

Interim Ministries

Book I

An Overview for Church Leaders
Second Edition

FOREWORD

This publication is one of a series available from CDO: the Office for Transition Ministries intended to help the church make more effective use of resources available for the calling process. It is designed to define interim ministry and to suggest how this unique ministry is useful to our congregations.

A companion publication, primarily addressed to bishops, diocesan staff and interim ministry specialists: **Interim Ministries, Book II: Practical Helps in Interim Ministry Management** deals with issues of the interim period, roles, funding interim pastors, Letters of Agreement, the training and support of interim ministry specialists, exit interviews and process evaluation.

Other CDO publications in this series include:

"Caring for Clergy in the Calling Process"
"Caring for Clergy Through Compensation"
"Caring for Clergy Through Housing"
"Interviewing in the Calling Process"
"The Clergy Side of Interviewing in the Calling Process"
"Prayer in the Calling Process"

The Board for Church Deployment expresses its deep appreciation to these numerous and anonymous individuals who have so fully given of their time and talents to make possible this publication.

These people are clergy and lay involved in the transitions/ deployment process in a variety of ways, who have been asked by the Board to assist in the development of these publications. The offering of their expertise and their generous contribution has greatly enriched the Church, for which we are most grateful.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	3
Theology	4
Relationships with: the Diocese, the Interim Pastor, the Interim Consultant, and Lay Leadership	4
Goals	6
A MODEL FOR STAGES AND TASKS FOR INTERIM MINISTRY	7
Policies	8
HISTORY	
Background and Benchmarks	9
Observations/Findings	10
APPENDICES	12
A. Definitions	12
B. Training Organizations	13
BIBLIOGRAPHY	14

INTRODUCTION

The 69th General Convention (1988) passed two resolutions on interim ministries in recognition of the value of such specialized ministries to many congregations and parishes. The resolutions recommend recruitment, training and use of professional interim pastors and consultants for the Episcopal Church. The interim period, interim ministry and interim pastors are defined. (See Appendix A)

The first resolution offered the following explanation:

"It has been increasingly recognized that the time of transition between rectors is one in which congregations may discover new opportunities for growth, development and renewal. Specialized interim ministries (pastors and consultants) have been successful in many dioceses and parishes. Training for these specialized ministries has proven to be essential."

This explanation was amplified in the companion resolution which gave a definition of the interim period as:

"...The time between rectors when educational and developmental opportunities abound... it is time of challenge...The energy present can be directed in very positive ways during this period."

The material in this publication is intended to assist in understanding those two resolutions and their implications in the life of a diocese. The resolutions use the generic term "interim pastor." Therefore that term is used in this document. It is understood that each diocese will select its own terms or titles. Since it is difficult to describe even a generic interim ministry, this document offers a variety of alternatives to be adapted as needed. The attempt is to teach and inform as well.

Specialized interim ministries provide opportunities for energizing any congregation but have proven to be particularly helpful:

- after long term pastorates
- after abrupt terminations
- where parish histories reflect substantial stress
- where there is conflict
- where there is a large staff

THEOLOGY

The very nature and character of interim ministry opens new dimensions to a theology of ministry. The idea of interim ministry introduces a helpful question mark. Priesthood is not monolithic, and the modern church gives us hundreds of valuable models of people who do not now follow traditional life-long patterns of ordained service in congregations. Indeed, contemporary life suggests possibilities of priesthood temporarily laid aside for other vocations, then resumed, and sometimes secular vocations are temporarily laid aside for a special task and calling that requires ordination.

Interim pastors witness to the power and importance of specific but limited license to short-term assignments within the call to ordained ministry. Interim ministries build on the models of Jesus' brief ministry and Paul's itinerant ministry.

