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Date

**From Surviving to Thriving:  
Exploring Healthy Pathways to Pastoral Succession in African American Baptist Churches  
using the Old Testament Succession Narrative of Moses and Joshua**

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## **Abstract**

From Surviving to Thriving:

Exploring Healthy Pathways to Pastoral Succession in African American Baptist Churches using  
the Old Testament Succession Narrative of Moses and Joshua

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This project focuses on developing strategic pathways to pastoral succession within the Black Baptist Church and how a close reading of the Old Testament succession narrative of Moses and Joshua can help us gain insight into how a transition should be handled. Through this project the problem of poor succession planning was highlighted from the perspective of failure of churches to establish a succession plan that takes into account the health and wellness of both the outgoing and incoming pastors, as well as the church. The thesis for this project is that a pastoral succession plan that intentionally considers and seeks to support the health and wellness of pastors will ultimately lead to a healthier and thriving church on the other side of the leadership transition. The research highlights problems connected to successions and offers suggestions for strategies that may lead to better outcomes. It also highlights a suggested pathway that takes into account the health and wellness of both pastors and the congregation based on insights gleaned from the research process.

**From Surviving to Thriving:  
Exploring Healthy Pathways to Pastoral Succession in African American Baptist Churches  
using the Old Testament Succession Narrative of Moses and Joshua**

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## **Section I: Introduction: My Why**

At a recent conference on church growth and leadership I listened as a co-pastor shared with us her journey in ministry to get to the place of success where her church is thriving, and she is a sought-after preacher. As she neared the end, there was a sharp turn in her story as she shared with the conference crowd that her husband and partner in pastoring is ill with symptoms like those of Alzheimer's disease, and that she is now doing ministry "all alone." Not only that, because she belongs to a denomination "that does not see the benefit of a transition plan," no one is showing concern for her future and her physical and emotional health (the exiting pastor), that of the incoming pastor, or of the congregation.

Her story time struck a chord with me—both because I have seen many churches thrown into turmoil and chaos due to poor transition planning, and because I am at a church whose senior pastor will be transitioning to retirement in the next five years, and I may well be the successor. Selecting a successor may be a part of establishing a transition plan, but that alone is not a plan. In this paper I explore and propose a framework for healthy leadership transitions in African American Baptist churches. In a Baptist church context where each church is self-governing and does not have to follow the governance of a greater outside body, transitions (and other matters) have the potential both to flourish and to fail miserably, depending on the pastoral leadership and lay leadership of the particular church. When it comes to successful church transitions, the most vital ingredient is often touted to be communication. While communication is a crucial element, I suggest that commitment is even more vital.

An episode of the TV show Grey's Anatomy revolves around the question: "Are you committed or just involved?" The pig sacrifices himself and becomes ham for breakfast; he is committed. The chicken just puts the eggs on a plate; he is involved. Thus, the question is "Are

you committed or just involved?" "Ham or eggs?"<sup>1</sup> When it comes to Emmanuel Baptist Church, I am ham; I am fully committed. I am currently the Executive Pastor of Emmanuel and have served on the staff full time since 2008, though I have been a member of Emmanuel my entire life. Emmanuel was the first church into which my mother ever carried me. I was dedicated to Christ there as an infant and baptized there. I preached my trial sermon and was licensed and ordained there. Later, I watched my own sons be baptized in the very same pool. Emmanuel is my church home. I am invested in and committed to the long-term success of the ministry and the work that is done there to advance the cause of Christ long after I'm gone!

So, although the tears I shed that day at the conference were for a woman minister I respected who was telling us about the impending transition for which she knew neither her family or church were ready, they were also for myself: Would Emmanuel be ready...for when our Senior Pastor transitions away from pastoring full time, and for me potentially becoming his successor? That day birthed in me a desire to do my best to get us all ready.

I live with the daily burden of the Senior Pastor having told me that he believes I am supposed to be his successor, but also knowing that while the church loves me, and I pastor and preach at our largest service, it would still be a historical precedent for a woman to be voted in as Senior Pastor. At the same time, our current Senior Pastor is my godfather and I care for him deeply. I have watched him struggle with seasonal affective disorder for most of his tenure, work compulsively, and spend far more hours at the church every week than he does at home, which makes me very concerned about how he will be able to transition away from ministry and still find meaning and purpose—and whether the congregation will expect the same commitment from me. Emmanuel has had long and consistent leadership: the same Senior Pastor for thirty-

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<sup>1</sup> Greys Anatomy. Season 3, Episode 6 "Let the Angels Commit." Ham or eggs is a metaphor that Greg, a patient's fiancé, uses to explain the concept of commitment.

one year and the same Executive Pastor for thirteen years I am concerned that if a pastoral succession plan is not in place and presented to the congregation in a way that offers them an opportunity to grieve what was and get excited about the possibility of what will be the church could very well implode due to the already transient nature of the congregation. While the leadership has been stable to congregation has always been made up of large numbers of people who cycle in and out every couple of years, which means in many ways Emmanuel can feel like a new community every couple of years.

## **Section II: My Context**

Emmanuel Baptist Church (EBC) is located in the Clinton Hill section of Brooklyn, NY. Emmanuel was founded in 1881 after a church split from Washington Avenue Baptist Church, which is now Brown Memorial Baptist Church. The first pastor of Emmanuel was John Humpstone, who served from 1882 to 1912. At one time Emmanuel was a predominantly White congregation and transitioned to a predominantly African American congregation in 1975. The first African American Pastor was Rev. H. Edward Whitaker, who initially served as Co-Pastor alongside Rev. Larry LeFeber for two years. However, Rev. Whitaker went on to serve EBC from 1973 to 1979 as a solo pastor. He was followed by Rev. Dr. Michael Harris Sr., who served from 1979 to 1988. Our current Pastor is Rev. Anthony L. Trufant who took over the pastorate in 1990.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Emmanuel was a seven-day a week facility; some form of ministry took place every day of the week. We have three services each weekend, Saturday at five p.m. and Sundays at nine a.m. and eleven a.m.. During Pastor Trufant's tenure, the church has experienced massive growth, prompting the addition of two services. In 1989 there was only one service; the second service was added one year into his tenure. Each of our three services is

designed based on a ninety-minute format, with the sermon being allotted thirty-five minutes. At Emmanuel throughout the year our preaching is based on sermon series developed by the Senior Pastor with a focus on a specific book, biblical character, or topic. Through the years we have twice switched what translation of the Bible we use at Emmanuel. Prior to Pastor Trufant coming to Emmanuel, the church used the King James Version. Upon his arrival in November of 1990, he transitioned the church to the New International Version, and just four years ago he transitioned the congregation again to the New Revised Standard Version. The shifts in the versions used happened with Bible Study in mind. Prior to Pastor Trufant's arrival, there was one midweek midday Bible Study taught by the Senior Pastor that averaged about ten participants. When Pastor Trufant came to Emmanuel, he initially added a midweek evening Bible Study that quickly gained traction and that resulted in Bible Study attendance growing to about fifty members each Wednesday evening. However, over the years the numbers at Bible Study have fluctuated greatly, and as our congregation began trending younger it has become increasingly difficult to sustain a weekly on-campus model for Bible Study. Much of the difficulty surrounding being able to maintain a weekly Bible Study can be attributed members having work and family commitments that conflict with the commute time needed to make it to Bible Study. We currently host "Super Saturday" biblical exploration classes four times a year, which are based on a specific book of the Bible or a topic. We also now host weekly Bible Study online via Zoom at one p.m. and seven p.m. on Wednesday evenings. The turnout for our "Super Saturday" experience has consistently averaged about 125 participants for the last two years. Ideally, we would like for these numbers to be higher, but have reconciled ourselves to this level of attendance by acknowledging that some members get their fill of Bible Study via the men's, women's, seniors', or young adult ministries. Most recently the move to doing Bible Study via

