

Great Milwaukee Synod  
Interim Ministry Task Force  
Manual for Congregations in Transition  
Interim Ministry

Life is a series of transitions from birth to death. At best, transition, though painful, can provide individuals and communities with a time of reflection, vision and opportunity to effect creative change. At worst, transitions can be disruptive and discouraging, leaving individuals and/or communities drained of spirit or hope. In all instances, transitions are made easier if there is a system of nurture and support in place to assist, coach, mentor or advise the individual and/or community through the time of transition. For individuals this support and nurture may come from parents, friends, partners and/or colleagues. For communities this support and nurture is more formalized and may be provided by someone who is appointed, elected or hired to assist the community in transition.

When a pastor leaves a congregation, for whatever reason, the congregation experiences a loss. This loss, when acknowledged, can best be resolved during the time of transition before a new pastor is called and installed. An interim pastor, appointed by the bishop, in consultation with the church council, will provide support and nurture when needed during the transition by assisting, coaching, mentoring and/or advising the congregation during its transition period.

**Biblical and Historical Perspective**  
**On Interim Ministry**

Interim ministry, though not clearly defined as such, began with the calling of the disciples. These people served as missionaries, congregational developers and overseers of congregational life. Their role was to encourage, correct, nurture, and support the people God through the means of Word and Sacrament ministry. They were most likely to be with the people for short periods of time and kept in touch with the congregations through follow-up letters. Evidence of this ministry is the core of the Pastoral Epistles, the Pauline Epistles and the Book of Acts.

Once the Church was granted legal status it also became more structured. Clergy were appointed to serve congregations for terms determined by the hierarchy of the Church. Little distinction was made as to the length of service for which the clergy were assigned.

As civilization became more complex and the church became embroiled in controversy, pastoral leadership often took on new forms. Following the Reformation and before the more formal development of mainline Protestant organizational structure, pastoral leadership in congregations evolved in a variety of ways. Sometimes this leadership was simply assumed by an individual with active consent of the people. At other times a congregation may have been formed around the personality of the leader. Many of these ministries were temporary or interim by nature, depending on the pastor's decision to remain and the amount of support provided by congregation. Some of these congregations eventually formed the base from which mainline Protestant churches evolved. In summary, the present system of calling a pastor is relatively new in the development history of the Church.

### **Present Understanding of Interim Ministry**

Given the historical perspective on ministry and the fact that the Church has evolved into an organizational structure that requires its leadership to be called and sent into Word and Sacrament ministry to congregations, interim ministry can best be classified as specialized ministry in that structure.

### **The Purpose of Interim Ministry**

The purpose of Interim Ministry is to provide appropriate and effective pastoral leadership from the time the current pastor leaves and the arrival of a new pastor.

There are two general types of interim ministry.

***Typical Interim***—a typical interim usually follows pastoral retirement or resignation. The five basic interim ministry tasks are coupled with the Synod's Mission Exploration Team (MET) process will be the interim's primary focus.

***Intentional Interim***—an intentional interim follows pastoral retirement or resignation that was preceded by a long and difficult period of congregational conflict or as a result of a disciplinary action. An intentional interim is also appropriate following an unusually long and successful ministry by the former pastor. Experience has shown that these and similar situations need to be addressed in an ***intentional*** way in order that the congregation can move forward with confidence.

## The Tasks of Interim Ministry

1. The Interim Pastor encourages the congregation to review its history. There are various ways to do this:
  - ◆ **Coming to terms with history.**

The congregation comes to understand what has happened. For example, at the close of an extended service by a beloved pastor, the congregation may need to deal with feelings of loss, grief, anger or anguish. “Letting go” of the former pastor is a critical dynamic in this developmental task.
  - ◆ **Discovering a new identity.**

The interim period provides an opportunity for the congregation to evaluate itself. It is a time to analyze present realities and real possibilities for ministry and mission.
  - ◆ **Managing shifts in lay leadership.**

When a pastor leaves a congregation, new patterns of lay involvement often arise. Person who has been actively involved may step back; others may step forward. Thus, the interim period can be a time when development and preparation of lay leadership calls for special attention.
  - ◆ **Strengthening Denomination Relationships.**

