

NARRATIVE OVERVIEW OF AN INTERIM JOURNEY

This narrative is intended to help you see the logic and a process flow using the Interim Journey events.



The Interim Journey resources help a congregation celebrate its Past, name and claim the challenges and opportunities of the Present, and share hopes and priorities for the Future. Taken together, the 5 Steps support helpful learning and discerning during a transitional time. As a process they can move a congregation forward in a fruitful way during the interim period. They provide a way for the congregation and leadership council to be meaningfully engaged. Together they introduce a time that is renewing and empowering for all, building anticipation for what God is about to do next in your life together.

Use of these resources begins with leaders walking through the steps to get a feel for what will happen and why, how they best fit with their church's life at this time. The coaching you'll receive will help you explore creative timeline options. While the process will look different in each setting, a general sequence is as follows:

The first two steps focus the congregation and leadership's attention on understanding their past and then present ministry context.

1. A **Heritage Celebration** is an event designed to engage the widest possible cross-section of the members of the church. Its purpose is to create a joint picture of the church members' world, values and commitments, and collective past – which impacts upon its present. It helps the church clarify the common ground upon which to make key decisions that build ministry for the future.
2. Building on this powerful experience looking back, the **leadership council** takes the next step to analyze the church's current reality. Through the use of a simple online survey tool they reflect on 10 topic areas key to every thriving congregation's life. A report is generated that becomes the stepping off point for leaders learning from one another. Their discussion is summarized as "key challenges and opportunities facing us." As helpful, key observations and questions are shared with the congregation, inviting dialogue contributing to a shared understanding of current opportunities.

The remaining steps in this process turn the congregation's focus to the future. It is crucial in a time of transition to have conversations that stimulate, share, and capture the essence of how God is calling this church into the future. This is often richly expressed in prayerfully shared congregational hopes. The following three steps introduce valuable practices to support this time of congregational formation and discernment.

3. **Congregation Bible study: A time of formation.** As Christians we are seeking not the vision of one, not even the vision that all church members agree on, but God's vision for the church. The Bible is therefore an important resource, in particular, Jesus' Sermon on the

Mount where in a concentrated way Jesus offers his vision of Christian community. Providing these moments for conversation around Jesus' words gives opportunity to share faith with each other and form our hearts and minds afresh around God's mission for us. This spiritual practice supports imagining together the church in some fresh and creative ways as you seek to follow God's call into the future.

4. **Congregation Vision Event.** All are invited now to share hopes and dreams, "What is God calling us to be and do as we look to the future?" The visioning conversation is designed to enable participants to:

- Participate in a communal discernment process, seeking God with all our heart.
- Learn together through worship, study, reflection, and fellowship, and
- Provide input to the expression of priorities and hopes for the future of your Church.

As the leadership council participates in this event, they listen and learn, and prepare to capture and express the heart of ideas and hopes that have been generated.

5. The **leadership council** has responsibility for pulling together input from all of the conversations that have taken place through the engagement of these four processes. All of these sources provide input to gaining a rich and reliable sense of the real context of this church. A set of key Priorities and hopes are named and shared with the congregation and with candidates for pastoral leadership in your church of the future.

The results of these interim practices prepare the church to discern new pastoral leadership based on a growing sense of God's calling for the church with an understanding of its real contexts. With a new pastor soon on board, the hopes and priorities named become shared agendas to embrace with fresh energy and imagination.