

SENIOR PASTOR

Pastoral Hard Conversation Preparation Pack

Prepare the issue. Lead the conversation.
Clarify the next faithful step.

A practical, non-denominational tool for lead pastors

Truth in love • Gentleness in restoration • Attentive listening

Ephesians 4:15 • Galatians 6:1 • James 1:19

Print-ready PDF + editable Word workbook

01

Quick Start

Decide what this conversation needs before deciding what you will say.

Use this pack when...

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ A ministry leader is not following through. | ☐ A volunteer, staff member, board member, or ministry partner needs a direct reset. |
| ☐ Expectations were missed, misunderstood, or never clarified. | ☐ Avoiding the issue is beginning to cost more than addressing it. |
| ☐ A recurring behavior is affecting people, trust, or ministry outcomes. | ☐ A decision, change, or boundary must be communicated personally. |

First, determine whether you should lead it alone

Pause and involve the appropriate church authority or qualified professional when the matter includes:

- A safeguarding concern, abuse allegation, threat, violence, harassment, discrimination, or suspected crime.
- Employment discipline, termination, compensation, accommodation, or another matter governed by law or policy.
- A complaint about you, a conflict of interest, or a decision outside your assigned authority.
- A medical, mental-health, substance-use, or crisis issue requiring trained help.
- A situation in which privacy, documentation, insurance, denominational policy, or legal counsel may be necessary.

Before scheduling

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ I can state the issue in one neutral sentence. | ☐ I have checked relevant policies, role descriptions, or prior agreements. |
| ☐ I know the outcome I am seeking. | ☐ I have enough authority to lead this conversation. |
| ☐ I have verified the key facts. | ☐ I have chosen a private, appropriate setting and enough time. |

Responsible-use note: This pack is a leadership preparation tool, not legal, employment, clinical, or safeguarding advice. Adapt it to your church's governance, policies, and local requirements.

02

Conversation Brief

Move from emotional weight to a clear pastoral purpose.

Person and role _____

Conversation date, time, and location _____

Who else should be present, if anyone _____

One-sentence issue _____

1. Desired faithful outcome

Complete this sentence

- By the end of this conversation, I hope we clearly understand...
- The next action or decision that would represent faithful progress is...
- Even if we disagree, I want this person to leave knowing...

Desired outcome _____

Minimum necessary next step _____

What I am not trying to accomplish _____

2. Pastoral posture

- ☐ I am seeking clarity, not victory.
- ☐ I am prepared to listen without surrendering necessary truth.
- ☐ I will address behavior, impact, expectations, and decisions rather than attack character.
- ☐ I will not use Scripture, spiritual authority, or public pressure to force agreement.

3. Prayerful self-examination

What emotion am I carrying into the room? _____

What assumption might I be making? _____

What part of the problem may belong to my leadership? _____

What do I need to release before the conversation? _____

03

Facts, Impact, and Questions

Separate what you know from what you fear, infer, or have heard.

OBSERVABLE FACT	INTERPRETATION TO TEST	SOURCE / DATE

Name the ministry impact without exaggeration

People, relationships, responsibilities, or outcomes affected

What becomes harder or less healthy if nothing changes

Prior expectation, agreement, coaching, or support already provided

Questions that create understanding

☐ How do you understand what has been happening?

☐ What support, authority, information, or clarity was missing?

☐ What context am I missing?

☐ What responsibility do you believe belongs to you now?

☐ What made the expectation difficult to carry?

☐ What would help us reach a clear and responsible next step?

04

The CLEAR Conversation Path

A five-part structure that keeps a hard conversation direct and pastoral.

C

CENTER Pray, regulate your pace, and state the purpose.

"I want us to talk directly about [issue] so we can understand what happened and agree on what needs to happen next."

L

LEAD WITH FACTS Describe specific observations, prior agreements, and relevant context.

"We agreed that [expectation]. On [dates/examples], [observable event] occurred."

E

EXPLAIN THE IMPACT Name why the issue matters without inflating it.

"The impact has been [people/process/trust/outcome]. That is why we need to address it now."

A

ASK AND LISTEN Invite the person's perspective, test your assumptions, and summarize what you heard.

"How do you understand what has happened? What am I missing?"

R

RESOLVE THE NEXT STEP Clarify the decision, commitment, support, consequence, and review date.

"Here is what we are agreeing to do next. We will review it on [date]."

My opening and key sentence

Opening purpose statement _____

The one fact-impact sentence I must communicate _____

The question I need to ask before proposing a solution _____

05

Response Map

Prepare to stay grounded without scripting the other person.

POSSIBLE RESPONSE	GROUNDED PASTORAL MOVE
Agreement	Do not rush past it. Confirm what is understood, then define the commitment, support, and review date.
Surprise or confusion	Slow down. Restate the specific facts and prior expectation. Ask what is unclear before adding more evidence.
Defensiveness	Acknowledge the emotion without debating every point. Return to the observable issue, impact, and needed decision.
Strong emotion	Lower your pace. Offer a short pause. Do not force immediate disclosure or use emotion as proof of guilt.
Counteraccusation	Note any legitimate concern for separate review. Do not let a new allegation erase the original issue.
Silence	Allow time. Ask one open question. Avoid filling the room with repeated arguments or threats.
Partial ownership	Name what has been acknowledged and what remains unresolved. Seek one clear next step rather than vague agreement.
Refusal	State the decision or boundary within your authority. Explain the next process without retaliatory language.

