

**DEVELOPING *INTERIM*  
MINISTRY  
IN THE  
NORTH EAST**

**A Guidebook and Discussion Document**

**Diocese of Durham  
Diocese of Newcastle**

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This guidebook has been prepared by a Working Group of the Dioceses of Durham and Newcastle, in order to give people a feel for the purposes and nature of *Interim* Ministry in the North East and an opportunity to engage with its issues and processes.

October 2008

### **Acknowledgment to Baltimore**

The writers of this introduction to Interim Ministry training and practice in the North East of England wish to acknowledge the 'Interim Ministry Network Baltimore' whose models provide the basis of our Training Programme and whose encouragement and resources are ongoing - without this support and expertise, our exploration of creative approaches to working with Vacancies within the Church of England in the North East would have been limited. We offer our experience, confident that our approach is underpinned with sound theory and long practice and complements and enhances the varied approaches to handling parish vacancies embraced by the Dioceses of Durham and Newcastle.

<b>Preface</b>	<b>Page</b>
i. <b>From an Interim Minister</b>	<b>4</b>
ii. <b>From a consultant to an Interim Minister</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>1. IM as a Model</b>	<b>8</b>
a. <b>Purpose</b>	
b. <b>Process</b>	
<b>2. IM in Preparation</b>	<b>12</b>
a. <b>Local Church</b>	
b. <b>Training</b>	
i) <b>Introduction to the Model</b>	
ii) <b>Engagement through case study</b>	
iii) <b>Leadership, systems, congregation analysis</b>	
iv) <b>CIR + Fieldwork</b>	
v) <b>Bible Study</b>	
vi) <b>Participants' Observations</b>	
vii) <b>Next Steps : mentoring, working agreement</b>	
<b>3. IM in Practice</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Two perspectives by Interim Ministers:         Keith Wassall and Peter Saddington</b>	
<b>4. IM in Progress</b>	<b>24</b>
a. <b>Issues for dioceses, deaneries and parishes</b>	
b. <b>Transferability of skills and concepts</b>	
<b>5. Theological Commentary by Richard Bryant</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>6. Appendices</b>	<b>28</b>
a. <b>Resources</b>	
b. <b>Timeline</b>	
c. <b>Working agreement</b>	

## **Preface (i) Hazel Ditchburn**

‘Interim Ministry Network Baltimore’ is ecumenical and has evolved over twenty years of working with the processes of ministry ‘in between time’ and draws upon the insights of Loren B Mead and others. It became clear to me whilst working as Area Dean over 7-1/2 years and facilitating many vacancies that the ‘in between times’ of ministers is a crucial opportunity for parish development. While on sabbatical in the U.S.A. in 1994 I saw that ‘Interim Ministry Training’ enables one to take seriously the various processes involved in the Termination of a ministry. It gives tools for guiding ministers and congregations through the journey of termination, contracting, direction finding, self-study and development, decisions about future ‘Parish Profile’, exiting and the appointment of a new minister.

### **Two Examples from observation of an IM at work and a parish**

*‘I met a couple at a party in the U.S. She was a full-time parish priest, he an Interim Minister. The different patterns of ministry available enabled them both to participate in parish ministry from different perspectives and with different intentions. While the intentions of the woman were those of building up a parish and its people in all aspects over a substantial period of time, his were working with the aftermath of losing a parish priest, and working through the dynamics and processes involved in letting go, facing realities, working through transition into a positive statement of needs – and all this in a finite time span from anything between 6-18months. He then would move on via a creative exit programme before the appointment of the new full-time minister.’*

*‘In a CofE parish – the only Christian Church left in that community – stood empty of a priest for one year while the*

*Deanery and Diocese considered how to 're-organise' pastoral provision then introduced 'Localities' which further muddied the waters. The people of the parish became disillusioned with the structures and with neighbouring, stronger parishes as they struggled to keep their worship and pastoral work going while all around found them an inconvenience to tidy plans. The appointment and ministry of an Interim Minister has enabled a clear understanding of the realities both for the parish and the Deanery and a possible way forward for continuing future ministry in that community.'*

'Interim Ministry' is specialized in that ministers are trained to seek to work with Parishes during vacancies, enabling officers and congregations move creatively with systemic and pastoral processes involved in the time of change and uncertainty, and into a realistic assessment of the needs and vision for the future.

Training in 'Interim Ministry' assumes a level of competency in all-round ministry tasks and builds upon the accumulated skills gained in them.

It is specialized in that it addresses in depth the processes involved in Parishes during vacancy and develops approaches to work with these processes, which enables a move to the 'Healthy Congregation' written about by Peter Stienke.

From observing this ministry in practice I moved into participation by accessing training in the U.S.A., and into practising as 'Licensed Interim Minister' in the parish of Swalwell Diocese of Durham for fifteen months.