Zoom has been a surprising hit with our congregation. Each time slot now has multiple teachers to facilitate the growing numbers. We also offer Sunday school during our 9 a.m. service, a tradition that has been in place for over a century. Our Sunday school classes currently use a UMI (Urban Ministries, Inc.) curriculum for all age groups. In addition, each of the more than 25 ministries within the church has a mandatory Bible-based devotion at the outset of all meetings, and we have ten active small groups that meet weekly and are guided by their Bible-based small group lessons.

Emmanuel has approximately 3,500 members, with a weekly worshipping population of between 1,400 and 1,900 people. The average age of members is thirty-two and is trending younger every year. Historically, Emmanuel has been a church comprised of college-educated members. While most members of the EBC community would self-identify as middle class, the church is culturally and socio-economically diverse, and intentionally welcomes all who come through our doors.

For many people who move to New York for work without knowing anyone, Emmanuel becomes the place where they find family. However, over time many of those same people start their natural families while at Emmanuel, and eventually after a few years to depart to raise their children and grow their families outside of the city. In that sense, Emmanuel is a transient congregation. Though there are veteran members who have been there for more than forty years, if you were to visit once every five years the church membership could look quite different each time.

### Section III: Baptist Polity

According to historian of religion Bill Leonard in *The Challenge of Being Baptist*, “being Baptist is messy, controversial, and divisive. Like the gospel.”<sup>2</sup> He argues this character is deeply embedded in the history of the Baptist Church as a movement that is rooted in “radical congregational polity.”<sup>3</sup> At its essence “the Baptist system of ecclesiastical order creates a dramatic sense of freedom for individuals and churches to determine their own directions in Christ, but such populism ensures dissent, disagreement, and the potential for schism at every turn.”<sup>4</sup> The fundamental idea of church autonomy within the Baptist church is one that inherently lends itself to the possibility and likelihood of division and infighting when it comes to a matter as sensitive as pastoral succession. In the Baptist church, there are two offices that are upheld as scriptural mandates: the office of pastor and the office of deacon.

The Amsterdam Confession (1611) stated clearly and concisely, ‘That the Officers of every Church or congregation are either Elders, who by their office do especially feed the flock concerning their souls, Act. 20.28, Pet. 5.2, 3. or Deacons Men and Women who by their office relieve the necessities of the poor and impotent brethren concerning their bodies, Acts. 6.1-4.’ That early statement generally reflects the nature of Baptist ministry into the twenty-first century.<sup>5</sup>

However, there is also the reality that pastors in our modern context are rarely seen as those who singularly “feed the flock.” No: in our current modern context many pastors are seen as the CEOs of their churches and are expected to guide the church through both spiritual

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<sup>2</sup> Leonard, Bill J., *The Challenge of Being Baptist: Owning a Scandalous Past and an Uncertain Future*. 1 ed. (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 51.

<sup>3</sup> Leonard, *The Challenge of Being Baptist*, 39.

<sup>4</sup> Leonard, *The Challenge of Being Baptist*, 39.

<sup>5</sup> Leonard, *The Challenge of Being Baptist*, 45.

development and business decisions, for example. In a similar vein, Marvin McMickle writes of the shift in the deacon boards of Black Baptist churches from humble servants to administrators with authority, attributing this shift in part to “the growing class of African American professionals who bring their experiences of corporate America into the life of the congregation.”<sup>6</sup> These continued shifts and evolution of roles and responsibilities of both pastors and deacons in the Black Baptist church continues to fuel the ongoing tension and controversy that has long troubled these two offices: “Is the deacon’s job to oversee and regulate the ministry of the pastor, or is it the deacon’s job to serve the needs of the people in support of the pastor?”<sup>7</sup> An African American Baptist church’s failure to bring some level of clarity to this pressing question means that there will be ongoing power struggle between these two offices within the church. Pastors Floyd Massey and Samuel McKinney explain this power struggle with great clarity in *Church Administration in the Black Perspective*:

Some deacons consider themselves the church’s spiritual fathers, ruling elders who serve and assist the pastor in the shepherding of the flock and, as a rule, have been basically loyal to the pastor and to the church, in spite of pressures brought on them to function differently. On the other hand, there have been deacons and other officers who felt it their solemn and sworn duty to protect the congregation from the pastor. Others considered themselves as [the] employer and subsequently the “boss” of the pastor.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Marvin Andrew McMickle, *Deacons in Today's Black Baptist Church* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2010), 37.

<sup>7</sup> McMickle, *Deacons in Today's Black Baptist Church*, 48.

<sup>8</sup> Floyd Massey and Samuel Berry McKinney, *Church Administration in the Black Perspective* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2003), 31.

In my current context at Emmanuel Baptist Church the church Constitution and by-laws answer McMickle's question. According to Article V of the Constitution, the deacons of EBC are expected to assist the Senior Pastor in the visitation of the sick, providing help and financial assistance to those in need, administer the ordinances, and various other responsibilities that are in line with being servants and helpers within the congregation.<sup>9</sup> However, Article IV of the Constitution describes that there could be a very clear shift in the role of the deacons and the joint board (which consists of the deacons and trustees) if the Senior Pastor should be terminated or suspended because of poor work performance, egregious behavior, or other extreme circumstances.<sup>10</sup> This clarity becomes particularly helpful when the roles of deacons and the Senior Pastor are considered in regard to Pastoral Succession. According to EBC's Constitution, in the event that a pastoral transition take place due to the Senior Pastor's retirement or amicable agreement, a Church Transition Team (CTT) is to be formed consisting of "two (2) representatives of the Trustee Board, three (3) members of the Diaconate, and four (4) members of the congregation at large."<sup>11</sup> The CTT is expected either to interview prospective candidates and approve a single candidate presented by the Senior Pastor, who would then be considered by the congregation for a church vote, or the CTT is to start a search process, receiving a pool of applicants and choosing the best one to present to the congregation for vote. While EBC's Constitution and by-laws offer more direction than many other Black Baptist churches, they say little about at what point the CTT is to be formed if a transition is caused by the Senior Pastor's retirement.

