

TRANSITION TIMES

A QUARTERLY OF THE INTERIM MINISTRY CONFERENCE

interimministrylcms.org
Editor, Anne R. Lee

Volume 4, Issue 2—April, 2020

THE COVID-19 WAY: A REFLECTION ON THE PANDEMIC By Roger Mackie

Based on the Old Testament Reading for the Fourth Sunday in Lent (Series A)

Speaking for the LORD, the prophet Isaiah wrote: he would speak more clearly and lead more directly “I will lead the blind in a way that they do not and visibly. Nevertheless, God’s promise can set aside know...” (Isaiah 42:16 ESV). The uncertainties introduced by the COVID-19 pandemic have started us down a road we have heard about but do not know. We are blind to what will come next globally, nationally, personally. We are blind to the best way to respond to current circumstances. Truth be told, we are usually blind and ignorant about what happens next. We’re just more aware of that truth at this moment.

Speaking directly to this condition, the LORD promises, “I will lead the blind...” Right now many wish

anxiety about tomorrow as we face the current day’s troubles. His promise can give us the freedom to make decisions and act, trusting that what we get wrong and make crooked, our Guide will straighten and make right—in his time—in the manner he knows best. In keeping with his good and gracious will for us in Christ Jesus, he will not forsake us.

Rev. Roger L. Mackie serves as Recording Secretary on the IMC board and is currently serving Hosanna-Tabor Lutheran Church in Redford, MI.

5 QUESTIONS ABOUT WHAT TO KEEP & WHAT TO LET GO By Timm Griffin

During this time of national crisis, with its accompanying restrictions on group activities, congregations involved in the Intentional Interim process are reassessing how best to move forward with IIM tasks. Some congregations are even asking whether it is healthy to keep tethered Intentional Interim Pastors out in the field or if they should let them go home. Asking these questions is healthy during this time of national transition (a “between time”).

Assisting a congregation in exploring five questions is essential if we are to have congregations that become healthy in the process of our interim time, and

then for them to remain healthy following our interim:

1. What is God’s church supposed to be doing?

We are here to live and share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. What this means and how it is done may look different from what we are used to, but it is well described in Scripture, and remains the key to fulfilling the whole purpose of our remaining here after we have been redeemed by our Lord.

2. What is our church doing well?

Identifying the positives in a church is essential to affecting the positive attitudes which are required for a congregation to heal and to grow. Understanding the positives also

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helps us to see the different expressions of God's presence in our midst. Without this perspective, congregations risk giving up too much in reaction during a crisis.

3. What is our church doing poorly, or not at all?

You can't fix what you are not willing to confront. As Intentional Interim Pastors, we lean into conflict and, I would add, into crisis. Answers to this question also help the congregation see those friction points which need to be addressed, redressed, or forgiven in order to move on as a church.

4. What should the top four ministries of our church be?

Uniting a church around those purposes which are identified and owned by the members of the church goes a long way toward creating an atmosphere of positive and healthy functioning. Narrowing the focus to no more than four chief ministries also keeps a church from diversifying itself back into dysfunction by trying to do too much.

5. Whom can the Lord use to best address these four things?

Getting the individual members of the church to include themselves in the answer to this last question undergirds the nature of our church. We are to be a functioning body of Christ where everyone has a part to play in the accomplishments of the whole.

There are creative ways an Intentional Interim Pastor can present these questions to a congregation. The key element remains that they must be addressed in the interim processes, and especially in the current crisis.

Rev. Dr. Timm L. Griffin, IIM Emeritus, served as an IIM practitioner for 7 years in the Nebraska, Minnesota South, Kansas, Northern Illinois and North Wisconsin Districts and as chair of the NALIP Education Committee.



THESE DAYS WE DO NOT NEED HYMN BOOKS
AS ALL OF THE WORDS TO THE SONGS
CAN BE FOUND ON THE INTERNET

CartoonChurch.com

JESUS LOVES BY STAYING AWAY

By Martin Lee

(adapted from "Gospel Handles" by F. Rossow)

Note the contrast between v. 5 and v. 6 in John 11: "Now **Jesus loved** Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." And so, "When he had heard therefore that he [Lazarus] was sick, **He abode two days** still in the same place where He was." Now isn't that something? Jesus loves Martha, Mary, and Lazarus – Lazarus gets sick – so Jesus stays away for two days.

So, Jesus stays away. What a lame and impotent conclusion! Jesus loves Lazarus – Lazarus gets sick – so Jesus stays away. Those two statements do not make any sense. Think of how this would sound if you heard it from anywhere other than the pages of the divinely inspired and inherent Word of God. For instance, Sally is my dear friend and she needs my help, so I delay in giving it.

Maybe you have felt God's love for you feels distant; that Jesus is for some horrible reason not present to relieve you (or someone you love) of fears, suffering, or even death. Or maybe you feel that God is being quite difficult, that He is intentionally withholding what would be for Him an easy fix. Maybe His staying away just confirms to you that God is uncaring or capricious. Maybe the world is tempted to feel that way during this Corona Virus Pandemic.

Jesus knows what He is doing. Obviously to Christians this Gospel story illustrates a divine truth. Jesus knows what He is doing. There's a heap of theology in the simple words "so" or "therefore." You've heard the clichés: "God's ways are not our ways;" "whom the Lord loves He chastens;" "All things work together for good to them that love God." Even though they're clichés, they're true. Put our Gospel handle into the context of these well-known sayings and it looks entirely different. Jesus loves Lazarus – Lazarus gets sick – so Jesus stays away.

His peculiar conduct isn't cold and loveless, not at all. True, Lazarus dies. But look what comes of it. Martha and Mary are strengthened in their faith, many Jews who had seen what Jesus did put their faith in him, and Lazarus himself is given evidence of the resurrection. Incredible!

Rev. Martin Edward Lee has served seven IIM assignments in Michigan, Kansas, and the Eastern and Southeastern Districts. He serves on the IMC board and as a NALIP trainer.

Please see lutma.org and imnedu.org for updated information on continuing and basic education.