

What is Interim Ministry?

A congregation in transition is shaped by the uniqueness of its individual context. Yet the Word of God transcends every context, moving and bringing forth what the congregation may need. We call the time between settled pastors, interim ministry.

Interim ministry finds its theological grounding within the Holy Scriptures. Consider the interim ministries of some of the Bible's greatest leaders who encountered change in their context: Moses, Abraham and Sarah, and Deborah in the book of Judges. And that's just in the Hebrew Scriptures.

We can turn to the New Testament and find even more biblical and theological grounding for interim ministry. After all, isn't interim ministry all about transformation? The Apostle Paul was transformed and became a transformational leader. There was John the Baptist, and, of course, Jesus. From death to resurrection, scripture points us to change and transformation.

History tells us that every congregation and every ministry is limited by time and scope. For Moses, part of his life and ministry were spent wandering in the wilderness.

Congregations in a season of interim ministry enter this wilderness experience immediately upon learning that there is going to be a shift in their leadership. Margaret Morris and Joan Mabon, pioneering interim pastors and trainers, have written in the Interim Ministry Network newsletter, *The In-Between Times*:

"Perhaps more than any other, the biblical motif 'wilderness' emerges most strongly as the metaphor for a congregation between installed pastors. 'Wilderness' is that place of sudden freedom, uncertain leadership, changed relationships, possible deprivation—temptations, hopes and disappointments. That place where all old fears reappear most threateningly... but where all the hopeful futures take on new promise. 'Wilderness' becomes a paradigm for the interim [transition] time."

As far as biblical precedent goes, John the Baptist just might be considered the first ever interim minister. He is definitely a model for interim pastors. All interim pastors strive to be the voice in the midst of the wilderness for any congregation in a season of transition.

John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus. The interim pastor prepares the way (i.e., the congregation) for the coming of the new called pastor, or another new direction the congregation will decide to take. John prepared the way for the new day, and interim pastors do the same thing.

Your Interim Pastor

Interim pastors work specifically within the congregational context, lifting a mirror to reflect to the congregation the culture within its own walls. The season of time led by the interim pastor is one where the congregation does the work, preparing themselves to receive the newly-called pastor.

A interim pastor, no matter what kind, works to work themselves out of a job. In John 3:30, John the Baptist points to the one who was called by God to take up ministry among the people: "He must increase, but I must decrease."

John the Baptist passed his ministry on to Jesus. Jesus, in turn, traveled throughout the countryside and into the villages and cities, constantly preparing his disciples to succeed him. The work of any congregation flows from the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, in, with, and through the will of God. Hence, interim ministry in a congregation centers, first and foremost, on God.

For pastoral leadership in the time of interim ministry, the Office of the Bishop is responsible for assigning a pastor to serve in your congregation. Interim pastors are Rostered Ministers of Word and Sacrament who serve in a congregation under contract. They are not called by the congregation. Instead, they are issued a term call by the Synod Council for interim service in your congregation. Service in an Interim position can last anywhere from one to multiple years. However, every context is different and the season of transition has many variables that cannot be calculated in advance to predict how long the interim will be.

The Bishop or their staff will provide a potential candidate to the congregation council. With the assistance of the synod staff, the council negotiates a compensation package with the interim pastor. The congregation contracts with the pastor for a period of one year, negotiated and renewable annually. It is the practice of the Sierra Pacific Synod that Interim Pastors are compensated according to the synod's compensation guidelines.

The interim pastor's time and purpose with your congregation is intentional. Interim pastors are called to assist your congregation in discernment and preparation for the season after this transition. To serve this purpose and for the discernment and health of the congregation, interim pastors are not eligible to interview for call in the congregation where they serve as interim.

It is not unusual for there to be a gap of time between the ministry of your former pastor and the ministry of your interim pastor. While waiting for an interim pastor, the council can invite a supply pastor to conduct worship and provide pastoral care (contact for supply pastors is available through your conference dean or the synod staff).