



Sierra Pacific Synod
committed to being re-formed

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Transition Time for Congregations

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Self Study: Encountering God in our Midst

The purpose of transition time is to mobilize discovery and generate the capacity to thrive anew. The two major goals are:

1. To discover a new and deepened sense of identity and purpose for the congregation, and
2. to establish a healthy relationship with the next pastoral leader who will walk with the congregation in mission.

The Transition Team (or Call Committee) allows the congregation council to focus on continuing to support the ministries of the congregation and the regular business of the church.

Other purposes of the transition time are:

- to help congregational members grieve after the loss of their pastor and to gain perspective on the chapter of congregational life that has now ended;
- to gather the feelings and ideas of both members of the congregation and people living in the surrounding community about their church;
- to provide a forum for sharing and focusing hopes and aspirations for the future;
- to help the congregation move from a preoccupation with the past to a state of readiness for a new chapter in its life under the leadership of a new pastor; and
- to involve the congregation in accomplishing the developmental tasks of the intentional interim period.

The members of the Transition Team (or Call Committee) commit to the unique opportunity presented in the transition time. It is a time of high challenge for any congregation, a time for self-assessment, and a time for visioning and recommitment to mission and ministry. The overall goal is to bring the congregation into a state of readiness to move forward under the leadership of a new pastor.

Forming a Transition Team and/or Call Committee

The Holy Spirit is on the move in a congregation in transition. Four to eight weeks following the arrival of the intentional interim pastor, it is recommended that a Transition Team (or Call Committee) be created. They will be responsible for research, analysis, documentation, and study. The interim pastor will help guide you through this process using a variety of tools to plan and guide a process that invites the whole congregation into a time of self-reflection, preparing the congregation for a new future with a new called pastor.

Visibility of the transition team in the congregation is important. Some things to consider: commissioning / blessing the transition team in worship; including prayers for their work and listing their names in the weekly prayers; regular updates in the newsletter or bulletin; a bulletin board with their pictures; special name tags.

The work of Transition Time

The Interim Pastor will work with the congregation to focus on five central focus areas:

- Heritage** Reviewing how the congregation has been shaped and formed
- Leadership** Reviewing the membership needs and its ways of organizing and developing new and effective leadership
- Mission** Defining and redefining sense of purpose and direction
- Connections** Discovering all the relationships a faith community builds outside of itself
- Future** Developing a vision for a future relationship with a new pastor

At all points, the congregation asks:

- Who are we?
- Who are our Neighbors?
- What is God calling us to do?

Congregational Leaders will work in partnership with the Transition Team and/or Call Committee and with the help of the Interim Pastor to:

- Update the current congregation constitution
- Study the congregation and surrounding community
- Establish and/or affirm core values
- Develop and/or affirm mission statement
- Develop and/or affirm vision statement
- Review staffing needs and concerns, making updates and changes as necessary
- Assess the congregation's financial reality
- Assess the congregation's stewardship of resources
- Assess the congregation's property issues
- Assess the congregation's organizational and structural issues

This packet contains helpful documents to aid in all of this transition work. However, each congregation will be unique and with the aid and guidance of the Interim Pastor, will find their own way of self study and preparation for the future.

This work in self-study, collection of data, discernment, and preparation of congregation materials will be the source material for the Ministry Site Profile. With the guidance of the Interim Pastor the Transition Team and/or Call Committee will draft a Ministry Site Profile based upon their work with the whole congregation.

Litany of Beginning for Interim Ministry

It would be appropriate to insert this into the Sunday morning liturgy on the first or second Sunday that the Intentional Interim Pastor begins ministry among you. As a symbol of beginning, it makes sense to place it at the beginning of the service after the greeting and Kyrie.

A representative of the Congregation Council: Pastor _____ has been contracted to be the Intentional Interim Pastor at _____. This is a ministry of specific tasks designed for the particularities of transition. Congregation President or other representative will read the interim agreement between Pastor _____ and this congregation.

Congregation President: (Reads the Agreement)

Congregation President: (address Pastor): Is it also your understanding of our agreement?

Pastor: It is and I commit myself to this new trust and responsibility. I promise to fulfill my responsibilities here to the best of my ability in accordance with scripture, with the Lutheran Confessions, and the Constitution of the ELCA. Will you as a congregation receive me as your pastor and partner in ministry as we seek God's call for us in this interim period?

Congregation: We will.

Congregation President: Welcome Pastor _____. We now officially begin our partnership in this interim ministry in the name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit.

Congregation: Amen.

