

**Common Awards Seedcorn Fund  
The Practice of Interim Ministry  
Rev Dr Elizabeth Jordan**

**Research into the tools and resources presently used by Interim Ministers in order to identify areas for development.**

**The Research Questions were:**

To what extent is the content of existing training and resources for IMs in N America and Scotland appropriate for IMs working in the Church of England?

What adaptations or development of new material is required?

How is material best made available, using online platforms?

How is mutual learning and movement between dioceses best facilitated?

This paper addresses the first two questions. The pattern of the report is:

**Introduction**

1. **The Interim Minister**
2. **The tools needed for the discernment of need.**
3. **Tools needed for entry, leading to 6 week review**
4. **Tools needed for 6 weeks for up to three years.**
5. **Tools needed at end of IM**
6. **'Conclusions'**

**Appendix I The questionnaire sent To IMs.**

**Introduction**

This research has been carried out into the tool and resources needed by the growing body of people who are carrying out 'interim ministry' in the Church of England. I have worked with a broad understanding of interim ministry so as not to exclude, at the outset, any expression of it, including contributions from those who prefer terms such as 'transition minister' and 'vacancy manager.' Rather than beginning with a definition I have preferred to meet those who are working in local churches in a less traditional pattern and listen to their experience and self understanding.

There are two sources of definition currently in operation: that of the Interim Ministry Network of N America,<sup>1</sup> which understands IM as time-limited, intentional work with a local church in the period between 'settled' pastors and those posts appointed under Guidance on Interim Posts made under Regulation 29 (7D) of the Ecclesiastical Offices (Terms of Service) Regulations 2009.<sup>2</sup> In practice, the individual ministers and diocesan leaders that I have interpreted this category of ministry in terms that meet the needs of their own situation. The common factor is a recognition that the church is in a period of very rapid change and that some churches are unable to resolve their past or manage transition to a new situation without considerable assistance. While some appointed to such posts may be acting more as locums, holding the place and people until a further decision is made and some may be church planters, revitalising a church with the growth of a new congregation while tending to the end of an existing one, a significant challenge to existing practice has emerged. A ministerial vacancy is not a time in which nothing must change since change is

---

<sup>1</sup> See especially, Roger S. Nicholson, *Temporary Shepherds: A Congregational Handbook for Interim Ministry* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Found at [https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/Interim%20posts%20Guidance\\_0.pdf](https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/Interim%20posts%20Guidance_0.pdf) Hereafter 'the Regulations.'

inevitable, both to the internal dynamics of the church and to its surrounding environment.<sup>3</sup> The vacancy is an moment of opportunity and much necessary and valuable work can be achieved during it.

Interest in interim ministry has grown even during the period of this research. A conference, sponsored by Chelmsford diocese, in February 2017, attracted fifty delegates from 19 dioceses. In October 2017 a questionnaire was sent to forty-three ministers who had been identified as acting as IMs by their diocese. Of these 18 IMs respondents were acting to effect change, rather than as locums, maintaining the status quo. There are now 26 members of an IM Facebook group. These are small numbers, yet the interest shown in this subject of interim ministry indicates that it appears to be a strategic concern of policy in many dioceses.

## **Diary of Common Awards research**

**22 - 24.2.17 National IM consultation**, sponsored by Chelmsford diocese,

**18.8.17** Visit to Liz Graveling, **Research and Statistics department**, Church House, to discuss formulation of questionnaire

**11-15.9.17** Participation in five day **IM network** training led by Molly Dale Smith for **Diocese of Europe**.

**19.9.17** Conversation with Archdeacon Phill Williams, **Nottingham and Southwell** diocese.

**October/November 2017** distribution of questionnaire and analysis. Found at Appendix I

**7.10.17** Meeting with Natasha Woodward, author of MA thesis on Interim Ministry in the Church of England

**21.10.17** Meeting with Harry Steele from **Sheffield** diocese

**30.10.17** Meeting with Rod Cosh, **Oxford** diocese

**11.11.17** Conversation with Steve Morris, **London** diocese

**22.1.18** Visit to meet **Liverpool** team in Transforming Wigan project

**1.2.18** Skype call with Ken Farrimond to discuss material on the **VLE**.

Conversation with Rob Hay, **Leicester** diocese

**19.2.18-21.2.18** Visit to **Church of Scotland** Interim and Transitional Ministers' conference.

**5.3.18** Conversation with Rob Dillingham of **Chichester** diocese.

**22.3.18** Meeting with **Oxford** diocese IMs and Bp Andrew.

**9.4.18** Conversation with George Rendell of **Bristol** diocese.

---

<sup>3</sup> Mead, Loren, *A Change of Pastors...and How it Affects Change in the Congregation*. Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2005.

**Literature:**

Bendroth, Norman B. ed *Transitional ministry today: successful strategies for churches and pastors*  
Rowman & Littlefield Publishers (2014)

Bridges, William. *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change*. London: Nicholas Brealy  
Publishing, 1995.

Jordan, E.A., 2012. Monarch, Shepherd or Parent? Interim Ministry and the Church of England.  
*Practical Theology*, 5(1), pp. 67-82.

Woodward, Natasha. *Complex Changes: Interim Ministry and the Church of England*, Unpublished MA  
dissertation, 2017.

## **I. The Interim Minister**

I intended, in this research, to focus on the tools and resources that would assist interim ministers in their work. It has become apparent, though that a prior issue is the question of the character of the person for whom interim ministry is a suitable ministry and the personal support and oversight that is given.

### **The characteristics of an effective IM.**

Several sources have identified the difference between IMs and longer term appointees: Molly Dale Smith, for example says: *'The long term pastor wants to be loved, the IM wants to be trusted.'*<sup>4</sup> she continued: they are task oriented, rather than seeking personal relationships as an end in themselves and the relationship with the church may be more akin to a contractual than an emotional one. Though good at developing collaborative partnerships they don't seek to embed themselves in the relationships within the congregation and can leave the Christian community without regret when the task is finished. They have a good sense of self, are grounded in relationship with God, and don't need to find affirmation from the congregation. 'Good leaders make one feel safe but inspired to change, they seek respect not popularity. They are team builders, not sole artists.'<sup>5</sup>

The supplementary advice to 'Interim Posts made under Regulation 29 (7C) of the Ecclesiastical Offices (Terms of Service) Regulations 2009 lists the following attributes:

6. What kind of priest is suitable?

6.1. This kind of ministry will be particularly suitable for someone:

- clear about his or her specific call to an interim role as a means of preparing the way for someone else's permanent ministry;
- able to honour and affirm the work of others past and present;
- experienced in conflict resolution and skilled at team building and managing change;
- able to be a calm presence in the midst of transition, grief or conflict;
- good at establishing positive and affirming working relationships;
- able to diagnose a situation quickly and develop action plans;
- able to provide honest and accurate feedback and communicate clearly;
- able to confront, challenge and strongly discourage certain forms of behaviour when appropriate.

The Church of Scotland, which has had thirty years' experience of interim ministry, emphasises the interpersonal and team working skills needed. Although their IMs should be able to work under their own initiative they are expected to work with the local structures of government in a presbyterian church. They need to be able to demonstrate the ability to work with volunteers and be efficient negotiators and mediators.

