

Effective and Ineffective Staff-Parish Relations Committees

Characteristics of Effective and Ineffective SPRCs

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

Ineffective

Conduct annual evaluations only

- Withhold regular feedback
- Allow issues to 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
- Not putting issues in perspective

What SPRCs and Clergy Most Need from Each Other

SPRCs Most Need from Clergy

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 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 the SPRC chair and the pastor and those deemed ineffective by the chair and pastor

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Theological Foundations for Evaluation

‘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.’

— *Theological and Theoretical Foundations for Evaluating Ministry*, General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 1990

Scripture

The wisdom of the Hebrew Scriptures offers foundations for evaluation.

- “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)

Wesleyan Heritage

“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 are 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*

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Types of Evaluation

Formative Feedback

- This type of feedback takes place “along the way” when no decisions must be made.
- The purpose is to help the person improve, develop, and grow.
- The success of the person is the purpose of this feedback.
- Participants become partners in the fruitfulness of the person receiving feedback.
- It helps identify issues early so the person can address them.
- It helps to clarify what is working and what is not.

Summative Feedback

- How well is person doing? Are they advancing church’s overall mission?
- This type of feedback takes place when formal evaluation is needed or when decisions are to be made concerning annual reviews, continued employment, salary, etc.
- There usually is a record of these evaluations.
- This feedback deals with how well the person is doing in advancing the church’s mission or the mission of a specific ministry for which the person is responsible. Performance and skills are considered.
- Progress on issues named in previous evaluations is discussed.
- The purpose is to make decisions regarding how well-suited a person is to the ministry needs of the particular church.
- This review leads to conclusions and sometimes specific action steps.
- Helpful for making decisions regarding the fit between the church and pastor

Suggested evaluation formula: 90% formative + 10% summative

How to know if your formative and summative proportions are correct: If any concerns or issues come up for the first time in the formal or summative evaluation sessions, there is a problem. There needs to be more conversation and feedback “along the way.”

Two Purposes of 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 Evaluation

- 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.

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Giving and Receiving Feedback

Feedback IS:

- Sincere and plain-speaking
- Self-revealing on the part of evaluators
- Humbly invited, humbly offered
- Conversation contains useful insights
- Dialogue *with* a pastor
- Personal and interactive
- Tool for improvement
- Ongoing process in the midst of ministry
- At its best, love in action

Feedback IS NOT

- Winning a point or coercing another
- Passing rumors
- Hiding behind what someone else says
- Advocating a theological perspective
- Something done *to* a pastor
- Weapon to be used against an enemy
- Defending one's self or others
- Saving up complaints for a one-time session
- Objective truth

Asking for and Receiving Feedback

- 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 and 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

- Have adequate time and a setting where you will not be interrupted.
- Be clear about confidentiality.
- Agree 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 the person hear what you meant to say?
- Divide the feedback itself and conclusions from feedback into different sessions.

Adapted from: Art Gafke, *Ministry Assessment Process: Giving and Receiving Feedback*, General Board of Higher Educational and Ministry

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