A history of Interim Ministry in England

“Christ’s great gift, the church – a body which needs constant nurturing and stewarding to ensure that its organisational life flourishes and resources our call to mission.”

In the beginning

Interim Ministry is fundamentally missional. Its evolution in the Church of England was inspired by its use in other parts of the UK and North America. It accelerated during the period of theological reflection and change around the Renewal and Reform programme announced by the Archbishops Council in 2015, and the Resourcing the Future Review which preceded it in 2014.

At the heart was a ‘spiritual challenge of reform and renewal as both personal and institutional’ which on one level was about structural and legal institutional changes to ‘ensure effective ministry and mission to the many communities we serve’; and on the other hand, about seeking to ‘respond and cooperate with the work of the Holy Spirit in reforming the church (including us) as a communion of persons’

While Interim Ministry was both a structural and legal reform, to enable shorter, time-limited ministry appointments to support strategic change in parishes, in practice it is (ideally) a profoundly spirit-led process of supporting change and transition. In this ideal scenario IM builds collaboration and partnership between parishes and dioceses, bridging local concerns and diocesan strategy.

In this respect it is a good fit for the ecclesiological structure of the Church of England. Dr Jane Williams, addressing the first national IM Conference in 2017, noted that the role of the IM was ‘to restore Anglican ecclesiology’ – to be part of the life-giving sacramental story of the whole community: to love the local people and know that God is there and loves them, and keep the locality conscious of wider issues.’

But Interim Ministry has been around in the Church of England long before it was known as such – dioceses have been experimenting for decades with creative approaches to the transitional time of vacancy and pastoral reorganisation. IM first emerged as a distinct approach in the Church of England as experimental processes in Durham and Newcastle in the early 2000s and there is evidence of IMs being appointed in Norwich in 2001-2 and Lichfield in 2010-11. It is said that Archbishop Justin Welby experienced a period of interim ministry at Holy Trinity Coventry in 2007.
The pioneers of IM

Early IM practice in the Church of England was built on the experience of using IM in other provinces, particularly in the USA and Canada, where a body of professional IM experience, practice and training had evolved for 40 years, led by the Interim Ministry Network (IMN) and supported by the research and publishing outputs of the Alban Institute. The work of the IMN emerged from the application of Organisational Development insights to churches and congregations in the 1970s, based on inter-disciplinary approaches to organisational management using sociology, psychology and systems thinking. The Church of Scotland drew on the learnings of the IMN and Alban Institute in the 1990s to develop its own approach, appointing its first team of Interim Ministers in 1996.

Pioneering priests were significant in seeding the methodology in the Church of England. One of the pioneers of IM in England, Richard Impey, latterly Bishops advisor for Parish Development in the Diocese of Sheffield, came across IM in a sabbatical in South Carolina, USA, in 1988, when the precursor to Interim Ministers – Temporary Shepherds – were being ‘road tested’. Another early pioneer, Hazel Ditchburn, a former Area Dean in the Diocese of Durham, experienced IM on sabbatical in the Episcopal Church in Baltimore in 1994 and brought her experience back with her, which stimulated the pilot in the dioceses of Newcastle and Durham with a team of IM colleagues.

A more recent IM pioneer from Liverpool, Chris Jones, went on sabbatical to the Diocese of Virginia in The Episcopal Church to research Interim Ministry and contributed his experience into the emerging Growth Planning agenda of the Diocese of Liverpool in 2013. Jones’ involvement in IM was supplemented by the strategic appointment of Jennifer MacKenzie, who, having studied and worked as an IM in The Diocese of Virginia, brought the professional IM skill set into her role as Archdeacon of Wigan and West Lancashire.

The Diocese of Chelmsford started exploring Interim Ministry when its Turnaround Project funded by the Church Commissioners’ Strategic Development Fund secured resources from 2015-2018 to use IM as one of a raft of approaches to transformation among a group of 60 parishes identified for pastoral, financial and strategic renewal. Over three years different forms of Interim Ministry and transitional ministry were tried in 46 different settings, from single parishes to multi-parish benefices, teams, ministry units and also in a deanery wide scenario. While the interventions did not always produce instant results or significant changes in attendance and parish share payments, the diocese tracked a wide range of improvements in communications, engagement, governance, vision, confidence and energy among those parishes.

The Turnaround Project steering group considered IM to be ‘the biggest success, exploring transformational change in a significant number of parishes’.

Chelmsford also used SDF funding to initiate IM networking structures across England and to launch the first national conference on IM – Interim Ministry: Stop Gap or Strategic Change? – in 2017. A number of regional networking and training events and a regular IM Bulletin sharing news and current practice information have followed.

Meanwhile, other dioceses and denominations had also been experimenting with transitional work in vacancies: The Diocese of Bristol adopted a transitional approach to vacancies in 2009, and developed a vacancy strategy in 2012, led by a lay Transition Manager, George Rendell, to harness vacancies as ‘a fruitful time for examining assumptions, creating a context for change and developing lay leadership. The aim of the strategy was to stimulate collaborative leadership during a vacancy. This gave rise to Interim Ministry appointments in 2017, often drawing on the skills of retired SSMs, ordained local ministers and curates.

The Diocese of Truro has followed a similar pattern, since 2016 developing its Transitions programme, in which lay transitions advisors support parishes through vacancy, working with a transition team of lay people on vision-making and building a parish profile.

In other denominations, Baptist Minister Sue Barclay researched Interim Ministry and developed and proposed to the Baptist Union of Great Britain a framework for Transitional Ministry – as ‘a time limited period of intentional movement from one state to another, with defined aims and timescales, and supported by a specialist minister who was not a candidate for long term ministry within the church.’ She considered the term ‘Interim Ministry’ open to confusion and apt to be misunderstood as caretaker ministry in the UK context. There is also emerging thinking and practice on IM in the United Reformed Church.

In the secular context, Interim models of business management were also evolving in the UK with the launch of the Institute for Interim Management in 2001 as a spinoff of the Institute of Management, to support the use of professional independent business specialists for fixed-term appointments addressing turnaround, transformation and crisis/ restructuring. There were common threads between interim assignments in distressed companies and parishes and common skill-sets for both types of role.

The genesis of Interim Ministry in England has therefore not been a clear linear process but a ‘bubbling up’ of experience from the grassroots, where senior staff, clergy and lay people have been ready to innovate and learn from creative approaches to vacancies and transitions in parishes. Embracing IM as an approach to vacancy and transition in Church of England legislation may be seen as institutional endorsement of a process, which has been evolving for a quarter of a century.
The genesis of IM in England

Legal provision for interim posts came about because dioceses thought that the clergy Terms of Service legislation did not provide enough flexibility to make short-term appointments in the range of circumstances in which dioceses would like to make them. There was a need for a balance between greater flexibility for dioceses, the interests of parishes, and the need to maintain common tenure’s security of tenure for individual clergy. The Simplification Group of the Archbishop’s Council, under the leadership of Bishop Pete Broadbent, recommended that changes were made to regulation 29 which were approved by the General Synod in July 2015.

The explanatory memorandum issued by the Legal Office to General Synod in 2015 stated:
A number of diocesan responses expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of flexibility and the inability to make short-term appointment for ‘interim ministry’. A number of circumstances were cited as examples of cases where it would be very desirable to be able to make a fixed-term appointment: the most common examples were:
(a) cases where there is a desire to put a new person in and see if a parish can be revived, before moving to consider pastoral reorganisation
(b) cases of relationship breakdown within a parish, where it may be helpful to appoint someone for a fixed period before making a fresh permanent appointment and
(c) cases where a need has been identified for a change in direction before making a permanent appointment and a parish needs help with the transition.

The memorandum stipulated that such appointments required the consent of the office holder and the diocesan mission and pastoral committee; and that posts could only be designated interim for terms of up to three years, renewable once only; to avoid some parishes becoming perpetual ‘interim’ appointments where no permanent appointment is ever made.

Guidance on Interim Posts was issued by the Archbishops Council to which Bishops are legally ‘required by the regulations to have regard.’ These guidelines fleshed out the key principles behind Interim appointments that they:
- Should be in response to a pastoral need or mission opportunity
- There should be ‘clear understanding and articulation’ of the benefits of the interim post before an appointment is made.
- The parish should be consulted at an early stage – noting that IM posts were only to work when the parish accepts that the post was to support transition.
- That IM appointments were not a substitute for a proper appointments process, for example ‘just to see if it works’.
- That IM appointments were a response to the needs of the parish, not the minister.

The guidance also indicated that potential circumstances which might justify interim appointments included:
- To enable a parish to equip itself more effectively for mission
- To determine what kind of minister is required in the longer term
- When the past has been difficult
- When there is an element of uncertainty about the future.

The same due process and care should be applied to IM appointments as permanent ones, particularly ensuring good communication with the parish, and ensuring that potential candidates matched the qualities required by the post. It also noted that while IM posts would usually be parochial they might also be archdeacons and cathedral posts; and it was possible to appoint a curate or licensed lay worker on an interim basis where there was a need for assistance or time-limited financial support for a post. Other options already existed in the legislation for fixed and time-limited appointments were an IM appointment to prove inappropriate.

Detailed supplementary advice was issued by the Archbishops Council in 2017 offering best practice in relation to IM appointments, including when an IM appointment was appropriate (and when not); terms and conditions, housing and other support systems; renewing and terminating appointments.

Significantly the supplementary advice described the process and nature of Interim Ministry, which mapped closely the traditional methodologies of IM used in the USA and Scotland. Specifically, it said that an Interim Priest can help a parish to:
- Come to terms with the past and discover a fresh identity
- Consider its future witness, mission and ministry
- Reassess its resources, needs and priorities
- See where and how it needs to change and work through transition
- Make plans and prepare for the next chapter of its life.

It offered the five main tasks, seen in traditional methodologies, as:
- Helping a parish to come to terms with history
- Enabling it to explore its identity and future direction
- Bringing about necessary changes in leadership, roles and structures
- Helping a parish renew links
- Commit the parish to looking in a new direction.
Learning from the Temporary Shepherds

An essential part of the exercise is to avoid unhealthy dependency and to encourage a responsible confidence within the congregation about its ability to be the body of Christ in a particular place. Richard Impey started experimenting with IM in Norwich in 2000. His own exploration was inspired during a Sabbatical spent in South Carolina in 1988, where he learned of parishes being looked after by ‘temporary shepherds’ between permanent appointments. This strategy apparently emerged from the diocese of South Carolina having a surplus of clergy as a way of keeping them employed. It led to the important discovery that ‘temporary shepherds’ often made a real and important difference. Impey arrived at the time the diocese was beginning to clarify what these differences and important difference. Impey arrived at the time the diocese was beginning to clarify what these differences were, and how they could both enable them to occur more often, and then to build on them.

The accidental discoveries included:
- Parishes which had had a ‘bad’ experience found some healing and restored confidence
- Parishes which had lost their way or were facing challenges were able to discover a way forward (sometimes simply by giving leadership)
- Temporary Shepherds rarely made a mess of the post!

This led to the deliberate policy of appointing a Temporary Shepherd when a parish clearly needed healing or a new direction or other identifiable need. Richard Impey transposed these learnings to the English situation as an Interim Minister in Norwich, drawing on his previous research and experience as a Training Officer. What happened next:… which led to the development of further thinking, being Parish Development advisor for Sheffield and ‘How to develop your local church’. Clearly the thinking kept evolving!

Link to Richard Impey, Why a church might need an Interim Vicar, Church Times, 3rd October 2007

https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2007/10/03/comm/why-a-church-might-need-an-interim-vicar

The findings were that the temporary shepherds fulfilled two strategic purposes very adequately:
- It kept ‘surplus’ clergy employed
- It gave the search committee time to find the best next Rector, and gave them more time and space to fulfill this task rather better.

Pioneering IM in Durham and Newcastle

‘IM Treats a vacancy not as an experience to be endured but as an opportunity to engage all the relevant parties in parish, deanery and diocese in discerning how best to address the missionary and ministerial needs identified in the locality.’ 07 Richard Impey started experimenting with IM in Norwich in 2000. His own exploration was inspired during a Sabbatical spent in South Carolina in 1988, where he learned of parishes being looked after by ‘temporary shepherds’ between permanent appointments.

While working as an Area Dean in Durham for more than seven years, Hazel Ditchburn noted that the ‘in between times’ of parish vacancies were an opportunity for growth. ‘The present process of parish appointments in the Church of England…militates against a realistic outline of needs and concerns’, Ditchburn noted. IM offered the opportunity for congregations to work more creatively towards a realistic vision of their needs and vision for the future’. During a sabbatical to the USA in 1994 Ditchburn researched Interim Ministry, then returned and undertook the Interim Ministry Network Training and became a Licensed Interim Ministry for 15 months, supported by Richard Bryant as a work consultant, who was principal of the Newcastle Local Ministry Scheme. Others in the Diocese of Newcastle were exploring similar approaches to IM at the same time. Keith Wassall (Deacon + Peter Saddington in Durham), and the Archdeacon of Sunderland, Stuart Bain.

Richard Bryant observed that Interim Ministry and Local Ministry were enabling people in parishes to be heard and were ‘centred on the apprehension of God’s will for congregation and parish.’ IM was, he suggested, an opportunity for creative and new thinking at a local level offering churches ‘ways of becoming and continuing as healthy congregations.’ Its strength lay in drawing together different perspectives as parish, deanery, diocesan and episcopal level, and offering wider ownership and engagement in the vacancy process.

The working group piloted a model of practical and theological training, involving tuition, parish ‘fieldwork’, theological reflection and mentoring, case studies and ‘Critical Incident Reporting’ of the IM’s experience in parishes. The IM process borrowed the ‘Five Tasks of the Interim Minister’ approach from IM in the USA – focused on history, leadership, identity, re-establishing links and commitment to a new direction.

They established a set of goals for the interim period:
1. To maintain the viability of the Church
2. To resolve feelings of grief
3. To reinforce the Ministry of the Laity
4. To clarify the Mission of the Church
5. To deal with special needs of the church
6. To emphasize Fellowship and Reconciliation
7. To strengthen Denominational ties.
8. To increase the potential for a successful ministry by the next permanent incumbent

A model of support emerged from the Cross Diocesan Vacancy Group in the North East. Appointments were undergirded by working agreements, setting out the length of the appointment, honoraria and expenses, and involved the Area Dean (as IM supervisor), Archdeacon and Bishop. Learnings highlighted the importance of Area Deans and Archdeacons preparing the ground; the need for transparency at all levels; appropriate support systems for IMs; structurally and personally, including peer support and mentors; and the need for a broader framework of ‘entry to and exit from’ appointments. Lay groups were encouraged to advise IMs and were found to be ‘honest, confidential, creative and risk taking’ resource. The project also started establishing a base line of skills for IM including collaborative ministry, active listening, enabling local byepeople, being a non-anxious presence, and ‘being able to engage without becoming entangled.’

LINK PDF document on Chelmsford Resources Site

Church of Scotland

The Church of Scotland has also been using Interim Ministry for more than 20 years. It drew on the learnings of the IMN and Alban Institute in the 1990s to develop its own approach, appointing its first team of three Interim Ministers in 1996. By 2017 it had worked in 70 different settings, and their approach had matured to appointing a national team of nine Interim Ministers (for shorter term appointments up to 2 years), three transition ministers (for longer-term turnaround appointments of 3-5 years) and an Interim Deacon. They are trained and led by an Interim Ministries Task Group and engage in ongoing shared learning and evaluation as a group.

The two types of roles have different functions:
- **Interim Ministers** are appointed where there has been a very long ministry, a very short ministry, a major change in the shape of the parish, or conflict. They are trained and led by an Interim Ministries Task Group and engage in ongoing shared learning and evaluation as a group.
- **Transition Ministers** are appointed where a new shape of ministry is needed across an area, such as a group of congregations experiencing long-term vacancies or a single congregation or where an area has been identified as needing additional leadership to effect change. Transition Ministers are also trained mediators using the reconciliation resources developed by Places of Hope.

**Interim Ministers** are often deployed in full-time placements, but can also be deployed part-time as consultants or in more than one situation. Many Interim Ministers are also trained mediators using the reconciliation resources developed by Places of Hope.

**Links**
- Places of Hope: https://www.placeforhope.org.uk/about
- https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/serve/ministries-
- For further details: https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/serve/ministries-

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**Notes**

1. Bp Stephen Conway response to The Green Report
3. IM Conference – Stop-gap or strategic change? REF Chelmsford website link
5. Revd Richard Impey served as an interim vicar for 18 months in Norwich from 2001-2 (Church Times, 3rd October 2007. Why a church might need an ‘interim vicar’)
6. Elizabeth Jordan served as an interim minister in Walsall, Lichfield diocese from 2010-2011 – where did she record her work in Lichfield in any paper?
7. Ref IMN website and Alban Institute
8. v Alban Institute link
9. vii Elizabeth Jordan served as an Interim minister in Walsall, Lichfield diocese from 2010-2011
10. viii Ref IMN website and Alban Institute
11. ix Alban Institute link
12. x Tony Evans, joint Interim Chairman, Institute for Interim Ministry Management Address to National Conference on Interim Ministry: Stop Gap or Strategic Change
15. xiii https://www.im.org.uk/
16. xii https://www.im.org.uk/
17. xv Tony Evans, joint Interim Chairman, Institute for Interim Ministry Management Address to National Conference on Interim Ministry: Stop Gap or Strategic Change
18. xvi Revd Richard Impey, Church Times, 3rd October 2007. Why a church might need an ‘interim vicar’

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**Seeing God at work through IM**

The stories of the bible declare that God’s work of salvation is transitional, involving and ending, an in-between time and new beginning… when we read the bible through the lens of transition, allowing scripture to shape our understanding as well as our response, both our favourite stories and many others reveal a God who continually transforms the world, a God who will not quit on us until the whole world is restored to the life God intends.¹

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¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar

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**The God of eternal transition**

Theological and biblical perspectives of change are an integral part of the ‘Interim’ journey, sometimes feeding into liturgical expressions of repentance, forgiveness and hope and commitment for the future. Bringing together the theory and practice of ‘Interim Ministry’ provides a rich learning experience for both minister and congregation and offers another model for change.¹²

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¹² Hazelditchburn

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Many commentators have noted that the parallels between the transitional period of Interim Ministry and key moments in biblical history. Scripture is a lens through which we frequently observe the human response to change and God’s relentless reworking of the human clay and its environment to bring about new life. Genesis records these earliest transformations from

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**Biblical and theological underpinnings for IM**

The scope for theological reflection on Interim Ministry in relation to scripture and theological and ministry models is vast and at present, and largely untapped in the context of the Church of England.

How does scripture help us interpret what God is doing in an interim period? How do we follow Jesus Christ in finding new gospel patterns for living as a renewed community? What does IM have to say about death, resurrection and salvation? How is our search for connection with our local communities and diocesan partnerships teaching us about God’s mission in the world – the missio Dei - and what are we being sent out afresh to do? How do we draw on pastoral theology in approaching grief, crisis and conflict within church communities? How are we to interpret IM in terms of our Anglican ecclesiology? What models of spirituality help support transition? What does Interim Ministry teach us about our vocational challenge as Christian people? The questions seem limitless but also highlight the degree to which Interim Ministry is a genuinely exciting area of theological enquiry.

Over the past 40 years there has been rich theological exploration of Interim Ministry in North America as it evolved. But we are at an early stage in this process in the Church of England. Some thought-provoking material has been and still is emerging through academic study and theological reflection of the IM experience. This chapter offers a snapshot of some strands of theological thinking in IM and some extracts of some of the emerging theological research of IMs working in the Church of England.
emptiness, chaos and darkness to light, order and complex creation – just so, transitions in ministry may be seen as another outworking of creation dynamism to bring about that which is good.

Key biblical episodes offer rich resources for reflection on the leadership of transition: Noah is the navigator of the flood of change which was God’s way of cleansing and renewing the earth; Abram and Sarai were called out of a settled life to journey to a new land in ‘retirement age’; the psalmist and prophets were heralds and watchmen, pointing out that God was doing something new in times of upheaval.

William Bridges, in his seminal leadership study, ‘Getting them through the wilderness’, identifies Moses in Exodus as a successful transition leader, and the time in the wilderness as an essential journey for transformation. Moses knew what we too often today forget,’ says Bridges ‘that people have to take a long journey through this second phase of transition before they can be transformed into the people who are ready for the Promised Land.’

More recently, Andy Jolley, the Archdeacon of Bradford, has noted the close parallels between the vocation of John the Baptist and Interim Ministry: ‘IM is a short ministry which is preparing the way. It is about encouraging people to “Think differently!” It is about unsetttling the status quo, setting a new vision, addressing powerful groups, and looking to one who will come after.’

Jesus came as the ultimate agent of change marking a new human epoch, and episodes from the New Testament illustrate the trajectory of his life, death and resurrection was about ‘making all things new’. In The Acts of the Apostles we witness his disciples taking over as leaders of transition and establishing the new way which became Christianity; in the unfolding of lives of leaders such as Peter and Paul we observe personal responses to times of challenge and change.

In fact, there are few moments in biblical history where God isn’t reworking the status quo. Interim Ministry is a formalisation, in many ways, of a very biblical leadership model supporting God’s ongoing change process. We might be reminded that only one day out of seven God rested: the remainder was transition time!

Thus scripture and biblical episodes of change and transition are a significant support framework for Interim Ministry – both for the spiritual stability of the interim minister and also for the collaborative process with church communities, to enable all to learn something new about the nature of God and their faith in the midst of change, and to consider their own call and response on a personal and communal level.

Furthermore, there are rich opportunities for reflection on the nature of Interim Ministry in respect of many areas of doctrine – some of which IMs have already touched upon. How to we come to know God’s presence and the working of the Holy Trinity? How do we see the Holy Spirit at work through times of transition? How does IM relate to the death, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus? How might we relate to the doctrines of sin and salvation, particularly in times of crisis? How does IM speak to us of the nature of the church and its leadership and governance, and particularly how does it reflect Anglican ecclesiology? How is the process of transition part of a realised eschatology of hope and salvation in the present time?

