

The Interim Period

Definition of Terms

- **Interim Period:** The interim period in a church is the time between the resignation of a Pastor and the call of his successor. In most churches the length of the Interim period ranges from six months to two years.
- **Interim Pastor:** A pastor who assumes the pastoral responsibilities during the Interim period.

Benefits of the Interim Period

1. A church can definitely profit from such a period, for it provides time for healing of hurts, evaluations of the gifts of future leadership, and for grieving caused by loss of the former pastor.
2. During the Interim period, a church can reflect on past victories without creating problems for the new Pastor. The church can look at present practices and make changes without disappointing their former Pastor. The church can have an effective ministry and will prepare the soil for greater ministry on the arrival of the new Pastor.
3. The interim period is often of special value because it allows the church a time to break ties with the departing pastor, particularly if the former pastor was deeply loved and appreciated. If the pastor left under duress, the right interim pastor may heal wounds and strengthen the church. He also will give continuity to the pulpit ministry even if the governing body chooses to periodically invite in special speakers during the interim period. The interim pastor will lend stability and uniformity to the service.
4. If the pastor and the people (*a*) view the interim ministry as more than marking time, (*b*) raise the congregation's self-image, and (*c*) put evangelism first, God will do the rest. Instead of marking time, the interim ministry becomes a wonderful opportunity to capitalize on the temporary.

Possible dangers of the Interim Period

Interims can create several potential problems that the leadership must be aware of and avert if at all possible:

1. An interim pastor may win the hearts of a segment of the congregation and there may be pressure to call the Interim as Senior Pastor. It is best to establish a policy that the Interim will not be considered by the Search committee as a candidate.
2. In most cases, if a staff member is selected as the Interim, he should agree to leave before the new Pastor arrives.
3. The Interim should not attempt to set a new direction for the church ministry, except in coordination with CBNW and the local Church.

What the church needs to know before selecting an Interim Pastor

1. The Association office has a list of possible interim pastors available upon request.
2. *However*, You must follow your church constitution if it speaks to the calling of an interim pastor.
3. It is recommended that the pulpit supply and the call of an interim pastor be the responsibility of the Board of Elders/Deacons so that the search committee can apply themselves to the single task of finding God's man for the Senior Pastor position.
4. If the church has worked through a diagnostic or assessment process with CB Northwest, then one of the primary responsibilities of the interim will be to help the leadership implement the prescription for the church. The working relationship between church leadership, the interim

pastor and CB Northwest staff becomes key to addressing the things that will strengthen the health of the local church.

5. An interim pastor should be called for a stated period of time, usually 6 months, with 3-month renewals. With the call and arrival of a new pastor, there is an automatic termination releasing the church and the interim once the new pastor is secured. All arrangements should be carefully stated and fully understood by both the church and the interim pastor. His insights and knowledge about particular ministers may provide helpful suggestions when his opinion is solicited by the search committee.

Church responsibility before selecting an Interim Pastor

1. Before selecting the Interim Pastor, the church leaders must determine what the congregation needs in this time period:
 - The governing board should prepare a job description for the interim pastor (See *Suggested Job Description for an Interim Pastor* at the end of this document).
 - Are there specific problems that need to be dealt with and is the Interim gifted to meet this need?
2. How much involvement does the church expect from the Interim?
 - a. *Regular Pulpit Supply – Preach in the AM and PM services*
 - b. *Teach a Sunday School class*
 - c. *Teach a Bible Study*
 - d. *Lead midweek prayer service*
 - e. *Visit members and visitors*
 - f. *Counseling*
 - g. *Meet with Boards & committees in the church*
 - h. *Development of Church Programs*
3. Give some thought to the length of the Interim ministry. Example—Six months, or until a new pastor arrives, or six months with 3-month extensions by invitation until a new pastor arrives (not beyond 2 years).

