

## **Being Intentional**

“Intentional Interim Ministry” is a mouthful that must mean something really important, but just what is it?

An interim ministry is that which takes place between two hopefully long-tenured ministers. In the case of the pastorate, a “temporary” or part-time pastor is sought whose primary task is to preach on Sundays, do crisis visitation and counseling, and perhaps be somewhat involved in limited day-to-day affairs of the church. However, the interim pastor is usually most concerned with bringing uplifting Sunday messages while life at church continues on as it has in the recent past under the direction of established elected leadership. This will work well for a church with a healthy past who has also enjoyed a gracious and cordial separation with the previous minister.

At those times when life in the church has not been smooth, when an abrupt or hurtful change has taken place, or when a very long-tenured pastor has resigned, retired, or died, it becomes necessary to seek help that by design will go beneath the surface and work in such a way to bring healing, hope, and health to the congregation. This is the purpose of an intentional interim pastor, who most often is an outside resource who offers a fresh perspective on the life, struggle, and ministry of the local congregation without fostering a politically charged agenda or attitude that is threatening or further divisive.

An intentional interim ministry may last a bit longer than most simple interim ministries, because the church will not begin a search for their next “permanent” pastor until the intentional process is complete and both pastor and people agree that the body is ready to begin a new search. The length of an intentional interim ministry is regulated by the degree of difficulty or struggle a church is experiencing and by how long it takes everyone to work through a number of important predefined tasks. These include such things as understanding and celebrating past and present history and ministry, looking closely at healthy leadership and decision-making options, exploring and clarifying outside ministry affiliations and partnerships, clearly defining the congregation’s identity and personality, and making a firm and focused commitment to the new pastor on the horizon with a hopeful vision for the future of the body.

The intentional interim pastor is not a savior or superman who swoops in to perform miracles. He is someone detached from the baggage of the church’s past who is usually able to discern things many have been unaware of because of their proximity to the situation. Everyone should take great care in helping one another understand that solutions exist within the congregation itself and ONLY to the extent that individuals allow the Holy Spirit to convict of sin, bring forgiveness and healing, and are obedient to do those things that honor God, build up the church, and give a positive demonstration of the character and attitude of Jesus Christ to those inside and outside the congregation. It rightfully should be a process of healing, exploration, and joyful adventure.

One of the first things we will do in this process is select a Transition Team who will carry the heavier loads through the interim ministry. The members of the Team will meet and work with the pastor each week, offer valuable support and insight into the life of the congregation, help conduct important studies and congregational gatherings, and enlist others to assist with specific assignments along the way. They will also make sure the intentional interim pastor doesn’t drag

his feet because he has become too comfortable in his job as pastor and preacher! The Transition Team remains active up to the time of formation of a Pastor Search Team, generally for just a year or two. They then fade away as the Search Team begins its work in earnest.

The intentional interim pastor will continue his work, but the focus will shift from that of resource consultant, team leader, and catalyst to shepherd. By the time a Search Team is at work the church should be on solid footing involved in positive on-going ministries. There should be signs of healthy growth and restored relationships as the body pulls together in a single direction. There is a godly vision and renewed excitement about honoring and serving Jesus Christ.

The selection of the Transition Team will take place over a period of some weeks. Members of the congregation will be asked to write down the names of potential individuals qualified to serve in this ministry, spend a week or more praying and meditating over their suggested names, and then turn these names into the Pastor, who along with key leaders, will spend another couple of weeks considering and praying over the many shared names before carefully interviewing and selecting a small number of willing individuals wholly committed to serve for the time necessary.

It is important that everyone understand that many names submitted will not be selected. As the Pastor leads in this process, he will do everything possible to insure a well-rounded Team that is representative of the congregation. This is not a popularity contest or a time for members to jockey for position in order to have a controlling influence on the future of the congregation. We are seeking individuals with the humility and spirit of Jesus Christ, able to patiently work with one another for the good of the body. There is no room for self-service and domination. The goal is for the Team to be a microcosm of the church itself. Each one should be a willing servant eager to help discover God's peace and purpose for First Baptist Church.

Team members must meet certain important qualifications.

- They must be 100% committed to the intentional interim process.
- They must be regular attendees to worship service.
- They must be regular committed tithers, invested in the ministries of First Baptist.
- They must be trusted by the body.
- They must be respected by those in the congregation.
- They must be men and women of prayer.
- They must be spiritually wise.
- They must be representative (not representatives) of groups within the body.
- They must be quick to listen to all perspectives and slow to speak.
- They must not be staff or family of staff.
- They must not serve on the team alongside a spouse.

As we move through the process we will keep everyone informed as to the next steps along the way. If you have a particular question about the Intentional Interim Ministry, please feel free to spend some time with the Pastor. He wants very much to put hearts and minds at rest during this phase of ministry and help us have fun and fellowship with Christ and one another along the way!