

## Interim Rector's Transition Report

*Transition:* the process or period of changing from one state or condition to another. Synonyms include transformation, evolution, transfiguration, passage, growth, and my personal favorite...mutation. This past year definitely qualifies as a Year of Transition. No aspect of life seems to have escaped changing from one state to another.

No aspect of church, in any faith tradition, has escaped either. And for churches in transition, it's been a double whammy.

Transition, or the Interim period, for any congregation is anxiety-producing in the best of times. It requires a lot of soul-searching, as well as reviewing, evaluating, and restating of heritage, traditions, hopes, mission, and dreams of a parish. It's the Exodus journey and it asks the question of how we are being called to be God's People in this time and for God's purpose. And, like the Exodus journey, there's a lot of "When will this be over?"

While the search process for a congregation is similar to a secular search, it's also vastly different. It's a spiritual process of exploring who we are, who we want to be, what we need to do to be healthier as a community of faith. There is work to be done.

We are not seeking to "search" for an open position, to fill a vacancy, to recruit a job candidate from some "pool" of potential priests. Rather we are "seeking and searching" for the one whom God is calling to be the next Rector, the next Shepherd, the next Joshua who will lead God's people into the Promised Land.

There is a process for doing all this soul searching, one that asks a lot of questions and takes time. It needs to take time. It's not about how fast it gets done, but how successful the search is in calling the right person. It's about patience and seeing the time and work to be done as an investment in the future.

And, during this time of COVID, the entire process for transition has been forced into a new and longer timeline, with new questions about who we are and who we want to be moving forward.

Last year, Bishop Breidenthal and the Diocesan Office for Transition, directed its Intentional Interim priests to prioritize getting our congregations through COVID in the healthiest and most stable position possible. This was based upon a belief that the pandemic would upend the traditional norms and structures of congregations and, for congregations in transition, successfully navigating the challenges of COVID would best position them for a successful search.

While no one anticipated that we'd be experiencing a COVID Transition that lasted for more than a year, the decision to prioritize keeping congregations active, engaged, and as healthy as possible was a prophetic one. Across all faith traditions, clergy seeking new pastorates are prioritizing how a congregation has been addressing the challenges of COVID and how the congregation is poised to rebound. How ready is the congregation to move forward into the Promised Land, or is the congregation still in the March 2020 Land of Pharaoh?

In fact, because of COVID, those Transition processes that everyone wishes to bypass to get to "The Search" have become even more critical. These processes challenge congregations and leaders to reflect sincerely and prayerfully on the opportunities, challenges, vision, mission, recruitment and development of new leadership, systems, revitalization, community engagement, and on effective stewardship and financing for the future. It is a critical requirement that before beginning the actual searching process, the congregation must be able to assure the Diocese that it can financially support the call of a new Rector.

Plus, how can we know who to call if we don't know who we are, where we're going, how we have changed, and how we will need to change.

Everyone hates that word, "change." It's seen as a giving up of something cherished for the unknown. Just as the Israelites faced in the desert. But, change is part of transitioning, transforming to a new reality. That new reality will not look like the church of 1990, or even the church of 2019. We are not alone in this. It's the reality, too, in more than just church life.

We've all gone through transitions in life: from a household of teenagers to one of empty nesters; or from adolescence to adulthood; from one job to another; one house to another. These were stressful, but necessary for growth.

Because, the antonym to “transition” is to “stand still.”

It’s a strange “transition” time even for those of us trained as Intentional Interims, certified transition specialists. We’re trained for transition and moving congregations through change. Now we’ve had to figure out how to do everything we’re supposed to do while every method for doing it all has changed. How do we do the processes and tasks of transition while on Zoom, masked, socially-distanced, and can’t put things up on walls!

We’ve all been moving forward this year, working as we can on the transition process, while trying to respond to the challenges of COVID. It’s not over. We can’t say for sure what the pastoral landscape will look like over the next few months, or even the next year. We just know that it will be different. Things have changed, things are changing, things will change.

We cannot stand still. We must be resilient, faithful, and responsive. So far, Holy Trinity has marched forward and faced a whole bunch of new ways of doing things, doing church, recording church, resurrecting outreach, continuing online daily worship, new communications tools and opportunities, recruiting new leadership, trying to care for each other, exploring new ways of sharing fellowship, and Zooming...a lot of Zooming.

That’s all due to you, and the abundant talents and commitment of this parish.

There is more to do, more to explore, and more to decide.

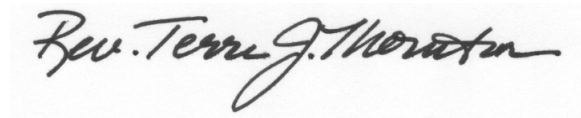
When I started last June, I told the Wardens and Vestry that my priorities were to see to the continuation of worship and liturgy, as well as to encouraging a return to as much of parish life as possible. We have been doing that very well.

