Transition Team: A Tool for Interim Ministry

Why Have a Transition Team?

The Transition Team is one of the key components of the Intentional Interim Ministry process. It is important to have a specific group that has no other agenda than to assist the Interim Minister and the congregation as they seek to use the time between settled ministers effectively. The members of the Transition Team advise and consult with the Intentional Interim on a regular basis, communicate and bear witness to the fact that transition is ultimately work of the congregation, and be available to hear the concerns of members of the congregation.

It should be a relatively small group (5 to 9 members depending upon the size of the congregation). Transition Teams generally meet a couple times per month for the first 4 to 6 months of the interim time. After that, the meetings may get stretched out to about once a month or longer. The make-up of the Team needs to be a good cross section of the congregation. In addition to serving an important communication role, the members will learn about interim process and dynamics (Focus Points, Basic questions, self-study, etc.).

Often the members of congregations may note that "We already have lots of committees, and boards – Why do we need another – why not assign this to an existing group (such as Elders or Session, Board or Search Committee)?

There are several reasons to have a separate Transition Team:

- Most pre-existing groups have specific purposes and full agendas. To give them additional responsibilities would either mean extending their meetings to unreasonable lengths, or asking them to hold special meetings to do the Transition Team work.

- Persons who are serving on a given board or committee are probably doing so because of their interest and gifts in that particular area. We need to respect and honor our leaders' commitments, gifts, and expectations.

- The members of other groups were most likely not chosen in an attempt to balance representation from all interest groups, ages, genders, and length of participation in the congregation. The Transition Team needs that balance.

- The process of nominating or recruiting persons to serve on the Transition Team gives them the opportunity to assess their interest in the work, willingness to make the commitment and ability to make the time commitment, or adjust their schedule. Transition Team members who willingly choose the role make more effective team members, and find learning and enjoyment in the process.

Establishing an Effective Transition Team

Once the decision to form a Transition Team has been made by the appropriate group, the Interim Pastor should meet with, or contact the Lay Leadership of the congregation (by whatever title), to plan the nomination and appointment process. There are a variety of ways of going about this process.

Often two or three key leaders meet with the Interim Pastor to nominate potential Transition Team members; in other settings, the nomination process is open to the full membership of the congregation. In either case, it is important to be clear about the scope of the work and the expectations of membership on the Transition Team.

The purpose and scope of the Transition Team is communicated to the members of the congregation Who are asked to think and pray about who they think would best fill this vital role

Choosing the Transition Team

The members of the congregation are asked to suggest individual names. Individuals nominated, whether by a Leadership Group or the membership of the congregation must agree to serve if selected, with the critical understanding that not all nominated may be asked to serve. The names suggested by the members of the congregation are generally gathered and compiled by the Interim Pastor. In consultation with the Congregational Leaders, the list of names is reviewed for the criteria listed below, as well as their ability to work together in an effective manner.

The Interim Pastor or Lay Leaders contact those who meet these criteria and their understanding of the necessary commitment and purpose needs to be confirmed, and their willingness to serve within those agreements needs to be re-confirmed. Given that understanding and agreement, they are then invited to participate as members of the Transition Team. The Members of the Transition Team are presented to the Congregation and its Governing Body.

<u>Criteria for nomination and selection should include:</u>

- Trustworthiness and Integrity; people who are widely trusted and respected
- Regular in their attendance and financial support of the congregation
- Ongoing commitment to the congregation and its future
- Willingness and ability to invest the necessary amount of time
- Acceptance of the general principles of an Intentional Interim Ministry
- Sense of creativity and openness to change – willingness to serve as a change agent
- Diversity of age, gender, length of membership
- Able to "Speak the Truth in Love" to the Interim and other members of the congregation
- Willing and able to listen to all persons and perspectives without becoming defensive or anxious
- Accessibility for all major constituency groups (such as women's, men's, youth, music programs, education groups, and social action groups); while this is not a representative process, the ability to have open communication is essential

- At least one person from the congregation's governing body

The final criteria may be the most important: Can every active member of the congregation find at least one member of the Transition Team with whom they would feel comfortable talking about the congregation and its future? In other words – can every member of the congregation identify at least one member of the Transition Team they trust?

Staff Not Eligible to Serve on Transition Team

As a general working matter, Congregational Employees and/or their spouses or immediate family members are not eligible to serve on the Team. Staff members may bring personal agendas (intentionally or unintentionally) to the Team and the process. The congregation may get the perception that staff members are controlling the process. The presence of staff may intimidate the lay members of the Team (thinking that because the staff is trained, or connected, their opinions and/or ideas should carry more weight than those of the laity). It creates an unfair pressure on the staff – this is not a task they were called by the congregation to perform. Finally, there may be times when the Team will have to consider comments and/or concerns that members have expressed about the staff.

The composition of the Transition Team needs to be completed and agreed upon **before anyone is contacted**. Alternates should be chosen if it is likely that someone will decline. Names of other nominees should not be shared at this stage of conversation. Nominees who have questions may be directed to the Interim Pastor.

The individuals who have been nominated (whether asked to serve or not) should be contacted in person, or by phone – NOT email or mail. Their understanding of the necessary commitment and purpose needs to be confirmed, and their willingness to serve within those agreements needs to be re-confirmed.

No names should be announced until all positions are filled and approved according to the requirements of the congregational by-laws. Once positions are filled, it's important to communicate the members of the Transition Team to the membership of the congregation. Sometimes a commissioning of the team in worship is valuable.

Transition Team Responsibilities

The initial meeting should include team building, discussion of responsibilities, discussion of the basic theory (Basic Questions, Five Focus Points for the interim time), and any special agenda developed, organizing, and setting up reporting and meeting dates.

- Meet regularly with the Intentional Interim Pastor, to assess needs, evaluate resources, set goals, determine priorities, and follow through on basic questions, and focus points for a congregation in an interim time.

- Provide advice and guidance to the entire Intentional Interim process.
- Organize to accomplish their tasks, which may include selecting a Chairperson, or Co Chairpersons, setting dates for meetings, and keeping those members who miss meetings informed and up to date.

- Have a representative present at each meeting of major decision-making groups to listen, answer questions, and perhaps report.
- Determine appropriate processes to facilitate congregational reflection regarding present and past happenings (as a means of planning for the future).
- Identify any areas of concern that need to be addressed during the interim time.
- Seek congregational input regarding areas of concern, and potential actions being suggested.
- Insure that any agenda of specific issues to be addressed during the interim time is adopted by the congregation's major decision-making body.
- Identify individuals or groups within the congregation's membership needing additional attention, or carrying a special concern, and the best person or group to help address their needs or concerns.
- Share results of data gathered, and potential agendas developed with key leadership, decision-making groups, committees and congregation as needed.
- Work with appropriate committees and other ministries of the congregation to develop appropriate goals, and strategies (short and longer term) for the congregation's increased health.
- With the Intentional Interim Pastor, and the Judicatory Representative, determine the appropriate time to activate a Pastoral Search committee, and recommend the same to the appropriate decision making group.

Adapting Transition Team to Local Needs or Polity

Any particular polity, denomination or congregation may have unique situations, requirements, or policies and procedures regarding the timing, formation, and purpose of a Transition Team. The guidelines offered above are exactly that - broad guidelines that are meant to guide and inform the application of the Transition Team to the unique characteristics of each particular local situation.

Reflection Questions:

Do these reasons for having a Transition Team make sense to you?

What additional reasons do you think would be needed in order for congregations in your faith tradition to find this process useful?

Can you think of other criteria that should be included for any congregation you know (such as participants from each worship service – if there is more than one)?