

Interim Ministry that makes the difference!

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A word about Interim Ministry:

There is a great need in the church at large for well-chosen, well-equipped, well-trained interim ministers.

In decades past, congregations in leadership transition often just found someone to fill the pulpit or simply shifted into neutral until the new pastor arrived. Today, we are realizing that those approaches are not only not helpful, but for many congregations, they can be detrimental. There are a number of factors that contribute to the importance of engaging an Interim Pastor of excellence during times of transition.

- The increasing gap of available, capable pastors, ready for a transition.
- The continued decline of 50% or more of our congregations.
- The decrease of healthy congregations ready and willing to explore and invest in a new lifecycle.
- Increased gap between the local church and current cultural challenges.
- Congregations are often unrealistic about the health of the congregation; their own individual spiritual health; the pay package of a pastor; or how to reach their communities for Christ.

An interim ministry of excellence can be beneficial in addressing these situations and many others so that congregations not just shift into neutral and wait, but actually make great strides in becoming healthy, addressing internal issues, and preparing to receive and support a visionary Senior Pastor.

For these changes to take place during times of transition and assist congregations in readiness, interim ministry needs to be **intentional**. They are not just filling a pulpit or space till the new person arrives. Specific goals and assignments that prepare the church spiritually and emotionally for new leadership should be identified and a strategic partnership with the assembly minister, the interim pastor, and the congregation must be purposeful.

Interim ministry must be intentional in that each congregation is unique. While there are some basic ministry roles that need to be addressed in every congregation, how those roles are accomplished, who is involved in completing the actions of those roles, and the outcome of the actions will vary. In addition, what worked well in the last interim assignment, may not work at all in the new setting. A skillful interim will approach each congregation with a toolbox of experience, knowledge, abilities, and resources, but more importantly with an awareness that they must intentionally evaluate and discern the needs, challenges, and opportunities specific to that congregation.

Finally, interim means **transitional** – for a time. But it does not mean fractional, or half done. It means “in-between.” Building a bridge between where the congregation is and where they need to go. How vital and important a role. Helping a congregation to be renewed spiritually, to be restored in their commitment to the mission, and to be prepared for new leadership can make a Kingdom difference for generations.

May the next few pages serve you well as you minister to your congregations in transition.

How to Select and Train Interim Pastors:

Building a team of skillful, trained, equipped interim ministers in your region that you can turn to in times of transition, will serve both you and your congregations in extraordinary ways.

Here are some suggestions and recommendations for your consideration as you build a team of interim ministers.

Identifying potential interim ministers:

The investment to develop a list of potential Interim pastors will serve you in so many ways.

There are eight significant characteristics to consider when building your team of interim ministers.

- **Personal Leadership Profile** that commends them to interim ministry.
 - It is strongly recommended that you take the time to have potential interim ministers take a full set of assessments and debrief so that clarity and understanding of strengths and weaknesses can assist in a good fit for the assignment and accurate recommendations of assignments.
- **Profile that exhibits a high EQ.** While training, skills, and experience are important, emotional intelligence is the greatest predictor of success and excellent leadership. Many transition assignments require strong skills in managing difficult people or situations and a high EQ strengthens a healthy outcome.
- **Proven Track Record in Ministry.** Interim ministry is so critical and vital that it is important to select individuals for your team with proven track records of leading congregations in health and growth.
- **People skills.** Ministry runs on the willingness of volunteers to serve in a variety of ways. People skills are critical to an interim being able to motivate and engage a broad base of leadership. Helping congregations become united in purpose and direction requires more than just a good sermon or a good administrator. Managing people in the midst of change in positive and helpful ways makes all the difference.
- **Process skills.** Many congregations find themselves without adequately defined and accepted processes and procedures. This results in confusion and even conflict. A strong interim minister can help leadership to identify healthy needed processes, procedures, and policies that can strengthen the foundation of the ministries of the church, clarify and empower leadership, and prepare the groundwork for new pastoral leadership.
- **Preaching skills** that reveal theological alignment with the Church of God. Congregations in transition need spiritual guidance and a good reason to keep coming back every Sunday and inviting others to come with them. If the preaching is lacking, the spiritual health of the congregation suffers, and the temptation is to lean back until the new person arrives.
- **Perceptive in discernment.** An interim minister with discernment is often able to gain insight and understanding into a variety of situations that impact the health and growth of a congregation.
- **Passionate love** for God, for God's people, for the mission, and for the church! It is vital that the interim minister is not "tired," spiritually lukewarm, or simply filling a role that provides income. Even a strong and healthy congregation in transition needs an interim that brings passion to the congregation. A passion for loving God and others and a passion for both outreach and discipleship.

