

Presbytery of Lake Huron
Committee on Ministry

POLICY ON INTERIM MINISTRY
12/7/04

INTRODUCTION

The Book of Order, Form of Government (G-14.0513 and G-IS.0514) provides the constitutional provisions for the manner in which a church may provide for pastoral leadership when it is without a pastor. There are some cases when a church may not have and may not plan to have a regularly called pastor. In these cases it may supply its pulpit and provide for the moderating of the session through consultation and agreement with the Committee on Ministry. This paper does not attempt to deal with those churches which do not have regularly called pastors, but rather is an attempt to discuss the appropriateness of various options available to churches which do have called pastors. It is intended to provide counsel and guidance to churches on those occasions when they are without pastoral leadership. A period of vacancy in the local church is a crucial period in which care and attention should be given by both the session and the Committee on Ministry (COM) to the manner in which leadership is provided. The role of the COM in this process is clearly spelled out in the Form of Government. It is not an adversary role but one which at times requires consultation, cooperation and in some cases approval by the COM before a local church may proceed with plans to fill the pulpit.

THE INTERIM PERIOD

Pastoral leadership of the local church is a cornerstone of the Presbyterian Form of Government. The administration of the sacraments, moderating of the session and congregational meetings, as well as providing for spiritual nurture and direction are tasks which are to be filled by those set apart by ordination as Minister of the Word and Sacraments. The interim period is not just a matter of filling the pulpit but providing for the varied tasks for which the church looks to trained and capable pastoral leadership.

In some cases local churches are accustomed to frequent changes in pastoral leadership. In others pastoral leadership changes are infrequent. The nature of the interim period is often dependent upon this frequency of change. While all interim periods are important, the nature of the interim period is dependent upon a number of factors:

Things to keep in mind when searching for an interim:

1. Length of service of previous pastor

A church which has experienced a long pastorate (at least five to ten years) will experience an interim period differently than a church which has had pastoral changes on a more frequent basis. Churches which come to a change in pastoral leadership after an extremely long pastorate (fifteen years or more) will present even a different set of dynamics.

2. Manner in which previous pastoral relationship is dissolved

A church that experiences dissolution of the pastoral relationship through retirement or through a move to another call after a good and fruitful relationship will go through a different interim period than one which has come to a time of dissolution that is the result of a troubled relationship.

3. The nature of the church with regard to its changing circumstances

A church in which the demographics and mission seem to be stable will have an interim period that is different than a church which is experiencing either rapid growth or decline in its membership. In addition, churches in the midst of changing emphases in mission and direction will find the interim period different than churches that are not dealing with such change.

4. The size and complexity of the church

Larger churches, with multiple staff and extensive programs, will experience interim periods differently than those with smaller membership and less complicated staffing patterns and programs.

5. The presence of conflict

Churches in which there has been or currently is conflict within the membership or between the membership and the staff will experience an interim period differently than those churches where conflict is not present.

TYPES OF INTERIM PASTORS

Full Time Interims

A full time interim is retained by the session with the approval of the COM. Full time interims are usually persons who specialize in interim ministry and who are experienced and have received training in this type of ministry. In some cases such persons may exist within a presbytery, but in most cases they are brought into the presbytery to fill a particular vacancy. Full time interims usually belong to an organization such as the Interim Network or the Association of Presbyterian Interim Ministry Specialists, or they are known to the Executive Presbyter or the COM Chair as possessing the skills and temperament appropriate for interim work. Full time interims are usually retained at the terms of call of the previous pastor. All contracts shall include the statement that the interim is not eligible for consideration for the installed position.

Part Time Interims

These persons in most cases are not specialists as the full time interims are, although part time interims may have skills and experience from previous pastorates or in some cases previous interim work. They are often retired, pastors living within a presbytery, or they may be persons awaiting a call or because of individual circumstances available to a congregation on a part time basis. In most cases they do not provide nil of the services of full time ministry. In congregations with complex dynamics, a part time interim is not as appropriate as a full time interim. Part time interims' compensation is negotiated on the basis of the tasks required. Interim contracts generally range from six months to one year, and they may be renewed, if necessary, by mutual agreement of the interim pastor, the session, the COM and the Presbytery.

All contracts shall include the statement that the interim is not eligible for consideration for the installed position. Contracts for the services of a part time interim must carefully spell out exactly what duties are included, the number of hours to be spent on the job, and the compensation to be paid. Compensation is usually negotiated on the basis of the tasks required in the job description.

DECIDING ON AN INTERIM

The COM representative should meet with the session when there is a vacancy or a contemplated vacancy. The intent is to examine the dynamics of the church and to devise a plan which is appropriate to the circumstances of the church. It is important that this process be done in such a way that the true dynamics of the situation are faced, so that an appropriate response to them can be formulated during the interim period.

Once a decision has been made about the type of interim, the COM will assist the session in obtaining an interim pastor who is enthusiastically endorsed by both.

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COVENANT AGREEMENT FOR INTERIM PASTOR

The Session of _____ Presbyterian Church, MI,

invites the Rev. _____ to serve _____
Presbyterian Church as Interim Pastor.

The Session being satisfied with your qualifications and trusting that your ministry in the Gospel will be to our spiritual benefit, the following covenant is agreed upon:

1. That the Rev. _____ will begin service on and will be accountable to the Session. and responsible to the presbytery through the Committee on Ministry during the period of this covenant agreement.
2. The Interim Pastor agrees to provide full time/part time pastoral leadership. The Interim Pastor will be responsible for the following:

(The Session shall provide a list of specific duties to be performed. If the position is part time, the number of hours per week shall be specified.)

3. The terms of this covenant agreement shall be:

Salary Items:

Cash salary
Housing allowance
Pension
Study leave time
Vacation time

Reimbursable items:

Travel reimbursement
Approved IRS Rate
Reimbursement of church-related phone calls made from home, when applicable
Study leave allowance
Moving expenses, when applicable
Professional expenses (specified)

In the event that the Interim Pastor has not secured a new position by the time service to this church is concluded, this church will:

- a) Provide full compensation for an additional one month or until service in a new position begins, whichever occurs first,
- b) Provide fall pension dues for 90 days or until service in a new position begins, whichever occurs first.

4. Other terms (if any)

5. This agreement is for a period of _____, commencing on _____ after which it may be extended on recommendation of the Committee on Ministry and approval by the presbytery. This agreement may be terminated by either party on 30 days written notice.

6. A mutual evaluation of the relationship between the Interim Pastor and _____ Presbyterian Church will occur after three months of service. An appropriate committee of Session will represent the Session in the evaluation process.

7. The Interim Pastor cannot be considered a candidate for the installed position.
8. At the termination of the interim relationship, the Session and the Interim Pastor agree to participate in an evaluation of the interim period.

CERTIFICATIONS

- A. This invitation to an Interim Pastor and Covenant Agreement for Interim Pastor was approved by the Session on_____.

Clerk of Session

- B. This invitation and Covenant Agreement were approved by the Committee on Ministry on

Committee on Ministry Chair

- C. This invitation and Covenant Agreement were approved by the Presbytery on

Stated Clerk

ACCEPTANCE

This is to certify that I have received and accept the invitation to serve as Interim Pastor, and this Covenant Agreement for Interim Pastor.

Date

Minister