

Guidelines for Interim Ministries

From the
PROCEDURES MANUAL FOR
MINISTERIAL AND CANDIDATES COMMITTEES



CHAPTER 11: GUIDELINES FOR INTERIM PASTORAL MINISTRY

Most churches are ill-prepared for the interim period between permanent pastors. The congregation may be buoyed up by such ideas as the ministry of the laity as the way God intends for the church to operate, the multiple gifts of God's people as resourcing the church for such a time and perhaps a history of handling crises well. Congregations, too, are generally energized by the new challenges presented to them, the opportunities the interim presents for new directions and the whole search process as a stimulation to congregational unity.

Depending on the circumstances surrounding the previous pastor's leaving, the congregation may be experiencing loss, shock, grief, anger, guilt, or panic. Old issues and unresolved conflict may re-surface during this period. A congregation may not realize that some old but needed leadership retires with the pastor's resignation. People that have been in the background of church life may begin to assert themselves. A congregation may not be prepared for the new future that a new pastor will bring. These all present opportunities to focus on certain developmental tasks appropriate to the "in-between" times.

When a pastor leaves, there are needs left unattended, which some members of the congregation desire quite intensely, such as the elderly facing their own death and wanting the care of a pastor. Moderating the Session and congregational meetings may need objective leadership. Pastoral representation at community functions may be neglected.

Healing may be needed, especially if the previous pastor left under duress or has left behind a conflicted congregation. Process time is needed to handle change appropriately. Familiarities and established patterns are being challenged. Denial, anger, and bargaining—all part of the normal grief process—need to lead healthily to acceptance. Crises must be dealt with well and utilized. Any sense of hurry needs to be moderated by careful planning and search, and can be handled in the awareness that the pastoral vacancy has been temporarily filled.

A congregation may feel that interim responsibilities can be handled by the associate staff or by lay leadership. In a multiple staff setting, this assumes that the church will accept an Associate as the head of staff as it accepted that person as an Associate. Such is not always the case. It also assumes that the Associate is prepared to be an Interim, "thinks" Interim, and can and does change priorities and style if necessary to do intentional Interim work, rather than continuing in the Associate's role and adding the head of staff responsibilities to an already busy schedule. In addition, serving as Interim makes it difficult for the Associate to look for a new position in anticipation of the new pastor asking the Associate(s) of his choice. Furthermore, an associate acting as head of staff may find it difficult to return to an associate position once the new pastor has come, should he stay.

If a church *does* ask a present Associate to serve as Interim Pastor, however (and this is not recommended), much of what is suggested here should be required, including the drawing of a covenant and intentional work on the specific issues of the interim period.

The search for a new Pastor demands a healthy congregation. No church wants its next permanent pastor to be, in effect, an interim, which happens with frequency. An Interim Pastor, equipped for this specialized kind of leadership in a transitional time, can help the church come to that point of health.

What is an Interim Pastor?³²

An interim *time* is an “in-between” time. For the church, it is the time between when one pastor leaves and a permanent pastor is installed. The ministry of the church goes on, sometimes in regular and familiar ways, but always with new and unfamiliar challenges. We continue in such a time to be the people of God with the unique and distinct mission committed to us as a church. As to the congregation’s ministry, therefore, there really is no interim period.

Many Interim Pastors have served as a long-term pastors, bringing unique personality, skills, maturity and perspective to the task. The Interim Pastor may also have special skills in handling grief, using conflict positively, and should be one who quickly analyze situations, and enters and leaves a congregation in a healthy way. Interim Pastors should have the ability to recognize unfinished tasks and lead toward their completion before the permanent pastor arrives. The Interim Pastor approached the tasks of the “in-between time” with intentionality, not simply filling the pulpit. The end result should be a congregation in a place of health, ready to receive a new long-term Pastor. An Interim Minister is convinced that this specialized work is a vital part of the church’s mission, not simply a fill-in until the “real” pastor arrives.

Chosen by the Session and approved by the Presbytery, an Interim Pastor should serve under a clearly defined, temporary, and published covenant, doing what a pastor generally and routinely does and more, and within a limited framework of time and goals. The Interim Pastor may serve full-time or part-time for a portion of the interim or for it all, be resident or not, but should not enter the relationship with the intention of becoming a Candidate for the longer term position.

Tasks of an Interim Pastor

Research done by Loren Mead and the Alban Institute, indicates that a congregation in transition generally has five basic areas of need. Mead calls these five areas “developmental tasks.” The order and manner in which they are addressed depend on the specific situation.

