

SURFACE TO SOUL

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Tips for Conducting Exit Interviews

WHAT IS AN EXIT INTERVIEW

An exit Interview is a private conversation between the pastor and key leaders of the church who are responsible for leading the church after the pastor departs. It's a time for deep listening by the church; not a time to respond to comments or defend past actions. It is a time for the congregation to learn from the past and to explore ways for the congregation to be healthy and strong.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR PASTOR/PAID STAFF

- When you accepted this position here, what were the compelling reasons for your decision to come here?
- During your time here, did you find what you expected? What surprised you? What concerned you?
- In what ways has the church changed during your tenure here?
- What gives you the greatest sense of fulfillment? With do you see as your legacy here? Which goals weren't realized?
- What did you learn from your experience here? Is there anything you would have done differently?
- What does this church do well? What might it build upon?
- What are this church's most pressing challenges? What does it need to START doing? STOP doing?
- What needs to happen before we call another person to fill your position?
- How will you interact with this congregation once you leave?
- What can we do to help you and your family make the transition to a new call or a new chapter in life?

STEPS FOR INTERVIEWING PAST MEMBERS

1. Form a small team of lay leaders to contact past members. Ideally, select volunteers who are not currently serving in other leadership roles at the church. Select people who are good listeners and will not get defensive if they hear negative comments about their church.
1. Assemble a list of those who have become inactive or have left the church. Contact these past members personally. Let them know they're missed. Ask if they'd be willing to share reasons for why they left or have chosen to become less active. Assure them your purpose is simply to listen, not to coerce them to return. You simply want to know how the church might improve its impact and ministries.
2. Set up a time, about an hour, to meet personally on neutral ground, such as a restaurant or coffee shop. Do not attempt to collect information through written surveys or over the phone. Meet face to face.
3. When you meet, reiterate you're there to listen. Ask for their honesty and candor. Say something like, "I know you haven't been around for some time and I'd like to learn more about what may have led to your absence or departure. It may help us avoid problems and hurt in the future."
4. Take notes, informing interviewees that you will pass along information to appropriate parties, with their permission.
5. At the end of the interview, thank the interviewees and extend a heartfelt apology if the church did not measure up to their expectations. This isn't admitting guilt. It's simply offering remorse and compassion for how they feel.
6. Compile the results of the interviews. Look for any common threads. Prepare a report for church leaders who have the responsibility to make your ministry as strong and effective as it can be. Be sensitive about handling accounts of individuals who were named by interviewees. That information should be shared directly with the named individuals and/or their immediate supervisors.
7. Consider the results and take appropriate action to improve your ministry



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