ABSTRACT

INTENTIONAL INTERIM MINISTRY:

ANOTHER TOOL FOR CHURCH REVITALIZATION

by

Ellen M. McCubbin

Intentional interim ministry has evolved from its beginnings of supply pastor ministry to a ministry that resolves issues within the congregation, creates new visions, and brings a congregation together, moving forward into God's preferred future for that congregation with a new settled pastor. This study is significant in demonstrating the effectiveness of Intentional interim ministers (IIM) in the North American Mainline Protestant Church. The study identifies activities performed by IIMs that have demonstrated success in revitalizing a church.

The purpose of this project was to discover transformational practices for leveraging intentional interim pastors to revitalize mainline North American churches. One hundred sixty-nine IIMs were directly involved in this research. Thirty of the one hundred sixty-nine IIMs were invited to a follow-up interview, with eight accepting and being interviewed via zoom or telephone. In addition, three of eight denominational leaders who were initially selected and invited to participate in this research responded and participated in the research. All participants were part of North American mainline protestant churches, representing The United Methodist Church, the Episcopal Church, The Presbyterian Church (USA), The United Church of Canada, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, the Disciples of Christ, the Baptist Church, and the United Church of Christ.

The study recommends changes at denominational levels that will result in better interim minister selection, support of the interim ministers, and provide additional educational offerings that intentional interim ministers need to continue being effective at revitalizing churches.

INTENTIONAL INTERIM MINISTRY:
ANOTHER TOOL FOR CHURCH REVITALIZATION

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of

Asbury Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Ministry

by

Ellen M. McCubbin

May 2023

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CHAPTER 1

NATURE OF THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

Mainline church revitalization is failing in North America. Many church revitalization programs have been launched and have not yielded the desired results. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a framework for investigating the use of intentional interim pastors to revitalize the mainline church. It lists questions guiding the research and key themes used in the literature review. This chapter provides a rationale for the project that evolved from personal experience and research. Included in the research project overview are the research design, purpose statement, research questions, and methodology.

Personal Introduction

I am a second-career United Methodist Pastor. My family has been Methodist for generations. I have a strong love for the Methodist church and have experienced profound sadness at the decline of many Methodist churches. Methodism was once known for its ability to make strong disciples of Jesus Christ, people who were active in tending to the need of their communities, as well as providing missions around the world.

My first career was in computer science. I was involved in the early years of object-oriented software development as both a researcher and implementer of the research software techniques. The theory behind object-oriented software is that it can be written in a way that can be reusable across many platforms and applications. Our team realized that much of the corporate culture needed to change to succeed in creating an environment in which object-oriented software could be used in diverse business

applications. In addition, I was responsible for turning around departments and organizations that were in decline. I believe these same business and technical skills can be of value in the revitalization of the mainline church in decline.

My call to ministry came as I was part of a very successful church plant. The annual conference supported the start but often verbalized their belief that we would fail. Literature on how to start a new church within Methodism seemed non-existent, save for the writings of John Wesley. Yet, using the strength of a small group of like-minded individuals who wanted to experience and serve a living God and the concept of everyone being involved in a small group, the church plant was (and still is thirty years later) highly successful. I was not the minister of the church plant, but I learned a lot from it as an active layperson.

During the time of significant growth in my local church, I felt God calling me into ministry. Given my computer science background, I was not sure what kind of ministry God would want me in, but I finally talked to our church ministers about this calling I was feeling. My pastors and the church leadership affirmed me in this calling. They provided tremendous emotional support through seminary until I was sent out to serve as a pastor in the North Carolina annual conference.

As an ordained elder in North Carolina, I have had the privilege of pastoring several one-hundred years old churches that were in decline. Some recognized that they were dying, and others could not see it. Yet the churches were full of faith-filled people. One of these pastorates was in deep grief and embarrassment, having experienced pastoral infidelity. Another pastorate had experienced trauma from actions taken by their pastor. I was an unintentional interim pastor. I fell in love with these people as I heard

their stories of why they were active at the church. They remembered stories of when the church was the center of the community. They longed to be known again as the best church in town. However, they tried revitalization programs recommended by the annual conference and failed. They have longed for young couples with children and failed to attract them. They were tired of failure.

The deep faith of these believers and their desire for a fruitful church that makes disciples of Jesus is worthy of our study. They want to live out their call. The key question is, can a church in decline turn around and become successful at making new disciples of Jesus Christ? I believe it can. The Church belongs to Jesus Christ, not the world. The Church is the Bride of Christ and will survive no matter what the world tries. In the past few months, as I have transitioned from full-time elder in the United Methodist Church to retired elder and intentional interim pastor, I have wondered whether the church can utilize intentional interim pastors to revitalize a church in decline. My history of being a lay person in a church plant and part of an organizational revitalization in the corporate world makes me believe this is possible. This project will investigate that question and provide recommendations based on the results of the investigation.

Statement of the Problem

The mainline Christian Church is in decline in North America. The Pew Research Center reported on October 17, 2019, that "43% of U.S. adults identify with Protestantism, down from 51% in 2009." In addition, David Kinnaman reported Barna Research numbers in 2019, indicating a significant decline (64%) in 18–29-year-olds who grew up in the church and are no longer active in a church as adults in the United States.

UM News (November 25, 2019) reported similar trends within United Methodism in their coverage of a report on membership data by the General Conference on Finance and Administration in November 2019. Kevin Dunn, the agency's director of data services, reported the overall drop in US membership was primarily due to members 'deaths. However, the overall loss exceeded the number of funerals. While the numbers above represent a ten-year decline, additional research demonstrates a fifty-year decline in the United Methodist Church.

Loren Mead, in the forward of Molly Dale Smith's book "*Transitional Ministry: A Time of Opportunity*" describes the origin of Interim Ministry as starting in the 1970s. Brad Miller points out that within twenty years, the Interim Pastor was "one of three key roles by which a person could most effectively intervene in the life of a congregation for long-term benefit." (Miller 2). Given the association of the interim pastor with positive long-term change in the congregation, it is reasonable to investigate the effectiveness of the intentional interim minister in revitalizing a North American mainline church in decline. This study examined interim pastors' success and failure in revitalizing North American mainline churches.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project was to discover transformational practices for leveraging intentional interim pastors to revitalize mainline North American churches.

Research Questions

The research questions were designed to investigate the effectiveness of intentional interim ministry practices in the revitalization of mainline North American churches.

Research Question #1

What intentional interim ministry practices are currently being used to revitalize mainline North American churches?

Research Question #2

What are the barriers to using intentional interim pastors in the revitalization of mainline North American churches?

Research Question #3

What approaches to intentional interim ministry best lend themselves to revitalizing a mainline North American church?

Rationale for the Project

First and foremost, this project matters because God created the church to tell the world about God and salvation through Jesus Christ. As the church is important to God, it is important to try to restore a declining church to a healthy disciple-making body of believers. Jesus Christ commanded his disciples to "go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:19-20 NIV). Early church history reflected in the Acts of the Apostles demonstrated the Church growing as news of Jesus spread to different towns and countries. It is reasonable to assume that church worship and administration differed in detail in these locations as the cultures differed. However, each church practiced worship which included teaching, baptism, the celebration of Holy Communion, the care of believers, and the ability of the believers to love and care for their non-believing neighbors.

The problem of the Christian church being in decline in North America has been known for a long time. The decline of a church is hinted at in Revelation, chapters two and three, but it was not indicated as a common occurrence. Currently, after years of programs like "seeker-friendly churches" and "contemporary worship," as well as online churches and "skinny jean" pastors, the church is no closer to success in revitalization than when we started. However, there are anecdotal stories of success in changing the direction of a church with an intentional interim pastor leading the church in change.

Loren Mead describes the five developmental tasks for interim ministers as coming to terms with history, discovering a new identity, implementing shifts of Power and leadership changes, rethinking and reconnecting to the denomination, and committing to new leadership and a new future (Mead, The Developmental Tasks, 2-7). Over the course of completing these five tasks, there is conflict management, reconciliation, and seeking the Holy Spirit's direction for the church.

As seen by this list, the role of the Interim Pastor can lead change in a congregation. Some of these interim-led changes can start a church on a path of revitalization. This project will examine the role of the intentional interim pastor in revitalizing existing congregations.

Definition of Key Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following terms are defined:

- Dying Church –Identified by the following symptoms: inability for its members to get along with each other, lack of newly baptized Christians (children and adults), lack of participation in discipleship training, lack of missions to their community

(inward-focused versus outward-focused), unwelcoming to newcomers, more talk about lack than abundance, and a desire to be served rather than to serve.

- Revitalize - Within the context of Christian Churches in North America, church revitalization means to reignite the love of Christ within an existing church, guide the church in defining a new vision, and create a successful plan around that vision so that new disciples of Jesus are made, nurtured, equipped and empowered to spread the Gospel in their community.

- Mainline church – For the purpose of this paper, Mainline Christianity in North America is represented by the Baptist Church (American Baptist, Southern Baptist, Cooperative Baptist, and Independent Baptist), the Congregational Church, the Disciples of Christ, the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Presbyterian Church, the United Church of Canada, and the United Methodist Church.

- Intentional Interim Minister - a ministry specialist hired during a time of transition in a congregation. The Intentional Interim Minister is hired to lead the congregation through issues that either led to a change in pastoral leadership or problems that keep a congregation from moving forward. The Intentional Interim Minister is also responsible for the ongoing ministry and responsibilities of pastoral leadership in the congregation. They are called for a specific purpose and period of time. For the efficiency of this dissertation, the Intentional Interim Minister is abbreviated to IIM.

- Covenant – Pastoral covenants are modeled after the covenants between God and God's people. Each side promises to do something for the other side. The

covenant may also include details in the contract and ways to reconcile differences between the congregation and the interim pastor.

Delimitations

The research for this project involved only North American mainline Protestant churches. The study included Intentional Interim or Transitional Pastors as defined by their church denomination polity, male and female over the age of eighteen. Research and interviews were limited in scope to the last twenty years,

Review of Relevant Literature

A thorough review of selected prior research pertinent to this study is found in Chapter 2. The literature review covered the biblical foundations of Intentional Interim Ministry, theological foundations including ecclesiology, the Trinity, incarnational ministry, interim ministry practices, barriers to change, and church revitalization practices.

Types of literature reviewed included books, journal articles, research papers, and web pages. Authors (like Loren Mead and Norman Bendroth) with twenty or more years of experience as an IIM wrote some of the books utilized. Journal articles were also written by experienced interim pastors like Ron Brown and Paul Svingen, who wrote about changes in interim ministry in *Clergy Journal.* Web pages contained published articles on leadership during times of transition by experts as well as pointers to denomination resources for intentional interim pastors., The researched themes included biblical leadership transitions, the impact of different ecclesiological systems on interim ministry, the application of Trinitarian theology to interim ministry, incarnational ministry, interim and transitional ministry, barriers to interim ministry, and church

revitalization. In addition, literature from the Alban Institute, the Intentional Ministry Network, the Interim Ministry Consortium of the PC (USA), and Transitional Intentional Interim Ministry Specialists (Southeastern Jurisdiction, United Methodist Church) was reviewed as it applied to interim ministry and revitalization.

Research Methodology

This project relied on quantitative and qualitative research methods to find how mainline North American churches have utilized IIMs to revitalize North American mainline churches in decline. This project utilized a multi-layer approach that included literature research, a continent wide survey, interviews of IIMs who responded to the survey, and interviews of denominational leaders who work with IIMs.

Phase one of the research involved detailed reading based on the relevant literature to create a detailed survey for IIMs. Phase two of the research involved the creation of the survey and interview questions. Phase three of the research involved locating IIMs to contact for the survey. Phase four of the research involved sending out the survey, evaluating the responses, and looking for common themes and methodology. Finally, phase five of the research involved interviewing eight IIMs who returned the survey and three denominational leaders responsible for interim ministry. In addition, the interviews allowed the researcher to explore common themes that could be reusable in other settings.

Type of Research

This project was a pre-intervention study in the descriptive mode. Using both qualitative and quantitative methods, the study involved a survey, interviews, relevant research, and the investigation of experiences of mainline protestant churches that used

IIMs to lead them in revitalization. The research led to conclusions about how to use

IIMs in church revitalization. Each step in the research can be found in detail in chapter

3.

Participants

The participants selected for this study were IIMs who came from various

mainline protestant denominations located in North America. In addition, three North

American denominational leaders who were involved in Intentional Interim Ministry

consented to an interview.

Instrumentation

The instruments used included a questionnaire developed specifically for this

project and disseminated through SurveyMonkey. Video and phone interviews were

hosted with Zoom and recorded with Zoom and an Aomago mp4 recorder as a backup.

Graphs and charts were created with Microsoft Excel and SurveyMonkey.

Data Collection

Data was collected via SurveyMonkey responses, followed by video and

telephone interviews with three denominational leaders and eight IIMs.

Data Analysis

All the information gleaned from the survey and transcripts from recordings were

coded and organized into a report of findings and translated into a list of

recommendations for ministry leaders and pastors seeking to utilize intentional interim

pastors in revitalizing a church in decline.

Generalizability

This study is by a woman with a history of revitalizing underperforming departments and businesses in the corporate world and who also loves churches with a history of making disciples of Jesus Christ. A strong faith initially built those churches. A strong faith can revitalize those churches into churches that make, equip, and empower disciples of Jesus Christ in our present time. God loves the church. After all, God gave the blood of God's Son to die for it. If God could love the church in Corinth with all of their problems, God can love, re-equip, and re-empower disciples in the church today that has forgotten how to make disciples of Jesus Christ. God can give the congregation the wisdom to proceed if they ask (Jas. 1:5).

This study acknowledges that change must happen for revitalization to occur in a church. This study also acknowledges that change is difficult to discuss and implement in a congregation accustomed to complacency. Much of what is discussed in this project is intended to be used in mainline church revitalization initiatives, including urban, suburban, and small town settings.

Project Overview

Chapter 2 includes an in-depth review of the selected literature. Chapter 3 details the process of developing the research questionnaires and conducting the video and phone interviews. Chapter 4 analyzes the findings of the study through interviews and questionnaires. Finally, chapter 5 provides my conclusions and recommendations for utilizing intentional interim ministers in revitalizing the North American mainline church.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

The end goal of this project is to identify if IIMs can be effective in the revitalization of the mainline North American church. The project addressed whether IIMs are currently being used in church revitalization and, if so, their effectiveness as church revitalizers. In addition, the project examined the barriers to success for an IIM as a church revitalizer. The literature review in this chapter contains the biblical, theological, and research topics for understanding the use of interim pastors as agents of revitalization in the established mainline church in North America.

The Biblical Foundations section addresses the leadership transitions seen in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. The Theological Foundations section explores the theology behind the use of IIMs. The research topics examine the concepts and components of intentional interim pastoral leadership, the challenges of initiating change as an intentional interim pastor, and church revitalization in North America.

Biblical Foundations

The purpose of this section is to examine leadership transitions in the Bible and recognize similarities between biblical leadership transitions and intentional interim ministry. The Bible does not refer to a leader as an "interim." However, the Bible does provide numerous examples of successful leadership transitions.

Old Testament

This section examines the Old Testament scriptures that deal with leadership change within Israel. It starts in Genesis with the creation story, moves to the wilderness

experience of the Israelites after the exodus from Egypt, the transfer of leadership from

Moses to Joshua, the transitions between Israelite kings, and the leadership of the

prophets while the Israelites were living in exile. It includes a short discussion on the

value of the psalms in times of transition.

God had a strategy in the order of creation that was crucial for the successful

transition of humanity to the Garden of Eden. For example, if Adam had been created on

day one instead of day six, then Adam would not have had any food or land to live on.

Cagle points out the importance of strategy in the success of IIMs based on the process

God used to create the world. The IIMs plan starts with helping the congregation with

their grief and fear of the interim time and gently moves them forward to needed change

and vision exploration. Attempting change before grief would be as unsuccessful as

putting humanity on the earth before there was land or food (Cagle 25-26).

Weborg calls interim ministry a ministry to the "between." It is an intentional

pastoral act between individuals and the leader or groups of people and the leader. He

pointed out the "reality of a between" as a prevalent theme in the Old Testament, starting

with the Israelites' exodus from slavery in Egypt into the wilderness, followed by the

wandering and settling in a new place each night until the Israelites entered Canaan. After

the Israelites entered Canaan, Weborg sees the Israelites living in the between as life

became a process of conquering and settling the land, becoming exiles, and returning to

Israel. During all of these times, the leaders of Israel were functioning as intentional

interim leaders (Weborg 4-6).

Morgan also identifies the time in the wilderness as an interim period when Israel

could "discover its identity and realize its mission" (Morgan 46). Leslie Robinson also

frames the Exodus story as a transition story from slavery to freedom. In the process of moving to the Promised Land, the Israelites are learning about God's will for them. While his leadership tenure was long, Moses was a type of IIM, teaching, training, and guiding the Israelites through the wilderness to the Promised Land. Moses was responsible for keeping their minds and hearts on Yahweh, which is a significant change from their previous life as slaves in Egypt, where the Israelites had no memory of their relationship with Yahweh (B.L. Robinson 235). Both William and Susan Bridges, and Nicholson argue that just as IIMs might need to employ consultants to help their congregation, Moses utilized Jethro (Exod. 18) as "the first organizational development consultant in history" (Bridges and Bridges Create Temporary Systems for the Neutral Zone). Jethro helped Moses reorganize his management by creating temporary decision-makers called judges (Nicholson 127). The Bridges' later contends that interim pastors and consultants working together can be effective in making necessary organizational changes (Bridges and Bridges Create Temporary Systems for the Neutral Zone).

The transition from Moses' leadership to Joshua, recorded in the books of Deuteronomy and the beginning of the book of Joshua, was relatively easy. It is thought that the transition was easy because Joshua served Moses for so long in what was essentially a mentoring relationship (Drummond). In addition to Moses' mentoring, the Lord told Joshua what he needed to do. God said, "Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful" (Josh. 1:7-8). Two

factors led to Joshua's successful leadership transition: a good and lengthy time of mentorship and a complete commitment to doing what God told him to do.

The nation of Israel was prosperous and militarily successful under Joshua's leadership. Unfortunately, Joshua and the elders who served with Joshua did not have a good transition plan, and the next generation "did not know the Lord" (Judg. 2:10). Chung writes that leadership transition is inevitable. The role of one leader must include planning and aiding in the transition to the next leader. A good leadership transition can produce prosperity, while a bad leadership transition can produce despair. This is often seen in interim ministry. Churches with a transition plan in place rarely need the services of an IIM unless there is conflict or misconduct. On the other hand, churches with long pastorates and no transition plan often need an IIM to guide them through that process.

After the time of Joshua, the succession plan for kings in the Old Testament was sometimes assassination (I Kings 15:29, 1 Kings 16:10-12). Not only was the king killed, but his family was also killed. The ego of the new king could not handle the memory of the previous king. Fortunately, assassination is not part of the North American pastoral transition plans. Still, Weese and Crabtree point out that the ego of the previous pastor or the ego of the next pastor can work against a healthy pastoral transition. A new pastor who tries to erase the legacy of the former pastor becomes a dividing factor in the congregation. King Rehoboam learned how costly a poor succession could be. In his case, he did not recognize that the people had not given him the authority they gave to his father, Solomon. When Rehoboam tried to exert his power, a rebellion happened, and the tribal alliance the Israelites had enjoyed under King David, and King Solomon was weakened forever. The people ended up being conquered, exiled,

and poor. The same danger exists for an IIM. While the interim contract may specify the

pastor's authority, only the people will determine if they will give the new, unknown

interim pastor the authority to do the job. Weese and Crabtree recommend that pastoral

transitions be treated like a "blended family" where the past is appreciated, and new

ministries are also created. The kings who had successful transitions kept their egos in

check, did not disparage their predecessors, were good to the people, and faithfully

followed Yahweh (Weese and Crabtree 20-29).

Brueggemann sees utilizing the psalms as a biblical tool for interim ministry. There

are psalms for each stage of interim ministry. For example, there are psalms of

orientation when everything is going well. Some of these psalms are Psalms 8, 36, and

119. Then there are psalms of disorientation when life is chaotic, and the congregation

needs an IIM. These psalms of disorientation include laments, anger, and shame.

Congregations that have experienced pastoral misconduct relate well to the psalms of

disorientation. Some of these psalms are Psalms 12, 25, and 51. These are psalms the IIM

can utilize and identify with as they start the work of healing and reorienting the

congregation to God's preferred future for them. An effective IIM begins their ministry to

the congregation with scripture that comforts the hurting congregation. Finally, there are

psalms of reorientation, which recognize God's grace and the corresponding thankfulness

of the people to God for that grace. Some of these psalms are Psalms 65, 46, and 50. In

addition, Brueggemann calls Psalms 22, 31, and 69 "literature of the interim" and

believes these psalms sustained Jesus during his "interim" period between teaching and

crucifixion. It is notable that as Jesus used the psalms in his ministry, IIMs should also

share them with their congregations, identifying with their pain and celebrations (Brueggemann 8-15).

