

Case Studies

The following “Case Studies” represent real churches where I have ministered as an Intentional Interim Pastor. Although the names are obviously fictitious, the situations are very real!

Case Study # 1

A Transitioning Church—Somewhere Fellowship

The Situation

When a fellowship allows one item (e.g. worship style, financial policies, regulation manuals) to dominate the agenda, they have clearly gotten away from what really matters. This is what was getting in the way of Somewhere Fellowship. During the interim period after a long-term ministry, “worship wars” had erupted over music style, decibel levels, and numerous related items.

It became so raucous that one man—a pillar of the church—had secretly brought in a “decibel meter” to prove his point on the loudness of the music on Sunday mornings. This leader had actually left the church over this issue when it was not resolved to his satisfaction. At an exit interview with the District Superintendent, a few elders, and me, this man shook his Bible at us, saying—*“The leaders and people of this church always knew that if they disagreed with me, they were going against this book!”*

The Solution

During my Intentional Interim Ministry in Somewhere Fellowship, I felt I needed to accomplish three major things—(1) Celebrate the ministry of the long-term pastor who had just retired while at the same time preparing them for a new pastor who would be his own man before the Lord; and (2) Get their focus off of the “worship wars” that had surfaced, and back on “The Main Thing”—namely, the Great Commandment and Commission of Jesus Christ; and (3) Act as consultant the Pastoral Search Team in finding a good match for their new Senior Pastor.

Both of these goals were reached, and I am pleased to report that Somewhere Fellowship is enjoying great days under the Godly leadership.

Case Study # 2

A Troubled Church—Anywhere Chapel

The Situation

Rev. John Doe was in his fifth year of ministry at Anywhere Chapel when he realized that his elders were divided down the middle in terms of their attitude toward his ministry performance—three were fully supportive, and three wanted him to leave. After meetings with the District Superintendent (DS), it was decided that Rev. Doe should resign. A date was set, and a letter that was pre-approved by the DS would be read on that Sunday of his resignation.

But when that Sunday came, Rev. Doe refused to read the letter or resign. In a very dramatic scene on the platform, even his own wife tried to get him to resign, but she was unsuccessful. Since the DS was out of town for this service, he was informed of the pastor's behavior, and immediately withdrew Pastor Doe's credentials as a licensed worker in that denomination.

Rev. Doe then contacted a lawyer, and presented a lawsuit to the DS naming both the DS and the District as liable for taking away his ability to earn an income as a minister. The lawsuit was ultimately settled out of court with Rev. Doe receiving several thousand dollars.

Rev. Doe then proceeded to start a new church just five miles away from Anywhere Chapel. Approximately 100 of the 250 in attendance at Anywhere Chapel followed Rev. Doe to help start this new church. It was at this point that I was called in to be the Intentional Interim Pastor for Anywhere Chapel.

The Solution

Obviously, there were many issues on many levels which led up to this debacle. I immediately began to preach sermons geared toward healing the great hurt that had taken place in a church that had been ripped apart in this manner. Then I called in a special "Church Assessment Team" (see "Tools of the Trade" on this website) to assist me in discerning—

- What are the real problems here at Anywhere Chapel?
- What are God's solutions to these problems?
- What are God's plans for this fellowship?
- Who are God's leaders to move this church forward?

After the Church Assessment Team gave its report, several task forces were appointed to test this report for its validity and implications for Anywhere Chapel. From these groups came several recommendations for changes that needed to occur at Anywhere Chapel, and practical steps toward healing the rift with the former pastor and those who had left the church.

All of this culminated in a "Solemn Assembly" (see "Sample Solemn Assembly" in Document Center on this website). This was a great evening of revival and

renewal in a service that lasted for three hours. Great healing came to the congregation through this event, but it must be remembered that much prayer and work was done to prepare for that evening.

I was then privileged to lead the Pastoral Search Team in the selection of the next pastor. Three candidates were interviewed initially, and one eventually became the favorite and was called to be the new pastor. He has enjoyed several years of effective ministry in this church and the congregation has grown significantly. In God's time, the former pastor asked the congregation of Anywhere Chapel for their forgiveness for his sins, too.

This is a classic story of how an Intentional Interim Pastor can be used of God to bring healing and restoration to a very troubled congregation.

Case Study # 3

A Tranquil Church—Elsewhere Church

The Situation

This congregation had just enjoyed a pastoral ministry that lasted twelve years. There were no major problems with the former pastor's departure. There were some significant stressors in the church surrounding a daughter congregation that they had planted a few years before—and this branch fellowship had significantly outgrown Elsewhere Church. Also, there was a general sense of malaise—a tell-tale atmosphere of inertia. There was no flagrant iniquity, but rather the church just seemed to have lost its sense of purpose.

So I felt that this congregation needed to do three things—(1) Revisit the issues related to mission, vision, and values, and (2) Reconcile with the daughter church; and (3) Act as consultant to the Pastoral Search Team in finding an appropriate Senior Pastor for their setting.

The Solution

With regard to the first initiative, we held a "Leadership Advance" (see "Sample Leadership Advance" in the Document Center on this website). This enabled the leadership community to renew its commitment to the core values inherent in the Great Commandment and Commission of Jesus Christ.

Concerning the much needed reconciliation between the mother and daughter churches, we appointed task forces to revisit an old "Church Assessment" that had been done a few years before. Through this exercise, and the subsequent recommendations that flowed naturally from the reports, it became clear that a *joint* "Solemn Assembly" was required (see "Sample Solemn Assembly" in Document Center on this website). With the full blessing and participation of

leadership teams from both churches, God once again moved in great power bringing healing and restoration to both congregations. Elsewhere Church made a wonderful selection of a new Senior Pastor, and both churches are today moving ahead in fulfillment of the Great Commandment and Commission of Christ.

It should be noted that the Intentional Interim Pastor has a huge advantage in negotiating between these factions because “he has no dog in this fight.” He can utilize his role as a neutral party to bring both sides to the table in an affirming, healing ministry.