13 of 18 IMs who responded to the questionnaire said they were in their first appointment as IMs and many had only just finished curacy. They had learned skills such as interviewing, advising, listening and team leadership skills as managers, as community developers, even as a security officer, prior to ordination. It was not parochial ministry that had taught them these skills. Some dioceses have experimented with asking retired or those approaching retirement to act as IMs, but this has

---

<sup>4</sup> Molly Dale Smith, IMN training, Sept. 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Institute of Interim Managers, IM consultation February 2017.

had mixed results. Long years in parish life is as likely to have established patterns of ministry that are unhelpful in Interim work as helpful. Although it is apparent that IMs do need to be very familiar with the regulations surrounding the legal responsibilities of PCCs and around pastoral re-organisation, length of experience in the parish is not an automatic indication of suitability. It was apparent to those I met and interviewed that the experience and character of the IM is **more** significant than the tools which they use in their particular roles. The IM needs to be someone who knows themselves well. Otherwise the best of tools will be rendered useless and even harmful, by their own assumptions and projections. In particular, the IM needs to know how they react in a situation of conflict: the IMN distinguishes between those who seek co-operation and those who direct, harmonise or avoid conflict. Reactions that are often based on childhood experiences in our birth family have a significant effect on the IM's capacity to act and guide a congregation. Although this research will look at the tools which IMs use and need, it is important to note that each is useless unless the IM has the character and disposition to use them. As well as the characteristics mentioned above, several spoke of the need for the IM to have the ability to *listen* at a deep level to groups and individuals and to be able to *facilitate* meetings with acute perception and impartiality. These are foundational abilities upon which the use of particular tools and resources depend.

### **Ongoing support also very important**

I was very impressed by the fact that the Church of Scotland conference of Interim ministers spent as much time considering how to nurture themselves as a team, to support and learn together, as in equipping themselves as individuals. In work which is innovative and which may involve resistance and distress it is important for each IM to know where to find support and to whom they are accountable.

Such clarity begins at the time of appointment. The appointment procedure advocated by the Regulations advocates that

- IMs are recruited on the basis of needs analysis, have evidence of appropriate skills and training.
- Good and effective communication about the IM and their task.
- Appropriate systems of monitoring and evaluation, with appraisal and exit interviews.
- a sound contractual basis to the post;
- appropriate housing arrangements, travel and expenses, and professional development;
- there is a good beginning and ending, with a litany of welcome in IM churches and a good ending and celebration of what has been achieved;
- IMs are plugged into and supported by structures – deanery synods, chapters, diocesan/national.

The conditions of the appointment - whether licensed to the parish, to a Cathedral or to a house for duty, or employed on a salaried basis - need to be ones which, as well as suiting the work to be done, provide affirmation and accountability.

Some dioceses/archdeaconries are clear that the IM is accountable to the respective Bishop or Archdeacon. Several senior staff, indeed, spoke of the value of the IM as one who told them what was happening in a local church, in a way that neither a long-term minister would, nor a visit from themselves could. IMs themselves, though, I found, are sometimes in an uncomfortable place between the diocesan leadership and the local church, knowing too much and unsure about lines of accountability and promises of confidentiality. Their place in the deanery and other ministerial support structures may be confused, especially if they live at some distance from the church where they are working. Clarity at the time of appointment, involving all concerned, is necessary.

The IMs who had regular supervision and effective mentoring spoke highly of this resource. Bristol diocese, which has invested heavily in training people to be mentors, believed this enabled people to act according to their individual skills while having the capacity to be connected with a diocesan plan. Chelmsford and Liverpool have each developed reporting frameworks that can be used by all their IMs, even though they work in quite different situations. Regular gatherings of IMs in each place enable mutual support and the exchange of ideas. Continuing mentoring, perhaps between IMs in a mutually supportive partnership enables IMs to share their reactions and review their work in safe and supportive environment. Hearing each others' stories, they learn not to take setbacks personally. Such structures, as well as providing cohesion in the local approach to interim ministry, also build up a sense of a collaborative effort.

**Further work** is needed on a common job description that at least applies to IMs working within an area such as a diocese so that parishes may have a better understanding of what an IM is and mutual support and learning is possible.

## 2. The tools needed for the discernment of need.

When should a church receive an Interim Minister? The IMN has worked on the basis that this is advisable after a very long and happy pastorate in which the church may have become stuck in patterns of behaviour, after a very short or unsatisfactory pastorate, after the death or severe illness of the pastor or where there has been conflict.<sup>6</sup> The IM may work to resolve conflict, facilitate grief, and introduce some change so that the person appointed to a longer period can begin ministry with less baggage from the past and more hope for the future. The IMN is itself now changing its approach as it recognises that the long term pastorate may look very different from the one that preceded it: the church and surrounding environment are in transition in a post-Christendom era. Cameron Trimble, indeed, recommends looking to the Church of England to see how such a period of change has been handled!<sup>7</sup> The task may not be to restore the church to the situation that it was in previously, but to help it manage these changes and cope with the resulting uncertainty and disruption.<sup>8</sup>

The dioceses that have employed IMs have done so for a variety of reasons which include the above, i.e. dysfunction, difficulties in making appointments, the suspension of a minister after misconduct, but which also cover places where there is so rapid a change in population or environment that a long term appointment could well be redundant in a few years and pastoral re-organisation in the light of declining numbers of stipendiary ministers. In many cases the reason given by senior staff for the appointment of an IM was simply to give them space to find out what was happening and time to consider the best way forward. The Regulations state that all appointments should be in the interests of the parish, but it is likely to be the senior staff in each diocese who decides what those interests are, rather than the congregation, as is the case in even the Episcopal church in N America, or the presbytery, as in the Church of Scotland.

### **Suggested Tool for Discerning when an IM appointment is needed:**

Interim Ministry has shed light on the need to treat all vacancies as opportunities for positive intervention. At present the assumption is made that local churches have the capacity and emotional maturity to discern, with a little assistance, their needs and that of their parish. In fact most local churches are in a situation in which change is desirable because the environment around them is changing and so fall somewhere along a continuum of being competent to decide on their future and needing some assistance. In a few cases it is recognised that a church is so far from this competence that it requires the assistance of a short term, intentional appointment of an Interim Minister.

There is no common process that is used by those making decisions about appointment, though the following has now been adopted by one diocese.

---

<sup>6</sup> Nicholson, 'The Challenge of the Interim Time', 4–5.

<sup>7</sup> The changing landscape of the American Church, Cameron Trimble pp37-51 in ed N Bendroth, in *Transitional Ministry Today*.

<sup>8</sup> Bridges distinguishes between the changes which occur and the *transition* required in attitudes and behaviour in his very helpful book *Managing Transitions: making the most of change* Nicholas Brealey Publishing; 2 edition (27 Nov. 2003)

The person responsible for decisions about appointments and/or the management of vacancies asks the following questions:

*Are people unaware of the need for change?*

*Do people recognise need for change, but don't know what to do?*

*Do people recognise need for change, but resist it - 'it'll see me out.'*

*Do people recognise the changes that are needed, but resist some of them?*

*Do people, or a small group, want to change things themselves, regardless of denominational structure*

*Do people, or at least the existing leadership, recognise the need for change and can identify some of the changes needed and are able, with diocesan assistance, to describe this in a parish profile and job description?*

It could also be valuable to ask the congregation themselves how they would evaluate their capacity to plan for the future.

Each of these situations require a different response, but they do allow an assessment of the situation based on the church's capacity to change, rather than one based on the symptoms of dysfunction, such as low attendance or poor finances. These questions may give an indication of the underlying causes of such symptoms.