Interim Ministers are called to be prophets and preachers speaking God’s word into the time of transition, helping a church community find renewed hope, purpose and direction, helping that community to explore its history, identity and faith and helping it to reshape its future. As Craig A Satterlee has noted: ‘Congregational transitions always affect people’s relationship with God. In ever transition, congregations consider God’s nature, purpose, and participation in the light of the prevailing situation. Is God am anchor or a breeze? Is God comforting, challenging, punishing, or abandoning the congregation? What is God calling the congregation to do and be? This situation and this transition – why are they happening?’

What is God’s purpose or is there no reason at all? To help congregations come to terms with these questions, preachers need to consider how they and their congregations might reflect theologically on the journey of transition.”

Stirring the pot
An interim will serve a congregation well by revisiting key texts and themes of scripture that most address the nature and calling of the church. If renewal and new life are to happen, churches need to get in touch in a fresh way with the basics, with what the apostle Paul termed the “extraordinary power that belongs to God,” which we hold in “earthly vessels.” When churches lose touch with that “extraordinary power,” their tendency is to turn the “earthly vessel”- the form or organization of church we have known—into a idol. Part of the challenge of the aforementioned cultural shifts is for congregations to re-think and re-discover their mission or purpose. A good sermon or study series on some of the key texts will help to till the soil and broaden the horizon. Texts which might be considered include, for example, Genesis 12:1–4, Exodus 19:1–6, Micah 6:1–8, Matthew 5:13–16, Matthew 28:16–20, and Acts 1:1–8. Each of these passages can help a congregation ask and explore the questions of what the church is and what the church’s vocation is…such questions are ripe for asking at times of leadership change and transition. But the point of doing so, at least during an interim, is less to determine an answer than to stir the pot.”

Anthony B. Robinson, Congregations Magazine, 01/09/2013 2012 Issue 4

The God of eternal Transition

Theology and IM
The theology underpinning IM is the Trinitarian nature of God as a community of persons themselves in relationship with communities of their making and loving. IM recognizes various communities of interest in the vacancy and appointment processes, all of them interrelated and focused on participation in God’s mission in the world.

These communities are vested in persons, such as the Parish Representatives, Area Dean, Archdeacon, Bishop. Each of them also has its own identity and purpose, which it can exercise only in cooperation with the others. As the Trinity’s focus is on the world, so the local church’s focus needs to be located there also, and the Interim Minister is appointed to help the local church honour this commitment; always, as with the Trinity, conscious of its own internal bonds of love.

Richard Bryant was Principal of the Newcastle Local Ministry Scheme and served as consultant to the team working on Developing Interim Ministry in the North East.

Trinitarian Theology and IM

The God of eternal Transition-

Eschatology and IM
The emergence of Interim Ministry is a timely summons to deal with the present and the immediate future, of course within the framework of the longer term and eschatological future. Arguably, the “realised eschatology” which characterised much 20th century theological discourse has had its day: the eschaton quite clearly has not become manifest at every level of human or creator’s life. This may tempt some into renewed effort to play their part in the coming of the kingdom and others into the quiescent passivism that rests content with present realities until God makes his decisive intervention. The question may be posed, “When does feverish activism become a betrayal of the gospel of grace?”

Between these two poles Interim Ministry poses a realistic, faithful and hopeful alternative. There is, in Christ, a holding together of both the “already” of God’s engagement with creation and the “not yet” of anticipation and hope. Interim Ministry sets out to enable a local church to retain the tension between these two dimensions in the context of a clerical vacancy.

Richard Bryant and Hazel Ditchburn in Developing Interim Ministry in the North East

In section four is a list of scriptural references. This list is not exhaustive, but is a sample of some passages of scripture, which are helpful for reflection during the IM process – or might be useful to Interim Ministers to give hope and resilience.

The Gospel of Transition

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What is God’s purpose or is there no reason at all? To help congregations come to terms with these questions, preachers need to consider how they and their congregations might reflect theologically on the journey of transition.”
In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep...Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.

(Genesis 1:1-4)

Catherine Keller argues that the creation of the world according to Genesis 1 is from a ‘primal chaos.’ This means the process of creation is about bringing order to something that is already there and is disorder, separating day and night, the waters above from the waters below, and so on (Gen 1). The creation of life is the creation of order, everything finding a place and a purpose. The value of order and stability is expressed frequently in the Hebrew Bible; for example in the promise of the land for God’s people and the establishment of traditions of worship, monarchy and law. In the New Testament, Paul admonishes the churches to order their common life, most powerfully expressed in the image of the church as a body (1 Cor 12).

The visions of the heavenly Jerusalem in Ezekiel and Revelation are also tributes to order; a gorgeous city whose precise measurements reflect a vision of holiness as order and certainty.

(Ex 40:1-9, Rev 21).

But we also see through the Bible that God’s action is often seen in the disruption of order. God calls Abram from his established life to uncertainty. In response to the orderly tower of Babel God divides human languages. When taking his people from Egypt God disrupts the order of that nation’s ways. The prophets frequently call for the disruption of the established order. The arrival of Jesus disrupts the lives of Joseph and Mary, and he speaks of not coming to bring peace but a sword (Matt 10:34). Jesus’ actions disrupt the established order – breaking Sabbath rules and social boundaries. His resurrection disrupts order at a cosmic level. The arrival of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is expressed by the sound of many languages, not one language. The fact that the followers of Christ do not order their common life in the way they did previously is a sign of God’s work in them (Acts 2:4). In scripture God’s action is seen in disorder and disruption as well as order.

We may therefore suspect that God’s action in creation is to bring the right amount of order for life to thrive: not too much, not too little. From science we learn that change is necessary for life, so for creation to truly live some disorder must remain. We also learn from science that what seems to be disordered chaos might reveal a pattern when you look at the bigger picture. Order may be based on chaos. Life itself comes out of this relation, as Dwight Friesen puts it, ‘the dance of chaos with order.’

He sums up God’s mission as ‘to bring life’, a mission which reaches its fullest expression in Christ who brings new life by disrupting the existing order.

This has implications for our attitude to the disruption of order. Transformative change is not possible in a completely stable, static system, and so the kind of disruption that opens a system to change without destroying it is to be welcomed. Disruption of a stable system may be necessary for the development, which is essential to Christian discipleship. But there is a balance. No order means no relationships, no trust, no security, no cooperation, no common life. Psychology teaches us that a child must have a secure base from which to wander, to experiment and to learn, and be able to return to that place of security. So too with the people of God. The travels of the Hebrew people were to attain a land which could be their own, a place of safety, which would be a sign of blessing. But blessing, it turned out, would also come from disruption.

Transformative change, which is the aim of most IM, is enabled by finding the right level of order and disorder. It may be the life of a congregation is falling apart, there are no connections or relationships, and the IM’s task is to nurture the emergence of a healthy, dynamic order which is based on good relationships and information flows. Or it may be that things have become ossified, static and in need of radical transformation. The task is to disrupt the order. Such disruption could help the congregation to change, and lead to the emergence of new life. It may be that most IM contexts will need a little bit of both: disruption in some aspects, the establishment of safety and security in others. Then order and chaos can come together to produce the life and love that are signs of God’s new creation.


Natasha Woodward is serving as an Interim Minister in the Diocese of London.
A Holy Saturday theology of Interim Ministry

What kind of life comes to new birth among the dead? The question is at the heart of interim ministry and a theologising of this specialist ministry is nothing short of an appreciation of that question and the in-between, of its paradoxes and hopes, of its tensions and opportunities. A Holy Saturday lens enables a particular interpretation of interim ministry as being both within itself and outwardly signifying the profound Saturdayness of Christian ministry, our existence, and our life journey.

What kind of life comes to new birth among the dead? The question is at the heart of interim ministry and a theologising of this specialist ministry is nothing short of an appreciation of that question and the in-between, of its paradoxes and hopes, of its tensions and opportunities. A Holy Saturday lens enables a particular interpretation of interim ministry as being both within itself and outwardly signifying the profound Saturdayness of Christian ministry, our existence, and our life journey.

Interim Ministry can be shaped, informed by and reflect the theologies of Holy Saturday; theologies which emphasise God’s bodily presence and action in the in-between. These theologies have the potential to empower, guide, and inform those who are involved in this aspect of church life, and signpost the direction of new life, while acknowledging a very real ‘death’ of sorts. They, in light of their subject matter and concern, also have the potential to guide and inform a theology of interim ministry; a specialist, intentional ministry with broad concerns.

In light of theologies of Holy Saturday, a step towards a theology of interim ministry is proposed. Holy Saturday is a unique theological space that offers profound insight into interim ministry and, more broadly, Christian ministry and human experience as a whole.

A theology of interim ministry is to be a theology of the in-between: a theology of the (to repeat Steiner’s phrase quoted earlier) ‘long day’s journey of the Saturday’ — ‘telling of the Christian journey; a microcosm of all human experience. Steiner’s phrase perfectly encapsulates the theology which promises to underpin, deepen understanding, and intellectually enliven interim ministry, and it serves as a premise from which to begin. The Saturday journey is not an eventless void but a life-filled tension between death and resurrection; a redeeming tragedy; an Easter vigil made reality by the Lord of the Sabbath; a fertile ground, a rupture allowing new creation, change, and transformation. It is only so because of God’s actual presence (a God who in Balthasar’s theology of Holy Saturday can be seen not so much in descent but in a ‘going to’ and ‘being with’) in the midst of it, seeking the lost and bringing life out of death.

The space that is Holy Saturday makes all things new. It is a place of both transformation and transition, where past, present, and future meet and are redeemed. The proposed theology of interim ministry will speak into and reflect upon something vast: on one level, the space between two church appointments — on another level a Saturday common to all. The in-between — the long day’s journey, of the Second Day of the Triduum — is, in God’s economy, the go-between uniting us all. This hope is encapsulated in Nicolas Lash’s ‘Easter Vigil’; the patient waiting in darkness for the sun to appear on the horizon.

Finally, a theology of interim ministry speaks well beyond the particular intention of the interim minister placed in the in-between, holding up a powerful truth to human experience and, as Ramsay puts it, ‘the realm of everyday ministry’, which is always concerned with and inhabits the tension between death and new life, between cross and resurrection.

In his appraisal of George Steiner’s work, Lash should have the penultimate word: ‘We live in Saturday.’ The space that is Holy Saturday is the place where all things are made new. It is the long day’s journey of interim ministry, all ministry, and human life.

However, there are possibilities and dangers in the making a link between theologies of Holy Saturday and Interim Ministry, not least the danger (if taken to one particular conclusion) of likening the Christ on Holy Saturday to the IM minister. The links need further exploration and this represents just one starting place.


Building up and Binding Together—
Interim Ministry and Anglican Ecclesiology

Development is not simply a matter of numerical growth. It is more about a kind of change which builds up the church... We will only be able to build up the church effectively when we take the trouble to analyse these subtle... features of how we organise our life together as Christians. At the heart of the matter lies taking the trouble to ask the people most involved what they do, and how and why they do it. This is also to respect them and take them seriously, which in turn is part of the love we as Christians owe one another.

Richard Impey, How to develop your local church, p4i

How does Interim Ministry fit into an Anglican ecclesiology? A comprehensive Anglican understanding of what the church is has never been simply defined or uniformly held. At its core, says Paul Avis, it is a ‘real and living synthesis’ of gospel, tradition and learning which, when ‘bound together and held in a community life of prayer, study and service’, should be ‘stumbling, correcting and modifying each other’, which leads not only to ‘a meeting of minds but a true communion (koinonia) in the spirit’. The intention and process of Interim Ministry should be exactly this and the best experiences do have that spiritual dynamic.

Dr Jane Williams has spoken of the role of Interim Ministers as being ‘to restore Anglican ecclesiology’. The parish is fundamental to Anglican sense of self-understanding in terms of ‘loving where you are’: the locality, the team, the population and the people of God living there. Thus, where an IM was appointed to bring renewal and change, to restore and heal, this process was one of recovering this model of church: ‘IMs need to be listening to Churchwardens, the PCC and the parish but also helping them to restore what has been lost’, she said. It is about ‘team, locality, loving where the real people are, and knowing that God is there and loves them; keeping the locality conscious of wider issues. It’s not just about maintaining but growing the church.’

There are both challenges and opportunities in seeding IM within an Anglican self-understanding. The inherited patterns and expectations of the Church of England’s parochial ministry are not always receptive to the transitional and temporary nature of IM. The parish priest ideal is ingrained, even decades after parishes have been conjoined in plural benefices. Interim Ministers in longer-term posts often talk about a subtle creep of expectations which made them feel like the parish priest. It can be quite an effort to maintain that they are there for the short-term when to all intents and purposes they seem just like ‘the vicar’. IM offers an opportunity for re-imaging the church’s role in the community, and its partnership with deanery, diocese and other denominations, but this very process can be blocked by fear and hostility especially when it disturbs power and centuries old status quo.

The collaborative process of IM is entirely appropriate into the conciliar nature of the Church of England, in which bishops, clergy and laity expect to share in corporate decision-making about mission and ministry. IM posts are approved by Area Mission and Pastoral Committees, which have episcopal, clergy and lay representation; they should be discussed with and approved by PCCs. There are reports of PCCs feeling that IM posts have been ‘forced’ upon them which seriously undermines the process of IM. But it is also dubious in terms of Anglican ecclesiology — we are a people who share, consult, listen, pray, recognising as Richard Impey says, that this ‘is part of the love we as Christians owe one another’.

The IM process itself binds us into our identity as a reformed church gathered around the principles of scripture, tradition, reason and experience - scripture should be at the heart of process of reflection and reform of parish life during Interim Ministry; exploring history is an exercise in reviewing change in the light of our tradition both within the parish, denomination, and nation; reflecting on our Christian identity and vision for the future is an invitation to consider God’s mission is in this place and how we might join in. When IMs support a process of healing and grieving, recovery from conflict, or challenge governance, behaviour, accountability and stewardship we are drawing on our experience of healthy models of church to bring about transformation. The whole IM process is an exercise in bringing together our corporate reason — that of people, priest and episcopal leaders – to find a new direction and purpose for the people of God in a particular place. Or at least, that’s how it should be.

Often, this collaborative process can expose fault-lines in our Anglican understanding of authority, which can be particularly uncomfortable for the Interim Minister to navigate. An IM is appointed and commissioned by the bishop and acts under their authority, and final decisions are ultimately the bishops’. There may be
times when resources are limited and ideal scenarios elusive, which makes easy solutions and ‘off-the-shelf’ ministry models imported from other places seem compelling. However, it is to be hoped that senior staff can avoid the temptation to follow pre-conceived plans. The best IM outcomes result from genuinely open-minded enquiry about the best way forward for a parish and a true meeting of minds between the whole body of Christ. Having opened up to the possibilities of Interim Ministry, it undermines the Interim Minister, the laity and the will of the Holy Spirit to override the process with a quick fix outcome, and may store up further discontentment for the future.

IM does not always deliver neat outcomes but it is inclusive and allows the body to travel together to provisional solutions along the Anglican way of synthesis. In that sense, IM is true to Michael Ramsey’s understanding of Anglican ecclesiology: ‘Its credentials are its incompleteness…it is clumsy and untidy, it baffles neatness and logic. For it is sent not to provide credentials but to point to the universal inclusive and allows the body to travel together to possibilities of Interim Ministry, it undermines the shared vision of the congregation, of everyone involved, and it will be rich and complex, made up of all sorts of things – including especially habits moulded by the successes and failures of the church’s story. It will be how we do things together.’

Richard Impey, How to develop your local church, pxi

Interim ministers arrive in the middle of a situation and a community which is established, often complex and needs careful reading and interpretation at the outset; which may require some specific issues, structures and behaviours to be addressed; and which needs a mixture of gentleness, playfulness and firmness to inspire movement towards change. It is a role which requires immense groundedness, an ability to manage one’s anxiety; and deep-rooted spirituality to allow the shared wisdom of the congregation, as described by Richard Impey (above), to filter through; to create space where people can reflect, learn and understand where they are and how they got there; to cultivate creativity and openness to new possibilities, and foster spiritual attentiveness to a new direction in which God may be encouraging them. ‘The role of the Interim Minister is to nourish possibility,’ according to a leading American IM practitioner and trainer, Molly Dale Smith.

Whatever else it might be, Interim Ministry is a collaborative process, therefore entering into an interim period or role with a ‘problem’ or ‘fix-it’ mind-set isn’t going to be helpful or effective. As Gilbert Rendle has noted: ‘It is often healthier and more responsible for leaders not to try to fix their congregation. By seeking quick but inappropriate solutions, leaders tend to add the discomfort and disequilibrium of their situation and actually subvert the opportunity to address deeper issues the face. Often quick fixes are collusive exercises that are intuitively designed not to bring any real change to the congregation but offer the feeling that something has been done.’

The process-based nature of Interim Ministry takes a more adaptive approach which is designed to allow the shared wisdom of the congregation, as described by Richard Impey (above), to filter through; to create space where people can reflect, learn and understand where they are and how they got there; to cultivate creativity and openness to new possibilities, and foster spiritual attentiveness to a new direction in which God may be encouraging them. ‘The role of the Interim Minister is to nourish possibility,’ according to a leading American IM practitioner and trainer, Molly Dale Smith.

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To recap, in the Church of England, Interim Ministry is a fixed-term ministerial appointment to parishes for up to three years (renewable for one term) in response to a pastoral need or mission opportunity. An Interim Minister has been described as: ‘one who temporarily assumes the role of the ordained minister, or of any particular person. Rather it will be the shared vision of the congregation, of everyone involved, and it will be rich and complex, made up of all sorts of things – including especially habits moulded by the successes and failures of the church’s story. It will be how we do things together.’

Richard Impey, How to develop your local church, pxi

Notes
vii Satterlee, Craig A. When God speaks through change – preaching in times of congregational transition, 2005. The Alban Institute, Herndon, Virginia, p14-15
ixvi Dr Andy Jolley, ‘This is an edited presentation to an IM meeting hosted by the Diocese of Leeds in May 2019
xii Ibid., 97.
xiii Ibid., 94.
xvi Paul Avis, The Anglican Understanding of the Church, 2000, SPCK, p46-49
Preparing for an IM appointment

For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, “This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.”

Luke 14:28-30

Preparing for an IM Appointment begins with discernment and dialogue between the parish, Area Dean, Archdeacon and involves Bishops and Patrons. It maps out the rationale and objectives for the appointment which should have the agreement at all levels. The parish, deanery and diocese may have different reasons for appointing so it is a good opportunity to be clear about what each player expects.

An Interim Minister may be advertised for or approached and the process of preparation continues with discussing the terms of their appointment, the agreed objectives, timescale, remuneration and housing, supervision and support systems. This process may take some months to conclude and it is important to be realistic with parishes about timescales.

The experience in the Church of England and the Church in Europe is that appointing Interim Ministers is challenging and advertising is not always effective. This is because we are at an early stage in formalising Interim Ministry and have not yet developed a sufficiently large pool of trained and experienced Interim Ministers to appoint from.

Committing to being a full-time Interim Minister requires living with a degree of instability which may not be acceptable until the practice and appointment of IMs is better developed nationally. Suitable candidates are often tied into clergy posts and housing. Those who are available and may not be geographically convenient. Even among those who are keen and committed to IM, giving up security for a short-term contract, especially when families and partners are involved, is not sufficiently alluring.

The experience in Chelmsford and other diocese has been that Interim Ministers are often best home-grown or appointed from known expertise, and allocated within the established clergy for a short-term contract, especially when families and partners are involved, is not sufficiently alluring.

The planning template for senior staff works through the current vacancy position and history, reflects on local views and considerations following initial consultations. It explores the nature of the needs and the priorities are for the post – for example:

Are there issues with leadership and relationships, such as conflict or a traumatic event?

Are there blockages in governance and parish systems? Is there a need to consider pastoral reorganisation? What historical challenges exist?

The second appointments template offers a framework for planning an appointment with an Interim Minister, including the objectives of the post, timeframe, remuneration, housing, supervision and support systems. This is the framework which outlines expectations and terms and conditions, and from which the IM will take their brief from the diocese.
Change, transition and systems

Understanding the difference between change and transition is fundamental to the process of IM. ‘Change is situational. Situations arise that change the congregation… A congregation’s success at responding to any change ultimately depends upon the congregation’s claiming a new identity and adopting new ways of being in response to the new situation.’

‘Transition, on the other hand, is a three-phase psychological reorientation process that people go through when they are coming to terms with change.’ Transformation is ‘the new shape that occurs after transition.’

Transition involves letting go of the old reality and identity. There is a ‘fragile’ neutral zone – a wilderness – as people prepare a way forward, exploring new patterns and ways of being. ‘Only after going through each of these first two phases of transition can people deal successfully with the third phase: beginning over again, with new energy, a new sense of purpose, a new outlook, and a new image of themselves,’ says William Bridges.

Change itself is neutral, but congregations may see it as a threat or opportunity. They may resist the transitional process, preferring to hang onto habits and identity in which the community is rooted. Interim Ministry aims to help the parish understand the reality of its situation and to acknowledge the change(s) which have made the parish a new reality. ‘Change is situational. Situations arise that change the congregation… A congregation’s success at responding to any change ultimately depends upon the congregation’s claiming a new identity and adopting new ways of being in response to the new situation.’

Any analysis of the parish therefore has to reflect on the system as a whole as well as its people – its parts. Every emotional system will have ways of functioning which give it stability, whether it is a healthy balance or not. ‘Any thing which disturbs the equilibrium of the system will result in an emotional response as the system tries to reassert the balance, which is why the IM needs to invest time in understanding the congregational system, its parts and the interconnections between its people – observing, listening and hearing stories are a significant strategy for getting a picture of both the parts and the whole.’