Carter, discussing the transition experienced by the Israelites in exile, argues that Jeremiah saw the interim time as a time of building. Jeremiah told the Israelites to seek the welfare of the city they had been sent to, not sit around and do nothing (Jer. 29:4-11). Carter argues that just because a church is between pastors, the church does not stop its ministries. He also points out that God raised prophets for the "in-between" times for God's people. These leaders led the people in dealing with their grief from captivity and walked with them, reminding them of God's presence. For example, Nehemiah led his people out of captivity to the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. Amos' prophetic preaching, visions, and prophecies led the people in the Northern Kingdom as they adjusted to being in exile. Both Nehemiah and Amos utilized a preaching ministry to help their people through transition periods. All of these job responsibilities that Carter associated with the prophets to the people in exile are job responsibilities that are assigned to IIMs today (Carter 192-203).

Weborg argues that it is natural that interim times increase people's anxiety. The Israelite's anxiety was present not only during the exodus but also during the exile when the prophet Jeremiah advised the people to settle down, buy land and build their houses, as mentioned above. The Israelites constantly fought the temptation to worship idols throughout the Old Testament. Weborg credited Calvin with the thought that the desire to return to Egypt was an idol typical in the "between" time. During the "between" time, fraught with anxiety and unknowns, people tend to idolize the past. This idolization is common during intentional interim times and needs to be named as the idol it is (Weborg,

4-18). In his book *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times*, Steinke also identifies

anxiety as expected for a congregation during the "between" times. He points out the

importance of leadership and the congregation recognizing and naming anxiety as one

part of successfully dealing with the anxiety (10).

Isaiah 43:18-19 says, "Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of

old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will

make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert." Morgan points out that Isaiah

defines the exile time as an "interim" between the Israelite's past and their future. The

prophet gives the people in Isaiah the same directions an IIM gives their congregations.

IIMs, like the prophets, lead their congregations in the interim to learn from their past and

move into the future (Morgan 46-50).

Finally, in the 37th chapter of Ezekiel, Ezekiel is transported by the spirit of the

Lord to the middle of a valley. The valley was full of bones, the image of a battlefield

(Darr 1497) where the bodies were not collected and buried but instead left to be eaten by

wild animals and decay on the ground. Yahweh tells Ezekiel to "Prophesy to these bones

and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these

bones: I will cause breath to enter you and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and

will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and

you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord." (Ezek. 37:4-6, NRSV). As Ezekiel

followed God's command, the bones came back together again. However, there was no

breath in them. Again, Yahweh told Ezekiel to prophesy "to the breath," and Ezekiel did

as he was told. Life returned to the bodies, and Yahweh told Ezekiel that Yahweh would

open up the graves and return the people to Israel. This Old Testament story shows

Yahweh as the "God of revitalization and resurrection" (Henard 9). If God can take

decaying bones and bring life back into them, God can take a dying church and restore it

to health.

The biblical evidence of the Old Testament is clear. Not only is God with God's

people in the interim, but God calls out leaders to help the people function while they are

in unknown territory. These leaders always point the people to God and away from idols

of their own making.

New Testament

This section examines the New Testament scriptures that deal with ministry

transitions and challenges. The scriptures studied include the time period from John the

Baptist to the arrival of Jesus, Jesus' crucifixion to his ascension, Jesus' ascension to the

coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and the transition challenges experienced by the

churches in Ephesus and Corinth.

Morgan, using Mark 1:2-3, argues that John the Baptist's mission statement is a

"prototype" of an IIM. Like an IIM, John the Baptist's tenure was short but effective in

pointing people away from himself. Instead, John the Baptist was pointing people to

Jesus (Morgan 46). Weese and Crabtree see Jesus as an IIM in that Jesus followed similar

rules as an IIM. Jesus honored his predecessor, John the Baptist, as well as all the

prophets. Jesus understood John the Baptist's role as being preparatory to Jesus. Weese

and Crabtree believe that Jesus saw his own role as preparatory to the disciples. Jesus had

to leave so the disciples could receive the power of the Holy Spirit and the church to be

born. An IIM is wise to honor their predecessor, regardless of how they left the job. An

IIM also understands that when they have completed their term of service, they are

leaving the church healthier and must leave for the church to live into God's future (Weese and Crabtree 20-22).

In his article, "The Future of Intentional Interim Ministry," B. Leslie Robinson agrees with Morgan and with Weese and Crabtree in identifying John the Baptist as an interim leader because just like God called John to prepare the way for Jesus, IIMs are called by God to prepare the way for the next settled minister (B.L. Robinson 235). Alan G. Gripe believes that Jesus was a model for interim ministry because he never had a home, and his ministry was only three years. Jesus was constantly traveling, teaching the disciples to follow him in ministry. IIMs work a short tenure in the congregations they are called to and are available to travel to different locations (25).

B. L. Robinson equates the role of IIMs with Jesus' story of the wineskins found in Matthew 9:17. Jesus said, "Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out, and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved." B. L. Robinson sees the job of an IIM as leading the unhealthy church to identify and leave behind actions and beliefs that have hindered their ministry of making new disciples of Jesus Christ. B. L. Robinson sees this behavior as the "old wineskins." The IIM must help the church focus on the future, the new wineskins, instead of the past (236).

Roger S. Nicholson uses Luke 24 as an example of Jesus behaving as an interim pastor, working on the five developmental tasks Mead describes for an IIM. In the scripture narrative of Jesus appearing to some disciples on the road to Emmaus, Jesus, like an IIM, appears unexpectedly in the middle of their confusion and despair after the crucifixion. Jesus invites them to share their story. The act of listening is a way of helping

the disciples work through their grief. As Jesus listens, he also teaches the disciples. In

their uncertainty about the next steps they should take, the disciples shared their

vulnerability with Jesus, and Jesus responded by reminding them what the prophets said

about the Messiah. The use of scripture is comforting to the disciples, who invite Jesus to

a meal. As they are eating together, Jesus breaks bread with them, and suddenly the

disciples are able to recognize Jesus. Jesus then leaves them, and the disciples return to

Jerusalem and share that they have seen the Lord. The disciples have found new meaning

and identity in meeting Jesus. They are entering into a new future, one full of hope,

which Mead would call "renewing linkages." Leadership shifts from Jesus in person to

the Holy Spirit leading the disciples. Later, the disciples are committed to a new future as

Jesus blesses them and ascends to heaven (Nicholson 124-125).

In the same way, the IIM enters into a congregation and listens to their grief,

providing emotional support. The IIM uses the Bible to help the congregation see Jesus in

the midst of their grief and assists them in recognizing Jesus already in their midst.

Finally, the IIM leaves the healed congregation in the capable hands of a settled pastor

(Nicholson 123-124).

Weese and Crabtree discuss Jesus' question to the disabled man at the gate in

Bethesda (John 5:6) and find similarities in Jesus' actions and an IIM. Jesus asked if the

man wanted to be healed. They contend that the IIM poses this same question to the

church they serve. The IIM will ask the question of healing and listen to the stories but

not focus entirely on the grief. Jesus did not focus on why the man was disabled, but he

healed him, just as an IIM leads the church into God's healing and a healthier future. An

IIM is called to lead a church past its wounds into a positive future. They lead the church

in listening to God and finding the vision God has for the church. All the while, the IIM points the church to God for the credit in their healing and turnaround. The interim time is a time to emphasize what the church has to celebrate in its history and spiritual gifts, not what the church does not have. The IIM, using the church's spiritual gifts, leads the congregation in preparing for a future pastoral leader who will come to lead them (Weese and Crabtree 20).

Weese and Crabtree believe that Jesus was preparing the disciples for a future with the Holy Spirit leading them when he said, "Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father." (John 14:12 NIV). The closer Jesus moved to the cross, the more he shared about what would happen. For example, Jesus told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit. Weese and Crabtree point out that just as Jesus had a strategic plan for the disciples after the resurrection (stay in Jerusalem, wait, receive the Holy Spirit), the IIM also needs to work with the congregation in creating a strategic plan for their future. This plan must include a leadership transition strategy (Weese and Crabtree 22-23).

Weese and Crabtree point out that when leadership starts to recede, then dysfunction increases. IIMs are trained to enter dysfunctional churches and guide the church into the steps required to stop the dysfunction. At a point of significant vulnerability for all the disciples, Judas betrays Jesus, quickly followed by Peter denying Jesus. Jesus' arrest took him away from the disciples, and fear and dysfunction revealed themselves among the disciples. Weese and Crabtree point out that the IIM should expect dysfunction during the leadership transition. The apostle Paul prepared the church at

Ephesus for such dysfunction to occur when he left them. Paul said, "I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock . . . so be on your guard!" (Acts 20:29, 31 NIV). Weese and Crabtree believe that the strong presence of the leader holds back the dysfunction in a healthy church. However, dysfunction tends to be more visible when the strong leader leaves. Following Paul's advice to the church at Ephesus, Weese and Crabtree assert that a healthy approach to a pastoral transition does not deny the dysfunctional parts of the organization. However, the IIM must not focus all their time and energy on fixing the dysfunction. Instead, the IIM works with the leadership to develop a strategy to contain the dysfunction. Weese and Crabtree tie spiritual disciplines to managing dysfunction. The IIM leads the church to keep its eyes on God, stay strong in its faith, and exercise spiritual wisdom and humility. If the church follows the IIM in this work, then the church will be strong enough to resist spiritual dysfunction taking over. Weese and Crabtree call this time of transition for a congregation their "wilderness Gethsemane." Just as there was a resurrection after Jesus' death, there also can be a resurrection for the church after their wilderness transition experience. All that is required is that churches follow Jesus in their transition (Weese and Crabtree 26-27).

Romans 12:2 says, "But be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will" (NIV). Paul N. Svingen sees Romans 12:2 as an invitation to utilize Intentional Interim ministry to revitalize a congregation. In Paul's letter to the Romans, Paul reminds the readers of three facts that apply to the Romans and congregations in transition. Congregations in transition need to allow God to change their thinking and be

transformed by allowing God to lead them. This transformation occurs in Bible study, prayer groups, and fellowship time. Next, renewals need to be tested by the word of God. Finally, transitions can lead to God's "pleasing and perfect will" for a congregation (Svingen 7).

Jerrie Barber uses Paul's words to the church at Corinth in 1 Corinthians about people causing division in the church. Paul's accusation against the church in Corinth was that they were following a human instead of Jesus. In cases of church dysfunction, Barber, along with the other authors already mentioned, agrees that division or dysfunction in a church because of human personalities is a distraction from the church's mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ (7).

Weborg sees the apostle Paul as an IIM. In Paul's writings to the church at Corinth (I Corinthians 10), Paul told the people they were in interim times. While the time Paul appeared to be referring to was the time between Christ's ascension and his second coming, the problems the church at Corinth was experiencing were typical of the issues churches requiring the skills of an IIM are experiencing. Paul's advice to the Corinthians is similar to his advice to the Ephesians. They must stay the course and remain faithful to Christ in their beliefs and behavior (9).

Like Weese and Crabtree, and Weborg, Richard Morgan identifies Paul as an IIM. Morgan identifies Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 3:6 ("I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow") as a "powerful motif" for interim ministry (47). Paul worked for a limited time in each city before moving on and allowing others to perform the ministry after him. Paul knew that God called him to plant churches and then move on as the Holy Spirit equipped the local leadership to lead those churches. While an

IIM is not called to plant a church, the IIM knows that they are there for a specific time and purpose and then, like Paul, must move on.

Barber also sees the Corinthian church as a church that has the typical problems an IIM must address. He quotes 1 Corinthians 5:1-2 to show the effects of apathy in a church. The Corinthian church refused to address the sin in their midst, and that refusal was a barrier to growth in the church. Barber points out that IIMs must be able to recognize apathy and the outcome of apathy in a church. Paul was not only concerned with the man committing fornication in Corinth but also with the church, which did not address the sin. An IIM must be able to stand up to public sin and its effect on the church body (Barber 21-22). Barber recognizes the similarities between the Corinthian church and the dysfunctional church in transition. 1 Corinthians 12:26 says, "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it." Barber recognizes the family systems component of the local church in the Corinthian church. He interprets 1 Corinthians 12:26 as a call to acknowledge the problem in the family and for the family to change, lest the same symptoms appear in other family members (17).

The Bible is full of leadership transitions and leadership challenges. The Bible also leads us in our understanding and plans of action to navigate leadership transitions successfully. Intentional Interim Ministry, while not in those exact terms, occurs throughout the Bible, with the scriptures providing comfort in the midst of grief and direction for how to hear and respond to God when we have gone astray.

Theological Foundations

Simply hiring an intentional interim minister does not create healing in a

congregation or guarantee that the congregation is ready for a new settled pastor.

However, the act of searching for and hiring an IIM is an acknowledgment by the

congregational leaders that they need to look at themselves and their historic beliefs, as

well as engage in a time of intentional discernment for God's vision for the church's

future. Intentional interim ministry is built on a number of theological foundations. These

foundations include ecclesiology, theology of the congregation, the Trinity, and

incarnational ministry.

Ecclesiology

Brad Harper and Paul Louis Metzer define multiple types of ecclesiology in

Christian congregations today. First, high church ecclesiology emphasizes church history,

tradition, liturgy, and the Eucharist. These churches are generally structured episcopally.

Most of the time, these churches practice infant baptism as a sacrament of initiation into

the Christian church. Next, there is low church ecclesiology which de-emphasizes history

and tradition while emphasizing the Bible as the ultimate authority. The Eucharist is de-

emphasized in the low ecclesiology churches, and their polity is congregational. These

congregations only baptize adults. Third is strong ecclesiology, which sees the church as

the way God is at work in the world. The church is seen as the embodied presence of

Jesus in the world. In this ecclesiology, membership in the church is mandatory for

Christian life and salvation. Finally, there is weak ecclesiology, where the church exists

to strengthen and teach its members and to bear witness to God's work of salvation in the

world. The emphasis is on the church universal that all Christians belong to. The local

church in this ecclesiology does not see itself participating in God's action but points the world to what God is doing "outside of human effort" (Harper & Metzer 292-293).

The tasks of an IIM vary based on the ecclesiology of the church the IIM is serving. From Mead's work, the work of an IIM was understood to be very denominational. The hiring or placement of an IIM depended on each denomination's polity and procedures. Yet, the tasks of an IIM were remarkably similar across denominations. While the methodology in performing the tasks may be different depending on the denomination's polity, the depth of emotion felt by the churches being served by an IIM and the leadership transition tasks were the same across the denominations (Smith Forward).

For example, in the polity of the Episcopal Church, when there is no settled rector, the "legal reality is that the bishop serves as the rector" (Smith Chapter 11). The IIM acts with the bishop's permission in the congregation. In this polity, the bishop finds an IIM for the congregation. It is important that the interim pastor have a close relationship with the bishop or a judicatory official designated by the bishop to be successful in the job (Smith Chapter 11).

Nicholson also affirms that IIMs need to have strong denominational relations (Nicholson 55). The Christian Reformed Church (CRC) utilizes the nondenominational Interim Ministry Network for training. However, only ordained CRC pastors are eligible for interim positions in the CRC. The local congregation does the hiring of the IIM if they feel they need an interim pastor. However, the CRC cautions that the IIM must have the blessing of the church council, or the IIM will find themselves isolated and their

leadership ineffective because of the difficult questions the IIM must ask to lead the church through their transition successfully (Baker).

Within the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA), the use of an IIM is a decision made by the synod bishop with the consent of the congregation or the Congregation Council. The IIM has all the rights and duties of a called pastor and is unavailable to be called by the congregation to be the settled pastor. It is normal for the bishop to assign an IIM to an ELCA church during times of transition. Occasionally, a congregation has sufficient notice of their minister's departure (such as retirement) that the congregation can establish a call committee while the minister is still there, but this is rare. It is also difficult for the congregation to have a call committee while the minister is still there (Church Council of ELCA 21-28).

Within the Presbyterian Church, IIMs maintain profiles (Personal Information Forms called PIFs) with "the Church Leadership Connection (CLC), which is an Internet-based matching and referral system of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)" (Church Leadership). Churches looking for an IIM review these files, and post a church profile to the same location. IIMs review the church profiles, and either party can contact the other to start an interview process. Negotiations between the parties follow. The Transitional Ministry Education Consortium trains all Presbyterian IIMs. The IIMs are encouraged to work with the session leadership in establishing contractual terms and expectations with the presbytery.

The United Methodist Church does not discuss intentional interim ministers in its Book of Discipline, as the vocation of intentional interim ministry in the United Methodist Church is relatively young. However, appointments are made for IIMs the

same as for settled pastors. Bishops appoint IIMs to congregations in conjunction with a request from the District Superintendent for the district the church is located in with agreement from the local church. In the United Methodist Church, IIMs are called "Transitional Intentional Interim Ministry Specialists" (TIIMS). Training for TIIMS is available through the United Methodist Endorsing Agency (UMEA) and offered in jurisdictional events (Transitional Intentional Interim Ministry Specialists, section 9).

IIMs in the American Baptist Convention (ABC) are called Transition Ministers. ABC/USA Transition Ministries provides training for ministers who want to serve as transition ministers in the American Baptist Convention. While the requirements to be a transition minister in the ABC include recognition or standing in the denomination, as evidenced through listing in the Director of Professional Leadership in the ABC/USA, exceptions to this requirement are negotiable. ABC/USA Transition Ministries acts as a central coordinating agency for transition ministers and congregations needing an interim minister. Negotiations happen between the churches and the interim minister (American Baptist Churches USA).

Finally, the Disciples of Christ utilize their regional ministers to provide churches in transition with a list of acceptable IIMs. The church needing an IIM reviews the list of potential interim pastors and their resumes and decides on the IIMs they want to interview. Contract negotiations are solely between the potential IIM and the calling church. Disciples Home Missions provides training for all Disciples of Christ IIMs (*The Calling*).

In conclusion, depending on the ecclesiology of the denomination, the rules for calling an IIM are different and are continuing to evolve. D'Angio points out that the

lines are becoming blurred between interim and settled pastorates in some denominations. He notes a newer trend in the Episcopal and Presbyterian churches where designated pastorates are planned for three to five years. He sees an increase in the use of contract rather than tenured pastorates. D'Angio also reports the time of a settled pastorate is shrinking to between seven and nine years (D'Angio 2).

Trinity

Bill Henard points out that living in community is the biblical model illustrated by the Trinity and the New Testament Church (255). Barbara Bundick argues that the core of Trinitarian theology and the congregation is relational (26). In his book *Incarnational Mission: Being with the World*, Samuel Wells describes how the persons of the Trinity interact with each other. He identifies eight "dimensions" of the Trinity. The first is being present in the same place with each other. The second is attention, which becomes focused interaction. The next is mystery. A mystery is not entirely understandable to an outsider but "can only be entered, explored, and appreciated" (Wells Being With). The fourth dimension is delight. Delight is open to surprise and humor and subversion and playfulness. Delight takes its time when everyone else is moving urgently. Next comes Participation, which is closely linked to the sixth dimension of partnership. Participation ensures that no one is left behind, even if including everyone means being less efficient. It ensures that all are truly engaging with the people around them. Partnership looks at the gifts people have and how they can be utilized together to create a team capable of reaching a common goal.

The seventh dimension is enjoyment. Wells leans on Augustine's distinction between what we use and what we enjoy. Things we use run out. Things and people we

enjoy have value in and of themselves. This dimension is somewhat incarnational because the dimension of enjoyment is "being with" people and appreciating them just as they are, without having any specific job for them.

The final dimension of the Trinity is glory. John 1:14 says, "The Word became flesh . . . and we have seen his glory." Wells believes the epitome of glory is God being with us in Christ (Wells, *Incarnational Mission* 11-12).

As indicated in the literature review on the tasks of an IIM, the work of the IIM imitates the work and the ways of the Trinity. As the Trinity is fully present, the IIM must be fully present and engaged with the church in transition. The IIM should be living in the community to help them be present and available to the community. Just as the Trinity is fully attentive to each person of the Trinity and their work, the IIM must be alert to the emotions present in the transition and conflicts keeping the church from being the church of Jesus Christ to their community.

The dimension of mystery describes the process of being an IIM. While there are known tasks to be performed, so much about the congregation is unknown that the IIM must engage with the congregation, explore different areas, and appreciate what God is doing in the congregation. The role of an IIM is not a mystery. However, the way the Holy Spirit leads the IIM in performing the function of an IIM is a mystery.

