

# Intentional Interim Ministry: Resource for Regional Council

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L'Église Unie du Canada

Intentional Interim Ministry: Resource for Regional Council (December 2021)



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## About This Resource

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This resource is directed to the regional councils of The United Church of Canada. It answers the question: What are our responsibilities regarding intentional interim ministry?

This resource largely contains recommended ways to live out mandatory policies and procedures found section I.1.10 in *The Manual*. You are encouraged, but not required, to follow the best practices outlined in this resource. It provides best practices that offer guidance, information and recommendations for following the mandatory policies and procedures.

This is one in a series to guide the church in the area of intentional interim ministry. The other resources in this series are as follows:

- *Intentional Interim Ministry: Policy and Procedures for Designation*
- *Intentional Interim Ministry: Resource for Governing Body of Community of Faith*
- *Intentional Interim Ministry: Resource for Transition Teams*

## Intentional Interim Ministry Policy

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The policy for Intentional Interim Ministry is outlined in *The Manual* I.1.10:

### **I.1.10.1 Meaning**

The purpose of “interim ministry” is to work toward specific goals decided on by the community of faith and regional council. An interim ministry is a time-limited ministry in a community of faith.

An “intentional interim minister” is a member of the order of ministry or designated lay minister who has been designated by the Office of Vocation to serve in interim ministry.

### **I.1.10.2 Designation as Intentional Interim Minister**

The Office of Vocation may designate a member of the order of ministry or a designated lay minister as an intentional interim minister.

The Office of Vocation must be satisfied that the person

- a) has suitable skills and disposition for interim ministry; and
- b) has, or is taking, appropriate training and education for interim ministry.

The designation is valid for the duration of the initial appointment of the intentional interim minister.

### **I.1.10.3 Terms of Interim Ministry**

The regional council may approve a community of faith for interim ministry on the community of faith’s request, or in any case where the regional council decides that interim ministry is appropriate.

The regional council and community of faith must decide on

- a) the needs and goals for the interim ministry;
- b) the terms of the appointment; and
- c) the processes for accountability of the interim ministry during the appointment.

### **I.1.10.4 Transition Team**

The search for an intentional interim minister is conducted by a transition team. This team consists of

- a) one or two representatives of the regional council, elected by the regional council; and
- b) four to six representatives of the community of faith, elected by the community of faith or its governing body. They must all be full members of the United Church and members of the community of faith.

#### **I.1.10.5 Appointment**

The process for appointing an intentional interim minister to the pastoral charge is set out below. The transition team, community of faith governing body, and regional council are each responsible for completing the steps of the process assigned to them.

- a) **Recruitment:** The transition team recruits an intentional interim minister and recommends their appointment to the community of faith governing body.
- b) **Recommendation:** The community of faith governing body recommends an intentional interim minister for the interim ministry to the regional council.
- c) **Decision:** The regional council makes a decision whether to appoint the intentional interim minister to the community of faith.

#### **I.1.10.6 Evaluation after Initial Appointment**

The Office of Vocation must evaluate the effectiveness of the intentional interim minister after the initial interim ministry appointment. The transition team submits evaluations of both the interim ministry and the intentional interim minister. If the Office of Vocation is satisfied that the person is effective as an intentional interim minister, the designation is continued. It is valid for as long as the intentional interim minister is in an interim ministry appointment and for five years thereafter. The Office of Vocation may remove the designation.

#### **I.1.10.7 Serving Community of Faith after Interim Ministry**

The intentional interim minister may not serve the community of faith in any call or appointment immediately after their appointment as intentional interim minister ends.

## Introduction to Intentional Interim Ministry

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Intentional interim ministry (often referred to simply as interim ministry) is an opportunity for a community of faith to take an intentional time out to seek spiritual and organizational renewal, to rediscover its identity, and to revitalize its mission. The regional council has a vital role in encouraging a community of faith to choose intentional interim ministry and in supporting the process during that time. A community of faith in need of intentional interim ministry is especially vulnerable, so it is vital to pay careful attention to communication, to pastoral care needs, and to expectations and the details of the contract with the intentional interim minister.