IM processes are tools for helping the parish to collectively reorientate itself to changed circumstances and find a new direction. It also brings order and planned process to a time which might otherwise feel chaotic and risky, and make people feel anxious and demotivated.

Exploring new ideas, trying out new patterns, developing new partnerships and leaders is part of preparing for this new beginning. The significance of enabling people to participate in this process is that it reassures them that it is not something being ‘done to’ them – it is their response to change based on their history, abilities and resources.

Grounding the process in scripture and prayer builds confidence in IM as a Godly transition through which they are accompanied and supported by the Holy Spirit, as a living experience of discerning the will of God as in Romans 12.2: ‘Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.’

LINK Appointment templates
LINK Training – Roller Coaster of Change
LINK Training – Family systems

To insert: Graphics from Alban Institute – beginning, neutral, ending zones and rollercoaster of change (see sample from HGG).
How/Governance Ask how decision are made and what policies and practices are in place for finance and safeguarding.

What/Activity Ask about events and activity in the church, both regular and special.

Vision Ask what the vision of the church is - what would be an ideal state?

Jordan also points out that listening to the stories people tell and how they are told is especially illuminating: Expect to hear contradictory versions. What actually happened is of much less significance than what people thought happened! Try to understand what version is believed. Listen to both those who have been in the church for a long time and those recently arrived. 

Engaging in a Listening Exercise with as many parishioners as possible is a good way of starting out in any Interim post. (LINK to sample Listening Exercise)

It is also useful to be alert to tacit rituals which can suggest that a parish which considers itself welcoming and friendly, is secretly putting up a ‘Keep Out’ sign! This system of signs, gestures, ways of behaving forms a ‘web of significance’ which gives people a sense of connection, order and meaning. So what is the language of this parish and how does it express it?

According to George Parsons and Speed Leas

*Ritual is also a way that a system identifies itself.* We are the people who do those rituals. A ritual helps maintain boundaries...Who is in? Those who know how to do those rituals. Who is out? Those who feel strange doing those rituals...Tacit rituals abound in church and out. They are the rites we engage in with little or no conscious awareness of what we are doing or why...unless someone does it wrong! Then we are aware that that person is not from our tribe, our system.

The IM needs support to engage with, learn about and ‘decode’ the parish. One such mechanism may be the Transition Team; This is a small group of individuals which supports the Interim Minister. It is not a duplicate of nor a replacement for the PCC, although it is likely to include some key figures from the PCC. The churchwardens may be able to suggest who should be part of it. It is important to stress that the Transition Team is not responsible for decision-making but acts in advisory capacity, suggesting ways of progressing the work of IM and feeding back on IM processes and findings. [See BOX below] As the IM moves through the process, the Transition Team might be able to take on responsibility for organising and leading some tasks such as congregational meetings – and they are certainly likely to be better than the IM at chivvying the regulars to join in!

After joining the ‘system’, begins the process of analysing how the parish is functioning and how healthy it is. This is a reflective task which evolves over time, engagement and prayer. Some issues may not appear at first, but after the first weeks of ‘best behaviour’ are over, deeper and more hidden issues may appear. It is important to journal in order to capture these as they emerge, otherwise, over time and the intensity of the process, they may be forgotten.

David Sawyer gives as examples: unresolved relationships with the most recent, previous leader; repeating patterns of relating with leaders over several previous generations; informal lines of authority and boundaries and rules; the existence of secrets...health or unhealthy relationship triangles. He notes: “The result of the early assessment becomes a hypothesis, an experimental hunch about what is going on in the system. As the months pass the interim leader will learn more information which will confirm or disconfirm the hypothesis, after which the hunches shift and grow into a stronger sense of the reality of the organisation.”

The Process Tasks are an opportunity for the Interim and the congregation to start exposing and exploring some of these hidden layers, and working with them, to address some of the unhealthy habits and affirm the healthy patterns, as well as helping to grow the confidence and enthusiasm of the parish to find a unique way forward for the future.

1 History and Heritage

Reviewing how the congregation has been shaped by its past

Congregations benefit from piecemeal but reflective examination of the past to discover what essential attitudes and assumptions are functioning now as a result of influences from the past. Images of the church which are drawn from the good old days can be so overpowering as to impede any significant attempt to identify future goals, objectives and points of mission. As a result of a prolonged, intentional and well designed process of gaining new perspective on their church’s history, a number of congregations have identified fascinating new directions.

William Bud Phillips

This has traditionally focused on five tasks or Focus Points which are adapted below for the Church of England context.

1. History and Heritage - reviewing how the congregation has been shaped by its past
3. Leadership - reflecting on the congregation’s way of organising and developing leader-ship.
4. Connections - discovering/reconnecting the parish to relationships/networks beyond itself.
5. Future Vision - drawing together the interim work together into a coherent vision for the future.

Each of these tasks has a range of tools and approaches to support the Intermediate Minister and lay leadership to work through the process collaboratively. Ideally, the IM is the facilitator of this process, enabling others to contribute and take ownership of it. The Transition Team can really come into its own for organising and leading these tasks, and then simultaneously becomes an exercise in growing and empowering lay leadership.

Richard Impey’s early work with Intermediate Ministry in the 1990s led him to a conclusion that the wisdom of the congregation which emerges from reviewing the past, telling stories, engaging in discussions about common life, matching people and tasks forms the bedrock of a collaborative process of shared learning and decision making about the process of change.

Process Tasks - 23
'Assembled one evening in the church basement after eating, the members adjusted their chairs toward a wall on which was tacked a long strip of butcher paper with a horizontal line drawn a third of the way down from the top. The years through which the church had lived were marked on the line, earlier years ticked closer together than those more proximate to the present. The pastor encouraged members to talk about what had happened in each year and, as they talked, a scribe noted key phrases in the stories at the appropriate place on the paper: ‘great music festival’, ‘administrative mess’, ‘Mrs. Churchperson dies’, ‘young people ask for a different type of worship’, ‘new kitchen’. Over the line were written events important to the larger community and world: ‘recession’, ‘Vietnam’, ‘new highway’. As the evening passed, the pace of storytelling quickened, and more difficult and embarrassing tales began to emerge. At the end, people signed the chart at the point they themselves had entered the church’s life. Throughout the following week, members kept adding other events important to the story. By the following Sunday the record had so enlarged in significance that it was moved from the basement to the rear wall of the sanctuary, where it still hangs. Occasionally, someone adds further elaboration or comment.’

James Hopewell

Eastern England experienced growth after the Second World War when bomb-damaged communities in London moved into new housing developments. Stories of these times should be encouraged and shared and help add flavour to the narrative—people could even be encouraged to bring photographs of these times to share.

By charting the journey, the parish can note that in its long history there have been both ups and downs and explore what caused these, but that nonetheless the community of worshipping Christians has remained a constant regardless through all those previous transitions. These process tasks, although separate, have organic connections, which become apparent: a historic event may reveal something of the values and identity of the congregation. For example:

‘Norma’s Armchair’ had sat in the nave of a modern church in one IM parish for some years. During a congregational meeting someone remembered that the armchair was brought into church for Norma, one of the elderly members of the congregation who had difficulties sitting. It became a symbol of their identity and values and affirmed the parish’s thoughtfulness and awareness of people’s needs. This in turn gave them a greater sense of confidence in moving forward.

In a parish where the IM experienced a reluctance to engage from one of the churchwardens, the underlying reason only emerged when it was noted that the parish had not been without a settled minister in 50 years when they became part of the team. The instability of the vacancy time caused that longstanding servant of the parish too much anxiety to fully engage. When that history was understood and the challenge acknowledged, it became easier to engage.

Richard Impey describes a similar process of developing a time line for parish history as part of ‘telling the story’ of the parish, a story which he points out may have rival versions, but nonetheless creates a way of bringing all versions of the story together as a combined narrative from different vantage points.

Looking at a timeline of when different people joined the church may reveal clusters around key events e.g. was there a missional activity which attracted people, or a great leadership team, or even a historic breakthrough which drove people away? Churches in areas of transition must ask whether the church may have moved in and out of different phases of life. By charting the journey, the parish can note that in its long history there have been both ups and downs and explore what caused these, but that nonetheless the community of worshipping Christians has remained a constant regardless through all those previous transitions. These process tasks, although separate, have organic connections, which become apparent: a historic event may reveal something of the values and identity of the congregation. For example:

The process of reviewing history may also help individuals and the IM understand how and why people are responding in certain ways to the current cycle of change:

It is important to ground this work in reflection on biblical change. Key stories of God faithfully guiding change through the past may build confidence as part of a congregational event on history or a sermon, such as the creation narrative in Genesis 1-2, the story of Moses and departure of the Israelites from Egypt in Exodus 14-19, the restoration of the walls of Jerusalem in Nehemiah or the return of the exiles and rebuilding of the temple in Ezra; or the challenges of the first churches in The Acts.

**The Power of Story**

‘Every congregation has stories to tell, stories of success and stories of failure. Stories of joy and grief. One of the times when a congregation’s stories are most likely to be recalled is during a pastoral transition… the interim period is a time to celebrate a congregation’s success and joy, but also a time, if the members are willing, to deal with painful stories from the recent or distant past that haunt a congregation and keep it from functioning at its best.’

Bonnie Bardot

As well as hearing stories, telling stories can be a useful tool for helping a parish think about its situation. Inevitably there are biblical stories to draw on, but bringing in a wider range of Christian-based stories and folk tales can also be effective.

**Stone Soup**

Some travellers come to a village, carrying nothing more than an empty cooking pot. Upon their arrival, the villagers are unwilling to share any of their food stores with the hungry travellers. The travellers go to a stream and fill the pot with water, drop a large stone in it, and place it over a fire. One of the villagers becomes curious and asks what they are doing. The travellers answer that they are making “stone soup”, which tastes wonderful, although it still needs a little bit of garnish to improve the flavour, which they are missing. One villager does not mind parting with a few carrots to help them.

The villager hands them a little bit of their stone soup, which has not reached its full potential yet. The villagers hands them a little bit of seasoning to help them out. More and more villagers walk by each adding another ingredient. Finally, a delicious and nourishing pot of soup is enjoyed by all.

The River

The people had lived by a river for as long as they could remember. The river was the centre of their life and provided for everything. All their stories, songs and traditions revolved around the river. But one year the river level was lower than before. One group were unconcerned, believing the river would never fail. When the river bed was nearly dry, a group of children offered to go and look for it. They found a glorious waterfall. A fall of rock had changed the river’s course and it was now flowing into a lush valley. Joyfully the children returned home and told of the river’s new course and the lush valley they had found. The children proposed moving the village to the new source of the river, but the elders refused to move until one grandmother spoke up in support of children and the community was persuaded to move.

As one churchwarden in an IM parish pointed out, it works very well with the song ‘Down to the River to Pray.

2 Mission and Identity

**rediscovering a sense of Godly purpose and direction**

‘Beginnings are strange things. People want them to happen but fear them at the same time. After long and seemingly pointless wanderings through the neutral zone, most people are greatly relieved to arrive at whatever Promised Lane they have been moving toward. Yet beginnings are also scary, for they require a new commitment. They require in some sense that people become the new kind of person that the new situation demands.’

William and Susan Bridges

Interim Ministry is an opportunity to review and reshape the identity of a Christian community and it is important to establish an expectation of this as a positive process from the outset, remembering the words of St Paul in 1 Corinthians 5: that ‘If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!’. Some may really welcome and embrace this idea, but others may be more resistive. It is im-portant, as far as possible, to bring everyone along with this process of transition.

Many episodes of change and transition in scripture are accompanied by a change of identity—witness the calling and covenant with Abram in Genesis 12 and 17 or Saul’s transition to Paul in Acts 9 and 13.9. But these times of renewal are not without struggle— as Jacob illustrates in his wrestling with God in Genesis 32.22-30 through which he is renamed Israel.

It is important in these circumstances to rekindle a collective understanding of our Christian vocation and of the behaviours which are expected, to gently and firmly call people back to a
way of living is healthy, which listens and honours different perspectives, but which is not held captive to any factions. Resetting the foundation of healthy behaviour can be especially important to re-establishing the church as safe space when relationships have broken down, as in the example of a Behavioural Covenant below.

One IM in Chelmsford diocese developed a helpful model of outlining in their first engagement with a PCC what behaviours were expected and desirable. The PCC themselves were drawn into a collaborative process of agreeing these 'ground rules' and it formed the basis on which change was navigated.

Ideal codes of behaviour in the church are probably best summarised by such passages of scripture as Jesus summary of the law in Mark 12.38–31; by descriptions of the Christian community as the body of Christ as in 1 Corinthians 12.12–26 or Ephesians 4.1–16. Also helpful for reflection is Jesus example of washing his disciples’ feet in John 13.1–20 and the passages on the works of the flesh and fruit of the spirit in Galatians 5.16–26.

This process of reflecting on identity enables the parish to consider what its culture and core values are. ‘Culture can be thought of… as shared meaning and behaviour… These deeply held beliefs, submerged as they are below the surface of ready awareness, hold the community’s energy and are the key to its own distinctive folkways. All the observable elements of any culture are intricately tied, often in mysterious ways, to its submerged beliefs… Paying attention to a congregations specific cultural elements slowly but surely offers perceptive insights, illuminating congregational behaviour in a way that nothing else can… We ignore culture only to our frustration and failure.’xxxi

The task of the IM is not just observing, but reflecting this culture back so that the church community can also see and learn from it. Like the parish which suddenly realised Norma’s Armchair was an important example of its culture and how it lived, sometimes these values are not obvious until observed and stated. Conversely, a parish may feel it has shared values which are widely held and understood, only to discover on further investigation that its patterns of living and worshipping are not clear and these values are not widely shared – they may consider themselves welcomed and open, but is this borne out in reality?

Tools to use at this time include a Core Values analysis and Power Analysis (See BOX XX) which help reveal some of the hidden motivations and issues in a congregation.

Listening to perceptions of a parish from external commentators is useful in shining a light on how the church lives out its Christian identity. If it sees itself as open and welcoming but has had no meaningful contact with the other community organisations, leaders or denominations it is not living up to its own image. This is where the work on identity starts to cross-cut with the process of re-establishing connections with other networks (below).

Understanding the gap between who we want to be as the people of God in this place, and how we actually are living up to our own and others’ expectations, helps us to glimpse the missional challenges and opportunities ahead for the parish.

There are creative practical tools for engaging in this process, such as the exercise on Core Values, and exercises such as this:

One IM parish reflected on its way of life at a congregational meeting, first reflecting on Ephesians 4.1–16, in groups and considering significant words and phrases and where these were evident in its own life or in other places. Having shared this reflection, participants then used it as basis to design ‘shields of identity’ in small groups. The shields were just an A2 flipchart paper divided into 4 quadrants considering and designed with as much or as little creativity that the group was capable of. The four quadrants were labelled: One Attitude of Mind; One Symbol of our Life; One Hope for the future and One priority for now. 98% of those who attended found it gave them a clearer sense of their identity and how they lived up to it, and affirmed them a sense of hope for the future. From this exploration came their vision of the parish as ‘a caring and loving family to all which is prepared to be flexible and serve the needs of others’. Another parish engaging in this exercise came up with a shared symbol of their identity – Cake – which then became a feature of mission outreach and hospitality throughout their IM journey and led to a ‘Bake Off’ community event.

One IM parish discovered a real passion for serving children and young people. Within months of its exploration of its self-identity, a new Sunday school group emerged with a very faithful and creative lay leader and former baptism visitor, who found she had really discovered her vocation. The number of young people attending church grew rapidly in a few months, as did the number of families seeking baptism. The lay leader started formally exploring their vocation...

Parishes have also found it helpful to conduct a worship survey at this point in the IM process, since worship is a significant expression of Christian identity. This can generate tension, so it is important to ensure it is anonymous and that there is an element of fun built into it – such as ‘nominate your favourite five hymns’ which resulted in a ‘Top 20’ list of hymns they would like to hear.

In an IM parish, one churchgoer nominated 30 of his favourite hymns! Activities like this build engagement and a real sense of ownership of change in simple ways.

The Interim time is an opportunity to try out new forms of worship as part of discovering a renewed and refreshed sense of Christian identity. This is not so much about churchmanship or tradition - or about ‘dumbing down’, and it is important to reassure on this point – but about exploring patterns of worshipping that ensure everybody can express their faith wholeheartedly. Some may discover they enjoy new styles of worship in the process, like the family that found real quietness and peace following a bereavement the Bam Book of Common Prayer in one IM parish.

A final strand of the identity exploration is learning about our gifts, which also cross-cuts with leadership (below). As a sense of identity develops, so does the sense of vocation to help and support the growth of the parish in its new identity. As new activities are tested and developed – and Interim Ministry is an ideal time to encourage exploration – so new leaders will emerge.

**Behavioural Covenant**

This is an example of a behavioural covenant developed by Gilbert Rentlexxxii for the leadership body of a church experiencing IM. It might be a useful starting point for discussion with a PCC.

**Our promises to God**

We promise to pray alone and together, to thank God and to ask God for help in our lives and in our work for our church and we promise to listen to God’s answer to us.

**Our promises to our church family**

We promise to demonstrate our leadership and commitment to our church by example; We promise to support our priests, lay leaders and staff so their efforts can be most productive; We promise to pray alone and together, to thank God and to ask God for help in our lives and in our work for our church and we promise to listen to God’s answer to us.

**Our promises to each other**

We promise to support our priests, lay leaders and staff so their efforts can be most productive; We promise to respect and care for each other; We promise to treat our time as an opportunity to make an important gift to our church; We promise to listen with an open, non-judgmental mind to the words and ideas of others in our church and on the (body); We promise to discuss, debate and disagree openly in meetings, expressing ourselves as clearly and honestly as possible so that we are certain others understand our point of view; We promise to support the final decision of (this group) whether it reflects our view or not.

**LINK Training Sheet** Exploring our Christian identity

**LINK Training Sheet** Core Values
3 Leadership

Reflecting on the congregation’s way of organising and developing leadership.

Interim Ministry provides both time and opportunity for lay leaders of the church to search out their own authentic understanding of ministry and become intentional about the lay leadership functions of congregational life. You can value the strengths and gifts of people in the congregation who step up now to offer leadership, knowing that, with the loss of a significant leader, others will be called upon to provide wisdom and guidance. You can begin to glimpse the opportunities made possible because of the fact that your pastor has left.

Interim Ministry provides an opportunity for the PCC and congregation to explore what their expectations and patterns of leadership are. Discussions on history and identity may reveal embedded patterns and ways of leading that need further exploration. As the parish tries out new ideas for worship or mission, new leaders and styles of leadership may emerge.

This may be exciting and rewarding or it may prove challenging, especially if the prevailing culture of the community is resistant to change. Unless they are really encouraged and sup-port ed, emerging leaders may feel uncomfortable.

George Parsons and Speed B Lea point out that congregations as systems often get stuck in habits, patterns and routines of the past. The need for shared and collaborative ministries between priest and laity is accompanied by the need for a shift in power and authority, but knowing what kind of shift is needed will require analysis of how leadership has operated in the past and how leadership dynamics work.

Parsons and Lea’s work on Understanding Your Congregation as a System and their Congregation Systems Inventory offers useful insights for exploring some of these dynamics with a PCC or transition team, though it is worth simplifying and changing some of the language to make it more fitting to a Church of England setting. While the tool has some unfamiliar jargon, it can expose patterns in the way a church responds to strategy, authority, clergy and lay leadership, relationship and learning, and where there are tensions between over and under-functioning in some of these areas.

For example, a focus on managerial leadership may result in leaders focusing on maintenance at the expense of transformation; leaders who focus on current demands and lack a future focus. Equally, parishes focused on authoritarian models of leadership may need to be encouraged to try out more spontaneous and creative approaches. At the other end of the scale, too much emphasis on risk and new ideas which are not grounded in good management or organisation can lead to a lack of clear focus and direction.

This work goes alongside tools like Power Analysis, where the Transition Team or PCC, with the IM, explores who holds what kind of power in the organisation, and where this is apparent. It is useful to develop a basic understanding of Family Systems Theory and how anxiety plays out in the parish ‘family’ system and in the leadership positions people occupy.

One IM noted during their time leading IM across two parishes there was increasing interest in vocations among lay people. A support group was set up to explore vocations collaboratively. Several people in this group found Interim Ministry liberating: they could test their leadership, try out new ideas and learn from experience. Some were not looking forward to the appointment of a settled minister because they feared it would be restrictive.

William Bud Phillips suggests that a congregation is a living organism and one way to understand it is to reflect on different parts of the body or sub-systems within the larger organisation. Members will tend to belong to at least one of these sub-systems. He identified eight sub-systems: worship and celebration; education and nurture; communal; pastoral/health; maintenance; transitional; evangelism, outreach.

Try analysing the activities of the church as a PCC or Transition Team to see who leads or is involved in these areas – or is the priest expected to do and lead everything? A review of gifts and talents within the congregation may identify others to bring on board or may indicate some who are not best suited to their current ‘sub-system’, might be best deployed elsewhere.

The systems used by IM to generate participation and collaboration – such as Transition teams and Congregational Meetings – are the very places to encourage people to try out new roles and develop their voices and input. Further information on Transition Teams is below (Fig XX).

Sometimes IM parishes lack key officer roles, such as Churchwardens, Treasurers and PCC Secretaries. The absence is an opportunity to encourage new people to ‘have a go’ perhaps with a more experienced member of the congregation as a mentor. In one IM parish a former Churchwarden was encouraged to return for just one year, to train and mentor two deputy churchwardens (for which the APCM made provision in a resolution) and these deputies in turn became a successful and effective ‘dream team’ of churchwardens for six years.

Interim Ministry may lead to a change of lay leadership but sometimes that is necessary to reach the destination, recalling from Deuteronomy 31.1-13, that was Joshua Son of Nun who ended up leading the Israelites into the Promised Land rather than Moses, who had steered them through the wilderness for 40 years! They key to the change is to ensure as far as possible that it is consensual, well supported and that those moving on are thanked and celebrated for all they have done.