### **The process of appointment:**

Once it is decided that an IM should be appointed, how best to achieve cooperation with the congregation? Instilling a sense of urgency with the danger of paralysing panic or gentler offers of assistance with the risk of complacency? The Institute of Interim Managers emphasises the importance of the psychological contract between client and IM, clarifying expectations on each side.<sup>9</sup> Honesty is recommended.

How much information should be given? The following advice from the IIM advocates a breadth of possibilities: 'Interim management is the provision of effective business solutions by an independent, board or near-board level manager, over a finite time span. Such complex solutions may include change, transformation and turnaround management, business improvement, crisis management and strategy development. Interim managers are often experienced in multiple sectors and disciplines' ([www.iim.org.uk](http://www.iim.org.uk)). In contrast one of the leading companies in this field, Odgers Interim notes: 'The most effective use of interim management is when it is deployed in a focused and controlled way with outcomes and timescales clearly defined and managed.' So how detailed should the job description for an IM be?

The questionnaire indicated that many IMs were appointed without clear guidance from senior staff about what was expected of them, the situation in the parish or what a desirable outcome would be. It is preferable that initial aims and a working agreement clarify these matters but are re-negotiable as a truer picture emerges. The IM needs to hold their position on a sound contractual basis: open ended appointments are not helpful and an end-date is valuable even if this is re-negotiated. There is need for further sharing of good practice in this area.

Most of those questioned resisted the idea of evaluating the 'effectiveness' of what they did, but would have welcomed a clearer indication of whether they were fulfilling the expectations of those who had appointed them. I observed significant differences in the attitudes of those supervising

---

<sup>9</sup> Presentation, IM Consultation, Feb 2017.



IMs, even within the same diocese. One might focus on outcomes, with performance indicators, for example, while another evaluated effectiveness on the basis of the level of participation of the congregation in the activities and processes carried out. These differences created confusion when IMs met together and made mutual support and common learning more difficult.

### **Who should be consulted?**

If IMs were unclear about their role it was also apparent that many parishes and their PCCs were not informed about the role and authority of the IM. If licensed they may not need the usual public service of institution, involving the mayor, head of school and so on, but the sense of early confusion and later betrayal were evident in some of the congregations I visited.

In Liverpool the place of the church in the deanery plan is an important consideration and this is also emphasised in Newham, in Chelmsford diocese, where the Area Dean has a 'turnaround' brief. The presence of a number of Area Deans at the IM consultation in February 2017 indicates that many are acting as transitional ministers for parishes in their deaneries. Consultation with the deanery is valuable.

Oxford has acknowledged the importance of working with other denominations as the role of a particular church building is discerned. Such a perspective also enables a church to look outwards and join activity which is already established - night shelters or food banks, for example.

The accumulated wisdom of those consulted was that the initial job description would need to be revised in the light of the work of the first 6-8 weeks of interim ministry. I note that the Supplementary advice notes suggest that an initial appointment to find out what is going on may be made, prior to an IM.<sup>10</sup> This initial investigation may, then be made by a person different from the IM appointed. The tools and resources needed for this crucial period are examined in the next chapter.

---

<sup>10</sup> Supplementary advice issued by the Archbishops' Council in December 2017 Interim Posts made under Regulation 29 (7C) of the Ecclesiastical Offices (Terms of Service) Regulations 2009 Found at <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2018-01/Interim%20posts%20Guidance%20supplementary%20advice.pdf>

### 3. Tools needed for entry, leading to 6 week review

It became apparent as I spoke to IMs that there was a need for clarity about the reason for their appointment and the outcomes expected of them, but also for flexibility as they discovered that actual situation that existed in the church. They needed to take particular actions that would enable them to assess the situation very quickly and then to be able to review both the work that was needed and whether they were the best person to carry this out. The consensus among IMs is this period is approximately 6 weeks.

Any newly appointed minister needs to find ways to discover the local situation: the IM needs to do this speedily, engendering a sense of urgency and awareness that status quo cannot continue. They also, though, often need to calm the anxiety and win trust. Some have found this is achieved by doing normal ministerial things - preaching, leading worship that show a level of competence which validates the appointment. One case in which nobody took care of fees for occasional offices demonstrated how important it is that there is clarity about the expectations that the IM and the church leaders have about what the IM will do. There may be a need for advanced planning on how occasional offices will be managed during the vacancy – in a busy parish with many weddings, funerals and baptisms, pastoral services could overwhelm the IM and distract them from the transition process.

The Church of Scotland also tries to establish a 'behavioural contract,' as each person and group agree about the manner in which discussion and activity will take place.

#### **Studying the church:**

The Church of Scotland trains its IMs in 'deep listening' to a church. Those familiar with the use of complexity theory in organisational development will recognise that, 'working on the edge of chaos, change, especially cultural change, happens through conversation, not always through structures or process.'<sup>11</sup> The value of meeting members of the congregation one-to-one and building strong relationships was repeatedly emphasised. In these meetings people will be encouraged to tell stories and recover past artefacts and texts which give a 'rich' picture of the church.

It is helpful for the IM to have an understanding of how they most easily work - in one-one to conversations, small group or large group processes. All will be necessary, but an awareness of preferences will enable selection of the most appropriate method and avoid always adopting the same process.

The IM network advocates the use of their *Congregational Systems Inventory* at this stage, but several IMs said it was particularly hard to adapt to the UK situation. The following is an amalgamation of that Inventory<sup>12</sup> and the work on congregational life cycles by George W. Bullard, Jr,<sup>13</sup> both contained in the IMN resource book.

---

<sup>11</sup> Stacey, R. D. (2001) *Complex Responsive Processes in Organizations* London: Routledge

<sup>12</sup> Which analyses the church in terms of Who – heritage, belonging, Where: context, How: processes of decision making and What: the programme of events.

<sup>13</sup> This analyses a congregation's life by looking at the cycle of vision, relationships, program and maintenance. It assumes that last is sign of decline and that, indeed, age = obsolescence.

I have re-phrased Bullard's topics as vision, relationships, activity and governance, and look for maturity in well established congregations, rather than pre-supposing obsolescence. Combining this with the who, where, how and what questions a number of perspectives on the state of the church may be obtained:

*WHO/RELATIONSHIPS* Ask who is involved - both individuals and the relationships between them. Be aware of systems thinking, which examines the links between people as much as their individual characteristics, but NOT only in order to discern difficulties: support systems can be a great blessing! Who is being blamed for problems - are they the presenting symptom of another underlying cause?

*WHERE* Ask about the context of the locality of the church. A big topic, but initially, find out how the church relates to its context: what is the congregational members' perception? Past and immediate presence is most important. Are there any historical events that influence the present and recent changes that have upset the pattern of living. Where are the connections with the surrounding area, such as schools and where are there 'no go' areas which have no connection with church.

*HOW/GOVERNANCE* Ask how decision are made and what policies and practices are in place for finance and safe-guarding.

*WHAT/ACTIVITY* Ask about events and activity in the church, both regular and special.

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

PCC minutes and the parish profile could be good sources of information, both to see what is recorded and how much space and attention is given to each of the above topics. It is necessary for the IM to listen to people' stories, without commenting on their objective truth. They may expect to hear contradictory versions. What actually happened is of much less significance than what people thought happened and understanding why that version is believed.

