

**CONGREGATIONAL ISSUES COMMISSION
REPORT TO PRESBYTERY
DECEMBER 3, 2024**

The Congregational Issues Commission (CIC) held its last meeting of the year on November 7, having met on three previous occasions in 2024. The commission reviewed some of the year's activities and looked ahead to 2025.

***The “Healthy Congregations” workshop** (Sep 21 at 1st Presbyterian Church, Winchester), was sponsored by the CIC in partnership with the Commission on Preparation for Ministry, Leadership Development Ministry, and the Commission on Congregational Transformation and Innovation. It was a highlight of this year's work. Thirty-five persons from around the presbytery attended the day-long event.

***“Annual Ministry Reviews”** has been the subject of much commission research, reflection and discussion this year. The CIC has presented several recommendations and background information for consideration by the Coordinating Commission and the presbytery. **Those recommendations and background information accompany this report.**

***Financial Misconduct Response** – The CIC has begun working on policies and resources to assist congregations in responding to situations of financial misconduct in their midst. The commission would welcome experiences and thoughts from congregations who have experienced such situations with particular attention to what would have/did help those congregations recover. **It is a CIC goal for 2025 to have resources ready to share by the end of the year.**

***Introducing the CIC** – Though the Congregational Issues Commission has been around awhile, congregational leaders are often unaware of the CIC as a resource to help in working through issues negatively affecting congregational life and ministry. **The CIC will request time during lunch at one presbytery meeting in 2025 to host conversation regarding CIC related issues.**

Special thanks to the members of the CIC for their time and effort this year, as well as to Philip, Robyn, and Jerry for their helpful staff support.

Respectfully Submitted,

Congregational Issues Commission
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ANNUAL MINISTRY REVIEWS

a recommendation to the presbytery

Background –

It has been the experience of the Congregational Issues Commission (CIC) that tensions and conflicts between congregations and their pastoral leaders can arise out of unclear goals/expectations and the absence of regular and mutual communication. From that experience the CIC set out to gather resources for possible use by congregational leaders to help encourage the setting of clear ministry goals and conversation about them, including resources from the PCUSA, Transylvania Presbytery congregations, ecumenical sources, and ministry consultants. Some of those resources are cited at the conclusion of this report. After reviewing and discussing the resources gathered, the CIC presents the following recommendations.

Recommendations-

In order to promote congregational health and effective ministry, the Congregational Issues Commission recommends...

...that the Presbytery of Transylvania strongly encourage its congregations to conduct annual “ministry reviews” with their pastoral leaders.

...that at the time of establishing new pastoral relationships, the presbytery counsel and encourage congregations to create clear job descriptions and processes for regular ministry reviews.

...that the question “Has a ministry review been conducted with the congregation’s pastoral leader(s)?” be added to the Administrative Review (i.e. Clerk’s Report) submitted by congregations each year.

...that the Congregational Issues Commission make resources available, including human resources, to assist congregations in establishing useful and helpful practices for reviewing ministry with their pastoral leaders.

Rationale –

It is the hope of all congregations to reflect the gospel of Jesus Christ in their shared life and ministry. Important to the realization of this hope is the leadership provided by sessions and pastors (including Teaching Elders and Commissioned Pastors) who share in congregational leadership. Appropriate goals/expectations and effective communication among congregational leaders is vital to ensure shared understanding of congregational goals and maintain healthy relationships. One tool to promote effective communication is to engage regular “ministry reviews” involving pastoral and other congregational leaders.

We describe this as a “ministry review with” the pastor rather than a “performance review of” the pastor. While a pastor’s leadership is certainly key to congregational health and ministry, it is important to remember that the pastor is not the only person responsible for the congregation’s health and ministry. Rather, they share that responsibility with the session and other leaders under the session’s supervision. Thus, it is appropriate that any review includes the congregation’s entire system and that it be mutual, that is a shared conversation rather than a one-sided examination/evaluation.

The form and process of a ministry review will vary from congregation to congregation depending on congregational size, organization, culture, etc. In all cases, the form and process should be intentional, open, and mutual, allowing opportunity for listening, sharing, and growth for all involved. Resources, both printed and human, are available to assist congregations in developing review processes that are practical and helpful for them.

To engage a process of ministry review requires time, effort, and some courage to speak and hear truth in love, but if the process is engaged thoughtfully and consistently, it can yield benefits for all involved.

Respectfully Submitted,
Congregational Issues Commission

See the following pages...

