

***Interim Ministry Guidelines  
of the Committee on Ministry  
for Congregations of New Castle Presbytery***

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Adopted  
6 March 2003

**Introduction**

You either have just lost or are about to lose a Pastor. No matter the circumstances, loss of a Pastor always affects a congregation deeply. Many people will feel loss. Some may be relieved, some confused. Some may feel betrayed. Regardless of the circumstances, it is a crucial time for the leadership of your congregation, a time that calls for special skills and leadership. This booklet is designed to help you understand the help you will receive from the Presbytery of New Castle, what options are open to you, and how you can best use this time to help your congregation deal with the confusing feelings they are experiencing so that you may move ahead toward a new Pastoral relationship with strength and vigor.

Philip Porcher, a long-time Interim Pastor and Interim Consultant, points out that such a time “provides a congregation with an occasion for new opportunity in ministry. It is indeed a time of freedom for you, as lay leaders, to make of this occasion what you will. It is one time in the life of a congregation when everyone expects change, and you have the choice of being victims of change or of taking advantage of the opportunity to share in the planning of that change.”

“What You Can Expect from an Interim Pastor and an Interim Consultant,” (The Alban Institute), p.2.

Having learned by hard experience that Phil’s observations are true, that some congregations use interim time as a preparation for fruitful work with a new Pastor while others, passing up that opportunity, enter a cycle of destructive short-termed pstorates, the Presbyterian Church, (U.S.A.) has come to recognize and value the special skills of leadership of people trained and experienced in the work of interim ministry. It is why New Castle Presbytery encourages every congregation facing transition to make use of the services of an Interim Pastor and why we will work with you to help you do that.

**The Five Developmental Tasks**

Research with many congregations of various kinds has indicated that predictable dynamics happen in churches during times of leadership transition. Congregations invariably deal with five areas of change as a result of transition. While not all are necessarily dealt with completely during a transition, those that remain unaddressed lie in wait below the level of consciousness for their completion and will surface with the arrival of a new Pastor, robbing energy from whatever goals and plans the Pastor and Congregation may embrace until they are dealt with. Indeed, as experience has shown, if these tasks remain largely unaddressed, the likelihood of a short pastorate is geometrically increased.

It should be noted that these tasks are the emotional and spiritual work of the congregation. It is not the task of the Interim Pastor to accomplish these tasks, but a competent Interim Pastor will help the congregation to do its work, if only by removing barriers to that work.

#### A. Coming to Terms with History

Following a Pastor's departure for whatever reason, a congregation usually needs to resolve its feelings: loss, grief, anger, relief, guilt, panic about the future. "Letting go" of that Pastor is a critically important task for a congregation as it begins to prepare for a new Pastoral leader.

In addition, churches sometimes have "old issues" or conflicts which were never fully resolved and which tend to resurface in unsettled times. A congregation needs to be released from any inappropriate or crippling power of the past, in order to be fully ready for a future with a new leader.

#### B. Discovering a New Identity

Often congregations have a strong self-image, positive or negative, which may or may not truthfully reflect present realities. As the search for a new Pastor proceeds, it is essential that both the Search Committee and the congregation have a clear sense of the church's identity, recognizing both strengths and needs. This task, therefore, calls for a careful self-assessment by a congregation, so that it can envision more clearly what it wishes to become.

#### C. Enhancing Patterns of Leadership

Congregations in an interim time often experience shifts in power or leadership among the laity, depending upon the relationships of individuals to the former Pastor. This is also a time for considering whether, as a whole, patterns of lay involvement in the church are healthy or unhealthy, empowering or disempowering for most of the congregation. This task is to see that lay leadership develops in positive and creative ways for the good of the whole church.

#### D. Strengthening Denominational Ties

During the interim period, congregations find themselves working more closely than usual with the denomination, particularly with Presbytery staff and resources. A primary opportunity exists to reinforce and strengthen a congregation's sense of belonging to the wider church.

#### E. Preparing for New Leadership

During the search process, two significant tasks are going on simultaneously: the Search Committee, on behalf of the congregation, is fulfilling the necessary concrete steps in the process of finding a new Pastor; and the congregation as a whole needs to be readying itself psychologically and spiritually to enter into partnership with a new leader.

This task is to strengthen the church's capacity to be a growing, changing, forward-looking body.

The interim Pastorate provides both the time and the focus by which a congregation can strengthen its ministries, rediscover and renew its goals and resources, and prepare positively for a new Pastor. In a well-led interim period, the process of self-study, search, and call can occur in a climate of honesty, healing, dreaming, building, and celebrating as the Body of Christ. The church finds that, far from being "on hold" during this period, it is directly and creatively engaged with the most essential issues of its common life. Freed from a sense of panic or crisis, the interim period can be a time of surprising renewal and growth.

