

Interim Ministry

CNH District

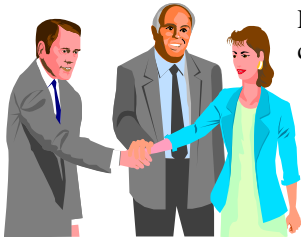
A Description

February 10, 2009

During the past twenty-five years various denominations have developed a specialized ministry, called Intentional Interim Ministry, to aid congregations during a vacancy. Slight differences exist between denominations and even among various districts of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in the Interim Ministry process. This description applies to the CNH District.

Encouraging fuller use of the intentional interim pastorate will foster both the ministry of the congregation, the selection process for a new pastor, and the future ministry of both congregation and pastor. Benefits to the congregation would include healing past divisions, breaking the “spell” of a longer pastorate, seeking new direction for the ministry of the congregation and others. The Intentional Interim Pastor understands the processes through which a vacant congregation goes and is able to facilitate healthy ministry in the midst of these changes. However, it is important to realize that the tasks associated with the interim (often called “developmental tasks”) are **congregational tasks**. The Interim Pastor facilitates the completion of these tasks within the congregation..

When a pastor leaves.....



Pastors leave congregations for a variety of reasons. When the pastor leaves, a congregation has several choices regarding future pastoral services.

- The congregation could simply arrange for substitute pastors to come on Sundays to conduct services. Other ministries of the congregation could be picked up by various members or be suspended. Much of the ministry of the congregation simply waits for the arrival of a new pastor.
- A congregation could arrange for a vacancy pastor. A vacancy pastor serves the congregation in its existing program. Often the vacancy pastor is not full time, fulfilling only those ministry programs that are considered essential. Ministry is in a “holding pattern” until the arrival of a new pastor. No special emphasis is placed on planning or evaluation.
- A third alternative is for the congregation to enter into an intentional interim period. This is a period during which the congregation wrestles with its own identity and ministry. In some ways the interim between two pastors is an ideal time for a congregation to do this work.. Specific goals and a time-line need to be set for this period. At the end of this process the search for a new pastor begins. The District staff who will help the congregation plan and staff this interim period.

Planned interim periods are especially important if the congregation finds itself in unusual circumstances such as, the previous pastorate had been long, conflict exists within the congregation, demographics of the congregation or the community have drastically changed, recent pastorates have been very short, or other circumstances. The question is simple: Are there circumstances that need to be looked at prior to asking a new pastor to serve us? Are there questions that we ought to answer prior to issuing a call?

An interim pastor also provides two somewhat distinct services to a congregation. On the one hand he provides a negotiated level of pastoral care for the congregation. If the Interim Pastor is

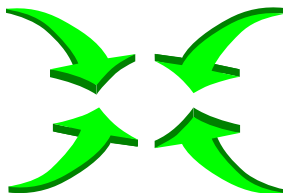


not full-time, decisions will be made as to which ministry tasks of the congregation will be done by the interim pastor and which will be done by various members of the congregation. It is important that the pastoral and other ministry tasks be assigned and completed. If ministry tasks are left undone, the congregation will anxiously focus on calling a new pastor and the “developmental tasks” of the interim period will not receive attention. The “developmental tasks” of the interim are the second area of service that the Interim Pastor offers. Interim Pastors have been trained to facilitate the work of the congregation in accomplishing the stages through which congregations pass during an Interim period. . Many congregations set up a special group to oversee these developmental tasks. The Interim Pastor will work as a consultant to this group

After the District staff aids the congregation in contacting one or more possible interim pastors. It will then be the congregation's responsibility to negotiate the contract for the interim pastorate. Expectations will be clarified if the contract is fairly specific. Specificity is particularly important if the congregation desires the interim pastor to perform only a portion of the pastoral task in the congregation. If there are areas of ministry that are excluded from the work of the interim pastor, they need to be assigned to individuals. Compensation is normally based on the current district salary schedule. Special arrangements for compensation may need to be made for those receiving social security payments.

What happens in a congregation?

Congregations face five major processes. These are often called the “developmental tasks of the interim.”. These events do not always occur in a specific order and they vary in length and importance with different congregations. However, rare is the congregation that does not experience these five in one form or another. These five developmental tasks do not have clear lines of demarcation between them. There is a lot of overlap. They often flow together. The goal of the intentional interim ministry is to utilize them for positive results within the congregation.



honestly.

- Every congregation needs to rehearse **its own history** in order to understand its present situation. If we don't pay attention to our history, it exerts a powerful influence. During the interim period a congregation has the opportunity to deal with its history in a very honest way. Past disputes, the ups and downs of membership, the good and the bad of past pastorates, and other items need to be talked through. All too often much is thought, but little is said. The interim is an opportunity face history

- Every congregation needs to describe **its own identity**. It is really only during the interim that this identity can be squarely faced. When a pastor is in place, the identity of the congregation is always tied together with that of the pastor. “Our pastor does this” is the operative phrase. However during the interim the congregation can decide for itself what its own identity looks like. When that decision is fully in place the congregation is ready to make the necessary decisions about the type of pastor that it may wish to call. One core piece of this identity building process is the self-study. The self-study begins with gathering statistics about the community and the congregation. But these statistics are only helpful if the congregation digests them and the implications are clearly stated. By themselves the statistics are only an informative paper in the file. However, if they are thoroughly discussed and the congregation in realizes the implications, the self-study can result in a very clear picture of the congregation’s identity.



- During the interim the congregation also opens the way for **broadened leadership**. Every pastor relates well only to a portion of the potential leadership within a congregation. However, when there is no pastor in place, leadership is opened to a wider spectrum

of the congregation. Congregations often find a leadership change during an interim. The presence of an interim pastor allows a congregation to transition its leadership without some of the trauma normally associated with these changes.

