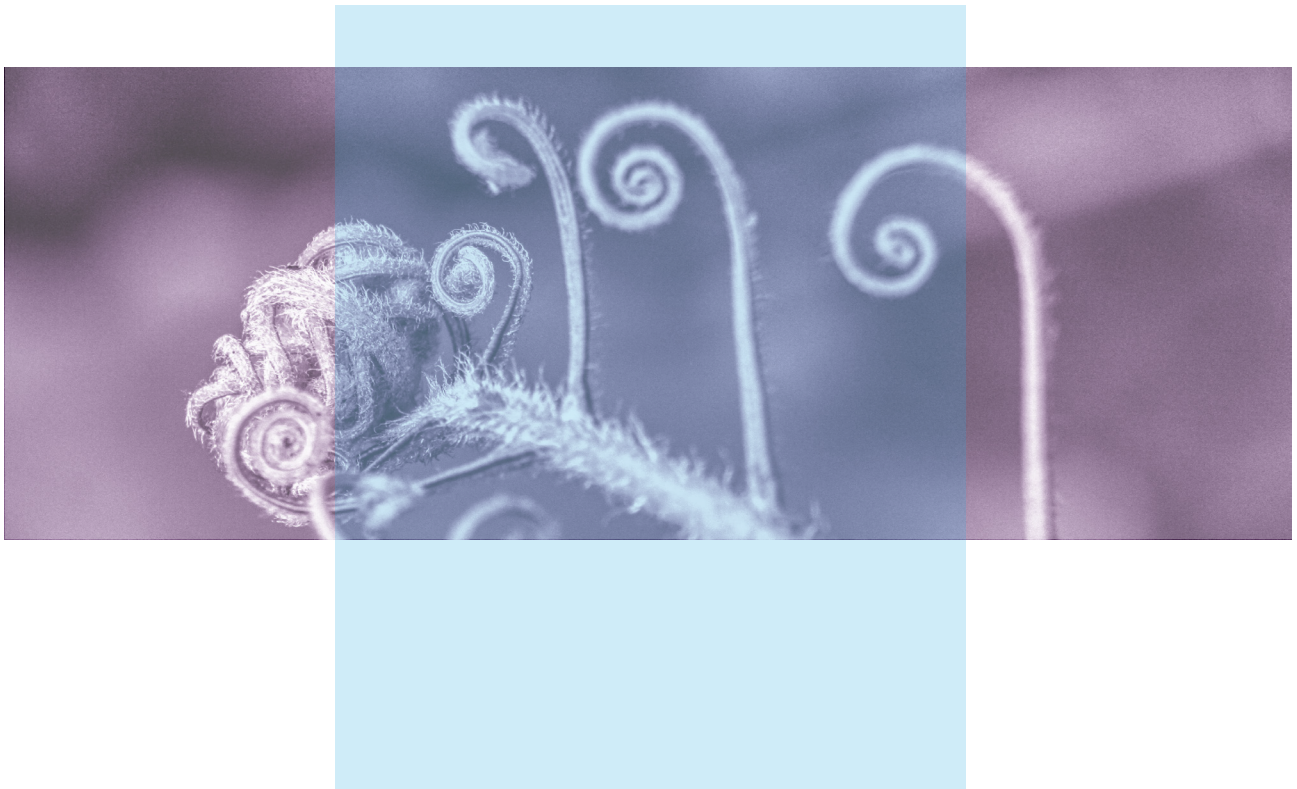


Interim Ministry Source Book

The Tasks and Processes of Interim Ministry

Preparation, engagement and process tasks



SECTION THREE

The Tasks and Processes of Interim Ministry

‘A local church has its own practical wisdom. It will not be the wisdom of the ordained minister, or of any particular person. Rather it will be the shared vision of the congregation, of everyone involved, and it will be rich and complex, made up of all sorts of things – including especially habits moulded by the successes and failures of the church’s story. It will be how we do things together.’

Richard Impey, *How to develop your local church*, p.xvi



Whatever else it might be, Interim Ministry is a collaborative process, therefore entering into an interim period or role with a ‘problem’ or ‘fix-it’ mind-set isn’t going to be helpful or effective.

As Gilbert Rendle¹ has noted: ‘It is often healthier and more responsible for leaders not to try to fix their congregation. By seeking quick but inappropriate solutions, leaders tend to add the discomfort and disequilibrium of their situation and actually subvert the opportunity to address deeper issues the face. Often quick fixes are collusive exercises that are intuitively designed not to bring any real change to the congregation but offer the feeling that something has been done.’

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

Interim ministers arrive in the middle of a situation and a community which is established, often complex and needs careful reading and interpretation at the outset; which may require some specific issues, structures and behaviours to be addressed; and which needs a mixture of gentleness, playfulness and firmness to inspire movement towards change. It is a role which requires immense groundedness, an ability to manage one’s anxiety; and deep-rooted spirituality to hear and trust what the Holy Spirit might be doing in this situation; and it requires boldness and courage sometimes to convey that to senior staff who might have other plans.

To recap, in the Church of England, Interim Ministry is a fixed-term ministerial appointment to parishes for up to three years (renewable for one term) in response to a pastoral need or mission opportunity. An Interim Minister has been described as: ‘one who temporarily assumes leadership of a congregation’² that is without an installed priest, in order to ‘help the congregation work on both past and present issues so that it might prepare for the future’.³ The work covers all normal tasks of an installed minister ‘plus special tasks...that include grief work, preparation for change in ministry and mission, and preparing the congregation to accept’ a new appointment.⁴ In the Church of England context there have been variations on this theme but the core task is still the same.

In all models of this approach, however, there are four key stages

- **Preparing for an IM appointment**
- **Engagement Tasks**
- **Process Tasks**
- **Evaluating, Endings and Handover**

This section aims to describe with examples and sample materials how work through these stages and what should be involved in each.

Preparing for an Interim Ministry appointment

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

Luke 14.28-30

Preparing for an IM Appointment begins with discernment and dialogue between the parish, Area Dean, Archdeacon and involves Bishops and Patrons. It maps out the

rationale and objectives for the appointment which should have the agreement at all levels. The parish, deanery and diocese may have different reasons for appointing so it is a good opportunity to be clear about what each player expects.

