

## Description of the Interim Congregation: The Five Developmental Tasks

Research with many congregations of various kinds has indicated that predictable dynamics happen in churches during times of leadership transition. Five basic areas need addressing.

### 1. Coming to Terms with History

Following a pastor's departure for whatever reason, a congregation usually needs to resolve its feelings: loss, grief, anger, relief, guilt, panic about the future. "Letting go" of that pastor is a critically important task for a congregation as it begins to prepare for a new pastoral leader. In addition, churches sometimes have "old issues" or conflicts which were never fully resolved and which tend to resurface in unsettled times. A congregation needs to be released from any inappropriate or crippling power of the past, in order to be fully ready for a future with a new leader.

### 2. Discovering a New Identity

Often congregations have a strong self-image, positive or negative, which may or may not truthfully reflect present realities. As the search for a new pastor proceeds, it is essential that both the Search Committee (PNC) and the congregation have a clear sense of the church's identity, recognizing both strengths and needs. This task, therefore, calls for a careful self-assessment by a congregation, so that it can envision more clearly what it wishes to become.

### 3. Strengthening Patterns of Lay Leadership

Congregations in an interim time often experience shifts in power or leadership among the laity, depending upon the relationships of individuals to the former pastor. This is also a time for considering whether, as a whole, patterns of lay involvement in the church are healthy or unhealthy, empowering or disempowering for most of the congregation. This task is to see that lay leadership develops in positive and creative ways for the good of the whole church.

#### 4. Strengthening Denominational Ties

During the interim period, congregations find themselves working more closely than usual with the denomination, particularly with Presbytery staff and resources. A primary opportunity exists to reinforce and strengthen a congregation's sense of belonging to the wider church.

#### 5. Preparing for New Leadership

During the search process, two significant tasks are going on simultaneously: the Search Committee (PNC), on behalf of the congregation, is fulfilling the necessary concrete steps in the process of finding a new pastor; and the congregation as a whole needs to be readying itself psychologically and spiritually to enter into partnership with a new leader. This task is to strengthen the church's capacity to be a growing, changing, forward looking body.