

PURPOSES OF PASTOR EVALUATIONS

Congregations expect a high level of performance from the pastor. Pastors expect a high level of performance from themselves. Often the start of a new appointment finds reasonable satisfaction on both sides. Sometimes the same level of satisfaction begins to wane in the second, third, fourth, and future years. Can anything be done to avoid the loss of that sense of doing well? Can the “honeymoon” be lengthened? Can there be a continuing growth in the match of congregation needs and pastor skills to help those needs be met? Yes. In its highest form that is what evaluation is about.

There are many reasons for establishing and carrying out a sound evaluation program. An effective, constructive evaluation provides criteria against which performance will be measured. It can point out areas of accomplishment and areas where improvement is needed. Ultimately, a well-conceived, well-managed evaluation program can lead to a better ministry for the pastor, the congregation, and the community.

In the local church the choir director, the custodian, the youth worker, the education director, the business manager, and the secretaries have people to whom they report and who provide evaluation of their work. The work of the pastor is supervised by the District Superintendent. In addition to supervision by the DS, as chief CEO of the church the pastor should also receive regular and formal comments and guidance from the local church setting. So, why evaluate?

- **The discipline requires that each pastor receive an annual evaluation.**
- **Because it provides a basis for recognizing and rewarding exceptional job performance, offering support to the pastor, and for identifying areas needing improvement.**
- **Mainly because, at its best, evaluation is a communication process.**

Evaluation as communication offers subtle and far-reaching advantages. It enhances communication and clarifies expectations. It requires defining what is expected of the pastor, the establishment of priorities, and the attachment of goals.

Evaluation is an on-going communication process and not just a once-a-year conference or written report. However, evaluation conferences and written reports do have a place. They should be collaborative efforts based on specific and documented evidence, provided by both the evaluator and evaluatee. They should speak to areas of exemplary performance and areas which need remediation in the attainment of the evaluatee’s goals and objectives.

Bishops with their Cabinets strive to be led by the spirit as they make appointments. Information gathered through the on-going supervision of clergy, congregations, and other ministry settings provides the basis for appointment making. Every effort is made to match gifts and graces, skills, and ministry experience of the clergy persons with the ministry needs, visions, and mission opportunities of congregations.

Nevertheless, the pastor and the congregation come together with different histories and a set of pre-conceived ideas and expectations. Once the appointment is made (and for the full duration of the appointment) the pastor and the congregation must work at coming together on goals and priorities. They must learn to work together to serve as faithful disciples of Christ. Some reasons to establish regular evaluations are:

- **Establish and maintain good working relationships between the congregation and the pastor.**
- **Define the functions and responsibilities of the pastor**
- **Improve performance by suggesting areas of responsibility and operating techniques that may need strengthening.**
- **Give encouragement and commendation for work well done.**
- **Improve the performance of the pastor's self-appraisal of characteristics, skills, graces, and talents.**
- **Provide an opportunity for the congregation and pastor to confer at periodic intervals on his or her performance.**
- **Offer a procedure for comprehensive and dispassionate appraisal in a setting other than during a time of crises.**

Pastors, congregations, Cabinets, and Bishops cannot function effectively without periodic checks on "how they are doing." If the evaluation job is done correctly, it will become an opportunity for the pastor and the congregation to set goals, establish priorities, move toward long-range planning and establish a leadership style that creates success.

PRINCIPLES OF PASTOR EVALUATIONS

For guidelines for pastor evaluations, consult *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2000*, Paragraph 331 (Responsibilities and duties), Pages 217-220. “Persons serving as pastors of congregations shall be evaluated in part on the basis of the following list of responsibilities and duties.” The additional principles would also guide any process of pastor evaluation.

- 1. Any evaluation process should be a mutual undertaking between the pastor and the congregation, under the guidance of the Staff—Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) or the Pastor—Parish Relations Committee.**

Ministry belongs to the whole people of God, not just the pastor. Pastor evaluations should not be done apart from the ministry evaluation of the whole congregation.

- 2. Pastor evaluation works best when it is done as part of a regularly scheduled process of measuring effectiveness (that is, a yearly examination of the goals and objectives of the congregation).**
- 3. Compensation considerations should not be part of an evaluation process.**

Compensation considerations will distort any honest evaluation of performance reviews. Consider dealing with compensation in the fall and evaluation in the spring.

- 4. Any evaluation process should not be done in conjunction with the SPRC’s recommendation regarding pastor appointment for the coming year.**

The process is intended to increase effectiveness of ministry, to offer commendation and praise, and to provide constructive criticism and suggestions for addressing growth areas. Conducting an evaluation at the same time as recommendations for pastor appointments creates the possibility that the evaluation may not be done in a careful and considered manner.

- 5. Pastor evaluations should be a collaborative process between the pastor and the SPRC.**

The pastor and the SPRC should agree on the pastoral functions that will be evaluated and how the process should continue. If they are unable to agree or if an adversarial process seems to be emerging, they should consult with the District Superintendent.

6. Pastor evaluations are a demanding process and take a great deal of time and energy.

It is recommended that thoroughgoing, detailed evaluations should be completed every four or five years. Less detailed processes may be done on a yearly basis to help the pastor and the governing board keep focus on mutual goals. It is important to be clear whether the evaluation is to be self-directed by the pastor(s) or whether the evaluation is being initiated and carried out by the congregation through the SPRC.

7. Be clear from the beginning what will happen as a result of the evaluation.

Who will see the results? How will the results be reported to the congregation? If there will be changes in job description or mission goals, who will make them? Make sure that these things happen. If evaluation is being done to assure a change in appointment, you need a conflict consultant or a District Superintendent—you are not talking about pastor evaluation!

8. Be sure to focus on pastor strengths as well as growth areas.

Knowledge of things that are working well provides an important context for areas that need special attention or improvement. We all need support and affirmation.

9. The pastor and the congregation should agree that anonymous evaluative information will not be given credence.

Family system therapists and specialists agree that healthy families learn to take responsibility for their feelings and positions on family issues. The same is true in our church families. We should all be working toward a goal of honest and open communications.

10. The District Superintendent may wish to be involved.

In some instances, this may simply be a matter of courtesy informing him/her that a ministry evaluation will be undertaken. In other instances, the SPRC and the pastor involved may well wish to have the consultative assistance of their District Superintendent. Make sure that your D.S. knows what is going on—remember they and we do not like surprises in the sensitive area of pastor evaluations (*The Book of Discipline of the UMC, 2000*, Paragraph 258.2e; page 165).

How well does our pastor do his/her job? Is he/she functioning as effectively as possible? How is her/his work affecting the whole ministry of the church?