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

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

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

The experience in Chelmsford and other diocese has been that Interim Ministers are often best home-grown or appointed from known expertise, and allocated within the established clergy appointments tied into existing teams and roles. This gives security and stability to the Interim Minister, but is also more financially sustainable for dioceses.

An Interim Ministry Appointment Planning template has been prepared to help with the appointments process. See Tools and Resources: Appointment template. Put at bottom

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

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

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

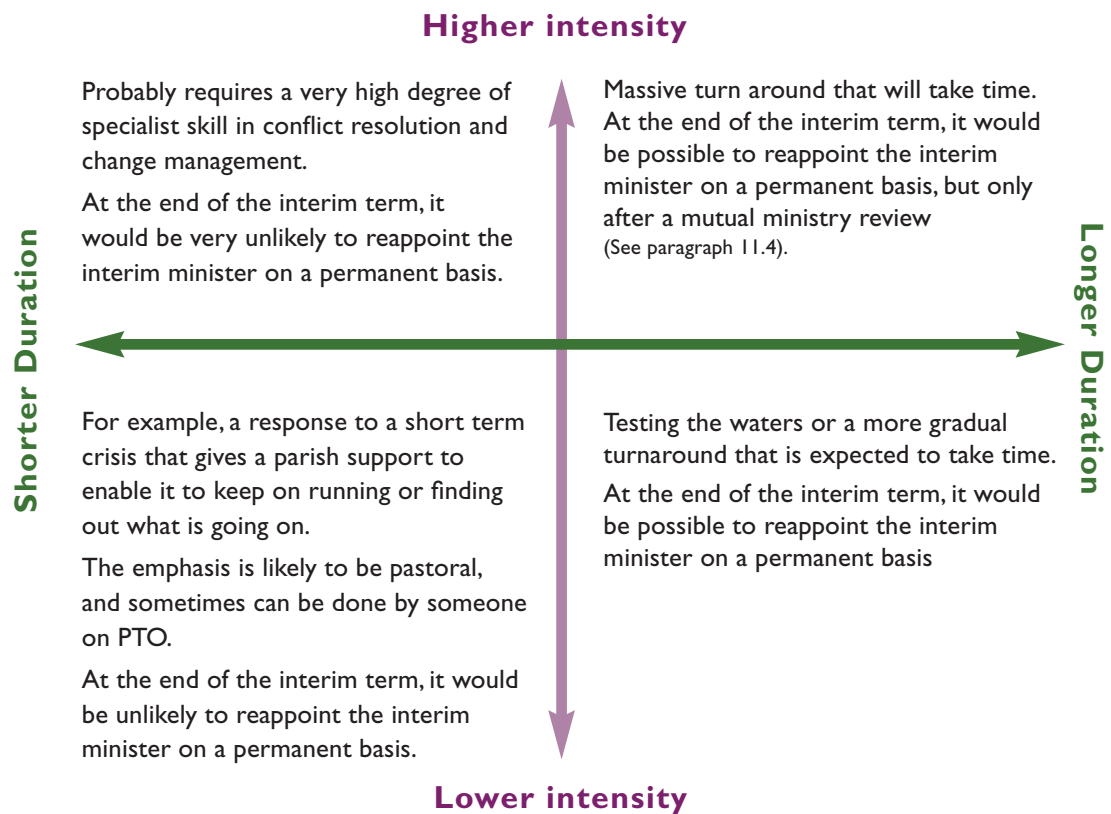
It also explores what processes need to be worked through – is there a need for healing and listening? A root and branch review of where the parish is and where it is going? Is there a need to grow local leadership? Is there a need for a fresh vision and missional approach?

The priority attached to these will indicate the nature of the appointment required – whether it is High intensity or Low intensity, shorter or longer duration – see below. Detailed information is available in the Supplementary Guidance.⁵

It also explores the resources which are available for the role and considers what options might be available for local resourcing, such as retired clergy, Licensed Lay Ministers, Readers and appropriately skilled lay people, some of whom may have secular experience in change management.

Once completed the template offers a comprehensive framework for discussion with PCCs and Area Deans and a model for proposals to Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committees. The Appointment template also forms the basis of the working plan and objectives towards which the IM will work, and against which to report and evaluate progress.

It is advisable that this plan and objectives are reviewed once they have settled in post.



Source: <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2018-06/Interim-posts-Guidance-to-bishops.pdf>

Change, transition and systems

Understanding the difference between change and transition is fundamental to the process of IM. ‘Change is situational. Situations arise that change the congregation...A congregation’s success at responding to any change ultimately depends upon the congregation’s claiming a new identity and adopting new ways of being in response to the new situation.’⁶

‘Transition, on the other hand, is a three-phase psychological reorientation process that people go through when they are coming to terms with change.’⁷ Transformation is: ‘the new shape that occurs after transition.’⁸

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

Change itself is neutral, but congregations may see it as a threat or opportunity. They may resist the transitional process, preferring to hang onto habits and identity in which the community is rooted. Interim Ministry aims to help the parish understand the reality of its situation and to acknowledge the change(s) which have made the transition necessary, and then to support them through this transitional process to a new beginning – a transformation.

It has been pointed out that, as a people, founded on the gospel understanding of birth, death, and resurrection, ‘the church should be an expert in transition!’⁹ However, just like our forebears throughout biblical history, we struggle. There are predictable dynamics through the transitional process which are well described in Gilbert Rendle’s Roller Coaster of Change¹⁰ in which the emotional responses to change are seen to change with the process of transition over time.

