

## When Your Preacher Leaves:

### Interim Services for Churches Between Ministers

Newsletter, August, 2006, #3

Thank you for your response to this Interim Ministry Newsletter. We hope you find a “mustard seed” that will be helpful in your ministry.

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The following address was presented by John H. Parker at the Freed-Hardeman Lectures in 2001.

#### INTERIM MINISTRY

##### Part Three: What the Interim Minister May Find

Those interested in interim ministry may consult the Interim Ministry Network for information and training, and the Alban Institute for related publications (see below for contact information). One introductory book is *Temporary Shepherds: a Congregational Handbook for Interim Ministry*, edited by Roger S. Nicholson. In his two introductory chapters he outlines what conditions are likely to appear in a church in transition, as well as the stages that such a congregation may or should go through on its path from the departure of one minister to the employment of another.

Characteristics which Nicholson finds in a church in this situation include the following: grief over the loss of the former preacher, conflict among individuals and groups, hidden secrets which gradually come to light, a lack of congregational self-esteem, a decline in giving, a need for change in operating procedures and for training of church workers, a need for better communication, differing reactions to the prospect of change, and differing emotions (14-24). These situations must be dealt to create an atmosphere in which the next regular minister can be successful, Nicholson says, and they can be if the interim period is managed well.

Eight stages which a congregation in transition will most likely go through, according to Nicholson, include termination of the work of the former minister, determining what to do next, conducting a self-study, searching for a new minister, deciding on a choice, negotiating with the new preacher, installing him in his work, and making a new start (5-6). (Of these stages, many congregations of the churches of Christ tend to omit or hurry too quickly through the second and third: carefully determining what to do next and conducting a formal, detailed self-study; they may rush too quickly to that of searching for a new minister.)

Nicholson also outlines developmental stages that, in his view, a church in transition should go through. Among these are the following:

1. Analyzing the congregation's history. This step will reveal strengths and weaknesses, many of which may be unknown to the present congregation (6-8).
2. Establishing a changed identity. While people tend to view a church as a constant in a changing world, in reality a congregation is always undergoing change itself. A realistic view of its true identity is needed (8-9).

3. Change in leadership. There may be a need for people to leave their positions or to assume new roles, and for revision of systems of doing church work (9-11).
4. Determining the future. Once problems are addressed and needed changes are made, the congregation can move optimistically and boldly forward (12).

#### Conclusion

Securing an interim minister is only one option for a church whose preacher leaves, but for some congregations, doing so may relieve pressure and provide opportunity for careful deliberation in selecting a new long-term minister. In the future, some of our preachers may find part-time or even full-time interim ministry to be an opportunity for effective service to the Lord's church. May all work be for the edification of his church (Acts 20:32; Rm. 14:19; 15:1-2; 1 Cor. 8:1; Eph. 4:7-16).

#### Works Cited

Nicholson, Roger S., ed. *Temporary Shepherds: a Congregational Handbook for Interim Ministry*. Washington, D.C., 1998. (Contains a helpful bibliography of works on interim ministry.)

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## Quotations From Literature Useful For Church Leaders

POLONIUS

Give every man thy ear, but few thy voice. (1.3)

Listen to all, but be careful about whom you confide in.

POLONIUS

Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,  
But not express'd in fancy; rich, not gaudy,  
For the apparel oft proclaims the man. (1.3)

Dress nicely and tastefully, but not in a showy or gaudy fashion.

From Hamlet:

Foul deeds will rise,  
Though all the earth o'erwhelm them, to men's eyes.

Can be used to illustrate Numbers 32:23: be sure your sin will find you out (The New American Standard Bible).

From Hamlet:

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

Can be used to emphasize the weakness of men's philosophies.

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## Smile of the Month

Ned has attended the same church for more than four decades. He was, by all accounts, a crabby little kid who grew into a crabby young man. After his religious conversion, he joined the church and became a crabby Christian.

He gives no evidence of uncertainty in his faith. He believes the Bible from cover to cover, and he believes the cover is genuine leather. But there doesn't seem to be any record over the last forty years of Ned ever changing his disposition, his mind, his expression, or his pew (John Ortberg, Jr., "What Changes at Conversion?", *Leadership*, Summer 1991, page 52).

I (JWB) have read every issue since *Leadership* began. I find good ideas and illustrations. You can get a sample and a free issue at:

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2006/001/14.105.html>

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### *Mustard Seeds from Favorite Books*, Jerrie Barber

I mentioned this book in last month's newsletter: *Transitions, Making Sense of Life's Changes*, Second Edition, by William Bridges, © 2004, published by Da Capo Press. This book has sold 500,000 copies. David Gaylor gave me a tape of this material several years ago. The first edition was published in 1980. It has been very practical and encouraging to me as changes come my way. On the front cover, the material is described as "strategies for coping with the difficult, painful, and confusing times in your life."

Here are statements I bracketed, filed, and saved:

"All transitions are composed of (1) an ending, (2) a neutral zone, and (3) a new beginning" (page 4).

"Everyone finds ending difficult, so your own style is not a sign that you have some "problem" that others don't have. The person who leaves early and the one who stays late are both avoiding endings and the discomfort of facing a break in the continuity of things. Whether you are a dasher or a lingerer is largely the result of how you learned to avoid the 'party's-over' experience as a child" (page 16).

"It takes a long time to be really married. One marries many times at many levels within a marriage. If you have more marriages than you have divorces within the marriage, you're lucky and you stick it out" – Ruby Dee, *In Brian Lanker, I Dream a World* (page 55).

"People change and forget to tell each other" – Lillian Hellman, *Toys in the Attic* (page 55).

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### Barber Clippings

Thank you for your response to our newsletter. I am hearing from many of you by e-mail and by phone on several different issues. We want to be of service. If either of us can be helpful, please contact us.

Our big event for July was saying good-bye to Chad and Shelly Hedgepath. I preached Sunday morning, July 30, and Chad preached that night. He did an excellent job of telling of their decision to go to Honduras. That lesson is available on tape if you would like to hear it. If

you would like to keep up with the Hedgepath's, their blogspot is:  
<http://shellyandchad.blogspot.com/>.

My wife, Gail, and I are continuing to visit families at Berry's Chapel. We want to talk with every family before we leave April 1, 2007.

Jerrie Barber

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My personal website for interim ministry has been updated. Please access it at [www.interimcofc.com](http://www.interimcofc.com). Included are

My lecture on interim ministry at the Freed-Hardeman lectures in 2001.

Three audio sermons and a six-minute segment of a video sermon.

Introductions of my PowerPoint presentations now available for churches:

Essentials of Christianity (based on my book *Bound and Loosed*).

"Abide with Me": Lessons from the Great English Hymns (based on my travels to sites in England with international photographer Paul Seawright). I will be presenting this series at the Granny White church in Nashville on Wednesday night during September.

The Bible in Great Works of Art (inspired by three extended tours of Europe as faculty for the Study Abroad program of Lipscomb University).

A sample chapter from my book *Bound and Loosed: Fundamentals of the Christian System*.

Resume, Referrals, Picture Gallery.

John H. Parker

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