The outcome of these questions can then inform the work that the IM does. It may, indeed, indicate that a set of skills not possessed by that IM is needed and another should be appointed. For example

Who: heritage, belonging – feeds into work on owning the past

Where: context – feeds into connecting with community

How: processes of decision making – indicates where governance issues, such as safe-guarding and financial accounting, should be addressed

What: programme of events – indicates the vocation of that church

Vision: the view of the future – beginning work on the next appointment.

The process of asking these questions may well contribute to the building of a team within the church who can work with the IM. This is essential for the long term success of the project. It will aid the IM in identifying those in the church who are influential, both in supporting and in resisting change. The voice of those who have been in the church for a long time and those recently arrived should also be sought.

Two alternative sources of review are the 'Healthy Churches' review,<sup>14</sup> and the Missional Church questionnaire,<sup>15</sup> both of which aim to give a picture of the church so as to identify the direction in which it needs to grow and develop.

In using each of these tools, however, it is important that the IM has the basic skills of listening and facilitation. Some have found a basic understanding of the building blocks of conversation analysis to be helpful:

*How do people tell their stories? Do they use first person 'I' second 'we' or third 'they' when talking about what has happened and what might happen in the future. This might indicate whether they expect to have a say in what happens or have abandoned agency.*

*How do people respond to each other - in adjacency pairings. For example, when one person says 'it's a family church' another might say 'we all support each other.' Or the second person might say, 'no-one has any secrets here.' It's easy for the minister to understand the comment about family in the light of their own experience and expectations - but it is better to listen for a qualifying comment.*

### **Identification of partners:**

The IMN emphasises the necessity of working with a transition team, formed solely for the purpose of accompanying the IM during the interim period. The Church of Scotland IMs proceed on the basis that the Presbytery retains authority and the IM is aiming to help them make decisions about the future. There is no such clarity about the individuals or body that the IM in England should work with. Just one of the respondents and those I met mentioned this collaborative aspect of their work, which is separate from the development of lay ministry that does not yet exist.

The basis on which the IM is appointed to the parish will affect the authority held by the Churchwardens and Area/Rural Dean and good practice suggests that their leadership and authority should be respected.

### **Is this IM the right person for this role?**

There are a variety of different methods of appointment in use at the present: licence to the parish, licence to another parish, licence to the Cathedral, House for duty, salaried post. Whatever process of appointment is followed it needs to be a structure that enables re-evaluation of the work that is to be done after 6 weeks. This re-evaluation should include the possibility that another IM would be better suited for the task ahead.

Some dioceses, and the Church of Scotland are distinguishing at the outset between interim and transition ministry and adjusting the expectations of each in relation to each other. The first is being used to describe short-term, intentional work of up to two years, the second a longer term appointment of up to five years. The complexity of the situation may mean that there is much re-building work to be done after the initial work of managing the conflict, anxiety or hopelessness: a transition minister could follow an interim.

One useful question is whether the church needs to be disrupted or to be made secure. The church may be in need of interim ministry because it is not coping with a dysfunctional situation or because it must face up to the need for change in the light of a changing pastoral environment. Each

---

<sup>14</sup> Warren, Robert *The Healthy Churches' Handbook: A Process for Revitalizing Your Church* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004)

<sup>15</sup> Found at Partnership for Missional Church. <https://churchmissionsociety.org/partnership-missional-church> Accessed 12.6.18.

requires different skills: The first to be a calming influence, a non anxious presence, the second to be a vision builder and strategic thinker.

### **Renegotiation of the aims of the interim ministry and the IM's working agreement**

The IMs interviewed agreed that after about 6 weeks it should be possible to predict how long it might take to accomplish the work they were appointed to do. This would then give them a time-scale into which they could plan their activity. This should be shared with the church leaders and with their supervisor so that all were clear about the temporary nature of their stay.

#### **4 Tools needed for 6 weeks for up to three years.**

The outcome of the initial investigation into the 'who,' 'where,' 'how,' 'what.' and vision of the church will inform the work which is undertaken during the period of interim ministry. It was apparent from the response to the questionnaires that the choice of tools and resources which were being used was not related to the reasons given for their appointment. Those later interviewed who described their choices said that they had been guided by their previous experience, their awareness of what was available and their 'gut instincts' about what was needed. Many felt under resourced, though some said that they believed that, in some ways, it hardly mattered what one did as the problem they faced had been the result of a lack of focus and activity. Attention of any sort to the internal dynamics of the congregation and to the mission of the church would be of assistance.

#### **From 6 weeks to 3 years**

It is during this time that the main work of the Interim Minister is carried out. The conversations, both one-to-one and in groups will continue, but the focus will shift from the gathering of a 'rich' picture of the church to processes, events and activities to change the situation. The Institute of Interim Managers declares that if there is no sign of improvement after three months the wrong tactics are being used or the company is beyond rescue. This is a reminder of the need for a continual evaluation of activities undertaken and the levels of engagement with them as well as any changes that are observed. There is some evidence that appointments of less than a year are surprisingly effective.

The personal needs of the IMs continue to be for effective supervision and the support of a mentor or critical friend. The skill of coaching and mentoring has been found to be very useful, both for themselves as they had been coached in the role by another interim minister and mentored themselves and also the one to one coaching and mentoring that they were able to offer to people in the local churches to give them particular skills to enable to look after themselves in future.

#### **Foundational skills:**

Alongside the ability to coach and mentor, the employment of the foundational skills of facilitation and listening continue to be crucial. Facilitation is a key skill both for community development and in adult training terms. At meetings enabling people to voice what they want as well as the skill of silencing some folk, the skill of bringing people to some kind of decision are essential. The Church of Scotland understood 'deep listening' as: the ability to hear what an individual or group is saying and reflect it back to them, perhaps so they hear it in a new and enlightening way. So the listener reports: 'this is what I hear you saying' and 'this is what I see is happening' and asks if that's accurate. They can then say 'I wonder if this would be an answer, how does this sound to you' in a speculative offering. The listening has gone well when somebody who has been listened to can then say, 'oh now I realise that what has happened, or 'I realise just why I felt that way,' The 'I see' and the 'I wonder' has produced the 'I realise' and you know that somebody has been properly listened to. In this respect the IM might be something of a prophet, sign-posting the future, though more in the sense of helping people see various options and possibilities than telling them what the future is. Since these skills of coaching, mentoring, facilitation and listening are essential to using the other tools they should either be possessed by the IM at the time of appointment or quickly acquired. They may be, though, habits and attitudes as much as skills - the desire to develop other people's ministry and encourage others' gifts is a pre-requisite. This *disposition* is then nurtured by repeated practice.

## The tools and approaches used

The IMN has identified five tasks, adapted to five focii, for the work of interim ministry: <sup>16</sup>

### Tasks (Classic) <sup>17</sup>

1. Coming to terms with history
2. Discovering a new identity
3. Leadership changes during an interim
4. Renewing denominational linkages
5. Commitment to new directions in ministry

### Focus Points (New)<sup>18</sup>

Heritage: reviewing how the congregation has been shaped and formed  
Mission: defining and redefining sense of purpose and direction  
Leadership: reviewing the congregation's ways of organizing and developing new and effective clergy and lay leadership  
Connections: discovering all the relationships and networks a faith community builds beyond itself  
Future: synthesizing the interim work, activating and training the pastoral search or call committee, and coaching the committee (as requested) to accomplish its work

Are IMN's five tasks still a good framework? Only one diocese reported using them in practice and they were unknown to most respondents to the questionnaire. These IMs were unaware of, or did not find useful, material from outside the UK. They have been effectively used in the final analysis and evaluation of a period of interim ministry ( see chap 5), but the pragmatic response of one IM: 'I haven't used any specific theory/approach, just dealt with issues and questions as they have arisen as appropriate' was much more typical of the approach revealed in through the questionnaire and in face-to-face interviews.