Another core piece of thinking for IM is Systems Theory, which has also been used to explore the emotional dynamics of change and transition in church communities, on the basis that: ‘Everything alive lives in some sort of environment and interacts with it. For people an important part of any environment is other people. We affect them; they affect us...when we think of the congregation as a system or a whole, we also

consider all of the interactions of the parts – and the emotional environment in which those interactions take place.’¹¹ Peter Steinke

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

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

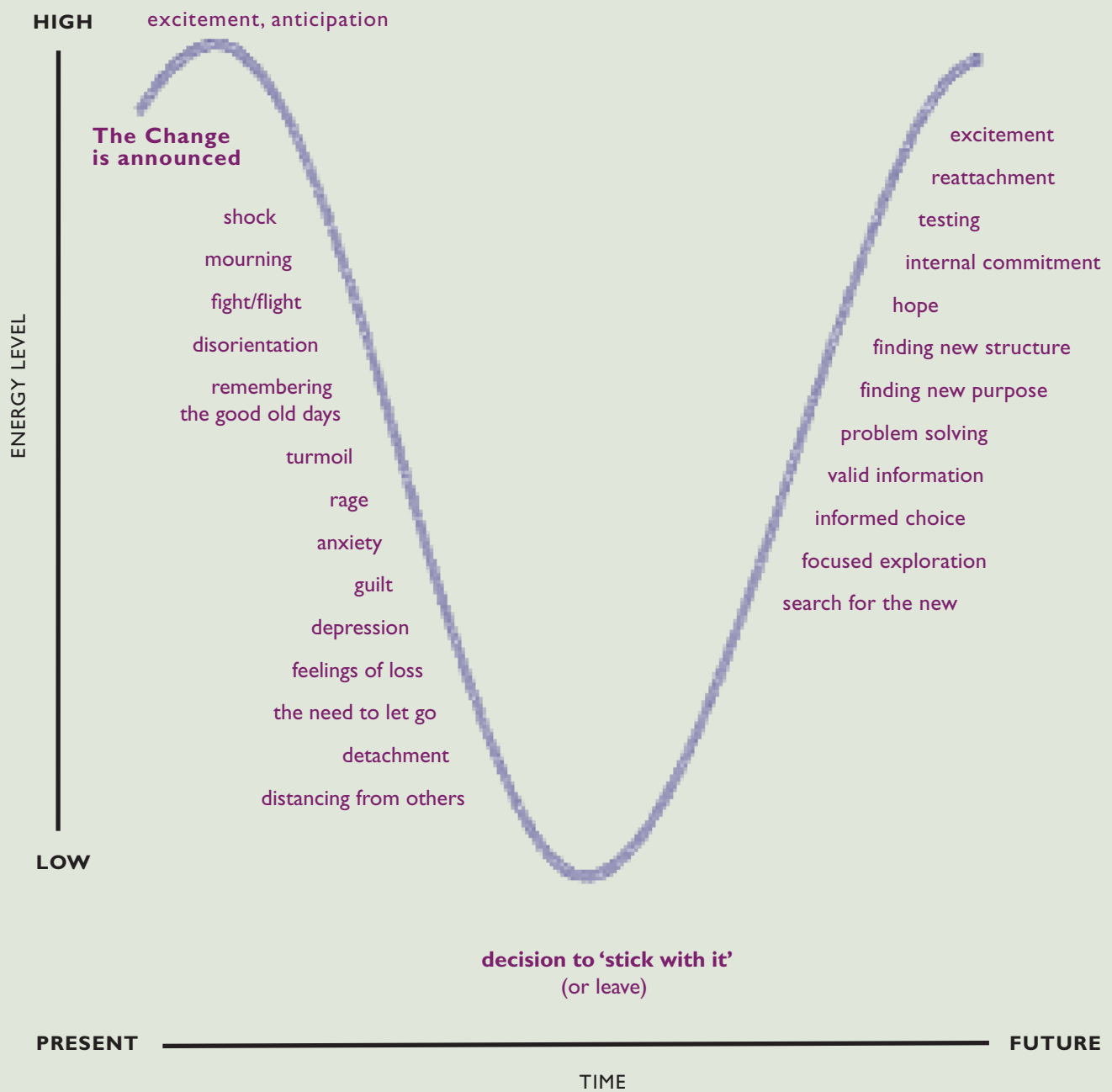
Exploring new ideas, trying out new patterns, developing new partnerships and leaders is part of preparing for this new beginning. The significance of enabling people to participate in this process is that it reassures them that it is not something being ‘done to’ them – it is their response to change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

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

Tools and Resources Appointment template, (see p.70)

Tools and Resources Family systems, (see p.67)

The Rollercoaster of Change



Engagement Tasks

Before taking up an appointment an Interim Minister will need to meet the key players in the parish, deanery and diocese and understand their expectations. They need to research the context in which they will be 'engaging', and gather as much background as possible. This is a part of the iterative process of review and analysis which, rather like the hidden part of the iceberg, is the reflective and prayerful work of the IM which goes on throughout the appointment alongside the other tasks, building up a multi-layered picture of the parish and its people.

Much useful data will be available on the 'Parish Spotlight' section of the local diocesan website (also known as 'Parish Dashboards'). Noticeboards may also yield useful material.

Good communications leads to a good start for an IM so it is vital that the area dean and archdeacon ensure that the parish is fully aware and on board before the start of the interim post, and understand what the nature and role of the IM is to make sure there is widespread awareness and understanding. This can be done by a senior leader attending worship and explaining the role publically, and communicating to the churchwardens a statement to be read and placed on the noticeboard. The incoming IM may also wish to prepare a statement about themselves for distribution.

There have been cases where the IM has arrived to find that worshippers have no idea who they are and why they are there, and there is limited support for the post – in one case a PCC refused to allow the IM to join as an observer. Such cases underline the importance of ensuring there is full support and understanding of the IM post prior to appointment.

The IM should have a public welcome and introduction by the archdeacon to signal the starting point of this ministry, much as a licensing and installation would signal the arrival of a new priest. This can be a welcome within Sunday worship or a freestanding welcome service. It is a great opportunity for the IM to preach on change and transformation from a biblical perspective – if the lectionary readings do not lend themselves easily to this, it is a good strategy to offer alternative readings (See the Gospel of Transition for examples).

Real analysis of the context can often only begin once the IM has 'joined the system' however. As Elizabeth Jordan notes: 'The consensus among IMs this period is approximately six weeks.' During these first six weeks,¹² as they are 'entering the system' the focus of the IM needs to be on tasks which will help them understand the parish, review how 'healthy' it is, analyse the situation and assess whether the initial objectives are correct and shared.

