



THE  
PASTORAL  
RELATIONS  
COMMITTEE



# THE PASTORAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE



*A* booklet for strengthening the local church  
prepared and published through support from the  
Strengthen the Church Offering by the United  
Church of Christ Parish Life and  
Leadership Ministry Team



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## PREFACE

Greeting from the Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team of the United Church of Christ

For many years, PLL's predecessor body, the Office for Church Life and Leadership, has been encouraging local churches to establish Pastoral Relations Committees to assist them in maintaining good relations between their pastor and people. This booklet is designed to assist in this important service to the local church.

It is with deep appreciation to the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. that this booklet was prepared by the Office for Church Life and Leadership. In 1985 the Commission on Ministry of the American Baptist Churches, U.S.A., produced a booklet for use in their congregations entitled "The Pastoral Relations Committee and the Church/Staff Relations Committee," written by Richard Waltz. The Office for Church Life and Leadership was most impressed with the document and sought permission from the American Baptist Commission on Ministry to utilize it in preparation of this booklet. We acknowledge their invaluable contribution to this production and celebrate their willingness to participate, in true ecumenical fashion, in this endeavor for the United Church of Christ and its conferences, associations, local churches, pastors, and leaders. We also acknowledge the helpfulness of many people in the United Church of Christ who shaped this adaptation. A special word of thanks goes to Martha Ann Baumer, Illinois South Conference Minister, for the case studies that help a committee explore expectations.

Publication of this booklet was made possible through the generous offerings of United Church of Christ members through the Strengthen the Church Offering.

With our best wishes to you and all members of your church, we offer this resource for your purposes as a part of our commitment to "... *give impetus and direction to the ongoing development and support of lay and professional leaders whose purpose is to strengthen the life of the whole people of God in mission and ministry*" and to "... *care for personal and professional growth of persons engaged in the practice of ministry*" (Paragraphs 220, 221, *United Church of Christ Bylaws*).

The Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team  
United Church of Christ

## I. INTRODUCTION

The pastoral office, and other positions of staff leadership, exist for the upbuilding of the congregation and equipping the saints to be about the mission of the church. Pastors are called to equip and embody the faith and faithfulness of the church and its members in church and society. As such, pastors do not do the ministry of the body of Christ; they share in and support that ministry which all are called to by virtue of their baptism. The health of the relationship between the pastor and people cannot be taken for granted. Each entrusts the other; each complements the other. The stewardship of this relationship is threatened if it is not seen as that, a stewardship of the relationship between a pastor and a people.

For purposes of clarity and simplicity, this booklet uses the term *pastor*. In those local churches with a multiple staff consisting of ordained, commissioned, licensed, or other ministers called by the church, readers should read *pastoral staff* where *pastor* appears in the text. Section VIII also addresses some of the issues of multiple staff.

Many churches have a personnel committee which deals with policy, salary, and benefits for all members of the church staff, including the pastor. The Pastoral Relations Committee has different functions from the personnel committee, and thus, does not replace such a committee.

This booklet contains suggestions of policies, principles, and procedures which may enhance the work of the Pastoral Relations Committee. If your church does not have a Pastoral Relations Committee, careful study of this booklet and of the resources mentioned within it will guide your consideration in establishing a Pastoral Relations Committee for your pastor and congregation. Guidance on establishing a new committee is found in Section IV.

If your church already has a Pastoral Relations Committee, this booklet may assist it in strengthening its understanding and functioning. An already existing committee may find it enlightening to read and discuss the entire booklet. It will want to compare the way in which it is organized and going about its work with the

suggestions in Sections V, VI, and VII. It also may find the case studies in Section IX of particular help.

## II. WHAT IS A PASTORAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE?

The Pastoral Relations Committee is a standing committee in a local church that seeks to support and maintain an open and healthy relationship between the pastor and members of the congregation. The committee serves in two primary ways: as an advisory group to the pastor and as support for the pastor's leadership. As an advisory group the committee shares ideas, dreams, hopes, expectations, and concerns of the congregation with the pastor. As support for the pastor, the committee interprets roles, functions, and needs of the pastor to the congregation.

Constructive and caring communication in an atmosphere of confidentiality and trust is essential to the work of the committee. This committee is the congregation's fundamental support group for the pastor. It builds the framework in which conflict can be dealt with creatively. Its goals are the professional growth and well-being of the pastor and the promotion of mutual ministry between the pastor and the congregation.

The basic reason for sustaining open and healthy pastor-people relationships through the work of this committee is to enhance the effectiveness of the church's mission. The nurture of the pastor by this committee not only brings about a wholesome and healthy congregation but also creates a climate in which the spiritual life and mission of the people are strengthened. Serious attention to the dynamics of the relationship between pastor and congregation can result in a local church able to carry out its ministry effectively.

The Pastoral Relations Committee is concerned with each staff member's well-being, the entire staff's relationship with the congregation, and the fostering of healthy relationships among staff members.

### III. WHY HAVE A PASTORAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE?

A Pastoral Relations Committee acknowledges the importance of the healthy relationship between the pastor and the congregation. Such a committee aids a church in following Paul's instructions: "Help carry one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith." (Galatians 6:2,10)

Through the ministry of the Pastoral Relations Committee, ways can be found to improve or maintain the relationship between the pastor and the congregation to enhance their mutual ministry, to resolve unfruitful conflict, and to assist the church in its mission and ministry. A trained and active Pastoral Relations Committee allows a congregation to care personally for its pastor.

The relationship between the pastor and the congregation should be constructive, rewarding, and satisfying. As the people of God, they share joys, heartaches, personal crises, and important decisions in ways that bind their lives together. However, sometimes the pastor-people relationship is characterized by tension, distrust, and conflict. When this occurs, there needs to be an arena for helpful and honest dialogue out of which new understandings may arise and new commitments to ministry may be forged.

A structure within the church that deals with the relationship between pastor and congregation is itself an indication that the relationship seeks to be a solid base for an effective witness and mission in the local church, the community, and the world. Attention to personnel policies and practices and expectations is required if a local church is to be responsible to the person called to be pastor and teacher.

