

INTERIM PASTOR SEARCH PROCESS

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INTRODUCTION TO INTERIM MINISTRY

When a pastor or associate pastor relationship is vacated, the COM shall counsel with the session of the church as to the need for ministry until a new pastor is installed. Ordinarily, the interim pastor will be approved by the presbytery (through its COM), in consultation with the Session. The interim pastor may be designated Moderator. The interim pastor shall guide the congregation in ministry, enable clarification of directions, and prepare for the arrival of the new pastor, conducting the work of a pastor. The interim has no relationship with the PNC about the selection of a pastor. The interim will work closely with the presbytery to address the needs of the congregation. The interim cannot be considered as a candidate for the pastor position, unless there are exceptional circumstances and with approval of $\frac{3}{4}$ of the presbytery, pursuant to G-2.0504c.

To implement the presbytery's policy on interim pastorates, the presbytery requires that all interim pastors endorse the "Interim Pastor Agreement" contract and agree to abide by the policies and guidelines of the presbytery.

It is the policy of the presbytery to ordinarily require that an interim pastor be a member of the presbytery and those accepting assignment to an interim pastor position who are not already members of the presbytery are expected to request transfer of membership and be received into the membership of the presbytery.

The presbytery requires interim pastor candidates to have completed one of the following: (1) Interim pastor experience, (2) Interim Level I training within the last five years, or (3) a commitment to take Interim Level I training within the first year of interim service.

INTERIM PASTOR SELECTION PROCESS

Friends in Christ: We recognize that a pastoral transition brings lots of questions and one of our important goals is to help you secure an interim pastor as quickly and smoothly as possible. Here is the procedure we use.

1. The Session meets to discuss its desire to have an interim pastor, as soon as it learns that the current pastor will be leaving. The current pastor is not to have any comment on this matter. A member of the Commission on Ministry, usually the liaison, will be present to discuss the appropriateness of having an interim pastor and to educate in general terms about the transition time in a congregation
 - a. The clerk of Session contacts the Presbytery Pastor and indicates whether you will be seeking a full-time, half-time or other part-time position.
2. The Session names a search team for the interim and determines its composition:
 - a. The entire Session
 - b. A select number of Session members
 - c. A combination of Session members and other members from within the congregation
 - d. A search team representative of the congregation (similar to a PNC).
3. The search team prepares a brief (3-5 pages) Interim Search Description that introduces the church and its current ministries and explains the position description and salary being offered. This brief document provides a summary of what interim pastor candidates can expect and should include the following:
 - i. Description of the congregation: membership, budget, worship attendance, key ministries
 - ii. Job Description
 - iii. Outline of contract
 - iv. Expectations of interim accomplishments
 1. To assist in the preparation of this document, **Appendix A: Interim Tasks and Goals**, is provided to give Sessions an overview of interim ministry and common, appropriate goals and expectations for the interim period.
- b. The session reviews the brief document and approves it
- c. The search team chair sends the approved brief document to the Presbytery Pastor (who will distribute it to the COM liaison)
4. ...in the meantime.... The Presbytery Pastor will begin identifying potential candidates for the interim position. The Presbytery Pastor will collect Personal Information Forms on each candidate and

perform governing body reference checks. The goal will be at least 3 persons to present for the search team's consideration.

- a. IF the search team wishes to advertise the interim position on its *own*, or if it receives an unsolicited PIF, it is understood that any candidates it identifies will be reviewed first by the Presbytery Pastor and Commission on Ministry for pre-approval. NO contact (email, telephone, face-to-face) will take place until the Presbytery Pastor forwards the pre-approved list of names and paperwork.

5. Interim Pastor Search Team receives PIFs from Presbytery Pastor

6. Ordinary Process of Selection:

- a. Review PIFs
- b. Interview by whole Search Team
- c. Check references on PIF
- d. Listen/watch tapes of sermons
- e. Prioritize
- f. Notify COM liaisons so that COM interview can be set up while the person is in town, if necessary
- g. If desired, bring in others – congregation pays for reasonable expenses*
- h. Choose person, negotiate contract. COM liaison may be present if you wish.
- i. Presbytery provides basic contract. Congregation and interim pastor may add or specify details.
- j. Present choice to Session for approval.