The Interim Minister is in a unique position being both an outsider and insider; and for this reason it is important to retain some level of critical distance: David Sawyer comments: 'At the same time the interim attaches to the system emotionally, the interim is also maintaining a detachment. The interim always remembers that she or he is only temporary, and is present intentionally to fill a very specific role within that organisation. A sense that the interim is simultaneously an insider and outsider increases the power of the interim to be of service to the organisation.'¹³

Jordan has summarised the task of analysis in the following way:¹⁴

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!

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 safeguarding.

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

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

Jordan also points out that listening to the stories people tell and how they are told is especially illuminating: 'Expect to hear contradictory versions. What actually happened is of much less significance than what people thought happened! Try to understand why that version is believed. Listen to both those who have been in the church for a long time and those recently arrived.'¹⁵ Engaging in a Listening Exercise with as many parishioners as possible is a good way of starting out in any Interim post.

It is also useful to be alert to tacit rituals which can suggest that a parish which considers itself welcoming and friendly, is secretly putting up a 'Keep Out' sign! This system of signs, gestures, ways of behaving forms a 'web of significance'¹⁶ which gives people a sense of connection, order and meaning. So what is the language of this parish and how does it express it?

According to George Parsons and Speed Leas, '*Ritual is also a way that a system identifies itself. We are the people who do those rituals. A ritual helps maintain boundaries... Who is in? Those who know how to do those rituals. Who is out? Those who feel strange doing those rituals... Tacit rituals abound in church and out. They are the rites we engage in with little or no conscious awareness of what we are doing or why... unless someone does 'it' wrong. Then we are aware that that person is not from our tribe, our system.*'¹⁷

The IM needs support to engage with, learn about and 'decode' the parish. One such mechanism may be the Transition Team: This is a small group of individuals which supports the Interim Minister. It is not a duplicate of nor a replacement for the PCC, although it is likely to

include some key figures from the PCC. The churchwardens may be able to suggest who should be part of it. It is important to stress that the Transition Team is not responsible for decision-making but acts in advisory capacity, suggesting ways of progressing the work of IM and feeding back on IM processes and findings. As the IM moves through the process, the Transition Team might be able to take on responsibility for organising and leading some tasks such as congregational meetings – and they are certainly likely to be better than the IM at chivvying the regulars to join in!

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

David Sawyer gives as examples: 'unresolved relationships with the most recent, previous leader; repeating patterns of relating with leaders over several previous generations; ... informal lines of authority and boundaries and rules...; the existence of secrets... health or unhealthy of relationship triangles.'¹⁸ He notes: 'The result of the early assessment becomes a hypothesis, an experimental hunch about what is going on in the system. As the months pass the interim leader will learn more information which will confirm or disconfirm the hypothesis, after which the hunches shift and grow into a stronger sense of the reality of the organisation.'¹⁹

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

LINK Tools for Discernment in Resources at <https://interimministry.org.uk>

Tools and Resources Transition Teams, (see p.73)

Tools and Resources Taking the Temperature, (see p.72)

Tools and Resources Listening to Experience, (see p.85)

Process Tasks

‘Top-down, hierarchical processes violate the integrity of a congregation’s experience and deny the incarnational reality that God is already present and working in the congregation. The task of ministry is not to bring God to people, but to help people discover how God is already present with them and how they can join in what God is already doing.’ Rob Voyle²⁰

This traditional model of IM has focused on five tasks or Focus Points²¹ which are adapted below for the Church of England context. These give a framework for exploring and exposing some of the

hidden issues in the system, but also help the parish to start building a future which is soundly rooted in its past, its values, its context and its strengths and those of its leaders:

- 1 History and Heritage:** reviewing how the congregation has been shaped by its past.
- 2 Mission and Identity:** rediscovering a sense of Godly purpose and direction.
- 3 Leadership:** reflecting on the congregation’s way of organising and developing leadership.
- 4 Connections:** discovering/reconnecting the parish to relationships/networks beyond itself.
- 5 Future Vision:** drawing together the interim work together into a coherent vision for the future.

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

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

I History and Heritage

Reviewing how the congregation has been shaped by its past

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

William Bud Phillips²²

The exploration of history and heritage is about the parish developing a collective self-understanding and awareness of its past and the journey it has been to the present time. Quite often, the reflection of this task helps a parish to comprehend that change is nothing new and that the parish

and their forebears have also coped with transition and survived.

This reflection also helps a parish root current changes in the past, and see a ‘through line’ between past, present and future which has a grounding and stabilising effect, especially if there have been events which have caused a sense of schism and breakdown.

In the Church of England the timeline often covers centuries and events part of long history, but this is nonetheless important. What might the significance of a Bronze Age settlement be – could it have always been a ‘thin’ place where God’s presence was sensed? What were the social and spiritual needs which led to a modern church being established in this community 60 years ago? Does some obscure event during the Civil War reveal why a congregation connects with a neighbouring parish but distrusts another.

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

James Hopewell

activity which attracted people, or a great leadership team, or even a historic breakdown which drove people away? Churches in areas of Eastern England experienced growth after the Second World War when bomb-damaged communities in London moved into new housing developments. Stories of these times should be encouraged and shared and help add flavour to the narrative – people could even be encouraged to bring photographs of these times to share.

By charting the journey, the parish can note that in its long history there have been both ups and downs and explore what caused these, but that nonetheless the community of worshipping Christians has remained a constant regardless through all those previous transitions.

These process tasks, although separate, have organic connections, which become apparent: a historic event may reveal something of the values and identity of the congregation.

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

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

departure of the Israelites from Egypt in Exodus 14-19, the restoration of the walls of Jerusalem in Nehemiah or the return of the exiles and rebuilding of the temple in Ezra; or the challenges of the first churches in The Acts, provide new food for reflection..

James Hopewell²³ tells the story of a congregation being asked to develop a timeline to deepen their awareness of the past: Richard Impey²⁴ describes a similar process of developing a time line for parish history as part of 'telling the story' of the parish, a story which he points out may have rival versions, but nonetheless creates a way of bringing all versions of the story together as a combined narrative from different vantage points.

