

How to discern whether it is time to leave your current pastoral appointment

[Just because you ask the question does not mean you will leave your current appointment.]

When **TO** engage the question of tenure:

- During an annual personal retreat set aside for the purpose of seeking God's direction
- If you are wondering about it, then engage the discernment process of this exercise
- If your Board or Denominational leaders ask you the question

When **NOT TO** ask this question:

- After a difficult Board or Annual meeting
- Mondays (a lot of pastors *'feel'* like quitting on Mondays)
- In the middle of a difficult issue that is still being worked out
- On your annual vacation

Suggested format for use of this exercise:

- Annual personal retreat
 - An afternoon or morning of uninterrupted time alone
 - In conjunction with an ongoing spiritual discipline of practicing discernment
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Part A. Prepare Yourself

Begin by spending a minimum of 30-60 minutes dwelling in the Word of God before you engage this exercise

- Suggested passages
 - John 15:1-8
 - Ephesians 4:1-3, 11-16
 - Nehemiah 2
 - Exodus 33:12-23
 - Consider whether you are ready to hear the Spirit's response to the question and whether you are prepared to be vulnerable and honest in your responses (if you are not then wait until you are)
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Part B. Self Reflection

To each of the following questions and/or statements you are invited to prayerfully and honestly respond using the word response and/or scale provided (place an 'x' along the continuum that best reflects your honest response). If you are more inclined towards journal writing, then consider each statement and/or question and write out your responses in your journal. This tool is for your use towards a goal of being able to answer prayerfully and reflectively whether you discern God leading you to stay or to go from your current pastoral appointment.

Remember, these questions are written to help you dig deeper beneath the surface in order to discern how God may be leading you at this time.

1. I am willing to respond in obedience to what I discern the Holy Spirit is speaking to me about my present pastoral appointment.

Not _____ Somewhat _____ Mostly
Very true true true

2. I am excited and enthusiastic about the next season of ministry at my current appointment

Not _____ Somewhat _____ Mostly
Very true true true

3. I am feeling unsettled and/or indifferent towards the ministry at my current appointment

Not _____ Somewhat _____ Mostly
Very true true true

4. I am working out of my strengths and giftedness most of the time

Not _____ Somewhat _____ Mostly
Very true true true

5. I feel supported by my lay leadership to continue at my current appointment

Not _____ Somewhat _____ Mostly
Very true true true

6. There is a cohesiveness of direction within the congregation

Not _____ Somewhat _____ Mostly
Very true true true

7. Congregants are excited about the present direction of the ministry at my current appointment

Not _____ Somewhat _____ Mostly
Very true true true

8. I have a vision for the future of this church

Not _____ Somewhat _____ Mostly
Very true true true

9. In the last year I have written a letter of resignation that I did not send

Yes No

10. In the last year I have considered writing a letter of resignation

Not _____ Somewhat _____ Mostly
Very true true true

11. In the last year I have sent my resume to other churches for their consideration

Yes No

12. When I consider my dashboard meters I am in a healthy place

a. Physical:

Not _____ Somewhat _____ Mostly
Very true true true

b. Spiritual:

Not _____ Somewhat _____ Mostly
Very true true true

c. Emotional

Not _____ Somewhat _____ Mostly
Very true true true

13. I am content to stay where I am

Not _____ Somewhat _____ Mostly
Very true true true

14. I have the necessary skill set to lead this congregation during the coming ministry season

Not _____ Somewhat _____ Mostly
Very true true true

15. My family (spouse and/or children) are thriving in this current ministry appointment environment

Not _____ Somewhat _____ Mostly
Very true true true

16. I feel supported by the lay leadership

Not _____ Somewhat _____ Mostly
Very true true true

17. I am concerned that the Board might ask me to leave

Not _____ Somewhat _____ Mostly
Very true true true

18. My working environment is peaceful and productive

Not _____ Somewhat _____ Mostly
Very true true true

19. My working environment is chaotic and non-productive

Not _____ Somewhat _____ Mostly
Very true true true

20. My relationship with the Board is positive, life-giving and cooperative

Not _____ Somewhat _____ Mostly
Very true true true

21. My relationship with other staff members is positive, life-giving and cooperative

Not _____ Somewhat _____ Mostly
Very true true true

22. I am receiving the support I need (from other staff, Board members and lay leadership) to perform my pastoral duties to the best of my ability

Not _____ Somewhat _____ Mostly
Very true true true

23. The general attitude of the congregation and leadership is one of unity

Not _____ Somewhat _____ Mostly
Very true true true

24. There is a considerable amount of unresolved conflict within the congregation

Not _____ Somewhat _____ Mostly
Very true true true

25. I am joyful in my service at this appointment

Not _____ Somewhat _____ Mostly
Very true true true

26. I feel adequately equipped to deal with the level of conflicts I face at this appointment

Not _____ Somewhat _____ Mostly
Very true true true

27. I trust the people who are in positions of authority and leadership at this appointment

Not _____ Somewhat _____ Mostly
Very true true true

28. I am engaging in unhealthy coping devices (over-eating, watching too much TV, people-pleasing, abusing drugs or alcohol, etc.) in order to keep my sanity in this appointment

Not _____ Somewhat _____ Mostly
Very true true true

29. I am engaged in unresolved conflict with one or more of my leaders

Not _____ Somewhat _____ Mostly
Very true true true

30. Congregants and lay leadership are complaining and criticizing my leadership more than they did last year at this time