In the course of my exploration into Interim Ministry I encountered others exploring similar approaches to 'the vacancy time' eg. In the Diocese of Newcastle where a small group were working on how to bring a more creative approach to vacancy work.

The current situation in the Church of England is a time of increasingly lengthy vacancies due to shortage of finance and available staff and the subsequent need for Pastoral re-organisation between parishes. The present process of parish appointments in the Church of England, which directs parishes to write a Parish Profile at the beginning of vacancy, militates against a realistic outline of needs and concerns. A vacancy often plunges congregations into battle-station mode in the present climate of shortage of priests and money. Energy goes into keeping the show on the road, often by the in-crowd or the remnant, while the sense of mission can be lost. There is often a gap in development and communication; and congregations can also be lulled into a false sense of security when regular worship is maintained by retirees or neighbouring clergy.

In working with the ‘Baltimore’ Model of Interim Ministry and adapting it for use by the Church of England it has naturally evolved in shape and structure to better fit our circumstances whilst at the same time remaining true to the ‘Basic Model’ and its’ emphasis on exploration, development, leadership styles, working with and understanding systems and processes and creative change. Alongside these the model encourages good pastoral and self care.

Theological and biblical perspectives of change are an integral part of the ‘Interim’ journey, sometimes feeding into liturgical expressions of repentance, forgiveness and hope and commitment for the future. Bringing together the theory and practice of ‘Interim Ministry’ provides a rich learning experience for both minister and congregation and offers another model for change.

For the future I envisage a pool of trained ‘Interim Ministers’ emerging from a number of different situations eg. Clergy nearing retirement, SSMS, experienced Readers, those clergy who have small parishes with spare working capacity, early retired and those who do not fit the ‘long haul’ of parish ministry.

## **Preface (ii) Richard Bryant**

My involvement in *Interim* Ministry began in 2001, through being work consultant to Hazel. Her own IM training in Baltimore required an external reflection on her reports of a critical incident in her *Interim* Ministry and on her general approach to ministry as IM. My immediate task was to offer a comment to Baltimore, so that the authorities there could be confident that Hazel had completed these assignments satisfactorily, but it was the conversation between us, using the Critical Incident Report (CIR) *proforma*, which energised me, because I could see so many applications for the method in the exercise of ministry in general. I have subsequently used the CIR method to help people in consultancy and training contexts understand what has been going on, what there is to learn and how/where God might in the midst of their lives.

In my own ministerial setting, as Principal of the Newcastle Local Ministry Scheme, I have also seen a variety of resonances between the principles of IM and the establishment of Local Ministry at local level. Both are deeply committed to enabling people in local contexts to be heard; both are concerned with the development of collaborative ministry and learning; both help raise ministerial questions about leadership; both offer a light framework for local people to explore their discipleship and ministry; and both are centred on local apprehension of God's will for congregation and parish.

### **Why Interim Ministry?**

As with many developments in church and society, the motivation for IM has been a mix of negative and positive. It has emerged in response to experiences of vacancies which have been mishandled or simply been allowed to languish, but it has also been seen as an opportunity for creative and new thinking at local level. The system of appointing a new priest similarly is almost bound to excite clash and confusion, because it revolves round two competing purposes:

the Bishop's, to appoint from a limited range of options, and the local church's, to seek either the continuation of what it has become used to or a complete change. There may also be differences of perspective locally and at Bishop's Staff level about the desired profile of the new priest and about the nature of the ministry to be sought in a particular vacancy.

IM's strengths are in honouring the diversity of perspectives about vacancies and, secondly, in offering constructive ways of addressing them at all relevant levels, parochial, deanery, diocesan and episcopal.

## **1. *Interim Ministry as a Model***

### **a. Purpose**

The stated aims of IM are to enable a local church to:

- take good leave of its outgoing priest
- use the period of vacancy constructively, addressing unresolved issues and maintaining appropriate pastoral, liturgical and executive care
- prepare well for the appointment and induction of the new priest.

### **Take good leave of its outgoing priest**

There are two dimensions here. First, the local church needs to find ways of celebrating the ministry exercised under the supervision of the outgoing priest, so that both priest and congregation can say goodbye to each other honourably. Secondly, the church needs to acknowledge and address the range of feelings there are likely to be at their priest's departure: there may be deep regret, evidence of dependency, fears for the future, senses of relief and even gladness. In these respects there are similarities between the farewell process and experiences of bereavement: in both, recognition of the reality is integral to the attempt to embrace the future with hope.



### **Using the period of vacancy constructively**

A vacancy can degenerate into tribal warfare, as groups of opposing views clash, or it can be seized as an opportunity to rethink the local church's role in God's mission. IM is clearly an attempt at facilitating the latter, but it does so by helping people locally to recognise important truths, however unpalatable, about their relationship with their previous priest, with one another and with God, and to locate ways of addressing hurts and issues. Some of these issues will be capable of solutions, because their nature is structural, organisational or technical, eg ensuring that Sunday services and occasional offices are conducted, arranging rotas, maintaining the fabric of church buildings. Others will be rather in the form of dilemmas to be lived with, especially those bound up with personalities and the dynamics of power.