**The questionnaire** distributed among IMs revealed a range of tools and resources that were used, apparently chosen according to the practitioners' previous experience rather than directed related to the reasons they were given for their appointment. Change management and conflict management were the highest scoring topics - twelve and thirteen responses among 18 respondents. When asked to name the tool used no particular change strategy was named and only 'Bridgebuilders'<sup>19</sup> was named as a tool for use in situations of conflict. The Church of Scotland IMs are all trained mediators, using the resources of 'A Place of Hope' organisation. They aimed to give

---

<sup>16</sup> This very helpful table comes from Woodward, MA thesis.

<sup>17</sup> Roger S. Nicholson, 'The Challenge of the Interim Time', in *Temporary Shepherds: A Congregational Handbook for Interim Ministry*, ed. Roger S. Nicholson (Alban Institute, 1998), 6–12. For a slightly different formulation see Miller, 'What Does an Interim Pastor Do?', 30.

<sup>18</sup> 'Interim Ministry - Center for Congregational Health (CCH)', *Center for Congregational Health (CCH)*, accessed 24 July 2017, <https://healthychurch.org/interim-ministry/>. See also John Keydel, 'Focus Points and the Work of the Congregation', in *Transitional Ministry Today: Successful Strategies for Churches and Pastors*, ed. Norman B. Bendroth (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 53–61.

<sup>19</sup> e.g. Bridge Builders, 2012. *Transforming Church Culture*. [online] Available at:

<http://www.bbministries.org.uk> [Accessed 12.6.18].

congregations the capacity to deal with their own conflicts, rather than to be the ones who resolved them.

Examination of the financial management within the parish was needed in six situations. A close link with diocesan officials in the diocesan Boards of Finance and access to diocesan help was particularly appreciated in this area, as it was in other matters of church rules and governance.

The way in which relationships were built, information gathered and action taken was deemed at least as important as the tools used. 'Loving them' was listed more than once as an essential attitude, communicating a positive, hopeful approach. Using Appreciative Inquiry,<sup>20</sup> and asset based strategies emphasised the resources which the congregation already had, while having a positive regard for what was done well rather than always criticising the less good was seen as transformative in itself. The use of Mission Action Planning was popular: nine responses and was accompanied in four cases by congregational audits.

Probably influenced by Bridgebuilders, a systems approach to the church was adopted by many, identifying the network of emotional relationships that created the family of the church. Where errors had been made by one individual - often a minister who had been suspended - the IM worked to engender collective responsibility, for the present and the future, if not for the past.

The range of tools used is demonstrated by the following list, each of which was named by one of the questionnaire's respondents:

- A diocesan 'Fresh Start' course
- Some of the tools from Leading Your Church into Growth,
- A parish listening exercise,
- A participatory congregational meeting,
- The IMN Congregational Systems Inventory,
- ICA's Group Facilitation Methods,
- CPAS The PCC Tonight (to improve dialogue and meeting management),
- A self devised Worship Questionnaire
- Community consultation

This range represents a varied mix of home-made courses, bits of branded Christian material and resources from secular situations. How did the IMs know what to choose? Several recorded their reliance on 'life experience,' which was sometimes quite specialised: of community development and human resources as well as of 'power dynamics' or a 'psychodynamic understanding of relationships.' Diocesan support, and the growing network of those working in this field is proving invaluable. Knowledge of the clergy appointment process and CofE Team/Group frameworks was regarded as essential by several respondents while knowledge of IM theory and practice was mentioned by only one respondent.

The impression that is gained is that the IMs in England are not, in the main, influenced by the experience of their counterparts in N America but are adapting the abundant resources available to any church for their own needs. Five respondents did not reply to the questions asking if material from outside the UK had been used, eight said 'no.' Their choice of resources is only partly determined by the reasons for their appointment. In several cases a process such as mission action

---

<sup>20</sup> The Church of Scotland has a very useful introduction to this for its IMs:  
[http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0013/20434/appreciative\\_inquiry\\_introductory\\_guide.pdf](http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0013/20434/appreciative_inquiry_introductory_guide.pdf)



planning was chosen for different reasons in different cases: for example, to provide encouragement, to give disparate communities a common task or to regenerate the decision-making systems of the church.

As with the identification of the foundational skills of listening and facilitation it is possible to see that some interpersonal skills such as negotiation, team-building and a positive approach are essential to the effective use of any of the tools which had been used.

One conclusion from this survey of the tools used is that it is highly unlikely that any programme for UK IMs, such as is advocated by the IMN, would be adopted. There are many resources on offer and the freedom to choose a process is too much valued to stick to one approach. Continual networking about what has been used is, however, greatly valued and the response to the question, 'What has been effective?' indicates that further conversation on this topic would be fruitful. There has clearly been several initiatives taken which have not yet born any fruit. This may reflect the early stage of many interim ministries, but the IM who had found that nothing worked could benefit from talking with the two IMs who responded that anything that gave a sense of purpose and achievement was effective!

Some IMs are finding it hard to locate the tools they need. Though seven did not respond to the question: '*In what areas are you unable to find resources at present?*' the areas of human resources, change, family systems and finance were each mentioned by one person and other systems theory and conflict by two. One person replied 'I had no resources' and one 'I don't know where to look.' After noting that resourceful IMs are finding their own tools it is noteworthy that some appointments are being made without enabling access to the support needed to carry out the work. Although several recorded the help given to them when diocesan personnel in finance and legal departments were contacted it appeared largely left to IMs themselves to find tools and resources and decide on their appropriate use.

## **The IM's Tasks**

As I talked face-to-face to IMs I was able to discover the aim of the work they were doing in local churches and identify which tools were being employed in which area. These included:

### **Continuing to investigate the nature of their congregations**

IMs were often now sharing the insights which had emerged with the lay leadership so that they could understand better the reasons for their current condition and the nature of the community that God was calling them to be. The IMN encourages the use of George Bullard's analysis of the life cycle and stages of congregational development<sup>21</sup> and the use of genograms for mapping family system relationships and sources of anxiety.<sup>22</sup> Church members are encouraged to listen to and tell stories of their own past and to use these to enliven and check the theoretical insights.

Further understanding of the church may be gained through use of analysis of the core values of the church and of the spiritual types present in the congregation.<sup>23</sup> But such resources were neither used nor, it would seem, required in the UK. Mapping the history of the church and parish for the previous five or ten years, and requesting photos, stories and mementos, can reveal the variety of perspectives that are present in one church. These investigations are not, as in the first few weeks of interim ministry, for the benefit of the IM and the senior staff but so as to enable

---

<sup>21</sup> Bullard, Jr. George W., *Pursuing the Full Kingdom Potential of Your Congregation*. Danvers MA: Lake Hickory Resources. 2005.

<sup>22</sup> There is a short guide to Bowen's theory of family systems at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RgdcljNV-Ew>

<sup>23</sup> Ware, Corinne, *Discover Your Spiritual Type*, Alban Institute, 1995.

the church itself to discern the way forward. A positive approach should continue, using the principles of Appreciative Inquiry.