Interim ministry poses a challenge to established patterns in modeling shared responsibility for ministry rather than clergy-centered authority. Each interim transition period provides an opportunity to re-examine the roles of clergy and laity. During the interim, the laity are clearly in charge of the self-study and search process, helping to discern and shape the next stage of their calling and ministry under God. The trained interim pastor and consultant support and nurture the laity in this important task.

RELATIONSHIPS AMONG THE DIOCESE, THE INTERIM PASTOR, THE CONSULTANT AND LAY LEADERSHIP

The vestry needs to be acknowledged as the body responsible for the ongoing tasks during this period. The importance of the vestry's leadership and management during this time cannot be overstated. The vestry is responsible for the process from the time of the rector's departure until the new rector arrives.

The relationships among the diocese, the interim pastor, the interim consultant and parish leadership are critical and, at the same time, they vary considerably from diocese to diocese and parish to parish. Perhaps it is best to understand that in these significant relationships, there just will not be "a right way to do it!"

Diocesan involvement begins when the bishop is notified of a pending clergy departure. In addition to helping the outgoing rector and the parish separate in a healthy manner, the bishop or transitions/diocesan deployment officer (DDO) acquaints the vestry with diocesan policies regarding interim ministries and offers resources. Recommendations can be made as to a specific interim pastor and/or consultant for the parish. It is important to note that the way this is done has substantial impact on the atmosphere in which interim ministry agreements are negotiated.

The bishop or transitions officer/DDO sometimes serves as interim consultant. An increasing number of dioceses train and/or locate persons with skills to provide interim consulting assistance for search committees and vestries during the search process. Many fine consultants are lay.

Some dioceses offer a "team" consisting of an interim consultant and an interim pastor to every congregation when the rector leaves as part of the interim process. Other dioceses offer the help of a transitions officer/DDO for one or two meetings with the vestry and search committee who, for the most part, are on their own. Some have an interim period "procedures manual" to give to the lay leadership of a congregation. Yet others have a variety of resources to offer each congregation, but lack a clear plan or procedure. Other dioceses are somewhere in between in their practices. Some interim pastors are assigned by the bishop. Other bishops give the vestry a list from which to choose.

Some interim pastors and consultants are freelancers who seek their own jobs, while others are part of a diocesan pool and are placed as needed or as available. Some are full-time. Some are part-time.

With all this variety, each diocese needs a clear process or system for interim ministry. Each interim pastor and consultant seeking to serve in a diocese needs to know, understand and work within that system. The burden of responsibility is on the bishop or transitions officer/DDO to establish the policy or procedure in each diocese.

One of the serious dilemmas about the practice of interim ministry is how to provide for it in smaller, rural dioceses, or those with limited resources. All dioceses are not close to larger metropolitan areas with clergy available for this type of work, nor can they afford to provide transportation from long distances. The point here is simply to acknowledge the problem and to suggest that more creative ways may be found in the use of available part-time or retired clergy. Please remember that, indeed, interim ministry was founded on part-time limited use. Interim ministry can be very valuable and useful – even on a part-time basis in large or small congregations.

An obvious caution in this complex relationship is "who works for whom?" It is important to define to whom the interim pastor and consultant are accountable – so that the bishop and congregation fully understand each other. Clarity is the higher value here rather than a right or wrong way to accomplish the task. Positive results can come from any system when that system is understood and all parties work within it – whether it is a tight system with careful guidelines and policies or one of more freedom and flexibility.

The greater the degree of teamwork and collaboration among all parties, the better for all concerned, even though complications may still arise. The Lord is served, ministry is expanded, congregations grow and develop, a sense of new vision and enthusiasm is begun, and a new future is open when His people work together in harmony.

At the other end of the spectrum is what often happens to the congregation during the interim period when the relationships are either unclear or are not working in the best interest of that congregation. Infighting and unclear policies often produce negative results. Who is responsible when the congregation suffers or flounders? The diocesan office usually gets the blame no matter where the fault lies.

All this points to the need for a "**Process for Interim Ministry**" in each diocese, a process which includes clarifying these relationships. A healthy transition and effective ministry are the overall goals.

