

INTERIM MINISTRY RESOURCES

The importance of interim pastoral services is often underestimated. Usually, this ministry is seen as a stop-gap measure between the departure of the previous pastor and the “coming” of “the real pastor.” In fact, this time may be one of significant change and growth in the life of a congregation. In addition to ordinary pastoral duties, and any specialized assignments, the interim pastor gives attention to a) the ordinary grief process which goes with change, b) enhancing personal relationships among members to build trust, and c) five specific developmental tasks.

The ordinary grief process which comes with any transition is found in congregation life and with individuals. The well-known stages: denial, anger, guilt, blaming, acceptance can be identified during a congregation vacancy period. It is important to handle these in effective and healthy ways. When this does not happen, the start-up ministry of the next pastor is complicated.

It is also important for the interim pastor to assist in enhancing personal relationships among members. The departure of the previous pastor provides an opportunity to build relationships in a new way and, well done, this can improve trust in a congregation. Relationship building is fun, but complex. It requires attention to communication skills and listening, and to improving ways of responding to criticism and handling conflict and disagreement.

Congregational studies have identified five specific developmental tasks during the transition period: coming to terms with history, discovering a new identity, coping with power shifts among members, strengthening partnership with Presbytery and other congregations, and building a commitment to a new future and new pastor. Trained interim pastors know many ways to help a congregation handle these tasks. When these tasks are effectively completed, the start-up of a new pastor is enhanced. When the developmental tasks are not completed, the effectiveness of the new ministry is delayed.

Here are some important resources for understanding interim pastoral ministry. All of these are available from the Presbytery Parish Resource Center.

Loren B. Mead, “Critical Moment of Ministry: A Change of Pastors”

“So Your Pastor’s Leaving?” (Multimedia package)

“New Beginnings: A Pastorate Start Up Workbook”

William Bud Phillips, “Pastoral Transitions: From Endings to New Beginnings”

Edward A. White, “Saying Goodbye: A Time of Growth For Congregations and Pastors”
(Rocky Point Parish Resource Center)

Roger Nicholson, “Temporary Shepherds: A Congregational Handbook for Interim Ministry”