

Covenant Faithfulness in Changing Times: Encouraging Healthy and Fruitful SPRC and Pastor/Staff Teams

I. The Importance of Covenant *Bishop Julius Calvin Trimble*

Jesus Christ is at the center of our ministry. Without that covenantal relationship there is no authenticity, no genuineness, no authority for ministry.

That relationship with God through Christ has within it a certain amount of mutuality:

- God has chosen to be our God – and we, in response to God’s prevenient grace-filled invitation – bind ourselves to God through Christ.
- God in Christ Jesus then also supports us and holds us accountable in this ministry.
- We seek to support one another and hold one another accountable in this ministry. A relationship – a covenant – that we cannot attempt if it were not for God’s covenantal relationship with us that preceded our relationship with God and with each other.

John Wesley placed this covenantal relationship at the heart of ministry of the movement called Methodism.

From *The Book of Discipline*, our Wesleyan Heritage holds this to be true, that: **“Support without accountability promotes moral weakness; accountability without support is a form of cruelty.”** (Paragraph 101, page 49) What makes this covenantal is that it is mutual for all members of the body of Christ called the Church.

“Covenant Faithfulness in Changing Times – Encouraging Healthy and Fruitful SPRC and Pastor/Staff Teams” has the goal of helping one another better understand and better practice the “method” of mutual accountability and mutual support, not only for the good of a few, but also for the good of all who call Jesus Christ Lord and to become more effective and fruitful in ministry as the church.

Much credit for this first session is given to the work of Gwen Purushotham of the Division of Ministry, General Board of Higher Education and Ministry for her research into mutual support and mutual accountability and the work of Lovett Weems and the Lewis Center for Leadership for the practice of mutual support and mutual accountability in evaluation processes that we will be exploring today. These are “best practices” incorporating healthy relationships in ministry that promote effective and fruitful ministry of both the clergy and the laity of the church.

Mutual Support and Mutual Accountability¹

“Support without accountability promotes moral weakness; accountability without support is a form of cruelty.” (The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, Paragraph 101, page 49)

The whole of scripture is the record of God’s grace supporting humanity and all of creation; yet here are few specific examples:

- “They confronted me in the day of my calamity; but the LORD was my support.” Psalm 18:18
- “As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the LORD our God, until he has mercy upon us. Psalm” 123:2
- “And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you.” 1 Pet 5:10

As we are supported so also we are charged with supporting one another:

- “In all this I have given you an example that by such work we must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" Acts 20:35
- “Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.” 1 Thessalonians 5:11

Along with this support is also accountability:

- “I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.” John 15:5
- “But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the rich root of the olive tree, do not boast over the branches. If you do boast, remember that it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you.” Romans 11:17-18

¹ This concept/practice is expanded by Gwen Purushotham in a Manuel that she has written as part of her work with the Division of Ministry, General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, United Methodist Church, Nashville, TN. gpurushotham@gbhem.org.

- “And we urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the faint hearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them.” 1 Thessalonians 5:14

In small groups, briefly list the ways that we are called to support one another in ministry. Make two columns, one labeled “Pastor/Staff” and the other labeled “Congregation” and list the ways that each can support the other in a mutual fashion.

Pastor/Staff

Congregation

In small groups, briefly list the ways that we are called to hold one another accountable to fruitfulness in ministry. Here also, make two columns and list the ways that both Pastor/Staff and Congregation can hold each other accountable to be fruitful in ministry. (The following are listed as examples.)

Pastor/Staff

Congregation

It follows then, that there is a necessity in the life of faith for both mutual support and mutual accountability. Now we will explore the ways in which evaluations of ministry for both the Pastor/Staff and the Congregation can reflect mutual support and mutual accountability and increase the potential for Spirit led, fruitful ministry.

II. Theological Foundations for Evaluation²

From “Theological and Theoretical Foundations for Evaluating Ministry” comes this insight:

“Evaluation is one of God’s ways of bringing the history of the past into dialogue with the hope of the future.... We are called into new growth and new ministries by taking a realistic and hopeful look at what we have been and what we can still become.”

from Theological and Theoretical Foundations for Evaluating Ministry, GBHEM, 1990

Scripture

From the wisdom of the Hebrew Scriptures

- “Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom for the future.” (Proverbs 19:20)

Jesus invited evaluation of his ministry

- He asked them, “Who do you say I am?” (Mk 8:27-29; also Mt 16:13-23; Lk 9:18-22)

The Bible calls us to grow toward “perfection”

- Jesus challenged listeners to “Be perfect ... as [God] is perfect” (Mt 5:48)
- From Paul: “Not that I have.. .already been made perfect, but I press on ...” (Phil. 3:12)
- Also from Paul: “Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the
- faith.. .that you may become perfect.” (II Cor. 13: 5, 9)

Truthful, loving communication can result in growth

- “But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into.. .Christ.” (Eph. 4:15)

² Lovett Weems, *Resources for Staff-Parish Relations Committees*; Lewis Center for Church Leadership, Wesley Theological Seminary; www.churchleadership.com.

