

Churches show lasting benefits from intentional interim ministry, study says

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WINSTON-SALEM, N.C.—Churches that go through the intentional interim ministry process show lasting benefits, recent research has demonstrated.

The [Center for Congregational Health](#) examined churches 24 to 36 months after they completed the intentional interim process, paying particular attention to how it affected each church's new pastor.

Research included on-site interviews, telephone conferences and mailed questionnaires completed by pastors and transition team members.

In a questionnaire, pastors gave their new churches highest marks for clearly communicating shared expectations and for differentiating their congregational identity from the former pastor's personality and leadership style.

They also responded favorably to questions about whether they felt involved in their congregation's shared vision of the future.

When members of transitional teams were asked to evaluate their congregations, they generally described the health of their churches as improved or improving.

Les Robinson of the Center for Congregational Health saw the survey results as "affirming" the intentional interim process.

"Churches that go through the process seem more in touch with who they are as the people of God and who God wants them to be," Robinson said. "As such, they are in a better position to know what kind of pastor they need."

Pastors gave lowest marks to their new churches for having systems of training lay leadership for various ministry tasks and for incorporating new people into leadership roles.

"This is by far the weakest link," Robinson acknowledged.

Almost two-thirds of the respondents said their churches had no plan or program for training lay leaders. The center has created an advisory group to examine the issue of leadership development and to shore up that weakness, Robinson noted.

Most surveyed churches showed increases in nearly every readily measurable area. Membership grew 11 percent, with nine congregations gaining members and two decreasing in membership. Overall worship attendance increased about 9.5 percent, with eight churches experiencing growth and three measuring some decline. Church budgets grew overall by 4.5 percent, with eight churches showing a gain and three reporting a drop in giving.

The one exception to growth was in Sunday school and Bible study attendance. More than half of the churches reported a decline, with the overall decrease measuring about 6.5 percent.

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