

Pastor Redeployment

By Bruce Dingman

"What's left for me to do? My church has been in decline for several years. Other plum assignments in my denomination are going to younger ministers. Where do experienced ministers go when they still have a passion to serve?"

A well-worn saying in church growth circles holds that a senior pastor will typically attract only those within ten years of his or her age. The wisdom goes (although it may be incorrect), younger families will not be as easily attracted to a church with an older senior pastor, and the church will move into decline. So where can all one's experience, training, passion and ability make a major difference? With an entire generation of baby boomer pastors turning 65 in record numbers, what can be done? Don't despair...the Lord has just the right place for you. Here are several options.

When the founding pastor of my church, [Calvary Community](#), retired as senior pastor, he started a new [ministry](#) to take what he had learned at Calvary to the Church at large. Another recently retired founding pastor who'd done numerous missions trips over the years found a niche in making several trips a year to India to train national pastors. Both pastors had members of their former church who believed in them and became supporters. These pastors felt very fulfilled in their new roles, knowing the experience and giftedness the Lord gave them was being used in a significant, deeply impacting way.

Another idea, particularly if the pastor and spouse have good health, enjoy mission trips (or even have been a missionary or an MK) and have a sense of adventure, is to become the pastor of an international church. Whether it be some place like San Jose, Amsterdam or Islamabad, if one feels called of God to the church and city that's all that matters.



Pastor & Mrs. Bloemberg and
Bruce in Hanoi

I have lived in several countries as a businessman and been a member of an international church (Sao Paulo and Panama City). As a search consultant serving Christian organizations, I have occasionally assisted some international churches with their senior pastor searches (Amsterdam, The Hague, Warsaw). What started as a hobby has now become a purposeful effort and God has given me the privilege of assisting another dozen churches. I can tell you from experience, this is a unique and rewarding opportunity for pastoral ministry.

Some international churches are large enough to pay a reasonable salary and often have other paid professional staff as well. Smaller churches of 50 people may only offer a small salary although they would love to pay more as the church grows. The opportunities vary.

Where do such pastors come from? Commonly from the U.S. and Canada, but also from Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Great Britain. They may have been a senior pastor, executive pastor or missions pastor, or a missionary or NGO leader now moving into the pastorate of an international church. I recall the former president of a missions organization based in Washington state who took on the pastorate of a church in Cairo. And there was the Associate Pastor of a community church near Sacramento who took on the mantle of a church near Amsterdam.



This building houses 52 international congregations in Abu Dhabi

What makes international churches unique? One, they are non-denominational and acknowledge that some members may believe or practice their faith differently than others (i.e., water baptism versus sprinkling). While teaching and preaching the Gospel, they tend to avoid theological differences that might divide but rather concentrate on the major points of salvation and the integration of Christ into their lives. In a fragmented North American religious scene, international churches provide a unique opportunity to focus on the unity of essential gospel truth.

Second, the congregation will likely be primarily international expatriates (corporate management types or NGO leaders and missionaries) and English-speaking nationals. This presents a few unique challenges. A fair number of expats leave after a few years, so transition within the congregation is an ongoing factor. During school vacation periods and holidays many families will travel to their home country so at times there is a big (but temporary) drop in church attendance. Expat believers usually have a home church somewhere else and many still tithe there, so they may not be principally tithing to this international church.

Some countries restrict international churches to only allow involvement of holders of foreign passports and may not allow the church to proselytize nationals. Yet the Christian expats yearn for a place for fellowship and worship. International churches can provide a wonderful feeling of community that may not be available anywhere else in that city. Relationships become deep and heartfelt. New growth in



attendance is likely to come via getting to know the friends of present attenders or involvement with an international school if local, a country club or the American Chamber of Commerce. The feeling of being a “big fish in a little pond” is common and even feels quite good in a positive way. You can make a big difference in a smaller, but strategic place.

Preaching isn’t typically the most important aspect, but one must be quite pastoral and hands on. There may be little or no paid staff. The elder board may or may not be strong, so this person needs to be wise in making good strategic and tactical decisions. Having a participative, collegial style, and developing buy-in is important.

This is an ideal situation for someone who’s been a missionary and loves being in the field and working in another culture. Being a seminary or Bible college graduate with the ability to preach, might find this very fulfilling.

Both the pastor and the spouse need to feel the Lord’s calling to the location and the ministry. Only one having a sense of adventure is not sufficient. When making the decision if the spouse senses a lack of comfort in the situation, it will likely intensify and probably become problematic. Both need to feel called and ready for the challenge.

The Lord has given experience and gifting that He wants to be well used. If one is sensing that God may be calling a pastor to a new season of service is the person open to leaving a comfortable place to be redeployed?

I help redeploy pastors to strategic positions of service around the world. Anyone who wants to chat is welcome to call me.