Looking at a timeline of when different people joined the church may reveal clusters around key events e.g. was there a missional

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

It is important to ground this work in reflection on biblical change. Key stories of God faithfully guiding through change in the past may build confidence as part of a congregational event on history or sermon series, Bible texts such as the creation narrative in Genesis 1-2, the story of Moses and

The Power of Story

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

Bonnie Bardot²⁵

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

Stone Soup

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

out, so that gets added to the soup. Another villager walks by, inquiring about the pot, and the travellers again mention their stone soup, which has not reached its full potential yet. The villager hands them a little bit of seasoning to help them out. More and more villagers walk by, each adding another ingredient. Finally, a delicious and nourishing pot of soup is enjoyed by all.

The River*

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

*This is a summary of a children’s story by Lois Rock, *Lion Book of Tales and Legends* (2004), Lion Hudson plc, p69-74.

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

2 Mission and Identity

rediscovering a sense of Godly purpose and direction

Interim Ministry is an opportunity

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

William and Susan Bridges²⁶

to review and reshape the identity of a Christian community and is important to establish an expectation of this as a positive process from the outset, remembering the words of St Paul in 1 Corinthians 5 that: ‘If anyone is

in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!’ Some may really welcome and embrace this idea, but others may be more resistant. It is important, as far as possible, to bring everyone along with this process of transition.

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

It is important in these circumstances to rekindle a collective understanding of our Christian vocation and of the behaviours which are expected, to gently and firmly call people back to a

way of living with is healthy, which listens and honours different perspectives, but which is not held captive to any factions. Resetting the foundation of healthy behaviour can be especially important to re-establishing the church as safe space when relationships have broken down, as in the example of a Behavioural Covenant below.

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

Ideal codes of behaviour in the church are probably best summarised by such passages of scripture as Jesus summary of the law in Mark 12.28-31; by descriptions of the Christian community as the body of Christ as in 1 Corinthians 12.12-26 or Ephesians 4.1-16. Also helpful for reflection is Jesus example of washing his disciples’ feet in John 13.1-20 and the passages on the works of the flesh and fruit of the spirit in Galatians 5.16-26.

This process of reflecting on identity enables the parish to consider what its culture and core values are. ‘Culture can be thought of...as shared meaning and behaviour...These deeply held beliefs, submerged as they are below the surface of ready awareness, hold the community’s energy and are the key to its own distinctive folkways. All the observable elements of any culture are intricately tied, often in mysterious ways, to its submerged beliefs...Paying attention to a congregations specific cultural elements slowly but surely offers perceptive insights, illuminating congregational behaviour in a way that nothing else can...We ignore culture only to our frustration and failure.’²⁷

The task of the IM is not just observing, but reflecting this culture back so that the church community can also see and learn from it. Like the parish which suddenly realised Norma’s Armchair (see p.25) was an important example of its culture and how it lived, sometimes these values are not obvious until observed and stated. Conversely, a parish may feel it has shared values which are widely held and understood, only to discover on further investigation that its patterns of living and worshipping are not clear and these values are not widely shared – they may consider themselves welcoming and open, but is this borne out in reality?

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

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

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

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

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

Looking at some basic data about the parish in small groups or as a PCC – such as Parish Spotlight or Parish Dashboards usually available on the local diocesan website – can be useful in identifying both challenges and opportunities ahead.

Parishes have also found it helpful to conduct a worship survey at this point in the IM process, since worship is a significant expression of Christian identity. This can generate tension, so it is important to ensure it is anonymous and that there is an element of fun built into it – such as ‘nominate your favourite five hymns’ which resulted in a ‘Top 20’ list of hymns they would like to hear. In an IM parish, one churchgoer nominated 30 of his favourite hymns! Activities like this build engagement and a real sense of ownership of change in simple ways.

The Interim time is an opportunity to try out new forms of worship as part of discovering a renewed and refreshed sense of Christian identity. This is not so much about churchmanship or tradition - or about ‘dumbing down’, and it is important to reassure on this point – but about exploring patterns of worshipping that ensure everybody can express their faith wholeheartedly. Some may discover they enjoy new styles of worship in the process, like the family that found real quietness and peace following a bereavement the 8am Book of Common Prayer in one IM parish.

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

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

Behavioural Covenant

This is an example of a behavioural covenant developed by Gilbert Rendle²⁸ for the leadership body of a church experiencing IM. It might be a useful starting point for discussion with a PCC.

Our promises to God

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

Our promises to our church family

We promise to demonstrate our leadership and commitment to our church by example;

We promise to support our priests, lay leaders and staff so their efforts can be most productive;

We promise to try to discover what is best for our church as a whole, not what might be best for us or our group.

Our promises to each other

We promise to respect and care for each other;

We promise to treat our time as an opportunity to make an important gift to our church;

We promise to listen with an open, non-judgmental mind to the words and ideas of others in our church and on the (body);

We promise to discuss, debate and disagree openly in meetings, expressing ourselves as clearly and honestly as possible so that we are certain others understand our point of view;

We promise to support the final decision of (this group) whether it reflects our view or not.

3 Leadership

reflecting on the congregation's way of organising and developing leadership.

Interim Ministry 'provides both time and opportunity for lay leaders of the church to search out their own authentic understanding of ministry and become intentional about the lay leadership functions of congregational life... You can value the strengths and gifts of people in the congregation who step up now to offer leadership, knowing that, with the loss of a significant leader, others will be called upon to provide wisdom and guidance. You can begin to glimpse the opportunities made possible because of the fact that your pastor has left.' William Bud Phillips²⁹

Interim Ministry provides an opportunity for the PCC and congregation to explore what their expectations and patterns of leadership are. Discussions on history and identity may reveal embedded patterns and ways of leading that need further

exploration. As the parish tries out new ideas for worship or mission, new leaders and styles of leadership may emerge.

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

George Parsons and Speed B Leas³⁰ point out that congregations as systems often get stuck in habits, patterns and routines of the past. The need for shared and collaborative ministries between priest and laity is accompanied by the need for a shift in power and authority, but knowing what kind of shift is needed will require analysis of how leadership has operated in the past and how leadership dynamics work.