Maintaining the vitality of the congregation's life, looking at its special needs and opportunities, preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments, providing Pastoral care and spiritual guidance are all to be expected of a competent Interim Minister. But above and beyond all that, the Interim Minister is future oriented. The Interim Minister is concerned with the coming of a new Pastor and with helping to prepare the congregation for that arrival.

## **Starting the Process**

The Presbytery of New Castle stands ready to help you from the very beginning of the process in the person of the Executive Presbyter and the Transition Team of the Committee on Ministry. Working closely with the Presbytery will make your job simpler and save you time and frustration. This process should begin no later than when your Pastor's (Associate Pastor's) resignation is submitted; in cases such as retirement or where a resignation is known in advance due to entry into a chaplaincy or the mission field at a known future date, planning with the Presbytery should begin sooner.

The Presbytery Executive and a member of the Committee on Ministry's Transition Team will meet as early as possible with the Session to review the process and take the initial steps to prepare for the interim period. At that meeting the Committee on Ministry will designate a member of the Transition Team as a representative to your congregation to serve as a liaison with the Session and Pastor Nominating Committee.

The first job for the Session to decide is the nature of the search for an Interim Pastor. Some sessions create a special committee for this task; others give it to their Personnel Committee. This committee will need to operate with deliberate haste, and the Presbytery will provide valuable assistance in getting started, in learning how to find an Interim Pastor, in checking references, and in assessing the abilities of candidates *vis à vis* the needs of your congregation.

It is important for you to realize that time is of the essence in this matter for several reasons. In the first place, our strong desire and intention is that your congregation not be without Pastoral leadership for an extended period. We all have an interest in maintaining the viability and movement of your congregation and its mission. Second, the pool of available Interim Pastors is extremely variable, and good Interims are generally not idle for extended periods of time. If you find someone who interests you, they may not be available for more than three or four weeks – often less.

## **The Next Steps**

The Presbytery Office has a list of people who at various times are available to serve as Interim Pastors. This list is for notification purposes only and does not assure approval by the Committee on Ministry of anyone listed as suitable for a particular position. When you have drawn up a tentative job description and salary package, the Presbytery will notify the people on that list. (This will satisfy the Presbytery of New Castle's equal employment policy.) Those who wish to do so will apply directly to you, sending a copy of their Personal Information Form to the Presbytery Office. You should also notify the Presbytery Office of all applications, regardless of their source. The Presbytery representatives will also show you how to advertise the position electronically and in print media.

Contracting with an Interim Pastor is a three-way process; it involves the Interim Pastor, the Session, and the Committee on Ministry. *No contract is valid without the participation of all three parties.*

Once you begin to receive dossiers, you should immediately begin reference checks on those in whom you are most interested. The Presbytery Executive and the Transition Team member are most helpful here and need to be involved early on; it is not their job to tell you who to invite to be your Interim, but they can and will help do background checks to uncover reasons that might make a potential candidate unsuitable for your congregation. This background check and approval by the Committee on Ministry needs to be done when you narrow your search to three candidates and *before* you enter into negotiations with a candidate, before your own hopes and enthusiasm outrun the realities of the situation.

## The Contract

When you are assured that the candidate(s) in whom you are interested are acceptable to the Committee on Ministry, it is time to move ahead. A detailed check list for drawing up a contract is attached (Appendix B), but before you turn to it, you need to remember several things about the nature of a contract with an Interim Pastor.

1. The contract is for *interim* work. The Book of Order (G-14.0513) clearly states that under no circumstances may anyone serving as Interim Pastor become the next installed Pastor, Co-Pastor, or Associate Pastor in the congregation. This needs to be in the contract, and it needs to be made clear to the congregation at the outset.
2. An interim contract cannot be for more than one year, although the expectation is that contracts will be renewed and that the Interim Pastor will serve until the election and/or installation of an installed Pastor. Adequate notice of intention to renew should be given by the Session – usually no less than ninety days prior to expiration. (See attached model contract – Appendix C)
3. An Interim Pastor works under a contract or covenant with the Session. The position is not like that of an installed Pastor who is called by the congregation and installed by the Presbytery.
4. Because interim work offers little security, and Interims often go without work for extended periods, appropriate provisions for severance are important, particularly in terms of maintaining medical coverage. (See attached model contract.)
5. Because you are asking an Interim to do all the tasks that you normally ask of a Pastor *and also to help manage the specialized work of transition* it is appropriate that compensation recognize the nature of the work. Normally compensation for an interim position will not be less than that paid for the installed position, with possible exceptions being made for lack of experience and/or training. In no case shall compensation for Interim Pastor be less than 80% of that for the comparable installed Pastoral position. It may never be less than the Presbytery minimum.
6. We believe that it is important for those practicing interim ministry in this Presbytery to be part of a support group. In the northern part of the Presbytery, one exists at the Brandywine Pastoral Institute in Wilmington. Recognition of this need should be reflected in the contract. Those Interims who are members of the Association of Presbyterian Ministry Specialists (APIMS) should be granted a week of professional leave to be a part of the annual gathering of APIMS and the Interim Ministry Network (IMN).
7. It is important to set up and spell out a process for monitoring and reviewing the work of the Interim Pastor and the relation with the Session.
8. The relationship of the Interim Pastor to the Pastor Nominating Committee is determined on a case-by-case basis with the Committee on Ministry. Interim Pastors with appropriate skills and experience may be asked to work as a consultant with the Pastor Nominating Committee; others may be denied that role. Either situation needs to be determined before drawing a contract and included in the contract.