Agreements between interim pastors and parishes are best approached as covenants for mutual ministry; e.g. exchanges of expectations and commitments between clergy and vestries to provide leadership during the period of transition.

A chart showing one view of the overall process – **A MODEL FOR STAGES AND TASKS FOR INTERIM MINISTRY** – may be found on the next page.

GOALS¹

Interim ministry has developed as a professional specialty to help vestries be less anxious and congregations overcome feelings of abandonment and inertia at times of transition. This has to do with "letting go" and moving ahead, with healthy grief work and readiness to respond to God's call in new ways. It should be noted that by grief work is meant the process of claiming and releasing all sorts of feelings as a relationship ends: sadness, anger, relief, joy.

Researchers who have studied the time when a congregation is between rectors have identified the following five developmental tasks as essential for an interim congregation to accomplish in order to support the new rector with renewed enthusiasm and fresh hope. **Healthy transition and effective ministry during the interim period are the overall goals of interim ministry.** Here are the developmental tasks engaged by interim pastors and consultants to help a congregation during the interim period:

1. **Coming to Terms with History**... acting on the realization that the former rector has departed... that the parish family will be different now... acknowledging the past as shaping who it is today and yet that history is only prelude to the present and the future.
2. **Establishing a New Identity**... claiming a new awareness of itself as a congregation independent of the past rector... redefining who it is now as a family of God.
3. **Changes in Leadership**... adjusting to new patterns of leadership that naturally evolve when a key individual leaves the organization... allowing new leadership to come to the fore constructively.
4. **Rethinking Denominational Ties**... seeing the diocese as a potential resource and support (rather than as an adversary)... using this opportunity to work together.
5. **Commitment to New Leadership**... preparing to move into the future with openness to the possibilities that new leadership will bring... wholeheartedly supporting the newly-called rector.

¹ *The material in this section is drawn from the research of Project Test Pattern and The Alban Institute, Inc. These points are to be found in **A Change of Pastors** by Loren B. Mead, p 18.*

A MODEL FOR STAGES AND TASKS FOR INTERIM MINISTRY

TERMINATION		Rector resigns/departs		
DIRECTION- FINDING	VESTRY	Meet with bishop	INTERIM PASTOR	ONGOING PROCESSES ↓
		Meet with diocesan consultant		
		Appoint calling/search committee		
		Call interim pastor		
SELF-STUDY	CALL OR SEARCH COMMITTEE	Process devised for entire parish to participate in exploration of its needs and goals		DEALING WITH THE PAST
		Data gathered from congregation and community is collated, analyzed for the "parish profile."		REDISCOVERING IDENTITY
		"Parish profile" developed (the story of its past, present and hopes for the future) with parish's understanding of its needs and the kind of leadership it requires		
SEARCH	CONSULTANT	Secure names from: Congregation Bishop CDO & DDO Networks Applications Website posting and advertising		MANAGING CHANGES IN LEADERSHIP
		Determine process and criteria for screening		
		Bishop screens possible candidates, reference checks short list with other Bishops		
		Committee makes visits and interviews candidates		
		Committee makes recommendation to vestry		
DECISION				RELATIONSHIP WITH DIOCESE
NEGOTIATION	VESTRY	Vestry consults with bishop on final call		AND
		Vestry issues a call		
		Agreement negotiated between vestry & candidate		
		Letter of Agreement signed		
INSTITUTION		Vestry plans farewell for interim pastor	COMMITMENT TO A NEW FUTURE	
START-UP		Institution of new rector		
		Start-up of new ministry		

STAGES

No matter what process or procedure a given congregation follows, research has determined that every congregation moves one way or another through the following stages during the interim period.

