

Great Milwaukee Synod
Interim Ministry Task Force
Manual for Congregations in Transition
Interim Ministry

Life is a series of transitions from birth to death. At best, transition, though painful, can provide individuals and communities with a time of reflection, vision and opportunity to effect creative change. At worst, transitions can be disruptive and discouraging, leaving individuals and/or communities drained of spirit or hope. In all instances, transitions are made easier if there is a system of nurture and support in place to assist, coach, mentor or advise the individual and/or community through the time of transition. For individuals this support and nurture may come from parents, friends, partners and/or colleagues. For communities this support and nurture is more formalized and may be provided by someone who is appointed, elected or hired to assist the community in transition.

When a pastor leaves a congregation, for whatever reason, the congregation experiences a loss. This loss, when acknowledged, can best be resolved during the time of transition before a new pastor is called and installed. An interim pastor, appointed by the bishop, in consultation with the church council, will provide support and nurture when needed during the transition by assisting, coaching, mentoring and/or advising the congregation during its transition period.

Biblical and Historical Perspective
On Interim Ministry

Interim ministry, though not clearly defined as such, began with the calling of the disciples. These people served as missionaries, congregational developers and overseers of congregational life. Their role was to encourage, correct, nurture, and support the people God through the means of Word and Sacrament ministry. They were most likely to be with the people for short periods of time and kept in touch with the congregations through follow-up letters. Evidence of this ministry is the core of the Pastoral Epistles, the Pauline Epistles and the Book of Acts.

Once the Church was granted legal status it also became more structured. Clergy were appointed to serve congregations for terms determined by the hierarchy of the Church. Little distinction was made as to the length of service for which the clergy were assigned.

As civilization became more complex and the church became embroiled in controversy, pastoral leadership often took on new forms. Following the Reformation and before the more formal development of mainline Protestant organizational structure, pastoral leadership in congregations evolved in a variety of ways. Sometimes this leadership was simply assumed by an individual with active consent of the people. At other times a congregation may have been formed around the personality of the leader. Many of these ministries were temporary or interim by nature, depending on the pastor's decision to remain and the amount of support provided by congregation. Some of these congregations eventually formed the base from which mainline Protestant churches evolved. In summary, the present system of calling a pastor is relatively new in the development history of the Church.

Present Understanding of Interim Ministry

Given the historical perspective on ministry and the fact that the Church has evolved into an organizational structure that requires its leadership to be called and sent into Word and Sacrament ministry to congregations, interim ministry can best be classified as specialized ministry in that structure.

The Purpose of Interim Ministry

The purpose of Interim Ministry is to provide appropriate and effective pastoral leadership from the time the current pastor leaves and the arrival of a new pastor.

There are two general types of interim ministry.

Typical Interim—a typical interim usually follows pastoral retirement or resignation. The five basic interim ministry tasks are coupled with the Synod's Mission Exploration Team (MET) process will be the interim's primary focus.

Intentional Interim—an intentional interim follows pastoral retirement or resignation that was preceded by a long and difficult period of congregational conflict or as a result of a disciplinary action. An intentional interim is also appropriate following an unusually long and successful ministry by the former pastor. Experience has shown that these and similar situations need to be addressed in an ***intentional*** way in order that the congregation can move forward with confidence.

The Tasks of Interim Ministry

1. The Interim Pastor encourages the congregation to review its history. There are various ways to do this:
 - ◆ **Coming to terms with history.**

The congregation comes to understand what has happened. For example, at the close of an extended service by a beloved pastor, the congregation may need to deal with feelings of loss, grief, anger or anguish. “Letting go” of the former pastor is a critical dynamic in this developmental task.
 - ◆ **Discovering a new identity.**

The interim period provides an opportunity for the congregation to evaluate itself. It is a time to analyze present realities and real possibilities for ministry and mission.
 - ◆ **Managing shifts in lay leadership.**

When a pastor leaves a congregation, new patterns of lay involvement often arise. Person who has been actively involved may step back; others may step forward. Thus, the interim period can be a time when development and preparation of lay leadership calls for special attention.
 - ◆ **Strengthening Denomination Relationships.**

The interim period usually brings a congregation into a closer and more frequent contact with the Bishop, the synodical staff, and churchwide resources. Through the call process, the congregation has the opportunity to evaluate and recommit to its relationship with the Greater Milwaukee Synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and other churchwide expressions.
 - ◆ **Committed to a New Leadership and a Future.**

During the interim ministry period, a congregation can ready itself spiritually in order to enter into partnership with a new pastoral leader. Renewed commitment to the Gospel is a primary goal in the time of transition.
2. The Interim Pastor helps the congregation to work with the changes in lay leadership that often comes with a change in pastoral leadership. This

transition time can serve as a time to bring closure to the previous pastoral leadership and to enable the congregation to welcome new leadership with openness and vision.

