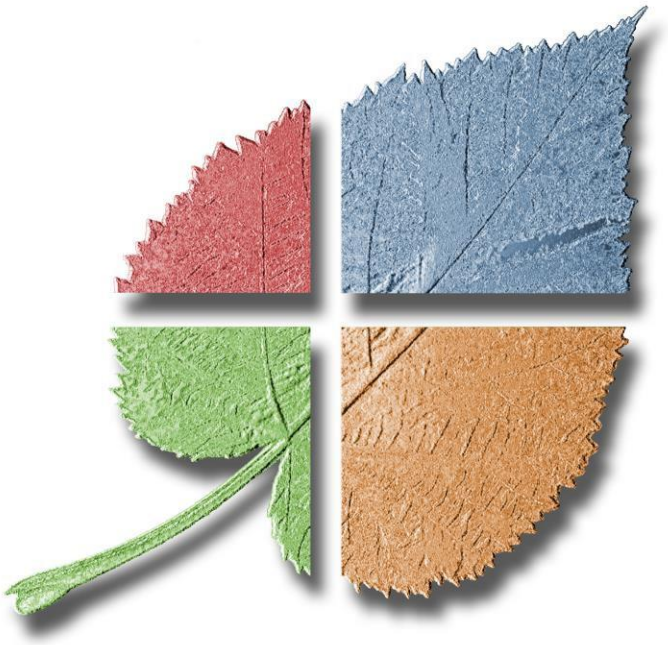
# The In-Between Time:

## Seven Checklists for Congregations In a Season of Transition

*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven....*
*Ecclesiastes 3:1*



## Transition Checklists

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# GREETINGS FROM BISHOP ANN SVENNUNGSEN

Dear Friends in Christ,

If you are reading this letter, it probably means your congregation is entering a time of transition. Though Ecclesiastes is clear there is "a time for every season under heaven," we are not assured every season is easy. You and your congregation are probably feeling many different emotions. I pray you will take time to recognize these feelings – gratitude, grief, wonderment, loss, new energy for the future.

I also pray that this will be a fertile time for your congregation to reflect, learn, and grow. You will invite members to assume new leadership roles on the call committee and other transition work. You will give thanks for this last chapter in your congregation's life and explore together where God is calling you.

This is also a time for deep listening: to God, through scripture and prayer; to one another in your household of faith; and to the people in the community where you're planted.

We recognize that every congregation is a unique community of faith serving a distinct neighborhood. In this time of transition, we pray that you will take the time necessary to look out and study the community you are called to serve, to identify your strengths in ministry, and to examine opportunities to grow.

We pray for bold faithfulness to follow the Spirit's leading as you look to the future in the calling of a new pastor.

I encourage you to use this resource as your guide. It will outline for you the steps most congregations follow in the "in-between time."

We at the synod office commit to walking with you during this time of transition; an Assistant to the Bishop will be your primary contact person. About midway through the process, I come to an all-congregational gathering (it's one of the best things I get to do as Bishop – and I look forward to meeting with you!).

We are also blessed with gifted interim pastors, wisdom from our many experiences accompanying call committees, and access to resources and expertise in the ELCA and beyond.

I am thankful for our partnership in ministry and pray that God will bless and guide you in the days ahead.

In Christ,

Bishop Ann M. Svennungsen
Minneapolis Area Synod

# Seven checklists for your congregation's time of transition

## Checklist 1 – Your pastor informs leadership of their leave-taking

___pastor and congregation president contact and meet with synod staff

___pastor presents letter of resignation to church council

___pastor negotiates four dates with leadership: farewell party, last worship, last day in the office, last day of pay (e.g. vacation days) and informs synod staff

