

Building a Healthy Pastoral Relationship

The events and exercises below are suggestions and guidance for COMs as they assist ministers, sessions and congregations build healthy pastoral relationships. This is a new resource provided by the Committee on Ministry office. Please let us know what works best for you and send us additional resources that you have found helpful (mwarren@ctr.pcusa.org).

We recommend a three-year program consisting of three partnering events that include one or two representatives of the COM, the newly ordained pastor, and members of the session or members of a ministry team from the congregation approved by the session. The COM PNC liaison that assisted the congregation and pastor during the search would be the optimum person to conduct the events.

Begin The Process With An Agreement Between The Pastor, The Session And The COM

A team designated by the COM, preferably including the PNC Liaison, would moderate the events scheduled.

1. Schedule an evening of historical reflection for the new pastor and the session/congregational ministry team within the first six months.
2. During the first eighteen months, meet with the session and pastor to reflect on mutual ministry goals and agree to any behavioral adjustment that need to be made. A process for this meeting is included later in this section.
3. During the third year, the pastor and session members or members of the congregational ministry team participate in a two-stage process. The first stage will reveal the leadership strengths and vulnerabilities of the pastor and the leadership needs of the congregation. The second stage consists of a mission study to inform the future direction of the congregation. Strategies to acquire the leadership skills needed to accomplish the mission will also be developed and adopted.

Considering Events That Have Been Formative In Our History - First Event (within the first six months of the Installation date)

The purpose of the first event is for **the pastor and congregation (via the session or ministry team) to share their respective histories. They will appreciate their separate faith journeys identifying similarities and differences.**

An Evening Of Historical Reflection

Timeline For The Minister

1. Draw a line across through the middle of a sheet of paper. Place your birth date on one end of the line and today's date at the other.
2. Place a date on the line marking significant events in your life. Write a brief description of the event and how it impacted your life above the date.
3. Write the names of leaders you have admired on the line near the date you admired them. List the leadership characteristics and qualities they exhibited that you hope to emulate below the line. Make special mention of the way you saw them dealing with difficult situations and/or people.
4. Write a brief paragraph about how you intend to lead this congregation.

Timeline For The Congregation Participants working individually:

1. Ask each participant to record the year they became members, or the year of their earliest memories of the congregation in large numbers at the top of a sheet of paper. They should also place their name at the bottom of the sheet.
2. Ask participants to list the names of people (members, family, ministers) who were influential in their decision to commit themselves to the congregation.
3. Ask participants to list significant events (mission trips, celebrations, challenges, controversies, etc.) in the life of the congregation since they joined.
4. Break into small groups of 5+ and invite each participant to share their responses with others in the group.

In plenary session:

1. Ask participants to attach their sheet on a wall and give a brief summary to the group.
2. Rearrange the sheets in chronological order as they are presented.
3. Invite the newly installed pastor to present and discuss her/his timeline.
4. Ask participants to share what they learned about their congregation during this event.
5. List their responses on newsprint and collect them into categories (outreach, handling difficulties etc.).
6. Debrief the evening by discussing:
 - a. What activities and events are instrumental in shaping the lives of our members?
 - b. What practices and relational styles describe this congregation's core values about its life as a community of faith?
7. Leave all the information in a public place for a couple of weeks. Invite people that were not present to add their sheets to the historical survey.

Meet with the minister and session/ministry team:

1. Discuss their impressions of the evening of historical reflection.
2. Discuss ways the event might help them work closely together.
3. Agree upon guidelines for communication and working together in the future.

Building A Healthier Pastoral Relationship - Second Event (twelve to eighteen months after the installation date)

The purpose of the second event is building a healthy working relationship with the session or congregational ministry team. A suggested process follows.

Five weeks before the scheduled meeting

1. Mail a notice of the meeting to the pastor and all other participants (session).
2. Include the Minister's Preparation Worksheet in the notice to the pastor. *Assure the pastor that her/his responses are for personal reflection and will not be made public. There will be a time during the meeting for the pastor to provide input and reflections but the pastor will decide what to share.*

The Meeting Schedule

With the pastor:

1. Meet with the pastor and discuss her/his responses to the Minister's Preparation information. (The COM team may want to take the pastor and spouse to dinner for this discussion.)
2. Ask the pastor about hopes and expectations for the meeting with the session.
3. Discuss the pastor's response to the Minister's Preparation Form.
4. Obtain agreement about information that will or will not be made public during the meeting.

With the session and pastor:

1. The Moderator of the COM team introduces others of the team.
2. The Moderator explains the purpose of the meeting and suggests guidelines for discussion.
3. The Moderator presents the agenda for the meeting.
4. Individual Reflection – 10 minutes - each participant completes the Preparation for Individual Members sheet.
5. Small Groups of no more than five persons per group – 20 minutes:
 - a. Discuss personal reflections from the individual work sheet.
 - b. Each group prepares a report and records it on newsprint for sharing with the entire group.
6. General Discussion – 30 minutes:
 - a. Small Group reports (COM Team records responses from the small groups on newsprint.)
 - b. The Pastor introduces her/his reflections on her/his personal preparation.
 - c. General discussion about similarities and contrasts between the pastor's and the Session's responses.
7. Next Steps Planning:
 - a. Prepare specific steps to overcome any barriers that the evening's discussion revealed;
 - b. Or prepare mutual agreements to improve the working relationship;
 - c. Or prepare a list of changes to be made by the pastor and the session/ministry team in order to facilitate a healthy relationship.
 - d. All agreements reached must be specific and must clearly state who will do what by when.
 - e. All agreements must contain agreement about how and when the agreements will be evaluated and by whom.
 - f. Conclude the meeting with a summary of the event and express your gratitude for the hard work of all the participants.