3. The Interim Pastor assists the congregation in developing an awareness of its own style and gifts within its membership that will continue and expand the parish's well being.
4. The Interim Pastor with his/her own style of ministry opens up the possibilities for the congregation to accept and welcome other styles of pastoral ministry.
5. The Interim Pastor will generally be asked by the bishop to assist in the Mission Exploration Team process and development of the congregational mission profile.
6. The Interim Pastor carries out the responsibilities as stated in the Covenant For Interim Pastoral Ministry.

The Interim Pastor

Interim Ministry is a specialized form of the ordained clergy. An Interim Pastor usually comes from the roster of ordained clergy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) or denominations with which we share ordained leadership.

General Characteristics of the Interim Pastor

The Interim Pastor....

- ❖ has met all of the requirements for call to the ordained ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).
- ❖ has skills in-group dynamics and group behavior.
- ❖ has skills, abilities and the temperament to deal with conflict situations which manifest themselves in power struggles and/or subversive techniques within the congregation's life.
- ❖ has the ability to work within a given time frame.

- ❖ has a healthy self-concept and pastoral identity which enables acceptance of the reality that one does develop deep relationships within the congregation and is often not recognized as the pastor.
- ❖ is trained to center on the tasks of interim ministry critical to leading the congregation toward the goal of calling its next pastor.
- ❖ fulfills the continuing education expectation for ELCA pastors with special attention to interim ministry issues and skills including training in conflict resolution.
- ❖ is simply a good pastor.

THE PROCESS OF APPOINTMENT TO INTERIM MINISTRY

1. When a pastoral vacancy occurs, the congregational leadership informs the Synodical Bishop's office.
2. The Bishop or representative of the Bishop consults with the congregational leadership to determine the needs of the congregation during the interim and how best to arrange for continuing pastoral leadership during the transition period.

In congregations where there is multiple staff and other clergy under call, this consultation will seek to involve these persons in determining the needs for interim leadership.

3. The Bishop selects and recommends an interim pastor.
4. Once the Interim Pastor has been selected and appointed, the Interim Pastor works under an agreement called an Interim Covenant (see appendix), that is developed in consultation with the Bishop's Office and the congregation leadership. This Covenant includes:
 - a. Mutual agreement of pastor and congregation to fulfill the goals of the congregation and stay within the guidelines of the constitution and by-laws of the ELCA.
 - b. The Interim Pastor's duties include a working relationship with the congregation's staff.

- c. The congregation's responsibility includes compensation to the Interim Pastor. Salary is based on the salary package of the former pastor.
 - d. The synod's responsibilities to the congregation and the Interim Pastor.
 - e. A time frame in which the Interim Ministry will be completed.
5. The Interim Pastor will be in close contact with the Synod Staff and the congregational leadership throughout the interim. The Interim Pastor will provide quarterly progress reports (see appendix), attend the monthly Synod Interim Ministry Gatherings and participate in a mutual mentoring relationship.
 6. The Synod will provide a general orientation to interim ministry for all new interim clergy, including an understanding of the difference between interim ministry and settled ministry.
 7. The Interim Pastor **will not** be available as a candidate for a regular call to the congregation.
 8. It is recommend that the congregation establish an interim mutual ministry committee as a way to support the interim pastor and as a means to enhance communication in this time of transition.
 9. The Interim Pastor's tenure will be complete at least four weeks prior to the arrival of the permanent pastor.
 10. In order to acknowledge the beginning and completion of the interim process, the congregation will include litanies of welcome and farewell to the interim pastor during worship.

“Why Can’t We Call Our Interim Pastor?”

Thoughts from the article, “Why shouldn’t we consider our Interim Minister as a candidate for the permanent position?”

Adapted from **Interim Ministry**, Rhode Island Conference, U.C.C.)

1. God’s Spirit has someone more suitable in mind!
2. The Interim has a leading advantage over other persons who might be interested in the vacancy. This raises a question of fairness of all prospective candidates.
3. While the Interim may be favorable to most members—some may have developed some dislikes. This raises the concern about a built in resistance right from the start.
4. If the Interim is considered along side other candidates and then not chosen, this could cause hurt and also a “Lame Duck” conclusion of the Interim’s pastorate.
5. The essential tasks that need to be addressed during an interim period may not get the attention that they really need. For example, calling the Interim might interfere with doing the necessary grief work regarding the loss of a former pastor. Also, an Interim Pastor may need to do some things in the interim period that he/she would not do if anticipating the roles as the “permanent, settled pastor.”
6. Such a practice could put into motion the idea that Interim Ministry is just a stepping stone in the call process.
7. Calling a trained interim specialist and his/her acceptance would remove this person from the small pool of people who are trained and able to serve in this capacity as an interim.
8. The Interim Pastor is a member of a network of people who have mutually agreed to this principle. To accept such a call would be perceived as the Interim going against his/her world.