One such individual in an IM parish was persuaded to join the PCC so that their cautious and conservative approach – which was often heard at congregational meetings – could play a useful role in planning change. Their position on the PCC also gave reassurance to those in the congregation who might feel the same.

The key to managing such dissent is listening to where the individual’s motivations lie and what concerns the process of change is raising which might need more careful consideration. At the end of the day people get anxious or angry because they care passionately about their church and parish and harnessing that passion can be a breakthrough moment.

Equally, a dissenting person may have power to disturb the status quo in helpful ways for transition. In one IM parish, a person who was a bit of a ‘thorn in the side’ by always asking questions and complaining that the PCC was not prioritising the right issues was encouraged to become a deputy churchwarden. They in turn challenged and questioned the rather conservative churchwardens and encouraged them to be more proactive and mission-oriented.

‘Difficult’ people

A person can get a ‘bee in his/her bonnet’ and become an absolute nuisance to others; he/she can be angry or upset – or simply unskilled – and bring his/her ‘attitude’ or incompetence into the church causing havoc or slowing progress. A systems approach to organisational problems does not deny the difficulties that can be caused by individuals and/or by problems the organisation needs to address, but it also observes the reactive patterns or non-conscious agreements or ‘understand-ings’ that people have about how they are supposed to act or get along.

In most parishes there will be voices of dissent. The key is to remember that there is no such thing as difficult parishes or people, just difficult situations. Behaviour is key: if the language, attitudes or behaviour is unhealthy, offensive and damaging it requires challenge. However, sometimes these voices of dissent may be emerging leaders who can be harnessed to bring balance and fresh perspectives.
The Power shift in Interim Ministry

There are many opportunities within Interim Ministry to enable the people of God to guide and influence the way ministry develops and moves forward. This change of influence and indeed power is a necessary requisite and those in leadership have to acknowledge this dynamic change.

The two interim settings that I was fortunate enough to share in where in many ways a ‘last resort’ to enable the church community to grasp hope in what seemed to them very dark times. One setting was three ‘old’ parishes with two closed churches, and the second was two parishes separated geographically.

If any interim ministry is to have the chance of ‘success’ then all concerned need to recognise that once power and influence is shared it must not be taken back. Interim posts have a beginning and an end and therefore leaders, area deans, and senior clergy should invest in this new dynamic that congregations can take responsible decisions; not just churchwardens or ‘the influential few’.

My experience saw people come to the fore and take responsibility with action as well as words. Listening and sharing with others about their frustrations, hopes, and anger saw people being taken seriously and I think gave them further momentum in their own discipleship and ministry. Harnessing this new resource is crucial for the future.

One of the challenges post-interim is that any new parish priest would find it helpful to spend time listening and reading about the journey an interim community has taken; the dangers of reverting to ‘type’ applies to all e.g. some members of congregations want ‘the vicar’ to get them back to normal; senior clergy are ‘relieved’ to have someone in post; this is not an easy meeting of minds!!!

Keith Wassall served as an Interim Minister in the Diocese of Durham

4 Connections
discovering/reconnecting the parish to relationships/networks beyond itself.

Transformation and innovation come not from programs presented by leaders but from the myriad ways ordinary people come together in dialogue… Only when we as a church community stand up for what is right and speak truth will we begin to reverse the decline.

Alan Roxburgh

Once a parish has reviewed its history and developed a sense of its identity and mission, the focus needs to turn to how it understands the context in which it is operating and the connections it has in the community or church networks, or could better cultivate, and most importantly develop a positive sense of what it has to offer others.

We are blessed in the Church of England because our missional shape and relationships still have a geographical focus on the parish or parishes in which our churches have ‘the cure of souls’. While other denominations struggle to re-draw the maps of their relationships, ours are still mapped for us. But this is only one layer of the network of relationships which a parish needs to reflect on.

Locally, what are the elements of the parish: is it rural or urban? Where are the key population centres and emerging housing developments in relation to the church(es)? What about schools, community organisations, local authorities, business centres and other recreational spaces and key parts of the environment? What other denominational or faith communities are there locally? How do we relate to all these? Do we have existing connections with them – is someone in our congregation a local businessperson, school teacher, councillor or farmer, for example.

Secondly, how do we or could we relate with these networks, and what is the best way to connect with them? It might be easy enough to engage with a primary school, but how to reach out to teenagers who might be travelling to a range of local schools? What is the best way to connect with local businesses or people using local recreation spaces or shops? What are the barriers to some of these connecting with us: members of the farming community may be working seven days a week; with new housing developments, church buildings may now find themselves in the wrong place to reach the majority of the population.

Missional map-making…involves creating safe spaces where ordinary people engage in more and more conversations about what is happening in their lives and what God might be up to in their neighbourhoods. The role of leadership is to learn how to nurture these places of conversation and dialogue within and across churches, inviting people to believe again that their own stories contain clues about what God may be up to among them as a local church. XXXV

Link training sheet Power analysis

Link training sheet Transition Teams

One of the most productive congregational exercises for parishes is to sit and physically draw maps and then share these to discuss new opportunities together. Maps may also shed light on the barriers of reaching churches and church facilities and suggest what improvements can be made. This activity may also be paired with the exercise in Asset Mapping (see below Fig XXX).

Looking at Parish Spotlight data (usually available on diocesan websites) will also shed light on some of the issues faced by local communities – are their challenges with worklessness, educational opportunities, housing or social issues which the church can help with?

Engaging in conversations with those outside the church can offer important understanding about perceptions too: how is the church seen and understood? Does people know what it does and when and is information easily available? Does it present an account of itself in the community which is consistent with its core values and identity? What are the key issues and concerns in a community to which the church might contribute?

More widely, what are the relationships and connections a parish has locally within the deanery and with other denominational groups, like Churches Together groups? How does it relate to the diocese – is there a sense of connection, accountability and shared purpose, or does it feel like a ‘them’? Is there a healthy and supportive relationship with the Area Dean, Archdeacon and Bishop, or are they viewed with suspicion or even hostility?
The importance of listening

A number of IMs have commented on the value of a Listening Exercise as a good method of engaging with the parish in any interim post. In low intensity posts, it is a good strategy for building relationships, understanding the context and finding out what works well and less well. What is possible depends on the priorities and time available.

But in situations where there has been conflict, breakdown or bereavement a listening exercise is a critical pastoral response, which can help rebuild relationships following pastoral breakdown, or even when reconciliation is not possible it can still offer a sense of healing and closure.

The listening exercise should include both those in positions of authority in the congregation and those who are apparently marginal, both within and outside the church. If there are individuals who have left the congregation, perhaps as a result of conflict or pastoral breakdown, it is especially important to ensure those voices are heard.

It is important that any listening exercise draws on a consistent set of open questions and that it is conducted anonymously and with an assurance given that comments are non-attributable. This gives people freedom to speak openly and honestly.

Listening exercises can also be useful in exploring mission: one IM parish engaged in prayer walking and talking – going out into the community in pairs just to meet people, engage in discussion, learn about their concerns and to offer to pray for situations they encountered.

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Every parish has hidden treasures which offer blessings to the community, whether in the form of buildings, spiritual resources, people or other ‘assets’. The trouble is that many parishes which need an Interim Minister have a diminished sense of their value and purpose.

However, there can be a real sense of excitement, energy and enthusiasm when parishes start glimpsing opportunities for the future. This work builds on the previous congregational work on history, mission and identity and the connections which have started to be formed in the community and beyond, and so there tends to be a strong thread between the future vision and the past.

An important task in IM is to help the parish rekindle a sense of confidence in itself and the future, to move from an attitude of scarcity to a realistic sense of abundance and possibility.

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Once a coherent and realistic vision for the future has emerged, it is important that this is checked and affirmed with the congregation and the PCC, and grounded in prayer, because this is the new beginning towards which the parish needs to start orientating itself. Intercessions should include prayers for this new vision and direction.

It is important that the Area Dean and senior staff are prepared to support and encourage the parish in this renewed vision. Review and assent can take place at a final congregational meeting, or within the sermon ‘slot’ as part of worship, in which the Area Dean, Archdeacon or Bishop could be invited to participate and bless.

Where IMs are in low intensity posts – without major pastoral breakdown, conflict or other problems to recover from – they might feel the time is right to engage in these discussions early on, which offers an opportunity to test some of these visionary offerings while the IM is still in post to offer support.

IMs in more complex long term posts may have to wait 12 months or more before they are able to reach this point however, when other priority issues have been addressed. Nonetheless ‘quick wins’ in the form of small, easy to achieve improvements can still build confidence and momentum during this time and may help generate warmer engagement with the IM process.

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5 Future vision
drawing the interim work together into a coherent vision for the future.

“Seeing differently is where we have to start...churches can be like carnival goers in a house of mirrors. What they see is a distortion of who they really are. Often the mirrors magnifies their struggles and losses and minimises the work that God is really doing among them.”

An important task in IM is to help the parish rekindle a sense of confidence in itself and the future, to move from an attitude of scarcity to a realistic sense of abundance and possibility.

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However, there can be a real sense of excitement, energy and enthusiasm when parishes start glimpsing opportunities for the future. This work builds on the previous congregational work on history, mission and identity and the connections which have started to be formed in the community and beyond, and so there tends to be a strong thread between the future vision and the past.

The ‘asset mapping’ exercise (see below) is a fun and participatory way of involving all the parish in rediscovering this sense of abundance and of starting to rebuild confidence and energy among parishioners. If all are encouraged to contribute, all will have a sense of having a stake in the future. Part of this exercise should involve encouraging individuals to put their name to follow-up actions which explore these possibilities further. Like other exercises, it may be the route through which new giftings and lay leaders start to emerge so it is important to be alert to this.
Appreciative Inquiry is a transformative tool for this process, enabling parishioners, as Cameron Harder puts it: ‘to see God graciously at work among an imperfect people through a history pockmarked with scars and struggle. In asset-mapping we discover that all aspects of our lives and our context, including our weaknesses, are resources for the spirit to use in building community.’

The method involves focusing on the best in an organisation and on positive change, on the basis that what we focus on becomes our reality: if we dwell on the problems and deficits in our organisation, it may reinforce a sense of helplessness and hopelessness about the future. By focusing on best practices and that which people value, Appreciative Inquiry moves people toward a positive future, while at the same time (almost as a side effect) moving them away from that which detracts from life,’ says Harder.

It does not mean that genuine problems and barriers are ignored: some IM parishes may have acute challenges and entrenched conflicts which need to be faced and resolved. But alongside and beyond these, the positive focus of AI can bring a sense of renewal.

AI was developed by David Cooperider and Suresh Srivastva in the 1980s to enable organisations to grow by focusing on what had worked in the past and using this as a springboard for planning. In churches, the focus is on what God has been doing in the past, and where God might be leading for the future. Our hopeful expectation is that, as in Isaiah 43.19, God is always doing a new thing.

The process focuses on valuing, hoping and committing

- What do we value most – in our church, parish, community or local life?
- What do we hope for, and how would our church/parish be different if that happened?
- What are we prepared to offer and commit to – what skills, time, resources, connections – can we offer to make our hope a reality?

Thus, in the context of an Asset Mapping exercise, or in an exploration of our Christian Identity and Mission, a positive focus not only generates ideas but committed by leadership.

The process of Appreciative Inquiry can be used multiple times in IM: in PCC meetings to stimulate more energetic meetings and sharpen the focus of PCC business; to explore certain areas of mission, such as children, young people and families. It is good to practice on a small scale – such as in a Transition Team – before widespread use to give key leaders an insight into how the process works.

In every circumstance, it is important to get the questions right. As Harder points out: ‘Bad questions can distort a congregation’s self-image, limit its options for action and divert it from exploring the things that matter most. Good questions give them confidence in themselves, open up their future, and get at the heart of their community’s needs.’

Good questions are open ended, arouse the interest of people, elicit stories which spark discussion, enabling people to start formulating their own questions, and start building connections which can be the starting point for action, focused on small but do-able actions that can be achieved successfully, and by doing, generate hope, energy and satisfaction.

Harder also suggests that enabling people to do the work at every stage is a powerful way of equipping people for lay leadership in parishes. The role of the IM is to facilitate not participate in identifying the resources, people and priorities for the future, empowering others to take responsibility for making connections and mobilising people for community action.

Interestingly, Harder suggests: ‘Appreciative Inquiry is a process of repentance. Repentance is a common English translation of the biblical Greek metanoia, which means ‘to change one’s mind’, ‘to think differently’. When we turn our focus away from ourselves and our world’s failures and look for the work of God among us, our lives and those of our congregations and communities, may be transformed.’
Coping with conflict in Interim Ministry

God’s grace opens the future for congregations and communities… When a community or congregation can see the presence of God in its history, the shame and regret lose their hold… God’s presence reveals this is a group God values, people who struggled but were accompanied by the sustaining power of God.” Cameron Harder xi

An understanding of how systems respond to change and transition (link to box XXX) is significant for understanding the landscape in which an IM is working. Gilbert Rendle says: ‘Change increases anxiety. People who feel pushed into change respond with active resistance as they seek to restore an equilibrium that seems threatened. The give and take, the push and pull, is not always gracious. Surprised people tend to behave badly’. This underscores the importance of preparing well for Interim Ministry, ensuring there is buy-in and effective communication about the role and process before appointment.

The process of IM should establish a safe environment for change – this means establishing healthy patterns of behaving and relating to one another, it does not mean that it will be an environment which is without conflict however. As Rendle notes, a healthy congregation recognises and values conflict: an idealised congregation does not. ‘Without healthy conflict, there is no life or energy’, but ‘conflict is not the same thing as a fight’. xii

Change and challenge in parishes can sometimes impose such anxiety and stress that people can lose sight of who they are called to be under God and how they should behave, especially if there is pre-existing conflict. Sometimes this can degenerate into outright bad behaviour. One IM recalled the situation she encountered in one benefice:

At its worst the behaviour had included parishioners shouting at each other across the aisle in services. There were two clear groups in the PCC – pro and anti-change. Those against change had succeeded in making PCC participation uncomfortable for some of the pro-change members; as a result of which the PCC had lost some of those who supported change and the anti-change faction had gained strength. The IM was told early on in the process that pro-change people on PCC were not going back on the PCC because of bullying.

The box (below XX Conflict in Church Communities) provides useful background information on handling conflict in church communities and offers some foundational thinking from Bridge Builders Ministries UK.

Case studies of managing conflict in Interim Ministry

Case study 1

The context was a rural parish with a population of 2,000. A previous self-supporting minister served for 5 years but left as a result of stress and ill health. An 18 month interim appointment was agreed to help a parish address conflict and to prepare for transition to lay leadership.

The IM encountered conflict in the PCC which had been ongoing for about 10-15 years precipitated by proposals to modernise and develop children’s work. There was limited willingness to cooperate with other local churches on ministry support. However, new outreach activities were emerging in the parish including a children’s church club at the local school. There was some strong leadership from members of the PCC and administrative help.

At the root of the conflict lay different visions of Christian identity and what it meant to be ‘church’ – some saw the church as a village institution to be preserved, others as a living, growing body of Christ. The IM worked to find positive options for the future but these were somewhat limited by entrenched PCC positions.

Options for the future were considered, which included closure or remaining open as a chapel of ease, supported by local churches. Key members of the PCC resigned, including the churchwarden and secretary, leaving the parish with limited governance.

After intervention by the chair of the local churches group, a PCC member did step forward as churchwarden. The ministry of an LLM was offered with retired clergy support. The PCC agreed to a reduced worship pattern of two eucharistic services and two non Eucharistic services monthly.

The IM helped the PCC to improve its own leadership by modelling good dialogue and better decision-making processes, and helped the PCC to understand how they could engage appropriately with other churches and those in authority.

At the heart of the conflict were deep issues of faith which could not be addressed in a short timescale. On one side there were a group of growing Christians with a living faith; on the other hand a group of unconverted nominal Christians who were focused on temporal issues.

Ultimately, these issues were unresolved although the process helped the parish find a way of practically moving forward which caused less friction and stress than before. But it wasn’t a new direction in which those in conflict could find a settlement, and the reality was that those who wished to see change ‘grew exhausted and ran away.’

The IM was in this case a ‘facilitator’ rather than manager. There was a need for regular input from a mentor or Spiritual Director who helped them carry the process and its frustrations and process it.

Learnings from the process included the following: ‘As an IM don’t project anxiety onto God or the situation. Retain an understanding of the constancy of God, the still centre at the heart of transition, which keeps the system moving. We can make great motions about this situation, while accepting the unchanging nature of God. Once we have done that we can let go of the temporal concerns, letting go of fear, in order to allow the possibilities that God has for us.’

‘IM is about Christ-centred change, which is what all priestly ministry should be about. IM is not a completely different animal but it is a ministry which is most particularly about enabling change and enabling church to become what God calls it to be.’

Case study 2

The context was a urban parish with a population of 15,000. The IM was running another parish nearby and came to the role with background knowledge about the parish which was helpful.

The last two vicars and two curates had left the IM parish having tried hard to get the community to be more outward-looking, but the stubbornness and resistance of the parish to change eventually took its toll. The last vicer suffered from racism and was clearly hurt. The negativity and racism in a church with a very diverse congregations caused people to leave or dig in, although this pattern was not known at the time of the IM appointment so the ground was very hard to start with.

Having initially tried some of the usually useful tools in the Interim Minister tool box, including a ‘looking back and looking forward’ exercise, it was evident that this was not going to be a quick fix. The IM worked mainly with the PCC at first, as the divisions were greatest there. This led to one of the church wardens leaving, which helped to calm things down.

It became evident that there were two distinct congregations sadly divided by race so lots of teaching on race and some bias training for the PCC also helped.
The black congregation was said to ‘never help with anything’, which was not true as the PCC was half and half, but it was something heard often. The IM took this bias seriously and started to correct these comments as they were made. This was often met with derision but soon people began to be more careful about their language. The pronunciation of names improved and, with teaching, the PCC learned to invite help rather than declare there wasn’t any.

What made the biggest difference were the ‘one-to-one’ conversations and the healing that took place by people being listened to and encouraged in their spirituality. People were encouraged to try new things and step forward using gifts, leading services and reading, and leading prayers. Although the first few stepped out into a very negative environment, with a careful mixture of people representing all of the congregation, it became an environment of encouragement, support and appreciation.

The church also had administration problems: the accounts, PCC minutes and governance processes were not as they should have been. It now has a good treasurer and the PCC is literally run by the book – the IM bought each one of the PCC a copy of the church representation rules! PCC meetings were very difficult at the beginning as nobody wanted to converse freely. By the end there was laughter and confidence and any questions were considered carefully and seriously. Some people were disruptive and defensive. Those people that were hurt or who hurt others, either took up the IM’s offers of help, or left.

Some of the congregation, who had left during the worst of the conflict, returned, and the whole attitude and atmosphere of the place has changed so much that we have a few new people getting involved in the church. The church now has a team of people who lead morning prayer when the IM is at the other church celebrating communion.

The IM parish became more able and willing to co-operate with the other local church. Towards the end, a vision was forming between the two churches - ‘The town and country church’ – and so a decision was taken to form a joint benefice with the IM continuing as Priest in Charge of both. Having the two teams blessed as one by the Bishop at the licensing was an important moment for the IM parish embracing the vision and looking forward.

The support of the Archdeacon and Bishop was key as they were clear that behaviour in the parish had to change and they had a limited time to do so. We focused on transition, on healing the wounds that people made on each other, and the need for spiritual direction and re-learning the basics of Christianity. There are still some group bias but it has calmed and the church is pulling together in ways that would have been impossible two years previously.

Learnings: As an interim minister I found myself at times at odds with the project and had to seek out new ways of helping the people. Bridge Builders Ministries training in conflict was very useful and gave me new insights and ways to help.

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Learnings: As an interim minister I found myself at times at odds with the project and had to seek out new ways of helping the people. Bridge Builders Ministries training in conflict was very useful and gave me new insights and ways to help.
The temptation is always to measure what is measurable, rather than what is important... not measured are the effects on people who have taken part in these projects and on the community of which they are part. Yet this is what is really important! Prove it. xiiii

Not all things are quantifiable and some things are only apparent after a lengthier period of time. Missional growth, for example, might happen several years after the IM has left. Success, indeed, may justifiably be deemed successful when decline is halted rather than when growth is achieved. Finance is, however, like dye in the water, indicating the direction and strength of energy. The establishment of transparent and reliable accounting systems, as with other governance issues, is a good indication of a return to viability. xiiii

What needs to be measured is the progress towards the specific objectives set at the beginning of the IM process. Interim Ministry needs a continual process of shared reviewing and monitoring progress against the original objectives, based on feedback from the congregation and lay leaders and observations from the IM.

This work needs to be shared and discussed with the supervising archdeacon and PCC regularly to consider how effectively the objectives are being met and what is changing as a result. Reviewing may suggest that the IM is going in the right direction or indicate that a change of tack or longer timescale is needed.

To achieve this requires a method for capturing not just the measurable ‘dye in the water’ things, like attendance, finance, etc.; and also more qualitative observations, such as what shifts are seen in leadership or behaviour; what moments of excitement or energy are noted; subtle shifts when things which were impossible at the beginning are suddenly possible.

One commonly used IM process for evaluation is a Mutual Ministry Review, which may be conducted at agreed intervals with the IM, transition team and key people like churchwardens (if they are not part of the former). This reviews progress against the original objectives and captures feedback, comments and suggestions for the way forward. It also enables the IM to hear a wider range of feedback than they may otherwise hear.

If the investment of time and effort in IM is going to be really worthwhile, we have to learn how and what kind of difference it has made in parishes and to people’s lives. But the challenge is how to measure – numerical data is not helpful. But as Elizabeth Jordan has noted:

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SECTION FOUR

Working with Interim Ministry

The Church of England is still in the process of developing its understanding of the vocation, appointment and management of Interim Ministers and of resourcing those called to this ministry. This section explores the vocation, skills and attributes of Interim Ministers and offers some models for support systems and appointment scenarios. It shares some of the testimonies of Interim Ministers and the experiences and perspectives from dioceses and senior staff.

