



BNN Restoration Project

Recommended Pastoral Restoration Procedure for Churches

Baptist Network Northwest has developed the following recommendations to aid churches and pastors who are dealing with the trauma of a pastor's spiritual or moral failure. Failure in a leader's life, whether sexual, ethical, or financial, not only affects the fallen leader, but his family and church as well. The shame and pain of pastoral sin can leave deep wounds and lifelong devastation for those involved. Yet we know that God is the healer of broken lives who delights in restoring those who have suffered sin's consequences.

Action Steps:

1. At first awareness of serious allegation regarding the pastor, a few godly representatives of the church leadership board should go to the pastor and inquire about the matter. If he denies the allegation, they will need to interview the others involved. Investigate what happened, and determine whether the accusation seems plausible. After the initial interviews, the truth should become clearer.
2. Keep in mind both the protection afforded pastors in the Scripture, and the serious duty of the church to handle the matter biblically: *"Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning."* 1 Timothy 5:19-20 (NIV)
3. Realize that the grip of sin will often keep us from repenting easily. It may take several meetings before sin's hold on a Christian will begin to soften. Whether the matter is a false allegation, or a pastor attempting to hide his sin, confession may come slowly. Be patient, prayerful, and deliberate about seeking the truth.
4. If the charges seem true, contact the leadership of Baptist Network Northwest. Our Regional Director will assist your church and the pastor in handling the matter carefully and properly. Sometimes the truth cannot be discerned by those involved, or while seeking to handle the matter, division springs up. In these cases, the assistance of BNN can be essential.
5. Keep a written record of all discussions, decisions, and actions taken by the church leadership. This will help if the matter escalates into a lawsuit. A written record protects the church and provides a framework of details for those seeking answers.
6. If it is discovered that the pastor has committed serious sin, he should be placed on paid administrative leave from his pastoral duties. The Bible requires high moral and spiritual qualifications of pastors, and if he is unqualified to serve, the leadership should immediately suspend him of his duties, including his ordination credential.ⁱ

7. Depending on the nature of the failure, the church may need to contact the police or other authorities. Determine if legal counsel is needed on behalf of the church, and separately, of the pastor. It might be wise to contact the church's insurance company at this time.
8. Determine as early as possible what to share with the congregation. If the possibility of a lawsuit looms, seek the assistance of legal counsel as you decide what to share. Keeping communication lines open is crucial, and may be best accomplished by a special meeting of the membership of the church, or a carefully written letter. Remember that serious pastoral sin carries the strong potential for gossip, rumors, and even a church split if communication is not handled well.
9. Make arrangements for pulpit supply. This can be handled by other pastoral staff at the church, by an interim pastor, by pastors from nearby sister churches, or at times by gifted church members.
10. Make counseling available to any and all who may need it. This includes the pastor, his family, others involved with and effected by the pastor's sin. BNN has connections with suitable counselors throughout the Northwest, and can assist with counseling referrals.
11. The church leadership board should appoint a "Restoration Team" made up of one or two board members, as well as several trusted church members. This team will prayerfully come together, submitting to God and each other for the purpose of helping their pastor experience biblical restoration. BNN also has gifted men throughout the region that could advise and/or serve on this team.
12. It should be noted that restoration to the original leadership position is not the team's primary concern. The leader must be first restored to fellowship with Lord, with his family, and with the church. Each of these three spheres of restoration is essential to handling pastoral sin properly. If, in rare cases, the pastor is restored to the pulpit or his original position, may God be praised. However, if that does not happen, it does not mean the team's efforts have failed.
13. The true spiritual indication of readiness for restoration is repentance on the part of the pastor. This will include transparency and confession of the sin, a change in attitude and behavior, and a willingness to submit himself to a written plan detailing the steps of his restoration. The Restoration Team, backed by the authority of the leadership board of the church, is to hold the pastor accountable to this restoration plan.
14. The work of the Restoration Team is so important that it must not be rushed. Often there will be a sense of urgency on the part of some in the church to restore quickly. At times, this same urgency will come from the pastor himself. Yet wisdom tells us that the pathway to restoration must be walked carefully and slowly. Often the work of the Restoration Team will take six to eighteen months or more.
15. If the pastor refuses to demonstrate biblical repentance, or to cooperate with the pathway of restoration, it will become necessary to pursue disciplinary action as required in Matthew 18:15-17. Discipline of a former pastor is one of the most difficult church discipline situations you will face, and must be handled carefully and properly. Remember that BNN is ready to assist your church in facing this difficult situation.

ⁱ It is recommended that every church take seriously the call to pastoral ministry and continuance of ones' credential to carry out that ministry: ordination. While ordination may have been bestowed by one church, any minister should have his ordination credential come under the authority of the church he presently holds membership in. See BNN web site for a recommended ordination policy for local churches.