

Procedure: COM Visitation to Ministers and Sessions

Introduction

1. In accordance with the Book of Order, G-11.0502a-c, the Committee on Ministry is charged with the responsibility to, "Visit regularly and consult with each minister of the presbytery."
2. In addition, "It shall visit with each session of the presbytery at least once every three years, discussing with them the mission and ministry of the particular church and encouraging the full participation of each session and congregation in the life and work of presbytery and of the larger church."
3. These guidelines are divided into two major sections as follows:
 - a. Visitations to parish ministers and sessions.
 - b. Visitations to ministers serving in other places or at-large.

General Responsibilities of the Committee on Ministry (COM):

1. Each minister and session shall be visited by an elder and a minister from the COM at least every three years. Members of other presbytery committees may also be requested to serve as needed. This Triennial Visitation Team shall be moderated by the COM Liaison.
2. The COM Liaison shall determine possible visitation dates with each minister and session.
3. It is the COM Liaison's responsibility to complete the final arrangements with each minister and session. Such arrangements should be completed at least one month before the meeting, but three to six months notice is preferred. Invite congregations to send you newsletters, bulletins, annual reports, and other helpful material.
4. The COM shall maintain appropriate records of all visits scheduled and made. Inform COM (for minutes) of scheduled visit at next COM meeting and report to presbytery which visits have been completed each year.
5. **Basic Advice: We go to these meetings as listeners and consultants.**

Purpose

1. To learn about the life, mission, and ministry of the local congregation.
2. To discuss the responsibilities of COM and the services offered.
3. To discuss and encourage the full participation of the session and congregation in the life and work of the Presbytery and its larger church.
4. To respond to questions, requests, and issues asked by the session and minister.

Salary Review Guidelines

Visitation teams should review and familiarize themselves with 4.6302 Salary Review, and be prepared to recommend these procedures.

Procedures And Responsibilities On Conducting Triennial Visits To Parish Ministers And Sessions

1. Call the Executive Presbytery **before** visiting to receive background information.
2. Arrange a visit with pastor, including the spouse if the pastor is married, at a convenient time, such as before the session meeting at dinner.

3. For multiple staff congregations, arrange visits separately with each pastor and associate pastor, including the spouse if the person is married. If possible, arrange a special meeting with just the pastor and associate pastor(s) present to discuss the staff relationship.
4. Arrange for a special session meeting for COM visitation if preferred by the pastor.
5. After visiting team is introduced to the session, the pastor/pastors should be excused.
6. Request a copy of mission statement, annual report, bulletins, etc. before meeting.
7. Assure all concerned that all meetings are confidential, and will only be shared with the COM committee and the Executive Presbyter.
8. Ordinarily the session visit should be about 60 minutes, a bit more if the spirit of the meeting calls for it.
9. Written notes should not be taken during the meetings, since the purpose is listening and dialogue. Make any notes needed afterward in private. Use all of your senses. There may be some issues that are not out in the open, but require some "fishing" or some informal follow-up later. DO NOT overstay your welcome. Often sessions and pastors are pressed for time. DO plan for your team to talk together (COM team) after the visit or the next day to discuss perceptions and necessary follow-up.
10. DO call the pastor(s) within **48** hours to briefly discuss the visit and to share perceptions and the necessary follow-up.
11. Within two weeks of the meeting, the COM Liaison is responsible for sending a letter to the session and to the pastor, thanking them for their time and cooperation, and informing them of observations, with a copy sent to the Presbytery Office. These observations should be honest and direct, without any implications or conclusions that they are absolute and whole truth. An oral report will be made by the COM Liaison at the next COM meeting. Ensure items of a sensitive nature are shared with the appropriate sub-committees (in private) for their attention (follow up on issues as appropriate).
12. A Summary Report of Session & Pastor Visit by Visitation Team shall be sent by the COM Liaison to the Executive Presbyter and Administrative Assistant at the Presbytery Office and to the COM Moderator.
13. If any significant problem exists, advise the Presbytery Executive as soon as possible.
14. The cost of the dinner for the pastor, spouse, and team members will be reimbursed by COM funds when an expense reimbursement request is submitted.

Questions to ask Parish Pastors

1. Assure the pastor that this is a pastoral call. Ask about the joys and hopes of his/her ministry in this congregation. Regarding your own ministry: What seems to be going well? What do you wish were going better? What parts of your ministry do you enjoy the most? Ask if there are any frustrations regarding salary, work conditions, housing, congregational expectations, family life, etc.
2. In what areas of your ministry do you find yourself growing the most? For what do you use your study leave? Are you satisfied with that?
3. What is your sense of the health of this congregation? Is it stronger in some parts, and not so strong in other parts? Identify which.
4. Do you sense that your personal goals for ministry are compatible with what you believe are the goals of the congregation? What are some of those goals?

