

A NEW APPROACH to PRC/MMC

A Biblical Framework

Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ. (Ephesians 4: 11-13) But we request of you, brothers and sisters, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13)

The Need for Something New

Most of our churches have built into their leadership structures either a Pastoral Relations Committee (PRC) or a Mutual Ministry Committee (MMC). In our conversations with pastors and church leaders the reality seems to be that most of these committees find themselves at a loss for how to function effectively. In reviewing ways to improve the functioning of such committees it appears that there are some foundational flaws related to too broad a scope of roles.

A Brief Overview of the Traditional Roles of the PRC/MMC

1. PASTORAL CARE

- Address needs of pastors and their families
- Prayer team for pastor and family

2. PASTORAL DEVELOPMENT

- Advocate for continuing education and professional resources
- Draft and approve plans for Sabbaticals

3. CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

- Mediate conflict between pastor/s and congregation
- Mediate conflict between church staff members

4. PERSONNEL

- Pastoral salary and benefit decisions
- Performance evaluations

Where to Start

All of these roles have value, but do they all fit well together under one team? Because there are different governing systems being used in our conference churches, some of the roles listed above are already handled by various elected leadership bodies (Council, Executive Board, Leadership Team, etc.). It is certainly important to be clear about who is handling each of the above responsibilities but also to consider which ones fit well together and whether they best fit the team to which they are assigned.

(over)

The Fit

Good Fit

“Pastoral Care” and “Pastoral Development”

It is very conceivable that the same group could tackle both of these functions. They both involve being an advocate for the pastor(s) and contributing to the overall health of the pastor(s). This group could educate themselves more on the unique challenges both professionally and personally of being in vocational ministry. A ready resource and good starting point would be the conference staff in the area of Pastoral Care and Development.

Bad Fit

“Conflict Management” and “Pastoral Care/Pastoral Development”

The conflict management role does not merge well with the pastoral care and development functions. If a team is to serve in a care role this would suggest a responsibility to advocate for the pastor(s). It is difficult for an advocate to be expected to engage in a neutral mediation role when a conflict occurs.

In addition those charged with conflict management must have a common knowledge of the whole current church environment -- ministry priorities, values, and staff expectations -- in order to deal with complex situations. The leadership body that is in place and managing the overall mission and vision of the church (Church Board, Council, or Leadership Team) should be engaged in dealing with church-wide conflicts and particularly those that involve unfilled expectations of the pastor(s) or any accusations of wrong-doing by the pastor(s).

Custom Fit

“Personnel” and the other three areas

There are a lot of possibilities for how the personnel function may or may not function with the other areas listed. In some larger churches there is a Human Resource (HR) team for all the staff. In that scenario personnel matters might be mostly separate from the other areas mentioned.

In settings without an HR team, it is very likely that whatever team handles conflict resolution would handle the personnel function in that they are the group with the greatest knowledge of the ongoing operations, vision of the church, and normal functioning of staff in their ministry roles. This group with the broadest oversight is usually also the group that is responsible for approving church policies (including personnel policies, employee handbook, etc.) and the budget (including staff salaries and benefits).

A team functioning in the area of pastoral care and development should certainly be consulted by whoever is handling personnel issues. This is helpful for a broader picture of pastoral need (salary, continuing education, retreats, vacations, etc.), and pastoral strength.

If you are interested in rebuilding this area of your ministry and need assistance, please contact NWC Pastoral Care & Development (612) 721-4893 x3129 or Jeff Burton, Director of Pastoral Care & Development (218) 260-5545.