

# **Transition & Interim Ministries**

**Southwestern Washington Synod  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

**2019**

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## **Transition and Interim Ministry in the Southwestern Washington Synod**

*"Now that Pastor Blake is no longer with us, what will we do to keep our congregation going?"*

The answer to such a question may be found in the person of an "Interim Pastor", or a "Transition Pastor".

*"An Interim (or Transition) Pastor is an ordained clergy who is called to serve Christian community with special needs, unique concerns, for a defined interval."*  
(A Manual for Interim Pastors, Easter 1985)

### **What happens when a pastor resigns?**

In most ways, the congregation continues to function in its normal way. Worship services will usually continue on the same schedule as in the past, sometimes with "pulpit supply" until an Interim or Transition Pastor can be scheduled. Provision will be made for pastoral care to visit the sick or shut-ins and perform funerals, weddings and other normal pastoral services.

### **What is Interim or Transition Ministry?**

Interim or Transition Ministry is a time between, a time to reflect on where we have been; a time to discover some things about ourselves; a time to renew and refresh ourselves; a time to map new journeys, devise new challenges, dream new dreams; a time to reclaim who we are and whose we are.

### **What does a Transition or Interim Minister do?**

An interim pastor is one who, in the absence of permanent pastoral leadership in a congregation, comes as a specialist sent by the Synod to:

- preach the Word of God to situations of change,
- teach the faith in ways to help us start again in our common ministries with new enthusiasm,
- guide us with counsel and encouragement through difficult decisions,
- bring insight and experience for renewal of ministry.
- faithfully celebrate the Sacraments

Interim and Transition Pastors live "in the field," sustaining the life of the congregation wherever needed, doing specialized ministry directed at healing, examination, conflict-solving, direction-setting, and the coming of the new pastor. They may be in a parish for six months or more, depending upon the need relative to the health and vitality of the congregation. Some are full time, ordained pastors who do interim and transition ministry as intentional specialized ministry. They are sojourners, just passing through, using their special skills for the specific concerns of the congregation.

According to the ELCA Model Congregational Constitution specifies in \*C9.07: "During the period of service, an interim pastor shall have the rights and duties in the congregation of a regularly called pastor and may delegate the same in part to a supply pastor with the consent of the bishop of the synod and this congregation or Congregation Council. The interim pastor and any ordained pastor providing assistance shall refrain from exerting influence in the selection of a pastor."

### **Why is the Interim or Transition time important?**

- It allows a congregation to re-discover its own identity and purpose aside from its permanent pastoral leadership;
- It gives a congregation time to resolve matters and problems it hasn't had the time or occasion to address;
- Often the Transition Pastor assists the congregation with special skills many pastors are unable to develop in long-term ministry;
- It gives a congregation breathing space so it can become more deliberate in the selection of its next pastor;
- And it allows the congregation to study its past and present situations so that it can confidently develop ministries for its future.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has also responded to congregations that need Intentional Interim Ministry by creating a procedure for receiving interim pastors. The Synod Office can provide information that will assist you in your interim pastoral needs.

When the congregation calls its permanent pastor the Interim or Transition Pastor will leave, to serve another congregation in need. Interim and Transition Pastors are not available for a call

to the congregation in which they have just completed interim or transition ministry, nor are they directly involved in the call process for a permanent pastor. The congregation may wish to honor the Interim or Transition Pastor before he or she leaves in recognition of their work there. At this time, the connection with the ministry of the congregation is concluded.

## **GUIDELINES FOR TRANSITION AND INTERIM PASTORAL MINISTRY**

Congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America periodically experience transitions in pastoral leadership. Synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America provide for the care of congregations during a time of pastoral vacancy through the appointment by the bishop of the synod of an ordained minister to provide pastoral care on an interim basis. A Transition and Interim pastor is appointed by the synod bishop with the consent of the congregation or the Congregational Council (C.9.06). Pastoral care is then provided on a contract basis, either through appointment or a term letter of call. The following policy statement describes the guidelines by which interim and transitional ministry is provided to congregations.

### **Congregations in Transition**

Because of the importance of the ministry of Word and Sacrament, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America seeks to insure appropriate pastoral leadership for congregations during a time of pastoral vacancy. Ministry is provided by synods during the time of transition following the completion of service by the congregation's former pastor and prior to the calling of a new pastor. This is also provided for in a congregation served by a multi-pastoral staff when a senior pastor leaves, or when an associate pastor or other pastoral staff leaves. The transition period is thus a time in which the synod provides pastoral care for a congregation as they move through a process of self-study and change toward new pastoral leadership. A congregation facing the normal range of congregational concerns related to pastoral transition may be served by an Transition Pastor without additional formal training. The synod bishop arranges for the congregation to receive Word and Sacrament leadership during the period prior to the regular calling of a pastor through the appointment of an transition pastor. An appointed Transition Pastor assumes the rights and duties in the congregation of a regularly called pastor and may delegate the same in part to an 'interim supply pastor' with the consent of the synod bishop (S.14.17). The Transition Pastor normally serves the congregation in a contracted and compensated arrangement. A congregation in a situation of significant concerns and stress related to a pastoral transition may benefit from the leadership of an experienced and trained Interim Pastor. Situations in which this is particularly appropriate include the transition following a long pastorate, a congregation facing new mission opportunities and/or a changed