Phrases that reduce unnecessary heat

☐ “Let me make sure I understood you correctly.”	☐ “I want to pause before either of us says something unhelpful.”
☐ “That concern matters, and we can give it a separate review.”	☐ “Here is what I can decide, and here is what requires another process.”
☐ “We do not have to agree on every interpretation to clarify the next responsibility.”	☐ “I am not asking for an answer this second; I am asking that we agree on when the answer will be given.”

06

Agreement and Accountability

Turn a good conversation into a specific, reviewable next step.

Issue or responsibility being clarified _____

Decision made or expectation reset _____

Person responsible _____

Completion date or next milestone _____

Support and boundaries

Support, information, training, authority, or resources provided _____

What is within the person's authority _____

What still requires approval _____

What will happen if the commitment is not completed _____

Review rhythm

CHECK-IN DATE	PROGRESS EVIDENCE	ADJUSTMENT / NEXT STEP

Confirm the close

Before ending, ask:

- What are you leaving this conversation responsible to do?
- What am I or the church responsible to provide?
- What needs to be written or communicated, and to whom?
- When will we review progress?

Minimal Follow-Up Record

Document the leadership process without creating an unnecessary narrative.

Record what is necessary, accurate, and appropriate

- Use objective language and distinguish facts, decisions, and direct commitments.
- Do not diagnose motives, preserve gossip, or write details unrelated to the leadership issue.
- Follow your church's approved access, storage, retention, employment, and confidentiality practices.
- If the matter requires formal minutes, personnel documentation, an incident report, or safeguarding records, use the correct process instead of this page.

Conversation date, time, location, and participants _____

Purpose of the conversation _____

Key facts or prior agreement reviewed _____

Person's relevant response or context _____

Decision, expectation, or commitment _____

Support or resources promised _____

Review date and responsible owner _____

Communication required after the meeting _____

Pastoral debrief

What was clarified? _____

What remains unresolved? _____

What did I learn about my leadership or the system around this issue?

What pastoral care is appropriate without weakening the boundary?

08

Pause, Escalate, or Continue

Use the right process for the weight and risk of the issue.

CONTINUE

The issue is within your authority, facts are sufficiently clear, the setting is safe, and a responsible next step can be agreed.

PAUSE

New information changes the issue, emotions prevent useful conversation, necessary facts are missing, or you need to check policy or seek counsel.

ESCALATE

The matter involves safety, abuse, threats, illegality, employment action, discrimination, formal discipline, governance authority, or another protected process.

My decision

☐ Continue now

☐ Pause and reconvene

☐ Move to the appropriate formal process

Reason _____

Person or authority to consult _____

Information or policy needed _____

What I will communicate now _____

Date for the next responsible action _____

If the conversation must stop

- State the pause plainly: “New information has come up that requires a different process.”
- Do not promise confidentiality you cannot maintain.
- Do not investigate a safeguarding or criminal allegation beyond your role.
- Preserve relevant information and follow required reporting, governance, employment, insurance, or professional guidance.

09

48-Hour Preparation and 30-Day Follow-Through

A compact rhythm for carrying the conversation responsibly.

24 to 48 hours before

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Write the one-sentence issue and desired outcome. | ☐ Choose a private setting, sufficient time, and an appropriate invitation. |
| ☐ Verify facts, prior agreements, role descriptions, and relevant policy. | ☐ Draft the opening, fact-impact statement, and three questions. |
| ☐ Decide who should attend and who has authority. | ☐ Pray and identify the emotion or assumption you must manage. |

During the conversation

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Use the CLEAR path. | ☐ Name the decision, commitment, support, and review date. |
| ☐ Listen for context that changes the issue. | ☐ Pause or escalate if the issue exceeds the room or your authority. |
| ☐ Summarize what you heard before responding. | ☐ End by asking each person to state the next step. |

Within 24 hours

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Send a concise written summary when appropriate. | ☐ Provide promised support or information. |
| ☐ Complete the correct follow-up record. | ☐ Communicate only with people who need to know. |

Within 7 to 30 days

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Hold the agreed check-in. | ☐ Adjust support, authority, role, or timeline only for a clear reason. |
| ☐ Recognize honest progress without lowering the expectation. | ☐ Close the matter when the outcome is complete. |
| ☐ Address missed commitments directly. | ☐ Review whether a system or leadership practice should change. |

Final review

What became healthier because the conversation happened?

What needs continued attention? _____

What will I do differently in the next hard conversation?

10

Reusable One-Page Conversation Planner

Print this page separately for routine leadership conversations.

Person / role / date _____

One-sentence issue _____

Desired faithful outcome _____

Observable facts and prior expectation _____

Ministry impact _____

My opening purpose statement _____

Three questions I will ask _____

Decision or commitment needed _____

Support and boundaries _____

Review date and owner _____

CLEAR at a glance

C

Center

L

Lead with facts

E

Explain impact

A

Ask and listen

R

Resolve next step

Lead well. Stay healthy. Finish faithful.

More practical pastoral tools at SeniorPastor.com