Coming to Terms with History

Natural reactions of grief, anger, despair, relief, guilt, panic related to the loss of a pastor need to be resolved. Old and debilitating ways of responding to crises need to be addressed. The “ghosts of pastors past” need to be put to rest. A dearly loved immediate past pastor needs to be released in the minds and hearts of the congregation. If the past pastor was pressured to leave by some in the congregation, healing between “for” and “against” groups needs to occur. Where the church has come from and how it got there needs to be understood, acknowledged, valued, and worked through, whatever is appropriate. Conflicts of long standing need to be resolved. Until this happens, a congregation is less able to face outward and cultivate its missional thinking and practice.

Discovering a New Identity

Churches in transition are no longer defined by their pasts. The Pastor who defined them in many ways is no longer present, and the church will not stay the same. A new identification must

³² “Interim Minister” in this chapter means the same as “interim supply” in G.10-7C.2; all **Book of Order** references cited are found at the end of this chapter.

develop. While the next Pastor will bring vision to the church, the congregation must discover what, in general terms, it wishes to become in the future.

Facilitating Shifts of Power

New leadership is necessary, since the former Pastor was a key in setting tone and direction for the congregation. Some members fade from active service when the Pastor departs. Others get more involved than they have been. If the previous Pastor was a great influence on the congregation, a bold or controversial leader, the more changes in leadership will occur. An Interim Minister can help in leadership shifts, making them positive and appropriate to the changing situation. The Interim Pastor may provide leadership training, giving the new Pastor a cadre of people who know the when, how, and where of church leadership.

Renewing Denominational Ties

Part of a church's identity is its connection with the larger Church. The staff, resources and organization of the EPC will become clearer to a church in transition as it connects more with the denomination in its search process. The Confession, the Catechisms, the Essentials, and the **Book of Order**, all of which help define us, should become more familiar to the church as it lives through the interim period. Contacts with the Presbytery and General Assembly leaders will be made frequently by the Pastoral Search Committee, with an increased appreciation for their work. An Interim Minister can help a congregation understand its EPC heritage and denominational structure.

Building Commitment to a New Leadership and a New Future

The church must move from its past orientation to a future vision. Pastoral styles differ and strengths vary, and the congregation must be open to the individuality of its next pastor. A congregation must be spiritually prepared for its new pastor. A commitment to the new Pastor must be encouraged, especially when that person is identified and called. Shared vision and working relationships can and must develop among the congregation. The church must become forward-looking, appreciating the past but rolling up its sleeves to a new and exciting ministry in the upcoming days. The Interim Minister can engage the congregation in this process.

A congregation must experience the maximum benefit possible in the interim period. The more these tasks are completed, the stronger a people will be for its next pastor. If a congregation assumes that these issues will be successfully addressed without interim leadership, it may be disappointed.

Steps to Securing an Interim Minister

1. When the previous Pastor leaves, the Session consults with the Ministerial Committee and determines to seek an Interim Pastor.
2. Session appoints an Interim Search Committee (ISC) as an ad hoc committee of the Session, appointing its chairman, if desired. This should be done before the congregation selects a Pastoral Search Committee.
3. The ISC profiles the Interim Minister it determines to be best suited for the church, considering the church's special needs in the interim, how long it envisions the interim period to be, possible beginning dates, salary and benefits package and other such

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matters as it considers appropriate. It then develops the covenant to be presented to the interim pastoral candidate. (See appendix for a sample covenant.)

4. The ISC may post the opening in the EPC Ministry Staff Opportunity List. The Ministerial Committee may be able to make recommendations of potential Interim Pastors.
5. The ISC studies the potential Interim Pastor's Personal Information Form (PIF) and prays about the choice(s) it will make for further investigation.
6. The ISC makes contact with the choice(s) it makes to discover availability and gather other information it may seek. Some Interim Ministers may be serving a church at the time another church calls, but may still be available within a month or two of that initial conversation. Contact may also be made with references at this time.
7. The ISC interviews its available choice, further developing and then reviewing the covenant and other pertinent information with the potential Interim Pastor.
9. The ISC recommends the Interim Pastor and the covenant to the Session. The Session issues the invitation (G.10-7).
10. When an Interim Minister is invited, the Session receives the necessary approvals from the Presbytery or ministerial committee, should this committee be empowered to make this decision (G.10-7).
11. Although an installation of an Interim Pastor is not required, it may be a beneficial marker for both the congregation and the Interim Minister. If so, the ISC plans for the installation service in consultation with the Ministerial Committee of the Presbytery. An "installation" of an Interim Pastor, if done, does not require an Administrative Commission of the Presbytery.
12. The Session may ask the ISC to continue during the interim period to act as the Interim Pastor's advisors, conducting periodic reviews of his covenant and ministry, and planning any and all matters related to his departure.
13. If an Interim Pastor resigns and Session determines that a second Interim Pastor is needed, the ISC repeats its work until the next Interim is secured by the Session.
14. Session dismisses the ISC with thanks when the church has secured a permanent Minister and its work is complete. Recognizing that there may be a gap before the next term of service for the Interim Minister, a reasonable period of transitional compensation should be offered.

