

Timing: Discerning the Right Time to Retire from Pastoral Ministry

Thank you for participating today. If this is your sixth webinar in this series congratulations! If this is your first session welcome! For some of you, and for Foursquare in general, our topic today may be the most important. We have addressed becoming prepared in five areas: spiritual, mental/emotional, social, physical, and financial. Today we tackle timing.

The purpose of these webinars is to: *Equip ministers to be spiritually faithful, emotionally healthy, socially connected, physically strong, financially free, and to transition on time.* What we mean by “retirement” is being “Free to serve without needing money, roles or an organizational platform”.

We are Ann and Jared Roth, Foursquare planters and pastors for 47 years. We retired three years ago from Evergreen Christian Center in Hillsboro. We were asked by our supervisor to lead the church for “not more than three years”. We stayed 13 years! Your context is different. What lead pastors share is the awkward dance between our polity that gives the responsibility to make pastoral changes with the district supervisor, and our culture that defers to the lead pastor to determine when she should leave. You may have noticed that the district and the pastor are not always on the same page.

My passion for timely transitions was fueled several years ago. I fired an 84-year-old pastor. Under his leadership the church grew to over 4000 in the 1950s when that was very rare. He continued to lead until he was 84 years of age and the church, still meeting in a building that had served 4000, numbered 120. Due to my denominational role, it was my unpleasant job to visit the congregation, remove him as pastor after 50 years, and introduce the new pastor. None of us want to end that way.

We do not have a perfect template but maybe some of our story will offer a model that helps you or others.

Our focus today is: Timing: Discerning the right time to step away from formal pastoral ministry.

Our purpose today is to help pastors prayerfully consider discernment markers for retirement, not provide prescriptive answers. The Spirit leads uniquely in each story.

In our story we focused on three questions:

The word of the Lord – When does it seem right to God?
The wisdom of the Lord – When does it seem right for the church?
The peace of the Lord - When does it seem right for me?

Responses from Foursquare leaders about “Retirement”:

I still have fire in my tank. I still have vision. My gifts and calling have not changed. I love what I’m doing! I am still effective. No one is asking me to go. I don’t know what I would do.

I'm not financially prepared. The church isn't ready. I haven't found my successor. Notice the point-of-view of most of these questions – ME!

First, the word of the Lord – discerning what Jesus' timeline for you to transition is by listening to Him early and often. then inviting trusted people to confirm, modify or challenge what you think you heard.

Second, the wisdom of the Lord - Signs & Markers for the church: Readiness.

- Take note of generational and diversity trends in attendance. We wanted to leave with a healthy generational diversity with plenty of kids and youth!
- Contextual connection and vision we carried for the church that would be better with younger and Latino leaders.
- Identify current leadership needs of the church –our story of delayed time-frame with COVID. Readiness was challenged in two ways: Covid requirements and the leaders' circumstances we had brought on staff to replace us (with the district's approval:-) (their readiness)
- John 10:11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. Laying down your life can mean staying longer or it can mean leaving before you expected to because the readiness factors were not in place yet.

Third, the peace of the Lord - Signs & Markers for us that carried the Lord's peace with them.

- Physical/Emotional health
- Energy for ministry demands
- Congregational needs vs. pastoral capacity
- Wisdom of trusted peers/family

Transitions in Scripture: Examples of leadership handoffs (Moses/Joshua, Paul/Timothy). Faithful Retirement - Not an "ending" but a shift into new forms of service, mentoring, or rest.

Personal Reflection (5 minutes):

- What word or phrase stood out from the presentation?
- How do I feel when I hear the word "timing"?
- Where do I sense resistance—or eagerness from myself—around this idea?

Now for the best part of our session – conversation. These questions are asked from the point-of-view of planning toward retirement. If you already made that transition, restate the question in the past tense and address your experience in this area. Pace yourselves so everyone can contribute. A countdown will let you know we're going to reconvene in this large group. Consider being prepared to share an insight directly related to these questions. See you on the other side of some great discussion.

Discussion Questions:

1. Inner Discernment: How do you discern whether God is inviting you to continue—or release—this role?
2. Congregational Needs: How have you seen your church's needs evolve? What do they need in the next decade?
3. Legacy and Transition: When you step aside, what would a faithful and fruitful transition look like to you?

What is one takeaway or next step God may be prompting you to consider? We encourage you to continue conversation with mentors, spouses, spiritual directors, or denominational leaders.

Resources: The Development Lattice on the NWD website recommends high-value resources. In the "Future Planning" section you will find several featured suggestions. A link at the end of that sampler list is a document with 50 resources curated specifically for these webinars.

Edited versions of these six webinars and the script for each session will be available????

As leaders we want to start with the end in mind.

Ann: My 100th Birthday.

At my 100th birthday party, there will be lots of laughter and joy! My husband and I will be holding hands, surrounded by family and some of our younger friends.

Jared will recall how we met in the 8th grade, how we became best friends and the 88 years we have known each other and the 77 years we have been married. He will, with great economy of words, say more than I ever could about how he cherishes me and reflections on our journey together. He will say that I taught him how to play and have fun, and how much I loved and cared for him.

My kids will be smiling as they share the joy and optimism, I live life with and the generosity that marks my life. They will share how loving God and loving people—especially family, was at the forefront of my life and will recall the things I did to share the love of Jesus with others and care for them, my mom and others. They will reminisce about the trips we took to visit pastors and their families but how we always made it an adventure for them too, visiting the sights along the way, and staying in hotels with swimming pools.

They will recall the many family adventures we had, the beach walks and bonfires with smores and hot dogs, the visits to the Roth family farm growing up, the Sunriver weeks, the games we played and the trash talking we did as we played them, and the wonderful meals we shared in our home, especially my homemade rolls. They will laugh about the roll bowl and insist I left out an ingredient when I shared the recipe with them. They will debate who gets the bowl when I am gone.

My grandkids and their kids will be chiming in, with laughter as they recall our grands camps each summer and they will laugh about the hike that led to nowhere our first year

out. They will recall how happy I always was to see them, the stories I told them that I made up on the spot when they were little, and my prayers for them and over them. They will remember how I celebrated them and others and cheered them on in their achievements and their milestones! They will laugh at all the confetti that flew and the mess I made but thought was worth it!

They will joke about how much Grammy would write in their birthday cards and how it became an expectation that the back of the card would always have writing about them on it too! They will recall my Wonder Woman moniker and the time they bought me one of her costumes but did not realize it was lingerie. They will have coffee almond fudge ice cream for me and my grandson will give me the biggest bag of sour cream cheddar chips he can find—our shared guilty pleasure!

My friends will laugh as they recall my determination in approaching my responsibilities or goals and how I do not give up...especially on people who still need to know Jesus. “Ann can and will,” my campaign slogan from running for student body office will probably come up in that recollection. They will recall the meals I made for them, the texts and calls to encourage them, and how I stuck with them through the tough times and the fun times. They will recall how I cheer them on and am generous with my time and treasure with them and others. They will be laughing about my energizer bunny pace of life and share stories of that and how I learned to slow down and enjoy the wonder in God’s big world. They will remember all the times confetti or poppers were a part of celebrating them. They will know they are loved!

At some point in the party, I will express gratitude for each of the guests, saying something specific about each one and give thanks to them and Jesus for the richness they have and do add to my life. Cue the confetti cannons and the balloon drop!

Closing prayer for wisdom, courage, and peace in discernment.