

THE CALLING OF AN INTERIM MINISTER

**A Brief Guide
to assist
The Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ)
in Nebraska**

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Introduction

Your congregation is involved in a very important transition in its life. The time between installed pastors is an opportunity for a congregation to reaffirm its vision and direction for ministry. The calling of an interim minister is a very significant step at the beginning of the transition period. The following pages seek to provide assistance in the call of an interim minister. Remember that your Regional Minister, Chris Morton, is always willing to help. You may reach him at 402-476-0359, or regmin@ccnebr.org.

For years, it was widely believed that the periods between installed pastors were times for congregations to “tread water.” It was assumed that change, direction, energy, etc. were not viable forces during such transitions. But, like many assumptions, when examined, this one was found to be invalid.

Persons who study and advise congregations have learned that churches are able to make and incorporate significant change during a very narrow spectrum of their lives:

- when there is a natural disaster and/or catastrophe
- when there is a community crisis (loss of major employer in the town, etc.)
- during the time between installed pastors

Now, the interim period becomes extremely important. It is one of the few times in a congregation’s life when it can openly set its future agenda. Indeed, the call of an installed pastor serves to confirm that agenda. Thus, it is very significant who provides direction and leadership during the interim period.

Typically, there are congregational developmental tasks to be accomplished during the interim period which allow the best opportunity for the new ministerial relation with an installed pastor to function well.



THE FIVE FOCUS POINTS

- 1. Heritage:** *reviewing how the congregation has been shaped and formed*
The congregation's heritage, both corporate and individual, is the foundation upon which the present rests. Paying attention to heritage means encouraging and hearing all of the stories about the congregation's past and embracing the rich variety that makes up this particular congregation.
- 2. Leadership:** *reviewing the membership needs and its ways of organizing and developing new and effective leadership*
Transition time provides opportunity for individuals ;and the congregational organizations to examine the types of leadership needed. New leaders will emerge, while some seasoned leaders may re-commit or may decide to refocus their gifts.
- 3. Mission:** *defining and redefining sense of purpose and direction*
The primary work in this area involves clarifying the faith community's identity and core values, working to develop mission and vision statements, and perhaps even working out short-term tactical plans.
- 4. Connections:** *discovering all the relationships a faith community builds outside of itself*
Sometimes congregational life is so busy that congregations and their leadership forget to attend to their connections both to their denomination and to the network of communities around them. Transition is an appropriate time to re-assess old links and to consider new ones.
- 5. Future:** *developing congregational and pastoral profiles*
Focusing on the future requires a healthy and honest assessment of the other focus points so that the congregation can turn its energy toward proactive decision-making for the future. The Intentional Interim Leader offers the congregation a variety of possibilities to engage the Five Focus Points.

AN ON-SITE INTERVIEW

After the phone interviews, the committee will want to determine a primary candidate. Contact that person as soon as possible. You will want to arrange an on-site visit. The purpose of the visit is to see if there is a match for interim ministry. The committee will want to spend time with the individual. Help the candidate get a feel of the community and of the church facility.



It is important to talk about the financial issues. Even though a decision normally is not made during the interview, you need to arrive at clarity on the important issues. Be clear with the candidate about what your call process is. Also talk very clearly about calendar. When are they available? When would you want them to start if they are called?

Any time that you have questions, do not hesitate to contact your Regional Minister. Remember, the skills which you seek in an interim minister may be significantly different from what you and the congregation would choose for an installed pastor.

A sample "Letter of Calling & Agreement for Interim Ministry" is available from the Regional Office. Many interim ministers will suggest wording and terms for a contract or letter of call. Most interim ministers will expect an initial term of call. The Region recommends six or nine months. After that, the call agreement requires a notice by either party for termination of the interim ministry. The Region suggests 30-days written notice by either party.

15. In what ways have you supported the larger work of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ); what things about being a Disciple are you most proud; and what things would you like to change in our denominational life?

When you receive the names of possible interims from the Regional Minister, schedule telephone conference calls with the candidates as soon as possible. Each call should be 25 to 30 minutes in length. Allow time between calls to talk about the call and to prepare to hear the next candidate. Remember, you may have to be flexible in setting the conference calls with the candidates. (It is a tight market for interim pastors.) Interim pastors are used to quick decision processes. An interim may be contacted by several congregations from a variety of Regions. Once you make contact, your committee will want to proceed as expeditiously as possible.

