. Removing the predecessor from the conversation of who should lead next is illogical.

Moreover, allowing the predecessor to be a key participant helps mitigate the emotional stress many retiring pastors experience. Pastors transitioning into retirement—or even a slower pace of ministry—will often admit an emotional element with which to contend that was far more difficult than originally thought. Bob Russel admitted that his own retirement was much easier primarily because of the large amount of planning he put into it. When the predecessor knows what to expect and has had adequate time to prepare for it financially, emotionally, relationally, and professionally, the transition can become a personally fulfilling event.

Perhaps most importantly, the predecessor is instrumental in leading the congregation to live out its mission. If the goal of a transition is to fill a vacancy, current protocols are sufficient—it gets the job done. However, if the goal is to ensure the church’s mission continues beyond one personality, then succession is a sensible alternative. Succession is more than finding a replacement. Pastors lead their congregations into a more faithful witness of the redeeming and transforming work of

Christ. As part of the preparation for succession, the predecessor can instill a shared ecclesiology and sense of mission. A congregation focused on the redeeming, missional work of God in the world will find themselves focused more on “a *way of being* in the world” rather than what they do or how they do it. A church’s primary function is to be sent—to incarnate the gospel in a specific context. Simply put, a predecessor helps the congregation be the church, not just find a new leader. The predecessor who is strategically involved in finding and training a replacement can personally live out this missional ecclesiology and encourage the congregation to do the same.

### **Pastoral Staff Remain Vital Team Members**

Requiring staff to resign ultimately leaves staff-led ministries in a state of confusion and uncertainty about the future. In an alternative model and plan of succession, pastoral staff have a much clearer understanding of continued roles and positions. In a plan of succession, the ministry team works together for a significant amount of time prior to the succession, adding to team cohesion. Since the successor is typically part of the staff (and has met the requirements of the *Manual* to be nominated, elected, and approved by the District Superintendent and District Advisory Board, as well as elected by congregational vote), the transition from associate to lead pastor is smooth and non-disruptive to the ministries of the church. Since the successor has worked with the ministry team for some time, it provides adequate opportunities for each staff member to understand each other’s areas of strength and weakness better. The ministry team knows one another’s personalities and leadership styles. Because of this shared experience, the shift from one leader to the next is less stressful, and the pastoral staff are

able to remain vital members of the team.

### **A Strategy Designed for the Long Haul**

The problems associated with how easily the current transition protocols can be disrupted and reset are extensive. If a candidate chooses not to accept a call after nomination and the congregational vote, the lengthy, highly confidential process of searching for a new pastor begins over again. While an alternative model and plan of succession is significantly longer, it is intended for the long haul. A succession plan is quite lengthy. In fact, a pastoral transition following the normal protocol might last as little as ninety days, a succession plan usually takes one to five years to complete. In reality, because there are significant perquisites for a plan of succession, it could take even longer (i.e., the financial security of a retiring pastor, the financial stability of the local church, etc.). A plan of succession is intended for the long haul.

A plan of succession requires a major commitment from the key players involved. This covenant-like commitment allows for the longevity of the leadership of the church. Because a succession plan refuses to see the transition from one leader to the next as merely an event, the time necessary for such a transition to occur allows all parties to prepare and adapt to change over time. For instance, a thirty-five-year pastor will need some time to emotionally let go of power and control—something that cannot happen overnight. Additionally, a brand-new pastor who has only served as an associate will need some time to prepare and be mentored in order to hit the ground running at full speed. Holding the baton of leadership for thirty years is not let go easily. Receiving the baton of leadership from someone who held it for thirty years is not picked up overnight. This type

of transition requires time and covenant-style dedication. The work of succession requires a commitment for the long haul. A commitment like this ensures the predecessor, successor, and congregation benefits greatly.

### **Based on Relationships and Shared Experiences**

With the traditional protocol, new pastors essentially campaign for their new position through a single sermon interaction with the congregation. Typically following the candidate's message, the congregation casts a vote. In an alternative model and plan of succession, the successor is someone who has received the favor of the congregation over time, rather than in a single, campaign-style interaction. A plan of succession elevates the relationship and character of the successor rather than performance. The favor of the successor is won through relationships and shared ministry experiences, more than one's preaching abilities. Because of the long-haul nature of a succession plan, a successor has interacted with the congregation for multiple years by serving, preaching, and ministering in different ways. One has spoken with, prayed over, and encouraged the congregation. One has started to earn loyalty from members of the congregation and put "chips" in one's pockets. In this case, the character of the individual involved is more important. Moreover, a successor has the predecessor's endorsement, who can speak highly of one's replacement. The relationships the successor develops over time will greatly influence one's ability to lead once the transition has officially occurred.

### **The Successor is Part of the Church's Culture and History**

Following the traditional protocol for pastoral transitions, a new pastor typically



knows very little of the new church's history or culture. However, in an alternative model and plan of succession, the successor is part of the church's culture and history—and, in many ways, may have contributed greatly to the church's history and culture. Because of the long-haul nature of a plan of succession, the successor and predecessor work cohesively together to create shared history with the congregation. The relationship between the predecessor and successor will ultimately set the tone for the church's culture. This shared experience will greatly help the successor make decisions and understand the people and ways of the church. Furthermore, the successor's time preparing for succession can be used to gain a deeper appreciation for the church's culture and history.

### **Raises Leaders from a Leadership Pipeline**

In the traditional protocol, pastors are often stolen from one congregation and promoted to serve in a different congregation. This often creates a domino effect, enacting several transitions across a denomination in multiple churches. In an alternative model and succession plan, pastors are not stolen from other churches but are elevated from within. Following Paul and Timothy's example, developing a leadership pipeline creates a system where leaders train new leaders (see Appendix D). In days where the culture is rapidly changing, the demand for high-capacity leaders is great. To effectively advance the Kingdom of God, fresh, new leaders must rise. The local church is the best place for these leaders to develop and be fashioned for ministry. From this pipeline comes the unique opportunity to shape the craft and character of those involved in ways that advance the Kingdom of God and prepare new leaders for the tasks of ministry.

## **A More Biblical Approach**

Finally, in an alternative model and plan of succession, churches will see a more biblical approach to selecting godly leaders. In the traditional protocol for the Church of the Nazarene, the practices used to replace a pastor tend to follow business practices rather than biblical examples. One does not have to look far to see that throughout Scripture, the most common approach to replacing leaders was “one becomes less, while another becomes more.” Some examples in Scripture are Paul and Barnabas, Paul and Timothy, John the Baptist and Jesus, Jesus and the Disciples, and Moses and Joshua. In all of these examples, leaders were replaced by another leader; however, their methods look more like succession. No votes were cast. No campaign-style interactions. Rather, successors were chosen based on character and skills evidenced through shared ministry experience. Unlike the traditional protocols used in the Church of the Nazarene, biblical examples point out that the predecessor is highly involved and selects the next leader. Perhaps it is time to return to a more biblical model of leadership transitions.

## **Limitations of Proposed Solution**

The author recognizes there are limitations to a strategic plan of succession. While each local church will need to determine for themselves if a plan of succession is suitable, churches will do well to be aware of some of the limitations associated with such a plan. The following is a brief overview of two limitations to a plan of succession. Although these limitations create the potential for new problems and challenges, they are not insurmountable. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, godly wisdom, and careful

planning, a local church can greatly benefit from a plan of succession.

### **Limitation One: An Unyielding Predecessor**

The researcher recognizes a substantial limitation to the solution of a plan of succession if the predecessor is unyielding. If the predecessor fails to relinquish power, control, and authority, the succession process will reach a stalemate. Even subtly, the predecessor can maintain more loyalty and influence in the congregation than one intends. Therefore, it is critical that the predecessor follow John the Baptist's example—one who decreased so another may increase (see John 3:30). This “state of becoming less” recognizes one's season of ministry must gradually end so another can begin. This posture must be maintained throughout the entire transition. This posture also says something about the pastor's role and view of the church. Is a pastor's identity tied up in what one does, or is it found in Christ? If one's identity is found in one's job, leaving that job will create a substantial void and challenge. If, however, a pastor's identity is rooted in Christ, one will find great joy in allowing the next person to lead. Russel writes, “Once you walk away from your position, don't second-guess your decision. Don't entertain the idea of going back and reclaiming your old position. Stay focused on the future.”

To help alleviate this limitation, the researcher suggests a clear and written timeline and plan that details the boundaries of the predecessor. Vanderbloemen and Bird call for specific rules of engagement. Having an agreement between the predecessor and successor will help with questions like: what will the predecessor do?; what will the predecessor ask permission to do?; and, what will the predecessor not do unless specifically asked to? As a significant part of the cohesive strategy, this document will

help all parties know when the predecessor will officially relinquish the senior pastor's responsibilities. Additionally, the document will give the timeline for giving up significant duties such as preaching, weddings, and funerals. This document aims to help establish a covenant that edifies all those involved and should be visited weekly.

Additionally, an unyielding predecessor can quickly block a plan of succession when one speaks ill of the successor or the new way of doing things. If the predecessor fails to recognize how quickly one can demonstrate support for or disapproval of the successor, the succession may reach another standstill. A predecessor may find themselves reminiscing about past success with congregation members. A predecessor may also find the church's direction not going the way one would desire. Publicly or privately disproving a successor eventually discredits the successor and ultimately hurts a succession.

To remedy this limitation, the predecessor must commit to becoming the successor's greatest cheerleader and speak only positively of the successor. No matter the concern, one must publicly and privately cheer the successor on and refuse to speak ill of the successor. If there is a disagreement, the predecessor must commit to speaking privately with the successor about the issue. In doing so, one follows the way of Christ outlined in Matthew 18:15. When speaking with members of the congregation, the predecessor must redirect the conversation to cheer on the successor. Doing so helps the successor maintain the predecessor's endorsement and demonstrates wisdom on the part of the predecessor as the one who selected the successor. When the predecessor publicly and privately applauds the successor, one enters a greater level of leadership—one that leaves a positive legacy.

## **Limitation Two: An Impatient Successor**

The research recognizes a second limitation relating to the successor. A successor's impatience will ultimately hurt the succession process. Successors must be patient and allow God's timing to be fulfilled. Often a younger successor will be chomping at the bit to take over, exert authority, and experiment with new ideas. Tom Mullens offers this advice to receive the baton of leadership well: The baton of leadership is the predecessor's to give, not the successor's to take. Successors must be patient—one's time will come. Impatience quickly adds to the stress and challenges associated with the transition.

