Complex Changes: Interim Ministry and the Church of England

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MA in Christian Approaches to Leadership

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This dissertation has been completed as a requirement for a higher degree of the University of Winchester.
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Interim ministry, where a temporary minister is appointed in the vacancy between two ‘settled’ ministers with the intention of helping the congregation make the most of the time of transition, has been a feature of church life in North America for 40 years or more. As well as being a means of helping churches in certain well-defined circumstances, interim ministry has broadened in focus to become transition ministry, with a specialism in helping congregations deal with change more generally. Interest in this practice is increasing in the Church of England, but is at early stages compared with the US. There is a gap in the literature as the US tradition of interim ministry is itself undergoing something of a transition, and very little has been published on the subject for an English audience. This dissertation is a contribution towards filling this gap with an exploration of practical, philosophical and theological issues raised by the practice of interim ministry especially with regard to the Church of England.

Contemporary organization development theory as influenced by complexity theories is found to be a fruitful source of ideas which connect with a range of the church’s concerns in this area, from what methods to use to help congregations develop, to a collaborative theology of ministry. From this wide-ranging survey specific issues are framed regarding the development of interim ministry in the Church of England in the present day, and potentially fruitful areas for further research identified.

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Abbreviations

AI  Appreciative Inquiry

IM  Interim Ministry

OD  Organization Development
1. Introduction

Interim Ministry has long been a well-defined feature of church life in North America. For many years since its origins in the 1970s the model has been that of a specially trained minister being appointed to work with a congregation for a limited period following the departure of a permanent pastor. In addition to the usual tasks of leading worship and offering pastoral care, the interim minister would offer a sort of consultancy, to help the congregation to move on from the past and look to the future, in recognition that the time between ‘settled’ pastors offers unusual opportunities for change. This consultancy aspect made the ministry ‘intentional’ in that the interim period was deliberately used, and reflecting the specialism of ministers in such ministry. Nowadays such ministry is commonly referred to as transitional ministry: for simplicity here we shall use ‘interim ministry’ (IM) throughout, as this is the language currently being used in the Church of England, and we shall assume such ministry to be intentional.

There is now growing interest in the Church of England in this model of interim ministry, which has been introduced by some dioceses in different forms. This dissertation seeks to resource for this developing interest, by offering a work of practical theology: theological reflection on practice which is informed by contemporary understandings from beyond the church, and whose aim is to ‘help generate concepts, norms, and actions that will be of practical utility and make a difference.’

The practice will be described in section 2 in broad terms: the structures and norms of interim ministry which have themselves been informed by the

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experiences of individual ministers and congregations. The limitation of not dealing directly with congregation experience will enable a fuller discussion of contemporary practice and theory outside the world of the church in section 3, with parallels drawn with interim appointments in business, and the huge field of organization development. Theological themes are treated in section 4. The discussion in section 5 draws out practical implications for the developing practice of interim ministry in the Church of England, an area on which very little has been published.  

2. Interim Ministry as it has been established

2.1 USA

Development

‘Interim Ministry’ was identified by Loren Mead and others as having the potential for becoming a distinctive practice over 40 years ago. In the time since then IM has developed into an established clergy profession across the mainline protestant churches with its own qualifications, methods of working and training. It has become sufficiently well-established to develop a distinction between ‘traditional’ interim ministry, and new practices and understandings. It has also attracted criticism for

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2 There are no books, and I have identified just one English journal article on the subject: Elizabeth Jordan, ‘Monarch, Shepherd or Parent? Interim Ministry and the Church of England’, Practical Theology 5, no. 1 (2012): 65–80. By contrast dozens of books on the subject have been published in North America, a selection of which are referred to here.


being used excessively, leading to defence as well as self-reflection within the community of practitioners.  

The work of Mead and his colleagues on IM began in the early 1970s from the then developing field of Organization Development (OD), which was about helping organizations to change. Initially they were interested in discovering whether Episcopal churches would benefit from this practice which was starting to be used in the world of business, education and government. Almost by accident they realised that churches that were in an interim period between ministers were especially fertile ground for such practice. More will be said about OD below.

The second major ingredient in the development of IM was the work of psychologist Erik Erikson. This was about the psychological development of an individual person through life. Erikson proposed eight developmental tasks that build successively towards an individual becoming a healthy, well-adjusted person. In IM these were translated to the church congregation, to become the ‘five tasks’ of IM, and eventually the ‘five focus points’ which we will explore in more detail when looking at the practice of IM below.

The third ingredient, which provides a strong legacy today, is systems theory. First the connections were made with family systems therapy, which developed from a social work context where people were interested in understanding the problems of families,

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6 Mead, ‘Foreword’.

and how such problems may better be understood as being about the way a whole family functions, rather than the behaviour of one person within it. Work by Edwin H. Friedman applying the theories from family systems therapy to Jewish and Christian congregations was subsequently developed by Peter L. Steinke in a church context, drawing an analogy between the kinds of behaviour that happen in a family and the congregation. Family systems theory has been a dominant paradigm in IM, especially for understanding how a congregation is affected by the departure of its minister, a disruption which opens up the system to change but also increases anxiety. Steinke’s application of the family systems paradigm to church congregations invites those working with them to reduce the spread of the ‘virus of anxiety’. This psychoanalytic influence via family systems therapy has shown in a therapeutic focus in IM as traditionally articulated (where the interim minister is there to identify and help heal ‘disease’), but later developments have drawn on Peter Senge’s seminal work on the development of organizations as systems and in particular the learning organization, connecting once again to the field of OD where IM began. The common focus is on dealing with change.

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**Practice**

**What**

Traditionally interim ministry has involved helping a congregation through five developmental tasks, normally undertaken sequentially. Since 2009, when at least one author was still writing about the developmental tasks in basically the traditional form, there has been a change of language to ‘focus points’.\(^{12}\) These areas of focus correspond to the traditional tasks with some changes, as shown in the table below.

<table>
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<th>Tasks(^{13}) (Classic)</th>
<th>Focus Points(^{14}) (New)</th>
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<td>Heritage: reviewing how the congregation has been shaped and formed</td>
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The development from tasks to focus points has been driven by fundamental changes in the way that IM has been viewed and understood by its own practitioners, changes that connect with broader developments in how we understand learning and development to take place, as well as wider changes in society.

One reason for this move was the experience of interim ministers that undertaking the tasks was an interactive and dynamic process.\textsuperscript{15} The tasks influence each other: later developments might lead a congregation to look differently at what it considered earlier in the process. In education theory it is widely understood now that development is not linear: it is important that former learning experiences are revisited and deepened in the light of new experience and experimentation.\textsuperscript{16} In this light the interim ministers’ experience that engagement with the tasks is dynamic and circular makes sense. In addition the language of tasks suggests that there is the possibility of finishing them. But in fact these are areas of congregational life which are never complete, and ‘should be continually evaluated, revised, and adapted in the light of current realities.’\textsuperscript{17}

More broadly, John Keydel understands the move from tasks to focus points as moving ‘away from the language of diagnosis and pathology’, where the interim minister is an outside expert there to identify and solve problems, to a more affirmative approach to facilitating the development of a congregation, especially influenced by the practice of


\textsuperscript{16} e.g. Honey and Mumford’s Learning Cycle, described in Joseph A. Raelin, Work-Based Learning, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 4.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI).\textsuperscript{18} Where once the model for IM was often described in terms of helping a congregation to overcome a trauma or deal with its anxiety and process its grief and loss, there is now a movement parallel to positive psychology which is about inviting the congregation to develop by (re)discovering and identifying good things instead of dwelling on what has gone wrong.\textsuperscript{19} AI is a substantive field of its own in OD and we shall consider it further in section 3 below.

Changes in IM also reflect actual changes in the way congregations work, mirroring wider changes in society. Michael Piazza suggests that a pastor’s role is so different from the time when IM was initially developed that a focus on a grieving process is simply not relevant: for him, a pastor is more of a CEO than a parent.\textsuperscript{20} Even if one agrees with this premise, one could take issue with the conclusion that a family systems approach is no longer relevant – the departure of a CEO from an organization is not emotionally neutral, while the use of family systems theory to analyze churches does not assume that a church is the same as a family, but rather that ‘the same emotional processes experienced in the family operate in the church...’\textsuperscript{21}

More relevant perhaps is the huge change in the position of mainline churches in US society, where they find they are no longer at the centre of things the way they were in the post WWII period and are seeing sharp decline in attendances. These changes raise what Norman Bendroth, following Ron Heifetz, calls ‘adaptive problems’, where

\textsuperscript{18} Keydel, ‘Focus Points and the Work of the Congregation’, 53.
\textsuperscript{21} Steinke, How Your Church Family Works, xi.
changes are such that the problems churches encounter are not going to be solved by attempting to restore things to how they were, but require more fundamental changes to how things are done, to truly adapt to a new context.\(^\text{22}\) The context itself will keep changing, so the need to adapt is not a one-off event. This is one of the reasons the former model of developmental tasks executed during a limited 'interim' period is inadequate: change is going to keep on coming.

**When**

Interim ministers in the US are appointed when a permanent or 'settled' minister has left, for a period of between six months and two years, at the end of which, normally, the interim minister hands over to a newly appointed settled minister. Traditionally, the situations in which a congregation might consider appointing an IM rather than going straight to appointing a new settled minister have been outlined as:

i. After a very long and happy pastorate

ii. After a very short pastorate

iii. After the death or severe illness of the pastor

iv. Where there has been conflict\(^\text{23}\)

The first three of these criteria can be seen to connect systems thinking, identifying situations where congregations are most likely to be in an emotional upheaval, an unsettled state, and open to change. On reflection the fourth case may be different – a system with conflict may be stable in its way, and if that conflict has extended over the time of several ministers then the departure of the minister may have little effect in disrupting unhealthy patterns of behaviour. So it is not surprising that there is

\(^{22}\) Bendroth, 'Whither Transitional Ministry?', 16.

recognition that a ‘traditional’ interim ministry, which would last up to two years, is not long enough to address conflict that really is endemic.\textsuperscript{24} Rather, interim ministry is appropriate where conflict and dysfunction are present but not yet endemic, as prevention rather than a cure. Where problems are more serious a longer ‘turnaround’ or transition ministry would be more appropriate.\textsuperscript{25}

Many practitioners now question the limitations of these criteria, and would advocate IM for a much wider range of circumstances.\textsuperscript{26} For example the US Episcopal Church’s policy advises that Interim Ministry may be useful for any congregation, but for those where it is especially useful adds ‘Where parish histories reflect substantial stress’ and ‘Where there is a large staff’ to the above areas.\textsuperscript{27} The Church of Scotland, which has had a formalized version of IM based on the US model since before 1996, adds some very broad criteria, including ‘Where there is a need for development,’ and ‘Where the composition of the parish is changing.’\textsuperscript{28} There is an argument that IM, or at least a style of ministry focused on change using the same tools and techniques, is appropriate for nearly every congregation, given the rate of change in society at the moment – we will see this in practice when we consider the diocese of Bristol below.

