

LANCASTER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

GRIEF IN THE LOSS OF A PASTOR:  
IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERIM MINISTRY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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to the following persons who have spent many hours in  
assisting in the preparation of this material:

PREFACE

The development of this presentation has been largely the result of the personal experience of the writer, who has served as an interim pastor for fourteen years. Illustrations are from first-hand encounters. Not only was she the daughter of a denominational official and shared many of his understandings of church life, she was also a pastor's wife. From different perspectives she has observed and participated in various experiences and programs of the parish.

Recent months have been involved in promoting the interim ministry through an interdenominational organization called the Interim Network. A copy of the first newsletter is placed in the Appendix. The writer has also been involved in the first training seminar conducted jointly by the Alban Institute and the Mid-Atlantic Association for Training and Consulting held in 1976-1977.

Sincere gratitude and deep appreciation is expressed to the following persons who have spent many hours in assisting in the preparation of this material:

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## INTRODUCTION

There has been genuine need for understanding the significance of the effect of grief upon a congregation when a pastor leaves. Simply described grief is response to a loss. Normally, grief related to a death is expected and dealt with, but other kinds of loss of relationship, such as the loss of a spiritual leader, are not often taken into consideration. The purpose of this project is the investigation of the grief resulting from the loss of a pastor with the consequent implications for interim ministry.

If the pastorate has been lengthy so that some members have really never known another minister, the grief may be deep and lasting. For example if the pastor also represents the religious faith of a parishioner and even has become the personification of that faith, the loss is more severe. During the interim period an adjustment, a reorganization, a redirection of the Christian faith may take place. It is at this point that a trained interim minister may be supportive and may give direction to a congregation with



the purpose of assisting during this transition period.

This constitutes the justification for this investigation.

One of the original contributions of this paper is the interpretation of three key dynamics of the interim period. This identification of significant components has been the result of an attempt by the writer to analyze the important aspects of the interim period and their ramifications pertaining to the effective maintenance of the church during the parish vacancy.

The terms minister and pastor are used somewhat interchangeably in this report, although an attempt is made to use pastor when the concept of a personal relationship is implied. Minister more naturally refers to the profession.

## I. Understanding Grief

### A. A Survey

Grief is universal in human experience accompanying virtually every occasion of loss. Parkes states, "Losses are, of course, in all our lives."<sup>1</sup> Adlai Stevenson at the funeral of Eleanor Roosevelt remarked, "We are always saying farewell in this world."<sup>2</sup> However common the experience, genuine understanding of its significance and effects are not common.

Grief, an inner experience, is an emotional feeling. The cause is definite that is, the loss of something or someone. Sigmund Freud defines grief simply as "the reaction to the loss of a loved person."<sup>3</sup> However, the reaction to loss is not definite. Although some reactions in grief can be commonly identified, there are varied factors affecting each unique grief experience. The grief of any

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<sup>1</sup>Colin Murray Parkes, Bereavement (New York: International Universities Press, 1972), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup>Adlai Stevenson, The Papers of Adlai E. Stevenson (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1979), p. 345.

<sup>3</sup>Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, James Strachey, Editor, vol. XIV (London: The Hogarth Press, 1966), p. 243.



fresh loss is a new experience for the loser.

The internalized character of grief interferes with the understanding and interpretation of its nature. Neither the participant nor the observer can fully comprehend what is happening. Extreme manifestations may vary from hysterical laughter or uncontrolled weeping to a state of shock exhibiting a blank expressionless stare. Consequently, certain grief responses therefore appear irrational at times as in mental depression.<sup>1</sup> However, acute grief responses are considered normal and only temporary and may often involve displays of great emotion. The emotional states in grief frequently fluctuate, and often appear as ambivalence. Menninger in a consideration of mixed emotions indicates that loss will always invoke a degree of both love and hate.

"The attachment of one individual for another (implying as it does both love and hate) sometimes consists of too large a proportion of hate or too small a proportion of love."<sup>2</sup>

Grief is not a static condition.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 243. In an effort to understand melancholia, Freud likened it to mourning.

<sup>2</sup>Cited by Rollo May, The Meaning of Anxiety (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1977), p. 212.

The major dynamic factor in the expression of grief is an acute anxiety response. An experience of loss will be accompanied by some degree of anxiety. Switzer sees an anxiety as "the fear of separation from the significant other upon whose presence the organism's well-being depends."<sup>1</sup> Such anxiety has its beginning in the early infant's separation from the mother.<sup>2</sup> Separation is typical in life, from the severance from the mother at birth when the umbilical cord is cut, to the departure from existence at death. Some psychologists actually identify anxiety and mourning by indicating that "adult mourning can be understood as a reproduction of analagous separation experiences."<sup>3</sup> Expression of grief frequently appears to the observer as anxiety precipitated by a broken relationship. Although grief primarily expresses itself through anxiety, the complex factors which impinge on the grief experience arise from the individual's past experience.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>David K. Switzer, The Dynamics of Grief, Source, Pain and Feeling (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), p. 101.

<sup>2</sup>It is significant that much earlier Freud noted, "the first anxiety state arose on the occasion of the separation of an infant from the mother." cited by Switzer, p. 67.

<sup>3</sup>Wayne Oates, Anxiety in Christian Experience (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), pp. 48-55.

<sup>4</sup>Cited by Spiegel, p. 59.



and feelings as well as from the immediate circumstance. What Bowlby learned has significance for any situation where a meaningful relationship has been terminated.<sup>1</sup> Attachment bonding, excessive dependency and their attendant symptoms involve psychological configurations which are meaningful in understanding the loss of relationship. Grief, consequently, should be considered as a process, and the experience can be analyzed by designating different stages through which the grieving person is passing. These stages have been variously identified by some writers as follows:

Spiegel: shock, control, regression and adaptation.<sup>1</sup>

Oates: shock, numbness, struggle between fantasy and reality, break-through of mourning, selective recollection connected with stabbing pain, and finally, acceptance of loss and the reaffirmation of life itself.<sup>3</sup>

Bowlby: protest, disorganization, reorganization.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Bowlby, Separation, Anxiety and Anger (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973), p. 77.

<sup>2</sup> Yorick Spiegel, The Grief Process, translated by Elsbeth Duke (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1977), p. 61.

<sup>3</sup> Wayne Oates, Anxiety in Christian Experience (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), pp. 48-55.

<sup>4</sup> Cited by Spiegel, p. 59.

Although interpretations differ somewhat, it is apparent that a grieving individual must work through a somewhat disturbing experience with varying reactions in order to attain again a degree of emotional stability.

Although it is important to recognize the stages of grief, it is of greater importance for the present study to know how grief may present itself. The practitioner needs to identify the evidence in order to deal with the problem accurately. For this reason the primary emphasis is upon symptomatology.

The loss of such relationship is basically a threat to the human ego, the security of the ego or the self. The French "partir, c'est mourir un peu" ("to part is to die a little") applies to the aspect of grief in the loss of a relationship. Psychologists recognize that the self develops through interaction with other selves. The very existence of the self is dependent upon others. With the loss of the other the self perceives its own death. Fear and anxiety result as the self is diminished. The self esteem of the bereaved suffers; the self image is reduced.



Anxiety, insecurity, helplessness, hopelessness are all expressions of loss of relationship.

Since grief work is a process through which one must pass, then there will be certain developmental tasks which the individual must accomplish to find release from the burden of loss. These are:

- 1) Time must be allowed for the grief work to be completed. This premise is readily accepted in the case of death, for there is a designated "period of mourning." It is not often recognized in the loss of a relationship.
- 2) Feelings must be expressed. Unexpressed negative feelings are like an infection. If the wound is not open, it festers and causes more difficulty later.
- 3) What or who is lost must be released. Freud elaborates this process, which is only "carried through bit by bit, under great expense of time and cathectic energy."<sup>1</sup> A new loyalty cannot be formed until the former similar loyalty has been removed.
- 4) New relationships need to be established. Withdrawal from all relationships is a pathological state.
- 5) Values relating to the loss need to be acknowledged. Humans seek meaning in their existence.

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<sup>1</sup>Freud, p. 245.



- 6) The reality of the loss must be accepted. A healthy personality is reality-oriented.
- 7) Reorientation toward the future needs to be accomplished. Only the future has genuine hope.

Five primary evidences of grief will be the foci of this research: shock, denial (or avoidance), anger, guilt, and depression. Each of these will be discussed and specific examples given.

Application of the understanding of grief as it relates to the loss of a pastor, as well as implications for the interim ministry, will be considered in a later chapter.

In Lamentations there is almost total preoccupation with grief. The whole poem is more emotional than philosophical or theological. Only briefly is the verse inter-

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<sup>1</sup> Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967), Vol. IV, pp. 317-318.

## B. Grief in the Bible

Several different words in the Hebrew Old Testament have commonly been translated as "grief", each having a particular connotation such as: weakness, pain, affliction, sorrow, anger, annoyance, anxiety, regret for sinfulness.<sup>1</sup> The variety of meanings associated with grief attests to the differing emotions attendant upon grief since feelings of grief coalesce. All of the meanings for grief are related to emotions, showing a preponderance of this aspect in the grief syndrome. The phenomenon of pain and sorrow is plainly seen especially in the Prophets, in the Psalms, in Lamentations, and in Job. Joy and sorrow are seen as intermingled in human life. However, in Hellenistic Judaism the emotions never constitute the theme of theoretical reflection.

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<sup>1</sup>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967), Vol. IV, pp. 317-318.

rupted with a note of hope. Feelings are graphically documented. The agonies of a people torn from their homeland and forcibly removed to a foreign country are illustrated by such phrases as "bitterly she weeps at night," "tears are upon her cheeks," "there is none to comfort her," "desolate her priests groan, her maidens grieve in bitter anguish," "she herself groans and turns away," "Is there any suffering like my suffering?" "I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall."<sup>1</sup> Grief is treated as part of the human condition. Sorrow is expressed without restraint and acknowledged openly.

In spite of the frequent expressions of grief in the Old Testament, there is abundant affirmation of immanent joy. In Lamentations the writer says, "Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail."<sup>2</sup> Job represents the Lord as saying that sorrow is turned to joy before him.<sup>3</sup> Isaiah affirms, "And the

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<sup>1</sup>Lamentations 1:2-3:19 passim.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 3:21.

<sup>3</sup>Job 41:22



ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah testifies to the Lord who says, "I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow."<sup>2</sup> Proverbs illustrates the ambivalence of grief, "Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness."<sup>3</sup> Sorrow and sadness are seen as part of the human condition, and yet hope and joy are promised to the faithful.

The particular word for grief in the New Testament is the Greek word "lupe."<sup>4</sup> It is used generally for sorrow and pain--especially sorrow of soul, sorrow of the disciples in Gethsemane and their sorrow in parting with Jesus as recorded in the sixteenth chapter of John.

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<sup>1</sup>Isaiah 35:10.

<sup>2</sup>Jeremiah 31:13.

<sup>3</sup>Proverbs 14:31.

<sup>4</sup>In the Septuagint "lupe" is not the accepted or even the preferred rendering of any one Hebrew word.

Both Old and New Testaments make it plain that sorrow and joy are integral aspects of existence. It is natural to seek joy and pleasure, yet the presence of joy presumes the potential presence of sorrow. For what brings joy, if lost, could bring sorrow. Kahlil Gibran in The Prophet, states it in this manner:

Some of you say, "Joy is greater than sorrow" and others say, "Nay, sorrow is the greater." But I say unto you, they are inseparable. Together they come, and when one sits alone with you at your board, remember that the other is asleep upon your bed.<sup>1</sup>

Recognition and acceptance of this duality in life can bring a measure of peace. Qoheleth indicated that there is time for both weeping and for laughter.<sup>2</sup> Human effort cannot change this fact.

In the eyes of God suffering and pain are regarded as things which ought not to be. In the third chapter of Genesis it is significant that pain and toil were imposed on human beings as divine punishment, but this interpre-

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<sup>1</sup>Kahlil Gibran, The Prophet (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952), p. 36.

<sup>2</sup>Ecclesiastes 3:4.



tation does not provide positive meaning for the sufferer. It is only when sorrow can be accepted as part of divine instruction that it can have some value. There is a firm connection between suffering and salvation between grief and joy. Those that sow in tears shall reap in joy.<sup>1</sup> This eschatological phenomenon is verified in the words of Jesus, "Blessed are they that weep now, for they shall laugh."<sup>2</sup> God's promise is joy, not as the opposite of pain in this world, but as delight in the very presence of God eternally.

There are two Biblical analogies which have significance for the interim period in a congregation's life. The Old Testament wilderness account relates to the traumatic experience of the Israelites.

"Wilderness" is that place of sudden freedom, uncertain leadership, changed relationships, impossible deprivation--temptations, hopes and disappointments. That place where all the old

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<sup>1</sup>Psalm 126:5; Revelation 7:17. Mabon, "Toward a Theology of Interim. . . 'Wilderness' as Paradigm for the Interim," *Three Biblical Perspectives*, *The In-Between Times* (Interim Network Newsletter), 1(March, 1980): 1-7.

<sup>2</sup>Luke 6:21.

<sup>3</sup>Jürgen Holtmann, *Passion for Life* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), p. 26.

fears reappear most threateningly...the frustrations of the present become more obstinate...but where all the hopeful futures take on new promise.<sup>1</sup>

Although it does not refer primarily to grief in the loss of a leader, the wilderness experience does describe the disturbed passage through which the Hebrew people needed to go before attaining the promised land.

Three perspectives from the wilderness experience may inform the interim periods: 1) the strengthening power of memory through recalling events in story-telling, 2) the reclaiming of loyalty to God and his laws, and 3) the congregation to experience again the passions of life in order to resolve feelings that block or prevent engaging in positive emotions for a new future.