Additionally, successors will need to fight the urge to change too much too soon. Some ministry methodology changes are appropriate, as the successor finds a new style of leadership and preaching that is unique to them. Some change is necessary for the church to continue to relate to the changing culture. Russel warns, "too much change too fast creates an atmosphere of instability in a world that's unstable." Wise successors must take adequate time before implementing dramatic change and "count the cost" of that change, as every change effort has a cost. Successors need wisdom, even when one is convinced that change is necessary and will benefit the church. Unfortunately, dramatic change in a succession is usually counterproductive. Russel offers this advice:

It's been my observation that many young ministers are focused on winning the lost but have little concern for nurturing those who are saved. In fact, they are so convinced of the methodology changes that need to take place to win the lost that when they meet resistance from within, they begin to see the congregation as barriers to accomplishing their goal. As a result, some leave the impression that they love the lost and hate the church. The key is balance, and I believe it's possible to evangelize the lost and encourage the saved simultaneously. In order

to maintain that balance, change needs to be made slowly and wisely.”

One method to remedy this limitation is for the successor to honor the past continually. Long-term predecessors have served many years of ministry with the organization. They have cared for people and walked through many trials and joys with them. Impatient successors ultimately discredit this long-term work. Successors may have some new ideas but must not do anything that dishonors the predecessor’s leadership or methodology. Speaking positively, both privately and publicly, not only honors the past but also earns credibility for the successor. Once trust and credibility have been earned over time, the ability to make change slowly becomes much easier. Successors must be patient.

### **Summary**

This chapter has given solutions to the problems mentioned in Chapter One. The author proposes that an alternative model and strategy of succession can mitigate many of the problems associated with the traditional protocols for transitions in the Church of the Nazarene. With a plan of succession, the exiting pastor is permitted to speak toward the future of the church and who follows. With a succession plan, the pastoral staff are better united and work cohesively before and after the transition. Because a succession plan requires a substantial commitment from both the successor and predecessor, the church benefits from the work of a long-term covenant. Additionally, a plan of succession helps the successor gain credibility and trust because of a relationship rather than a single, campaign-style performance. This relationship develops through shared ministry

experience. Moreover, the successor advances from a leadership pipeline, creating an environment where training new leaders becomes the norm. Finally, a plan of succession follows examples found in Scripture.

While a succession plan is not without limitations, two significant limitations were noted—an unyielding predecessor and an impatient successor. However, both limitations can be remedied by the Christ-like character of the predecessor and successor through a covenant-style relationship. When both treat well and speak favorably of each other, the limitations can easily be avoided.

## **PART II**

### **CHAPTER FOUR: DESCRIPTION OF ARTIFACT**

As demonstrated thus far, the Church of the Nazarene's current transition practices can considerably contribute to failed transitions—especially among those with lengthy pastorates. The author proposes that failed transitions can be mitigated if the key participants—the predecessor and successor—worked cohesively on an alternative model and strategy of succession. To aid in the transition taking place at Wanamaker Woods Church of the Nazarene, the author has outlined a succession plan. This succession plan serves as the artifact for this dissertation. This chapter demonstrates how the artifact provides a practical incarnation of this thesis and ends with a brief overview of an evaluation method.

#### **How the Artifact Embodies the Thesis**

For Wanamaker Woods to avoid a failed transition and the problems associated with the traditional protocols for transition in the Church of the Nazarene, a plan of succession has been selected as an alternative model. Outlining a strategic plan has been a challenging yet meaningful endeavor. This project's artifact is a handbook that outlines the plan of succession for Wanamaker Woods Church of the Nazarene (see Appendix A). The handbook's goal is to outline a strategy that can easily be implemented to ensure a



smooth and successful transition from a long-term pastor to a new pastor at Wanamaker Woods.

Because of the nature of a succession and the immense amount of work it takes, it helps to break down the strategic plan into three phases: a preparation phase, an implementation phase, and an evaluation phase. The artifact follows these three phases and asks a series of questions intending to hold each party accountable to the plan. The first phase deals with items relating to succession preparation, asking essential questions to ensure the readiness and viability of succession. Phase Two deals with significant items once the succession is underway and how to properly implement such a plan. Finally, Phase Three asks intentional questions after the transition has occurred so as to evaluate the succession plan and offer ways to improve.

### **Phase One: Preparing for Succession**

The first section of the artifact gives a framework by which Wanamaker Woods decided if succession was a viable solution. By asking a series of specific questions, the leadership of Wanamaker Woods discussed in depth a plan of succession and arrived at a strategy deemed fitting for the context. The questions asked were:

- Is succession the best route?
- Is the timing right?
- Is the church healthy?
- Is a successor in place?
- What is next for the predecessor?

- Can we afford a succession?
- Is accountability in place?
- Is the denominational leadership in alignment?
- What is the projected timeline?
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These questions became the guiding principles by which Wanamaker Woods developed a strategic plan of succession. The artifact breaks down each question with Wanamaker Woods leadership's proposed solutions to the challenges presented.

### **Phase Two: Implementing a Plan of Succession**

The next section of the artifact gives the framework by which Wanamaker Woods intends to implement the plan of succession. By asking a series of specific questions, the leadership of Wanamaker Woods will implement the plan of succession. The questions asked are:

- Are the key players meeting regularly?
- Is the predecessor yielding authority and responsibility?
- Is the successor patient?
- What is the projected timeline?
- How is the succession plan communicated with the congregation?
- How will the final handoff take place?

These questions will guide Wanamaker Woods in implementing a plan of

succession. The artifact breaks down each question with Wanamaker Woods leadership's solutions to the challenges presented.

### **Phase Three: Evaluating a Plan of Succession**

The final section of the artifact gives the framework by which Wanamaker Woods intends to evaluate the plan of succession. By asking a series of specific questions, the leadership of Wanamaker Woods is preparing to evaluate the success of the plan of succession when the time arrives. The questions to ask are:

- Are the key players meeting regularly?
- Did the key players commit to their responsibilities of the succession plan?
- Was communication with the congregation clear?
- What would Wanamaker Woods Church of the Nazarene do differently next time?
- What is the projected timeline?

These questions will become the guiding principles for Wanamaker Woods in evaluating the plan of succession when the time arrives. The artifact is broken down with Wanamaker Woods leadership's anticipated solutions to the challenges presented.

### **Standard of Publication**

Because the handbook offers a strategic, three-phase plan for Wanamaker Woods, the standard to measure the handbook's effectiveness is how clearly the strategy helps Wanamaker Woods accomplish its stated objective. A good strategy must answer two

significant questions: (1) Where is the organization going? and, (2) how will the organization get there? The end goal is just as important as the process of getting there. The goal of the succession plan at Wanamaker Woods is to mitigate the problems associated with the traditional methods of pastoral transition in the Church of the Nazarene. Therefore, the succession plan must be evaluated in light of how well it actually prevents the problems described in Chapter One from occurring.

Likewise, this particular handbook must be evaluated in light of how well Wanamaker Woods transitions from its current lead pastor to a successor. Again, the goal is not only to replace the senior pastor. Rather the aim is to see that the reins of leadership are passed on in a way that allows the church to continue its mission of leading people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ. Therefore, the artifact outlines specific milestones and accomplishments—many of which have already been accomplished by the key participants at Wanamaker Woods. The handbook also offers guided questions that hold the key participants accountable. These questions further serve to evaluate and modify the plan as needed in order to stay the course. The author hopes that this strategic plan, which has been bathed in constant prayer and accompanied by obedient action, is a God-honoring response to the needs of Wanamaker Woods Church of the Nazarene.

### **Summary**

This chapter has sought to demonstrate how the artifact provides a practical incarnation of the thesis. The artifact is a handbook that provides the strategic details and timeline for each phase of the plan of succession at Wanamaker Woods Church of the Nazarene. The plan of succession is broken into three strategic phases. Phase One helps

the church prepare for succession. Phase Two helps the church implement the succession. And Phase Three helps the church evaluate the succession. Each phase is guided by questions to help each party stay on course. Finally, this chapter identifies a standard for evaluation. The standard used to measure the effectiveness of the plan is not only that a new pastor installed, but also the process by which the baton of leadership is passed on. The artifact outlines a plan of succession that will mitigate many of the problems associated with traditional protocols for pastoral transition in the Church of the Nazarene.

## **CHAPTER FIVE:**

### **CONCLUSION**

Through this study the researcher has proposed that a failed transition can be mitigated if the key participants work cohesively on an alternative model and succession strategy. In Chapter One, the author demonstrated the problems associated with the current model of transitions. In Chapter Two, the author reviewed crucial literature on successions and outlined the findings relating to the two key participants in a succession. In Chapter Three, the author substantiated how an alternative model and plan of succession helps to mitigate those problems. The author also noted two potential limitations and offered solutions. In Chapter Four, the author described how the artifact embodies the thesis. In this chapter, the author will describe the development of the artifact, suggestions for further research, and recommendations for future applications.

#### **Artifact Development**

The handbook was developed over the past four years. Wanamaker Woods Church of the Nazarene started the transition of leadership from Pastor Holmes to Pastor Michael before this project began. Remarkably, upon conducting research for this project, the leadership is affirmed that the steps taken thus far have been well executed. Because the plan of succession is a five-year plan, the predecessor and successor have had adequate time to develop the questions and phases that appear in the handbook.

One option that was considered but not selected for the plan of succession at

Wanamaker Woods was a co-pastorate between Pastor Holmes and Pastor Michael. One benefit to this option is that co-pastors are equal in the pastoral office. Therefore, throughout the implementation phase of the succession, Pastor Michael would be elevated to the same status as Pastor Holmes. This option was carefully considered but not selected because of the following reasons:

- Co-pastors are equal in the pastoral office. Therefore, Pastor Holmes would be subjected to nomination and a congregational vote to co-pastor with Pastor Michael.
- Pastor Holmes and Pastor Michael would need to resign as an equal team to switch out of the role of co-pastor once the transition period ended.
- Pastor Michael would need to be renominated and voted on once more to be the sole lead pastor.
- The congregation's view of the senior pastor would not alter. Many in the congregation would still see Pastor Holmes as the Senior Pastor, regardless of Pastor Michael's status as co-pastor.

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This is not to say that the co-pastoring option will not work. Other churches may find tremendous benefit in pursuing the co-pastor route. For instance, one of the co-pastors could mentor the other and resign at the appointed time. The church could then elect the trained pastor as a sole lead pastor, or the church could elect a co-pastor team with the trained pastor mentoring the next co-pastor. This could create a system by which pastors intentionally train and replace themselves. However, for Wanamaker Woods, it did not appear to give enough advantage to pursue, particularly after following a long-term pastor. The tradeoff of requiring resignations, renominations, and multiple votes seemed unnecessary for the succession plan.

Throughout the preparation phase, it became apparent to the author the necessity of having an honest and open conversation for the health of the key participant's relationship and the success of the succession plan. A critical conversation early on facilitated transparency between Pastor Holmes and Pastor Michael. Early on, Pastor Michael desired to make a change to the Sunday evening programming. Pastor Holmes questioned Pastor Michael about the change because the desired change affected multiple ministries. At one point in the conversation, Pastor Holmes asked if he was getting in the way of the church's need to change and adapt to new ideas. Pastor Michael vulnerably and honestly said yes. That conversation has often been referred to as the breakthrough in their relationship. Pastor Michael notes that had the conversation not taken place, Pastor Holmes and Pastor Michael would not have the transparency necessary to speak frankly with one another. That conversation permitted Pastor Michael to let Pastor Holmes know how he honestly felt. It also paved the way for Pastor Holmes to understand how easily he can hold on to control.

