

## ***Pandemic Impact on Searching for a New Position***

As a former Diocesan Transition Minister (DTM) for over a decade, I quickly learned that staying in touch with my former colleagues was key to landing a new position. I have found, however, that things have changed a lot since the pandemic has taken hold of the church, our dioceses, and our churches. Recently, I had an Interim lined up, but then the DTM called to inform me that when the rector, who had announced his/her retirement, realized that COVID meant not being able to say “good-bye” face to face with members, s/he decided to postpone the retirement until they could gather again. As more time passed, and it was evident that COVID wasn’t going away anytime soon, s/he decided to postpone retirement all together, so s/he could shepherd his/her beloved congregation through the pandemic.

When I inquired with the DTM if there were any other upcoming retirements that s/he might need an Interim, s/he informed me, there were, but they all also had decided to stay on “to get their parishes through COVID.” When I started checking in with other DTMs, I heard this story time and time again. And there was another story as well. Many of the dioceses had closed or were closing down their search processes! And those were the DTMs I was able to reach, yet another wrinkle. My, how things had changed in a few short months.

What used to call for an email stating I’d call them in a week to see how I could be of service, accompanied by an updated resume and OTM, now would require a different approach.

I needed to:

- make contact with many more DTMs, and be patient knowing that I may not hear from them at all, even those I knew well
- settle on talking to the receptionist, not the DTM, and asking if s/he could get a message to the DTM, or if I was lucky, get the DTM’s cell phone
- open myself up to offering my transition skills for positions that were not what I had previously imagined

More than anything, my search required patience, persistence, and perseverance. Every time I was met with a “not right now,” I asked if the DTM knew of a colleague somewhere else who was looking for someone. Receptionists became my best friends, my connectors to DTMs who were working from home and did not have the technology to forward phone calls. My biggest stretch was opening myself to using my transition skills beyond what I imagined I would be doing until I retired.

I had heard that the ELCA had a shortage of trained Interims. With a quick phone call to the Church Pension Fund, I learned that the ELCA now pays 18% into our pension fund and we earn a year of credited service, the same as in an Episcopal position. I made contact with the closest ELCA Synod and found that they were in need of trained Interims. Soon the Synod Bishop was on the phone with the bishop I had just served under, and he and his regional minister (DTM) wanted to set up an interview!

I also opened myself up to Priest-in-Charge positions in dioceses that saw the first one or two years like an Interim and the second or third year as a time of discernment to see if the relationship might become permanent. While it took me a bit of imagination to open myself up to the possibility of becoming a rector, I knew that those early years were all about transition work and the Focus Points from our IMN (Interim Ministry Network) training that we use as trained Interims. Discernment would come later and who knows what God may have in mind.

I was delighted to find that things began to open up for me once I began to see possibilities in other ways of offering my gifts and skills. I actually was once again “in demand!” I suspect this is the way of our future as Interims. Patience, Persistence, and Perseverance will be the key to landing each new position. The landscape of transition ministry is in transition itself. Who knows, maybe learning how to search for a position in a new way, is one of the gifts of COVID.

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