The interim period usually brings a congregation into a closer and more frequent contact with the Bishop, the synodical staff, and churchwide resources. Through the call process, the congregation has the opportunity to evaluate and recommit to its relationship with the Greater Milwaukee Synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and other churchwide expressions.
  - ◆ **Committed to a New Leadership and a Future.**

During the interim ministry period, a congregation can ready itself spiritually in order to enter into partnership with a new pastoral leader. Renewed commitment to the Gospel is a primary goal in the time of transition.
2. The Interim Pastor helps the congregation to work with the changes in lay leadership that often comes with a change in pastoral leadership. This

transition time can serve as a time to bring closure to the previous pastoral leadership and to enable the congregation to welcome new leadership with openness and vision.

3. The Interim Pastor assists the congregation in developing an awareness of its own style and gifts within its membership that will continue and expand the parish's well being.
4. The Interim Pastor with his/her own style of ministry opens up the possibilities for the congregation to accept and welcome other styles of pastoral ministry.
5. The Interim Pastor will generally be asked by the bishop to assist in the Mission Exploration Team process and development of the congregational mission profile.
6. The Interim Pastor carries out the responsibilities as stated in the Covenant For Interim Pastoral Ministry.

### **The Interim Pastor**

Interim Ministry is a specialized form of the ordained clergy. An Interim Pastor usually comes from the roster of ordained clergy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) or denominations with which we share ordained leadership.

### **General Characteristics of the Interim Pastor**

The Interim Pastor....

- ❖ has met all of the requirements for call to the ordained ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).
- ❖ has skills in-group dynamics and group behavior.
- ❖ has skills, abilities and the temperament to deal with conflict situations which manifest themselves in power struggles and/or subversive techniques within the congregation's life.
- ❖ has the ability to work within a given time frame.

- ❖ has a healthy self-concept and pastoral identity which enables acceptance of the reality that one does develop deep relationships within the congregation and is often not recognized as the pastor.
- ❖ is trained to center on the tasks of interim ministry critical to leading the congregation toward the goal of calling its next pastor.
- ❖ fulfills the continuing education expectation for ELCA pastors with special attention to interim ministry issues and skills including training in conflict resolution.
- ❖ is simply a good pastor.

### **THE PROCESS OF APPOINTMENT TO INTERIM MINISTRY**

1. When a pastoral vacancy occurs, the congregational leadership informs the Synodical Bishop's office.
2. The Bishop or representative of the Bishop consults with the congregational leadership to determine the needs of the congregation during the interim and how best to arrange for continuing pastoral leadership during the transition period.

In congregations where there is multiple staff and other clergy under call, this consultation will seek to involve these persons in determining the needs for interim leadership.

3. The Bishop selects and recommends an interim pastor.
4. Once the Interim Pastor has been selected and appointed, the Interim Pastor works under an agreement called an Interim Covenant (see appendix), that is developed in consultation with the Bishop's Office and the congregation leadership. This Covenant includes:
  - a. Mutual agreement of pastor and congregation to fulfill the goals of the congregation and stay within the guidelines of the constitution and by-laws of the ELCA.
  - b. The Interim Pastor's duties include a working relationship with the congregation's staff.

- c. The congregation's responsibility includes compensation to the Interim Pastor. Salary is based on the salary package of the former pastor.
  - d. The synod's responsibilities to the congregation and the Interim Pastor.
  - e. A time frame in which the Interim Ministry will be completed.
5. The Interim Pastor will be in close contact with the Synod Staff and the congregational leadership throughout the interim. The Interim Pastor will provide quarterly progress reports (see appendix), attend the monthly Synod Interim Ministry Gatherings and participate in a mutual mentoring relationship.
  6. The Synod will provide a general orientation to interim ministry for all new interim clergy, including an understanding of the difference between interim ministry and settled ministry.
  7. The Interim Pastor **will not** be available as a candidate for a regular call to the congregation.
  8. It is recommend that the congregation establish an interim mutual ministry committee as a way to support the interim pastor and as a means to enhance communication in this time of transition.
  9. The Interim Pastor's tenure will be complete at least four weeks prior to the arrival of the permanent pastor.
  10. In order to acknowledge the beginning and completion of the interim process, the congregation will include litanies of welcome and farewell to the interim pastor during worship.

