

# MINISTRY DURING THE INTERIM

## THE TRANSITION TIME

Although lay and staff leadership can attend to many of the issues presented to a congregation in transition, pastoral presence and support is still needed. The congregation must continue to worship, receive the sacraments and pray together during the transition period. A congregation that relaxes or ignores the worship needs of its members will find it even more difficult to deal with the pastoral vacancy. It is recommended that close contact be maintained with the Synod staff as a source for pastoral support resources.

## Intentional Interim Minister

The intentional interim will oversee the maintenance of existing ministries and programs equipping lay leaders for mission and ministry. The Intentional Interim will also support the congregation throughout the transitional time including the grieving process by modeling and teaching effective communication. The Intentional Interim will help the congregation come to terms with its history, discover a new identity, manage leadership shifts, and renew connections with the synod and the ELCA.

Because of the unique nature of Interim Ministry, the Interim Minister is NOT available to be a candidate considered by the Call Committee. Interims are appointed for the specific needs of a congregation during the time of transition and those needs are not necessarily the same as the congregational needs for a permanent/settled pastor. The Interim Minister also has an unfair advantage over the other possible candidates. The other candidates have not had the opportunity to develop relationship as the Interim Minister does, therefore giving the Interim an unfair advantage.

The Interim Minister may relate to the call committee as an outsider perspective or provide help with a mock interview. The Interim Minister does not regularly meet with the Call Committee, nor is s/he a member of the Call Committee. The expectation is that the Interim Minister is not intimately involved with the Call Process. Questions for the Call Process should be directed to the Synod Office.

## Supply Pastor

Supply pastors may preside at worship, preach, teach on Sunday morning and/or may provide a minimum of pastoral care for the seriously ill or those in crisis. These pastors work either for specific, one-time duties, or for very limited work defined in a carefully designed contract that outlines the scope of their work and range of authority. Sunday supply and part time pastors may be pastors who are retired, On leave From Call, or lay persons with special training who have been authorized by the Synod to engage in this ministry.

The Congregation Council, in consultation with the Synod Office, identifies persons who could offer transitional ministry. The council will meet with this person (or persons) to determine the purposes, duties, and mutual expectations (including compensation) for this ministry. This is unlike calling a pastor where there is a large pool of candidates. The Synod Office will do their best to match the gifts of the congregations with the transitional ministers available at the time.

In the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin Interim Ministers are usually paid what the congregation's previous pastor was receiving for defined compensation. Exceptions are negotiated with consultation of the Synod Office. The interim contract included in this handbook will address some of the other parts of compensation.

The council president, secretary, and pastor(s) sign an Interim Contract and forward a copy to the synod office. This is a contract and not a call and therefore does not need a full congregational vote. A contract is included on the following page.

Sometimes a congregation is in a transitional phase in its life cycle and would benefit from an extended self-study process in order to prepare for a fruitful ministry with its next pastor. There may be issues that need to be resolved or confronted before beginning the call process. There are many synod resources available including the Synod Mediation Team, conflict resolution and strategic planning to name a few. The council and president, in consultation with the synod office, will determine the potential helpfulness of such a study for the congregation in its particular circumstances.

## Synod Mediation Team

A group of pastors and lay leaders has been trained to come to congregations in teams to address unresolved issues and or conflict. This resource is available for minimal cost and the full process involves the whole congregation over the course of several months. The end result is the congregation ready to move forward with a new spiritual leader, healthier and more self aware.

## Interim Introduction Questions

The interim time is a very different time in congregations. Congregations should keep in mind that there are unusual emotional dynamics at work during the interim period. The departure of a pastor creates a difficult situation for almost any congregation. There is a sense of loss that may result in a grief process similar in many respects to what happens to an individual who has suffered a loss. The congregation needs time to adjust to the loss of its pastor and to establish its own identity, separate and apart from the departed pastor. This is part of a process referred to as "Coming to Terms with its History" (Developmental Task #1). The departure of a pastor may result in other staff changes or leadership changes within the Council or Committees. This is normal, although it may seem a bit unsettling (Task #2). Then the congregation must discern the direction in which God is calling it to move. God has a plan for every congregation. The congregation needs to give attention to God's will and develop a Vision for the Future (Task #3). There is an obvious need to work closely with the synod, both in the selection of an interim pastor and in the search for a new pastor (Task #4). And, finally, there is the need to establish a Call Committee and go through the search process (Task #5).

We have been encouraging staff/councils to ask questions appropriate to the interim time and not "general ministry questions" only. Here are a few you might consider based on the Five Developmental Tasks of the Interim Period:

1. How will you help this congregation come to terms with our history?
2. How will you help us think thoughtfully about leadership changes?
3. How will you help us develop a vision for the future?
4. How will you help us connect with the South-Central Synod of WI and the ELCA as a whole?
5. How will you help us commit to new directions in ministry as we look for our next leader?

All general ministry tasks are expected of interims, eg. preaching and worship leadership, visitation, special services, attending meetings, teaching, etc. A few brief questions in these areas may be appropriate to see if this will be a good short term fit for both congregation and rostered leader.