Covenanting with the Interim Minister

A church and its Interim Pastor must have a clearly understood working relationship with each other. Unhappy relationships develop when expectations are not clear. A covenant should be drawn, therefore, which fits both the needs of the congregation and the Interim Minister. The expectations of both the church (the Interim Search Committee and the Session) and the Pastor should be thoroughly discussed and expressed in a covenant similar to the example found in this manual. Items included should be the tasks involved, the compensation package (salary, housing, vacation time, insurance, and possibly pension allowance), travel reimbursement, disability, and other such matters as express the desires and priorities of both parties. A congregation may wish to spell out the priorities for the first two or three months of interim ministry. No

assumptions should be made.

The covenant should include a pledge of support and cooperation between the church and the Interim Minister. The length of time before it is reviewed should be made clear. How the covenant is terminated by either party can be spelled out. What happens in the event of the church's dissolution or the Interim Minister's death can be written into the covenant. While this is not "Terms of Call" in a technical sense and does not need Presbytery approval, the Ministerial Committee should be consulted and informed.

The covenant should be reviewed by the Interim Search Committee and the Interim Pastor after three months of interim service to see if it reflects the intentions of both the church and the Pastor. Renegotiate, if necessary. If needed, changes should be suggested to the Session. At the same time, the ISC should evaluate the ministry of the Interim. Thereafter, the covenant should be reviewed no less than every six months for the same purposes, should the ministry of the Interim continue to be needed by the church.

This covenant is not intended to restrict ministry, but to release it by clarifying all issues from the start, allowing the church and pastor to do, unimpeded, the critical work the interim period requires.

Compensation for Interim Ministers

Each church and Interim must work out a compensation package agreeable to both. The compensation for a full-time interim position differs from a part-time position, of course. As guidelines for the Session, consider these suggestions:

1. Salary should be negotiated based on the church's current budget and the compensation package of the previous Pastor. It must be remembered that an Interim Pastor is a "real" pastor, often with experience and sometimes with specialized training, and that compensation must be appropriate to the position and experience. In either case (full- or part-time), the benefits package should include health insurance if the Pastor is not covered in another way, as well as pension. Because the Session "invites" rather than "calls" an Interim Minister (G.10-7), the invitation is approved by the Presbytery, but not the compensation package.
2. One option for determining compensation is the unit system. A unit is a block of time, usually three to four hours (a morning, an afternoon, or an evening) compensated at a certain rate for each unit.³³ Using the Interim Pastor Worksheet in the Appendix, the number of hours required for an Interim's ministry can be determined. Another option is that the Interim is paid a percentage of the former pastor's compensation (suggested 80%).
3. Travel reimbursement should meet IRS guidelines. If commuting from a distance, reimbursement for that mileage should be included.
4. Business expenses should be reimbursed by the church.
5. Vacation should be determined on the basis of one paid week of vacation for each three months of service (four weeks per year, which is the standard for EPC Teaching Elders). General Assembly and presbytery attendance is not considered vacation.

³³ A rate of \$100 per unit would equate to an annual salary of approximately \$50,000.

6. If a church owns a manse, its use should be a matter for the church to determine and, if it determines to make it part of the compensation offered, this should be negotiated with the Interim Minister.

Terminating the Interim Relationship: Giving the Gift of a Healthy Farewell

An Interim Pastor should plan to leave one to four weeks before the new Pastor arrives, giving the church the opportunity to anticipate its new pastor without too much of an Interim's influence and a church's affection for the Interim Minister still intact. What is important is that the Interim Pastor be intentional about the way the interim ministry is concluded. In some situations, it may be appropriate to include the Interim Pastor in the welcoming of the new pastor, though this should be carefully considered before deciding to do so. The late Lyle Schaller, eminent church consultant, suggested that as the conclusion of the interim time nears, the Interim Pastor should think like a predecessor and leave behind a packet of useful information for the next Pastor. This could include church and city directories, maps, telephone numbers, etc.