Many people are unconvinced that a tenured pastor would be willing to let go of the Senior Pastor's responsibilities after thirty-five years. However, Pastor Holmes is excited about a new season of ministry. Pastor Holmes has often said that he chose Pastor Michael. That choice makes it all the more important to ensure Pastor Michael's success. There is no benefit for Pastor Holmes to belittle or ridicule Pastor Michael's leadership or try to hold on to leadership. Pastor Holmes wants what is best for the church, which includes a new, confident, and supported leader. Moreover, Pastor Holmes has been yielding leadership and responsibilities to Pastor Michael. The original plan was for Pastor Holmes to move across the hall into an executive office, and Pastor Michael would



move into the Senior Pastor's office at the appropriate time. However, Pastor Holmes said he felt a check in his spirit and realized that the optics of moving across the hall from Pastor Michael would not help people shift their loyalties to Pastor Michael. Instead, Pastor Holmes will move into a smaller office at the end of the hall so that people will see Pastor Michael first before seeking Pastor Holmes.

Pastor Holmes also shared how God has released him from the position of Senior Pastor but not the calling. Years ago, God called Pastor Holmes. The calling of a pastor is a humble, yet high vocation. It is a call to serve the church in the way of Christ. Pastor Holmes admitted a struggle in giving up responsibility, as one's identity is often connected closely to one's work. In early 2021, Pastor Holmes shared that God has released him from his position but not his call. For Pastor Holmes, that was incredibly freeing. Pastor Holmes will still be a pastor on staff, still fulfilling his call to serve the local church in a new position as Pastor Emeritus.

Furthermore, correspondence between the District Superintendent, Pastor Holmes, and Pastor Michael has been crucial in the preparation and implementation phases. One question left to deal with was the issue of staff resignations. How does the succession plan follow the requirements of the *Manual*, paragraph 159.5? This paragraph requires the resignation of ministry staff upon the resignation or retirement of the Senior Pastor. This question was addressed in a meeting with the District Superintendent, Pastor Holmes, and Pastor Michael. It was the hope of the author that resignations would be unnecessary under the provisions of a succession plan. However, after careful deliberation, it was decided that a modified letter of resignation would satisfy the requirements of the *Manual*, and still maintain the desired outcome of the succession

plan. A draft of the modified resignation letter can be found in Appendix E.

Additionally, the relationship between Pastor Holmes and Wanamaker Woods must be clearly defined before Pastor Michael is installed as the new lead pastor. To aid in this, Pastor Michael and Pastor Holmes developed a written covenant that defines the terms of the relationship at the appointed time. The emphasis on a *covenant* relationship is important, as it stresses mutual commitments for both parties. The written covenant outlines what Pastor Holmes will do, will not do, and will need permission to do. It also clarifies how Wanamaker Woods will honor and care for Pastor Holmes. The covenant can be found in Phase One of the Artifact (see Appendix A).

The plan of succession at Wanamaker Woods will end approximately one year after the publication of this project. Thus, the handbook was developed with three phases in mind: preparation, implementation, and evaluation. The first phase was primarily developed from what Wanamaker Woods had already accomplished. The implementation phase is where the succession is at the time of this writing. The questions being raised at the time of this project's writing are the questions being used to hold Pastor Holmes and Pastor Michael accountable. These questions have been developed out of the research conducted and from the weekly conversations between Pastor Holmes and Pastor Michael. The final phase of the succession was developed out of anticipation for what the predecessor and successor expect to occur. Because the desire is a successful succession from Pastor Holmes to Pastor Michael, the final phase of the handbook was designed to evaluate the strategy within two years of the installment of Pastor Michael as the lead pastor of Wanamaker Woods.

## **Implications for Future Studies**

Because the plan of succession at Wanamaker Woods will end after the publication of this project, a future study will need to follow up on the effectiveness of the implemented strategy. The author notes that the strategy's effectiveness is ultimately the standard of publication. Within two years after the publication of this project, the effectiveness will be evident. The author's prayer that this hard work and patient endurance will be well-fitted for Wanamaker Woods Church of the Nazarene. The author wants nothing more than what is best for the local church. Future studies might include:

- The long-term effects of the predecessor remaining on staff
- The dynamics of two generations of leaders
- Faithfully leading an aging congregation
- Effective strategies for receiving the baton of leadership following a tenured pastor
- A co-pastor option for succession
- Implications for denominational adoption

If the author had the opportunity to accomplish this project again, the author might have changed the focus to be less on the strategy of a succession plan, and more on the relationship between the successor and predecessor. Narrowing the focus on the relationship of the key participants could enable a better approach for selecting the right successor and creating a stronger relationship.

Finally, if others wished to build upon this project, the author suggests broadening it for the denomination. The lens for analysis was for Wanamaker Woods and thereby

limited itself to one local context. A broader project might develop a strategy for the denomination to utilize succession as a viable option for other Nazarene churches facing pastoral transitions in the future.

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## **APPENDIX A: ARTIFACT**

# **Transition in Leadership Handbook:**

## **A Plan of Succession for Wanamaker Woods Church of the Nazarene**

**By Michael J. De Haan**

## **Introduction**

Churches who dearly love their pastor will often find themselves with the same pastor for twenty, thirty, or even forty years. It is often during those lengthy tenures that churches experience growth and stability. The unique relationship between a tenured pastor and one's congregation is extraordinary. However, when that pastor leaves or retires, there are significant challenges to overcome. Many transitions have resulted in decline or upheaval. Ministries can quickly fall apart, and the church is often left wondering who is to blame. Sometimes there is a "sacrificial pastor" who comes in but is eventually obliged to leave after a short while. During this interim time, many churches experience substantial loss and decline.

The resources available for churches facing transitions are on the rise. The author's goal with this project is to offer a strategic plan of succession for Wanamaker Woods Church of the Nazarene, Topeka, Kansas. This handbook outlines the details of the strategic plan for the leader-shift taking place between Pastor L.D. Holmes and Pastor Michael De Haan. Furthermore, it provides a blueprint to mitigate several of the problems that often occur when a church follows the traditional protocols of the Church of the Nazarene for replacing a tenured pastor.

This handbook is broken into three phases. The first phase deals with the preparation for succession. The second phase deals with the implementation of a plan of succession. The final phase provides an evaluation of a plan of succession. Each phase offers a set of questions that ultimately guide the conversations needed for a succession to be successful. The author hopes that through this experience, the leaders and congregation of Wanamaker Woods will be able to look back and not only see God's work through the process but will also come out on the other side with a deeper assurance of God's amazing grace. Finally, the author would be overjoyed if this project could benefit other churches facing a similar situation.

### **Phase One: Preparing for Succession**

It must be clearly stated upfront: a plan of succession is not for every church. It is the firm belief that succession can mitigate many of the problems caused by the traditional protocol for transitions in the Church of the Nazarene. However, the author recognizes that not every situation is suited for succession. In fact, a model of succession will introduce some of its own problems. After much prayer, the leadership at Wanamaker Woods decided that succession was appropriate. The work of preparing for the succession was extensive. What follows are the questions utilized to prepare Wanamaker Woods for a pastoral succession.

#### **Is Succession the Best Route?**

Some churches will find that the current protocols put in place by the Church of the Nazarene work sufficiently for their context. At times, because of the nature of the

transition, the procedures outlined in the *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene safely guard churches and pastors and provide direction during the unsettling time between pastors. These procedures aim to provide stability and unity in local churches. Therefore, a necessary first step would be to ask if succession is the best route.

A plan of succession is hopeful to mitigate many of the problems that arise from the complexities of traditional methods. However, a plan of succession has the potential to introduce new complexities that are not present in the Church of the Nazarene's traditional protocol. In either case, seeking first the Kingdom and God and God's righteousness is of the utmost importance. Pastors must pursue what is best for the church God has entrusted to them. Ultimately, pastors and church leaders must decide for themselves, with the Holy Spirit's guidance, which approach is most appropriate for pastoral transitions in their local church.

Succession planning is hard work. It requires everyone involved to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's work and what is best for the church. It requires significant long-range planning. It demands humility and vulnerability from everyone involved. Succession planning involves letting go of authority and responsibility, starting new ministry chapters, and concluding others. Succession planning take incredible patience and self-control. In the end, a plan of succession will test both the predecessor's and successor's character. If the key participants involved have carefully evaluated the cost and demands of succession, they may find succession a viable option. In any case, one would do well to seek the Holy Spirit's guidance and trusted friend's advice before deciding if a succession plan is right for one's church. Wanamaker Woods has determined that succession is the best option for transitioning from one leader to the next.

### **Is the Timing Right?**

Many pastors will sense the timing of their own ministry effectiveness. Pastor Holmes has said that he feels he could easily offer more years to the church. However, he quickly adds that doing so would not be fair to the church nor beneficial. He has sensed that his own ministry timing, as the one holding the reins of leadership, is coming to a close. Recently, Pastor Holmes described a release from the assignment of Senior Pastor, but not from the pastoral call. Therefore, it is time for Pastor Holmes to enter a new season of ministry. For Wanamaker Woods, the timing is right. Before the succession plan, members of the congregation asked what would happen when Pastor Holmes retires? Who would take his place? These questions helped confirm the readiness of succession planning.

### **Is the Church Healthy?**

One key factor for succession deals with the health of the church. Not only is the timing right, but is the church healthy? In other words, is the church ready for a significant change? The leadership at Wanamaker Woods found that the church was ready for change. When looking at the church's attendance trends, the leadership soon found that it had reached a plateau—neither gaining nor declining in attendance. Furthermore, the financial stability of the church was at its best. The church was faithfully giving and adding to the ministries.

Additionally, the church is united. Several years prior, the church had settled on a ministry and worship style that suited the needs of the congregation well. For example,

the church holds two worship services on Sunday mornings. The first service is a traditional service with hymns and choruses. The second service is a modern worship service with a worship band. This two-service style allowed two groups to worship according to one's heart language and not feel left behind by attempting to blend the services. This style has set the church up for succession by ministering to a broad range of people, both young and old. This ability to minister effectively to both groups has aided in the church's overall health.

### **Is a Successor in Place?**

One major advantage that Wanamaker Woods had was a large staff from which to select a successor. When a youth pastor vacancy came up, Pastor Holmes began searching for a new youth pastor and someone who could serve as a potential candidate for succession. Having sensed the right timing, Pastor Holmes had succession in the back of his mind as he interviewed candidates.