There are a number of reasons why an existing board or committee is not chosen for this committee's tasks. Usually such boards or committees are large, while this committee needs to be small enough to deal with sensitive and confidential matters. A church council, consistory, board of deacons or trustees carries wider responsibilities for the mission and program of the congregation, likely leaving too little time available on its agenda to handle pastor-

congregational issues comfortably. It is unlikely that pastors would feel comfortable being as candid with an entire governing board as with a committee specifically designed for such conversations. Existing committees or boards may find it difficult to serve in both programmatic and personnel roles.

#### IV. DECIDING TO FORM A PASTORAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

When a church recognizes that a committee is needed with specific responsibility for strengthening the relationship between the pastor and the congregation, the following steps may be followed:

1. Distribute copies of this booklet to members of the governing board of your local church, and make arrangements for a subsequent discussion of its contents as applied to your church.
2. Invite your conference or association minister to meet with the pastor and representatives of the governing board to discuss the possibility of establishing a Pastoral Relations Committee.
3. Invite a member of a nearby church that presently has a positive experience with its Pastoral Relations Committee to speak with your governing board about that church's experience.
4. Suggest that the governing board conduct discussions with members of the congregation about the helpfulness to your church of a Pastoral Relations Committee.
5. Encourage the governing board and congregation to make a decision whether or not to proceed with the organization of a Pastoral Relations Committee.

If the church decides to form a Pastoral Relations Committee, a bylaw change to the church's constitution that states the purpose and functions of the committee, the size of the committee, the process for selecting members, the length of their terms in office, and the committee's relationship with a search committee may be necessary.

A Pastoral Relations Committee is neither programmatic nor policy oriented. Its effectiveness often depends upon whether or not

the church has a written personnel policy, position description, and evaluation procedure for each staff member. The Pastoral Relations Committee may produce these items if none exists and if there is no other committee designated the responsibility. Then the committee will need to secure approval of these documents through the legislative bodies of the church.

It is important that training be provided for the Pastoral Relations Committee. The responsibility for the initial training of the committee and the pastor rests, most likely, with your conference or association office. Request information from one of these offices regarding assistance available to you.

The responsibility for continuing training rests with the leaders of the committee and the pastor. Time for training should be set aside during the regular meetings of the committee or at special meetings designed solely for training. The resources listed at the end of this booklet may prove helpful to the committee as it plans for training. Use of the case studies in Section IX will aid in training. You may also look to the conference or association office for guidance in continuing training and evaluation.

See Section VII for ideas for planning committee meetings.

## V. ORGANIZATION OF A PASTORAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Consider membership qualifications, size of the committee, selection procedures, accountability of the committee, and its relationship with the search committee in organizing the Pastoral Relations Committee.

### A. SIZE OF THE COMMITTEE

There are no hard and fast rules about size of the committee, except that it should not be large. Usually there are three to seven members. A small committee makes it easier to establish relationships of trust within the committee and to maintain confidentiality. Small size contributes to the effectiveness of the Pastoral Relations Committee.

## B. MEMBERSHIP QUALIFICATIONS

The following skills and attributes are generally looked for in members of pastoral relations committees:

- Christian character that commands the respect and admiration of the congregation and the pastor
- maturity
- patience and flexibility
- vital interest in the life of the church
- ability to maintain confidentiality
- ability to appreciate different points of view
- ability to negotiate and reconcile differences
- availability for listening to church members
- trustworthiness
- willingness to learn how to be effective in this ministry

No person possesses all these characteristics in equal strength. Prospective members of this committee must be carefully considered to see if they adequately possess these skills and attributes.

## C. SELECTION OF THE COMMITTEE

Choice of the committee members is crucial. The members of the committee must be people whose ideas and opinions are valued by the pastor and the congregation. Both the pastor and the congregation should have input into the selection of the committee members. If the pastor does not have input, a person may be chosen who does not relate well to the pastor which could inhibit the needed open and trusting relationship. If the congregation does not have a voice in the selection, a committee could become ingrown or be dismissed as hand-picked by the pastor.

The governing board of the church may decide, when the congregation is preparing to start a new pastoral relationship, to appoint members from the search committee to the Pastoral Relations Committee during the first year of the new pastorate. This builds on the familiarity developed between new pastor and

the search committee. Members may also be representatives or officers from specific committees of the church. This would especially be wise where more than one pastor is involved and duties are specifically assigned. Some congregations have additional committee members to represent the whole church.

Churches differ in how persons are selected for this committee. Some hold elections, with the nominating committee involved in the process of securing candidates. Others permit the governing board to appoint the committee. The election or selection process for the committee should be written into the church's bylaws.

After a year or two of service by the pastor, new members of the Pastoral Relations Committee may be selected in a process as follows:

- The pastor submits names to the nominating committee.
- The governing board also submits names to the nominating committee.
- The nominating committee then selects names from each list and recommends the slate for either election by the congregation or appointment by the governing board.

When there is more than one member of the the pastoral staff, it is important that each member be in agreement about the names of the persons who are submitted to the nominating committee or governing board so that those who are eventually elected or appointed are supported by the entire pastoral staff.

#### D. ACCOUNTABILITY OF THE COMMITTEE

It is recommended that the Pastoral Relations Committee be established as a separate standing committee accountable only to the congregation rather than to the church governing board. The Pastoral Relations Committee should make an annual report to the congregation. The committee should meet at least quarterly. It may want to report to the congregation after each of these meetings. The reports can evidence the committee's advocacies in behalf of the pastor and indicate the categories discussed during its deliberations.

## E. RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SEARCH COMMITTEE

If there is an existing Pastoral Relations Committee, when it becomes necessary to form a search committee for a new pastor, it is advantageous to have some members of the Pastoral Relations Committee as part of the Search Committee.