Parsons and Leas' work on *Understanding Your Congregation as a System*³¹ and their *Congregation Systems Inventory*³² offers useful insights for exploring some of these dynamics with a PCC or transition team, though it is worth simplifying and changing some of the language to make it more fitting to a Church of England setting. While the tool has some unfamiliar jargon, it can expose patterns in the way a church responds to strategy, authority, clergy and lay leadership, relationship and learning, and where perhaps there are tensions between over and under functioning in some of these areas.

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

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

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

William Bud Phillips³³ suggests that a congregation is a living organism and one way to understand it is to reflect on different parts of the body or sub-systems within the larger organisation. Members will tend to belong to at least one of

these sub-systems. He identified eight sub-systems: *worship and celebration; education and nurture; communal; pastoral/healing; maintenance; transitional; evangelism, outreach.*

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

The systems used by IM to generate participation and collaboration – such as Transition Teams and Congregational Meetings – are the very places to encourage people to try out new roles and develop their voices and input.

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

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

Tools and Resources Transition Teams, (see p.73)

‘Difficult’ people

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

Parsons and Leas³⁴

In most parishes there will be voices of dissent. The key is to remember that there is no such thing as difficult parishes or people, just difficult situations. Behaviour is key: if the language, attitudes or behaviour is unhealthy, offensive and damaging it requires challenge. However, sometimes these voices of dissent may be emerging leaders who can be harnessed to bring balance and fresh perspectives. (see Behavioural Covenant, p.28)

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

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

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

The Power shift in Interim Ministry

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

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

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

decisions; not just churchwardens or 'the influential few'.

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

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

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

Tools and Resources Power analysis, (see p.80)

Tools and Resources Transition Teams, (see p.73)

4 Connections

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

'Transformation and innovation come not from programs presented by leaders but from the myriad ways ordinary people come together in dialogue...Only when we as church leaders understand that the future is forming offstage and outside the programs will we grasp the implications for the re-shaping of our life in this new space: recognition that leadership in the local church is less and less about creating and managing programs and getting people into them and more and more about creating the environments that foster interconnections and conversations among people.'

Alan Roxburgh³⁵

Once a parish has reviewed its history and developed a sense of its identity and missional calling, the focus needs to turn to how it understands the context in which it is operating and the connections it has in the community or church networks, or could better cultivate, and

most importantly develop a positive sense of what it has to offer others.

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

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

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

Missional map-making ...involves creating safe spaces where ordinary people engage in more and more conversations about what is happening in their lives and what God might be up to in their neighbourhoods. The role of leadership is to learn how to nurture these places of conversation and dialogue within and across churches, inviting people to believe again that their own stories contain clues about what God may be up to among them as a local church.’³⁶

One of the most productive congregational exercises for parishes is to sit and physically draw maps and then share these to discuss new opportunities together. Maps may also shed light on the barriers of reaching churches and church facilities and

suggest what improvements can be made. This activity may also be paired with the exercise.

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

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

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

One Interim parish had suffered a pastoral breakdown with their previous incumbent and has subsequently been in vacancy for three years. It had extensive discussions with its archdeacon and bishop. A parish profile was developed, possible appointments were discussed but nothing came to fruition and one possible appointment was rejected by senior staff. Frustrated and tired by the long vacancy, its key officers resigned, and the parish nursed a sense of grievance towards the archdeacon and bishop. They felt abandoned and let down. A year of listening and healing in the parish culminated in an airing of both positive and negative perceptions on Good Friday; a letter of apology was read by the Bishop, and the Archdeacon-led prayers for healing. Having placed their anger, grief and frustration at the foot of the cross, the parish was able to move on and rekindle a healthy relationship with senior staff and the diocese.

The importance of listening

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

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

The listening exercise should include both those in positions of authority in the congregation and those

who are apparently marginal, both within and outside the church. If there are individuals who have left the congregation, perhaps as a result of conflict or pastoral breakdown, it is especially important to ensure those voices are heard, so that closure is found both for the parish and parishners..

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

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

Tools and Resources: Listening to Experience, (see p.85)

5 Future vision

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

‘Seeing differently is where we have to start...churches can be like carnival goers in a house of mirrors. What they see is a distortion of who they really are. Often the mirrors magnifies their struggles and losses and minimises the work that God is really doing among them.’³⁷

Cameron Harder

scarcity to a realistic sense of abundance and possibility.

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

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

The ‘asset mapping’ exercise (see Tools and Resources: Asset Mapping) is a fun and participatory way of involving all the parish in rediscovering this sense of abundance and of starting to rebuild confidence and energy among parishioners. If all are encouraged to contribute, all will have a sense of having a stake in the future. Part of this exercise should involve encouraging individuals to put their name to follow-up actions which explore these possibilities further. Like other exercises, it may be the route through which new giftings and lay leaders start to emerge so it is important to be alert to this.