- i. The search team is the decision-making body in the selection of a candidate. However, if a church has more than one pastor the search team may set up a confidential, informational meeting with the continuing pastor(s) to introduce the candidate prior to presentation to the Session for approval.

- ii. To ensure confidentiality, Personal Information Forms for the selected candidate should not be distributed outside the search team without the permission of the candidate and should be limited to the pastor(s) and members of the Session.

- k. Have COM liaison forward all paperwork to the presbytery office.

7. Set starting date.

8. Obtain COM approval.

9. Inform other candidates quickly.

10. Session informs the congregation. Congregation does not vote on candidate. It is a Session contract.

11. Prepare for an exciting time of growth during your interim experience.

*Reasonable Interview Expenses:

- Coach airfare for candidate. The congregation chooses whether to pay for spouse. Overnights in local motel of your choice – congregation arranges.
- Meals during the trip
- Mileage to and from home airport
- Rental car if needed – distance from airport to your town – congregation determines

Make arrangements clear before person comes. Prepaying ticket, motel keeps you in budget.

We have reviewed the Presbytery's procedures and understand the process:

Clerk of Session/date

Search Team Chair/date

COM Liaison/date

INTERIM PASTOR AGREEMENT

At the request of the _____ Church, the Presbytery hereby appoints _____ to be Interim Pastor for a period of _____, beginning _____, 20____, subject to 30 days notice for termination.

A description of duties and services expected is attached. It is clearly understood by all parties that the interim pastor and the church subscribe to the policies of the presbytery regarding an interim pastor relationship. Further, it is understood that the interim pastor shall not be a candidate for the position of pastor, associate pastor, or designated pastor and is not eligible to be the next installed pastor or associate pastor.

The _____ Church will provide the following support for the ministry:

Salary	\$ _____	Moving	\$ _____
Housing	\$ _____	Vacation Time	_____
Study Leave	\$ _____	Study Leave	_____
Travel / Mileage	\$ _____		

ENDORSEMENT TO THIS AGREEMENT

By the Session on _____, 20____ by _____
Clerk of Session

By the COM on _____, 20____ by _____
COM Chair

By the Presbytery on _____, 20____ by _____
Stated Clerk

By the Interim Pastor on _____, 20____ by _____
Interim Pastor

COVENANT OF CLOSURE: PASTORAL ETHICS WHEN LEAVING A CHURCH

The Rev. _____; the _____ Church of _____, and the Commission on Ministry of the Presbytery having discussed the importance of making a clean break for a pastor who is leaving a church, enter into the following covenant:

1. The Rev. _____ agrees
 - a. not to involve him/herself in any leadership or advisory role (public or private) in the church;
 - b. not to intervene, support or give advice to anyone involved in a congregational disagreement or dispute;
 - c. not to officiate in any special events in the lives of former parishioners or of the congregation, including weddings, funerals, baptisms, worship leadership, church anniversary activities, etc. unless expressly invited by the Moderator of the Session;
 - d. to refuse requests for pastoral services made by members of the congregation;
 - e. to recognize that some conflicts make it unwise for a prior pastor to return to visit a previous congregation, and as a matter of professional courtesy, to establish an understanding with the new Moderator of Session regarding subsequent visits to the church, attending worship or attending a special event;
 - f. to refrain from giving opinions or direction regarding church business that could undermine the transition necessary for the church and the development of the relationship between the congregation and a new pastor;
 - g. in the event that the departing pastor continues to live in the area and does not begin service to another church, he/she will not normally attend congregational events for at least one year, or at least one year after a new pastor is installed. After this period, in consultation with and invitation by the session and the current pastoral leadership, the departing pastor may resume worshiping and fellowship within the congregation, provided that the requirements above continue to be observed; however,
 - h. if the departing pastor has family, (spouse, children, grandchildren) who remain active in the former congregation, in consultation and with the approval of the current pastoral leadership, he/she may be attend isolated “special events” in the life of the relative, e.g., baptism, ordination, marriage, Christmas programs, always being careful to observe the criteria contained in this agreement.