Most people who serve on search committees have never done so before. The process of calling a new pastor is a delicate one. Because of their work on the Pastoral Relations Committee, the training they have received, and their occasional contact with conference or association staff persons, members of the Pastoral Relations Committee are well prepared for service on a search committee.

The bylaws of most local churches give guidance on how a Search Committee is constituted, including any relationship it might have to an existing Pastoral Relations Committee. The bylaws may require an amendment to allow for the suggested relationship between the Pastoral Relations Committee and Search Committee.

# VI. FUNCTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF A PASTORAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

## A. UNDERSTANDING THE PASTORAL AND CONGREGATIONAL ROLES

The Pastoral Relations Committee and pastor interact with each other and come to appreciate each other's understanding of the expectations and roles of pastor and members of the congregation in carrying out the intended mission of the church.

Roles and expectations are themselves derived out of long experience and trust that God calls persons whose ministries are to help build up the body of Christ. Roles and expectations are always within this deeper context in which ministries serve, equip, and embody the faithful mission and ministry of the church and its members. As this deeper context is actively remembered, the work of a Pastoral Relations Committee becomes an act of stewardship, taking care for health in the relationship of pastor and congregation. All these relate to the upbuilding of faith and faithfulness of the church and its members in church and society.

Members of the congregation expect many things, and many different things, from their pastor. For example, some expect a dynamic sermon every week. Others want to be visited regularly. Some think the pastor should take an active role in the stewardship program; others think the pastor should not mention money. Some members want the pastor to emphasize evangelism; others want the pastor to lead the congregation in addressing social issues in the community. In light of the diverse expectations, the congregation and pastor need to be aware of certain realities. They need to recognize that pastors have specific and limited abilities, interests, and time. Helping the congregation to have reasonable expectations of the pastor and helping the pastor to have a clear picture of priorities are essential functions performed by the Pastoral Relations Committee.

Pastors have many roles: preacher, teacher, counselor, visitor, administrator, and resource person to the congregation. Tasks of this committee include helping clarify pastoral position descriptions and mutual expectations about what the pastor is to do and determining what has priority. Periodically renegotiating expectations is another important task.

It also should be acknowledged that pastors have expectations of congregations. Of course, there are expectations of fair compensation and other forms of support. But there also are expectations related to participation and responsiveness, taking on volunteer tasks, and being about ministry in church, in the community, and beyond. The Pastoral Relations Committee is a setting in which these expectations can be expressed and ways found to develop sensitivity to them.

It is wise for the Pastoral Relations Committee to have a clearly defined relationship with the Personnel Committee of the local church if there is one and to be most familiar with the church's personnel policy if one exists. Where a committee functions without the benefit of either a personnel committee or a personnel policy, it is advisable that the Pastoral Relations Committee become an advocate for a written personnel policy with provisions for salary, continuing education, vacation, holidays, sick leave and disability, and grievance procedures.

“The Ordained Minister’s Code” and “The Local Church in Relation to Its Pastor” in the United Church of Christ’s *Manual on Ministry* can be used to facilitate discussion of the roles, expectations, and ethics of pastor and congregation.

When basic understandings are agreed upon, these should be correlated with the church’s goals and objectives and shared with the congregation. Members of the committee, by the nature of their responsibility and through their training, will become the most knowledgeable persons within the congregation regarding the roles of the pastor. The committee should take the lead in constantly seeking to improve communication, interpretation, and understanding between the congregation and the pastor.

Understanding the complexity and interrelatedness of roles of all persons on the staff of the church and clarifying expectations are vitally important for committee members in a multiple-staff church where people are sharing in the pastoral leadership.

## B. PROVIDING A COMMUNICATION LINK

The committee serves as a vehicle to promote healthy relationships between the pastor and congregation. If there is a staff of more than one pastor, the committee will also be concerned about communication among members of the pastoral staff. It is important for the pastor to be able to express feelings, concerns, and ideas to the committee. Providing an opportunity for the pastor to reflect in confidence about personal concerns, hopes, ambitions, and frustrations is very important.

It is also important for the committee to feel free to express its views to the pastor. Openly and honestly communicating feelings and reactions of church members to the pastor is vital. Defining areas of potential conflict between the pastor’s ministry and that of the congregation and assisting in developing alternative solutions and possibilities for avoiding destructive conflict are important tasks of communication for the committee.

Important and necessary communication will occur when there is an understanding that the pastor and the committee will regularly review the pastor’s leadership, the congregation’s respon-

siveness to it, and the pastor's response to the congregation. Sometimes calling upon a conference or association staff person to assist in this process of evaluation and interpretation is warranted.

For personal well-being and effectiveness, the pastor needs a group within the congregation with whom there can be real openness about matters regarding the church that may be troubling to the pastor. The committee needs to be alert to the pastor's concerns between its meetings as well. The committee needs to encourage the pastor to plan time for personal recreation, exercise, relaxation, spiritual development, and personal relationships. Demonstrating concern for the pastor's total being in ministry communicates genuine acceptance and care for the person who has been called to "equip the saints of the church."

The committee should meet regularly. The purpose of regular communication between the pastor and the committee is to provide support and to lessen the possibilities of misunderstanding. Issues are not to be forced. At some meetings more time can be given to discussion and study of general issues, such as those noted by the case studies found in Section IX. An alert but relaxed attitude is necessary so that when something surfaces that needs discussing, the atmosphere for communication will already have been established.

### C. HELPING THE CHURCH AND PASTOR DEAL WITH CONFLICT

Although the functions of the Pastoral Relations Committee are designed to prevent destructive conflict and misunderstanding by promoting healthy relationships, sometimes such conflict does occur. At these times, this committee can serve as the reconciling agent between the pastor and the congregation. If serious conflict arises, the committee will want to call upon conference or association staff who are experienced in this area. The committee can develop a written procedure for the resolution of serious differences, including the use of outside consultants such as conference or association staff.

Disagreements must be negotiated as soon as possible or they will dissipate strength. The congregation has a high stake in harmonious, caring relationships being created in the midst of differences.

One of the services to a congregation that a Pastoral Relations Committee can offer is to learn and then teach the art of successful negotiating.

