

Interim Ministry Overview

From Bishop John Roth

Interim pastors are appointed by the bishop with the approval of the Parish or Congregation Council(s). Normally, it is not until we get to within a month or month and a half of the vacancy that my staff and I have a good idea of which pastors might be available to serve the vacancy. When it is a called pastor who is leaving the congregation or congregations, we do not begin working on the call process until after the called pastor has left. This allows the called pastor and congregation to focus on saying goodbye well.

My practice is to appoint an ordained pastor as a congregation's interim pastor wherever this is possible, even if that ordained pastor is not able to provide regular Sunday morning worship leadership. Interim ministry can be provided by an appointed Synodically Authorized Minister. ELCA guidelines stipulate that Synodically Authorized Ministers be overseen by an ordained pastor. You see this option reflected in the various interim ministry scenarios I've sketched below.

There are basically three overarching ways to structure an interim ministry: "full-time interim ministry," "part-time interim ministry," and "basic fee for services" interim ministry. Full-time ministry and part-time ministry focus on the number of working days per week for the pastor. Full time implies 5 to 6 working days per week, including Sundays; part time generally translates to 3 or 4 working days per week, including Sundays. However, the part-time number of days may vary.

A full-time interim ministry would include the use of the parsonage, when there is a parsonage, as part of the minister's compensation. A part-time interim ministry and a "fee for services" interim ministry typically would not include the parsonage as part of the minister's compensation, even if the minister stays in the parsonage a couple of nights a week. Often, a congregation will provide modest rental accommodations for a minister when that minister is part-time, though those accommodations are not compensation to the minister.

The typical interim ministry agreement (full-time or part-time) is written somewhat similar to a call document, with a general statement of ministry expectations and with provision for health coverage and pension benefits. The typical interim ministry agreement (full-time or part-time) would include a larger financial investment in the interim ministry by the congregation than the "basic fee for services" sketch I give below; the typical interim ministry agreement (full-time or part-time) also would include a greater investment by the interim minister in the ministry of the church.

The third option is the "basic fee for services" option. Below is a sketch of what I have used with congregations that are looking for a basic "fee for services" structure for interim ministry.

Interim basic: \$200.00 - \$900.00 per month depending on the responsibilities involved. Responsibilities always include attending monthly Congregation Council meetings and may include (a) attending normally-scheduled joint Council meetings where more than one congregation is involved, cooperating with the Council to provide pastoral visitation when not providing this visitation herself/himself, assisting the Council to find pulpit supply when not providing pulpit supply himself/herself, producing a written mileage report, and providing an annual pastoral report; (b) up to at least between 6 - 16 hours per month for on-call availability (for pastoral care, responding to administrative needs, and hospital / nursing home / homebound visitation) depending on the responsibilities agreed to.

Additional office hours and visitation: \$35.00/hour

Preaching and leading worship: \$175.00 per service

Classes taught (Confirmation, new member, etc.): \$60.00 per class

Mileage Reimbursed at the IRS rate (56 cents/mile in 2021)

One variation on the “fee for services” structure of interim ministry in which a neighboring ordained pastor serves as the interim pastor even though this pastor is not present on Sunday mornings. Regular pulpit supply by someone other than the interim pastor is sought and the compensation for the basic compensation for the interim pastor is adjusted to fit the extent of responsibilities and duties the interim pastor in that circumstance.

I write interim ministry agreements for six months at a time, renewable upon review. In addition, an interim ministry agreement terminates when a called pastor begins at the congregation or with a 30-day written notice by the interim pastor, the Congregation or Parish Council, or the bishop.

I ask for your patience and your flexibility as I pursue the best interim ministry arrangement available. In our synod, we are constrained by limited availability of pastoral resources, though we try to accommodate a congregation’s choice of type of interim ministry.

I hope this is helpful. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the synod office or Rev. Maureen Stein (309) 338-2194.