Over a decade ago, one of the Newcastle-Durham pioneers, Hazel Ditchburn shared a vision of growing ‘a pool of trained Interim Ministers emerging from a number of different situations’ both lay and ordained. We are some way off this vision, even five years after formalizing IM appointments. This is because while IM posts have been enabled by legislation we have not yet followed through with resourcing and training to make it a viable option for many people lay or ordained to choose a career in intentional – or dedicated – interim ministry.

The result, as Natasha Woodward notes, is that: ‘There is not yet an economy of interim posts which would give a dedicated interim minister confidence that a suitable post would be available when required, similarly there is no pool of interim ministers available that would give a diocesan leader the confidence that it would be able to appoint such ministers quickly when they are needed.’

IM posts are, by their very nature, insecure, which means that unless salaries reflect the risk, stress and insecurity of these appointments and offer some ongoing security and development, these posts are difficult to fill. Many dioceses have found it hard to recruit and retain IMs.

There have been some well-funded IM posts but many have been associated with external funding which is not sustainable for diocese to retain this knowledge and experience. There has also been a generous offering into IM by near- or post-retirement clergy and by licensed lay ministers who have been willing to offer their time and expertise, but this is not a reliable long-term strategy for resourcing IM or for the more intensive and demanding posts. Other strategies can be found, such as appointing IMs to serve on an area or diocesan basis using existing posts and housing allocations, and this has proved a successful model in some dioceses.

Training and resourcing the next generation of IMs and extending our knowledge base is not only a priority for the future but, as Woodward suggests, becoming an ethical challenge to the church, if the pool of talent is limited to those with independent income and resources to buffer the insecurity of IM appointments: ‘Entering Interim ministry should be a response to calling by God. For the church to – however unintentionally – effectively limit the ability to respond to that calling to the wealthy would be a subversion of gospel values.’

Notes

5 Supplementary advice issued by the Archbishops’ Council in December 2017, Interim Posts made under Regulation 29 (2) of the Ecclesiastical Offices (Terms of Service) regulations 2009, p7.
6 Craig A Satterlee, When God speaks through change (2005) The Alban Institute, p3
10 Gilbert R Randell, The Roller Coaster of Change, adapted by the Interim Ministry Network, USA, from Randell’s Leading Change in the Congregation, 1998 The Alban Institute, p110.
14 Jordan, Tools for Discernment.
15 Cameron Harder, Discovering the Other – asset-based approaches to building community together, (2013) The Alban Institute, p73.
16 Cameron Harder, Discovering the Other – asset-based approaches to building community together, (2013) The Alban Institute, p73.
17 Cameron Harder, Discovering the Other – asset-based approaches to building community together, (2013) The Alban Institute, p73.
18 Cameron Harder, Discovering the Other – asset-based approaches to building community together, (2013) The Alban Institute, p89.
19 Cameron Harder, Discovering the Other – asset-based approaches to building community together, (2013) The Alban Institute, p92.
20 Cameron Harder, Discovering the Other – asset-based approaches to building community together, (2013) The Alban Institute, p80-82.
21 Gilbert R Randell, Leading Change in the Congregation, 1998, The Alban Institute, p161
23 Richard Impey, ‘How to develop your local church – working with the wisdom of the congregation,’ 2010, SPCK, p4-10
37 Free Focus Points developed by The Centre for Congregational Health, North Carolina,https://healthychurch.org/
40 Richard Impey, ‘How to develop your local church – working with the wisdom of the congregation,’ 2010, SPCK, p4-10
42 Interim Ministry Network, USA, from Rendle’s Leading Change in the Congregation, 1998, The Alban Institute, p110.
44 Cameron Harder, Discovering the Other – asset-based approaches to building community together, (2013) The Alban Institute, p73.
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50 Gilbert R Randell, Leading Change in the Congregation, 1998, The Alban Institute, p161
The Vocation of Interim Ministry

Intentional Interim Ministry is a distinct calling to difficult places and tough challenges, to be alongside parishes during times of transition. It is hard to define why some have this vocation but it is perhaps akin to why some people might choose sailing into a stiff wind and unpredictable seas in preference to a nice round of golf! Intentional ministry is dynamic and creative, drawing on a wide range of skills, as well as spiritually and emotionally demanding. To those with a call, it feels like an invitation to an exhilarating walk on the wild side with God.

Paul Svingen

Early explorations of Interim Ministry in the USA discovered that there was a cadre of ministers which interim ministry particularly suited: ‘Such people tended to be problem-solvers with gifts for congregational and community analysis…They are people who think systemically and pose the right questions.’ They also found that those who find the focused, short-term nature of Interim Ministry a good fit for their gifts and temperament – they are naturally missioners not maintainers.

This early work identified six characteristics of Intentional Interim Ministry adapted as follows:

• Intentionally facing conflict or addressing transition
• Problem identification and solving
• Contracted to achieve specific objectives
• Requires a broad interim skill-set
• Adopts a consultancy model
• Has a planned termination and closure.

Because it is often involves working in situations with intense and conflicting human emotions, it also requires particular coping mechanisms: An IM must be able to ‘demonstrate a healthy balance as an emotional, social, psychological, rational and spiritual being. She must function as a wise steward of self in the midst of a whirling mix of human behaviours…’ An intentional interim pastor will bring calmness, thoughtfulness, objectivity, trustworthiness, care and maturity to this context of change,’ says Svingen.

It is important to recognise that nothing in these skills and giftings specifically limits Interim Ministry to the priesthood. It is a model of ministry which fulfils traditional models of priesthood – IMs need to be compassionate servants or diakonoi with God. That is what makes IMs tick and thrive. The challenge to the Church of England is to recognise, understand and affirm their gifts and this distinct vocation.

Intermediate Ministers have a distinct sense of vocation which is an important attractor. They are not simply called to cover vacancies or implement top-down change on behalf of a diocese. When reduced to ‘simply plugging a gap’, Elizabeth Jordan noted that she felt ‘more like a hireling than a true shepherd.’ IMs are drawn to the more uncomfortable places, which seem challenging, insecure and troubled, to regather and tend the flock and seek out new pasture. Drawing on a wide variety of metaphors which have been applied: they are called to be ‘midwives of change’, healers of past hurts, ‘nourishers of possibility’, story-gatherers and story-shapers, sentinels of hope and new life-giving in God. That is what makes IMs tick and thrive. The challenge to the Church of England is to recognise, understand and affirm their gifts and this distinct vocation.

Required Skills and Attributes for Interim Ministry

Interim ministers need the following skills and attributes, though the degree to which they are essential or desirable will depend on the context in which they will be working.

To consider:

• Will it be sufficient to have an understanding of the purpose and processes of IM, and if so will training be provided?

Experience

• Ordained leadership in the Church of England to include e.g. 5 years parochial experience post-training in a variety of contexts.
• Experience of church development and transition in an IM or similar context.
• Listening and supporting healing and pastoral care.
• Management of change.
• Organisational development.
• Facilitation of groups and meetings.
• Monitoring and evaluation of objectives.
• Team building.
• Fluent verbal and written communication.

Personal Attributes

• Spiritually mature and grounded in God.
• Clear about their own identity and vocation to facilitate mission and transformation.
• Collaborative and able to work effectively both alone and with others.
• Able to establish positive and affirming relationships and join congregational systems quickly.
• Able to diagnose a situation and develop appropriate responses.
• Able to provide honest and accurate feedback.
• Able to support healthy behaviour in church communities and challenge behaviour which undermines relationships and the process of transition.
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Support Systems for Interim Roles

Interim Ministry requires effective systems of support to enable the IM to work with confidence in the process they are leading, with affirmation, support and accountability to both those who have appointed them and to the church community which they are leading.

Appointment processes
It is important to be clear at the outset of the role what the contractual nature of the role is: What are the terms and conditions, working hours, benefits and holidays, housing, travel and other expenses and professional development will be provided. Broad objectives for the role should be agreed at an early stage even if, as is normal, these are adjusted once the IM gains a clearer understanding of the priorities once they are in post. If the role is working across a number of parishes, where will the appointee worship and find spiritual nourishment for themselves and their family? It is important that IMs feel spiritually grounded somewhere where their work is prayed for and supported by other colleagues.

Supervision
The most effective source of supervision is the archdeacon. They are usually the ones who have recruited and appointed the IM, they have drafted the terms of the appointment and its objectives, and will have a clear understanding of both what the diocese hopes to achieve, and what the issues are on the ground. Regular supervision meetings with an IM will also keep them in touch with progress with more detail and insight than they would otherwise receive. They also have the necessaryiscopal authority to go into a parish and either reinforce or affirm the process which the IM is leading, if required to do so. Supervision has been offered from other places, such as area/archdeaconry IM roles, but this may be what works best in some circumstances.

Coaching and Mentoring
Interim Ministry is demanding and stressful, especially in the most intensive posts. It can also be quite a lonely and uncomfortable experience, since the IM is carrying both a detailed understanding of the situation on the ground and of the expectations and thinking of diocesan senior staff. This is not information which can sometimes be readily shared or discussed as part of collegial networks within deanery or diocese, and nor sometimes can the experience of leading IM be fully shared with senior staff. This makes it necessary to find a safe space to share and discuss how their post is proceeding openly and without concern. Some dioceses make provision for one to one coaching or mentoring. It is important that the coach or mentor has experience or understanding of IM situations and can enable the IM to reflect and learn from their experience and plan positive next steps. In general a coach will be more performance driven and help the IM to be more effective in their role. A mentor will focus more on individual development and growth.

Peer networks
Learning and sharing experience of IM with others is an important source of learning, mutual support and professional development. Elizabeth Jordan’s research into the Practice of Interim Ministry found that one of the most impressive models of this was the Church of Scotland which enabled its Interim and transition ministers to meet and work as a team, supporting one another and learning together. Different team members developed reporting structures on tools and approaches to IM and they mentored and learned together reflectively.

The Interim Ministry Network (https://imnet.org/) in the USA describes itself as ‘a learning community of transitional ministry practitioners’ and runs ongoing programmes of training, seminars, networking, accreditation and support for its 1,200 members including an annual 3-day conference. There is an emerging network in the Church of England which is seeking to provide resources and training for IMs.

Further details
https://www.chelmsford.anglican.org/ordained-ministry/interim-ministry

Training
Specialist Interim Ministry training may be available in the future via UK networking sources above. Some IM webinars and training from the Interim Ministry Network (https://imnet.org/) are available at times accessible to UK participants.

Core training in Conflict and Family systems are provided by Bridge Builders Ministries (https://www.bridgebuilders.org.uk/).

Training in facilitating participatory group meetings can be found at ICA UK (https://www.ica-uk.org.uk/) and TalkAction (https://www.talkaction.org/training-courses/facilitation-training/).

Training and coaching/mentoring is available from 3D Coaching (https://www.3dcoaching.com/for-churches/)

Emerging Models of Interim Ministry

Several models of Interim Ministry have evolved over the past 40 years and it is clear there is a mixed pattern of use emerging in the Church of England. These models have been identified by Norman Bendroth and others:

Classic Interim Ministry

The traditional model of IM where an Interim Priest is appointed for periods of between 6 months to 3 years at a time, to lead a parish through a process using the five tasks or focus points.

Interim Supply

A basic holding operation, leading worship, preaching and providing pastoral care with no work on transition, usually on a part-time or house for duty basis. This may be appropriate as part of a wider pastoral reorganisation when the future of a parish is uncertain or more time is needed to work out ministry and resourcing strategies. This low intensity and possibly limited duration work may be best suited to those who are looking for a less demanding and shorter IM involvement. There are examples of this model emerging in the Church of England.

Sustaining/Bridging Interim

A full-time short-duration, low intensity appointment which is focused on maintaining continuity while exploring some aspects of transition in a focused and strategic way. This model has been used successfully in some dioceses using an area/archdeaconry IM role to resource appointments in multiple locations, enabling low level transition and improving governance, finance, safeguarding and stewardship in several different parishes.

Interim Consultancy/Associates

An IM may be brought into a parish, sometimes to work alongside an incumbent as an associate priest, to support and advise on a process of transition. This has been appropriate in places where an incumbent may be incapacitated or may lack skills for this transition process. There have been a number of examples of this working well in dioceses but it requires great clarity and sensitivity in making appointments and in managing the relationship with the incumbent.

Two-tiered Interim Ministry

This is a ‘double act’ in which an Interim Priest leads worship, provides pastoral care, preaching and teaching, and supports ministry and leadership, while an Interim Consultant leads the congregation through the process of reflection on history and identity, and discerning the vision and mission for the future.

Something close to this model has been successfully used in the Church of England using a retired priest and their non-retired spouse. In another example, an Assistant Curate provided liturgical and pastoral support, while the Training Incumbent led the strategic process.

Another version reversed these responsibilities with a Licensed Lay Ministry team providing strategic development and pastoral care, teaching, preaching and missional outreach while associate clergy from a neighbouring team provided the liturgical support.

Intensive Interim/Transitional Ministry

The Church of Scotland describes its longer term, high intensity posts of 3 or more years as Transitional Minister posts because they are focused on achieving transformation – Bendroth described them as ‘Repositioning’ roles because they are leading a congregation towards ‘revitalisation and renewal’ over a longer period.
A short-term version of this role – a ‘Crossroads pastor’ – is described in Bendroth as one who works with a congregation in survival mode (i.e. as a crossroads) to establish whether it is viable or should close, after which they may stay on and complete the transitional work.

There have been examples of this working well in the church of England and some interesting models of pairing this with church planning and grafting – see Personal Perspectives on Interim Ministry (below). Other models of transitional ministry have included a Turnaround Area Dean who coordinated a number of interim posts across a deanery as part of a wider deanery strategy of pastoral reorganisation and transition – this was akin to the Two-Tiered model.

Is it ever acceptable for the IM to become the settled priest?

The traditional norm is that the Interim Priest is never the candidate for the long-term appointment. There are some important principles behind this, to maintain a level playing field for appointments, and to ensure that appointees can be free and unbiased in discerning the will of God for their next appointment.

However, it is important to be pragmatic, and there have been reasonable exceptions to the rule in the Church of England where the appointment of the IM to the settled role appeared a sound strategy to allow a longer period of stability, where there were limited candidates for the permanent role, or where the IM role was conducted alongside other local posts which embraced the interim parish at the conclusion of the appointment.

The key to such decision is transparency, good communication and following proper procedures. Where it emerges as a possible scenario during the IM appointment it is important that the parish and candidate are given an opportunity to reflect and consider whether this is the right way forward. In an ideal scenario, there should be a proper appointment procedure with a Statement of Needs, role description and person specification and the candidate should be interviewed and selected in the traditional fashion. Further guidance is provided on this in the Church of England’s Supplementary Advice on Interim Posts.

Should the IM become the permanent appointee, there needs to be a clear and point between the Interim Ministry and a new period of settled ministry, with a break which allows the IM to stop, reflect and refresh, with a liturgy to mark the end of IM ministry; followed by the traditional licensing service to mark the inauguration of a new settled ministry in the parish.

Where this is a possible scenario from the outset it is important that both parish and candidate are made aware of this option before the appointment, and give both an opportunity to reflect on whether it is a good match prior to a permanent appointment. Bendroth described this as ‘Candidate’ Interim Ministry.

The role required

Listening: this was the congregation’s Church and fellowship not mine. I was there to serve. Patience: none of us move at the same pace, and with openness and time trust grew. Visiting: crucial in listening

IM requires discernment, particularly recognising people who were on the edge of decision making structures, yet saw the opportunities for this new ministry. Similarly to understand those who doubted the worth of IM but tended to be more vocal.

A self-limiting characteristic which was hard but helpful was that I did not chair PCC meetings; I didn’t vote; I reported under an agenda item and would comment or offer clarity on other items if asked.

It was very difficult to begin but the crucial way forward was the training, the mentor and following the model. I sent a regular report to the Archdeacon and he invited me to meet and share both positives and negatives.

Personal Perspective on Interim Ministry

Rvd Canon Keith Wassall
Retired Interim Priest

ministry in the Diocese of Bermuda, a remote island in the Atlantic ocean with the nearest land contact being the United States and Canada. It was this proximity that first alerted me to the possibility of an alternate form of ministry. When I returned home we relocated to Durham and the Archdeacon of Sunderland Stuart Bain who invited me to consider the role of an Interim priest in a group of parishes facing a very difficult situation.

Interim ministry was a new initiative in the diocese and as such a period of training was offered to all who wished to take up this new opportunity, led by Canon Hazel Ditchburn (Durham) and Canon Richard Bryant (Newcastle). The model of IM gave people structure in a time when we were all unsure. Part of that model was a beginning and end of IM Ministry and adhering to timing was helpful.

Both my IM’s were around 2.5 years. Each group of parishes had an Interim working group of 10 people consisting of some PCC and or Churchwardens and some non PCC.

IM’s need to understanding that if the Church fellowship is to move forwards, they must be willing to grasp the changes that emerge and that the whole congregation must own the decision making. This is very different from anything I exercised in the past where often I led and people followed. Empowering people to think, to share opinions, past failures as a church, even anger, hurts and disappointments was about freeing the people to take ownership.

Rvd Louise Vincer
Interim Priest
Dioceses of Lincoln and Canterbury

For several years I was fortunate enough to exercise a priestly ministry in the Diocese of Bermuda, a remote island in the Atlantic ocean with the nearest land contact being the United States and Canada. It was this proximity that first alerted me to the possibility of an alternate form of ministry. When I returned home we relocated to Durham and the Archdeacon of Sunderland Stuart Bain who invited me to consider the role of an Interim priest in a group of parishes facing a very difficult situation.

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It was very difficult to begin but the crucial way forward was the training, the mentor and following the model. I sent a regular report to the Archdeacon and he invited me to meet and share both positives and negatives.
In my experience IMs have abilities in:

- reflecting theologically;
- acting strategically;
- building trust working relationships whilst not getting hooked into past patterns of behaving;
- nurturing functioning teams;
- grabbing opportunities and leaving well; recognising openly what can’t be achieved, but still needs to be addressed.
- bridging between diocesan structure and congregations in telling the diocesan/congregational story and celebrating signs of God’s transformation.

Necessary experience includes:

- mature, unpartisan understanding of parish ministry
- leading change with groups
- discerning congregational vocation and unique gifts
- Training and support needs include:
- Personal supervision
- Specific training eg coaching conversations and family systems
- Terms of reference agreed with parish, diocese and IM before appointment
- Accountability and regular reporting to appropriate senior staff

Romans 8:12-25 has been one helpful passage this year in my IM. We hope for what we do not see. If it is true then being hopeful is hugely courageous because it means we are open to things that we cannot imagine. And hope is a gift the church holds out to the world – it means we are open to things that we cannot imagine.

The idea was that I would spend 12 months in each of 3 churches and also be involved in introducing the concept to the diocese. For this purpose the North American experience was invaluable. For part of it I stayed with Rev Jennifer McKenzie who I had got to know in 2008 and then she was appointed as an archdeacon in our diocese. Her experience of IM and the input of Revd Steve Pierce and a group of other interims in the diocese was invaluable.

I had felt a call to this ministry. I had served 2 long incumbencies in the diocese and aged 64 was not keen to take on another but was not yet ready for retirement. In this context my calling to IM was refreshing for me. Having had a long and fulfilling ministry in two incumbencies I wanted to use my skills and experience for the specifically missional purpose of ministry in two incumbencies. I wanted to use my skills and experience for the specifically missional purpose of ministry in two incumbencies.

To be an IM you need flexibility, being thin skinned but caring. Only change things when change is essential. Take the PCC and the leaders with you. Sometimes a stealthy approach is best. Be ready and able to let go at the end of your interim period. In terms of the requirements for the role, it would have to involve facing challenging situations in ministry and found a way through them. It would be essential to have had at least 5 years in a leadership role in ministry.

There was a mixed response to me in my IM posts - “why are you here?” “have we done something wrong”. One team rector just wanted to appoint a team vicar “in his own image” before he retired but I was brought in to work alongside him instead. In other churches, negativity was a block to change. However one church I served in were pleased that I pointed them to a future in a team of churches. Their previous long term vicar had held them back from joining a new team and got the PCC to vote against women’s ministry being exercised in the parish. I was able to help them get a new perspective and to update their worship and they are now part of a thriving team.

An IM post must be an evolving one as the congregation are encouraged to look forward to a viable future so the licence for the IM needs to be flexible.

In terms of training, support and supervision it is important to read and learn from the experience of practitioners, particularly in the fields of family systems theory, appreciative enquiry and conflict resolution. In my posts the archdeacons were in charge of my supervision and job description. I found my spiritual director helpful too in a less formal way.

Rev. Penny Cuthbert
Transition Minister
Diocese of Oxford

I was appointed Transition Minister in June 2016, with a brief to bring change: to nurture, disciple and grow the congregation, and to help them engage more confidently with the surrounding community. The post was for three years, with a possible extension to four.

The parish had been in decline, with an ageing and ‘stuck’ congregation, a building in need of repairs, and financial difficulties. Prior to ordination, I had worshipped in a large local town centre church. So I began to talk about the possibilities of a graft team from this church joining the IM parish. The PCC and our bishop all agreed. A team of 8 adults and 7 children joined the IM parish, commissioned by the Bishop we were led on foot by him across the river to a welcome service at the IM parish.

The IM congregation and the newcomers worked extremely hard at building relationships. The two church traditions were different but both groups showed real humility and a determination to worship together and see where God led. A part-time Children and Families Outreach Worker was appointed, regular outreach events were held, and a Cafe Church launched on Sunday afternoons. Over the next 18 months numbers on Sundays grew from approx. 35 adults and 4 children to around 55 adults and 20 children, with over 30 children on the register. The congregation, and the atmosphere in the building on Sundays, have been transformed. The IM parish is becoming known as a lively church that cares for its community.

