

Pastoral Relations Committee  
Handbook

**A**  
**Productive**  
**Partnership**

*“People learn from one another, just  
as iron sharpens iron.”*

*Proverbs 27:17 (TEV)*



The Ministers Council

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# I N T R O D U C T I O N

**W**hen traveling by plane you will hear the flight attendant give instructions regarding the use of oxygen in flight. The instructions always direct caregivers to put on their masks before attempting to assist those in their care. There is a fundamental truth in this instruction. Caregivers must have their needs met first - so that they can administer care to others. This is also very true of pastors and all those in ministry. Sadly this is not always the case. In fact, the opposite may be true - more pastors are burning out than ever before. Why is this true? Think about how much more fast-paced the world has become just in your lifetime - then compound that with the added stress that each pastor must face. The long hours, relentless problem solving and life in the "goldfish bowl" all add stress to the pastor's life. But a Pastoral Relations Committee (PRC) in your church can improve the Pastor's life and the communication between clergy and congregation. The PRC can encourage the pastor and pave the way for a successful ministry. The Ministers Council, American Baptist Churches USA has put together this resourceful workbook so you will have the tools to begin a PRC in your church.

The PRC will support all those who work in ministry in your church. If you have multiple pastors, a music minister as well as others on staff - the PRC will support them all. Please note that while reading this booklet the term pastor is used to describe any and all in ministry.

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# GETTING STARTED!

## WHAT DOES A PASTORAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE'S (PRC) DO?

The PRC's role is to aid the church in achieving its mission. Developing a group of committed persons to facilitate communication between the ministerial staff and the congregation is vital to life of a healthy church. This gives the clergy and the congregation a middle ground, somewhere to go to discuss their concerns. The PRC provides an opportunity for problems to be discussed and resolved before they grow unrestrained. When conflict does arise the PRC can take some of the pressure off the pastor and allow God to work directly in the lives of those concerned. Supporting your pastor and championing constructive relationships with those in ministry is the charge of the PRC. A first step toward accomplishing these vital tasks is to be aware of and, whenever possible, dispel myths that members of your congregation may have about clergy.

## WHEN SHOULD WE START A PRC?

It is generally considered best to start a PRC at the beginning of a pastorate before any problems arise. If you start a PRC when a church is in trouble it

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*"Be responsive to your Pastoral leaders ...  
Contribute to the joy of their  
leadership not its drudgery.  
Why would you want to make things  
harder for them?"  
Hebrews 13:17*

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may only compound the problems. Do not start the committee without the consent of the new pastor. Most pastors will readily agree to a PRC because they know that it will reduce stressful situations for them and improve the life of the church. Often the PRC can be designated from members of the search committee who have already established a rapport with the new pastor and have the appropriate qualities needed for PRC members. It is essential that the PRC relate to the church board or committee that oversees the pastoral ministry of the church. It is also necessary that PRC members receive training before and throughout their service, so that they understand their role and how to go about it as effectively as possible.

*"Iron sharpens  
iron, so one  
sharpens  
another."*

*Proverbs 27:17*

## QUALIFICATIONS FOR PRC MEMBERS

Look for these qualities in potential PRC members. Be certain that members...

- ▲ Have a genuine concern for the life of the church
- ▲ Are sensitive to personal relationships and understand people
- ▲ Are able to present ideas clearly
- ▲ Can successfully maintain confidentiality
- ▲ Have an ability to solve problems
- ▲ Can facilitate problem resolution
- ▲ Understand organizational structure
- ▲ Are spiritually rooted
- ▲ Have earned the congregation's trust and respect

WHAT ARE  
INAPPROPRIATE  
QUALITIES FOR  
MEMBERS?

Certain personality traits would be inappropriate for members of the PRC and in fact would be detrimental for your church's health. Avoid including persons in the PRC who:

- ▲ Are cynical
- ▲ Bear a grudge
- ▲ Are unable to forgive
- ▲ Are nosy
- ▲ Have an emotional need to be heard
- ▲ Have an emotional need for power

TRAINING MEMBERS  
OF THE PRC

New members on the PRC should receive training. The Ministers Council has a training video for Pastoral Relations Committees. "The Productive Partnership." This video can be viewed a number of ways. It works very well as an orientation for new or potential members of the PRC, or as a review by the PRC of a specific goal, or at a regional gathering of PRC members from various churches. This workbook is designed to companion and reinforce the training of the video. "The Productive Partnership" can also be used at a meeting of all the PRC as a training vehicle using the discussion questions on pages 4 and 5.