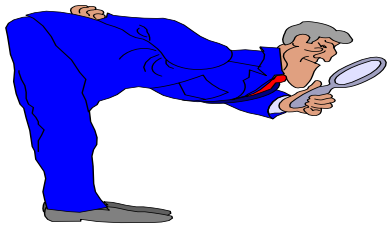
- ❑ Also needing evaluation and re-structuring during an interim is **the congregation's relationship to the District**. When a pastor is in place, by default he most often becomes the principle funnel through which information flows both to and from the district. During an interim this information channel no longer exists. This offers an opportunity for the congregation to relate in new ways. The absence of a pastor and the necessity of calling a new pastor also open up channels of communication with the district officers.
- ❑ The result of all of this evaluation and re-structuring often means **new directions of ministry and mission**. It is very important for the congregation to pay close attention to spreading the commitment to these new avenues throughout the congregation. There are great dividends to having broad consensus to the new directions of ministry. When there is no pastor in place, the temptation to simply "follow the pastor" does not exist.

There may well be other tasks that are necessary for the congregation during the interim. Reducing anxiety, rebuilding infrastructure, training leaders and other tasks may well need attention. But it is in the five-fold developmental tasks that research has shown the most benefit for the congregation.

What can you expect from an interim pastor?

1. First and foremost, the interim pastor brings a "vision" of what an interim period can be like. It is a vision of what a difference it makes to have a congregation ready for a new permanent pastor and a sense of what it takes to help a congregation get there. With experience from many in-between-time ministries, the interim pastor can provide steadiness among parishioners for whom this is an unexpected period.
2. The interim pastor understands the issues and concerns that a congregation might experience during this period, and has the skill to deal with them pastorally as the ordained leader. From the neutral vantagepoint of not being a candidate for the position, the interim pastor can be relatively free and unbiased in proposing and/or implementing actions necessary in the ongoing ministry of the congregation.
3. He has the pastoral skill to help bring about whatever change is needed, deal with internal conflicts, help heal past divisions, break the "spell" of an extra-long pastorate, etc. and then move on, leaving the congregation ready and eager to receive the ministry of the new pastor. Interim pastors receive specific training both in serving as a change agent and in conflict resolution. They also have referral skills that may be useful.
4. In providing a regular and steady pastoral ministry to the congregation during the search process, the interim pastor offers a kind of "security blanket," especially to those members who might otherwise be in a hurry to "just get a new pastor."
5. The interim pastor May be able to offer the congregation some temporary new models of ministry and parish life, which they are then free to accept or reject as part of their future. Many congregations know just one style of ministry—that of the previous pastor—and some different approaches can be refreshing.
6. The Interim Pastor will fulfill the pastoral care and administrative tasks as they have been negotiated.

7. The Interim Pastor will expect to work with a specially appointed committee on the various tasks that need to be done during the interim. Look for a lot of activity that brings people together to talk about the life of the congregation.
8. Normally the Interim Pastor expects that the congregation will delay the search and calling process until the process of building the identity of the congregation is well underway. The coordination of the intentional interim period and the calling process needs to be clarified at the beginning of the interim.
9. In many situations, the Interim Pastor will help the congregation with a planning process that will result in statements of values and goals. The understanding and ownership of the plan by the entire congregation is important. These values and goals will guide the congregation in the search and calling process. They will need to be re-worked after the call has been accepted and a resident pastor is in place.
10. In certain situations, the Interim Pastor may help the congregation with staffing and volunteer transitions.



11. The Interim Pastor will be asking a great many questions about the community and the history and life of the congregation. These conversations not only aid the Interim Pastor settling in rapidly, but also are the means toward helping the congregation deal with its own past and the effect of that past on its future.

12. The Interim Pastor will normally not be the congregation's principle advisor during the call process. The District President normally appoints the Circuit Counselor for this task. However the Interim Pastor continues to provide pastoral care and administrative coverage during the call process.

What does the congregation need to do for the Interim Pastor?

1. The congregation will negotiate an acceptable work schedule and compensation package with the Interim Pastor. Samples are available from the Director of the Interim Ministry.
2. The congregation will postpone establishing a search committee until the goals of the intentional interim are met. Rapidly focusing on the calling process will truncate the attention to the processes that take place during the interim.
3. The congregation will focus its attention on the developmental tasks of the interim period. They are not to be accomplished by the Interim pastor. Consensus will be built regarding the identity of the congregation if a significant number of individuals within the congregation are focused on the various developmental tasks of the interim period. .
4. The congregation will accept the Interim Pastor as the pastor of the congregation for the interim period.

What is the involvement of the District?

1. The CNH District furnishes the Interim Pastor Program . This program includes initial training, continuing education, consultation and supervision. Some Interim Pastors are also trained and certified by an inter-denominational program called the Interim Ministry Network.
2. The District also has staff who aid congregations both in determining the need for an intentional interim and in planning for the most effective use of the interim period. Often the District staff person is able to help the congregation formulate goals and parameters for the Intentional Interim period.
3. Frequently District staff can aid the congregation in contacting potential staff to serve during the interim. Aid is also offered in negotiating an acceptable contract for the Interim Pastor.

What are the goals of the whole program?

The goal of an intentional interim program for a particular congregation is simply that the relationship between congregation and called, settled pastor be the most fruitful possible. We feel that strengthening the congregation's sense of its own identity enables the congregation to do the best job of searching for and calling a pastor.

Congregations need to be fully self-confidant with a complete sense of their own purpose. That congregation who then calls a pastor to lead it into that vision is the one who has been served well by the intentional interim.