

PASTORAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE
GUIDELINES AND PROCESSES

THE PURPOSE:

According to the Discipline (par. 336) the purpose of the Pastoral Relations Committee shall be to aid the pastor, and any additional members of the pastoral staff, to effectively serve the needs and programs of the local congregation. It shall be a conferring and counseling committee and shall be available for consultation with the pastor concerning conditions with the local congregation that pertains to various pastoral duties. (Conference Journal, 115.1.)

The Pastoral Relations Committee is not a decision-making body regarding the programming, the visionary agenda, or the schedule of sermon topics of the church. Instead, the Pastoral Relations Committee handles the relational aspects of congregational life in connection with the pastoral leadership. As a result, the members primarily serve as an advisory council to the lead pastor to assist him in monitoring and supporting the health of congregational life, as well as to managing certain negative effects of ministry upon the pastoral staff and their families.

THE FUNCTION:

The Pastoral Relations Committee shall provide a confidential forum within which the pastor, and additional members of the pastoral staff, may seek and receive counsel, input, and insight regarding the work of the local church. In all meetings and activities of the committee, it is expected that biblical principles of conduct in relationships, in particular those principles drawn from Matthew 18, shall be the norm.

The committee shall assist the pastor in developing a written description of responsibilities for the pastor. The description of pastoral responsibilities shall incorporate the pastor's vision as well as the mission of the church. The senior pastor in consultation with his pastoral team shall develop a written description of responsibilities for each additional member of the pastoral staff, taking into account the mission and goals of the church as well as the input of the Pastoral Relations Committee. Each description of pastoral responsibilities shall be submitted to the Official Board/Ministry Council for approval.

The committee shall sensitively monitor the relationship between the pastor(s) and the local congregation and cultivate that relationship through consultation with the pastoral staff. The committee shall also communicate to the people the nature and function of the pastoral office.

The committee shall assist the pastor(s) in balancing and prioritizing family and personal needs with church needs. It shall remind him of the wisdom of using all annual vacation days, unless deferral arrangements have been made. In addition, assistance shall be given to appropriately use a week for ministry leave for the purpose of personal spiritual development, study, service, or a global ministry experience. The committee shall also expect the pastor(s) to avail themselves of one day off per week so that, through wise stewardship of time, "burnout" can be avoided, and the biblical requirement of "keeping the Sabbath" can be met. As a result of this wise stewardship of time, the pastor(s) will realize a greater protection of adequate family time, in addition to greater physical, emotional and spiritual health. The committee shall also work to help the congregation understand these needs.

The committee and the pastor shall annually assess the health and progress of the overall ministry of the church in achieving its mission, vision and goals. As part of that assessment, the committee

and pastor shall together consider the pastor(s) role in light of the mission, vision and goals of the congregation, and his progress in fulfilling the responsibilities agreed upon in the statement of pastoral responsibilities. The conclusions of this consultation shall be kept in written form in the records of the committee for future reference. The portion of this consultation concerned with the pastor's role shall have as its objectives both to encourage the pastor and to discern areas for potential growth, both personal and ministry related. The consultation shall also be concerned with potential means by which that growth may be achieved. In the case of any additional members of the pastoral staff, the senior pastor shall conduct that annual consultation with each staff member, keeping in mind the objectives set forth above. The senior pastor shall then share the written conclusions of each consultation with the committee. The committee may then consult with each staff member individually, keeping a written record of the conclusions of such consultations. (Conference Journal, 115.2.)

MEMBERSHIP:

The Pastoral Relations Committee shall be constituted at the Annual Meeting of the Official Board/Ministry Council of each congregation following the annual congregational meeting and the reorganization of the Official Board/Ministry Council. It shall consist of not less than five (5) members, plus the pastor(s). The total number of lay members shall be an odd number. Membership shall include the pastor(s) assigned by the National Conference, the lay delegate and the Official Board/Ministry Council president. The senior pastor, in consultation with the lay delegate and the Official Board/Ministry Council president, shall present additional names to the Official Board/Ministry Council for approval.

Only one member of an immediate family shall be permitted to serve on the committee. In cases where the inclusion of the lay delegate or president would result in a second person from the same family serving on the committee, the alternate lay delegate or vice president respectively shall replace that person. However, where the pastor, president of the Official Board/Ministry Council and the lay delegate are in unanimous agreement, the second member of an immediate family may serve. (Conference Journal, 115.3.)

Additional members may be added where necessary and appropriate, especially when the committee is involved in seeking a new pastor (see section 900).