There are also different understandings of what changes, if any, are permissible and to be encouraged, and by whom. IM assumes that in vacancy the local church is free to develop its ministry, within a canonical framework, and that there need not to be as great a reluctance to introduce changes of policy and direction, as long as due process is observed, as churchwardens sometimes confess. Of course, there are limits, and again IM is about helping a local church to move forward organically, ie through consultation with all relevant parties and agreed protocols. In this respect IM is one tool among several in offering local churches ways of becoming and continuing as "healthy congregations".

### **Preparing well for the appointment and induction of the new priest**

The PCC's submission of the parish profile to the Bishop is a key moment in the process of making a new appointment, and with IM this process takes longer than is usual, but with the resultant advantage of a wider ownership and a more focused attention to both what is happening already and how local people see their part in God's mission. The *Interim* Minister does not write the profile

but helps the PCC to provide as full a picture of hopes and fears, as well as of parish and congregation(s), as possible for the benefit of a prospective new priest. Hopefully, the greater care taken in the production of the profile will issue in fewer complaints by prospective clergy that the profile bears little resemblance to the reality.

Usually the *Interim* Minister leaves the parish once an appointment has been made, so that the local church can make its own arrangements to welcome the new priest. Before leaving, the IM would help the church consider not only the formal welcome service but also how best to enable the incoming priest to become acquainted with local ethos and issues.

This outline of the purpose of IM has two concerns at its heart, one practical and one theological. On the practical front, IM seeks to enable clergy to enter and exit well and congregations to welcome and say goodbye well. This is easy to write but less straightforward to implement, as a welter of activities and emotions presses on priest and congregation at the points of arrival and departure. However, it is important that we minister to one another as well as possible, because an initial or concluding tone and taste will either energise and inspire or leave with regrets and recriminations.

The theology underpinning IM is the Trinitarian nature of God as a community of persons themselves in relationship with communities of their making and loving. IM recognises various communities of interest in the vacancy and appointment processes, all of them interrelated and focused on participation in God's mission in the world. These communities are vested in persons, such as the Parish Representatives, Area Dean, Archdeacon, Bishop. Each of them also has its own identity and purpose, which it can exercise only in cooperation with the others. As the Trinity's focus is on the world, so the local church's focus needs to be located there also, and the *Interim* Minister is appointed to help the local church honour this

commitment, always, as with the Trinity, conscious of its own internal bonds of love.

## **b. Process and contract**

The Interim Ministry Model provides a clear structure for the theory, practice and reflection needed in the processes of change.

The Baltimore Model was of 30 hours residential face to face tuition divided by 6 months of Fieldwork and 2 written assignments ie. Critical Incident Reports. This model whilst giving an in-depth learning experience was expensive, limited to the U.S.A and time consuming. The Interim Ministry Network has subsequently revised its course provision in line with changing circumstances.

In the different context of the Church of England we have found that the provision of three separate days and two written assignments along with working with a mentor for reflection has provided 15 hours face to face tuition and a six month process in which there is space for theory, practice in the back-home situation and reflection, in the writing of the CIR and in the mentoring relationship.

In committing to the training the student undertakes to complete the whole course, theory, practice and assignments whilst at the same time working with a mentor. On satisfactory completion a certificate of attendance/completion is given validated by the course Staff Team.

## **2. *Interim Ministry in Preparation***

### **a. *The Local Church***

The purpose of *Interim* Ministry is to enable and encourage the local church during its vacancy, the process of arranging a new appointment and in its induction of a new minister. The Basic Model of dealing with change in vacancy outlined by Loren Mead in his book *A Change of Pastors*<sup>1</sup> cites seven Tasks for the Congregation. These tasks can be closely paralleled in the vacancy structure of the Church of England:

	<b>IM</b>	<b><u>C of E</u></b>
<b>i</b>	<b>Termination</b>	<b>Ending</b>
<b>ii</b>	<b>Direction Finding</b>	<b>P.C.C. informed</b>
<b>iii</b>	<b>Self-Study</b>	<b>Parish Profile written</b>
<b>iv</b>	<b>Search</b>	<b>2 Parish Reps Appointed</b>
<b>v</b>	<b>Negotiation</b>	<b>Meetings &amp; Interviews with Area Deans, Archdeacon, Patron</b>
<b>vi</b>	<b>Installation</b>	<b>Institution/ILicensing</b>
<b>vii</b>	<b>Start-up</b>	<b>Induction.</b>

However, there is one important difference: in the IM model Self-Study allows time for the Five Tasks of the Interim Minister, also cited in Mead's book<sup>2</sup>, to be addressed before the writing of the Parish Profile, as illustrated below:

- i Coming to terms with History**
- ii Identification of Leadership – Power Shifts**
- iii Discovering a New/Realistic Identity**
- iv Linking with Denomination**
- v Committing to New Leadership and Direction.**

A Creative working with these tasks over a set period negotiated by all parties concerned allows and encourages a realistic understanding of a parish's identity and potential.