It is understood that this policy does not affect or require the termination of friendships with individuals in the former congregation.

2. The Session and members of the _____ congregation agree
 - a. not to initiate pastoral or professional contact with previous pastors;
 - b. to respect the terms of the Covenant of Closure agreed upon by The Rev. _____ outlined above;
 - c. to interpret the terms of the Covenant of Closure to the congregation; and
 - d. to incorporate this agreement in the Session minutes.

3. The Presbytery's Commission on Ministry shall
 - a. interpret this Covenant of Closure to the Session of _____ Church;
 - b. be the Presbytery's agent in reminding the parties to this Covenant of Closure of the principles of the Covenant in the event any transgressions are reported to it;
 - c. note this agreement in the minutes of the Commission on Ministry; and
 - d. consider setting aside portions of this policy if requested by a departing pastor and the session of the former congregation.

I understand these policies and agree to abide by them.

Pastor

Date

Clerk of Session

Date

Name of church

City

Commission on Ministry representative

Date

APPENDIX A: INTERIM TASKS AND GOALS

Five Development Tasks of Interim Ministry

The major agenda of an interim ministry period centers on five developmental tasks first spelled out by Loren Mead in a monograph entitled *The Developmental Tasks of the Congregation in Search of a Pastor* and then elaborated on in his book *Critical Moment of Ministry: A Change of Pastors*.

1. *Coming to Terms with History* – It is important for congregations to know their history so that they can appreciate their heritage and at the same time be aware of the issues and concerns that need to be resolved in order to move freely into the future.
2. *Discovering a New Identity* – Identity is the task of understanding "who we are now in our present context and what it is we understand God is calling us to be." It is the task of developing the vision to which a congregation is being called.
3. *Shifts of Power/Leadership Changes* – In most congregations over a period of time the leadership begins to take on much of the style and values of the previous pastor. When that pastor leaves, there is often a time when persons who have been in leadership rethink their commitment and determine whether or not they want to continue in leadership positions. Other persons often find the interim time an opportunity to take leadership roles. This is an opportune time to empower those who are out of power and to welcome leadership gifts from all parts of the congregation.
4. *Rethinking Denominational Linkages* – Congregations often are not aware of the support and resources they receive from their middle judicatory and national denominational structures. That relationship is normally more visible while the structures of the church beyond the congregation are engaged in working with the congregation in moving through the interim period and seeking to find the right pastor to call. The transition time helps raise the awareness of a congregation to its denominational heritage, ministries and resources.
5. *Commitment to New Leadership and to a New Future* – When a congregation has developed a shared vision of its future and has sought to call a pastor to help lead it in moving into that future, there will probably be a new commitment both to that new leader and to that new future.

Seven Additional Tasks of Interim Ministry¹

Thirty-three interim pastors identified seven agenda items most often dealt with in their interim experiences in addition to the normal developmental tasks of history, relationship to the denomination, leadership issues, establishing a new identity, and commitment to new leadership.

1. *The Necessity to Rebuild the Congregational "Infrastructure"* – That is, the administrative structures, processes, procedures, and "know how" efficiency. Joan Mabon, a Presbyterian interim minister, offered the observation/theory that there is generally a three-year period of neglect to the infrastructure by the exiting pastor. One year of trauma or feeling of rejection, one year of struggle with a decision to stay or go, and one year of attention given to

¹ Terry Foland, IBT Vol. 9, No. 1, page 3, September 1996

the search for a new position. With those concerns preoccupying the pastor there is unintentional but certain neglect of the administrative functions of the pastor. This seems like a reasonable theory—but of course we have no hard data to substantiate it; perhaps we will sometime soon.

2. *Evaluation of and Removal of Staff Members if Necessary* – Congregations seem to be more willing to deal with this difficult issue with the Interim Pastor’s leadership than with an installed pastor. The Interim Pastor will not have to live with consequences, and the new pastor won’t have to “hassle with” that problem in the start-up months of a new ministry.

3. *Financial/ Stewardship Issues* – Often giving is down when a pastor leaves due to disillusionment, unrest, conflict, or disappointment around the pastor who has just terminated. Basic stewardship education and fresh efforts to secure financial commitment to the church can often be more readily received from interim ministerial leadership.