Our Wesleyan Heritage³

“Going on to perfection” is a familiar theme in Wesley’s sermons and writings.

- Growth and development are essential not only to human existence but also to faith.
- Faith as a lifelong process—a continual journey of growing into salvation. (I Peter 2:2)

Class Meetings were foundational to the early Methodist Movement.

- Class meeting as a time for reflecting on one’s faith journey.
- Class meeting as a loving, supportive, and nurturing environment in which to evaluate one’s growth in faith.
- Class meeting questions designed to encourage giving and receiving honest feedback.

Christ’s Body – The Church⁴

Within the Church, we are called to mutual support and accountability through the various gifts that are given in Christ Jesus:

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

Ephesians 4:11-13

Ministry within the church is not a simple matter of hired and/or volunteer work, but ministry within the church is a matter of “call”.

We are partners in Christ in our calling that comes from our baptism in Christ. Members of the Body of Christ are partners in Christ through prayers, presence, gifts, witness and service.

For both pastor/staff and congregation there are numerous callings, based upon specific gifts given to each within the primary and all encompassing gift of God’s love in Jesus Christ.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Developed for this resource.

Effective and Ineffective Staff-Parish Relations Committees⁵

Ineffective

Conduct annual evaluations only

- Withholds regular feedback
- Lets issues build too long
- Related to salary and appointment decisions more than to growth

Allow too little time and care

- Insufficient time to do task well
- Insufficient care in getting input and preparing for evaluation

Behave unfairly

- Bringing unevaluated complaints
- Bringing anonymous complaints
- Giving all sources equal credibility
- Doesn't put issues in perspective

Effective

Meet regularly and often

Prepare for meetings

- Have an agenda
- Stay focused on agenda and identify topics for future meetings
- Allow adequate time

Establish partnership with pastor

- Keep pastor/staff informed
- Take pastor/staff into confidence
- "We are in this together" attitude
- Provide support and understanding

Keep SPRC informed
Take SPRC into confidence
We are in the together" attitude
with SPRC
Provide SPRC support and
understanding

⁵ Lovett Weems, *Resources for Staff-Parish Relations Committees*; Lewis Center for Church Leadership, Wesley Theological Seminary; www.churchleadership.com. The italic items have been added for this resource to illustrate how the pastor/staff member can also establish a partnership with the SPRC.

What SPRCs and Clergy/Staff Most Need from Each Other⁶

Every covenantal relationship is mutual in what is needed or expected from one another. This is also true in what SPRC's need most from clergy/ staff persons and what clergy/staff person(s) need from SPRCs.

SPRCs Most Need from Clergy/Staff

Cooperation and receptivity

- Willing to listen with open mind
- Attempt to understand members' needs and concerns
- Attempt to make some changes
- Openness to improvement ideas

Clear and open communication

- Pastor's vision for ministry
- Candid assessment of what is going on in the church
- Information about issues and needs

Clergy/Staff Most Need from SPRCs

Honest feedback

- Balanced, objective, thoughtful, and candid feedback
- Treated as adults who can take criticism

Personal concern and support

- Advocate for pastor

Communication with the congregation

- Education of congregation
- Feedback from and to congregation

Based on a comparison of staff parish relations committees deemed effective by both and the pastor and those deemed ineffective by the chair and pastor.

⁶ Ibid.

Giving and Receiving Feedback⁷

Giving Feedback *IS NOT*:

- Winning a point or coercing another
- Passing rumors
- Hiding behind what someone else says
- Advocating a theological perspective
- Something done to pastor
- Weapon to be used against an enemy
- Defending ones self or others
- Saving up complaints for a one-time session
- Objective truth
- Advocating personal preferences rather than the mission of the church

Giving Feedback *IS*:

Sincere and plain-speaking

- Self-revealing on the part of evaluators
- Humbly invited, humbly offered
- Contains useful insights
- Dialogue with pastor
- Personal and interactive

Tool for improvement

Ongoing process in the midst of ministry

At its best, love in action

Upholds the mission and ministry of the church

⁷ As printed and adapted by Lovett Weems; Lewis Center for Church Leadership; Wesley Theological Seminary; www.churchleadership.com from Art Gafke, Ministry Assessment Process: Giving and Receiving Feedback, GBHEM; with the exception of the final bullet point in Giving Feedback Is Not and the final statement in Giving Feedback Is which have been added for this resource.