Evaluating the needs of the congregation in selecting the right interim minister:

If you have ever experienced a hurricane, tornado, or flood, you know it doesn't take long for an amazing amount of destruction to happen and it takes much longer to repair the damage!

That is true for interim ministry! No one person is right for every position or role. We all have strengths and weaknesses.

Discovering the right fit between an interim minister and a congregation is critical to both the congregation and the interim minister.

Here are some important factors to consider when selecting or recommending an interim minister for a congregation in transition.

One size does NOT fit all! It is important that as you prepare a congregation for interim ministry there is a discerning process that evaluates the true scope and depth of assignment. Some of the items to consider include:

- What are the expectations of the leadership and congregation? Do they fully understand the benefits of interim ministry, or do they just want pulpit supply that requires a teacher/preacher?
- What is the health of the congregation?
 - Are they in a normal time of transition that requires someone with ministry experience and skills who can continue to assist them in their growth?
 - Are they in a season of conflict or brokenness that requires a person with unique skills of healing and resolution as well as broad ministry experience?
 - Are they in a season of grieving – the loss of a long-term beloved pastor; or a pastor that has failed morally; or perhaps an awareness that they are in a declining/dying lifecycle and finding new leadership will be difficult at best? Again, these situations require a person with rare and unusual gifts and skills.
- Discern where the congregation is in the lifecycle.
 - Remember - one size does not fit all!
 - If the congregation in transition is in the midst of a vision that is alive and well and they are in a growth pattern – this requires an interim with the profile and skill to continue motivating and resourcing the congregation strategically, so they don't lose momentum.
 - If the congregation had been growing, but recently is showing signs of slowing down or beginning to fall back – this transition period becomes critical! An interim pastor with the right profile and skills will be able to bring healing and begin to help the congregation address the challenge and reignite their commitment to growth and outreach.
 - If they are in a declining pattern, the transition period can literally become the deciding factor of life or death. An interim pastor who is able to discern well and evaluate the potential of the congregation and the community will be invaluable.
 - If they are in a hospice situation, a very different and unique interim pastor is required, who moves at a different pace. Who can listen to their stories, remember with them all the ways God worked in their midst, and help them discover how to become a legacy church.

Caring for the Interim Pastor:

Busy assembly ministers can make the mistake of sending the signal that the interim is in place, and they don't have to focus on that congregation. That is a missed opportunity to build a relationship with both the interim minister and the congregation.

Interim Ministry has become a significant and vital resource for assembly ministers who have an increasing number of congregations in transition.

Recognizing the value and worth of good interim ministers as part of your "staff" and nurturing that relationship is one of the best investments you can make.

Here are ways that you can strengthen the relationship and value of interim ministers in your region.

- Be sure that you have evaluated the needs of the congregation and share with the interim minister what those needs are and recommended goals.
 - Have a clear written contract/covenant/job description with the church and the interim so that expectations are clearly understood by everyone.
- Negotiate the salary package with the congregation (and or benefits – vacation, time away, etc.) for the interim minister. Talk with the interim minister in advance to ensure that you are representing their needs adequately.
 - Determine housing needs or mileage.
- Have 3 – 5 goals that you outline for the interim minister that are based on the congregation's current lifecycle and needs. These goals are clarifying for the interim and give you a point of conversation with the interim.
- Pray for your interims as you would one of your pastors.
 - Let them know you are praying for them.
 - Develop a prayer team in your regions that pray daily for congregations in transition and for the interim pastors serving those congregations.
- Express gratitude for their ministry.
 - Send them a handwritten note identifying something specific that you appreciate about them and/or their ministry.
 - Make time at least once while they are serving in your region to take them and their spouse out for a meal.
 - If possible, visit them on a Sunday while they are serving one of your congregations.
 - This builds not only the interim minister's relationship but also your relationship with the congregation.
 - If it is not possible to visit in person, watch one of the services or their sermon and send them a note letting them know what you appreciated about their message and ministry.
- Meet with them monthly for 30 minutes in person if possible or just by Zoom.
 - This honors the work they are doing for you and the congregation AND helps you keep the interim on course.
 - Offer resources for difficult situations they may encounter.
 - Coach the interim. Interims benefit greatly from getting advice, wisdom, and insights from you regarding the challenges they see in the congregation.