#### **Section IV: Transition Challenges**

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9 Emmanuel Baptist Church Constitution, 14.

10 Emmanuel Baptist Church Constitution, 11.

11 Emmanuel Baptist Church Constitution, 8.

The biggest challenge that a church may find itself facing during a pastoral transition is a failure to plan. According to researchers of the Barna Group, churches who initiate pastoral transitions without an official succession plan mapped out normally face more challenges during the process, including a longer timeline to execute the transition.<sup>12</sup> Failure to plan is frequently connected to one of the primary transition challenges experienced by many churches, namely the reluctance of the outgoing pastor to let go of his power over and involvement in the church and to move through the process of succession. In *Passing the Leadership Baton*, Tom Mullins senior pastor of Christ Fellowship Church in Palm Beach Gardens writes,

I think one of the most difficult things for a lot of outgoing leaders is simply stepping away from everything they've built and invested in for a significant number of years.

Often, it has become the platform for their credibility as leaders and value as individuals.

A change in that role threatens their security and identity.<sup>13</sup>

Mullins continues by explaining that feeling one's identity threatened is often connected to pride and the pastor's belief that the church is their church rather than God's. In order for any church leadership transition to be successful, there must be a clear desire among all parties to surrender to will of God. "We must simply be willing to do what God wants."<sup>14</sup>

Another key challenge for many pastoral transitions is insufficient communication. Failure to communicate fully, transparently, or in meaningful ways can be the downfall to many relationships, but when it comes to a pastoral transition it can damage a relationship with an incoming pastor before it really begins. Based on the research of the Barna Group, pastoral transitions in which the congregations believe there was a high level of communication normally

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<sup>12</sup> Barna Group, *Leadership Transitions*, 2019, 23.

<sup>13</sup> Mullins, Tom. *Passing the Leadership Baton: A Winning Transition Plan for Your Ministry*. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2015), 38.

<sup>14</sup> Mullins, Tom. *Passing the Leadership Baton*, 40.

lead to high positive views of the overall transition. “A lack of clarity and direction always causes confusion. And when people are confused, they will naturally come to their own conclusions about a situation. This can be catastrophic for you, your successor, and the organization.”<sup>15</sup> When it comes to communication and pastoral transition, writer and spiritual director Sam Ogles suggests a church should use communication to: guide the narrative, be faster than the “competition,” get on the same page, over-communicate, and have a clear timeline.<sup>16</sup> Communication is the vital linchpin that holds families, church leadership, and congregations together during a transition.

While it may seem obvious that money could end up being a challenge in a transition, the research actually shows more specifically that challenges typically arise in the midst of transition when financial stability is prioritized over church unity, fresh growth, and sustained vision.<sup>17</sup> While the health of the church’s finances are important, the research from Barna Group suggests that it should not be a primary focus. In many instances within churches and other charitable organizations, a downward trend can normally be traced to how people feel about the organization rather than simply just in response to financial strain. If during a transition the leadership team spends more time reflecting on and addressing the mission and morale of the congregation, Barna Group reports that financial concerns will typically soon turn around. However, in *Next: Pastoral Succession that Works*, pastors William Vanderbloemen and Warren Bird do address the important fact that a pastoral transition can be costly for a church and should be built into the budget. One of the key things that they highlight that could also present a challenge for the transition process is the recognition that the incoming pastor’s salary may have

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15 Mullins, Tom. *Passing the Leadership Baton*, 54.

16 Barna Group, *Leadership Transitions*, 2019, 63.

17 Barna Group, *Leadership Transitions*, 2019, 49.

to be higher than that of the outgoing pastor.<sup>18</sup> Because at many churches long-tenured pastors often decline raises offered along the way in an attempt to hold budgets together, and these raises are rarely instated once the church is in a better financial position, this results in the outgoing pastor's salary being below market rate.

Another potential transition challenge that can be a landmine to navigate is the question of whether or not the incoming pastor keeps the staff they inherit from their predecessor or whether they release them to their destiny. Vanderbloemen and Bird shed light on the once common practice of entire staff resignations that were offered voluntarily as a way of helping the incoming pastor be able to develop their own team.<sup>19</sup> This practice was often met with the new pastor thanking the staff and then saying that all of the letters of resignation would be held for six months and then either accepted or torn up. Staffing can be either a huge blessing or a burden. On one hand, it is wise to keep staff members who hold crucial institutional knowledge and can help a new pastor to navigate new terrain. On the other, keeping staff who will not be loyal to the new leader or who fail to demonstrate competency, character, willingness to adjust to cultural shifts, or chemistry with the new pastor, can be quite a hindrance to ministry.

## **Section V: Pastoral Interviews**

I conducted three interviews to ascertain from pastors currently serving as Senior Pastors what their transition experiences have been like, what they learned about themselves and their churches, and what their self-care regimen looked like at the time. The first person I interviewed was the Senior Pastor of my current church, Emmanuel Baptist Church in Brooklyn, NY. Pastor Trufant is a native of Chicago, Illinois, a third-generation preacher who is married with two

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<sup>18</sup> Vanderbloemen, William and Warren Bird. *Next: Pastoral Succession That Works*. Baker Book House, 2015, 236.

<sup>19</sup> Vanderbloemen, William and Warren Bird. *Next*, 227.

young adult daughters, and who has served as the Senior Pastor of EBC for thirty-one years. The second person I interviewed was Rev. Dr. Gina Marcia Stewart, who has served as the Senior Pastor of Christ Missionary Baptist Church (CMBC) in Memphis, TN for twenty-six years. Dr. Stewart is a native of Memphis and is also the first woman pastor in the history of CMBC. Dr. Stewart grew up at Christ Missionary Baptist Church and was called to be the pastor after the untimely death of her predecessor Pastor Curry. My third and final interview was with Pastor Reginald Wayne Sharpe, Jr. the new pastor of Fellowship Missionary Baptist Church in Chicago, IL. Pastor Sharpe was called to Fellowship after walking with his predecessor, Charles Jenkins, for almost a full year to prepare for the transition. Pastor Sharpe is married and originally from Macon, GA. Each one of these amazing leaders helped me to recognize both the wisdom and the gaps in much of the research around the topic of pastoral transitions. These interviews also helped me identify further some challenges of Baptist church autonomy, as well as some blessings. However, one of the most insightful things I learned from these conversations is that ideas about succession and succession planning may very well be attached to tenure and age, more specifically hesitancy about when this planning should start.

