

5. **Deal with Special Needs of the Congregation.** Every church is different. As a result of discernment, the interim pastor will learn of specific problems that exist in the congregation. Through training and knowledge of how to deal with conflict and with tactful suggestions by the “outsider,” beneficial changes may be effected.
6. **Emphasize Fellowship and Reconciliation.** There are many opportunities for encouraging Christian fellowship among congregational members. The incorporation of “congregational concerns” during a worship service can encourage true sharing and open the door to healing broken relationships.
7. **Strengthen Denominational Ties.** The interim pastor personally maintains a good relationship with both the denomination and local judicatory, encouraging the local congregation to participate in district/synod and denominational-wide activities and programs.
8. **Increase the Potential for a Successful Ministry by the Next Permanent Pastor.** The interim pastor is future-oriented, concerned with the coming of a new pastor by helping prepare the congregation for their arrival. They also communicate information helpful to the new permanent pastor.

What are the “focal points” of transitional ministry?

There are five interactive areas of development or “focal points” a congregation will encounter during the Intentional Interim Ministry Process:

1. **Heritage.** Reviewing its historical heritage with honesty and transparency; talking through the disputes, strengths and challenges, and the positives and negatives of past pastorates.
2. **Leadership.** During a transition, lay leaders and staff often change and opportunities arise for leadership development. This is also a time to consider organization, governance, and boundaries to guide all leaders and describe their ministries.

3. **Mission.** Reviewing God’s call to “mission” as a church includes a reminder of what mission and ministry are all about, renewing the congregation’s sense of who they are and who they serve on Christ’s behalf.
4. **Connections.** Re-affirming not only the congregation's connection to the judicatory, but also to the community and ministry partners, helps affirm the congregation's identity as outwardly focused.
5. **Future.** During the interim, the congregation uses tools, such as self-study and demographic tools, to discern their identity and God's call to the future. Rather than seek to maintain past ministry only, the opportunity to find new directions is presented.

How can I learn more about Transitional Ministry?

Intentional Interim Ministry is available to all judicatories (synods, districts, conferences, etc.) even if they do not have their own program. A local judicatory interested in providing interim ministry or a rostered leader who is called to this ministry, may contact the LuTMA Executive Director at LutheranTMA@gmail.com, or the Interim Ministry Association or Interim Ministry Conference for a presentation.

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Lutheran Transitional Ministry Association

*An introductory guide for Judicatory Leaders
and those discerning a call
to transitional ministry.*

Introduction to Transitional/Interim Ministry



Congregational vacancies are times of *transition* - the end of a chapter in the story of the congregation, and the beginning of a new chapter in its story. Some of these “interim” times are the result of God’s call for a pastor to leave one place and go to another. Other times, the vacancy comes after a long pastorate or, unfortunately, a troubled one.

There are times when a congregation can be served by a *vacancy pastor* - that is, a neighbor-pastor from a local congregation who serves the vacant church part-time (or a retired pastor, perhaps). Word and Sacrament ministry can continue during a *vacancy arrangement*, but only as a stop-gap until a new pastor is called and installed.

Transitional or *interim ministry* is more than a stop-gap measure achieved by a part-time pastor. Intentional Interim Ministry provides a full-time and deeper service to a church as it concludes the current chapter of its history and prepares to begin the next chapter. While a vacancy pastor has the seminary training and practical experience that comes from being a parish-pastor, an Intentional Interim Pastor has been specifically trained to assist congregations in their transitional journey - especially following the tenure of a long-serving pastor or the end of a pastorate due to conflict or misconduct.

The **Lutheran Transitional Ministry Association** (formerly the National Association for Lutheran Interim Pastors) offers quality training for clergy to lead congregations through a time of transition. The training program consists of Basic Training in Transitions that includes pre-program reading, formal training (60+ hours) in a virtual classroom followed by a residential classroom. A coach-mentor phase is offered to those who desire additional guidance.

What is the involvement of the Judicatory leadership?

Within the ELCA, LCMS and other faith traditions, some judicatories provide and sustain an Intentional Interim Ministry program that includes consultation and supervision. The judicatory leaders are involved in helping to determine the need for an interim minister and, additionally, help the congregation define goals and parameters for the transitional period. The judicatory can also assist in identifying an intentional interim pastor to serve the congregation.

Both the Interim Ministry Association of the ELCA and the Interim Ministry Conference of the LCMS have rosters of trained and experienced interim pastors who are available to serve congregations in transition.

How long does an Intentional Interim Pastor serve a congregation?

A congregation in transition does not run according to a fixed schedule; depending on many factors, a typical interim runs from one to two years. The factors depend on the health of the congregation, the depth of the challenge at hand, and the congregation’s leadership. Length of interim ministry is one of the early conversations a congregation will have with a potential interim pastor. It should be noted, as a congregation prepares to receive its next permanent pastor, the length of the call is not as important as the health of the congregation.

The best of transitional ministers have gifts for analyzing congregations and their communities. They like having one foot in the congregation as pastor and teacher and one foot outside as observer and consultant. They like to think systematically and pose the right questions.
(From *Transitional Ministry Today*)



Appropriate Goals for the Interim Period

In addition to the ministry of Word and Sacrament, the Intentional Interim Pastor is trained to assist a congregation in transition to address specific issues, challenges, or needs to be dealt with prior to the calling and arrival of a new permanent pastor. Questions are asked to lead the congregation

to ponder who they are and Whom they serve:

- What are your *values*?
- What is your *purpose*?
- What is the *process*?

Some of the “goals” of an intentional interim can be:

1. **Maintain the Viability of the Church.** The ongoing vital program expected of a lively congregation consists of pastoral duties plus the ministry of the laity. Continuing the essential programs already underway and making an effort to help make them more meaningful are the responsibility of the interim leader.
2. **Resolve Feelings of Grief.** Pastoral visitation and group meetings involving personal, direct contact with individuals is important. Intentional expression of interest in members’ feelings help provide healing.
3. **Reinforce the Ministry of the Laity.** Encouragement of participation and leadership by lay persons is vital. The time of transition is a particularly apt time to develop lay leadership. Many responsibilities in the congregation may be carried out by a trained laity that will benefit the ministry of the new permanent pastor.
4. **Clarify the Mission of the Church.** Congregations may need to be reminded that Christians are called to serve, not only to be served. The interim may be a voice of the church-at-large when the congregation is turned inward to its own needs. The interim pastor teaches by example, by preaching, and by formal teaching/training.