

Pastoral tasks and congregational needs across the church life cycle

Similarly to church size, a congregation's life stage directly impacts the competencies needed in a pastoral leader. Awareness of life stage is important for finding a good-fit minister and for understanding how quickly hoped-for shifts are likely to occur. Below are descriptions of the stages all congregations move through.

- **Establishing stage: the new church starts**
 - The minister's primary tasks are vision-casting and creating a sense of connectedness among participants. The minister's biggest challenge is taking the long view.
 - The congregants' biggest growing edges are learning how to articulate shared beliefs and how to become lay leaders.
 - At this stage, the minister's charisma is the glue. There's also an urgent need to grow for the church start to be viable.
- **Formation/formatting stage: the church moves toward stability**
 - The minister's primary tasks are establishing processes and structures that will lead to and accommodate growth, fostering a sense of corporate identity, and creating ministries that embody the vision. The minister's biggest challenges are the temptation to water down the vision to keep everyone happy and the increasing demands on time for equipping members for ministry.
 - The congregants' biggest growing edge is learning how to become lay leaders.
 - This is the stage at which a church's DNA is formed.
- **Adolescence stage: programs proliferate**
 - The minister's primary tasks are focusing congregational energy on programs and discerning whether to stay or go due to the change in needed competencies. The minister's biggest challenges are the temptation to water down vision to keep everyone happy and avoiding burnout due to the fast spread of programs.
 - The congregants' biggest growing edges are the accurate assessment of current programs and the formation of new Christians.
 - At this stage more services may be needed for (or expected by) members.
- **Prime stage: the church hits its stride**
 - The minister's primary tasks are teaching church how to do conflict well, helping members stay connected, and continually communicating the vision. The minister's biggest challenges are navigating the conflicts that pop up around being a settled church and dealing with complacency around vision.
 - The congregants' biggest growing edge is learning to innovate.
- **Maturity: the status quo develops**
 - The minister's primary tasks are leading the congregation in (honestly) celebrating its heritage and facilitating conversations about what and how

the church does ministry. The minister's biggest challenge is fighting the church's tendency to focus inward.

- The congregants' biggest growing edge is creating formation opportunities for newer members and the larger community.
- Aristocracy: an appreciation of professionalism and "the way we've always done it" guide ministry
 - The minister's primary tasks are restoring vitality in the congregation and leading re-visioning. The minister's biggest challenge is urging change in the face of the church's comfort.
 - The congregants' biggest growing edge is becoming willing to adjust.
- Bureaucracy: structure and anxiety keep the church stagnant
 - The minister's primary tasks are managing anxious and controlling members and leveraging the resources in the congregation well. The minister's biggest challenge is helping members separate personal from corporate anxiety.
 - The congregants' biggest growing edge is focusing on the members most willing and able to change.
 - Congregations at this stage need a pastor with lowered expectations of the short term who is able to stay long enough to see slow changes through.
- Dissolution: the church closes
 - The minister's primary task is to help the church die with dignity. The minister's biggest challenge is the commitment of members to keeping the church open.

[Information summarized from chapter 4 of *The Hidden Lives of Congregations: Discerning Church Dynamics*, written by Israel Galindo and published by Rowman & Littlefield in 2011.]