



INTENTIONAL INTERIM PASTOR RESOURCES

Pastor Randy Fett

INTENTIONAL INTERIM MINISTRY DESCRIPTION

Learn what Intentional Interim Ministry is, what it is not, and why we need Intentional Interim Ministry.

A NARRATIVE ON INTENTIONAL INTERIM MINISTRY

Pastor Randy Fett prepared a selection of articles to aid in the pastoral transition and how to engage in Interim Ministry.

INTERIM PHASES AND PROCESS

Pastor Randy has highlighted four phases in the Interim process:

1. Breathe
2. Full on conditioning and training work
3. Naming the game plan
4. Celebration.

A MENU OF INTERIM TOOLS AND OPTIONS

Pastor Randy has featured a list of helpful tools that could be used with Bethel congregational members and Bethel staff members.



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INTENTIONAL INTERIM MINISTRY DESCRIPTION

What is it? What isn't it? Why do we need Intentional Interim Ministry?

"Things will fall apart if we don't call another pastor soon"

Have you been hearing things like this, "An intentional interim takes too long. We can't afford to wait." "Only bad churches need an intentional interim. We don't want people to think we're a problem."

1. What is Intentional Interim Ministry?

In every congregation there will be times when members wrestle with their church's identity and ministry. These unique transitions occur after particularly long pastorates, when conflicts exist within the congregation, when there are instances of pastoral misbehavior, when demographics change drastically, or during other church-changing circumstances. Such times of transition are often marked by congregational stress and anxiety hampering ministry and making a fulfilling church experience difficult. Intentional Interim Ministry is designed to **restore congregational health** by offering a safe bridge between challenging times and the selection of the next resident pastor.

Intentional Interim Ministry happens during the time between regularly called pastors. It is not just crisis ministry, nor is it simply maintenance ministry. It is ministry with specific "intentions" and tasks to be accomplished,

The interim period in the average church is used exclusively for **finding the next pastor**. Often, attendance, giving, and energy decline during the interim period, increasing the discomfort in an already anxious congregation. Decades of studying the interim period by the Alban Institute, the Interim Ministry Network, and the Center for Congregational Health have shown the interim period can be a **productive time to address key issues** in a church's life. Addressing these issues will **improve the health of the church**, while **fine-tuning** the understanding of the **type of pastoral candidate that should be called next**.



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Two modern fables help readers deal with change. First, *Who Moved My Cheese*, by Spencer Johnson; and second, *Our Iceberg is Melting*, by John Kotter and Holger Rathgeber. Both books have been used widely in the business world to help leaders, managers, and supervisors understand the inevitability of change and the necessity of adapting and planning.

Interims recognize the inevitability of change—in the culture, in our communities, in our denomination, and in a congregation. Change goes on not only during the interim between settled pastorates, but during those pastorates as well. The transition between settled pastorates, however, is an **opportunity to wake up to changes**.

2. Churches which should particularly consider the Intentional Interim Ministry (IIM) include churches that are losing a pastor after a significant tenure, that have lost vision, that find themselves stuck on a numerical plateau or in decline, or that are experiencing conflict (or are in the aftermath of serious conflict). Not intentionally addressing key issues means a church is likely to repeat its history. The next pastor will inherit unresolved issues, be sidetracked from God's purposes, and leave after a short tenure. Meanwhile, the church will be confused, fellowship will be hurt, and the cycle of an anxious interim time will return.

3. The interim period opens the church to a time of dialogue about items that might be difficult to address during an installed pastor's tenure. The interim period is the best time to **clarify members' differing expectations, hopes, and desires**.

4. Five tasks have been identified that should be addressed by churches in an interim period.

- **Heritage**—examining a church's history, for instance, coming to terms with why the last pastor(s) – staff left.
- **Leadership**—a careful examination of staff positions, job descriptions, policies and procedures, bylaws, and lay leadership.
- **Connections**—theology, synod, missions, and partners



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- **Vision and Mission**—a call from God that belongs to the whole church. While the first three tasks help a church answer, “Who are we?” This fourth task answers: “Who are we supposed to be? The IIM period guides the church in finding their God-given purpose and to express it with broad generalities and specific short-term actions.
- **Future**—This last task prepares a church for the calling of a pastor by developing a Pastor’s (desired) profile and a church profile, to complete the question: “How are we going to get there?”

5. The benefits of Intentional Interim Ministry

- **Healing.** Without healing existing divisions within the church, it is difficult to have a unified mission and ministry. There are also circumstances where congregations feel manipulated or misled by their pastor, and need guidance to become whole again. They need assistance in developing an attitude of trust toward pastoral leadership.
- **Thorough resolution.** There are situations that simply take time to untangle. It is important to do what is necessary to reach understanding and closure.
- **New perspectives.** When a long-term pastor leaves a congregation, the norms and expectations set up by the long tenure may be difficult for the pastor that follows. Intentional Interim Ministry allows a congregation to experience different approaches to ministry, and opens eyes to different kinds of pastoral leadership.
- **Setting a fresh course.** When a church feels it’s at a difficult crossroad, quick decisions may be made without fully exploring options and potential outcomes. Intentional Interim Ministry slows down the call process, allowing the congregation time to make well-informed and deliberate decisions regarding the future course of the church.