As with the persons of the Trinity, the IIM must be open to surprise, humor, and playfulness. The IIM must move slowly and deliberately, not in a panic. The IIM must ensure that all voices are heard and responded to in the transition period. Participation by the entire congregation is required for healing, and church vision, while setting up the next dimension of partnership. The IIM leads the congregation in finding their spiritual

gifts. As gifts are identified, the IIM leads the congregation in identifying and training

new leaders and ensuring that people are invited to serve where they are gifted. At this

point, the congregation has built teams, seen progress, and is enjoying the achievement of

its goals. Taylor and Simpson call this point an agape point because of the harmonious

relationship built with God and each other. This is the same relational quality the persons

of the Trinity enjoy (17).

If one looks at Well's dimensions of the Trinity as steps in the ministry of an IIM,

the next step would be enjoyment. This incarnational dimension demonstrates healing

from conflict as the congregation enjoys being with each other.

The final dimension of the Trinity, as explained by Wells, is glory. Bill Henard

points out that "Living in Community for the glory of God is one of our best arguments

for Jesus among our unbelieving friends and family" (255). The ultimate responsibility of

an IIM in a congregation is to help the congregation return to health so they can welcome

a new settled pastor that will lead them in the way of discipleship. When the congregation

no longer needs to dwell on itself but looks to God and gives God all the glory, it is ready

for a settled pastor, as it reflects the nature of all the persons of the Trinity.

Incarnational Ministry

For Wells, incarnational ministry is the ministry of "being with." For the church,

incarnational ministry means being with each other and encouraging each other. The

importance, as Wells sees it, is that the church must assemble often – for worship, for

fellowship, for study, and for prayer. Biblically, incarnational ministry uses the scripture

"Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (Matt.18:20) as

its guide. Christians were meant to be in community, helping each other, confessing and

repenting, giving thanks, and singing along with the other gathering activities mentioned above. Wells uses the ministry of Mary as an example of incarnational ministry. Mary was with Jesus from birth to death to resurrection to ascension. She supported Jesus with her prayers and her presence (Wells, *Incarnational Ministry* 82-96).

In a companion book to *Incarnational Ministry*, Wells wrote a book called *Incarnational Mission: Being with the World*. In this companion book, Wells contends that incarnational ministry is not just inwardly focused, but also outwardly directed from the church to the world (*Incarnational Mission* 10-13).

Ed Stetzer and Daniel Im affirm Wells in terms of the importance of relationships in church planting and effective incarnational ministry from those churches to their communities (Stetzer and Im Section 1). Taylor and Simpson follow up on Stetzer and Im's work in identifying that the church must be incarnational in their witness instead of expecting that church events will connect people to God (Taylor & Simpson 69).

Rob Voyle argues that the first step of transitional ministry is to join incarnationally with a congregation. IIMs need to live with their congregation (in the community), listen, and learn the values of the congregation. Once the IIM is accepted and "on the inside," then they will have the power to make changes that are in line with the congregation's values. When the IIM encounters situations where the congregation's values are not in line with God's values, the IIM walks with the congregation as they teach through sermons and Bible studies to explore deeper into the congregation's values to find a common value that the IIM and the congregation can agree on. This incarnational living on the part of the IIM is key to a successful transition ministry.

Voyle also believes that the entire congregation must define the values of the congregation in light of their understanding of God's love and grace. A top-down, hierarchical approach denies the incarnational reality that God is already present and working in the congregation.

Interim Ministry Practices

This section describes the history of Intentional Interim Ministry, the typical tasks an IIM performs in a congregation, and the importance of an IIM being an excellent preacher.

History

Loren Mead is credited with understanding the need for IIMs as well as the organizational development of IIMs. As told to Molly Dale Smith, between 1969 and 1973, Mead worked in an Episcopal Church program called "Project Test Pattern." The program started to utilize techniques and theories from university management programs to develop consultants trained to be change agents in local congregations. Their task was to help the congregation be more effective in their work as a congregation. For example, Keith Irwin, a Presbyterian pastor, recommended that Mead train him as a consultant to be a "supply pastor" in a congregation that was having difficulties. Using a consultant as a supply pastor prompted a further study in Project Test Pattern on leadership transition in the local church (Smith Foreword).

In 1974, Mead continued his study on transitions in leadership in the local church at the ecumenical Alban Institute. The goal of the Alban Institute was to enable church leaders to be "agents of grace and transformation that could shape and heal the world." ("History"). As Mead's work continued in the Alban Institute, a retired Episcopal priest,

Felix Kloman, urged Mead to utilize clergy who were entering retirement in the transitional periods for congregations. Kloman felt that the retirees were very talented and skilled and underutilized by the church in their retirement. In addition, many of the congregations that were facing pastoral change needed pastoral care in their grief, and an experienced pastor versus a consultant made sense to Kloman (Smith Foreword).

Mead agreed with Kloman and organized a group of experienced pastors already working in interim placements. That meeting resulted in a training program for multiple denominations experiencing the same challenges. (Smith Foreword) As a result of the training program, there was a realization of the need for a support system for the interim pastors. This need resulted in the start of the Interim Ministry Network (IMN) for interim pastors. The IMN now operates training and certification for potential IIMs ("The Fundamentals").

Appropriate Times for using an IIM

Gordon affirms the use of IIMs where a church has experienced a long pastorate of fifteen to twenty years, or the pastor has died in office, where there was moral or marital trouble, and where there is a sabbatical or a church merger (Gordon 31). Nicholson has noted that the definition of a long pastorate is getting shorter over time (Nicholson Introduction). The length of the IIM assignment depends solely on the congregation and the denominational leadership. The assignment length often depends on the depth of grief the congregation is experiencing after the loss of their settled pastor, whether it be from retirement or death (Gordon 31).

B. Leslie Robinson, Michael L. Halleen, and Jean B. Sibley have written separate articles that acknowledge the need for an IIM as a congregation is experiencing a

transition between pastors. William and Susan recognized that change brings situational challenges, while transition creates psychological challenges. The Intentional Interim Pastor's role is to help people come to terms psychologically and spiritually with the change and the new situation that transitions cause (Bridges and Bridges Chapter 1).

The timing of the start of ministry for an IIM varies from congregation to congregation. Elizabeth Ann Jordan asserts that it is essential for church leaders to find an Intentional Interim Minister as soon as a congregational vacancy is announced. The sooner the intervention and stabilization that comes with an IIM, the easier the transition for the congregation (Jordan 69). Mead has written the exit of a settled pastor from a congregation is a time of "unfreezing" for the congregation. The pastoral vacancy forces the congregation to open up to new possibilities (Mead Change of Pastors 82). An effective IIM encourages the congregation to embrace the opportunities and leads the congregation in managing the challenges that come with new opportunities. Erickson also embraces Mead's concept of unfreezing when he points out that interim appointments helped break the male-only pastoral expectation of some congregations (P. Erickson 25).

Ron Brown recommends that interim pastors be utilized when a church has had the same minister for more than seven years, when there has been a forced termination, when the church is in conflict, or when the church has had a series of short-term pastorates (Brown 246). However, some denominations believe in utilizing IIMs during all pastoral changes (P. Erickson 19).

Characteristics of an IIM

Nicholson recognizes that IIMs must be adaptable and flexible when serving a congregation. There will be different theological positions within the same congregation

that the IIM will have to navigate. The IIM's family needs to be supportive of the lifestyle associated with being an IIM, possibly living in a parsonage part-time and their home part-time. An IIM must bring "calmness, thoughtfulness, objectivity, trustworthiness, care, and mature leadership" into the church needing interim care. The IIM must also be flexible in their own leadership and conflict management styles, adapting their style to the church's needs (Nicholson 55-56).

Lisa R. Withrow refers to interim ministry as a time of "intentional liminality" or "interstitial time" because of its temporal focus (78). The congregation expects change and a new pastor in the near future. Withrow understands that this liminal time is high in anxiety, activity, expectations, and hope, and the IIM must maintain a non-anxious presence full of hope during this liminal time. Withrow, unlike the other authors, believes the IIM should pay attention to the incoming minister's particular approaches to worship, pastoral care, and church development and start any needed changes in those areas before the next pastor arrives. Like the other authors, Withrow believes the IIM helps the congregation self-reflect on its beliefs, especially those that may have generated conflict. If conflict is present, it often intensifies during this liminal time. The interim leader has a unique opportunity here to set the groundwork for holy conversation without concern of being fired (Withrow 78-79).

Glenn Taylor points out that the type of IIM needed varies from congregation to congregation. One church might need an IIM with a strong healing ministry, while another might need a pastor with skills in moving from a family to a program-size church (G. Taylor 100).

Tasks Performed During the Interim

Loren Mead described Five Developmental tasks for Interim Ministry. They are:

1. Coming to terms with History

2. Discovering a New Identity

3. Shifts of Power/Leadership Changes

4. Rethinking Denominational Linkages

5. Commitments to a New Leadership and a New Future (Mead 21-44).

McCutchan has added one item to the list of tasks an IIM should perform in a congregation. That task is educating the congregation on the role the congregation has in creating a healthy ministry while encouraging the pastor to live a healthy lifestyle. In documenting the problems of obesity and chronic illness among the clergy, Rae-Jean Proeschold-Bell and Sara H. LeGrande point out the importance of targeted interventions to improve clergy health, with the church being a vital part of the intervention strategy. McCutchan acknowledges the health challenges all pastors confront in their jobs and believes that the interim can help the congregation create an atmosphere of physical and emotional health for the IIM and the settled pastor following the IIM. This atmosphere will then contribute to longer, more successful pastorates for the congregation (McCutchan 9).

Halleen affirms Mead's task-oriented nature of the IIM but prefers to see the interim minister as a pastoral leader and a transitional consultant. Early in the history of IIMs, most congregations viewed them as substitute preachers. Halleen argues that the primary task of the interim minister is pastoral, helping the people deal with their feelings from the previous pastor's departure. Halleen also believes that the interim pastor helps

the church learn who they are and the direction they need to go. Unlike Mead and most of the other authors read, Halleen does not believe that the IIM should make a massive change or define long-range goals for the church (Halleen 35). Sibley is in radical disagreement with Halleen. Sibley believes IIMs must act quickly to help a congregation recognize its failings and make necessary changes to prepare the congregation for the settled pastor (Sibley 8).

Both Leslie Robinson and William and Susan Bridges thoughts on IIMs being change managers are middle-of-the-road compared to Halleen and Sibley. While Halleen believes the transition process is a process that shows a congregation how to deal with change without necessarily making any change, both Leslie Robinson and William and Susan Bridges are in favor of the IIM leading necessary change in the congregation. However, neither Leslie Robinson nor William and Susan Bridges believe in change for the sake of change.

Leslie Robinson is adaptive in his leadership style, recognizing that different styles work best in different situations. He sees the IIM as crucial in leading the church to organize for ministry and recruit and train new leaders, as many leaders step down after a settled pastor leaves and an interim pastor arrives. Robinson believes the IIM leads the church in evaluating its decision-making process and how it relates to its members, its neighborhood, and the church universal. In addition, the IIM helps the congregation discover its identity apart from the previously settled pastor. As the congregation discovers its identity, it can develop a vision that will help meet the spiritual needs of members and grow its ministry inside and outside the church. Once identity is clarified

and a vision determined, the congregation is ready to find their new settled pastor (B. L. Robinson 234-236).

Norman Bendroth summarizes current IIM training as having five process tasks the IIM performs in a congregation. First, the IIM connects emotionally and organizationally with the church, its lay leaders, and its members. Next, the IIM analyzes how things are done in the church's local context and who the church's leaders really are. Then the interim connects with people in and around the church, the community, and the denomination. Then the IIM prioritizes their work. Finally, the IIM continues to learn about their context and adjusts the ministry tasks that need to be done (*Interim* 80-81). This work list is consistent with the work done by Mead and the Alban Institute.

Bendroth reports that the congregation has a list of tasks that need to be performed for the transition time to be of value to them. First, the congregation needs to understand the good and bad of their history, including conflict and grief, and identify if conflict and grief continue to be a source of division in the congregation. They need to find their identity, core values, and purpose. Third, there may be changes in the congregational leadership. The last step for the congregation is preparing for a new pastor with a contract, clear expectations, and plans for the future (*Interim* 41-46).

Nicholson agrees with Bendroth and the processes and tasks listed above. His experience has been that, in addition to the documented tasks above, any unresolved conflict must be resolved prior to the call of a new pastor. Unresolved conflict results in a much smaller chance of success for the next settled pastor and the church (Nicholson 96-98).

Bendroth (*Interim Ministry in Action* Chapter 2) credits David Sawyer with

proposing that the five processes listed above change to three areas of concentration:

structures, symptoms, and narrative. Structures include ensuring that the congregation has

processes or a system to follow that leads them in dealing with conflict and change.

These structures include policies and boundaries. Next, symptoms include identifying the

points of discontent and passion. Finally, narrative is the church's story around issues of

identity, core values, and missions. Bendroth (Rethinking 23) also agrees with Sawyer

about the five development tasks needing to change. Bendroth references the late Karen

Olson, Missioner of Ministry for the Episcopal Diocese of Minnesota, who recognized

that many parishes could not afford a full-time IIM. Their diocese places a transitional

priest and a transitional consultant to work together in a single church. They have found

that this methodology results in a quicker transition. Bendroth (Rethinking 23) also

credits Ken McFayden, Professor of Ministry and Leadership Development at Union

Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond, as recognizing changes needed in the development

tasks of the intentional interim. McFayden believes adaptive leadership and ethnographic

evaluation of congregations are essential to interim pastors' success in this century.

Finally, Rev. Dr. Rob Voyle, Director of Training of the Transitional Ministry Network,

recognizes a need for the IIM to change from Family Systems theory to utilizing

Appreciative Inquiry as a tool for understanding the congregation when the congregation

has more than fifty members. Beaumont recommends using Appreciative Inquiry

questions as well (Beaumont 110-111).

Roy Oswald, one of the first project directors for the Interim Ministry Network,

points out that IIMs need to be competent leaders in negotiation, grief support,

observation, intervention, data analysis, and conflict management. Oswald also identifies the characteristics of an ideal IIM. These characteristics include the ability to adapt to change quickly, a history of being bored with long-term ministries, an ability to be comfortable with conflict, independent self-starters ("loners") with a lot of resilience, goal-oriented, and a history of being good parish pastors" (Oswald 25).

Brown agrees with Mead that the IIM helps the congregation deal with their grief of losing the previous pastor and addresses any internal conflict to bring healing to a congregation. It is important that IIMs be trained in conflict mediation to have the skills they will need to lead a church through conflict to healthy resolution successfully. Brown recommends that a church do a self-study during the interim period. The study should examine membership trends, mission education enrollments, attendance patterns, and financial giving. The church should also re-evaluate its mission and vision statements at this point (Brown 250-251).

In agreement with Brown, Barber, and Mead's recommendation for a church to do a self-study, Gregg Okesson recommends the creation of an ethnographic study of the congregation. Okesson says the goal of ethnography is "to understand a context from within sustained, immersed observation, while allowing people on the ground to provide meanings to any of the data that emerges" (Okesson 163). Mead was the first of many to document the importance of the IIM engaging in a study of the church and its processes and systems, leadership styles, behavioral norms, stewardship, and power brokers in the congregation (*Change of Pastors* 54). Carter, calling this an exegesis of the congregation, adds that the IIM must understand the context in which the congregation exists (198). Bendroth also affirms the importance of ethnographic analysis to understand the

congregation's location and community challenges ("Rethinking" 198). For a good

overview of the congregation, Okesson recommends that doctrinal statements and

historical documents be reviewed. In addition, interviews with church leadership, former

pastors, and demographic information about the church and the surrounding area are

valuable data points (Okesson 163-164).

Barber is unique in that he limits his understanding of the role of the IIM to

preaching sermons, teaching Bible classes, and helping the congregation resolve their

grief and conflict. His views are that the IIM is more like the traditional concept of pulpit

supply than a change leader (Barber Introduction).

Daehnert also affirms the need to analyze unresolved conflict, generational

tensions, and the congregation's decision-making process. He identifies the importance of

the IIM quickly making emotional connections with the congregation. While some IIMs

seem to do this naturally, others need to be intentional about understanding the family

relationships, church customs and traditions, and identifying the leaders, whether they

have official positions in the church or not. While the emotional connections are being

made, there is also an expectation that must be set that the IIM is a temporary pastor and

will not become a settled pastor in that church (Daehnert 180).

Beaumont points out that churches run their meetings using business management

styles of leadership and decision-making. He contends that the church in transition must

change from business management in its decision process to putting discernment of

God's will and the leading of the Holy Spirit before worldly decision-making. He

discusses how God's will is best discovered in a group that can put aside their ego and

opinions in favor of the leading of the Holy Spirit. Beaumont believes that there are

several theological assumptions that the group must agree on to be effective in a group

discernment process. They are:

1. God is self-revealing.

2. God gives us a choice, and our choices matter to God.

3. Discernment is a gift from God, mediated through the presence of the

   Holy Spirit.

4. Discernment is a discipline we practice.

5. The truths of God are revealed and tested within the community.

6. Discernment unfolds in God's time (Beaumont 75-76).

These areas should be presented in sermons, Bible studies, and meetings to

become a part of the congregation's DNA.

Svingen in Bendroth's *Interim Ministry in Action* (56) and Moss (36) also

advocate the utilization of the IIM in the discovery of the gifts and skills of the

congregation for leading the church. Glenn Taylor (102) agrees with using spiritual gifts

to identify leaders for different ministries and finding the right IIM for a congregation.

Preaching

Richard Morgan defines the preaching of the IIM as a "pastoral response to the

needs of the congregation, and prophetic call to change and new direction" (48). He

recommends sermons that are related to the development tasks that were mentioned

earlier. The first development task was for the congregation to come to terms with their

history. Sermons where members have a chance to look back and appreciate their history

and highlight the changes the congregation has successfully navigated in the past are

helpful to the congregation in coming to terms with their past. Second, in identifying their

new identity, sermons that concentrate on biblical characters finding their identity are appropriate. Third, as lay leadership changes are common with changes in pastoral leadership, Morgan recommends sermons on leadership changes in the Bible. Fourth, Mead recognized that one of the tasks for the congregation in transition is often to renew denominational ties. Sermons that concentrate on what the denomination believes and how the denomination is at work in the world are appropriate. Finally, as the congregation has worked the necessary tasks in the transition time, Morgan recommends sermons on who the congregation is discerning God is leading them are appropriate (48).

In addition, Morgan recommended seven additional preaching areas for the IIM (49-50, 71). D'Angio summarizes Morgan's recommendations with the following topic list.

- Grief Work – remind the congregation that grief is expected when there is a change of pastor

- Listening – members need to speak and listen to one another with love.

- Identity – members look at the New Testament church and compare it to their congregation

- New Leadership –sermons on spiritual gifts help the laity discover their spiritual gifts for use in their church.

- Change – sermons on how God calls us out of our old ways into new ways

- Conflict – sermons on how the early church resolved disputes

- Preparing for the new pastor – sermons about good transitions in the Bible

In three separate articles, Morgan, Grey, and Carter all agree on the importance of an IIM's preaching. However, both Grey and Morgan argue that the IIM has more

freedom in preaching than the settled minister. According to Grey, "the interim minister has no ulterior motives, no axe to grind and can openly speak the truth in love" (28). Morgan says the IIM has the "freedom to cause a gentle rocking of the boat since they are not under consideration as the next pastor" (71).

Carter identifies preaching as the most vital part of the interim ministry and requires special attention due to the congregation's unique needs (196). Macy recognized the importance of the IIM preaching on the nature of the church, its mission, and its ministry. In addition, Macy identified several other topics that could be covered in the IIMs sermons, including the role of the ordained, equipping all the saints for ministry, and the theology of the cross (out of death comes newness of life) (13).

Carter does not recommend using the same set of sermons in each church location, but he affirms Mead's suggestions regarding the importance of preaching about the church's mission, determining the church's identity, and preparing the church for the future without the previous pastor. In addition, sermons about biblical transitions can help the congregation relate their possible feelings of grief, surprise, confusion, and frustration to the Israelites in exile (194).

In addition to the sermon topics listed above, Carter also recommends sermons that help with specific struggles of the congregation. For example, sermons on trust and faith are relevant if the congregation feels betrayed. If the church is floundering without direction, sermons focusing on the main tasks of the church, such as the importance of ministry, evangelism, and missions, would be appropriate. Finally, sermons on spiritual gifts will help the congregation to understand their role within the church and how to

exercise those gifts (203). As the congregation discovers and utilizes their spiritual gifts, they start to find direction and build unity within the congregation.

Leslie Robinson states that intentional interim ministry is much more readily accepted as a viable approach to the transition time than it was ten years ago (241). It is also more involved, with multiple skills and spiritual gifts required for a successful interim ministry.

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Barriers to Intentional Interim Ministry

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This section examines the barriers to a successful intentional interim ministry experience. The barriers are divided into two categories: barriers from the church and barriers from the IIM.