The candidate Pastor Holmes selected to become the new youth pastor was Pastor Michael—who had over ten years of experience as a youth pastor. Additionally, Pastor Michael had experience preaching to a larger congregation and ministerial experience appropriate for that of a lead pastor. The advantage of hiring a new staff member was two-fold: it filled the vacancy of the needed position (i.e., youth pastor), and it provided an opportunity to evaluate the craft and character of the individual hired. For the first year of employment, Pastor Holmes observed Pastor Michael through the lens of his potential successor. When the timing was right, Pastor Holmes brought the plan of succession to Pastor Michael's attention, asking Pastor Michael to pray about the possibility of

succession. Once Pastor Michael agreed, the strategic plan was drafted.

### **What is Next for the Predecessor?**

One of the most significant factors for the predecessor in yielding authority and responsibility is having a meaningful new chapter of ministry in which to step once the transition takes place. Pastor Holmes is not retiring in the traditional sense of retirement. Rather, Pastor Holmes is entering a new season of ministry—one not at the head, holding the reins of leadership. Pastor Holmes' new position will be Pastor Emeritus. Pastor Holmes will oversee visitation and senior care ministry. The position is still being finalized as ministry needs become realized in the next few years. Because much of the research indicated that it is wise to craft a written covenant, what follows clarifies expectations and commitments with Pastor Holmes and Wanamaker Woods.

#### *Covenant Between Pastor Holmes and Wanamaker Woods*

Throughout Scripture, covenants outlined many relationships. To “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3 NRSV), the leadership at Wanamaker Woods has asked God to guide us into a covenant relationship with humility. It is the desire that the prayerful use of this covenant will bring fruitfulness and Christ-honoring joy to all parties involved. The Apostle Paul reminds us, “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching” (1 Tim. 5:17 NRSV). As we look back on Pastor Holmes's thirty-five years of pastoral leadership, we are exceedingly grateful and wish to honor Pastor Holmes for his faithful service.

Given the special relationship between Pastor Holmes and Wanamaker Woods, it is in the best interest of both parties to establish clear expectations which honor the relationship. This covenant relationship is distinguished from a contract as it serves as an expression that seeks to guide the relationship by outlining mutual commitments. Moreover, this covenant will be reviewed annually to ensure it continues to honor Pastor Holmes and serves the best needs of Wanamaker Woods Church of the Nazarene.



#### Covenant Commitments:

- We agree that Pastor Holmes will remain a full member in good standing at Wanamaker Woods Church of the Nazarene.
- We agree that Pastor Holmes will adopt the title “Pastor Emeritus.” Pastor Holmes will continue to be on staff. As such, Pastor Holmes will be financially compensated for this role and provided a furnished office.
- We agree that Pastor Holmes will not serve in any elected church positions but may serve as a volunteer for committees or ministry teams.
- We agree that Pastor Holmes may be asked for input, as Pastor Michael deems appropriate.
- We agree that Pastor Holmes will be available to perform pastoral duties, such as weddings, funerals, counseling, baptisms, dedications, and visitations. For Pastor Holmes’ sake, and for the sake of Pastor Michael, the request for and availability to perform such tasks should be made known to Pastor Michael.
- We agree that Pastor Holmes and Pastor Michael will continue to meet regularly to check in on each other and the progress of the succession, as well as to share the joys and burdens of ministry. This meeting will also serve as a place to ask questions of accountability.

#### **Can We Afford It?**

Wanamaker Woods took on a substantial cost once the leadership decided to proceed with succession. For Wanamaker Woods, the cost mostly consisted of salaries and training. Wanamaker Woods needed to accommodate three salaries—the senior pastor, youth pastor, and replacement youth pastor. On June 1, 2021, Pastor Holmes will take a fifty percent pay reduction. This reduction serves two purposes. First, it allows funds to be available to hire a replacement youth pastor. Second, it releases Pastor Holmes to serve as a part-time pastor. A second reduction in salary will occur at the start of the fiscal year, June 1, 2022, when Pastor Michael officially becomes the new lead

pastor. This salary reduction, again, serves two purposes. First, it allows funds to be available to better compensate Pastor Michael in the new role as lead pastor. Second, it compensates Pastor Holmes further as a part-time pastor.

One key factor enabled the salary reductions to occur. Early on, Pastor Holmes prepared personally for this financial change. Pastor Holmes regularly saved and invested in retirement funds so that when the time came, he could surrender his salary and live in such a way that he no longer depended on full-time income. This wise decision early on prepared Wanamaker Woods so that the church could afford a succession.

A further cost associated with Wanamaker Woods' succession plan was the expense of school. Many in leadership felt that Pastor Michael needed to have a doctorate prior to becoming the lead pastor. As a result, the board approved a budget to allow Pastor Michael to attend school to earn the degree. Pastor Michael enrolled in school at Nazarene Theological Seminary in 2018. For three years, Wanamaker Woods has budgeted for the cost of the program, including transportation and books.

### **Is Accountability in Place?**

One of the drawbacks of a succession is how easily it can become mundane. Many people felt the succession was a long way off at the beginning. At first, many questioned if anything was actually happening—if Pastor Holmes was releasing responsibility and if Pastor Michael was assuming responsibility. To remain accountable to the plan, Pastor Holmes and Pastor Michael asked the staff and church board to keep them accountable. The church board is tasked with ensuring Pastor Holmes and Pastor Michael work well together. The board asks questions like, are Pastor Holmes and Pastor Michael sharing a

vision for the future or fighting for their own? The board and staff keep both the predecessor and successor accountable to the plan.

Additionally, Pastor Holmes and Pastor Michael both have personal accountability partners asking difficult questions. These accountability partners hold both pastors accountable to their personal goals, the shared vision, and to speaking well of one another. The personal accountability partners regularly ask how one honors and speaks of the other. This decision aided in fostering a relationship between Pastor Holmes and Pastor Michael that grew out of mutual respect for one another as well as a desire to honor the other.

### **Are Denominational Leaders in Alignment?**

This step became necessary to fulfill the requirements of the *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene. Because Pastor Michael was on staff, the District Superintendent and the District Advisory Board needed to approve Pastor Michael as a candidate for succession (see *Manual* para. 159.8). In November 2017, the District Superintendent and District Advisory Board issued a letter to Wanamaker Woods, approving the plan of succession with Pastor Michael as a successor and thereby affirming the value of such a plan. (See Appendix C for a copy of the letter sent by the District Superintendent and District Advisory Board.) Since the succession plan's approval, Pastor Holmes and Pastor Michael maintain regular communication with the District Superintendent to keep them informed.

### **What is the Projected Timeline?**

The following timeline was projected and given to the District Superintendent, the District Advisory Board, and the local church board for approval. Upon the approval of the aforementioned parties, the timeline was given to the congregation for a vote of approval.

#### *Timeline to Present*

**Prior to 2015** – Pastor Holmes senses timing, spends significant time in prayer, and drafts a potential plan of succession for Wanamaker Woods.

**Summer 2015** – Youth Pastor position became vacant. With succession in mind, Pastor Holmes interviewed potential candidates to become a youth pastor and a potential successor.

**Fall 2015** – Pastor Michael accepts the call to serve as Wanamaker Wood’s next youth pastor. Pastor Holmes mentors Pastor Michael, keeping an eye on character and craft for senior pastor potential.

**Early 2017** – Pastor Holmes discusses with Pastor Michael a plan of succession and asks for prayer. Pastor Michael responds by desiring to proceed with a plan of succession.

**May 2017** – A Leadershift Committee is formed and tasked to recommend to the church board a plan of succession. Additionally, the plan of succession is introduced to the staff.

**June 2017** – Leadershift Committee approves and recommends to the church board a plan of succession. The church board approves the plan of succession and nominates Pastor Michael for a church vote, pending the approval of the District Superintendent and District Advisory Board.

**November 2017** – District Advisory Board and District Superintendent approve the plan of succession for Wanamaker Woods.

**May 2018** – The plan of succession is presented to the congregation at two consecutive town-hall meetings. At the annual meeting, the church cast a 97% favorable vote to accept the plan of succession.

**Fall 2018** – Pastor Michael begins his Doctor of Ministry program and continues to lead youth ministry. Pastor Holmes continues to mentor Pastor Michael. Pastor Michael assumes 25% of preaching on Sundays.

**Spring 2019** – Pastor Holmes continues to mentor Pastor Michael. Pastor Michael continues doctoral studies and leading the youth ministry.

**May 2019** – Pastor Holmes and Pastor Michael update the congregation on the progress of the succession plan at the church's annual meeting.

**Fall 2019** – Pastor Holmes continues to mentor Pastor Michael. Pastor Michael continues doctoral studies and leading the youth ministry.

**Spring 2020** – Pastor Holmes continues to mentor Pastor Michael. Pastor Michael continues doctoral studies and leading the youth ministry. Conversations about hiring a replacement youth pastor begin.

**August 2020** – Pastor Holmes and Pastor Michael update the congregation on the progress of the succession plan through a video interview.

**Fall 2020** - Pastor Holmes continues to mentor Pastor Michael. Pastor Michael continues doctoral studies and leading the youth ministry.

## **Phase Two: Implementing a Plan of Succession**

Phase One prepared Wanamaker Woods for the succession plan. The questions raised above organized the church and key players for the next phase of succession. Phase Two turns to implementation. Wanamaker Woods will implement the plan beginning in early 2021. What follows are questions designed to keep the succession plan focused and on task.

### **Are the Key Players Meeting Regularly?**

Perhaps the most crucial element of ensuring a succession strategy remains on course is through regular meetings between the successor and predecessor. Pastor Holmes and Pastor Michael continue to meet weekly. These meetings last approximately sixty to ninety minutes each week. Mission, vision, and strategy dominate the conversations.

Pastor Holmes regularly coaches and mentors Pastor Michael. Pastor Holmes and Pastor Michael often discuss what is going on in the church and work together to lead through each situation properly. Pastor Holmes and Pastor Michael ask direct questions in these meetings. The following outlines several of the questions regularly asked.

*Accountability Questions for Pastor Holmes*

- Are you doing or saying anything that might shed a negative light on Pastor Michael and his leadership of the church?
- How can you use your “relational equity” or “chip count” to aid Pastor Michael?
- How have you cheered on Pastor Michael this week?
- How are you doing emotionally with the transition out of the spotlight?
- How is your family responding to the changes?
- Is there an area of ministry you have had difficulty letting go of?
- What has been the most challenging piece of this process?
- What is capturing your passion?
- Are you finding fulfillment in your new role? Do you feel your new role contributes to the Kingdom of God in meaningful ways?
- With Pastor Michael as the new lead pastor, what excites you about the future?
- With Pastor Michael as the new lead pastor, what concerns you about the future?
- What are some of your biggest roadblocks to transitioning out of the senior pastor role?
- When it comes to your personal finances, are you able to part with your current level of compensation?

