

The Art of Transitional and Interim Ministry II
Monday, October 17, 2016, 8:45 AM – Friday, October 21, 12:00 p.m.
Continuing Education, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

Dear Week II Participant,

Welcome to the Art of Transitional and Interim Ministry, a program of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and the Transitional Ministry Education Consortium. We are delighted that you will be joining us for a time of learning, sharing, challenge, and exploration about ministry in times of transition and we look forward to meeting and getting to know you.

We will be your faculty for the whole week. Helen Blier, the Director of Continuing Education, and members of the Pittsburgh Seminary faculty will be joining us for presentations and conversations. We look forward to being with you through this week of shared learning.

As you may remember from Week I, this week is planned as education for the practice of interim and transitional ministry. Like Week I, ***it is a very full week***. For those of you who are PCUSA ministers, denominational standards for interim ministry education require 30 program hours. We encourage all participants to ***clear your schedules of all other commitments. It is essential to the learning process for you and other members of the group that you be present at every class session. Failure to be present the entire time will limit the learning experience significantly—both for yourself and for our group process, and very likely will result in your not receiving credit for completion of the week.*** We suggest that you arrange for someone else to cover emergencies in your congregation during this time. You will receive a tentative schedule for the week in the near future.

The assigned reading for Week II includes:

Wonder (including “Julian” chapter), R. J. Palacio (Knopf Books for Young Readers, 2012)
A Door Set Open: Grounding Change in Mission and Hope, Peter Steinke (Alban, 2010)
The Acts of the Apostles

This reading will provide the basis of much of our Week II discussion of the Pastor as leader in transitional ministry.

The Pittsburgh site has required the following readings for Week I participants this past year:

Transitional Ministry Today: Successful Strategies for Churches and Pastors, edited by Norman B. Bendroth. Rowan & Littlefield;

Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership, and Congregational Life, by Ronald W. Richardson, Fortress Press;

Christianity After Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening, Diana Butler Bass, Harper One

If you have not previously read these, we encourage you to do so as they are the background for our work together. All books listed above and below are available online. We encourage you to patronize your local bookstore or www.heartsandmindsbooks.com, an independent theological bookstore.

We also ask that you view the Pixar/Disney movie **Zootopia**, with an eye to how it plays with our understandings of systems and the process tasks of the transitional/interim leader.

In addition to the above reading and viewing, please prepare the following four (4) assignments:

- I. Write a paper (no more than 2 pages, single-spaced, 11 pt. Arial Font) assessing your interim/transitional ministry setting from the perspective of systems theory. Include at least three major concepts (triangles, homeostasis, chronic anxiety, acute anxiety, etc.) of systems theory in your reflection. **Please send your Systems Paper to Jan Nolting Carter at revjncarter@verizon.net by Monday, September 19th.** Your paper will be reviewed and possibly returned to you for editing. Bring your paper with you and be prepared to verbally share it with Week II participants.
- II. Prepare one Leadership Learning Conversation (LLC) utilizing the attached format. You will find it **very helpful** to write this **after** you complete the Systems Paper, assignment #1. **Please send your LLC Report to Paul Rhebergen at plrheberg@verizon.net, by Monday, September 26th, 2016.** Your LLC will be reviewed, and possibly returned to you for editing. Please bring 8 copies of your edited LLC Report with you to Week II.
- III. Read and write a one page *reflection* (**this is NOT a book report!**) on one of the books listed below. Your reflection should give clear indication of how insights from this reading have or will impact your leadership style in your interim/transitional setting. Bring 16 copies of your reflection to share with the Week II group.
 - a. ***Holy Conversations*** by Gil Rendle and Alice Mann (Alban, 2003)
 - b. ***Strategic Leadership for Change*** by Kenneth J. McFayden (Alban, 2009)
 - c. ***Healthy Congregations*** by Peter Steinke (Alban, 1996)
 - d. ***Leadership on the Line***, by Ronald Heifetz and Martin Linsky (Harvard Business Review Press, 2002)
 - e. ***Memories, Hopes, and Conversations***, Mark Lau Branson (Alban, 2004)
 - f. ***A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix***, Edwin H. Friedman (Seabury Books, 1999, 2007)
 - g. ***The Way of Conflict: Elemental Wisdom for Resolving Disputes and Transcending Difference***, Deidre Combs (New World Library, 2004)
 - h. ***Sailboat Church: Helping Your Church Think Its Mission and Practice***, Joan Gray, Westminster John Knox Press, 2014)
 - i. ***Walk Out, Walk On***, Margaret Wheatley and Deborah Frieze (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2012)
 - j. ***Changing the Conversation: A Third Way for Congregations Transforming Congregational Culture***, Anthony Robinson, (Eerdmans, 2008)
 - k. ***There's a Woman in the Pulpit: Christian Clergywomen Share Their Hard Days, Holy Moments and the Healing Power of Humor***, by Rev. Martha Spong and Rev. Carol Howard Merritt (SkyLight Paths Publishing, 2015)
 - l. ***A Field Guide for the Missional Congregation: Embarking on a Journey of Transformation***, Rick Rouse, and Craig Van Gelder (Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2008)