At the same time, one of the founding fathers of IM, Loren Mead, has criticised US


church authorities for deploying IM *too* widely, not only with congregations who are willing to do the work involved in the reflection and development processes.  

*Directions*

Recent books on IM make the change to using the term ‘transitional’ instead of ‘interim’. This reflects a broadening out of traditional understandings of the practice of IM, and a recognition that the tools and approaches of IM are useful well beyond the usual 6-24 month appointment to a church which falls under the traditional criteria. In a rapidly changing world churches are as likely to need to undergo transition for external as well as internal reasons: not only when the pastor leaves. ‘Transition’ ministry can refer to longer or shorter terms of ministry, and to work done by people other than professional interim clerics. Other approaches described in the book include succession planning for large churches (where a departing minister overlaps with his or her successor), ‘hospice care’ for dying congregations, and a range of congregational development options. Bendroth in his summing up identifies a very long list of ways in which an interim minister may function. The common features are that the interim minister is an expert in transition, and is temporary (although there are exceptions to this too).  

Depending on where the congregation is in its lifecycle and experience (growing, thriving, declining, dying, recovering from a disaster or tragedy, or in the midst of big changes of context) it might benefit from a pastor who has a short-term role to undertake a specific task, a ‘crossroads’ or ‘repositioning’ pastor to help discern a

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29 Referred to by Bendroth, ‘Whither Transitional Ministry?’, 6.  
change in direction, or a sustaining interim who is there primarily to maintain continuity in the church’s programmes. Another possibility is to use two-tiered interim ministry, where a temporary minister supports the ordinary ongoing life of the community in its worship, pastoral care, education etc and an interim consultant (who may or may not be ordained) assists the congregation in the work of self-reflection and discernment. Alternatively an interim minister who is not trained in IM but may conveniently provide ‘pulpit supply’ to a church could with coaching from a trained interim minister, be supported to enable work in the areas of focus. Some of these new directions opened up by the designation of ministry as ‘transitional’ rather than ‘interim’ are quite different from traditional interim ministry. In particular, there is more willingness to consider the possibility of the interim minister being subsequently appointed to the permanent position, or for a longer initial appointment.

The tools and theory are also changing. While the legacy of psychotherapeutic insight via family systems therapy is still present, OD models of strategic planning and appreciative inquiry are shaping the tools of IM. Although the emphases are different, strategic planning and appreciative inquiry as used in IM are interested in both process and outcome. On the strategic planning side, Friedrich, for example, advocates a form of strategic planning which is based on looking at the congregation’s life-cycle and characteristics of the stage it is at.\textsuperscript{32} Such analysis eventually results in the distillation of priorities for the next four years, which with a new settled pastor should be developed into a ‘clear and comprehensive plan’.\textsuperscript{33} He notes that such an outcome will not, however, be effective if the process has not been sufficient to build up trust


\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 101.
among all the participants: as shown in an inadequate process that Friedrich himself guided, and humbly relates.\textsuperscript{34} Appreciative inquiry focuses less on an endpoint and more on a process that is likely to lead to good outcomes by helping participants focus on what is good, building up confidence and trust in each other and in God.\textsuperscript{35} There is more to explore in relation to AI and the pitfalls of long term strategic planning which we shall do in section 3 below.

\section*{2.2 Church of England}

\textit{Central Institutions}

The Church of England enacted new legislation to enable the appointment of interim ministers in November 2015. The legislation was seen to be required as a follow-on from the introduction of Common Tenure for clergy appointments in 2011, which made it more difficult to appoint clergy to parishes on a temporary basis. More positively, the need for new legislation was discerned in a 2014 church report ‘Resourcing the Future’, in which a majority of surveyed dioceses predicted that IM would be ‘of increasing use’.\textsuperscript{36} In the report interim ministers were described as those who deliver ‘turn-around’ ministry for parishes with problems, and dioceses requested changes in legislation to recognise this type of ministry.\textsuperscript{37} The change in legislation became part of the ‘Renewal & Reform’ programme, which is, in part, about re-imagining the church’s ministry.\textsuperscript{38} While it was always possible to find ways of appointing clergy on an interim basis, the legislation provides new means of doing so.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 106. \\
\textsuperscript{35} Voyle, ‘An Appreciative Inquiry Paradigm for Transitional Ministry’, 124. \\
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 16. \\
\end{flushright}
More significantly for our purposes, the new legislation has provided an opportunity for the Archbishops’ Council to offer advice and guidance on the appointment of interim ministers, which at present is the closest we have to a policy statement on the subject from the central institutions of the Church of England.

The guidance provides for interim appointments to be made for three years in the first instance, with the option to renew to a maximum of six years.\textsuperscript{39} Such appointments should be made primarily in response to a particular need or opportunity, with the parish being consulted at an early stage in recognition that an interim appointment is only likely to work with the parish’s support. The following criteria for such an appointment are given, but are not exhaustive:

i. To enable the parish to equip itself more effectively for mission

ii. To determine what kind of minister is required in the longer term

iii. When the past has been difficult

iv. When there is an element of uncertainty about the future.

The advice lists some of the usual situations for IM (after a very long or short incumbency, where a parish is at a crossroads, when the past has been difficult) and in addition includes when pastoral reorganization is contemplated but not clear, and when a parish is having difficulty appointing a minister.\textsuperscript{40}

The guidance and advice are at pains to point out that interim posts should not be used to punish a parish, but there is what will be for some (given the Church of England’s tradition of holding together different theological viewpoints) an alarming

\textsuperscript{39} ‘Guidance on Interim Posts Made under Regulation 29 (7D) of the Ecclesiastical Offices (Terms of Service) Regulations 2009’ (Archbishops’ Council, n.d.).

\textsuperscript{40} ‘Interim Posts Made under Regulation 29 (7C) of the Ecclesiastical Offices (Terms of Service) Regulations 2009: Supplementary Advice’ (Archbishops Council, n.d.).
implication that theological tradition may be a sign that there is something wrong in the parish, and therefore that IM is needed:

Although interim posts should never be used as a way of penalising a parish for following a particular theological tradition, for falling numbers, or for a failure to pay parish share or because of poor relationships with previous clergy or the diocese, these can sometimes be an indication that something is wrong.41

Aspects of employment law and church regulation make the area complex, but by various means (not just this particular legislation) it is possible to appoint clergy to serve in parishes on an interim basis. There is recognition that the skills required of an interim minister will be different from one appointed permanently: for this and other reasons the interim minister should not be a candidate for the permanent post.42

There are significant differences from the US system. In the US an interim post is for up to two years and no more - the guidance that an interim post in England could be for up to six years indicates that ‘interim’ is being used in a different way, perhaps to include what Americans might call crossroads or turnaround ministers. The recognition that a parish needs to be ‘consulted’ an early stage is a reflection of the more top-down governance of the Church of England, and that parishes do not ultimately make their own appointments – in the US it is not generally a matter of the parish being consulted, but the parish deciding whether it wants an interim minister, not least because (even in the Episcopal church) churches must be able to commit to the costs, which are sometimes more than for a settled pastor.43 The criteria for

41 Ibid., para 3.8.
42 Ibid., para 11.5.
placement of an interim minister are much broader than as commonly stated in the US, perhaps reflecting the fact that this is legislation, wanting to keep options open for bishops to exercise their discretion. In particular ‘(i) to enable the parish to equip itself more effectively for mission’ seems to include any conceivable situation and parish, although the guidance also states that interim appointments should not be the norm.

**Examples**

It is too soon to see the impact of the new legislation. But some dioceses in the Church of England have taken inspiration from the US model of interim ministry for 20 years or more.

While the use of limited term appointments is not new (this is what ‘priest-in-charge’ enabled in the time before common tenure was introduced), what is developing now is an increasing recognition that such appointments may have strategic value beyond being a stop-gap, with the invitation to consider such ministry as having distinctive characteristics and opportunities of its own. Here I will describe examples of interim or transitional ministry in three of the dioceses which have been developing the area recently.

The model of IM being developed in Liverpool Diocese is strongly connected with the American tradition, via their Archdeacon of Wigan and West Lancs, Jennifer McKenzie, who was formerly an interim minister in the US.

The Liverpool criteria for the use of IM cover a wide range of situations:

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44 The diocese of Newcastle, for example, produced a handbook of interim ministry in 2008 ‘Interim Ministry Conference Outcomes’, 3.
a. Turnaround situations in ‘fig tree’ churches which might go either way

b. Pastoral disruption or breakdown, significant conflict or pastoral trauma

c. Significant change on the horizon such as pastoral reorganisation, viability, parish share or building related issues

d. Following long incumbencies

e. Helping a church to die with dignity

Compared with the Archbishops’ guidance quoted above, these criteria are more specific, drawing attention to particular situations where a church may need to equip itself better for mission (criterion i, above), or think carefully about what will be required of a new minister (criterion ii, above).

In addition to appointing Interim Ministers to help within parishes and teams, Liverpool is seeking to make creative use of Interim Ministry to enable strategic development on a larger scale, notably under the umbrella of its ‘Transforming Wigan’ programme. Transforming Wigan is about ‘turnaround’ not just of a parish but of a very large and struggling deanery containing 30 parishes, with ambitious aims to reconfigure its worshipping life and its use of buildings to enable growth and the establishment of new worshipping communities. It is a 7 year programme, launched in 2015 with the help of substantial funding from the Church Commissioners (i.e. central funding from the Church of England). The appointment of interim and transitional

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46 Luke 13.6-9 The parable of the barren fig tree: the gardener tends the tree and gives it one more year to bear fruit.
ministers in churches that are identified as needing to close or transition to something
different is a key part of this strategy.48

Chelmsford Diocese has also received Church Commissioners funding which is in part
for the development of IM as part of its ‘Turnaround’ project. They are using the term
Interim Ministry to apply more widely than to the appointment of ministers to serve in
parishes with vacancies: IM here includes consultancy to parishes with incumbents, a
‘turnaround’ area dean, and lay appointments as well as clergy.49 (Liverpool also has
such varieties of ministries, for example as part of ‘Transforming Wigan’, but does not
class them all as IM). The common focus is on change.