context for ministry, a transition following the resignation of a pastor related to disciplinary action by the synod, or a transition marked by significant discord or upheaval within a congregation.

## **Appointed or Called Transition and Interim Ministry**

A Transition or Interim Pastor may either be appointed by the synod bishop or may serve under a term call extended by the Synod Council (7.41.1 1.b.) Generally, calls to transitional or interim ministry may not be extended by a congregation. A pastor serving either under appointment by the bishop or under a term Letter of Call normally serves the congregation in a contracted and compensated arrangement. Unless previously agreed to by the Synod Council, a Transition or Interim Pastor is not available for a regular call to the congregation served during this time of transition and shall refrain from exerting influence in the selection of a pastor. C9.07.). An Interim or Transition Pastor who is on the retired roster of Word and Sacrament Ministry is contracted by the congregation, with the approval of the synod bishop. They are not called to this position.

## **Guidelines for CALLED Interim or transitional Ministry**

1. A called interim or transitional pastor shall provide a minimum of a quarter-time ministry (at least 10 hours per week) to the congregation with commensurate compensation in accordance with synod guidelines, and consistent with the ELCA guidelines for shared-time calls. A call to interim ministry shall be primarily for the benefit of the congregation served, not for the status of the ordained minister. Such a call may either be a term call to a specific congregation, or a term call to interim ministry in the synod. The determination of this will be with the concurrence of the congregation being served.
2. Prior to being eligible for a call to Interim Ministry, the pastor shall normally receive appropriate training for interim ministry. The Domestic Mission Unit of the ELCA will review interim ministry training programs and serve as consultant to synods in evaluating such programs.
3. Only pastors who have served in a regularly called congregational ministry for a minimum of three years are eligible to serve in a called interim or transitional ministry.
4. The interim or transitional ministry agreement between the congregation and the called interim pastor will specify compensation, benefits, and the specific goals and expectations related to the period of interim ministry. A sample agreement and current compensation rates will be given to the congregation council, as well as a compensation spreadsheet for each interim candidate considered by the Synod Office.

5. In issuing a call to interim or transitional ministry, the synod assumes no responsibility for guaranteeing continuous employment, compensation, or benefits for the pastor under call (ELCA Constitution 7.43). It is understood that compensation and benefits are normally provided entirely by the congregation or ministry setting being served. Where possible, continuity of Portico Benefits will be advocated by the synod. It is explicitly understood that the synod is the calling agent and not the employer of record at any time during the service of an interim pastor under call from the Synod Council.
6. Calls to interim or transitional service within a synod is often issued for a one to three-year term of service, with an annual review by the Synod Council. The call may be terminated by agreement of two of the signing parties- the pastor, the congregation Council or the Bishop of the Synod. A term letter of Call issued by the Synod Council may also be coterminous with the duration of service within the congregation served (7.43). The term call may also be terminated by action of the Synod Council. A pastor may resign a call to interim or transitional ministry at any time.
7. Initial issuance of a call to interim or transitional ministry by the Synod Council shall be upon the recommendation of the bishop. The initial interim or transitional ministry agreement with a congregation may be reviewed by the bishop or synod staff prior to the acceptance of the contractual arrangement by the interim pastor.

### **Guidelines for Appointed and Contracted Transition Ministry**

1. An appointed and contracted Transition or Interim Pastor is authorized to provide Word and sacrament ministry to a congregation by the Synod Bishop with the concurrence of the Congregational Council. The Transition pastor assumes the rights and duties in the congregation of a regularly called pastor. The appointed interim pastor may delegate the same in part to an interim supply pastor with the consent of the synod bishop. (S 14.17.).
2. A retired pastor or pastor on leave from call who serves an interim ministry is recommended by the bishop and signs an interim ministry agreement with the congregation which provides for the compensation, benefits, and the specific goals and expectations related to the period of interim ministry.
3. Normally, only pastors who have previously served in a regularly called congregational ministry for a minimum of three years will be eligible to serve in an appointed interim ministry.
4. Contact the Southwestern Washington Synod Office for compensation and written agreement.