*Asking for and Receiving Feedback*⁸

- ✓ Specify the feedback you seek and why you are asking.
- ✓ Be sure those giving feedback understand what they are being asked to do.
- ✓ Have adequate time and a setting where you will not be interrupted.
- ✓ Assume positive motive and intention on the part of those giving feedback.
- ✓ Invite feedback givers to offer specific observations from their own experience.
- ✓ Repeat & rephrase comments to be sure you understand what they meant to say.
- ✓ Be aware of your feelings, breathing, physical comfort—call for a break if needed.

*Giving Feedback*⁹

- ✓ Have adequate time and a setting where you won't be interrupted.
- ✓ Be clear about confidentiality—what can be shared from evaluative session.
- ✓ Avoid ganging up as a group on the one receiving feedback.
- ✓ Assume positive motive and intention on the part of the one receiving feedback.
- ✓ Speak from your own experience—give specific details.
- ✓ Invite questions for clear understanding—did they hear what you meant to say?
- ✓ Divide the feedback itself and conclusions from feedback into different sessions.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

Secrets and Confidentiality¹⁰

In any and every healthy relationship there needs to be a distinction between secrets and confidentiality.

SPRCs, Pastor/Staff and congregations can create difficult situations by the keeping of secrets from one another and confusing secret-keeping as keeping confidences. The keeping of secrets diminishes the capacity for caring for one another, trust, and leads to broken relationships.

Secrets and confidentiality are not the same.

- *Secrets are pieces of information that will cause harm to another, such as gossip.*
- *Secrets triangulate relationships.*
- *Secrets hold power over someone.*
- *Secrets are another way of valuing anonymous feedback, such as “I know something you don’t know.”*
- *Secrets are destructive.*

Confidentiality . . .

- *Confidentiality is a trust, a responsibility held, with permission, for constructive relationships.*
- *Confidentiality is a trust, a responsibility that seeks to do no harm and will not aid others in doing harm.*
- *Confidentiality is maintained for a “place” of healing.*

It is a necessary and wise practice to always end every SPRC meeting with a mutual agreement about what needs to be held in confidence and what can be shared with whom and who will share it.

¹⁰ Prepared for this Resource by Harlan Gillespie and Nicholas Longworth.

III. Types of Evaluation

A productive and healthy evaluation is actually an evaluation of mutual support and mutual accountability on the parts of both the church and the pastor/staff member(s). In the best of ministry contexts, evaluations will –

- Provide for a way to bring clarity and focus to the ministry;
- Increase the understanding of what all members of the body of Christ can do to further the mission and ministry of the church, and
- Bring every member of the body of Christ into a better working relationship with each other as expressed in their holy callings.

These three things need to be the goal of any and all persons involved in evaluations.

Two basic, common Types of Evaluations

Formative Evaluations¹¹

- How can person improve? How can person develop and grow?
- Participants are partners in process.
- Calls for substantial trust among participants.
- Leads to concrete suggestions for improvement.
- Satisfies strategies for ministry.

Summative Evaluations¹²

- How well is person doing? Are they advancing church's overall mission?
- Participants are assessing performance and skills.
- Leads to conclusions about how well-suited a person is to the ministry needs of the particular church.
- Helpful for making decisions regarding the fit between the church and pastor

Suggested evaluation formula: 90% formative + 10% summative¹³

¹¹ Lovett Weems; Resources for Staff-Parish Relations Committees; Lewis Center for Church Leadership; Wesley Theological Seminary; www.churchleadership.com.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

Two Purposes in Evaluation

- Examine the effectiveness of the church in achieving its mission.
- Examine the effectiveness of the pastor/staff in leading the church toward the fulfillment of the mission.

Some Steps in Evaluation¹⁴

- Gather appropriate information.
- From a thoughtful assessment of the information, decide what feedback will be shared, by whom, and how.
- Present the affirmations and areas for growth.
- Thank those from whom information was sought and indicate that it was helpful in the recently completed review.

