

Intentional interim ministry: What good is it?

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Intentional interim ministry seems to be a best-kept secret. As a result, many churches are unaware of the clear benefits of engaging in the intentional interim process.

[Part 1](#) described when a church should engage an intentional interim and some things a church should know about the process. Part 2 describes the benefits of the process and how to know when the process is successful.

Who becomes an intentional interim?

One of the benefits and safeguards of intentional interim ministry is the longevity of ministry experience intentional interims are required to have to be credentialed by the Baptist General Convention of Texas. A few examples follow.

Lynn Eckeberger became an intentional interim after years on church staff. His experience is in enlisting, training and managing Christian education in the church and engaging people in missions. He was also a director of missions and on staff at the BGCT.

Rusty Walton is a retired senior pastor who sensed the same call to intentional interim ministry as he did to the pastorate. As Walton demonstrates, calling to intentional interim ministry is an important consideration.

Levi Price became an intentional interim because he “was doing a lot of interim work and desired to do a better job” with them. Intentional interim

training taught him how to “work through [churches’] problems and situations” more effectively.

How are churches improved through the intentional interim process?

“Differences are embraced rather than denied or silenced,” Eckeberger said. Everyone gets on the same page.

Churches who go through the process have restored and deepened fellowship leading to renewed hope for their future. They develop strategies for dealing with conflict.

“Perhaps among the best fruit is that the new pastor is welcomed into a church ready to step forward” into a new and shared vision, Walton said.

As a church begins to think more about its mission than the struggles of the past, despair and defeat give way to hope, and grieving gives way to a positive outlook, Price said.

How does a church know when the process is successful?

“The most common thing I hear from church members is, ‘Someone cared about what I thought’ or, ‘We got our voice back,’” Karl Fickling, coordinator of [interim ministry](#) for the BGCT, said.

Even when people don’t “get their way,” they feel heard and respected and “are on-board with church-wide decisions,” Fickling said.

Another indicator of success is that churches decide together rather than decisions solely being made by leadership and passed down.

When the intentional interim builds trust and transparency with the whole congregation, anxiety lessens and open and honest discussion begins, said Walton.

Each intentional interim brings unique gifts and affects the outcome in particular ways. “All of us who do this work are committed to the process. We believe in the process, but we have the opportunity to accomplish it in our own way,” Price said, which illustrates the significance of interviewing intentional interim candidates and examining their call.

In Price’s experience, churches begin to see the success of the process when they reach the mission focus point of the self-study. When the congregation sees and understands “its unique core values and begins to work to find the unique mission of that church,” the congregation becomes hopeful and positive in outlook and begins moving forward “to carry out the mission,” Price said.

What success looks like

To illustrate the success of the process, Eckeberger shared the following story.

“A group of more than 100 was meeting immediately after the morning worship service. Questions were being asked about a particular phase of the intentional interim process. A female church member in her 30s stood and waited to be called on.

“I have spoken my mind in previous meetings. In doing so, I spoke harsh words that were intended to clearly communicate my thoughts, but carried with them the intent to harm some of you. I was wrong. Some of those I hurt are no longer with us. I know it may be impossible, but God has made it clear, I must apologize to them as well. I need your help. Will you tell those you know I hurt that I am sorry and I want to say that to them

personally? Will you tell them I should have listened? Will you let me know who you tell so I don't leave anyone out? I thought I was supposed to win the argument, but I know I was not supposed to lose my brother or sister in the process. Please forgive me.”

“She hardly finished before fellow church members were embracing her in a huddle of hugs.

“The meeting lost its structure, but gained a sensitivity, transparency and collaboration, which yielded a fragrance of forgiveness and acceptance that never left the church for the remainder of the intentional interim process.”

What do leaders say about the intentional interim process?

Melanie Ayers, the administrator at Sterling Wood Church in Houston, echoes the descriptions of a successful intentional interim.

“During the transition, the intentional interim helped clarify our vision and surface issues that needed to be addressed,” she said. “The intentional interim provided stability and hope to a church that was reeling after the loss of our founding pastor.” In her role as the administrator, she felt the weight of that loss and the burden lifted by the intentional interim.

Sterling Wood was benefited in another way by the process. New young leaders were elected to the transition team. They took “tremendous ownership in the future well-being of our church and continued in leadership to make those dreams a reality,” Ayers said.

How do pastors who follow an

intentional interim evaluate the process?

Ross Shelton was called as pastor of First Baptist Church in Brenham at the conclusion of its intentional interim process. He describes the church as stabilized. Prior to the intentional interim, attendance and giving had decreased.

During the process, healing took place as “people were able to share their hurts and disappointments and, having been heard, were able to move forward toward a better future,” Shelton said.

Over time, the success of the intentional interim period are being demonstrated in “healthy patterns of thinking and behaving” and in perseverance. “Having been through a difficult season and an intentional interim, the church learned they can persevere with God’s help through difficult times,” he said.

While the process reduces anxiety, it doesn’t remove all of it. First Baptist in Brenham—like many other churches—still was anxious about the unknowns of a new pastor. In addition, not every issue is settled during the process. Some important discussions still needed to take place when Shelton arrived.

Describing the church, Shelton said: “Most of the people look back to the intentional interim time with fondness. For most, it was a time of relief from previous stress and an opportunity to dream and vision about the future.”

For more information, visit the [Interim Church Services](#) webpage or the [Intentional Interim Ministry](#) website.

When should a church engage an intentional interim? How is an intentional interim different from a traditional interim? What should churches know about the intentional interim process?

These questions are answered in [Part 1](#).

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