The practice in Chelmsford diocese is to place IMs in parishes where there is seen to be
a high level of dysfunction, as shown for example in poor leadership, decline or lack of
growth, not meeting expectations of financial contributions to the costs of ministry,
and conflict issues. There are other criteria, but these are the main ones: indicating
parishes where there is a ‘problem’.50 This is in addition to a form of very short term (6
month) consultancy named ‘turnaround’ to help with the development of troubled
parishes where there is an incumbent in post. This vocabulary is in contrast to that
used elsewhere, for example in Scotland, where ‘turnaround’ ministry is longer than
interim ministry, in recognition that deep change takes years, not months.51

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48 Diocese of Liverpool, ‘Transforming Wigan Bid’, accessed 26 July 2017,
http://www.liverpool.anglican.org/userfiles/files/About%20the%20Diocese/whatwedo/transformingwig
an/Transforming%20Wigan%20Bid.pdf.
49 Helen Gheorghiu Gould and Peter Hill, ‘Improving the Future by Disturbing the Present’, 2017,
https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2017/20-january/comment/opinion/improving-the-future-by-
disturbing-the-present.
50 Interim Ministry Conference Outcomes’, 11.
51 Ibid., 9.
Bristol Diocese is quite different. In 2009 they implemented a ‘vacancy leadership development strategy’ which is in effect a form of interim ministry. The programme works on a two-tier basis, where a consultant employed by the diocese supports many different churches in vacancy at the same time through a process of development. This development process has in practice involved developing the local church leadership and, where necessary, the promotion of reconciliation and healthy relationships in and after difficult circumstances. It is run in every parish in vacancy – you could say that there are no particular criteria, or alternatively that every parish in the diocese is in a context of significant change, most notably the implementation of a diocesan strategy involving a significant reduction in the overall number of stipendiary clergy. The strategy also recognises the traditional aims of interim ministry: to assist with transitions and address dysfunction, and more generally to make a better permanent appointment when the time comes. The process begins with a review, including 20 to 30 one-to-one meetings with church members as well as meetings with the whole church and the PCC, using various methods as appropriate for the particular congregations. It does not finish until six months after the new incumbent takes up his or her post, with facilitated conversations between the congregation and the new minister. The overall approach is influenced by Appreciative Inquiry, and also Elizabeth Jordan’s research on facilitated conversations between newly appointed ordained leaders and their congregations.

53 Ibid., 2.
A 2012 report analysed the results, comparing the three years since the programme had been in place with the four years prior to its introduction. It found that with the programme in place the length of vacancy extended from 16.0 months to 17.4 months, and that parishes which took part generally found their attendance and giving both growing more than the diocesan average of all parishes (including those not in vacancy). By contrast in the four year period before the programme was introduced the attendance at parishes in vacancy decreased at a greater rate than the diocesan average. There are exceptions, and these are identified as parishes where the programme was not fully implemented, where expectations were managed poorly, where there was an extremely long vacancy, and where the vacancy had followed a traumatic event (e.g. the death of the incumbent). The report recommended that difficult issues in the parish were made more explicit at the outset, and that the kind of leadership development offered by the programme should be extended to include parishes that are not in vacancy. Since that time steps have been taken to shorten the programme for several reasons, including a desire to shorten the vacancy but also because many parishes have now developed more extensive lay involvement and less development has been needed. There has also been a reduction in central staff, and so volunteers (lay and ordained) are now involved in facilitating the programme.

We have seen that Interim Ministry has been around long enough in the US to have an established tradition, and that it is undergoing something of a revolution as practitioners are exploring and analysing different ways of approaching the traditional ‘tasks’ of development, and situations in which interim ministers may be deployed.

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56 From unpublished notes of a conversation George Rendell, Transition Manager for the Diocese of Bristol
The Church of England, while in some dioceses influenced by the US model, is in a very different place, with no common practice or even vocabulary emerging, let alone established. The variety of approaches found in the Church of England is not dissimilar to the variety that US practitioners are starting to point to, but team ministries, pastoral reorganisation, combination with pioneer ministry and more episcopally led processes (even compared with the US Episcopal church) add a level of complexity. It may be significant that the appointment is not controlled by the congregation in the way it would traditionally be in the US (and so there is the risk of interim ministry being seen as a punishment). In England terms like turnaround, transition, interim and development are not used consistently or in the same way as they are in the US, but nevertheless they reflect a common focus which has become the hallmark of the best interim ministry: a desire to help congregations to discover their vocation in the midst of change.
3. Experience and Insights from beyond the church

3.1 Interim CEOs and Managers

There is an obvious parallel to IM in the business world: the appointment of interim CEOs. This is a practice that evolved in the 1980s, in the context of a great deal of change and restructuring of organizations, and has grown. In 2013 Mooney et al. described a ‘dramatic’ increase in the number of interim appointments in the previous five years. In business, appointing an interim CEO is an alternative to appointing a permanent CEO (in contrast to IM in the Church of England where the delay in appointing a permanent minister which may be caused by using interim ministry is less well-defined). The need to appoint an interim CEO has traditionally been seen as a sign that a company has not sufficiently planned for the leadership succession, or that something else that has gone wrong. Interim appointments cause unease in the markets, and there is evidence that the financial performance of an organization goes down during an interim CEO’s time in office.

Nevertheless the appointment of an interim CEO is seen as helpful when emerging out of a crisis, or when there is a skills gap or a sudden change in needs. Research by Mooney et al. have identified different types of interim CEOs. They are:

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i. Seat warmer – keeps things going until the permanent CEO arrives (less than 3 months)

ii. Marketer – negotiates the organization’s merger/sale etc thereby doing him/herself out of a job

iii. Groomer – is a former CEO or founder who comes back to identify and prepare a successor internally to take on the role (6 – 12 months)

iv. Contender – is an internal candidate who is likely to be appointed permanently

v. Fixer – repairs existing parts of the organization to reinstate financial health, possibly including difficult decisions like redundancies (12 – 18 months)

vi. Cleaner – deals with serious situations where the organization might not survive, like imminent bankruptcy, where much more severe decisions are needed (12 – 18 months)

They caution against any appointment of a seat warmer – instead a permanent appointment should be made. The marketer is appointed in particular situations where it is possible there will no longer be a CEO in the same form in the long term, and so an interim appointment ensures there is no conflict of interest for the CEO leading the negotiation. The other types map onto three common situations which the authors identify as possibly appropriate for the appointment of an interim CEO.⁶³

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⁶³ Ibid., 626.
### Scenario | Organizational needs | Interim roles
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Unexpected CEO departure | Transition<br>Continuity<br>Certainty | Groomer<br>Contender
Dismissal of CEO | Strategic change<br>Turnaround management<br>Transition | Fixer<br>Cleaner
Retirement of long-tenured CEO | Transition to new CEO<br>Time to identify and groom an heir<br>Strategic change | Groomer<br>Contender

Fixers and cleaners are appointments from outside the organization, and a cleaner may be a professional interim. It is helpful for such appointments to be interim for various reasons. Firstly it can be easier for a temporary leader to make difficult and unpopular decisions. Secondly, these are areas which require specialised expertise and experience, and it may be difficult to appoint a permanent CEO who has suitable qualities for the turnaround/transition period. Finally such a person is likely to be more expensive – a cost which could be born perhaps for an interim period but not permanently.\(^6^4\)

Mooney et al. recommend that interim CEOs are given short term goals, to reflect the expected length of their tenure – attending to long term objectives are tasks for the permanent CEO, and the board.\(^6^5\) Tony Evans, a UK interim manager, concurs that objectives need to be clearly defined, but points out that half the time they will need to be changed when he discovers what is really going on in the organization.\(^6^6\)

Whatever the particular objectives, fixers and cleaners are appointed to

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\(^6^4\) Ibid.
\(^6^5\) Ibid., 630.
manage/create/encourage the changes necessary to improve the organization’s fortunes.

The appointment of ‘interim’ managers or CEOs in the corporate world is generally seen as a response to something that has gone wrong in an organization. The context of such appointments is very different from parishes in the Church of England in that parishes can function without a lead minister for a period, as the leadership of a parish is (at least theoretically) shared with lay representatives. Nevertheless research suggesting that it is never a good idea to appoint someone temporarily simply to hold the fort is salutary, supporting the idea that interim ministry should be in the interest of development – always ‘intentional’. The role of marketer is relevant to the Church of England in the context of pastoral reorganisation, and the distinction between fixer and cleaner draws attention to the fact that not all IM situations are equal. Given that at least one diocese has had problems finding suitable people to serve as IMs, these distinctions (suitably altered for church context) could help to clarify situations where less specialised ministers would be appropriate, as in business it is only the cleaner who is likely to be a professional interim manager. Other comments above about paying more for an interim than for a permanent CEO/manager and the nature of goal-setting also have implications for the church, which we will consider further in section 5 below.

3.2 Theories of Organization Development and Change

We have seen that the initial work of Loren Mead on interim ministry had its origins in the field of Organization Development (OD). OD has evolved into a field with a huge
literature, where theory and practice have mainly evolved separately.\(^67\) We will not, therefore, attempt to survey the whole field.\(^68\) Instead we will begin by tracing the history of OD ideas which have influenced interim ministry practitioners before setting out some current aspects of complexity theory which have a great deal to say about change and development in organizations.

Kurt Lewin, writing in the 1930s and 40s, made a huge contribution to the understanding of learning and change.\(^69\) Part of his contribution was to realise that if one sought change in an individual’s behaviour or attitude it was necessary to change the group of which they were a part, otherwise the pressure of the group would likely cause them to revert to their previous ways.\(^70\) A person is subject to forces (for example social pressure or internal needs) that drive him or her to behave or think in a certain way. For change to occur there must be motivation to change which is created by altering the forces to which people are subject.\(^71\) The stages of change may be named as ‘unfreezing, movement, refreezing’: initially balanced forces are disrupted to create a situation where change can happen, after which a new equilibrium is reached, where the new field of forces entrenches the new behaviour.\(^72\) This is Lewin’s ‘three step’ model of change.\(^73\) In order to deliberately bring about different behaviour, one analyses the forces and adds to or adjusts them accordingly, provoking the ‘unfreezing’, helping people to change their perceptions of the world around them.


\(^{68}\) For a concise up-to-date survey see Mee-Yan Cheung-Judge and Linda Holbeche, Organization Development: A Practitioner’s Guide for OD and HR, 2nd ed. (London: KoganPage, 2015).

\(^{69}\) Ibid., 33.


\(^{72}\) Ibid., 49.

\(^{73}\) Cheung-Judge and Holbeche, Organization Development: A Practitioner’s Guide for OD and HR, 34.
Lewin’s work was the beginning of modern OD, seeing the group as a locus of change which can be directed through careful analysis and intervention, while using participative and collaborative processes.\textsuperscript{74}

Psychoanalytic theory was also important in the early development of OD. Harry Levinson was a clinical psychologist, and proposed that an organization could be understood as a family, with behaviours driven by the need to reduce anxiety which may distract from the organization’s true purpose. Like in psychoanalysis, the case history is very important to understanding and even ‘diagnosing’ an organization, and in this tradition interventions are mainly with the senior management, as they are most likely to shape the ‘personality’ of an organization.\textsuperscript{75} More broadly OD is influenced by psychotherapeutic understandings of how structures and behaviours in organizations can be a defence against anxiety – a highly relevant topic when considering IM.\textsuperscript{76}

Systems theory was first applied to organizations in the 1960s.\textsuperscript{77} A system is an array of elements that interact with each other and, in an open system, the environment. When considering organizations there are systems at many levels: subsets of the organization and the organization itself may be understood as \textit{open} systems which interact with their environment. This may seem a trivially obvious point, but identifying organizations as systems invites new perspectives. For example, change in one part of a system will impact on other parts, perhaps with unintended


\textsuperscript{75} Burke, ‘Where Did OD Come From?’, 36.