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<sup>1</sup> LB Mead *A Change of Pastors* Virginia: Alban Institute 2005 pp 17-18

<sup>2</sup> LB Mead p 18

The *Interim* Minister enables the local church to engage with these processes in a relaxed but focused way, so that the objectives listed below may be achieved. Not all the stated goals will apply in all places, but a number will.

### **Appropriate Goals for the *Interim* Period**

1. To maintain the viability of the Church
2. To resolve feelings of grief
3. To reinforce the Ministry of the Laity
4. To clarify the Mission of the Church
5. To deal with special needs of the church
6. To emphasize Fellowship and Reconciliation
7. To strengthen Denominational ties.
8. To increase the potential for a successful ministry by the next permanent incumbent

### **b. Training**

#### **i) Introduction to the Model**

As a new model of ministry in the Church of England it has been necessary to prepare the ground for its reception. To this end we have encouraged workshops on ‘Sharing the Model’:

**with Area Deans** who usually have the responsibility for advising about Pastoral re-organisation from their perspective ‘on the ground’ and who have legal responsibility for the administration of the parish during vacancy

**with Archdeacons** – who as members of the Bishop’s Staff will have an understanding of the needs of the Diocese, the Deanery and

the parish and who in turn will take time to prepare particular parishes for receiving an Interim Minister in a vacancy.

**with the Bishop**- who having the overall responsibility for the ‘cure of souls’ can encourage the whole process of working creatively towards a healthy outcome with some parishes during vacancy

Discussions of the model and its benefits for some parishes have taken place within the ‘Cross Diocesan Vacancy Group in the North East’ Out of these discussions it has emerged that different parishes will require different contracts in terms of length of time, working hours, remuneration (discussion revolved around *honoraria* and expenses). However, the principle of a working agreement between the Parish and the Interim Minister in consultation with the Area Dean and Archdeacon has been accepted throughout. A Licensing/Commissioning service has taken place with either the Archdeacon or the Bishop and with the Licence specifically stating the length of the Interim Time.

**The course we have** offered follows closely the model of the ‘Basic Education Course’ offered by the Interim Ministry Network .

The sharing of coffee-breaks and lunch together provides time to talk things through in a relaxed and caring atmosphere.

The introduction of the ‘Critical Incident Report’ and Fieldwork Model allows further exploration and reflection of the Interim Process.

## **ii) Engagement through Case Study**

As the Introduction has shown, participants are exposed to a measure of theory in the 1<sup>st</sup> training session, and it is important to offer a way of enabling them to appreciate and apply the theory in practice. The case study gives them such opportunity, whether through role-play or discussion, by presenting them with an *Interim* Ministry story, which raises some of the potential hazards in

ministry. It highlights issues of local leadership and power, of interference from the last priest, especially when retired nearby, of the IM's freedom to initiate, of the interplay between parish, deanery and diocese in an *Interim* context.

The Case Study enables understanding of different concepts and models of Leadership and Self-differentiation (**iii** below). The importance of clear Entry and Exit strategies is explored, and organisational systems are addressed from the perspective of the 'family' model, with its emphasis on connectedness. In the process the differing dynamics in congregations experiencing change and loss are evaluated. The Developmental Tasks and Processes involved in the Five Congregational Tasks allow practice and reflection.

The case study serves also to prepare participants for the report they write on an incident in their own ministry (**iv** below).

### **iii) Leadership, systems, congregation analysis**

Interim Ministry is enhanced when the minister has an understanding of different Leadership Styles. Those who have been involved in long-haul parish ministries have found that a fresh look at their particular leadership skills and abilities and a 'brushing up' or adoption of new approaches enables a clearer understanding and more creative facilitating of the processes involved in change. Understanding of Leadership Style is intrinsically linked with an understanding of the System they are about to enter. This understanding of Leadership and System in turn serves to facilitate the relationships between the Interim Minister and the congregation. In the Training Course offered we look at the concept of 'Differentiated Leadership' (cf Course Pack –article Robert W. Johnson.), which enables ministers to learn about themselves, their style and their impact on the people around them. The concept of

themselves as a ‘Non-Anxious presence’ is the goal for Interim Ministers.