Pastor: Let us pray

Almighty God, you call you people in baptism into the death and resurrection of your son, Jesus Christ. You turn us from the old life of sin and gave us rebirth and everlasting life. May we be renewed daily by the gift of your Holy Spirit and may we be especially aware of your leading in this interim period. Grant us faithfulness and peace in all that we do so that you may be glorified among us. We pray through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Congregation: Amen

Review of the Congregation's History

Congregations need to come to terms with their history in order to move on. There is in every congregation that which has been creative and worth celebrating and that which has been debilitating. And just as human beings are shaped by their histories and experiences, so too, is a congregation.

The interim time should be filled with the telling of stories, remembering the happy events of the past and talking out loud about the sad ones. The sharing helps members get a perspective on their past, helps them "remember" things they may not personally have experienced, and frees them from unexpected and seemingly unexplainable actions that might pop up later.

Your Interim Pastor will have some ideas on how to help the call committee lead this review of history but here are some suggestions you might want to consider.

- Have a History Day and invite people to bring old snapshots of past church events. Plan an album by decade or by year where these pictures can be put and invite people to tell and write stories about them in the album. Make it a day of celebration.
- Make a timeline of the church putting years of pastors' service, building projects, significant events of the congregation on the line. One might then ask members to write on the timeline when they joined or were married or were baptized. Ask them to write memories on the timeline of things that were significant for them (e.g. notable events, people, etc.). Talk about the events and what they mean to people. Don't be afraid to talk about why a pastor left or why a pastor served for only a short time. Name the emotions that people experience in the memory.
- Put a church trivia quiz in each newsletter. Be sure to publish the answers since knowledge of the history is what this is about.

If you notice that the congregation is generally "living in the past," that is, they long for things to return to the way they were; if they are unwilling to look at the why of traditions and practices; if they are stuck in anger, denial, grief or alienation; or if they exhibit selective memory of the congregation's past, then addressing the history in a creative way will be important.

With the Interim Pastor, pay special attention to individuals who are having difficulty with this process. Not everyone will be able to move ahead at the same rate and pastoral care is important to everyone. Since your Interim Pastor does not know members as well as you do, be helpful in identifying for them people who may need special pastoral attention.

Review of the Congregation Constitution and Policies

It will be important that your constitution is updated so that your call process goes smoothly. Review your current congregation and compare it to the model constitution of the ELCA. You can download the model constitution from the ELCA web site www.ELCA.org. The model constitution has various changes, usually minor, every three years after the ELCA churchwide assembly in August. Every congregation council should have on their regular agenda, an update of the constitution at least every third year.

As you are reviewing your constitution in the transition period, make note of the sections and lines that must be in your constitution and the things that are optional or have various options. If you haven't updated your constitution for a long while, you may find that there are quite a number of decisions to be made about changes.

When you have updated your constitution, you may send it to the Synod Constitution Review Committee for review: *Office of the Bishop 9985 Folsom Blvd., Sacramento CA 95827*. The committee will make sure that you don't have conflicting statements in sections and that it is consistent with the ELCA model constitution. The committee will return your constitution within 120 days and keep a copy of file in the synod office. If the 120 days expire before it is returned, the constitution becomes effective as it was sent in. Remember that a change in the constitution, even an update, takes a congregational vote, so be sure to do this early in the transition process.

It is likely there are one or two people in the congregation who are gifted and interested in this particular task. Let those people work out the draft and bring it to the church council for review and revision.

At the same time that you are reviewing your constitution, be sure that your congregation policies are in place and up to date. At a minimum every congregation should have a current personnel policy and financial policy including endowments and investments. You should also look at updating/creating a personnel manual, mutual ministry policy, sabbatical leave policy, parental leave policy, wedding and funeral policy, memorials policy, safe children policies, publications policy, policies regarding use of building and special equipment, etc.

It may seem like a lot of work if you have none of these in place, but it is important for incorporated entities to have procedures in place so that decisions are made in an orderly manner and reflect the core values of the congregation. You will find that decision making is streamlined as they provide guidance and framework for committees, boards, and individual members. Begin work on these policies during the interim period so that your new pastor won't have to search for them in old archives.

Review of Core Values, Mission Statement and Vision Statement

Every congregation has a purpose. We know that we have been sent “to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” (*Matthew 28:19*). And we know congregations function in the areas of faith, fellowship and service. A mission statement that reflects those things could be applied to almost any Christian congregation. No two congregations are exactly the same. Each one has a different personality, a different ambiance, a different realm in which it functions best. Each one has its own core values, some of which may be similar to other churches, but there are some core values that make your congregation unique. These are the lenses through which you see the world, and the priorities you have established for yourselves. As you begin to evaluate and update your mission statement, try to list four or five core values of your congregation.