### When Is Interim Ministry Necessary?

Interim ministry assists with transitions of all kinds. Some of the primary ones are

- disagreements and tension that have become obstacles
- serious trauma, such as sexual or financial misconduct
- the departure of a long-tenured (10+ years) minister or the death of a minister
- inadequate finances for the community of faith's life and mission
- major changes in the demographics of the community of faith or its surrounding community
- the desire of a community of faith to rediscover its identity and mission or to move in a new direction in its ministry

Interim ministry is essential for communities of faith that are in crisis. Trained ministry personnel will lead the community of faith through its feelings of anxiety, struggle, pain, anger, and grief to a place of healing and readiness for the next stages.

Interim ministry is also of benefit to any community of faith that wishes to manage change intentionally for a stronger, healthier ministry and future.

### What Is the Intent of Interim Ministry?

A period of interim ministry may lead a community of faith to

- a clearer understanding of who the community is and how its past has shaped its identity
- discernment of God's call and renewed strength and leadership to respond
- energy and wisdom to make decisions about its future
- deeper connection to the surrounding community and to the United Church

### Who Decides on Interim Ministry?

Interim ministry may be requested by the governing body of a community of faith, recommended through a community of faith profile, or required by the regional council.

### **How Long Is an Interim Ministry?**

Intentional interim ministers are appointed for a specific, limited time. In the United Church, the norm is two years. An appointment can be longer or shorter depending on the goals set for the interim ministry period and the community of faith's readiness or resistance. An appointment may be extended for a specific time, at the request of the Transition Team or the governing body or by decision of the regional council, if more work on the goals is required or more time is needed to anchor new behaviours.

### **Who Are Intentional Interim Ministers and What Do They Do?**

Intentional interim ministers are experienced ministers with special training who have been designated by the Office of Vocation of the United Church. They will lead a community of faith to understand itself better with spiritual discernment and practical tools specifically chosen for its circumstances and needs. Interim ministers do not come with a predesigned template to fix all the problems, nor is the success of the interim ministry the sole responsibility of the interim minister. They guide the community of faith in the development of its ministry.

### **What Is an Intentional Interim Minister's Compensation Package?**

Intentional interim ministers have specialized skills and training, so the minimum salary is at least 10 percent above the minimum for the applicable category. If they are not relocating for the appointment, additional compensation for commuting is normally paid (as a taxable benefit). The community of faith is required to make an annual payment to the United Church's Interim Ministry Sabbatical Fund. The rest of the compensation package is as it would be for an appointed minister.



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## Benefits of an Intentional Interim Ministry

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The regional council plays a key role in advocating for, educating about, and laying the foundation for interim ministry in a community of faith. To do this, staff and those within the regional council with responsibility for oversight of communities of faith need to be informed about the value and role of interim ministry. Communities of faith may be resistant to interim ministry, viewing it as judgment or as a punishment. A frequent response to the suggestion of interim ministry is “We’re not *that* bad.” The regional council can help a community of faith welcome interim ministry as an opportunity rather than as something to be feared or dismissed.

Where there is or has been a crisis, failure to deal with the aftermath can have an enduring impact on the community of faith. Such trauma does not go away by itself. Lamenting, healing, behaving constructively, building or rebuilding trust, and communicating effectively and with care are all stages toward a healthier future. When the community of faith is in disarray, it may have difficulty seeing the need for an interim time or finding a way forward. The regional council can persuade the community of faith about or require an interim ministry.

An interim ministry can also be beneficial when there is no obvious crisis, particularly after a long-term pastorate (10+ years) or when the community of faith is exploring new directions in mission and ministry.

### What if an Intentional Interim Minister Is not Available or Affordable?

When the issue is affordability, the regional council might consider a financial subsidy to allow for the appointment of an intentional interim minister.

An intentional interim minister may not be available for every community in need of one, or for a particular location. If the community of faith, the governing body, and the regional council are able to manage change intentionally, a transition team, including representatives from the regional council, would still be appointed to guide the process.

Working with the transition team, two possible options are:

#### Appointment of a Supply Minister and a Consultant

A supply minister and a consultant are most often appointed when an intentional interim minister is geographically distant. They are perhaps retired or acting as a consultant with several communities of faith.