If we take our bearings from the passion of God and the passion history of Christ we are led out of death-before-life and into life-before-death, and our world is preserved against collapse into apathy.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Margaret Z. Morris and Joan I. Mabon, "Toward a Theology of Interim. . . 'Wilderness' as Paradigm for the Interim Time--Three Biblical Perspectives," The In Between Times (Interim Network Newsletter), 1(March, 1980): 5-7.

<sup>2</sup>Jurgen Moltmann, Passion for Life (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), p. 26.

The grief experience of the disciples following the crucifixion of Jesus is particularly relevant to the present study. The events prior to the crucifixion and those following until the revival at Pentecost are significant. In the twelfth chapter of John's Gospel Jesus tried to prepare the disciples for his coming death. He gave them assurances that all would be well for them even though he was leaving. He promised the comfort of the Holy Spirit. He explained to them the meaning of his life and the reason for his death. He washed their feet, teaching them servanthood by example. He gave them final instructions telling them of the responsibility that was theirs because of their love and devotion to him.

In spite of Jesus' efforts they did not understand. Perhaps the shock was too great. The events of that last week in Jerusalem had come too fast, for comprehension of the import of Jesus' death was too much for them to grasp. That period must have been one of great emotion for both Jesus and his disciples. The disciples were



confused; they did not understand what was happening, either to themselves or to their loved leader. When the crucifixion and death of Jesus finally came, the disciples were stunned. There is evidence of fear particularly when Peter raised his sword against the servant of the high priest and when he denied knowledge of and acquaintance with Jesus. During the actual crucifixion there is little evidence of activity on the part of the disciples. Apparently they were overwhelmed. Their disbelief continued even after the empty tomb. They huddled together for mutual support in fear of the Jewish rulers and in their sense of grief and loss. Similarly at the time of the ascension the disciples were still in a state of shock. Acts records that two men said to them, "Why stand ye gazing up into heaven?"<sup>1</sup>

It took time to work through their grief. However well prepared they had been, the transition period of fifty days was necessary before focus could come.

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<sup>1</sup>Acts 1:11.

<sup>2</sup>Wolcott, *The Dynamics of Grief*, p. 185.

Healing of the body and of the spirit takes time. David Switzer designates a normal period of time for acute grief as approximately six weeks.<sup>1</sup> The Scriptures recount that it was not until the day of Pentecost, fifty days after the crucifixion, that the disciples were able to recover from the terrible experience that had been theirs. Only after this period did the disciples become invigorated with the power of the Holy Spirit so that they could begin to carry out the commission given to them. At that time Peter, inspired and enthusiastic, began to preach, to tell the world of the love of God through his Son, and to relate the significance of his coming for the salvation of humankind. Although they still grieved, the paralyzing agony of initial shock had passed.

Biblical teaching indicates that sorrow and suffering are woven into the very fabric of life. Accepting and utilizing this difficult aspect constitutes the responsibility of the children of God. Again and again, primarily through the life of Jesus, it is demonstrated that suffering and grief can be transformed into joy.

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<sup>1</sup>Switzer, The Dynamics of Grief, p. 185.



### C. Ministry to the Grieving *Part of the Funeral.*

Grief has within its very process the essence of its own resolution. Book titles, such as "The Healing Power of Grief," "Beyond Sorrow," "Grief's Slow Wisdom," imply this. Three authors go further in their assessment of healing. "Every organism is self-healing," says Sanford.<sup>1</sup> Switzer affirms that the grief "reaction itself carries with it that which in most circumstances tends to produce its own healing."<sup>2</sup> Spiegel adds, "Grief can become an experience that leaves a human life not more deprived but enriched."<sup>3</sup>

Three personal needs of the bereaved are paramount: to face the shock, to find meaning in the loss, and to change the direction of their lives.

1) The shock of loss must be confronted, faced, and alleviated. A man learned of the death of his wife while she was in another city chaperoning a group of students. In a daze he went through the process of making funeral arrangements. Three days later he picked up the

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<sup>1</sup> John A. Sanford, Healing and Wholeness (New York: The Paulist Press, 1977), p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> Switzer, p. 185.

<sup>3</sup> Spiegel, p. 348.

daily newspaper and read the account of the funeral. Suddenly, total realization came to him. Such harsh reality must be faced with full recognition of its significance. This state of shock must not remain.

2) An overriding concern in the experience of grief is the need to find meaning. Frankl states, "Man's main concern is not to gain pleasure or to avoid pain, but rather to see a meaning in his life."<sup>1</sup> To be able to extract something of value from an experience makes possible the accepting of pain.

Although there is always the danger of regressive and destructive forces at work in any traumatic situation, the potential for stimulus to development and growth is definitely inherent. One of the facts of life is that one grows through struggle and suffering. Clark, for instance, in a chapter entitled "Strength Out of Suffering," identifies the constructive value which may ensue from life's

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<sup>1</sup>Viktor E. Frankl, Man's Search for Meaning (Boston: Beacon Press, 1946), p. 115.

John G. Clark, Meditations on the World's Suffering (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1958), p. 20.

<sup>2</sup>Alfred Lord Tennyson, In Memoriam, Stanza 4, Part XXIX.

difficult experiences. He says, "It can be used and made to serve high purposes."<sup>1</sup>

One value that can be derived from the grief experience is a recognition of the reality and the importance of love. One who does not love would not grieve. The opposite of love is indifference or death. Tennyson expressed it, "Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all."<sup>2</sup>

Another value is that of thankfulness. It follows from love that one is grateful for the blessings it brings. Being thankful moves the focus away from selfish remorse to concentration on others. It is a healthy virtue.

A third mitigating factor in the experience of grief is that of memory. The value which can be obtained from loss can to a degree be retained through recalling experiences from the past. It is characteristic of human beings that the memory would be selective. Negative experiences can teach us; positive memory can be strengthening.

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<sup>1</sup> John G. Clark, Meditations on the Lord's Supper (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1958), p. 88.

<sup>2</sup> Alfred Lord Tennyson, In Memoriam, Stanza 4, Part XXVII.



This is one of the values of Holy Communion. The communicants are empowered to face life through remembering Jesus and the power he had to "overcome the world." The weakness and powerlessness of one who is grieving responds to the power which comes through the "comfort" (strengthening) of the Holy Spirit. The Comforter heals, sustains, and guides. In much the same way a person can be grateful for the enrichment derived from the interaction with another person who has been subsequently lost. Jesus' followers became stronger in bringing him to remembrance.<sup>1</sup> The Bible testifies to the eternal values found in the qualities of love, thankfulness and memory.

One of the beneficial outcomes from experiencing grief is that one may come in touch with universal suffering. The horizons of life are broadened. For instance, a young mother watched as her three-year-old daughter was killed in an automobile accident. Following the tragedy the mother reached out in trying to find meaning for herself from the difficult experience. She and her

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<sup>1</sup>I Cor. 11:24.

*Cited by Paul H. Irion, A Ministerial Funeral Service*  
Millwaukee: Waverly Press, Inc., 1971, p. 20.

husband were able to donate the daughter's kidneys to two young women in need. Several weeks later the mother related her new perspective by saying, "I have come to be in touch with the suffering of the world."

Moreover, one learns that there is a fellowship of suffering, of grieving. Inner strength comes as one shares in common suffering. It has been said that grief is personal but not private. Helen Keller's observation is pertinent:

We bereaved are not alone. We belong to the largest company in all the world--the company of those who have known suffering. When it seems that our sorrow is too great to be borne, let us think of the great family of the heavy-hearted into which our grief has given us entrance, and inevitably, we will feel about us their arms, their sympathy, their understanding.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, the one who has experienced grief may utilize this personal encounter in helping others in similar circumstances. To know first-hand the reality of the situation dealing with loss is to be able to identify and understand the feelings of another who is

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<sup>1</sup>Cited by Paul E. Irion, A Humanist Funeral Service (Baltimore: Waverly Press, Inc., 1971), p. 28.

grieving. "For thou art with me"<sup>1</sup> expresses the innate yearning of the individual sufferer not only for the presence of God, but for the representative of God, a fellow human being. We are bound together in an empathic fellowship in a special way when we grieve.

3) A significant loss in an individual's life will inevitably bring changes. These changes may involve a different behavior pattern, a loss of a supportive relationship, a major shift in the philosophy of life-- or even all three. Basically, it means a change of direction. That direction must be charted. Change of direction in some degree is also true during the interim period as well as when a new pastor comes to a church.

The most profound concept of Christ doctrine is contained in the simple statement, "God is love."<sup>2</sup> It is the love of the Father, who, "having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end."<sup>3</sup> It is a suffering love, one that participates in the suffering

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<sup>1</sup>Psalm 23:4.

<sup>2</sup>I John 4:8 and 16.

<sup>3</sup>John 13:1.



of his children, the grief they bear from living in this world of pain. That love was demonstrated on Calvary, where God himself suffered for humankind.

#### A. Objectives of the Research

The research relating to the loss of a pastor was concerned with identifying and describing the manifestations of grief among those left behind. It should be noted that the pastor also grieves although that is not the subject of this study. Some attention was given to the effect of grief on the life of the church. No attempt was made to deal with either the stages of grief or the final resolution of the grief although both were evident. An eclectic method of research was utilized. Focus was directed to five typical manifestations of the grief syndrome: that of shock, denial (avoidance), anger, guilt, and depression. These will be further amplified.

#### B. Description of the Sample (data base)

Three churches which had recently lost a pastor were selected for investigation. Descriptions of these churches are tabulated in Table I.

## II. Grief in the Loss of a Pastor: A Descriptive Study

### A. Objectives of the Research

The research relating to the loss of a pastor was concerned with identifying and describing the manifestations of grief among those left behind. It should be noted that the pastor also grieves although that is not the subject of this study. Some attention was given to the effect of grief on the life of the church. No attempt was made to deal with either the stages of grief or the final resolution of the grief although both were evident. An eclectic method of research was utilized. Focus was directed to five typical manifestations of the grief syndrome: that of shock, denial (avoidance), anger, guilt, and depression. These will be further amplified.

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TABLE I  
DESCRIPTION OF THE THREE CHURCHES

Church A	Location: in a rural community.
	History: formed by three churches uniting several years earlier. A new building was constructed.
	Minister: had served five years, young, married with children. He was not an outstanding preacher, but formed warm relationships. He was dearly loved by many. His particular interest was in a Bible study course, which he promoted extensively.
	Membership: about 500.
	Circumstances of his departure: An attractive offer was made to work in the area of his special interest. He announced his resignation six months prior to his departure, and helped many people to accept by his sensitive preparation.
	Interim: two months.
Church B	Location: in a suburban community.
	History: the church had lost its building in a natural disaster, met with another local church for a year and a half, and occupied a new building three years prior to the investigation.
	Membership: about 600.
	Minister: had served over ten years, was middle-aged, married with teen-age children. He was private, reserved.
	Circumstances of his departure: There was pressure for him to leave. The consensus seemed to be that he should have left when the new building was completed. The income, interest, attendance, activities and finances were all decreasing. The minister had announced the year before that he was leaving "next year" but gave no definite date. His final departure was welcomed.
	Interim: two months.
Church C	Location: in a small community.
	History: The church had come out from a six-point charge nine years earlier.
	Membership: about 250.
	Minister: had served eight months, was middle-aged, single. He left abruptly. He was promoting a good program, interest and finances were increasing, and the youth group was flourishing.
	Circumstances of his leaving: purportedly for health reasons, yet he took another charge immediately. There was an unfortunate incident, very sensitive in nature. Confusion resulted.
	Interim: thirteen months.



Ten persons from each church were chosen as subjects. All were persons involved in the life of the church; few were volunteers, most were leaders selected upon recommendation by church officers. In each case the church secretary and the president of the church council were included.

At the time of the investigation only four members did not hold leadership positions. Two were elderly, having been much involved with the church for many years, and each having close family ties with the church in the past. The third was an eighteen-year-old girl who was active in a youth organization and who was close to the pastor. The fourth was a young man who had received extensive counseling from the pastor.

The common factor in the selection of these individuals was involvement in the life of the church, which included regular church attendance with participation in at least one other church activity.

### C. Design of the Interviews and Questionnaire

Information was obtained through two hour-long interviews with each of the thirty persons. Following the arrival of the new pastor, a questionnaire<sup>1</sup> was submitted to each by mail for the purpose of documenting and verifying the interview responses.

The purpose of the first interview was an attempt to elicit typical manifestations in the grief process, such as shock, denial. The second interview was conducted with the primary purpose of providing pastoral care. The interviews were semi-structured. No tapes of the interviews were made, but the responses were documented by the interviewer. An effort was made to help the person being interviewed to feel comfortable and at ease, for the purpose of facilitating the expression of feelings. There was wide variation in this approach. The first direct question was, "Do you remember when you first learned that your pastor was leaving?" The second question was,

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<sup>1</sup>For questionnaire, see Appendix.

"How did you feel when you learned this?" From that point on, various methods were utilized to determine the type of grief experienced and the way it was expressed. None was reluctant to talk; many indicated depth of concern. In the process much was learned about the history and background of the church.

The techniques of pastoral counseling were part of both interviews by means of encouraging verbalization, by listening attentively, and by acknowledging the expressed feelings. In two instances definite direction was given. One was in the case of the woman who later left the church. The interviewer asked, "Why don't you give the new minister a chance?" The other circumstance was with the young man who could not accept the change. The interviewer inquired, "How did you come to know the last minister?" The man replied, "He visited me in the home." "Then, why don't you invite the new minister to visit in your home?"

The most notable response in both interviews and in the questionnaire came from the first interrogation.