Every congregation also has a vision, what it shall be some day. A vision is necessary for survival. “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” (*Proverbs 29:18*) Maybe you have not given much thought to your congregational vision lately. The interim period is a good time to re-vision your congregation, preparing your hearts for the vision that God has for you. Spend intentional time in the interim period with spiritual disciplines. Establish a Bible Study and encourage everyone’s participation. The Book of Acts has a lot to offer a congregation doing a self-reflection and self-study as do Paul’s letters to the Corinthians. The Book of Nehemiah, probably less familiar to many, is the story of great visionary who sets about rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem. He encounters many of the same things that congregations today encounter.

As you prepare your hearts and minds for God’s vision for your congregation, you will be asking yourself: “What is our purpose? What is God calling us to be? Who is our neighbor?” And then as you discover your vision for your future, you will identify the activities you will engage to get there. This becomes your mission statement.

A vision statement is more about *becoming*:

- It pictures the future of your congregation as God has planned it to be
- It describes the results you hope you will realize in the “real world”
- It captures the uniqueness that God has given your congregation
- It is short, motivational, and easy to memorize
Example: to be a congregation that is known as a safe haven for all people.

A mission statement is more about *doing*:

- It tells something about your purpose as a part of the larger body of Christ
- It hints at how you will make your vision a reality
- It is short, motivational, and easy to memorize
Example: We welcome our neighbor with enthusiasm and love, knowing that God will show us the ministry we might do.

Core values are more about *being*:

- Each one will describe what people experience in your congregation
 - Together they capture the uniqueness which is your congregation
 - They are fundamental to the beliefs and lived out
- Example: Empowerment; Hospitality; Challenge; Journey; Community

So let's think about the process you might engage in order to develop or redefine your core values, vision, and mission. Let's begin with, *Core Values are intended to communicate what the congregation stands for and on what principles it operates. They guide the everyday actions of members and staff as well as congregational planning.* We assume that a congregation which demonstrates its core values at a high level will be more effective in its ministry as will be easier to be identified by others.

One way to help people discover and identify their core values would be to invite all congregation members to gather in focus groups after worship on a Sunday. It will actually take two Sundays, two weeks apart and they should both be scheduled before you have the first one. Make it celebratory and not a drudging "duty." What could be more exciting than discovering what God is calling you to do? As people are seated at tables, tell them that the goal is to articulate your core values in order to be focused in your ministry. Define core values in a way that is clear to all, maybe as simply as using the definition above.

- Give each person 10 sticky notes. Ask them to write on sticky notes (one comment per note), the main things that they personally live by. For example, some may write kindness, honesty, hospitality, friendliness, privacy, or integrity. Others may include things like family, friends, relationships, achievement, jokes and humor. All of these things reflect values of individuals. Ask them to go put all those sticky notes on the wall someplace where all may see them.
- On different color sticky notes, ask them to write things that reflect the values of the congregation. What are some words that reflect how the congregation makes decisions, treats people, and does ministry? Some of the words might be the same, but new words may be added as well. Ask them to put those sticky notes on the wall as well.
- Then there will be a time of storytelling. Ask people about a time when one of those "congregational values" was demonstrated. Keep that conversation going until everyone who is willing has had a chance to share. Ask if there have been times when the congregation has acted in ways that reflect values other than those listed. Add those values to the list. Ask if there are things on the personal values list that should be added to the congregation's value list. Add those values to the list.
- Let people think about the values as they leave this section and let them know that they will gather again to refine the list. Take the information from the sticky notes and put it on a single page and leave the values posted somewhere in the church where people have access to them. Ask people to add to the list if they think of something during the next two weeks. *How have they seen them reflected? How might they be guides in decision making? How have those values formed their thinking? How have those values shaped their faith journey?* Then ask the members to select the top five core values. They may decide they want to name them something different in order to incorporate one or more

values. For example, they may have kindness and helpfulness as core values but may decide to change the word to compassion in order to incorporate both words.

- At the second meeting, two weeks later, give everyone 10 'sticky dots'. Ask them to place their dots next to the ten values they believe the congregation should claim as its core values. In other words, what are the top 10 things to live by as a congregation? Have some conversation about those ten values.
- Post the core values in a place where people can see them and begin to ask about them in terms of stories that reflect those values. Bring up the values at council meetings as decisions are being made and ask what decision would best reflect our values. Live with them for a while and get feedback through the council. Note differences between the preferred values (what is listed) and true values (what is demonstrated) of the congregation. Set a time to talk about those at a later date.