Not all disagreements can be resolved. Because people are so different in theology, personality, and background, some differences can never be totally eliminated. Richness and strength in ministry may come from an appreciation of diversity in the church. But, that will only come about as the result of an intentional atmosphere of good communication and clear confidentiality.

Sometimes when conflict arises there is danger of focusing only on the relationship between the congregation and the pastor. The Pastoral Relations Committee works with the pastor in managing conflict and negotiating differences whenever they arise between the entire pastoral staff or individual members of the staff and the congregation or between individual members of the pastoral staff.

#### D. ADVOCATING CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR THE PASTOR

Persons serving in pastoral roles need continuing education experiences. The rapid rate of change in society and the church is such that effective ministry is highly dependent upon continuing education. The committee needs to encourage the pastor to participate in continuing education programs and in planning a sabbatical that builds upon strengths and deals with weaknesses within the pastor's ministry. The committee needs to be sensitive both to the pastor's needs and to the needs of the congregation as the committee assists the pastor in making decisions about personal and professional growth.

Churches that have more than one member on the pastoral staff should encourage them to participate in workshops designed to enhance the working relationships among pastoral staff members or to seek other staff development resources.

Continuing education will result in greater skills and knowledge for use in service to the local church. The Pastoral Relations Committee may need to advocate that the pastor have quality continuing education. Members can interpret for the congregation

that the funds expended and time taken by the pastor for personal or professional growth are not for vacation.

The committee will want to assure that the congregation provides time away from normal duties for continuing education. A specific number of days per year should be allocated to the pastor for this purpose and adequate continuing education funds from the congregation's budget allocated each year. Whether or not funds and time can be accumulated, and for how long, should also be clearly decided and provided in a written personnel policy statement.

Congregations may grant a sabbatical leave to a pastor after a determined amount of service (usually five or more years). If there is no sabbatical policy, the committee will want to consult with the pastor in developing a sabbatical proposal and then presenting it to the appropriate board or committee for presentation to the congregation.

#### **E. ADVOCATING PARTICIPATION IN UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST AND ECUMENICAL ACTIVITY**

The committee can play an important role in supporting and advocating the pastor's participation in the life of the wider church. Doing so helps to underscore that the local church is itself part of a wider church and that the pastor has responsibility to fulfill this wider church dimension of ministry by virtue of being an authorized minister of the United Church of Christ.

The pastor may be elected, appointed, or requested to serve on boards, committees, or task forces that are denominational or ecumenical in nature. Pastors are likely to have both voice and vote in United Church of Christ association and conference annual meetings. These opportunities to serve the wider church mission and ministries are not to be seen as in addition to, but rather a part of, the ministry of pastors. The committee can encourage participation and help to interpret such participation to members of the local church.

## **F. MONITORING THE EVALUATION PROCESS**

The committee needs to be helpful in seeing that a procedure for the evaluation of the pastor takes place, that the process is fair, and that the primary focus is to improve ministry, not to assess failure. The Pastoral Relations Committee should be a strong advocate for evaluation based upon mutually accepted goals and objectives.

The booklet “Clergy Evaluation,” from the Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team, can help in the evaluation process.

## **G. REVIEWING THE PASTOR’S COMPENSATION ANNUALLY**

Demonstrating concern and expressing understanding for the pastor’s financial needs are important tasks of this committee. The compensation of the pastor should be reviewed annually. This committee may need to be an advocate for adequate financial support when the budget is being considered.

The relationship between the pastor and the congregation can be enhanced by candid discussion concerning cash salary, housing allowance or parsonage (with allowances for utilities, repairs, and general maintenance), benefits (such as annuity; medical, dental, disability, and life insurance; social security allowance; continuing education funds and time; vacation and sabbatical leave), ministry related expenses (such as auto allowance or mileage reimbursement, office supplies, meeting costs, books and subscriptions, secretarial support and temporary staff assistance).

Conference staff in the United Church of Christ are able to assist local church leaders in their evaluation of pastoral compensation packages. Conference guidelines of salaries and benefits are developed with an awareness of local abilities to support pastoral leadership financially and the experience of United Church of Christ local churches and pastors across the nation.

In some churches, the pastor may negotiate directly with the Pastoral Relations Committee regarding compensation and benefits. When agreement is reached, the committee may take the initiative and present its recommendations regarding compensation and benefits to the local church’s appropriate committee or board.

In local churches that use another process for reaching such agreements, it is a good idea to include a time for review of pastoral compensation annually in the work of this committee.

For this reason, the committee needs to discover what is appropriate compensation and educate the congregation regarding ministerial compensation. The pastor's compensation should be measured against realistic standards, and then recommendations should be made to those local church bodies which formulate and pass the forthcoming annual budget.

The senior pastor may bring recommendations to the committee concerning other staff members' compensation since that person is in a good position to appraise each staff member's ministry and negotiate with each staff member personally. This can be discussed with the committee and then a final recommendation regarding staff compensation brought to the church or designated committee. It should be clearly understood where the final authority for setting staff compensation resides and the role of the senior pastor to other pastoral staff in the process.

## H. ASSISTING IN START-UP WITH THE PASTOR

The work of the Search Committee continues until the new pastor has arrived, is received by the congregation, and is installed by the association and local church. Because search committees disband once their work is done, it is helpful to have the Pastoral Relations Committee work with the Search Committee to ensure that the transition in leadership is smooth and that commitments which have been made to the new pastor are honored.

When the decision is made to call a new pastor, the Pastoral Relations Committee will want to work with the Search Committee to see that there are as few unspoken expectations as possible. Expectations that are never laid on the table and, therefore, never mutually affirmed, can become sources of irritation and conflict that impair the relationship and sometimes set it up for failure. Making sure those expectations are surfaced and negotiated will make the task much easier for the ongoing work of the Pastoral Relations Committee.