"Do you remember when you first learned that your pastor was leaving?" In every instance the answer was positive "Yes." There was no equivocation. Many described the setting in which the information was given. That the initial reaction to this knowledge was clear and definite indicates some emotional involvement.<sup>1</sup> This fact also confirms the existence of feelings relating to the departure of a pastor even for those persons with whom the association was not too close. In the interviews with older church members, there was much talk about former days. One church had evidently had a large men's class (400-600) which was the pride of the church. This class no longer existed, and the loss was regretted.

#### D. Intensity of Grief: an analysis

In an attempt to evaluate the severity of the impact of grief, five determinants of relationship

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<sup>1</sup>The tie of emotions to memory has been recognized by many writers throughout history. See David Rapaport, Emotions and Memory (New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1959), pp. 4-5. <sup>2</sup>the length of the relationship, <sup>3</sup>the quality of the relationship, <sup>4</sup>the timeliness and untimeliness in grief, and <sup>5</sup>the nature of the death.

Pattison's list of determinants: 1) degree of interaction, 2) emotional intensity, 3) degree of positive emotion, 4) the relation has an instrumental base, and 5) the degree of reciprocity.

were identified. These determinants were adapted from two presentations by Oates and by Pattison.<sup>1</sup>

- 1) The length of the pastorate and/or the length of the relationship
- 2) The positive intensity of the relationship
- 3) The amount of interaction
- 4) The degree of reciprocity
- 5) The circumstances surrounding the departure of the pastor

On the basis of interview responses, the degree of each person's grief was estimated in respect to each of the five determinants rated on a three value scale (little, some, and much).

Table II presents these scores. The findings of this evaluation are necessarily estimated yet the categorization has been based on specific answers given by the

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<sup>1</sup>Wayne E. Oates, Pastoral Care and Counseling in Grief and Separation (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), pp. 51-55; E. Mansell Pattison, Pastor and Parish--A Systems Approach (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), p. 18.

Oates's list of determinants: 1) the length of the relationship, 2) the quality of the relationship, 3) the timeliness and untimeliness in grief, and 4) the nature of the death.

Pattison's list of determinants: 1) degree of interaction, 2) emotional intensity, 3) degree of positive emotion, 4) the relation has an instrumental base, and 5) the degree of reciprocity.



TABLE II  
INTENSITY OF GRIEF

	Respondent			Determinants of Relationship						Dominant Reaction	
	No.	Age	Sex	Extent of Leadership	Length of Relationship	Intensity of Same	Amount of Interaction	Degree of Reciprocity	Circumstances of departure		Total Score
Church A	1.	30-45	M	2	2	2	2	1	0	7	Mixed feelings
	2.	over 60	M	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	Surprise
	3.	20-30	M	8	1	1	2	1	0	5	Surprise, free
	4.	over 60	F	1	2	2	1	1	1	7	Surprise
	5.	18	F	0	2	2	2	2	1	9	Distress, hurt
	6.	30-45	F	5	2	2	2	2	1	9	Mixed feelings
	7.	45-60	F	3	2	2	2	2	2	10	Anger
	8.	30-45	M	0	1	2	2	2	2	9	Regret
	9.	45-60	F	12	2	2	2	2	1	9	Depression
	10.	45-60	F	3	2	2	2	1	1	8	Mixed feelings
	Totals				18	17	17	14	9	75	
Church B	1.	45-60	F	1	2	0	2	0	1	5	Relief
	2.	over 60	F	4	2	0	1	0	0	3	Mixed feelings
	3.	30-45	F	4	2	2	1	1	0	6	Regret
	4.	over 60	F	5	2	0	0	1	0	3	Glad
	5.	30-45	M	1	1	0	0	1	0	2	Mixed feelings
	6.	over 60	F	0	2	2	1	1	0	6	Regret
	7.	45-60	M	8	2	1	2	1	0	6	Regret, guilt
	8.	over 60	F	0	2	1	1	1	1	6	Hurt, surprise
	9.	over 60	M	4	2	2	1	1	1	7	Regret
	10.	over 60	M	2	2	0	2	0	0	4	Happy
	Totals				19	8	11	7	3	48	
Church C	1.	45-60	F	2	1	2	2	1	2	8	Shock, regret
	2.	45-60	M	2	1	2	1	1	2	7	Regret, hurt
	3.	over 60	F	4	1	2	1	1	2	7	Anger, shock
	4.	over 60	F	2	1	1	1	1	2	6	Shock, surprise
	5.	30-45	M	3	1	2	2	2	2	9	Regret
	6.	20-30	M	3	1	2	2	2	2	9	Anger, regret
	7.	30-45	M	1	1	0	1	0	2	4	Acceptance
	8.	30-45	F	1	1	0	1	0	2	4	Relief
	9.	over 60	F	3	1	0	1	0	2	4	Regret
	10.	45-60	F	4	1	1	2	1	2	7	Regret
	Totals				10	12	14	9	20	65	



individuals either on the questionnaire or in the interviews and can be defended. The total points for each church are:

Church A - 75 points  
Church B - 48 points  
Church C - 65 points

The total of each church was obtained by adding the totals for those respondents in each church. These totals correspond with the observed degree of grief in each of the churches.

Church A sustained the greatest degree of grief, as indicated by the summary of points from the determinants of relationship. However, it was apparent that the pastor's willingness to help prepare the people for his departure lessened the trauma. It was evident, too, that there was much affection for him; yet, his consideration of them reflected a mutual concern. The parishioners wanted "the best for him" as well as he for them. The grief was there, but it was bearable for most. As a result, the total for the fifth determinant was relatively low in this church. Only the lady (A-7) who was so disturbed that she left

the church and the young man (A-8) who felt a deep attachment through personal counseling, were affected seriously.

Church B evidenced some anticipatory grief; yet, the extended period of realizing the pastor would be leaving increased anxiety. The leave-taking was characterized not by regret as much as relief that it had finally happened, and the congregation felt a sense of release from an unpleasant situation.

Very different were the circumstances in Church C where the minister remained but a short time. A deep relationship between pastor and people had not yet had time to develop. However, this ministry was beginning to give promise of a positive Christian experience for that church when it was suddenly terminated without an adequate explanation of the reasons. This increased their anxiety and resulted in diffused emotional responses. All sorts of accusations were directed toward the "scape-goat" who sensed and resented the ostracism.

One such person in Church A stated that the pastor was his "friend" and that prior to receiving counseling from the pastor he had only "acquaintances."

The common answer, "mixed feelings," which was used frequently on the questionnaire, was a catch-all response. It was somewhat neutral. To a degree the questionnaire enabled the person who responded in this way to be non-committal in order to refrain from offending. Although many persons had negative feelings, they also had some reluctance to express those feelings. In addition, some persons cannot identify the significance of their emotions and find it simpler to give a "mixed" answer.

The relationship between pastor and parishioner constitutes the setting for the degree of grief when that pastor departs. The number of leadership positions held by a parishioner is a significant factor since more contacts with the minister are likely when key positions are held. However, there may be other situations where the pastor may relate in a meaningful way to a church member. For example, an individual receiving supportive counseling from the pastor will more keenly feel the loss of a needed concerned person. One such person in Church A stated that the pastor was his "friend" and that prior to receiving counseling from the pastor he had only "acquaintances."



The minister in Church B was not considered close to anyone. He seemed somewhat introverted. Those who appeared to relate to him best, according to their statements, simply expressed "regret" at his leaving.

The eight-month stay of the minister in Church C was not long enough to produce a serious sense of loss. However, the youth director (C-6) appeared to bear the greatest distress. The minister and the youth director were firm friends, and together had developed a somewhat successful youth program.

One of the key determinants in the pastoral relationship which significantly affected the involved grief in a church appeared to be the circumstances surrounding the departure. If the causes, the methods, and the reasons for the pastor's leaving were acceptable; much of the grief would have been overcome. The eighteen-year-old was helped to accept the loss of the pastor of Church A when he said, "you are leaving, too. You are going away to college, and everything will be different for you also."

It is recognized that the degree of emotion is not easy to assess.

Since in two of the three churches investigated there was advance knowledge of the minister's departure, the significance of anticipatory grief needs to be considered. *of the grief trauma?*

Observation of the responses in these two churches (A and B) indicated that the shock of loss was somewhat alleviated; yet, it was questionable if the distress was any less because of foreknowledge. The sense of loss was still intense; the grievous feelings were still present.<sup>1</sup> *notice of his or her departure (usually sixty*

*to about* No matter how much one knows ahead of time that a loss will occur, the reality and the finality of loss cannot be known prior to the actual experience. This reality and finality cannot be anticipated completely. One woman in Church A commented, "I have a feeling he'll be back," indicating her unwillingness to accept what was ahead and her hope that it might not be true. There was still the wish that the minister's leaving might not be a fact.

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<sup>1</sup>It is recognized that the degree of emotion is not easy to assess.

The question arises: Is there any advantage in connection with a pastor's leaving when it is known in advance? Will preparation for the departure help to reduce some of the grief trauma?

Limited research related to the advantage of foreknowledge in a death indicates that the trauma may not be lessened, but that complete and positive recovery is more likely to occur when anticipatory grief has taken place.<sup>1</sup> Since in the majority of cases the minister will give some notice of his or her departure (usually sixty to ninety days), helpful realistic facing of the loss to come could mean a healthier and more wholesome new pastoral relationship.

In Church A, where the minister had announced his resignation six months prior to his actual leaving, there appeared to be confusion of feeling on the part of both the minister and the congregation. The minister questioned his decision to remain that long by consulting

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<sup>1</sup>Irwin Gerber, "Anticipatory Bereavement," in Anticipatory Grief, eds. Bernard Schoenberg et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), p. 27.



both judicatory and congregational officials. He even offered to leave sooner. He himself was not sure what was best, thus contributing to the confusion. Nevertheless, his positive concern for the well-being of the people he had served conveyed a warmth which was accepting of their feeling. This would be healthful in the long range.

In Church B the uncertainty of when or even if the minister might leave caused much ambivalence, confusion and guilt. There was evidence that the uncertainty increased hostility. Aldrich concurs:

A period of anticipation may provide a mourner with an opportunity to carry out grief work in advance of loss, but at the same time it complicates the working-through process by giving the hostile component of ambivalence a more realistically destructive potential.<sup>1</sup>

The risk factor needs to be taken into account while all possible provision is made for positive experiences.

One observation on the part of the writer which is difficult to document specifically was the sense of

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<sup>1</sup>C. Knight Aldrich, "Some Dynamics of Anticipatory Grief," Anticipatory Grief (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), p. 7.

discouragement and despondency apparent in the life of churches which have just lost their pastor. This sense is expressed and communicated more in a feeling than in actual words and actions. Since loss of self-esteem is characteristic of grief related to a death, so too a congregation may be affected in losing a spiritual leader. The woman in Church C who stated, "Who will want us now?" had some of this feeling. Church B was very discouraged; Church A was disheartened. Loss of self-esteem is related to these emotions.

#### E. Expressions of Grief

In spite of the great variety of circumstances within the three churches where the interviews took place, there was a commonality in the manifestation of grief. Five typical expressions of grief are described in the following pages and specific instances are cited and identified from each of the three churches. A few of the most pertinent instances have been chosen to illustrate each manifestation.



## (1) Shock

Shock is a natural initial response to grief. There is a tendency for human beings to desire to maintain the status quo, and to continue in a stabilized situation particularly if the situation is pleasurable. To lose a good leader is disruptive. For some, shock causes confusion and disorientation of thought.

Church A demonstrated the greatest degree of shock. That situation had seemed to be progressing and developing well. After four and a half years of ministry, the pastor was well accepted and was much loved by many individuals, who were enjoying a strong, expanding program. Although he announced his resignation six months before departing, the pastor still left a great deal of emotional trauma. For example, one lady describing her reaction said,

He came to the home. He sat at the kitchen table and told us. My stomach dropped. I was stunned. I didn't expect it. I hate to see him leave, but I won't stand in his way.



Church B sustained trauma but not as a result of shock. From the time the minister had announced his resignation the previous year, the program, attendance, and financial support of the church had decreased. As a result, some church leaders responded "relief" and others were "happy" over his departure. The trauma related to the circumstances of the minister's departure. However, the writer recognized that shock could have existed one year earlier when the resignation was announced.

Church C gave evidence of shock in their confusion over the suddenness of the pastor's departure. For instance, a member of the call committee which was responsible for the pastor's coming showed some indignation along with surprise at what had happened: "I was on the call committee, and I felt he would fill our needs."

## (2) Denial (Avoidance)

Denial is a characteristic expression of grief. Essentially, it signifies the inability of the individual to accept the loss and is often seen in avoidance of reality. In a related situation, as a loved

minister lay dying in a hospital, one church leader cried out, "He can't be dying--we need him so much." Denial is part of the earlier stages of the grief experience. In the loss of a pastor there is less evidence of denial as an aspect of grief than in other experiences of loss. It is possible that church members have learned by experience that ministers customarily move with some frequency. In addition, when an announcement is made, ordinary church members may feel powerless to change it, even though they might wish to do so. Denial takes many forms of expression.

(3) In Church A one retired gentleman cynically commented that five years was about the usual stay and that he was not surprised since that had been true in the past. There was definite evidence members did not wish the minister to leave, but they felt his departure was inevitable. For example, one woman in distress said, "I feel so bad. I have a feeling he'll be back." This was her way of denying the minister's leaving. At the second interview when the church had already called a new pastor,

*Emphasis noted by the interviewer.*



a young man said, "I'm glad they have a new pastor."<sup>1</sup>

Church B illustrated an effort to deny and avoid dealing with what was happening in the life of the church. An apathy, a sadness, a cloud of discouragement permeated the atmosphere. One reticent lady commented, "I'm sorry. I don't know what to say." She wished to deny the circumstances in her reluctance to talk about it.