When asked what he had learned about himself during his transition, Pastor Trufant stated that he learned that he was so eager to make his mark on the congregation that he forgot that his first responsibility was to get to know the people and show them that he cared. Dr. Stewart said that her transition taught her that that she needed to develop a thicker skin and a tender heart. She reflected on learning early not take things personally when it comes to ministry hurts and that she realized she would need to be able to navigate relationships without holding grudges. Pastor Sharpe shared that he learned that if he was going to survive the transition with any sense of sanity or joy, he had to find a sense of self-confidence that he previously never

knew he needed. He shared that he experienced congregants making a lot of comparisons between him and his predecessor, and that he had to make peace with being his authentic self. Each of their responses reminded me that a pastoral transition can humble anyone, and that though it is the ugly side of pastoral ministry about which few people talk, church folks can be hurtful. Pastor Trufant's self-critique regarding his enthusiasm to translate vision into reality highlights author, professor, and senior pastor Ralph Watkins' assertion that "it is commonly accepted that it takes seven years at a minimum for the transition from one pastoral team to another pastoral team truly becoming pastor."<sup>20</sup> This fuels the idea that a new pastor should come in and preach without really striving to change or do much initially. This idea is quite different to the reality in many appointment-based denominations where new pastors are often looking to make an impact within the first year.

When I asked the question of what they learned about their churches, all three pastors spoke about learning things that reflected the church culture. Pastor Trufant said that he learned that from the outside people have suspicions about the new pastor. He acknowledged that the suspicions can be warranted, depending on the kind of experience they had with their former pastor. He added that one of the things he learned about Emmanuel in particular is that Emmanuel is a very intelligent and resourceful congregation that was comprised primarily of people who genuinely wanted to grow in their relationship with God but who have been misguided by his predecessor regarding what it means to grow in that relationship. He mentioned that his predecessor had made them into good church people but not necessarily growing Christians.

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<sup>20</sup> Watkins, Ralph C. *Leading Your African American Church through Pastoral Transition*. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press), 2010, 11.

When asked the same question, Dr. Stewart commented that the thing she learned about the church was the extent to which her predecessor had been “covering” her. She mentioned the battles that he had fought behind the scenes without her ever knowing and discussed how she had not realized until the mission and in fact until after her election as pastor just how deeply rooted sexism was in the congregation. Much of that she did not recognize previously because her predecessor kept it from her, with the intention of protecting her.

When speaking of Fellowship Chicago, Pastor Sharpe stated that what he learned about the church is that we pastors are not in opposition to the people, but that we are in opposition to the culture. Pastor Sharpe's comments actually put all three responses in perspective when it comes to this one question—that ultimately when it comes to pastoral transitions and the difficulty of navigating a new culture all new pastors have to recognize that they are not in fact in opposition to the people but in opposition to the culture and are often striving to create a new church culture while people grieve the culture that existed under the tenure of the previous pastor.

The answers I received when asking each pastor about their relationship with their predecessor appear to line up with the recommendations made by the Barna Group and almost every other book I read on pastoral transitions. Throughout my research each source recommended that any length of time that a new pastor can spend walking with their predecessor will prove to be a beneficial to them during their tenure as the senior pastor. Given what I heard from these three pastors, that recommendation rings true.

When I asked Pastor Trufant what his relationship was like with his previous pastor, he simply responded that it was not very good. He went on to detail that one of the reasons why they struggled to develop a relationship was because he believed that his predecessor was bent

on trying to prove that he would be the pastor of note and that his tenure would be the most consequential one in the history of Emmanuel, though he served for only eight years. In addition, he also spoke very ill of his predecessor which was something that rubbed Pastor Trufant the wrong way.

I was not shocked to hear that Dr. Stewart's response regarding her relationship with her predecessor was very different, especially since she grew up at Christ Missionary Baptist Church and Pastor Curry was her first pastor as a child. Dr. Stewart describes Pastor Curry as a spiritual father/mentor/father figure. She says they always shared a good relationship, and that because as a child she was close friends with his daughter she frequented his home often to play with his daughter. As she grew older and he began to recognize a call on her life even before she recognized it, the relationship shifted to more of a mentor-mentee relationship. At that point she says that much of what she learned from him was through observation. Dr. Stewart used a memorable phrase to describe this; she said that much of what she learned from him was not so much taught as caught. When speaking of Pastor Curry, Dr. Stewart mentioned an interaction in which he gave her some advice about how to handle honorarium requirements. Pastor Curry told her that a minister of integrity never gives a dollar amount for an honorarium; you tell the church that you trust the integrity of the ministry and that they will be fair. She said that from that day to this, that's pretty much what she's done, and so it's very clear that Pastor Curry made an indelible imprint on her life and that she learned a lot from him that sticks with her to this day.

While Pastor Sharpe did not grow up at Fellowship Chicago, he too spoke in glowing terms of his predecessor and said that they have a very strong relationship. He highlights that Pastor Jenkins hand selected him and took time to get to know him by having dinner with him and his wife. What stands out most about what Pastor Sharpe said about his predecessor was that

he was so relational that it made the transition smooth. Because he had developed such a family culture at the church, by the time Pastor Sharpe was introduced to Fellowship Chicago he was introduced not as a new associate pastor or the next in line to be the senior pastor but simply as more family. Pastor Sharpe notes that this was a new and refreshing experience for him since many of his relationships with other pastors had been transactional instead of relational.

Pastor Trufant was honest about the fact that he did not share a good relationship with his immediate predecessor. Yet he believed nonetheless that one should always be complementary of one's predecessor both in public and in private, and that one should give them the benefit of the doubt and be merciful since one did not know the situation and circumstances that that person had to endure during their tenure.

After listening to all three pastors speak, I reflected on the importance, value, and the benefit of having the support of your predecessor and how much easier it makes the beginning of one's journey into a new pastorate.

When asked what surprised him about the transition, Pastor Trufant responded how gracious some of the gatekeepers were when he first arrived at the new church. He spoke about how much it meant to him to be welcomed and accepted, though he was not "warm and fuzzy" personality. He mentioned that them welcoming and accepting him made all the difference in the world because he had no credibility at the time. They not only accepted him, they also ran interference for him. In their efforts to run interference for him they became the loyal confidants he could count on to support and spread his vision throughout the congregation. When reflecting on this transition as a twenty-eight-year-old pastor, he told me about a time when one of his favorite deacons reminded him stop saying he was the pastor and just be pastoral. He said at the

time he felt overwhelmed and challenged, but that that was a lesson that stuck with him through the years.

There was nothing shocking about Dr. Stewart's response to the question of what surprised her about her transition into the role of senior pastor when she responded “not a whole lot” because she grew up at the church. Dr. Stewart told me that the good thing about growing up at the church that you end up pastoring is that you already know the trouble spots and difficult personalities. She spoke about the advantage of already having some level of institutional knowledge coming in to the position, and how that helped her to navigate relationships early on. What surprised Pastor Sharpe the most about his transition at Fellowship Chicago was the church culture, which was drastically different to that of church in Georgia. He noted that in Georgia and in the south in general decorum is everything, and that when it comes to worship the church is about order and structure, timeliness elegance, and pageantry. Pastor Sharpe emphasized that there are certain things that people simply know not to do like walk during certain times during a worship service while that is simply not the case in Chicago or more specifically at Fellowship Missionary Baptist Church and that was a surprise for him. These responses reinforce that each transition is unique. However, both Pastor Trufant and Dr. Stewart's responses highlight the value of having some level of institutional knowledge on your side. For Pastor Trufant it was currying favor with the gatekeepers of Emmanuel early on, but for Dr. Stewart it was simply being in the know for herself.