As the exit approaches there should be expressions of joy and sadness, talk about how the new Pastor and will be received, records put into good order, arrangements made regarding pending weddings, etc., conversations about exact dates for the Interim's break from the congregation, covenant termination, and the planning of an appropriate farewell event for the Interim. A sermon or sermon series reviewing the time together, affirming the congregation as it moves forward, the experience of change and such topics would be appropriate.

An exit interview benefits both the church and the Interim Pastor. The interim period should be evaluated, the work of the Interim discussed, how the congregation is perceived by the Interim, what gains were made and what work needs to be done in the future. Each of the five developmental tasks should be discussed to discover where the congregation is as it enters into a new and exciting phase of life together.

The Interim Pastor should plan a transition conversation with the next Pastor and the Session told that the Interim plans such a talk.

As an Interim approaches the end of the interim period, planning should begin for the next ministry, including an evaluation of the interim time and learnings for the next one. The Interim Minister has been involved in a significant and intense time in a congregation's life and likely needs a break in order to be fresh for the next assignment. Above all, the Interim Pastor should celebrate with the church, say "good-bye," and LEAVE!

SAMPLE INTERIM PASTOR COVENANT

BETWEEN _____ Church and the Reverend _____ to provide interim pastoral leadership, it is agreed that the Reverend _____ will begin to serve as Interim Pastor of the _____ Church on _____. It is understood that this Covenant will be reviewed after three months of service to see if it reflects the expectations of Church and Pastor and thereafter at least every six months, until a permanent pastor is called and installed. During this interim, the congregation and Interim Pastor will work together, with the help of God to:

- Provide for worship and the practice of ministry with the congregation and community.
- Engage in the evaluation of the church, reviewing its past and planning for its future, strengthening the mission and unity of the church.
- Prepare for the coming of a permanent pastor called by the congregation.

By signature on this covenant, the Interim Pastor acknowledges that there is no intent to be considered as the permanent pastor and that at no time will he meet with the Pastoral Search Committee or assist in the search process unless specifically asked to do so by the Session of the church.

SHARED MINISTRY

- The Interim Pastor agrees to provide (full-time / part-time) pastoral leadership and shall be responsible for the following:
- Preaching and leading the worship of the Church
- Officiating at baptisms, weddings and funerals as requested
- Visitation of the sick, shut-ins and counseling members as requested
- With presbytery approval, serve as Moderator of the Session and congregation
- Serve as head of staff
- Attend and resource committees as requested
- Provide leadership and training for members, including self-study, future planning, membership outreach and stewardship
- Give intentional leadership to the Five Developmental Tasks of the interim period
- Represent the church in the community and remain active in the Presbytery and General Assembly of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church
- Participate in an evaluation of the interim pastorate at the conclusion of this interim period
- Other duties:

The church will support and cooperate with the Interim Pastor assuming responsibility for:

- Attending worship services and other meetings
- Continuing financial support of the church and its ministries
- Sustaining lay leadership and shared ministry
- Supporting the pastor in the church's ministry to the community and the world
- Working on the Five Developmental Tasks of the interim period
- Participating in the Presbytery and General Assembly
- Informing the Interim Pastor of the timing of possible and definite leadership transitions, including Candidate Sundays
- Keeping the Interim Pastor informed of covenant termination
- Participating in the evaluation process at the end of the interim period

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Other:

COMPENSATION

The church agrees to provide the following compensation to the Interim Pastor:

- _____ Base salary, per month
- _____ Housing allowance
- _____ Health insurance
- _____ Pension
- _____ Travel allowance (\$___ per mile or _____ allowance)
- _____ Social Security offset
- _____ Vacation (one week for each three months of service)
- _____ Other _____

DISABILITY

In case of disability due to accident or illness, the church shall be responsible for the Interim Pastor's full salary and benefits at a rate of one week for each week served up to three months of disability.

DEATH

In case of the Interim Pastor's death, the spouse and/or family shall receive full salary and housing for three months, plus any earned vacation pay.

It is agreed that this covenant shall be in effect for _____ months after which time it may be renewed. It is further agreed that thirty days' notice shall be given by either the church or the Interim Pastor if either wishes not to renew this covenant. It is also agreed that, when a permanent pastor has been called, this covenant shall conclude as the Session deems best, but, at the most, one week before his installation.

Copies of this Covenant shall be provided to the local church, the Interim Pastor and the ministerial committee of the presbytery.

_____ Date
For the Interim Search Committee

_____ Date
For the Session

_____ Date
The Interim Pastor

_____ Date
For the Presbytery

INTERIM PASTOR WORKSHEET

To be used by the Interim Search Committee

Before the Interim Search Committee interviews possible candidates, here is a checklist of activities in which you see your Interim Pastor involved while with your church.