## WHO SHOULD BECOME A MEMBER OF THE PRC?

Selecting PRC members carefully is one of the keys to success for the committee and also for the church. Some qualities to look for in PRC members and some to avoid have been listed on this and the previous page.

## HOW MANY MEMBERS ARE ENOUGH?

Three to six members is generally considered sufficient since anything larger creates a more complicated group dynamic that would require longer meetings so that everyone is heard. It is best to keep the committee smaller, but as diverse as possible. Try to include a cross-section of the church if you can (gender, age and ethnic identity).

## HOW OFTEN AND WHERE SHOULD THE PRC MEET?

Usually four to eight meetings annually will be sufficient. It is best to schedule at least four meetings per year, with an understanding from committee members that other meetings will be added as needed. Do not wait until you "need a meeting." There are two good reasons to avoid this pitfall. First, this sends a message that there must be a problem because the PRC is having a meeting. Everyone will be tense and probably defensive. Secondly, when meetings are called only as needed the meeting will come complete with a problem that has grown large enough to require a team to solve it.

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*"Let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak  
and slow to anger; for anger does not achieve  
the righteousness of God."*

*James 1: 19-20*

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An effective committee utilizes the scheduled time together to encourage open and honest communication. This way any potential problems can be avoided before they have an opportunity to grow into real difficulties. Of course, there will be unavoidable conflicts and problems. But if you have developed a good relationship with your pastor, when a difficulty arises you will have a head start at solving the problem.

Devote at least one meeting per year to reviewing and evaluating both the church's ministry and ministers. Remember, the effectiveness of your congregation's ministry depends on far more than the performance of the pastor alone.

Also, do not invite the pastor's spouse to the meeting. People have a tendency toward defending their spouses and children when others criticize them. Keep the group dynamic as simple as possible, cultivating a healthy relationship between the pastor and the committee members. You should select a comfortable place to hold meetings where conversations cannot be overheard.

# SAMPLE MEETING AGENDA

## 1. OPENING PRAYER OR SCRIPTURE.

It can be very helpful to open the meeting with prayer and/or a Scripture. Some committees rotate that responsibility. It is best not to call on the minister each time he or she is present for this responsibility. Remember that a key role of a Pastoral Relations Committee is to minister to the pastor.

## 2. ACCOMPLISHMENTS.

The chairperson asks each person present to mention a positive area where they have seen growth in their church. Starting the meeting with positive comments puts everyone at ease. It is also a reminder of God at work in our midst.

## 3. CHALLENGES.

The chairperson asks each person to mention an area that may need work. Someone may mention items that are better handled by another committee or individual. (i.e., burnt out lights or thermostats incorrectly set). Let these members talk but be ready to refer these problems to the appropriate or responsible person(s) or committee(s). Give everyone a chance to speak and hear what all members have to say but be prepared to mention any large problems that haven't been mentioned. It is best if the chairperson waits until last to discuss problems, giving everyone else a chance to share. In this way no problem is overlooked and everyone feels a part of the process.

## 4. DISCUSSION.

Select any issues from step three that the committee feels necessary for their involvement. For most committees open and free discussion without the need to vote works best. This gives members the freedom to discuss their feelings. Creativity can surface and resolutions are easier to find when there is not a board meeting environment.

## 5. CLOSING.

No matter what has been discussed at that particular meeting be certain to remind the members of their need for confidentiality and try to end on a positive note. Some groups close in prayer.

*Let us  
consider how  
we may spur  
one another  
on toward  
love and  
good deeds."*

*Hebrews*

**10:24**

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*"A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in  
settings of silver."*

*Proverbs 25:11*

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# VIDEO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## SEGMENT I

1. How does Proverbs 27:17 suggest that learning from one another can sometimes be difficult?

2. How does your PRC offer your pastor (or ministerial staff) "caring" and "sensitivity" so that *iron sharpening iron* improves everyone?

## SEGMENT II

1. Does your church see the pastor as someone who needs care in the light of Galatians 6:2?

2. Does your PRC encourage the staff and the church's ministry to be evaluated at the same time?

3. What would happen to your congregation if PRC members possessed unwanted characteristics?

## SEGMENT III

1. Why is the third goal of a PRC - consider the pastor's (ministerial staff's) compensation - so important scripturally and administratively?