IIM Barriers

As has already been highlighted in separate publications by Robinson and William and Susan Bridges, change is an important aspect of the IIM process. Anita Keire points out that, by definition, IIMs are agents of change (11). Humanity generally resists change. Keire, in an article entitled "Long-Term Interim Ministry," points out that the power brokers in the congregation may try to block the process. To keep this from happening, the IIM must work slowly to create an "orderly, intentional shift in leadership"). It may take two years for this shift to occur (Keire 11).

Weese and Crabtree point out that if a congregation is encouraged to concentrate on their wounds and lack of ability in some areas rather than their strengths, they will have an unsuccessful interim period. The IIM needs to lead the congregation, so that past problems and dysfunction are acknowledged and learned from without being the whole focus of the ministry. Bowen Family Systems is a theory that views "the family as an

emotional unit" and stresses the interconnectedness and interdependency of family members ("Introduction"). Bowen's family-based systems encourage facing dysfunction but not allowing the dysfunction to take control of the system. Just as failures and dysfunction must be acknowledged, so should areas of giftedness that each congregation has. A culture that continually reinforces a congregation's weaknesses makes them dependent on the transition leader instead of raising up local leaders and depending on the Holy Spirit for congregational direction (Weese and Crabtree 19-21).

Grey points out that a barrier to success is the IIM forgetting that they are an interim pastor. Best practices of interim ministry require the church and the IIM to acknowledge that the IIM must not be a candidate for the settled pastor position. If the IIM is also a candidate for the settled pastor position, they are less able to say the difficult things that often must be told to a church in transition because they do not want to risk offending the church (Grey 29).

Charles Wilson points out that low self-esteem in the IIM makes difficult transitions for the church when the IIM leaves. The IIM must be mature, depend more on peers than on their interim congregation for sharing their emotions, and must have a grief support plan for the grief that the IIM will inevitably feel at the end of their interim assignment with a congregation. Wilson recommends that the IIM talk with hospice chaplains to ready the IIM and the congregation for the grief that comes at the end of the service to the congregation to prevent unhealthy grief (Wilson 67).

Friedman says that self-differentiation is required of a leader for effective change to occur (Friedman 24). Steinke concurs in How Your Church Family Works. He indicates that the IMM must maintain emotional objectivity amid a church in transition

while remaining connected to the church leadership. The IIM must also be able to hear, discern, and not react. Self-differentiation is required for the IIM to avoid being triangulated in decisions, discussions, and conflicts (69). Friedman points out that all clergy starting in a new parish hear triangulation statements about the previous minister. These statements are seductive because they are made in a way that praises the new minister. The IIM must resist the good feelings that come with these remarks, lest they get drawn into an old triangle (Friedman 271).

Richard Loringer and August Lageman document the importance of a non-anxious presence in the IIM. The congregation needs to know that the church will continue in its ministry while searching for a settled pastor. They need reassurance that their concerns will be heard and the appropriate response will happen. For growth and healing to occur, the IIM must be non-anxious in all interactions. If there is anxiety, they recommend using a therapist for the IIM to process the anxiety outside of the church's presence (53-54).

Church Barriers

Leslie Robinson points out that the most common objection to interim ministry is that it takes too long and costs too much. In the early 2000s, the research found that it took an average of 16.2 months from when an IIM began working with a congregation until the new settled pastor arrived. The same study found that it took fourteen to sixteen months for churches with call systems to call a new pastor, regardless of whether the church had used an IIM. Robinson maintains that the spiritual growth and development that occurs with interim ministry more than offsets this additional one or two months of interim time and any added costs of utilizing an IIM. In addition, with an IIM, the

congregation is much clearer about what they believe God has called their church to be and do, allowing for a much smoother beginning for the new pastor (239).

The lack of trust in an IIM is a barrier to a successful interim ministry. Rein Brouwer investigated the challenge of an IIM in gaining the trust of a congregation and determined that the IIM having the trust of the congregation is vital to being successful in an interim pastorate. He found that trust develops over multiple phases. The first phase is contracting, and trust is created by virtue of the ordination of the IIM, as well as other credentials the IIM may have. Brouwer states that church board members start with trust because they understand their congregation needs help (Brouwer 18). The congregation minimizes its risk by hiring someone with experience as an IIM and credentialed by a transitional ministry organization. In the next phase, the IIM can build more trust by being effective in the job they were hired to do.

Dan Hotchkiss, Weese and Crabtree, and Jim Keck all acknowledge that congregations do not universally accept using an IIM. Lack of acceptance of an IIM has the potential to lead to conflict between the pastor and the congregation. They see a conversation between the denominational leadership and the congregation necessary to move forward with an IIM. Hotchkiss also emphasizes that an IIM is not a pulpit supply but a temporary pastoral leader for the congregation. Some congregations may not need an IIM, and some denominations do not require an IIM. Congregations where pastors are appointed, such as the United Methodist Church, have a long history of not utilizing an IIM. However, even these denominations have realized that an IIM can be valuable where there has been significant conflict, a long pastoral tenure, or the sudden unexpected departure of a previous pastor. Other denominations that utilize a "call"

system have utilized IIMs successfully for a long time because they understand their pulpit will be vacant for a long time while they are doing a pastoral search. They also know they need pastoral leadership working with them while the search committee is doing the search process. The interim ministry process can help the search committee prioritize the next minister's skills and gifts (Hotchkiss 20-21).

Philipp Porcher identified a congregation that wants to maintain the status quo as another barrier to successful change. The congregation that is more interested in maintaining the perceived status quo will fight the change needed in the congregation for it to be more effective and oppose the IIM, who is presenting change opportunities (Porcher 2).

Another barrier to a successful pastoral transition is a church culture that revolves around the pastor. Weese and Crabtree noted that the impact of a pastoral transition upon a congregation is shaped by the church culture and the expectations that members bring to their church experience. If these expectations are ignored in the transition process, the results may not be successful. In addition, a new minister with a different leadership style forces change to the existing culture, which must be understood and agreed upon for the transition to work. This is especially true in a personality-driven church (57-60).

Sibley is against the use of an IIM in a church that is thriving. He believes that in interim ministry circles, there is an implicit assumption that the church is sick and, therefore, in need of intervention between pastoral appointments. Assigning an IIM to a congregation that starts with this assumption may well inhibit any needed changes. He also identifies a barrier to the long-term success of the congregation when the IIM is an excellent preacher. The church may "drag its feet" before calling another pastor because

of the excellence of the IIM. This hesitation to complete the process hurts the church in

the search process and hurts the church's reputation among those who are candidates for

the position. The IIM must prepare the way for the next pastor, not hinder it (71-72).

Vanderbloemen (135) agrees that not every pastoral change requires an IIM. He

said that if the church can fill the pulpit, has historically done well between pastors, and

there is no significant turmoil or conflict; then the church may not need an IIM. However,

if there is toxic culture in the church, a succession of short-term (two to three-year)

pastorates, then an IIM should be considered. Anthony Robinson agrees with

Vanderbloemen that some churches do not need an IIM between pastors. Robinson cites

the same reasons as Vanderbloemen. In churches like this, the imposition of an IIM by

denominational officials on the church may be detrimental. This can hurt a church in

transition and be a barrier to accepting IIMs in the future when the church needs them (A.

Robinson, "The Decline").

Angela Yee pointed out the support an interim minister needs from the church

leadership. If the church leadership is unwilling to support the interim minister in their

leadership overtly, then the interim time will not be successful for the congregation. This

does not mean blanket approval of every action but regular, meaningful dialogue between

the interim leader, church leadership, and the congregation. Yee notes that rapid change

is not good for the congregation that needs the services of an IIM and that rapid change at

the beginning of the IIM tenure can impede long-term success (74-75).

Steinke writes extensively about the problems in the church from a family

systems perspective. He says, "Actually, religious institutions are the worst offenders at

encouraging immaturity and irresponsibility. In church after church, some member is

passively-aggressively holding the whole system hostage, and no one wants to fire him or force her to leave because it wouldn't be 'the Christian thing to do'" (*How Your Church Family Works* 59). A church's unwillingness to face the offenders and the problems they are causing is a significant barrier to change and, therefore, a barrier to the success of an IIM. Yet, Justin W. Tull points out that in the midst of high anxiety, sound changes can occur (2). The IIM should not let the congregational anxiety stop the change that must occur. Instead, the IIM must manage the group anxiety and frequently teach about the benefits of the change being considered.

Nicholson points out that some churches are hesitant to pursue a new identity for fear that they are changing their faith. This fear of change can stop a congregation's forward movement. He recommends a self-study process, including an ethnographic study to help the congregation recognize their current reality and not just "fond remembrances of past experience" (9). There should be sermons and classes on what the congregation believes theologically. He also points out the difficulties many conflicted congregations have with laity leadership changes. For some congregations, this is a generational battle, with the younger generations wanting more leadership control. For other congregations, it is representative of control issues of key leaders who refuse to let others help them or, in the case of treasurers, refuse to allow anyone to audit the books. Nicholson sees the job of the IIM in this situation as being one of getting the congregation to recognize that generational fear is unhealthy for the congregation. Anxiety is almost always present when there is a leadership change. If the congregation understands that, they can learn that their anxiety is normal and should not be allowed to

stop them from moving forward. If the problem is not addressed, the church will not be successful (Nicholson 8-10).

Nicholson was the only author to point out that it is not unusual for congregations utilizing an IIM to have stewardship problems. Conflict within the congregation may cause some members to vote with their wallets until they can get their way. A decline in giving can hinder a congregation's ability to accept change, and stewardship must be a part of the work congregations do in the interim period. A scriptural understanding of stewardship should be part of the congregation's self-assessment and mission understanding (Nicholson 20).

A toxic environment can be a barrier to success for an IIM. Thom S. Rainer said, "It only takes one toxic member to destroy a church" (Rainer 88). Charles Stone reports that two surveys taken over a year apart of two different large groups of pastors found that fifteen percent of the pastors reported that unhealthy relationships among people in the church resulted in conflict, lack of unity, gossip, and poor communication (Stone 65). Peter Scazzero and Warren Bird said, "The overall health of any church or ministry depends primarily on the emotional and spiritual health of its leadership. In fact, the key to successful spiritual leadership has much more to do with the leader's internal life than with the leader's expertise, gifts, or experience" (20). This applies both to clergy as well as church leaders. Shelley refers to dysfunctional church members and leaders as "well-intentioned dragons." They are known for being openly critical and spreading false accusations in the church. A person is not a dragon because of different ideas but because of destructive actions (168). Unaddressed behavior by "well-intentioned dragons" is a barrier to successful change led by an IIM in the church.

Finally, congregations tend to hide their secrets when an IIM is assigned, and it is often a challenge to discover the real history of the congregation. Secrets typically hidden include financial management (or past mismanagement), previous toxic behavior in the church, and prior church splits. Beaumont encourages the congregation to approach their remembering as a sacred work (96), as it influences the congregation's identity. Miroslav Volf points out the dangers of forgetting corporate memories as they are key to a strong future for the church. Even when the memories are of times when the church was not healthy, hiding them gives them more negative power than ever (24-25).

The role of an IIM has many challenges, requiring the IIM to be self-aware, have emotional support outside of the congregation being served, and have extensive training in family systems and conflict and change management.

Church Revitalization

Bendroth reports the results of two small studies that indicate a sixty percent success of an IIM in congregations that had experienced a high level of conflict or trauma ("Rethinking" 24). The Center for Congregational Health reported that eighty-seven percent of their congregations who used an IIM said they were healthier at the end of the process than initially. A church that has moved in a healthy direction is a church that has new life. In 2007, Research Services of the PC(USA) published a study of the effectiveness of interim pastors in Presbyterian churches over two years. Sixty-Nine percent felt the IIM was a positive experience (Bendroth "Rethinking" 24).

Leslie Robinson reports that transformation grows out of the transition process. It is a transformation that "gives the church new life and new possibilities and new energy as the people claim their place and purpose in God's kingdom" (L. Robinson 235). The

definition of revitalization presented in chapter one of this dissertation says, "Church revitalization means to reignite the love of Christ within an existing church, guide the church in defining a new vision, and create a successful plan around that vision so that new disciples of Jesus are made, nurtured, equipped and empowered to spread the Gospel in their community." Robinson says that the transformation that comes from a successful interim ministry is revitalization for the church (L. Robinson 235-243).

In "Rethinking Interim Ministry," Anthony Robinson discusses the problems that arise from using Intentional Interim Pastors as "one-size-fits-all" in pastoral transitions. The model of interim ministry has changed from solely helping a congregation let go of the previous pastor and prepare for a new pastor. Instead, interim ministry has progressed to include changing the culture of a congregation, helping a congregation to "come to terms with its history," and helping a congregation to change to be effective in the current culture. Part of achieving these new tasks in Interim Ministry is for the Intentional Interim Pastor to do a congregational assessment. This ethnographic study contributes to the congregation's understanding of its history and how it interacts with the local community. He then recommends that for renewal and new life to happen, the church needs to get back in touch with the "basics" of Christian belief and how the basics relate to the vocation of the church. Robinson sees the IIM as setting the environment for renewal and revitalization (A. Robinson, "Rethinking" 21-24).

In an article titled "Rethinking Transitional Ministry," Norman Bendroth agrees with Anthony Robinson and the "one-size-fits-all" problem of Interim Ministry. He also references Michael Piazza with the thought that different kinds of IIMs are needed. One type of intentional interim pastor is the healer who will help the congregation recover

from trauma, whether it be a natural disaster, clergy impropriety, or significant conflict within the congregation. The other type of intentional interim pastor is an "entrepreneur" who can lead the congregation to renewal. Bendroth says this renewal is what brings about revitalization ("Rethinking" 21-24).

Svingen reports that in his experience, if the congregation has successfully finished addressing its history and problems, determined its current identity, navigated leadership change, and reconnected with the denomination; then it will be successful in taking new directions in ministry. Walking with the IIM through the process, the congregation can reclaim God's vision for them and reconfigure their staff and leadership to support their mission (Svingen 7).

Withrow calls transformational change the great hope for liminal space. She sees this occurring as the IIM leads the congregation through holy conversation, which Withrow calls "liminal bridging." Liminal bridging has the potential to transform a congregation while avoiding polarizing disagreements. It is in this transformation and holy conversation that revitalization occurs for the congregation (Withrow 79).

Bendroth also recognizes the liminality of interim ministers and states that the job of the IIM is to move the congregation into its new identity. The interim can take different risks to shift behavior, change thinking, and help the congregation discern new directions until the new leader arrives and a new normal is recognized. It is out of the change in thinking and the new directions discerned that revitalization happens (Bendroth, "Rethinking" 78-79).

As indicated in the discussion of Ezekiel 37, Henard stated that two basic steps were involved in bringing the dead bones, an image of the church, back to life. First was

the willingness of Ezekiel to do precisely what God had asked, which was to preach

God's Word to the bones. Next was God's action through the Holy Spirit to bring life

into the bones. Henard argues that church revitalization demands the church hear God's

Word and a movement of the Holy Spirit. One without the other is insufficient for revival

and restoration of a "declining, dying church" (Henard 10).

In May 2005, the cover story for *Fast Company* was about the difficulty of

making significant changes in the business world. Using information from the medical

community, Deutschman argues that most people choose to die if living requires major

life changes. In the case of the medical world, it was found that eighty percent of health

care spending was on illnesses caused by behavioral issues. CEOs are supposed to be

change agents for their companies, yet it appears they are very resistant to change

(Change or Die). Rainer points out that the same problem exists in churches that are in

decline today. His research found that church leaders choose "tradition over change,

comfort over change, preferences over change" (20). His research shows that these poor

choices are leading to churches dying. He agrees with Henard that effective change in a

church must be Biblically based, "saturated" in prayer, and empowered by God. Rainer

goes on to identify characteristics of churches that turn around. Churches that have turned

from dying to vibrant ministry have accepted responsibility for their lack of vitality and

embrace the Great Commission for their personal lives and churches. They do not let

church traditions, music, buildings, or staff become church idols. Churches that have

accepted God's revival offer were undergirded by powerful prayer movements, some of

which a single prayer warrior started. These churches identified and held accountable

people who were dividing the church. They followed Matthew 18 in handling difficult

people and lovingly confronted them. Rainer said, "renewal did not take place until the negative member departed" (Rainer 86). According to Rainer, churches that were revived demonstrated ten behavior changes. They were:

1. Members stopped insisting on certain music styles.

2. Meetings have a clear purpose and agenda.

3. Facilities were used, not worshiped.

4. All programs were evaluated. If a program had outlived its usefulness, the church let it go.

5. Revived churches had budgets that reflected increasing ministry beyond their walls.

6. Revived churches did not expect unreasonable pastoral visitation.

7. Revived church members "sought to serve rather than to be served."

8. Revived church members seek to serve and encourage each other, not blame the pastor, staff, or each other.

9. Revived churches have a few people sharing their faith regularly.

10. Revived churches have a willingness to change (Rainer 128-136).

As seen earlier in the literature review, all these items listed by Rainer for church revitalization are tasks an IIM does in the transition time between settled pastors.

While the IIM position was created to assist churches as they are between settled pastors, the literature review clearly demonstrates a skill overlap between the skills needed by an IIM, the tasks an IIM performs in the interim, and that which a church needs to revitalize itself.

Research Design Literature

The literature review demonstrates that while the tools of church revitalization are similar to the methodology utilized by an IIM, there has not been any study of the effectiveness of church revitalization led by an IIM. Therefore this study used a mixed-methods design, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methods. Creswell and Creswell argue that using both methods results in more insight than either method alone (Creswell & Creswell 23).

The study began with a quantitative method that introduced the hypothesis that an IIM can be an agent of revitalization in the local church. The study used SurveyMonkey to collect the data and maintain anonymity and objectivity.

From a qualitative perspective, the lack of literature identifying IIMs as agents of revitalization in a congregation prompted a second phase of the study, which utilized qualitative questions in a semi-structured interview. The qualitative questions clarified the quantified survey results and captured the various social settings, backgrounds, and differences in thoughts and processes of the individual IIM. The use of interviews allowed the collection of routine information, which affirmed the tasks and problems identified in the literature review. The interviews also identified how IIMs see themselves as agents of church revitalization.

The mixed-method research provided information that could not be gathered in a single data collection methodology. Interviews with open-ended questions allowed survey participants to expound on their answers in ways the quantitative questions could not. The resulting analysis provides a better understanding of using an IIM as a church revitalizer.

Summary of Literature

In summary, the Bible contains many examples of leadership transitions and the importance of a plan for mentoring new leaders to create a leadership pipeline to minimize the transition problems. From Old Testament leaders and prophets, the challenge of leadership and the conflict that comes from leading people was clearly evident and directly affected the faithfulness and freedom of the Israelites. The Psalms provide visibility into the leaders' thoughts as they lead the people thru different transitions and are a source of comfort to IIMs today.

The New Testament presents a procession of leaders, training, and multiplication of leaders necessary for the church to grow and thrive, despite social opposition. While the Old Testament literature review emphasized human leaders, the New Testament literature review stressed the importance of listening to the Holy Spirit to lead the church. The direction of the Holy Spirit also guided the church through resolving conflict in the local churches.

Theologically, the literature highlighted that different ecclesiastical structures impact how IIMs are sent to congregations and how they perform their tasks. Staying in close contact with denominational leadership is very important in terms of success in the mission of the IIM. The literature review highlighted the work of an IIM being similar to the work of the Trinity. Successful intentional interims are relational, working with everyone. The IIM ensures everyone is participating, working together for the sake of the body of Christ, and giving God all the glory. As Jesus was God incarnate, being an IIM is incarnational ministry.

The literature review described the history of intentional interim ministry and the adaptive nature of interim ministry in changing times. There are times an IIM is the best choice for a congregation and times when an IIM is not appropriate for a congregation. Personal characteristics of an IIM are explored, as well as the common tasks an IIM performs during the transition time. These tasks were shared across different ecclesiastic structures. The importance of the IIM being a good preacher and some common topics an IIM should preach about was a repeated theme in the literature review.

The literature reviewed barriers to intentional interim ministry. It revealed that some of the obstacles an IIM experiences are also experienced in other churches in conflict that do not have an IIM leading them. The literature divided barriers into two categories – obstacles that a church presented and barriers from an IIMs style and the ability to self-differentiate.

Finally, the literature review investigated church revitalization performed by an IIM. While there was a significant lack of material in this area, the available material indicated an overlap in the attributes of an IIM and a church revitalizer. There is also an overlap in the revitalization tasks a church must do and the tasks an IIM leads a church in during the transition period.

The literature review reinforces the need for the research study to investigate using an intentional interim minister for church revitalization.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

Intentional interim ministers walk into situations that require a calm, non-anxious presence. Often the congregation is grieving the change of pastor or has experienced some trauma hindering them in their mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ. This chapter describes the research methodology for discovering transformational practices for utilizing intentional interim pastors to revitalize mainline North American churches. The chapter examines the research questions in detail, discusses the context of the ministry, as well as the criteria for selecting the survey participants. In addition, it discusses ethical considerations of the data collection, the validity of the data collection, and data analysis.

