

CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

THE INTERIM PASTOR

An “interim” pastor is one called for a specific purpose and period of time to lead a congregation during the in-between times of installed pastoral leadership. The interim pastor is called when, for any reason, the regular pastoral position has become vacant. The interim does many of the same things as the regularly called pastor, but within a different framework of time, goals, and planning. The interim ministry has three primary functions: (1) maintenance of congregational life and ministry; (2) enhancement of selected aspects of congregational life and ministry; and (3) working at specific designated tasks. The goal of interim ministry is to fulfill these functions in a way that will enable the congregation and the next pastor to be prepared with vision, commitment, and excitement for the future.

John the Baptist is an excellent model of an interim pastor. His ministry had a specific purpose and time frame. He was called upon to “prepare the way” of the one who would follow. He immediately removed the focus from self and put it on the one who was to follow. He knew when his ministry was completed. When Jesus came, John gracefully bowed out of the picture. In this biblical understanding of the interim pastor, there are some basics that can be useful today.

The interim period can be an opportunity for congregational development and renewal, rather than just a time to keep the doors open. A planned interim pastorate can have positive and long-lasting benefits for the congregation. This in-between-ministers time is proving to be valuable for congregations, not just to give them continuity until a new pastor arrives, but to provide a designated period to resolve problems, evaluate themselves, overcome the grief or anger some feel from losing their pastor, and to select priorities and goals for the future. Philip Porcher, writing in an Alban Institute pamphlet, suggests:

The relatively new understanding and use of the interim period has sound biblical and theological roots. As we study the history of the ancient Hebrew people, the life and ministry of Christ, and the formation of the early church, we find that times for going apart, for withdrawal, rest, renewal, regrouping and then beginning again were very much in evidence. The Christian concept of death and resurrection speaks powerfully to periods in our lives when, individually or collectively, we need to say “good-bye” to the old and “welcome” to the new (in all phases of our life). The interim period is a time of grieving and letting go of what has been and then renewing our faith, beginning to open ourselves to a new future.¹

A positive way to help congregations deal with a change in pastoral leadership is through an interim pastor. Every congregation has its own unique concerns, but there are some issues and feelings common to all congregations during pastoral change. Some commonly experienced feelings are . . .

1. Philip Porcher, *What You Can Expect from an Interim Pastor and an Interim Consultant*. Washington: The Alban Institute, 1980, p. 2.

- relief/anger over the pastor's leaving
- guilt over some aspects of the past
- insecurity about the present and the future
- recognition of reality of the situation
- awareness of need for some help
- hope for the future
- excitement about a new pastor ²

Others have suggested congregations go through these feelings naturally, but a person with some training and support can help guide this process toward a happier and more constructive resolution.

When the pastor leaves, for whatever reason, all people experience loss with the departure. The pastor who stood with them, led them, and ministered in their midst will be missed. It's difficult to imagine going on without secure pastoral leadership. At this time the congregation asks, "What do we do now?" Feelings of confusion, grief, emptiness, and fear often surface. The response is, "We need to find a pastor fast, to hold things together." A congregation should not rush to find pastoral leadership. Certainly the mission and ministry will continue.

How a congregation chooses to meet this challenge has a lasting effect on the "ministry" of the congregation. This should not be a time of maintenance, of keeping things going until the next minister arrives; but a time to look intentionally at concerns and explore future opportunities for ministry. A congregation that understands interim ministry has unique opportunities for exploration and moving forward. This can be a challenging and stimulating time for the local church, if used in a thoughtful and constructive way.

The following information about the interim period and interim pastorate is offered to help in an understanding of this important role: ³

- The interim period helps the congregation move toward a positive future vision.
- It allows space for transition, preparing the congregation for new leadership.
- The time frame gives opportunity for the congregation to re-examine goals and its basic mission.
- An important function for the interim is to work at congregational issues, such as re-defining identity, conflict resolution, etc.
- A side benefit is that congregations become more responsible for their ministry and claim it as their own.
- Since the interim is short-term (usually from six to eighteen months in length), problems may be addressed because the interim pastor will soon be leaving.
- In certain situations mediation skills may be required.
- The interim pastor must have a positive sense of self-worth, not gauging the success of his/her ministry on congregational feedback.

