

The Incredible Ministry of the Interim Pastor

When done right and well, the relationship between a pastor and his people is profound. The pastor serves as the voice of God through his preaching, teaching, comfort, and care. Deep bonds are built through good times and bad. Shared events such as sports competitions, recitals, graduations, weddings, births, trips, retreats, family fellowships, and funerals deepen the pastor/people relationships. Then comes a time no one wants to consider. The pastor resigns, retires, moves on, or goes to heaven. The church is saddened or perhaps stunned by the void he leaves. What are they to do? How will the church go on? Who will become the next pastor?

Many churches today have enjoyed the same pastor for very many years. Most pastors are quite stable in their tenure, serving faithfully in the same church for decades. Churches may not have searched for a new pastor for 30 or 40 years. Perhaps no one in lay leadership has been through a season without a pastor or led in the search process for a new pastor. *Churches in these and other circumstances should seriously consider calling an interim pastor.*

Who Serves as an Interim Pastor?

Most often an interim pastor is a seasoned, mature, usually retired veteran, who along with his wife, brings a calming assurance to a church that “everything will be ok.” The interim pastor and his wife have enjoyed many years of local church ministry and have likely experienced just about every eventuality in ministry. They are not easily discouraged or shaken. They have some good years left in ministry and desire to make the most of their senior years for Christ’s sake. When others might retire from active life, they press on to serve the Lord and help people. Gospel Fellowship Association has formed a capable team of interim pastors and wives, and we are always open to bringing on more like-minded couples. GFA is also happy to connect churches with fine interim pastors who are not officially connected with GFA.

What Does an Interim Pastor Do?

The interim pastor is a pastor during the transition. An interim pastor and his wife relocate to serve as a temporary pastor until the Lord leads a new permanent pastor to come. The interim pastor and his wife make a preliminary visit so that both the couple and the church can determine if a suitable interim plan can be worked out. If the church calls the interim pastor, he will serve for perhaps six months or more.

The church is not to get comfortable having an interim pastor. He may set a time limit on this tenure. He will not only preach for the regular services of the church but will also shepherd the flock as a regular pastor would. He will assist with church administration, visit those with special needs, provide counsel, and likely assist the pastoral search committee in its quest for new pastoral leadership. He will provide loving, stabilizing pastoral leadership and may be able to help resolve any pressing church difficulties. He has no interest in becoming the next pastor of the church, even if such an overture should surface.

Often the church people will so enjoy the interim pastor's ministry that they will want to keep him permanently. Therefore, it might be good to clarify publicly at the start that the interim will not be the next pastor. Normally the church's experience with an interim pastor and wife is a mutual blessing to both parties.

How Should an Interim Pastor and Wife be Cared For?

The church should do its very best to provide well for the interim pastor and his wife. Most pastors are not able to accumulate retirement wealth. In addition, they have chosen to leave the comforts of home and family to serve churches in transition. They should be shown a gracious and generous level of remuneration and provision for living according to the Bible's teaching on honoring God's man (1 Timothy 5:17-18).

If a church is able to pay a full-time pastor's salary, the church should be able to do something similar or special for the interim pastor. The church should provide a good comfortable furnished apartment or home that the leadership of the church would not mind living in. The bedding should be first-class and the heating and air conditioning systems in good working order. The church should find out from the interim couple the best arrangement for them regarding meals, whether they prefer to cook or eat out. The Lord will honor the church that honors His servants.

To listen to GFA's RE:CHURCH podcast on "Churches in Transition: The Stabilizing Influence of an Interim Pastor," go here. [link: <https://www.gfamissions.org/pages/for-pastors/podcastdetail/1/72/1>]

For more information about GFA's interim pastor program, call Dr. Marshall Fant at 864.609.5500.