The ‘Family System’ is the basis in the course of our understanding of the Christian Congregation. Who, Where, How, people interact with each other within this system produces the What of Parish life. The Interim Minister enters the Church Family and from careful listening and analysis identifies the personal interactions that make up the System, the Processes involved in these interactions and the healthy or unhealthy outcome of them. In this entering of the system by the Interim Minister lies the bedrock of Congregational Analysis and the entering is applicable in all church sizes from Pastoral to Corporate. A simple ‘Timeline’ exercise can be very effective in gathering knowledge of the individuals who make up a congregation. ( Appendix a)

#### **iv) Critical Incident Report (CIR) and Fieldwork**

Although the Critical Incident Report has particular reference to IM, the process has an application in any ministerial context. In an IM setting it is the mechanism through which the IM-in-training connects theory to practice. The IM reports and reflects on an incident in her/his ministry with the aid of peers and tutors. Training participants follow a deliberate *schema* in the reporting and reflective processes, partly because of its own intrinsic merits and partly because standardisation in this respect makes for a sense of equivalence and ensures that key elements are observed. The report is condensed to one side of A4 and paragraphs under the following headings:

- Background to incident
- Description of incident
- Analysis
- Evaluation
- Theological Reflection.



A key to its successful implementation is to adhere to the distinctive understandings of the three critical faculties: Analysis, Evaluation, Theological Reflection. Analysis identifies what went on, eg there was a power struggle between the Reader and the Churchwarden. Valuation identifies learning needs arising from the incident, eg the IM needs to know more about addressing conflict, the Reader and Churchwarden about each other's responsibilities. Theological Reflection ponders the nature and activity of God in this scene, with the help of the Scriptures, beliefs and contemporary reason and knowledge.

In the reflective processes, the reporter is silent after her/his presentation of the incident, while peers and tutors discuss the analytical and evaluative issues, before rejoining the discussion to both engage with their perspectives and share in the final section on theological reflection.

The aim of the CIR is twofold: to assist IMs-in-training to address, at least for themselves, the particular ministerial challenges in the reported incident and to give them the tools to apply in other contexts. Although it benefits from being a collaborative venture, it also functions well at individual level.

The fieldwork component uses the same reporting and reflective process as the CIR but relates it to the general direction and practice of ministry. It notices the biases of ministry and considers whether they are determined by the IM's own gifts or local needs, how they are resourced, what their theological foundations are, what pastoral and ministerial issues and questions they (are likely to) raise.

#### **v) Bible Study**

During IM training we have found it valuable and helpful to include a bible study in the 1<sup>st</sup> session, which otherwise is dedicated largely

to the process and mechanics of IM. We have selected passages which have had something to say into contexts of entry and departure, and hopefully this has helped maintain the IM focus during the study. However, the study pattern has been just as significant as the content in offering participants opportunity to attend to one another through listening rather than debate. Following the Baltimore model and the 1998 Lambeth Conference, we have used an African Bible Study form, which invites participants to read the selected passage in threes, and to reflect in turn on it, without comment and in a prayerful context. This part of the session brings its own justification and rewards, but it also resonates with the theologically reflective part of the IM training and ministry processes, enabling participants to connect with the experience of leadership, power relationships, personal care, letting go, entering and leaving as people of faith in a Trinitarian God. The concepts of God Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer underpin the motivation for the course, as evidenced in ch 5.

#### **vi) Participants' Observations**

These have formed a vital and central part of the training, partly because they have demonstrated the collaborative element in training (the trainers have themselves been learning through the process), and partly because the issues raised have touched on fundamental matters of philosophy and practice. Some of these have been capable of immediate response, while others have needed to be taken to diocesan authorities for further reflection and, in cases of finance and legality, executive decision. The list below gives a flavour of questions registered:

1. what to leave behind at the conclusion of any period of ministry, but with particular reference to IM
2. how diocesan staff deal with issues in vacancies and enable IM to happen
3. the need for transparency at every point and move
4. the importance of recognising ministry as service and call

5. the need for IMs to have appropriate support, structurally and personally
6. the need to recognise attempts at manipulation
7. the need to recognise and work with key people
8. the need to be aware of gender issues
9. the need to recognise and address the place of the *ego* in ministry, including IM
10. the importance of acquiring and sustaining a sense of self-esteem in ministry
11. the place of preaching, including the interaction between our experience and the Word of God
12. Working Agreement Issues –
  - ◆ the location of “Cure of souls”
  - ◆ Occasional Offices to be highlighted more
  - ◆ key personnel to be highlighted, eg Churchwardens, other clergy, Readers
  - ◆ the need for flexibility in adapting the template to address local contexts
  - ◆ the “shared ministry” dimension to be highlighted
  - ◆ the need to include a section on local church/PCC expectations of the IM
13. the critical role of Area Deans and Archdeacons in educating churchwardens and PCCs before IM is embraced or begun and in supporting the IM
14. the need to set IM within the broader framework of diocesan attempts to enable clergy to enter and exit well

**vii) Next steps, mentoring, working agreement**

It is always important in ministry to identify next steps to be taken, and the IM training course gives space for participants to register for themselves and in plenary what they feel they need to do next, whether in relation to the practice of their ministry in general or in the context of a particular incident or issue. The course offers two aids in this respect, the second of which is obligatory. The first is

voluntary, but we press the importance of selecting an appropriate mentor, who can help the IM clarify and address particular issues, continuing the role of peers and tutors in the training process.