The Role and Benefits of Interim Ministry:

As the assembly minister, you are often challenged to clearly express “why” a congregation needs an interim minister or what the benefits to the congregation may be.

A well-prepared document or brochure that describes the benefits and perhaps gives several testimonies from congregations who have benefited from interim ministry will prove useful.

- Healing hurts and wounds
 - Can be especially beneficial when the former pastor has died unexpectedly/ left unexpectedly/ left after a long-term ministry/ had moral failure/ etc. etc.
- Dealing with situations that are difficult to address. Speaking bold truth in love that brings corrections to perceptions, attitudes, prejudices, etc.
- If there are staff members (paid or unpaid) the interim minister can invest in mentoring, them and also in helping to continue to guide their ministries without role confusion developing.
- Allows for a new reframing. Sometimes individuals get into a defensive posture, they have history with the former pastor and perhaps others in the congregation and are unable to see another perspective. An interim can provide neutral ground where defensive postures can be relaxed and with time even healed.
- Bring an objective external perspective without any conflict of interest in future positions. An experienced interim pastor can do a good assessment of strengths, weaknesses, etc.
- Can enlighten and missionally equip a congregation for the current cultural contexts that may be very different than they realize.
- Interim pastors are freed from being concerned about building long-term relationships and can more quickly help the congregation come to terms with their present reality and future challenges in a positive and hope-filled way.
- Freed from dealing with future strategies or even building issues, the interim can focus on building a strong spiritual foundation and discipleship culture.
 - It is an opportunity for spiritual renewal and revival.
- Strengthening or addressing systems, policies, and procedures that may be outdated or even hindering the growth and development of a congregation.
- Strengthening the relationship and connectivity with the assembly ministry. Diffusing any misconceptions or broken understandings.
- An experienced interim can provide beneficial support and resource to the search committee.
- The interim can ensure clear and concise communication in all matters with the leadership, the congregation, and even the assembly office. They are invaluable in helping to keep information regarding progress, needs, and the search process flowing regularly.
- Interim ministry may not seem like the perfect time to welcome visitors, but it is the perfect time to really focus on helping the congregation recapture authentic biblical koinonia.

Do's and Don'ts of Interim Ministry:

Every interim needs to be keenly aware of “do’s” “don’ts” and healthy boundaries they should not cross while serving in an interim position.

Here are a few cardinal rules to consider:

- Don't consider your role anything more (or less) than an interim. You are not their future! You are the bridge in the present moment.
- Do encourage them to pray for the search committee. Pray for their next pastor and family. Pray for their congregation during this time of transition. Build excitement about their future pastor and teach them how to love that pastor well.
- Don't hire permanent staff. If it is essential to hire for a key ministry role, work with the assembly minister and the congregational leaders to hire on a clearly defined limited interim basis.
- Do encourage current leaders and identify possible future leaders. Do empower volunteers and let others step up and meet needs. Interim ministry is the perfect time to empower others to do visitation; make calls in the hospital; work at the altars; anoint and pray; and help in serving communion.
- Don't make expenditures that can be avoided.
- Do help them find ways to refresh their facility and property. Workdays, a coat of fresh paint, adding some new plants or landscaping touches.
- Don't establish a new vision! Cast the vision of what is possible, of what they can do together under the power of God, to motivate them to get involved and to pray earnestly for their next leader.
- Do encourage them that God loves them and has a plan for them as they seek Him with their whole heart.
- Don't paint an unrealistic picture of church growth - - You can be a church of 5000 if you just follow Jesus.
- Do create an authentic culture of praise for what God is doing in their midst right now!
- Don't do everything! Don't become their “hero”! Make heroes and heroines out of as many of the lay leaders as you possibly can. Train and empower existing leaders and identify and nurture potential leaders. Of all ages.
- Do lift up, recognize, and express appreciation to those who are faithfully serving. Do model stewardship and service!
 - Tithe to the church you are interim serving in.
 - If there are special appeals – Christmas, needy families, etc. give a generous offering above and beyond your tithe.
 - Serve in some way other than what's expected or written in the contract. Help wash dishes after a fellowship. Help clean up after a meeting.
- Don't let them “go back to old ways.”
- Do paint a clear compelling picture of what it looks like to authentically follow Christ as His disciples (John 17:15 – 19; Matthew 28:16 – 20; Matthew 22:36 – 40)
 - Spiritual growth personally and corporate that recognizes the importance of discipleship, worship, and prayer.
 - Missional community with an outward focus
 - Growing in biblical knowledge and understanding that results in transformation
 - Serving in their spiritual gifts
 - Cultivating an atmosphere of prayer
 - Growing in extravagant generosity of giving grace, resources, and time.