# “Why Can’t We Call Our Interim Pastor?”

Thoughts from the article, “Why shouldn’t we consider our Interim Minister as a candidate for the permanent position?”

Adapted from **Interim Ministry**, Rhode Island Conference, U.C.C.)

1. God’s Spirit has someone more suitable in mind!
2. The Interim has a leading advantage over other persons who might be interested in the vacancy. This raises a question of fairness of all prospective candidates.
3. While the Interim may be favorable to most members—some may have developed some dislikes. This raises the concern about a built in resistance right from the start.
4. If the Interim is considered along side other candidates and then not chosen, this could cause hurt and also a “Lame Duck” conclusion of the Interim’s pastorate.
5. The essential tasks that need to be addressed during an interim period may not get the attention that they really need. For example, calling the Interim might interfere with doing the necessary grief work regarding the loss of a former pastor. Also, an Interim Pastor may need to do some things in the interim period that he/she would not do if anticipating the roles as the “permanent, settled pastor.”
6. Such a practice could put into motion the idea that Interim Ministry is just a stepping stone in the call process.
7. Calling a trained interim specialist and his/her acceptance would remove this person from the small pool of people who are trained and able to serve in this capacity as an interim.
8. The Interim Pastor is a member of a network of people who have mutually agreed to this principle. To accept such a call would be perceived as the Interim going against his/her world.

## LITANY OF WELCOME

L: A church family is constantly changing. Loved ones come to the end of their lives. Individuals come and go in our church life. It is important and good that we recognize these times of passage, of endings and beginnings. Today we share the time of welcome with Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ whose time as our Interim Pastor begins.

Pastor \_\_\_\_\_, in the presence of this congregation will you commit yourself to this new trust and responsibility, and promise to fulfill your duties in harmony with the constitution of this church.

*P: I will and I ask God to help me.*

L: Will you love, serve and pray for these people of God, nourishing them with the Word and Sacraments and lead them forward during this important time of change?

*P: I will and I ask God to help me.*

L: Will you lead this people of God in giving faithful witness to the Word of God and in making known the love of God through loving service among themselves in this community?

*P: I will and I ask God to help me.*

L: Almighty God, who has given you the will to do these things, give you the power of the Holy Spirit so that you may perform them with strength and compassion.

**Congregation: Amen.**

L: I ask all of you, people of this congregation, will you receive this messenger of Christ, Pastor \_\_\_\_\_, who continues the work of bringing the Gospel of hope and salvation. Will you regard him/her as a fellow servant of Christ and work with him/her in the ministry of this congregation?

**Congregation: We will!**

L: Will you pray for him/her and honor him/her for his/her work's sake and in all things strive to live together in peace and unity?

**Congregation: We will!**

L: By your statements of commitment and affirmation of this congregation, we welcome you as Interim Pastor of this congregation in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

**Congregation: Amen.**

INTERIM PASTOR'S QUARTERLY REPORT

From: \_\_\_\_\_ To: \_\_\_\_\_

**Pastor** \_\_\_\_\_ **Congregation:** \_\_\_\_\_

1. What are the major issues confronting the congregation? How is the congregation dealing with those issues?
  
2. What new issues have surface in the past quarter?
  
3. What is the most important thing that happened this quarter in the congregation?
  
4. What change has occurred in the congregation since your last report?
  
5. Where is the congregation in the call process?
  
6. Is there anything with which the synod staff can assist you?
  
7. Will this assignment end as covenanted? \_\_\_\_\_ be extended? \_\_\_\_\_ be terminated early? \_\_\_\_\_  
Why? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Please mail to: The Bishop or the Assistant to the Bishop serving your parish.