6. Conclusion. The interim period between one pastor leaving and the next pastor arriving can be a special time of God moving in a congregation. Instead of sitting back and waiting for the next person to arrive, the interim time creates a wonderful opportunity to address issues, questions, concerns, vision, and the church’s health. Turning the interim period into an intentional interim period can make a tremendous difference in the future of your church.



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A NARRATIVE ON INTENTIONAL INTERIM MINISTRY

8 Signs Your Church Needs an Intentional Interim Pastor, By Lavern Brown

Calling an intentional interim pastor should be the first thing a church considers doing when the pastor resigns, especially if the church meets any of these criteria:

1. The pastor is leaving after a lengthy tenure (experts differ over “lengthy tenure”, with figures from 7 to 15 years).
2. The church churns its pastors (a new one is called) every few years.
3. The pastor leaves under duress (forced out) or due to moral failure.
4. The church’s leaders can’t identify or agree on the church’s mission.
5. It has been three years since the last ministry audit (everything is reviewed for “mission fit” and amended as needed)
6. It is a “commuter church” (members are very different from those who live near the church).
7. Attendance has plateaued (people coming in offset those who leave).
8. The church faces significant financial challenges

Change Management: Intentional Interim Ministers and Congregations By Rev. Malcolm Himschoot

When pastors leave, die, retire, move on, or are let go, churches often wonder: What do we do now? Though it might seem rare for these events to happen – and it is rare for any particular congregation to experience such events – across whole denominations these events are a regular occurrence.

The ministry of Jesus Christ can bear such times of pastoral change. In fact, since the Christian journey is all about transformation, faithful churches can use these moments to move forward in powerful ways. The challenge that typically comes with the opportunity of change in the life of a congregation is to manage anxiety, while embracing a whole host of tasks in preparation for what is next.

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Intentional interim ministry defined

Intentional interim ministry is a pastoral practice for those with ongoing education in organizational dynamics and leadership transition.

Intentional interim pastors accompany a church using skills such as conflict facilitation, strategic planning, and process management. Such skills are often drawn from and recognized by professional consultants and executives who are not pastors.

Intentional interim ministry is spiritually grounded and theologically-minded, just as pastoral work is.

Used well, the interim time has a purpose to unify a congregation, in order for the church to confidently call a new pastor in an open-ended commitment to God's ministry among and ahead of them.

In the larger picture, a congregation needs to take time to discern God's mission for this particular congregation. What is God calling this congregation to be or to do? In what direction should it be headed?

One contribution of an intentional interim minister is to help leaders attend to excellent communication. A second contribution is to help the church note a clear sense of progress and/or learnings in preparation for a successful search for their next pastor. During the time they work together, the intentional interim minister often requests a transition team named by the church to help lead churchwide activities toward important assessment, learning, reflection, and discovery that will draw this community of faith together and onward.

Work of preparation is done before the church sets a new Scope of Work for the next minister, and before the church elects a Call Committee to fill that position according to the church's Ministry Site Profile. The best clarity of the whole church will later help a small group in the confidential search process, to interview and prayerfully recommend the candidate that is a good match with God's calling as expressed by the congregation.

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The end product is a package of material called the Ministry Site Profile. It is normal that during an Interim period, once a Call Committee and church board have collaborated on a candidate, the whole congregation votes to issue a call to the next minister, and the Intentional Interim completes their work with the congregation.

A Description of “Transition”

Periods of transition are holy times. They are moments when deep work can be done, inspiration can appear, and renewal can be leveraged to propel us into the future. Transitions are not wasted time. “Without transition, the change changes nothing,” William Bridges notes in his book *Managing Transitions*. During a transition, congregations take time to feel (grief, joy, anticipation), to think (reflect on the past, dream of the future) and connect spiritually (through prayer and study). These are whole- self moments, when the Holy Spirit breathes new life into a congregation and grows something new for the sake of humanity. After transitions, congregations and individuals are never the same, but God is constantly with us, re-creating us into the body of Christ that the world needs today. During the process, congregations in transition are in partnership with the Office of the Bishop, supporting one another and holding one another accountable to be who God is creating each to be: the Body of Christ.

Everyday ministry continues during the transition process, usually led by the intentional interim pastor and the Congregation Council. During this in-between time, a transition team of the congregation will find engaging ways to guide the faith community through a self-study that will embrace the past, name the present, and prayerfully discern God's call into the future. To do this, the whole community will need to communicate well and often so that everyone stays committed to moving forward in this process.

Transitional or interim ministry is more than a stop-gap measure achieved by a part-time pastor. Intentional Interim Ministry provides a full-time and deeper service to a church as it concludes the current chapter of its history and prepares to begin the next chapter.



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Typical Things heard during a pastoral transition

"Things will fall apart if we don't call another pastor soon. An intentional interim takes too long. We can't afford to wait."

"Only bad churches need an intentional interim. We don't want people to think we're a problem."

These are common misperceptions about intentional interim ministry. Intentional interim ministry, however, is designed to enable churches to assess themselves while continuing their ministries without losing ground. In reality, most churches can't afford not to engage an intentional interim.

When should a church engage an Interim Ministry?

There are three typical situations for which an intentional interim is helpful: when a long-tenured or beloved pastor leaves the church, when a church is stalled or when a church is reeling from conflict.