## LITANY OF WELCOME OF INTERIM/TRANSITION PASTOR

*Leader: A church family is constantly changing. Loved ones come to the end of their lives. Individuals come and go in our church life. It is important and right that we recognize these times of passage, of endings and beginnings. Today we share the time of welcome with Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ whose time as our Interim (or Transition) Pastor begins. Pastor \_\_\_\_\_, in the presence of this congregation will you commit yourself to this new trust and responsibility, and promise to discharge your duties in harmony with the constitutions of the church?*

*Pastor: I will and I ask God to help and guide me.*

*Leader: Will you love, serve, and pray for these people of God, nourishing them with the Word and Holy Sacraments and lead them forward during this important time of change?*

*Pastor: I will and I ask God to help and guide me.*

*Leader: Will you lead this people of God in giving faithful witness to the Word of God and in making known the love of God through loving service among themselves and in this community?*

*Pastor: I will and I ask God to help and guide me.*

*Leader: Almighty God, who has given you the will to do these things, give you the power of his Spirit so that you may perform them with strength and compassion.*

*Congregation: AMEN.*

*Leader: I ask all of you, now, people of this congregation, will you receive this messenger of Christ, Pastor \_\_\_\_\_, who continues the work of bringing the Gospel of hope and salvation? Will you regard him/her as a fellow servant of Christ and work with him/her in the ministry of this congregation?*

*Congregation: WE WILL AND WE ASK GOD TO HELP & GUIDE US.*

*Leader: Will you pray for him/her and honor him/her for his/ hr work's sake and in all things strive to live together in the peace and unity of Christ?*

*Congregation: WE WILL AND WE ASK GOD TO HELP & GUIDE US.*

*Leader: By your statements of commitment and the affirmation of this congregation, we welcome you as interim pastor of this congregation in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.*

## LITANY OF FAREWELL for Interim/Transition Pastor

*Leader: A church family is constantly changing. Loved ones come to the end of their lives. Individuals come and go in our church life. It is important and right that we recognize these times of passage, of endings and beginnings. Today we share the time of farewell with Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ whose time as our interim pastor ends.*

*Pastor: I thank the congregation of \_\_\_\_\_ Church, its members and its friends, for the love, kindness, and support shown to me over these last \_\_\_\_\_ months. I ask your understanding and forgiveness for mistakes I have made and for expectations unmet. I am grateful that my leadership has been accepted. With joy I recall the many things we have been able to accomplish together and with sadness the many things we were not able to accomplish together.*

*Congregation: WE RECEIVE YOUR THANKFULNESS, AND WE OFFER OUR FORGIVENESS FOR ANY FAILURES, AND OUR THANKS FOR ALL ACCOMPLISHMENTS. WE ACCEPT THAT YOU NOW LEAVE US TO MINISTER ELSEWHERE. WE EXPRESS OUR GRATITUDE FOR YOUR TIME AMONG US AND ASK YOUR FORGIVENESS FOR OUR SHORTCOMINGS AND SOMETIMES FLAGGING FAITH. YOUR INFLUENCE ON OUR LIVES WILL NOT LEAVE US EVEN THOUGH YOU DEPART FROM US.*

*Pastor: I forgive you your failures and accept your gratitude, trusting that our time together and our parting are pleasing to God and to the Christ we are called to serve.*

*Leader: Do you the members and friends of \_\_\_\_\_ Church now release Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ from the duties of interim pastor?*

*Congregation: WE DO, WITH THE HELP OF GOD.*

*Leader: Do you offer your encouragement for Pastor \_\_\_\_\_'s continuing ministry?*

*Congregation: WE DO, WITH THE HELP OF GOD.*

*Leader: Do you, Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ release \_\_\_\_\_ Church from turning to you and depending upon you?*

*Pastor: I do with the help of God.*

*Leader: Do you offer your encouragement for the continued ministry here at \_\_\_\_\_ Church?*

*Pastor: I do with the help of God.*

*Leader: Let us pray.*

*Congregation: GOD, WHOSE EVERLASTING LOVE FOR ALL IS TRUSTWORTHY, HELP EACH OF US TO TRUST THE FUTURE WHICH RESTS IN YOUR CARE. THE TIME WE WERE TOGETHER IN YOUR NAME SAW OUR LAUGHTER AND TEARS, OUR HOPES AND OUR DISAPPOINTMENTS. GUIDE US AS WE HOLD THESE CHERISHED MEMORIES BUT NOW MOVE IN NEW DIRECTIONS, UNTIL THAT TIME TO COME WHEN WE ARE COMPLETELY ONE WITH YOU AND WITH EACH OTHER, IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST WE PRAY. AMEN.*

*Leader: Go now, Pastor \_\_\_\_\_, surrounded by our love and led by the promises of God, the presence of Jesus Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Amen*