2. With what other boards or committees should your PRC work to address the pastor's compensation issues?

3. If the PRC doesn't fulfill the fourth goal - enlist people for ministerial leadership - who will?

## SEGMENT IV

1. How does the practice of confidentiality within the PRC become a means to free your pastor?

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2. Does your PRC ensure that all three areas of feedback - personal style, preaching effectiveness, professional development - get equal emphasis?

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3. Why might your pastor's continuing education go from A to Z - anthropology to zoology?

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4. Has your church considered the pastor's sabbatical?

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## SEGMENT V

1. How do the goals of a PRC affect the number and regularity of PRC meetings?

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2. When would your PRC practice Jesus' guidelines given in Matthew 18:15-17?

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## SEGMENT VI

1. How do the purposes of the pulpit or search committee and the PRC intertwine?

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2. How has your PRC produced a **productive partnership** at the beginning and completion of your pastors' ministries? How could it?

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3. How does your PRC fulfill the words of the hymn used during the credits (e.g. *"May we learn the art of sharing, side by side and friend with friend, Equal partners in our caring to fulfill God's chosen end"*)?

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# MYTHS ABOUT BEING A PASTOR

*“Dear friends,  
let us love one another,  
for love comes from  
God. Everyone who  
loves has been born of  
God and knows God.  
Whoever does not love  
does not know God,  
because God is love.  
This is how God  
showed his love  
among us: He sent  
his one and only Son  
into the world that we  
might live through  
him. This is love: not  
that we loved God,  
but that he loved us  
and sent his Son as an  
atoning sacrifice for  
our sins. Dear  
Friends, since God so  
loved us, we also  
ought to love one  
another.”*

*I John 4:7-11*

## 1. THE PASTOR HAS AN EASY JOB.

You may have heard someone in your church say, "Wow, the pastor only works one day a week!" or "Besides your sermon, what else do you do?" Often members of the congregation wish they had the pastor's job. This is usually the case because they don't understand, even in small part, what the pastor does. A pastor's job is very stressful - not unlike a doctor's profession. The pastor is one of the first people called in an emergency - which makes the pastor's job 24 hours-a-day seven days-a-week. That is why it is imperative that the PRC intervene on the pastor's behalf to be certain that their pastor has adequate time off each week, a vacation each year and a sabbatical from time to time.

## 2. THE PASTOR IS AN EXPERT.

While your pastor may have graduated from seminary, that does not mean that he or she is an expert in all fields. Leading your church may require skills that the pastor has not yet acquired. The PRC can encourage and provide the resources for the pastor to continue studying.

## 3. THE PASTOR'S FAMILY IS PERFECT.

Many people may think this is true, but it just isn't so. The pastor's family has to deal with many stressful situations that most families will never know, such as living their lives in the goldfish bowl life of a parsonage - where they are on display for the church and community at large as specimens of the spiritual life. In addition, the pastor's family is dealing with a lot of stress which may include:

- ◆A parent working many long hours,
- ◆Unreasonable expectations for clergy children and spouses from those around them, and
- ◆Limited finances

## 4. THE PASTOR'S MARRIAGE IS IDEAL.

The pastor is usually very knowledgeable about marriage. He or she marries people, teaches and preaches on marriage as well as counsels couples who are about to marry or have difficulties in their marriage. This gives the pastor a unique understanding of marriage - but it does not mean that the pastor has a perfect marriage. The pastor and his or her spouse must deal with all the stress that every other couple has to deal with and the additional stress that the pastorate brings to their home.

It is essential to realize that many pastoral leaders are single. That does not mean that every second of their time is at the disposal of the church. You know what they say about all work and no play, and what church would want a dull pastor? Unmarried persons require as much personal time as married to cultivate a network of close relationships, either extended family or friends.

## 5. THE PASTOR HAS MANY FRIENDS.

It may surprise you to realize that this is seldom true. More often than not the pastor has had to relocate to begin work at your church. With that relocation comes distance from close relationships. It is often difficult to develop new relationships while investing significant time to begin a new ministry. Time constraints as well as opportunity to meet peers, the need for confidentiality and the burden of leadership all interfere with the opportunity to develop significant friendships for pastors.

