



WHAT DOES GOD WANT US TO DO? **CREATIVE STRATEGIES**

Over the last four weeks, we have looked at the shortage of Free Will Baptist pastors. The 124 churches currently without pastors are "[Everyone's Problem](#)." We have challenged our people to pray for more laborers. We have looked at how this crisis is exacerbated when pastors and congregants [look for greener grass](#) rather than serving where they are. We stressed the need for more men willing to [serve as bi-vocational pastors](#). Last week, we looked at how [better pastoral transitions](#) can reduce pastoral attrition and increase church health.

Yet, as a wave of pastoral retirements approach, [the pastoral crisis will be with us for some time](#). This multifaceted problem requires multifaceted solutions. One size will not fit each church situation. I encourage all of us to examine where we are and ask, "What does God want us to do?" Throughout Scripture, God promised to give us wisdom when we ask for it and believe He will help (James 1:2-8). As we seek His wisdom, we must seek and do His will rather than our own (Matthew 5:10). With that in mind, here are some questions to consider:

***If you are one of the 124 churches (or will be part of that group in the future), what options are before you?
What creative solutions are you willing to consider?***

If you have been a church with a full-time pastor, are you willing to consider a bi-vocational option?

Are you willing to partner with another church by sharing pastors or utilizing a "circuit riding" option?

Are you willing to restart and replant your church?

If you have another church in your vicinity, would you consider joining with that church to have a greater impact on your community?

Is it time to close your church?

When these strategies are mentioned to church leaders, they often react with an immediate dismissal or unwillingness to consider the options. Before you immediately reject these ideas, I encourage you to spend a considerable amount of time praying for God's guidance. When I read about David's early leadership as king, I am struck by how often he "inquired of the Lord." Some examples are found in 1 Samuel 23:2, 4, 11-12; 30:8; 2 Samuel 2:1; 5:19, 23; 21:1; and 1 Chronicles 14:10, 14. Sometimes, the answer seemed obvious, but David prayed anyway. On the other hand, consider how costly it was for him and the kingdom when he acted without praying first (1 Chronicles 21). So, I ask that you pray about some creative approaches as we deal with this ongoing problem.

Sharing Pastors

We can learn much from our past. At one time in our history, many churches shared pastors. This can be an option again today. Doing so would be difficult and would require the congregations to work together on service times and other issues to meet the varying needs. This truly would be an enactment of Philippians 2, but churches in close proximity could pool resources to pay a pastor an adequate salary. Larger churches might lend a pastor. Churches may benefit from utilizing resources such as [**GRACE Outreach**](#) developed by Dr. Bruce Barnes and Virginia Free Will Baptists.

Restart and Replant

In some cases, the demographic makeup of church neighborhoods has shifted. I do not believe the location of a church is an accident. Perhaps God is calling your church to replant itself to reach your community. I encourage you to contact [**North American Ministries**](#) and discuss your situation. What would it hurt to talk about your issue (Proverbs 11:14)?

Join Another Congregation

One can't help but think about merging churches to better utilize resources and have greater impact on communities. Dr. Danny Dwyer often says, "Merging churches is an idea whose time has come." [**Watch his webinar**](#) on merging churches for more information. Much is being written about church mergers today. No doubt that each merger will be difficult, and I suspect the successful joining of two (or more) congregations will not occur without the guidance and grace of the Lord, which is a good reason to consider them (Matthew 19:26).

The process of merging is fraught with land mines, so consider two 9Marks articles:

[**How to Merge Two Church Cultures**](#)

[**What I Learned From Two Failed Church Mergers**](#)

From a distance, merging churches makes great sense, but up close, it appears much more difficult. This is described in Tomberlin and Bird's [**Better Together: Making Church Mergers Work**](#) (2012).

Though difficult, merging churches is an area the denomination needs to explore.

Close

Finally, some churches will close. Sadly, this is happening far too often. Yet, even when closing, a church still has choices. First, it is wrong for the remaining members to use the proceeds of the church for personal benefit. If God said people who fail to give tithes rob God (Malachi 3:8-11), what does He think about those who use tithes for personal benefit? It is also illegal, since those who contributed to the church received tax deductions for their contributions.

Fortunately, most churches give the proceeds from the closure to other ministries, as required by law. See David Brown's Better Together Podcast "[Closing a Church the Right Way](#)".

I encourage every church that must close to consider putting the proceeds into endowments for ministries. With an endowment, the principal cannot be spent, but the interest earned on the endowment is given to a specified ministry until the Lord returns. In these situations, I encourage churches to establish long-term endowments to benefit multiple ministries, especially giving to the work of helping other struggling churches. I believe if we contribute resources to struggling churches, they will become a clear priority to us, and we will see results.

Pray and Act

Whatever the state of your church today, it is important to pray and act rather than to wait for challenges. A plateaued church would benefit from [Refresh](#) and coaching resources. A church in decline would benefit from [Rekindle](#). Some churches would benefit from restarting and replanting and others from merging. The weaker a church becomes, the more its options diminish.

The Bible tells us isolation is not good, and there is success in a multitude of counselors. Reach out to your state leaders. Speak to North American Ministries, and of course, the Executive Office would love to help you as well. We can't fix your situation, but we will do our best to help you or to direct you to someone who can.

I have never worked as a "circuit-riding" pastor or participated in a church merger. We are in uncharted territory. Yet, I sense God pulling us in new directions. So, as we are all concerned and uneasy about what we face, let us pray.

Pray for the discipleship process so that churches may be healthier and more effective, spawning more men to go into the ministry rather than being repelled from it.

Pray for God's will for our churches, not our own interests or desires. Let God's will be done in each and every one of our churches.

I don't know what the outcome will be, but I do know that if we pray and act upon God's will, we will be okay, whatever comes.

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