**By: Katrina Palan**

In a congregation, interim time is the time between settled or installed pastors.  It is the “in between” time. Once a settled pastor has left the congregation, it begins the interim time. This is a time where congregational members feel unsettled, anxious and worried about the future of the church. A trained interim pastor can help minimize this impact, but it is important for the interim pastor to remember that he/she is deliberately putting themselves into an unstable environment from the first day.

A congregation then moves into what Roger Nicholson, in his book “Temporary Shepherds” calls direction finding.  Nicholson says that the purpose of direction finding is to “reduce anxiety and reassure the congregation that all will be well.”  It is in this time of direction finding that congregations need to take an unhurried look at five different tasks. These tasks are: coming to terms with their history, discovering a new identity for their future, looking at current leadership to see if any changes need to be made, rediscovering relationships with the denomination, and committing to new directions in ministry. It is in doing this hard work of looking at self that the congregation sets itself up for a positive and successful new pastor and ministry with him/her.

A trained interim learns the skills to help a congregation navigate their way through this “in between” time. This training looks at systems theory, conflict management, life cycles of congregations, negotiating contracts, looking at power models, and many more skills. Being an interim is not just the next step after retirement for someone looking to supplement their pension, but a called ministry for those looking to help congregations work through their interim times.