**6. THE PASTOR'S SPIRITUAL LIFE IS ALWAYS DYNAMIC.**

The pastor does not have a special hotline to God. While it is important that your pastor has a strong spiritual life, we should realize that everyone experiences dry times in his or her walk with God. If a pastor has had a long season of stressful situations without adequate time off it is easy for his or her zeal to evaporate. If the pastor's schedule remains unrelenting for a long period of time he or she may fall prey to burnout.

**7. THE PASTOR IS VERY FULFILLED.**

While pastoral work is fulfilling, there may also be considerable disappointment and stress that the pastor must deal with in his or her ministry. These disappointments may be institutional, such as ministerial missions that haven't been successful in the pastor's or the church's view. In addition, the pastor must deal with demanding personal crises from members of the congregation. Remember that the pastor hears everything; death, divorce, drug abuse and church conflicts are all a part of the pastor's real world. Experiencing struggle in the lives of others, as well as his or her own, can drain the pastor. The PRC can support the pastor in real ways by ensuring that the pastor is not overloaded, has a support network in place and receives feedback and encouragement on a regular basis.

*“Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, they will pour into your lap. For whatever measure you deal out to others, it will be dealt to you in return.”*

*Luke 6:38*

# HOW TO ENCOURAGE YOUR PASTOR

**W**ith long hours, limited pay and criticism that can regretfully be constant, pastors can become discouraged, defeated and even depressed. The following list can be used to educate your PRC and your congregation. Here are some proven ways to encourage your pastor or ministerial staff member:

1. **PRAY REGULARLY** - for your pastor and your pastor's family. Pray that God will richly bless your pastor with spiritual gifts. As Tennyson wrote more than a hundred years ago, "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of."
2. **DON'T CRITICIZE** - your pastor. Most workers are evaluated once or twice a year, but clergy are critiqued every Sunday. It is easy to express disappointment with the chosen hymn, or the length of a certain sermon or anything else for that matter. A more challenging and rewarding activity is finding something positive to say to your pastor each week in order to encourage him or her. Matthew 7:1 says, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged." A few years ago a study stated that bad news travels 11 times while good news passes to only four others. That is human nature and a primary reason why pastors feel discouraged and stressed. They hear everyone's negative thoughts and very few positive comments. Refrain from negative or sarcastic comments. The PRC's job is to strengthen the pastor by reviewing areas of success and failure in a constructive, private way.
3. **DONATE YOUR SKILLS** - by using your abilities to bless the pastor. Do you have a special skill? Perhaps you could volunteer to help the pastor with his or her computer, give the pastor's car a tune-up, or even build some shelves for the pastor's hobby corner at home. Pray and think about this opportunity to serve.
4. **CRUSH GOSSIP** - whenever possible. Be certain never to repeat a negative comment. When you hear one be certain to respond with a positive remark. If you know that misinformation is being spread, correct it with accurate information. If people are gossiping in a group simply walk away. This action says volumes. Remember James 1:26: "If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless."
5. **PROVIDE ANSWERS** - by offering to assist with problems. Don't fall into the trap of giving advice when you see an area that needs improving, but offer to work on it instead. It may be that God pointed out something specific to you because you were also given the skills to correct it.
6. **PERFORM RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS** - nothing encourages a pastor more than knowing that teaching is being heard and applied. Find ways in your community to reach out to others - without being asked. Show God's love in simple ways to others. This is a testimony that your church is alive.
7. **DON'T COMPARE** - your pastor to other pastors, most especially any predecessors. Focus on how your pastor is being used by God in effective ministry now.
8. **AVOID THE SEVEN DEADLY WORDS** - "We've never done it that way before." Nothing can squelch the pastor's spirit more quickly than that empty put down.
9. **SHARE YOUR GROWTH** - let your pastor know what you have learned or any insight you may have had as a result of his or her teaching.
10. **INVITE SOMEONE NEW** - to your church. Nothing compliments the pastor more than seeing new faces. Let your enthusiasm for your church show by inviting those you know to visit. You'd be surprised who will say yes. Always introduce visitors to the pastor - it will make both of them feel special.