There are frequently high hopes for a new pastor's first one hundred days, which means if anything is going to be done, the incoming pastor probably should have a vision for the church before they enter the doors. When asked whether or not he had a vision for the church before his transition, Pastor Trufant responded frankly, “I thought I did.” He quickly explained that he

eventually realized that what he had were goals and not a vision, he explained that vision speaks of destination while goals are simply markers on the way to a clear destination. He eventually had to stop and go back to the drawing board to develop a clear sense of vision mission and values. In the book *The Changeover Zone* authors Jim Ozier and Jim Griffith state that “vision casting can and should be a fruitful part of the on boarding process and if done correctly can solidify your pastorate and allow you to be accepted more quickly as the church’s new leader.”<sup>21</sup> Dr. Stewart stated that while she did not have any immediate vision for the church she knew that things at Christ Missionary needed to be “resurrected, reignited, and recreated”, but that she also understood that the foundation of all of this work was going to start with fellowship. She discussed how intentional she was about using fellowship experiences as a means of disarming people who may have otherwise been standoffish and allowing hospitality, reconnection and relationships to become a priority in her first year.

Pastor Sharpe definitely had a vision for Fellowship Chicago. Indeed, he was fortunate enough to be allowed by Pastor Jenkins to host a vision night while he was still the associate pastor. He shared his vision with the leaders first, and then with the church as a whole. I asked Pastor Sharpe how his vision for the church unfolded in his first year in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, and he shared that out of ten goals the church was able to accomplish eight, which makes for a very successful year, especially since the two that they did not accomplish or the two that he chose to scrap were connected to financial goals that he did not believe to be a priority in that sensitive economic climate. During each interview it was clear to me that from the very outset of their respective tenures each leader had some form of a plan to help them get going and

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<sup>21</sup> Ozier, Jim and Jim Griffith. *The Changeover Zone: Successful Pastoral Transitions*. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press), 2016, 73.

to energize their churches however, as the conversations continued what became obvious was that each of them had failed to develop a plan from the outset for their own self-care.

In an age where talk about self-care has become a cultural norm in discussions of clergy burn out are all too common how is it possible that pastors still think they can care for others without intentionally caring for themselves? By all accounts seasons of transition are stressful, so the last question that I asked each pastor was what their self-care regimen looked like during their period of transition. Pastor Trufant admitted that he's been bad at self-care much of his ministry. He said that the only two things he's done consistently as acts of self-care are maintaining good relationships with close friends and investing in therapy. Dr. Stewart too admitted that while she had learned about self-care in seminary and understood intellectually the value of self-care, her praxis was always lacking in it until around her tenth year in ministry. She explains that she did not learn to embody self-care truly until she participated in an immersion experience in which she had to lead other people through an exercise in self-care. It was at that time that she began to take vacation days, honor her time off, set boundaries around her work schedule, and honor her time with her family as sacred. Dr. Stewart remarks that much of her hesitancy regarding self-care had been due to the fact that she is a self-proclaimed perfectionist and workaholic. However, she also commented that through the years she has dealt with the immense pressure of being the first woman pastor in Memphis, and that she's always lived with an awareness that failure for her might mean ruining opportunities for women coming after her. She went on to say that in the Black tradition many people believe that the harder you work the more acceptable you are to God. She highlights that many pastors of black Baptist churches have not had pastors to model self-care to them, nor congregations that encouraged pastors to take care of themselves. Dr. Stewart reported that her mentor, Rev. Shirley Prince, used to say to her

“they'll kill you and put a plastic flower on your grave, and then say, “She sure was a good pastor. She served us well. And then they'll move on to the next one.”

Pastor Sharpe shared that for him self-care looked like being aware that he needed healthy spaces in which to vent with trusted mentors and friends. He shared that while he was an associate pastor, he didn't have a therapist but felt as if he needed one, and so that was an investment he made within his first five months of his pastorate. Pastor Sharpe said that he would recommend that any pastor invest in a therapist as soon as possible. His recommendation is rooted in his belief that the pain and trauma of places and people we have left behind travel with us to new places until we heal. He asserts that the pain you're dealing with comes with you into every new season and so the sooner you're able to heal from it the more you're able to fully embrace the newness of what's happening to you in your present season.

## **Section VI: The Moses & Joshua Succession Narrative**

Throughout the Bible we find a variety of examples of leadership transitions, as well as models for various leadership styles. While many of these examples are useful for gleaning various lessons regarding what God expects from leaders, the converse is also true: there are a multitude of examples of poor leadership and of leaders whom God rejected. As New Testament scholar Patrick Miller notes, “By story, example, instruction, prayer, law, and prophetic oracle, the Bible frequently sets before us a focus on responsibilities, characteristics, and demands incumbent upon those who are called or chosen to lead the people of God.”<sup>22</sup> With his words in mind, as we reflect on the successful succession narrative of Moses and Joshua, we will focus in

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<sup>22</sup> Miller, Patrick D. "Toward a Theology of Leadership: Some Clues from the Prophets," *The Asbury Journal* 47.1, 1992, 43.

on the similarities and differences of responsibilities, characteristics, and call stories of two different godly leaders, and the relationship they share. The succession narrative of Moses and Joshua will serve as a source to glean from as we develop a viable succession plan in a modern context.

In her article “An Investigation Into Successful Leadership Transitions in the Old Testament,” A. Kay Fountain makes the observation that “there is a wealth of literature on leadership, styles of leadership, personalities in leadership, how to train leaders, developing the leadership potential of others and so forth, but in all this literature, there is virtually nothing on the subject of leadership transition. There appears to be an assumption that if you train and develop leaders properly, then the transition to the next generation of leaders will go smoothly.”<sup>23</sup> This assumption is a false one, however. In spite of having good leaders on both sides of the succession, for some churches the transition itself will not be successful. I would submit that in these instances the failure lies not in the quality of either leader, but in the failure to develop a plan to pass the proverbial baton without dropping it from one leader to another.

There are a variety of types of leadership transitions throughout the Bible, but perhaps the three most significant ones we see in the Old Testament take place among priests, kings, and prophets. Fountain’s observation that “too often a leadership transition takes place for the wrong reasons: a leader dies or moves on to another ministry; others fail in a variety of ways and have to be removed. Sometimes there is a power struggle between an older and a younger leader”<sup>24</sup> is one that holds true for both biblical accounts of transition and our modern context of African American Baptist churches. When a leadership transition is forced because of the premature

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<sup>23</sup> Fountain, A Kay. “An investigation into successful leadership transitions in the Old Testament.” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 7.2, July, 2004, 187.

