

Intentional - Transitional Ministry

By Pastor Alan Utting



'Intentional ministry turns a season of waiting into a season of building.' Anonymous

Intentional Ministry (IM), a form of Transitional Ministry (TM), is both highly rewarding and demanding, and closely linked to change management.

'Intentional ministry' can address conflicts ahead of appointing a permanent leader for a troubled organisation. It also allows time for people to adjust after a long-serving, well-loved leader departs, before welcoming new leadership when the time is right.

During this transition period the IM leader will normally face many challenges both emotionally and physically, possibly including relocation.

I have been actively involved in IM both as an adviser and participant and this article provides a short summary of the topic. There is an ongoing need for people in this role.

Bible Perspective

Change is challenging, exciting or both.

The Pharisees struggled with change, particularly when Jesus Christ, the anticipated but unrecognisable Messiah appeared on the scene.

'So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, 'Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?'

He replied, 'Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written 'These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.'

'You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions' (Mark 7:5-8FF).

'See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you' (Isaiah 42:9).

Observations

1. People within an organisation often feel vulnerable, angry or directionless when an established leader leaves, especially if that person leaves unhappily. It is like a vicarious suffering they pick up from others and find it very difficult to let go of.
2. An Interim Ministry leader primarily cares for a group without making major changes, while an Intentional Ministry leader focuses on managing change and helping to heal those who are struggling.
3. An Intentional Ministry Leader's role normally lasts from one to two years.
4. Intentional Ministry Leaders are often given extra authority from a denomination or a board in an organisation to draw upon when difficult decisions must be made. However, they should always be consultative in their approach to reduce tension and to gain collective wisdom from others.
5. Brain scans have shown that when people hear new information that challenges their existing beliefs, their initial response is emotional rather than intellectual. It often takes time before they can process and accept the new idea rationally. This means it is natural for most people to resist change at first. Therefore, when leading

a group, allow time for adjustment to new suggestions or directions. Help people engage with the process by involving them in decision-making and providing clear, helpful information about the future that they can discuss together in small groups.

6. 'Self-differentiation' encourages leaders to maintain emotional distance during organisational change to avoid losing perspective or burning out. IL ministry should remain objective throughout the change process, though this can be challenging.
7. 'Appreciative Inquiry' is a positive, strengths-based approach to change management that focuses on what works well in an organisation, rather than what is wrong. Instead of starting with problems to fix, it begins by identifying successes, strengths, and best practices, and then builds on those to create a shared vision for the future.

Developed by David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva in the 1980s, Appreciative Inquiry is based on the idea that organisations grow and change in the direction of what they study and talk about. If people focus on problems, they often get more problems; but if they focus on what gives life to their organisation, they are more likely to inspire positive change (See below in Resources).

8. The IM leader is advised to hold monthly meetings with a qualified and experienced supervisor for reflection, professional insight, and to maintain appropriate perspective on challenges. Given the potential for isolation in this role, remote supervision via digital platforms should be utilized if geographical distance from a suitable supervisor presents an obstacle.
9. If an organisation requests an Intentional Ministry leader, then once that ministry is completed it is strongly recommended that the IM leader does not stay long term, as 'power dynamics' are likely to change and cause confusion among the people. Many an Intentional Ministry Leader has destroyed their ministry because they have stayed longer than they should have.
10. Since this is a specialised ministry, the Intentional Ministry leader should complete relevant training before taking on this ministry assignment. Seminars and books are available in Australia, New Zealand and other countries who can assist with preparation.
11. During this time of IL ministry, you may receive gratitude from those you lead but also face difficulties from people who disagree with your actions, a common experience in Intentional Ministry. Very often these difficult people do not see the whole picture as due to confidentiality matters not all information can be shared with them.
12. Throughout this ministry time consider developing a sermon series focused on individuals and groups experiencing periods of transition. Scripture offers numerous examples, such as the narratives found in the book of Nehemiah.
13. During the Intentional Ministry time, main leadership in the church or organisational leadership frequently shifts, allowing new leaders to emerge and strengthening denominational or network connections.

Resources

Leith Anderson, *Dying for change*

John Kotter, *Leading Change*

M D Smith (Editor), *Transitional ministry – a time of opportunity*

https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/appreciative_inquiry *