

Presbytery of New Covenant The Role of an Interim Pastor

What is an Interim Pastor?

An Interim is a Temporary Pastoral Relationship, hired by the session for a fixed period of time, to lead a church during the transition between installed pastors. An interim is **not** an installed position.

From the Book of Order, G-2.0504b: Temporary pastoral relationships are approved by the presbytery and do not carry a formal call or installation. When a congregation does not have a pastor, or while the pastor is unable to perform her or his duties, the session, with the approval of presbytery, may obtain the services of a teaching elder, candidate, or ruling elder in a temporary pastoral relationship. No formal call shall be issued and no formal installation shall take place. Titles and terms of service for temporary relationships shall be determined by the presbytery. A person serving in a temporary pastoral relationship is invited for a specified period not to exceed twelve months in length, which is renewable with the approval of the presbytery. A teaching elder employed in a temporary pastoral relationship is ordinarily not eligible to serve as the next installed pastor, co-pastor, or associate pastor.

Why Choose an Interim?

Many sessions decide on an interim pastor to guide the congregation during the period between installed pastors. The most effective interim pastors have had extensive special training for this unique ministry. Some interim pastors serve full-time and others serve part-time depending upon the needs of the church. The character and grace of this interim period will have an impact on the congregation's future with its next installed pastor. This transition is an important period in the life of the congregation. It is not just "in-between time," but a valuable period in-and-of itself. The purpose of the interim pastor is to guide the congregation through five major tasks:

1. Come to Terms with History through Conversation and Healing

- Celebrate what God has been doing and is doing in this congregation.
- Recognize wounds, scars that need to be healed.
- Be able to leave the past and move into the future.

2. Discover the Church's Identity

- How do we see ourselves?
- How does our community see us?
- What gives the church its identity?
- What are the unique gifts God has given to this congregation?

3. Empower Leadership of the Congregation

- Where are the centers of power in the congregation? (Note: power here is considered in positive terms: Who has been raised up by God to provide leadership for us?)
- What changes in power are taking place? Who is letting go of previous leadership responsibilities? What new persons are beginning to take leadership roles?
- Who needs to be challenged to take additional responsibilities?

4. Affirm the Connectional Linkage as a Presbyterian Church

- What are the strengths of our Presbyterian connectional system?
- How are we helped in our mission by the Presbytery, Synod and/or General Assembly?
- How can we further build on the strengths and assets afforded us by our connectional system?

5. *Make New Commitments to the Future and New Leadership*

- Do we have any unexamined expectations of the new pastor?
- How will the new pastor be welcomed?
- Saying goodbye to the interim period and moving with enthusiasm into the new future.

Possible Activities during the Interim Period

Every congregation is different. A congregation is different at different times. The interim experience at one time will not be the same at another time. A session and the Interim Pastor Search Committee will want to spend some time in thinking through the congregation's particular needs at this specific time. What have some congregations experienced during the interim period? Below is a "laundry list" to consider. Some will apply to your situation, others will not. Use this list to reflect on your particular congregation:

- Leadership in the congregation's re-visioning process.
- Conflict resolution within the congregation.
- Exploration of new programmatic possibilities.
- Reorganization of session and training of officers.
- Guidance about staffing concerns.
- Examination and possible revision of by-laws, procedures, policies, and structural organization to be in line with the church's mission.
- Possible ritual of closure with previous pastor, if not already done.
- Express emotions, heal hurts, completion of grief work.
- Renew faith; discover strengths.
- Maintain regular contact with the COM and presbytery staff with regular reports.
- Updating of records.
- Implementation of changes already determined by the congregation.
- Practice new ways of communicating and making decisions.
- Reducing level of anxiety and fear of the unknown in the congregation.
- Attention to stewardship and financial matters. How is giving in the congregation? Address issues of endowments, memorial policies. How is financial statement related to the church's mission statement? When was the last audit? What are the procedures for handling money?
- Renewing the spiritual life of the congregation.