*Eternal God, we thank you for \_\_\_\_\_ and for our life together in this congregation and community. As they have been a blessing to us, so now send them forth to be a blessing to others; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.*

## INTERIM/TRANSITION PASTOR EXIT REPORT

*Interim/Transition Pastor* \_\_\_\_\_ *Phone* \_\_\_\_\_

*Address* \_\_\_\_\_

*Congregation Served* \_\_\_\_\_

*Address* \_\_\_\_\_

*Reason for Interim* \_\_\_\_\_

*I Served this Congregation From* \_\_\_\_\_ *To* \_\_\_\_\_

*Summary of situation when you arrived:*

*Summary of present status of congregation:*

*Summary of interim/transition experience:*

*What difficulties were dealt with during the transition period?*

*How might synod staff have provided additional support during the transition period?*

*Additional comments:*

*Are you willing to serve again as an transition/interim pastor?* [  ] Yes [  ] No

*If yes, when?*

*Date* \_\_\_\_\_ *Signed* \_\_\_\_\_

# Maintaining ELCA Benefit Coverage In Times of Transition

When a call ends or starts, there are plenty of details and emotions to sort through. Let Portico help ensure that benefits don't add to the complexity. In times of transition, it's important for each party involved — pastor, current congregation, and new congregation — to contact Portico right away.

## When a Call or Assignment Ends

<p><b>Pastor</b></p>	<p><b>As soon as a change is anticipated, call Portico at 800.352.2876.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't wait until dates and details are pinned down. The sooner Portico is notified, the more options there may be to keep ELCA benefits active.</li> <li>• Next call or assignment unknown? Portico will explain next steps, which may include reviewing monthly costs to continue health coverage, or contacting Securian Life to continue supplemental life insurance.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Current Congregation</b></p>	<p><b>As soon as the pastor's end date is known, report it on EmployerLink.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sign in to <i>EmployerLink.PorticoBenefits.org</i> and go to <i>Resources &gt; End of Call or Employment</i>.</li> <li>• The end date is the pastor's last working day plus accrued vacation.</li> <li>• Portico will email the pastor with next steps after the end date is reported.</li> <li>• If Portico receives a start date from a new congregation and hasn't received an end date from the current congregation, Portico will contact the current congregation to confirm the call is ending.</li> <li>• Portico cannot administer severance packages.</li> </ul>

## Before a New Call Begins

<p><b>New Congregation</b></p>	<p><b>Before the new pastor's start date, report it on EmployerLink.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sign in to <i>EmployerLink.PorticoBenefits.org</i> then go to <i>Resources &gt; Enrollment Center</i>.</li> <li>• If the start date has not been reported, ELCA health benefits will end on the pastor's end date at his or her former congregation. The pastor and eligible family members won't have active coverage until the start date is reported.</li> <li>• If there are fewer than 31 days between the end and start dates, Portico will waive the cost of health coverage during this time. However, this is only possible once the new congregation reports the start date.</li> <li>• If Portico is notified after the start date, benefits will be reinstated retroactively.</li> </ul>
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**Don't wait for the pastor's first day!  
Contact Portico up to 60 days in advance.**  
You have an impact on the new pastor's benefits before he or she even starts. Early reporting is critical to avoid a gap in health coverage and a potential situation where a claim is denied.

## Maintaining ELCA Benefit Coverage in Times of Transition, Continued

<b>Special Circumstances</b>	
<b>Sponsored Couples</b>	<p>Nearly 1 in 10 sponsored plan members is part of a sponsored couple — that is, when both spouses are pastors or other church employees sponsored in the ELCA benefit program. Contact Portico to discuss specifics about how a change in call or assignment works for a sponsored couple.</p> <p><b>Portico Customer Care Center</b> 800.352.2876 <i>mail@PorticoBenefits.org</i></p>
<b>Interim Ministry</b>	<p>Interim ministers often experience more frequent transitions between calls or assignments. Portico has a dedicated point person for interim ministers and their congregations.</p> <p><b>Andrew Feller</b> Portico Customer Care Service Recovery and Innovation 800.352.2876 ext. 4060 <i>afeller@PorticoBenefits.org</i></p> <p>Tip for interim ministers: As you near the end of your assignment, please share this document with the incoming pastor to help ensure a smooth transition into his or her new position.</p>

Find the most current version of the ELCA Health Plan summary plan description on myPortico at [PorticoBenefits.org/summaries](http://PorticoBenefits.org/summaries). The plan document of the ELCA Medical and Dental Benefits Plan is the full, legal description of the plan. Your rights under the plan are governed by the plan document. If the summary plan description is found to be inconsistent with the plan document, the plan document will be considered the controlling document. A copy of the plan document is available from the Portico Customer Care Center. Portico reserves the right to change any term of the plan through the amendment or termination process described in the summary plan description.