Passing the Baton from the Interim to the new Senior Leader:

As the interim role comes to a close, it is important for an interim minister to finish well and pave the way for a successful transition to the new pastor.

Your job is to prepare the people for their new pastor. You are like a father who walks the bride down the aisle, places her hand in the hand of the groom, and then you step aside. Walk the church to their new pastor, and then step aside and let him take over.

Here are some ways an interim can finish well.

- Create a notebook or file of clear records of important matters:
 - Job descriptions
 - By-laws
 - Recent Board Minute meetings
 - Recent financial reports
 - List of anyone accepting Christ or being baptized while you are the interim
 - Church Directory if available
 - List of lay leaders and their positions/roles
 - Identify when lay leaders terms expire if appropriate
- Once the new pastor is selected, encourage the congregation to pray for them and their family, and help them think of ways to welcome their new pastor.
- Close out your interim ministry with grace and humility. Celebrating the new pastor's arrival is the focus!
- Close any pastoral relationships. Do not agree to return for weddings, funerals, or other celebrations. If you are invited to participate communicate immediately with the new pastor and determine what is best.
- Don't share confidentialities or private matters with anyone other than your assembly minister.
- Give prayers of thanks for what God has invited you to be part of in preparing the congregation for their new leader.
- Treasure the good memories and remember the lessons learned.
- Thank your assembly minister for the opportunity to serve and for their support.
- Pray for your assembly minister as they continue to serve in so many ways.

Additional ideas concerning interim ministry

<https://www.turnaroundpastor.com/the-right-way-to-hire-an-interim-pastor-part-2/#:~:text=Evaluate%20Teaching%2C%20Training%20and%20Preaching,inquire%20about%20her%20t raining%20skills.>

https://www.vanderbloemen.com/search?q=%20Interim%20Ministry%20&size=n_20_n

<https://yourncs.org/t-i-p-s/>

<https://healthychurch.org/services/interim-ministry/>

A manual for interim ministry:

https://macucc.s3.amazonaws.com/C10F917B0BCC4644AC69DF0E6D472288_A%20MANUAL%20FOR%20INTERIM%20MINISTRY.pdf

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5848377a59cc681c8c6659c8/t/5b323726f950b7b7fc065200/1530017574965/Guidelines-For-Interim-Ministry.pdf>

Sample interim pastor Contracts:

http://www.centerforcongregationalleadership.org/uploads/6/0/0/9/6009825/sample_itm_contract_2017.pdf

<https://chonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Interim-Pastor-Contract.pdf>

https://www.csis-elca.org/wp-content/uploads/core_content/call-process/Sample-Interim-Agreement-2021.pdf

https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Interim_ministry_sample_contract.pdf

Salary for an interim

<https://www.ziprecruiter.com/Salaries/What-Is-the-Average-Interim-Pastor-Salary-by-State#:~:text=How%20Much%20Do%20Interim%20Pastor%20Jobs%20Pay%20per%20Year%3F&text=%2440%2C000%20is%20the%2025th%20percentile,Salaries%20below%20this%20are%20outliers.&text=%2460%2C000%20is%20the%2075th%20percentile.>