___synod staff leads an orientation and timeline for transition

___with executive leadership of congregation AND/OR_____with the church council

___include synod staff on newsletter and e-news list

___letter of resignation sent to congregation members

___resignation announced at worship

___congregation plans farewell and closure events

___*congregational leadership communicates transition news to congregation*

___exit interview with leadership and synod staff (see Appendix 1A)

___pastor certifies to synod that congregational records are up to date (see Appendix 1B)

___pastor and leadership certify to synod that all financial obligations are fulfilled (both pastor to congregation and congregation to pastor) (see Appendix 1C)

## Checklist 2 – Bringing an interim pastor on board

___congregation leaders meet with synod staff to determine interim needs

___congregation leaders complete Congregation's Ministry Assessment (see Appendix 2A)

___*congregational leadership communicates transition news to congregation*

___synod staff recommends one or two candidates for interim pastor

___a small group of congregational leaders interviews and select interim pastor (see Appendix 2B)

___Interim Letter of Agreement is completed and submitted to synod office (see Appendix 2C)

___a bridge interim may be needed until chosen interim pastor can begin (synod staff will help with this)

___*congregational leadership communicates transition news to congregation*

___interim pastor is installed by congregational leaders (see Appendix 2D)

___interim pastor works with leadership to determine needs, issues to be addressed, and a timeline for this transition time (see Appendix 2E)

## Checklist 3 – Engaging in mission during this in-between time

___the church council appoints a Transition Team (with at least one church council member appointed). Check your constitution for this process. Some congregations have the Call Committee do the work of the Transition Team.

___*This is the time to set up a webpage, corner of the bulletin, and/or newsletter/e-news report for transition updates.*

___interim pastor and Transition Team meets (for the complete "to-do list" see Appendix 3A)

___the main task of the Transition Team is to complete the ELCA's data base tool: the Ministry Site Profile (MSP), (see Appendix 3B)

___interim pastor provides monthly updates, via newsletter or email, about transition process/progress and the "state of the congregation" (see Appendix 3C for questions to be addressed by the interim pastor during the beginning, middle, and end of transition)

___especially during this transition, the entire congregation is encouraged to listen carefully and intentionally to 1) each other, 2) the surrounding community, and 3) to God. (See Appendix 3D for the Three Great Listenings)

___the church council and interim pastor lead the congregation through a discernment process for mission and ministry.

___check with synod office about the demographic tool: MissionInSite (see Appendix 3F)

___MissionInSite and other survey tools will help your congregation with the Three Great Listenings.

___the church council begins the work of putting your Call Committee in place. Check your constitution

___the church council leadership determines, from their annual budget, the "cost of a pastor" and informs the synod staff. This helps the synod staff in their "Talent Scout for Jesus" work. (see Checklist 5)

## Checklist 4 – Completing your Ministry Site Profile (MSP)

___using the Three Great Listenings, and with the interim pastor's guidance, the Transition Team works to complete the Ministry Site Profile (MSP)

___Take time as a Call Committee for honest and significant discussion about the diversity of candidates you will meet and interview. How would your congregation welcome the gifts of a potential leader who identifies as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or queer? Additional resources are available here: https://www.elm.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Enrich-and-Transform.pdf

___when the MSP is about a month out from being completed, the Transition Team informs the Congregation President to contact the synod office to arrange a visit by the bishop for a Congregational Conversation with the Bishop. (see Appendix 4A)

___the Transition Team sends the first draft of the MSP to the ELCA Community Site (see Appendix 4B)

___*congregational leadership communicates transition news to congregation*

___the Bishop holds a Congregational Conversation with the worshipping community. The Transition Team listens carefully to see if the MSP needs edits, changes, or additions

___after the Congregational Conversation with the Bishop, the Transition Team makes final revisions to the MSP

___the MSP is submitted to the ELCA Community Site (see Appendix 4B)

___the Transition Team celebrates a job well done!

## Checklist 5 – The call process

___the church council appoints your Call Committee (Check your constitution for this process). Usually two members of the Transition Team are appointed to the Call Committee (see Appendix 5A for job description and tasks of Call Committee)

___synod staff meets with Call Committee at their very first meeting for orientation to each other and to the call process. The interim pastor may attend this first meeting.