A member of the church council in Church C reacted by saying, "I could not understand the reason for his leaving--because everything seemed to be going so well." The suddenness and immediacy caused rejection.

### (3) Anger

Anger in the grief experience can be directed to any available target. Often a scapegoat is artificially produced. Anger is a release of pent-up feelings. The expression of irate feelings is desirable for the individual but often results in misunderstandings. The observer may not realize what is happening.

The pastor's leaving often provides a target for people's anger. They begin to look for someone

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<sup>1</sup>Emphasis noted by the interviewer.



to blame for the circumstances. If it is not the pastor, it may be the governing board, the judicatory, the position that attracted him, or certain individuals.

In Church A one woman who felt the loss of the pastor so keenly that she subsequently withdrew from the church. She directed her anger toward the church which called the minister to a new position. She was obviously ignoring the fact that her loved pastor had accepted the call. "He promised us seven years, and he only stayed five. I was angry--not at him, but at the church that took him away from us."

Anger in Church B was directed toward the pastor in various ways. For the most part anger was caused by his failure to carry out pastoral functions such as visitation. The anger brought about frustration, helplessness, and inability to resolve dissatisfaction. One said, "We were his flock, and he should have been there."

Church C was provided with a scapegoat, unfortunately for him. Although members readily admitted

that they did not know what happened, it was easy to blame one person whether it was justified or not. As a result, many in the church openly expressed their anger toward this man as the one responsible for the pastor's leaving. During the worship services the targeted man regularly sat in the congregation alone on one side near the front of the sanctuary. The man himself was always conscious of his predicament; the interim pastor was constantly aware of this deliberate ostracism. In expressing anger toward this man, one woman remarked, "I wouldn't believe him anyway. He doesn't tell the truth."

#### (4) Guilt

Guilt has a place in the grief process. Memory of a loss usually includes some element of regret and thus invokes feelings of guilt. Since guilt is not an easy feeling to admit, it appears primarily in subtle forms. Guilt arises from negative feelings, from feelings difficult to articulate, from questions of person or persons to blame, and from the confusion of "Why?" it happened.



In Church A, one of the young men who had a position of leadership, expressed extensive criticism of the departing minister. Then suddenly he changed his tone and began to compliment the minister and to recount his accomplishments. It was rather obvious that he had some feelings of guilt in criticizing the minister so severely. It is also interesting that he was one of the few to volunteer to participate in the interviewing process. When he was asked how he felt when he learned that the minister was leaving, he commented, "Free." His reasoning was that he would then be free to plan his own programs rather than follow the minister's direction.

The members of Church B developed extensive feelings of guilt during the period following their pastor's indication of an impending resignation. They felt guilty because they wanted him to leave. The longer the wait, the more guilt they felt. As the pastor sensed the pressure, both minister and parishioners became increasingly uncomfortable. The president of the church council responded that he felt "regret that it had happened, guilt for the pressure that was applied, and relief."



Church C was left in a state of confusion, not really knowing whether to feel guilty or not. The fact that they could project some anger onto another person relieved them of introspection. However, the very existence of anger indicates inner turmoil that demands an outlet. The president of the church council commented, "Perhaps there was something else I could have done."

#### (5) Depression

Depression is not always readily identified with the grief experience since there are numerous causes for a feeling of despondency. It is related to a sense of helplessness and hopelessness. Discouragement is evident almost universally when a church suffers the loss of a pastor. The exception could occur when a church wishes the pastor to move as in Church B. However, circumstances relating to the departure may cause deep regret, accompanying depression.

Depression was definitely present in Church A. The church secretary, who held twelve leadership positions in the church during the last five years, was asked how

she felt on learning of the pastor's leaving. She answered, "Lonely." She added on the questionnaire: "To be of any future value to the church, I knew I had to accept it and I did--we must go on."

The church secretary in Church B also showed definite depression:

I don't believe that I can ever again have the whole-hearted enthusiasm for my church and its work I once had. I find a great amount of cynicism in my reactions toward almost everything. It is very difficult to pray."

One woman in this church also stated,

I wanted him to leave with a good feeling about us and us to have a good feeling toward him. But his family didn't even come to the last worship service, and he said he hoped the new pastor would feel better than he did.

The difficult experience in Church C caused one woman to comment, "Who will want us now?" Some of these negative reactions were alleviated by the extended interim.

Since Church A sustained the most severe grief, some other expressions of their emotions are significant.

In addition, an exit interview with the pastor gave much insight into his ministry.

The church secretary in commenting about the pastor's departure said, "I've known this for so long, but it didn't make any difference. It is just as difficult." She was also the church organist and choir director.

On the minister's final Sunday an anthem was used which she had composed in his honor, "Called to be a Blessing."

The president of the governing board of the church indicated that he had some regrets regarding certain church programs; however, he added, "We loved him."

One older man learned of the minister's resignation from the pulpit announcement, and it came as a shock, "I didn't know why." However, he added, "The church is not falling apart."

Another individual reacted this way, "It can't be! What has happened? There must be a reason." In retrospect she commented, "I did not want to believe it."

A woman who held important positions of leadership both in the church and in business described her feelings this way,



At first I felt selfish. Then I thought if it is God's way, he (the minister) will need support and our blessing. There are tears, but that's part of love. It is difficult. We will face reality nearer the time. . . At the exit interview I felt he was on the witness stand."

A young man who had joined the church two years previously and had received counseling from the pastor, was genuinely distressed.

I was upset when he announced he was leaving. He was more like a friend than as a minister. He was easy to talk to and I needed to talk to someone. I'm afraid the next minister won't be. It made me feel good to know that he was here. Church is good. I enjoyed coming to church. Some people come because they feel they have to. . . He helped me to know Christ. I want now to be stronger.

Another middle-aged woman commented,

I wanted to cry. It (the resignation) was a shock. I cried all the way home. He was special. We had to adjust to his leaving in six-month's time. I did not feel beneath him. He was more like a brother. I could talk and he would listen. . . We are richer for having him. He was warm. He loved everybody. How can we find another like him? In referring to a call committee visiting in the congregation, she stated, "The vultures are here."

The eighteen-year-old expressed her feelings this way,

I knew ahead of time. I was kind of expecting it and I was happy for him. We were good friends. He said he might be leaving some time and didn't want me to be dependent. . . I miss him. It's different than I thought it would be. He's gone; he is not there. Life goes on.

#### F. Summary

A dominant aspect of the interim period is that of grief, an issue with which an interim minister must deal. The grief results from the loss of a pastor and the state of being without a designated leader. This grief state is often not recognized as such. Grief reveals itself primarily in anxiety, which may have a variety of manifestations, such as shock, denial, anger, guilt or depression. Each may serve to identify grief. Even when a minister leaves upon request, some form of grief is evident. In such circumstances, the grief may exhibit itself in guilt as a primary manifestation. The analogy is the loss of a spouse when the relationship has been bad. The irresolution feeds grief.

It was also interesting that so many of the interviews stressed the need for caring. This response



seemed to be the determinant for the pastor's success or failure. Either "he cared" or "he didn't care" or "we need someone who cares" was expressed. One individual remarked, "He was concerned." During the process of grieving, caring becomes the necessary ingredient for the individual's success in dealing with grief. One who was interviewed quoted the following: "When we begin to care,<sup>1</sup> that's when the cure begins (source unknown)."

The interim should not be just a period for marking time. For the congregation, as well as the individual member, there must be movement "through the valley of the shadow." The interim minister needs to be the kind of person who can supportively lead the people in this process.

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<sup>1</sup>The word care is derived from the Old German Kara, meaning lament, or grief. A synonym for care is anxiety, providing further significance for the use of this word.

minister.

The interim period has become essential in the life of any congregation. That period can affect the quality of the ministry during the next period.

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<sup>1</sup>Lloyd H. Burley, Ministry and Interim, 1971, pp. 12-13. Originally in the Journal of the United Church of Christ, 1971, pp. 12-13. Research Center in Religion and Society, 1971, pp. 12-13.



### III. Implications for Interim Ministry

#### A. The Nature of the Interim Ministry

In the histories of congregations which choose their own ministers there is a time between pastorates called an interim period. For at least one denomination, the United Church of Christ, the total of such periods averages about one tenth of the total life of the local church.<sup>1</sup>

Little attention has been given in the past to this stage in the church's life. Essentially, it has been viewed as a time to maintain the status quo or to be on hold until the new minister arrives. Without designated leadership the church coasts. Frequently, only the necessary pastoral duties, such as conducting worship services, funerals, and weddings are performed by a supply minister.

The interim period has hidden potential in the life of any congregation. What happens may affect the quality of the ministry during the next pastorate.

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<sup>1</sup>Loyde H. Hartley, Placement and Deployment of Professionals in the United Church of Christ (Lancaster, PA: Research Center in Religion and Society, 1973), pp. 23-24.

Whether the church grows or stands still may be predicated on the preparation made in this period. A positive, forward-looking leader can foster a spirit of optimism and expectancy. Loren Meade advocates "a caring on-the-spot kind of assistance and support" by a qualified interim minister.<sup>1</sup>

Out of the ecumenical movement there has arisen new interest in the issues which Protestant churches have in common. One of these is interim ministry. An interdenominational meeting was held in St. Louis in 1975, to discuss this neglected area in the life of the church. The result was a planned seminar jointly sponsored by the Mid-Atlantic Association for Training and Consulting and the Alban Institute, both based in Washington, DC. Each of us who participated in this training seminar was then qualified as a "pastoral change specialist." Since that time, these pastors have formed an Interim Network with the purpose of strengthening this ministry through sharing.<sup>2</sup>

The unique needs and problems of the interim period often grow out of the circumstances relating to

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<sup>1</sup> Loren B. Mead, Changing Pastoral Leadership (Washington, DC: The Alban Institute, Inc., 1979), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix for Interim Network Newsletter.



the pastor's leaving. Feelings will be aroused when a loved pastor is retiring after many years of service. Feelings will also be stirred if the minister has been requested to leave following a controversial issue. There may also be problems relating to a financial difficulty, a building issue, or simply personality differences. However, most church problems relate in some manner to the departure of the minister and fall into the area of concern during the interim period.

Consequently, the initial task of the interim pastor is to diagnose and to determine the nature of the church's situation. Often a quick assessment can be conveyed by a judicatory official. This happened once when a staff member said, "They have had too much done for them." From this comment it was clear that more lay involvement was needed. Since it is always necessary for the interim minister to move rather quickly, someone has dubbed the interim the "faster pastor."

The diagnosis will determine the interim's specific goals. Each of the following goals will have



some bearing on this type of ministry, depending upon the existing situation. Appropriate goals usually include:

- 1) To maintain the viability of the church

The ongoing vital program that is expected of a live congregation consists of pastoral duties plus the Christian activities of the laity. Continuing the needed programs already underway and efforts to help make them more meaningful are the responsibility of an interim leader.

- 2) To resolve feelings of grief

Pastoral visitation involves personal, direct contact with individuals. Intentional expression of interest in their feelings, more often than not, will provide healing catharsis.

- 3) To reinforce the ministry of the laity

Encouragement of participation and leadership by lay persons is vital. The interim period is a particularly apt time to develop lay leadership. A member of the laity may accompany the pastor when home communion is administered. Many responsibilities in the church may be carried out by lay persons rather than by a pastor.

- 4) To clarify the mission of the church

Congregations need to be reminded that Christians are here to serve, not only to be served. The interim may be the voice of the larger Christian community at a time when the church is turned inward to its own needs. The minister teaches by example, by preaching, and by formal teaching.

- 5) To deal with special needs of the church

Every church is different. As a result of diagnosis, the interim will learn of specific problems in the congregation. Through knowledge of techniques in conflict management and tactful suggestions by the "outsider" (the disinterested person, the interim minister) beneficial changes may be effected.

- 6) To emphasize fellowship and reconciliation

Opportunities for encouraging Christian fellowship are many. For example, arranging for a coffee hour before or after worship services is helpful. The incorporation of "congregational concerns" during a worship service can become a time of real sharing.

- 7) To strengthen denominational ties

The interim minister personally maintains a good relationship with the denomination and encourages the local church to participate in denomination wide activities and program.

- 8) To increase the potential for a successful ministry by the next regular pastor

The interim minister is future-oriented. The interim minister is concerned with the coming of a new pastor and is helping to prepare the congregation for the arrival. In addition, he/she communicates with the new pastor any information that might be helpful.

<sup>1</sup>Freud, *Mourning and Melancholia*, p. 245.



### THREE DYNAMICS

The regular pastor and the interim pastor are basically alike in function, but the interim differs in three dynamics characteristic of this transition period. One of the outcomes of specific research was the recognition that there are key dynamics within its concept and practice which are important. The unique determinants of this interval are time, change, and leadership. Each relates to the aspect of grief.

### TIME

The time factor affects both the quality and the quantity of what can be accomplished. The limitations of time restrict, as well as permit certain activities.

It has been known for centuries that time is needed to cure sorrow, a fact that is recognized by most people through experience. Since grief occurs with the loss of a pastor, allowing some time for the resolution of that grief is advisable. Grief work cannot be hurried. Freud emphasizes that cathectic energy needs to be expended in order to carry through the task.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Freud, Mourning and Melancholia, p. 245.



If the interim period is too short to permit proper expression of that grief, the next regular minister and that ministry may suffer and his/her stay may be truncated. This has been documented again and again in experience and in the many case histories presented by Lyle Schaller.<sup>1</sup> Without realizing the potential difficulty the congregation may wish to move through this transitional period as quickly as possible. Most people prefer not just to mark time. The congregation may need to re-think the interim as a time to accomplish certain tasks, one of which may be the working through of grief. In addition, the period can involve an opportunity for an in-depth evaluation of the existing status of the church, a determination of goals, and a definition of the qualities needed in the next pastor in order to accomplish those goals. If a decision on the new minister is made too quickly, it may be based on reactions rather than careful consideration. Sometimes quick decisions result only in securing a minister

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<sup>1</sup>Lyle E. Schaller, The Pastor and the People, Building a New Partnership for Effective Ministry (New York: Abingdon Press, 1973), ch. 4: Survival Tactics in the Parish (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1977), ch. 14.

