

REPORT TO DIOCESES ON THE TRAINING PROGRAMME FOR INTERIM MINISTRY (BY ZOOM)
JANUARY 2021. **(by Revd Stephen Skinner, member of IM Steering Group)**

This Report is a Summary of a very successful Training Course for practitioners of intentional Interim Ministry, which took place on Zoom over six days in January 2021. The total length of the Course was 30 hours – it involved a substantial amount of input, ‘break out’ groups, and plentiful Q & A from the 30 participants. The participants were drawn from at least 12 dioceses from around the Provinces of Canterbury and York. The Course was organised and convened by Revd Helen Gheorghiu Gould, IM Coordinator in the Chelmsford Diocese. We are immensely grateful for the enormous amount of time that Helen invested in overseeing the Course. Helen produced the “Interim Ministry Source Book”, which formed the essential background material for the Course. This Source Book runs to over 80 pages, and includes a large number of Training Sheets that can be used both by Ministers and Congregations, as they work through some of the key activities involved in following through an effective transitional process during Interim Ministry. This Source Book is available from the website of the Diocese of Chelmsford once it has been finalised in March 2021.

The Course included important input drawing from the experience of IM in America, where it has proved to be an increasingly valuable aspect of ministry over the past forty years. We enjoyed input from the Revd Susan Eibner on “Creating a Climate of Change in Churches”, and “The work of the Interim Leader”. It is stressed that Interim Ministers need to be a ‘non anxious presence’ within their church communities, during periods of transition to new vision and mission; which can involve Conflict. We also received input from the Revd Liz Griffiths of “Bridgebuilders UK” on “Handling Anxious Systems” and “Working with Conflict”. It is clear that, although these skills are essential for IMs, they are needed more than ever in the wider church as we face the post Covid future.

Various other Sessions included “Tools for Discernment” (Elizabeth Jordan), “Working with the Wisdom of the Congregation” (Richard Impey), “Facilitation Skills” (led by ICA UK), “Self Care for IMs” (Susan Iskander & Keith Wassall) as well as many excellent sessions led by Helen Gheorghiu Gould.

It became even clearer to the Course participants that whilst IM has been used to ‘fill the gaps’, for example when it seems impossible to fill a vacancy, this dimension of ministry needs to be taken far more seriously across the Church of England. Intentional IM is at its best when it is specifically designed to meet the challenges of parishes/benefices that are in intentional transition, for example:

- ~ Parishes where there has been serious pastoral breakdown;
- ~ Parishes who need a fresh sense of direction and require new vision to face mission opportunities;
- ~ Parishes in need of pastoral reorganisation (eg merging of parishes into a larger Benefice);

The approach of IM at its best is not only about ‘problem solving’, but about a deep process that enables parishioners to discover a new and more hopeful future, under the guidance of God, using analytical tools such as: ‘Power Analysis’, ‘Appreciative Enquiry’, ‘Asset Mapping’, ‘Vision Discernment’. We discovered that the IM process will be most effective when it proceeds sufficiently thoroughly through 5 stages of a process often followed by IM in America with their congregations. This is a process that requires sufficient time – and generally speaking should not be rushed, if the necessary deeper change is to be achieved ahead of the appointment of a new permanent minister.

Following on from this ground-breaking Course, the new Steering group volunteering to continue with the development of IM in the Church of England offer the following Recommendations:

1. All Dioceses regard employment of intentional IMs as a strategic possibility whenever they are considering a range of suitable appointments to a parish / benefice.
2. All IMs are trained adequately using the IM Source Book and regular IM Training Courses.
3. Diocesan training departments include IM for both clergy and lay leadership training
4. Dioceses ensure that IMs are adequately supported, supervised and resourced
5. The National Church continues to invest in IM, including a National Coordinator.
6. IM training tools are used in other situations where ‘transition’ of some kind is needed.