Nature and Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project was to discover transformational practices for leveraging intentional interim pastors to revitalize mainline North American churches. The goal was to answer these questions effectively: 1) What intentional interim ministry practices are currently being used to revitalize mainline North American churches? 2) What are the barriers to using intentional interim pastors in the revitalization of mainline North American churches? 3) What approaches to intentional interim ministry best lend themselves to revitalizing a mainline North American church?

This project utilized a multi-phased approach in the research that included literature research, nationwide questionnaires, and interviews of IIMs who responded to the questionnaires and agreed to a further interview. Phase one of the research involved detailed reading based on the relevant literature to create detailed questionnaires for IIMs.

Phase two of the research involved the creation of questionnaires and interview questions. Phase three of the research involved locating IIMs to contact for the survey. Phase four of the research involved sending out the questionnaires, evaluating the responses, and looking for common themes and methodology. Finally, phase five of the research involved interviewing eight people who returned questionnaires and three denominational leaders responsible for interim ministry to get questions resolved. In addition, the interviews enabled the exploration of common themes that could be reusable in other settings. In addition, the interviews allowed the researcher to explore common themes that could be reusable in other settings.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this project's research methodology and data analysis.

RQ #1. What intentional interim ministry practices are currently being used to revitalize mainline North American churches?

This question addressed the first part of the purpose statement on the transformational practices of IIMs. To collect data for this question, I created a short survey for distribution via SurveyMonkey. Since this survey was distributed via a worldwide platform, the first four questions addressed the demographics of the IIM. This demographic analysis allowed responses from the non-North American mainstream Protestant churches to be removed for the purpose of this project. Question 10 and Question 12 of the survey addressed this question. In addition, Questions 1 and 2 of the semi-structured interview of IIMs and Questions 1 and 2 of the semi-structured interview for denominational officials addressed this question.

RQ #2. What are the barriers to using intentional interim pastors in the revitalization of mainline North American churches?

This question also addressed the first part of the purpose statement as barriers to the work of an IIM prevent them from being successful not only as an interim pastor but also in revitalization. To collect data for this question, I used the short survey mentioned above to collect data for this question. Question 11 of this survey addressed this question. In addition, Question 3 of the semi-structured interview of IIMs also addressed this question.

RQ #3. What approaches to intentional interim ministry best lend themselves to revitalizing a mainline North American church?

This question addressed the last part of the purpose statement. Question 12 from the survey collected data to answer this question. In addition, Question 2 from the semi-structured interview of IIMs and Question 2 and Question 3 from the semi-structured interview of denominational officials addressed this question.

Ministry Context(s)

This study focused on intentional interim ministers of mainline Protestant denominations in North America. The churches that these IIMs serve are rural, urban, and suburban. While most of the IIMs were ordained, some were not. Some IIMs served under episcopal leadership, and some were hired by independent churches loosely connected by a convention or a presbytery. IIMs are men and women.

This research occurred at the end of the COVID pandemic, which caused many smaller churches to close. It also forced many congregations out of their Sunday morning comfort zones to internet worship, Bible Studies, and meetings. The effect of COVID on

the ministers and congregations was significant. The Barna group reported in June 2022 that there was a significant increase in the number of pastors considering leaving full-time ministry between October 2021 and March 2022. Barna attributes the increase in pastors considering leaving full-time ministry to pastoral burnout, which may require an IIM to assist the congregation in recovering from losing their pastor. Barna's research examined all US Protestant congregations. This project examined only the Congregational Church, the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Presbyterian Church, the United Methodist Church, the United Church of Canada, the Baptist Church (American, Southern, Cooperative, Independent), and the Disciples of Christ.

<div align="center">

Participants

</div>

This section considers the criteria for selecting the research participants, a description of the participants, and ethical considerations concerning the participants.

Criteria for Selection

Selection criteria included all self-identified intentional interim ministers in North America who are part of one of the following denominations:

- the Congregational Church

- the Episcopal Church

- the Evangelical Lutheran Church

- the Presbyterian Church

- the United Methodist Church

- the United Church of Canada

- the Baptist Church (American Baptist, Southern Baptist, Cooperative Baptist, Independent Baptist)

- the Disciples of Christ.

Invitations to participate were sent to the following groups:

- Transitional/Intentional Interim Ministers mailing list (all denominations)

- Intentional Ministry Network mailing list (all denominations)

- Women in Transitional Ministry Facebook group (all denominations)

- United Methodist Clergy Facebook group (United Methodist Clergy only)

- Clergy Chicks Facebook group (all denominations)

- Small Church Pastor Facebook group (all denominations)

- Senior Pastors Central Facebook group (all denominations

- Lutheran Interim Pastors (ELCA) Facebook group (ELCA Pastors only)

- PC(USA) Interim/Transitional Ministry Facebook group (Presbyterian pastors only)

- Interim Ministry Café Facebook group (all denominations)

- Association of UCC Intentional Interim Ministers Facebook group (Congregational pastors)

- High Church Coyote Facebook group (Episcopal pastors)

Participants were invited to participate in the survey through a message on the Facebook group or the email list. After taking the survey, those who volunteered to participate in follow-up interviews entered their email ID's on the submitted survey.

In addition, invitations were sent to interim ministry leaders for each of the denominations listed above for interviews using the semi-structured interview in Appendix C.

Description of Participants

Participants were male and female pastors who self-identified as intentional interim pastors in North America. Their age range was thirty-five to over sixty-five years of age. Participants served churches in the United Methodist, Episcopal, Presbyterian, United Church of Canada, Baptist, and Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. Their education ranged from Bible College to Doctoral level. Ethnicity was not measured. Intentional Interim Training ranged from no specific training to utilizing training from the Intentional Ministry Network, which is the largest interim training in North America. Years of experience ranged from less than one year experience as an intentional interim minister to greater than ten years.

Ethical Considerations

The consent form on the first page of the survey informed participants of the nature of the study. The consent form can be found in Appendix D. Participants who did not agree to the consent form were sent to the survey thank you page without completing the survey. Participants who agreed to the consent form proceeded with the survey. At any point in time, a participant could cancel out of the survey. All survey responses via the SurveyMonkey tool were set to be anonymous.

Participants in the interviews were sent a consent form which indicated that the interview would be recorded and the interview responses would be considered

confidential. Interview participants were allowed to stop the interview at any time. Any

references to interview results maintain the confidentiality of the participants.

Results were disseminated first through the publication of a dissertation housed in

the Asbury Theological Seminary library. The publication of several articles and a book

of devotions for IIMs was also intended.

Instrumentation

Three instruments were used in this project, all of which were researcher

designed. The first instrument was a quantitative survey conducted via SurveyMonkey.

The second and third instruments were qualitative semi-structured interviews.

The first instrument, The Intentional Interim Minister survey, was a quantitative

survey disseminated by SurveyMonkey. This researcher-designed survey provided a view

of the work of an IIM as a revitalization agent from the perspective of the IIM. The

survey started with a consent form, followed by six demographic questions and six

questions related to the research questions, and ended with a question inquiring whether

the survey participant was willing to be contacted for an interview.

The second instrument, the semi-structured interview for IIMs, was a qualitative

survey administered by the researcher via an interview with participants who agreed to be

interviewed in the IIM survey. Participants selected for this interview indicated that they

had either succeeded in revitalizing the church(es) they served or had seen themselves as

agents of revitalization. The semi-structured interview had three questions designed to

allow the participant to open up and share their experiences. The answers to the interview

provided insight into the ability of an IIM to revitalize a congregation.

The third instrument, the semi-structured interview for denominational officials, was a qualitative survey administered by the researcher via an interview with denominational officials who had insight into the use of IIMs in their denomination. The three questions in this semi-structured interview were designed to allow the participant to share their experiences with IIMs revitalizing the local church. The reason for using this instrument was to examine how denominational officials view IIMs as revitalizing agents.

Pilot Test and Expert Review

Four ministers, one from the United Methodist Church, one from the Episcopal Church, one from the Presbyterian Church, and one from the Disciples of Christ, participated in a quantitative IIM survey pilot test. They were asked to verify that the instrument worked, was easy to follow, took the time expected to fill out the survey, and was not confusing. In addition, the pilot test participants tested the instrument to ensure they could quit the survey at any time and could not take the survey without completing the consent form. The results of the pilot test provided positive feedback. The average time to take the survey was twelve minutes. In addition, the pilot test participants were unable to crash the survey. One suggestion received from three of the pilot test participants was to add a gender demographic question and include a list of genders beyond the traditional male and female, as their denominations have transgender clergy. Another suggestion was to add the United Church of Canada, as it is a large North American denomination. The final suggestion was to change from the American Baptist Convention as a surveyed group, to include all Baptist churches. These suggestions were implemented in the survey.

Three expert reviewers also received access to the quantitative survey and qualitative interview questions. The only comment received was to ensure the proper verb tense for the question about interim ministry practices.

Reliability & Validity of Project Design

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether the skills and methods employed by IIMs could also be used in church revitalization. The best people to provide information for this pre-intervention project are the people who are in interim or transitional ministry. Therefore, the utilization of IIMs in the survey and the interviews is appropriate for this type of study as the information was collected directly from the people with the most experience as interim ministers.

Each instrument had questions directly related to the research questions being asked. This allowed for a reliable quantitative analysis of the research questions and qualitative analysis with room for further exploration in the semi-structured interviews.

To produce reliable results, multiple tools were utilized for data triangulation (Sensing 72). Creswell and Creswell (231) identify data triangulation as a way to ensure the internal validity of the data. The foundational tool was the use of the survey providing quantitative data. The survey was followed by semi-structured interviews of both IIMs and denominational officials with direct knowledge of intentional interim ministry. The semi-structured interviews allowed me the freedom to follow up with additional questions related to the responses given by the interviewee.

All interviews were recorded for three reasons. First, it allowed me the ability to review the interview and take quality notes. Second, it provided the ability for me to focus on the person being interviewed without worrying about taking notes. Finally,

recording interviews offered the ability to utilize a third observer if necessary for data

analysis (Wiersma and Jurs 247).

Given the repeatability of the survey, the semi-structured interviews, and the

number of interim minister groups on social networks, other researchers can repeat this

research in the same or other locations and discover the same results.

Data Collection

The purpose of this project was to discover transformational practices for

leveraging intentional interim pastors to revitalize mainline North American churches.

This pre-intervention study began by finding ways to contact experienced IIMs. I used

social media as well as contacted training centers for interim ministers to find potential

participants.

The literature research of Chapter 2 served as a basis for designing the questions

in the survey. A survey draft was created on SurveyMonkey, and four ministers of

multiple denominations tested the survey on SurveyMonkey to ensure clarity in the

questions and that the survey did not crash. The reviewers suggested the addition of a

gender question for the demographic section, which was added. A draft of the survey was

then sent to three expert reviewers. The only suggested change was to correct the verb

tense on question 11 to be present tense. Bruce W. Tuckman and Brian E. Harper endorse

using a quantitative survey for soliciting information from a large group of people (244).

However, they see the use of a survey as a first step to finding answers to research

questions, not the only step. Once the Institutional Review Board approved the project,

the online surveys were started on the SurveyMonkey tool, and emails with the survey

link were sent to the TIIMS mailing list and the Facebook groups listed in the

Participants section above. The email and Facebook request to participate in the study can be found in Appendix E. The suggested timeframe for the survey to be completed was three weeks, with reminders sent out after ten and fifteen days. As participants returned the surveys, the statistical data was collated question by question using the data analysis software from SurveyMonkey. I made notes as themes emerged.

I chose eight participants based on their willingness to engage in an online interview and the revitalization they reported in the survey. I notified them by email that they had been selected for an interview. In addition, three denominational leaders agreed to an online interview. All interviews were scheduled and recorded via the ZOOM tool. The interviews were reviewed, data collected, and predominant themes documented. Sensing endorsed using a qualitative interview to investigate questions at a greater depth than a quantitative survey can provide (Sensing 57). Creswell and Creswell recommend the mixed-method approach so that there can be a triangulation of data to ensure the internal validity of the data and the study behind the data collection (Creswell and Creswell 231).

Data Analysis

The type of research used in this pre-intervention project was mixed-mode. The first instrument utilized was a quantitative survey focused on the research questions. Next, the write-in sections of questions 11, 12, and 13 were analyzed using text analysis for repeating themes, with different documents created for each theme.

The semi-structured interviews occurred after the collection of the survey data. Surprise findings were documented in separate documents. Repeating themes via text analysis were also documented.

The step-by-step nature of the study was important to understanding the final results. First, SurveyMonkey provided the tools for collecting and analyzing the survey data. The next step was organizing the data by the research questions and arranging and documenting into separate categories any surprises that occurred. Next, the analysis of survey findings took place before any interviews with IIMs. The interviews with the IIMs provided clarity and understanding of the survey results. Finally, the interviews with the denominational leaders allowed me to analyze the challenge of an IIM as a church revitalizer from a different perspective.

After completion of the data analysis, significant findings and results were written up in Chapter 4 of this dissertation, addressing all three research questions. When combined with the findings from the literature review, all three research questions, especially RQ #3, were then addressed in Chapter 5, offering a view into the use of an Intentional Interim Minister as a church revitalizer.

CHAPTER 4

EVIDENCE FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter describes the quantitative and qualitative research results on the effectiveness of intentional interim ministry practices in the revitalization of mainline North American churches. It considers the three research questions and examines the data revealed from quantitative questions and qualitative interviews. Driven by the research questions, the data is presented in charts and graphs to facilitate the interpretation of the data. In addition, themes identified by the qualitative interviews are correlated with the quantitative data, demonstrating common themes across the project.

The chapter presents data collected for each research question, with a summary of the meaningfulness of the data. Finally, the chapter ends with a short summary of five major findings from the research.

Participants

One hundred sixty-nine IIMs were directly involved in this research. Thirty of the one hundred sixty-nine IIMs were invited to a follow-up interview, with eight accepting and being interviewed via zoom or telephone. In addition, eight denominational leaders were initially selected and invited to participate in this research, with three responding that they were willing to participate. All participants were part of North American mainline protestant churches, representing The United Methodist Church, the Episcopal Church, The Presbyterian Church (USA), The United Church of Canada, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, the Disciples of Christ, the Baptist Church, and the United Church of Christ.

While two hundred sixty-three IIMs responded to the survey, four IIMs did not represent North America, forty-seven chose not to answer the geographic question, and forty-three did not represent a mainline protestant church. They were therefore removed from the analysis of the results, yielding results from one hundred sixty-nine IIMs. Figure 1 details the breakdown by denomination for the online survey participants.

Figure 4.1 shows the survey participant by mainline protestant denomination.
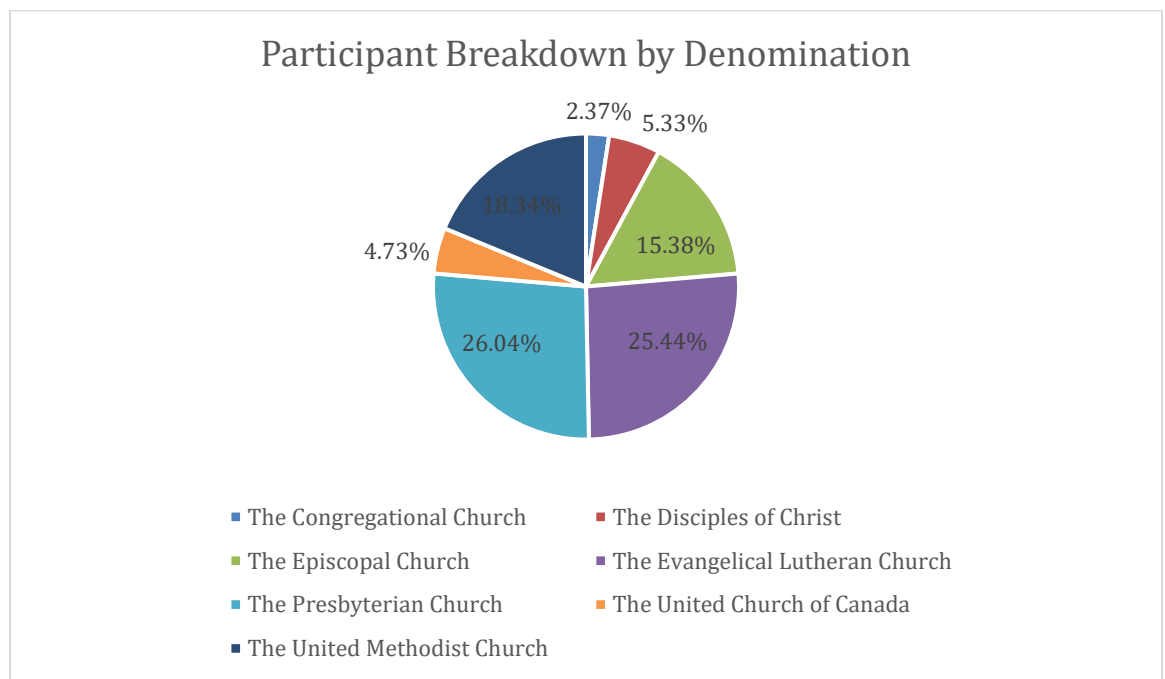
Figure 4.1. Participant breakdown by denomination.

Figure 4.2 shows the survey participants by ordination status. By triangulating the data (combining answers to multiple questions), it was observed that ordination was not required for either candidate to serve a church in their denominational polity (United Church of Canada, Baptist church). One respondent was among the youngest who replied to the survey, and the other was in the upper age range.
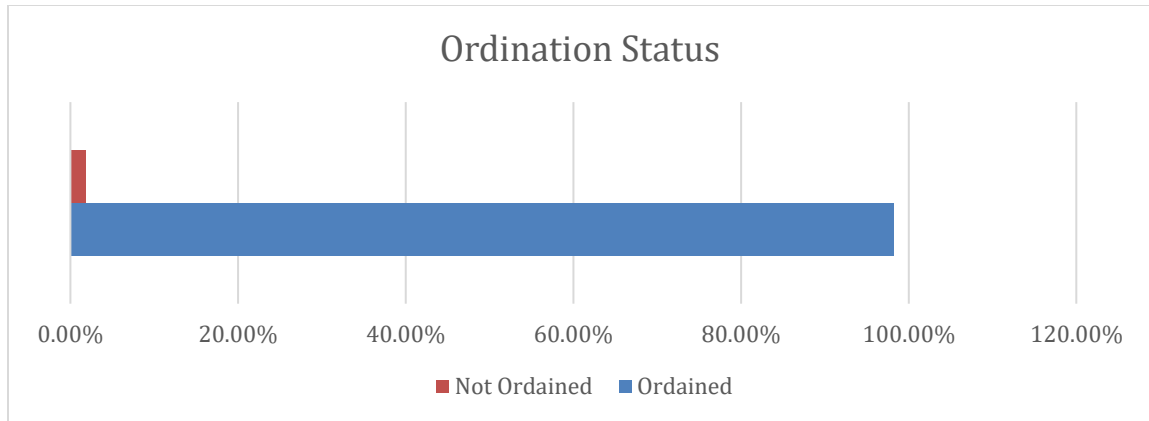
Figure 4.2. Survey participants by ordination status.

Figure 4.3 shows survey participants by age. It is noteworthy that there is only 1 IIM who would be considered young clergy (age range 25-34). The lack of young clergy was raised in the denominational interviews, with the response from two out of three denominational leaders that the issue is health care. As IIMs move from congregation to congregation, they may be required to change health insurance providers. The lack of portable health care for IIMs has created a situation where insurance for pre-existing conditions has been delayed or unavailable to new insurance subscribers. Interviews revealed that this situation does not exist in Canada, where they have National Health Care, and the pastors are freer to change locations without negatively impacting their health care.