The Church of Scotland IMs emphasised the importance of 'deep listening' at all stages, but also demonstrated how listening can help a community move forward. Appreciative questions such as: 'what kind of things have gone well in this place?' questions of concern, such as: 'what concerns you about the present and the future?' and 'what difficulties and struggles are you experiencing at the moment?' can lead to further questions: 'how can you take responsibility for the future?' and 'what help do you need to realise the goals which you've identified as desirable?'

The IM can also carry out further research through such approaches as a reading of past PCC minutes and analysis of how money has been spent. There are further tools available for congregation inquiry and development such as Robert Warren, *The Healthy Churches' Handbook: A Process for Revitalizing Your Church* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004) and Keith Elford, *Creating the Future of the Church: A Practical Guide to Addressing Whole-System Change* (SPCK, 2013).

### **Developing more lay leadership**

This appears to be a widespread aim of interim ministry, both on the part of IMs themselves and the diocesan leadership which appoints them. It is not always apparent, though, that those leaders are comfortable with the resulting independence of thought and action that the lay leadership demonstrates! There is widespread awareness that the appointment of an IM might be seen to take away responsibility during a vacancy from Wardens and PCC members and some resistance to it may result. The IMs to whom I spoke, though, were clear that their aim was to increase people's capacity for taking responsibility, aware that return to the days of co-dependence between a priest and congregation was neither possible nor desirable.

Lay empowerment begins with deepening of faith and the aim of developing Christian discipleship through the promotion of Bible reading and prayer was common. Then the ability to identify skills in a congregation and enable people to believe in their own calling is vital. There needs to be ways for everyone to comment and contribute, so channels of communication must be clear.

Some congregations, in the process of pastoral re-organisation, have needed the roles and responsibilities of Church wardens and PCC members explained. Individuals have needed coaching and mentoring in these roles and then to learn to act as a team, working collaboratively. This has proved very effective in a number of situations.

### **Resolution of conflict:**

The first step for many of the IMs was to understand the causes of the conflicts which were prevalent in the churches in their care. Many of the respondents to the questionnaire recorded the Bridgebuilders' course as useful in this respect, though I was not able to find out how it was used in the churches.<sup>24</sup> The IMN has several resources in this area, used by at least one IM. It advocates knowing one's own reaction to conflict since our own behaviour and responses in conflict may influence the situation. Listening was, once again, essential so that that the IM could find out what people are complaining about.

The Church of Scotland emphasised the work that was necessary for a congregation to learn to manage its own (inevitable) differences of opinion. All IMs had received training in the mediation offered through 'A Place for Hope' and most had been practitioners in other places before becoming

---

<sup>24</sup> courses are offered, e.g. Bridge Builders, 2012. *Transforming Church Culture*. [online] Available at: <http://www.bbministries.org.uk> [Accessed 12.6.18].

IMs.<sup>25</sup> The aim is that the health of the congregation and its own capacity for healing is strengthened, rather than that conflict is resolved by an outsider. Though aware of the value of a family systems analysis and knowing the congregations act in ways that are different to their individual members is very important, it was felt that using such a tool in conflict resolution could distort perspectives on the family-like nature of the church, suggesting it is always negative. It was essential that the congregation's capacity to listen to each other was developed so that there was an awareness that no-one person or version held a 'correct' version of events, but that there would be different perceptions of each situation which provide an essential picture of people's hopes, fears and commitments.

Coventry Cathedral, as a centre for reconciliation work in this country, has produced guidelines for conversations between those who disagree.<sup>26</sup> It is important that the IM knows what they are trying to achieve and the extent of their role, as, for example, *either* a mediator or an arbiter.

This deep listening on the part of the IM and development of this skill in the church members facilitates the process of vision building and of making changes that must take place.

### **Vision-building:**

Many of the IMs that I spoke identified the lack of purpose in the church as a significant indication of the loss of confidence and identity. Two IMs spoke of the need to tidy the church building - an actual and emotional clearing away of jumble which had accumulated over many years. The use of mission action planning was widespread, though IMs were aware of the danger of generating 'wish-lists' or engaging in fruitless nostalgia for a mythical past. Asset based approaches needed, such as that provided by the IMN<sup>27</sup> or Appreciative Inquiry, the latter being widely used.

The manner of these discussions was, therefore, as significant as the content and both the book *Holy Conversations*<sup>28</sup> and a Grove Booklet I wrote in the course of this research on conversations which explore expectations in areas of leadership, worship style and the mission of the church<sup>29</sup> have been used.

Despite the wide use of MAP, many of the IMs I spoke to were reluctant to see themselves as responsible for the long term future direction of the church, believing this was the role of the person appointed after them. The number of those who recorded the use of MAP in the questionnaire may reflect the fact that a large proportion of those presently appointed as IMs do stay for at least three years and several have then been appointed as the priest-in-charge. I did not have the capacity to identify for how many of the present appointments this applied.

### **Management of Change:**

The work by Bridges on the emotional impact of change has proved valuable, helping to frame ministerial vacancies as liminal times.<sup>30</sup> Knowing that in this period uncertainty and disorganisation may be expected can be a relief for church members. It can also be a time of creativity and freedom from restraint. The relational aspect of guiding people through this process is

---

<sup>25</sup> See <https://www.placeforhope.org.uk/> Accessed 13.6.18

<sup>26</sup> *Grace and Dialogue, Shared Conversations on Difficult Issues*. Prepared by St Michael's House, Coventry for General Synod, July 2016.

<sup>27</sup> Snow, Luther K. *The Power of Asset Mapping: How Your congregation Can Act on its Gifts*. Copyright 2004 The Alban Institute Inc.

<sup>28</sup> Gil Rendle and Alice, *Mann Holy Conversations - Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013.

<sup>29</sup> Jordan, E. *Honest Conversations in Churches* Grove 2017

<sup>30</sup> *Managing Transitions*

underlined. In one case-study presented by the Church of Scotland IMs they described how they had ensured that they had spoken one-to-one to every person in the large decision making assembly before the vote was taken. They realised that it was important to acknowledge that people oscillated between supporting and resisting change, sometimes relating to whichever group they happened to be in at the time. There's always a tendency to want to be compliant with the people who are around one and perhaps to support a motion at one meeting which at the next one presents as being taken by other people. This was natural and didn't mean that people were betrayers or traitors: it was simply part of the natural way in which human dynamics work. It was necessary to make it easy for people to be supporters.

One author and one theory have also proved useful. Kotter identifies a step process for managing change in organisations: urgency, building team, get vision right, get buy in, empower action, create short term wins, don't give up, make it stick.<sup>31</sup> The changes that IMs needed to see through were those that redressed malfunction, rather than establish patterns for a new direction and this pattern needs to be operated in ways that ensure that ideas arise from the church rather than being initiated by the IM.

Complexity theorists identify five key areas to address in encouraging a system to becoming flexible enough to face the future: connection, diversity, information, power differentials, and level of anxiety.<sup>32</sup> 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. Once again, conversation is at the heart of change: change, especially cultural change, is effected by people with soft power, the people with most contacts rather than those with most structural power or the latest processes.<sup>33</sup> The power of influence is greater than the power of command. It is worth asking those who have been part of one conversation to talk to someone else and thus themselves become agents of change.

As part of the care for people in time of transition it is important to agree on how to make decisions before those decisions are discussed and decided. Will, for, example, the whole church be involved, or only the Church Council? Is unanimity required or a majority vote?

### **Engagement with community,**

The local parish church's engagement with the surrounding community has been the foundation of its existence for many centuries - but is often the aspect which is soonest lost as a church declines in vision and capacity. Several IMs I spoke to had begun a re-vitalisation of the church by restoring connections with a local school and re-establishing children's work, such as Messy Church.