"After 10 years [or possibly shorter tenure] of the last pastor, the next pastor is often an 'unintentional interim,'" "The departing pastor sets an emotional high mark that is hard for the next pastor to reach. The new pastor does things differently or wants to help the church make some needed changes, and this threatens the status quo."

An intentional interim can help bring closure to a long pastorate while preparing the church for a new pastor.

The vast majority of churches are plateaued or declining, and most of those churches want a pastor to reverse that trend. For success, a church first needs to face its own issues. Intentional interims are trained to help a church do so honestly. After that struggle, a church can call a pastor who best fits the situation and desires of the church.



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Conflict “needs to be addressed before calling a new pastor into a no-win situation,”

“Some people think [conflict] is the most common—or only—reason for an intentional interim,”

The intentional interim is a “‘bottom-up’ model, where the process starts with the congregation.” – Karl Fickling

The Intentional Interim Pastor’s job

An intentional interim pastor brings mission-critical skills needed during this critical time in the church’s life.

Interim Pastors keep continuity between pastors. They guide the church through changes that leave the church’s focus intact. The way congregants view their church’s mission is unchanged. A Transition Pastor is intentional about managing transitions. This requires congregants to change their internal attitudes and ideas about the mission of the congregation.

In addition to the ministry of Word and Sacrament, the Intentional Interim Pastor is trained to assist a congregation in transition to address specific issues, challenges, or needs to be dealt with prior to the calling and arrival of a new permanent pastor.

Questions are asked to lead the congregation to ponder who they are and Whom they serve:

- What are your values?
- What is your purpose?
- What is the process?



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During this transition the intentional interim pastor aids the church in removing the obstacles that hinder the church from achieving of its God-given potential. This leaves the church poised for growth when the new pastor arrives. The specific skill sets that the interim pastor will employ in this project include (but are not limited to the following items:

- **Assessment.** The intentional interim pastor must be able to discern the true state of the church by the use of various assessment tools, interviews with a statistically significant portion of the congregation, and a comprehensive review of all governing documents, minutes of meetings and other historical information. The fruit of the assessment are consolidated into one report that contains a succinct statement about the findings, a commentary on the factors that led to the current state, and a proposed course of action to ameliorate the problems.
- **Grief.** In many cases the church needs to bring out its grief and work through the pain. The grief may be due to the loss of a beloved minister, to destructive conflict that led to the minister's departure, the loss of a compelling vision for the future or other reasons. An effective interim pastor will employ leadership behaviors that bring the congregation to relief and to a full embrace of the new normal.
- **Direct Action.** If there are immediate threats to the church's welfare the intentional interim pastor provides leadership to insure that the problems are either resolved or removed in a biblical and God-honoring fashion. The interim pastor is responsible for the welfare of the whole church as a corporate body. It is likely that he will have to confront strong personalities, perhaps the "church boss" and deal firmly. This requires special skills to keep the "main thing the main thing" without getting sucked into a personal clash. In these situations the interim pastor will likely need the services of a coach to get through this phase unflustered.
- **Training.** The congregation in transition will be in need of training, but the specifics will vary from church to church. The intentional interim is able to provide the appropriate training, bring appropriate ancillary materials to bear and insure that the congregation is equipped to sustain the eight key systems of a healthy church. By the time the interim leaves the church should have a sustainable training



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- **Mission, Vision and Strategic Planning.** An intentional interim pastor will possess the skills necessary to guide the congregation into their own understanding of the mission. This requires the ability to work within denominational guidelines and doctrinal statements while remaining true to the text of scripture. The pastor must also know how to move from mission to vision and thence to strategic planning. The end result of this part of the transition process is that the members themselves own the mission, they are energized by the vision and they are committed to executing the strategic plan. The intentional interim pastor must know how to guide the congregation or its leaders so they are the ones who do the actual development work. If they don't, the mission, vision and plans aren't theirs!
- **Manage Change.** Introducing change into the life of a church is tricky business. Even people who recognize and embrace the need for change can be thrown. Most people will naturally react to change with resistance borne of fear. An intentional interim pastor needs to have and use the tools that manage the change process. If not, the changes will not be permanent and the church will probably slip back into status quo ante when the new pastor arrives; this creates additional tension for the next pastor.
- **Pastor Search.** The next pastor is crucial to the church's future. If the pastor has the right mix of skills, giftedness and personality, the church will move forward in fulfillment of its vision. The interim pastor must know how to train the Pastor Search Team so they conduct a thorough search, conduct a thorough background check and interview process, and make sure that the pastor is not only the right fit, but one who can commit to helping the church move forward in its mission and vision.
- **Transition.** The intentional interim pastor's duty to the church is not finished when the new pastor arrives to begin his ministry. The interim pastor will coach the new pastor for a year (perhaps longer) to insure that the pastor doesn't step on any land mines, learns how to work with the strong figures in the congregation, and quickly gains the trust needed to lead.



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Hard Truths about the Interim Season

Churches do not handle “treading water” well.

Any time (and for whatever reason) a minister is in a “lame duck” role, the church is going to suffer. The longer the time of transition, the greater the suffering. Certainly it is appropriate to celebrate a beloved minister and his tenure at a church. But churches do not exist for the purpose of celebrating past ministers. They exist to accomplish kingdom business. When a minister knows his ability to provide effective leadership is compromised, it is time for that minister to step aside for the health of the church. And when a church realizes the same, a relatively rapid transition to new leadership is recommended.