"exactly like" the one who left or one who is "completely different". Decisions of this kind should not be made hastily. During the period of grief confusion may predominate, at least for a while. Emotions foster uncertainty and grief confounds productive thinking.

#### CHANGE

Growth involves change. Even though change threatens no progress occurs without it. Change is a stimulus to growth. The acceptance of change is one of the positive factors in the maturation process. John Finley says, "Maturity is the capacity to endure uncertainty."<sup>1</sup>

Change is characteristic of life in our day.

"The greatest problem facing every institution in today's society--including the church--is the problem of change. The world is changing, society is changing, people are changing."<sup>2</sup>

Change in the local church is intensified at the time of pastoral change. Because of the potential for becoming traumatic and disruptive, change is difficult.

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<sup>1</sup> Cited by Michael J. Mahoney, Self-Change (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1979), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Elisa L. Desportes, Congregations in Change (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), p. 5.



Naturally, the organism resists change. There is a tendency toward a state of equilibrium, identified in biology as homeostasis. This tendency is termed "the conservative impulse" by Marris<sup>1</sup> and represents the need of stability and continuity in the human condition. Such need is recognizable when a college senior states "I wish everything would crystallize just as it is...that I would never have to graduate from college, that I could live at home with my mother for the rest of my life." It is also seen when a project is proposed before a church council and a member responds, "We can't do that; we've never done it before." It has been said that when a leader presents a new idea, initial opposition to that idea should be anticipated. A new idea is threatening.

Eric Hoffer writes in The Ordeal of Change:

No one really likes the new. We are afraid of it...Even in slight things the experience of the new is rarely without some foreboding...In the case of drastic change the uneasiness is of course deeper and more lasting. We can

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<sup>1</sup>Peter Marris, Loss and Change (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 4.



never be really prepared for that which is wholly new. We have to adjust ourselves and every radical adjustment is a crisis in self-esteem; we undergo a test, we have to prove ourselves. It needs inordinate self-confidence to face drastic change without inner trembling.<sup>1</sup>

Resistance to change characterizes the human condition. What is true for the individual is no less true for a group. Then a pastor resigns obvious change is ahead for this congregation. Some apprehension can be anticipated. At the very least there will be a new leader, a new face in the chancel on Sunday morning. If the former pastor was authoritarian, the laity may have to assume new responsibility and they will need support. If the laity is rich in leadership ability, the change may be less drastic.

How can anxiety caused by change be dealt with? First, the anxiety may be reduced to a point where it is manageable. The interim can keep structural changes to a minimum. Instead of changing the liturgy from its

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<sup>1</sup>Eric Hoffer, The Ordeal of Change (New York: Harper & Row, 1952), pp. 1-2. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972).

accustomed format, the interim minister can inject new meaning into the worship experience. Content may be injected without disturbing the form.

It has been said that the fear of the unknown is the greatest dread. The United Church of Christ recommends and provides a step-by-step procedure poster for the call committee. This poster, placed on a conspicuous bulletin board within the church, can keep the congregation informed of the progress made in securing the new pastor. As full disclosure as possible of the work of the call committee can help to reduce apprehension.

The church by its very nature compounds the difficulty in the change process since the church prizes tradition more than innovation. Lyle Schaller, in The Change Agent,<sup>1</sup> considers in detail the meaning of change, how change can be brought about, and the place of the leader in effecting change--particularly in the church setting. In the discussion of actual experience he

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<sup>1</sup>Lyle E. Schaller, The Change Agent, The Strategy of Innovative Leadership (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972).

<sup>2</sup>Rev. John Thatcher, "The Bridges," The American Churchman.

recounts a comment by a new pastor, "That situation needed an interim pastor who would shake things up, open the doors to change, and then move on carrying the hostility with him."<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the interim bears the weight of hostility. There is a place for the scapegoat. However, the satisfaction can come from knowing that the special needs of a church have been met under the unique circumstances of an interim period. Like John the Baptist the interim recognizes that there is the possibility of becoming beheaded!

#### LEADERSHIP

The interim pastor utilizes leadership qualities somewhat differently from the regular pastor. By the quality of leadership the interim possesses some of the inevitable conflict and insecurity of this period can be relieved. The interim minister can strengthen the work of the church, indicated by a magazine article, "Interim Ministers Build Strong Bridges."<sup>2</sup> Not only can

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<sup>1</sup> Schaller, The Pastor and the People, p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. Joan Thatcher, "Interim Ministers Build Strong Bridges," The American Baptist, January 1975.



the interim pastor tie together the two ministries of regular pastors, one coming before and the other after, but he/she can enhance the values of both.

The interim pastor needs to be able to listen--listen to the expressions of feelings of parishioners--without being judgmental. Feelings are certain to surface during this period, and they need to be expressed directly as a healing catharsis. The interim minister may assist the congregation in self-awareness in recognition of the cause of the grievous feelings. In particular, this need applies to persons suffering from the pangs of grief, either over the loss of a loved pastor or over the circumstances of the former pastor's leaving. Furthermore, the interim pastor must have sufficient inner emotional stability to refrain from allowing or fostering dependency. When the interim leaves, no grieving trauma should remain. The interim pastor is constantly aware and keeps the parishioners aware that the time is brief. The purpose of this period is to "prepare the way" as John the Baptist did. The expendable person must be able to say, "He must increase; I must decrease."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>John 3:30.

There are three concepts of leadership which apply rather uniquely to the interim ministry.

1) The Servant as Leader. Among publications on leadership is a significant small booklet entitled The Servant as Leader, later incorporated into book form with the title The Servant Leader. The author, Greenleaf, offers meaningful insights into the functioning of an effective leader. He states, "The great leader is seen as servant first."<sup>1</sup> It is not simply that a leader must serve the needs of the group which he leads, but that the desire and the will to serve must be the first impulse of the one who would truly lead. The difference manifests itself in the degree of concern for needs as exhibited by the visible leader of the group. The rigid test is this: Do those being served grow as persons while being served, grow in becoming healthier, wiser and freer to become servants themselves? This idea, presented as a model for secular leaders, is even more critical for religious leaders, since the very name of the profession is

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<sup>1</sup> Robert K. Greenleaf, The Servant Leader (Ramsey, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1978), p. 2.



"minister" which means to serve.<sup>1</sup> Greenleaf adds a word about the motivation of the servant leader. "We serve for our own healing."<sup>2</sup> The covenant between servant leader and those he/she leads is the search for wholeness, which they share in common. Together the church becomes a "colony of heaven"<sup>3</sup>--serving together, sharing together, working together, healing together. The unique needs of the interim period must always be the priority for the interim minister.

2) The Ecstatic Healer. One chapter in the book, Healing and Wholeness<sup>4</sup> by Sanford, is devoted to the concept of the ecstatic healer, referring to the ancient cult of Asklepius. Surrounded by mythological symbols, Asklepius, who began as a human physician, became a divine healer. His wife epitomized the healing by gentle hands. From the name of his children are derived the words

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 22:27.

<sup>2</sup> Greenleaf, The Servant Leader, p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> Ephesians 2:19.

<sup>4</sup> John A. Sanford, Healing and Wholeness (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), chap. IV.



panacea and hygiene. Asklepius was, according to legend, "snatched from death." He himself became master of the mysteries of illness and death because he participated in them firsthand. Healing can only be carried out by one who has been ill and recovered. The philosophy of Alcoholics Anonymous in our day states that only recovered alcoholics can minister to other alcoholics. Ancient Greeks believed that medical knowledge is a gift from the Gods. It comes by inspiration. "We do not think up knowledge, it comes to us."<sup>1</sup>

Asklepius' daughters were responsible for the feminine principles of warmth, concern, and intuitive understanding. These attributes are essential for a spiritual or psychological process. The Old Testament did not separate physical and psychological healing nor did the Acts of the Apostles. Human beings were considered as a whole. Modern medicine considers that a person hospitalized for physical ailments is also affected emotionally.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

In primitive societies the shaman was recognized as the person with healing gifts. Both men and women were called to be shamans, usually through an experience of illness that exposed them to the spirit world and endowed them with divine powers. The shaman's effectiveness in healing others is derived from personal experience.

The shaman is an individual, and can only help people in an individual way by helping them to relate to their personal, inner experience, not to an institutional faith.<sup>1</sup>

The shaman's skill is the capacity of ecstasy, which literally means to be out of oneself. In a spirit of ecstasy, his/her center of consciousness shifts from the self-centered ego frame of reference to another stance. The spiritual world is perceived through the unconscious, according to Carl Jung.<sup>2</sup> The shaman is able to be in touch with the spiritual world, through the medium of the unconscious. The shaman is the leader, the healer, the one to whom people turn.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>2</sup>Carl G. Jung, Modern Man in Search of a Soul (New York: Hancourt Peace, 1933), p. 229.



The interim pastor is a healer, one who can stand above and beyond conflict. The interim pastor is one who has spiritual resources preferably gained through the trial of personal experience. The interim pastor needs inner emotional maturity and portrays the assurance of strong Christian beliefs.

3) The Wounded Healer. The concept of the wounded healer is interpreted by Henry J. M. Nouwen in a book by the same name.<sup>1</sup> The recently vacated church is rarely free from some type of wounds and is consequently in need of healing. Nouwen's contention that the nuclear man of the present day is characterized by dislocation fragmentation. Rootlessness could typify the church that has recently lost its pastor and is in need of healing and restoration. He also presents three roles which he deems essential for the Christian ministry of the future: the leader as the articulator of inner events; the leader as a man of compassion; and the leader as contemplative critic.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Henry J. M. Nouwen, The Wounded Healer (New York: The Seabury Press, 1977).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 26-27.



These three roles can be particularly relevant to the work of an interim pastor.

The first role applies to the interim minister's familiarity with spiritual realities. The interim needs to be able to relate to the spiritual/emotional needs of bereaved parishioners. The loss experienced by the parishioners may be the loss of the very one who represents their faith. Identification of the espoused faith with the person who professes that faith is common.<sup>1</sup> Christians are commissioned to be "in Christ" and the leader who teaches such faith can become a personification of Christ himself.

The second role is one of warmth and caring. Greenleaf's definition is helpful. Caring is

an exacting and demanding business. It requires not only interest and compassion and concern; it demands self-sacrifice and wisdom and tough-mindedness and discipline.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Nouwen, The Living Reminder, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup>Greenleaf, The Servant Leader, p. 243.

The third role of being constructively critical is one more easily undertaken by the interim minister. Some honest appraisal can be given by an outsider who is expected to leave shortly. Simply because the interim is an outsider, a disinterested person who does not have personal investment, he/she is not as likely to be suspected of prejudice. It is also true that an outsider is more likely to be considered an expert, one from whom advice can be more readily accepted.

The ultimate epitome of The Wounded Healer is seen in the person of Jesus the Christ. By his suffering, all are healed. He was and is the true Healer. Nouwen sees this aspect in his book The Living Reminder<sup>1</sup> and makes the reader conscious of the need to be reminded of the Source of all healing, the divine Son of God, throughout all ministry.

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<sup>1</sup>Nouwen, The Living Reminder.

## B. Dealing with Grief in the Interim

The first responsibility of the intentional interim pastor, according to Lyle Schaller,<sup>1</sup> is to assist members of the congregation to work through grief. Prior to presenting some specifics relating to dealing with grief, several considerations need to be recognized. Important are 1) charting the grief process, 2) determining grief intensity, 3) acceptance of grief expressions, 4) the feeling tone of the church, 5) assessing anticipatory grief, and 6) the limitations for healing.

1) The accompanying chart of the grief process (Table III) shows the passage through which the individual must go. Not everyone, nor every congregation, goes through the process in the same manner. Stages may be different for different members of the congregation; however, if time is not allowed for working through grief feelings there will be lingering problems. When a new minister comes before grief work is relatively complete, there may be evidence of continuing emotional disturbance. The new minister

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<sup>1</sup>Schaller, Survival Tactics in the Parish, p. 205.



TABLE III  
BEREAVEMENT

STAGES	TIME	PSYCHODYNAMICS	TASKS FOR BEREAVED	TASKS FOR CARING PERSONS
1. Shock	hours -- days	Shock - denial, confusion PROTEST	Release of grief	Comfort - Protection
2. Numbness	1 - 7 days	Self-control; Repression of emotions Detachment Emptiness Loss of self-esteem	"Letting go" Trusting environ- ment Acceptance reality (progressive)	Guidance - to quiet presence
3. Disorganized feeling - anger, rage, guilt, crying	2 - 6 weeks	Regression painful, frightening Simplification withdrawal Anguish	Structuring -- setting priorities	Ventilation permission Prediction  Empathic listening
4. Grief work	4 - 6 weeks to several months	Depression Introjection of deceased	Decision for life	Sharing Celebration of memories
5. Mourning - selective memory with stabbing pain	6 weeks - 2 years	Self-Integration	Expression of un- acceptable feel- ings, desires	
6. Acceptance of loss	6 weeks - 2 years		Evaluation of loss	Cutting loose
7. Re-linking/New orientation	6 weeks - 2 years	Adaptation	Emancipation - re-commitment	

from the Chaplaincy Department  
Geisinger Medical Center  
Danville, Pennsylvania

may become frustrated, feel he/she is not accepted, and may actually be bypassed because of carry-over loyalty to or guilt about a former minister. The chart also confirms Schaller's recommendation for up to two years with an interim period if the grief trauma is severe.<sup>1</sup>

2) Many factors affect the extent and intensity of grief. Determinants of the amount of grief experienced by a congregation may include these features:

- a. The kind of preparation given relating to the former minister's departure. The congregation should be able to understand and accept the reasons for the minister's leaving.
- b. The orderliness of the leave-taking which should not be rushed and should include rites such as a farewell reception.<sup>2</sup>
- c. The positive relationship or affinity of pastor and people. A reserved, private pastor does not usually leave warm regrets.
- d. Negative factors, such as the element of dissent among members, the limitations of the former pastor, a serious financial problem, deterioration of the parish, poor lay leadership, which tend to intensify and prolong grief.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 203.