- m. **God's Big Table: Nurturing Children in a Diverse World**, Elizabeth Caldwell (Pilgrim Press, 2011)
- n. **Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory**, Todd Bolinger (IVP, 2015)
- o. **Real Good Church: How Our Church Came Back from the Dead and Yours Can Too**, Molly Phinney Baskette (Pilgrim Press, 2014)
- p. **Facing Decline, Finding Hope: New Possibilities for Faithful Churches**, Jeffrey D. Jones (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2015)

IV. Read the article (below) by Dr. David Sawyer entitled. *The Process Tasks of the Interim Leader*.

You will be receiving an invitation to DatAnywhere by mid-September. The faculty will place important documents in that file for you to read before you arrive, and will use it to provide presentation files.

In summary, you will have a total of six (6) assignments:

1. Read: **Wonder, A Door Set Open**, and **The Acts of the Apostles**.
2. View **Zootopia**.
3. A Paper assessing your transitional-interim ministry setting using Systems Theory.
4. A Leadership Learning Conversation, bringing 8 copies.
5. A Reflection paper on one of the books listed above, bringing 16 copies.
6. Read *The Process Tasks of the Interim Leader*.

Registration will be held at Long Hall, Knox Room, beginning at 8:45am. Long Hall is a part of the seminary campus; meals are served in the cafeteria in the bottom level of McNaugher Hall. Snacks will be provided during the day, but all meals are available for purchase. You will have Tuesday and Wednesday evenings free. If you have any questions concerning lodging, food or registration, please direct them to Lori Arnold at the Continuing Education Office by e-mail at larnold@pts.edu or by telephone at 412.924.1345.

If you have any questions about the assignments, or the class, you can e-mail Paul at plrheberg@verizon.net.

We are looking forward to seeing you on Monday, October 17 at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

Blessings,

Paul

Paul Rhebergen

Jan

Jan Nolting Carter

Leadership Learning Conversation

Presenters' Preparation Instructions

The Leadership Learning Conversation is designed to help each Week 2 participant focus on their own leadership through a group conversation about a concrete experience in their ministry. Using a variety of perspectives, views and lenses, you and your colleagues in Week 2 will explore potential learning and insights to help you form an accountable action plan as you move forward as a leader in the named situation/issue. Reflection on a situation or issue that is still open and where you as a leader would like to learn additional possible responses will have the potential to make the group interaction a stronger learning opportunity for all.

The following outline is intended to help in your reflection process and to help your conversation group in Week 2 to process possible leadership actions with you. Careful and honest preparation of your presentation of an issue helps prevent incoherent or incomplete explanations of the problem. Additionally, your conversation partners will appreciate good use of their time. At the top of the appreciation list is the accurate identification of the problem. **Limit your total response to one typed page, single spaced, using an 11 pt. Arial font; please begin each section with the number and bold capital lettered words below (i.e. "1. THE ISSUE IS:"). Bring 8 copies of your issue presentation with you to be turned in when you arrive on October 17.**

1. THE ISSUE IS:

Be concise. In one or two sentences, get to the heart of the problem. Is it a concern, challenge, opportunity, or recurring problem that is becoming more troublesome?

2. IT IS SIGNIFICANT BECAUSE:

What's at stake? How does this affect ministry, mission, dollars, income, people, program, services, congregants, community, family, timing, the future, or other relevant factors? What is the future impact if the issue is not resolved?