This year we will be working on many things, including what a return to in-person worship will look like and how we do that; how to continue the critical work of energizing and revitalizing all areas of church life; addressing how to build a healthy financial situation amid declining membership; seeking and developing members for leadership roles; developing the history and story of the parish as a basis for a new Parish Profile; all critical steps in the Transition Process.

The Nominating Committee has done exemplary work in assessing the leadership talent and skills needed by Vestry to successfully tackle this work, and that is reflected in those nominated for Vestry and Delegate positions. I prayerfully request that you give them your unequivocal support at the Annual Meeting, as well as in the months ahead. We all will need it and be extremely grateful!

I also pledge to spend more time getting to know you all (and not just on Zoom!) and I hope you will take advantage of contacting me to introduce yourself and to learn more about the work of Transition.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rev. Terri J. Thornton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Rev. Terri J. Thornton  
Intentional Interim Rector

## **The Questions Intentional Interims Always Get Asked**

### **What is an Intentional Interim?**

Intentional Interims are certified transition specialists with specific training in leading congregations through the transition period and preparing them for a successful search process. This is called an Intentional Interim Ministry (IIM). Intentional Interims work with a congregation's leadership to ensure that the search process successfully matches a congregation with the one God is calling to be the next settled, installed Rector.

IIM is the best-practice process recognized today for churches proactively addressing the challenges of transition from one pastor to another by "intentionally" managing the transition process. This process aids the church in the best ways of achieving of its God-given potential. This leaves the church poised for growth when the new pastor arrives.

Intentional Interims are not candidates for the position.

### **How is an Intentional Interim different from a Priest-in-Charge or a Supply Priest?**

It can be confusing because in the Episcopal Church, and often in other denominations, there are multiple terms used to describe priests in authority and priests who are leading a congregation without a settled Rector. Depending upon Diocesan practices, these terms can be used interchangeably.

A *Supply Priest* is a priest without a cure available to provide altar, pulpit, and pastoral services on a short-term basis. Sometimes a parish may contract with a priest for specific services over a specified short period of time. A priest may provide long term supply to a parish with the permission of the Bishop.

A *Priest-in-Charge* (PIC) is appointed by a Bishop and is the priest in charge of a congregation that is without a Rector. Sometimes that's because of a Sabbatical or Family leave, or a priest who has been called to an open Rector position until s/he is officially installed by the Bishop. A PIC has all the rights and authority as a Rector under Canon Law.

An *Interim Rector* or Interim Priest-in-Charge is most often appointed by a Bishop for specific interim periods upon the departure of a Rector to ensure continuity of congregational life. Depending upon the needs of the congregation and the situation, the Interim Rector or Interim PIC, may or may not be a certified Intentional Interim. They may have some training in conducting searches.

An *Intentional Interim Rector*, usually just called the Interim Rector, has all the authority of a Rector but is charged with more than the continuity of congregational life. They are to evaluate, coach, encourage, and lead necessary congregational self-study, as well as reflect on and respond to the nature of the pastoral system.

While they are called to maintain the continuity of parish life, Intentional Interims have substantial work to do outside the normal expectations and role of a settled pastor. Therefore, they must prioritize the work of transition over many other typical parochial and pastoral activities.

### **What is the work of the Intentional Interim (II)?**

The essential work of the II is to ensure that the church is successful in the calling of a new Rector and facilitating the relationship that they will begin together. This includes evaluating the primary church areas spiritual life, formation, mission and vision, organization systems and processes, finances and stewardship, engagement with the world outside the church's walls, training and leadership development, and parochial life and health.

Additionally, the II leads the parish through its own self-study and work on the 5 Focus Points, the critical developmental tasks that strengthen its present and future ministry, including:

- *Heritage*- reviewing how the organization has been shaped and formed.
- *Leadership* - reviewing the organization needs and its ways of organizing and developing new and effective leadership.
- *Connections* - discovering all the relationships a community builds outside of itself.
- *Mission* - defining and redefining sense of purpose and direction.
- *Future* - developing congregational/organizational and leadership profiles.

## **What is the usual timeline for the Interim period or the Transition Process?**

In a non-COVID world, the transition time frame can be anywhere from a year to three years. The average is somewhere around 18 months. In the past year, because of the impact of COVID precautions, travel restrictions, and the need to prioritize parish continuity and health over transition work, the time frame seems to be trending longer.

## **When will we begin searching for a new Rector?**

The search process will begin when the Intentional Interim and the Canon for Transition notify the Bishop that the congregation has completed its work on all the processes and focus points and is ready to begin forming a search committee. This ensures that the congregation has clarity and a strategic focus on who they are and the kind of pastor they are seeking.

In the Diocese of Southern Ohio, the search process is overseen by a special search consultant who will work with the Search Committee.