<sup>2</sup>Roy M. Oswald discusses the leave-taking processes in Running Through the Thistles (Washington, DC: The Alban Institute, 1979).

The grief process is likely to be disrupted if the minister retires and retains membership in the parish, possibly living nearby. The former minister may assist the transition by confirming the separation through clarifying his position as no longer the pastor. There is always the fact that the individuals will sustain differing degrees of trauma. Those closest to the pastor are likely to feel the loss more keenly.

3) Grief is a rejection of the situation in which persons find themselves. Acceptance of the situation by a related person, in this case the interim minister, assists in the incorporation of healing. The interim pastor's most helpful response to the grief situation is quiet acceptance. To illustrate from another setting, a minister visited a dying man in the hospital. The family was standing around, not speaking, just waiting for the passing. The nurse had cautioned that they should say nothing that they did not want the man to hear. The pastor of the man had come to know him well through the process of several



pastoral visits. She went to him, speaking aloud, "Jimmy, everyone is here, all your children. Everything is fine; all is taken care of. Let me hold your hand." The whole atmosphere in the hospital room changed, and the family expressed gratitude for the presence of the minister. Acknowledged feeling constitutes one of the most freeing avenues toward acceptance. The facilitator must be able to overcome any personal feelings which might block accepting the grief situation.

4) Much of what can be accomplished during the interim ministry is dependent upon the overall feeling tone of the total church environment. The temporary leader can create a positive climate within the life of the church. Discouragement, negative attitudes, hopelessness on the part of the interim minister should be avoided at all costs. Jesus' ministry was positive but not falsely positive. The Golden Rule differed from previous pronouncements in that it was stated in the affirmative. The individual should take the initiative, not just refrain from doing evil. The Beatitudes are positive in contrast to the Ten

Commandments with their negative emphasis. Christians should initiate action rather than just reacting. The joyous leader can set the stage for a good worship experience; the joyous leader has an infectious spirit. The pastor needs to affirm people at a time of their weakness. The Christian faith is hopeful, expectant.

5) Through observation and listening it is possible for the interim minister to make some determination of the degree of anticipatory grief experienced by the congregation. Prior to the interim period some acceptance of the fact of the pastor's leaving may already have taken place. Even though the amount of grief will differ with individuals there will be some consensus of regret. The interim minister needs to be aware of where the people are in order to lead them.

6) When grief is severe, the wound is rarely completely healed. Scars seem to remain, as in the death of a spouse. Total healing may not be possible in some cases relating to the loss of a loved pastor. Effort then

should be made toward reducing the trauma to the point where it is manageable, to the degree where the individual may begin to function with some normalcy. Emotion is reduced by expression of feelings, by the passing of time, and by loving support. The goal is toward reasonable psychological health, which Schaller identifies with the person who "is linked to the past, is convinced he can influence the future, and is able and happy to live in the present."<sup>1</sup>

### THREE SETTINGS

The interim minister functions in three distinct settings in the process of dealing with grief: 1) the one-to-one relationship that the interim has with individuals, 2) the contacts in small groups, and 3) utilization of the more formal worship service.

1) Individual contacts. One notable way to relieve the trauma of grief is by catharsis. Switzer affirms, "Talking is a way of relieving anxiety."<sup>2</sup> Parkes calls

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<sup>1</sup>Schaller, Parish Planning, p. 26.

<sup>2</sup>Switzer, The Dynamics of Grief, p. 112.



this experience, "the talking cure."<sup>1</sup> Spiegel recommends this approach, "Encourage the grief sufferer to express his hurt and loss."<sup>2</sup> Feelings need to be expressed. The personal one-to-one relationship in a private session provides the best opportunity for this purpose.

This type of meeting does not need to be limited to a formalized counseling session. There can be innumerable informal expressions of such feelings. Consequently, the interim needs to be a good listener, one who expresses no judgment, and one who can keep confidences. "Talking it out" releases tension, and expressed feelings often find relief simply through the process. The interim minister can provide a sympathetic and understanding ear, but can remain objective, since he/she is without long-term investment in this parish. Techniques such as those recommended for formal counseling should be practiced at all times.

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<sup>1</sup>Parkes, Bereavement, pp. 1-2.

<sup>2</sup>Yorick Spiegel, The Grief Process, trans. by Elsbeth Duke (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1977), p. 166.

Saying good-by on any occasion and for any reason is likely to arouse a host of emotions. In clinical pastoral education the counselor is trained to respond to the feelings of the counselee. The counselor identifies with the feeling, experiences participative empathy. The purpose is for encouragement of verbalization on the part of the counselee in order to give vent to those emotions which when bottled up tend to be disruptive. The interim minister is an individual also subject to personal relationships and emotions. As a facilitator, the interim pastor must be realistic regarding personal abilities and maximize his/her strengths.

One individual church member, seen by other parishioners as the cause of a loved pastor's leaving, was ostracized by the congregation and became the scapegoat for the people. This situation existed in Church C, as recounted in Chapter II. Efforts by the interim pastor sometimes appeared fruitless, since there were many complicating factors. The interim attempted to accept his individual as a fully participating member of the church, even



though he was not, talking with him and listening to him on various occasions, and encouraging participation in parish activities. The interim used the theme of forgiveness and reconciliation in messages on the need for Christians being together and loving one another. Past events interfered. Some reduction of unpleasantness resulted. The only element that appeared to be positive was the length of an extended interim period of thirteen months. Time helped.

Since grief often isolates the individual and contributes to loneliness and ostracism, then one way to alleviate personal grief is to encourage fellowship. A coffee hour before or after the worship service and a place for congregation concerns during the worship service are proper media for the expression of fellowship and common sharing. People strengthen one another. When a loved one dies, one of the most helpful aspects is the support provided by the presence of family and friends.

genuine feelings is important in releasing grief.

The value of sharing in small groups, although not related to the loss of a pastor but of a lay leader,



2) In small groups. In recent years there has been an ever increasing use of small groups in the church for Bible study, for working through administrative problems ("task forces"), for sharing common interests. Some churches have established groups for the specific purpose of sharing common problems in a kind of group therapy. These groups have included those recently divorced, those with terminal diseases, and those recently bereaved. The common bond of similar experiences has often strengthened those individuals participating.

Advantages for these groups are provided by the small number of persons in a relatively small group--presumably no more than eight or ten persons. In a larger meeting there is less opportunity for interaction. The more people present, the less opportunity there is for each to speak. If the group is too large, it can be broken down into smaller groups. Many persons feel more free to be honest and open in a small group. Expressing genuine feelings is important in releasing grief.

The value of sharing in small groups, although not related to the loss of a pastor but of a lay leader,

is illustrated by one church council meeting. The majority of the session was involved in the expression of feelings related to the suicide of a leading member. The suicide had occurred that morning. There was a common concern, a desire for understanding, and a real need to find release in confession. The sharing was needed and was tremendously helpful in the relief which resulted. Small groups encourage discussion.

A small group is also one of the best media for education. Discussion promotes learning and an effective teacher can facilitate mature personhood through group participation.

There are some dangers in small groups. They may become exclusive. Within the Christian fellowship, according to scripture, the principle is "Whosoever will may come."<sup>1</sup> All should be welcome. An exclusive group can damage Christian fellowship. Another danger is that a small group may separate itself from the main body of the church and become divisive. When a small number of persons wishes to dominate, they sometimes form a power

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<sup>1</sup>Revelation 22:17.



block through an organization within the life of the Church. Jesus' teaching to the disciples "that all may be one"<sup>1</sup> is pertinent. This has happened with a women's society and with church school officers in specific situations. Such behavior serves to break the bond of fellowship that should exist in the life of a Christian family.

Group dynamics are in effect in any small group. The democratic process should have first priority. Effective leadership is also needed. A course to train church members in leadership techniques can increase the positive use of small groups. Leadership may be assumed by either the pastor or a lay person, but the common component of groups should be "their existence as small units in which people could be known by their first names and in which they could talk as well as listen."<sup>2</sup> The small group has become a significant medium for the development of a support system which not only enhances fellowship, but often offers a way of expressing and working through such

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<sup>1</sup>John 17:21.

<sup>2</sup>Reid, p. 20.



feelings as those of loss and grief.

3) In worship services. The central purpose of worship is to respond to God. The meaning of the Greek word for liturgy is "the work of the people." The congregation at worship should experience God, should come to know him better. "Worship is pastoral, edifying, corporate and integrative," as Willimon says.<sup>1</sup> Corporate worship can help to counteract the emphasis in today's society on individualism and separatism. Worship provides the strengthening power for facing the grief and suffering of the world. In addition, it should be remembered that the funeral service itself is a worship service and offers an opportunity for dealing with suffering and loss from a Christian perspective. The Sacrament of Holy Communion also offers a unique opportunity to interpret the relationship of God's suffering to the suffering of persons.

One of the priestly duties of the interim minister is to attempt to bring divine direction to the situation in the local church. There are no pronouncements

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<sup>1</sup>William Willimon, Worship as Pastoral Care (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), p. 2.

except those that come from such scripture as the statement by Jesus, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another." The interim minister does not judge or dictate to a congregation, in the sermon or in the context of liturgy, but maintains a posture of sharing. Although the interim minister presumably has had training and experience in preparation for this specialized ministry, in no way does direction come from a dictatorial or superior stance. Acceptance of the decision-making right of an autonomous body always predominates whether in worship or in other assemblies.

One avenue by which a congregation may find release from some of the grief trauma is through corporate prayer in conjunction with the pastoral prayer during the regular worship service. By means of directed prayer an interim minister may assist the people to remember the former pastor with thanksgiving for positive memories and good experiences, as well as for unfulfilled mission and uncompleted tasks. Corporate prayer which acknowledges feelings may assist in the grief process.



The themes for worship during an interim ministry can be consonant with that of pastoral care, that of healing. Some themes for worship which may be helpful during the interim are these:

I. The Greatness of God. The objective here would be to assist the parishioners to recognize that only God is omnipotent and that no one among human beings is perfect. Dependence upon a former pastor should not supersede our dependence upon God.

II. Hope and Expectancy. This theme is an important focus in Christian philosophy. Anticipation provides courage and fosters joy.

III. The Mission of the Church. Clarification of the true purpose of servanthood within the life of the church and extending outward to other persons is the heart of the Christian faith.

IV. Assurance. Each person needs a firm foundation on which to build individual faith and with that certainty to be able to function effectively.



V. The Savior. "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. . ."<sup>1</sup> is a mandatory directive for the church of Christ providing the only ultimate guide for Christian living.

VI. Renewing the Mind. Life-long education in whatever form it takes provides the needed stimulus for constant reevaluation necessary for growth.

VII. Forgiveness. Cleansing through daily confession makes possible continuing healthy relationships.

Not only should these themes be in the sermon message, but also incorporated into the total worship liturgy.

Throughout the worship experience, the interim pastor can bring the healing Spirit of God. By providing support and nourishment the interim pastor conveys the strengthening power of God. The sermon is the medium for edification. Here is the primary means for assisting in the development of a wholesome, a healing theology. Knowledge of the significance of Jesus' life and teaching offers the greatest understanding. Willimon declares,

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<sup>1</sup>Hebrews 12:2.

"In the life, death, healing and resurrection of a Jew from Nazareth, we have seen as much of God as we ever hope to see."<sup>1</sup> Colossians says, "For in Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form."<sup>2</sup> He is the Source of all our healing.

#### THE RESOLUTION OF GRIEF

The loss of a loved pastor can become a source of inspiration for the bereaved church. Memory plays a prominent part in grief as noted before. Nouwen attests, "Most of our human emotions are closely related to our memory. Remorse is a biting memory, guilt is an accusing memory, gratitude is a joyful memory."<sup>3</sup> The church is strengthened spiritually by the memorial significance of Holy Communion, when Christ and the meaning of his life are remembered. For that matter, one is encouraged by the memory of all those who have preceded him/her in death, those who have contributed to the Christian faith.

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<sup>1</sup>Willimon, Worship as Pastoral Care, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup>Colossians 2:9.

<sup>3</sup>Nouwen, The Living Reminder, p. 19.



The value of selective memory is verified by the personal testimony of Rose Kennedy,

"Instead of dwelling on loss, I try to bring back all the best memories, the joy that has not been dimmed by time... Only my faith has given me the strength to bear those sorrows and try to balance them against the blessings. I tell myself that God gave my children many gifts--spirit, beauty, intelligence, the capacity to make friends and to inspire respect. There was only one gift he held back--length of life...And though I grieve, I go on...if we yield to grief, if we let our emotional and mental energy be absorbed by our losses, we lose something greater still--the awe and fascination of life itself."<sup>1</sup>

Memory work, however, needs to be accomplished before the election of a new minister. With the coming of a new minister there will tend to be a repression of the recounting of past events and experiences allied with a former minister. This is another reason for perceiving the uniqueness of the interim timeframe and pointing up grief management as the "faster" (interim) pastor's work.