It was key that the IM congregation were involved in the decision to invite the grafting team, and that the team who came all sensed a clear call from God, and came in humility and with a desire to serve. There was no sense of takeover. They also brought their ties. It hasn’t been easy holding the two traditions together, and the graft team have struggled with liturgy and a more sacramental theology. The illness and death of my husband in 2019 was a huge challenge for all of us, and the pace of change has slowed. But with the parish having clearly turned the corner, I was licenced in as Associate Vicar.

Since ordination I have served in several different ministries: curate, vicar, area dean, and training adviser. Interim ministry wasn’t on my radar until I was asked by my area bishop to serve for a two-year period at a church in which had a troubled past.

Rev. Alex Summers
Interim Minister
Diocese of Chelmsford

Personally, there were several things that were immediately appealing – a short-term appointment with a clear structure and a clear set of IM objectives and a consultancy role which enabled me to be both embedded as parish priest but also have an overview of a particular situation with a clear set of objectives in mind.

Interim ministry is a ministry in the in-between: in-between appointments, and in-between the past and potential future. Ministering in-between is both a challenge and inspiration – to be caught in-between, but not be stuck there – using that ‘space’ as a creative place to explore past, present, and future, and do so alongside those who are also on this journey and have a desire to travel safely.

In a sense all ministry is (or at least should be) interim and transitional, but many structures in the Church of England are still modelled on a permanence which may be unhelpful in some cases. Interim ministry is intentionally a ministry of the in-between, seeking to explore and understand past, discern a possible future direction, and celebrate the present.

We are fortunate in the Diocese of Chelmsford to have IM leadership and a structure of training and support. There are also national guidelines which are incredibly helpful and can be usefully adjusted to suit local needs and situations.
I like doing new things, and I enjoy the challenge of dealing with problems. As a priest in the Church of England the fact that I really enjoy learning about new contexts has felt like a guilty secret because it means I quite like moving on, when we have a long and important tradition of valuing stability in ministry. So when I heard of the US tradition of Interim Ministry it scratched a personal itch. But it also addressed a problem in church life that I had been puzzling over: when an appointment of a minister to a parish doesn’t work out well. I wondered if IM might be a way of addressing difficult situations that make appointments challenging, in the long run saving pain and expense for everyone concerned. After researching the topic in the context of MA study alongside being a vicar, I took the plunge and approached my bishop. Just 1 month into my new appointment as an interim minister I am discovering what it means for the parish to know that I have a mandate to address specific areas in a short space of time. Reminding myself of this has been important and worth talking about new contexts has felt like a guilty secret.

In my view, interim ministry still has a very low profile in the Church of England, because we see a swirling nascent church of New Testament times. Into this I would like to contribute a reflection from my own experience of three years as Senior Interim Minister in Gloucester Diocese. During this time I have worked in an ‘inner city’ parish, a rural 9-church Benefice, across two rural Benefices including a new housing development, and a couple of small town parishes linked with adjoining rural parishes. The shortest period of engagement was three months, the longest nearly a year. Incidentally but not insignificantly all but the first location are on the boundaries of the diocese. For the three years I have been living in Gloucester and travelling out from home. It has helped to have some measure of physical distance to underline that the IM is not the parish priest. The IM and the Sling represent two different modes of operating as an Interim Minister, and they are entirely context- and mission-dependent. The Sling mode has nothing to do with David and Goliath and everything to do with holding secure a broken arm or sprained wrist to allow reconciliation of broken bones and healing to happen. When operating in Sling mode, the following points are significant:

- Fundamentally there needs to be change in the processes and systems of the Benefice, although there may be some flexibility and openness about the precise nature of this change. It is not helpful for there to be the perception that the IM is there to force a pre-conceived plan from the diocese. This perception will almost certainly be the default understanding at least among some of the local leadership.
- The IM brings ministerial competence and looks to invest in a confident and spiritually mature local leadership. This new leadership may have some overlap but is unlikely to be identical with the previous leadership.
- The IM works at changing the conversation from maintenance to mission thinking, and developing a vision for growth and not a strategy for survival.
- The IM accepts that there will inevitably be tensions in the relationship with some as well as acceptance and warmth from others.
- The temptation for the IM is to become too confrontational and to feel isolated and unsupported.

Of course these are not absolute distinctions and in practice the boundaries between these modes become blurred. But in my experience it is essential that there is clear understanding of which mode is dominant, and this has to be agreed with the senior leadership of the diocese, the Area Dean and the Benefice.

I was licensed as interim priest-in-charge (now interim vicar) of two parishes (now one) in Leeds diocese in November 2017, having completed my curacy earlier that summer. I started training for ordained ministry in 2011, following a career as a solicitor. During my curacy, I carried out a placement in a rural multi-parish benefice which was struggling with numerous issues. As I observed and reflected on the context, I found myself automatically diagnosing the situation and thinking about how I might set about tackling the most pressing of the problems. At that stage, I had no idea that interim ministry existed! It was later, in discussion with the Archdeacon about possible future posts after curacy that he invited me to consider the vacancy for an interim minister – the post I’m now in. In this role, I have five clear objectives set out in the role description. I’ve met quarterly with the Archdeacon to discuss and monitor progress against each objective. These supervisory meetings have been essential to maintaining focus and monitoring progress. They also provided a forum for discussing problems and exploring possible solutions, as well as a welcome element of pastoral support. Having a strong, positive relationship with a skilled and supportive Archdeacon who is fully aware of the challenges of the role has been crucial.

In my view, interim ministry still has a very low profile and is not yet well understood in the wider church. And yet it is a potentially powerful and valuable tool for the church to have at its disposal, and can be transformative. I have not received any specific training, and have drawn instead on my past experience and existing skills. My hope and prayer is that we will see a greater awareness of interim ministry developing (starting with the training institutions and embracing parishes, clergy colleagues and senior church leaders) that will lead to its better resourcing.

Revd Canon Dr Tudor Griffiths
Retired Interim Minister
Diocese of Gloucester

Interim Ministry is at a very creative and interesting point in the Church of England, because we see a number of different currents coming together. The resulting pattern is not yet fully resolved and certainly not neat. All of which is absolutely fine. If we were bold enough, we could say that it is even a little reminiscent of the swirling nascent church of New Testament times.

The Mirror mode can remind us of James 1:21-25, and it is definitely the more challenging mode of operating.

- Fundamentally there needs to be change in the processes and systems of the Benefice, although there may be some flexibility and openness about the precise nature of this change. It is not helpful for there to be the perception that the IM is there to force a pre-conceived plan from the diocese. This perception will almost certainly be the default understanding at least among some of the local leadership.
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**Personal Perspective on Interim Ministry**

Interim Ministry in the Diocese of Chelmsford

Interim Ministry offers ‘transformational change’ in parishes.

In 2015 Chelmsford secured support from the Strategic Development Fund for the Turnaround Project. This aimed to support parishes where there had been leadership issues and pastoral breakdown, a failure in governance, lack of resources, building issues, and ‘a sense of tiredness’. One of the five turnaround intervention strategies proposed was Interim Ministry (IM), which was sanctioned by changes in the Clergy Terms of Service in the Church of England in July 2015. The Turnaround project enabled a programme of testing and trialling Interim Ministry and other transitional appointments. An end-of-project review in 2018 considered IM to be ‘the biggest success, offering transformational change in a significant number of parishes.’

The initial proposal aimed to fund three full-time roles for five years. Potential parishes were identified by Archdeacons, Area Deans and Mission and Ministry Advisors from a list of around 38 parishes which had been identified as being most in need of intervention. Eight were initially identified for IM. However, as the scope of the work increased, so too did the range of opportunities for IM.

Between 2015 and 2018 different forms of Interim and ‘transitional’ ministry were tested by around 16 appointees (some used multiple times) in 46 different settings, from single parishes to multi-parish benefices, to teams, ministry units and also testing a deanery-wide approach:

- A half-time IM was deployed to support two additional parishes in a neighbouring benefice for 18 months.
- An incumbent in a half-time post took an additional half-time IM appointment in a neighbouring parish.
- An SSM became an IM Consultant working alongside an incumbent in a half-time post to take an additional IM.
- A half-time IM was deployed to support two teams, ministry units and also testing a deanery-wide approach:
  - A common appointment framework for IMs across the diocese;
  - Effective consultation and communication with PCCs about the rationale for IM;
  - Clear objectives, support systems and supervision for the IM.
  - Supervision by Archdeacons, embedding senior staff in ongoing IM review and evaluation.
  - Evaluation of IM using a log frame to record progress, outcomes and impacts.

The Diocesan Director of Lay Ministry, Revd Dr Elizabeth Jordan, led an evaluation process with lay leaders of churches which had experienced IM between 2015 and 2017. Her report noted that: ‘the provision of interim ministry has clearly made a substantial difference to the lives of churches which have benefitted from the process’.

But it also noted that there was ‘no clear process’ for appointments; ‘considerable difference in understanding and practice of IM’ across the diocese, ‘the great variety of expressions’ and ‘different patterns of accountability and supervision’, all of which had made it more difficult to establish a coherent and consistent approach and good practice. Many IMs had no formal training and ‘were using skills, tools and materials they had acquired in life before ordination’. Her report recommended a collegiate approach, focused on sharing skills and experience within the diocesan IM group. The evaluation observed that even where there were shortfalls in the appointments process and the parish was not well prepared for an IM appointment, a good process could make up for this. Conversely, a poor handover at the conclusion of an IM appointment can undermine a good process and leave parishes with a sense of frustration and lost opportunity.

The evaluation highlighted the value of engaging with the parish ‘network of relationships’ – the archdeacon, bishop, deanery (particularly area deans and lay chairs), mission unit and diocese – as part of a systematic approach to interim ministry. The evaluation noted IM was challenging conventions, such as the idea that nothing changed during vacancy and that there should be no handover between clergy leaving and joining the parish. It recommended that IMs prepare a handover file, contribute to the job description and parish profile, and meet the new post-holder.

This process of experimentation and the evaluation led to a more consistent process of appointment and reporting across the diocese after 2018, resulting in greater clarity and decision making, improved engagement and buy-in from parishes; IMs were better understood and supported, leading to better outcomes.

**Best practice in the diocese now includes:**

- Overlap/handover between the IM and incoming incumbent.
- A diocesan IM networking group offering mutual support and learning.

A review of the impact of IM across the project in 2019 indicated quantitative changes in parishes were not always a reliable barometer of change: a decline in both attendance and share performance was commonly visible in parishes requiring IM and transitional ministry. Where there were positive changes – a flurry of new attendance or giving – these were not always sustainable. In many cases the pattern of decline was not reversed in the lifetime of these short appointments, but that did not mean that positive progress had not been made.

Qualitative changes indicating renewed confidence, energy and engagement were often visible and appeared to be a foundation for future turnaround.

The following twelve positive outcomes from Interim Ministry were commonly identified from evaluation and handover reports:

1. Interim Ministers listen and engage neutrally with the issues of the parish.
2. IM encourages transparency and better communication.
3. IM builds engagement/re-engagement by parishioners.
4. IM generates a sense of confidence and energy.
5. IM promotes the development of a shared vision for the future.
6. IM encourages better governance.
7. IM encourages a more positive approach to financial stewardship.
8. IM generates a sense of progress and ownership of church fabric.
9. IM offers an opportunity to experiment and try out new patterns and forms of worship.
10. IM offers fresh engagement with core spiritual disciplines such as bible study and prayer.
11. IM encourages a parish to identify mission priorities, new opportunities and partnerships.
12. IM helps parishes to prepare for the future.

Through this project we have learned how best to appoint and deploy Interim Ministers, and to support them so that they remain stable and non-anxious leaders of transformation; we have helped them to understand and lead effective IM processes, and we have started to develop a body of expertise and materials which can be used to train and develop others.

We are now mainstreaming IM into our leadership training, ministry practice and appointments process. We have built better awareness of IM within the diocese and nationally through our networking activities – and there is a growing understanding and consistency in this work across the diocese. It is clear that there is a growing interest in using Interim Ministry but, in common with the rest of the country, we do not have enough trained and equipped managers. There is more scope to train Pioneers and Licensed Lay Ministers with relevant background skills, and enable skilled lay leaders to use some of these tools in vacancy, so that the process of transformation need not wait for ‘an expert’ to turn up, but can be led from the grassroots with support.

The Turnaround Project has also offered a great opportunity for partnership and learning with other dioceses. Chelmsford has used SDF resources to stimulate national learning and networking: it hosted the first national conference on IM in February 2017, and has developed a network and initiated regional IM gatherings and training. We hope this foundation will offer a springboard for the further development of Interim Ministry nationally.

**Interim Ministry in the Diocese of Gloucester**

Interim Ministry should be considered in the wider context of our diocesan culture. This was established in 2017 as LIFE from John 10:10 – Life in all its fullness. The ‘L’ of Life refers to Leadership, and Interim Ministry relates to two of the sub-themes:

- Piloting liberating models of leadership and ministry
- Developing learning networks for lay and ordained leaders.

The roots of Interim Ministry were found in the use of retired clergy with PTO being given a holding ministry in certain parishes during vacancies. In 2017 Canon Dr Tudor Griffiths was appointed as the Senior Interim Minister, which is a full-time post based in Gloucester. This appointment was made with a specific placement in mind in West Cheltenham. Prior to his appointment as SIDM Tudor had been Area Dean in Cheltenham and Acting Rector in West Cheltenham for a few months.

Since completion of this placement he has worked in a number of other Benefices in the diocese for periods ranging from 3 months to a year. Additionally he has worked in a more of a consultancy role in other Benefices. It is significant that this role has developed and continues to develop in consultation with senior staff in the diocese.

We have now identified the diocese and consider that there is a compelling rationale for the future of Interim Ministry in the diocese.

**The Vocation of Interim Ministry**

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There are a number of key words in thinking about Interim Ministry in Gloucester Diocese

Pragmatic it was set up as a pragmatic response to a real need in Cheltenham and a willingness to see where it developed from there.

Learning a crucial part of the role is learning, reflecting and recording. Regular feedback is given to the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Group. It has become clear that Interim Ministry operates in different modes. For instance, there is the ‘Sling mode’ – holding a Beneﬁce through a difﬁcult time. This is about healing and reconciliation. Or there is the ‘Mirror mode’ where the IM role is to hold up a mirror to the Beneﬁce and enable people to reﬂect on where God is shaping them and where they have to change. We have found that it is important that if these modes are to operate successfully, then the relationship between the IM and the Beneﬁce needs to have a ‘distance’ that is neither desirable nor possible for a static ministry. It is helpful in our context that the SIM lives in Gloucester and has to commute to the Beneﬁce. There is thus both ‘belonging’ and ‘not belonging’. Communication it is essential for there to be good communication between the SIM and the senior diocesan staff, especially the relevant Archdeacon.

Rooted the SIM is rooted spiritually in a praying community; in the current case at the Cathedral. In terms of being rooted in a ministry community the SIM is a member of the Department of Mission and Ministry and meets regularly with the Director of Mission and Ministry.

Facilitating the idea is to share the Learning with others, especially early retired clerics with PTO who are engaged in more traditional Interim ministry. This has been disrupted in 2020 along with so much else.

Networking the SIM has the diocesan brief to network with others in different dioceses, recognising that the learning takes place elsewhere. It will be very apparent that we are in the early stages of developing Interim Ministry in Gloucester Diocese and at this point we are reliant for this ministry on one priest who is nearing retirement. Currently the Archdeacons are formulating a job description for a Developing Interim Ministry in Gloucester Diocese and it has become clear that Interim Ministry operates in different modes. For instance, there is the ‘Sling mode’ – holding a Beneﬁce through a difﬁcult time. This is about healing and reconciliation. Or there is the ‘Mirror mode’ where the IM role is to hold up a mirror to the Beneﬁce and enable people to reﬂect on where God is shaping them and where they have to change. We have found that it is important that if these modes are to operate successfully, then the relationship between the IM and the Beneﬁce needs to have a ‘distance’ that is neither desirable nor possible for a static ministry. It is helpful in our context that the SIM lives in Gloucester and has to commute to the Beneﬁce. There is thus both ‘belonging’ and ‘not belonging’. Communication it is essential for there to be good communication between the SIM and the senior diocesan staff, especially the relevant Archdeacon.

Interim Ministry in the Diocese of Gloucester

The Diocese of Gloucester is an early and enthusiastic supporter of Interim Ministry in the Church of England. In October 2015 the diocese explored the possibility of introducing Interim Ministry to support chaplaincies facing particular circumstances common to other interim appointments: after a long incumbency or interregnum; when a chaplaincy has been facing serious difﬁculties, conﬂict or underperformance; and/or when a congregation has decided that a change of direction has been identiﬁed. Bishop’s Council allocated funds for recruitment and training for IMs, and agreed that their strategy would be to appoint IMs where:

- there was a clear understanding and articulation of the reasons and particular beneﬁts that will be conferred by making the appointment interim rather than permanent;
- and that a chaplaincy would be consulted at an early stage to secure its understanding and acceptance of the purpose of the interim appointment and to help it be properly prepared.

In 2017 the diocese launched its recruitment and training programme for IMs. They speciﬁcally sought experienced priests who were looking for a challenge to encourage and equip churches in transition who would beneﬁt from experienced leadership, for short-term appointments lasting about 1-2 years and they may be part or full-time.

The diocese worked in partnership with the Transitional (Interim) Ministry Network of The Episcopal Church (TEC) – which has more than 30 years in providing training and professional development in IM in the USA. It offered training in Fundamentals of Interim Ministry for 10 participants in 2017 in Woking, 8 of which had expressed an interest in accepting IM posts in the Diocese.

But, like many dioceses, it has found recruiting IMs to posts the most challenging aspect of the project. ‘We remain very excited about IM, and our senior staff team have huge interest in recruiting them. We trained a really high calibre group of people, and it was an excellent training course, but we are still ﬁnding it difﬁcult to appoint. Our bishops and archdeacons are actively looking for IMs, but there simply do not seem to be enough around, although we refuse to be discouraged,’ reports the Revd Canon Ulla Monberg, Diocesan Director of Ministerial Development.

A key strategy for the future, Revd Canon Monberg notes, is to look at recruitment for IMs, including active retired clergy or those nearing retirement who would be willing to take on IM posts. Supervision and gathering of the European IMs so that they do not feel isolated is another important aspect of IM in the Diocese of Europe.

The Genesis of Interim Ministry in the Diocese of Liverpool

The Diocese of Liverpool is one among those pioneering interim ministry and it is already proving advantageous as the church faces increasing challenges of low numbers in attendance, funding, and available clergy.

In 2014, the Rev’d Chris Jones was coming towards the end of a 16-year incumbency in Ormskirk, a market town in the north of the Diocese of Liverpool. He was not ready to retire but could not see himself taking on another incumbency before retirement, so he started exploring with senior colleagues the possibility of a shorter ministry helping a church experiencing problems. A sabbatical followed in the USA where Chris visited the Diocese of Virginia – one of Liverpool’s link dioceses – and other places, investigating the well-tried US model of Interim Ministry. This model used the ‘five tasks’ approach to IM: exploring heritage and history, lay leadership development, connections with the diocese and community, mission and identity, and future vision. He reported back to Liverpool on the how the model could be adapted.

Liverpool’s Director of Learning and Stewardship, Steve Pierce, gathered a small ‘task group’ who were undertaking short-term posts in the Diocese and they considered how the model had the potential to address:

- Turnaround situations
- Pastoral disruption or breakdown, signiﬁcant conﬂict or pastoral trauma
- Significant change on the horizon
- Following long incumbencies
- Helping a church to die with dignity

In 2015, the Ven Jennifer McKenzie then joined the diocese as Archdeacon of Wigan and West Lancashire, from the Diocese of Virginia. She had experience in the diocese as Archdeacon of Wigan and West Lancashire, with four churches operating with a three-year license from IM to be:

- Process: interim clergy lead the church through a ﬁve stage process of ‘holy conversations’ which explore, typically: Heritage; Leadership; Connections; Mission; Future.
- Outcomes: the interim minister thinks and works backwards, his or her ministry being informed by some established outcomes and working to realise those goals.

As the model has developed there have been longer-term appointments with a more transitional focus, and also shorter term, high-impact appointments, and the development and application of IM in different situations continues.

Liverpool has observed some emerging beneﬁts from IM to be:

- Assisting churches in vacancy by undertaking the core liturgical and pastoral tasks of parish ministry
- Maximising the potential of a vacancy to be a time of growth, creative thinking and planning
- Addressing difﬁcult issues where they are identiﬁed: money, governance, pastoral breakdown, personality clashes.
- Facilitating creative reﬂection and forward planning by parishes in transition to the appointment of a new priest.

The Diocese of Bristol – Vacancy Development and Interim Ministry

There is an ongoing programme of IM appointments. Three interims are now licensed in the diocese and are available where needed. Chris himself has been involved with four churches operating with a three-year licence from the bishop as an Intentional Interim Minister. Other interims have been used for periods of six months to two years across all four archdeaconries. Interim Ministry has also been a feature of the deanery transition project, Transforming Wigan.

The diocese has found IM to be a creative and effective model of parish ministry which richly compliments the ministry of the ‘settled’ pastor. Serving for a limited period of time under a Bishop’s Letter of appointment which captures clear goals, the interim minister blends the central tasks of parish ministry with a focused attention on the established goals, and leading the church through a structured process of review and forward thinking which is recognised by the congregation. But the greatest challenge in making interim appointments is a lack of available trained interim clergy: a challenge Liverpool are facing by exploring training and seeking out potential
The Diocese of Bristol has extended its response to vacancies through a programme of Interim Ministry. Bristol first started developing its approach to vacancy leadership in 2009, and developed its vacancy strategy in 2012 with a view to harnessing vacancies as a vital important ministry that helps churches and candidates. Liverpool believes this is not a stopgap but has similar aims.

