

2015

CHURCH TRANSITIONS HANDBOOK

As practiced by The Free Methodist Church in Canada

[for use by the Pastoral Leadership Task Force]

Your local church is declared "in transition" and you are appointed to the Pastoral Leadership Task Force (PLTF). As a member, you have the responsibility of working with the Director of Church Health, the Director of Personnel and the Ministerial Education, Guidance and Placement (MEGaP) Committee of the Conference in a search for the person who will give pastoral leadership to the next stage of the church's development. This is an important responsibility and will likely involve hours of dedicated committee work, prayer, communication and interviewing. At the end of the process you will have a recommended person for the Bishop to introduce to the MEGaP Committee. This handbook is designed to help guide the PLTF in the process ahead of you. During this process it is important that you work in co-operation with the Director of Church Health, the Director of Personnel and the Bishop.

Revised Jan 2015



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SECTION ONE

FIRST STEPS IN THE CHURCH TRANSITION PROCESS

1. *Dealing with the emotional feelings of the congregation.*

When a minister announces an intention to leave a current appointment, some members of a congregation may feel betrayed or deserted. Others may feel sorrow, guilt and self-doubt. Some think the church will fall apart. A few will feel relief that a change is about to happen. These are all normal feelings that accompany this kind of transition.

It is right to understand and expect feelings that are similar to those experienced during periods of loss and grief. These include denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and finally acceptance. It is important that while many in the congregation will go through these various stages, they will not necessarily happen at the same time so patience and understanding will be required. Some members of the congregation will require extra care. The Pastoral Leadership Task Force (PLTF) can help the process by providing opportunity for these feelings to be expressed.

Since the pastor and family may also struggle with feelings of loss, it would be helpful for the PLTF to invite the departing minister to meet with them for an “exit interview” to share thoughts, concerns, and hopes for the local church. This could provide a healing moment that helps the minister “let go” and express feelings about leaving. If the pastor departs before the PLTF is formed, then an exit interview will not be possible.

Pastoral transitions require a fresh start. It is, therefore, wise not to invite the previous minister back to do weddings, baptisms, funerals, or other pastoral involvements. An outgoing pastor should consult with the new pastor before returning for any pastoral involvement.

2. *Is this the time for a transition pastor?*

A transition pastor is a member of the conference (or a supply) who is appointed to a local church for a period of time BEFORE the search process becomes active. This appointment is not intended to provide a temporary stand-in but to serve a particular need in the church during the transitional period. A transition pastor will have clearly defined goals to accomplish BEFORE the search process becomes active and will have expertise and training to give guidance and coaching to the search process.

There are times when the possibility of a transition pastor should be considered:

- when there has been a long term pastoral relationship (10 or more years)
- when the community of the local church has undergone drastic changes and the conference needs to assess the changing role of the local church in the community
- when a minister has died while serving the local church
- when the last minister has had an authoritarian style of leadership and the congregation wants to build greater lay participation in the church’s ministry

- when there has been conflict in the local church, the congregation is polarised, the minister was asked to leave, and there needs to be healing in the congregation
- when there are reasons to extend the transitions process and it would be wise to wait for up to a year before appointing the next lead pastor

Transition pastors bring special gifts to the task. They may assist the local congregation:

- to develop a vision for ministry
- to deal with conflict
- to heal divisions
- to provide new models for ministry and mission
- to assist with transitioning to a board model of leadership that is a better fit for the church
- to make the transition to new leadership

Please contact the Director of Personnel to discuss how a transition pastor would be valuable in your situation.

3. Meeting pastoral needs in an interim period (while the search is underway).

The process of searching for a new pastor will likely extend beyond the time when the previous pastor has moved away. This can be a difficult time in the life of the church. It may also be a time when lay leaders feel free to come forward to exercise spiritual gifts for the benefit of the whole congregation.

It is important that the Official Board makes provision for the ongoing ministry during this time, even when a transition pastor has been appointed. Care must be taken not to fall for the temptation to “coast” until the new pastor is engaged.