3. MY IDEAL OUTCOME IS:

What specific results do I want?

4. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Summarize with bulleted points; How, when, why, and where did the issue start? Who are the key players? Which forces are at work? What is the issues current status?

5. WHAT I HAVE DONE UP TO THIS POINT:

What have I done so far? What is my contribution to the issue/problem? What options am I considering?

6. THE HELP I WANT FROM THE GROUP IS:

What result do I want from the group? For example, alternative solutions, confidence regarding the right decision, identification of consequences, where to find more information, critique of the current plan, areas for further exploration.

Adapted from Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success at Work & in Life, One Conversation at a Time, by Susan Scott, Berkley, for use at MALT Transitional Ministry Education.

Leadership Learning Conversation Conversation Process

The Leadership Learning Conversation is a significant part of the Week 2 educational experience. This is designed to help the participants reflect on an issue in such a way that the maximum learning can happen in a collegial environment. The focus is on what is learned, areas for further learning, and a commitment to integrate the learning in an accountable way.

Each participant will be part of a one hour conversation where you and a small group will share your issue and learning. The following framework will help guide the conversation

1. The Conversation Partner presenting an issue will read aloud their presentation preparation report. **(5 minutes)**
2. Once the conversation partner with the issue has presented it to the conversation group, other conversation partners may ask clarifying questions. These are clarifying questions, not analysis questions, or solution suggestions. **(5 minutes)**
3. Once the conversation partners are satisfied that the real issue has been identified and they have all of the relevant information, move to ideas for solutions. This may include discussion of other information to be explored, i.e., theological, systemic, cultural, leadership practices, etc. This is not a time to make conclusions or seek consensus, but to brainstorm possibilities. The presenter's role at this time is to take notes and listen. **(20 minutes)**
4. After the brainstorming discussion each conversation partner will be asked to formulate a one-sentence recommendation. After one minute or so for each to write down on the back of the presenter's LLC paper their recommendation, go around the table and have each conversation partner give his or her recommendation. The person with the issue may not respond, only listen. **(10 minutes)**
5. The conversation partner with the issue will be asked, "What did *you* hear?" with regards to the discussion and the recommendations. **(5 minutes)**
6. The conversation partner with the issue will then be asked "What actions are you committed to taking and when will you take them?" They will then commit to an accountable action. It is ok to respond, "I need time to digest these ideas. I will let you know what action I'll take by Thursday evening." It is important that a commitment is made before leaving this educational event. **(10 minutes)**
7. Follow up! When a group has worked hard to help a peer, it deserves to know what happened next. The conversation partner with the issue will be asked to commit to letting the other conversation partners and faculty know what has been done so far, the results, and the intended next steps. This can be done by e-mail at an appointed time in the near future. The issue presenter should let the group know when they will hear and one person should be appointed to follow up with a reminder if the group has not heard by the target date.
(5 minutes)

Adapted from Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success at Work & in Life, One Conversation at a Time, by Susan Scott, Berkley, for use at MALT Transitional Ministry Education.

The Process Tasks of the Interim Leader

by Dr. David R. Sawyer

The developmental tasks of a church or religious organization in transition have been well documented in *Critical Moments of Ministry* by Loren Mead (Alban Institute, Bethesda MD, 1986). Even though these concepts have not been validated empirically, church leaders, from church board members to regional staffers, have heard over the past decade about:

- **Coming to terms with history**
- **Discovering a new identity**
- **Managing shifts of new leadership**
- **Rethinking denominational linkages**
- **Commitment to new leadership and a new future.**

The tasks have been arranged as the centerpiece of programs designed to prepare women and men for the challenge of service as interim leaders, interim executives and interim consultants to churches and church organizations which are between leaders.

The term "developmental" was chosen as a metaphor for a church organization as a whole, as an individual personality, passing through stages of growth in a journey toward maturity. Echoes of developmental psychology were meant to resound in the readers' ears. Each task was a response of the faith community to a transitional crisis in its life. Failure to resolve a task would result in a deficiency in the corporate life of the church. The developmental tasks belonged to the particular church or agency to resolve.

Occasionally these descriptions of evolving organizational personality have been mistaken as the tablet of law for the interim leader. Over-zealous or misguided temporary leaders might take the five tasks as their personal objectives, to "work through the developmental tasks."