¹⁴ Ibid. The bullet points are from the Lewis Center for Church Leadership. Commentary on each point has been added for this resource.

2010-2011

MINISTRY APPRAISAL PROCESS

Pastor		Copy to:		District Superintendent
Charge				Pastor
Date				S/PPRC Committee File

(Use this copy as a master to make copies for committee members)

This resource/tool is for the purpose of being accountable for our ministry by measuring and encouraging effectiveness in that ministry. One key question is: What is effectiveness?

The Bible talks about accountability in terms of fruitfulness. For John Wesley, “fruits of ministry” was a key concept. He liked to ask three questions: 1) Is there faith? 2) Is there fire? and 3) Are there fruits?

The Lewis Center for Church Leadership is currently analyzing descriptions of clergy effectiveness developed separately by numerous different denominational judicatories. The goal is to identify the most common recurring features. At this point we can report that three primary categories seem to capture virtually all the specific descriptors of effectiveness:

- 1) “Character” or who the leader is;
- 2) “Competence” or what the leader does; and
- 3) “Contribution” or what the leader accomplishes.

The mission of the Iowa Annual Conference is “Making Disciples of Jesus Christ, Developing Leaders and Transforming the World.

Because it is the responsibility of the S/PPRC to annually review the ministry of the congregation and the staff the following tool has been developed to assist in this process.

The following tool is divided into three sections. With the above as a background we have developed the following three sections of “guiding questions” for the process of being accountable for our ministry together.

We also ask that you please refer to the attached **Guidelines for the Staff Parish Relations (PPR) Committee** for this feedback session. Remember to begin and end with prayer. The following are suggested questions to be asked by the chairperson.

To prepare for this process please review the “Standards for Credentialed Ministry of the Iowa Annual Conference,” the “Markers of Discipleship,” Annual Conference Covenant Expectations, Code of Ethics for Professionals in Ministry, your ministry expectations for 2010-2011, and your church’s vision, before you proceed with your evaluation process.

After both the pastor and SPRC members have reflected on their ministry for the past year, meet together, review, affirm, and plan ways to strengthen ministry. Both pastor(s) under appointment and S/PPRC are to return a completed copy of the following document to the district superintendent one week following your appraisal meeting and no later than May 1.

Guidelines for the Staff Parish Relations (PPR) Committee¹⁵ In the Evaluation of Clergy and Church Staff

Please Note: Copies of this page should be distributed to all members of the Committee along with the guiding questions that follow.

Prior to this feedback session, prayerfully consider ways you have experienced the clergy/church staff as he/she lives out these roles and responsibilities in ministry. Also, keep in mind the following guidelines as you offer feedback:

- Begin and end your meeting with prayer.
- The role of the chair of the committee is key. The chair sets the tone by asking the questions in a caring and loving manner.
- As a committee member, speak out of your own experience. Giving specific examples out of your own experience is helpful.
- Not every committee member has to answer every question.
- Share spontaneously but the chair should make sure that every committee member is invited to share and that a few people do not dominate.
- Be clear about and state the confidentiality of this feedback session.
- Be aware of the physical setting and create a comfortable and caring climate where you will not be interrupted. Sitting in a circle of chairs or round a table together may be most helpful.
- Have adequate time, at least 1 ½ hours, for this session. For a multiple staff church, the committee may need to divide into smaller groups.

Feedback needs to done with the purpose of relationally based feedback clearly in mind.

Note these differences between judgment-based feedback and relationally-based feedback:

Judgment-based feedback

- ✓ Focuses on performance and skills
- ✓ Participants as observers
- ✓ Objectifies and isolates
- ✓ Draws conclusions and makes decisions

Relationally-based feedback

- ✓ Focuses on identity, roles, and performance
- ✓ Participants as companions
- ✓ Draws participants closer
- ✓ Clarifies strategies for ministry.

¹⁵ Virginia Conference Board of Ordained Ministry and Cabinet as published on the Virginia Annual Conference Website. Developed by the Lovett Weems; Lewis Center for Church Leadership. www.churchleadership.com.

Section 1¹⁶ Character “Is there Faith?” Who the leader is.

Personal Faith in Christ

1. To the SPRC: As feedback, let’s share with (name of clergy) ways we have seen him/her live out a personal faith in Christ. This area includes conduct, personal actions, and witness in preaching and/or teaching.

2. To the clergy: How do you see yourself living out your personal faith in Christ?

3. To the SPRC: Are there things we could share with (name of clergy) that would strengthen her/his ministry in this area?