A strong sense of tomorrow is critical to a church's health. The question, “Where have we been?” can give a church comfort and encouragement. But only the question, “Where are we going?” injects energy and vitality into a church. A church that does not see a clear and imminent path to the future is a church ripe for stagnation and discouragement.

It is difficult for churches to be in a “holding pattern,” waiting not just for the next season of the church's life but for the necessary process by which that next season is defined and envisioned.

Churches need a significant break between the former minister and the next.

Churches need time to adjust to the loss of one minister and the calling of another: a time for celebrating the past and mourning its passing ... a time to prepare for the next minister and anticipate his coming.

The longer the tenure of your departing minister, the longer the interim period should be. (Think one month of interim for every year of ministry.) This is recommended for several reasons:



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- The longer a ministry, the deeper the ruts, and the more time and effort required to develop new habits.
- A new minister will inevitably be compared to the last one. The passage of time (and a growing sense of anticipation) can help blunt such comparisons.
- Fans of the former minister need the time to accept that the new guy (just because he is not the old guy) is not therefore a “bum.” Many good ministers are never given a chance to develop their ministry because the church is not ready to give them a break.
- Critics of the former minister need the time to accept that the new guy (just because he is the new guy) is not therefore a “Messiah.” Unrealistic expectations have been the downfall of more-than-a-few new ministers.

An intentional and effective interim ministry allows a church to “cleanse the palate” of the former minister (no matter how sweet and appreciated the taste may be) and prepare the church’s tongue for new taste experiences ahead.

Significant changes in the church “system” need to happen before the new minister arrives.

Don’t wait for the new minister to land before you identify and address needed changes in your church. Waiting not only postpones necessary transitions, it also requires the new minister to shoulder the burden (and the blame) for those changes. Putting your house in order before the new minister arrives creates a healthy and forward-looking environment in which he can operate effectively. It allows church leaders to make changes on the basis of kingdom principle rather than open the new minister to charges of preferential and arbitrary changes.

A church that is committed to protecting the new minister recognizes the wisdom of fighting some battles before he arrives on the scene. Once again, this is a good reason for a longer interim period and an intentional interim ministry. Someone stepping into your church between your present minister and the next can lead you through a season of change, take some of the arrows that will inevitably be launched, and set up the next pulpit minister to have a more peaceful and effective ministry.

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Typical Work Projects during an Intentional Interim Ministry Time Period

- **Come to terms with History Work.** Putting Tenure of Previous Pastor(s) in Perspective; Matching Congregational Identity with Reality. The Role of the Intentional Interim Pastor is to Prepare the Congregation to Call an Installed Pastor. Pastoral change brings major emotional transition into life of congregation as they say goodbye to one pastor and prepare to say hello to another. Congregations Mark Time by the Tenures of Their Pastors. Asking Questions is important. Ignorance is the Interim's Ally. Recognize that the Emotional System is Disrupted by Even an Amicable Parting of a Pastor. Pastoral Change Naturally Brings Opportunity for Self-Reflection by Congregation. Self-reflection includes more than just a look at the previous pastor(s) and their relationship with the congregation—it includes an assessment of the congregation's place in community/society, history (21st Century), Christian Church, and respective Christian tradition.
- **Begin To Hear God's Voice Anew:** Self-Reflection is Not a Welcomed Exercise For Most Congregations. There Will Be Hurt Feelings—Prepare for Resistance. Congregations are emotional systems as much as they are missional bodies—they can and do "feel". What Do They Want/Not Want to Talk About?—Use What They Want to Talk About to Talk About What They Don't Want to Talk About. A Sure Sign of Health at this Early Stage of the Interim Journey is the Ability of a Congregation to Hear God's Voice Anew. Insights about the congregation's past, its identity, and its future are given ultimately by God. Honor the History, Personality, Traditions, Customs of the Congregation—But Be You (Self-Differentiate)
- **Discover New Identity;** Finding God's Provision in Wilderness. Discerning God's Voice & Vision Together. Wholeness: Healthy Congregational Identity & Relationships. Emergence of Congregational Vision, Mission & Ministry. Who Are We? (Identity). What Are We Called to Do? (Purpose). Who is Our Neighbor? (Mission). The Past is Put in Perspective as the Congregation Begins to Respond to God's Voice. Hope is Fostered as They Talk About Where God Might Be Leading. Honest self-assessment \ What are the Congregation's Strengths?— (What Are You Not Hearing?) Strengths May Reveal weaknesses. A Body (Congregation) Suffers When One or More Parts are Unhealthy. A Healthy Body is Able to Listen and Respond More Faithfully to the Movement of God's Spirit



