

**The Interim Journey at
Coeur d'Alene First Presbyterian Church
Adopted by the Session 04/27/10
as its Guide for Understanding the Stages and
Processes "In the Interim"**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE PERIOD BETWEEN THE DEPARTURE OF A LONG-TERM PASTOR AND THE CALLING OF THE NEXT INSTALLED ONE CAN BE A VERY PRODUCTIVE TIME FOR CONGREGATIONAL REFLECTION, GROWTH AND CHANGE. IN THIS COMMUNICATION YOU'LL FIND DESCRIPTIONS OF THE REASONS TO HAVE A TRAINED, INTENTIONAL INTERIM PASTOR, THE STAGES THAT A CONGREGATION GOES THROUGH DURING THE INTERIM PERIOD, AND THE TASKS THAT A TRAINED INTERIM IS EXPECTED TO ADDRESS.

"Why the Need for an Interim Pastor?"

Having an Interim Pastor following the departure of a called minister is certainly *not* a new phenomenon. *What has changed is the nature of the training of – and expectations for – the interim.* In prior years, interims were often retired pastors who, were primarily responsible for "holding things together" and providing the essential pastoral services until the next called pastor was on board. In the past twenty-five years or so the trend has been toward considering the interim period as a vital time for congregational change, reflection, and -- hopefully -- even growth.

As part of this change, most interim pastors became *intentional* rather than *convenient*. In the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) this means that in addition to being seminary trained and serving in called assignments for at least some period of time, an interim is required to take two weeks of denominationally-approved training, with the weeks separated by twelve months of on-the-job-training. Pastor Bill received week one training in Federal Way, WA, in the summer of '06, and week two training at Zephyr Point Presbyterian Conference Center on Lake Tahoe in the summer of '07.

What Exactly is Considered the *Interim Period*?

Organizations and researchers who study such things, have identified eight stages in what they call the "Interim Journey." These stages are as follows:

Stage One: Termination

This stage takes place when the previous pastor leaves.

Stage Two: Direction Finding

During the second stage presbytery leadership is consulted for help in securing interim leadership. The CDA First PC session assigned this task to a Long Range Planning Team who – after a comprehensive search process – recommended that Pastor Bill be contracted as the Interim Pastor.

Stage Three: Self-Study

CDA First PC was ahead of the curve on this stage as a consequence of several years of extensive self-study, including the "Journey of Discovery" process, and utilization of consulting teams or groups related to the building of a new sanctuary (or not), and other factors. Upon its formation the Pastor Seeking Committee (PSC) – as the group charged with drafting the *Church Information Form* that is used in the pastoral search process --will not need to redo this good work, but will need to seek to assess how the congregation has changed and is continuing to change.

Stage Four: The Search for a New Pastor

This step should not begin until the congregation has clearly focused its identity, a process which will be assisted by the work of the Interim and through the completion of the PC(USA) *Church Information Form (or CIF)* – see Stage Three.

Once the *Church Information Form* has been completed and approved by both the Session and the Presbytery’s Committee on Ministry, then the Pastor Seeking Committee (PSC) can begin to solicit resumes, called *Personal Information Forms (or PIFs)*, from prospective candidates for CDA First’s pulpit.

The PC(USA) *Office of Vocation* also provides a computer matching service which links the priorities that congregations have listed in their CIF with the functions and priorities pastors have listed in their PIFs. This linking system may find the perfect match, but it never replaces direct contacts, referrals, reference checks, etc.

An additional invaluable resource for everyone involved in the pastor-seeking process is the booklet *On Calling a Pastor: A Manual for Churches Seeking Pastors* (Revised Edition), which is published by the Church Leadership Connection unit of the Office of Vocation, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Each member of the Pastor Seeking Committee will be given a copy of this guide.