4. *Conflicts of Issues or Congregational Agenda* – An Interim Pastor can usually be more objective and have less personal vested interest in the outcome of such conflict and be more able to help facilitate some decision-making processes. It is a desirable goal that such conflict is resolved prior to the calling of the new pastor.

5. *Interpersonal or Intergroup Conflicts* – Again, an Interim Pastor will probably be able to serve as an objective third party mediator since he/she will not be concerned about long-term relationships with the individuals or groups who are in conflict. The principals involved can more readily focus on the issue rather than the question of “is the pastor on my/our side.”

6. *Getting Closure with the Previous Pastor* – Formal farewell is one thing. Weaning a congregation from the previous pastor is another. The Interim Pastor can help congregations understand this issue since he/she is not the future clergy person with whom lack of closure is apt to be a lingering problem.

7. *Communication Improvement* – Among other things often neglected as a pastor begins to “look elsewhere” are the communication channels with the congregation. A natural interest and concern held by most members during the interim period makes this a prime time to enhance communications processes.

Appropriate Goals for the Interim Period²

1. *To Maintain the Viability of the Church* – The ongoing vital program that is expected of a lively congregation consists of pastoral duties plus the Christian activities of the laity. Continuing the needed programs already underway and efforts to help make them more meaningful are the responsibility of an interim leader.

2. *To Resolve Feelings of Grief* – Pastoral visitation and group meetings involving personal, direct contact with individuals, and intentional expression of interest in their feelings, more often than not, will provide healing catharsis.

3. *To Reinforce the Ministry of the Laity* – Encouragement of participation and leadership by lay persons is vital. The interim period is a particularly good time to develop lay leadership. A member of the laity may accompany the pastor when home communion is administered. Many responsibilities in the church may be carried out by lay persons rather than a pastor.

² Presbytery of National Capital, www.thepresbytery.org. Accessed May 23, 2018.

4. *To Clarify the Mission of the Church* – Congregations need to be reminded that Christians are here to serve, not only to be served. The interim may be the voice of the larger Christian community at a time when the church is turned inward to its own needs. The minister teaches by example, by preaching, and by formal training.
5. *To Deal with Special Needs of the Church* – Every church is different. As a result of diagnosis, the interim will learn of specific problems in the congregation. Through knowledge of techniques in conflict management and tactful suggestions by the “outsider” (the disinterested person, the interim minister), beneficial changes may be affected.
6. *To Emphasize Fellowship and Reconciliation* – Opportunities for encouraging Christian fellowship are many. For example, arranging for a coffee hour before or after worship service is helpful. The incorporation of “congregational concerns” during a worship service can be a time of real sharing.
7. *To Strengthen Denominational Ties* – The interim minister personally maintains a good relationship with the denomination and encourages the local church to participate in denomination-wide activities and programs.
8. *To Increase the Potential for a Successful Ministry by the Next Regular Pastor* – The interim minister is future-oriented. The interim minister is concerned with the coming of a new pastor and is helping to prepare the congregation for the arrival. In addition, he or she communicates with the new pastor information that might be helpful.

Examples of Inappropriate Goals for the Interim Minister (and an explanation why)

1. *Grow the church* – this goal depends on too many factors outside of the control of the interim pastor, including the demographics of the congregation, neighborhood, willingness of members to invite others, etc. Sessions should avoid listing their “hopes and dreams” for the congregation as an expectation for the interim pastor (this includes the perennial church request to “attract young families.”)
2. *Cultivate a culture of...* – this goal is too global. Whether one desire a culture of evangelism, a missional culture, or a culture of tithing, or some other kind of culture, it is important to remember that a Session can change a program overnight but “church culture” changes over time. Be realistic about what can occur in a congregation over a 12 to 18-month time frame.
3. *Have scheduled office hours* – this goal is too specific and should be an ordinary expectation of professional ministry. Other examples of too specific are “preach sermons” and “visit the sick.” These actions are more appropriate for inclusion in the job description but are not helpful if included in the Interim Search Document as expectations of what a Session hopes the interim pastor will accomplish in, with, through, and for the congregation.