### *Accountability Questions for Pastor Michael*

- Are you doing or saying anything that might shed a negative light on Pastor Holmes and his leadership of the church in the past?
- How have you gained “relational equity” or “chip count” lately?
- How have you honored Pastor Holmes this week?
- How are you doing emotionally with the transition into the spotlight?
- How is your family responding to the changes?
- Is there an area of ministry you have had difficulty assuming?
- What has been the most challenging piece of this process?
- What is capturing your passion?
- Are you finding fulfillment in your new role? Do you feel your new role contributes to the Kingdom of God in meaningful ways?
- What excites you about the future?
- What concerns you about the future?
- What are some of your biggest roadblocks to transitioning into the lead pastor’s role?
- When it comes to your personal finances, are you living within your means based on your current compensation? Are you saving and investing in ways that will allow you to make the same type of transition later?

### **Is the Predecessor Yielding Authority and Responsibility?**

A significant factor determining the success of a plan of succession is related to the exiting pastor’s ability to yield authority and responsibility to the incoming pastor. This is a topic of regular discussion in the weekly meetings. Initially, Pastor Michael

preached one Sunday a month. This allowed Pastor Michael to develop the craft of preaching and began earning him credibility with the congregation. Pastor Holmes regularly gave leadership over to Pastor Michael when it came to managing the staff. Pastor Michael is building and developing his team by shifting some positions to suit the staff's strengths and ministry needs. For instance, Holly Woodbridge became the children's pastor. Donny Woodbridge serves as the worship pastor. Delinda Jeronimo shifted to become a middle school pastor. Joel Woodbridge, the most recent hire, became the director of technical and creative arts. These new staff members have all been hired or shifted to accommodate the ministry needs as Pastor Michael saw necessary. Pastor Michael is currently chairing staff meetings. Occasionally he chairs board meetings as well.

Furthermore, many of the decisions relating to relaunching ministry after the global pandemic brought on by COVID-19 were discussed and left to Pastor Michael. As a result, some ministries have been altered to be more effective at reaching families. Pastor Holmes yielded much of the decisions to Pastor Michael because he did not want to start something that Pastor Michael did not wish to continue. Both saw the relaunch efforts as an opportunity to initiate change that otherwise could not have been afforded.

### **Is the Successor Patient?**

At the very beginning, Pastor Michael admits to having felt that the plan was much longer than necessary. Eager to chomp at the bit, Pastor Michael wanted to cut the plan to three years rather than five. However, the time necessary for both Pastor Holmes to be ready to let go emotionally and for Pastor Michael to assume responsibility has been



adequate. Furthermore, many of the changes Pastor Michael desires are not ready to come to life. Pastor Michael admits to wanting to accomplish much more change. However, he is listening to Pastor's Holmes and other's advice. Pastor Michael has come to see the value of going slowly through the process and the length necessary to attain it.

### **What is the Projected Timeline?**

The following is a projected timeline for implementation:

**January 2021** – Pastor Michael assumes 50% of preaching on Sundays.

**February 2021** – New youth pastor is hired to replace Pastor Michael. Pastor Holmes receives a 50% pay reduction and begins working part-time. The handoff between Pastor Michael and the new youth pastor begins.

**May 2021** – Pastor Michael graduates from the Doctor of Ministry program. The handoff between Pastor Michael and the new youth pastor completes.

**June 2021** – Pastor Michael assumes 75% of preaching on Sundays. The remainder of the time, Pastor Holmes mentors Pastor Michael. The transition of all church accounts to Pastor Michael takes place. Pastor Michael leads staff meetings and board meetings. Pastor Holmes continues working part-time in the new role of Pastor Emeritus.

**May 22, 2022** – Pastor Holmes hands the baton of leadership to Pastor Michael in celebration service. Pastor Holmes is honored and thanked for his legacy. Pastor Michael assumes 100% of preaching on Sundays. Pastor Holmes takes an additional 50% pay reduction to compensate better Pastor Michael as the new lead pastor. Pastor Holmes and Pastor Michael relocate offices.

### **How is the Succession Plan Communicated with the Congregation?**

Throughout the process, communication must be clear and effective. For Wanamaker Woods, communication with the congregation began once the succession plan was approved by the church board, the District Superintendent, and the District

Advisory Board. Two weeks prior to the Annual Meeting in 2018, it was announced that a very important conversation would be held during the Sunday School hour. During this meeting, Pastor Holmes introduced the plan to the congregation. The succession plan timeline was printed, along with a frequently asked questions (FAQ) document to answer many of the questions associated with the transition. After presenting the plan, the congregation was allowed to ask questions. Following the meeting, a congregational vote took place. The result of the vote was ninety-seven percent in favor of the plan of succession.

Since the initial annual meeting, there have been two additional communication pieces. At the annual meeting in 2019, Pastor Holmes and Pastor Michael briefly shared the progress of the transition. In 2020, due to COVID-19, Pastor Holmes and Pastor Michael recorded an interview with one of the lay members, answering questions about the progress of the transition. Additionally, Pastor Holmes and Pastor Michael have remained in communication with the church board about the status of the transition. Moving forward, the communication will increase as the succession becomes more obvious and more critical. As Pastor Michael preaches more in the coming months, he intends to honor the past with every chance he can, speaking well of Pastor Holmes.

### **How Will the Final Handoff Take Place?**

The final handoff is planned to occur on Sunday, May 22, 2022, as an installation service for Pastor Michael. In this service, the leadership intends to honor the past and cast a vision for the future. In this service, the District Superintendent will preside and help lead a charge to Pastor Holmes, commissioning him for a new chapter of ministry

and thanking him for his faithfulness in leadership. Furthermore, the District Superintendent will commission and charge Pastor Michael with shepherding the flock of Wanamaker Woods well. The service will be a celebration, giving thanks to God for all that God has done and will do through Wanamaker Woods. At this service, there will be a symbol of handoff—Pastor Holmes intends to give Pastor Michael a track and field baton, signifying the passing of leadership from one to another.

Following the service, the leadership plans to have a reception or lunch. While the key participants do not particularly care for this, the research has shown that a reception is more for the congregation. The reception gives the members of the congregation an opportunity to thank and honor the past. When the desire to thank Pastor Holmes has been satisfied, the congregation will be more prepared to move forward with Pastor Michael as the new lead pastor.

### **What Happens if Something Goes Wrong?**

The implementation of the succession plan has many variables that could limit the succession. For example, what happens if Pastor Michael is unable to complete his doctorate? Or what happens if Pastor Holmes becomes unable to continue as lead pastor before Pastor Michael's installment. The possibility of something going wrong leaves questions that must be answered.

To answer these "what if" questions, Wanamaker Woods has adopted a contingency plan. If something prevents the succession from following the timeline, the District Superintendent and District Advisory Board will need to intervene. If needed, the Wanamaker Woods' membership may choose to amend the resolution in a subsequent

annual meeting, or they may choose to supersede the plan with a new resolution. In either case, the District Superintendent would need to step in and offer wisdom and guidance. Additionally, if the succession plan must change, communication with the congregation is essential.

The author understands that these “what if” questions are legitimate and need constructive deliberation. In this uncharted territory, the key participants have worked diligently to remain on course. Even through a global pandemic, where innovation was crucial, the strategic plan has not altered. It is the author’s firm belief that God’s provisional hand has been upon this plan of succession. Even if the plan does not go exactly as prescribed, the key participants want only what is God honoring and best for Wanamaker Woods.

### **Phase Three: Evaluating a Plan of Succession**

Since Wanamaker Woods is about a year away from the final handoff, the succession’s final phase will be sometime in the future. Nevertheless, this final piece is crucial to the success of the plan of succession. Following a plan without evaluation is absurd. The leadership wants to ensure the transition benefits the church, edifies those involved, and continues the mission of the local church. The final phase of the transition will cover a two-year span following the transition.

#### **Are the Key Players Meeting Regularly?**

Because much of a plan of succession relies on the relationship of the predecessor and successor, the continuation of regular conversation is vital. In Phase Two the

meetings were crucial at helping establish a trusting and open conversation about succession. In Phase Three, the meetings shift to be more about encouragement and shared friendship. Pastor Holmes will continue to mentor and encourage Pastor Michael for two years following the installation of Pastor Michael. The meetings will continue to be weekly; however, additional meetings will be scheduled to review the entire strategy and process (see timeline below).

### **Did the Key Players Commit to Their Responsibilities of the Succession Plan?**

There are two significant questions to ask about the succession plan: (1) Did Pastor Holmes appropriately yield authority and responsibility to Pastor Michael, and (2) did Pastor Michael lead with patience? The key participants' commitments to let go and be patient are crucial to the success of the plan. Following the transition, these two questions will dominate the regular meetings and the conversations with personal accountability partners.

### **Was Communication with the Congregation Clear?**

To evaluate the effectiveness of the communication with the congregation, a short survey will be administered following the transition. This survey could easily be emailed to the congregation. The following survey might be utilized:

- On a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being smooth, 1 being difficult), what was your overall experience with the pastoral transition at Wanamaker Woods Church of the Nazarene?
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being smooth, 1 being difficult), how well did the leaders communicate the reason for the pastoral transition?

- On a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being smooth, 1 being difficult), how well did the leadership communicate on the timeline of the pastoral transition?
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being smooth, 1 being difficult), how well did the leadership handle the pastoral transition?
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being smooth, 1 being difficult), how satisfied are you with the outcome of the pastoral transition?

### **What would Wanamaker Woods Do Differently Next Time?**

Following the email survey of communication with the congregation and the conversations between Pastor Holmes and Pastor Michael, it would be beneficial to draft a document outlining the findings learned from the succession. This document must include a section that speaks to how the plan progressed since the publication of this artifact, how the leadership would approach succession differently given an opportunity to do it over again and any findings which hindered or helped the succession along.

### **What is the Projected Timeline?**

To ensure Phase Three is accomplished, the following is a projected timeline for evaluation:

**June 2022** – Pastor Holmes and Pastor Michael continue to meet to discuss ministry and evaluate effectiveness.

**September 2022** – Pastor Holmes and Pastor Michael meet to discuss ministry and evaluation succession effectiveness.

**December 2022** – Pastor Holmes and Pastor Michael meet to discuss ministry and evaluation succession effectiveness.

**March 2023** – Pastor Holmes and Pastor Michael meet to discuss ministry and evaluation succession effectiveness.

**September 2023** – Pastor Holmes and Pastor Michael meet to discuss ministry

and evaluation succession effectiveness.

**May 2024** – The Regular Church/Pastoral Relationship Review, conducted by the District Superintendent and the church board.

### **Handbook Summary**

This handbook has provided the blueprint for a plan of succession at Wanamaker Woods Church of the Nazarene. Through three important phases, the leaders are given adequate tools to prepare the plan, to implement the plan, and to evaluation the plan. Each phase is loaded with questions that have been carefully crafted to assist in accomplishing the objective of transitioning leadership from one pastor to the next. Seeking God's wisdom cannot be left out, as the plan must be bathed in the discipline of prayer. Keeping in mind that Wanamaker Woods is God's church, both Pastor Holmes and Pastor Michael know and understand well the joys of serving God through shepherding God's people. Pioneering the challenges of a succession can be one of the most testing seasons for a church, but also one of the most rewarding.