They would meet with the transition team and the community of faith face-to-face two to four times a year, and otherwise electronically.

The role and involvement of the supply minister and the relationship between the supply minister and the consultant must be spelled out clearly and explicitly. In some agreements, the work is divided between an experienced supply minister who does the regular tasks of ministry

(worship and preaching, education, and pastoral care), and the consultant who works with the transition team to manage the change process. In other agreements, the consultant acts as a coach to the supply minister, who then has a more hands-on role in the transition work.

### **Use of United Fresh Start Process and Facilitators**

[United Fresh Start](#) is designed to facilitate a healthy beginning to a pastoral relationship, but it includes a number of modules that can be very helpful for congregations in transition. United Fresh Start facilitators might offer appropriate modules for a community of faith to initiate discussion, education, and planning.

## Preparing for an Intentional Interim Ministry

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Interim ministry may be initiated by the governing body of a community of faith, a regional council, or a community of faith. The regional council and the governing body consult with each other to determine the expected length of time for the interim ministry.

### Goals

The regional council works with the governing body of the community of faith to set goals for the interim ministry. These goals outline the work that the community of faith will be engaged in and are specific to its needs and direction. Initially the goals can be somewhat general; the transition team will refine them to make them sufficiently particular and practical to guide the work ahead.

In general terms, five Focus Points guide the work of interim ministry:

1. **Heritage:** reviewing how the community of faith has been shaped and formed
2. **Leadership:** reviewing needs, organizational structure, and development of effective and new leadership
3. **Mission:** defining or redefining values and purpose
4. **Connections:** discovering all the relationships a faith community builds outside of itself
5. **Future:** developing community of faith profile

(These Focus Points were developed by the [Center for Congregational Health](#) and are foundational in the training offered by the Interim Ministry Network.)

The goals for the interim ministry usually draw from these Focus Points as well as other priorities.

### Regional Representative(s)

The regional council appoints one or two representatives to the transition team. If there are two, one should be a layperson, and the other ministry personnel. They do not need to be members of the regional council, but they will be in regular communication with it. It is helpful if the representatives have some familiarity with the community of faith; for this reason, they are often neighbours.

The regional representatives are people who

- listen well and deeply
- work as cooperative members of a team
- have educated themselves about interim ministry and about the process
- offer different perspectives and consider differing points of view
- draw on their own experience as a guide without treating it as definitive
- are comfortable with differences of opinion and are able to remain relatively calm in conflict

- consider first the well-being of the community of faith they are working with
- know the United Church and its polity, and the Christian story

They contribute to the transition team by

- providing an arm's length/balcony view of the community of faith
- listening and sharing their knowledge and experience to support the transition team in its work
- acting as a bridge between the transition team and the regional council
- representing the wider church

Regional council representatives are not required to attend every meeting. However they are expected to read the minutes and the presence of one is required for significant decisions, including recommending initiating formal updating of the community of faith profile and the search process. They are expected to contribute to midterm and final reports and evaluations. Attendance may be in person, electronically, or by conference call.

The role of representative to the Transition Team is different from that of a pastoral relations liaison. A liaison's role is limited, primarily providing support. A representative to the Transition Team is fully engaged in the work of the team, although they may not attend every meeting.

### **Community of Faith Profile**

If a community of faith was in a search process when the decision to have interim ministry was made, that work stops. Often interim ministry includes a community of faith profile process.

### **The Search Process**

With the guidance of the regional council representatives, the transition team selects an intentional interim minister. The regional council will arrange a covenanting service.

The search for ministry personnel to serve after the interim ministry will be initiated by the community of faith on the recommendation of the Transition Team and in consultation with the regional council.

## The Role of the Regional Council Representative

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The regional council representatives contribute to the transition team by

- providing an arm's length/balcony view of the community of faith
- listening and sharing their knowledge and experience as appropriate
- acting as a bridge between the transition team and the regional council
- representing the wider church

The regional council representatives communicate regularly with the regional council on the well-being of the community of faith and the progress being made on the goals.