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- **Find God's Provision in the Wilderness.** This is when the Congregational Vision, Mission & Ministry emerge. Confidence is Gained when Progress is Made Along the Interim Journey. Manna, Tangible Signs of God's Sustenance and Grace, little things along the interim path. The Bible is Full of Stories of God's Providence and Care—Pray It! Preach It! Teach It! Going Back to Egypt Can Be Tempting—Know The congregation's Egypt. Egypt is Not an Option—Rest Don't Resist, Listen Don't Fight. Listening Leads to Reflecting on What Has Been Heard. Reflection Becomes Vision When Consensus Is Shared.
- **Navigating Change.** Responding to God's Call Through the Voice of New Leaders. It's essential that the people who are called to serve share a common vision and perspective. They need not always agree (low level conflict is healthy) but they should work in harmony with each other. The True Test of a New Leader is Not Whether They Agree With the Pastor (Interim, Other). Gifts For Leadership Need to Be Honed. Leadership training.
- **Addressing Authority & Power Dynamics.** Engage the Powers, Empower the Leaders. The emergence and activity of new leaders will undoubtedly trigger reactions. A skilled interim will use shifts in leadership to address issues of power and authority. Low Level Conflict is a Sign of Progress—Celebrate Resolution. Conflict is Part of Change—Run to It, Not Away From it. God Bestows the Gifts to Fulfill the Vision. The interim congregation will need “short-term” successes in order to remain engaged in the interim journey. They also serve as reminders of God's grace and provision. Making Connections is Key. The Intentional Interim Pastor is an Interpreter/Communicator of Connections.



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- **Renew Relationships with Denominational Church and Community Mission Partners.** Relate Mission & Ministry of Congregation to God's Activity In the World. What is Our Mission? How Do We Support Our Mission (Stewardship)? What Does it Mean to Be Lutheran? Who is My Neighbor? Church consultants say there are three questions every congregation must ask itself: Who are We? What Are We Called to Do? Who Is Our Neighbor? Like It Or Not, The (Denomination) is a Mission Partner. Perceptions Are Reality—Know the Difference Between Sacred Cows and Paper Lions. A balance between the inward organization or program of the church and active engagement with the world on behalf of God makes for a healthy church.
- **Healthy, Balanced Relationship with New Pastor & Hope for Future;** Patience, Patience, Patience (& Perseverance). Transition Team. With the assistance of your Intentional Interim Pastor, your church forms a Transition Team made of elected church leaders. This team is made up of trusted, spiritual, and wise leaders from the congregation. The Transition Team looks like a microcosm of the church. The Transition Team does not take over the church. The Transition Team does not have elected voice. It does not do the work for the church. Instead, the team's role is to develop strategies to engage the congregation in each process so that the church body will be impacted by the study and so the church members will feel ground up ownership of decisions made in the interim period. The Intentional Interim Pastor doesn't become the leader of the church; he or she becomes the "coach" to a Transition Team. The Transition Team, a customized leadership group for the church, helps lead the church in an intentional time of self-examination and reflection. The Intentional Interim Pastor and the church's Transition Team craft a unique process tailored for each particular church, including identifying Focus Point issues that need to be looked at before the next pastor arrives, preparing the health of the church for the next pastor, and identifying the type of leader who needs to be called next for the church. The church delays the formation of a Call Committee until the major work of the congregation self-study is completed. Delaying the pastor search activities actually cuts the overall search process by months, since the church has renewed clarity and strategic focus on the kind of pastor they are seeking. The "genius" behind Intentional Interim



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Ministry is that the Interim Pastor must rely on the lay leadership of the church. It is the lay leadership that knows the church, the church's culture, and the church's history. The Interim Pastor "coaches" the Transition Team on the process, but it is the Team that leads out in deciding what issues need to be tackled as they select the Focus Points that need attention. The Team knows how best to get the congregation engaged in processing the issues, and the Team knows when each Focus Point has been adequately addressed.

What are the benefits of Intentional Interim Ministry?

An intentional interim provides a "pastor during the interim." The intentional interim is an appropriate person to lead a church to address prickly issues that otherwise might disturb a church's fellowship or jeopardize a full-time pastor's employment. Without such fear, an intentional interim creates a safe environment for difficult conversations. Churches with intentional interims tend to be much calmer, feeling less anxious about rushing to fill a vacant position.

What is Intentional Interim Ministry?

Decades of studying the interim period by the Alban Institute, the Interim Ministry Network, and the Center for Congregational Health have shown the interim period can be a productive time to address key issues in a church's life. Addressing these issues will improve the health of the church, while fine-tuning the understanding of the type of pastoral candidate that should be called next. Churches which should particularly consider the Intentional Interim Ministry (IIM) include churches that are losing a pastor after a significant tenure, that have lost vision, that find themselves stuck on a numerical plateau or in decline, or that are experiencing conflict (or are in the aftermath of serious conflict). Not intentionally addressing key issues means a church is likely to repeat its history. The next pastor will inherit unresolved issues, be sidetracked from God's purposes, and leave after a short tenure. Meanwhile, the church will be confused, fellowship will be hurt, and the cycle of an anxious interim time will return. The interim period opens the church to a time of dialogue about items that might be difficult to address during an installed pastor's tenure. The interim period is the best time to clarify members' differing expectations, hopes, and desires.



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Five tasks have been identified that should be addressed by churches in an interim period. With slight recent refinements, these “Focus Points” continue to prove to be the vital areas that must be addressed in a successful IIM. The five Focus Points are: Heritage—examining a church’s history, Leadership—a careful examination of staff positions, job descriptions, policies and procedures, bylaws, and lay leadership. Connections—, partnerships in ministry and missions—reconnecting the church, unifying the church. Mission—a call from God that belongs to the whole church. finding their God-given purpose and to express it with broad generalities and specific short-term actions. Future— “Who are we?”: “Who are we supposed to be?”

