

Appendix 2 Making good use of a time of transition

Reaction to change

The movement of a minister brings with it many different reactions and a wide range of emotions. Sometimes symptoms of bereavement will predominate, at other times perhaps the excitement of a possible new beginning. The Interim Moderator will need the gifts necessary to help a pastorate through a period of change.

Supporting

It is not easy in a transition period to support the life of the church. This is particularly true where the leadership expectations of the members have rested almost entirely on the minister. The elders and the entire congregation will need help from the Interim Moderator in encouraging their self-confidence and recognising their gifts. But the life of the church is their responsibility – its worship, pastoral care and outreach – and the Interim Moderator can help them to accept this responsibility, try to guide their thinking and encourage best practice. Positive thinking about the present, together with the constructive view of the past will provide the best foundations for a healthy future.

Reflecting

The transition period is not a time for simply maintaining things as they are. For the health of the church (and in order to be more attractive to an incoming minister) it should be seen as a time of reflection on where the church is and where its future lies. There is time to re-assess resources and discover ones previously unrecognised. The Interim Moderator as an independent observer is well placed to serve as a catalyst to this process. Square pegs and round holes can sometimes be better seen from a distance and lateral solutions to problems suggested. Adequate reflection takes time but is an important prerequisite for the writing of a clear and visionary profile.

Planning

A well-used transition period can be used to plan for the future. The church's participation in God's mission continues and, while there are some things which are better developed with the new minister, it is a mistake to put aside all new ideas, especially those which are likely to raise the spirits of members. The Interim Moderator's experience and objectivity again will help the church to analyse when to do and when to defer. It seems safe to assume that a new minister will look more favourably at a church which is moving forward rather than one which is bogged down in struggles to stay where it is.