It may be helpful to recall the expectations of the congregation and/or Search Committee expressed to the new pastor on the “Local Church Profile.” Many congregations use this document in the search process as a way of surfacing congregational expectations. This document could be the guide for negotiating additional expectations of the new pastor.

Of course, no pastor can be found who will fulfill all the congregation’s expectations. The church should always be ready to deal realistically with what it wants from a new pastor. This committee can be the group that helps everyone deal realistically with expectations. There is no greater cause of low morale and eventual conflict in ministry than the unresolved conflict of expectations between pastor and people.

The Pastoral Relations Committee will want to be especially observant and available in the first six months of the new pastor’s tenure. The committee can help the pastor and the congregation adjust to each other and come to accept the differences that exist in the new relationship from the previous ones.

At the end of six months, the pastor and the committee will want to discuss how things are going in the new relationship. Some helpful questions which might be asked are:

- How do the new pastor and the congregation feel about the relationship and why?
- Are there items that need to be handled in the normal process of beginning the relationship?
- Are there any concerns that need to be responded to quickly so that they do not continue to block satisfactory start-up?
- Are there any surprises?

A similar conversation should take place at the end of one year.

It is often difficult for members of a congregation to make the transition from the previous pastor to the new one, especially in the first months after the arrival of a new person. It is natural for some to feel more comfortable in calling a former pastor at a time of crisis or celebration. For the sake of the ongoing ministry of the church, it is important to make the transfer to the new pastor’s leadership as

smooth and as full as possible right from the start. The Pastoral Relations Committee can be very helpful in this time of transition by interpreting this need and its importance to the congregation.

When a new person joins the staff of the church, the Pastoral Relations Committee can see to it that the new pastor—and family, if family members accompany the new pastor—is oriented to the church and the community.

## I. ASSISTING WITH TERMINATION PROCEDURES

Emotions like those experienced by persons in grief are experienced by a congregation and the pastor when a resignation is announced. One of the early tasks of the Pastoral Relations Committee should be to work through basic procedures that will apply when a pastor is in transition.

The Pastoral Relations Committee helps all parties move through the process following resignation by the pastor so that they emerge better able to carry on ministry in the name of Christ. Emotions toward the pastor may run the gamut from deep love to bitter animosity. Other feelings such as anger, rejection, disappointment, concern, depression, and guilt may be part of the experience. Such feelings may be directed at anyone involved. The committee needs to help the congregation and pastor work through their feelings.

How is this done? One way is by pairing, in their own conversation and perhaps in statements to the church, every negative statement with a positive one. For example, “We will deeply miss our pastor, but we are sure that God has called her/him to another area of service where others will respond to her/his leadership and care.”

A farewell service should include the celebration of specific accomplishments in the pastor’s ministry and expressions of appreciation. This will be helpful to the outgoing pastor and, just as important, it will help the congregation to feel good about itself. It will enable members of the congregation to appreciate their capacity to function in a Christlike manner even in difficult times. It will give them hope in their ability to relate to future leaders. The service

entitled "Order for Times of Passage: Farewell" in *Book of Worship United Church of Christ* provides a framework for this service.

In the case of a forced resignation, the committee needs to be very sensitive to the situation and be supportive of the pastor (and family, if family members are present), as well as help in the healing process with the congregation. The committee needs to help the church be fair in all aspects of the situation, including allowing sufficient time, with compensation, for the pastor to find another position, realizing that a resignation without a place to go increases the difficulty of finding another position. A situation handled poorly and without compassion can produce pain within the church and impair the church's future ministry.

The committee can help plan for and conduct an exit interview. These have proven to be an invaluable resource to the Search Committee for closure of a pastorate. Exit interviews may be conducted at the close of a positive ministry or one which was filled with stress. The committee may obtain a sample exit interview from the notebook usually used by Search Committees entitled *A Local Church Seeks a Pastor*.

This section has covered a host of responsibilities. All are aimed at helping the Pastoral Relations Committee define its responsibilities; establish clear and workable directions, goals, and plans of action; and help the congregation understand and value the ministry it performs. The resources listed at the end of this booklet should be in the local church's library for the purpose of enabling the Pastoral Relations Committee to do its best work.

## VII. PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETINGS

*As* a general rule the committee should meet with the pastor at least four times a year. However, in the first six months of a new pastorate or newly formed committee, monthly meetings may be very helpful. This gives time for training when a committee is just beginning its experience. Regular meeting dates should be established. If a meeting is called only in times of trouble, the purpose and effectiveness of the committee will be weakened.

The effectiveness of the committee rests heavily upon trust being built and maintained between the pastor and the committee. In order to ensure confidentiality, committee members **must** refrain from telling anyone, even spouses, about the content of the meetings. Some committees do not keep minutes. If minutes are kept, they should be only a brief list of decisions made. The minutes should not be shared beyond the committee. Reports of the Pastoral Relations Committee to the governing board or the congregation should be general narrative, not a compilation of the minutes.

It is good to have a well established agenda for each meeting of the Pastoral Relations Committee. *The Leaders' Box* (Card C2) gives some excellent suggestions to any committee that seeks to improve its agenda building skills. It is important that the agenda for every meeting of the committee be shared well in advance with all participants so that proper preparation may be done by all members prior to the meeting of the committee. It is a good idea to begin every meeting with an agenda check even before conducting devotions to make sure everyone agrees with it before starting.

Time will not permit every item listed below to be discussed at every meeting. Some of the items listed are annual emphases and others might be considered as the need arises.