Stage Five: Decision

An exciting yet critical and anxiety-provoking time is when the PSC believes it is ready to ask the Session to call a candidate or candidates for filling the pulpit on a called/installed basis. Obviously this is not a one-sided process, as the ministers who are candidates are also considering the congregation, the community, and other factors, and they may be weighing one congregation’s desire to call them with other prospective calls. Part of the determining factor in such decisions is, of course, the “terms of call,” which leads us to the next stage in the process.

Stage Six: Negotiation

This is the stage during which the local church [in our case of course this is CDA First PC] and the Presbytery’s Committee on Ministry liaison seek to finalize such factors as the details of salary, benefits, and the proposed starting date.

Stage Seven: The Arrival and Installation of the New Pastor

This stage may vary in length from a few weeks to a few months from the time of acceptance of the offer to the actual beginning of ministry here.

Stage Eight: Startup

This is when the pastor officially begins, marking a new chapter in the congregation’s life.

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During stages two and three, the Intentional Interim Pastor is charged with working with the Session and other bodies within the church on Five Developmental Tasks, which are described as follows:

##### **TASK 1: COMING TO TERMS WITH HISTORY**

Pastor Bill remembers a sermon illustration given by the Chaplain of Alma College in Michigan who – prior to going to seminary – had been a civil engineer for the City of Detroit. His responsibility was to lead the work team that dug the underground tunnels for the city’s needed infrastructure. He noted that every morning before they began digging, the team took two soundings. One sounding went all the way back to where the tunnel began, and the second went all the way ahead to where the tunnel would end. His point was that without knowing where they’d *been*, they had no chance of accurately and successfully completing their work.

Similarly, a congregation has had a beginning some years earlier, and its history is an important contributor to its present and its future.

#### **TASK 2: DISCOVERING A NEW IDENTITY**

CDA First PC is not the same congregation it was prior to Mike's retirement. It is not the same congregation it was during the summer when a variety of wonderful ministers and lay folk filled the pulpit. It is not even the same congregation it was when Pastor Bill began in September of this past year. In short, it is clear that the congregation is in transition, but it is not clear as yet what it is in the process of *becoming*.

#### **TASK 3: LEADERSHIP CHANGES DURING THE INTERIM**

It is not unusual for a change in pastoral leadership to bring about changes in the lay leadership of a congregation, as well as in staff positions. Sometimes extensive structural changes need to be made in the congregation's way of doing things.

In Presbyterian congregations certain transitions in lay leadership occur naturally given the term limits for serving as an elder or a deacon. Changes in life circumstances also contribute to changes in lay and/or staff positions. We have certainly experienced this already since Mike's departure and, although additional changes are not currently planned, we should not be surprised if a change transpires.

For example, since Pastor Bill has arrived Session composition naturally changed as a result of one class completing its term (2009), and another being elected (2012).

For whatever reasons, this congregation had not been following Presbyterian polity as detailed in the Book of Order in various aspects of its "way of doing things." Seeking to bring congregational practices back in line with the "Presbyterian way" is one area demanding Pastor Bill's time. He is grateful for the cooperation and affirmation he has received to-date in this regard.

#### **TASK 4: RENEWING DENOMINATIONAL LINKAGES**

Although it is common for a few individuals within a congregation to have strong ties with the Presbytery, Synod, or councils or committees of the General Assembly, a majority of members are not clear about the role of these governing bodies in the selection of a pastor for that congregation. The reality is that the Presbytery – through its Committee on Ministry – has a role in approving the congregation's Church Information Form, and designated members of the Committee on Ministry meet with candidates who reach the stage of serious consideration.

The Presbytery Executive or his or her designee, is also typically active in checking references from the Presbytery in which the pastor has already served, and talks with the executive of that Presbytery – whether or not that person has been listed as a reference.

#### **TASK 5: COMMITMENT TO NEW DIRECTIONS IN MINISTRY**

As the interim journey progresses, the congregation becomes more ready to move into the future with a new pastoral leader. Congregational self-study has clarified the congregation's sense of uniqueness as a faith community. Members have become aware of new opportunities for service, while at the same time affirming what is good and well established in the congregation's life and program.