

PASTORAL SUCCESSION PLAN FOR ABC CHURCHES

*In our world where it is clear that old forms do not always work and new forms are needed, we at ABC-MI believe that our churches need options for calling their next pastor. This Pastoral Succession plan is one of those options. Two of our congregations have expressed a desire and have taken some steps toward such a plan designed specifically for their churches. From this we have developed a broader application for a Succession Plan that can be contextualized for many churches. Therefore, the following considerations for a succession plan are general guidelines that should be contextualized for appropriate settings. It is recommended that a Region staff person lead this assessment process in order to ensure integrity in the process.**

- 1) The standard criteria for churches considering a Succession Plan would be that the church meet *all* of the following conditions:
 - a. a clear understanding of and commitment to God's Mission for the Church
 - b. a clear understanding of their unique Purpose that expresses how they are to live out God's Mission
 - c. congregational ownership of the Purpose that has demonstrated some success in fulfilling that Purpose
 - d. committed to continuing the same general direction under their current Purpose
 - e. free of dysfunctional conflict, meaning that all current conflict is in the win-win stages
 - f. healthy enough to respect the new pastoral relationship with the new leader. An attitude of "We always did it this way with the former pastor" will only serve to undermine the effectiveness of church life and mission, and the leadership of the new pastor.
 - g. The presence of effective and strong leadership that has demonstrated support of the leadership of the pastoral office and person
 - h. Meets the parameters of the Maturity to Prime levels of the Life Cycle of the Church (Bullard), or other evidence that they are at a peak in their ministry effectiveness

- 2) Succession Plans could be used when the current pastor is planning on leaving for a different ministry setting or is planning their retirement. This necessitates the church having the capacity for funding two full time pastors during the transition period. In the case where this is not possible, an alternative approach would be to have a seamless transition that provides an overlap period that is based on the financial ability of the congregation. The general recommendation is that the Succession plan be no less than 6 months and no more than 12 months for the overlap period.

- 3) In most cases a Pastoral Succession plan would follow a timeline as suggested below:
 - a. 3 months for completing a study and assessment to establish the readiness of the church to engage a Succession Plan. It is recommended that Bullard's Life Cycle of the Church be used as the assessment tool.
 - b. 3 months to identify the strengths, gifts, and leadership style sought in the new pastor; to establish the ministry expectations of the new pastor, and the cooperative relationship that will exist once the pastoral successor begins their ministry.
 - c. 3-6 months for the search process to call a pastoral successor.
 - d. 6-12 months for the current and newly called pastor to work together to complete the transfer of leadership. During this time the current pastor will be actively searching for their new ministry with the assistance of the Region through the appropriate Region Staff person, or planning for their retirement.

- 4) It is generally understood that the retiring pastor and the new pastor be willing and able to agree to the following as they apply to each one individually:
 - a. Ability to move into new relationships with the congregation where each is respected and supported. In short, both persons should be willing to keep their egos in check.
 - b. The new pastor should not do anything that will undermine, criticize, or otherwise diminish the outgoing pastor. In the case where there is a member of the church who has unresolved issues or concerns with the outgoing pastor, they should counsel the member to resolve these issues between themselves and the outgoing pastor according to biblical guidelines for resolving conflict.
 - c. The retiring pastor should be held accountable for honoring the American Baptist Minister's Council Code of Ethics, specifically: they should be expected to either be moving out of the community as a step in their retirement, be expected to

attend another church for at least one year if they are retiring and remaining in the community, or move on to another ministry setting. In all three of these scenarios, the pastor should make a commitment to not interfere with the ministry of the new pastor in any way, either through a contact by a member of the church or by initiating contact.

- d. Both pastors should be willing to enter into an agreement that reflects the above guidelines.

5) It is generally recommended that the process for calling the new pastor be as follows:

- a. The Governing Board of the church will serve as the Pulpit Committee. A person other than the pastor will serve as chair of the Board. In many cases, the congregation will have to vote to temporarily suspend the portion of the Bylaws that describe the forming of a Pulpit Committee.
- b. It is recommended that the Pastor should have access to the deliberations of the Pulpit Committee as a consultant to the process.
- c. The appropriate American Baptist Region staff person will be invited to work with the Pulpit Committee to help in training and consulting.
- d. The current Pastor will stay in place maintaining all current responsibilities while the search process takes place.
- e. The new Pastor will be called to a Co-Pastorate which is generally recommended to be not less than 6 months and not more than 12 months. During this time the work of the Pastor will be shared between the co-pastors. Guidelines will be established ahead of time that clarifies specific shared responsibilities which shall include but not be limited to: preaching, weddings, leading the Board, leading the staff, etc, with continued accountability to the Board for both pastors.
- f. In the case where the pastor is retiring, there will be a time for the Retiring Pastor to be honored.
- g. It is recommended that the Church begin immediately to plan for the financial implications of this plan.

This plan is not intended to be comprehensive and cover all scenarios and contexts. This should be viewed as a beginning discussion for churches considering such a plan for Pastoral Succession.

*This recommendation does not assume the lack of integrity on the part of church leadership, it only serves to provide a neutral party to lead so personal ego's and agendas do not get in the way of an effective Succession Plan.