Self Care

1. To the SPRC: The next area is self-care. This area includes spiritual disciplines, physical and emotional health and well-being, taking time off, continuing education, etc. Please share affirmations of (name of clergy) ’s attention to self-care.

2. To the clergy: How do you see yourself being faithful to self-care?

3. To the SPRC: Are there things we could share with (name of clergy) that would strengthen her/his self-care?

¹⁶ From “Guiding Questions” of the Virginia Conference Board of Ordained Ministry and Cabinet as published on the Virginia Annual Conference Website.

Section 2¹⁷ Competence “Is there Fire?” What the leader does.

Worship Leader

1. To the SPRC: The second area for feedback involves the area of worship leadership. How can we affirm (name of clergy) as a worship leader. For elders, this area involves preaching, the order of worship, the use of prayer and music as well as sacraments. For deacons, this area involves assisting in worship and in the sacraments. Let’s give feedback in all of these areas about how you have appreciated her/his leadership.

2. To the clergy: How do you see yourself as a worship leader?

3. To the SPRC: Are there things we could share with (name of clergy) that would strengthen her/his ministry in this area?

Pastoral Care

1. To the SPRC: Now let’s move on to pastoral care. This area includes visitation ministry, availability, crisis skills, etc. Let’s share our affirmations in this area.

2. To the clergy: How do you see yourself in pastoral care ministry?

3. To the SPRC: Are there things we could share with (name of clergy) that would strengthen her/his ministry in this area?

¹⁷ Ibid.

Teaching

1. To the SPRC: The next area is teaching. In this area, let's illustrate with specific personal examples our affirmations of (name of clergy/staff)'s teaching ministry.
2. To the clergy: How do you see yourself in providing leadership in teaching ministry?
3. To the SPRC: Are there things we could share with (name of clergy) that would strengthen her/his ministry in this area?

Administration

1. To the SPRC: This area is administration. This area includes faithfulness to United Methodist doctrine and polity, timely reports, time management, communication, managing the life of the church, etc. Please share affirmations of (name of clergy)'s leadership in administration.
2. To the clergy: How do you see yourself in providing leadership in administration?
3. To the SPRC: Are there things we could share with (name of clergy) that would strengthen her/his ministry in this area?

Making Disciples

1. To the SPRC: The next area is Making Disciples. This area includes leading the church in disciple-making ministries. Please share affirmations of (name of clergy)'s leadership in disciple-making.
2. To the clergy: How do you see yourself in providing leadership in making disciples?
3. To the SPRC: Are there things we could share with (name of clergy) that would strengthen her/his ministry in this area?

Section 3 Contribution “Are there Fruits?” What the leader accomplishes.

1. What ministry results did you celebrate in your congregation during the past year?

2. How has the pastor/staff person met the shared expectations adopted a year ago at Church Conference?

3. How has the congregation met the shared expectations adopted a year ago at Church Conference?

4. How has the S/PPRC met the shared expectations adopted a year ago at Church Conference?

5. Other reflections/observations important to be noted.

Signature of SPRC Chair: _____

Telephone: _____ e-mail: _____

Date: _____

Signature of Pastor/Staff Person: _____

Telephone: _____ e-mail: _____

Date: _____

IV. STAFF-PARISH RELATIONS AND Self Care

Rev. Dr. Mary Fraser

I. Self Care as a Holistic Way of Life

- a. Mind – Emotion – Spirit – Body are unified
- b. The importance of Mental Rehearsal
- c. The importance of repetitive practice of healthy habits
 - 1. nutrition, exercise, spiritual practices, family and friends
 - 2. the creative use of time and nurture of intellect and emotion
 - 3. collegial support and identification

II. Self Care and The Community

- a. Healthy Boundaries vs. Enmeshed and Fused Boundaries
 - 1. triangles and walls
 - 2. reactivity and deactivating reactivity
 - 3. centering in God – (Gendlin’s “Felt Presence”)
- b. The Truth about Honest Communication
- c. Professional Ethics in setting boundaries

III. The Role of the Staff Parish Committee

- a. Support vs. Collusion
- b. Professional evaluation
 - 1. goal setting for pastoral self care
 - 2. evaluation of goals
 - 3. affirmation for new goals
- c. Negotiating Conflict and Concerns between clergy and congregants
- d. Maintaining a non anxious presence
- e. Engaging in practices of self care within and as a committee