

## Some Thoughts on Interim Ministry from an Interim Pastor

First, let us define our terms. Interim means both the time of transition between installed persons serving the congregation and the pastoral transition of leadership. Interims, by design, fill space and make space. They fill space by providing a person to serve faithfully in the pastoral office. A primary task of the interim is to reduce possible anxiety in the congregation by continuing to provide pastoral presence and care. This is important because the average call process takes nine to twelve months.

But interims also create space. They provide an intentional transition between what has been and what might be. They provide a structured break. This break provides space and time for grieving . . . and for hoping. Thus, if the interim person entertains the call or is granted it by the synod, they all, by definition, work against the interim task of filling space and making space.

In addition, if the prior pastor returns while the interim is still serving the congregation, that former leader's presence can also work against the interim process. It does this by filling the congregational space with an old emotional field. Unfortunately, this occurs sometimes because the office of the interim is valued less by clergy than a regular call. This, I think, is an oversight by the Church and is slowly changing.

Thus when the interim is understood as a helpful, regular component of congregational life, and when it is empowered through the bishop's office to fill and create space, the congregation can focus in a non-anxious way on blessing both the past and the future as they seek a new called leader.