The interim pastor should . . .

- Be clear about his/her role;
- BE A GOOD LISTENER;

2. Alan G. Gripe, *The Interim Pastor's Manual*. Philadelphia: The Geneva Press, 1982, p. 9.

3. This information was gathered from Brethren pastors serving in interim roles and District/Executive Ministers currently serving in CODE.

- Be aware of the grief process of losing the pastor and encourage the sharing of good times with the last pastor;
- Help with the transition by gently naming the importance of letting go and anticipating the new pastor;
- Have a clear job description with specific goals and a definite beginning and ending date established.
- The agreement should include a clause for early termination (usually a thirty-day period).
- An interim pastor does not initiate changes in program or organizational structure that will create a problem for his/her successor.
- The interim is never a consultant to the search committee or possible pastoral candidate.
- The interim is usually not to be considered as a candidate. [*See paragraph at the end of these suggestions.*]
- If an interim or congregation is open to him/her being considered a candidate for the permanent pastoral position, that decision should be made at the time of signing an agreement so stipulated therein.

The interim should . . .

- Keep in close touch with the group in the local church you are working under;
- Effectively get to work;
- Preach challenging upbeat sermons around the theme of praise, discipleship, reconciliation, forgiveness, vision, family struggles, and affirmation;
- Always keep the title distinct—INTERIM PASTOR!

Usually the interim should not be considered as a candidate for the permanent call. This should be stated clearly in the contract or letter of agreement. However, in some situations the interim may be considered as a candidate. This should be acknowledged when the church board employs the interim. Item five (5) in the letter of agreement indicates “open to permanent call” or “closed to permanent call.” If the designation would change after employment, it would be processed through church board action in consultation with the interim and District Executive/Minister. The former term *interim pro tem* has been dropped from our terminology.

Remember, the interim pastor has a unique role and can have a significant impact on the ministry of a congregation. Just like John the Baptist, the interim pastor helps “prepare the way” for the one who is to follow. When the call is extended to the new pastor, the interim pastor gracefully bows out of the picture, knowing his/her role is completed.

Resources for further reading on Interim Pastor

- Coffin, Roy R. *Interim Ministry: Availability, Attractions and Concerns*. Interim Ministry Network, 1989.
- Gripe, Alan G. *The Interim Pastor's Manual*, rev. The Geneva Press, 1997.
- Hopewell, James F. *Congregations: Stories and Structures*. Fortress Press, 1987.
- Leas, Speed B. *Discovering Your Conflict Management Style*. Alban Institute, 1984
- Leas, Speed B., and Paul Kittlaus. *Church Fights: Managing Conflict in the Local Church*. Westminster Press, 1973.
- Macy, Ralph. *The Interim Pastor*. Alban Institute, 1978.
- Mead, Loren B. *Critical Moment of Ministry: A Change of Pastors*. Alban Institute, 1986.
- Narowitz, Cathleen. *Worship Resources for the Interim Time*. Ministers-At-Large Program, 1991.
- Oswald, Roy. *The Pastor as Newcomer*. The Alban Institute.
- Phillips, William. *Pastoral Transitions: From Endings to Beginnings*. Alban Institute
- Porcher, Philip. *What You Can Expect from an Interim Pastor and an Interim Consultant*. Alban Institute, 1980.
- Putney, Richard S. *Support Systems: Basis Attachments for Well-being*. Interim Ministry Network.
- Putney, Richard S. *Change and Resistance*. Interim Ministry Network.
- The In-Between Times Newsletter*. Interim Ministry Network, PO Box 21251, Baltimore, MD 21228-0751.
- Zedan, Margaret G. R., and Edith A. Gause. *Stages of An Interim Pastor: Work to Be Done*. Interim Ministry Network.

CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

SAMPLE LETTER OF AGREEMENT INTERIM PASTOR

Between _____ and the _____ Church of the Brethren

Beginning date _____ Ending date _____

I. TIME ¹

- A. Will provide ministry for Sunday plus two-and-one-half days. The days are Thursday, Friday, and Saturday morning. The actual days may vary depending upon schedule.
- B. Will be on call seven days a week for emergency calls at area hospitals.
- C.

II. GOALS FOR THE INTERIM PERIOD

- A. To provide worship experiences and pastoral leadership within the church and community
- B. To work at open communication between the church board and the church membership
- C. To prepare the congregation for the calling of a new pastor
- D.
- E.

III. RESPONSIBILITIES OF MINISTRY

- A. Sunday worship
- B. Bulletin planning, using format and local leadership: worship leaders, children's church, special music
- C. Meet with _____ and _____ on Thursday for planning
- D. Visit those in the hospital and respond to emergencies

1. Time: Consider twelve to fourteen units for full-time ministry. Units can be converted to hours and then to salary equivalent.

E. Visit the homebound once a month from a list supplied by _____

F.

G.

IV. SALARY AND BENEFITS

A. Will receive \$ _____² per month, with \$ _____ for salary and \$ _____ for housing allowance.

B. The interim will be reimbursed for travel at the General Board established rate. For the purpose of figuring mileage, home will be considered as the base for ministry.

C. Pension

D. Medical

E. Vacation will be prorated according to time served.

V. CALL [check one]

G Open to permanent call

G Closed to permanent call

Signed: _____ Interim Pastor

_____ Church Board chair

Copies to: Church Clerk, Treasurer, District Executive/Minister

2. Salary. Percent of where person is on scale. Start with retirees at least at 20-year level.

Affirmed by Council of District Executives, 7/96

Revised 1/2000

CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN
**LETTER OF AGREEMENT
INTERIM PASTOR**

Between _____ and the _____ Church of the Brethren

Beginning date _____ Ending date _____

I. TIME ¹

- A.
- B.
- C.

II. GOALS FOR THE INTERIM PERIOD [See *SAMPLE*]

- A.
- B.
- C.
- D.
- E.

III. RESPONSIBILITIES OF MINISTRY

- A.
- B.
- C.
- D.
- E.

1. Time: Consider twelve to fourteen units for full-time ministry. Units can be converted to hours and then to salary equivalent.

F.

G.

IV. SALARY AND BENEFITS ²

A.

B.

C.

D.

E.

V. CALL (check one)

G Open to permanent call

G Closed to permanent call

Signed: _____ Interim Pastor

_____ Church Board Chair

Copies to: Church Clerk, Treasurer, District Executive/Minister

2. Salary. Percent of where person is on scale. Start with retirees at least at 20-year level.

Affirmed by Council of District Executives, 7/96
Revised 1/2000

CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

INTERIM PASTOR

Date _____

I. Personal Data

Name _____
 [*last*] [*first*] [*middle*]

Address _____
 [*street, box*] [*city/town*] [*state*] [*zip*]

Phone [*including area code*]: Home _____ Office _____

E-mail _____ Fax _____

Age _____ Marital status _____ General health _____

Currently receiving pension ___ Yes ___ No Social Security ___ Yes ___ No

Housing needs _____

Total years of pastoral service _____

Currently serving as an Interim Pastor ___ Yes ___ No

If yes, where and term of service? _____

II. Future interest in Interim Ministry

When [*date*]? _____ Willing to relocate? ___ Yes ___ No

If yes, name a location preference _____

If not willing to relocate, give miles willing to travel _____

Do you prefer a particular time of the year? ___ Yes ___ No

If yes, when? _____

III. Additional information that will be helpful in placement process

Training for Interim Ministry _____

Experience(s) as Interim Pastor _____

Specific skills for Interim Ministry _____

Are you interested in additional training in Interim Ministry? ___ Yes ___ No

Other: _____

District Executive/Minister _____ District _____

Date _____

Please send the completed form to the Office of Ministry, Church of the Brethren General Offices, 1451 Dundee Avenue, Elgin, IL 60120-1694.