The attached contract is a model. Many others exist and are acceptable, but they must take the items above into account to find approval from the Committee on Ministry.

## The Interim Period

While the Book of Order is clear (G-14.0513) there is to be no formal installation service for an Interim Pastor, it is appropriate that the beginning of an Interim Pastor's service be marked liturgically with a recognition of the special nature of the work, noting its transitional and temporary nature and emphasizing that the tasks at hand are the important work of a specialized ministry. The Presbytery representative can help with suggestions and models of such recognition.

The first task of the Interim Pastor is to join the system, to come to know the customs, manners, and style of the congregation, its major and minor players, the issues, struggles, and the unwritten rules by which the life of the congregation is carried on. This process will normally take several months. It is a time in which the Interim Pastor will expend great amounts of time and energy that may be visible only to his/her family or to an Interim Pastor support group.

When Interim Pastor and congregation have come to know each other, *if there are no outstanding issues of conflict or misconduct to be dealt with*, it is time for the Session to begin the process of self study, often called a Mission Study. This is a process in which your Interim Pastor is prepared to provide guidance and direction to the Session. Our expectation is that this will be a major event in the life of the congregation, an extended work of several months that involves no less than two-thirds of the actively worshipping congregation. Several models exist for such work, and your Interim Pastor will work together with your Presbytery representative to choose or design an appropriate model.

When this self study has been completed and approved by the Session and the Committee on Ministry, you will be given authority to elect a Pastor Nominating Committee. It is the Session's responsibility to determine the process for doing so, recognizing the need that, however it may be formed, it should be broadly representative of the congregation.

**Alternative A:** Congregations that have undergone such extensive mission studies report that the process often changes their understanding of themselves and their mission that it also changes their views of who should represent them on a PNC. It is for this reason that our policy is that the PNC is normally chosen only after the Mission Study is completed. In a few cases, however, there may be good and compelling reasons to elect a PNC before the Mission Study is undertaken. The Committee on Ministry is willing to counsel with you on this issue.

**Alternative B:** Likewise, there may be cases where a significant self-study that meets the expectations of the Committee on Ministry has been recently completed. In such a situation, with the approval of the Committee on Ministry, the Session may itself or with the PNC complete an abbreviated Mission Study Form that will be the basis of the Church Information Form. This situation often exists in the search for an Associate Pastor.

The Committee on Ministry may choose to appoint your Interim Pastor to work with the Pastor Nominating Committee, or the Presbytery representative may fulfill that function. That consultant will help the PNC understand and prepare for its task, complete the Church Information Form (CIF) that will become the basis for a Pastoral search, and be available for consultation on process. The consultant will never express an opinion about potential candidates for the installed office or in any way attempt to shape the outcome of the search other than to assure that it meets the Presbytery's guidelines for affirmative action/equal employment.

*Despite attempts by the denomination to speed the process of matching candidates and congregations, a search will likely be an extended process. It is extremely rare for a PNC to complete its work in less than a year. Be prepared to be patient and as a leader to set an example of patience for your congregation.*

While the search continues, your Interim Pastor will continue to be active performing the normal roles of a Pastor and overseeing the congregation's work on its developmental tasks. These tasks are not linear but circular; for example, a congregation never stops coming to terms with its history during transition periods. But progress will be made toward being ready to receive and work with new Pastoral leadership.

When the PNC has narrowed its choice of candidates to a "short list" it is appropriate to notify the Interim Pastor if she/he is not the consultant working with the PNC. Like startup, this too is an emotionally demanding time for the Interim Pastor. S/he is committed to working with you for the duration of the interim period and will give full energy to that task until it is finished. At the same time, s/he must prepare emotionally and spiritually to leave and to begin to seek new work. Just as you experienced a sense of loss when your Pastor left, so now the Interim Pastor must deal with the coming separation from people s/he has come to love and care for. At the same time, s/he must be prepared to stay if the call fails, and the search continues.

Nonetheless, at some point a call will be extended and accepted, and your Interim Pastor completes her/his tasks of closure, of saying good-bye to people and groups, of beginning the process of separation and pointing to the new leadership that is to come. This too, needs to be marked liturgically, giving the congregation full chance to say good-bye and recognize its own mixed feelings of loss, sorrow, accomplishment, and excitement at the pending arrival of a new Pastor.

Congratulations on having negotiated well the risks and opportunities of transition. With the help of a trained Interim Pastor and the support of the Presbytery, you should have prepared yourself well for a long and productive pastorate.