

The Pastoral Excellence Committee

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Table of Contents

Introduction

Why another change in name?	4
A(nother) New Model	4
A. What is a Pastoral Excellence Committee?	4
B. Why Have a Pastoral Excellence Committee?	4-5
C. Format for a Pastoral Excellence Committee	6-7
D. Frequency and Length of Pastoral Excellence Committee Meetings	7
E. Dealing with Complaints	8
F. Conflict Management	8
G. Composition and Organization of PEC	9
H Meeting Guide Sheets	11-50

WHY ANOTHER CHANGE IN NAME?

The Pastoral Relations Committee (PRC) or the Pastor Parish Relations Committee (PPRC) is a concept that has been around for a long time. In this author's experience, it is rarely functional. A big piece of that is owed to the fact that the model is based on a Ministerial and Pastoral Care function, but is carried out by business people. In my first degree and subsequent career in the business arena, I never once heard of segments of meetings wherein there would be time for "sharing". That is process-oriented—not something to which most business people relate.

As a result, the PRC or PPRC often degenerated into a gripe session, a place where complaints and grievances were aired, since that is the closest we could get to "sharing". Eventually the pastors lost interest in, or worse, did not trust the committee, and it failed.

A(nother) NEW MODEL

After watching these failures in communication and process for a number of years, I began to wonder if a more American Business Systems friendly model could be implemented. A model that made sense to bottom line types as well as those that are more process-oriented. Please know that this is not a formula, but a work in process. This is not a book or even booklet right now, it's an idea. As author and editor, I covet the feedback of all who use it. Just promise me right now, not to call and "share" your thoughts. Call me, talk to me in direct language, and ALWAYS come with a suggestion for improvement alongside a criticism. (Trust me, you'll understand by the end of this).

A. WHAT IS A PASTORAL EXCELLENCE COMMITTEE?

A Pastoral Excellence Committee (PEC) is a small group of persons who provide *support* for the pastor, a *regular channel of communication* between the pastor and the congregation, and a means by which the tools which sustain Pastoral Excellence are monitored and modeled.

B. WHY HAVE A PASTORAL EXCELLENCE COMMITTEE?

There are three basic reasons for a congregation to have a PEC:

1. *Building Up The Body of Christ*

The *first* reason is to *build up the life of the church and its ministry*. The church is the body of Christ, knit together by God for the mutual up-building of life.

Ephesians 4:15-16 says: *Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and up-builds itself in love.* Ephesians 4:15- 16

This responsibility calls for sensitive care and careful discernment regarding what is beneficial, and is to be exercised in a humble and loving way.

2. Support

The *second* reason to have a PEC is to provide focused, consistent support for the pastor. Ministry is a high stress profession. The high level of personal and congregational expectations contribute to the need for support. Being a primary *care-giver*, the pastor needs a supportive environment for renewal.

Focused attention has been given in recent years to *clergy stress*. Following is a summary of the facts that contribute to stress.

Work related stress factors for parish ministers can include:

role ambiguity – *uncertainty about what your job includes*

role conflict – *clash between ministerial functions and personal or family life*

role overload – *being overwhelmed by the expectations of parishioners*

time demands – *constantly being thrown off schedule by unexpected issues*

lack of pastoral care – *not having a solid counselor to turn to with your own problems*

lack of chances to “de-role” – *to be taken care of yourself, for a change*

relocation - *to a new area or job*

career uncertainty – *knowing your whole future can depend upon how you get along in one parish*

loneliness – *the fact that few outside the ministry understand the demands on you that make you feel isolated even in the midst of a committed, caring community.*

from “Clergy Stress and Burnout”

2. *Support (continued)*

Additionally, changing social patterns, demographic transitions, marginalization of the church, and conflicting beliefs are factors that contribute to ministerial stress and impact the pastor's family life. Consequently, the PEC needs to be sensitive to the experiences and needs of the Pastor's spouse/family.

