FIVE DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS FOR INTERIM MINISTRY

While interim pastors will often do the things installed pastors do, such as preaching, teaching, and visiting, their peculiar focus during the transition time between installed pastors is on what are called the Five Developmental Tasks:

**Coming to Terms with History**
It is important for congregations to know their history so that they can appreciate their heritage and at the same time be aware of the issues and concerns that need to be resolved in order to move freely into the future.

**Discovering a New Identity**
Identity is the task of understanding "who we are now in our present context and what it is we understand God is calling us to be." It is the task of developing the vision to which a congregation is being called.

**Dealing with Shifts of Power and Leadership Changes**
In most congregations over a period of time the leadership begins to take on much of the style and values of the previous pastor. When that pastor leaves, there is often a time when persons who have been in leadership rethink their commitment and determine whether or not they want to continue in leadership positions. Other persons often find the interim time an opportunity to take leadership roles. This is an opportune time to empower those who are out of power and to welcome leadership gifts from all parts of the congregation. It is also a time to confront “informal leadership” or special interest groups.

**Rethinking Denominational Linkages**
Congregations often are not aware of the support and resources they receive from their middle judicatory and national denominational structures. That relationship is normally more visible while the structures of the church beyond the congregation are engaged in working with the congregation in moving through the interim period and seeking to find the right pastor to call. The transition time helps raise the awareness of a congregation to its denominational heritage, ministries, and resources.

**Commitment to New Leadership and to a New Future**
When a congregation has developed a shared vision of its future and has sought to call a pastor to help lead it in moving into that future, there will probably be a new commitment both to that new leader and to that new future.

- Adapted from information on the ELCA website - elca.org.
USING THE FIVE DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS

When I do an intentional interim pastorate, I use the Interim Network’s “Five Developmental Tasks for Interim Ministry” as an overall framework. They provide the broad background against which everything during an interim is done. My preferred tool for exploring them is questions – lots and lots of questions – leading to conversation and reflection.

1. COMING TO TERMS WITH HISTORY

How did your congregation come into being in the first place? What path (or paths) has it followed thus far in answer to God’s call? Have there been unexpected detours, rough patches, obstacles, or the like, and how have they been handled? What lessons have been learned and what questions have been raised along the way?

2. DISCOVERING A NEW IDENTITY

How has your congregation been shaped by the ministry of your former pastor, and his or her predecessors? How has the makeup of your congregation changed over time? What changes are you experiencing now? What changes do you see approaching? Who is God calling your congregation to be in the next chapter of your life and ministry at this time in this place?

3. ALLOWING NEEDED CHANGES IN LEADERSHIP

Who are the leaders now wanting or needing to step away from familiar tasks? Who are the leaders currently “in training”? How is the congregation supporting and encouraging present and future leaders?

4. RENEWING DENOMINATIONAL LINKAGES

How does your congregation currently participate with other ELCA congregations in your area? With the synod at large? With the whole ELCA? What use does your congregation make of available resources within the ELCA? How often do you invite synod leadership to your congregation simply to participate in what your congregation is doing?

5. COMMITMENT TO NEW DIRECTIONS IN MINISTRY

What customs or practices or priorities in your congregation appear to have run their course and are in need of retirement? Which ones might need to be refreshed and renewed instead? What “new things” is God doing in, with, and through your congregation? How are you preparing to welcome and support your new pastoral leader?

I consider an interim “successful” to the extent that the congregation participates openly and actively in such conversation and reflection.

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