MEMBERSHIP PROFILE:

Members of the Pastoral Relations Committee need to understand the essentials of healthy congregational life and the ministries that support this vision. They should be aware how the overall mission and vision of the church are accomplished. They should be sensitive, responsive, and willing to learn about the stresses that are involved with pastoral families involved in congregational ministry.

Members of the Pastoral Relations Committee must not only understand the importance of confidentiality but be compassionate and trustworthy with sensitive information. They must be shaped by a character that reflects God's love for others, where they are able to conduct themselves with professional candor that represents a humble and appreciative posture in their

relationships. Ultimately, they must be focused on the needs of the whole congregation rather than their own individualistic wishes.

Members of the Pastoral Relations Committee need to possess skills in facilitating and negotiating reconciliation between opposing parties. They must be persons who understand how to forgive and how to help others seek and find forgiveness. They need to be able to faithfully follow the procedures and policies outlined in the denominational documentation for the Pastoral Relations Committee.

Members of the Pastoral Relations Committee should be able to see how God is at work in difficult situations. They must understand how a healthy missional congregation supports one another and engages the community. They should be able to see how the pastor's vision takes root, generates life in the body, and accomplishes the goals of vibrant, healthy ministry within and beyond the church. Lastly, they should be able to see the importance of healthy family life within each pastoral family.

ORGANIZATION:

Following the appointment of the Pastoral Relations Committee, the senior pastor shall convene the same within thirty (30) days to elect a chairperson, vice chairperson, and secretary, and to schedule the committee's meetings for the year. No member of the pastoral staff shall serve as an officer of the Pastoral Relations Committee. (Conference Journal, 115.4.)

MEETINGS:

The Pastoral Relations Committee shall hold at least four (4) meetings each year, one within each conference quarter. In case of a multiple-church charge, the committee of each church within the charge shall meet jointly at least once a year on matters relating to the charge. Special meetings may be called by the chairperson, senior pastor, the Stationing Elder, or the District Field Director. (Conference Journal, 115.5.)

REPORTING:

Members of the Pastoral Relations Committee shall keep all deliberations and decisions of the committee strictly confidential, except as are specifically directed by the committee. Report of pertinent matters of the committee meetings shall likewise be made to the Official Board/Ministry Council. (Conference Journal, 115.6.)

BIBLICAL RESOLUTION PROCESS:

Matthew 18:15-17: *"If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector." (New International Version)*

Proverbs 6:16-19: *There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet*

that are quick to rush to evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up conflict in the community. (New International Version)

Covenant: *In obedience to God’s Holy Word and commitment to practicing Biblical Resolution, I promise to follow the Principles of Priorities. That is, my priorities are to glorify God, build harmony in the church, and avoid conflict. I will do as Matthew 18 admonishes—go to an offending brother “first alone.”*

First Step: *I will not first share the offense with another person. I am committed to restoring the relationship, rather than exposing possible sin. I recognize most problems with people are personality clashes, and I will try to understand their actions based upon their perspective.*

Second Step: *If going to a person “first alone” does not resolve our difference, I promise to seek an objective and spiritually mature leader of the church who will listen to each our perspectives on the problem. As a mediator in this dispute, this person will be able to advise one or both of the disputing parties concerning blind spots or areas of needed growth in order to resolve the issue and bring glory to God.*

I recognize that the person serving as a “witness” may reveal or say things that I won’t like hearing, but I will trust that God is using this individual to help resolve the conflict rather than take sides with either of the disputing parties.

Warning: *I will not see to find others who have also been offended, nor share my concerns with potential “witnesses” prior to the meeting with my “offending brother.” The purpose of have a “witness” is not to validate my hurt but rather to open my heart and mind to the possible needs I have regarding my relationship with others.*

I realize my friends may naturally listen to my concerns, but also take up my offense. I will, therefore, not cause them to become a party to possible division and disharmony because of our friendship. Whenever I feel an urge to share offense with friends, I will pray and commune with God about my hurt.

