

STRENGTHENING CHURCH MINISTRIES

The Strategic Interim Pastor Ministry

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With complexity of the pastoral ministry in the realm of the local church there is a need for a common sense way of helping churches with special care for *recovery* and the *interim period*. There have been good men that have helped churches that were in a crises mold or that needed help in finding the next pastor for their church.

In the past there has been very little written to help these good men of God, to do a work that sometimes seems impossible concerning some churches. They have done the best that they could with their experience, education and hard work for those churches that were in need of a preacher or pulpit supply. Churches have used different kinds of temporary pastors during interim periods in the past. Today there are some proven methods that other churches have used and had good success with in such times. They are teaching their pastors and churches how they can work through their time of emergency or in between time with pastors. This is not a cure all for every church and their problems, but a way to help them to work through them with the help of a trained man of God. This would be a preacher that has the tools and training, to guide churches in their reality of the help that they really need, to be their best for God's glory.

Understanding Strategic Interim Ministry:

1. The ***pulpit supply pastor*** is often a retired person who speaks on Sundays and leaves the rest of the ministry to a staff or leadership team in the church.
2. The ***traditional interim pastor*** is also usually retired and typically serves a church on a part time basis for a short period of time. This person comes with specific strengths and interests that serve as the core of his ministry. As with the pulpit supply pastor, the goal of the traditional interim pastor is to maintain the ministry until a permanent, pastor is called.
3. A new ministry, however, is that of the ***Strategic Interim pastor***. The chief difference between the **Strategic** Interim pastor and a pulpit supply pastor who serves on weekends or a traditional interim pastor who often serves on a part-time basis or for a few months at a time, is the nature of a planned interim ministry. This person helps the congregation examine key areas of church life that pertain to the interim period which is for a predetermined period of time set by the church and interim pastor. He also performs all the other duties of church ministry: administering the communion, conducting weddings and funerals, giving pastoral care, and helping lead the church through the various boards and committees that exist already in the church.

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There are five main phases that this kind of ministry will need to go through if the church decides to accept the **Strategic** Interim pastor, to help them get ready for the new permanent pastor in the future. There is also a need for these men that will serve in this position to be

trained by someone that has experience and training with helping other churches through these areas and have had good success.

The five phases of Strategic Interim pastor are:

I. Examine the church History with Honesty.

"I have but one lamp by which my feet are guided, and that is the lamp of experience. I know of no way of judging of the future but by the past." (Patrick Henry)

- When a pastor leaves for whatever reason there is a time for healing or rejoicing in most cases and to put the church into a good perspective of the past. There must be a time of letting go of the former pastor, before the church can see where it is really at in many areas of its ministry. It is only when a church can let go of one pastor that they are able to seek and call the next. There must also be complete honesty within the church members if they are will to have a closure with pastor and the people.
- Honest examination will show all the good as well as the bad, the ups and downs of the churches ministries from its beginning. Each pastor has had an impact upon the church members and the ministries over all.
- This is not just the history of the last pastor, but all of the pastors from the beginning of the church, until the last.
- There should be rejoicing over the victories and healing over the defeats that the church can remember about the past.

II. Analyze the church Leadership and Organizational Structure.

- Who is serving where in the leadership of the church is very important to the present and the future of the ministry.
- If the current leadership has any issues that need to be addressed this is the best opportunity for that to be done.
- It is very difficult for a new pastor to even consider changing the leadership of the church, for fear of what will happen.
- There must be a godly, servant leadership in the church for it to function well at this and all other times.
- The present leadership may have served a long time and with a great heart and motives.
- But there are in many churches those who should have resigned a long time ago for the churches sake.
- The church should be willing to develop new and sometimes younger leadership from within its membership.

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A. Evaluate leadership styles:

1. There are many good books on leadership styles that are for the church today.
2. With this evaluation the church should again look at the past pastors leadership style and the leadership styles of all the officers and teachers that are presently in place at the church.