In the church of God there is a constant reminder of the true source of all strength, a reminder that depen-

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<sup>1</sup>Rose Kennedy, "My Life at Ninety," McCalls, August 1980, pp. 106-107.



dence is upon him, and not upon an earthly leader, such as a loved pastor, no matter how fine that one may be. The Creator of life is an omnipotent and an immanent Presence, fulfilling all the needs of his creatures.

The Bible indicates there is a purpose in suffering. Human life is not free from it. Meaning and value can be derived from the pain and suffering of this world. Besides the atoning function of suffering, the believer is made to identify with the travail of the universe.<sup>1</sup> Suffering cleanses faith from the burden of self-love and worldly desires.<sup>2</sup> In the acceptance of suffering, the believer knows the transforming power of the gospel and the glory of Christ.<sup>3</sup>

Since relief from the anxiety associated with grief is naturally the greatest need for the bereaved, peace is the desired goal. Jesus' response to this need is "Peace I leave with you" (John 14:27). The consequence

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 8:19-22.

<sup>2</sup> II Timothy 1:8.

<sup>3</sup> I Peter 2:21-25.

of faith and commitment for the Christian is peace, or rest. Again Jesus proclaims, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

The ultimate inheritance for the follower of Christ is inner serenity, the peace that "passes all understanding" (Philippians 4:7).

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### CONCLUSION

Grief is a common element that manifests itself in a variety of ways, whenever there is pastoral transition. It appears to permeate the total life of the church. The loyalty that a congregation gives to the pastor is usually sacred and binding. A religious leader is related to the individual's commitment to life's meaning. That relationship, therefore, may have a deeper significance than other types of leadership association. Henri Nouwen identifies the minister as "The Living Reminder" of Christ himself.<sup>1</sup> If such identification occurs, then it is understandable why more trauma is likely to result.

The interim minister may serve as grief manager, and as such can benefit from specialized training. A specialist needs to possess some tools. If he or she is knowledgeable and experienced in circumstances relating to the pastoral vacancy and its residual emotion, the interim pastor is better equipped to deal with the interim issues and to help prepare the way for a new leader.

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<sup>1</sup>Nouwen, The Living Reminder (New York: The Seabury Press, 1977)



Lyle Schaller's list of qualifications for an interim minister portrays a leader who would be capable of functioning well in the interim situation. He indicates that the most effective interim minister usually is a model of:

1. A committed Christian
2. A mature and secure person.
3. A person who does not possess personal, ego-centered career ambitions that have to be fulfilled here as an interim pastor.
4. A stabilizing force.
5. A reconciling figure.
6. An effective and active listener who can listen with understanding and grace.
7. A sustainer of morale and trust.
8. A lover of people.
9. One who is patient!
10. A supporter of the identification, recruitment, training, placement, and support of lay leadership.
11. An outsider who has no ties to either the past or the future of this congregation.
12. A possessor of understanding and skill in helping people with grief and bereavement.
13. A cheerful person.
14. The owner of an excellent sense of humor.
15. One who absolutely cannot be persuaded to accept a call as the permanent pastor! (To violate this is one of the most effective methods of undercutting the concept of the interim pastorate and of producing an unhappy pastor.)
16. He absolutely will not allow the congregation to develop a dependency relationship to him!<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Schaller, Survival Tactics in the Parish, p. 208.

As more investigation into the unique characteristics of the interim period takes place, more understanding of what can be accomplished will be developed, and more sophisticated techniques for serving the needs of the period may then evolve.

One area calling for further specific research is that of anticipatory grief and a consideration of how it affects the congregation and the church as a whole. Problems relating to the emotional effect of a pastor's resignation need to be understood more clearly so that the remaining time of the pastor's stay may be constructive. In addition, a plan needs to be implemented from the judicatory level which would provide for more continuity in pastoral change. The purpose of such a plan would be the provision of smooth transition from the point when a minister resigns, through the interim period, to and into the beginning of a new pastorate.

The task of an interim pastor in view of the grief sustained by a congregation in the loss of a minister is essentially to light a candle of hope in providing courage and guidance for the people of God.

*Feelings* (New York: Arbor House, 1976), p. 149.

A somewhat simplistic summary by Viscott which serves to recapitulate the import of this paper, to provide perspective, and to emphasize the process of grief, follows: "A loss in the future is perceived as fear. A loss in the present is felt as pain. A loss in the past is experienced as anger."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>David Viscott, The Language of Feelings (New York: Arbor House, 1976), p. 149.



### QUESTIONS

1. Do you remember your first meeting with the pastor when your former pastor was leaving? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

2. How did you relate to the pastor? (check all that apply)

I was quite close to the pastor \_\_\_\_\_  
 I knew him only moderately well \_\_\_\_\_  
 I was at a distance from the pastor \_\_\_\_\_  
 I generally agreed with the pastor \_\_\_\_\_  
 I approved of the pastor's ideas \_\_\_\_\_  
 I disagreed with him much of the time \_\_\_\_\_

3. How would you describe your feeling when the pastor left? (check all that apply)

Sad \_\_\_\_\_ Hurt \_\_\_\_\_ Guilt \_\_\_\_\_ Anger \_\_\_\_\_ Shock \_\_\_\_\_ Surprise \_\_\_\_\_  
 Distress (anxiety) \_\_\_\_\_ Depression \_\_\_\_\_ Mixed Feelings \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other (please explain) \_\_\_\_\_

### APPENDIX

4. What has happened in the process of the pastor's leaving to help you accept the change?

Conversations \_\_\_\_\_ Consistory meetings \_\_\_\_\_ Visit by pastor \_\_\_\_\_  
 Sermon \_\_\_\_\_ Phone call \_\_\_\_\_ Sunday School class \_\_\_\_\_  
 Bible study \_\_\_\_\_ Coming of a new pastor \_\_\_\_\_ Other (please explain) \_\_\_\_\_

5. Your age range: 20-30 \_\_\_\_\_ 30-45 \_\_\_\_\_ 45-60 \_\_\_\_\_ over 60 \_\_\_\_\_

6. How many years have you been a member of this church?  
 All my life \_\_\_\_\_ For \_\_\_\_\_ years

7. How many leadership positions have you held in the church during the past five years? \_\_\_\_\_

8. Have you previously been a member of another denomination?  
 YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

9. If so, what denomination? \_\_\_\_\_

10. If so, how did you happen to choose this church?

I came because of family \_\_\_\_\_  
 I came with friends (neighbors, associates) \_\_\_\_\_  
 I came because of the pastor \_\_\_\_\_  
 I came because it was near my home \_\_\_\_\_

## QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Do you remember your first reaction when you learned that your former pastor was leaving? YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_
2. How did you relate to the pastor? (check all that apply)
 

I was quite close to the pastor \_\_\_\_\_.  
 I knew him only moderately well \_\_\_\_\_.  
 I was at a distance from the pastor \_\_\_\_\_.  
 I generally agreed with the pastor \_\_\_\_\_.  
 I approved of the pastor's ideas \_\_\_\_\_.  
 I disagreed with him much of the time \_\_\_\_\_.
3. How would you describe your feeling when the pastor left? (check all that apply)
 

Regret \_\_\_\_\_ Hurt \_\_\_\_\_ Guilt \_\_\_\_\_ Anger \_\_\_\_\_ Shock \_\_\_\_\_ Surprise \_\_\_\_\_  
 Distress (anxiety) \_\_\_\_\_ Depression \_\_\_\_\_ Mixed Feelings \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other (please explain) \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
4. What has happened in the process of the pastor's leaving to help you accept the change?
 

Conversations \_\_\_\_\_ Consistory meetings \_\_\_\_\_ Visit by pastor \_\_\_\_\_  
 Sermon \_\_\_\_\_ Phone call \_\_\_\_\_ Sunday School class \_\_\_\_\_  
 Bible study \_\_\_\_\_ Coming of a new pastor \_\_\_\_\_ Other (please explain) \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
5. Your age range: 20-30 \_\_\_\_\_ 30-45 \_\_\_\_\_ 45-60 \_\_\_\_\_ over 60 \_\_\_\_\_
6. How many years have you been a member of this church?
 

All my life \_\_\_\_\_ For \_\_\_\_\_ years
7. How many leadership positions have you held in the church during the past five years? \_\_\_\_\_
8. Have you previously been a member of another denomination?
 

YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_
9. If so, what denomination? \_\_\_\_\_
10. If so, how did you happen to choose this church?
 

I came because of family \_\_\_\_\_  
 I came with friends (neighbors, associates) \_\_\_\_\_  
 I came because of the pastor \_\_\_\_\_  
 I came because it was near my home \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (Initials only)

# The In Between Times



March, 1980  
Volume 1

## INTERIM NETWORK NEWSLETTER

### EDITOR'S INPUT

I am pleased to be a part of the new beginnings of an INTERIM NETWORK by tackling the task of producing a newsletter to help in the linking and sharing necessary for the support of people in a newly emerging profession.

I want to acknowledge the prior editing skills of Cynthia J. Brandt to the Interim Ministry Newsletter, printed and distributed by the Office of Church Life and Leadership, United Church of Christ. Cindy's model has been extremely valuable to me. My hope at this moment is to have the opportunity to meet you; Cindy, face-to-face.

The Office of Church Life and Leadership will continue to print this newsletter under the new name of THE IN BETWEEN TIMES. Tom Tupper is the person from that office who has and continues to support us by providing this service. Tom has also supported the decision to expand the format of the newsletter.

Those people joining INTERIM NETWORK can expect to receive copies of this 8-page newsletter in June and October of 1980 and in February, 1981. CR

### REPORT ON INDIANAPOLIS CONFERENCE

This past November, Alban Institute sponsored a conference for Interim Pastors in Indianapolis. At that conference the formation of the INTERIM NETWORK took root. This newsletter is one facet being provided by this new support network. Alban Institute is providing primary leadership during its first year of operation.

Rationale for creation of this new support network grows out of the increasing use by judicatories of interim clergy for specialized work with congregations in search of new full-time pastoral leadership. Interim clergy are evolving into a special cadre of skilled practitioners whose service to the Church is being recognized more and more.

(continued page 2)

### LEARNINGS FROM THE INDIANAPOLIS CONFERENCE

When participants got together at the Indianapolis Conference, they recognized that in order to understand Interim Ministry, they needed to ask the right questions first. Questions emerged as the participants shared their case histories in small groups. These questions seemed to fall into six categories. Each category and some of the questions are listed below along with participant learnings. (If you want a full listing of the 108 questions, write the INTERIM NETWORK office in Boonsboro, Maryland.)

(continued on page 3)



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## CONFERENCE REPORT (continued)

Over the past five years, these clergy have received specialized training for interventions in congregations just having lost their pastor, --congregations which require a special kind of pastoral ministry prior to calling a new pastor. Some of the unique circumstances under which interim clergy have been called are:

- a. Congregations that have just completed a long pastoral ministry (10 years or more)
- b. Congregations in deep internal conflict
- c. Congregations in a rapidly changing environment
- d. Congregations which are experiencing considerable theological disarray.

The INTERIM NETWORK will provide for the following:

1. Connecting interim clergy from a variety of denominations to each other in an organic way.
2. Developing channels of communication between interims whereby experiences, insights, training opportunities and printed support material can be shared.
3. Developing standards for quality interim work, with pathways whereby interims can continue their professional development.
4. Providing a variety of forums whereby interims have the opportunity to gather for support, dialogue and exchange of material and ideas.
5. Assisting judicatories in developing sound policies and practices around interim work.
6. Developing ethical standards for interim work.
7. Developing a Theology of interim work.

Election of officers to manage the INTERIM NETWORK will occur at the first Annual Conference proposed for the Spring of 1981. Until that time the following people will serve as an ad hoc Steering Committee:

Beth Clark, United Church of Christ  
Rip Coffin, Episcopal Church

Jim Davis, Lutheran Church in America  
Terry Foland, Disciples of Christ  
Joan Mabon, United Presbyterian Church, USA  
Margaret Morris, United Presbyterian Church, USA

The first meeting of this group will be April 28-29 at Gilmory Diocesan Center (Roman Catholic) in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

The INTERIM NETWORK hopes to be sponsored financially through:

- a) Members fees (\$20.00 per year)
- b) Contributions from judicatories
- c) Grants.

The Alban Institute has been given a small grant to finance its participation in assisting to get a network moving. We anticipate having the NETWORK as self-supporting by the end of an 18 month testing period. We will seriously be evaluating its viability should it not be self-supporting. We are counting on your participation to help us determine whether or not we are addressing a genuine need somewhere out there.

Roy Oswald, Director of Field Research at the Alban Institute, will be the Executive Director during the first year to help in the organization and management. Administrative Director and Editor are the titles given to me, Carole A. Roush. That puts the National Headquarters of this new INTERIM NETWORK in my "home-office" which is located outside of Boonsboro, Maryland (Rt. 3, Box 471-B) 21713. The phone number is (301) 432-2616. If you have any questions or concerns related to Interim Ministries, please feel free to call or write. I will do my best to answer and/or channel your communications. Any insights and/or contributions you care to share with others through the newsletter will be welcomed!

Roy and I look forward to sharing and serving with you in this new arena of ministry.

# CONFERENCE LEARNINGS (continued)

## I. Good Judicatory Use of Interims

### Questions

- What is the role of the judicatory--in choice of Interim
  - ongoing work with the Interim
  - decision to use an Interim
  - in setting criteria, training, recruiting and supporting Interims?
- To what extent can judicatory strategy about a congregation be implemented by the appointment of an Interim?
- Is there a different message given in being a free lance Interim Pastor as opposed to an agent of the judicatory?
- Relation of Interim Pastor and judicatory regarding the role of the Interim Pastor?

1. An interim ministry is one of special care which consists of several elements during the time between installed pastors.