___at the first meeting, the synod staff helps the call committee choose 1) a chairperson, 2) a communicator, 3) a chaplain to delegate/lead devotions—Christ-centered time (see Appendix 5B)

___the synod staff will explain their "Talent Scout for Jesus" work. We gather names from three sources: 1) congregational nominations, 2) pastors who are interested in this call are to contact the synod office (not the call committee), 3) your synod staff does their "talent scouting" work to come up with possible candidates

___your church leadership installs the Call Committee at worship (see Appendix 5C)

___*congregational leadership communicates transition news to congregation*

___the Call Committee invites/solicits pastor candidate nominations from the congregation (see Appendix 5D) and sends the names to synod staff

___ the Call Committee reviews the MSP and prepares to interview and host candidates (see Appendix 5E)

___one month after the Congregational Conversation with the Bishop, synod staff brings names of candidates and their paperwork: the Rostered Minister Profile

___because your synod staff brings only the names of candidates they imagine will flourish leading your congregation, the expectation is that you will choose to interview all the candidates

____Follow up with each candidate you decide not to move forward with; keep in touch with those you are still considering (see Appendix 5F)

____once you've narrowed your list of candidates, make arrangements to hear them preach. (see Appendix 5G)

___ after initial interviews and second interviews**,** Call Committee reaches consensus!

## Checklist 6 – Recommending a final candidate

___ the Call Committee recommends final candidate to Congregation Council (see Appendix 6A)

___at a regularly scheduled or specially called Congregational Council meeting, the Call Committee introduces the candidate (in person or by live video) to the Council

___this "meet and greet" with the candidate is not an interview (the Call Committee did the interviewing!)

___the candidate is excused, and the Call Committee explains why they recommend the candidate

___if the candidate is approved, the Congregational Council:

1) sets the date for a Congregational Vote (see your constitution)
2) arranges a time with the candidate to reach a "handshake" agreement on compensation (see Appendix 6B)
3) informs the synod staff of the recommended candidate so the synod staff can begin the background check as required by the State of Minnesota (see Appendix 6C)
4) conducts a criminal background check on the candidate
5) please note, the pastor's name is held in confidence until the day of the vote

___the synod's background check needs to clear before the congregational vote

___the synod's background check is NOT the same as a full criminal background check

___*congregational leadership communicates transition news to congregation*

## Checklist 7 – The last things

___a special Congregation meeting is held to vote for the candidate. Only congregational members vote. Proxy votes are not allowed. Written ballots are used. No other congregational business is to be conducted at the meeting. See your constitution.

___at the meeting, the Call Committee shares with the congregation the process, and most importantly, their excitement in recommending this candidate to be your next pastor

___if vote is 2/3rds or greater, the official letter of call goes out to the synod for the Bishop's signature (Appendix 7A)

___the council president contacts the pastor with the good news

___the council president contacts the synod staff member with the good news

___the new pastor accepts the call (although the pastor has 30 days to accept the call, usually the pastor verbally accepts the call when hearing the news from the council president)

___the new pastor informs their bishop, and resigns from their current call

___after the pastor accepts the new call to your congregation, a start date is set by the pastor and council leadership (first day in the office, first Sunday, and moving details)

___interim pastor's departure date is determined (sometimes a bridge interim is needed until the new pastor's arrival)

___*congregational leadership communicates transition news to congregation*

___evaluations of the interim period are completed (see Appendix 7B)

___farewell event for interim pastor (see Appendix 7C)

___invite your new pastor to write a letter of introduction to the congregation

___Welcome the new pastor at worship!

___other welcome and get-to-know-you events for the new pastor

___the Congregational Council forms a Mutual Ministry Team with the new pastor (see Appendix 7D)

___contact the synod staff to set a date for the new pastor's installation (see Appendix 7E)

___Congratulations and God's blessings on a new chapter in the life of your congregation!