In reality, the church organization will work through these tasks or not, and the best an interim leader or interim consultant can do is to coach, guide, or encourage the resolution as they emerge. Any expectation that the interim leader achieves these tasks sounds suspiciously-similar to pushing a rope.

Unique and significant tasks remain for the interim leader, nevertheless. They are not the content of interim leadership, however, such as preaching, teaching, pastoral care, and leadership development in a particular congregation. Such content tasks are not much different for an interim pastor than for other pastors. The focus is rather on processes of a human system, such as patterns of organization and behavior, relationships, communication and decision making.

I have identified five process tasks which parallel the developmental tasks of the organization:

- **Joining the system**
- **Analyzing the organization as a system**
- **Connecting with the denomination or larger church**
- **Focusing and assuming responsibility**
- **Exiting and evaluating**

The term "system" is used here as a reminder that a church organization is like a human system which behaves as though it were a person or organism with a life of its own, with its own internal inter-connectedness, multiple contexts, structures and stories.

Joining the System

The metaphor for this task is borrowed from the work of systemic consultants to both organizations and families, in whose discipline connecting with the client system is the first and sine qua non task. Effective interim leaders find ways to make quick and significant connections with members of the organization. The manner of making contact creates an emotional fulcrum point at which the pastor's leadership and service have an impact.

Emotional connections may be formed by adopting a few significant customs. For example, if members refer to each other by first names or by formal titles, Mr., Mrs., Ms., or brother or sister, the interim could follow suit. If pastors are customarily present for the prayer breakfasts or quilting circles, find ways and times to attend early in one's ministry in those places. Local phrases and regional festivals are other ways to blend into the system. These accompany relational practices such as learning names, discovering family relationships, easing into roles of humor or trivial pursuits with members and particularly with leaders. One family therapist, Carl Whitaker, calls this task "soaking in."

The interim leader does not hide his or her own uniqueness or preferences in these matters, but finds a way to be included in the togetherness bonds of the organization.

At the same time the interim leader attaches to the system emotionally, the interim is also maintaining a detachment. The interim always remembers that she or he is only temporary, and is present to intentionally fill a very specific role with that organization. A sense that the interim is simultaneously an insider and an outsider increases the power of the interim to be of service to the organization.

Without a point of emotional contact, a relationship cannot grow, and no leverage can be applied within the system. That is the reason this process task comes first on the list and first in priority for the interim.

Analyzing the System

After interim leaders have begun to join the system, they commence a more systematic reflection on the nature of the system. Some issues will be obvious, such as the degree of anxiety among the members, the level of dependence or independence in relationship with the former pastor, and with the interim leader, and the strengths or weaknesses of the lay leadership. The interim also becomes aware of existence of conflict or its absence.

However, a systemic analysis accepts the obvious, surface patterns of the organization as a first layer of reality, under which lie further factors which define and govern the relationships of the church. This is analogous to pastoral counseling in which the "presenting problem" usually leads to more hidden and sometimes more difficult issues in the person's life.

Examples of the deeper levels of organizational reality might include:

- unresolved relationship issues with the most recent pastor;
- repeating patterns of relating with leaders over several generations of leadership;
- the extent to which the informal lines of authority, boundaries and rules are in line with the formal constitutional patterns;
- the existence of secrets and the relative emotional power of the secrets;
- healthy or unhealthy relationship triangles.

Analysis begins early in one's ministry in a particular church, but it actually never stops. The results of the early analysis become a hypothesis, an experimental hunch about what is going on in the system. As the months pass, the interim leader will learn more information which will confirm or disconfirm the hypothesis, after which the hunches shift and grow into a stronger sense of the reality of the organization.

Connecting with the Denomination

Just as the congregation or other church unit faces a crisis in transition that needs a rethinking of the linkages with the larger church, so the interim leader serving in a connected denominational setting needs to make strong connections with the denominational structures and the staff and committees of the regional and national offices. Thinking systematically, the denomination is part of the context, (or a super-system) for the particular church or judicatory. The denominational offices are often able to provide information regarding history and patterns of the church organization which are helpful in analysis. Furthermore, the committees or staff of the denominational bodies frequently hold expectations or goals for a particular unit. In many denominations, the interim is appointed or recommended by the denominational officers and serves as a representative of the judicatory.