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

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

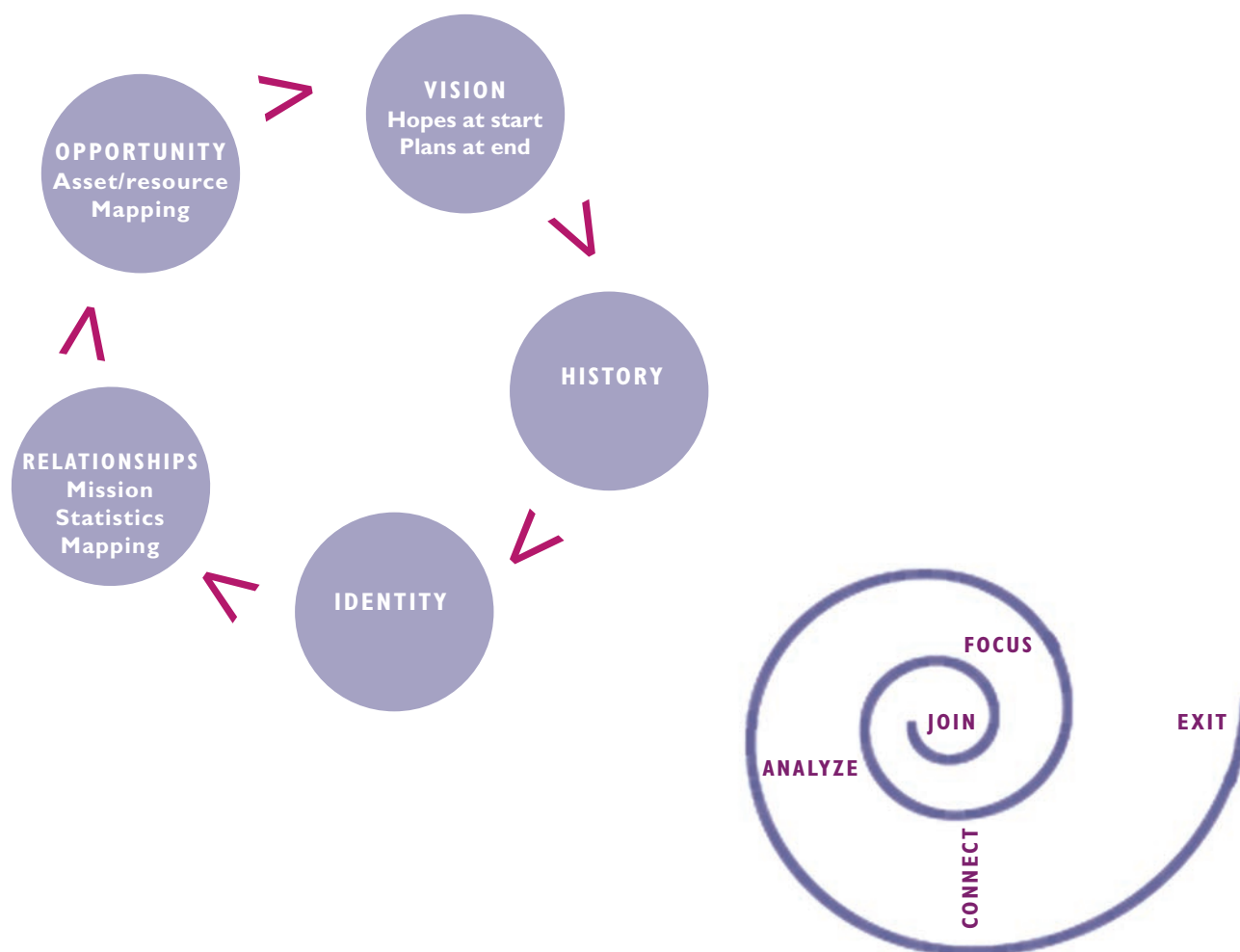
IMs in more complex long term posts may have to wait 12 months or more before they are able to reach this point however, when other priority issues have been addressed. Nonetheless ‘quick wins’ in the form of small, easy to achieve improvements can still build confidence and momentum during this time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

Drawing together a coherent vision for the future is not, perhaps, as in traditional priestly ministry, about vision setting, but about gathering of the wisdom of the congregation from the whole IM process and agreeing a way forward which will generate enthusiasm and commitment. It is a cycle which moves from hopes expressed at the start of the IM process towards plans and commitments.

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

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

The following graphic illustrates how the Process Tasks follow from one another, although there is flexibility to tackle them in a different order depending on the priorities. But they also fit into the wider Interim Ministry process illustrated by the spiral graphic.



Based on an original graphic by Molly Dale Smith/
Interim Ministry Network USA <https://imnedu.org>

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a transformative tool for this process, enabling parishioners, as Cameron Harder puts it: ‘to see God graciously at work among an imperfect people through a history pockmarked with scars and struggle. In asset-mapping we discover that all aspects of our lives and our context, including our weaknesses, are resources for the spirit to use in building community.’³⁸

The AI method involves focusing on the best in an organisation and on positive change, on the basis that what we focus on becomes our reality: if we dwell on the problems and deficits in our organisation, it may reinforce a sense of helplessness and hopelessness about the future. ‘By focusing on best practices and that which people value, AI moves people toward a positive future, while at the same time (almost as a side effect) moving them away from that which detracts from life,’ says Harder.³⁹

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

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

The process focuses on valuing, hoping and committing

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

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

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

In every circumstance, it is important to get the questions right. As Harder points out: ‘Bad questions can distort a congregation’s self-image, limit its options for action and divert it from exploring the things that matter most. Good questions give them confidence in themselves, open up their future, and get at the heart of their community’s needs.’⁴⁰

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

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

The Diocese of Oxford has developed a Parish Planning Tool, which uses Appreciative Inquiry to develop vision in parishes. Further information can be found here: <https://www.oxford.anglican.org/mission-ministry/our-common-vision/resources/parish-planning-tool/>

Coping with conflict in Interim Ministry

‘God’s grace opens the future for congregations and communities...When a community or congregation can see the presence of God in its history, the shame and regret lose their hold. God’s presence reveals this is a group God values, people worth standing by. So their past is changed. Their identity is transformed. They cease to be those who failed and were forsaken. Now they are a people who struggled but were accompanied by the sustaining power of God.’ **Cameron Harder**⁴¹

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

The process of IM should establish a safe environment for change – this means establishing healthy patterns of behaving and relating to one another; it does not mean that it will be an environment which is without conflict however. As Rendle notes, a healthy congregation recognises and values conflict; an idealised congregation does not. Without healthy conflict, ‘there is no life or energy’, but ‘conflict is not the same thing as a fight.’⁴²

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

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

Getting help with conflict

Some conflicts in churches may need expert mediation support. Some sources of help are:

Bridge Builders Ministries provides an interpersonal mediation or group reconciliation service to help churches and groups identify hurts and strategies for healing and reconciliation.

LINK: <https://www.bbministries.org.uk/mediation/>

Email: mediation@bbministries.org.uk

ACAS (The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service) offer training and support for mediation in the workplace:

LINK Website: <https://www.acas.org.uk/mediation>

Getting help with governance

Interim Parishes often face multiple challenges with governance, administration, finances and stewardship, safeguarding and sometimes building projects which have turned into crises.

