

# Congregations in Transition: Three Scenarios

by Pr. Don Brandt, Congregations in Transition Organizer and Former CORE Board Member

## Three Scenarios

Perhaps one of these three scenarios applies to you or your congregation.

1. You are a Boomer pastor approaching retirement. Like literally hundreds—if not thousands—of Lutheran pastors, retirement is looking pretty enticing. You’ve faithfully served as a pastor for thirty or forty years, and it’s time. And when you begin to waver about this your spouse confirms what you know, in your heart, to be true, and says, “Honey it *is* time.” But you’re concerned about what the future might hold for your congregation. Even in normal times a transition like this can present significant challenges for churches; especially when their solo pastor departs. But these are not normal times. There is a developing clergy shortage among Protestant denominations, and this shortage might soon become a true crisis. Boomers (like you) are retiring in increasing numbers, and seminary enrollment is rapidly declining. It’s beginning to look like the “perfect storm.” So you’re worried about how long it would take for your congregation to find the “right” pastor.

**Honey, it is time.**

2. Second scenario: You are a lay leader in a congregation where your solo pastor *has already left*. Maybe you are on the church council, or the recently organized call committee. You are just beginning to see how difficult this search process will be. Perhaps you’ve discovered that the minimum financial package needed for a new pastor could be 25 to 40% more than what your previous pastor received. (You keep hearing that college student debt has become a common issue.) Or maybe you sense that available pastors are unlikely to be interested in living in your local small-town or rural community. They are more interested in suburban congregations. In some cases there is the issue of the pastor’s spouse needing to live where she/he can pursue his/her chosen career.

**Lutheran CORE can help, and help in meaningful, practical ways.**

3. Or the third scenario: You are on a call committee that has already been meeting and working for many months. You and your committee are beginning to get discouraged, if not pessimistic. And making matters worse is an increasing sense of ur-

gency. This prolonged interim is beginning to impact worship attendance and congregational giving. Some of your once active members are drifting into inactivity. Perhaps your congregation was not able to secure the services of an interim pastor; at least not a full-time one. And this has had a profoundly negative effect on your congregation’s ministries and morale.



## Lutheran CORE Can Help

Do any of these scenarios apply to your situation? If so, Lutheran CORE can help, and help in meaningful, practical ways. We are training a group of recently-retired, confessional Lutheran pastors to consult with congregations like yours. And these pastors, by the way, are *volunteering* their time, so the only cost to your congregation is the actual travel expenses for one initial visit to your community, and a nominal sign-up fee (\$150) to cover CORE’s administrative costs. But know this: That initial on-site visit to your community will only be the beginning of a six to nine-month (or longer) phone and online relationship with key congregational leaders chosen by your church council. The primary purpose of all this? To help you address the immediate ministry challenges of your transition.

## Loss of Momentum

Here is the tragic irony for many congregations in transition: Their search process can be so prolonged that they lose essential ministry momentum. This lost momentum then, in turn, jeopardizes their financial ability to find and call a competent pastor. Just one hypothetical example: After a twelve to eighteen month search process a congregation’s financial giving suffers and they find they can no longer afford a full-time pastor’s salary and benefits package.



This new CORE ministry is called *Congregations*

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# CiT: Three Scenarios

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*in Transition* (CiT), and we'd like to help you navigate a transition process often characterized by challenges that could put your church's health and future stability at risk. However, it is not just about minimizing risks, it's about capitalizing on ministry opportunities. That's right, *opportunities*. Opportunities to mobilize your lay leaders, renew your church's spiritual life, and embrace the full potential of what God has in mind for your congregation and its mission.

**Lost momentum can jeopardize a congregation's ability to find and call a competent pastor.**

## Contact Us

So if any of the above scenarios resonate with what your faith community is facing, contact Pastor Don Brandt, or CORE Executive Director, Pastor Dennis Nelson. Coach training is scheduled in early April, but CORE is already signing up a limited number of congregations. Any and all of our thirty-two written CiT resources are available to you; at no cost and with no obligation. (Or if that's too many, we can email you some samples.) Also, Dennis and Don are available to answer any questions.

We hope to hear from you. Never underestimate what God can accomplish in and through your congregation; even in this time of transition.

**CORE is already signing up a limited number of congregations.**

Please contact either Don Brandt at [pastordonbrandt@gmail.com](mailto:pastordonbrandt@gmail.com) or Dennis Nelson at [dennisdnelsonaz@yahoo.com](mailto:dennisdnelsonaz@yahoo.com).