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 . . .

- 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

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:

- 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.

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3. This information was gathered from Brethren pastors serving in interim roles and District/Executive Ministers.
**The interim pastor shall . . .**

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

- 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**


Leas, Speed B. *Discovering Your Conflict Management Style*. Alban Institute, 1984


Oswald, Roy. *The Pastor as Newcomer*. The Alban Institute.


Putney, Richard S. *Change and Resistance*. Interim Ministry Network.

*The In-Between Times Newsletter*. Interim Ministry Network, PO Box 21251, Baltimore, MD 21228-0751.

LETTER OF AGREEMENT
INTERIM PASTOR

Between __________________ and the __________________ Church of the Brethren

The Interim Minister shall serve __________ time beginning __________ and shall be for a period of __________. This letter of agreement may be terminated by either party upon 30 days notice. There shall be intentional assessment of the interim ministry at regular intervals by the appropriate congregational leadership.

I. TIME EXPECTATIONS
   
   •
   •
   •
   •

II. GOALS FOR THE INTERIM PERIOD

   •
   •
   •
   •

III. RESPONSIBILITIES OF MINISTRY

   •
   •
   •
   •
IV. SALARY AND BENEFITS

A. Will receive $ ________ per month, with $_______ for salary and $ _______ for housing allowance.

B. The interim will be reimbursed for travel at the IRS established rate.

C. Pension

D. Medical or Miscellaneous Benefits

E. Vacation will be prorated according to time served.

V. CALL [check one]

___ Open to permanent call

___ Closed to permanent call

Signed: ___________________________________________________ Interim Pastor

___________________________________________________ Church Board chair

Copies to: Church Clerk, Treasurer, District Executive/Minister
CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

INTERIM PASTOR
INFORMATION FORM

Date _____________________

I.  Personal Data

Name _________________________________________________________________________

[ last ]          [ first ]          [ middle ]

Address _______________________________________________________________________

[ street, box ]      [ city/town ]     [ state ]    [ zip ]

Phone: Home____________________ Cell__________________ Office ___________________

E-mail ________________________________________

Age ________ Marital status __________________

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.