We have seen in the discussion of interim ministry above how systems theory was applied to families in a therapeutic context, to help deal with problems. When applied to organizations the emphasis was different, especially as evidenced in Peter Senge’s very influential work on learning organizations. Senge identified patterns of behaviour mainly related to the organization’s ability to use feedback. The OD consultant can help the organization to become a ‘learning organization’ by identifying patterns that distort feedback and replacing them with those that will help the organization to learn.

The theories presented so far have been mainly used by OD practitioners to help them analyse the situation, diagnose the problem, and intervene to bring about a desired outcome. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) uses a different model of practice, where the process of finding out about the organization is itself the intervention, with no real diagnosis taking place and an outcome that is not planned but emerges from the process. The theoretical backing for this approach is deeply philosophical, deriving from an understanding that the language that people use to some extent creates the reality they experience. What this means in practice is that it matters what people say, and the stories they tell can change their behaviour. AI is founded on the basis that in every organization there is something that works, and reflecting and talking about that will give people the energy and confidence to build on it. AI is not about problem solving, but creating a space for a new way for an organization to listen to itself and develop. It is highly collaborative, with the aim to hear all the voices in the organization. The inquiry itself is the intervention that leads to change, and the

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78 Ibid., 30.
responsibility for change lies with everyone, not just those at the top of the organization. As we have seen in section 2 above, AI has been taken up wholeheartedly by IM practitioners.

OD approaches influenced by complexity and chaos theories take systems thinking to another level, and provide a further theoretical basis for AI (along with other diverse insights from organization development). Complexity theory is a huge field, with origins and applications across many areas of knowledge, and is itself not one theory but a collection of theories and ideas. Here I will introduce some of the most influential concepts in the application of complexity ideas to OD. In such a large, complex and emerging field there is a danger of applying scientific metaphors without fully appreciating their meaning, however with care non-scientist scholars have found such metaphors extremely useful, and the application of complexity thinking to organizations is a growing and fruitful field.

Complexity theory invites us to consider the contrast between a system that has a stable equilibrium – a state in which it remains or to which it returns – and one which is chaos. Chaos in this context does not mean complete disorder, but a delicate balance between randomness and stability in which curious things happen. This state is often referred to in OD literature as ‘the edge of chaos’. In this state of bounded instability, patterns emerge that are not obviously connected with the movements of the system’s elements. Such a system is a ‘Complex Adaptive System’ (CAS), which is a self-organizing network which adjusts itself to its environment. Examples of CASs

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81 ibid., 38.
include the stock market, networks, gardens, bee colonies – and humans. Living systems are all CASs.

Various characteristics of CASs provide vivid metaphors for organizational life. CASs adapt to their environments, sometimes gradually, and sometimes suddenly. No one directs them or can predict how or when they will change. They can display apparently discontinuous change, where a small event causes the whole structure to break through into a different way of being. This is when the straw breaks the camel’s back, or an avalanche is triggered, or a butterfly’s wingbeat leads to a tornado. In organizations change is not always step-by-predictable-step – important changes can be dramatic, sudden and (crucially) unpredictable, although in retrospect a cause may be discerned.

These characteristics are related to the fact that CASs display fractals. A fractal is a pattern which results from a mathematical calculation which is ‘scale-free’, meaning that the same shapes appear however far you zoom into it – ferns and coastlines are examples from nature. Some features of organizations are also apparently fractal, for example characteristics like secrecy or openness, a tendency to name-calling or thoughtfulness may be found throughout an organization, whether in the interactions of its lowest-paid staff or in its annual general meeting.

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84 Ibid., 149–50.
88 Wheatley, Leadership and the New Science, 128.
By contrast CASs also display various features (including self-organization, emergence and ‘strange attractors’) which mean that patterns that are seen at a larger system level cannot be deduced from examining the individual parts: such patterns emerge. In nature this can be seen in the way shoals of fish or flocks of birds move, or in the way a colony of ants produces an anthill.\(^89\) Despite the individual ants knowing nothing of the greater structure, their behaviour produces something showing great order which is qualitatively different from the small actions that created it. It is essential to look at the whole system to understand what is really going on: no examination of why individual ants do what they do will tell you about the ant hill.

Introducing complexity thinking into the area of organizational change is a move away from a Newtonian perspective on the universe. This scientific and philosophical point has profound implications. In Newton’s theories the things of the world are like billiard balls, which may be pushed around by a force but only one of sufficient size, and having been set in motion have momentum which will carry on unless something intervenes. In a Newtonian understanding, with sufficient information the progress and movement of the ball can in theory be perfectly understood and calculated. In traditional OD organizations are thought of in this way: they have momentum, which takes them on smooth and predictable paths of change, they can be changed in a predictable way through a suitable application of force, and they will resist external forces in a way commensurate with their size.\(^90\) As Wheatley puts it, this means we think that to change an organization we need ‘sufficient mass to counteract the organization’s material weight’ and that we need either large change projects of

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\(^90\) Eoyang, ‘Complexity and the Dynamics of Organizational Change’, 319.
‘smaller projects that have a lot of speed’.91 The implication is that if a change effort fails – and most do – the problem was that likely that those exerting the forces for change did not apply enough effort, and the answer is to put more effort in the next time.

Complexity science observes that the world is different. The Newtonian model is found to be a useful approximation for when things are stable. But when you move to the verge of chaos a whole host of things happen that Newtonian science cannot explain. Complexity shows that change is possible without exerting huge pressure, that change can be spontaneous, and that order can exist within chaos. This is enormously encouraging in a world where it is widely recognised that the pace of change is getting faster, where the one thing we know for certain is that in 10, 25, or 100 years everyday life is going to look very different, in ways we cannot predict. If the world were purely Newtonian, that would be a terrifying prospect for those organizations that recognise they will need to adapt – as the larger the change, the larger the effort required, and with imperfect information about the future it is not known where exactly that effort should be applied. In a complex world there is another solution: organizations can move to the edge of chaos, to harness the energy there and release its members to discover and enact what it needs to do in order to adapt.

**Implications of theory for practice**

Complexity theories in OD have significant implications for practice. They invite a different perspective on what a healthy organization looks like. If an organization is in

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a changing environment and is required to undergo adaptive change to survive, the
edge of chaos is the best place for it to be, a fact which would challenge those who
desire to use organization development processes to bring order everywhere. As
Stacey puts it, ‘Disorder is not simply the result of inertia, incompetence, or ignorance
– it is a fundamental property of creative systems and it plays a vital role in that
creativity.’

These implications and ideas can be quite challenging to those who are used to
practices based on the Newtonian model: a recent textbook for OD practitioners
dedicates a whole section to the issue of how to promote a complexity approach to
change in organizations that have a more traditional change management culture, and
even includes tips about doing so covertly. This is a serious business. And yet, it is
widely recognised that the traditional (Newtonian) planned approach to change
doesn’t work most of the time. Those who are keen to see change in organizations
have good reason to try new ways of doing things. Complexity-compatible methods
may not be as new as they seem, either. While some of the practices that help to
encourage complex change may not be part of traditional OD, many of them have
been discovered and used in other contexts where groups form (and indeed we might
recognise some from church life, with rich theological resonances which we will
explore in a later section). In particular, AI has strong connections with complexity
theory.

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Jossey-Bass, 2006), 239; Haridimos Tsoukas and Robert Chia, ‘On Organizational Becoming: Rethinking
Complexity theory tells us that we need to work with the whole system. That is not new – it is the definition of systems thinking. But in contrast to traditional systems thinking, a stance which takes complexity seriously is less about analysing and more about looking at the whole and the parts at the same time. Emergence and self-organization show that some aspects of the whole can never be seen as the sum of the parts, while fractal patterning invites the consideration that other aspects of the whole may be seen in the parts individually, and vice versa. This contrasts with traditional systems thinking where the way to understand the system is to break it down into parts and reveal the way they act on each other, which may be complicated but is basically predictable. In a complex system there may be order which only can be seen by looking at the whole, and which at a more basic level is chaos.\textsuperscript{96} This means analysis will never reveal the whole picture.

If you can’t analyse, what do you do instead? Wheatley describes moving ‘past cognition into the realm of sensation’ – being open to the whole, ready to discover what is happening.\textsuperscript{97} This is a move from a classic understanding of left brain thinking to right brain, from analysing into parts to looking at the whole, from deduction to intuition, from analysing to sensing.\textsuperscript{98} To do this one uses tools that encourage holistic, creative, ‘right brain’ thinking: for example story-telling, drawing, imagery, poetry, drama and improvisation.\textsuperscript{99} Such methods will help to understand the system, but are also, from a complexity perspective, part of the process of change. This is

\textsuperscript{96} Wheatley, \textit{Leadership and the New Science}, 139.
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., 140–41.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., 140ff; Iain McGilchrist, \textit{The Master and His Emissary}, 2nd ed. (Yale: Yale University Press, 2012).
because using them can change the relationships of people within the system. From a complexity perspective, if change is wanted but is not happening the best way to achieve that is to encourage an organization to become a CAS, which will itself work out and execute the changes that are needed. While such changes may not be engineered, they may be fostered.\textsuperscript{100}

Complexity theorists identify five key areas to address in encouraging a system to becoming a CAS: connection, diversity, information, power differentials, and level of anxiety.\textsuperscript{101} These may be thought of as building the strength of the system or network so that it is resilient enough to exist on the edge of chaos. Connection is improving the connections within the network, diversity is increasing their variety. Power differentials must be addressed so that information from all parts of the organization is used and flows as appropriate to all other parts: those on the margins who are more related to the outside world have access to essential information about the environment that is all too easy for those whose strong connections are at the centre of the system not to receive.\textsuperscript{102}

The connections we are talking about here are generally relationships between people, and so complexity change interventions are about building up the strength and diversity of relationships. Because for CASs it is important to address power differentials, include those on the margins, and increase diversity of connections, any intervention is most likely to be productive if it includes the whole of the system. Methods of inquiring into the system, like storytelling as mentioned above, not only tell us about the system but can also build up the strength of the system if they are

\begin{footnotes}
\item[101] Ibid., 47.
\item[102] Mirvis, ‘Revolutions in OD’, 65.
\end{footnotes}
done in a way to include the greatest variety of people and encourage trust and positive relationships. This may include disrupting ‘hierarchical power plays’ to ensure that everyone really can speak and be heard.\(^{103}\) If the process of inquiry is handled well it becomes an intervention which helps the system to change.