1. **Termination:** the former rector resigns, dies, retires, or is asked to leave – a relationship ends.
2. **Direction-Finding:** a decision is made, generally by the wardens and vestry, about what to do next – either on their own or with help and guidance of the bishop.
3. **Self-Study:** a time to look at the congregation's past, present and future – its history, its present needs, its goals. The task at this stage is to respond to two key questions:
 - a) What does this congregation need to learn about itself?
 - b) What is the best way to learn it? (e.g., surveys, interviews, parish meetings, research and statistics, etc.)

The results of the self-study are condensed into a document known as a "parish profile," including the profile of the desired rector, outlining the skills, experience, qualifications and leadership style needed as determined by the study.

4. **Search:** names are obtained from several sources (CDO, DDOs, bishop, parishioners, direct applications, website posting and advertising, etc.), visits begin, and a screening process filters in the most appropriate candidates.
5. **Decision:** the search committee recommends its candidate(s) to the vestry and, after notifying the bishop of the decision, the vestry issues the call to the candidate elected (see Canon III-18.2).
6. **Negotiation:** before a mutual decision between the candidate and vestry is reached, some negotiating and clarifying of expectations takes place. (Congregations with interim pastors should address closure of that relationship as well.)
7. **Institution:** a big welcome, liturgical celebration and reception occurs with special guests invited.
8. **Start-up:** priest and people set out together on a new ministry.

During this time there is a temptation for congregations and their leaders to be more concerned with the task of finding a new rector than with the opportunity to enhance the mission and ministry of the parish. It should be helpful for congregations to know that **the development of a parish profile is primarily intended for the purpose of providing a process for growth and revitalization.** All parishes, but especially those that have experienced significant trauma, conflict, stagnation and/or decline will find it most productive to take sufficient time to reflect on their history, values, vision for future ministry and the kind of leadership needed.

The time taken and the thoroughness of work done, the clarity of decisions and expectations and the understanding of each of the above steps vary widely. Work done in collaboration with the diocesan office can save a congregation much time, help avoid some pitfalls, and provides guidance, resources and experience that can prove invaluable.

POLICIES

Dioceses need to have an overall policy for interims – either explicit or implicit. Each bishop and staff is engaged with parish leadership directly or through interim ministry specialists (pastors and/or consultants) throughout the period of transition. Elements to be considered in the formation of policies include such matters as:

- offering assistance with an exit strategy for departing clergy to effect complete and healthy closure;

- clarifying what direction and resources will be provided to parishes at the beginning of an interim period, so they will know what to expect;
- defining roles, relationships and expectations of interim pastor; vestry; search committee; consultant; bishop; and transitions officer/DDO;
- priority given to training, using and supporting interim ministry specialists;
- questions of prioritizing and allocating limited personnel resources (interim ministry specialists) throughout the diocese;
- establishing and publishing whatever norms, policies or rules the bishop intends to follow regarding such issues as the eligibility of the interim pastor, the use of assistant rectors or supply clergy instead of interim pastors, policies on interim pastors not seeking nomination, etc.

HISTORY

BACKGROUND AND BENCHMARKS

The notion that interim ministry could be helpful to the ongoing life of congregations developed in the late 1960s. Congregational studies of Episcopal churches using the lens of organizational development (Project Test Pattern) identified the period of transition from one clergy leader to another as a "prime time for renewal." **Prime Time for Renewal** was the title of a book on the subject written by Bill Yon in 1973. Initially the efforts to provide this ministry came from diocesan staff who functioned as consultants to vestries and search committees.

Until 1975 there was no such thing as a formal concept of "interim pastor." Instead, there were a variety of arrangements in use to cover pastoral needs during an interim period. Some were called "locum tenens", others "supply priest", "care-takers" etc. Another large group became "unintentional interims" who accepted full-time permanent positions only to leave inexplicably after 1-3 years.

In 1975 some people who were testing a new model for intentional interim pastorates gathered at a meeting sponsored by the Alban Institute. A number of national and regional executives from several denominations were present. The consensus of the participants was that this new model of ministry was an important resource, especially to congregations of the types described under "Purpose" in this publication.