Church responsibility during the Interim Pastor Period

- The governing body and the Interim Pastor need to determine the Interim Pastor's role in the pastoral selection process.

Process for finding an Interim Pastor

1. Where does a church go to find a suitable Interim? The best source is the CB Northwest office, which has a list of men interested in serving as Interims. Retired pastors, missionaries or denominational leaders make good Interims as they have experience and are not interested in the permanent position, and thus can help your church avoid many difficulties that could arise. Call if you have such a need.

Interim Pastor Qualifications

- The NWCBA office will be diligent in screening those desiring to serve in an interim role. However each church should conduct their own screening according to the qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

Selecting an Interim Pastor

- Our advice would be this: Check out a potential interim thoroughly – call his references, have him come do pulpit supply for a couple Sundays, have a church potluck after a service so that the people of the church can meet him and his wife. Does he preach the Word? Does he connect well with people? Ask lots of informal questions – then make a decision. If he’s a fit, go with him. Most men will have had significant pastoral experience.
- In most churches, the Interim Pastor decision is made by the Board (or search committee), not by the whole church. But conduct yourselves in a manner consistent with the dynamics, expectations, and governing documents of your fellowship.

Helps for the Interim Pastor

Interim ministries are times of great opportunity. The following strategies are important during interim periods:

1. *Raise the Church’s Biblical Ministry image*

Congregations that lose their pastors are susceptible to feelings of low self-esteem. Though some members may celebrate the minister’s retirement or moving, others will see it as a cause for mourning and wonder how they can carry on.

Neither of these attitudes creates a positive congregational image or gives gusto for evangelism. As people search for the “good news of God,” they do not tend to join either a hypercritical or a down-in-the-mouth congregation. The interim minister must therefore do his best to accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative. Bringing the outsider’s perspective helps the interim to define and celebrate the strength of each congregation.

The interim pastor has a tremendous opportunity and responsibility to remind believers of their identity in Christ Jesus. Even though there may be a time of mourning for a pastor who leaves it is imperative that believers’ trust be directed to who God is and who they are in Christ.

2. *Act Quickly*

The interim minister must hit the ground running and keep the congregation up to speed, for time is limited. Begin visiting all families. This will prove highly valuable in establishing a working relationship between pastor and people. Since the interim is often recognized as a prophet from another country with the expertise of an outside consultant, people will treat him with honor.

Because his stay is temporary, the interim can feel less threatened by possible future repercussions of his leadership advice than does the regular contracted minister. While building a bridge between the past and the future, interims not only can offer encouragement, but also can be a real catalyst for action because of their outsider’s perspective regarding how the church functions.

3. *Keep First Things First*

Adversity is an ingredient that can lead to either spiritual growth or despondency. As believers focus on what God wants to teach them during this time of adjustment growth will occur and spiritual growth is contagious. One of the greatest ways to strengthen a discouraged church is membership growth. The upbeat interim minister is in a unique position to help accomplish that.

Bring a determination to rank this ministry (membership growth) first among other needs of the congregation. That requires regular meetings of committees devoted to church growth and visits to everyone on our responsibility list (comprised of new attenders, newcomers in the area, and names suggested by members on a card used in worship each week.) Give an invitation in each worship service.

Suggested Job Description for an Interim Pastor

1. Conduct the services of the church (Choose those which apply):
 - a. AM Service(s)
 - b. PM Service
 - c. Teach a Sunday School class
 - d. Teach a Bible Study
 - e. Lead Midweek Prayer Service
2. Be available for counseling _____ days per week in the church office, during specific hours.
3. Make the following calls:
 - a. Hospital
 - b. Visitors
 - c. Members that need encouragement
4. When requested, meet with the Pastoral Search Committee. The interim should not be a member of this committee.
5. When requested, advise elders/deacons and committees on issues they must make decisions on.
6. Pay package -- _____ hours per week
 - a. Housing and benefits
7. For financial arrangements, call the Placement Department at CB Northwest.