WHEN YOU MAKE THE CALL:

- a. Always do conference calls with the entire committee present, so all can get first-hand information on which to reflect and discuss.
- b. Use a speaker-phone so all the committee can hear the total conversation.
- c. Each member should take notes on each call.
- d. Decide prior to the call who will ask which questions.
- e. Arrange the room so it that it is comfortable and so each person can hear well.
- f. Each one should identify who they are before addressing the ministerial candidate.
- g. Ask the candidate for the names and addresses of three or four persons who can serve as references. Seek references from their most recent place of service.
- h. Always express appreciation for the telephone interview.
- i. Do not commit yourselves in the course of the interview, but do give the candidate an idea of when you will be back in contact with him/her.

These are vital tasks. Churches must work at them. They are not accomplished by accident. Too often churches decide to tread water in the interim period. They decide to save money. Because they do not decide to grow (and thus maintain energy), they slide! Momentum lost in an interim period will usually translate to problems for the new installed pastor. The reason is that the congregation is no longer where it thought it was.

One of the best ways to ensure that the new installed pastor will do an unintentional interim is to downplay the importance of the intentional interim. The decision is often made that if we move fast enough our problems will go away. It just doesn't happen.

When congregations do not deal with transition, problems retain their power for destruction within the congregation for years. The conclusion of a ministry represents an opportunity for the congregation to either move toward its future with open eyes and clear planning, or for the congregation to deny its possibilities and turn opportunity into a difficult and painful period.

The temptation is to say we cannot afford an "interim." The truth is that congregations cannot afford not having an interim. There is work to be done. There is direction to be set. There is the need on the part of many persons for closure.



GETTING READY FOR CANDIDATES

Interim Minister Selection Steps

1. Develop a basic understanding of the Interim position. If one is available, look at the job description for the installed pastor. Clarify if this is a full or part time position.
2. Determine the compensation package which the church will offer to its interim minister.

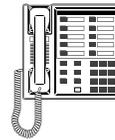
3. Create a list of questions to be used in the conference call interviews. You may also want to develop answers to questions which you feel the candidates may address to your committee.
4. Receive names of potential candidates from the Regional Office.
5. Complete conference calls with all potential candidates.
6. Narrow your selection, and phone that candidate again; do not leave a possible interim candidate hanging without follow-up from you. They may be asked to serve in another congregation, before you get around to contacting them.
7. Telephone their references.
8. Interview the preferred candidate on site, if possible.
9. Negotiate a “*Calling Agreement*”.
10. Present the candidate of your choice to the Council or Board for their affirmation, and then to the congregation.
11. Notify the other candidates that you have made a different decision.

Before you are ready to receive the names of possible candidates, there are several tasks which need to be done because once the committee receives names, it needs to move quickly in the selection process.

JOB DESCRIPTION

Use the minister’s job description, if there is one, and make needed changes to reflect what you expect/need from an interim minister. You may want to include the Five Focus Points (page 2) of an Interim Period. You will also want to know your church’s procedure for calling an interim minister – usually it requires a congregational vote but check your By Laws.

INTERVIEW PREPARATION



Prior to interviewing candidates in a telephone conference call, you need to develop a set of questions which will be asked of each candidate. The way to find out something is to ask questions!

Don’t overlook the preparation of good questions prior to interviewing prospective ministers. By using intentional questions, both the committee and the candidate will make the most of the interview. Good questions cannot be answered by yes or no. A good question allows the answerer to show how he/she thinks, how to handle challenges, and how to express oneself.

Here are some samples—you can create better ones. One last word--the minister will probably want to ask some questions of you—be sure to have good answers ready!

Sample questions:

1. Please tell us about yourself, your family, etc.
2. What do you like to do for fun, hobbies, interests?
3. Tell us about your call to ministry.
4. What strengths do you feel you bring to interim ministry?
5. Tell us about your most recent place of ministry.
6. What in your ministry shows your leadership?
7. What do you especially enjoy about ministry?
8. What is hard for you about ministry?
9. What are the sources of strength that keep you going?
10. How at-home do you feel with children, teens, young adults, middle-aged adults, senior adults?
11. How do you handle “potshots” and unfair criticism by church members?
12. Describe what you now do to strengthen your relationship to God.
13. Tell us about your preaching. How do you prepare sermons?
14. What is your attitude about your days off? Are you available for emergencies? If you lose a day off, do you take it at another time?

- **ANNUAL LEAVE**

It is recommended that all clergy leadership receive four weeks of annual vacation, with part-time clergy's vacation be on a pro-rated basis (e.g., half-time pastor would receive four weeks, but 20 hours per week). Time for assemblies, continuing education or service to the Region in ministries such as camp and conference are not considered annual leave.

We recommend that the interim minister's contract call for one week of annual leave per quarter. We also recommend that this not be cumulative beyond two weeks. This prevents the congregation from incurring an obligation for several weeks of vacation while it is paying moving expenses for its new installed pastor.

LEGAL ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Federal Form W-4 is to be filled out. It can be obtained from the Social Security office. Federal Form W-4 pertains to dependents. It is for interim pastors.