Who will do the work of the lead pastor during this time? Here are some possibilities:

- A transition pastor (see number 2 above).
- Lay persons from within the Local Church could do some pastoral visitation, lead worship, or co-ordinate the small group or Christian Education program. Some could occasionally preach.
- There may be a number of ordained persons who could supply the pulpit if/when the transition pastor is not available. They may be retired ministers without regular Sunday responsibilities, or for whatever reason they are currently without an appointment at a local church. Ministerial Candidates or Commissioned Ministers may be able to help out once or twice. Check the weekly Bishop’s notes for a list of available pulpit supply pastors or contact the Director of Personnel office.
- One person might become a regular pulpit supply. This may be a student, a Ministerial Candidate, a retiree, a professor in a Christian college or a minister who is in special relationship with the Conference. There are a number of persons who have expressed an interest in this type of work within a given distance from their home.
- A minister in a neighbouring church may be willing to help out for crisis pastoral care, weddings, funerals, and the administration of the sacraments.

POLICIES FROM *THE MANUAL OF THE FREE METHODIST CHURCH IN CANADA*

¶875 POLICIES FOR PASTORAL TRANSITIONS AND APPOINTMENTS IN THE FREE METHODIST CHURCH IN CANADA

The Free Methodist Church in Canada, through the ministerial education, guidance and placement committee, appoints pastors to local churches. While the appointment of pastors by the conference is a historical distinctive of Methodism, the process of making appointments has been modified from time to time to meet the changing needs and expectations of pastors and local churches throughout the history of the denomination.

In keeping with the expressed core values of The Free Methodist Church in Canada and the commitment to empower the local church, the process of appointment has been further modified to involve the local church in a greater and more responsible manner.

1. The bishop declares a pastoral transition through a letter sent to the church and pastor when:
 - a. The bishop agrees in writing to a pastor's signed request to be released from the present appointment. The bishop will advise the director of personnel and the church. The church is to receive at least sixty days' notice unless modified by an agreement signed by the director of personnel, the pastor and the delegate(s).
 - b. The bishop agrees in writing to a signed letter of request to the bishop from the chair of the official board and delegate indicating that a strong majority (75%) of the official board has expressed in a recorded vote that they have lost confidence in the pastor's capacity to lead the congregation
 - c. If a performance appraisal of the pastoral leader (see ¶335), based on the current official board approved job description (built locally and reflecting the current vision and stated mission) results in an overall average score below 5.5, the results will be referred to the bishop and the ministerial education, guidance and placement committee (MEGaP) who may declare that the church is in transition. The pastor is to receive at least sixty days notice unless modified by a salary continuance agreement as outlined in ¶880.
 - d. Disciplinary action of the bishop and MEGaP committee necessitates a transition in leadership.
 - e. After an appraisal, it is the opinion of the conference, through the MEGaP committee, that a transition is necessary for the health of the church, the pastor or both.
 - f. At the discretion of the MEGaP committee, the conference appoints a pastor to another charge. The vacancy created by such action places a church in transition.
2. Once a church has been declared in transition:
 - a. The local board will be instructed by the director of church health to establish a pastoral leadership task force (PLTF) of at least four persons who:
 - are members and/or preparing for membership, who have had significant involvement in the local church for more than a year.
 - fairly represent the makeup of the congregation