From the article, “The Most Frequent Burdens Church Staff Face”

Use this post as a catalyst to pray for your church's staff members.

- **Lacking time with senior leadership** – Given the size of some churches, it may be difficult for staff to spend significant time with the senior leader – but that reality seldom lessens the desire of staff to have face-to-face conversations. Staff often struggle when they have no more time with the senior leader than does the typical layperson.
- **Lacking clear role expectations** – Sometimes leaders know in their mind exactly what they expect from staff, but the church has provided no written job descriptions. In other cases, a job description is provided, but expectations are different than the written narrative. In either case, staff are then held accountable to unstated expectations.
- **Longing for a God-sized vision** – Too often, staff cannot answer our question, “What is the vision of this church and its leadership?” When this happens, we usually learn that senior leaders have lost their vision as well. Staff yearn to serve with a leader whose vision compels them each day.
- **Having few friends, especially among other staff** – I am an introvert, but even I am surprised by how many staff members are lonely. Church members become acquaintances, not friends. Staff families seldom spend time together. Staff themselves are sometimes at odds with each other, especially in struggling churches.



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- **Living in a ministry silo** – Staff love their sphere of ministry, but few others share their level of passion. Others make decisions that affect their ministry without discussion or dialogue. Calendaring events becomes competition rather than cooperation. The silo gets lonely.
- **Ministering with few funds** – Many churches find salary money by decreasing ministry funds. Thus, they hire personnel but provide little money for them to do the work they are called to do. A vision without resources can bring frustration and fatigue.
- **Perceiving they have no voice** – Some staff believe no one in authority listens to their ideas or concerns. In some cases, that perception is based in the church's history: the staff's previous attempts to voice their opinion went unheard.
- **Having no "safe" place to be honest** – This burden is obviously connected to the previous one. Our consultant team often hears these concerns simply because staff believe they have no other place to go with their concerns.
- **Receiving poor salary and/or benefits** – Our team has not heard from staff who are ungrateful for their positions, but we have heard from staff who are struggling with their bills. Our salary and benefit evaluations often do show some staff are underpaid when compared with averages for similar positions.
- **Longing for affirmation** – All leaders operate differently, but most staff appreciate a "pat on the back" once in awhile. Even little gestures – a public "thank you," a lunch invitation, a drop by visit, or a small bonus – can go a long way toward building a strong team.
- **Competing for volunteers** – Every ministry needs workers, but willing volunteers are limited. Because most churches do not have a strategy to enlist and train workers, staff often compete for the same workers. Recruitment thus becomes organizational rivalry.
- **Seeing and hearing too much** – I wish I could ignore this burden, but integrity demands I include it. Too many staff members wrestle internally because they have listened to leader and staff language, overhead jokes, and watched actions that are less than Christian. Typically, they express this burden to us with a heavy heart and deep grief.

To be frank, I wish I had appreciated my staff members more when I served as a full-time pastor. Take time right now to pray for your church staff. If you are a pastor or staff member, direct your folks to this post and ask them to pray for your team. Nobody on the team should carry burdens alone.



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INTERIM PHASES AND PROCESS

BY PASTOR RANDY FETT



Phase One: "Breathe."

Phase Two: "Full 'on' conditioning and training work"

Phase Three: "Naming the game plan"

Phase Four: "Celebration"

That same day two of them were walking to the village Emmaus, about seven miles out of Jerusalem. They were deep in conversation, going over all these things that had happened. In the middle of their talk and questions, Jesus came up and walked along with them...

They came to the edge of the village where they were headed. He acted as if he were going on but they pressed him: "Stay and have supper with us. It's nearly evening; the day is done." So he went in with them. And here is what happened: He sat down at the table with them. Taking the bread, he blessed and broke and gave it to them. At that moment, open-eyed, wide-eyed, they recognized him. And then he disappeared. Back and forth they talked. "Didn't we feel on fire as he conversed with us on the road, as he opened up the Scriptures for us?"

- Road to Emmaus Story, Luke 24, The Message

Ideal at the start

Interim Pastor is "Called", still under call in the ELCA, as a called pastor, (Held by synod council and Bishop), by both the Synod Bishop's office/ synod council, and the congregation.

INTERIM PHASES AND PROCESS

Two legs to the Interim Journey:

1. Serve as pastor/ Senior Pastor
2. Serve a Vision consultant – The goal is to bring the congregation to a level of health again, to a vibrant, relevant vision for moving forward, and to the point of calling their next pastor.

Transparency and monthly reports to congregation via a monthly Sunday worship mission moment and monthly informal coffee forum both on Sundays and mid-week. Interim pastor is not open to and will not serve as the next pastor who will be called by the congregation.

During each of the first 3 phases it will be important to meet regularly with an ad hoc group of Committee leaders, Church council presidents present and past, as a type of sounding board, an idea bouncing group, and informal conversation group.

One year contract call plan, or more, as needed. Interim pastor contract can be renewed or amended and extended at the end of the one-year contract time period.

A question to consider on the front end: What is needed the most from the Interim Resource? A doctor, a sorter, a maximizer, a counselor, a processor, quiet time, space, a therapist, a theologian, a pastor, a coach, a fixer, a navigator, ships crew, a facilitator, a shepherd, a strategist, or a leader?