In 1976 the Mid-Atlantic Association for Training and Consulting (MATC) agreed to co-sponsor with the Alban Institute training for persons in this specialty. In addition, several denominations (Presbyterians, Unitarians, Disciples of Christ etc.) began developing their own specialists and training. In 1981, with the help of a small grant, the Alban Institute helped launch The Interim Ministry Network, a national ecumenical association of interim pastors, consultants and denominational officials interested in this work.

The Episcopal Church played a significant role throughout this evolution and is still very involved today through the Board for Church Deployment, CDO, National Association of Episcopal Interim Ministry Specialists (NAEIMS), Interims trained by the Interim Ministry Network, and many individuals around the country.

OBSERVATIONS/FINDINGS

In light of this background several points need to be made:

- Many people use the term "interim" pastor generically for any kind of pastoral oversight of a congregation between rectors. At this point when one says she or he is an "interim pastor," one cannot always be sure what is being said.
 - Interim consultation may remain a function of bishops or transitions officers/DDOs.
 - Training for interim specialists is intense and takes time.
1. As of 2005 the **Interim Ministry Network** (IMN) offers a certificate of completion diploma after 80 contact hours of training, including:
 - 3-day training on the "Fundamentals of Transition Ministry" – 20 contact hours. A one or two-day program provides orientation to what interim pastors do, but rarely suffices to give the skills and knowledge one needs for this specialty. Well-prepared interim specialists also need training in conflict management.
 - 5-day training program for the "Intentional Interim Minister"- 40 contract hours of class work plus 20 contact hours of field work.

IMN also offers a Professional Transition Specialist program that is more rigorous. This confers an "IMN Designation" status on the Specialist.

2. **Appreciative Interim Ministry** training is available through the Transitional Ministry Network under the leadership of The Rev. Robert J. Voyle, Episcopal priest, psychologist and executive coach.
3. Some dioceses and provinces are presently training their own interim specialists who are available to serve the particular needs of that diocese. Clergy who have gifts to offer, full or part-time, are being trained in interim skills and process.
 - Many transitions officers/DDOs who have formerly been "**the consultant**" to search committees (and vestries) are also training consultants, lay and ordained, to assist in this process according to the norms and policies of a given diocese. Many part-time clergy, retired and non-stipendiary, are available to be trained for these ministries.

Several dioceses share interims between dioceses to help keep them employed. Interim pastors who move around the country are accountable to the bishops in whose dioceses they serve.

Some congregations just need to be "loved through the process" by a trained, part-time person while others call for more experience and leadership.

When local individuals are either unavailable or do not fit the immediate need, there are other sources including CDO, the Interim Ministry Network, NAEIMS, other dioceses and interim pastors themselves.

- Even though the Interim Ministry Network has developed a professional training program, neither it, the CDO, nor anybody else has a system which can tell authoritatively that "this" interim specialist is effective as opposed to "that" one. IMN training, membership in IMN, plus an updated CDO personal Profile would be indicators of seriousness about intentions but not necessarily effectiveness. ***References from previous positions should be checked carefully.***
- The role of interim pastor is one with many temptations for self-aggrandizement. There continue to be cases in which a person accepts the interim pastor role in order to be in a stronger position to be considered for the permanent position. Many bishops have strict policies against this practice.
- The appointment of the parish assistant or other ordained staff member as interim pastor may seem the easiest thing to do but is not often the wisest. The congregation needs to be free to consider new possibilities. Some other problems caused by the appointment of the assistant are: it ignores the specialist skills of an interim pastor, it makes for an uneven playing field for other candidates, it often severely contaminates the calling process by raising questions of the assistant's candidacy and it may divide the congregation. [See Canon III,14.1(b)]