Further queries with denominational officials about the vast majority of IIMs being over the age of fifty-five yielded an insight that many interim assignments are part-time, and it is the retired pastors living on pensions that have the financial ability to take those interim pastorates. In addition, the interviews brought out the perceived value of experience in ministry **and** age for an IIM. The interviewees believed that both factors

bring "wisdom and emotional maturity" to the congregations that need the services of an

IIM.
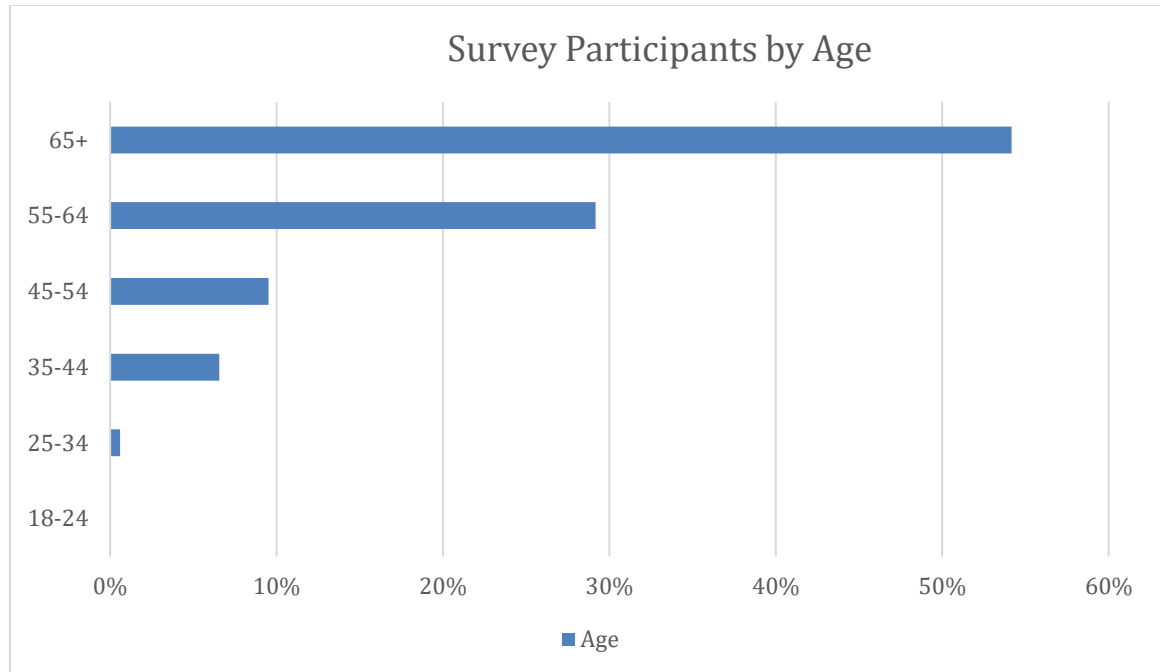
Figure 4.3. Survey participants by age.

Figure 4.4 shows survey participants by gender. A surprising insight was that the

majority of IIMs were women. According to the *State of Clergywomen in the U.S.: A

Statistical Update*, in 2016, women were 20.7% of U.S. clergy. In addition, among the

denominations surveyed and interviewed in this report, clergywomen have only reached

numerical equity with clergymen in the United Church of Christ. When I presented this

information in the interviews, a variety of responses were received, two of which follow.

"We have an easier time placing women as interim pastors, breaking the glass

ceiling in our churches, than in getting the churches to hire a woman as a settled pastor."

"Women are more willing to take part-time jobs than men."
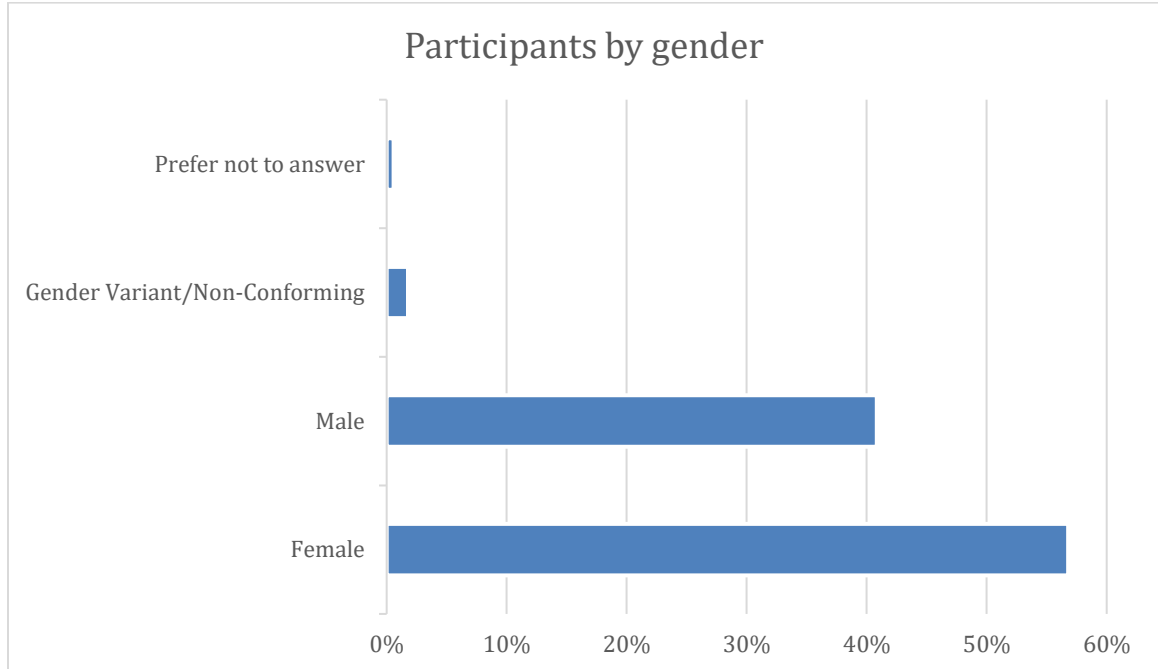
Figure 4.4 Survey participants by gender.

Figure 4.5 shows the ministry training each participant received. More than one answer could be selected. As expected for mainline protestant denominations, the vast majority of respondents had a Master of Divinity degree. Interestingly, the three denominational officials all had Doctor of Ministry degrees. The variety of degrees conferred makes it evident that IIMs are well-educated for ministry. In addition, the amount of supplemental training received via the write-in selection on the survey indicated that IIMs desire to continue training to increase their effectiveness.
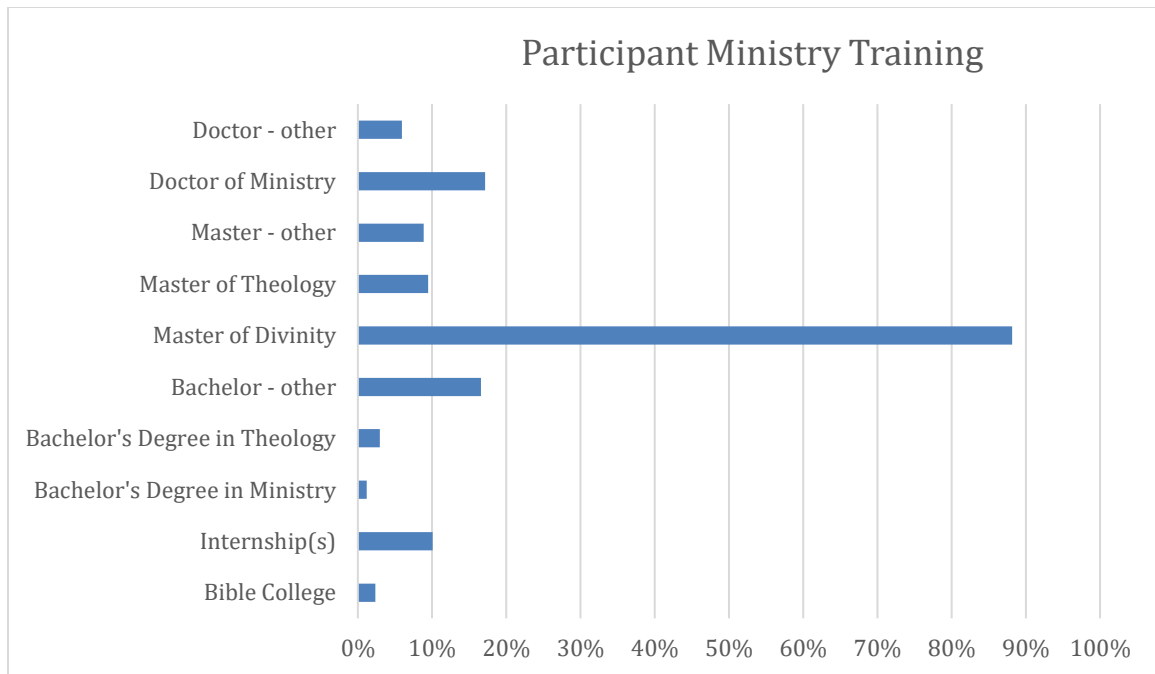
Figure 4.5. Participant ministry training.

Ministry training identified as "other" by survey participants is listed below, with the number of occurrences in parentheses. The specialist nature of interim ministry makes clinical pastoral education, conflict mediation, crisis intervention, and trauma training practical tools for IIMs, as well as spiritual direction, leadership, counseling, and psychology. The traditional processes developed by Mead for interim ministry (see Chapter 2) relied heavily on Family Systems training. Much of the additional training listed below relies on Family Systems to resolve conflict and crises.

- Clinical Pastoral Education (4)

- Conflict Mediation training (2)

- Crisis intervention training (3)

- Trauma intervention (2)

- DMIN candidate (2)

- Ph.D. candidate (2)

- Certificate in Spiritual Direction (2)

- Master Arts in Religion (2)

- Certificate in Executive Leadership (1)

- Life Coach (1)

- Military chaplaincy (1)

- Pastoral counseling residency (1)

- Ph.D. Pastoral Care and Counselling Psychology (1)

- Master of psychology (1)

- Master of mythology (1)

- MA Counseling & Human Development (1)

- Glasser Reality Therapy training (1)

- ELCA synodical training (1)

- Master of Sacred Theology (1)

- Facilitator for Healthy Congregations (1)

- Beeson Institute for Advanced Church Leadership (1)

Figure 4.6 shows the interim ministry training received by the survey participants. Eight percent of the respondents indicated more than one interim training. The Interim Ministry Network (IMN) was the first group to form and offer interim ministry training in the 1970s. The survey participants indicated that IMN is responsible for the majority of training received for North American IIMs. The percentage of IIMs who have not received any interim ministry training is 8.3%. The write-in selection for training

indicates that more denominations are creating their own training programs instead of

relying on the Interim Ministry Network. Figure 4.7 shows the breakdown among

denominations for survey respondents who did not have any interim training. The largest

group that reported zero interim training was the United Methodists. United Methodists

are the last denomination listed in the survey to embrace intentional interim ministry.

Some annual conferences utilize the Interim Ministry Network for training, while others

use TIIMS. Currently, the appointment of an IIM to a United Methodist Church is the

exception, not the norm.

Figure 4.6. Interim ministry training.

Denominational Breakdown by no interim training

Episcopal ■ UMC ■ ELCA ■ Disciples ■ Presbyterian
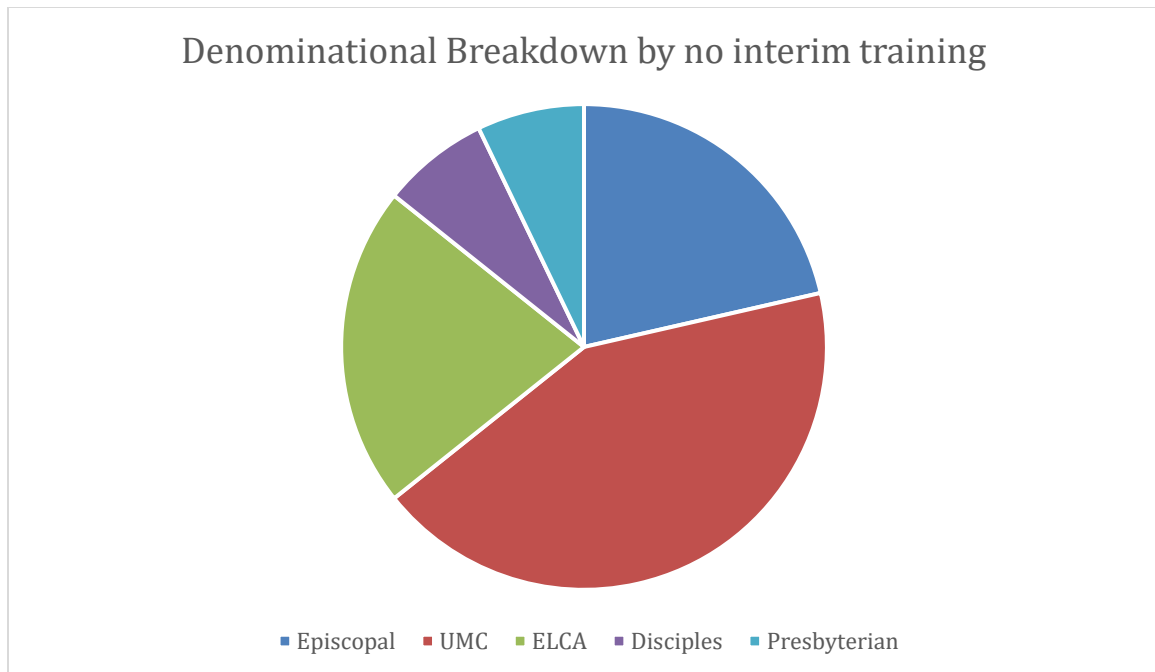
Figure 4.7. Denominational breakdown by no interim training.

Write-in responses for other training are represented below, with the number of occurrences in parentheses.

- PCUSA interim training (17)

- NALIP (now LuTMA) (6)

- Center for Congregational Health (4)

- Mentor (2)

- Transitional Ministry Workshop (2)

- Advanced Ed Interim Ministry - Boston University school of Theology (1)

- Alban Institute (1)

- American Baptist Churches USA training (1)

- Center for Congregational Growth (1)

- Clergy Leadership Institute (1)

- Coaching training (1)

- Healthy Congregations with Peter Steinke (1)

- Diocese (1)

- Dubuque Theological Seminary (1)

- IIMT with Healthy Congregations at Wake Forest (1)

- Intentional Interim ministry training, Rocky Mountain Synod, ELCA (1)

- Luther Seminary Continuing Education (1)

- Lutheran Interim Ministry Association (1)

- MALT through the PCUSA (1)

- National Assoc. of Lutheran Interim Pastors (1)

- Pittsburgh Seminary (1)

- Presbyterian Church The Art of Transitional Ministry (1)

- Princeton Seminary (1)

- Sand Bur Consulting (1)

- The Appreciative Way, Dr. Rob Voyle (1)

- Union Presbyterian Seminary (1)

- United Church of Canada with IMN support (1)

Figure 4.8 provides the demographics for the years the survey respondents have served as an IIM. Slightly over fifty-five percent of the IIMs who reported success in revitalization have more than five years' experience as IIMs, in addition to their years as settled or installed pastors. In the interviews with the IIMs, seventy-five percent indicated that it took them five years to be competent enough in interim ministry to effect change in a church that led to church revitalization.

How many years have you served as an intentional interim minister?
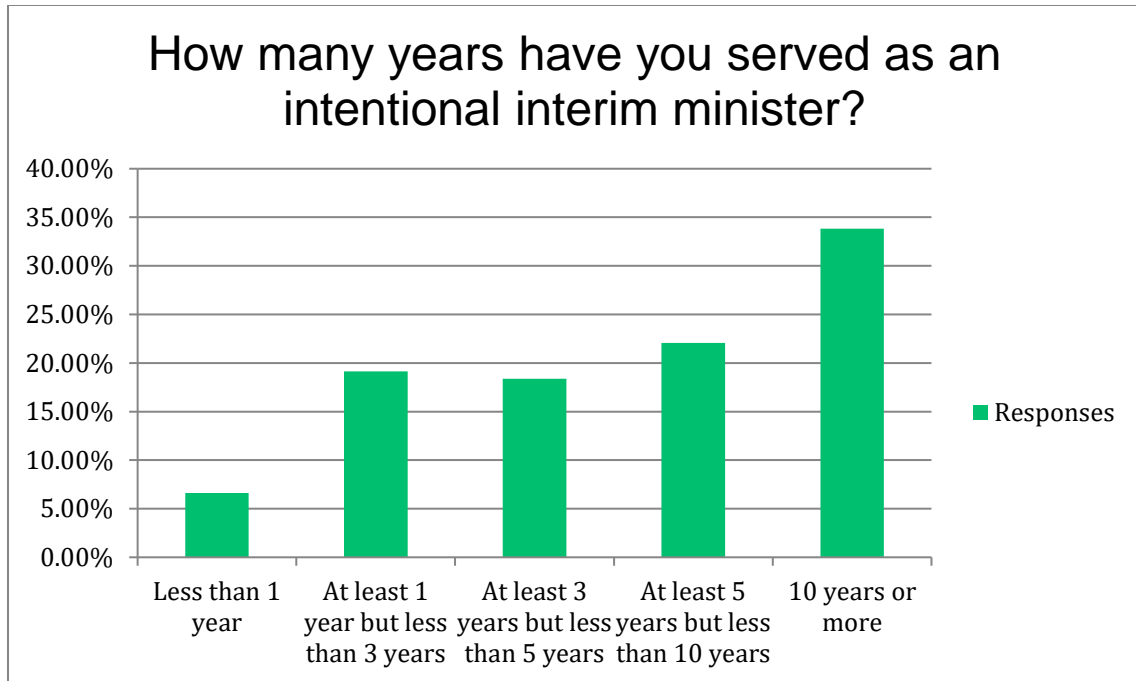
Figure 4.8. Years of intentional interim ministry.

Figure 4.9 shows the number of churches the survey participants have served as an IIM. There is a direct correlation between the number of churches served, the number of years served as an IIM, and success in revitalization. Seventy-two percent of the IIMs who reported success at revitalization had served one to six churches over ten years. The majority of IIMs interviewed indicated a twelve to eighteen month interim period at each church. However, the interim time was extended to several years for several of the IIMs in order to resolve more conflict and reorganization of the churches they were serving.
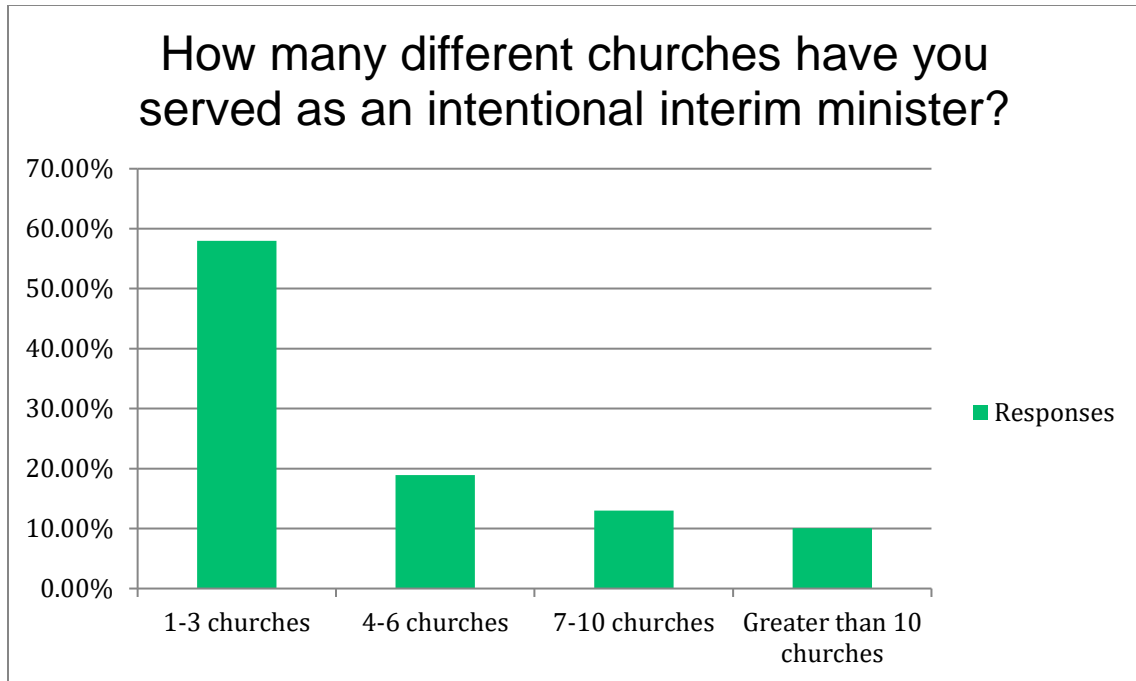
Figure 4.9. Number of churches served as an IIM.

Research Question #1: Description of Evidence

Research Question #1 asked, what intentional interim ministry practices are currently being used to revitalize mainline North American churches?

Table 4.1 shows the intentional interim ministry practices the survey participants reported using in their revitalization efforts. Note that multiple answers were allowed. The answers in Table 1 are typical IIM tasks, as identified in Chapter 2 of this dissertation. The survey revealed that IIMs that were successful in revitalizing congregations were more likely to work on unifying a congregation and resolving conflicts than IIMs that were not successful in revitalizing a congregation. A surprise finding was that the IIMs who were successful revitalizers were also more likely to educate the congregation on the role the congregation has in creating a healthy ministry environment. This holistic approach to ministry includes boundary setting for the pastor,

their family, and their parsonage, expectations on continuing education, hours worked

each week, vacation, and sabbaticals. One denominational official reported that healthy

ministry environments contribute to the church's revitalization and the ability to attract

the right settled pastor.