# THE GOALS OF THE PASTORAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

## GOAL #1

### UNDERSTAND AND INTERPRET THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH

The PRC keeps everyone - the clergy and the congregation - focused on the church's mission. To do this it is imperative that the pastor receive the support that he or she needs. To aid the church in fulfilling its ministry the congregation needs to know and understand the church's mission. If the church doesn't have the mission in writing the PRC should encourage the appropriate body to develop it. Then the PRC should see to it that the congregation is educated about the importance of their church's mission and their role in ministry.

### MINISTRY IS MUTUAL

Each person in the church has a place in ministry. The congregation should understand that the pastor is only one of the church's means to accomplish God's will in your community. In Galatians, we are clearly told that each of us has a different place in the body of Christ. Unless all of us strive toward fulfilling God's design for us, we will not be able to accomplish the church's mission. It is unrealistic and clearly unscriptural to consider that the fulfilling the church's mission is 100% the pastor's responsibility. Your pastor has been called to leadership - but we must remember that he or she isn't designed to perform all the functions in your church.

## GOAL # 2

### PROMOTE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE PASTOR AND THE CONGREGATION

A primary objective of the PRC is to promote healthy dialogue between the congregation and the pastoral staff. The PRC needs to get to know the pastor's strengths and weaknesses. The pastor must be able to be his or herself with the members of the PRC.

## GOAL #3

### FACILITATE FAIR AND JUST COMPENSATION FOR THE PASTOR

Every pastor and staff person will appreciate the church being intentional about fair pay. The pastor should feel free to speak openly about his or her expectations and needs. After hearing the pastor and some careful consideration the PRC should present its recommendations to the appropriate committee(s). This will free the pastor from having to be his or her own advocate for compensation.

Making decisions about pastoral compensation requires a careful review of many facts. The church's financial resources and unique circumstances will play a major role - but there are many other pieces that need to be examined before a fair solution can be found.

### IMPORTANT FACTS TO CONSIDER WHEN EVALUATING STAFF:

- Responsibilities
- Experience
- Education
- Expertise
- Effectiveness
- Years of service

Other factors to consider are:

1. Cost of living and salaries of professionals with similar education, experience and responsibilities:
2. A review of pastor compensation for similar size churches in the region.
3. The Consumer Price Index and average salaries of selected occupations - including school principals and superintendents - which can be obtained from your State Department of Labor or the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics, Washington, DC 20212
4. If your church compensation is not equivalent to full-time pay, a bivocational pastorate will allow for a second outside income from another job.

**REIMBURSABLE STAFF  
EXPENSES SHOULD  
INCLUDE:**

- Mileage and automobile reimbursement
- Convention and other denominational events
- Books, magazines and other resources
- Continuing education
- Hospitality
- Ministers Council dues

*"For scripture says, 'Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain,' and 'The worker deserves his wages.'"  
I Timothy 5:18*

If your church has multiple staff, the salaries should be related as a percentage of the senior pastor's pay and the senior pastor should be a part of the review process for the rest of the staff.

Also, be certain that ministry related expenses are to be fully reimbursed and benefits provided for all ministers on staff.

**BENEFITS**

Be certain the church provides a Social Security/Medicare tax offset of a minimum of 50% of your pastor's self-employment tax liability. Also, assure that the employment package should include medical, dental, death and retirement benefits. For more information about benefits contact The Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board at 1-800-986-6222. It is also important the pastor's compensation is accurately reported. Underreporting compensation can have a negative cumulative impact on the pastor's eventual retirement.

There are resources about reviewing staff available at [www.ministerscouncil.org](http://www.ministerscouncil.org). The Ministers Council can also provide a Compensation Workbook to facilitate the determination of benefits.

**GOAL #4 CHURCH VOCATIONS**

The committee should enlist the help of the congregation to call forth future ministerial leadership for the church. The committee should identify and encourage gifted persons in the congregation to assist in the church's ministerial leadership and create a climate of expectation where God's call to vocational ministry can be heard.

While speaking with potential ministry candidates, remember that most pastors leave seminary with a large debt load. This can add a financial burden later in ministry when as a pastor he or she may be trying to raise a family. Look for ways to help pay seminary tuition up front. If the church is unable to provide any tuition assistance for those entering seminary to fulfill their call to the ministry, seek out other resources. The ABC offers some scholarships, including Dan E. Weiss Fund for Excellence grants to challenge gifted persons who might not otherwise consider seminary. For information contact the Office of Financial Aid for Studies, American Baptist Home Mission Societies, ABCUSA, 1-800-222-3872, extension 2067, or request an application form online. Many ABC regions also have resources to assist and seminaries also may offer financial aid.