Third Step: *When I am in a dispute with a fellow believer that cannot be resolved voluntarily, even with a mediator present, the one with whom I am at odds and I should request that the church appoint an arbitrator(s) to listen to our arguments. The arbitrator(s) will then render a binding decision to resolve the disagreement.*

Fourth Step: *If a person who professes to be a believer refuses to be reconciled to a fellow believer in a conflict situation, refuses the advise of a mediator or fails to submit to the binding decision of arbitrator(s), and if the party found guilty of an offense refuses to repent, seek forgiveness and be reconciled, then his or her church leaders should intervene with the disciplinary measures of trial and removal from the local fellowship as is deemed necessary for the restoration of justice and order in the local church. (Governance Manual, pp. 52-53.)*

THE PROCESS FOR ADDRESSING CONGREGATIONAL COMPLAINTS AND CRISES:

Ephesians 4:1-6: *I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one*

body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Galatians 6:1: Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

James 5:19-20: My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

2 Timothy 2:24-26: *And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.*

Titus 3:9-11: *But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.*

Issues Between Members: When discord arises between members, the PRC member(s) will explain the process for addressing the complaint as follows:

1. Follow the steps outlined in the Biblical Resolution Process above.
2. In the event where resolution is not found, the lead pastor or a PRC member may be asked to provide witness for reconciliation at Step 2 above. If matters of sinful conduct are involved, the lead pastor will be notified, and will provide guidance and appropriate disciplinary measures to those involved.
3. At the next quarterly PRC meeting, the lead pastor and/or PRC member will report about the conflicts that were brought to their attention, and the means by which they sought for it be resolved. In this reporting, they will express whether the conflict was brought to resolution or needs further attention by the PRC.
4. The PRC will then evaluate and determine whether any further steps are necessary regarding the quarreling member(s) or the health of the overall congregation.

Issues About the Pastor and Staff: When a member(s) wishes to address a complaint about a pastoral staff member to the Pastoral Relations Committee (PRC), the PRC member will explain the process for addressing the complaint as follows:

1. The complaining member(s) will be required to first address the issue with the appropriate pastor involved. The PRC member will give them one week to bring this matter to the attention of the individual pastor, after which time the PRC member will contact the member(s). If the member(s) indicates that they will not address the issue with the appropriate pastor, then the issue will not be addressed with the individual pastor by the PRC at all. If the member indicates that they will or already have now addressed the matter with the appropriate pastor, then the PRC member will notify the appropriate pastor (after he or she is certain that he has been notified by the member(s)) that he or she has received a complaint from the congregational member(s).

2. Once the individual pastor is notified by the congregational member, he will take appropriate steps to address the issue, resolve it, or provide an explanation for his behaviors. If the congregational member is not satisfied, he may wish to address it with the lead pastor and/or a PRC member to follow the Biblical Resolution Process above.
3. At the next quarterly PRC meeting, the lead pastor or PRC member will report about the conflicts that were brought to their attention, and the means by which they were resolved. In this reporting, they will express whether the conflict was brought to resolution or needs further attention by the PRC.
4. The PRC will then evaluate and determine whether any further steps are necessary regarding the complaining member(s) or the health of the overall congregation. At this point, the PRC may wish to inform the District Field Director of the issue(s).

Issues Within the Pastoral Family: When conflict exists within a pastoral family, the PRC should provide wise counsel to help resolve the issues. In matters of severe conflict, the PRC may wish to provide the individual pastor opportunity for a temporary reduction in hours or a temporary leave of absence until such matters find some relief. Additionally, the PRC should ask the pastor and family to seek the assistance of a professional counselor, negotiating the costs involved to be paid through the EC Care Program or by the local church. At this point, the PRC will inform the District Field Director of the issue(s). If the PRC determines that sinful, abusive, or illegal behaviors are being conducted, they will report them to the appropriate local or denominational authorities.

Issues of Congregational Crisis: When a member(s) stirs up discord among other congregational members through malicious or seditious attacks on the pastoral staff and/or leadership, the PRC will govern the process of restoration as closely as possible with the Biblical Resolution Process above. Additionally, the PRC is advised to pursue a means to conduct themselves as those who are spiritual in order to restore him/them in a spirit of gentleness—see Galatians 6:1. If the process does not result in resolution, the PRC will follow these steps:

1. Inform the District Field Director of the issue(s) in order to include his input into the process.
2. Inform the discordant member or faction to cease their seditious activities.
3. Inform him or the group to appear before the Pastoral Relations Committee to respond to charges of errant behavior. The lead pastor and PRC chairman (and any other members of leadership) will provide a written document of charges for which the discordant member(s) must provide account.
4. Conduct a meeting under the direction of the PRC chairman to seek resolution to the congregational crisis.
5. If the discordant member(s) reveal ignorance or remorse for their activities, grant them the opportunity to find restoration. However, if they continue to reveal a lack of repentance, the PRC will take appropriate actions based on their findings, including, if they so choose, the process outlined in the Discipline, Section 6.
6. In the event of a larger widespread issue, conduct a congregational meeting to secure harmony and unity among the members of the body. Consider measures that may involve clear and relevant teachings on the subject from Evangelical Seminary or the denomination's Faith and Doctrine Committee.