Connecting with the denomination includes early and regular contact with the head of the next higher judicatory (executive, bishop, president) as well as progress reports to the appropriate board or committee at agreed upon intervals in the interim time. As difficulties arise, consultation with the judicatory's structure and personnel can also be helpful to maintain the detachment required for professional functioning.

Finally, connecting with the denomination is necessary to clarify the judicatory's expectation regarding the interim leader's relationship with the search process for new leadership.

Focusing and Assuming Responsibility

As assessment of the strengths and needs of the organizational system, including gathering information from the denominational connections, usually provides several avenues of needs and concerns which the interim leader can appropriately address. The task of that leader is to select the issues or activities which could be the emphasis of work during the interim time.

The selection of an emphasis is based on several factors:

- The leader's understanding of role and responsibility;
- The particular skills and experiences of the leader;
- The indications of relative openness in the system to one or more of the issues identified, including the agreement from other responsible leaders in the organization;
- The leader's understanding of God's call to her or him in this particular situation.

Edwin Friedman, author of *Generation to Generation* (Guilford Press, New York, 1985), has introduced systems thinking to many in the past few years. He has been heard to tell interim pastors that they should "Join the system, and then do what is fun." That suggests that interim leaders have an opportunity to define their own goals and values and assume responsibility for leadership roles in the system. Within that responsibility, leaders need to follow their own hearts and focus on work that suits their unique personalities and experiences - that's "fun".

In some settings the focus might be on healing from grief or reconciliation following conflict. In another situation, the need for clarifying roles and structures might cry out for leadership. A church organization might need a strong charismatic leading or it might need to have the leadership reins turned back over to the members of the system themselves in empowerment. Alternatively, an interim may feel called to encourage either spiritual renewal or administrative effectiveness based on an assessment of strengths and needs.

In every situation, the focus of the interim leader needs to include self-care and acceptance of limitations or responsibility. The spiritual growth, physical well-being and emotional health of the interim leader, have a high priority in this task of focus and responsibility. Without them, the interim leader loses the necessary detachment and the essential energy required for a focused leader.

Exiting and Evaluating

Frequently the best gift to a church organization for the interim period is an experience of a healthy farewell. Such an exit would include appropriate mutual expressions of joy and sadness, intentional person-to-person contacts with members who have had significant relationships with the interim leader, and a well-planned farewell ritual in the context of worship or membership assembly. Negotiations regarding contract termination are also important to be completed positively and with integrity.

Assisting the system to learn from the interim time is included in this task. Such learning is also mutual, with the exiting leader gleaning as much constructive information about her or his effectiveness as possible, and at the same time provide the church organization with an opportunity to reflect on its life and ministry.

Interim leaders do well to remember that the existing process includes the clean break in relationships after the relationship has ended. While denominational ethics vary on this subject, ordinarily the interim is advised to end all pastoral and social relationships with members of the church organization, in order to allow the emotional space for the new leader to join the system effectively.

Conclusion

Since interim leader training has been strong on process, and since an emphasis on process aids any leader to keep a more distant perspective on the organization by looking at deeper layers of experience and meaning, the five process tasks offer an agenda for an organization in transition. However these tasks are uniquely those of the interim leader. To differentiate the leader's tasks from those which belong to the organization, these five focus on the work of effective leadership and constructive ministry. They are better suited to personal prayer and journaling, or to discussion with the leader's supporters beyond the church organization, than they are to conversation with the members of the system in transition.

On the other hand, they correspond to the developmental tasks in timing and sequence. Interim leaders have discovered that they begin leaving from the first day of entering an assignment. Focus itself has its moment of clarity and moments of confusion, and at each examination of focus and responsibility, the analysis of the system needs to be re-examined, and the hypotheses updated or radically changed. Of course the task in the middle of the list also belongs at the beginning and the ending since an interim leader enters and exits a situation with the help of the denominational connections.

Such circularity serves as a reminder that process in human systems is also circular. Three elements interact: The work of the interim leader, the unfolding of the life of the church organization, and the loving providence of God. With that belief the interim leader can confidently join a system and assess it, assume a limited area of focus, and prepare to leave, confident that no wood work is lost in the realm of God.

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