A. WORSHIP	Hours per week
Sunday preparation	_____
Sunday service(s)	_____
Special services _____	_____
_____	_____
Weddings, funerals	_____
Other _____	_____
B. PASTORAL CARE	
Hospital visitation	_____
Shut-in visitation	_____
Home visitation	_____
Counseling	_____
C. ADMINISTRATION/LEADERSHIP	
Session	_____
Office work	_____
Committee involvement	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
D. TEACHING	
Adults	_____
Children	_____
Confirmation	_____
Other _____	_____
E. OUTREACH	
Missions	_____
Community	_____
F. STAFF	
Head of staff leadership	_____
Staff meetings	_____
G. DENOMINATION	
Presbytery	_____
General Assembly	_____
H. EVALUATION AND PLANNING	_____
I. OTHER	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Total hours per week required _____

INTERIM PASTOR PROFILE

Name _____ Date _____

Current address _____ Phone (h) () _____

State/Zip _____ Phone (w) () _____

Fax: () _____ E-mail: _____

Permanent address, if other _____

Presbytery of which you are a member _____

Years in ministry since ordination ____ Retired? ____ Yes ____ No ____ Will be soon

Churches served: Last full time _____

Last interim _____

Other recent ministries _____

Types of interim positions you wish to serve (check all that apply)

- ____ Commuter (Live away, but return home 2-3 days a week)
- ____ Regional (Have a home base, but work within a region)
- ____ Moving (Will pack up and move)
- ____ Part-time (Part-time interim my only employment)
- ____ Part-time Retired (Interim plus pension and/or social security)
- ____ Tentmaker (Part-time interim plus other work)

Length of time you prefer an interim assignment to last (check all that apply)

- ____ 0-5 months ____ 6-9 months ____ 10-13 months ____ 14-18 months
- ____ 19-24 months ____ Longer than 24 months

Skills you bring to an interim ministry (rate 0-5, with 5 being the highest rating):

- | | | |
|--|---------------------------|------------|
| ____ Organizational/Administrative | ____ Evangelism | ____ Other |
| ____ Counseling | ____ Small group process | |
| ____ Self-study of church | ____ Conflict utilization | |
| ____ Program development | ____ Change management | |
| ____ Visitation/membership development | ____ Stewardship | |

Helpful Questions for Potential Interim Pastors

What training and/or experience has prepared you for interim ministry?

Write a brief statement of what you believe the interim pastorate to be.

Note any special working restrictions you require (handicap-accessible, absence on special days, etc.).

Describe briefly your style of ministry and leadership.

List preferences regarding interim pastorates (geographic, size of congregation, etc.).

List limitations regarding interim pastorates you would accept (geographic, size, length of assignment, etc.)

Give two (2) telephone references from recent pastorates (permanent or interim):

I will inform the General Assembly Office when I want my name removed from the Interim Pastor availability roster.

Signed _____

BOOK OF ORDER REFERENCES

Guidelines for Interim Pastoral Ministry

G.10-7 Temporary Pastoral Relationships

- A.** When there is no Pastor, a Session may invite a lawfully ordained Minister in good standing or a Commissioned Pastor to enter a temporary pastoral relationship. Although this invitation is not a call as defined in G.9-5, the invitation and authority to preach the Word, to administer sacraments, and to moderate Session must be approved by the Presbytery or by the Ministerial Committee acting as a Commission.
- B.** Ordinarily, a person currently serving in a temporary pastoral relationship is not eligible to be called as Pastor of that church. Should a Search Committee desire to consider any person who has served in a temporary capacity since the pulpit most recently became vacant, it must secure approval by a three-fourths vote of the Session and a three-fourths vote of the Ministerial Committee in order to proceed.

C. Types of temporary pastoral relationships

1. Stated Supply

A Stated Supply Pastor is invited to serve for a definite period of time of not less than one month and no more than twelve months. The Stated Supply may be appointed by the Presbytery to Moderate the Church Session during the time of service. Before the end of any invited period of service, the Session may extend the invitation for an additional period not to exceed twelve months with the approval of the Presbytery or of the Ministerial Committee acting as a Commission.

2. Interim Supply

An Interim Supply Pastor is invited to serve during the period a congregation is seeking a Pastor. The Interim Supply Pastor may be appointed by the Presbytery to moderate the Session during the time of service.

3. Occasional Supply

An Occasional Supply Pastor is invited to serve regularly on specified days. Only the Ministerial Committee must approve.