...”Thoughts Regarding Ministry Reviews”

...”sample ministry review questions”

...”additional resources”

THOUGHTS REGARDING MINISTRY REVIEWS*

***Mutuality** – Reviews are most helpful when there is mutuality between the pastor, other leaders, and the congregation. All have a stake in and responsibility for the congregation's health and ministry. In addition to receiving input regarding their leadership, pastoral leaders should have the opportunity to provide input regarding their experience including concerns and needs for support from other leaders and the congregation.

***Goals and Expectations** – Goals and expectations (setting, reviewing and revising them) should be part of the ministry review process. While effective ministry is not always measured by achieving goals, goals can provide a useful guide for congregations and their leaders. Similarly, clearly described expectations (e.g. job descriptions) can help avoid misunderstandings and frustrations between congregations and their leaders.

***Review Team** – The conversation required for an effective ministry review is best accomplished by a small group of people, perhaps a committee of the session or other group appointed by the session. While input might be received from a larger number of people, the conversation itself is better suited to a smaller group setting.

***Avoid Anonymous Participation** – Any information used as part of the review process should be acknowledged by the person providing it. This protects against persons using the review process to vent personal frustrations or agendas regarding the congregation and/or its leadership.

***Simplicity** – Keep the review process simple and appropriate to the congregation's size, organizational structure, and culture. While formal surveys might be useful in some settings, simpler tools make better sense in other settings. Select or create a process that best allows for intentional and thoughtful sharing of information, concerns, celebrations, etc.

***Separate from Compensation** – Ministry reviews should be kept separate from discussions related to pastoral compensation in order that all involved can feel free to share openly and honestly regarding the congregation's ministry.

***Not for Conflict Resolution** - Ministry reviews are intended for settings in which a congregation's relationships and ministry are generally healthy and effective, with the intention of maintaining and enhancing congregational health and effectiveness. Situations of significant stress or conflict call for different tools and skills. In such situations, congregational leaders should seek out conflict resolution resources.

***An Ongoing Conversation** – While the primary ministry review conversation, and preparation leading up to it, might occur on an annual basis, conversation with leaders regarding the congregation's health and ministry should be ongoing. A year can be a long time to wait if there are matters that need immediate attention. A process should be in place for congregational

leaders to inform and support one another regularly and as needed regarding the congregation's health and ministry.

*The preceding thoughts are adapted and expanded from "Some Helpful Tips for Doing Annual Ministerial Reviews," as published by the Unitarian Universalist Church and available at www.uua.org.

(sample ministry review questions – edit as appropriate to local context)

Name: _____
Role: _____
Review Period: _____

1. What went well this past year? What major goals did you/we accomplish:

Comments:

2. What challenges did you/we face this past year? What major goals did not quite get done?

Comments:

3. Where do you/we need help? How can we help one another succeed?

Comments:

4. What major goals do you/we plan to accomplish in the year ahead and why?

Comment:

5. Do you/we have any suggestions to help make our church more effective??

Comment:

6. Is there anything else you/we would like to discuss about our work together?

Comment:

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

***“Employment Guidance for PCUSA Sessions and Session Personnel Committees,”** a publication of The Office of the General Assembly PCUSA, 2021, available online via pcusa.org.

***“How Do We Evaluate Performance,”** an essay by John Wimberly of the Center for Congregational Health. Mr. Wimberly offers a different view of performance evaluations. Essay available at –

<https://healthychurch.org/resources/archives/how-do-we-evaluate-performance/>

***“Pastor Evaluation,”** National Capital Presbytery. A sample pastor evaluation process. Available at...

<https://thepresbytery.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Pastor-Evaluation-Process.pdf>

***“Resources for Ministry and Personnel Committees,”** United Church of Canada, 2019, particularly sample “annual review” resources on pages 30-31 of the document. Available at...

<https://united-church.ca/sites/default/files/resources-for-mandp-committees.pdf>

****When Better Isn’t Enough***, Jill M. Hudson, The Alban Institute, 2004. This book provides useful insight and tools for planning and evaluating ministry in the post-modern environment.

****When Moses Meets Aaron: Staffing and Supervision in Large Congregations*** by Gil Rendle and Susan Beaumont, Rowan & Littlefield, 2007.

*Second Presbyterian Church (Lexington), Troy Presbyterian Church (Versailles), and Versailles Presbyterian Church shared review tools with the CIC. Contact these congregations regarding their ministry review experience.