A judicatory extends special care and attention to an individual congregation during the time it is without an installed pastor.

2. This special care requires:

a) Diagnosis/Analysis  
Assistance/Instruction/Advice in processing the existing vacancy according to judicatory procedures and rules.

b) Specialized Pastoral Leadership (i.e. Interim Pastor)

c) Consultation  
Help in areas of special need (i.e. self-study, session design, interviewing skills, dossier analysis, etc.)

d) Organization  
A support system which helps to implement the above three areas.

3. The diagnosis, pastoral leadership and consultation can be performed by three different people or by one person.

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If all three areas are performed by one person it is important to clearly distinguish what role is being performed in each encounter between the person and the congregation.

## II. Essential Tasks of an Interim Pastor

### Questions

- What are minimum functions that an IP should perform to get developmental tasks done?
- What are some of the critical turning points in an interim that an IP looks for/works for?
- What are the various components of an interim and can they be divided between individuals?
- What are some of the effective and practical ways an IP can assist a congregation to get into its grief?

### Learnings

The first step in an interim ministry is the development of the working contract between

- a) the IP and the judicatory and
- b) the IP and the congregation.

The overall purpose of an interim is to:

- a) help the congregation stay alive physically, emotionally and spiritually
- b) help it develop a sense of its accomplishment
- c) help it discover its potential
- d) help it enhance its self-image.

The IP needs to perform the developmental tasks of helping the congregation to:

- a) deal with its grief
- b) come to terms with its history.
- c) deal with internal power shifts and leadership change
- d) discover a new identity
- e) rethink denominational linkages
- f) become committed to new leadership and a new future.



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The IP must now help the congregation to identify the real problems of the system and engage them in problem solving around these issues (i.e., dealing with conflict and guilt, dealing with basic disunity of the congregation, etc.)

### III. Theology of Interim Ministry

#### Questions

- Does the IP's theology need to be compatible with the congregation's theology?
- Is there a theology of Interim Ministry?

#### Learnings

Margaret Morris took the brainstorm and work of the small group on theology from the conference and shared a draft of her work with the other members. Joan Mabon has contributed a reworked version of Margaret's initial paper. Their combined efforts on this are found on the next page.

It is offered as an "open" paper. You are invited to share in the process "Towards a Theology of Interim Ministry."

Send your comments/critique to the Editor.

### IV. Characteristics of a Good Support Network for Interims

#### Questions

- What are support group resources?
- What kind of judicatory support most effectively supports IM?
- What would a good support network for an interim look like?

#### Learnings

1. It is multi-faceted.
2. It occurs on a variety of levels (i.e., congregational, middle judicatory and national).
3. It is non-contradictory.
4. It grows out of clear contracts.
5. Recognition that there are identifiable skills necessary and applicable to interim work and provision

for training opportunities for the same.

6. Financial undergirding is related to expectations and to professional development.

### V. Characteristics and Qualifications for Interim Pastors

#### Questions

- Is there a special character to interim preaching? teaching?
- Should there be special training?
- How important is the authority of the IP?
- How to select the right person to perform healing ministry?
- What are the personal characteristics of the effective IP?
- Prophet vs. Shepherd

#### Learnings/Characteristics

- Flexibility
- Personal
- Strong sense of personal worth
- Risk taking -- tackling the unknown or confronting problems
- Common sense and perception
- Deals well with stress
- Sense of humor
- Short term mentality
- Emotional stability
- Pastoral

#### Qualifications (or skills)

- Experience as pastor or equivalent -- good track record
- Interim Pastor training
- Skills in dealing with conflict
- Process oriented
- Problem solving
- Family flexibility
- A vocational choice (Expectations/Desire/Calling/Needs)

### VI. Contracting and Evaluation

#### Questions

- How does and IP get critiqued? By whom? By what standards?
- What kind of data is available following an interim to evaluate it?
- What kind of contract does an



- IP need with the judicatory executive?
- How do you arrive at salary scale? Role of judicatory in salary and contract?
  - What are the elements/content of a good IP contract?

### Learnings

#### Contracting Process

1. Interim pastor and judicatory contract first
2. IP, judicatory representative and church board work out contract with congregation --Clarity on:
  - a) Primary task of interim
  - b) Lines of accountability
  - c) How evaluated.
3. Openly negotiated with official board and then communicated to congregation.

#### IP/Judicatory Contract Elements

- Salary
- Benefits --Housing, travel, hospitalisation, pension
- Ministerial ethics (i.e. returning pastoral services)
- Loyalty to denomination
- Length of time (i.e. one year)
- Non-availability for Call (to that parish)
- Ordination status resolved
- Conditions of service
- Salary/benefits when unemployed
- Conditions of supervision/evaluation
- Provisions for termination (either party)
- Support of judicatory (interventions of authority)

#### IP/Congregation Contract Elements

- Salary
- Benefits --Moving costs, travel, housing, pension, hospitalisation
- Length of time/free time of IP
- Provision for termination (either party) should be prior to the arrival of new pastor
- Non-availability for Call (stay out of search process)

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- Primary piece(s) of work to be done (in addition to pastoral services)
- Define role of leadership/congregation ) the more
- Define role of IP ) specific ) the better.

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#### TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF INTERIM. . . "Wilderness" as Paradigm for the Interim Time -- Three Biblical Perspectives

Margaret E. Morris  
Joan I. Habon

Perhaps more than any other, the biblical motif "wilderness" emerges most strongly as the metaphor for a congregation between installed pastors. "Wilderness" is that place of sudden freedom, uncertain leadership, changed relationships, possible deprivation --temptations, hopes and disappointments. That place where all the old fears reappear most threateningly...the frustrations of the present become more obstinate...but where all the hopeful futures take on new promise. "Wilderness" becomes a paradigm for the interim time. But the biblical sources of "wilderness" can offer three helpful perspectives--

- the setting for story-telling;
- the occasion for Torah;
- the content for liturgy.

"Wilderness is the setting for story-telling --telling our own story and rephrasing the ancient stories. It is the context that encompasses many events --the agonized remembrance of an oppressed existence left behind; the wrenching struggle of the break for freedom; the barrenness of desert hardships --will we have enough to sustain us?; the warnings against God and our leaders --weren't we better off back there?; the fearsome obstacles that lie beyond the river; claiming Canaan at the journey's end. The lively Exodus accounts, the Deuteronomic re-telling, even 2nd Isaiah's gracious return from Exile --all these "wilderness" stories help an unsettled and fearful interim congregation know God's faithfulness, God's steadfast love.

(continued on page 6)

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The "wilderness" story settings reflect the full range of human and divine passion. There is Miriam's joyful song of liberation (Ex. 15); there is the community's acknowledgement of guilt laid on Azazel's head (Lev. 16). We hear God's voice drawing us back to basic relationships in Moses's tender wooing (Mos. 2:14-20) and, through Moses' angry wrath, calling us away from the golden calf to the "Lord's side" (Ex. 32). Recalling "wilderness" stories offers the opportunity to experience again the passions of life so that a congregation may resolve feelings that block or destroy and engage positive emotions for a new future. Jurgen Moltmann puts it this way: "If we take our bearings from the passion of God and the passion history of Christ we are led out of death-before-life and into life-before-death, and our world is preserved against collapse into apathy".

*(Passion for Life, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1978, p. 26)*

"Wilderness" is the occasion for reclaiming the structures of torah. It is not insignificant that law-giving is prominent in the desert. Different accounts have it occurring at different times (Ex. 19, Num. 1, Dt. 5). The law give limits outside of which there can be no life; life becomes possible because God authors the limits for community. In crisis counseling, the threat of danger prompts us to impose structure on immobilizing chaos and panic. In a heavy snowstorm, simple survival techniques teach us to secure basic needs...water and warmth. For a congregation severely disoriented...in serious conflict or in great despair...basic needs are required; basic theological teaching in doctrine, polity, confessions, and connectionalism can be the structures of survival. Moltmann describes the experiences of "ochlos, an unorganized, uneducated, imprisoned and suffering mass of people without a face, without freedom, without history" (Ibid p. 97). That oppressive, inhibiting formlessness can be addressed and identity reclaimed in reviewing basic ecclesiological forms: Bible study, membership classes, administrative procedures, diakonia

patterns. Whenever the support structures have broken down in pastoral transitions, the interim period offers the opportunity for re-establishing structures positively.

Relationships are the basic stuff of our torah structures, whether those be relationships to God, to leaders, or to each other. The "wilderness" time helps us see the need to describe more carefully those relationships and also provides some models. An early statement of our relationships to God and within the community is the Decalogue--a gift from the "wilderness" time. Lent's beginning reminds us that Jesus, in his 40-day desert vigil, depended on the Deuteronist's teaching to refute the devil's temptations (Matt. 4). The Baptizer, calling from the wilderness, teaches us to prepare the Lord's way, to "make his path straight" (Luke 3:4) through repentance, turning back to the spirit of torah. As the disciples faced potential chaos at Jesus' coming passion, our Lord taught them the relationship of "friends" and the new torah to "love one another" (John 15). Paul sought to calm the chaotic new Corinthian congregation by instructing them about their relationships to one another as members of Christ's body (I Cor. 12). In the "wilderness", chaos times, it is important to attend to relationships within the covenantal structure of torah, to recognize our dependence on God's grace, to respond in loving obedience, to nurture the supportive bonds of the caring community.

The "wilderness" event, however, is more than just stories to make us feel good about who we are; it is more than just a teaching occasion to strengthen and support our eroding faith. The dialectical dimensions of the "wilderness" experience--danger and salvation, fear and manna, obedience and gifts, testing and protection--are important content for liturgy; they have the greatest power for renewal when they shape the peoples' worship. Any congregation alternates between needs for caring nurture and for disciplining instruction; at the interim time, those needs become more pronounced more extreme. The need for comforting manna



may be painfully overwhelming; at the same time, the need for sharp, abrasive correction may be equally strong--and ALL those things have the urgency of RIGHT NOW!

Jila Sanders describes two modes of biblical thinking: the "constitutive or supportive way" and the "prophetic...challenging way" (IDB Supplement, Abingdon, Nashville, 1976, p. 405). Though both sets of needs and both biblical hermeneutics are valid (varying with the situation), the issue becomes how to meet these conflicting needs and to maintain the tension between the two approaches--especially now when all the issues appear most pressing. In the 8th and 7th centuries, with the Assyrians threatening conquest from outside and with social ills bringing disintegration inside, the Deuteronomic writers faced the same problems--how to provide the needed word of God's grace while challenging God's children to make hard choices. Their inspired solution was to use the "wilderness" themes of salvation and discipline within the liturgical ceremony--covenant renewal. Throughout Deuteronomy, God's historically saving grace and the Israelite's covenant responsibility are linked in liturgy with the continuing confrontation of "this day".

It is important for the Interim Pastor to remain alert to the needs for both "constitutive" or "prophetic" proclamation to maintain the creative tension of those needs within the congregation's life; and sensitively to address those needs in worship. "Wilderness" provides the elements of constitutive, tradition-linking stories and of challenging, prophetic Torah.

Here, from the "wilderness" context of Deuteronomy, the ancient liturgies hold content still useful for today--

- the affirmation of our identity: "A wandering Aramean was my father..." (ch.26);
- the call to focused worship: "Hear, O Israel: the Lord your God is one Lord..." (ch.6);
- the reply to our doubts: "And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you..." (ch.10);

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--the challenge of our response: "I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore, choose life..." (ch.30).

The Interim worship leaders will want to use the liturgical occasions with great care, employing the rich resources of our faith judiciously, lovingly.

It is not accidental that the conclusion of the Hebrew primary canon coincides with the end of the "wilderness" account, that the Pentateuch ends just BEFORE God's chosen ones reach their promised destination. At one point in biblical scholarship, the nomadic life was thought to be the true norm for faithful believers. Although we now see the Davidic monarchy, the Exile, the Kingdom of God, the caring Koine as other appropriate biblical norms, it would be a mistake to dismiss too quickly this pilgrimage period in a congregation's life. Stress conditions that are existentially a part of this period have much to tell us about ourselves as God's faithful ones and about the church as Christ's body. Pintauro and Corita write: "Nowadays...to be on your way... is to be home." (*To Believe In God*, Harper and Row, Evanston, 1968). The "wilderness" journey can be a rich, creative time when it is approached with discipline and hope.

#### Mailing List

This is the first edition of *The In Between Times*. It is being sent to judicatory executives and Interim Pastors whose names we already have on file. If you want to continue receiving this newsletter, please us the enclosed Membership Form to join the INTERIM NETWORK. If you know of others who should be on the mailing list, or if you would like additional copies of this edition of the newsletter, send your requests to INTERIM NETWORK, Rt. 3, Box 471-B, Boonsboro, Maryland 21713.



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TRAINING PROGRAM FOR INTERIM MINISTRY

The Mid-Atlantic Association for Training and Consulting is offers an intensive training program for interim pastors and vacancy consultants. It is a two-phase program with field work between each phase.

For a detailed description of the program write to: MATC, Suite 325, 1500 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Washington, D.C. -20005.

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INTERIM MINISTRY RESOURCES

The Interim Pastor, Ralph Macy.  
The role of the IP --its special opportunities and demands. \$2.50

Conversations with Interim Pastors (cassette). Roy M. Oswald interviews Interim Pastor trainers Cynthia Brandt and Ray Welles on problems and opportunities of the interim pastorate. \$8.00

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Boonsboro, Maryland  
21713

Resources (continued)

Self-Rating Inventory. Roy M. Oswald  
A tool to help you assess yourself in interim ministry. \$1.00

All these resources can be obtained from the Alban Institute, Mount St. Alban, Washington, D.C. -20016. or the INTERIM NETWORK office.



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