



Heart Warming Ministries

Interim – A Time of Opportunity

Every church will sooner or later go through a time between one pastor leaving and another pastor entering the role of leadership and ministry within a congregation. It does not matter why your pastor left. If he left under good circumstances such as a call to another field of service or in scandal or somewhere in between, the church has entered into a *wilderness journey*. Where are we going? Who's going to lead us? What are we going to do? These are common questions demanding immediate answers from most members of your church. Their unofficial and unspoken new church mission statement is: **Get a Pastor Faster!** "If we just call a pastor, all our problems will be over," is the common mindset. As a pastor search team, one of the most helpful things you can do is to help calm the people. Church members have various reactions to the time between pastors. Some have great anxieties about the church and its future. Some have feelings of excitement and joy about the possibilities for the church. Some don't know what has happened or what is happening. Wilderness journeys can provide many benefits for an individual or a church. The people of God called the Israelites had forty years of wandering in the wilderness. Biblical characters such as Abraham, Moses, and Paul experienced wilderness journeys. Jesus also had a wilderness experience. The point is that times in the wilderness can be used by God to prepare an individual or a church for what He wants to do in their lives.

Often that time is a period of transition and the congregation wishes to see it as not important and to desire to "rush through" that time to get the next pastor. For some, that time is not seen as a time of opportunity, but as a time to endure, with the hope that it will pass quickly. It is not unusual for churches to mistakenly use multiple supply preachers during that time hoping they might "find one" who would be willing to stay. Within some congregations that time of transition is a time when attendance, giving and energy are in decline, but it doesn't have to be that way.

Honestly, the opposite should be the case. Churches and members of the congregation should embrace the transition period as a time of opportunity. There is a wonderful story in Matthew 14 and Mark 6 of Jesus coming to the disciples walking on the water in the night. What we have recorded here is a miracle. I believe that with all my heart. Do you believe in miracles? But it is more than a miracle; it is a miracle with a message. The message is that you can have the peace of God in the midst of your storm. Some time ago, while sharing on this scripture the following thoughts were shared:

1. God's providential leading brought me here. (vs.22 &24)
2. God's Prayers protect me here. (vs. 23)
3. God's Presence comes to me here (vs.24-25, Isaiah 43:1-2)
4. God's Power will see us through.



Heart Warming Ministries

Pastor search committees and congregations need to realize these powerful truths while in the “interim”. Yes, God has providentially led you here. Yes, Jesus, God’s Son is interceding for your congregation in prayer. Yes, God’s presence is with you here. Yes, God will see you through. The committee needs to help the congregation to slow down and calm down. The interim opportunity may be directly from God’s heart. Churches who see the interim in that light see the transitional time as a time of energy and growth. Why might a search committee want to slow down and seek the opportunity available through the Transitional Interim Ministry Process?

- The church is plateaued, or in decline, having lost its energy and vision.
- The church is in or has been in significant conflict.
- The former pastor’s leaving has created difficult feelings.

These or many other conditions may merit an act of wisdom and grace by engaging a Transitional Interim Pastor. Transitional pastors lead churches to move from one pastor to another regardless of the reasons for being without a pastor. They help the church bring closure to one era of pastoral leadership, prepare thoroughly for calling a new pastor, and launch a new pastoral-leadership era. The “interim” time should be one of reflection, understanding, healing, encouragement, and hope. It truly is a time of opportunity and growth for the congregation. Slow down and walk with God in the *Wilderness Journey*.