## **APPENDIX B: NAZARENE MANUAL STATEMENTS**

### **Statements Pertaining to the Calling of a New Lead Pastor:**

**115.** An ordained elder or licensed minister (elder track) may be called to pastor a church by two-thirds favorable vote by ballot of the church members of voting age present and voting at a properly called annual or special meeting of the church, provided that:

1. The nomination shall have the prior approval of the district superintendent.
2. The nomination shall have been approved by the District Advisory Board when the individual nominated is a member of that same local church, or serving as a paid or unpaid associate of that local church; and
3. The individual shall have been nominated to the church by the church board by two-thirds vote by ballot of all its members.

This call shall be subject to review and continuance as hereinafter provided. (119, 122-125.5, 129.2, 159.8, 211.10, 225.16, 514, 532, 533.4, 534.3)

**115.1.** Acceptance of a call to pastoral relations shall be given by the minister not later than 15 days from the date of the church meeting voting the call.

**115.2.** The church board and the pastor should clearly communicate their goals and expectations to each other in writing. (122, 129.3-129.4)

**115.3.** As soon as practical after a pastor begins serving, the pastor and the congregation may participate in an installation or bonding service. The objective of the service should be to celebrate unity and direction concerning the will of God. Where practical, the district superintendent shall preside.

**115.4.** Upon issuing a call, the local church will specify the proposed remuneration. The amount of this remuneration shall be determined by the church board. When agreement has been entered into between the church or the church board and the pastor, the payment of the pastor's salary in full shall be considered a moral obligation by the church. If, however, the church becomes unable to continue the payment of the salary agreed upon, such inability and failure shall not be considered a sufficient cause for civil action against the church by the pastor; and in no case shall the church or District Advisory Board be legally responsible in excess of funds raised



during the term of the pastor's actual service, and not otherwise designated. If civil action is taken against the church or District Advisory Board by a current or former pastor, a district may take steps to obtain the minister's credential and subsequently drop the minister's name from the Roster of Ministers.

The local church should also make provision for the pastor's traveling and moving expenses. (32-32.3, 129.8-129.9) 115.5. The remuneration of the pastor shall commence on the Monday preceding the first official Sunday of service to the local church.

**115.6.** Local churches may consider alternative plans for pastoral support in cooperation with their respective districts. (32.3, 129.8)

#### Statements Pertaining to Pastoral Staff and Associates:

**159.5.** In times of pastoral transition, the stability, unity, and ongoing ministry of the local church is crucial. Consequently, the district superintendent (or a representative appointed by the district superintendent) will work closely with the local church board to implement the following steps which (a) may allow the local church to retain some or all staff for at least a period of time during the transition; (b) will still allow the new pastor freedom to develop his/her own team of associates, if desired; and (c) will allow a board and district superintendent discretion to provide transitioning staff a reasonable amount of time to make necessary personal and professional adjustments. First, upon resignation or termination of the pastor, any associates shall also submit their resignations effective concurrently with the pastor. Second, a local church board may request that the district superintendent approve the continued service of any or all associates. This approval, if granted, could continue until 90 days after the new pastor's assumption of duties or until the incoming pastor nominates his or her paid associates for the coming year in harmony with paragraph 159. Directors of childcare/schools (birth through secondary) shall submit their resignations effective at the end of the school year in which the new pastor assumes the duties of the office. The chief executive officer of any subsidiary and/or affiliated corporation shall submit his or her resignation at the end of that contractual period in which the new pastor assumes the duties of the office. The incoming pastor may have the privilege of recommending the employment of staff members previously employed.

**159.6.** Communication with staff members, the church board, and the congregation regarding the effect of paragraph 159.5 on staff members at the time of pastoral change shall be the responsibility of the district superintendent.

**159.8.** Any person serving as paid staff would be ineligible to be called as pastor to the church of which he or she is a member without approval of the district superintendent and the District Advisory Board.

Statements pertaining to Co-Pastors:

**121.** Upon the recommendation of the church board and approval of the district superintendent, a congregation may elect co-pastors to serve. In this case, the following stipulations will apply:

- The co-pastors shall work with the church board, under the direction of the district superintendent, to develop a plan for shared responsibility and authority.
- Co-pastors are equals in the pastoral office. If required by law, one person shall be officially designated by the church board as the presiding officer, serving as president of the corporation and chairperson of the church board.
- The church/pastoral relationship review process shall be conducted as provided for in paragraphs 123-123.7.
- A local church whose pastor has not been appointed and who has served for at least two years may add one or more ministers as co-pastors by following paragraph 115 for this process. Upon approval by the district superintendent and a two-thirds vote of all the church board members, the church will vote whether to add any co-pastor. A co-pastor candidate would need to receive a two-thirds vote of the congregation in order to be approved to serve as co-pastor for that local church.
- If the necessary two-thirds vote is received, the two-year term would then begin on the same date for each minister. A regular church/pastoral relationship review would be scheduled within 60 days of the second anniversary of the pastoral service of the co-pastors (115, 123-123.7).

• **121.1.** Within sixty days upon the resignation or termination of a co-pastor, the district superintendent, or appointed representative, shall conduct a regular church/pastoral relationship review as outlined in paragraphs 123-123.7. If the church board decides to no longer call a co-pastor, such decision will require the approval of the district superintendent and the two-thirds vote of the local church membership

**APPENDIX C: LETTERS FROM DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT AND  
DISTRICT ADVISORY BOARD**



Kansas City District  
*Church of the Nazarene*

7640 Antioch Road  
Overland Park, Kansas 66204

P: 913.381.4466  
F: 913.381.4494  
kcdistrict@kcdistrict.org  
www.kcdistrict.org

Jeren Rowell  
*District Superintendent*  
jrowell@kcdistrict.org

November 30, 2017

Pastor L.D. Holmes  
Wanamaker Woods Church of the Nazarene  
3501 SW Wanamaker Rd.  
Topeka, KS 66614

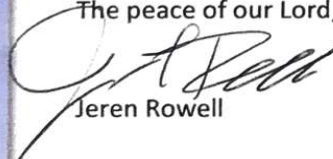
Dear L. D,

I want to report to you that the District Advisory Board considered you for approval of Rev. Michael DeHaan to be considered for election by congregation as pastor according to the "leader-shift" timeline that your church board have developed. In a meeting of the DAB on November 16, 2017, this approval was granted unanimously in accordance with Manual 16.

We pray with you that this transitional plan will not only bless the Wanamaker congregation but might also become a model for leadership transition for long tenure pastorates.

Thank you, friend, for your outstanding leadership across these years, especially for the support and friendship you have offered to me as a colleague and then as district superintendent. May God bless you and continued ministry among us.

The peace of our Lord,



Jeren Rowell

c: Terry Coward, Secretary of the Board



Kansas City District  
*Church of the Nazarene*

7640 Anschutz Road  
Overland Park, Kansas 66204

P: 913.381.4466  
F: 913.381.4494  
kcdistrict@kcdistrict.org  
www.kcdistrict.org

Dr. Edward L. Estep  
*District Superintendent*  
edwardlestep@aol.com

April 7, 2021

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is in regard to the succession plan – LeaderShift – at Wanamaker Woods Church of the Nazarene in Topeka, Kansas, and an acknowledgment of support and appreciation to the leadership at the church has been thoughtfully designed, carefully implemented and communicated. I have every anticipation that it will lead to a healthy transition of leadership.

While this particular approach is not well suited for most churches, it appears well suited for this church. The success of this approach will be due primarily to the support and to the two persons involved – Pastor L.D. Holmes (current lead pastor) and Pastor DeHaan (lead pastor elect). The leadership at Wanamaker Woods has kept the congregation informed all along the way, has sought and gained the appropriate approvals, and has been careful to follow the requirements of the Manual of the Church of the Nazarene.

The following components have contributed to the effectiveness of this approach:

- A lead pastor with a 30+ year tenure in the church (Pastor Holmes began in March 1985).
- A lead pastor with high credibility and skills in strategic leadership.
- A lead pastor-elect whom the congregation knows and in whom they already have confidence.
- A willingness of the congregation, lead pastor, and lead pastor-elect to buy into the plan (has been a 5-year plan)
- A lead pastor who is willing to mentor, invest in, and gracefully give way to the next leader.
- A lead pastor-elect who is willing to be mentored, to be patient, and to accept the leadership of the pastor he will succeed.
- The ability of the lead pastor-elect to give significant reflection to this approach during his D. Min. work.
- The weekly accountability meeting between the current lead pastor, lead pastor-elect, and a wise and trusted lay leader.

I have every confidence that the May 22, 2022 service in which the congregation will "Pass the Baton" to Pastor Holmes and in which Pastor DeHaan is installed as lead pastor will mark the official passing of the baton of pastoral leadership to be officially passed in a meaningful and significant way.

Warmly Yours in Christ,

Edward L. Estep  
District Superintendent  
Kansas City District Church of the Nazarene

ELE:wmm



## **APPENDIX D: BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL THEMES FOR SUCCESSION**

Answers to a church's leadership questions must certainly be shaped and guided by the stories and instructions found in God's Word. Scripture is full of wonderful examples of godly leadership. There are stories of success and stories of failure—both serving as examples from which to draw key principles for leaders today. This section will look at three transitions found in Scripture—the transitions between Moses and Joshua, Solomon and Rehoboam, and Paul and Timothy. These examples will reveal important lessons about leadership in the midst of a succession.

### **Moses and Joshua**

Moses was getting along in his years. Today, Moses would most likely not have received a favorable vote to become the next senior pastor of a church. At the age of eighty, Moses encountered God in the burning bush and then *started* the task of leading the people for the next forty years. While many pastors do not begin a forty-year adventure at that age, Moses' leadership was significant, purposeful, and God-ordained. Age was not a determining factor for Moses. Rather, Moses was called to lead the Israelites for a specific leg of the journey, with someone else raised up to lead the next.

Towards the end of Moses' leadership, in Numbers 28:12-17, God had Moses climb a mountain to see the Promised Land. Looking over the land, Moses remembered that he would not be the one to lead the people to their new home. Moses would only be allowed to view the promised land from afar. Interestingly, Moses did not barter,

complain, or argue—he had learned his lesson and knew better. Instead, Moses’ concern was for the people he had been leading for years. He turns to God and asks:

Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint someone over the congregation who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in, so that the congregation of the Lord may not be like sheep without a shepherd. (Numbers 27:16-17 NRSV)

Moses’ concern was not for himself. His primary concern was for the people—that they would have someone to lead them after he was gone. Moses asked God for a successor. Even though he was familiar with the people’s stubbornness and sinful tendencies, Moses wanted what was best for the people. He knew how their rebellion had led them to where they were—on the edge of the Promised Land, rather than in it. He knew the people needed a leader who could lead, not just manage their constant grumblings. Yet, in these final moments, Moses’ concern was for something greater than himself—the congregation.