The second is the working agreement, a sample form of which appears as an appendix. This is worked through and signed by the IM, the Parish Representatives and the Area Dean, and there are particular sections of the agreement in which each constituency is encouraged to include its particular concerns and hopes. There is also a section in which any diocesan perspectives can be logged. It functions as a point of reference for all relevant parties, and it also forms the basis of the IM's regular conversations with the Area Dean and, probably less frequently, Archdeacon, as well as being a proper subject of meetings between the IM and her/his mentor.

### **3. *Interim Ministry in Practise***

We offer below two reflections from Interim Ministers in the diocese of Durham, to indicate how the theory of IM has worked in practice and how two Interim Ministers have perceived the issues arising.

#### **A Keith Wassall**

Having heard about interim ministry when serving overseas I was keen to take up the opportunity to minister short-term (2 years) within the diocese of Durham in a stipendiary capacity. Initially only half of my post was interim but this changed to about 85% after nine months. The only request from the Archdeacon was that interim needed to assist the parishes discern their future for ministry and mission.

The interim parishes were ‘fresh’ into vacancy but all 3 had experienced painful times in recent years. St N and AS were now worshipping together in St N’s Church hall and as one parish...both had lost their parish churches, one because of depleting numbers and the larger because of subsidence. Their ‘Group’ partner St M had lost its status as a Crown living and felt uncared for, having experienced 3 *interregna* in a short period of time and some tension with an existing full-time associate vicar. This priest went off sick after 9 months and returned 15 months later to say ‘farewell’.

I was fortunate to have been able to begin this ministry and participate in the 3 training days for interim ministry led by the Cross-Tyne group. The key solution in empowering the model of interim was for me the work of the lay working party. A total of 6 lay people representing those 3 communities.

This Lay group met monthly and became a resource that was honest, confidential, creative and risk-taking. Most of the 2 fellowships were ‘seniors’, but with big hearts and willingness and courage to respond to challenges and difficulties. The model asked them to look and listen to one another’s past; to view opportunities for change as creative and to re-connect constructively with their diocesan structures and the wider deanery (also struggling with the notion of localities). This group fed responses into their PCCs that had a permanent agenda item for IM. PCCs were chaired by the laity, and I held no safe keys or access to money.

One of the crucial aspects of this ministry is to help the laity take and make decisions whilst the parish(es) is in vacancy. Initiatives and changes did take place, some priestly led, others from the laity. Since these two parishes were initially uncomfortable and fearful of one another, conscience efforts were made to treat them fairly. Undoubtedly the failure of St N’s Church hall heating in early in January was a catalyst. For 3 months the congregations worshipped together at St M and even began to trust one another and learn one another’s names. This coupled with more lay participation in

worship and also congregation meetings that pulled no punches and which gave all a voice (even the more cynical) revealed a desire by all concerned to face the facts and seek strength from one another. Some of the comments from the working group about IM are:-

Element of stability in worship & governance.

Continuity but with the incentive that there is a statutory ending to work towards and concentrate the mind.

Congregations were encouraged to be open and to use this opportunity.

Listening is key as well as the sharing of history

Crucial interim working group of lay people + interim priest/minister

Allows & encourages lay ministry and support.

## **B Peter Saddington**

My experience of working as an Interim Minister was gained from working in a parish of approximately 15,000 people, which originally comprised one large council estate. The contract was for nine months but this was informally extended for a further six weeks. Despite differences in Church tradition I was made to feel very welcome and received full support from the Churchwardens and the congregation.

The contract identified my tasks and role as Interim Minister as follows:

- 1 Working primarily with the Churchwardens to ensure the normal life of the Church continued without interruption and help prepare the way for the coming of the new incumbent.
- 2 Together with other clergy provide “worship” cover as agreed with the Area Dean.
- 3 Provide essential but not routine pastoral care.
- 4 Coordinate cover for funerals.

5 Working with the Steering Committee to facilitate the following development tasks:

- A) Coming to terms with history.
- B) Facilitate changes in power and leadership.
- C) Seeking a new identity.
- D) Review of denominational links.
- E) Clarify the mission and vision of the Church.

The departing vicar had served for six and a half years and the parish were concerned that the stability he had achieved was not lost, and so I was primarily seen as someone who would provide continuity and smooth the process. In any future prospective IM parishes I would want to meet not just the Churchwardens but also the PCC before any agreement is reached. Communication is vitally important and it is essential to explain what Interim Ministry is all about and what opportunities it can bring to the parish. I would also want a regular item on the PCC agenda to keep people up to date with the progress being made.

The work with the steering committee went well. I found that producing a six-month timetable in advance enabled people to know what was coming and also to keep focussed on the task in hand. Ideally the size of the group should be a minimum of eight rather than six. The discussions were on the whole constructive and positive although on one or two occasions they tended to run out of steam. In the discussions certain key issues arose which I hoped the Church would begin to tackle and deal with there and then, but they preferred to wait for the new incumbent. I saw this as a missed opportunity. Depending on the circumstances of the parish it would be good if there were an “agreement” to tackle issues incorporated in the contract.