3. Even when the church votes on a pulpit search committee those who will be leading this group of church members should be known for a servant leader's heart.

III. Reassessing Independent Baptist Connection.

- Many congregations have often learned to see the church through the eyes of its former pastor in relationship to other Baptist churches, independent or otherwise.
- With increasing polarization of theological differences, even in the independent Baptist churches, it is crucial that each local congregation clarify its main theological belief.
- A congregation that does not deal with this aspect of its life runs a strong risk of calling a pastor who does not align theologically or philosophically with the congregation.
- This can be a devastating experience for the pastor as well as the congregation and lead to severe congregational conflict, even if both call themselves independent Baptist.
- The **Strategic Interim** is a good time to do this Rethinking, before starting the new pastor search.
 - **Reconnect with independent Baptist.** One of the realities of modern church life is that many people who are members and friends of a local church are not necessarily familiar with the broader independent Baptist family. A person's interest in the pastor, staff, and programming of the local church may not necessarily translate into an awareness of wider ministries and great resources which independent Baptist have to offer.
 - **Connect together with the Likeminded.** Though we are independent, we are also interdependent for fellowship and association with like minded independent Baptist churches and ministries and yet independent. All groups of independent Baptist (and so called), are in reality having some sort of interdependence upon each other whither they admit it or not.
 - **There are many different independent Baptists.** Even though we are "independent" and each have a philosophy of how they do the ministry in each church, we need to know what that philosophy their methods consists of. And if the church has gone away from that way of doing ministry as they once did, they need to ask themselves if they want to continue in that direction, before calling the next pastor.

IV. Clarifying Your Identity and Vision as an Independent Baptist

- Most independent Baptist churches would be a lost, if a visitor would ask them their Identity and Vision for the church.
- Periodically churches should ask themselves questions that give fresh insight into their purpose, direction and what it is that distinguishes them from other churches in town.
- This is a good time to conduct a study about the church membership and the surrounding community to see what has or has not changed in the past ten years or more.
- Is the church ministries effective at the present as it was in the past, there may need to be a rethinking of ministries that are not working and to start new one that will reach and serve the neighborhood.

- This Strategic Interim time would be an opportune time to go through this process.
- Many churches have no vision for the lost and only have single vision inward into its own membership, which will be very dangerous and self-centered. Proverbs 29:18 says, "Where there is no vision, the people perish."
 - **Discuss issues of mission and vision.** In the *Strategic Interim* time you not trying to redevelop and rework the missions program of the church, but to seek a fresh vision of the church and its overall mission. It's letting the members take part in the identity of the church and become part of its vision with a mission. This done of course with God's word and His leading through the church as a whole.

V. Loyalty to the New Pastors Leadership.

- After the church has completed the four phases above they are now ready to move forward with a pastor search and seek candidates that are in line with the churches ministries, mission and vision.
- During this phase of the Strategic Interim, the congregation prepares to receive a new pastoral leadership and makes arrangements for call, installation, and start-up for its new pastor.
 - **Prepare for the next chapter in ministry.** Helping a church examine its history is the first thing an intentional interim pastor does. Helping a church prepare for the next chapter is the last thing he does. Usually this preparation begins after the new pastor has been called. It begins by referring to the new pastor by name and preparing for the beginning of his ministry.
 - **This is a task that can be filled with anticipation and excitement.** Working together, the Planned Transitional Interim pastor and the congregation can talk about ways to welcome the pastor and his family.
 - **Time to exit with love and confidence.** This last phase of ministry is also a good time for the Strategic Interim pastor to prepare to make a good exit. Like John the Baptist, the interim must decrease so the newly called pastor can begin to increase.

These crucial phases of a congregation are vital for any church that wants to be their best for the Lord and the next pastor. If these phases are done thoroughly with participation by members of the churches, the possibility for effective ministry with a new pastor are greatly enhanced.