Rather than run ahead of God and take matters into his own hands, Moses pauses and seeks God. Moses had learned that it was far better to wait on God. The mistake of doing things his own way had gotten him in trouble before. He did not want to repeat that mistake. The Lord answered Moses:

Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your hand upon him; have him stand before Eleazar the priest and all the congregation, and commission him in their sight. You shall give him some of your authority, so that all the congregation of the Israelites may obey. But he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the decision of the Urim before the Lord; at his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he and all the Israelites with him, the whole congregation. (Numbers 27:18-21 NRSV)



As one who had proved himself, Joshua was the obvious choice. In Exodus 17, Joshua had revealed himself as a mighty warrior. Joshua was one of Moses' chosen assistants since he was young (Num. 11:28). Joshua refused to leave the tent where God would speak with Moses (Ex. 33:11). Joshua was one of the hopeful spies who gave a favorable report with trust in God's power over enemies (Num. 14:6-8). Joshua was more than qualified to become Israel's next leader. As one who had journeyed with Moses, spent time with him and learned from him, Joshua was the obvious choice.

Moses and Joshua's relationship reveal some important lessons on leadership transitions. The interactions between these two men of God reveal key principles from which church leaders today will benefit when facing a pastoral transition.

### **Predecessors Start the Process of Succession Before it is Necessary**

Moses' concern for the people was greater than his concern for himself. Moses wanted what was best for the congregation. He knew it was best for them to enter the Promised Land, but that the journey would be long and difficult. The challenge for whoever would lead was massive. To get the Israelites into Canaan required a different leader—one with a different skill set and a different voice. Deep in his spirit, Moses knew he would not be the one to lead the people. He knew not only because God had told him (Numbers 20:12), but because deep down, he knew the road ahead would be more than he could handle. Even with the frustrations of a grumbling community like Israel, Moses showed deep concern for the people's future.

Since Moses knew he would not be the leader to take the Israelites on the next leg of their journey, he began the process of succession before it became necessary. In reality,

Moses began the process even before God had told him that he would not lead the Israelites into Canaan. Moses began pouring into Joshua while Joshua was still young. Moses mentored Joshua for years before succession became necessary. Moses appointed Joshua to lead an important battle (Numbers 17:9). Moses invited Joshua to join in a meeting with God (Exodus 24:13-14). Moses also commissioned Joshua as a leading spy (Numbers 13-14). In each interaction with Joshua, Moses began to see more and more the work of God in his life. Each time, Joshua was successful and won favor with God, Moses, and the people.

Similarly, predecessors must begin early the important task of preparing future leaders. One of the greatest places to find a successor is from within the organization—one into whom a predecessor has invested and poured. One who has the favor of the predecessor and the congregation. The best successors have been mentored and coached by wiser and more mature leaders. The next generation of leaders will arise from organizations that diligently and purposefully train and equip people to lead. Moses had several leaders from which to choose, yet Joshua became the one appointed by God. At times, a predecessor may need to look outside the organization; however, the best candidates just might be those from within. Like Moses, pastors who regularly mentor and coach others will be better equipped to ask God to make evident who should succeed their ministry. Therefore, predecessors must begin the task of succession before it is necessary.

### **Predecessors Bring Successors Closer to God**

Moses met with God regularly. He sought God and saw God's face. Many times,

when Moses met with God, Joshua was right next to him. Joshua climbed Mount Sinai with Moses in Exodus 24. Joshua was consumed with the presence of God in the Tent of Meeting along with Moses in Exodus 33. Moses regularly allowed Joshua to get in close proximity to the presence of God. Throughout their relationship, Moses did not simply teach the Law of God, but rather, Moses helped Joshua experience the holiness of God. Because Moses let Joshua in, Joshua had no trouble trusting that God would help the Israelites conquer the land. Because Moses permitted Joshua to be part of his encounters with God, Joshua saw God move in powerful ways. Joshua learned to trust God deeply because Moses allowed him to see God's powerful arm multiple times.

Similarly, pastors can offer younger leaders significantly more than a how-to for ministry tasks. Predecessors can teach more than right theology and doctrine. The elder's unique connection with God—as one who serves as a mediator between the people and God—allows predecessors to see more and more of what God is doing in the midst of God's people. Pastors often see answers to prayers—especially long-tenured pastors. Pastors often witness God's incredible miracles and mighty arm. Pastors realize how God leads their people in ways that often go unnoticed. Simply put, pastors often hold a front-row seat to God's redeeming work. This unique perspective cannot be learned in a classroom at a seminary. Pastors must invite others into a close proximity with God and ministry. Good predecessors will know how to bring successors closer to God.

### **Predecessors Let Successors Lead**

Moses gave Joshua significant leadership. This step demonstrated an essential principle in leadership succession: Moses trusted Joshua to lead the Israelites. In Exodus

17, Moses tells Joshua to go to war against Amalek. Moses knew this was more than a physical battle. It was a spiritual battle—one God would fight for the Israelites. In fact, every battle the Israelites encountered was a spiritual battle. The battles of victory by the Israelites were always at the hand of God. As Joshua and his men fought the Lord's battle, Moses positioned himself on a hill with Aaron and Hur's assistance. With Aaron and Hur's help, Moses raised his hands steadily in the air and interceded with God on Joshua's behalf. As long as Moses' arms remained stretched out to God, Joshua was successful. Moses trusted Joshua to lead the group to victory and positioned himself to intercede with God on Joshua's behalf.

With the spies' report, Moses saw Joshua and Caleb demonstrate courage even when the other spies were timid with fear. Each spy was a leader among the tribes of Israel (Numbers 13:3). Yet, Joshua's refusal to back down in the face of adversity demonstrated to Moses significant leadership potential. From that moment on, Moses gave Joshua more and more leadership.

Likewise, predecessors must provide opportunities to let others lead and then pray for them. This is the work of equipping the saints for ministry. At times, giving leadership to others is difficult for many reasons. For example, one might not be as good at the task, or may perform the task differently. One may not be as gifted in communication or pastoral care. However, younger leaders will learn and improve with more opportunities given. Often, the work of equipping involves stepping aside and trusting others to lead from their own strengths. Like Moses, it requires predecessors to let others lead and position themselves to intercede in prayer on their successor's behalf.

## **Predecessors Encourage Successors**

On at least two occasions, God commanded Moses to encourage Joshua (Deuteronomy 1:38, 3:28). This command was more than a pep talk. Joshua was not just feeling down; rather, Joshua needed someone to be a secure cheerleader. It was a means of instilling confidence and strength. The word “encourage” is from the Hebrew word *chazaq*, which means “to strengthen.” This command was vital to helping Joshua become a strong leader.

One of the greatest gifts a predecessor can offer a successor is the gift of being their greatest fan and cheerleader. Predecessors have been through the tough times and know what it is like in ministry—those lonely times, feelings of inadequacy, struggles to continue, questions like: ‘am I making a difference?’ Predecessors can recognize body language or comments that indicate something is off with a younger leader. In those moments, a predecessor can walk alongside a successor and offer hope in the midst of discouragement. This vital practice must be public and private. Like Joshua, the successor will need to hear it more than once, in more than one way. Like Moses, offering encouragement must become a significant task of those desiring to pass the baton of leadership on to the next leader.

## **Predecessors Give Successors Authority**

Moses’ final act as the leader of Israel was to commission Joshua as the new leader by laying hands on him in front of the entire community (Numbers 27:18-23). With the priest present to confirm the decision, Moses confirmed that Joshua was the new leader. The entire assembly would now follow Joshua—a man full of the spirit and

appointed by God. This commissioning service was the final piece in Moses and Joshua's transition.

In a pastoral succession, predecessors must hand their successors the baton of leadership. It is not for the successor to take, but only to receive once the predecessor is willing to let go. At some point, the predecessor must acknowledge an official moment when the transition has occurred. Failing to narrowly define the moment the transition occurs leaves everyone in a state of confusion. Joshua would never know when he was allowed to lead. Moses would never have taken a back seat, and the people would not know whom to turn to for leadership. Joshua had clearly been chosen and defined as the next leader. Moses was on his way out; the people needed to know when the leader-shift had formally taken place. This public act finalized it. Moses was no longer responsible for leading—it was now Joshua. This public act of giving over authority to a successor is crucial for a successful transition.

Moses and Joshua offer significant principles that leaders will need to consider when looking at succession as a viable option for pastoral transition. Predecessors begin the process before it is necessary. Predecessors bring successors closer to God. Predecessors let successors lead. Predecessors encourage successors. And finally, predecessors give successors authority.

### **Solomon and Rehoboam**

With Moses and Joshua, one sees a positive succession. However, in the succession of Solomon and Rehoboam, one observes a very different kind of succession—one where things quickly turn ugly. Differences in personalities were

certainly present, but there is more going on between Solomon and Rehoboam than meets the eye. Starting as the wisest king of Israel, Solomon had gained incredible wealth and prosperity for the nation. God had granted Solomon wisdom and fortune. Solomon built an immaculate temple and accomplished much good for the kingdom. However, later in his reign, Solomon's wisdom did not keep him from turning from God. Instead, Solomon began to follow other gods. Solomon's diplomacy methods motivated him to intermarry with neighboring royalty. This ultimately caused Solomon to turn away from God. These many political arrangements (also known as marriages with seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines) brought foreign worship practices contrary to what was established by God. The nation and its leader were now tainted with paganism. Additionally, to support his large family with multiple luxurious homes, Solomon imposed heavy taxes and forced the nation into labor. Unlike Moses, whose concern in his final days was for the people, Solomon was more concerned about his own prosperity. Solomon had already started sowing the seeds of division, mistrust, and apprehension without considering the future. Worst of all, Solomon began leading the people away from God.

When Rehoboam succeeded as king, his first act was to hear the complaints of the people. His father had been demanding. Taxes were high and the people were forced into hard labor, so they wanted to be heard. The complaints came to Rehoboam, who listened and wanted to seek advice. He turned to his father's former advisors—older men, who suggested that Rehoboam serve the people so that the people, in turn, would serve him forever (1 Kings 12:7). Not wanting to leave out his own advisors, Rehoboam received counsel from those who grew up with him. They said, "Thus you should say to them, 'My

little finger is thicker than my father's loins. Now, whereas my father laid on you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.'" (1 Kings 12:10-11 NRSV).

The advice Rehoboam acted on was the latter. Rather than listen to the advice of the older, more experienced men, or hear the complaints of the people, Rehoboam sought to do himself a favor. The people were there to serve him. He was in charge now, and the people were at his disposal. Soon after, however, the people revolted. The next several years resulted in a civil war that ultimately split the nation in two—the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

While this succession plan did not turn out positive, there is a significant amount to learn. Solomon and Rehoboam's transition demonstrates some principles from which pastors facing transitions will benefit.