Not _____ Somewhat _____ Mostly
Very true true true

31. If nothing changes in my current working situation I am prepared to stay and lead this church for another year

Not _____ Somewhat _____ Mostly
Very true true true

32. I have the emotional, physical and spiritual energy needed to serve this congregation for another year

Not _____ Somewhat _____ Mostly
Very true true true

33. I do not have to sacrifice my core convictions and values to lead this congregation

Not _____ Somewhat _____ Mostly
Very true true true

34. My current church appointment is life-giving to me and my family

Not _____ Somewhat _____ Mostly
Very true true true

35. After engaging all of the above statements I sense God directing me to remain in my current pastoral appointment

Not _____ Somewhat _____ Mostly
Very true true true

36. I am at peace with my decision.

Not _____ Somewhat _____ Mostly
Very true true true

37. If I were to leave, my motivation to do so is pure and honorable before God

Not _____ Somewhat _____ Mostly
Very true true true

Part C. Going a Little Deeper

Ignatius of Loyala is credited with developing a series of spiritual exercises to help people discern God's pathway for their lives. Authentic discernment involves time, choices, perspectives (God's, ours and others), and the more ethereal world of sensing or impulses.

If engaging the self-reflection exercise of Part B is inconclusive for you to base your important decision on, then consider expanding your discernment process.

Stefan Kiechle has synthesized Ignatius' discernment exercises to the following ten directives (taken from the book "The Art of Discernment" part of the Ignatian Impulse Series).

1. Stay in touch with reality and what is really going on. Pay attention to its concrete aspects. Even to the small things.

Daily journal writing can be beneficial if you record what you are reading from scripture and take note of repeating themes or word threads.

2. Develop and appropriate internal sense of timing: do not act in too much haste, but do not drag out decisions either. Accept external time pressure as well as huge delays with prudence. Break down your decision-making process into steps and put them on a realistic timetable.

Once you have asked the question of tenure and secured a response, do not drag out your decision. Alternatively if you are in doubt about your decision wait for confirmation.

3. Place your thoughts and plans before the critical eyes of your friends. Seek the advice of prudent people. Examine your alternatives by testing them against experience.
4. Listen to what your mind, your heart, and your intuitions tell you. Make sure all three of these voices from your soul are part of the final discernment.
5. Be aware that the 'evil spirit' often intends to make the decision more complicated than it actually is. He uses fear. Seek trust and simplicity.
6. Do not make a decision when you are immersed in a crisis. In everything, look for the greater degree of consolation and the greater amount of fruitfulness. Follow your desires. Be radical.

7. Know your limits; accept and observe them. Do not seek the cross, but be prepared to accept it out of love if God wants you to. God's will does not come to us in the guise of something alien, but reveals itself through the desires of your heart, in the consolation and in the fruit.

Leaders, especially type A ones, are often so driven that they make sacrifices God never intended for them to make. Remember the yoke of Jesus is well-suited to us and is one that is life-giving.

8. Mourn the possibilities you ignored as well as the opportunities you missed. Your life is a path of letting go and dying. If you accept life to be this way, you will be able to commit to relationships more easily and become more content.
9. Jesus should be the norm, the primordial image and the 'shape and form' of our lives and decisions.

It really is okay to ask, *'What would Jesus do?'*

10. Once we are involved in the process of making a decision, we will reach a point where "The Gordian Knot" must be cut. We must accept the risks and let go. One's fundamental trust in life, in fellow humanity, and in God will help throughout the process.

Proverbs 3:5-6 "Trust in the Lord with all your heart; lean not on your own understanding, but in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your path."

Part D. Invite the input of others

It is not easy to let people into the inner sanctum of our lives, but it is worth it in order to get a full orb'd perspective. To the degree that you feel comfortable, share some or all of your responses to the above questions with a trusted spiritual friend; someone whom you know will keep confidence and pray with you in your discernment journey.

If you are willing, ask trusted individuals to complete the above reflective exercise on your behalf and consider their responses against your own.

Part E. What to do with the results

Your self-reflection is only a part of the discernment journey about whether to stay or leave your current pastoral appointment.

Do engage trusted colleagues, mentors, prayer partners and spiritual friends to discern with you about your tenure.

Do invite the input of others about the questions you engaged above.

Do not ignore what you sense the Holy Spirit of God saying to you about the BIG question of tenure or about some of the issues revealed above.

If you and your trusted entourage sense that some of your responses to the above statements indicate that you may be headed towards a burnout, it is imperative that you deal with these issues now before it is too late. Other responses may be indicative of serious internal problems in your church and require the services of a consultant (either from the denomination or beyond) to assist you in bringing about a healthy resolution. *The presence of problematic issues is not in itself a reason for you to leave.*

To the degree that you are comfortable you may need to share some of your reflections with your leadership (staff, Board, lay leaders as the case may be) in order to get their input into generating some resolutions.

File these results in a safe place and don't be afraid to review them as needed.

Part F. If the decision is made to leave

Do not stay in your current assignment when you sense God directing you to leave. Trust Him that He does indeed guide the steps of the righteous. He knows your future and can be trusted to guide you where He wants you to be. Staying where God does not want you to be is not healthy for you or the church you are leading.

If you sense God leading you away from your current pastoral appointment, even if you do not know where you should go next, talk to the Bishop and follow the denomination protocols for transition.