## INTERIM PASTOR EXIT REPORT

Interim Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Congregation Served \_\_\_\_\_

Address of Congregation \_\_\_\_\_

Reason for Interim \_\_\_\_\_

Interim Served From \_\_\_\_\_ To \_\_\_\_\_

Summary of situation when you arrived:

Summary of present status of congregation:

Summary of interim experience:

What difficulties were dealt with during the transition period?

How might the synod staff have provided additional support during this transition period?

Additional comments:

What is your earliest day of availability for the next assignment:

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Please mail to: The Bishop or the Bishop's Assistant serving your congregation.

## EVALUATION OF THE INTERIM PASTOR

Please complete the following evaluation so that the synod, through the bishop and the bishop's staff, can best provide assistance to you and other congregations entering pastoral vacancies. This information will be shared with the interim pastor to help provide growth in ministry skills and insight.

Congregation \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Interim Pastor \_\_\_\_\_

Length of time serving your congregation \_\_\_\_\_

1. A. Under the covenant established with the interim pastor, what were the specific expectations and responsibilities, as you understood them? List below.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

B. How were these expectations and responsibilities met?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

2. Were there any need services that you feel were neglected during the interim pastor's ministry?

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2. In your words, describe the work of this interim pastor among the people of your congregation?

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4. Other Comments:

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Return this form to the congregational council president. After all forms are gathered from council members, the council president will forward them to the synod office.

## LITANY OF FAREWELL

L : A church family is constantly changing. Individuals come and go in our church life. It is important and good that we recognize these times of passage, of endings and beginnings. Today we share the time of farewell with Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ whose time as our interim pastor ends.

*Pastor: I thank the congregation of \_\_\_\_\_ Church, its members and its friends, for the love, kindness and support shown me over these last months. I am grateful that you have accepted my leadership. With joy I recall the many things we have been able to accomplish together.*

**Congregation: We receive your thankfulness. We accept that you now leave us to minister the gospel elsewhere. We express our gratitude for your time among us. You influence on our lives will not leave us even though you depart from us.**

*Pastor: I trust that our time together and our part are pleasing to God and the Lord Jesus Christ whom we are called to serve.*

L: Do you the members and friends of \_\_\_\_\_ Church now release Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ from the duties of interim pastor?

**Congregation: We do, with the help of God.**

L: Do you offer your encouragement for Pastor \_\_\_\_\_'s Continuing ministry?

**Congregation: We do, with the help of God.**

L: Do you, Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ release \_\_\_\_\_ Church from turning to you and depending on you?

*Pastor: I do with the help of God.*

L: Will you pray for the continuing ministry at \_\_\_\_\_ Church?

*Pastor: I do with the help of God.*

L: Let us pray

**Congregation: God, whose everlasting love for all is trustworthy, help each of us to trust the future which rests in your care. The time we were together in your name saw our laughter and tears, our hopes and disappointments. Guide us as we hold these cherished memories but now move in new directions, until that time to come when we are completely one with you and with each other, in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.**

L: Go, now, Pastor \_\_\_\_\_, surrounded by our love and led by the promises of God, the presence of Jesus Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

# COVENANT FOR INTERIM PASTORAL MINISTRY

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Name)

In the name of the Father, and of the Son  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our ministry comes from Christ through the church and belongs to the whole people of God. The gospel calls all Christians to be ministers in word and deed. So it is the privilege of every Christian to be a steward of the gospel of God's reconciling love. The whole church ministers as it celebrates God's presence, shares the good news, cares for those in need and witnesses to the power of God's love.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America recognizes the office of pastor. It also recognizes that there are occasions when parishes need to be served by interim pastors while they seek permanent pastoral leadership. Keeping in mind the apostolic advice that all things be done decently and in order (I Corinthians 14:40), the church provides a covenant between interim pastors and congregations.

Accordingly, \_\_\_\_\_ church and the Greater Milwaukee Synod of the ELCA covenant with you to serve as Interim Pastor beginning on \_\_\_\_\_ (date). The Interim Pastor will serve our congregation (full time or part time: please specify): \_\_\_\_\_ The interim pastor will serve our congregation for the initial period of at least 12 months.