Table 4.1 IIM Practices for Revitalization

Process	All respondents	IIMs with success at revitalization	Difference
Prepare the congregation for their next leader	91.72%	92.03%	0.31%
Help the congregation come to terms with their history	84.62%	85.51%	0.89%
Help the congregation define a new identity for their future	83.43%	86.96%	3.53%
Educate the congregation on the role the congregation has in creating a healthy ministry environment	69.23%	73.19%	3.96%
Help the congregation resolve conflict	67.46%	72.46%	5%
Help the congregation thru a grief process	66.86%	70.29%	3.43%
Reconnect the congregation to their denomination and denominational beliefs	65.09%	68.12%	3.03%
Help the congregation change leadership structures	64.50%	67.39%	2.89%
Help unite the congregation	56.21%	61.59%	5.38%
Create new congregational policies	52.07%	55.8%	3.73%
Create a congregation self-study	52.07%	52.9%	0.83%
Create an ethnographic study of the congregation and surrounding area	24.85%	26.81%	1.96%

In addition, survey respondents and those interviewed reported the following

ministry practices helped revitalize their churches.

- Utilizing appreciative inquiry

- Instilling a spirit of hope and optimism

- Re-energizing worship

- Deal with residue from previous pastoral misconduct

- Deal with residue from financial misconduct

- Terminate ineffective staff

- Resolve property management issues

- Come to terms with financial sustainability

- Provide clear administrative leadership

- Create a church behavioral covenant

Utilizing appreciative inquiry was repeated five times in the interviews and seven times in the write-in comments, indicating that it is viewed positively by the IIMs who have successfully revitalized a church. The attitude of the IIM when they walk in the door and start work was also mentioned numerous times. If the IIM is not optimistic about the church's future, then the IIMs attitude is contagious to the parishioners. As one survey participant said, "You have to be honest. You can't fake it. If you do not see a reason to be optimistic, then you have to address it head-on. If you do not have hope for the church, they will give up. No one should be an IIM if they are a pessimist."

Property management issues were also mentioned several times in the write-in comments on the survey and twice in the interviews. The churches with property management issues had monetized their assets (buildings) and had unhappy tenants or businesses with employee issues. In both cases, the church had fallen down on its responsibilities, creating friction in the building, which was known in the community. As a result, the congregation was depressed. However, one of the interviewed IIMs said that

showing competency in leading the congregation through the property issues gave them credibility in addressing the overall church needs.

Research Question #2: Description of Evidence

Research Question #2 asked, what are the barriers to using intentional interim pastors in the revitalization of mainline North American churches?

Table 4.2 lists the barriers IIMs encountered in revitalizing mainline North American churches. More than one answer could be selected for this survey question. The number one barrier to revitalization identified by the survey and the interviews was that the congregation did not want to change, followed by trust issues between congregants, fear of change, and stewardship problems. Evaluating the barriers experienced by all IIMs, and the barriers experienced by IIMs who reported success at revitalization, it was surprising that the IIMs who reported success at revitalization reported congregations were unwilling to address a toxic environment more than those who did not report success at revitalization.

The survey and interview data demonstrated that the congregation's unwillingness to change was a significant barrier to revitalization. In addition, church bullies often led the resistance to change. IIMs who were interviewed credited church bullies, along with the church's inability to confront the bullies, with the failure of church revitalization.

The survey data and interview data also demonstrated that the number two barrier to revitalization was that members of the congregation lacked trust in each other. The interviews provided greater clarity to this finding. One United Methodist IIM said, "Before I had even moved into the parsonage, I was being contacted by members telling

me who I could trust and who I couldn't trust." A Disciples of Christ IIM said, "My first day at one church, I was inundated with people complaining about other people and telling me not to trust their motives." The prevalence of church bullies and people who felt entitled to "run the church" because of family history in founding the church was also called out in the interviews as "blocking" change in the church and a source of distrust between congregants.

The survey data and interviews also indicated that congregations with financial issues are not in a position to grow and change until they fix their underlying problems. For example, one IIM said, "The church wanted to change but could not afford to pay me or fix anything that broke in the parsonage." Another pointed out what they felt was a growing problem for congregations. They said, "They [the congregation] want a full-time pastor for less than half-time pay, and I am supposed to fix everything without their cooperation." As a result, both of the IIMs said they ended up closing those churches. However, a denominational official recounted how his eighteen-month interim contract was extended so he could lead the church in fixing its infrastructure, which included finances, building, and staffing, which enabled the church to change and start growing again.

In addition, write-in comments indicated that a lack of denominational support and involvement with the interim ministry process was a barrier to revitalization. These comments varied by denomination. One United Church of Canada IIM said, "When I hit a barrier I don't understand, I have someone in the denomination who helps. Consequently, I can tough it out when difficult situations occur." Another Presbyterian IIM said, "The presbytery may have approved my position and contract, but they have

not provided any support in making good changes." Denominational officials who were interviewed elaborated on these comments. Some denominations have leaders who coordinate the IIMs in their denomination or their region. Other denominations have a central database of churches requesting interims and interims looking for churches. In the latter situation, it is up to the interim and the church to find each other, and the IIM feels less supported.

Finally, the IIM interviews brought out another surprise in the barrier category. Two respondents said IIMs have skills that should be used in conjunction with settled pastors to resolve issues and challenges in the settled pastor's church. The interviewees proposed that IIMs not currently serving a church work alongside the settled pastors to resolve conflict and establish a visioning process. One United Methodist IIM said, "The visioning process is long and complex. I don't think settled pastors have the energy to do that if the church is in a downward trend. But I can help shore up that pastor and help the church find the direction God wants them to take."

Table 4.2. Revitalization Barriers Experienced

Process	All respondents	IIMs with success at revitalization	Difference
Congregation wanted to maintain the status quo	65.64%	64.39%	-1.25%
Congregation had trust issues with each other	58.28%	62.88%	4.6%
Congregation was afraid of change	57.67%	59.85%	2.18%
Congregation had stewardship problems	46.01%	46.21%	0.2%
Congregational culture revolved around the previous pastor	41.72%	43.18%	1.46%
Congregation was unwilling to address a toxic environment	39.26%	42.42%	3.16%
Congregation did not believe they needed an Intentional Interim Pastor	31.29%	31.82%	0.53%
Congregation was unwilling to deal with their grief	28.83%	28.03%	-0.8%
Congregation had trust issues with you	28.22%	28.79%	0.57%
Staff was uncooperative	21.47%	21.21%	-0.26%
Congregation was unwilling to do a self-study	12.88%	10.61%	-2.27%
Congregation broke your contract	9.82%	9.09%	-0.73%
Congregation did not need an Intentional Interim Pastor	3.07%	3.79%	0.72%

In addition, survey respondents and those interviewed reported experiencing the following barriers to revitalization.

- Unwillingness to meet the needs of the community (7)

- Lack of Denominational Support (6)

- Inability to affect change and build community during the COVID pandemic (6)

- Congregation wanted the interim pastor to be the new settled pastor

- Inadequate staffing of the church

- Staff resignations

- Church Anger at denominational leadership

- Lack of spiritual formation for laity

- Church bullies (5)

- Church staff and lay leadership manipulative behavior (6)

- Interference from previous pastors (2)

- Congregation refused to work with LGBTQ+ appointed pastor

- Congregation did not understand the purpose of interim ministry

- Congregation tried to speed up the interim process to get rid of unwanted female interim

- Christian nationalism splitting the congregation

All of the barriers expressed are known challenges in congregations, as documented in Chapter 2. However, according to the interviews with survey participants, the more of these barriers present in a single congregation, the longer the congregation needs the interim, and the lower the chance of revitalization in that congregation. In addition, the denominational interviews indicated the longer the history of conflict, the more likely the church is on its way to closure versus revitalization.

Research Question #3: Description of Evidence

Research Question #3 asked, what approaches to intentional interim ministry best lend themselves to revitalizing a mainline North American church?

Figure 4.10 shows the survey results for whether intentional interim ministry has helped to revitalize the church the interim was serving. Eighty-three percent of the survey respondents indicated that their ministry as IIMs helped to revitalize a congregation.
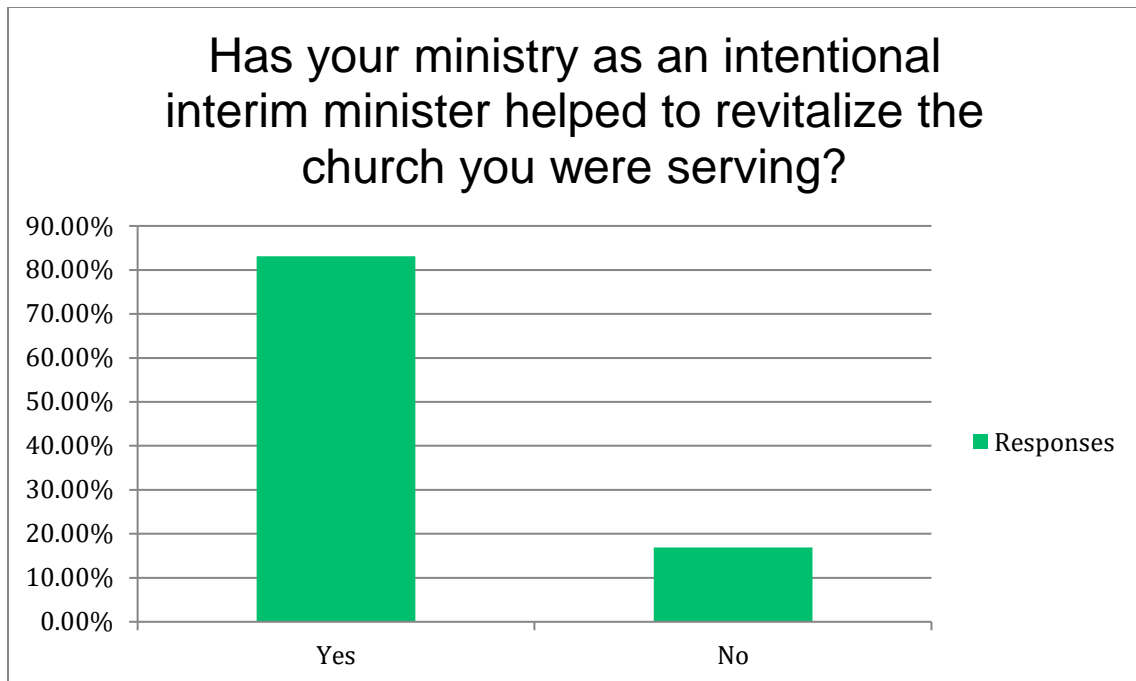
Figure 4.10. Interim minister success at revitalization.

Cross-referencing the survey responses that indicated success at revitalization, with the other responses that have already been discussed, yields the following insights about approaches to intentional interim ministry best lend themselves to revitalizing churches.

1. Success at revitalization was not dependent on the sex of the IIM. The percentage of IIMs who reported success at revitalization is the same as the overall survey respondents reported in Figure 4.

2. Success at revitalization was not dependent on ministry training. The percentage of IIMs who reported success at revitalization had the same basic ministry training (Bachelor in Ministry, Bachelor in Theology, Master of Divinity, Master of Theology, and Doctor of Ministry) as the overall IIMs who responded to the survey, as reported in Figure 5.

3. The type of interim ministry training that an IIM received made no
   statistically significant difference in success in revitalizing a church. One
   hundred percent of the IIMs who reported having success at revitalization
   indicated post-seminary training in interim ministry. The Interim Ministry
   Network (IMN) trained the most IIMs who participated in the survey (49.4%,
   83 respondents). A slightly smaller percentage (48.18%, 66 respondents) of
   the survey participants who indicated they were successful at revitalizing a
   church were trained by the IMN.

The number of years an IMM had served as an interim pastor made a statistically
significant difference in the success of church revitalization. Intentional interim ministers
who had served for more than five years as an IIM were 6.78% more likely to report
success in church revitalization than those who had served less than five years. The
survey also showed that IIMs who had served more than four churches as IIMs were
5.09% more successful at revitalization than the IIMs who had served less than four
churches.

Further elaboration on the reasons for success by survey participants and the
interviews yielded the following best practice insights for IIMs leading church
revitalization. The most frequent comment on the survey and from the interviews was
that the first steps in revitalization were leading the congregation through a self-
understanding of who they were and an understanding of who God was calling them to
be. This understanding and visioning process often drew out toxic leaders (both laity and
paid staff) and often resulted in a realignment of staff and congregational infrastructure.
Once new leaders were in place with the new vision and budget, the congregation could

continue to grow and change as needed. Sometimes behavioral covenants were created for the congregation and staff as part of the staff and congregational infrastructure changes. Some IIMs used curriculums across the congregation, such as *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God* by Henry T. Blackaby, et al, *Sacred Ground* (Episcopal curriculum), *A Door Set Open* by Peter Steinke, and other curriculums developed by consultants and denominational leadership.

Other IIMs hired after clergy misconduct, sudden clergy resignations, financial mismanagement, church splits, or during a pandemic all reported that the first and most important thing they did to start the congregation towards revitalization was a calm, non-anxious, and steady leadership. The importance of active listening was emphasized, and small group listening meetings for the congregation with the IIM. One IIM serving a divided church reported that they had a meeting where "people were given random numbers and had to sit at a table with those of their number and then listen to each other without responding. They then had to summarize what they heard from each other and how that made them feel, and what that meant to them as a church. After being heard, they started to talk to each other and work with each other. They became a church for each other and a church in truth in Jesus Christ." One IIM reported that the non-anxious presence, despite "pipes bursting, toilets backing up, and a loan coming due," helped the congregation trust them to lead the congregation. Another IIM reported using a multi-month study of the book of Exodus until the congregation came to understand that "while they [the congregation] were wandering, they would get to the promised land if they were faithful." Another pastor emphasized using a visioning process and said, "As the

congregation's trust in the leadership grew, and their understanding of their job as a congregation grew, they were willing to dream God-sized dreams."

Another repeated reason for success in IIMs leading revitalization in the church was introducing the congregation to new ways of worship, either by creating new worship services or slowly blending new worship elements into existing worship services. In addition, the IIMs reported that the more laity involved in the creation and execution of worship, the easier it was for the existing congregation to accept the changes and the easier transition the next settled pastor experienced. One pastor reported, "The youth group grew the music program, and none of the older adults wanted to discourage the youth. Word grew in the community about the youth, and their peers started coming, eventually bringing their parents. A whole new vitality resulted in the church. Funny thing, the youth were combining old hymns with electric guitars and drums."

Revitalizing IIMs also spoke about the importance of re-examining traditional church leadership structures and discarding those that had "long lost usefulness." Some reported that "fewer committees and more mission teams" turned around their church. The effort to have more mission teams also resulted in the churches reconnecting with their communities.

Another repeated theme expressed in the survey and the interviews was the importance of the attitude that the IIM carried into a new environment. For example, sometimes, the churches are so depressed emotionally that they need significant positivity from the new leader to turn things around. One IIM reported that this was evident in one pastorate that kept refusing interim pastors because they felt "having an interim named to the church would give them a reputation of being a bad church." I asked in the IIM

interviews whether this was true and found that the word interim has a "growing negative connotation" for churches.

In summary, the approaches to intentional interim ministry that best lend themselves to revitalizing a mainline North American church involve a multi-focal approach. The approaches that result in revitalization include evaluating the vitality and financial stability of the congregation, active listening, and visioning. Conflict must be acknowledged and addressed. Undergirding these approaches is solid teaching on faith, discipleship, and the purpose of the church. In addition, survey and interview participants said that leadership training was critical in getting a church healthy and creating an environment where a leadership pipeline is established. Training future leaders will yield a healthy church for many years

Summary of Major Findings

This chapter has described the research findings, showing the evidence for each discovery. It has revealed much data. However, four major findings are significant in this detailed information.

1. The role of IIMs in leading a church in revitalization

   The very nature of the processes IIMs are trained in can lead to the revitalization of the congregation, whether it be conflict resolution or future visioning.

2. The Effect of a Lack of Denominational Understanding and Support on Revitalization

   All pastors need a support network to accomplish the job where God has placed them. Where there is support, understanding of the call, and continuing education, there is a greater incidence of the revitalization of congregations.

3. The Importance of an IIMs experience in successfully revitalizing a church

IIMs with greater than five years of experience as an IIM reported more success in church revitalization. Therefore, care should be taken in appointing or hiring new IIMs to place them in congregations where they can build and grow their skills before placing them in congregations that need revitalization.

4. The Use of IIM Skills Beyond the Interim Setting

IIMs are trained to handle crises, visioning, conflict, and infrastructure restructuring. Therefore, settled pastors should utilize IIMs to help the settled pastors' churches in revitalization efforts.

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CHAPTER 5

LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

The purpose of this project was to discover transformational practices for leveraging intentional interim pastors to revitalize mainline North American churches, which are rapidly declining. This final chapter integrates the research findings with personal reflections. Significant findings are explained along with the biblical and theological support for these findings, leading to some overall implications of the research, explaining how the findings will be helpful to both to IIMs and denominational leaders in North America. The chapter includes a section on limitations and some unexpected observations discovered during the course of the research, and it makes some final recommendations. It concludes with a postscript reflecting on the research journey of this project.

Major Findings

The Role of IIMs in leading a Church in Revitalization

IIMs often lead a church in revitalization. I have observed churches that have made significant positive changes under the leadership of an intentional interim minister. These changes gave the congregation a new outlook, hope, and a reminder of who they were called to be as a church. However, the training offered to IIMs does not talk about revitalization. Instead, IIM training teaches processes to enable a smooth transition while ensuring regular pastoral work is done without a settled pastor. The use of an IIM also gives the congregation time to grieve and recover from the departure of their previous pastor, time to discern the attributes of the settled pastor they needed, and time to search

for that pastor. While these processes address conflict in the congregation, they do not address revitalization.

During my research, the survey found that over eighty percent of the IIMs reported success at revitalizing a church. As illustrated in chapter four, the processes used by IIMs also identify challenges within the congregation, which, when addressed by the congregation, results in the congregation being better off than they were before. For example, one IIM reported that congregational worship was re-energized by utilizing appreciative inquiry to discern changes that should be made. As a result, hope and optimism returned to the congregation, who felt listened to and claimed ownership of the new worship style "which they created." The hope and optimism resulted in new visitors and new professions of faith.

As the IIMs led the congregations they served in a self-study or visioning processes, they sometimes found that staff needed re-alignment to meet the new needs of the congregation. Old job descriptions from the 1960s were not applicable in 2020. In the early years of interim ministry, these findings were left for the newly called settled pastor to resolve. Unfortunately, a newly settled pastor changing job descriptions or firing existing staff can result in a hurt and divided congregation at the start of the new pastor's ministry. The newly settled pastor has to ask themselves, "Is this the hill I want to die on." Often they would say no to that question, and the staff problems would continue to hamper effective ministry. As interim ministry has evolved, the IIM should be empowered to lead the church in staff reorganizations. This revitalization and reorganization of the staff result in a more stable, energized staff for the future called or appointed pastor.

Church revitalization also occurred when the surveyed IIMs reported leading congregations rewriting their bylaws to create a new lay leadership structure more in tune with the current times. For example, in the interviews, the United Methodist IIMs said they had led some churches in changing the leadership structure to a one-board model. In the 1970s, that would have been impossible as a one-board leadership model was not in the United Methodist Book of Discipline. In 2023, many United Methodist churches have transitioned to a one-board model of church leadership. As the IIM led in the transition, the next minister to be appointed by the bishop to their churches will find a revitalized, energized group of trained leaders ready to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Finally, IIMs reported that in recent years, they were asked to lead the church in resolving property management issues. As the issues were resolved, cash flow in the church improved, the church's reputation in the community improved, and the church saw new vitality because they had money to create new mission programs. Resolving financial problems enabled the newly settled pastor to walk into a church that was more financially stable than before. Stewardship models for churches are changing as society is changing in North America. IIMs reported that they were being asked to lead stewardship campaigns as part of the church revitalization, so there would be a solid financial foundation already in place for the next pastor. Stewardship campaigns involve more than asking for estimates of giving. They also teach biblical stewardship, ensuring sound financial policies are in effect and the church budget reflects its mission and financial ability.

None of these examples cited are in the traditional definition of intentional interim ministry. Instead, they have evolved as the church has evolved. In the literature review in Chapter 2, Bendroth reported the results of two small studies that indicated a sixty percent success of an IIM in congregations that had experienced a high level of conflict or trauma. Resolving conflict resulted in healing which led to church revitalization. In addition, the Center for Congregational Health reported that eighty-seven percent of the congregations who used an IIM said they were healthier at the end of the process than initially (Bendroth "Rethinking" 24). A church that has moved in a healthy direction is a church that has new life. Unfortunately, despite those two references from the literature review, the rest of the literature review does not discuss the role of an IIM as a revitalizer. Perhaps that will change with the results of this project.