Engagement with those outside the existing structures of leadership also enables new voices to be heard, people who are less likely to be committed to the status quo.

---

<sup>31</sup> Kotter, J.P. and Cohen, D.S. *The Heart of Change*. Boston. Harvard Business School Press.

<sup>32</sup> Taken from Woodward, Natasha, MA Thesis

<sup>33</sup> Stacey, Ralph D. 'The Science of Complexity: An Alternative Perspective for Strategic Change Processes'. *Strategic Management Journal* 16, no. 6 (1995): 477-95.

## **Pastoral Care**

'I just love them!' declared one response to the question about resources used. When I spoke to lay leaders in congregations in Chelmsford diocese that had received an Interim Minister there was agreement that a regular ministry of leading worship with pastoral sensitivity, preaching the Gospel of God's care and provision care and the calm and competent conduct of the occasional offices had restored not only a sense that they were loved but also a capacity to care for each other. This care could be expressed in the traditional ministry of home visits or in the use of a programme such as Russ Parker's on the healing of memories.<sup>34</sup> The use of liturgy to express deep emotions was effectively used by some: a service of reconciliation, for example.

There has been some use of training courses to promote pastoral care amongst church members. These courses, usually on listening skills, have in one place helped people from different congregations who did not know each other well to listen to each other's perspective and in another to improve their ability to listen to stories about the church's past and identity. Enhancing church members' ability to listen to each other has resulted in a considerable improvement in the care they offer each other.

It may be worth noting that complexity theory, as used in organizational development places value on the uncertainty created by instability, since it is such a state that an organisation is able to adapt to a changing situation. The stability of some churches is a factor in their decline - I heard of one church that had managed to continue act as a small village church even as a major expansion of the town had happened around it. Some emotional stability is needed to survive, but the church will face the future better if it does not seek an unchanging future.<sup>35</sup>

## **Governance issues:**

There are some aspects of local church life which need to be established, to satisfy church and charity law and practice. These include reviewing the policies about Safe-guarding, the handling of finance, working agreements for authorised and licensed ministers and the conduct of church council meetings. Not all the IMs had been incumbents; indeed not all were ordained, and the support of the appropriate officers in the diocesan administration was requested in the questionnaire responses. A list of available experts and reliable sources of information could help the church to re-connect with the diocesan structures.

**The IM themselves** continue to need the care, support of the diocesan hierarchy. Supervision, with clear lines of accountability and mutual mentoring are presented as the minimum required. Work on the desirable outcomes should, ideally, be a matter of ongoing discussion between the supervisor, the IM and the PCC. Supervision can then hold the IM to that process, allowing evaluation of the congregation's participation in the process. The church's capacity to work with the changes that are happening should be continually monitored. At least one IM found that being open about the changes that were needed and using that as a means of evaluation at each church council enabled continual monitoring for herself and for the church.

The health of the IM is important, not only for its own sake, but because of the effect on the congregation of the minister's attitude and behaviour. One respondent spoke of the need to model the relationships that they were encouraging among church members. Thus both in their treatment of all with respect and trust and in their interaction with potential lay leaders they exemplified a way of relating rather than merely talking about it. It may be that such a model of behaviour is more significant and needed at a time of trauma and transition than during a 'normal' period of ministry.

---

<sup>34</sup> e.g. Parker, Russ, *Healing Wounded History*, DLT 2001.

<sup>35</sup> Once again, I am indebted to Natasha Woodward for sight of her dissertation.

One respondent found teaching on church leadership, provided in his case by the New Wine network, vital as he ministered to a congregation that had lacked this care. He was not otherwise able to find a place to reflect on the role of the leader in a time of transition.

### **Conclusions**

Much of what has been learned here is not exclusive to Interim Ministry - these are processes that might be expected to be an integral part of any licensed ministry. One key difference between an IM and 'normal' appointment is the timescale involved. An IM would usually expect to identify an appropriate course of action and work on that with some focus and intensity. The position is confused when an IM is then appointed as the priest in charge: several dioceses spoke of the need to make a clear declaration at the outset to the congregation and the individual minister how long the appointment will be for. This is to avoid situations in which, for example, a process such as mission action planning is used for a short term gain, but which produces expectations of long term action.

## 5. Tools needed at end of IM\_

There are three parts to this section on the tools used and needed at the end of a period of interim ministry:

- how to discern when the need for interim ministry is drawing to an end
- how to evaluate the effectiveness of that ministry and
- how to achieve a successful handover.

### Discerning when is IM drawing to a close

It should be no surprise to the church that an Interim Minister is leaving: many emphasise the value of planning for this moment from the outset and reminding church members that the appointment is temporary on repeated occasions.

If the appointment has been on the basis that the church was not in a position to make a decision about the longer term ministry without the assistance of an IM, the moment at which this is deemed possible is the moment for the IM to prepare to leave. Similarly, if clarity has been achieved within the diocesan structures about the future shape of ministry this should be marked with a new appointment.

The issue of whether an IM should be appointed in the longer term is one on which there is no agreement. The church of Scotland, out of thirty years experience, has decided that this should be the case when the minister has been acting in the short-term, intensive, way that an IM does, but may be possible if someone has been appointed in the longer term as a transition minister. The criteria for decision, as for the appointment, should be the best interests of the parish. Does the IM's gifts fit the needs of the new situation? One way forward could be for the job description and parish profile to be drawn up, with no involvement from the IM if he or she is likely to apply, and then to follow normal advertisement and interview procedures.

One could, then, return to the questions which were asked and resulted in the decision to appoint an IM:

*Are people unaware of the need for change?*

*Do people recognise need for change, but don't know what to do?*

*Do people recognise need for change, but resist it - 'it'll see me out.'*

*Do people recognise the changes that are needed, but resist some of them?*

*Do people, or a small group, want to change things themselves, regardless of denominational structure*

*Do people, or at least the existing leadership, recognise the need for change and can identify some of the changes needed and are able, with diocesan assistance, to describe this in a parish profile and job description?*

Following this pattern, the aim of IM is to bring a church to a point where the last question can be answered, at least in part, in the affirmative.

IMs themselves spoke largely in terms of a developing lay leadership: "corporate leadership who can work with priest. Not a compliant parish that will return to control of priest or diocese, as one put it. They looked for a sense of pride in the place of worship and a desire to be involved in decisions about its future through contribution to policy-making and appointments. They valued lay people who took initiative and had moved from passivity or opposition to action and ideas contributed by themselves. In this sense IMs are catalysts of a change in patterns of ministry.

## **Evaluating the effectiveness of interim ministry**

IMs noted that the Church Commissioners emphasise outcomes and impact at the moment, but not all things are quantifiable and some things only apparent after a lengthier period of time. Missional growth, for example, might happen several years after the IM has left. 'Success,' indeed, may be that nothing happens, in a situation in which major conflict was brewing. Interim ministry may justifiably be deemed successful when decline is halted rather than when growth is achieved.

Finance is, however, like dye in water, indicating the direction and strength of energy. The re-establishment of transparent and reliable accounting systems, as with other governance issues, is a good indication of a return to viability.

