

PASTOR AND CONGREGATION EVALUATION PACKET

Dear Members of Evaluation Committees, Church Councils, and Pastors,

Evaluation of the ministry and the leadership of a congregation is natural and inevitable. Evaluation happens and a carefully designed evaluation process is vital for the health and growth of both pastor and congregation.

This packet is designed to provide an orientation to the delicate art of congregational leadership evaluation. It provides several evaluation tools designed for specific kinds of congregational situations.

***Section A** seeks to clarify the **nature** and **purpose** of a leadership evaluation process.*

***Section B** lays out the **theological basis** for evaluations in what we believe about God and the church.*

***Section C** speaks to the importance of **preparation** for periodic major evaluations by setting them into a pattern of normal on-going evaluation-conversations in the congregation. A **list of conditions** conducive to a growth-directed evaluation experience for both the pastor and the congregation is presented.*

***Section D** provides a variety of **evaluation tools**. There is no “one size fits all” approach. Size, cultural tradition and ethnicity are just some of the ways congregations are distinct and that call for different approaches to leadership evaluation. For example, small congregations require different approaches from large multiple-staff congregations.*

*Before beginning, let’s acknowledge the **anxiety factor**. Both pastor and congregation feel some anxiety, not to mention members of the evaluation committee, when a major evaluation comes up; this is normal and unavoidable whenever our ministry effectiveness is discerned. As you prepare for an evaluation, remember that evaluation is not something you do “to” or “about” someone; it’s something you do “with” someone. It is a sensitive discerning time that is done in the context of a relationship.*

To provide a positive, growth-producing process in leadership evaluation! That was the goal, when we met as a group of conference ministers and denominational leaders at AMBS in April 2005 to review and renew the evaluation practice of our congregations. This packet reflects the hard work of this group of leaders. I prayerfully commend it to you as you seek to lead your congregation in a growth-directed leadership evaluation.

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A. INTRODUCTION

*“Evaluation is natural to the human experience. Evaluation is one of God’s ways of bringing the history of the past into dialogue with the hope of the future; without confession of sin there is no reconciliation; without counting of blessing there is no thanksgiving; without the acknowledgement of accomplishment there is no celebration; without awareness of potential there is no hope; without hope there is no desire for growth; without a desire for growth the past will dwarf the future. We are called into new growth and new ministries by taking a realistic look at what we have been and what we can still be.” (Jill M. Hudson, *Evaluating Ministry*, Alban Institute, p. 7)*

1. What is Leadership Evaluation? Loren Mead describes the task of leadership evaluation as *“that task in which pastors and laity collaborate to press each other and nurture each other into growth...”* (Hudson, p. 2) Periodic major evaluations are most helpful and produce less tension when regular evaluation reflections are done in the light of a congregation’s vision and goals.

2. Who participates in the evaluation process? The pastor, the leadership team and the congregation itself all have responsible roles in the leadership and ministry of the congregation. Therefore when the ministry of a pastor is being evaluated, all the players are also called to reflect on their roles and responsibilities in the life of the congregation. The Pastor-Congregation Relations Committee or an Evaluation Committee offers leadership in the process. Experience indicates that involving every member through an every member survey may not be the best approach. There are excellent alternatives in the Evaluation Tools, Section D.

3. What is the purpose? The goal of an evaluation or review process should always be to improve the ministry of a congregation and the effectiveness of its members and staff. This is done through reflection and discernment on strengths and weaknesses, successes and failures. All this is done in the context of the congregation’s call and vision. As a result, pastors, leaders, and members all gain insight, discern new priorities, and experience empowerment. An evaluation whose focus is seeking the satisfaction of the felt needs of congregants is not most helpful; an evaluation should rather propel the congregation towards its call and mission.

4. What are the payoffs? Jill Hudson identifies three payoffs for congregations and pastors willing to engage in mutual assessment:

- a. New realizations will emerge. Congregational leaders will gain from new insights and perspectives; there will be encouragements from successes and challenges for growth.
- b. New goals and directions can be established.
- c. The mysterious relationship between pastor and members will be explored. (Hudson, p. 5)

5. When are formal evaluations to be done? Many congregations and pastors have found it helpful to have an agreed upon pattern of evaluation at regular intervals. Formal evaluation is not recommended in a context of major conflict. Conflict calls for some form of conflict mediation.