- A. Agenda check: "What issues will we talk about?," led by the chairperson
- B. Community building: Catching up with each other, led by the chairperson
- C. Worship: brief devotions, led by a member
- D. A time for taking the pulse of the congregation, where hurts are shared and victories celebrated, led by the chairperson
- E. Relational issues from the pastor that need reporting and discussing
  1. An event or experience to share and celebrate
  2. Recent disappointment
  3. Future expectations
  4. Most persistent concern
  5. Other concerns, ideas, feelings

- F. Relational issues from the congregation that need reporting and discussing, led by the chairperson
  1. Areas of strong satisfaction with and appreciation of the pastor at the present time
  2. Specific items that have caused some negative reaction or expression of concern
  3. Other feedback
- G. Specific issues assigned for this meeting, such as annual compensation, review of the pastor's or congregation's performance compared to expectations, and continuing education plans of the pastor, led by the chairperson
- H. A training session to help the committee function better, led by a designated person
- I. Assignments for next meeting, led by the chairperson. Are there steps that should be taken to try to resolve or improve a particular situation? What needs to be communicated to the congregation? What groups or individuals should be contacted in order to clarify and interpret the pastor's or congregation's ministry?
- J. Closing prayers for and with one another as all continue in the ministry and service of the church, offered by a member.

As the work of the Pastoral Relations Committee progresses, there are ways to increase the skills, knowledge, and effectiveness of each participant. Here is a list of suggestions from *The Leaders' Box* (Card B22), which may help the committee:

- Listen to what church members are saying about programs, ideas, and the pastor.
- Read *The Pastor and the People: Building a New Partnership for Effective Ministry* by Lyle Schaller, which includes suggestions for writing position descriptions and surfacing expectations.
- Use "Clergy Evaluation," a booklet from the Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team, for ideas about appropriate methods of evaluation.
- Order the booklet "My Pastor Has a Family," a resource of the

Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team (when appropriate) for committee members.

- Ask your conference for guidelines on pastors' salaries.
- Have the chairperson and pastor get together to discuss issues to be brought to the meeting.
- Meet regularly so that you establish an open relationship and are able to speak comfortably with each other.
- Rotate the membership of the committee, so that there will be continuity of those familiar with the committee's work.
- Meet in a setting where you will not be interrupted or overheard.

To a large extent, any local church's effectiveness depends on a productive partnership between laity and clergy. It should be evident that a variety of avenues can be used to improve these relationships. But, the local churches that maximize the potential of their Pastoral Relations Committees will have the best opportunities for effective ministries within their own faith communities, local communities, and the world.

In churches that have multiple staffs, good relationships within the staff and between the staff and the congregation are of critical importance if the ministry of the staff is to be strong and effective.

In most churches, the action to add to the professional and/or support staff brings up the question of lines of accountability and responsibility. There are no set rules for arranging these lines. The predominate model suggests, however, that within the United Church of Christ, where there is a designated senior pastor, all additional professional and support staff are accountable and responsible to her or him.

However, there are times when other staff members feel a need for a committee with whom they can discuss their ministry, their

goals and concerns, their continuing education plans, and even their conflicts. The Pastoral Relations Committee can be a positive influence by helping staff work through their plans, ideas, concerns, and differences together. The committee can do this in several ways:

- Help at the very beginning of a staff member's tenure to clarify and understand roles. This, in turn, can be shared with the congregation so that misunderstandings about staff roles can be eliminated before serious divisions occur. This permits staff to work in a relaxed atmosphere, freeing their energy to be used in ministry and service.
- Help to assure that personnel policies are in place so that staff members can be clear about what is expected of them. A personnel manual may be written by the committee or assigned to some other board. If the latter is the choice, the Pastoral Relations Committee should monitor the policies. The kinds of questions they might raise are: "Are the policies fair and caring for the congregation and for the staff persons?" "Do the policies honor one staff person over another?" "Do allowances go to all who need them?" "Who is entitled to time and money for continuing education?" "Is compensation built on the least that can be paid or on what is fair and caring?"
- Provide a system of support and understanding for all staff that will do much to promote good relations among staff. The committee must recognize the responsibility of the pastor or senior pastor as the supervisor of the staff (if this is the way your multiple staff policy is stated) and be careful to work in a way that is supportive of the entire staff. All pastoral staff need a group to share frustrations or good feelings in order to receive an objective critique of relations among staff and between staff and congregation.

The tasks of the Pastoral Relations Committee are vital to an effective ministry in any local church of the United Church of Christ. The Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team covets for every local church of our denomination a healthy and productive ministry and mission. In a multiple staff setting this takes work among staff as well as between staff and the congregation.

## IX. CASE STUDIES

The case studies in this section were prepared by Martha Ann Baumer, Conference Minister, for use in the Illinois South Conference of the United Church of Christ. They focus on the roles and relationships of the pastor and congregation. The use of case studies is a good tool as part of the training and preparation of Pastoral Relations Committees. These are just the kinds of issues that Pastoral Relations Committees must deal with. Focusing on the issues before they are a point of tension between the pastor and congregation allows for creative preventative measures and shaping the ministry of the pastor and congregation.

A case study could be used each time a Pastoral Relations Committee meets or several could be used in a training event. After experience with these, churches may be able to develop their own case studies.

### A. VISITATION

Mr. Alpha was fussing to his neighbor. Both of them are members of St. John United Church of Christ where a new pastor recently began.

"Do you know what?" Mr. Alpha sputtered. "That new pastor hasn't been here to see me yet! And it's almost two months since she began. I've a mind to call the council president and complain. Wouldn't you think we'd get a good pastor for a change?"

That afternoon the neighbor chatted on the phone to his daughter, also a St. John member. "Old Alpha says our new pastor doesn't do her job. She hasn't been seen in this neighborhood yet! Except, of course, driving through with her kids on the way to school."

And still later, the daughter told her husband. "Guess we got taken again. Seems our pastor has offended the whole congregation. Wouldn't you think we deserve better?"

#### For Discussion:

1. What does your congregation expect your pastor to do?

2. What are the various responsibilities which he or she must carry?
3. When listing “visiting” as a responsibility, what do you mean? What priority should be given to the following kinds of calling:
  - A call to one who visited worship last Sunday
  - A call to a member who is hospitalized
  - A call to a member who lives in a nursing home
  - A call to an active attender
  - A call to a member who rarely attends but is healthy
  - A call to an unchurched resident who has asked for help
4. How would your pastor be received if she arrived at your home unannounced for no special reason? Should she call? Should there be a purpose to the visit?
5. What is important to your congregation about pastoral calling? What is its purpose?
6. How will a new pastor know who in the congregation needs to be called on and who expects to be called on?
7. How will you ask a pastoral candidate about his or her understanding and practice of pastoral calling?

