

Pastoral Evaluation Guidelines

Introduction

Pastoral evaluations can be anxiety producing for the pastor and his family. Factors which increase this anxiety include trusting a committee of inexperienced people to lead the review, the prospect of allowing the whole congregation to offer their feedback (in what other job are all the customers invited to review the chief staff person?), giving a platform for a few disgruntled people to infect the body with their toxicity, and the awkwardness of the same leaders who have been teaming with the pastor in ministry (like the elders) suddenly becoming his evaluators.

We can't avoid all the complications of pastoral evaluation. But we will do it more responsibly when we understand the complexities and when we respond somewhat lightly and non-defensively to the experience.

Do

- Keep it as simple as you can. But realize that the review process is itself always highly complex, and pastoral ministry is an extremely complex phenomenon.
- Beware of negative bias that distorts reality. Pastoral reviews claim to be impartial and objective. But lurking behind them is sometimes a negative assumption that something might be wrong and that somewhere in the past the member may have experienced the pastor in a situation or a relationship which must now be critiqued.
- Place the pastoral evaluation in the context of the congregation evaluating itself: its body life, the way its members are expressing their ministry, and its programs for internal growth and outreach. In this context the question is not "What kind of job is the pastor doing?" Rather the question is, "How are we fulfilling our mission and how is the pastor helping us to do this?" Such an approach takes the focus off the pastor and involves the whole congregation.
- All questionnaires should be signed by the respondents. In congregational life members are taught to address one another face to face, to be responsible for what one says and does (Matthew 18:15-20). For leadership groups to use anonymous questionnaires is to undercut such teaching and to encourage irresponsible behavior.
- Seek consultation or assistance from, for example, the overseer or conference pastor to guide you in the process. It is best to have a person outside the congregation who is experienced in working with congregations and who knows the experiences of a pastor to serve as a consultant in the evaluation process. The congregational leadership group can benefit by testing the evaluation plans and the questionnaire with such a person. Even more important is the presence of such a person when the leadership team develops its summary of the findings and interprets them to the pastor. An overseer or conference

pastor can help deal with feelings which may emerge and help the evaluation process move toward positive steps for growth and change on the part of the pastor and the congregational leaders.

Don't

- Avoid exclusive use of pastoral reviews to determine future salary compensation or continuing employment. But if reviews don't supply some clues for decisions on these issues, they haven't been as helpful as they might have been.
- Don't give pastors the questionnaires when they are returned. Some people use anonymous questionnaires as a way to say unkind things. There is no reason why a pastor needs to see these, whether signed or not. The responsible leadership group conducting the evaluation can weigh such statements and decide what will be helpful to convey to the pastor.
- Don't do pastoral reviews in the context of an intense congregational conflict.

Quotes About Reviews

- “Those pastors who eagerly engage in a review are usually not the ones who will benefit the most; they are in fact the types who will constantly ask their members for feedback. But those clergy who need assessment are often the least able to handle candid feedback.” Roy Oswald
- Pastoral reviews are intended to put more objectivity into the assessment process and to make it more responsible and realistic compared to what occurs in the church parking lot or over the telephone after the meeting. But most pastoral reviews are unreliable and one-sided assessments of the actual situation. “Though likeableness was consistently placed at the very bottom of the list of importance, it nevertheless fell at the top in terms of its correlation with this overall effectiveness rating. Though raters disclaimed its importance, it still provided the chief basis for their overall evaluation” (C. Phillip Alexander).

*This material was adapted from a number of sources including *Growing Leaders* and *Builder*.