<sup>24</sup> Fountain, “An investigation into successful leadership transitions in the Old Testament.”, 188.

death of a leader or because of something else that happens suddenly or requires a quick shift in leadership, there is often a panic to fill the spot of the lost leader immediately in a fashion that may not result in hiring the best candidate or ensuring the smoothest possible transition process. However, by looking at this transition narrative we glean ideas about how best to handle transitions when they can be planned far ahead of time. As we take a closer look at the Moses and Joshua succession narrative, I will use several elements identified by Fountain as vital evaluation pieces of a leadership transition from one generation to the next: “source of authority, divine approval or disapproval, transfer of power, popular recognition or rejection, and the relationship between the older and the younger leader.”<sup>25</sup>

*Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint someone over the congregation  
 17 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.” 18 So  
 the Lord said to Moses, “Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your hand  
 upon him. (Numbers 27:16–17, NRSV)*

The book of Numbers is a book that demonstrates to readers that God is a God of love who also values order and law. While we get a lot in this book about the law it is important to take note of the fact that God chooses to “enter into a covenant with them, a dependable agreement by which he placed in indelible record his eternal love for them, contracting to care for them and protect them, meeting all their needs”<sup>26</sup> because God loved them. God demonstrates God’s love for Israel in Numbers by providing spiritual leaders, such as priests

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<sup>25</sup> Fountain, “An investigation into successful leadership transitions in the Old Testament.”, 189.

<sup>26</sup> Brown, Raymond. *The Message of Numbers: Journey to the Promised Land*. Inter-Varsity, 2002, 20.

and their assistants who walk with the Israelites and help them to navigate seasons of chaos and confusion.<sup>27</sup> The themes of new land, rebellion, and provision are prominent in the book of Numbers as the Israelites make their way towards the Promise Land, so much so that these same themes are even connector threads between Moses and Joshua. The story of Moses passing the mantle of leadership of the Children of Israel on to Joshua is such an important one that though it starts in Numbers we see the story show up again in Deuteronomy 3:21–29, Deuteronomy 31:1–7, and Deuteronomy 34:1–12. The story of succession from Moses to Joshua is one that captures the beauty of a God-ordained transfer of power that has the ingredients of strong leadership, willingness to submit to the will of God, prayer, mentoring, order, and faith coupled with bravery. Leadership transitions are not for the faint of heart and one can expect to encounter some bumps in the road requiring leaders who are “strong and courageous.”<sup>28</sup>

Joshua is appointed Moses' successor after Moses is shown the Promise Land but is reminded that he will not enter it because of his disobedience in the wilderness of Zin (Exodus 27: 12–14). Moses was a great leader who had liberated the Israelites from Egyptian bondage. Through their forty-year journey, he sought the Lord for provision and trusted God to show up on their behalf. Moses was a complex man who had been raised and educated within the Egyptian system as a child of privilege after being adopted by the Pharaoh's daughter. The calling of Moses to be leader of the Israelites offers an insight that many church search committees do not consider, namely that God can use anyone regardless of their past if they

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<sup>27</sup> Brown, Raymond, 20.

<sup>28</sup> Joshua 1:9 (NRSV)

are willing to submit their life to God. When God called Moses he was reluctant to assume the responsibilities of a leader as someone who was still on the run from Pharaoh for murdering an Egyptian, and he did not believe that he was the one who should speak for God because he had a speech impediment (Exodus 4:10). Moses demonstrates that a part of the character of a great leader is to be concerned about the outcome of a situation or the future of a people even if you yourself will not benefit from it. Numbers 27 records Moses praying that God will appoint a leader over Israel, so that the people will not end up like sheep without a shepherd. After Moses prays, the Lord tells Moses to anoint Joshua, son of Nun. Both men take their cues from God. Moses is called by God in Exodus 3 and Joshua is called by God and affirmed by Moses through the laying on of hands in Numbers 27.

God used Moses to set the Children of Israel free from Egyptian bondage and then helped them to cross the Red Sea on dry ground as they escaped the Egyptian army in pursuit of them. It was Moses to whom God entrusted the law to be shared with and obeyed by the Israelites. Moses was a reluctant leader whose success could readily be attributed to his willingness to seek, rely, and trust in God. In similar fashion though acceptance of a call may still be something met with hesitation by many modern-day leaders. Once accepted it should always be faced with a strong willingness to like Moses to seek, rely, and trust in God. While the call on Joshua's life was the same call to lead the Children of Israel the circumstances through which he would be leading them would be very different than under Moses' tenure and therefore while they still needed a strong leader, they did not need the same kind of leader. It is the responsibility of a successor to honor their predecessor and their accomplishments while at the same time honoring the uniqueness of who they are and the gifts

they have that God is trusting them to use to fulfill the call on their lives. Joshua's call to lead the people of Israel into the Promise Land would require that they had to cross the Jordan in a move eerily reminiscent of the Red Sea, but once in the Promise Land Joshua led the people in both strategy and battle as they sought to possess the land. The new leader Joshua knew he must seek, rely on, and trust in God because of the example that Moses had set for him.

God's approval of Joshua is declared in Numbers 14:30 after Joshua and Caleb prove themselves to be faithful and obedient to the word of God in the face of opposition after they spied out the Promise Land. While the Bible speaks of Joshua as a great and mighty warrior God declares in Numbers 22:18 that the spirit is in him a reference I believe is connected to his proven faithfulness to God more than his military prowess. "While his ability as a warrior was undoubtedly important for the role he would fulfill in bringing the Israelites into the Promised Land, it is not this ability, but rather his faith and vision, which brought God's declaration of approval."<sup>29</sup> Joshua distinguishes himself as a faithful, optimistic, warrior who can be trusted to follow God's leading even in the face of uncertainty. Through Joshua we get a glimpse at an unwavering leader who is willing to seek God and then face any opposition as long as he has the reassurance that God is with him. This steadfastness is a reminder to all new church leaders that regardless of how daunting the obstacles may be, they should continue to press forward once they have sought God and have been able to discern that it is the will of God for them

Following the selection of Joshua, the transfer of power takes place in two parallel texts—Numbers 27:18–23 and Deuteronomy 31: 7–8, 14, 15 and 23. In both accounts, the transfer of power takes place in front of the people of Israel. In the Numbers account, God instructs Moses to lay his hands on Joshua and to have him stand before the priest Eleazar and all

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<sup>29</sup> Fountain, A. Kay, 190.

of Israel. God tells Moses that he is to give Joshua some of his authority so that the people of Israel will obey him. These instructions from God highlight the importance of a successor having the support of their predecessor and this support being something that is clear and obvious to the congregation. This helps as a means of assisting in a smooth transfer of power. The instructions for Joshua to stand before Eleazar the priest establishes a clear model from God for what Joshua is to do in the future before making decisions or taking action: that is, to seek God's will.