This covenant shall terminate when a new pastor has accepted the Call to be pastor of this church. The president and the Interim Pastor will negotiate the specific date. In no case shall the date be beyond the starting date of the permanently called Pastor. The Interim Pastor, the congregation or the Synod Bishop may also terminate this call with a two week written notice and forfeiture of any payment beyond that period.

The conditions and mutual agreements of this covenant are set forth as follows:

**We together will:**

- A. Examine the history of the congregation and work through the transition emotions that usually follow the departure of a pastor.
- B. Seek to confirm and identify current issues facing the congregation  
And develop ways of dealing with them.
- C. Develop a vision for the interim period and provide leadership to complete this mission.
- D. Examine the congregation’s linkage with cluster, synod, churchwide units, and the resource that may be available for our ministry.
- E. Prepare for the arrival of the new pastor.
- F. Subscribe to the constitution and bylaws of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and to the constitution(s) and bylaws of the congregation(s).
- G. During the interim, agree to address the following concerns:
  - 1. \_\_\_\_\_
  - 2. \_\_\_\_\_
  - 3. \_\_\_\_\_

**You as Interim Pastor will:**

- A. Lead worship and preach.
- B. Administer the Sacraments.
- C. Provide special services (marriages and funerals)
- D. Teach in the congregation’s education program.
- E. Do pastoral calling in the congregation
- F. Be a consultant and resource to church council, committees, and parish program.

G. Agree to meet regularly with the synod interim pastor for review and consultation.

H. During this interim you will give special attention to: (this section is to be completed within the first two months of the interim and reviewed periodically during the interim ministry)

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**The Interim Pastor will not:**

- A. Work with the Call Committee of the congregation except at the request of the Synod Bishop.
- B. Under any circumstances be a candidate to the congregation.

**We the Congregation will:**

- A. Uphold and support the ministry of the Interim Pastor with prayer.
- B. Look to you to preside at baptisms, celebrations of Holy Communion and rites of the church.
- C. Agree that we will not consider you for regular call to this congregation.
- D. Provide for a review and evaluation during the interim. The Synod will provide the format on which to base this evaluation.
- E. Compensate you in the following way:  
*(As a general rule, compensation is based on the compensation of the previous pastor. Part-time service is pro-rated: ½ time would receive ½ total compensation levels, etc.)*

1. Pay you a salary of \$ \_\_\_\_\_, the payments to be made in equal installments as follows: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Provide for your housing as follows:

a. A residence free of charge, utilities paid, and an additional housing benefit of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ in lieu of housing equity.

**OR**

b. A housing allowance of \$ \_\_\_\_\_.

c. Provide a Social Security allowance of \$ \_\_\_\_\_.

3. Contribute to the Pension and Benefits Plan according to the regulations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America according to the Synod Compensation Guidelines:

\_\_\_ Pension Percentage: \_\_\_ 10% \_\_\_ 11% \_\_\_ 12%

\_\_\_ Medical/Dental: \_\_\_ Member Only \_\_\_ Member/Spouse  
\_\_\_ Member/spouse/child

4. Grant one week vacation for each 10 weeks of interim service, not to exceed five weeks.

5. During your ministry here, grant you continuing education leave at the rate of one day per month and \$ \_\_\_ per day toward study expenses.

F. Reimburse you for expenses related to our common ministry.

1. Compensate you for miles driven on behalf of the congregation at IRS allowed level.

2. Pay expenses, not otherwise provided for, incurred in attending synod assemblies and other official meetings at which your attendance is required.

3. Pay your moving expenses as follows: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Other \_\_\_\_\_

Please acknowledge receipt of this interim covenant. As you consider this covenant, may the Holy Spirit guide you. It is sincerely hoped that you may Find it to be in accordance with God’s will to give this invitation your immediate and affirmative response.

Correspondence should to sent to:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: ( ) \_\_\_\_\_ home ( ) \_\_\_\_\_ office

\_\_\_\_\_  
Congregational President

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Congregational Secretary

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Attested by: Bishop

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Accepted by: Pastor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