If the organization being considered is a stable system and adaptive change is required, then the purpose of any intervention is to disrupt it, to enable new connections to be made and to create some instability which brings it to a place of creativity. Empowering the marginalized and powerless is one way of doing this, to ensure they disturb the system.\(^{104}\) This means more than listening to what they have to say: it means allowing people real freedom to organise themselves so that they can identify and execute appropriate actions, to experiment and even to fail at their experiments. If the problem is that people do not care enough to take initiative to do such things, then a purpose of interventions will be to help them to ‘care enough’ to do so – which means changing their values.\(^{105}\)

There is a saying that culture eats strategy for breakfast. It is well known in the OD world and beyond that culture and the values that go with it are extremely hard to change, and that a major reason that traditional change efforts fail is that they have not successfully created a change in culture.\(^{106}\) Complexity both explains why this is and suggests ways of influencing culture and values. If values are an emergent feature of complex behaviour, they cannot be controlled directly. Wheatley suggests that values create ‘attractors’, namely the patterns that can emerge from chaotic systems –

\(^{103}\) Cheung-Judge and Holbeche, *Organization Development: A Practitioner’s Guide for OD and HR*, 47.
\(^{104}\) Mirvis, ‘Revolutions in OD’, 65.
which are ‘attractive’ in that they draw the behaviour of elements of the system into an overall pattern.\textsuperscript{107} If existing values are considered negative, then shifting them means disrupting the system sufficiently that a different ‘attractor’ can emerge, to draw people away from their old ways to something better. Because this is a complex system and values are an emergent property, this cannot be done directly by simply telling people what the organization’s values are. In fact, if such communication of values reinforces power structures that reduce helpful information flows across the network they may serve only to entrench the old ways – hence the surprising advice is given to stop communicating (new) values, if communication is limited to traditional channels and therefore reinforcing the old pattern.\textsuperscript{108}

The way to inspire people, and to change their values, Wheatley proposes, is to help them to discover new meaning. As she writes, ‘by far the most powerful force of attraction in organizations and in our individual lives is meaning.’\textsuperscript{109} The idea is that if an organization is trapped by values which are negative, these can be best overcome if a connection is made with a new meaning, which becomes a new attractor – a new emergent pattern which can overcome the existing pattern – releasing energy for change. ‘With meaning as our attractor, we can recreate ourselves to carry forward what we value most.’\textsuperscript{110} If they are to adopt new ways of being people need to see the connection between those new values and their own stories. This is a reason storytelling is a valuable tool, for it can help people place their own actions in a larger context, and give them meaning.


\textsuperscript{108} Harle, ‘The Formless Void as Organizational Template’, 116.

\textsuperscript{109} Wheatley, \textit{Leadership and the New Science}, 132.

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 134.
Attempting to change values should, however, be a last resort – and may in fact not prove possible. A far more certain plan which a complexity perspective enables is the possibility of discerning the good values that are already expressed in the organization, however sporadically, and building on those by increasing the strength and connectivity of the people involved so that their values can be heard and spread and strengthened in the rest of the organization. It may be seen that this is an effect of Al, which proceeds on the assumption that there is something good in every organization, and that focusing on it will help it to grow.111

Making new connections and allowing different people the freedom to self-organize and experiment might be uncomfortable for those at the centre of the organization who have their stable patterns disrupted, but is ultimately productive as it moves the organization towards a CAS. If on the other hand the organization is one that hardly befits the name, and is more of a random set of people acting independently, interventions including a carefully managed process of inquiry can help to build relationships and security, and thereby the connectivity which is a feature of a CAS. Wheatley gives the evocative example of a spider repairing a damaged web: ‘If a system is in trouble, it can be restored to health by connecting it to more of itself. To make a system stronger, we need to create stronger relationships...’112

The role of anxiety in all this deserves special attention. Moving a stable system to a CAS requires its members to be able to cope with being on the edge of chaos, but, understandably, people can find this very threatening. As Wheatley puts it, ‘Chaos is the last state before a system plunges into random behaviour where no order exists’: it

111 Cheung-Judge and Holbeche, Organization Development: A Practitioner’s Guide for OD and HR, 47.
112 Wheatley, Leadership and the New Science, 145.
is not surprising that people should find it difficult to be near a state where nothing
can be relied upon. The fear of chaos needs to be addressed if people are to be
willing to move to this different way of doing things. The need to control anxiety
may explain why the commitment to Newtonian planning persists in environments
where it is not working. And a certain amount of anxiety is helpful, in encouraging
people to look for opportunities to change.

When anxiety is holding back potential for change it should not be ignored, but
addressed, beginning with those who are seeking to encourage the change, who must
themselves be ready to allow a process to unfold without knowing what exactly it will
lead to. There may be a need to build security, so that leaders are able to ‘disturb the
system yet surrender control to the flow of events’. Leaders need to learn to let
things happen rather than make them happen. It is hard, but for CASs to really show
their strength it is essential, for the whole point of encouraging an organization to a
CAS state is that this is a situation where the organization itself makes the best use of
all the information it receives in order to develop and implement solutions, but that
this kind of change cannot be predicted or directed. To let go of planning is to accept
the reality that we cannot direct a complex system, we can only disturb it.

This is not to say there is no place for planning. Not all change that is required is
adaptive – sometimes the challenge is a technical one, about improving existing
processes in a stable system – in which case a Newtonian command and control
approach to change might work. In a changing environment planning can help to

113 Ibid., 117.
116 Mirvis, ‘Revolutions in OD’, 68.
117 Harle, ‘The Formless Void as Organizational Template’, 111.
defend against anxiety. What complexity tells us is not that we shouldn’t have any plans, but that we need to attend to the process by which plans are created: such processes should allow for healthy conflict, conversation, experiment, and wide participation.\(^{118}\) I would add that attention should be paid to how a plan is developed especially if considering the longer term: there is no point in attempting to develop a CAS with all its benefits unless there is space in the plan for unplanned activities and initiatives to be discerned and encouraged. Fostering the dynamics of a CAS can be done at the same time as enabling appropriate control structures.\(^{119}\)

Overall complexity theory suggests that those who are seeking to develop organizations in the face of adaptive change should attempt to build resilience rather than stability.\(^{120}\) Improving connectivity within an organization will make it more able to adapt and respond to changes both internal and external, and therefore is more likely to have a real long term impact than traditional long term planning which is out of date as soon as it is written. When adaptive change is on the cards plans are generally best made in the short term, with the best long term prospects being for an organization that is in good health and can respond well to change regardless of what plans it has made.

We have seen that in business the idea of ‘interim’ is looked on with suspicion, but research indicates particular circumstances and types of appointment that are recommended. Transferring these concepts to the church takes a bit of reimagining,

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\(^{119}\) Mary Uhl-Bien, Russ Marion, and Bill McKelvey, ‘Complexity Leadership Theory: Shifting Leadership from the Industrial Age to the Knowledge Era’, *The Leadership Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (August 2007): 304.

but there is nevertheless useful wisdom from business experience of interims that should be considered. Regarding the content of interim ministry, organizational development is a rich field with many relevant ideas to the topics of change and transition. The latest developments influenced by complexity theory provide a rich theoretical basis for the move in interim ministry away from the five sequential tasks, while supporting in particular the importance of the development of the ‘connections’ focus point, and the use of appreciative inquiry. They also encourage a move away from a hierarchical view of leadership and management to a collaborative, networked approach, which will prove fruitful in our theological reflection below.
4. Theological Reflection

A theological reflection on interim ministry could take us to just about the whole of the faith and the whole of the world. Here we will reflect on four broad areas that arise from the practice of interim ministry, and have the potential to give both encouragement and guidance: they are life, love, power and priesthood.\(^{121}\)

4.1 Life

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, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. 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 not from nothing (\textit{ex nihilo}), it is from a ‘primal chaos’.\(^{122}\) The process of creation is about bringing order to something that is already there and is disordered, separating day and night, separating the waters above from the waters below (Gen 1.6-7), separating the creatures from the land (Gen 1.24), and so on. In the very beginning the substance of creation, which is chaos, needs order imposed on it for life to come forth. The value of order and stability is expressed elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, for example in the promise of the land for God’s people and the establishment of traditions of worship and of monarchy. 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 with

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\(^{121}\) Complexity theory provides a fruitful area for reflection on divine action, which we will not consider here for reasons of space. For example, see several chapters in W. Mark Richardson and Wesley J. Wildman, eds., \textit{Religion and Science: History, Method, Dialogue} (London: Routledge, 1996).

many inter-related members (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 safety (Ezk 40-48, 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 disrupts and divides human languages, in 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 express his message of disrupting the established order –
breaking Sabbath rules (occasionally) and social boundaries (frequently). The arrival of
the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is expressed not by the people miraculously speaking one
language, but many languages. In scripture diversity and disorder are frequently signs
of God’s presence at least as often as order is depicted as a sign of God’s blessing.

Transformative change, which is at the heart of IM, can be enabled both by the
disruption of order, and by allowing order to emerge where things threaten to fall
apart. There can be change when maintaining order, but this is not transformative
change – it is maintenance. Time and time in the scriptures God’s action is seen in
disruption, not in maintenance. While it may be that the maintenance of order is not
spoken about by scripture so much simply because there is less to say about things
that stay the same, God’s action in disrupting, transforming change is certainly no less
important in the history of God’s people as recorded in the Hebrew Bible than is the
maintenance of stability.

In the New Testament the action of God in disrupting order reaches new proportions in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. In this context of huge disruption, Paul’s attempts to bring order to the life of new Christian communities are revealed as a relatively light touch approach to preserving values (e.g. ensuring due welcome and consideration is given to all at the Lord’s supper 1 Cor 11.20ff) and ensuring some aspects of the previous order do not return (notably the requirement for circumcision Gal 5.2ff). In the New Testament 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 2.43ff).

So God’s action is seen in disorder and disruption as well as order. Returning to Genesis, and the origin of life in the primeval chaos, we should suspect that God’s action in bringing order is about bringing the right amount of order for life to thrive, not removing disorder altogether. From science we learn that change is necessary for life, so for that creation to truly live, some disorder, some capacity for change remains. We also learn from science that what is disorderly when you look at it closely might reveal a pattern when you look at the whole. Order can have chaos at its root, and so order and chaos are not opposites, but related. Life itself comes out of this relation, as Friesen puts it, life is ‘the dance of chaos with order.’