Phase One: First 3 months or more as needed. "Breathe."

- Begin service as normal pastor assuming all pastor/ senior pastor. Work with staff, organizing and administering duties at the start. Engage Associate pastor in splitting of pastoral duties.
- Great care and grace at this stage.
- Networking
- Getting familiar with rhythms, schedules, and routines.
- Meets with staff and works with them on teamwork and collaboration goal during this time.



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INTERIM PHASES AND PROCESS

- Enable the leaders to lead; support them
- Community building
- Building trust
- At the front end of this phase: Leadership of the church works with Interim pastor and synod Bishop's staff to develop an Intentional Interim Action plan with goals to accomplish during this time.
- Typically, intentional - guided- facilitated deep listening sessions – one on one and with various groups; large group and small group components. This part of Phase One involves trying out a few intentional listening and caring sessions to identify any health issues and concerns of the congregation and to take the first steps to fostering healthy and committed conversations. Perhaps, bring in some outside resource people to assist the Intentional Interim pastor and to facilitate these conversations. Asking what do we learn from these open sessions? Where do we want to be? What work do people feel needs to be done during the intentional interim time period? Report to the congregation the findings, what heard, and summaries.
- Use of “Appreciation Inquiry” tools – Moving from the typical “What is wrong here, what needs to be fixed?”, and thoughts of pastor leaving to a healthier, “What is God doing here?” – Moving from “How has God been calling us?”, to more to of what is God calling us to. And to “What do we dream of for the next five years?”
- Perform a Healthy church assessment.
- Begin listening for names and interview people for a “Transitions Vision Team”. Need a 9- 12-member team – One council liaison rep.
- The church takes intentional time for prayer for direction and discernment during this phase. Maybe bring a resource pastor or spiritual director in for this.

Phase Two: Next 6 months or more as needed:
“Full ‘on’ conditioning and training work”. Begin conditioning for the upcoming race. Much work to do in this phase. Interim Pastor “Coaches” the current leadership throughout Interim Pastor led and directed activities, at the start of this phase



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INTERIM PHASES AND PROCESS

- A full, creative, review of history -a whole congregation activity
- Identifying Core Values that drive the people and congregation right now – what makes the congregation who it is – that church? Why are you here verses another church in the city?
- Speaking of, naming, and exploring the “Iceberg” effect with congregation and leaders. What is below the surface? What is the “Back story” to this place? What hasn't been fully dealt with?
- Reviewing current biblical principles given by God that drive our current mission. Prioritizing or naming a priority scripture passage or story to guide us. What do we hear God leading us to?
- Interim Transitional Vision Team is formally commissioned
- With Transitional Vision Team now:
- Full review of trends, numbers, and statistics within the congregation; Worship numbers, financials, giving, stewardship plans, staffing and areas of service, volunteer leadership, committees, and council teams, Small groups, youth, children, teens, confirmation, adults, and family ministries, mission dollars, service projects. Graph this data out, analyses, and understand. This will come into play in the planning as a church. Compare this with other churches our size.
- Interim Pastor shares research and teaching on sizing and style of churches. Church council with Transition Team claim their size. Question: How will we live this out?
- Transition Team sent out to identify cultural trends, and needs of the neighborhood, challenges, and qualities of Neighborhood, county, city, state. What is the state of affairs? What are the needs of our neighbors?
- Demographic reviews. Business climate a review, School reviews, access to any other survey in the area.
- What are the key issues that people are dealing with? What are the needs they are identifying? How might the congregation reach out and serve these needs?
- Transition Team summarizes their findings and comes up with 3-5 key mission - service ideas, to enhance the congregation mission Where does the Transition Team sense that God is calling the congregation right now?
- This gets laid alongside of the core values identified earlier along with the biblical driving principle. How do these key needs/ service ideas match up? How do they not?



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INTERIM PHASES AND PROCESS

- This also gets measured against the current church Vision and Mission statements? How do they measure up? How do they not measure up? Is there need for the casting a new vision and navigational mission points?
- Transition Team prepares a summary of their findings and key service and mission points to share with leadership and congregation.
- Congregation Self-study. Transition Team performs survey of congregation with these previous summaries and key points in the hands of the congregation. Attempts made to reach as many people as possible with Pastor Randy's On-line Survey Monkey Tool, and Pastor Randy's printed survey tool. A deeper survey is given to the current and past leadership of the congregation. (Interim Pastor Randy has developed each of these three surveys. No need to hire a consulting firm).
- Interim pastor analyzes and summarizes the results of the surveys -with the help of the Transition Team.
- All of this gets shared with leaders and the congregation as a whole.
- Critical Question to be asked at this step; What is the view from the balcony? 10 feet up? 100 feet up? 1,000 feet up? 3,000 feet up? The sky's the limit? Transition Team, along with, and in partnership with, the church council leadership, articulate the mission of the congregation. Review, restore, reconfigure, or come up with a new 1. Vision Statement, and 2. Three – Five Navigational Mission Points/ directions to drive both the Vision of the congregation and the type of pastoral leader that is needed in the next senior pastor who will be called.

