

# ***The Interim Period***

***After I go through Macedonia, I will come to you—for I will be going through Macedonia. Perhaps I will stay with you for a while, or even spend the winter, so that you can help me on my journey, wherever I go. For I do not want to see you now and make only a passing visit; I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me. When Timothy comes, see to it that he has nothing to fear while he is with you, for he is carrying on the work of the Lord, just as I am. No one, then, should treat him with contempt. Send him on his way in peace so that he may return to me. I am expecting him along with the brothers. Now about our brother Apollos: I strongly urged him to go to you with the brothers. He was quite unwilling to go now, but he will go when he has the opportunity. Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. Do everything in love. You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the Lord's people. I urge you, brothers and sisters, to submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work and labors at it. I was glad when Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus arrived, because they have supplied what was lacking from you. For they refreshed my spirit and yours also. Such men deserve recognition.***

1 Corinthians 16:5-18

Did you notice from the devotional passage above how much transition happened in the early Church? Not only did they move from their Judaist roots to a new identity of being Christ followers, but their leadership base was continually expanding. From church planter Paul, to the teachers like Apollos and Timothy, to the leaders like Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus, a growing Church required changing leadership.

Transitions are a reality of life. Physically we change. Our families change. Our jobs change. It's not surprising, therefore, that a living organism like the Church will also undergo change. Some congregations face pastoral change on a regular basis; other congregations with longer tenures, experience it less frequently. The period between pastors is usually referred to as *the interim period*. Depending upon the form of church government, this period could last from a few months to a few years.

Most people do not understand the uniqueness and value of this interim period. Some view the approaching months with sadness, and perhaps even pessimism, especially when a beloved pastor moves. But others recognize it for its potential—a time for both pastor and people to assess, to dream of new possibilities and to undertake new directions. Most congregations develop hope and renewed energy for the season of ministry ahead.

A great analogy for the interim period is that of train station and locomotive. There are two basic ways of viewing the scene. Some view the train as parked at the station waiting for the engineer to arrive. According to this perspective, it is not wise to initiate any new programs or ideas until the new leader arrives. The new leader may not approve

or support the direction the church is heading. So while the train is at the station, effort is focused on painting, cleaning, polishing and greasing the train. Momentum declines and, in many cases, ceases.

A second view observes the train heading in the direction of the church's vision. When the new pastor arrives, the train is slowly moving forward and gathering steam. The new leader arrives at the station and begins to run after the caboose. He reaches out, grabs the railing and jumps on board. Gradually the new pastor proceeds to the front of the train.

Rather than the interim period being a *downtime*, view it as a gift from God. It is a unique opportunity to accomplish his purpose for your church. The interim is not best viewed as a *period*, but rather an open space of time. What is written in that space will be determined by whether your leadership chooses to wait at the station or to begin gathering momentum.

*DEAR LORD, as leaders help us not to waste or mark time.*

*Thank you for giving us the gift of this unique period in our Church.*

*We look forward to what you are going to accomplish through us. We take comfort and are glad you are in control of this transition process. Amen!*

**A Final Thought:**

**It is much easier to steer a moving vehicle than a stationary one.**