Life is a process of becoming. Dwight Friesen sums up God’s mission as ‘to bring life’, a mission which reaches its fullest expression in Christ. Christ’s life, death and most especially his resurrection bring new life by disrupting the existing order. Change is an essential part of Christianity: renewal, repentance, metanoia, conversion, and healing.

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124 Ibid., 97.
125 Ibid., 94.
are different ways of referring to the transformations at the heart of Christian discipleship. It is important to note that such change is not once-for-all – the call to follow Christ is a call to the paradoxical-sounding continuous conversion. The Benedictines make this one of their vows – a call to ‘conversion of life’, which is about continually being recalled to Christ, to come closer to following his ways and all that God calls one to do and be. The assumption behind such a vow is that such a conversion does not happen once, but time and time again. God calls us to new life again and again, and each time that involves change.

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 is necessary for a life of continual conversion. But there is a balance. A system that has no identity, no connections within itself risks breaking down into total disorder. No order means no relationships, no trust, no security, no cooperation. Attachment theory from child development teaches that a child must have a secure base from which to wander, to experiment and to learn, and have the ability to return to that base. So too with the people of God. The travails of the Hebrew people were to attain and then be restored to a land which could be their own, a place of security and prosperity, which would be a sign of blessing from God. In our own times it is understandable that we identify chaos with despair, as something

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127 Ibid.
to get through.\textsuperscript{129} When things go wrong we look for something regular to hold on to, to take comfort from. At a global level time and time again we hear of the disorder of war and its consequences of famine, displacement, and the breakdown of society stunt and ruin millions of lives – what so much of the world needs is a little order, to bring peace and security that will allow people the space to become all that God calls them to be. We long for security, and at times naturally fear change.

The bible in its very method invites us to look positively on change, seeing it as part of God’s story: for the bible is full of stories, of narrative, which is the only way to describe something that changes. Another feature of narrative is that it is usually possible to tell more than one story about the same events: there is an aspect of narrative which is subjective, and chosen, although it describes something objective and given. Branson proposes that the change of continual conversion may be understood as ‘adopting a different narrative.’\textsuperscript{130} Narrative describes change and also opens up the possibility for change in the future. The story of Christ’s life and death, ended there, is a tragedy. Allowed to roll on to the resurrection, it is transformative and life-giving. Rolling on yet further into the history of the church there is further tragedy, transformation and beauty. We place ourselves somewhere in that history by the stories we tell, stories that ultimately will be about the culmination of God’s kingdom, although we do not know how we will get from here to there or what exactly it will look like.


\textsuperscript{130} Branson, \emph{Memories, Hopes, and Conversations}, 54.
David Ford notes that a dramatic approach has been particularly fruitful in theology, for example in the way that drama unfolds, conveys particularity and complexity, and invites us to become engaged ‘and to look toward its as yet open ending.’ Drama embraces the objective and the subjective, both speaking truth and inviting participation. Appreciative Inquiry understands the capacity of story not only to express truths that are otherwise hidden, but through that expression to change what people do. Both stability and change are at its root: the belief that in any church or organization God is already working, but that a story is still unfolding in which those who play a part have choices to make which can lead toward or away the holy dance of life which is God’s mission. Telling stories invites those involved to grow in goodness, to change, and to enter more fully into life.

4.2 Love

While the sparkling, beautifully proportioned heavenly Jerusalem of eternal noonday is an evocative image of that order which seems to be the opposite of war and purposeless suffering, it is static. It is not alive, it needs change, it needs people to move in to bring life, and the gift of human life is love. We have seen that change is at the heart of the Christian faith and life. The changes of life are sanctified when they provide occasion for love. ‘God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them’ (1 Jon 4.16b). Love is at the beginning of creation, for the beginning of love is the perception of the loveliness of the other:

God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. (Genesis 1.31a)

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According to Genesis, creation, and all that is in it, is good. This is a central tenet of Christian belief, but its working out has sometimes run into problems when considering humanity. The creation of humankind in God’s image – therefore good – is marred by sin, and at times in the history of Christianity, the marring has been seen to be more of a wipe-out of God’s image, and even the replacement of that image by something downright evil. From before the time of Augustine, at different times and places, Christian teachers have seen humanity as more or less inherently depraved and lacking in goodness.\(^{132}\)

Appreciative inquiry is about reversing this tendency, remembering that love is at the heart of the universe, and that God invites us to ‘wake up to the love that already is’ and join in with what God is doing.\(^{133}\) It is, following Martin Buber, about learning to see the light that we carry within, and so to have no reason to fear the darkness.\(^{134}\) Dwelling on what is good will bring gratitude, which can resource important, life-giving change. As Branson puts it, ‘Gratitude is not first affect (emotions), although it often helps us move from fear or doubt or anger; rather, gratitude is a stance that changes our perceptions, our thinking, our discernment.’\(^{135}\) Focusing on the good does not mean that the bad is ignored, in fact it provides the strength and encouragement to be able to face up to what is wrong and do something about it.

Remembering with gratitude is a frequent theme of the Hebrew scriptures and of Jewish practice, especially expressed in many of the psalms (e.g. Pss 47, 78, 145).\(^{136}\)

\(^{134}\) Ibid., 122.
\(^{136}\) Ibid., 46ff.
This theme flows into Christian stories and practice, for example in the parable of the ten lepers (Luke 17.12ff) and supremely in the ‘thanksgiving’ prayer which is at the heart of every Christian celebration of the Eucharist. Returning to the theme of narrative, remembering means that a new story can be told about dreadful events, as when in the Eucharist the act of remembering the night before Jesus died becomes a celebration of the inauguration of a new kind of community, gathered to break bread together. Goodness can be discerned even in sorrowful events, which may reveal love as much (or even, on occasion, more than) those that are joyful.

Branson comments that most writings on AI focus only on looking at the good, for fear of getting into a mire of negativity, but that doing so misses an opportunity for positive change. As he puts it ‘...the framework of gratitude can create an environment in which lament and confession can be properly generative’ i.e. bring about good, transformative change.\textsuperscript{137} Gratitude can itself be a consequence of genuine lament and confession. Everyday experience teaches us that remembering our own mistakes and knowing that we are forgiven can make us kinder and readier to forgive. Gratitude, which may be occasioned by sorrow, is very closely tied with love both given and received. For gratitude receives events, things and people as gifts, perceiving the goodness in the other: it is a small step from this to love.

Love which begins with perceiving the goodness in another is also about being involved in a story. Emma Percy, writing about priesthood and mothering, points out that love is never disinterested. She challenges portrayals of the agape love of Jesus as expressed in his sacrifice as expecting nothing in return, instead drawing attention to

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 522.
Jesus’ radical love and desire to bring people into relationship and community.\textsuperscript{138} This agape is a love, like a good mother’s love, which is passionately involved with the other, separate but deeply connected. Love is about togetherness and separateness, it is about relationship which allows for distinction and movement. For Percy this love is ‘about giving attention to the other, motivated by the question, What are you going through?’\textsuperscript{139} Such attention has obvious connections with Appreciative Inquiry, and invites us to consider that God too, like a mother, attends to the stories being unearthed in a process of AI, as it were looking over the shoulder of a church’s members as they unearth their gift and carry it to the future.

4.3 Power

True love as exemplified in mothering involves giving up control: loving means seeing the other as a gift, which means accepting them as they are.\textsuperscript{140} Interim ministers clearly have to be ready to relinquish whatever control they acquire, they know that they are only there for a limited period, and that it will be the congregation with their new pastor who take forward any plans developed in the interim period. Complexity theory says that one of the ways leaders can nudge a system out of deadly stability is by empowering those on the margins, which also means giving up control.\textsuperscript{141} In a living network power is ‘not hoarded; it flows as a relational lubricant.’\textsuperscript{142} This means some will lose power while others gain it. The theme of loss of worldly power has strong echoes in the Christian story, where often apparent powerlessness results in the

\textsuperscript{139} Emma Percy, ‘Reverend Mother - How Insights from Mothering Can Inform the Practice of Leadership in the Church (Part II)’, \textit{Modern Believing} 44, no. 3 (2003): 32.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., 29.
\textsuperscript{141} Mirvis, ‘Revolutions in OD’, 65.
\textsuperscript{142} Friesen, \textit{Thy Kingdom Connected}, 100.
release of a different kind of strength and connection with God. This is most apparent in the crucifixion, as Jesus’ self-emptying kenosis was the occasion for his greatest act of love.

Unrealistic attitudes to power and control lead to sin, a ‘fantasy of control’. Attempts to control the other often lie behind abuse and conflict in churches, and many ‘distorted images of God.’ Giving up power is an occasion for love, holding onto it inappropriately an occasion for sin. This is not to say that power is bad in itself. Sam Wells writes of the importance of acknowledging the power one has, and we can see that power enables action. The ability to disrupt a stable system into creative disequilibrium and to incorporate the marginalised is about a correct use of power. It may also be a correct use of power to create a place of stability which can be a safe place for people to reveal their vulnerabilities and to grow. As Percy puts it, this kind of leadership ‘...takes seriously the empowerment of others, but it will be most passionately aroused when the life it seeks to preserve is threatened.’ This is the use of power to empower others. Such actions are less about solving problems than creating a situation where people can solve their problems together, enabling mutual transformation through relationship. This is love. There is, in this loving use of power to empower, a recognition of the presence of the image of God in every person, and a fundamental letting go of predictions and plans.

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143 Ibid.
146 Friesen, Thy Kingdom Connected, 89.
4.4 Priesthood

Our discussions of IM have mainly been influenced by the US model. For most of the Church of England’s history it has not been the tradition to have ‘temporary’ clergy leading congregations. As a relatively new form of ministry IM reveals and questions implicit models of priesthood, as Elizabeth Jordan found in her own experience as an interim minister in the Church of England. It has been common currency in the church that parishes should avoid making plans at all in a vacancy, since the new incumbent may have his or her own ideas. IM challenges this, saying that the congregation has the right and ability, with help, to consider its vision for the future and to require that a new incumbent should join in with and develop that vision. This raises important issues about the nature of ministry and its place in the church. To put it simplistically, in an older, static hierarchical view, the minister is the leader, the congregation the followers, and it is up to the minister to discern and determine what the congregation should be doing. If this were the case it would be nonsensical for a congregation to work during a vacancy to develop its vision as happens in IM.