The status of the pastor for income tax purposes requires providing a Form W-2. The W-2 is required for persons who are considered employees. A Form 1099 is provided for persons classified as self-employed. The IRS has ruled that clergy are "employees" for tax purposes, and this includes interim ministers. Therefore, a 1099 is not permissible. Penalties may be assessed if a 1099 is issued. They are fine to use with contract employees, but not with ministers. If the congregation does not have a Federal Employer Identification Number (FEIN), the congregation's treasurer should secure one as soon as possible by contacting the IRS.

Liability insurance on the pastor to protect the congregation is prudent due to the counseling role that is an expected part of pastoral care. The congregation is responsible for this coverage. It is typically included in the Comprehensive Insurance coverage which congregations purchase. Check your policy.

FINANCIAL AND LEGAL MATTERS

While reviewing and revising the job description the search committee will need to determine its compensation package for the Interim Minister, and the reimbursable expenses that will be covered. The Christian Church In Nebraska has a Compensation work sheet that the search committee can use in calculating specific costs.

COMPENSATION

When congregations approach an interim period, the temptation is often to try and save money. Most interims are contracted for the same cost to the congregations as the previous settled pastor. Following are areas of compensation to consider when thinking through the full costs of having an Interim Minister:

- **CASH SALARY**

This is the amount of Compensation specifically declared as Salary, and not Housing & Utility Allowance. Many churches let the minister know what the total amount is available for Salary, Housing & Utility Allowance, and Social Security Offset, and ask the minister to determine how s/he would like it divided.

- **HOUSING & UTILITIES ALLOWANCE**

Churches are asked to provide either a parsonage OR a housing allowance. The Housing and Utility Allowance includes rent and/or mortgage payments, plus all utilities (e.g., gas, electric, water and sewer, telephone, cable, internet, sanitation and garbage). Housing & Utility Allowance is taxed at a different rate than Salary. Therefore, the specific dollar amount requested as Housing & Utilities Allowance is usually set by the minister in a resolution that must be approved by the governing board.

- **SOCIAL SECURITY OFFSET**

(This is figured at 7.65% of cash salary and housing.) Its inclusion is negotiable with an interim pastor. If included as an item, it is also used in calculating the pension. The IRS considers this as taxable income and it should be shown as such on a Form W-2.

BENEFITS

Benefits are not considered Compensation, like most employees who receive benefits.

- ***PENSION***

Total of Cash Salary, Housing & Utility Allowance, and Social Security offset is multiplied by 14%. If the interim pastor is already retired, you cannot contribute to his/her pension. However, you can contribute to a tax-deferred annuity in lieu of paying pension dues. This will keep the congregation from reducing its sense of what competent leadership will cost.

- ***HEALTH INSURANCE***

The Disciples' Pension Fund no longer has a Churchwide Health Plan. Therefore, clergy health insurance is covered either through a partner/spouse, or through the insurance market – either privately, or through the Affordable Care Act/ Marketplace Nebraska. The church should include a budget amount to provide health insurance coverage for the minister.

- ***TAX-DEFERRED ANNUITY***

Retired clergy, who often serve as Intentional Interim Ministers, opt for a Tax-Deferred Annuity since they can no longer contribute to the Pension Fund. Calculating a tax-deferred annuity can be difficult. It is suggested you consult the Regional Office or the Pension Fund.

CHURCH BUSINESS EXPENSES

See if your church's board has a policy statement regarding Church Business Expense reimbursements. The Interim Minister will need to follow that policy so that reimbursable expenses are calculated correctly, and are not seen as taxable income.

- ***AUTO ALLOWANCE***

This business expense needs to be an accountable and reimbursable process, otherwise the minister will face difficulty. The mileage rate set by the IRS each year and can be found by searching the internet or contacting the Regional Office. The church may set a monthly dollar amount for budget purposes, but the pastor will need to provide appropriate monthly documentation within 60 days of the incurred expense to receive mileage reimbursement.

- ***CONTINUING EDUCATION***

Interim Ministers may wish to participate in Continuing Education events (e.g., conferences, retreats) and/or engage in their own studies (e.g., on-line courses). Within a negotiated amount, this should be provided on a cost reimbursement basis with the expenses being reported to the church.

- ***BOOKS*** 

Within the budgeted amount this, likewise, should be provided on a cost reimbursement basis with the expenses being reported to the church.

- ***MOVING EXPENSES***

Your Interim Minister may need to move some/all of her/his furniture to the community where they will now be living. If so, you will want to negotiate what assistance is necessary and/or appropriate. Most interim pastors are willing to work with a congregation to minimize this expense. Be clear with the church board about the moving expenses you intend to provide for your candidate.