### **Predecessors Must Set the Stage for Succession**

Solomon failed to make the transition smooth for succession. Because Solomon was set on serving himself and his many wives, he refused to listen to the needs of the people. In his great wisdom, Solomon failed to follow God whole-heartedly. Solomon built the temple of God with incredible beauty. Unfortunately, his loyalty was divided not only with God but also within his own family. Furthermore, Solomon's financial affairs were in significant trouble. While he had accrued extreme wealth for the nation, heavy taxes became his means of financial security. Solomon doomed a successor to failure rather than set the stage for a successful transition.

Similarly, predecessors hold the potential to help ensure a succession goes well by



preparing their organization for succession. Solomon had sown seeds of dissension and set his son up for failure long before Rehoboam assumed the role of king. Solomon used the organization he led for his own gain. More tragically, in doing so, Solomon led the people away from God.

One key factor every succession must face is the relationship between the leader and the people. Solomon was concerned about building his own personal kingdom rather than God's kingdom. Both predecessor and successor must regularly ask themselves whose kingdom is being built—mine or God's? When pastors focus on the work of God and building God's kingdom, there is little room left for what-is-best-for-me thinking. The call to lead in the church is a call to serve and lay down one's life—a call modeled by Jesus.

Predecessors can do much to prepare for succession long before it is necessary, both organizationally and personally. Dealing with areas of trouble or dissension must be a significant step in the succession process. If a difficult conversation needs to be held with a staff or volunteer, the predecessor needs to do so. Leaving toxic situations to the successor significantly limits the successor's leadership. Ensuring financial affairs are in order is a must for the predecessor. Is the church budget headed in the direction of spending more than people give? Helping set the stage for success must be a primary work of the successor. The task can certainly be quite challenging for pastors, who are handing the baton of leadership to the next person, to give away the spotlight. It can be painful to watch allegiances shift to the person next in line. However, remembering that “it is not about me” will need to be a continual phrase repeated for both the successor and predecessor in order to prepare the organization for a succession.

## **Successors Must Listen to the Right Voices**

Despite the results, Rehoboam did one thing right—he sought the advice of others. Unfortunately, he heeded the wrong advice. Those who were more experienced, wiser, and more mature offered solid counsel. Their advice would have secured loyalty and trust from the people. However, the younger and more brash advisors provided foolish guidance. Unfortunately, in his effort to pause long enough to seek wisdom, Rehoboam never sought wisdom from God. Rehoboam’s foolish choice resulted in his own demise, a soiled reputation, disloyalty from the people, and a divided kingdom.

Wise successors will not only seek advice but will also listen to the right voices. Seeking advice from others is a must for any young leader. Seeking the right advice can be challenging. Those allowed into the role of advisor or mentor must be carefully chosen. Pastors may be tempted to listen to the voices that call for self-serving changes or only to the voices that agree with what one wants to do. One may also choose to ignore the needs of the people. However, wise successors will carefully listen to others who have proven to be wise in the past. Furthermore, one must adequately seek God’s wisdom. How differently the nation of Israel would have ended had Rehoboam paused long enough for God’s wisdom. Wise successors may not like the advice given, and often the advice of those wiser will be difficult to hear. Still, Rehoboam’s succession reminds all of the need to listen to the right voices.

Learning from the experience of others is helpful. Solomon and Rehoboam’s example reminds those in leadership transitions of the need to prepare the organization for transition as well as the need to seek the right advice carefully.

## **Paul and Timothy**

Paul and Timothy's mentoring relationship is well established in the New Testament. Looking closely at this relationship between Paul and Timothy reveals a significant approach to how leaders can prepare those who will lead after them. Neither Paul nor Timothy were perfect. Paul was brash and often forceful. On the other hand, Timothy was young, shy, and timid. Timothy was not exactly the type of person one would expect to receive a baton of leadership from a man like Paul. Yet throughout his letters, Paul affirms Timothy as a co-laborer and often describes Timothy as a spiritual son (1 Cor. 4:17, Phil. 2:22, 1 Tim. 1:2, and 2 Tim. 1:2). These men of God saw to it that the needs of the community rose above their own personal preferences. As a result, Paul and Timothy benefitted from the mutual blessing of a predecessor and successor relationship.

While much of what Paul does with Timothy would fail to be identified as an intentional "plan of succession," Paul's process involved inviting Timothy on a journey with him. Paul allowed the process to be simple, not complicated. Paul merely understood that if the gospel message was to continue beyond himself, Paul had to teach others to do what he did. Paul and Timothy's example teach those in leader-shifts several significant principles.

### **Predecessors Train Leaders to Train Leaders**

Throughout the New Testament, Paul is set on receiving from Christ only to pass it along to others. In his first letter to the church in Corinth, Paul says he "handed on to

you as of first importance” the message about Christ’s death and resurrection, which he had received (1 Cor. 15:3 NRSV). Paul is determined to pass on the good news of the gospel to others. But for Paul, this message must continue to be passed on by *anyone* who receives it. As one received, they too must pass along to others. Paul instructs Timothy, “What you have heard from me through many witnesses, entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well” (2 Tim. 2:2 NRSV). Paul instructs Timothy to train leaders who will also train other leaders.

Passing on one’s faith should be a priority for all Christians. Handing down scripture and one’s faith traditions is something every follower of Christ must do. Imagine a church that refused to engage the next generation in teaching Scripture or participating in faith traditions. The church would literally die with the passing generation. Yet throughout Scripture, one is reminded of the necessity of passing down one’s faith to the next generation. Even as early as Abraham, one can see the blessing passed from one generation to the next. Later with Moses, one can see in the *Shema* the urgency of the Israelites to “recite these words (i.e., the Law of the Lord) to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise” (Deut. 6:7 NRSV). Later the leaders of Israel struggled to complete this task, as entire generations grew up not knowing the Lord (for instance, see Judges 2:10). A significant theme emerges throughout Scripture—passing on what one has been given is of utmost importance.

This “theology of succession” is really a matter of stewardship. The positions or assignments leaders receive from God last only for a season. No matter the position or assignment (i.e., pastor, parent, volunteer, etc.), God calls one to be a caretaker *for a time*.

Eventually, the responsibilities of the position will be passed on to the next person. God has granted leaders their positions to be stewarded well. Training those who will follow is a must. Paul not only trained Timothy, but he further instructed Timothy to do the same thing: Train leaders, who will train leaders, who will train leaders. Predecessors and successors will do well to understand this principle and start early the task of training others to become replacements when the time is right.

### **Predecessors Cannot Be Afraid of Younger Leaders**

One fascinating principle that shows up in Paul and Timothy's relationship is a deep trust rather than fear. Paul trusted Timothy to accomplish specific tasks—i.e., to pray all kinds of prayers for everyone (1 Tim. 2:1), to train oneself in godliness (1 Tim. 4:7), to teach others (1 Tim. 4:11), to set an example in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity, (1 Tim. 4:12) to name a few. Paul's confidence in Timothy comes out in several ways. First, Paul sent Timothy to several churches as an encourager. In Corinth, Timothy was sent to remind these Christians of Paul's faithful example. In Philippi, Timothy offered hope. In Ephesus, Timothy was charged to care for the congregation. Paul relied on Timothy to set an example, offer hope and encouragement, and speak truth to those in each church.

As mentioned before, Timothy was well qualified. Timothy was knowledgeable about doctrine and truth, was brought up in the faith from a young age, had devoted his life's work to serving Christ, and had deep compassion for the community. Still, Timothy was young. Many times, younger leaders can be overlooked or looked down upon. Their immaturity and lack of experience can often disqualify them for consideration. Young

pastors often feel as if they must serve as an associate first or start at a small church to prove themselves before they will be allowed an opportunity at a larger church. Maturity and proven experience are certainly helpful. However, older wise leaders will do well to make room for younger leaders to grow.

Larry Osborn has written about the importance of letting young pastors gain experience. He notes that older leaders often forget that they were once inexperienced, young, and impatient. He writes:

I'd be a liar if I said that protecting and promoting young eagles is a pain-free venture. It's far easier in theory than in practice. I don't like giving up my personal power, prestige, or preferences any more than the next guy does. But young eagles are born to fly. It's their nature. It's how God made them. If they can't fly high in our church, they'll bolt and fly elsewhere. And sadly, if and when they do, they'll take most of the life, vitality, and the future of the church with them.

Paul's trust and confidence in Timothy were in his heart and character. Unthreatened by Timothy, Paul gave Timothy opportunities to gain more significance and experience in order to learn from it. Paul encouraged and mentored Timothy with a trust that gave room for Timothy to grow well. Predecessors will do well to allow young leaders to find opportunities to do the same.

### **Succession Focuses on Strengthening Relationships**

Humans are wired for relationships. Going alone is not good (see Gen. 2:18). Humans need connection with other humans. The church is not a building or program but the people of God. For Paul and Timothy, their relationship mattered deeply. From this key relationship, trust and honest communication were developed. The relationship

between Paul and Timothy resulted in a mutual blessing for both. Paul found Timothy an essential worker and spiritual son in the Lord. Timothy found a spiritual father, mentor, and coach. The blessing of that kind of relationship is precious and highly valuable.

Furthermore, the body of elders affirmed Timothy's call to lead by the laying on of hands (1 Tim. 4:14). In other words, finding a replacement was not just a Human Resources' task. It was not just another staff position to be filled by a search committee. It was much more than finding a replacement. Locating a replacement is much more than an event. It is a significant process. It was out of the body of believers that God appoints and assigns the next leader. Often, the problems that arise in pastoral transitions stem from the lack of relationship between a new pastor and the congregation. The relationship between a pastor and the congregation is vital. If a congregation cannot trust their leader, dissension is in order. Other times, the exiting and incoming pastor have little conversation with each other. That lack of relationship or trust between a successor and predecessor can greatly contribute to failed transitions.

Paul and Timothy show us a different way. Their close relationship fuels their ministry. Timothy has one who is encouraging him, instructing him, and letting him lead. Paul has one in whom he can pour wisdom, offer prayers, and extend encouragement. In moments when either is exhausted or feeling the weight of the difficulties of ministry, they can find mutual understanding and help from one another. Plans of succession must resemble this approach. The relationship between predecessor and successor should be crucial—one full of humility, respect, and mutual submission. The benefits of such a relationship are far greater than an event that merely pinpoints one's replacement.

Paul and Timothy reveal several crucial principles for succession. Paul and

Timothy help predecessors and successors understand the necessity of finding leaders who will train others. Paul and Timothy point out that predecessors cannot be afraid of younger leaders. Paul and Timothy reveal that a significant key to leader-shifts is the relationship. Paul and Timothy offer much in the way of a strategy for succession.



## APPENDIX E: SAMPLE STAFF RESIGNATION LETTER

May 1, 2022

Pastor Holmes and Pastor Michael,

I am writing this letter to notify you that I am resigning my position as     (position)    , effective May 22, 2022, per the requirements of the *Manual* para. 159.5.

It is my desire to remain in my current position and support the mission of Wanamaker Woods—leading people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ.

Respectfully submitted,

(Signature)