Chelmsford diocese has sought evidence of the following in evaluating the effectiveness of the IM appointments in the diocese:

- *Evaluation of transformation:*
  - Evidence of new attitudes to church*
  
  - Evidence of new mission values instilled,*
  - Evidence of fresh leadership developed*
  - A process of effective handover/overlap to standard/permanent leadership*
  
- *Evaluation of Interim Minister:*
  - Evidence of the suitability, preparation and effectiveness of the Interim Minister*
  
- *Evaluation of process:*
  - Specific key actions during the period of interim ministry*

The Church of Scotland's appraisal framework asks the presbytery to comment on

- 1) The impact of the interim ministry process.
- 2) What needs to happen next to enhance the life of this church and to build on its achievements.
- 3) What the church has learned through its experience of the interim ministry process.
- 4) What further support from the wider church would be helpful to this church.
- 5) Further comments.<sup>36</sup>

Within the Church of England's structures, the diocesan authorities are more likely to assume that they are the arbiters of a 'successful' interim ministry, but as local lay and ordained leaders assume more responsibility for the future the opinion of non-archival, episcopal authority needs to be supplemented by the church's own assessment.

Although the five focus points used as a framework for the activity of IM in N America have not been used by IMs in this country to guide their work, they have provided a means of evaluating the work which has been done. Activities and outcomes can be recorded against each of these:

- Coming to terms with history

---

<sup>36</sup> From the Church of Scotland Interim Ministries Handbook, found at [www.churchofscotland.org.uk/\\_\\_\\_/interim\\_ministry\\_handbook.pdf](http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/___/interim_ministry_handbook.pdf) accessed 6.6.18



- Discovering a new identity
- Helping the local/lay leaders to grow and change
- Renewing denominational linkages
- Commitment to a new direction

### **Handover/saying goodbye:**

IMs and their supervisors were divided about question of how much the IM should be involved in the appointment of their successors and the manner of handover to them. Some were reluctant to do anything that could not be reversed by next incumbent, apparently adhering to a traditional view that it would be 'their church' then. One person thought that a role for the IM was almost a akin to a scapegoat, taking the pain of the community and removing themselves before the new ministry phase began. One was reluctant to pass on information, even (or especially) to the Bishop, believing that they were accountable to the congregation. Others had worked to establish a sense of ownership by local lay leaders and left decisions about the transition in the hands of Churchwardens.

The people responsible for the appointment process have a role in this handover and this will, in a church of England setting, probably include some of the Bishop, the Archdeacon, the Area Dean, the Wardens and the parish reps. There is, though, no handover document which is commonly used, even by IMs working within a single diocese or archdeaconry. The IMN advocates holding 'exit conversations' between the IM and the lay leadership, covering

Comparisons between expectations and what was experienced

Changes noted in church life,

The strengths of the congregation

What outstanding business is there – e.g.- in areas of activities, services, organisation, stewardship, outreach?

Recommendations of the IM, for looking at these areas and for new areas of mission and ministry.

Any other comments from IM or questions from lay team, perhaps including deciding who will brief the new minister. (not a usual practice!)<sup>37</sup>

Areas to include: Pastoral, policies and rituals, the wider community care of staff and volunteers, as well as the congregation in general.

As to saying goodbye, just one respondent to questionnaire recorded the need to mark this occasion and had used an Iona liturgy of leaving.

### **Further Work**

It would be valuable to share any good practice about handover procedures and to draft a pro forma. One might begin by asking what a new minister might need to know: What does the new minister need to know? A preliminary list could be:

The 'Membership'

Annual Reports

Newsletters

Minutes,

Key documents: bye laws, agreements, covenants

---

<sup>37</sup> "Holding exit conversations" *Beginning Ministry Together* pp 17-19. and "Sample Questions for Exit Conversations" pp91-94.

Job descriptions, working agreements,  
Calendar  
Worship patterns and practices  
Congregational goals.

Further work is needed in this area.

## 6. 'Conclusions'

The following bullet points are offered as provisional discussion points.

- The appointment of IMs is, at present, rather haphazard, despite the guidance given by national Regulations. Further work would be valuable on identifying a job description and person specification that would facilitate the sharing of information between those practising this ministry and enable local churches to know what they might expect when an IM is appointed.
- The most important skills that an IM needs is the capacity to listen and the capacity to facilitate. Without these the best of other tools and resources are less effective and may have a negative effect.
- IMs in this country are using a wide range of tools and resources. Some are more effective than others, but there are few areas in which there is a lack of available resources. Such areas might include
  - Further thought about a tool for the assessment of the situation in the first 6 weeks of an IM's appointment,
  - Consideration of the action and information that would provide an effective handover process.
- It is apparent that IMs are often dependent on their own experience and resources and further assistance in how to access material would be greatly valued.

Thus the second two research questions are most pertinent:

How is material best made available, using online platforms?

How is mutual learning and movement between dioceses best facilitated?

At present the answer looks like networking for mutual learning. How is this to be promoted?

## **Appendix I Questionnaire**

### **Research into the training and resource needs of Interim Ministers.**

I am writing to invite you to share your experiences of the resources available to help you in your role(s) as interim minister. I have been given your contact details by your diocese as someone who is now or has been recently in an intentional, short term post.

The Common Awards Seedcorn Fund has given me a grant to discover what resources are already available for use by those appointed as 'Interim' or 'Transitional' ministers in England, what needs to be adapted from other countries and what resources we need to develop for future use.

Our goal is to add to the online resources provided by Common Awards to enable existing and future Interim Ministers to access training and resource material appropriate to their situation. In addition, we will report on the skills necessary for the effective practice of Interim Ministry to enable those making appointments and supervising IMs to ensure they make adequate provision for training and support.

Your response will be anonymised and full confidentiality is assured. The details asked about yourself are only to give an idea of the background and previous skills of those taking part in this survey. Please contact me if you have any questions about the questionnaire, or this piece of research.

This questionnaire will take about 15 minutes to complete. Please reply by 27th October. One reminder will be sent, but no further contact will be made after that.

With many thanks for your participation.

Rev Dr Elizabeth Jordan.  
Lay Development Adviser,  
Diocese of Chelmsford.

[ejordan@chelmsford.anglican.org](mailto:ejordan@chelmsford.anglican.org)  
01245 294454

## The Questionnaire

### About you

Age (please circle) 20-29 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-69, 70-79.

If ordained, Year of ordination as deacon

If licensed, Year of licensing as lay minister or lay worker

How many appointments as an IM have you held?

For each appointment please give the length of term served in years and months

What is the purpose of your present appointment? (*tick all that are applicable*)

Resolution of Conflict

Assessment after lengthy appointment

Financial irregularity

Consequences of sexual misconduct

Falling numbers

Other - please specify

Which of the following list of skills have been used in your role(s) of an Interim Minister, dealing with: *(tick all that are applicable)*

Change management

Human resources

Conflict

Finance

Family Systems

Other Systems Theory

Community development

Other - please specify

What resources have you used in your work as an Interim Minister? *(tick all that are applicable)* Material on:

Congregation audits

Bridgebuilders' courses

Systems theory

Appreciative Inquiry

Change strategies

Asset based approaches

Mission development

Coaching, mentoring

Other - please specify.

Which of the skills and resources listed above have you found effective in your work?

Have you adapted material from outside the UK (if so, please describe),

Did you need to amend the material to make it suitable for your context (if so please give brief details)

In which of these areas are you unable to find useful resources at present: (*tick all that are applicable*)

Human resources

Change

Family Systems

Other Systems Theory

Conflict

Finance

Community development.

Would you be willing to be contacted to discuss IM further?

Yes..

No..