- are committed to involvement that may last several months.
 - are willing to work in co-operation with the bishop, director of church health and the MEGaP committee.
 - are not local church employees, ministerial candidates or lay ministers who are tracking for ministry within the FMCIC, members of conference or located ministers.
- b. The delegate(s) shall be a member of the pastoral leadership task force.
3. The director of church health or a designee will be assigned to guide the pastoral leadership task force.
4. The first task of the pastoral leadership task force (PLTF) is to develop a church profile to be given to prospective candidates which should include:
- a. A clear job description based on the current vision and stated mission approved by the official board. The Job Description Performance Appraisal System (JDPAS), a resource available from the conference at the expense of the local church, is recommended for use in evaluating the present condition of the church's ministry and for communicating the role of the pastor to the MEGaP Committee for presentation to prospective pastors.
 - b. If the JDPAS process is not used, the profile must include the church's present vision, mission, core values and pastoral job description. The pastoral job description should be built on biblical, community and congregational research.
 - c. A profile of the local church will also include:
 - local church description (i.e., building, pastoral history, finances, staff)
 - community information describing the positive life of the village, town or city
 - the preparation of other proposals for pastoral leadership with supporting rationale (For example, a church may need to face the reality that they can only recommend a bi-vocational pastor to give leadership at this time.)
5. The director of personnel and/or MEGaP committee, in consultation with the PLTF, and using the summary of the profile, will develop a short list of MEGaP approved potential candidates. When a transition pastor has been appointed, he/she should not assume that he/she will be recommended as the new lead pastor. He/she may, however, be considered for short lists. The short list will contain no more than three names. Short-listed pastors will be informed by the PLTF that they are on a short list.
6. The PLTF will limit its consideration of candidates to the short list. The PLTF will develop an appropriate interview process in consultation with the director of personnel. (See the "Transitions Handbook" available from the director of personnel's office.) All candidates on the short list will have a first interview by telephone or in person, depending on travel distance. Further interviews, after the initial interview, may be limited to only one candidate, and not necessarily extended to all short-listed candidates. An invitation to participate in a worship service at the local church may be offered to only the final candidate.
7. During this process the chairperson of the PLTF needs to maintain clear and current communication with the candidates and the director of personnel or designate.
8. The PLTF process will eventually result in the preparation of a recommendation to the bishop for action by the MEGaP committee. A Letter of Understanding (§879) will have been

drafted and signed by the candidate prior to the recommendation being sent to the bishop. The PLTF will notify unsuccessful candidates in writing.

9. The recommendation should use the following wording: *The Pastor and Board of Name Free Methodist Church, City, Province recommends to the Ministerial Education Guidance and Placement Committee that Candidate's Name be appointed to Church name as Title of Position effective date that the appointment should start.*

Note: The assigning of a pastor's title is the responsibility of the local church. (See Par. 374.4.) If, in the future, an appointed pastor's title is changed because of a job description change, the local church will inform the Personnel office of the FMCiC of the new title. The only exception to this is in the case of a staff pastor becoming a lead pastor (including assuming a transition lead pastor role). In this case, an appointment recommendation needs to be made to MEGaP.

10. When the MEGaP committee approves the recommendation from the PLTF, the bishop will announce the new appointment, thus completing the process. The PLTF will disband.
11. The receiving church will be responsible for the expenses incurred in the recruitment and moving of a new pastor.

Note: These are the first pages of a document that is used to coach local churches when they go into transition. These pages summarize the policies and process of pastoral transitions as practised in The Free Methodist Church in Canada. The complete *Transitions Handbook* is available from the FMCiC website or the director of personnel's office. The chart on the following page summarizes the whole process.

*MEGaP
Revised January 26, 2014

BISHOP Declares church as “in transition” ↓		
DIRECTORS OF CHURCH HEALTH (DCH) AND PERSONNEL (DOP) Guide entire transitions process ↓		
LOCAL CHURCH BOARD		PASTORAL LEADERSHIP TASK FORCE (PLTF)
decides on whether to seek a transition pastor	←	
establishes Pastoral Leadership Task Force (PLTF)	←	
	→	elects chairperson
participates in Life Plan guided by DCH and shares data with PLTF	←	
	→	Guided by DCH, uses Life Plan data to prepare Church Profile and job description
prepares remuneration package, refines and approves Job Description	←	
	→	uses Board approved Job Description to form part of Church Profile
	→	Chair submits completed Church Profile to DOP for posting (requests for profile are sent to DOP/resumes are received by DOP)
	→	Chair receives approved resumes from DOP
	→	creates short-list of candidates
	→	interviews candidates
	→	chooses successful candidate and Chair informs Board
informed by PLTF Chair of successful candidate	←	
Board chair negotiates and signs Letter of Understanding with successful candidate and informs PLTF chair when completed (Board chair informs treasurer to be in contact with candidate to complete payroll documents)	←	
	→	Chair sends request for appointment to Bishop
↓		
Bishop sends appointment request to the regional Ministerial Education Guidance and Placement (MEGaP) committee by email to vote for approval of appointment. ↓		
Bishop sends letter to delegate announcing the appointment. Letter to be read by delegate to congregation the following Sunday. Bishop announces new appointment in next issue of the Bishop’s Notes.		