A three church parish which had been in vacancy for two years and the Pioneer Minister was about to move on leaving a part time OLM Associate Minister who had finished her curacy in the parish one year previously. The Associate became half time stipendiary Priest in Charge on the understanding that it would be for one year. An appointment has just been made.

A large parish church became vacant following a difficult 6 month period and the curate came to the end of his term shortly afterwards. Several Associates were left in the parish but they were a dysfunctional team. A retired Archdeacon (not the one in 2) was appointed to provide oversight to the team for six months. An appointment has just been made.

Six years’ on the process today has been adapted but has similar aims.

The Stage 1 review has become even more extensive and engages the parish to a greater degree.

At Stage 2, greater emphasis has been placed on the development of the parish and the creation of the Role Description for the new priest. Bristol’s Transition Manager works over 6 months with the new incumbent and PCC in the implementation of the plans outlined in the parish profile.

A grid has been developed for Area Deans to support Deanery Leadership teams in the process, which shows how all the parties interact during a vacancy.

Additionally, Bristol started drawing on Interim Ministry in 2017 as a means of helping parishes in transition.

Former Transition Manager, George Rendell wrote of the evolution of IM: ‘Having advertised unsuccessfully early in 2017 for two short-term stipendiary appointments in parishes which needed transitioning, we have not tried this again. However we have used a range of alternative ways of providing temporary priestly leadership in parishes (due to vacancy or long term uncertainty).’

These included

1. A multi-parish (10) benefice which had been vacant for 6 month when the OLM Associate Minister moved on leaving a part time OLM curate as the only ordained minister.

2. A multi-parish (10) benefice which had been vacant for 6 months.

3. A large church which had been in vacancy for 2 years and the OLM Associate Minister who had finished her curacy in the parish one year previously.

4. A retired SSMAssociate Minister who had finished her curacy in the parish one year previously.

5. A retired Archdeacon who acted as her Mentor.

6. A retired Associate Minster who had finished her curacy in the parish one year previously.

The Stage 1 review has become even more extensive to support the team for six months. An appointment has just been made.

The future looked good, but they were scared.

Then the men who had gone up with him said, “We are not able to go up against this people, for they are stronger than we.” So they brought to the Israelites an unfavourable report of the land that they had spied out, saying, “The land that we have gone through as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people that we saw in it are of great size… and to ourselves we seemed like grasshoppers, … and the people rebelled: “Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the Lord bringing us into this land to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become booty; it did not go well and soon the people were complaining in the desert.

The situation became no better as they got closer to the promised land and camped just on the border at Paran. From there Moses sent out men to spy on the land for forty days to go and see if the land was good or bad and whether the towns were un-walled or fortified and if the land was rich or poor, noting that it was the season of the first ripe grapes (Numbers 13: 20).

The spies returned with their reports and they told Moses: “We came to the land to which you sent us and it flows with milk and honey… yet the people in the land are of great size, and to ourselves we seemed like grasshoppers, … and the people rebelled.”

And the people rebelled: “Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the Lord bringing us into this land to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become booty; it did not go well and soon the people were complaining in the desert.

Numbers 13:27

Numbers 14:2–4

It did not go well and soon the people were complaining in the desert. The manna God had sent was not good enough. The rabble had a strong craving:

“Who made all this land flow with milk and honey; why did you not bring us up to this good land? Why did we ever leave Egypt? Yet the Lord was angry with me because of you, and he said: “you shall not bring this people into the land which I promised on oath to give to their descendants. I will give them the land, but you will die in this wilderness.”’

Numbers 14:2–19

They formed a ‘Let’s Get Back to Egypt Committee’, and we have been forming them ever since!

Now I certainly do not want to imply that Interim Ministers are to be spies. Indeed to be effective I think it is essential that IMs work within an agreed framework and in an open and transparent way even though some aspects of their work may be confidential. However there is a sense that they are operating in the wilderness with memories of an (alleged) golden past in Egypt behind and a promised land before and are therefore sent to search out the new landscape that the church is called to inhabit.

It is significant to note that IMs are sent out. IMs are by their nature connected; they explore the place to which they are sent coming back to report and recommend to those who send. In our context that is to the Bishop and to the Diocesan Mission Committee who hold the oversight of the mission and ministry of the Church pastoral, evangelistic, social and eccumenical to which it must always ‘have regard’. (Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011).

IMs working with the Bishops as part of the Diocesan Leadership will be those who have a clear understanding of the missional challenge facing the church today at a time when much of our traditional ministry is becoming unsustainable. They will have confidence to recognise and speak hard truths but they will also be confident in God and God’s faithfulness as we seek to reimagine ministry and proclaim the Gospel afresh in this generation.

With this in mind I want to propose a framework by which IMs might carry out their task and report back as together we seek to enable the people of God to look forward rather than back. This framework is: Theological, Pastoral, Practical and Spiritual.
It is perhaps obvious to say, but we need to begin our exploration with a confidence that we are ‘doing theology’, not as an isolated academic discipline but as essential to ensuring our journey is authentically that to which God calls. Such an approach needs to be thus Christological, with a focus on the Kingdom and an Anglican Ecclesiology. It is Christological in that it is rooted in the person of Jesus Christ who comes to dwell with his people with the offer of life in all its fullness, whose life the church is called to show forth in the world. It has a focus on the Kingdom since this is what Jesus came to proclaim, a church confident in singing the Magnificat with Mary, with the proud scattered, the mighty put down, the humble and meek exalted and fed and God’s mercy made known. Lastly our theology must have an Anglican ecclesiology recognising the vocation of the Church of England to serve the nation and all its people, to exercise the ‘cure of souls’ and not to descend into congregationalism, but remain engaged with the communities in which we are set.

Such a theological approach is bound therefore by definition to be also pastoral, connected to and understanding of the needs of those in our care, even of those who might want ‘to go back to Egypt’. This is not to say that the IM colludes, we are not going back to Egypt, but to understand, however hard it may be, that each person is made in the image of God and loved. A pastoral approach will seek to embody the teaching of Augustine of Hippo that we come not to God ‘by navigation but by love’.

Pastoral but also practical. The experience of the wilderness for the people of Israel was that of managing their resources as they collected their daily manna. The IM will be acutely aware of the resources available to the church and the necessity of managing and stewarding these. This will be both of those of the community in which they are ministering and of the wider church. IM will have a highly developed sense of the ministry of the whole people of God, and of the need for the church’s ordained ministers to lead and to collaborate. They will be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of physical plant and of the nature of money as profoundly spiritual in enabling ministry. They will be both realistic and ambitious and not afraid to challenge. The reports with which they return must be sustainable and deliverable as well as theological and pastoral!

Lastly the IM must have a profound and deep spirituality. IMs will lead this first for themselves. The ministry in which they engage is often in arid places in which deep roots are needed to find the living water in Jesus Christ. With a deep faith themselves they will be passionate in enabling others to develop a similar thirst. An IM will want, often with limited resources, to offer the best of worship giving sometimes demoralised congregations a ‘foretaste of the heavenly banquet’ provide opportunity for a new exploration of prayer, that the people may be renewed and, with Christ in their hearts, they may glimpse afresh how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ to be filled with the measure of all the fullness of God (Ephesians 3: 18-19).

Returning to the book of Numbers, the people were afraid. Many wanted to go back; even among those who had spied out the land there were those who hesitated. We should be under no illusion that the work of the IM is anything but challenging, but a sufficient number of the people were tenacious, excited about the promised land flowing with milk and honey that they wanted it for their children and their children’s children.

IMs will be those who will provide that enthusiasm and courage and in reporting back and working with the Bishop and the Diocesan Mission and Partnership Committee and working with Archdeacons and Area Deans, building partnership and forging alliances, renewing hope building ambition, and in so doing they will help the people not look back but forward to the place God is calling.

As a postscript Moses of course did not enter the promised land and such is the nature of IM that more often than not this will be the case for such ministries – not that IMs should expect to die! Rather the ministry they exercise will cease as the new commences, that has been brought to birth as the waters of the Jordan are crossed which is why as a Church this is a ministry is something for which we must be thankful and encourage, walking with God’s people to the promised land.

The Ven Dr Andy Jolley
Archdeacon of Bradford
Diocese of Leeds.

Was John the Baptist an Interim Minister?

Leeds has been engaged in Interim Ministry since 2018 and is actively making IM appointments. Here, Archdeacon Andy Jolley shares more of his approach and understanding of the role of IMs.

The Guidance under Regulation 29 (7D) of the Ecclesiastical Offices (Terms of Service) Regulations 2009 stipulates that: “An interim post should primarily be a response to a particular pastoral need or mission opportunity.”

Which raises the question: was John the Baptist, then, an Interim Minister? IM is a short ministry which is preparing the way. It is about encouraging people to “Think differently!” It is about unsettling the status quo, setting a new vision, addressing powerful groups, and looking to one who will come after.

Interim Ministry is also about coming to terms with the past, losing old fears and find new hopes, and perhaps discovering a fresh identity. It is a time of opportunity to explore possible future arrangements with other parishes and whether pastoral reorganisation is viable. It is a time to consider future witness, mission and ministry; reassess resources, needs and priorities; and to see where and how change is needed, and work through the inevitable transition. It is a time to make plans for the future and prepare for the next chapter of the church’s life.

Interim Ministry is an option to consider when the future is unclear; when pastoral reorganisation is being considered; or when the past has been difficult. It is an opportunity to enable the parish to equip itself more effectively for mission, and to determine what kind of minister is required in the longer term.

Some of the differences between Interim Ministry and Usual Ministry are that IM is

- A fixed duration;
- Has specific objectives;
- Is future focussed;
- It involves ongoing review;
- It has a focus on pastoral care;

Some Typical Objectives for Interim Ministry might include

- To revitalise ministry and mission in the parish;
- To identify and build up a core leadership team with whom to provide leadership to the congregation and grow their capacity and numbers;
- To re-engage with the local community and community organisations;
- To establish whether the congregation can grow to a viable level;
- To establish robust financial governance of the PCC and determine whether the parish’s finances can be rebuilt to a viable level;
- To agree with the PCC changes needed to enhance the church’s prospects of flourishing, and to implement them (e.g. worship patterns);
- To develop and agree proposals for future pastoral organisations;
- To strengthen relationships with the rest of the Deanery and Diocese;
- To help the parish develop and articulate its identity clearly, setting it up to know the skills and experience to seek in the next Vicar.
The Rollercoaster of Change

A model that helps congregations understand the predictable dynamics of the journey of change.

**THE CHANGE IS ANNOUNCED**
- Excitement, anticipation
- Shock
- Mourning
- Fight/flight
- Disorientation
- Remembering the good old days
- Turmoil
- Rage
- Anxiety
- Guilt
- Depression
- Feelings of loss
- Feeling the need to let go
- Detachment
- distancing from others

**ENERGY LEVEL**
- High
- Low

**TIME**
- Present
- Future

**DECISION TO 'STICK WITH IT' (or leave)**
- Excitement
- Reattachment
- Testing
- Internal commitment
- Hope
- Finding new structure
- Finding new purpose
- Problem solving
- Valid information
- Informed choice
- Focused exploration
- Search for the new

**GIL RENDLE**, Adapted from Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual and Organizational Tools for Leaders, © 1998 by the Alban Institute
Murray Bowen was an American psychotherapist (b1913 Tennessee) who began researching the impact of family on a schizophrenic child in 1950s. He connected his work to general systems theory which had evolved in 1930s-40s (Austrian theorist: Ludwig von Bertalanffy). Over the next 16 years Bowen developed his research into a unified theory known as family systems theory, or Bowen Theory. The work was subsequently explored in relation to synagogues and churches by Rabbi Edwin M. Friedman, who also went on to apply his interventions to corporations, educational institutions and government agencies.

**Systems theory suggests that systems are**

**Dynamic** things are in constant motion in a system. No part is static.

**Interconnected** you cannot change one piece without affecting all the others.

**Tends towards a steady state** each movement provokes a counter-balancing movement, hence overall changes resisted.

**Boundaried** define what is inside and outside. Boundaries in a healthy system are clear but permeable. Boundaries in an unhealthy system tend to be rigid or invisible.

**Organic** they are the basis of all life and they are born, grow, develop and die.

So Bowen said

Each family should be regarded as a dynamic emotional system, therefore when treatments is needed it should be directed at the whole family system, not just the 'sick' one. A diagnostic focusing on one individual is unhelpful (although some critics have said that Bowen also 'pathologises' the family too).

**Family systems theory assumes the existence of two forces in relationships:**

- the desire for togetherness (the need to remain emotionally connected with others)
- and the desire for separateness (to be an individual)
- the desire for togetherness (the need to remain emotionally connected with others)

**Chronic anxiety** in society mirrors chronic anxiety in a family and may result in regression: where the hard-mentality of togetherness overrides the need for individuality (the desire for separateness).

Symptoms might appear such as violence, polarisation and rigid beliefs, fear or risk, a 'blame' or 'scape-goating' culture, litigiousness, all of which can be magnified by the media 'reflecting back' anxiety like a mirror into the system. These issues are not causing the anxiety; they are the symptom of the anxiety.

Churches are complex family systems, and these symptoms of anxiety may appear in churches too: as a symptom of anxiety in church relationships; or as a result if anxiety at large in society, from which people might 'seek refuge' in churches.

**IM as leaders of anxious systems**

Interim Ministers are often called to work with church systems suffering from acute anxiety (a short-term stress in the system, such as the loss or indisposition of a leader) or chronic anxiety which might have built up over time.

A significant skill of an IM is to be 'a non anxious presence' – that is a well differentiated person who is able to work with the system to help it understand its patterns of relating and responding to tensions and stresses: the historic patterns of relating: and to help it see where the issues are and start to define itself differently.

**Leaders in an anxious system will experience some predictable responses**

**Resistance** because systems tend towards a steady state, the system will try to re-establish equilibrium, therefore attempts to define in a new way may represent a threat to the equilibrium, and the leader may experience groups/individuals banding together to resist a change in the system.

**Blame and scape-goating** anxieties in the system might cause the targeting of individuals as the one responsible for the group’s problems. They might be the most vulnerable or the most responsible – even the IM. But this is the system trying to find an outlet or relief for the anxiety by focusing it in a specific place. Some parishes may be labelled 'clergy killers' as they may have scapegoated a number of previous clergy. In fact, they are just projecting their anxiety onto that leader. The IM needs to help the system understand its anxiety and resolve it in a healthy way.

**Invisible patterns** ('The Naked Emperor?') system’s patterns of relating are largely invisible to those people within it. Repeated patterns of relating or events go unnoticed; little is learned from past mistakes: the system seeks over-simplified explanations and quick fixes.

**The BB manual notes**

'It may take careful research to see how events are interrelated and are driven by an emotional field, affected by a complex web of relationships. Working at this sort of understanding is one of the most important contributions that a leader can make. (p17, leading in Anxious Times Manual, Bridge Builders Ministries 2018)

The work in IM to explore history, identity and seek a new vision, identifying resources and potential partnerships for future development, are therefore critical to help those within the system to notice their patterns and to start defining their system in a new (and hopefully healthier) way.

**IM leaders (and all leaders in anxious systems)** therefore have to

**Foster a non-anxious presence** creating relationship and fostering an environment in which issues can be expressed and explored in a healthy way, without retreat or attack. As leaders we must offer a living example of that way of being non-anxious (as Jesus was) – but also we must loving pastors accepting that whatever patterns people bring with them into the system will be learned from their family of origin and may take time to un-learn or change.

**Support self-definition** help people to define themselves in a clear and positive way – as individuals and as a system. This means being able to express what you feel or believe, what you need and can offer, what you hope and feel disappointed about. IMs lead the way in this process of definition – not by telling people or the system how they should be, but by responding to the process and behaviours of the system, and often by holding up scripture and biblical examples as models of behaviour and kingdom living, and helping others to define themselves/church well.
Maintain connection when people feel anxious they will move away from the source of the anxiety — by becoming rude, aggressive or by physically distancing. The IM must retain emotional contact with people who are seen to be blocking the process, disagreeing or rejecting; and the IM also needs to help individuals to maintain (or rebuild) emotional contact with one another.

Stand firm Resistance and pressure to return to the old ways are inevitable. The IM is there to hold firm to the objectives (agreed at the outset) and the process of change, and their own honestly held convictions, while being flexible enough and willing to adapt the process in the light of others’ genuine concerns.

Well differentiated leadership has the following characteristics:
- Clear self-definitions, purpose, convictions, identity (hence the importance of clear objectives)
- Non-anxiety: The capacity to stay calm in the face of difference and anxiety, and to avoid getting reactive.
- Maintain healthy relationships: The ability to model intimacy and good boundaries
- Maintain connections: The ability to stay connected with those you disagree with and dislike
- Teamworking: drawing on the wisdom of others and sharing the load with peers (transition teams!)
- Resilience: the ability to stay on course in the face of opposition and disappointment
- Humility: the ability to be able to recognise and admit your own limitations and disappointment
- Courage: the willingness to rock the boat at the right time and disrupt the status quo, especially when faced with injustice or wrong-doing

Poor differentiation may be marked by an over-functioning, authoritarian approach — not listening, inflexibility, lack of consultation and collaboration; or by contrast, by under-functioning and accommodating, trying to please everyone leaving a leadership vacuum.

Jesus said: ‘Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid’ (John 14.27).

However (source TBC) ‘the processes in a family always have the power to subvert or override its religious values. The emotional system can always jam the spiritual message it is receiving’.

This material has been developed in response to and with the considerable aid of the training manual from Leading in Anxious Times, by Bridge Builders Ministries, 2018.
All churches are systems of interacting people and influences – rather like the mobile right, they can be tipped out of balance by change. But change is also an opportunity to shift the system into a better and perhaps more harmonious shape. You want enough movement to change the shape, but not so much that it tips completely into a tangled mess! But how do you know the state of the system, and therefore in what direction it needs to shift, especially as an outsider coming in with little knowledge of the system and how it works?

Discernment

As Elizabeth Jordan’s paper points out, there is a need to discern where parishes are, and then to enable a process of self-discovery so that parishioners themselves can start to assess their own state and needs. At the early stage of the process, parishes may not have sufficient capacity to see this clearly. The preparatory period for, and early weeks of, Interim Ministry are an important time for assessing this.

How can you find out?

Before you arrive in post

- Ask the Archdeacon/Area Dean for a full briefing;
- Review recent PCC minutes, annual reports and parish profiles;
- If possible, observe worship and the life of the congregation before you step into it;
- Explore the context, history and setting of the parish so far as you can gather it from websites, looking at key connections and relationships/gaps;
- Pattern of life – what does the parish do, when and with who?
- Understand who is who – meet with churchwardens to gather information on key people (including people on the margins who have influence);
- Governance – do PCC meetings tell you about how healthy the systems are and what decision making has focused on?
- What does the parish say about itself in documents/websites – what is its stated vision?

When you arrive in post

- Listen to a range of views – key people, marginal people, long-stayers and new arrivals. Much of this can be done by hanging around chatting and listening and asking open questions over coffee after worship. You might want to arrange one-to-one sessions with a few people, or meet a group e.g. flower arrangers, choir, parent and child groups.
- Listen to how they tell their story individually and in groups – for more information see Elizabeth Jordan’s paper on conversational analysis.
- Listen for key words and behaviour which will tell you how people are feeling – the Rollercoaster of Change graphic and Managing Change graphic analyse mental states in times of change. Can you make a rule of thumb assessment on the basis of your conversations about where people are? Even angry and resentful people need to be heard and could provide key information about the temperature.
- Get others to help you in the process of analysis – e.g. Congregation System Analysis is a tool from North America which uses a questionnaire, and can be undertaken with the PCC or Standing Committee (although the language might be a bit alien and off-putting).

The whole process of engaging, listening and analysing is a healthy change-making process, as it includes people at the centre as well as those who may have been on the margins; it helps the system to reflect on itself, and it starts information flowing in the system in different ways. In doing so, these methods can start to change the relationships in the system and kick-start a new dynamic. The information gleaned from these early processes will start to inform the objectives of the Interim Ministry process. At the conclusion of your initial analysis, you may want to revisit and adapt the objectives in consultation with the PCC and archdeacon/bishop.
It has become common business practice (certainly in the USA) to gather a core group of people who will support the process of change in an organisation. This is a model which is used in the Episcopal Church to support Interim Ministry or change processes. It has been likened to ‘a council of advice’ or sounding board for IM. Its work ensures the process is ‘owned’ by the congregation and that the IM process is grounded and effective.

**Role and composition of a Transition Team**

The model is to draw together a small team: 5-9 members are suggested, depending on the size of the church. The role of this group is to assist and advise the IM throughout the process. This ensures the work of the IM is grounded in the congregation and is well informed by people who are trusted and know the organisation well.

It is suggested that this is not a pre-existing group (such as a PCC or standing committee) as these committees will have enough to do already, and extending their agenda and responsibilities may impose further strain at a difficult time. Furthermore, PCCs may be functioning with unhelpful power dynamics which it is useful to avoid. It must be stressed that the Transition Team is ultimately powerless; it does not carry any authority or decision-making power within the parish; it is simply advisory so should not be a threat to existing structures.

The Transition Team should consist of those in good standing (regular worshipper with a record of serving the parish); they should be committed to giving time to the role (and may have to put down some other responsibilities for a while to facilitate this); they should be a team player who is capable of working for the good of the parish and not in a partisan manner; they need to be able to ‘speak the truth in love’ both to the IM and congregation; and be willing to listen to people without becoming defensive or anxious; they should be open to change and willing to be creative and supportive.

The team should consist of not more than two members of the PCC – one of these should liaise with and report to the PCC. Team members should not be related to one another; as far as possible, team members should be chosen to reflect the diversity of the congregation. In larger churches it is not advisable that staff members sit on the transition team, to avoid the perception that staff members might be controlling the process. In larger churches, a chairperson may be needed to plan and organise meetings, make notes and keep others up to date.

