

Information: Thoughts on Session / Pastor Visits By COM

Sequence of Events

1. Contact the Executive Presbyter well in advance of the visit to secure any pertinent information.
2. COM will assign teams for the visits.
3. The teams need to decide who does what to achieve the COM objectives.
 - Schedule the visit well ahead of the actual date by phone.
 - Confirm the visit with a letter (See 4.2501) and information for session and pastor(s) about what to expect and suggested preparation.
 - Inform COM (for minutes) of scheduled visit at next COM meeting. Request information packet from the congregation (mission statement, newsletter, bulletin, annual report, etc.). Suggest a special meeting (60 minutes) just for this meeting.
 - Talk before the visit(s) and decide on an approach and who does what. Review COM visitation policy as a reminder of roles and/or responsibilities. If one of the team cannot be present, find a replacement. It is important to have lay and clergy representation at the visit, since each brings a unique perspective.
 - Arrive early for the visit.
 - 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.
 - Remind pastor(s) and session that you are there to listen, learn, share as appropriate, and provide assistance as appropriate; the information is shared only with COM, the Executive Presbyter, and Moderator (as appropriate); our motive is to be supportive and helpful.
 - LISTEN, ENCOURAGE, EXPLORE, BE SENSITIVE.
 - 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.
 - DO call the pastor(s) within 48 hours to briefly discuss the visit and to share perceptions and the necessary follow-up.
 - DO follow up with individual letters to the pastor(s) and the session within 2 weeks of the visit - the sooner the better.
 - DO provide a copy of the letters to COM (for the records) at the next COM meeting and report to COM on the visit (for the minutes). Ensure items of a sensitive nature are shared with the appropriate sub-committees (in private) for their attention (follow up on issues as appropriate).

Suggestions For Meeting With A Pastor

1. Contact the Executive Presbyter well in advance of the visit to secure any pertinent information.
2. Assure the pastor that this is a pastoral call.
3. Ask about the joys and hopes of his/her ministry in this congregation.
4. What are the goals for the ministry in this congregation?
5. Ask if there are any frustrations regarding salary, work conditions, housing, congregational expectations, family life, etc.
6. Discuss pastor's program and plans for continued education.
7. If there is a staff relationship, invite the sharing of both joys and concerns. Ask if he/she

- would be willing to meet together with staff pastors.
8. Invite sharing frustrations and joys regarding relationships with presbytery, committee work, etc.
 9. Ask if there are any special ways the COM committee can support him/her.
 10. 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?

Suggestions For Meeting With 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 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 does 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. Possible discussion questions:
 - "If you could have one wish come true for the life, program, ministry, and mission of this congregation, what would it be?"
 - "If a 28-year-old teacher, his wife, and their two children, ages 5 and 3, move to this community from Seattle next month and visit your congregation on their own initiative,

why would they decide to come back instead of shopping for another congregation?"

- "If it was announced next week that one of the members left the congregation \$50,000 with absolutely no restrictions on how it was to be used, how do you think your congregation would want to spend it?"
- "What has happened here during the past few years that has been a very significant event or moving experience in your own spiritual growth?"
- "What do you personally see as the most pressing issue, problem or concern here in your local congregation? In the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) at large?"