Another option for those entering the clergy is bivocational ministry. This is possible when the pastor goes to work in a very small church and is able to work part-time as a pastor and part-time at another career.

**GOAL #5 ENCOURAGE PASTORAL DEVELOPMENT**

Encouraging the pastor is a key ingredient in the fight against burnout. Burnout is considered the number one reason why pastors leave the ministry.

Fighting stress and discouragement are crucial to your success as a PRC, the pastor's success in the ministry and your church's success in attaining its mission. To encourage your pastor you need to know him or her. Getting to know your pastor will take time. The first step, however, is letting your pastor know that the PRC is one place where he or she can be his or herself. Everything that transpires within the PRC is confidential. Remember that your pastor is a person and people have frailties and faults - don't expect perfection. When your committee and the pastor become comfortable enough you will discover his or her dreams. It is important to know what the pastor hopes for in order to encourage him or her. Always speak truthfully to your pastor. Honesty is not just the best policy, for a PRC it should be the only policy. But dispense the truth with love and sincere concern. Remember, iron sharpens iron.

### **PASTORAL BOUNDARIES**

The pastor's schedule is a hectic one, fraught with unexpected emergencies and often dealing with crisis for a great many people. This creates a stressful environment for the pastor. Rest is a key ingredient in the fight against stress. It is easy for the ministry to begin to take more and more of the pastor's time but it is imperative that pastoral boundaries be set and respected. The PRC needs to encourage the pastor to take appropriate time off. At minimum the pastor should not work more than three evenings per week, take off at least one full day each week and get three to four weeks of vacation per year. It will be easier to implement these parameters if they are in writing. In addition to those periods of rest, pastors need a serious time of rejuvenation every few years. It is the PRC's task to encourage the pastor to continue studies and to rest. As such it is important for the PRC to pave the way for the pastor's sabbatical.

### **SABBATICALS**

The word sabbatical is rooted in the biblical concept of Sabbath, which involves, ceasing, rest, worship, plan and reflection. Sabbatical reflects the practice of letting the land lay unplanted every seven years so that the soil could replenish itself and continue to be rich in minerals. In today's vernacular, it is an opportunity to experience the gift of renewal that God offers each one of us. Sabbaticals offer the pastor the gift of time to experience the fullness of Sabbath restoration, trusting that God will continue the work of the church even as the pastor is away to experience renewal.

### **SABBATICAL BENEFITS**

It is important to communicate to the congregation that the benefits of a clergy sabbatical extend beyond the pastor to the congregation.

1. The congregation will grow through extended leadership. Lay volunteers can assist with some of the clergy duties during the planned absence. These could include teaching, visitation and administration.
2. Hearing a variety of preachers gives the congregation an opportunity to be taught in different voices on a wide variety of subjects. Also, a gifted layperson can have an opportunity to speak.
3. Renewed and revitalized returning clergy bring to the congregation energy and broadened experience.

### **IMPORTANT PLANNING STEPS FOR THE PASTOR'S ABSENCE:**

- 1 Be certain that the dates of the sabbatical are agreed upon and they are well known in advance.
- 2 Begin at least three months in advance of the start of the sabbatical, in order to complete the plan.
- 3 Develop a list of duties and assign staff and/or laypersons whenever possible.
- 4 Be certain that a lay leader or staff person is assigned for visitation and other duties. If this schedule rotates during the pastor's absence be certain that the schedule is published.
- 5 Arrange with a nearby minister to stand by in case of an unforeseen emergency.
- 6 Have a contact at the regional level that is available to answer questions that may arise.
- 7 Look for ways to help.
- 8 Keep the congregation informed.
- 9 Line up guest preachers.
- 10 Let the congregation know how everyone will benefit from a sabbatical.
- 11 When the pastor returns provide an opportunity for the congregation to share in this special time. Invite the pastor to publish a report upon his or her return or have a welcome back reception that give the pastor a time to speak about sabbatical experiences.