I needed to remind myself that as an Interim Minister even more so than as an incumbent I was there not to lead the people but to enable them to formulate ideas and make decisions for themselves. I have

found the experience of Interim Ministry both enjoyable and stimulating and certainly worthwhile.

#### **4. *Interim Ministry in Progress***

##### **a. *Issues for dioceses, deaneries and parishes***

Durham and Newcastle dioceses have pursued IM because of their commitment to find more creative ways of handling vacancies than has been possible in the past. IM treats a vacancy not as an experience to be endured but as an opportunity to engage all the relevant parties in parish, deanery and diocese in discerning how best to address the missionary and ministerial needs identified in the locality.

The process requires commitments from all parties. Local people are to take responsibility for ensuring that voices in church and community are heard and evaluated. The Area Dean is to be committed to working with the process as supervisor to the Interim Minister and consultant to any IM Group established by the PCC. The Archdeacon and Bishop have to gauge the measure of diocesan support required in terms of both personnel and finance and to consult with relevant diocesan people and bodies how best they can be offered.

Clearly, there are also issues for all these parties. The local church needs to have confidence in those who speak for it, and the Area Dean and/or Archdeacon may need to offer some time to a given church to help it decide whether and how IM might be implemented. The diocese, both episcopally and synodically, will also need to ensure that appropriate support and training are available to the key players in the process, eg churchwardens/parish representatives, prospective IMs, Area Deans.



IM is feasible in any parochial vacancy. It is not designed simply to help parishes where there have been particular problems (eg pastoral breakdown between vicar and PCC), though IM may be particularly suitable in such contexts. It will be for Bishop and Archdeacons to determine any appointments, bearing in mind recent history in a given parish and the impact on it of any deanery plans and perspectives.

## **b. Transferability of skills and concepts**

The IM concept fits well with the Church's renewed commitment to collaborative working, which finds expression in both Local/Shared Ministry Schemes and attempts to create and sustain partnerships with a variety of community agencies. IM too has as one of its goals the emergence of a developing sense of partnership both within a local church and between that church and its environment.

The skills required of an IM are consonant with those to be found in clergy and Readers:

- a capacity for attentive listening, with both challenging and encouraging components
- a readiness to help people see how the spiritual and the practical are intertwined
- a competence in enabling expression of local needs and gifts within the context of worship.

An IM needs to be conversant with parochial life but able to stand back from it in order to help local people evaluate its character and needs. The IM is not the vicar, although s/he may take services, but is rather pastor to the church and community for the purpose of discerning the nature of the ministry desired for the next phase of their life. The IM, therefore, has some of the characteristics of a consultant, in being able to engage without becoming entangled.

S/he will help local people reflect on where they are, where they sense God is calling them to and how they may set out in that direction.

## 5. Theological Comment

A Church preoccupied with eschatology, exhorting people to either work for or wait upon the Last Day, can easily turn its back on the *interim* times in which we live. Even a blatant eschatologist like St Paul had his *interim* moments, as in 1 Thess. 4:13-18 and 1 Cor 15:22-28, where he seems to envisage a period of “*interim*, earthly messianic kingdom” (Seth Turner *The Interim*, earthly messianic kingdom in Paul *JSNT* 25.3 Sheffield: SAP March 2003 pp 323-342). And in other parts of the New Testament the emphasis is very much on the here and now rather than the there and then, eg Luke’s form of the Lord’s Prayer (Lk 11:1-4), where the prayer is for bread “every day” rather than, as in Matthew 6:9-13, “today”.

The emergence of *Interim* Ministry is a timely summons to deal with the present and the immediate future, of course within the framework of the longer term and eschatological future. Arguably, the “realised eschatology” which characterised much 20th century theological discourse has had its day: the *eschaton* quite clearly has not become manifest at every level of human or creation’s life. This may tempt some into renewed effort to play their part in the coming of the kingdom and others into the quiescent passivism that rests content with present realities until God makes his decisive intervention. The question may be posed, “When does feverish activism become a betrayal of the gospel of grace?”. Between these two poles *Interim* Ministry poses a realistic, faithful and hopeful alternative.

There is, in Christ, a holding together of both the “already” of God’s engagement with creation and the “not yet” of anticipation and hope. *Interim* Ministry sets out to enable a local church to retain the tension between these two dimensions in the context of a clerical vacancy. While there is a natural tendency to look ahead to the appointment of a new vicar, there needs equally to be a concentration on the needs of the moment and the gifts available to address them. *Interim* Ministry is one of several initiatives designed to help church people to recognise and celebrate their faith and ministerial gifts and to work collaboratively.