3. *Feedback And Communication*

The third reason for a congregation to have a PEC is to provide a regular channel of communication for cultivating an open, affirmative and creative relationship between the pastor and congregation, and enabling the church to fulfill its mission effectively. Communication is a vital ingredient in the provision of support. Regular meetings are essential for maintaining relationships at an optimal level. Maintenance of a *regular schedule* guards against the PEC becoming a *crisis* management agent. By providing a regular means of feedback, the PEC helps to prevent major crises and helps in the building of trust which is crucial to the function of ministry.

C. **FORMAT FOR A PASTORAL EXCELLENCE COMMITTEE**

The format for a PEC session is important because it provides a framework for keeping the purposes intact. Following is a suggested format to help keep the PEC focused. (*Note: The pastor is to be present at all PEC meetings.*)

1. *Opening Prayer and/or Brief Meditation*

The chairperson could do this or request members to share in this responsibility on a rotating basis.

2. *Discussion of Ministries of the last Month*

- What went well?
- What could have gone better?
- What are some ideas for all of us to improve our next experience?

3. *Spiritual Perspectives and Spiritual Growth*

- Where have we seen God at work in our
- Minister and our Shared Ministries?
- What other Ministries need a Spiritual Boost?

4. *Projecting Goals*

- What are three major goals the Minister is working toward?
- What steps are needed to achieve these?

5. *Continuing Education*

- What activities is the minister engaging?
- Is there sufficient time for study/education?

6. *Time Management*

- Discuss what the Pastor is doing for self care
- Is the Pastor taking a true day off?
- Is the Pastor giving adequate time to family?
- Is the Pastor giving adequate time to recreation?
- Is the Pastor maintaining healthy relationships beyond the church?

7. *Family Roles*

- Is the church laying unrealistic expectations or demands on the Pastor's family?
- Is the church including the Pastor's family without special conditions or demands?

8. *Next Meeting*

- Schedule this BEFORE you leave

9. *Closing Prayer*

D. FREQUENCY AND LENGTH OF PEC MEETINGS

Ideally, the PEC is to meet once per month, but 8-9 times per year may be sufficient to maintain the continuity and sustain the dynamics as a regular means of support and feedback.

Regularly scheduled meetings, convened and chaired by the chairperson, are essential to maximize the effectiveness of the PEC. The PEC may need extra time at the outset of the year to find the optimal meeting time. It is recommended that PEC's do not meet just prior to other meetings (e.g. board or committee meetings) or worship services. Ninety minutes is a sufficient length of time for a PEC meeting. Respect this schedule. It will contribute to an effective PEC.

E. DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS

The PEC is not designed to function as a “grievance committee.” On the other hand, it should not ignore negative feelings or the emotional climate within the congregation. Being sensitive to feelings assures each person of her/his value, and that what each feels and thinks is important.

Supporting direct communication in the congregation is the role of the PEC. This enhances communication and prevents the PEC from becoming a “lightening rod” for complaints. The PEC is not intended to replace or disrupt the flow of communication in a congregation. The PEC always encourages persons to relate directly to others, or to the pastor, with a complaint or a concern.

For example, if someone shares a matter with a PEC member, that PEC member should listen attentively. After the matter is shared, the PEC member inquires, “Have you shared this with _____?” (*the person who is the subject of the concern*). If the person says “No,” then the PEC member is to advise that person to talk with the individual directly.

A PEC should not allow itself to be used as a pressure group to get the minister to behave in a certain way. When complaints are expressed to a PEC member about the minister, it may be a “cop out” on the part of the person who should express their concern directly. PEC members should listen attentively to people, but they must also make judgments about the relative significance of the input: whether to advise the person in another direction, and whether or not to enter it in the PRC agenda.

F. CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

The PEC is not designed to be a crisis management team, although it may be called upon to help handle a crisis from time to time. A PEC is more of a “safety valve.” The elements of regular meetings, support and feedback are designed to avoid major crises. If major conflicts arise in the congregation, it is advised that either a regional/area staff minister or another professional resource person be consulted as soon as possible to help provide conflict management.

