

What is Intentional Interim Ministry?

The interim period in the average church is used exclusively for finding the next pastor. Often, attendance, giving, and energy decline during the interim period, increasing the discomfort in an already anxious congregation.

Decades of studying the interim period by the Alban Institute, the Interim Ministry Network, and the Center for Congregational Health have shown the interim period can be a productive time to address key issues in a church's life. Addressing these issues will improve the health of the church, while fine-tuning the understanding of the type of pastoral candidate that should be called next.

Churches which should particularly consider the Intentional Interim Ministry (IIM) include churches that are losing a pastor after a significant tenure, that have lost vision, that find themselves stuck on a numerical plateau or in decline, or that are experiencing conflict (or are in the aftermath of serious conflict). Not intentionally addressing key issues means a church is likely to repeat its history. The next pastor will inherit unresolved issues, be sidetracked from God's purposes, and leave after a short tenure. Meanwhile, the church will be confused, fellowship will be hurt, and the cycle of an anxious interim time will return.

The interim period opens the church to a time of dialogue about items that might be difficult to address during an installed pastor's tenure. The interim period is the best time to clarify members' differing expectations, hopes, and desires.

Five tasks have been identified that should be addressed by churches in an interim period. With slight recent refinements, these "Focus Points" continue to prove to be the vital areas that must be addressed in a successful IIM.

The five Focus Points are:

- Heritage—examining a church's history, for instance, coming to terms with why the last pastor(s) left.
- Leadership—a careful examination of staff positions, job descriptions, policies and procedures, bylaws, and lay leadership. Common issues addressed often include the recruiting and training of new leaders and seeking ways to involve more members in decision making so as to create a true consensus as the church moves forward.
- Connections—Baptist theology, financial support of other ministries, partnerships in ministry and missions—most church members are disconnected to these important areas of a church's life. The interim period is a key time for reconnecting the church to Baptist life, unifying the church around these concepts, and making sure the Pastor Search Committee finds an appropriate candidate for the church.
- Mission—a church should have a call from God that belongs to the whole church. Too often the church depends upon the pastor to create the mission and to enlist workers, while the church ignores the mission because they have not heard the same call. The IIM period will guide a church in finding their God-given purpose and to express it with broad generalities and specific short-term actions.
- Future—the first three Focus Points help a church answer, "Who are we?" The fourth task answers: "Who are we supposed to be?" This last task prepares a church for the calling of a pastor by developing a Pastor's (desired) profile and a church profile, to complete the question: "How are we going to get there?"

The IIM calls the entire congregation to engage in a self-study of these five Focus Points so that the congregation unites in an understanding of these areas and in how to address any of these areas—including building consensus about any changes that must be made. The IIM approach improves the chances that the church's ministry, and the next pastor's tenure, will be effective.

The Transition Team

With the assistance of the IIM pastor, the church will put together a new team. This team will be made up of trusted, spiritual, and wise leaders from the congregation. It will look like a microcosm of the church.

The Transition Team does not take over the church. It does not do the work for the church. Instead, the team's role is to develop strategies to engage the congregation in each process so that the church body will be impacted by the study and so the church members will feel ownership of decisions made in the interim period.

The "genius" behind the IIM is that the interim pastor must rely on the lay leadership of the church. It is the lay

leadership that knows the church, the church's culture, and the church's history. The IIM pastor "coaches" the Transition Team, but it is the team that leads out in deciding what issues need to be tackled in each Focus Point, how best to get the congregation engaged in processing the issues, and when each Focus Point has been adequately addressed. This means that the Transition Team is also responsible for knowing when the church is ready to wrap up the self-study and begin the work of finding a new pastor.