If we are in an Anglican context, traditionally the minister is seen as able to do this work because she or he is an ordained priest, called by God and the church to lead a congregation. A challenge to this is the ‘priesthood of all believers’, also a part of Anglican doctrine. There is a puzzle of how to relate these two priesthoods. Stephen Pickard, an Anglican, develops an account of ministry in which these two priesthoods are intrinsically and dynamically related. His account takes from complexity theory the emergence of order from movement and relationship, addressing what he believes

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147 Jordan, ‘Monarch, Shepherd or Parent?’
148 Stephen Pickard, Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 124.
to be weaknesses in other trinitarian accounts of priesthood which do not give a convincing account of how the two types of priesthood are connected.\textsuperscript{149} For Pickard, the orders of ministries are emergent, interrelated and dynamic.\textsuperscript{150} It is to be expected, therefore, that new forms of ministry should emerge from the life of the Christian community: Pickard points to episcopacy as an important example of a ministerial office which emerged in the early church.\textsuperscript{151} Consequently he argues for a more ‘grounded’ episcopate with stronger links between it and the ministry of all the baptised.\textsuperscript{152} We might consider IM (whether undertaken by those who are lay or ordained) to be a further example, emerging from and inseparable from the ministry of all the baptised, who both enable and are enabled by such ministry in a truly collaborative way.

A further connection between episcopacy and IM has been noted by Jane Williams, drawing on the fact that interim ministers are necessarily less embedded in the communities in which they serve, since they will not spend so much time there.\textsuperscript{153} Bishops are called to be at the ‘crossroads of the local and the universal’: likewise interim ministers bring to the congregations they serve a connection with the wider church, while learning enough about the local situation to serve. This connects with one of the traditional tasks of interim ministry, to renew denominational linkages, but gives it a deeper and richer meaning. In an episcopal church all ministers are in a sense the bishop’s representative, in whose ministry they share, but interim ministers may be closer to the bishop than is ordinarily the case. Williams suggests this is a virtue,
and that ‘reporting back to the bishop’ may in itself be a legitimate brief for interim ministry in an episcopal church, providing a context for the expression of episcopal ministry.

Pickard’s work on the emergence of orders of ministry is part of his project to provide a theological basis for collaborative ministry. Interim ministry, in the understanding presented in this paper, should be a deeply collaborative process, enabling the congregation to develop a vision which it holds and carries through a new minister’s arrival who may influence that vision but is not expected to fundamentally change it. A complexity-influenced approach to interim ministry challenges hierarchical, bureaucratic views of the church and change, and invites the use of different metaphors for church and ministry.

An image proposed recently by an interim minister is that of the church as a garden rather than a machine, and the pastor as a gardener not an engineer. A garden can only be tended, it cannot be fixed, the best approach by far is to begin with what is there, it takes time to develop, and whatever the gardener’s efforts are, the growth can only be given by God. While this image has great strength in encouraging the valuing of what is there already, and tending rather than controlling, other images are needed – for a garden is not conscious, and cannot discern its own vision.

The idea of stewarding a garden has resonances with, and is expanded by Percy’s use of images from mothering in her account of priesthood and leadership, and with the established US tradition of interim ministry’s focus on the health of a congregation as a

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Percy’s description of how a mother may view her child’s development is particularly striking:

‘A wise mother does not know how her child will turn out, she has values and boundaries of acceptable behaviour but within those she delights in the unfolding individual and even allows that individual to push and change some of those boundaries and values.’

There are many resonances here with complexity ideas of emergence and giving up control. All of these images show aspects that may come together under a metaphor introduced by Friesen in his discussion of ministry more generally: the pastor as ‘network ecologist’, whose role is to care for the living system of the church, and to steward the conditions that promote life. The network ecologist is also part of the network, and is influenced by the network as well as influencing it. There are resonances here with how the ordained priest is part of and emerges from the priesthood of all the baptised. The issues raised by interim ministry, when combined with complexity theory, invite a deeply collaborative view of ministry and priesthood which resonates with the Christian tradition.

We have seen that the theological themes raised by interim ministry are rich and varied, and touch on core aspects of the Christian faith and ethics under the themes of life, love and power, which give encouragement to a practice of interim ministry shaped by ideas from complexity theory. Regarding priesthood we have found that complexity theory has been used to powerful effect in developing a new way of

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155 Steinke, Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach; Friesen, Thy Kingdom Connected, 113.
156 Percy, ‘Reverend Mother - How Insights from Mothering Can Inform the Practice of Leadership in the Church (Part II)’, 27.
accounting for different orders of ministry, to provide a theological foundation for truly collaborative ministry which is the best foundation if IM is going to enable transformative change. This account also gives us a structure for understanding IM as an emergent form of ministry, like episcopacy, and sharing some features with it, which will be important in considering how interim ministry might develop in England as distinct from the US.
5. Discussion

In this section we shall lay out some of the implications of this research for the development of interim ministry in the Church of England. In doing so we must keep in mind that IM represents an extremely wide range of practices developed to meet varying needs in congregation support and development. Its origins in a time when the interim was considered to be an open time between two periods of stability should not put us off in our present day when churches may expect to encounter huge changes regardless of whether they have ministers in post or not. Important factors to take into account when considering IM in the Church of England as distinct from the US will be the nature of our church government, episcopacy, team ministry, parish structure and the nature of the changes the church is going through.

5.1 Is there a role for interim ministry in the Church of England?

As we have seen, the term ‘interim ministry’ is used for a wide range of situations, sometimes inconsistently. In the narrowest sense of IM from the US tradition, dioceses in England have found it useful to be able to make short term clerical appointments for specific purposes. But there is widespread recognition that the tools and focus of IM – with its focus on change and transition – are of use in a wider range of situations than would traditionally have been thought to be the case. For example, in the Church of England the use of interim or transition ministry in the context of pastoral reorganisation is a particular need that has not been present in the same way in the US tradition, and naming ministry in such a period as IM (or transitional ministry) draws the attention of all involved to the possibility of using the time to enable a healthy transition. Dioceses across the Church of England are wanting to take a
strategic approach to the widespread reduction in clergy numbers and other changes affecting the viability of churches, and IM is seen to be a useful tool in this process, as the diocesan examples we looked at in section 2 above illustrate.

The use of IM for a parish that is struggling or ‘sick’ invites different considerations. As with the appointment of interim CEOs, the need for an interim in such circumstances may be seen as itself a sign that something has failed. As participants at a recent Interim Ministry conference hosted by Chelmsford Diocese commented, wouldn’t it be better to address a parish’s problems before it gets to the stage of needing an interim minister? In particular, would such urgent situations be less likely to arise if more clergy had training in the skills of facilitation and conflict resolution, and a working knowledge of family systems theory? Even for parishes that are not in interim, and not struggling but are facing major change, the tools and approach of IM may be helpful – as suggested by the fact that Bristol diocese has widened its offering of leadership development to all parishes, encouraged by the results of the programme it was running in vacancies. The natural conclusion is that all ministry needs to have some characteristics associated with interim ministry, but there is likely still a space for a specialism both to resource the wider ministry and to act in particularly severe or complicated situations. This research shows that there are good theological, philosophical and practical reasons why IM may be particularly helpful to the Church of England at this time.

5.2 How should interim ministry be set up?

**Vocabulary**

US churches now call the time between two ‘settled’ pastors an ‘interim’ rather than a ‘vacancy’, in recognition that church life and ministry goes on even when there isn’t a permanent minister. ‘Interim’ ministry is narrowly ministry during a vacancy, and ‘transitional’ is the catch-all term to refer to other types of ministry especially dealing with change (e.g. hospice care, crossroads).\(^{158}\) By contrast ‘interim’ in the Church of England legislation includes provision for appointments longer than two years that might also be considered turnaround, transition or crossroads ministry rather than ‘interim’ as such. Given the possibility for renewal to a six year term, this ‘interim’ ministry is potentially longer than many incumbencies. The difference is that the interim post has a fixed end, and so is especially appropriate if there are longer term transition issues and the future is not clear. This is a different situation, and would require a different approach and a different kind of appointment from one where the interim ministry is taking place in a vacancy between two ordinary incumbencies. It would be helpful to develop a common nomenclature (and further analysis of the circumstances for such appointments) distinguishing shorter from longer term (3 years +) posts within the broad remit of transition ministry. Given the use of the word ‘interim’ in the Church of England legislation to refer to all of these posts it would probably cause more confusion to import the US terms (where ‘transitional’ is the broader term and ‘interim’ is construed more narrowly), and so new vocabulary would be helpful.

\(^{158}\) Mead, ‘Foreword’, v.
Which churches

In the US individual churches choose whether they want to appoint an interim minister. This has the advantage of ensuring that the church wants this kind of ministry. The Church of England guidance indicates that a parish should be consulted at an early stage, but this is not the same as choosing this ministry. This is in keeping with the way parish appointments are generally made in the Church of England: the parish is involved but does not normally make the final decision about, for example, whether an appointment will be part time or full-time. The fact that the final decision about an interim appointment is not likely to be held by the parish raises the possibility of interim ministry being seen as a punishment with consequent suspicion that will need to be overcome and may be helped by sensitive handling of the consultation process.

If existing criteria for the appointment of IMs continue to be used parishes may be encouraged that they include healthy churches as well as those in trouble. A nuance is that a church encountering a crossroads, or where the future is uncertain, may be in the context of pastoral reorganisation involving a permanent reduction in the number of clergy which, often as not, is not desired and may be perceived to be imposed from above. Interim ministry is an obvious tool to use in such circumstances, and dealing with the likelihood of increased anxiety and suspicion will be a significant task for the interim minister. A further complication in the English context is the prevalence of team ministries, where colleagues will also need to be on board with any plan to appoint an interim.
**Format**

There are various ways of enabling interim ministry which are relevant for the Church of England. There is the traditional model of a specialist minister who provides leads the usual services, pastoral care and other needs alongside managing an interim process of reflection and development. As such a minister could only work for one benefice at a time this is likely to be the most (human) resource intensive method of deployment. There are various logistical issues with this approach which, with imagination and investment, could be addressed. We will explore these further below.

Alternative arrangements may include a consultancy approach, and various forms of two-tier arrangements. As we saw above Bristol diocese’s vacancy development programme is an example of a consultancy arrangement, which allows for a significant reflection and development process to take place in every parish in vacancy. The consultant or the consultancy team is able to support several parishes at a time, while in some circumstances the parish may have the advantage of being able to have local, familiar ministers undertake more ordinary clergy duties, easing anxiety and developing longer term relationships. Since the consultancy team is not so embedded in the parish care needs to be taken to ensure that the whole church and the wider community are involved in the work, and that the worship and pastoral care in particular are fed by and feed into the reflection and development processes.

An alternative two-tier arrangement may be where a local non-specialised minister such as a curate or retired minister is appointed as interim and is supported in undertaking the reflection and development processes. This support takes the form of regular supervision with a specialist in interim ministry. It may be possible also to
provide specialised training on specific issues (e.g. conflict management) however timing and availability may mitigate against this. This approach should logistically be easier to organise than attempting to appoint a specialist interim, and has the advantage of disseminating the wisdom of interim ministry to a wider group of people as well as potentially enabling continuity of relationship within the local community. A challenge would be ensuring that the interim minister is sufficiently supported to really be able to undertake the reflection and development work, particularly if he or she is a less-experienced minister (e.g. a training curate) who may also be taking on many additional ministerial duties due to the vacancy. In the interests of clergy and parish well-being care should be taken not to simply ask more of those who are likely to be already stretched.