**STEPS TO  
REMEMBER WHEN  
RESOLVING  
CONFLICT:**

1. Remember that everyone needs to win. No conflict is a win-lose situation. The goal should be to discover a mutually acceptable solution.
2. Use constructive criticism and concentrate on improvement.
3. Define the conflict by using specific words that are constructive.
4. Don't assume you know the intentions of others. If you want to know why they did or said something, ask them. This will open the door for forgiveness.
5. Listen without prejudice. Set aside any and all judgment while you are listening.
6. Rephrase what you hear. This proven listening technique usually diffuses the most upset person. Rephrase in order to clarify what you have heard, and not to state an opinion.
7. Always focus on the present and try to keep the past, or any history lessons, out of the discussion.
8. Be willing to admit that mistakes may have contributed to the problem.
9. Be certain that both sides of the conflict describe their feelings in a constructive but assertive way.
10. If one person is unable to hear what is being said try to reschedule the meeting without assigning any guilt.
11. Always focus on the solution and not the problem.
12. When several difficulties arise at once, deal with them one at a time.

Preparation is the key ingredient for a successful sabbatical experience for both clergy and congregation. A committee, which may or may not consist of PRC members, should be organized to develop a plan for the pastor's absence. The Ministers Council web site [www.ministerscouncil.org](http://www.ministerscouncil.org) offers suggested sabbatical policies as well as pointers to funding sources.

**GOAL #6 RESOLVE CONFLICT IN THE CHURCH**

It is the PRC's role to facilitate communication between the pastor and the church and to try to prevent conflict. But the church is made up of people - and with people often comes conflict. Matthew 5:9 says, "Blessed are the Peacemakers for they shall inherit the earth." Notice that this verse doesn't say, blessed are the "peacelovers," it is very specific - peacemakers. Making peace is an effort that God prizes and according to Matthew even rewards. Getting from conflict to peace is rarely, if ever, an easy path. The steps listed on this page will help you resolve conflicts in your church. Remember that it is always important to deal with a potential conflict - which usually begins as a misunderstanding - before it grows.

For more help in resolving conflict be sure to request the assistance of the region staff. Also visit the Ministers Council web site at [www.ministerscouncil.org](http://www.ministerscouncil.org) for more resources.

**GOAL #7 ASSIST CHANGE**

The committee should be aware of any church staff openings. When there is a pastoral transition, the committee can help make it a smooth one. These changes include installation of new clergy and staff, clergy appreciation, resignation or retirement.

**INSTALLING A NEW PASTOR**

Remember that the pastor has had to move from a location where he or she may have had significant support. There are adjustments that must be made, just as there would be with any person relocating. What makes it more challenging for the pastor is the nature of the job and its potential loneliness. It is imperative that the minister find peers and support from those who understand the pressures of ministry. Many pastors find it helpful to develop friendships with other pastors in the area from different denominations. This is something that could be encouraged, and if appropriate introductions could be made.

The Ministers Council *Together in Ministry* project encourages the formation of collegial covenant groups to strengthen ministers through relationships.

**STAFF DEPARTURES**

In almost all circumstances it is important to recognize publicly a staff member's contributions to the church's mission. This can be done during worship, with a special offering or a time of fellowship for the entire church. In many churches it is traditional to express gratitude through the bestowal of a significant gift.

#### TERMINATION

When it is clear that the clergy or staff person is no longer able to fulfill his or her position in the church it is the PRC's task to assist with the termination process. The termination process should be spelled out in the church's personnel policies. In times of conflict, especially when conflict nears the point of termination, the PRC should request the assistance of region staff. There are many tools available on the Ministers Council website regarding involuntary separation of service.

#### RETIREMENT

This is a major life event for anyone. It is important both for the pastor and for the congregation to find special ways to celebrate the pastor's life, work and ministry. Be certain to incorporate in the celebration ministry milestones in the years prior to your pastor's arrival at your church.

Celebrations could include a book of letters from those who have known the pastor, dinners, gifts and most importantly notes of appreciation and heartfelt comments from the congregation. Remember that the Ministers Council Covenant and Code of Ethics requires that a pastor retiring or resigning for any reason must sever pastoral relationships with the congregation and its members. A document on "Ethics for Retiring Pastors and Those Replacing Them" may be found on the Ministers Council website, as well as sample retirement rituals that clarify the change in relationship. The PRC should be familiar with this information and ask both the pastor and the congregation to follow these guidelines.