Preparatory work by senior staff and the Interim Minister is likely to involve reviewing these areas to establish what priorities there are for the IM process and what other resources are needed to support IM.

Many dioceses can offer specialist support from their in-house teams e.g. parish finance coordinators may help in the absence of a Treasurer; safeguarding teams will be able to help guide the review of safeguarding systems and procedures; Church Buildings Officers and/or Buildings for Mission Advisors may help plan building projects and developments.

The website run by Parish Resources is also an invaluable source of advice on PCC governance, finance and giving, administration and buildings:

LINK: <https://www.parishresources.org.uk/>

Case studies of managing conflict in Interim Ministry

Case study 1

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ultimately, these issues were unresolved, although the process helped the parish find a way of practically

moving forward which caused less friction and stress than before. But it wasn't a new direction in which those in conflict could find a settlement, and the reality was that those who wished to see change 'grew exhausted and ran away.'

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

Learnings from the process included the following:

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

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

Case study 2

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

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

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

It became evident that there were two distinct congregations sadly divided by race so lots of teaching on race and some bias training for the PCC also helped.

The black congregation was said to ‘never help with anything’, which was not true as the PCC was half and half, but it was something heard often. The IM took this bias seriously and started to correct these comments as they were made. This was often met with derision but soon people began to be more careful about their language. The pronunciation of names improved and, with teaching, the PCC learned to invite help rather than declare there wasn’t any.

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

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

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

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

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

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



Sunyu Jhq, Unsplash

Evaluating, Endings and Handover

*'The temptation is always to measure what is measurable, rather than what is important...not measured are the effects on people who have taken part in these projects and on the community of which they are part. Yet this is what is really important. Prove it.'*⁴³

If the investment of time and effort in IM is going to be really worthwhile, we have to learn how and what kind of difference it has made in parishes and to people's

lives. But the challenge is how to measure – numerical data may tell one story, and certainly is helpful. But as Elizabeth Jordan has noted:

'Not all things are quantifiable and some things are only apparent after a lengthier period of time. Missional growth, for example, might happen several years after the IM has left. 'Success,' indeed, may be that nothing happens in a situation where 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 the water, indicating the direction and strength of energy. The

establishment of transparent and reliable accounting systems, as with other governance issues, is a good indication of a return to viability.'⁴⁴

One IM parish seemed to flourish in the first year of IM and its giving was 100% but after a number of years both attendance and giving had declined because the initial flurry of re-engagement and the willingness to pay full share was unsustainable in the longer term.

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

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

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

One commonly used IM process for evaluation is a Mutual Ministry Review, which may be conducted at agreed intervals with the IM, transition team and key people like churchwardens (if they are not part of the former). This reviews progress against the original objectives and captures feedback, comments and suggestions for the way forward. It also enables the IM to hear a wider range of feedback than they may otherwise hear. There are a number of examples of Mutual Ministry Review being used in the Episcopal Church of the USA such as here: https://dioceserg.org/docs/for_congregations_clergy/mutual_ministry_overview.doc

A simple evaluation sheet (see p.90) at the end of each congregational meeting is a good way of understanding how useful people found it and what they are anxious or excited about going forward.

A tool for keeping track and documenting change is the IM Log Frame (see p.88). Against each objective the IM notes what successes are being seen, what activities are happening, what outcomes are resulting – what changes are being observed in the life of the parish; and what evidence there is of change: e.g. comments, new patterns, policies, partnerships etc.

Towards the end of an IM appointment a wider participatory review of the whole IM process and the IM's work can be conducted with the whole congregation to capture feedback. An example of this is shown overleaf.

The results of this cumulative monitoring is gathered into an evaluation report towards the end of the IM and shared with and discussed by the PCC, deanery (area dean) and diocese (archdeacon and bishop) as a summary of the IM process.

Finally, the Interim Minister prepares to exit the parish by supporting handover to the new appointment, if necessary by briefing the incoming candidate, preparing a file outlining the IM process and its outcomes and key information. One forgets how radical this is to the Church of England where the convention used to be that each priest arrives to a fresh slate.

Senior staff are instrumental in effective handover, because they can enable incoming leaders to take note of what has gone before. Planning posts to follow on from IM needs to take account of the outcomes of the IM process, otherwise it can risk undoing the goodwill and success of IM processes. Some really strong work in IM has been undermined by poor handover and has resulted in resentment among parishes and lay leaders.

A good handover and a proper farewell is also important to both closure and to signalling the end of the interim time and the start of a new beginning. A final farewell service enables the parish to give thanks for the transition process and celebrate their achievement, and enables an IM to give thanks and disengage well from a process which will have inevitably required much spiritual and emotional energy and investment.

As it needs to be stressed to the IM parish, no handover or farewell signals the end of transition, just the start of a new journey with God under a new season of leadership.

LINK Sample Welcome and Farewell Services **Resources section** www.interimministry.org.uk

Interim Ministry Exit Report

Parish name

Date

1 Summary

- The IM task and key dates
- Brief IM objectives and how these changed

2 Background

3 Governance, Finance and Leadership

4 Worship and Pastoral

5 Partnerships

6 Building Redevelopment (if any planned)

7 The IM process

- Objectives of IM and how these have been amended
- Key results, achievements and challenges of IM process supported by comments from PCC/TT or meetings
- Evaluation of IM process (taken from final discussions with PCC/TT)
- Future hopes, anxieties and desired objectives



Jens Johnsson, Pexels

8 Appendix

- Meeting reports can be provided in appendix
- PCC membership, churchwardens and key officers
- Partnership organisations
- Other useful information

Notes

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- 6 Craig A Satterlee, *When God speaks through change* (2005) The Alban Institute, p. 3
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- 29 William Bud Phillips, *Pastoral transitions – from endings to new beginnings*, (1998) The Alban Institute p33
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- 31 *Ibid.*
- 32 George Parsons and Speed B Leas, *Understanding your Congregation as a System*, (2014) Rowman and Littlefield.
- 33 William Bud Phillips, *Pastoral transitions – from endings to new beginnings*, (1998) The Alban Institute pp. 59-63
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