## B. AVAILABILITY

Mrs. Beta has complained to a council member that Pastor Gamma is never around when you want him. “Seems he’s always out of town, usually attending those conference meetings. Don’t know what he does there, anyway. We hired him to be our pastor, after all.”

When asked in the council meeting about his availability, Pastor Gamma agreed that he had been away from town several days this month. Two were attending the Conference Board of Directors meeting, one was to hear some lectures on theology at the seminary, and two were personal outings. He added that he had phoned the council president with his plans for the meetings and lectures, giving the president phone numbers where he might be reached in emergencies. The personal outings he considered his

“days off” and did not feel that he needed to account for them since he’s entitled to at least one day off each week.

**For Discussion:**

1. How do you expect your pastor to be available to church members and others? When? And where?
2. Do you expect your pastor to maintain office hours? How long? How often? For what purpose?
3. Does your church provide a convenient, comfortable, and pleasant study for your pastor’s use?
4. Consider why it is important for your congregation and for your pastor that he or she continue to study and learn. How does your church help to make a good continuing education program possible for your pastor?
5. Do you expect your pastor to be available at any and all times by telephone? What’s reasonable?
6. When your pastor must be away from town, how do you plan to be able to reach him or her? When is it all right to do so? Who should be the one(s) to make the contact?
7. What is the difference when the pastor is
  - in the office
  - out calling
  - at a meeting
  - at home
  - in a counseling session
  - having a day off
  - on vacation
  - attending a lecture
  - working on a sermon
8. As a rule, how many hours or units (a unit is one morning or afternoon or evening) is it reasonable for your pastor to work each week? How do you assist him or her in determining what tasks take priority? What role do church members play in the pastor’s healthy lifestyle?

### C. NEW MEMBERS

“Pastor,” the council president said, “we want you to get more new people into this church. There are just not enough of us any more and we’re getting old. There’s lots of room on Sundays for people to come to church, and if you don’t get more here we won’t be able to pay your salary.”

“Yes, but when I called on that couple who last visited us, they said they didn’t feel welcome!”

“Well! They didn’t seem to understand how we do things in this church. If they’d come more often, they’d learn.”

“The Smiths have suggested that some of the younger adults would like to eat together once a month. They’re thinking with me about a Sunday supper, just a simple meal, as a time to get acquainted and to talk about the sermon and other things from time to time. They said there might be others who have some other interests and they’d like to get to know them.”

“We don’t need to do that. They can come to the Guild or the Brotherhood. They both need new blood.”

“No, they don’t want to do that. I’m not sure just why, but when I invited them they just said it wouldn’t fit their schedules.”

“They could come if they want to. You don’t need to cater to them; and we don’t, either.”

#### For Discussion:

1. How do you expect to include newcomers in your congregation’s life?
2. What do you expect your pastor to do? Is that reasonable?
3. Do you allow the necessary time in the pastor’s schedule of things to do? And does new member involvement take priority? Over what?
4. What if a suggested new group meets the same night as the Guild? Which group should the pastor attend? Why?

5. What presently attracts new people to your congregation? What might be keeping them away?
6. What do you and other members need to do to receive new members into your congregation's life? Will you do that? Or do you do that now?

#### D. CHANGES IN WORSHIP

"Well, I never! You'd never know this was the United Church of Christ!"

"We never did it this way before and I think it's wrong!"

"I certainly never remember the confession after the sermon. Doesn't seem right. And the bread! A whole loaf torn in half and passed around!"

"And the music. I think Former Pastor didn't do it that way."

Needless to say, changes were made in the service of worship.

#### For Discussion:

1. How are changes in worship introduced in your church?
2. What is your pastor's role?
3. What should she or he do when desiring to make a change?
4. What is the role of members of the congregation?
5. How might something "new and different" be introduced effectively in your congregation?
6. Is there a board or committee which deals with worship? What is its responsibility? How are members chosen and to whom are they responsible? How do you expect the pastor to work with them?
7. If there is no such group, how does the pastor introduce new ideas and practices? How does the pastor receive the congregation's wishes and reactions? Where are new ideas and possibilities discussed? What provision is there for change to be made and for the congregation to learn various ways to worship?

8. What worship customs seem most “sacred” to you? And what are simply comfortable?

### E. SERVING OUTSIDE THE LOCAL CHURCH

Pastor Delta announced to the council that “I’ve been asked to serve on the Conference Board of Directors and I’d like to accept. But before I do, I want you to know what it would mean for St. John. I would need to be away from town for board and committee meetings. I suspect I’d need to spend some time in preparation for those, and there might be some work for our church secretary to do. I know I’ll be involved in helping plan and pull off the annual mission festival the conference has, and we may be asked to host a visiting missionary from time to time.”

“Here we go! Just when we were getting used to you and liking you! That conference always comes and gets our good pastors. They never let us alone. They’ll take all your time and we’ll never see you!”

“What’s more, I’m not so sure about what they do. I’ve heard strange things, frankly. I know they keep asking for our money, too. Now they want you.”

“I know I need to be responsible to you,” the pastor replied. “But I would like to accept. You know both the congregation and I are members of the conference. I know sometimes it seems the United Church of Christ does things we don’t fully understand or even with which we disagree. But we are the United Church of Christ.”

“Maybe if you’d be there they wouldn’t do those dumb things.”

“Well, I’m not sure I can guarantee that. But I can guarantee that I’d do my best for the whole church. I can talk with you about what I’m doing and, from time to time, mention it to the congregation in a sermon or in informal comments in worship. And, it would be a way for all of us to be a part of the whole church. That includes our church, but it’s a lot more than just our church.”