5. How do you help officers and members of the congregation grow in their understanding of the Presbyterian Church, especially the Book of Order, the Directory of Worship, and the Book of Confessions?
6. Describe the mission work and commitment of the congregation to other people outside the congregation and the ministry work and commitment to people inside the congregation.
7. In what ways do you and others in the congregation give yourselves to the work of the Presbytery and /or other parts of the wider Church? Invite the sharing of frustrations and joys regarding relationships with presbytery, committee work, etc.
8. If you have a family, will you tell us about it? What about your financial support from the congregation? Where do you find spiritual and emotional support for your ministry?
9. Are there concerns or questions surrounding the terms of the minister's call (salary)?
10. Are there any special ways the COM committee can support him/her. What areas of their ministry need changes or improvements to be more effective? Can presbytery help in any way?
11. What would you say are the congregation's strong points? Weak points? The session's strong points? Weak points? What is your perception of the health of this congregation?
12. For associate pastors especially, ask how well their job expectations are being met?
13. Is there a personnel committee? Does it function well? How is annual salary review made? Are you satisfied with this process? Is your salary adequate?
14. How are you involved in the community?
15. Are there any other areas that you want to share with us?

Questions to ask the Session

1. Explain the purpose and procedures of this visit, as carried out under the requirements of the Book of Order. It would be helpful to read the appropriate sections (a-c of G-11.0502). Also, explain that this is a pastoral call.
2. Ask elders present to share something of themselves; to say why or how they came to be a member of this particular congregation; and what is their special responsibility within the congregation?
3. Review their mission statement. Ask how the congregation is being effective in the community.
4. Ask about joys and concerns regarding current pastoral leadership. If there are problems, would they like to pursue the matter further with the COM committee, or do they feel confident in working it through themselves? What are the strengths of your pastor? Where are there opportunities for improvement?
5. Encourage session to groom elders for presbytery leadership, urging that the names of qualified people be submitted to the Nomination Committee.
6. Invite discussion about their support for the mission program of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and of the Presbytery.
7. How do the pastor and family fit into the long-established tradition of the congregation? How do they relate to the wider community?
8. What is the most important strength or asset of this congregation? What do you folks do best? (Asked of group with voluntary responses.)
9. What does your pastor(s) do best? Where might he/she need some help from members in carrying out the ministry?
10. Does the congregation review salaries annually? Do you feel good about the process?
11. How does the session and congregation minister to your pastor and family?
12. Do you encourage your pastor to take time for continuing education?

13. What would you like to see happen in your congregation in the next few years? How can it be achieved?
14. What involvement does your congregation have in Presbytery? General mission?
15. As a session: How do you feel about yourselves as elders? Are you glad to be working together? Are there some places where things don't fit too well? What do you wished worked better?
16. Your congregation: How would you describe it? What seems to be the best thing in your congregation? What do you wish were better?
17. Your mission work outside your own congregation: Tell us about it. Tell us also about the ministry that takes place within your congregation.
18. In what ways have you grown in the past few years in your understanding of the Presbyterian Church, specifically in your study of the Book of Order, and the Book of Confessions? How has that growth taken place?
19. What goals do you and/or the congregation have for the next few years? Are these goals compatible with the goals of your pastor(s)?
20. The session is responsible for setting the shape and thrust of worship. Tell us how you do that. What standards do you use? How does the Directory for Worship guide you? Do you see the fruit of the Gospel growing out of your worship? In what ways?
21. Your personnel committee: Tell us about it. Do you feel it works well? How do you feel about your financial, emotional and spiritual support of your pastor(s) and staff?
22. Are there concerns of questions surrounding the terms of the minister's call (salary)?
23. In your ordination you promised to serve, as you were able, in the wider units of the Church. Tell us how that is working for you.
24. About the presbytery: Tell us how you see that working. In what ways has presbytery been helpful to you? In what ways do your wish it were more helpful?
25. Are there any other things you would like to explore with us?

Visits to Ministers a) In Other Service of This Church, b) In Service Beyond the Jurisdiction of the Church, or Members-at-Large.

1. Call the Executive Presbyter or Stated Clerk **before** a visitation to receive background information that would facilitate your visit.
2. Arrange meeting at a convenient time and place for minister and team members.
3. Follow the appropriate guidelines for visitation to parish ministers, including dinner out.
4. Visits should be made at least annually.
5. Suggested Questions:
 - How do you see yourself participating actively in the Presbytery?
 - How would you like to have the Presbytery involved in your ministry?
 - What concerns would you like to raise?
 - Depending upon the non-parish pastor's situation, other questions may be appropriate or necessary. (Remember, the Executive Presbyter or Stated Clerk can give you information **before** the visit.)

Finally, we thank you for joining with us in mutually building up the life of Christ's Church, your particular congregation, the presbytery and the wider church. The Apostle Paul said that he wanted to visit one of his churches so that he and the church would each be blessed and strengthened by the visit. That certainly is our aim in a triennial visit, and to that we have committed ourselves.