

What is Intentional Transition Ministry?

You may have heard of an *Interim Moderator*. That’s the person appointed by the presbytery when a church doesn’t have a minister of its own. The interim moderator’s job is to lead the church through the process of calling a new minister.

Sometimes, in a vacancy, a church might also engage an *Interim Minister* (sometimes called a “supply minister”). His job is to perform the functions of a regular minister during his appointment.

An *Intentional Transition Minister* fulfils both of these functions and more. He is an interim minister appointed not just to “hold the fort” but with a specific intention to transition the church to a new future. In an intentional transition ministry (ITM) the appointee deliberately and carefully leads the church through a process developed to (i) draw people together; (ii) help them establish a vision for the future that is appropriate to their contemporary situation and (iii) see them determine new ministry directions.

During the process the congregation’s leaders will study the strengths and weaknesses of the congregation and deal, in particular, with the following matters:

* structures and traditions that are hindering the growth of the church
* look at who they are, where they are and where they are going
* relational issues with in the congregation
* needed leadership changes
* establishing the identity of the congregation and its relationship with the community
* choosing, and developing commitment to, new ministry leadership
* prayerfully developing a clearly defined vision of God’s will for the congregation, its ministry, and its direction into the future.

ITM work is a specialised form of ministry which requires particular competencies and training. Together with the competencies required of all ministers, intentional transition ministers must be able to enter and leave churches without stress and grief as the ITM will only continue for 18 months to two years. As for the training that’s required, the Presbyterian Church in NSW relies on the *‘Transitional Ministries Association’* to prepare ministers to serve the Presbyterian Church in this way. In spite of this special training, intentional transition ministers are not miracle-workers. Experience shows that the success of intentional transition ministry depends almost entirely on the members of the church and their willingness to respond positively to the challenges before them.

Intentional Transition Ministers are appointed by the Ministry and Mission Committee, at the invitation of the congregation and the Presbytery for a set time to *intentionally* work through issues within the church and thus give the greatest possible hope for a fruitful ministry to be established once the ITM has concluded.

Intentional transition ministers normally serve on a full-time basis and receive the same remuneration package as full-time inducted minister.

An ITM can be effective in a church that has experienced problems in its immediate past and needs to have those issues dealt with so that people work together and are excited about future ministry. An ITM can be just as effective in a church that has had a long and happy ministry. In those situations the church leaders do well to look afresh at the future direction of ministry and thus ensure that it is relevant to where God may wish to use his church in the future.

Before an intentional transition minister takes up an appointment, the Ministry and Mission Committee will explain what can be expected of the church through conversation with the Session and Interim Moderator – and what will be expected of the appointee. It will then issue a contract to be signed by the appointee. A Support Person will then be appointed by the presbytery, to meet with the appointee regularly for prayer, encouragement and support of the ITM work.

The interim transitional minister will set up a Care Team for his support. The Care Team will include the support person from Presbytery, a member of the Ministry and Mission staff and, if possible, a person who has been an interim transitional minister in the past. The Care Team will meet early in the appointment to set the purpose of the team, to decide together how regularly they will meet and if that is in person or via video call.

The intentional transition minister will set up a Transition Team made up of diverse people representing all parts of the congregation, to undergo self-study and to plan for future ministry. This Transition Team is guided by the intentional transition minister but the Team must do its own work if it is to have a positive, lasting impact.

The Transition Team looks at the history of the church to clarify both the identity of the church and the nature of the local community and to determine what needs to be done, what can be done, and how a new future may be achieved. The Transition Team then draws up a commitment to new ministry and prepares the church to call a new minister who is appropriate to the church’s needs. The Transition Team engages with the Session and also with the entire congregation so that the whole church becomes enthusiastic to know and follow God’s plan for the church’s future. The Transition Team must report regularly to the congregation about its work.

When invited to appoint an intentional transition minister, the Ministry and Mission Committee will assess the degree to which the congregation appears willing to re-examine and adapt its vision for the future and to make the changes necessary to work with its new minister successfully.

As the intentional transition ministry reaches its conclusion, the Ministry and Mission Committee and the congregation will assess the congregation’s progress and the presbytery will facilitate the next steps in the congregation seeking to call a settled minister. (The intentional transition minister is disqualified from being considered for a call for at least two years after the conclusion of the ITM.)

**Flow Chart of the Process:**

1. Discussions between M&M and the Interim Moderator regarding the possibility of an ITM
2. M&M discussions with session/COM (or diaconate)/congregation via Interim Moderator. (M&M can have direct conversations with Session/ COM (diaconate)/Congregation if needed)
3. Search for an appropriate Interim Transition Minister. (This may have already been happening)
4. Session calls congregational meeting to discuss ITM and to seek the congregations approval to seek an ITM or propose a specific ITM, rather than call a minister for the duration of the contract and to approve the remuneration package.
5. Session requests M&M to appoint an ITM to their congregation
6. Presbytery approval
7. M&M appoint ITM for 12months – 2years and contract issued from M&M to ITM