*Interim* Ministry’s gift to the Church embraces but goes beyond the immediately local, in that it challenges the whole Church to accept the *interim* aspect of its outlook and ministry: we are called to take the present moment seriously, as God-given, but also to set our gaze beyond the immediate to its fulfilment in “a greater light”. It hinges on a range of partnerships (between the *Interim* Minister and the congregation, between the congregation and the deanery + diocese as well as parish, between the *Interim* Minister and Area Dean + Archdeacon), which can help local people appreciate in practical ways their membership of the Body of Christ. Its processes also offer ways of reading dynamically the world and church of which we are part: through its critical incident enquiry it focuses on an analysis of what happened, an evaluation of learning to be gained and a reflection on where God might have been (prompting) in the process.

Critical moments in life and ministry often disclose opportunities and growth points. *Interim* Ministry is a mechanism for alerting church people to these positives at an acute and sensitive time in their history, by attempting to build up their confidence in God and their understanding of their part in God’s mission.

## **6. Appendices**

### **a. Resources**

## **Books**

- M Attwood et al *Leading Change* Bristol: Policy Press 2003  
PE Becker *Congregations in Conflict* Cambridge: CUP 1999  
D Goleman *Emotional Intelligence* London: Bloomsbury 1996  
M Grundy *Understanding Congregations* London: Mowbray 1998  
TR Hawkins *The Learning Congregation* Louisville: WJK 1997  
S Leas *Discover your conflict management style* USA: Alban 1989  
DB Lott *Conflict Management in Congregations*  
Bethesda: Alban 2001  
L Mead *A Change of Pastors* Herndon VA: Alban 2005  
RM Oswald *New Beginnings* USA: Alban 1977  
RM Oswald *Beginning Ministry Together* Bethesda: Alban 2003  
RM Oswald & O Kroeger *Personality Type & Religious Leadership*  
USA: Alban 1988  
PL Steincke *Healthy Congregations: a systems approach*  
Herndon VA: Alban 1996

## **People**

- |                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| Stuart Bain      | <a href="mailto:archdeacon.of.sunderland@durham.anglican.org">archdeacon.of.sunderland@durham.anglican.org</a> |
| Richard Bryant   | <a href="mailto:r.bryant@newcastle.anglican.org">r.bryant@newcastle.anglican.org</a>                           |
| Peter Saddington | <a href="mailto:psaddington2@toucansurf.com">psaddington2@toucansurf.com</a>                                   |
| Keith Wassall    | <a href="mailto:klwassall@tiscali.co.uk">klwassall@tiscali.co.uk</a>   |

## **b. Timeline**

A simple way of accessing information on the present make-up of the congregations is for the Interim Minister to write to members introducing him/her self and asking them to complete a short questionnaire as follows.

Name.

Age range. 0-10,11-20, etc up to 100 (please circle)

I first attended this parish...

The most significant event was.....

I have ministered in the following areas.....

These simple, short questions produce data such as.

-age range of congregation

-gender

-timescale of attendance

-breadth of ministry.

It is then possible to tease out the implications for questions of Mission, value of specific events (e.g.Liturgy/Worship always appear as significant), the importance of 'the rites of passage', the skills and resources available for any development plans the parish may have.

This data proves more than enough for use in the Interim period.

### **c. Interim Ministry Working Agreement**

The terms of the contract would be worked out between the prospective IM and local church representatives, as per the attached guidelines, with the aid of the Area Dean. The contract would include practical issues, such as hours offered and expenses, but it would also indicate the flavour of the IM's time in the locality. There needs to be acknowledgement that:

- i. the Interim Minister is not available for the permanent Position.
- ii the Interim will work intentionally on essential tasks for congregational health.
- iii. the Congregation will provide a Steering Committee to work with the Interim Minister.

**1. Expectations from  
a. PCC/Churchwardens**

**b. Area Dean**

**c. Bishop's Staff**

**2. Beginning and Ending**

**a. Dates**

**b. Aims, Outcomes and Strategies**

**3. Work expected**

**a. in terms of hours/days or units**

**b. in terms of type**

**i. meetings**

**ii. services**

**iii pastoral care**

**iv. study groups**

**v. community involvement**

**4. Finance**

**a. to be arranged by diocese**

**i. Remuneration in the form of Honorarium/Stipend/Fees**

**ii. Housing expectations if applicable (including removal expenses)**

**iii. Benefits (such as Pension contributions)**

**b. Expenses to be arranged by the PCC**

**i. Agreed travel**

**ii. Continuing Education expenses**

**iii. Administration costs**

**iv. Telephone**

**5. Commitment to Reviewing the *Interim* Ministry with**

**a. Area Dean and/or Archdeacon**



**Date(s)**

- b. IM Support/Working Group and PCC  
Date(s)**

**6. Holidays**

**7. Other Issues identified together with an indication of  
how they will be addressed**

**8. Signed by  
Date**

**a. the Interim Minister**

**b. Local Church Representatives**

**c. Area Dean**