The regional council representatives support the work of the intentional interim minister. They help the minister regain objectivity if the minister is getting caught up in the system, and can provide a sounding board.

As members of the transition team, the regional council representatives must read and familiarize themselves with *Intentional Interim Ministry: Resource for Transition Teams*. Along with the intentional interim minister, they will be looked to for knowledge, education on process and polity, and wisdom.

The transition team will provide a mid-term review to the regional council halfway through the interim period. This provides a more formal progress report than the regular communication from the representatives. The regional council then has an opportunity for timely intervention as required, either through or alongside the representatives.

If there are concerns regarding the governing body of the community of faith and its functioning, the regional council needs to provide additional support for the intentional interim minister.

## Preparing for the Future

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Once the community of faith has made decisions about its future mission and ministry, and has done sufficient work on its other interim goals, the transition team makes recommendations to the governing body of the community of faith and the regional council. It may recommend one or more of the following:

- a community of faith profile, in preparation for a call or appointment; once the profile has been completed, the regional council will initiate the search process
- negotiations with other communities of faith or agencies with a view to amalgamation or some other form of partnership in mission
- discussions with the regional council about selling, redeveloping, or renovating property
- any other appropriate measures to prepare for the future of the community of faith

If, by four months before the end of the interim appointment, the community of faith has *not* made decisions about its future mission and ministry and/or has not done adequate work on its interim goals or has not sufficiently integrated that work, the regional council, in consultation with the governing body, decides what appropriate action needs to be taken to ensure that the community of faith addresses its future needs. Such action might include the following:

- providing additional expert support for conflict resolution or planning
- providing support to assist with selling property, or amalgamating or disbanding
- extending the interim appointment
- planning for another specialized appointment following the interim period

## Concluding an Interim Ministry

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Four months before the end of the interim ministry the transition team prepares for the evaluation process; the regional council may wish to give input through its representatives.

Two months before the end of the interim ministry, the regional council

- receives and reviews the evaluation report of the interim ministry
- adds any comments on the circumstances of interim ministry situation and forwards the evaluation to the Office of Vocation for reference
- receives the evaluation of the interim minister's work during the appointment and forwards it to the Office of Vocation
- evaluates the current state of the community of faith
- ensures that the community of faith has the human resources and tools to move forward in its new mission

### Exit Interview

At the end of an interim ministry appointment, an exit interview is conducted by one or two representatives of the regional council (which may include the pastoral relations minister) and the Office of Vocation minister. It is helpful if one of the interviewers has interim ministry experience or training. The interview team can tailor the process to the circumstances, consulting the suggestions below.

### Preparation

The team reviews the evaluation from the transition team (and the evaluation from the intentional interim minister, if a separate one has been written) and determines the issues to be addressed. One of the interviewers takes notes.

### Questions

The interview concentrates on the progress on the goals of the interim ministry and the health, well-being, and future of the community of faith. Discussion points might include the following:

- What were the goals? How well did the community of faith achieve these goals? What were the roadblocks to achieving them? How did you facilitate the community's work on them? Did these goals change, and if so, why?
- What did you learn about the community of faith's systems, and what information needs to be included in a report to the next ministry personnel?
- What, in your view, are the strengths of this community of faith?
- What do you see as the main goal or objective for this community of faith as it moves ahead to the next phase of its ministry?
- Ask for clarification or expansion on any issues raised by the file.

The interview also provides an opportunity to debrief with the intentional interim minister. You might ask:

- How are you feeling at this point in the interim appointment? What were some of the high points and low points?
- What have you learned? What new skills have you developed? What gifts have you received in this appointment that you will carry into your next ministry?
- What does the region and/or Office of Vocation need to be aware of in our work with transition teams and intentional interim ministers?
- Do you have any additional comments or questions?

### **Follow-up**

The note-taker prepares a report summarizing the interview, which is circulated to all participants for editing and approval. Copies of the exit interview summary (except for the summary of the debrief portion of the interview) are shared with the regional council, the Office of Vocation minister, the intentional interim minister, the governing body, and incoming ministry personnel. The Office of Vocation minister will ensure a copy is placed in the personnel records and reviewed by the Credentialing Committee of the Office of Vocation.