**For Discussion:**

1. How do you expect your pastor to represent your congregation in the conference and denomination? In the ecumenical church?
2. How do you expect your pastor to represent the whole church of the United Church of Christ, and the ecumenical church, within the life of your congregation?
3. How do you and other members share those responsibilities?
4. What kind of a “member” is your congregation in the conference, the United Church of Christ, the ecumenical church?
5. How does the life of your congregation show that you are a part of the whole church of Jesus Christ?

**F. BAPTISM AND A FORMER PASTOR**

“Pastor, we want our new baby baptized. We’ve invited the whole family and some of our friends. They’ll all be at the house next Sunday so come at three o’clock and we’ll be ready. You can do the baptism in the living room.”

“I don’t do baptisms that way. We need to talk. Can you come to see me this week? Or can I make an appointment to come to your home to talk to the two of you about this?”

“But we have all the arrangements made. What’s to talk about? Our other kids were done that way. Former Pastor didn’t complain.”

“I’d like to explain to you why I can’t do what you’re asking.”

“Forget it. We’ll get Former Pastor to come.”

**For Discussion:**

1. What does baptism mean? What happens in baptism? What is the role of the congregation? The parents? The sponsors? The pastor?
2. How do you expect your pastor to respond to such a request for a private baptism? Why?

3. What does the pastor need to consider
  - about the sacrament?
  - about the family involved?
  - about the congregation?
4. What is the response you expect from Former Pastor? Why?
5. Is it ever ethical for a former pastor to be involved in the life of the parish? If so, under what circumstances? With what arrangements?

### G. TEACHING CONFIRMATION

In August, New Pastor called a meeting of all the potential confirmation class members and their parents. She outlined the course which she expected to pursue over that year, which she had developed with the approval of the Christian Education Committee. She told the class members and their parents the proposed schedule of class meetings as well as the expectations for church and church school attendance and for a service project.

In December, Mrs. Jones called New Pastor to say that Johnny would not be in class this week. She knew he had used all his allotment of “cuts” but indicated that he wanted to play ball and this was his only chance. New Pastor responded that it was unfortunate since now John would not be eligible to consider confirmation in the spring because of missing too many classes. Mrs. Jones was furious, saying that she hadn’t had to do that when she was in confirmation and she had no intention of having her son treated this way.

New Pastor indicated that there would be many opportunities, surely, to play ball. Mrs. Jones said New Pastor didn’t understand that ball was very important to John and that she and her husband believed he had the potential to be a star. Further, she intends to take the subject up with the Christian Education Committee or the Consistory.

#### For Discussion:

1. What is the committee’s role in this dispute? What is the pastor’s role? The parents’? The student’s?

2. What would happen, really, in your church?
3. What do you expect of your pastor concerning confirmation?  
Of the parents? Of the students? Of church boards and members?
4. How do you discuss your expectations concerning confirmation and any other matters with your pastor? How do you hear your pastor's expectations?
5. What can your pastor expect from church members? From the governing board? Where and how will support or correction be offered?
6. In what ways are the governing board and the committees of your church prepared to support the pastor when the pastor meets resistance to a program or policy the group has approved?
7. How do the officers of your church and your pastor work together? What are their responsibilities to each other and to the congregation?

## H. ADMINISTRATION

"Let's get this council meeting going. I call it to order. Pastor, will you pray?"

"Yes. Let us bow our heads in prayer."

Three hours later, "I guess that does it. Is there a motion to adjourn?"

"But we have lots to do yet!"

"What do you mean, Pastor? We've been here all night."

"I thought you'd ask for my report. I have it ready. And I also have a number of questions and items which need your attention."

"Well, let's get on with it. It's late. I guess we could stay a little while yet, but I'd rather not. Can't this stuff wait?"

### For Discussion:

1. What role do you expect your pastor to have in your church governing board?

2. Who forms the agendas for meetings? When? How? Who is consulted?
3. Who follows up when an action has been taken?
4. How are the members accountable? What is their role between meetings? At meetings?
5. How do your governing board and your pastor work together to serve your congregation?

## I. POLITICAL ACTIVITY

“Did you see the news? Our pastor had a letter to the editor in the paper about the school bond issue. And I hear she’s thinking about running for the school board.”

“Really, I didn’t think a pastor could do that! After all, they don’t pay taxes, do they?”

“I don’t know. I think they pay state taxes, and I know they pay sales taxes. I never thought about it. It just seems funny to have the pastor messing around in politics.”

“You know she preaches about politics sometimes. Says we’re supposed to vote. And she talks about civil rights a lot. I always thought religion and politics don’t mix.”

### For Discussion:

1. Is it ever appropriate for a pastor to be a member of a school board, city council, or other governmental body? How would your congregation support such a role for your pastor?
2. How do religion and politics mix? What are your expectations of your pastor in relation to preaching about current affairs or conditions in our nation and world?
3. What is the role of the Christian faith in our secular lives? How is your pastor expected to make that connection for your congregation?

## J. THEOLOGY

“Pastor, why don’t we say the creed anymore? I miss it. We always used to say it. We had to memorize it when I was a kid, and it doesn’t seem right not to use it.”

“What creed do you mean?”

“The Apostles’ Creed, of course.”

“Well, I think the language is difficult for lots of people today, including me. And I struggle with the line about the virgin birth since I have questions about that. So I just avoid it and use other things.”

“What? You have questions? I thought they taught you what to believe in seminary! Didn’t they? And I certainly believe Jesus was ‘born of the Virgin Mary’! Why, I’m shocked at what you said. I never knew that about you. I always thought you and I believed the same things.”

### For Discussion:

1. What beliefs about the Christian faith are central to your local church? How are they expressed?
2. What statements of the Christian faith are most widely accepted in your local church? Why?
3. What room is there for differences of belief or understanding? How are such differences encouraged or discouraged?
4. Does your church’s belief focus most heavily upon one or another of the three persons of the Trinity? Which one?
5. How do you expect your pastor to teach you about the Christian faith? How do you expect to be involved in learning? In teaching others?
6. What happens when the pastor and members of the congregation differ? Where can those differences be expressed in a caring and accepting way, seeking understanding? Or can they?

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