

The Important In-Between

Introduction of Rev. Sarah Robbins, Interim Pastor

History

Choice of scripture

Things you should know

The interim period is the “in between times: for a congregation, bridging the time when their installed pastor has resigned and departed and another pastor is called and installed. This period in the life of a congregation is not a tragedy; rather it is a creative and dynamic moment in their corporate faith journey and history.

Interim Tasks for All Congregations

1. Coming to Terms with History

Following a pastor's departure for whatever reason, a congregation usually needs to resolve its feelings: loss, grief, anger, relief, guilt, panic about the future. “Letting go” of that pastor is a critically important task for a congregation as it begins to prepare for a new pastoral leader. In addition, churches sometimes have “old issues” or conflicts which were never fully resolved and which tend to resurface in unsettled times. A congregation needs to be released from any inappropriate or crippling power of the past, in order to be fully ready for a future with a new leader.

2. Discovering a New Identity

Often congregations have a strong self-image, positive or negative, which may or may not truthfully reflect present realities. As the search for a new pastor proceeds, it is essential that both the Search Committee (PNC) and the congregation have a clear sense of the church's identity, recognizing both strengths and needs. This task, therefore, calls for a careful self-assessment by a congregation, so that it can envision more clearly what it wishes to become.

3. Strengthening Patterns of Lay Leadership

Congregations in an interim time often experience shifts in power or leadership among the laity, depending upon the relationships of individuals to the former pastor. This is also a time for considering whether, as a whole, patterns of lay involvement in the church are healthy or unhealthy, empowering or disempowering for most of the congregation. This task is to see that lay leadership develops in positive and creative ways for the good of the whole church.

4. Strengthening Denominational Ties

During the interim period, congregations find themselves working more closely than usual with the denomination, particularly with Presbytery staff and resources. A primary opportunity exists to reinforce and strengthen a congregation's sense of belonging to the wider church.

5. Preparing for New Leadership

During the search process, two significant tasks are going on simultaneously: the Search Committee (PNC), on behalf of the congregation, is fulfilling the necessary concrete steps in the process of finding a new pastor; and the congregation as a whole needs to be readying itself psychologically and spiritually to enter into partnership with a new leader. This task is to strengthen the church's capacity to be a growing, changing, forward- looking body.

Questions with Answers

How long will the interim period last?

The In Between Time— the interim time, will last until the next pastor is called and has arrived. This can take typically anywhere from 1-2 years, with the average being 1.5 years in the PC(USA).

How is the PNC formed?

Nominating Committee— each year the congregation elects members at-large to serve on the nominating committee, with a representative from the Session and Deacons as well. This committee will put together a slate of folks for the Pastor Nominating Committee, which also needs congregational approval.

Pastor Nominating Committee— this group of folks is determined in number and eligibility by your by-laws and advice from Session. This group will have the confidential and serious task of forming the MDP (Ministry Discernment Profile, formerly the MIF) about Sixth Presbyterian Church as well as identify the skill set this congregation needs in the next pastor. They will screen, interview, and eventually nominate a candidate to approved by the Presbytery and then sent to the congregation for approval and vote.

How does the Interim Pastor's contract work?

Interim pastor contracts, as determined by the presbytery's COM, are either sixth months or a year long. Pastor Sarah's contract is until the end of July 2024. It can be renewed. Ideally the interim pastor remains until the next pastor is called, with a few weeks in-between the interim pastor's departure and the next pastor's arrival.

Interim tasks that are currently planned:

Retreat— the Session is engaging in a half-day retreat on October 7th at ELPC. We will talk further about the interim tasks and things that need addressed in the congregation. We will talk about a congregational survey as well as set goals and areas of focus for the year to come.

Nominating Committee— is meeting on September 14th to begin their work. More information about nominations process to the PNC will be sent out.

Congregational Meeting to Dissolve Call and Elect PNC— It is likely at the September Session meeting that they will call for a congregational meeting at the end of October, directly after worship. Please make every effort to attend this meeting to vote.