Your congregation probably has a mission statement already.

Does it reflect your core values? Does it describe the overall purpose of the congregation?
Is it clear to those who are not members or part of the congregation?

Does it guide the members of the congregation as they make decisions, make policies, and develop ministries?

Do the members of the congregation know and embrace the mission statement?

Where is the mission statement displayed?

Where is it discussed?

How does the mission statement shape the mission of the congregation and how is the mission of the congregation reflected in the mission statement?

It's usually easier to write a mission statement in a small group than in the congregation as a whole. It is important, however, to have a feedback loop that includes everyone, so that the statement is not something imposed on them and the congregation can "own" it.

A vision statement reflects where the congregation sees itself in the future if it is effectively carrying out its mission. Putting together a vision statement can be an enjoyable process allowing people to dream big and imagine success. The statement can be used as a motivational tool or as a reminder of why we do what we do as a congregation. A helpful vision statement is one that has an idealism mixed with realism. What will your congregation look like in ten years if you are actively engaged in your mission? What does God have in mind for you given the gifts he has placed in this congregation?

Review of Staffing Needs and Resources

It is often the case that when a pastor resigns, staff members submit undated letters of resignation as well. The smaller the congregation, the more appropriate this is. A pastor should be allowed then to work with the people who are in place for a few months to decide if the working relationship is such that they can accept the resignation(s) or simply tear them up and rewrite new contracts for staff members.

This process of requesting staff resignation is sometimes difficult because our tendency is to want to take care of the people we have come to know on the congregation's staff. Certainly compassion for staff members is important and that will be reflected in their compensation, bonuses, and severance packages if their resignations are accepted. Always keep in mind that your congregation has a purpose: a vision and a mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

As you begin to look for a new pastor it is time to look at the total staffing picture as well. Staffing is a function of the vision of the congregation. And as a function of vision, staffing should always be focused on the future. A rule of thumb is to staff for the next step of your future. What is your next step? What functions will need to be carried out to reach your vision? Who is gifted in those areas? Are there volunteers in the congregation who see this as their ministry? Is paid staff the best alternative? Should the staff position be full or part time? Are there people available for full time or part time?

Congregations are sometimes hesitant to evaluate staff members, however careful and regular evaluation is a benefit both to the employee and to the mission of the congregation. Volunteers might also be given opportunity for evaluation as well. Keep in mind that evaluations are not a measure of the person so much as they are a measure of whether that person is right for that particular task or job. Every existing job should have a job description. Checking the written job description against what that employee may be now expected to do is a task for this interim period. Your Interim Pastor will help you find resources for staff evaluations, for writing job descriptions and for developing a policy for regular evaluations in the congregation.

As you look at the tasks ahead to carry out your mission, you will need to discern whether volunteers will be as effective as paid staff and whether the task requires full time or part time work. If the task requires part time staffing now, how will it increase as the ministry grows? Continually evaluate your ministry and the increases in work that employees and volunteers take on. Look at the market to establish fair wages and benefits. Annually review employee compensation and compare to cost of living increases, market parity, and value to the congregation. Treat employees fairly.

You are in the process right now of evaluating your pastoral needs. How should those be balanced with other staff positions in your congregation? Remember that Deacons are trained in a variety of specialties such as Youth and Family Ministry, Educational Ministry, Outreach Ministry, Music Ministry, Administration, Spiritual Care and Counseling. It is possible that a Minister of Word and Service or lay person might fill some of your ministry needs as you grow into your future?

Some congregations have staff positions in these areas:

- Director of Music
- Office Administrator
- Director of Christian Education
- Director of Adult Ministry
- Director of Small Group Ministry
- Volunteer Coordinator
- Hospitality Coordinator
- Visitation Coordinator
- Director of Family Ministry
- Youth and Family Minister
- Director of Outreach and Social Ministry

Clearly each one of these comes with a job description that helps the specific congregation carry out its mission. Once you are clear about your values, vision and mission, and appropriate staff, and then look at the possibilities for staffing.

Intentional Stewardship

Stewardship is a key to accomplishing the mission of the congregation and is a reflection of its health. There is no perfect stewardship plan for a congregation and the same plan may or may not be effective in any two years. Every stewardship plan should be reflective of your core values, your vision, and your mission.

We are sometimes hesitant to talk about stewardship in churches, forgetting that we exercise stewardship every time we make a decision about what we will or will not do. Christians are called to be intentional about their stewardship, not just of money, but of their time and other resources as well. Intentional stewardship is bringing to consciousness and witness those things that we are already doing and those things that we intend, with God's help, to do in the future.