The Intentional Interim Pastor

Entering into an IIM process necessitates that a church call a pastor who has completed the IIM training. Each trained IIM has met the following requirements:

- Completion of Interim Ministry for Today's Church course or an equivalent
- Evidence of significant ministerial experience before entering IIM training
- Successful completion of a professional background check conducted by the Center for Congregational Health prior to acceptance into IIM training
- Successful completion of the IIM residential lab and field work (including 85 classroom hours)
- Continued membership in YCORE (a professional group for IIM pastors)
- Ten hours of continuing education per year
- Allowing a Reflection review of one's performance after every IIM pastorate

The IIM pastor is ideally the "pastor during the interim." A written covenant will detail all the expectations of the IIM pastor, ranging from part-time to full-time ministries (preaching, pastoral care, administration, supervision, etc.) [In some circumstances, a church may elect to call an IIM Consultant, who guides the self-study while the church uses a different person as the interim pastor.] The covenant will also detail compensation, length of covenant (including extending the covenant or canceling the covenant), the IIM process, and that the IIM pastor CANNOT be considered for the permanent pastor's position.

Costs of Intentional Interim Ministry

If a church elects to enter into an IIM, the church should compensate the IIM pastor fairly. Basically, it is suggested that the church match the interim pastor's pay to the percentage of work the interim pastor takes on. For instance, if the interim pastor does half of a pastor's work, the church would pay him half of the pastor's salary package. Additional expenses to cover travel or housing, etc., might also be necessary. Other costs for printing, mailing, and fellowships are minimal.

Key Elements of Intentional Interim Ministry

Two things are required in order for a church to be considered doing intentional interim ministry:

- The church has officially voted that it will work on a self-study, including the five Focus Points before it releases a search committee to begin searching for a new pastor. Ideally, the church will not even elect a search committee until after the self-study phase has ended.
- The church has a specific covenant describing the relationship between the intentional interim pastor/consultant and the church. This covenant includes the fact that the IIM cannot be a candidate for the next permanent pastor.

How Long Does It Take?

From the start of the IIM period, to the calling of the next pastor, from 12-18 months will have elapsed, on average. A six to nine month period of self study will be followed by a pastor search process that may take six months or more. However, every church is different. The presence of high conflict, or other circumstances, can delay the actual process. It is important to note that the Transition Team determines the pace of the self-study and when the church needs to release a search committee.

Myths About Intentional Interim Ministry

Intentional interim is better than traditional interim ministry.

While the IIM process could probably help any church, it would be an overstatement to claim that all churches need to engage in the IIM. Traditional interim ministry has helped many churches over time. A church simply needs to decide what is best for them at the present time.

Intentional interim ministry is only for troubled churches.

Any church in conflict should seriously consider the IIM for their next interim period—but this is not the only reason for engaging in the IIM. Addressing the lack of focus, or the absence of vision, are common reasons churches choose to utilize the IIM. Also, following a long-tenured pastor (beloved or not) is most often a predictor of failure for the next pastor unless related issues have been addressed in the interim period.

Intentional interim ministry is very costly.

The process is designed so that it should not be much more expensive than having a permanent pastor on the church field.

The intentional interim pastor will tell us what to do.

The IIM pastor is a guide to help the process. The Transition Team leads the congregation to actually engage in the work. However, it is the congregation that must do the work of the IIM period.

Intentional interim ministry is not Baptist.

While the IIM's origins were in ecumenical circles, the process has been reshaped by Baptists to work in Baptist churches.

Does The IIM Work?

Every Transition Team that leads a congregation in the IIM must design an original self-study, so it is next to impossible to compare rates of success. Nevertheless, we are happy to send you survey results on the "success" of the IIM, as well as contact information on lay leaders from churches that have used the IIM.

Where does the ABSC fit into all of this?

Churches entering into an interim period may be initially led by a Personnel Team, the Deacons, an Interim Pastor Search Team, a Pastor Search Committee, or some other group. Common steps in considering the IIM usually include:

- A key leader in one of these groups calls the ABSC to discuss options for the interim period.
- A presentation to the entire deacon body or leadership team of a church is scheduled.
- If the deacons and/or leadership team wants to recommend the IIM to the church, an additional presentation is scheduled for the whole church.
- If the church votes to engage in the IIM, a list of candidates is provided to the IIM pastor search team.
- A search can usually be completed within six to eight weeks.

For further information, or to arrange a presentation, please contact Jimmie Sheffield, Leadership & Worship Team of the ABSC at:

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