Deuteronomy recounts a private meeting that takes place between God, Moses, and Joshua in which the Lord appeared and spoke to Moses and revealed that after Moses' death the Israelites would again rebel against the Lord and as a result face trouble and hardship. This is an interesting point that highlights that the congregational temperament is also a vital part of evaluating a transition. In this example it is clear that both Moses and Joshua are God's selections and that the transition is taking place according to God's timing. Nonetheless, they learn that the long-term behavior of the people will ultimately be rebellion against God. Joshua is widely accepted by the people as Moses' successor, and because they witnessed the transfer of power, the people were ready to accept and follow Joshua as their leader. However, Fountain also points out that the people's willingness to follow him was probably partly attributable to his previous success as a warrior (see Exodus 17: 8–14).<sup>30</sup> "The people's choice is based, not upon authority, but upon the leader's perceived capacity to serve a need."<sup>31</sup>

The final element of evaluating a leadership transition as presented by Fountain is the relationship between predecessor and successor. Joshua served Moses for forty years in the wilderness, humbling himself to serve as Moses' personal attendant.<sup>32</sup> Prior to the succession,

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<sup>30</sup> Fountain, *"An investigation into successful leadership transitions in the Old Testament."*, 191.

<sup>31</sup> Kouzes, James M. and Barry Z. Posner. *Credibility: How Leaders Gain and Lose It, Why People Demand It*. Jossey-Bass, 1993, 9.

<sup>32</sup> Maxwell, John C. *Deuteronomy, Communicator's Commentary*. Word Books, 1987, 56.

Moses chose Joshua to be one of the spies to go into the Promise Land and in the face of naysayers chose to believe Joshua and Caleb's report about the Israelites' ability to possess the land. I believe that these two occurrences speak to a rapport of trust and respect that was already in place between Moses and Joshua. The words of strength and affirmation that Moses speaks to Joshua—

“Be strong and bold, for you are the one who will go with this people into the land that the Lord has sworn to their ancestors to give them; and you will put them in possession of it. It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not fail you or forsake you Do not fear or be dismayed”

—are representative of what a good leadership “hand off” looks like and can be a good reminder to us all.

### **Section VII: It's so hard to say goodbye**

There is often so much focus on how a pastoral transition will affect a church and how the incoming pastor will adapt to and learn the culture of the church that thoughts of the outgoing pastor quickly fade once the baton has been passed. In *Next: Pastoral Succession that Works* by William Vanderbloemen and Warren Bird, they posit that the three essential questions for setting the tone for a successful pastoral succession are: "What is succession success? What captures my passion? How are my finances?"<sup>33</sup> Each of these is a crucial question, but I believe another vital one that is often overlooked is, “What does self-care look like for me in this season?”

While Vanderbloemen and Bird define the success of succession based on the continued success and growth of the church, I believe another measurement could be the continued growth/health of the outgoing pastor. There is a level of irony connected to the fact that the

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<sup>33</sup> Vanderbloemen, William. *Next: Pastoral Succession That Works*. Baker Book House, 2015, 60.

influence of the previous pastor can be used to explain why an incoming pastor is not readily received or struggles to implement new vision, but at the same time in many contexts can be treated as if they no longer matter once they have left a church. I believe that a key part in a congregation embracing a new pastor and committing to supporting that pastor is connected to then knowing that the previous pastor whom they have loved and been ministered to for years is doing well past transition. Therefore, I believe that Vanderbloemen and Bird's second and third questions paired with my question regarding self-care may be vital in giving a congregation the reassurance they need that the shepherd who once cared for their flock is doing well and therefore it is okay for them to lend their support to the new senior pastor.

How to do this? One can begin by asking the outgoing pastor about their plans and engage with their responses. "What captures my passion?"<sup>34</sup> This is the question that every retiring pastor should ask themselves as they are preparing to retire. Will they move on to another career? Will they travel the world? Will they write books? Will they become a ministry consultant? Do they have a plan? Pastoring is the kind of vocation that can consume all areas of one's life. It is the kind of vocation in which long time members can become best friends with the pastor through the years, where the chair of the Deacon board can end up being the godmother of the pastor's children, where your mechanic can be one of your favorite ushers, and your dentist sit in the same row every Sunday for worship. And then one day a pastor retires and must figure out how to renegotiate so many aspects of their life. Knowing what's next and what feeds their passion will help them to have a sense of identity after the pastorate. For the congregant, helping them process that and even just inquiring about it can ease some of the anxiety that can be attached to a pastoral transition. "Too often pastors stay at a church not

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<sup>34</sup> Vanderbloemen, William. *Next*, 60.

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. "35

### **Section VIII: Recommendations for a Successful & Healthy Pastoral Transition**

A healthy pastoral transition is one that enables a church to move forward into the next phase of its external and internal development with a new leader appropriate to those developmental tasks, and with a minimum of spiritual, programmatic, material, and people losses during the transition. The focus should be on preserving spiritual, programmatic, material, and people resources as much as possible during the transition.<sup>36</sup>

The following recommendations are made with the intention of developing a framework that will allow a church to maintain spiritual, programmatic, material and human resources throughout a pastoral transition. I submit these recommendations from the outset knowing that this model does require a church to have the financial means to sustain both the outgoing pastor and the incoming pastor for a period of twelve months prior to the official handoff. There are financial constraints that limit what some churches are able to do and then another unfortunate element is that because some of the following recommendations are connected to the overall idea of total wellness many churches will not see them as necessary or important. Twenty-four months prior to the senior pastor's departure she/he should be partnered with a financial advisor, a life coach, and a therapist if they do not already have one. As the outgoing pastor begins to look towards the door, it's time to determine their financial situation. Hopefully this isn't their

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35 Vanderbloemen, William. *Next*, 64.

36 Weese, Carolyn, and J. Russell. Crabtree. *The Elephant in the Boardroom Speaking the Unspoken about Pastoral Transitions*. Wiley, 2012, 41.

first time assessing their financial needs and thinking about their fiscal health, but if so, working with a good financial planner will hopefully begin to get them on the right track for the future.

In their interviews, both Pastor Trufant and Dr. Stewart took time to note that many pastoral transitions take place later than they should because senior pastors cannot afford to leave the pastorate: they have not made the financial plans necessary to allow them to retire comfortably as they age. This means that one of the key aspects of any transition plan should be to make sure that the outgoing pastor's financial situation is intact or at least on its way to being stable so that they can thrive as they transition away from the pastorate.