An alternative two-tier arrangement is where an appointment is made from outside the parish of someone who is not already a specialised interim. Such an arrangement (consultancy, support, training) may also set a standard for permanent or longer term appointments where there is a recognition that there is likely to be significant change, and likewise disseminate the skills for dealing with change to a wider set of clergy.

Whatever model is used it is important to bear in mind that if transformative change is desired the process should involve working with the whole church along with people on the edge who may not even be members of the church, but who play some role in it (e.g. neighbours, schools, hirers). While in the US the focus of IM is on the congregation, Anglican tradition suggests the wider parish should be involved, and complexity theory supports this, as one of the ways of strengthening a system is to empower those on the edge. For Anglicans, the edge of the system is not the edge of
the regular congregation, but somewhere out in the parish. Working with the PCC alone should be avoided as this would severely limit the potential for adaptive change.

**Housing, stipend, security**

In the secular world, interim managers and CEOs are paid more in recognition of the additional work and stress of such roles. The Church of Scotland follows this lead and pays its interim ministers approximately £8,000 p.a. more in recognition of the disruption and challenges of such ministry, along with the greater experience and training of its practitioners. If the Church of England wishes to recruit ordained interim ministers without additional pay, special consideration needs to be given as to how to make such a role no less attractive than an ordinary post, given the significant downsides of such posts for most clergy. While the nature of the ministry may be interesting and a reward in itself, two areas where there are particular issues are housing and security.

Most stipendiary clergy in the Church of England are required to live in housing provided for them. For an interim post a decision must be made about whether to require the minister to move into the parish vicarage. A requirement for an interim minister to move into the vicarage has expense and logistics associated with it, and is less likely to be acceptable for short appointments. On the other hand clergy stipends are set at a level that assume that housing is provided, and most stipendiary clergy considering an interim post will need somewhere to live. There are examples of interim ministers being employed by dioceses and provided with a housing allowance to use as they wish. In such case residence in the vicarage is not required, which

greatly aids deployability, and should allow a minister to remain in the same accommodation through several different appointments. While in many areas a housing allowance is unlikely to pay for the standard of accommodation stipendiary clergy are usually provided with, for some clergy this arrangement is attractive.

Security problems arise because interim posts are of limited duration. Unless an arrangement is made where the minister is employed by the diocese on a permanent contract and deployed to different interim posts within that, clergy who are appointed to interim posts will have fixed date by which they will need to find a new post if they are to have continuity of income and possibly housing. In the world of business part of what makes such a situation acceptable for interim managers and CEOs is that they are paid enough to fund themselves for any gaps in their employment. This is not likely to be the case with clergy, who are not considered to have high incomes and may also have the matter of finding a new place to live. A period without a post could cause real hardship for a cleric and his or her family. The Church of England guidance recognises this, and emphasises the importance of looking for a new post before the interim post is completed.

The difficulty is that the appointment process for any post (interim or not) at present can easily take several months, longer than a short interim post. If you add in waiting for a suitable post to come up, and applications that do not come to fruition, it would not be unusual for a cleric to take more than a year to find a new post. 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 diocese confidence that it would
be able toappoint such ministers quickly when they are needed. Clergy with other sources of income may be happy to accept short, fixed term posts (and indeed some may appreciate the limited term) but relying on them alone could result in effectively making wealth a criterion for being able to become an interim minister, thereby limiting the pool of talent and raising ethical issues. On the other hand, there may be disadvantages of an employment model: Jordan writes of the negative effects on identity and role of the move from holding the bishop’s licence to having permission to officiate as was legally required under such an arrangement.\textsuperscript{160}

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. At the same time there are clergy who are free to give their time in different ways from the traditional stipendiary model and may find that interim ministry in the form of a fixed term post is a healthy context for exercising their gifts in the service of the church. The choice for a diocese does not need to be either/or – both longer term employment and short term posts may be used to enable interim ministry, and the choice as to what to use may rightly depend on the circumstances of those who may be ready to offer themselves for such ministry.

\textit{Commissioning, timing and outcomes}

In the Church of England any interim minister and/or team is, like all clergy, sharing in the bishop’s cure of souls. As we saw above, interim ministers share more closely in the bishop’s ministry than other clergy, and bishops and their teams should be aware of this and expect to be more closely involved in such appointments than they are in

\textsuperscript{160} Jordan, ‘Monarch, Shepherd or Parent?’, 71–72.
others. A brief should be agreed most especially by the bishop’s team and the interim minister but also (in outline at least) with the congregation and any team ministry or others with an interest. The whole arrangement is an opportunity to model collaborative ministry at every level, from the bishop through to the congregation and beyond, embedding collaboration in the whole system.

We have seen that those experienced in interim management advise that desired outcomes should be agreed in advance, but there should also be expectation that these will be revised as the work develops. Complexity theory indicates that if the desired outcome of interim ministry is that a parish should be better equipped for a changing future, then this will not express itself in a long-term plan, but in movement towards showing the features of complex adaptive systems. A parish coming out of an experience of trauma may be in quite a different state, where the need is for the interim period to build a sense of safety and security. Describing and assessing such outcomes needs careful thought and imagination on a case-by-case basis, and the expectation should be that any agreed outcomes will be revised in the light of what the minister discovers in the place.

The length of the post should relate to what the desired outcomes are. For example, in a parish where there are multiple problems and levels of change to deal with, a relatively short appointment could be made initially with a primary focus on just one area, say dealing with internal leadership issues, with a view to a subsequent appointment who would take things on from there. The Church of England guidance that two interim appointments should not be made to the same place successively seems wise, and so while any second appointment would still involve transitional
work, it would be made on a permanent basis, not interim. Alternatively a longer appointment could be made initially.

The vacancy system brings in other considerations. Since in the Church of England the gap between permanent appointments is ordinarily relatively long (6 months between incumbencies would be considered short, a few years is not that unusual), there is an opportunity for interim ministry in the gap that already exists. This existing system is one of the reasons it was possible for Bristol diocese to introduce a form of interim ministry across all its parishes – it was a new process for a time that already existed, and as we saw above only slightly lengthened vacancies. Steps taken in Bristol since then to shorten the interim ministry process may even mean that it does not lengthen the vacancy at all, but this is in a diocese where overall vacancies are relatively long.¹⁶¹

Depending on the state of a parish and the pressures of time, a full process of reflection and development may not work out in any given time period: a complexity theory approach to organization development should ease anxiety about this, as a more important aim than developing long term plans is to develop the church so that it is better at adapting. Indeed, complexity theory points to the fact that inappropriate planning may prevent a church from making the really fundamental changes that might be needed. The need to produce a parish profile and person specification for the new appointment may make it tempting for parishes to declare long term plans and priorities which are inappropriate and may actually be retrograde, a risk the interim minister needs to be alert to.

There are different views about whether the most important priority should be to shorten a vacancy or complete a fuller process of reflection and development. The experience in the Church of Scotland is that as there are not enough interim ministers to fulfil demand, parishes sometimes wait for one – and those that do find it well worth the wait.\textsuperscript{162} This suggests a context where the process of interim ministry is valued by parishes in its own right, and is worth making sacrifices for. On the other hand interim, like other ministers, are aware that they only ever accompany a parish for part of the journey, and whatever work is possible is helpful. Having said that, if significant change has taken place in the interim period, especially if it is very short, it is important that the permanent minister appointed is able to take such changes forward and help to anchor them into the culture.

\textbf{Tools, methods and people}

There are many tools and methods an interim minister could use. We have seen that AI is popular with interim ministers in the US and has strong theoretical grounding. The five focus points from the US model are as relevant in the UK. More generally there are many tools and models of parish development available, and our research gives some ideas as to how these may be assessed. Modern OD reminds us of the need to attend to process as well as outcome, indeed a well-designed process should encourage and value unexpected outcomes. Methods that engage ‘right brain’ approaches and genuinely wide participation (not just consultation) are more likely to be helpful if what we are interested in is promoting adaptive change. Such approaches are also likely to be useful if congregation needs are more therapeutic, helping people to build up trust, process painful experiences, and rediscover God’s gifts together.

\textsuperscript{162} ‘Interim Ministry Conference Outcomes’, 7.
When choosing methods consideration needs to be given as to whether what the church needs is to be disrupted or to be made secure (or both, in different ways) – forcing a congregation to take part in an activity outside its comfort zone may be counterproductive if anxiety is excessive, or conversely may precipitate a breakthrough into a new way of being. In environments where major adaptive change is required long term planning should be avoided in favour of development of vision and values, with enough short term planning to get things done.163

Interim ministers themselves may be lay or ordained, depending on the model of IM being used. Due to the variety of IM they are likely to need different skills depending on where they are to serve: some may be specialists in change, others in healing, reconciliation and pastoral care. Because of the wide range of skills needed, most need to be willing to learn, and due to the tensions in the situations they encounter they need to be mature (not necessarily older). Generally they need to be comfortable with change. Like all clergy nowadays they need to work collaboratively, be humble enough not to impose their vision on others, and to let things go when they inevitably move on. Given this range of qualities it should go without saying that IM should not be considered merely as a useful place to put someone who has had a history of difficulties.164 Conversely a good parish priest will not necessarily be a good interim minister, and likewise someone who struggles to fit in to more ordinary ministry may be much more suited to IM, thriving in the change and challenge involved.

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6. Conclusion

This research has really just scratched the surface of the issues raised by interim ministry, which is in a nascent stage in the Church of England. While there is a lot of US literature on IM, we have seen that developments in OD and the translation of IM to the Church of England raises new possibilities and factors to consider. There are therefore many potentially useful areas for further research, including:

- identifying various IM types and situations they are suitable for
- identifying, analysing, developing resources for use in IM
- assessment of IM outcomes
- IM in relation to pioneer ministry, priesthood and episcopate
- different methods of succession planning and appointment
- experiences of interim ministry in the English and Scottish churches

In our exploration of interim ministry we have also come onto issues of wider significance. The application of complexity theory to organizations has led us to important new images for ministry, in particular the pastor as network ecologist, and the possibility that forms of ministry are emergent features of church life. These are just two aspects of the deep ramifications that complexity thinking can have for our perspective on how to deal with change in church life. IM arose as a discipline because people realised that a change which could be difficult could also be a time of opportunity. This research which began with interim ministry suggests the same could be true of the church as a whole: that the radical changes church and society are currently undergoing are turbulence bringing the church to the edge of chaos, with all the potential for change and the emergence of new life that implies.
7. Bibliography


‘Interim Posts Made under Regulation 29 (7C) of the Ecclesiastical Offices (Terms of Service) Regulations 2009: Supplementary Advice’. Archbishops Council, n.d.