Moses led the Israelites from slavery to freedom. As enslaved people, the Israelites had zero understanding of the God who had called them. Moses had to teach the Israelites to give up their pagan ways of worship, depending on God, and following God. While his leadership tenure was long, Moses was a type of IIM, teaching, training, and guiding the Israelites through the wilderness to the Promised Land. The people who entered the Promised Land were different from those who left Egypt. They were changed. They had a purpose. They were revitalized.

The Effect of a Lack of Denominational Understanding and Support on Revitalization

The lack of denominational understanding and support directly affects success in revitalization. As a United Methodist elder, I am accustomed to having denominational support in the churches to which I have been appointed. While I realize that other United

Methodist elders may not have received such support, I have found that it is always there

when I ask for help. In contrast to my experience, the survey results and interviews

highlighted that a lack of denominational understanding and support is directly related to

an IIMs ability to lead a church in revitalization. For example, the IIMs who were part of

a call system where the IIMs searched databases of job openings and applied for those

jobs without support, encouragement, and matching of skills were less likely to have a

support system in place for the tasks they were being called to perform in a congregation.

While there are some support systems offered by the Interim Ministry Network and even

some FaceBook groups, there was a repeated theme in the interviews and in the write-in

comments that if the IIM had more support from the denomination for the necessary

changes that needed to happen in the congregation, more revitalization could have

occurred.

As indicated in Chapter Two, Smith reported the need for a support system for

IIMs was recognized by the IMN and implemented. However, this support is not at a

denominational level (Smith Foreword). Angela Yee (74-75) pointed out the support an

interim minister needs from the church leadership and denominational leadership.

However, none of the authors read in Chapter Two identified the type of assistance from

the denomination that IIMs need to succeed in the interim period and in revitalization.

Some of the denomination-specific differences for IIMs are steps to closing a church,

enforcing denominational standards in a call agreement, and enforcing denominational

standards in the negotiated exit agreements. As reported in the interviews, IIMs are

hesitant to engage lawyers to enforce contracts out of fear of ruining their reputations.

While the New Testament describes the start of the church, it does not describe denominations. There are churches in many locations, created by the travels of Paul and the other apostles, that were all considered offshoots of the Jerusalem church. In Acts 15, there is a description of the Jerusalem Council, which met to resolve questions about the requirements for Gentiles to become Christians. Did the Gentiles need to become Jews first? Did the Jewish circumcision and dietary laws apply to Gentile Christians? As the Jerusalem Council made its decision, the leaders in every church knew how to proceed in their location. It is this ability to have a group within the denomination to assist them that the IIMs are requesting.

The Importance of an IIM's experience in successfully revitalizing a church

The experience of an IIM's experience matters in the success of an IIM in revitalizing a church is not surprising. Experience matters in the success of any project in any vocation. Within the vocation of intentional interim ministry, after five years of experience, IIMs reported success in revitalizing a church. Interviews found that IIMs felt more confident and empowered to lead their churches in doing the necessary things that resulted in church revitalization after having experience as transitional ministers. In addition, interviewees reported that with each success, their confidence increased, yielding more successes in the future. This finding implies that a more experienced IIM might be needed when a church needs revitalization. For example, healthy churches searching for a new pastor after a non-conflict-related resignation of the former pastor may benefit from a less experienced IIM, while churches in conflict or need reorganization will benefit from a more experienced IIM.

The literature review did not identify experience as a necessity for an IIM to effectively lead revitalization. However, the Bible highlights the importance of an experienced mentor in the effectiveness of early Christian leaders. For example, Barnabas (Acts 9:26-30) mentored the apostle Paul into a position of Christian leadership. Barnabas was a mature Christian while Paul was learning and was able to introduce Paul to the church leadership and help Paul gain credibility as a leader. This task was not easy, given that Paul had once persecuted the church. As time progressed, the Biblical narrative documents Paul mentoring Timothy, Silvanus, and Titus (2 Cor. 1:1, 1 Thess. 1:1, and Gal. 3:1). In the Old Testament, Joshua went from being a spy to an assistant to Moses since his youth (Num. 11:28). When Moses laid his hands on Joshua, the people accepted him as their next leader (Deut. 34:9). The Biblical narrative is clear. Experienced Christian leaders teach and raise effective Christian leaders. IIMs walk into unhealthy church environments and lead the congregation in self-understanding, visioning, and healing. Experienced IIMs are more likely to create a healthy church environment than brand-new IIMs.

The Use of IIM Skills Beyond the Interim Setting

One observation that started with a write-in comment on the survey was that the respondent felt that the IIM skills of conflict resolution and congregational visioning could be utilized in non-interim ministry settings. This prompted an additional question that I asked during the interviews. The question was, "Are your IIM skills transferable to a settled pastorate?" Seventy-Five percent responded that they were transferable. One IIM said that in her denomination's polity, she must constantly apply for interim ministry jobs in a North American database and she often has periods of unemployment between

interim ministry jobs. She felt that some of the dioceses she served would have benefited

from allowing her to "come alongside" a settled pastor to be a consultant to help with

conflict resolution, as well as leading the congregation in a self-study and visioning

process.

The literature review found that most interim pastors started as settled or installed

pastors and transitioned into interim ministry as a retiree vocation. None of the literature

documented IIMs working as consultants between interim pastor assignments. However,

when the question was posed to denomination officials during the interviews, the officials

thought that using the IIMs as consultants to congregations needing IIM skills was a good

idea that should be pursued. It should be noted that the congregational officials

interviewed were responsible for placing IIMs versus the other system where IIMs were

responsible for interviewing with churches in need of an interim minister.

Akinyemi O. Alawode, discussing effective evangelistic methodologies,

recognizes the Apostle Paul's effectiveness as a church planter. When the church was

established and local leaders selected, the Holy Spirit would direct Paul to travel to a new

location. Some would say that Paul was an IIM specializing in church planting. Ian Paul

recognizes the Apostle Paul as an expert in conflict resolution. Paul's advice to the

churches he wrote in the Epistles offers insights into their problems and how to deal with

them. Based on what Paul said in his letters to churches, Paul is acting as a consultant to

churches in conflict and is a precursor to IIMs using their skills to assist settled pastors.

Ministry Implications of the Findings

The ministry of an IIM is evolving, and the placement of IIMs needs to evolve as

well. IIMs will not be as effective without changes to the denominational support of the

interim ministry. Denominational officials should assist their parishes in finding the right

IIM for their current needs, as well as assist the IIM in negotiating expectations, salary,

benefits, and time of service. IIMs without much experience should be sent to stable

churches needing a pastoral transition. IIMs with more experience must be selected and

recommended to churches that need revitalization. The effectiveness and happiness of an

IIM will increase if they have visible support from their denominational leadership,

especially with things that vary from denomination to denomination.

The study results will be shared with the Intentional Ministry Network and those

who have requested a copy. I have also been asked to make one or more presentations to

the Intentional Ministry Network of the findings, along with my recommendations. I hope

these findings will generate additional training from IMN for the IIMs and motivate

denominational officials to take basic interim minister training. In addition, as listed in

the recommendations, I expect new modules to be developed for IIM and official

denominational training.

Finally, with this study's recommendations, the intentional interim ministry

practice will continue to evolve, and the deployment of IIMs will be more effective.

Limitations of the Study

The number of denominational officials available for the interview limited this

study. The intention was to interview one official in charge of interim ministers from

each North American mainline denomination. However, due to differences in polity and

practice, I found that most denominations do not have a person or office in charge of the

placement of interim ministers. Only the United Church of Canada, some United

Methodist annual conferences, and some dioceses of the Episcopal Church were able to

identify leaders with interim ministry in their job descriptions. Another limitation was an outbreak of COVID-19 among those scheduled for interviews. Fifteen interviews of IIMs were canceled due to illness.

If I were doing the study again, I would add race to the collected demographic information. More studies can be done on the demographics of an IIM, including salary and race, which might provide some unexpected results and recommendations.

Unexpected Observations

I was surprised by the lack of denominational leadership in placing IIMs. I was also surprised by the perceived lack of denominational support experienced by the IIMs. Going deeper into the data where IIMs indicated a lack of support, I found a direct correlation between the perceived lack of support and the lack of denominational leadership. Analyzing the call systems for the IIMs that reported a lack of support yielded an additional surprise. The denominations that utilize call systems were less likely to have a person in charge of the placement of an IIM, less likely to have a database of IIM skills that could be utilized in the placement of an IIM, and a higher likelihood of a perception of lack of support by their IIM clergy. However, this is not a hard fast rule. For example, some presbyteries have a clergy member who welcomes and guides the IIM and is the voice of the presbytery to the church employing the IIM. Other presbyteries may not have this leadership. Methodist IIMs and Episcopal IIMs made similar comments. The United Church of Canada has a denominational official responsible for placing IIMs, and none of the IIMs who participated in the survey reported a lack of support.

I was also surprised by the suggestion of an IIM that IIMs could be used as consultants to support settled pastors in their ministry. It had not occurred to me that an IIM in charge of a parish would be willing to work alongside a settled pastor leading conflict resolution, ethnographic studies, and missional visioning activities. However, this suggestion and subsequent discussions in the interviews of other IIMs affirmed the potential of an IIM as a consultant to churches and settled pastors.

Finally, I was surprised that most IIMs who responded to the study were female. In the denominations surveyed, the majority of pastors are male. However, it appears that is not the case with IIMs. I asked an Episcopal IIM if they had any thoughts on that finding, and they mentioned that it is hard for a female priest to get a full-time pastorate in some areas. However, as interim ministers, women priests are breaking the glass ceiling in those areas.

Recommendations

The first recommendation is to encourage the denomination, diocese, presbyteries, conventions, or annual conferences to send one person in regional leadership to IIM training. Denominational leaders must understand the capabilities of IIMs. Knowing the capabilities of individual IIMs will help the denominations to know when and who to recommend, call, or appoint an IIM to a local congregation. Next, this denominational leader needs to contact the IIMs and start the process of providing support to those IIMs. Support comes in multiple forms. For denominational specific challenges (such as how to close a church), the denominational leader can convey the necessary legal information per denominational polity.

Second, the research showed that IIMs also need emotional and spiritual support. The denominational leader can also be considered the IIMs pastor, providing emotional and spiritual support. Third, each denominational unit should maintain a confidential personnel database of IIMs, with details on their gifts for interim ministry and revitalization capabilities. After each interim assignment, the denominational official should interview the church and the IIM separately so updates can be made to the IIMs profile on the database. As the database becomes populated, the denominational leadership will know which IIMs have a track record for revitalization and which IIMs need to start in a less conflicted pastorate to gain experience.

Fourth, the denominational leader should know the status of individual churches needing an interim minister. For example, is there a history of short clergy assignments to the church? Is the church having financial difficulty? Is the congregation dealing with grief or unresolved conflict? The denominational leader will then be able to search their database of IIM skills and experience and recommend IIMs for the church to interview or the denomination to appoint to the church. Finally, the denominational leader should ensure that the IIM's contract meets the denomination's employment standards.

The purpose of this project was to discover transformational practices for leveraging intentional interim pastors to revitalize mainline North American churches. The above recommendations deal with supporting the IIM based on survey and interview feedback. Transformational practices utilized by IIMs are well documented in Chapter Four. They represent basic processes that Mead recognized in the late 1970s and additional processes that transform the congregation (Mead, The Developmental Tasks, 2-7). In addition, new processes for visioning, stewardship, and congregation self-study

via ethnographic tools have emerged. Interim ministry training needs to be updated to teach these newer practices. In addition, the proliferation of social media provides the opportunity to create blogs with IIM revitalization success stories of how God has used the IIM to revitalize a church. These stories provide inspiration and guidance for IIMs and will help to refine transformational practices.

In support of the transformational practices identified in Table 4.1, I recommend that the organizations that train IIMs update their training on leading a church into financial stability. On August 30, 2022, the Religion News Service reported: "giving to churches as a percent of income declined between 1968 and 2019" (Empty tomb). The lack of funds inhibits a church's success at being missional in its community. One solution to this problem, reported by a survey participant, was for the IIM to lead the church in monetizing its assets. For example, renting out a family life center for exercise classes or allowing children's Sunday school rooms to be utilized during the week by a preschool. There are legal and financial ramifications to monetizing church assets that must be understood by the IIM and church leadership. Therefore, I recommend groups like TIIMS, IMN, and other denominational interim training groups add stewardship campaigns and information on monetizing church assets to their training. Two books that could help with this training are *Not Your Parent's Offering Plate* by J. Clif Christopher and Mike Slaughter and *Missional Vibrancy and Financial Viability* by Jay Moon and Mark DeYmaz.

Finally, a repeated theme from the IIMs was that they needed direction and support when the congregation realized they were no longer viable as a church. The IIMs need help in two areas. First, what are the steps that must happen to physically close the

church? These steps vary based on the denomination, polity, and church bylaws. I recommend that each denomination create guidance specifically for IIMs serving churches that may need to close and designate a denominational official as a contact person for questions. The IIMs must know the procedures before leading a church in this activity. In addition, the IIMs were uncertain about how to preach in times of church closure. I recommend that the groups that educate the IIMs create a webinar on helpful scriptures when a church is closing. Sermon samples could be provided for inspiration for the IIM, who will indeed be grieving along with the church. As the Israelite prophets preached to the Jews in exile, there is always hope. The faithful disciples that have realized their physical church must close need to be reminded of this hope and encouraged in their actions.

This research was the first continent-wide survey of IIMs. It should not be the last. I anticipate this research will generate webinars that are denomination-specific and webinars that are independent of denominations. In addition, I hope that the research will prompt the groups training IIMs to work together on the common areas across the protestant denominations and generate education modules specific to the denominations. Finally, I hope that this research will prompt changes at the denominational levels, resulting in better support for the IIMs and the churches that need them.

Postscript

As I started this journey, I expected to find a set of processes that would enable IIMs to lead their churches in revitalization. I also expected to find significant commonalities between denominations that could enable an IIM to serve multiple denominations if needed. Instead, I found that denominational differences and lack of

support often hinder the success of an IIM. I also found that the existing processes used in interim ministry will lead a church in revitalization if that church wants revitalization.

Despite those findings, I also found that the IIMs I interviewed were proud of their work and surprisingly optimistic despite their perceived lack of support. They saw their ministries as a calling to a healing ministry, and I agree with that perception.

I will share the results of this research with the different groups that are training IIMs and hope to create webinars that will answer the needs identified in this research. I have already agreed to write at least one article for IMN on this research. I will also help educate denominational leadership on the needs of the IIMs. I am also willing to help create a database of IIMs and their skills for the United Methodist Church.

APPENDIXES

A. Quantitative Survey questions

1. What geographic area are you located in? (select 1)
   - o Africa
   - o Antarctica
   - o Asia
   - o Europe
   - o North America
   - o Oceania
   - o South America
2. What denomination (s) have you served? (You may select more than one answer)
   - o The Congregational Church
   - o The Episcopal Church
   - o The Evangelical Lutheran Church
   - o The Presbyterian Church
   - o The United Methodist Church
   - o The Baptist Church (American Baptist, Southern Baptist, Cooperative Baptist, Independent Baptist)
   - o The Disciples of Christ
   - o The United Church of Canada
   - o Other – fill in the blank _____
3. Are you ordained? (select 1)
   - o Yes
   - o No
4. What is your age? (select 1)
   - o Under 18
   - o 18-24
   - o 25-34
   - o 35-44
   - o 45-54
   - o 55-64
   - o 65+
5. What is your gender (select 1)
   - o Female
   - o Male
   - o Transgender Female
   - o Transgender Male
   - o Gender Variant/Non-Conforming
   - o Prefer not to answer
   - o Not Listed (please specify) _____

6. What ministry training have you received? (You may select more than one answer)
    o Bible College
    o Internship(s)
    o Bachelor Degree
    o Master of Divinity
    o Master of Theology
    o Doctor of Ministry
    o Other (Please describe) _____

7. What training did you receive for interim ministry? (You may select more than one answer)
    o Interim Ministry Network (IMN)
    o Transitional Intentional Interim Ministry Specialist (TIIMS)
    o Other - Please describe _____
    o None

8. How many years have your served as an intentional interim minister? (select 1)
    o 0-3 years
    o 4-6 years
    o 7-10 years
    o 10-15 years
    o Greater than 15 years

9. How many different churches have you served as an intentional interim minister (select 1)
    o 1-3 churches
    o 4-6 churches
    o 7-10 churches
    o Greater than 10 churches

10. What intentional interim ministry practices do you use in your ministry? (You may select multiple practices)
    o Help the congregation come to terms with their history
    o Help the congregation define a new identity for the future
    o Help the congregation change leadership structures
    o Reconnect the congregation to their denomination and denomination beliefs
    o Prepare the congregation for their next leader
    o Educate the congregation on the role the congregation has in creating a healthy ministry environment
    o Help the congregation resolve conflict
    o Help the congregation thru a grief process
    o Help unite the congregation
    o Create new congregational policies
    o Create a congregation self-study
    o Create an ethnographic study of the congregation

        o   Other. Please specify other interim ministry practices you used
           _____

11. What barriers have you encountered in your ministry as an intentional interim minister? (You may select multiple barriers)
    - o Congregation was unwilling to deal with their grief
    - o Congregation had stewardship problems
    - o Congregation had trust issues with you
    - o Congregation had trust issues with each other
    - o Congregation broke your contract
    - o Congregation did not believe they needed an Intentional Interim Pastor
    - o Congregation wanted to maintain the status quo
    - o Congregational culture revolved around the previous pastor
    - o Congregation did not need an Intentional Interim Pastor
    - o Staff was uncooperative
    - o Congregation was unwilling to do a self-study
    - o Congregation was unwilling to address a toxic environment
    - o Congregation was afraid of change
    - o Other, Please briefly describe the barriers you have encountered
      _____

12. Has your ministry as an intentional interim minister helped to revitalize the church you were serving? If so, how?
    - o Yes
      - i. Please elaborate on what you did and the revitalization that occurred _____
    - o No

13. Are you willing to be contacted for a follow-up interview? If yes, please provide your email below
    - o Yes
      - i. Please provide email _____
    - o No

B. Semi-Structured Interview for IIMs

1. Where have you seen yourself as a church revitalizer?

2. What specific things did you do that helped a church turn around?

3. What obstacles hurt your ability to revitalize a church?

C. Semi-Structured Interview for Denominational Officials

1. Where have you seen an IIM lead a church in revitalization?

2. What specific things did they do that helped a church turn around?

3. Do you see potential in using a trained IIM as a church revitalizer?

Denomination _____

D. Informed Consent Letters/Forms

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

Intentional Interim Ministry: Another Tool for Church Revitalization

You are invited to be in a research study being done by Ellen McCubbin, a doctoral student from Asbury Theological Seminary. You are invited because you have experience as an Intentional Interim Minister in a mainline denomination (Baptist Church -American Baptist, Southern Baptist, Cooperative Baptist, Independent Baptist, the Congregational Church, the Disciples of Christ, the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Presbyterian Church, the United Church of Canada, and the United Methodist Church) in North America.

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to complete a survey via Survey Monkey survey which will take no more than ten minutes. In addition, if you agree to a follow-up phone or ZOOM interview, it will be no more than forty-five minutes in duration. There is no payment for participation in this study.

If anyone else is given information about you, they will not know your name. A number will be used instead of your name.

Data from the Survey will be collected anonymously and stored on a password-protected hard drive and maintained there for three years. Audio and Video recordings from interviews will be transferred from their recording devices to a password-protected hard drive and maintained there for three years. After three years, all data will be destroyed by reformatting the hard drive three times. All responses are confidential, with numbers assigned to interview responders to maintain confidentiality.

There are no known risks to this study. The potential benefits of the study are an understanding of how Intentional Interim Ministers can be used to revitalize a congregation.

If something makes you feel uncomfortable in any way while you are in the study, please tell Ellen McCubbin, who can be reached at ellen.mccubbin@asburyseminary.edu . You can refuse to respond to any or all of the questions, and you will be able to withdraw from the process at any time without penalty.

If you have any questions about the research study, please contact Ellen McCubbin at ellen.mccubbin@asburyseminary.edu .

Signing this paper means that you have read this or had it read to you, and that you want to be in the study. If you do not want to be in the study, do not sign the paper. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be upset if you do not sign this paper or even if you change your mind later. You agree that you have been told about this study and why it is being done and what to do.

_____   _____

Signature of Person Agreeing to be in the Study   Date Signed

E. Request to Participate in Study

The following was included in emails to the Transitional/Intentional Interim Ministry

Specialists and placed in the Facebook groups listed in the participants section of this

paper.

> Calling all Interim Pastors!
> You are invited to be in a research study being done by Ellen McCubbin, a doctoral student from Asbury Theological Seminary. The purpose of the project is to discover transformational practices for leveraging intentional interim pastors to revitalize mainline North American churches. Your responses are anonymous.
> To take the survey, go to: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/XDFQ7FV
>
> Thank you in advance for helping me!
>
> Rev. Ellen M. McCubbin

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