As you develop your stewardship plan in the congregation remember these things:

- People give to purposes they believe in
- People give to things that make a difference
- People give to things where they feel they have "ownership"
- People tend to be generous, decent, and fair

Think about how you present an overall stewardship plan that includes regular offerings to the congregation, special gifts and capital campaigns, and end of life of legacy gifting. The congregation council has the opportunity to take leadership on stewardship during the transition time. Work with your Intentional Interim Pastor as you develop your intentional stewardship plan.

Related to your overall stewardship plan is an inventory of your corporate physical plant. As you get ready to call a new pastor and re-evaluate your ministry as a congregation, the following inventory will give you some questions to ask yourselves about property and the message the property gives as a witness to who you are. It isn't meant to be a check list, to simply answer the questions, but as a guide for conversation, learning, and potentially making improvements and upgrades to make the building more inviting and hospitable to guests.

Stewardship of Property Inventory

1. Are you proud to bring friends, guests and visitors to your church building?
2. When was the facility built?
3. Is the building well located for present and future community needs?
4. When was the last renovation? What kind of renovation was it? How much did it cost?
5. How were the funds raised for the last remodel/renovation?
6. Are outdoor signs well placed for traffic visibility? Are they lighted?
7. Is information current on outdoor signs?
8. Do outdoor signs have phone numbers, email and website address?
9. Does the property look well kept? Is it landscaped?
10. Is access to the main entrance to the building easily identified?
11. Do the main doors have glass for easy visibility?
12. Is the facility handicapped accessible? Do the outdoor signs have accessibility symbol where appropriate?
13. Is there adequate parking? Is the parking lot lighted?
14. Is there well marked visitor and handicapped parking?
15. Are there good directional signs inside the building (to bathrooms, office, sanctuary, fellowship hall, etc.)?
16. Are hallways and rooms well lit?
17. Are the windows clean?
18. Are closets and storage areas assigned and tidy?
19. Are education rooms free of excess paper and clutter, and do they invite?
20. Are the bathrooms clean?
21. Is there at least one all-gender bathroom on the campus?
22. Is there a baby changing table in the bathrooms (*both* men's and women's)?
23. Are faucets and drinking fountains free of leaks?
24. Have the halls and rooms been recently painted?
25. Are bulletin boards updated and kept tidy?
26. Is the nursery clean and in good repair? Are toys checked and cleaned on a regular basis (is there a way to track this)?
27. Are the floors in good repair? Is the carpeting up to date?
28. Is the roof in good repair? Has water damage been repaired?
29. Are fellowship areas welcoming to strangers?
30. Are chairs and tables in fellowship areas clean and orderly?
31. Is the sanctuary inviting and inspiring?
32. Are the pews or chairs in the sanctuary comfortable and convenient for families and elderly?
33. Is there a convenient space for wheelchairs in worship? Can wheelchairs and other mobility aids move easily in the space?
34. Is the furnace and heating system in good repair?
35. Is there a need for air conditioning in offices or sanctuary? Is it in good repair?
36. Is there ongoing capital fund for building emergencies and planning remodels?
37. Are your light fixtures and bulbs energy efficient?

Involving the Congregation

There will be many points at which it is essential to involve the congregation in the work of the transition. At times it will also be more appropriate for the Transition Team and/or Call Committee to do work on behalf of the congregation.

Reporting regularly to the congregation council and the whole congregation helps to keep everyone on the same level of understanding about the process of transition time. There is no such thing as over-communication during transition time.

Newsletter articles explaining the discernment of the transition team can keep the congregation informed and may invite excitement and consideration from many voices and perspectives.

Notices in the Sunday bulletin about upcoming events and activities of the transition process will send the message that the ideas and needs of the congregation are important to those who are doing the work on the Transition Team and/or Call Committee.

Temple Talks by a member of the Transition Team and/or Call Committee will familiarize the congregation with the individuals who are involved in this work and will engender trust and confidence in the outcome of the study.

Announcements via email and newsletters can speak of the things that congregational leaders are considering, wondering, and discerning. They can invite participation or inform and announce that the process is still moving forward.

Be sure the congregation website, bulletin boards, and social media pages are up to date with the work of the Transition Team and/or Call Committee. This is a public place where others can connect with the work of the leaders. It might be a good place to put Frequently Asked Questions.

In a time of transition it is normal and right for there to be increased anxiety in the congregation. This is what humans do in uncertain times. Frequent and open communication from the Transition Team and/or Call Committee will give assurance about the process and the forward progress of the congregation. It will increase confidence in the leaders and invite participation to building a future together.