The idea of partnering the outgoing pastor with a financial planner to help them solidify their finances, and with a life coach to help them transition to retirement or their next job or stage of life, may be one that the church finds outside their responsibilities. Yet I believe such partnering is a good way to show care to someone who has been an important part of the congregation's life. With a life coach, the goal of this partnership is to help an outgoing pastor identify their (new) life passions. What will they do next? What brings them joy? What opportunities are out there for them? What are they passionate about? For many pastors their sense of identity is so caught up within the church that a life coach can help them to begin to establish their identity separate from the ministry of which they have been a part for so many years. In the book *the Emotionally Healthy Leader*, Peter Scazzero writes: "when meeting someone for the first time we usually ask, 'What do you do?' We ask because, in our time and culture, identity is defined in large part by occupation or job title."<sup>37</sup> But, how dangerous is it when our identities become so wrapped up in what we do for a living that we can hardly separate

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<sup>37</sup> Scazzero, Peter. *The Emotionally Healthy Leader: How Transforming Your Inner Life Will Deeply Transform Your Church, Team, and the World*. Zondervan, 2015, 154.

what we do from who we are. Now certainly as pastors many of us would say our calls and our vocations are an integral part of who we are as people. But each of us still has value to Christ outside of the work that we do. The idea of partnering the outgoing pastor with a therapist is one that simply seeks to encourage wholeness, far too often pastors serve as wounded healer's bleeding while bandaging other people's wounds. Part of the goal in this effort is to help the outgoing pastor have a safe and confidential space to process their feelings of grief, sadness, fear, excitement, or whatever else they may be experiencing.

This twenty-four-month mark prior to the outgoing pastor's retirement date is also an ideal time to move forward with the search process/decision to select the successor. Twelve months prior to the senior pastor's departure, the chosen successor should walk, serve, and shadow alongside the current senior pastor as a way to learn the church firsthand and to be exposed to all aspects of the church through the lens of the senior pastor.<sup>38</sup> This time also gives the incoming pastor the opportunity to learn a lot while being an active observer, but prior to being in the proverbial driver's seat. This is a great season to model the mentoring that took place between Moses and Joshua, such as how to handle conflict and manage morale. It gives the incoming pastor an opportunity to watch how their predecessor interacts with leaders, handles crises, manages business meetings, and cares for the church.

At the same time, Tom Mullins author of *Passing the Leadership Baton* says that this is also a good season for a successor to prepare for a different leadership role by having the opportunity to preside over worship services, lead staff and board meetings, learn how to manage

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<sup>38</sup> Vanderbloemen, William. *Next, 102.*; Ozier, Jim and Jim Griffith. *The Changeover Zone: Successful Pastoral Transitions*. Abingdon Press, 2016, 67. ; Mullins, Tom. *Passing the Leadership Baton: A Winning Transition Plan for Your Ministry*. Thomas Nelson, 2015, 93. Each of these books speak to the benefits of some varying time frame of an overlap between the outgoing and incoming pastor.

finances, and meet key leaders.<sup>39</sup> During this transition period where the incoming pastor is walking with the outgoing pastor and perhaps carrying a temporary title, there should be intentional and scheduled self-care time placed on their calendar, so that she/he can be groomed to develop healthy self-care practices. My recommendations are a physical trainer three times a week, a therapist once a week, a sabbath day, vacation days, doctors appointments. Additionally, I believe the church should connect them with a financial advisor at the beginning of their tenure to help them to start making good fiscal decisions. During my interview with Dr. Stewart she remarked that the church is not critical of pastors' lack of self-care and that this seems to indicate they are willing to allow us to kill ourselves rather than risk intervening. While this may be true based on what happens in praxis, I do not believe that this represents the heart of most congregations who genuinely love their pastors.

Another key element to a successful pastoral tradition is the ability to honor what has been while simultaneously supporting and being excited about what is to come. This is the season where the outgoing pastor should be praying for their successor and preparing the congregation. These are two of the best gifts a predecessor can give their successor. "Leaders are lifters of others, so you should always look for ways to honor your successor, both publicly and privately."<sup>40</sup> The outgoing sets the tone for how the congregation will grieve, receive the new pastor, and be open to cultural shifts therefore the ownness is on the outgoing pastor to demonstrate to the congregation that the new pastor is the pathway forward for the church. Once

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<sup>39</sup> Mullins, Tom. *Passing the Leadership Baton: A Winning Transition Plan for Your Ministry*. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson), 2015, 93-99.

<sup>40</sup> Mullins, Tom. *Passing the Leadership Baton: A Winning Transition Plan for Your Ministry*. Thomas Nelson, 2015, 141.

the transition takes place and the baton has been passed the new pastor now has the same opportunity to both honor their predecessor and to pray for them on an ongoing basis.

Once a new senior pastor takes on their new assignment the goal should always be to honor the legacy of the previous pastor while continuing to build for the future. Every new pastor has to be willing to take the time to get to know their congregation even if they've already been there for a year. "Churches that do well in transition focus on doing ministry. They focus primarily on the five things the church does: worship, fellowship, spiritual care and nurture, education, and outreach, and service."<sup>41</sup> Therefore, it is crucial that the new pastor establish a vision for the church that allows the church to focus on these five areas and specifically allows the pastor to interact with the congregation as much as possible so they can learn her/his heart. During this time it is important for the pastor to preach and teach the church in the direction she/he wants to see it go. At the beginning of a new pastor's tenure the primary goal should be to develop relationships and to learn the lay on the proverbial land. They should be cautious to always remember that the church belongs to God and therefore they should keep a constant line of communication going with God via prayer and personal devotion time. The smartest thing a smart person can admit is that they don't know everything, so all new pastors should be willing to share "leadership with knowledgeable people who can cover the new pastor's weaknesses and make the work of ministry happen."<sup>42</sup> At the end of the transition success will be the end result when it is the goal of both pastor and people to demonstrate the love of Christ to one another and share the message of that same redeeming Savior with those who have yet to meet Him and accept Him for themselves.

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<sup>41</sup> Watkins, Ralph C. *Leading Your African American Church through Pastoral Transition*. Judson Press, 2010, 11.

<sup>42</sup> Watkins, Ralph C. *Leading Your African American Church*, 28.

Transitions can be traumatizing! However, I believe they can also be a beautiful process for all involved when handled carefully taking into account the many variables of impact. When this model of succession planning is followed there is a boost in morale throughout the congregation rooted in the peace of knowing that the outgoing pastor is secure and preparing to follow new life passions, the financial security of consistent giving by members who have continued to be present throughout the transition and the hope that the new pastor is equipped with the vision and enthusiasm to guide them into the future. However, the theological implications of following this succession model is that God is honored and gets the glory along each stage. Through this succession model commitment to the well being of the “other” is constantly held in tension and no one is discarded or overlooked as nominal or devoid of value once their usefulness or tenure has expired. Likewise in the economy of God we are all evaluated by the way we treat and value one another, particularly those thought to be of little use to us progressing forward. Though Moses was never allowed to step foot in the Promise Land his leadership introduced the Children of Israel to a place that they would progress forward into not with him or even because of him, but rather because of the seeds he planted that were later watered by Joshua. Healthy church transitions are similar to gardening; in some instances a gardener plants and waters seeds that they will never see grow and that will be harvested by another gardener and yet each stage, each gardener, the soil and the seeds are each essential to the process.

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