Interim pastor, Transitional Vision Team members, along with current and past leaders:

A. Host "Small group" cottage home meetings" to engage many people on possible ideas, needs, directions, and futuring – Appreciation Inquiry questions are used again at this step. (This ground input and hands on mission engagement is critical).

-Or -

B. Host at church small group gatherings inviting many people in for feedback dessert meetings. Interim pastor would lead these meetings with trained in house co lay leaders. It is a moment to reclaim, and rediscover the congregation identity. Openness and flexibility with future, missions, community care and commitment, programs ideas and service discovery.



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INTERIM PHASES AND PROCESS

Transitional Vision Team and Interim pastor summarize the data from discussion A. or B. and present to the congregation

During this phase, focus is also given by the Interim Pastor to any work that needs to happen with church organization/management, and leadership with roles and responsibilities, and any new ways to lead the church in a healthy way. "Who's driving the bus?" Why? How did they get there? What is everyone else doing? Where is everyone else sitting on the bus? Working together as team it is critical for leadership to look at congregation family systems that have come into being and are a part of being in that place, who makes decisions and how, roles and responsibilities of leaders, the processing of change, and the managing of conflict. The goal is to define the building blocks for unlocking a community's health and strength.

Interim pastor shares team analyses with Council leaders, color wheel and personality traits, Insights and discoveries. Interim Pastor leads a "Working towards Collaboration" workshop.

Leadership tends to relationships with synod, churchwide ELCA, ecumenical partnerships in the city, worldwide missions, companion synods, sister congregations, and the broader church.

Phase Three: 2 months or more as needed, "Naming the game plan"

(Two activities begin to happen simultaneously)

First Activity: Strategic planning. All of the summaries, and the navigational mission points are sent to the church leadership groups, committees, and work groups in the congregation to come back to the church council with strategic plans: 1 -2 specific goals with each navigational mission point, detail, dates, by when, by whom, how many resources are needed, and by who. This strategic plan is then reviewed and processed by the church council leadership



INTERIM PHASES AND PROCESS

Once this in place it is presented to the congregation by someone on council with a full report, summary, and details. Some congregations actually vote on the strategic plan.

Second Activity: Pastoral search /Call Committee is formed.

- Call Committee is formally asked, found, launched and installed.
- Work is fairly confidential.
- One Call Committee rep is a liaison to the church council.
- Call Committee first meets with synod staff for orientation and training.
- Call Committee meets jointly with Interim Pastor, Transitional Vision Team, and leaders of the church with Interim summaries in place, new Vision and Navigational Mission points in hand.
- Call Committee is sent off on their own now away from the Transitional Vision Team and Interim Pastor., but working in connection with church council and keeping the congregation informed regularly as the call process goes along.
- Call Committee prepares Church Profile for Call process.
- Call Committee does a mock interview with a local practicing pastor.
- Call Committee begins interviewing

Phase Four: “Celebration” last month, or more as needed:

Transition team is formally thanked, and all of the thorough Interim work celebrated. They are finished with their work and released from duties. The leadership torch is formally passed to the church council and call committee.

Second leg of Interim pastor call is complete. Interim pastor backs off of that part of Interim work now. Interim pastor now serves with the one leg as Senior pastor until the new Senior pastor is officially called, and begins work.

Interim work is completed. In the context of worship, Interim pastorate is concluded, thanked, and sent off to next call.



A MENU OF INTERIM TOOLS AND OPTIONS

- Deep Listening Events
- "What's on Your Dashboard" activity
- Core Values
- Biblical Guiding Principles
- Church "Sizing" and characteristics; what shifts need to be made in the church's overall ministry, style, and mission?
- History gathering, staffing, and lay leadership names and roles.
- 3 Different Ministry Surveys: The simpler online version, the written version, and the more thorough and deeper leadership version; This all comes with a full analysis and grouping of responses, along with recommendations from the Interim consultant
- Interim Planning Transition Team: Assessing and analyzing community needs, trends, demographics, health issues in the community, cultural shifts in the area. Identify the space and ways the church will engage a unique ministry moving forward, given these factors
- Faith X national church consulting analysis program
- Full "Ground up" member input rewrite of Church Vision along with accompanying sense of directive Mission Points to faithfully arrive there
- Strategic goal specific planning
- Review of policies and procedures, including financials with audit of books, Personnel handbook, Committees – Ministry teams - leaders – council structures, Worship styles and planning, Education classes and models, and activities for Children, Youth, Adults, and families, constitution, and the congregation's appetite for service and outreach beyond the church doors.
- Service of Reconciliation, Healing, and Beginning Anew
- Teaching course: "Healthy Relationships, Healthy Life, Healthy Church" Teamwork and Partnership, Conflict Management, Collaboration, Decision Making- Power - and Authority, Paradigm Shifts, and Change; reviewing with leadership how decisions are made and power and authority structures at play at church.
- Helpful tools that could be used with staff:
 - "Coaching" one on one
 - Conflict resolution strategies
 - Communication Styles



A MENU OF INTERIM TOOLS AND OPTIONS

- Ministry Plans, Goal Setting, and reviews
- Cooperative 360 Ministry Reviews
- Leadership Behavior Styles
- Strength Finders
- Personality Colors
- Enneagram
- Spiritual Gift Inventory
- Values Inventory
- Use of spiritual guides
- Staff/ Team outings, Retreat, and Team Building



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