Please note that nothing here is written in stone. Interim ministry is not an exact science. Most of the "thou shalt nots" have been violated and in a few cases the results were splendid. Yet there is overwhelming experience and wisdom contained in these observations and findings. However, adherence to the final sentence in the General Convention definition of Interim Pastor is usually strongly recommended, i.e. ***"The interim pastor is not a candidate for the permanent position."*** (See Definitions, Appendix A)

DEFINITIONS

Adopted General Convention, 1988

The Interim Period

The interim period is the time between rectors when educational and developmental opportunities abound. Transition activities may include:

- Reviewing history
- Evaluation and planning for the future
- Encouraging lay ministry
- Dealing with grief, loss and anger
- Leadership development

It is a time of challenge. The energy present can be directed in very positive ways during this period.

Interim Ministry

The collective ministry of the diocese with the parish through the bishop, staff, interim pastor, interim consultant and parish lay leaders which intentionally seeks to respond to the opportunities, issues and energies present when a parish is between rectors.

Interim Pastor

(Interim Ministry Specialist . . . a professional)

An interim pastor is a priest with parish experience and interim ministry skills and training, who can give guidance to parishes which are between rectors, and who understands and is trained to respond to dynamics and issues which come into operation during the interim period. In addition, the interim pastor should be available for a minimum of two or more days per week, including Sundays. Anything less is more typically described as supply. The interim pastor is not a candidate for the permanent position.

TRAINING ORGANIZATIONS

Basic and Advanced Training

Interim Ministry Network

P.O. Box 21251
Baltimore, MD 21228
800-235-8414
www.imnedu.org

The Alban Institute

2121 Cooperative Way Suite 100
Herndon, VA 20171
800-486-1318
www.Alban.org

Transitional Ministry Network

The Rev. Robert J. Voyle, Coordinator
4965 NW Pederson Rd.
Hillsboro, OR 97124-9210
(503) 647-2382
www.transitionalministry.org

Episcopal Organization

National Association of Episcopal Interim Ministry Specialists

NAEIMS

c/o The Rev. Dr. Robert E. Friedrich Jr., Secretary/Webmaster
bob@churchdrs.com
www.naeims.com

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Available from **CDO: the Office for Transitions Ministry**, Episcopal Church Center, 815 Second Ave., NY, NY 10017-4594. Tel. 800-334-7626, Ext. 5250 See website: www.episcopalchurch.org/cdo

- **Interim Ministries, Book II: Practical Helps in Interim Ministry Management**
- **“Search: a Manual for Those Called to Guide the Parish Through a Process Leading to the Election of a Rector”** by Charles R. Wilson.
- *Positions Open Bulletin* lists Interim positions. See: www.episcopalchurch.org/cdo
- **CDO search for trained, experienced and/or available Interims**

Available from the **Alban Institute**, 2121 Cooperative Way, Suite 100, Herndon VA 20171. Tel. (800) 486-1318. www.Alban.org

- **Beginning Ministry Together: the Alban Handbook for Clergy Transitions**, Roy M. Oswald, James M. Heath, Ann W. Heath
- **A Change of Pastors...and How It Affects Change in the Congregation**, Loren Mead
- **Temporary Shepherds: a Congregational Handbook for Interim Ministry**, edited by Roger S. Nicholson (includes an extensive bibliography)
- **Saying Goodbye: a Time of Growth for Congregations and Pastors**, Edward A. White
- **Pastoral Search: the Alban Guide to Managing the Pastoral Search Process**, John Vonhof
- **The Life Cycle of a Congregation**, Martin Saarinen. Or download for free at: www.npreigion.org/fileadmin/npr/resources/life_cycle_of_a_congregation.pdf
- **So You're on the Search Committee**, Bunty Ketcham with Celia Allison Hahn

See professional training for Interim Pastors at: **Interim Ministry Network, Inc.**, P.O. Box 21251, 916 S. Rolling Rd., Baltimore, MD 21228-0751. Tel. (800) 235-8414. www.imnedu.org/

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