WORKSHEET

Minister's Preparation: One month before the scheduled event.

1. At the top of a sheet of paper write a short statement about your hopes and dreams for your ministry through this congregation.
2. Keep a log of time spent on your various ministry activities for a month. A sample time log is provided for your assistance.
3. Compare your time log to your hopes and dreams.
4. Are you satisfied with the balance of time spent realizing your hopes and dreams compared to the time you spend in other aspects of your ministry? If not, what are some ways you could adjust your time in ministry in order to achieve a more satisfactory balance?

Questions for reflection and discussion with others *at your discretion:*

In your ministry here, what makes you feel proud?

What are some barriers to a more complete fulfillment of your mission through this congregation? How have you sought to overcome those barriers?

What word or phrase would you use to describe the working relationship between you and the session?

What (if anything) needs to change in order for you to have a satisfying and successful ministry here?

LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES FOR BUILDING THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH

Time Log

Activity	Hours – 1 st week	Hours – 2 nd week	Hours – 3 rd week	Hours – 4 th week
PREACHING: Including preparation				
ADMINISTRATION: Planning and conducting meetings				
WORSHIP: Planning and conducting regular and special services of worship				
SICK, CRISIS, BEREAVEMENT VISITATION				
EVANGELISM: contacting prospective members				
STEWARDSHIP: Planning, canvassing and budgeting church resources				
TEACHING				
SOCIAL MINISTRY: Addressing the needs of our community				
THEOLOGY: Applying Biblical teachings to the present day				
COUNSELING				
Denominational and ecumenical participation				
Pastoral care (non- crisis) visitation of members				
Other ministerial activities				

In the third event:

1. The pastor will learn her/his preferred leadership style and the strengths and vulnerabilities.
2. The congregational group will identify its leadership needs.
3. The pastor and congregational group will develop a strategy to improve its present skill bank and acquire those it will need in the foreseeable future. The Leadership Effectiveness Analysis and Strategic Directions Questionnaires will be the primary resources for this event.

NOTE: The third event is extremely helpful for all new pastoral relationships. Researchers have identified several progressive stages of pastoral relationships. **The third year appears to be the pivotal year.** Hugh Halverstadt in his yet unpublished work, *The Priesthood of all Believers: From Belief to Practice* describes several stages in the progression.

- The pastor and congregation begin life together as pastor and people. They have great expectations and want to believe that they are “really meant” for each other.
- Soon, however, both parties begin to experience parts of each other that they don't affirm or value.
- Both parties begin to question what they have gotten themselves into. At this point they either build a partnership or they settle into separateness.
- If they begin to disengage, clergy usually focus on career more than calling and the congregation focuses on the church as an institution rather than a fellowship of believers.
- What began as shared vision of ministry becomes a shared burden of institutional maintenance. Spiritual burnout begins and grows.

The third event serves as a discovery event and, hopefully, the beginning of a faithful mutual ministry.

Identifying the congregation's skills bank - the pastor and session members or members of the congregational ministry team complete the Leadership Effectiveness Analysis (LEA) and the Strategic Directions Questionnaire (SDQ). A licensed interpreter will conduct a meeting with the pastor and ministry group. The pastor will become more clearly aware of his/her leadership strengths and liabilities. Suggested action plans for further leadership development will also be included. Members that completed the SDQ will become more clearly aware of their personal expectations of their congregation's pastoral leadership. A group profile of the members' leadership expectations will serve as a “springboard” for discussion about future leadership needs of the congregation. Participants will also approve specific plans for developing the leadership needs of the pastor and congregation.

Reaching into the future – the mission study. There are many mission study processes available. Some presbyteries have approved formats for them so the COM team will want to make certain to use it when it is available. A simple mission study process is included below for use as appropriate.

Congregational Survey And Mission Study

Phase I - Information Gathering

Step 1. Choose the formats that best suits the size of the congregation/group.

1. Cottage meetings
2. Congregational Gathering and Small Group Discussions

Discussion topics:

1. What values and practices must continue if we are to be faithful to our heritage as a congregation?
2. What groups of people, inside and outside the congregation, will most likely be receiving the ministries of this congregation in the next five years?
3. What do I personally want our congregation to be doing five years from now?
4. What resources (human and financial) do we have that will help us realize our vision of the future?
5. What about us is most likely to make accomplishing our vision difficult?
6. What suggestions do you have to help us overcome the difficulties in accomplishing our vision?

Step 2. Collate data received and prepare a report to the congregation.

Phase II - Information Sharing

Step 1. **Church-wide fellowship gathering to review the report and discuss its results.**

Small group work to:

identify areas for future emphasis and preliminary wording for a Mission Statement.

Plenary sharing of small group work.

Step 2. **Small group work to:**

1. Describe the conditions, which would be present if this mission emphasis were successfully addressed.
2. Identify conditions/issues, which presently serve as barriers to successfully addressing this future mission area.
3. Suggest plans and actions, which might be helpful in overcoming the barriers.

Step 3. **Information from the small groups is collated and published in a report to the congregation.**

Phase III - Session Retreat To:

1. Review the information and suggested actions.
2. Prepare a Mission Statement for the Church.
3. Set goals and objectives for implementation.
4. Match the skill resources from stage one (LEA/SDQ) and prepare a plan for acquiring the skills needed. This might involve continuing education for staff members or paying the expenses of church members to events that will train them to minister in their congregation.

Phase IV – Congregational Gathering To Hear And Discuss Results Of The Session Retreat And Congregational Adoption Of Its Actions.