**When should it start working?**

A transition team needs to be established as quickly as possible – or even planned before the IM starts work - so that it can support the IM through the early discernment process of reviewing and analysing the needs of the parish. It could help the IM understand context, culture, power systems and core values, and help ascertain whether the objectives set at the outset of the IM process are correct or need revision.

At the outset the commitment is likely to be twice a month, but slowing down as the IM process gets underway.

As the process progresses, the Transition Team may be able to take on planning and delivery of some of the congregational meetings. If there is time and capacity to training team members in listening skills and conversational analysis, they would become additional eyes and ears for the IM in discerning the temperature and climate of change in the congregation and in the wider parish.

Towards the end of the Interim Ministry they could help with the process of planning the exit, farewell service of celebration and handover, and contribute to the development of a parish profile.

**Exodus 18.17-23: Jethro’s Advice to Moses**

‘Moses’ father-in-law said to him, ‘What you are doing is not good. You will surely wear yourself out, both you and these people with you. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone.... You should also look for able men among all the people, men who fear God, are trustworthy, and hate dishonest gain; set such men over them as officers over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. Let them sit as judges for the people at all times; let them bring every important case to you, but decide every minor case themselves. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. If you do this, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people will go to their home in peace.’

HGC/07/18
Exploring our History Workshop

What is our history and how does it influence now and the future?

The purpose is
To explore the church’s history, identify significant moments and people; explore their negative impact; agree what we carry forward and what we leave behind.

1. Biblical reflection Deuteronomy
30:19b-2031.6-8

Moses last words to the people of Israel:

I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life, so that you may live in the land that the LORD swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread of them, because the LORD your God who goes with you will not fail you or forsake you.’

Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel: ‘Be strong and bold, for you are the one who will go with this people into the land that the LORD swore to give them; and you will put them in possession of it. It is the LORD who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you.’

3 Resolution
What attributes of our Christian life, values, and history do we want to carry forward into our future, and what do we want to leave behind?

For a model meeting plan for a History Workshop, see next page.

2. Timeline
As a group create a timeline of the church from what can be gathered from history, memory, recalling special moments (weddings, baptisms, special services, projects, events) and people and parish stories.

Share and record on a long timeline (using roll of IKEA paper or blank wallpaper lining paper) and use post-its or similar to mark the significant events and people on the timeline.

Review together (or in pairs/small groups) and reflect:

- What does this tell us about our history – what do we learn about ourselves?
- What is negative?
- What is positive?
- What patterns of life do we have?
- What is our culture?

Do we want to change some things?

What would we like to stay the same?

What is most appealing about who we are?

What is our culture?

What patterns of life do we have?

What is positive?

What is negative?

What do we hold onto?

What do we let go of?

Put words on flip chart

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Exploring our Christian Identity workshop

Who are we under Christ? How do we live here? And what do we hope for?

What will we do
- Explore our Christian identity
- How we live as Christians together
- Share our hopes for this community for the future

How it should feel
- We'll share our experience of parish life together
- We'll develop a sense of what's important to us
- We'll start to look ahead with hopefulness

1 Exploring the Word
Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16: Unity in the Body of Christ
I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all...

...But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body is joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

2 Shields of identity
This exercise will enable small groups to work together creatively and collaboratively to produce Shields of Identity as a visual symbol of their 'ideal' Christian identity. Rather like a 'Coat of Arms' symbolised the values and achievements of great families historically, what would our Coat of Arms say about us as a Christian Family.

Working in small groups, allocate a sheet of A2 flipchart or similar sized paper to each group with a set of pens. Ask them to design a shield (as creatively as they wish). The shield should be divided into 4 quadrants with each quadrant representing the following:
- An attitude of mind that we feel we share in this Christian community – a few words or a picture.
- A symbol of our Christian life which we all agree is important - lots will use the cross but encourage them to think about distinctive local symbols!
- Our hope for the future – how would we symbolise our hope for our Christian community in a few words.
- What is one immediate priority which will really fulfil our sense of Christian Identity?

Consider in small groups or pairs
What are the significant words and phrases in this passage?
What is important to our life here? (Which is another way of asking what are our underlying values?
What do we learn from this about our vision for the future?

3 Spiritual Gifts and Spiritual Needs
Looking at the shields in the light of our reading from Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16, where do we identify spiritual gifts – what gifts we already have? Where do we identify spiritual needs – gifts we need more of?

In pairs/threes capture these on post it notes/pieces of paper – Pink for spiritual gifts and Green for spiritual needs.

These can be brought forward and placed on a flip chat paper divided into two columns.

4 Concluding reflections
As a group ask people to reflect for a few moments on these shields and Post-its alone and consider:
- What do they see? – What are they observing?
- What is most striking? What do they note?
- How do they feel? – What memories or questions do these raise for them? What makes them laugh?
- What makes them surprised? What makes you concerned? What gives them hope? What is most exciting?

What is the significance? – What is the importance of this for now? What hidden issues is this revealing? What kind of changes will we need to make to live like this? What other things do we need to consider?
- What does this mean for the future? – How does this affect what we hope to do? What would we like to do differently? How do we see that happening? What would the next steps be? Who is committed to these?

Planning Sheet for this workshop is on the next page.
Values Exercise – a collaborative process to explore core values

Every organisation has values, and often two sets – a set of values through which it idealises how it would like to be; and a set of values by which it lives, which is seen in behaviour and structures.

Core values are deeply held beliefs about who we are. In church, these are central to our Christian identity. Helping a parish to discover, articulate and communicate its core values is an essential part of the IM task.

When we live in accordance with our core values, it shows in our behaviour, and we have integrity.

One exercise which can help discern core values is story-telling.

STORY-TELLING EXERCISE

Each person in a (small) group tells a story about an everyday act in their church which touched them or made them feel admiration in some way. After all the stories are told, reflect for a few moments on the values at work behind each story. Work in small groups to name the values.

This can be twinned with a biblical exercise to explore different passages and the values they demonstrate.

This process can be twinned with Appreciative Inquiry.

It can be a group exercise to come up with a list of values.

A collaborative group process (e.g. congregational meeting) can be used to cluster values and name a core value which arises from the cluster; or to name a way a church would like to frame its values.

This exercise may also throw up examples of where negative behaviour is undermining intended values, which is an important point of discussion and transformation.

The core values which emerge can be used for preaching and teaching. The challenge is to really live with these values for a period and try to inhabit them. What difference do these values make to the way the church communicates about itself and how it plans mission and activities?

Here is a set of core values which can be used, or alternatively a group can generate its own list.
Anyone joining a new congregation will be conscious that different people hold power in that community for different reasons. Sometimes that can be quite hard to read and understand. But it is important to know who has power and why in order to bring change. Power Analysis helps us discover who holds power, why they hold power and what difference that makes to the change process.

The Power Analysis explores different types of power:

- **Coalitional Power**: when I am part of a support group within a bigger system that has the capacity to influence the system e.g. the PCC, Pastoral Care Team. (the flower arrangers!)


- **Reputational Power**: I have power because the organisation knows and trusts me from past experience (e.g. former churchwarden, old parish family, local dignitary).

  **Biblical examples**: Exodus 18.17-27 – Moses appointed trusted men as judges to assist him; Job 1.1-5 – Job’s good reputation; Matthew 8.5-13 – The centurion whose servant is healed by Jesus.

- **Communicational Power**: I have power because I have access to information e.g. treasurer, secretary.

  **Biblical examples**: Exodus 4.10-17 – Aaron speaks on behalf of Moses; Judges 16.10-19 - Delilah uses information against Samson; Luke 3.7-18 – John the Baptist proclaims the coming Messiah.

- **Structural Power**: when I have influence because I occupy a role or position of authority in an organisation e.g. churchwarden, patron.

  **Biblical examples**: Genesis 45.4-5 – Joseph’s power and authority in Egypt; Matthew 16.15-19 – Peter is pronounced the rock of the church; Acts 5.33-39 – Gamaliel influences the Sanhedrin to the benefit of the disciples.

Who occupies different places of power in this community? You may need help from a transition team, or trusted group/individual to analyse this. Many people will have more than one place of power. Some may have none at all. Are there people who have good ideas and vision that are outside the current power structures? Are there people who have too much influence and limit the possibilities for change?

Your own power and credibility is also a significant factor in bringing change. The credibility that you have with people with strong corporate power in the organisation will influence the change that is possible.

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**POWER ANALYSIS EXERCISE**

You ‘test’ an individual’s power base by considering whether they have any influence with each type of power. A check in each box will give a power base score of 4. You test your credibility by considering whether that person would be more likely to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to you – the highest credibility score is 6 and lowest is 1.

It is an exercise that can be used several times – at the beginning of the IM process and midway through to look at how power is shifting.

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<th>Name</th>
<th>Coalitional Power</th>
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Discerning Vision

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.”  Jeremiah 29.11

The discernment of vision in our IM parishes is one of the key tasks of IM. It is a multi-dimensional process drawn together over our whole appointment, beginning with the mutual agreement of objectives, and concluding with consent to a way forward beyond the term of our post. In the meantime, we may explore new ideas and opportunities to see if our hopes are realistic and to stimulate enery participation and ownership.

Congregational meetings and workshops are the best way of engaging the whole community and gaining ‘group’ assent. But if this community is divided, work may have to be done in small groups, at a slower pace in order to get to a place where whole community activities are possible. Be realistic – not everybody will be available all the time, but the important issue is that all are invited and have an opportunity to contribute to this process.

It is important to remember that this work of discerning vision is not about our vision, or the Bishop/Archdeacon’s vision, or parish reorganisation, or about appointments, but about finding a way forward which will generate enthusiasm and commitment, and which then will inform parish reorganisation and the appointments process, by forming a key part of the parish profile.

Vision

What is our best hope for our future as our worshipping community here in this parish?

What are we being called to be and do here? And who wish?

History

What has our worshipping community been like in the past?

What can we learn about ourselves from that history?

What do we want to take forward into our future vision?

Identity

Who are we under Christ? What is our life here like?

How do we live out our Christian identity in our worship, relationships, activities?

Relationships

Who do we connect with and how? What is the quality of these relationships?

How can they be better developed?

This may involve relationships in church, in the community, with other churches/denominations, and also with our diocese and senior leaders. If relationships have been strained in some areas we may need to reconnect and rebuild.

Opportunities

How are we doing at the moment? Who do we partner with?

What assets have we available (not just money but people, buildings, ideas, connections)?

Vital statistics - https://www.chelmsford.anglican.org/advice/parish-spotlights

Group work to draw a map of missional connections

The following graphic captures this process, but totally over-simplifies it!

There may be individual elements which need to be broken down, and additional cycles which need to be added e.g. healing and pastoral conversations where there has been breakdown and hurt; worship review where the worship life of the church has become tired and lacking in energy; hospitality and welcome where this has ceased to be life-giving.

Throughout this process the IM will also need to be praying, analysing, capturing feedback, discussing progress with others and planning the next steps. The Log Frame is used to record this process regularly (at least quarterly) and discussed with supervisor and transition team.

Individual elements will be moved round but the IM process will involve all of these – see next page.

Preparing for New Directions

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.” Jeremiah 29.11-14

Preparing for new beginning

St some point in the Interim Ministry, usually just over half way through, there is a need to start preparing for a new direction in the life of the church. At this stage, one would hope that there is a team in place to support the IM and that work has been done to review the history, identity and vision of the parish; identity emerging mission opportunities, and there will be new shoots appearing in the form of new ministries, partnerships and leadership.

If this is not the case, then this may be an important signal that there is still more work to be done beyond the term of the current IM period, and you will need to discuss with the Archdeacon/Bishop a possible extension to the IM post. An IM post can be extended once: the maximum for each term of the post is 3 years, with one extension allowed regardless of the length of the extension. Therefore, care needs to be taken to discern with the transition team and senior staff, what might be an appropriate extension to complete the IM process satisfactorily.

Taking the temperature

Together with the transition team it will be important to establish what the mood of the congregation is, much in the same way as the IM did at the outset of the process. Graphics such as The New Beginning (William Bridges, Managing Transitions) and The Rollercoaster of Change (Gil Ronde, Leading change in the congregation) will help.

Are the majority of people indicating they are engaged, enthusiastic and energetic? Is there a flow of ideas, creativity and involvement, and a willingness to experiment and ‘have a go’. Are people still confused and unsure, perhaps uncommitted – this may show in ways of such a dwindling attendance? How many people are still struggling to let go of the past, resisting change, grieving, expressing frustration and anger?

It is important not to go back over old ground at this stage, and the IM may need to give firm leadership in

God has a vision for greater than my sight!

For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, “This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.” Luke 14.28-30

It is important to check that the congregation is committed and prepared for a new direction, because this is about making the transition from looking backwards at the past, to looking forwards to the future and the new ministry and vision to follow, which is a key part of the IM role. It is a time of both winding down and gearing up. In facing this task, the parish can be encouraged to bear in mind the words of Jesus in Luke 14 (above).

Tasks and activities completed so far need to be recorded and noted so that a parish is aware of some ‘quick wins’ and can build further confidence to make change. Reviewing what has been achieved may be included in congregational feedback above e.g. produce a flipchart showing the small actions and changes which they have made so far and thank/affirm/applaud those who have led/been part of that change.

There may be some doubtful voices about the direction of travel. Unless this is widely shared, don’t abandon the decisions and commitments made in previous meetings, which might just need seeing through in a different way.

Previous commitments which were consensual and widely-held must be honoured, and not discarded, unless there is equally consensual and widely-held agreement to do so.

back

back
It is important not to go back over old ground at this stage, and the IM may need to give firm leadership in this, unless it is clear that there is a lingering problem. In which case, this needs to be considered by the Transition Team and IM and ways of unblocking the problem found.

If it is with particular individuals, in which case, arrange private meetings to discuss. If it is congregational, it may require taking a step back in the process, and arranging focus groups or a congregational meeting to gain commitment and confidence to move forward. If there is still unresolved conflict, the diocese may be able to help with mediation – speak to your local CMD advisor.

Preparing the Way

Some essential steps of preparing the way are:

**Prayer**

Having committed, it will be important to seek God’s blessing on this new direction, to ask for insight and guidance on decisions, and for energy and confidence to implement. These prayers can conclude a congregational meeting/review session, and can also be included in regular intercessions, PCC and Transition Team meetings.

**Lay leadership**

Is the lay leadership ready for this transition, do they feel they need extra training and support to prepare with confidence, or someone to come alongside them to give encouragement? Where can this be found – from the IM, diocese, Director of Lay Ministry, MMA, senior staff, or MMU/nextdoor parishes? Are new lay leaders needed, and have they been asked or encouraged? Equally, are there people who need to be given permission to step down gracefully – it will be important to honour those that do. The new leadership needs to be affirmed and supported perhaps by means of ‘commissioning’ at a main Sunday service.

**Preparing the parish profile**

What elements need to be included in the profile from the IM work? Can a small team from PCC/TT be tasked to reflect and start producing some materials to assist this process? This work-in-progress can be brought back to PCC to consider and refine. An important part of this is considering what kind of ministry the parish is seeking in order to fulfil its vision for the future: what skills and gifts will be needed? What type of personality and ways of working are important? Is gender or churchmanship significant? The IM can play a role in facilitating this discussion but needs to maintain clear neutrality in doing so.

**Making connections**

This is a time of opportunity. If this has not already started, start encouraging key people from the parish (PCC members, wardens) to start building a network of support for the parish’s new direction by contacting influential parishioners, organisations and partners to discuss this way forward and explain what their hopes and expectations are. Additional ideas, offers and suggestions may be contributed.

**Evaluating progress**

Review the objectives for the IM period, initially with the Transition Team, and consider honestly what progress has been made. The IM Log Frame is a useful tool for this – particularly, at this stage, the ‘Outcomes’ and ‘Evidence of Impact’ sections. It will be useful to include both ‘qualitative’ information (how something has improved or feels different) as well as ‘quantitative’ information (how much, how many, how often). Information from the congregational discussions on the way forward may be useful. Towards the end of the IM you could arrange a celebration event at the end of a service where people can make comments or draw pictures on a flip chart/wall chart about how they feel about the process, and how they feel about the future.

**Preparing for handover**

We have discovered that good handover is vital. A document summarising the process needs to be prepared by the IM. This would cover context, leadership, situation which the IM encountered at the outset, objectives agreed with parish and archdeacon; the results of history, identity, vision and other meetings; a summary of progress towards vision, activities tried (successfully and failed); leadership development; and new partnerships. This document will need to be discussed initially with the PCC to check it is fair, and also with Archdeacon, Bishop, Area Dean, MMU leaders if necessary. It should be made available to the incoming minister.

**Saying goodbye**

It is important that the end of an IM process is marked and celebrated. There are liturgies available which can be inserted into a eucharist before the blessing (see Roger S Nicholson, Temporary Shepherds; Iona Community, write your own, or ask HGG).

**Leaving**

If an IM is being asked to consider a settled appointment it is important that due process is followed and that the PCC is consulted. It is important take a break to clearly mark the ending of the IM and the start of a new stage of ministry. If you leave, you may come back to visit at the invitation of the new minister (but not their licensing perhaps) and it may help them to meet you and discuss the IM process early on in their ministry.
**Training**

**Asset Mapping –**

**Charting the hidden riches of the parish**

'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field' Matthew 13.44.

Parishes often need the support of an Interim Minister because they have complex needs. But also, in coping with multiple challenges, they may have developed a sense of failure, hopelessness and ‘poverty’, perhaps accompanied by what is often a very real lack of resources – lack of funds to make repairs or pay parish share, for example. It is hard, in this state, for any parish to develop a positive notion of what its assets are – what pre-existing ‘wealth’ it can draw on for mission and renewal.

In fact, a focus on what has gone wrong, on blame, on loss, can lead to what has been called ‘inattentional blindness’ – this is where you are so focused on one thing that you fail to notice other important details: the classic example is the moonwalking bear in the online attention test found here at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ahg6qcgoay4.

Asset mapping is a process through which a parish can start to collectively go on a treasure hunt, look creatively at what resources it does have (even if they are not financial resources) and therefore start to see where its real treasure lies – the people, ideas and skills, the networks and partnerships which it already has and can build on.

This works very well as a congregational exercise, because the more people who contribute, the broader and more interesting the opportunities will be; it also builds on parishioners’ personal interests and passions, and therefore can be a trigger to greater involvement in church life and mission activities; and also because it can generate a real sense of optimism and excitement which can be a significant turning point in the change process.

Asset mapping is also focused on real situations and contacts, so it is grounded in reality, not on imagined possibilities or idealistic wish-lists, and is therefore immediately credible and achievable. Because the ideas and opportunities generated come from within (rather than being suggested by the ministers) there is a greater sense of ownership and investment in making sure ideas are followed through. As Jesus noted in Luke 12.34: ‘Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.’

For this reason it is very important that IM’s stand aside from this process and facilitate the hunt, rather than digging up the treasure themselves.

A good biblical parallel for this exercise might be Moses and the people of Israel during their 40 year wandering in the Sinai peninsula – they can start to glimpse where God might be at work in their midst instead of feeling like God has abandoned them in the wilderness, though the temptation is always there to hark back to that state of exile!

The parish may also need reassuring that God is always at work and can give sufficient resources in any situation. The Lord’s Prayer is always a useful reminder or texts like this:

‘God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. As it is written, “He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures for ever”. He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.’ 2 Corinthians 9:10

1 Challenge
Pick from the following opening questions and invite participants to respond on their cards:

- What are the things you most like to do for fun?
- What local person/people do you have a strong connection to who might be willing to help, loan or share in any of the above?
- What would you be willing to offer if asked?
- What are the thing/s you most like to do for fun?

2 Cluster
Each group should spread the completed cards out on their table, take a few minutes to look at the cards, and cluster around it the cards showing the relevant skills and interests, and write a title. 10 minutes

3 Develop idea
After several clusters have emerged ask the group to pick their clearest/best idea and to develop that by sticking it on wallpaper sheets/flipchart paper; and cluster around it the cards showing the relevant club/institutional connections, available resources, donations/offering and people who might help.

15 minutes

**SAMPLE ASSET-MAPPING EXERCISE**

**Room set-up**
Tables/chairs or chairs in small groups

**Materials**
- Recording cards 3x5 inch – A4 cut in half or large post-its, 5–6 per person.
- Large felt-tip markers (flipchart or whiteboard)
- Roll of Wallpaper cut into 25 ft sections: or large sheets of plain paper (such as flipchart paper).
- Low-tack tape/blue-tack to hang paper on walls.

**Process**
- Divide people into groups of 5–6 people. Place 30–35 recording cards and pens on each table.
- Allocate 3 sticky dots/stars to each person.
- Make the atmosphere as relaxed as possible (put our small bowls of sweets)
- Start with prayer and offer a positive piece of scripture for focus and encouragement.
- Explain that participants write one response per card (not all their ideas on one card!) and each response should be written in large letters and be clear to read (a phrase not just a single word)
- Everyone should initial their cards in the corner.

4 **Stock Pot**
On a second sheet place all the additional ideas and resources so they are available to other groups (this is where post-its work well!). The point is to ensure no idea is ‘lost’ and all ideas are honoured.

5 **Presentations**
Invite each group to present their idea to the wider assembly – either one member of the group or the whole group could do this. If just one member presents, then ask the rest of the group if they have anything to add before moving on. Ask for general questions of the group by the assembly. Run through the list of stock pot ideas which are available to others. Place both sheets on the wall. 20 mins

6 **Voting**
Give time for everybody to review the ideas and vote for their three favourite ideas using their sticky dots/stars.

7 **Group formation**
The most popular ideas are selected and volunteers identified to work as a group. Groups can also take other ideas/resources from the stock pot. Each group chooses a facilitator who will host/organise the first meeting and report back.

**Variation**
This exercise can also be used in response to a focus question, agreed in advance with the PCC or Transition Team, e.g. how can we develop better ministry with children or young people?; or how do we engage better with people from the north side of our parish? This Focus Question is written in large letters and placed in a prominent location where all can see it. The ideas are then a response to the focus question.