

STANDARDS FOR THE PRACTICE OF TRANSITIONAL MINISTRY

Developed by the Interim Ministry Network
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Introduction

Based on over 40 years of experience of service to and evaluations by religious communities of clergy who practice transitional ministry, these standards represent what the Interim Ministry Network© identifies as basic expectations for competent professionals in transitional ministry. We offer them to transitional ministry professionals, judicatory leaders, and religious communities to define and evaluate the ministry of interim clergy.

Focus

Transitions are a reality in the life of religious communities. Clergy come and go. Social, economic and environmental changes impact religious life, leading missional focus to evolve. Any religious community has the opportunity to utilize a transition time intentionally to encourage corporate renewal, deal with any grief or unresolved issues that arise during the transitional period, reaffirm faith, and prepare for new life and leadership in a way that is proactive and grounded in empirical data rather than reactive to events of the past.

Professional transitional clergy are trained to:

- Help congregational systems work through the process and emotions of transition
- Guide congregations through their work of the five Focus Points
 1. Heritage Review how the organization has been shaped and formed.
 2. Leadership Recruit, train and equip the organization to meet current needs.
 3. Mission Identify the reason why the organization exists.
 4. Connections Discover how the organization relates to the community, locally and globally.
 5. Future Direct the energy of the organization with an eye on what's next.
- Help a religious community find and express a vision that will guide its ministry and aid in discerning the choice of its next leader
- Provide a worshiping, pastoral and theological context for the interim time

Necessary Preparation and Abilities for Transitional Service

It is strongly recommended that professional transitional clergy will have:

- Education at the level required to meet the standards for ministerial standing of their religious affiliation
- Recognition or standing in a duly recognized denomination or religious community
- Experience of at least five years in a major leadership role in a religious community
- Special training that deals with religious community dynamics, the process of organizational transition, the focus points of the intentional interim period, planning, human relations, group dynamics, religious community management, and conflict management. Training in congregational consulting is also valuable.

- Experience in planning and leading worship, preaching and teaching

Performance and Process Skills

Transitional clergy should be able to:

- Make a quick, positive and informed entry into the religious community's system
- Integrate the knowledge of Family Systems into the practice of ministry as a self-differentiated non-anxious presence
- Help the religious community to identify its strengths for ministry and to recognize and address its dysfunctions
- Understand the dynamics of change/maintenance in a systems context
- Guide the religious community to articulate its mission/purpose to fit its current setting in order to set the foundation for a strategic goals and vision process
- Recognize and respond appropriately to conflict issues
- Adhere to the ethical standards of interim ministry

Personal Characteristics

The following personal characteristics are valuable for transitional clergy:

- A clear sense of calling to the practice of transitional ministry
- A joy in living and a genuine interest in the well-being of others
- Clear personal boundaries
- Action/goal orientation that is flexible and adaptable
- Attention to self-care, including
 - A life of prayer and a sound, positive, and growing faith
 - Effective level of physical and emotional vitality
 - Active and ongoing personal and collegial relationships
 - Commitment to continuing education in the field of professional transitional ministry
 - Good sense of humor and the ability to play

Agreement

A transitional position agreement or covenant should include:

- Clear statements of job responsibilities, expectations and accountability in interim work
- Clarity about the term of the transitional period
- Defined roles for the Interim Leader, lay leadership and the judicatory in congregational self-study and planning as well as with the search process
- Compensation and benefits including stated times of work and leave, housing arrangements, and travel arrangements for an Interim Leader working at a distance from her/his home base
- Provision for Mutual Ministry Review and exit interview
- Specific agreement that the Interim Leader **will not** be a candidate and will not be considered for the settled position

Ethical Standards

Transitional ministry, in its nature, has a beginning and an ending, and limits within which it must operate to be both faithful and effective. IMN understands these to be the ethical standards of excellence for both transitional clergy and congregational leaders:

- Transitional clergy have a time-limited covenant/contract with those they serve and should be clear about the terms of service from the beginning of the relationship.
- Transitional clergy have full responsibility for the pastoral and administrative functions of the position to which they have been called.
- Transitional clergy reinforce the transitory nature of their calling by retaining their standing and membership outside the bounds of the faith community they serve as transitional leaders.
- Relationships with the search committee and the search process are clearly defined with the faith community and the judicatories or placement people who oversee the search process at the outset of the relationship. Questions about candidates and process will be guided through the channels appropriate to the system of the faith community being served.
- Because evaluative discussion of former clergy is likely to occur during transitions, transitional clergy are expected to guide those conversations in ways which are honest, open and productive for the life of the faith community.
- Transitional clergy will not impose their agenda on the faith community in ways which will be problematic for their successor, or divisive within the faith community or the judicatory with whom the faith community relationship.
- Transitional clergy may surface desires for organizational changes from the faith community. The faith community acknowledges the need to be open to future incorporation of the ideas of the clergy leader who will enter the faith community after the interim which can help make its vision a reality.
- When the transitional work is completed, transitional clergy will release the faith community, and the faith community the transitional clergy, from all pastoral and professional duties in order that the new ministry can flourish and grow. Discussion about a successor's ability, theology, personality, etc. is off limits.