#### IN CLOSING

The role of a Pastoral Relations Committee should always be taken up with sobriety and sincere desire to serve God. It is important to remember that our pastors are people. People need both encouragement and constructive criticism. As the Scripture says, "Just as iron sharpens iron" it is the role of the PRC to assist the pastor and the church in realizing their mission.

*"And now, friends,  
we ask you to  
honor those  
leaders who work so  
hard for you, who  
have been given the  
responsibility of  
urging and  
guiding you along in  
your obedience.  
Overwhelm them  
with appreciation  
and love!"  
I Thessalonians*

*5: 12 - 13*



# RESOURCES

## PASTORAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

**"A Productive Partnership."** Video for training of PRCs. The Ministers Council, PO Box 851, Valley Forge, PA 19482-0851.

Johnson, Emmett V. **Work of the Pastoral Relations Committee.** Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1983.

Reiland, Dan. **Shoulder to Shoulder: Strengthening Your Church by Supporting Your Pastor.** Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997.

Rubietta, Jane. **How to Keep the Pastor You Love.** InterVarsity Press, 2002.

## BIVOCATIONAL MINISTRY

Bickers, Dennis W. **The Tentmaking Pastor: The Joy of Bivocational Ministry.** Baker Book House, 2000.

## COMPENSATION

**"Compensation Workbook."** The Ministers Council, PO Box 851, Valley Forge, PA 19482-0851.

## CONFLICT MEDIATION

Fisher, Roger and Ury, William. **Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In.** Houghton Mifflin Co. (second edition), April 1992.

Lott, David B. **Conflict Management in Congregations.** Alban Institute, 2001.

Rendle, Gil. **Behavioral Covenants in Congregations: A Handbook for Honoring Differences.** Alban Institute, 1999.

Ministers Council resources for dealing with congregational conflict are available at [www.ministerscouncil.org](http://www.ministerscouncil.org).

## CONGREGATIONAL RESOURCES

Policies, position descriptions and other resources are available at [www.ministerscouncil.org](http://www.ministerscouncil.org).

## COVENANTS

**"Covenant and Code of Ethics for Ministerial Leaders of the American Baptist Churches, U.S.A."** The Ministers Council, PO Box 851, Valley Forge, PA 19482-0851.

**"Suggested Minister-Church Agreement."** The Ministers Council, PO Box 851, Valley Forge, PA 19482-0851.

**"Together in Ministry."** The Ministers Council, PO Box 851, Valley Forge, PA 19482-0851.

## EVALUATION TOOLS

Hudson, Jill M. **Evaluating Ministry: Principles and Processes for Clergy and Congregations.** Alban Institute, 1992.

Woods, C. Jeff. **User Friendly Evaluation: Improving the Work of Pastors, Programs and Laity.** Alban Institute, 1995.

Evaluation forms and exit interviews are available at [www.ministerscouncil.org](http://www.ministerscouncil.org).

## PASTORAL BEGINNINGS

Oswald, Roy. ***New Beginnings: A Pastorate Start Up Workbook***. Alban Institute, 1989.

## PASTORAL SEARCHES

***"Calling an American Baptist Minister."*** Ministerial Leadership Commission. Order from Judson Press, 1-800-458-3766.

Olsen, Charles M. and Morseth, Ellen. ***Selecting Church Leaders: A Practice in Spiritual Discernment***. Upper Room, February 2002.

## PASTORAL TRANSITIONS

Avery, William O. ***Revitalizing Congregations: Refocusing and Healing through Pastoral Transitions***. Alban Institute, 2002.

White, Edward A. ***Saying Goodbye: A Time of Growth for Congregations and Pastors***. Alban Institute, 1990.

Services to mark retirements and resignations and a resource on retiring pastor ethics are available at [www.ministerscouncil.org](http://www.ministerscouncil.org).

## SABBATICAL PLANNING

Bullock, Richard A. ***Clergy Renewal: The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning***. Alban Institute, 2000.

Oswald, Roy M. ***Why You Should Give Your Pastor a Sabbatical***. Video and Leader's guide. Alban Institute, 2001.

Sabbatical policy and planning resources plus funding source information are available at [www.ministerscouncil.org](http://www.ministerscouncil.org).

## SYSTEMS APPROACH

Steinke, Peter L. ***How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems***. Alban Institute, 1993.

Steinke, Peter L. ***Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach***. Alban Institute, 1996.



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