G. COMPOSITION AND ORGANIZATION

1. ***Board-approved:*** It is important that the decision to establish a PEC be ratified by the church board. Guidelines such as this document can be used for operation and procedures, but they need not be included in the constitution. It is desirable that the board confirms the persons selected to serve.

2. ***Size of the PEC:*** A PEC should be relatively small. An optimum number would be five to six persons, in addition to the minister. This is large enough to provide for good group interaction and small enough to allow for total participation. A relatively small committee is easier to convene. But it is important that those who are selected make attendance at meetings a high priority, because too many absences in a small group may inhibit its effectiveness. Another important reason for having a relatively small group is due to the importance of maintaining a high trust level. The ratio of members to minister is smaller, and confidentiality is more easily protected.

3. ***Selection of PEC members:*** Because of the special nature of the PEC, it is more appropriate to select its members by appointment rather than through formal nominating and election processes. It is appropriate for the minister to provide a suggested list of names to the chairperson of the board, including at least one elder. Then, in mutual consultation between the minister and chairperson of the board, final selections will be made. Once the committee members have been selected and secured, the board chairperson will report the appointments to the church board. The committee will select its own chairperson at its first meeting (someone other than the minister). Because of the frequency of meetings, the committee may want to rotate the chairperson on an annual basis.

4. ***Qualifications for members:*** First and foremost, the PEC members are persons with whom the pastor has a good relationship. Important characteristics include:
 - persons who are supportive of the minister with a sensitivity to the feelings and needs of both congregation and minister
 - persons who are good listeners;
 - persons with skills in human relations and communications;
 - persons who have integrity with regard to maintaining confidentiality;
 - both men and women, of mixed ages.

4. ***Qualifications (continued)*** - It is not particularly necessary or appropriate to include members of other committees or departments of the church simply because they represent those groups. Because the committee is small, not all the church can be represented. If input is needed from other groups, the PEC may invite representatives to its meeting and excuse them after a particular agenda is fulfilled. It is best not to have the current chair of the board on the PEC. It is desirable to have at least one elder on the committee.

5. ***Length of term:*** Two main factors must be considered in determining the length of term. One has to do with maintaining continuity. The other is establishing checks and balances. Rotation of members enables new perspectives to enter the process and establishes definite terms.

The formation of a PEC should take place within six months following the arrival of a new minister. The search committee may be asked to serve as the PEC following the call of a new minister until a new committee can be established. This allows the minister time to get acquainted and to identify those persons who fit the suggested profile for PEC members.

Depending upon the size of the committee, length of service may be set up on a three to five year basis. At the time the committee is established, it would be necessary to determine the length of term for each member in order to start the rotation.

When the minister leaves the congregation, that PEC would cease to function.

1. *Opening Prayer and/or Brief Meditation* – The chairperson could do this or request members to share in this responsibility on a rotating basis.

2. *Discussion of Ministries since last meeting*

What went well?

What could have gone better?

What are some ideas for all of us to improve our next experience?

3. *Spiritual Perspectives and Spiritual Growth*

Where have we seen God at work in our Minister and our Shared Ministries?

What other Ministries need a Spiritual Boost?

4. Projecting Goals

What are three major goals the Minister is working toward?

What steps and assistance are needed to achieve these?

5. Continuing Education

What activities is the minister engaging?

Is there sufficient time for study/education?

6. *Time Management*

Discuss what the Pastor is doing for self care is the Pastor taking a true day off?

Is the Pastor giving adequate time to family?

Is the Pastor giving adequate time to recreation?

Is the Pastor maintaining healthy relationships beyond the church?

7. *Family Roles*

Is the church laying unrealistic expectations or demands on the Pastor's family?

Is the church including the Pastor's family without special conditions or demands?

8. *Next Meeting* – Schedule this BEFORE you leave

9. *Closing Prayer*

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