**B. WHAT IS THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR EVALUATION?
HOW DOES WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT GOD AND THE CHURCH SHAPE OUR
PROCESS?**

“For by the grace given to me, I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the same measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are all members of one another.” (Romans 12:3,4)

1. This congregation is God’s Congregation.

“There is a God. I am not in charge. God is at work before me. It is God’s church. I belong to the church. It does not belong to me.” – Dan Nighswander

The vocation of the church is bigger than any one of our single vocations. If God is at work building the congregation, all who are called to its leadership are called to have a spirit of willingness to be accountable toward God and toward one another.

2. Leadership functions in a covenanted relationship.

A Mennonite Polity for Ministerial Leadership understands the relationship between congregations and their ministerial leaders “...to be one characterized by covenant with each other before God. The relationship, built on promises made, is one of interdependence and mutuality.” (p. 73)

3. Leadership is a communal gift.

“Leadership is not simply a gift of the Spirit to the pastor or other leaders. It is a gift to the church. Leadership is a communal gift to build up the body of Christ so that it can fulfill its vision.” Jack Suderman

A pastor is not evaluated by individual members, but by the congregation in its prayer-centered communal discerning.

4. Leadership functions with mutuality both in ministry and in evaluation.

“Ministry receives its authority from both God and the church...The church and its leaders must be accountable to God and to each other as they respond to the call of ministry and the exercise of authority.” (*A Mennonite Polity for Ministerial Leadership*, p. 22)

“Ministry is and must be mutual. Therefore no individual’s performance in ministry can be reviewed with fairness apart from the whole.” (Hudson, p. 3)

5. Leadership evaluation is an opportunity of modelling and exercising community care, expressing sensitivity, gentleness, integrity of language, and a spirit of mutual accountability as the congregation reflects together on its identity and ministry.

6. Leadership evaluation is an exercise of faith.

Trust in the guidance of the Holy Spirit is exercised. Prayer is the elemental activity undergirding the evaluation process.

C. UNDER WHAT CONDITIONS DOES AN EVALUATION FUNCTION WELL? WHAT CAN WE DO TO PREPARE FOR A FRUITFUL LEADERSHIP EVALUATION?

The very best evaluation procedure will yield troublesome results from a fractured congregation in a state of anxiety and fear; and even the most threadbare approach can yield positive results from a congregation enjoying unity and positive expectation as they approach an evaluation process. The health and morale of the congregation and the pastor will shape the results of the evaluation.

Use this packet with creativity, adapting it to the needs, circumstances and culture of your congregation. If your congregation is of an alternative cultural group, we encourage you to adapt this packet to your congregation's culture.

We strongly recommend that each congregation's leaders consult with your Conference Minister before you proceed with your evaluation process.

A checklist for a healthy evaluation process

1. Has a leadership group, such as an **Evaluation Committee** been appointed to take responsibility for the evaluation process? Is the Evaluation Committee prepared to lead the process with explicit reference to a **vision for the future**, clearly established congregational **ministry goals** and the **pastor's job description**?

Are the following documents available to the Evaluation Committee and the pastor in order to provide a frame of reference for a productive evaluation?

- a. A Congregational **Vision Statement**. Past and present ministry should be evaluated and future ministry envisioned in light of a vision statement.
- b. The Pastor's **Ministry Goals**, previously developed by the pastor in dialogue with the leadership council of the congregation.
- c. The **Covenant of Understanding** as the agreed-to terms for the pastor's employment.

2. Is there **pastor buy-in** for the evaluation process? Pastor buy-in can be enhanced by first soliciting the pastor's insights. Which areas of ministry need attention in his/her particular ministry as well as the wider ministry of the congregation? This gives the pastor the opportunity to help shape the evaluation process and feel creatively involved.

3. Has the pastor completed a written **self-evaluation**? A pastor is empowered to enter the evaluation process with greater clarity and confidence after reflection on his/her ministry goals, areas of success, and areas needing growth and development.

4. Is there a **Pastor-Congregation Relations Committee**, or some other designated group providing consistent, on-going feedback, encouragement and caring accountability? When there is an intentional regular pattern of caring evaluation, surprises will be minimized and anxiety reduced.

5. Is there **congregation buy-in**? Have the congregants been adequately prepared for an evaluation process? Has the theology of the evaluation process been taught? Has the purpose of the evaluation process been made clear? It is critical that congregants understand that evaluations are not a means for dealing with conflict issues. Has the methodology and all its steps and stages been explained and understood?

6. Is there a good understanding that they are involved together as a congregation in evaluating a pastor's ministry, rather than individually doing evaluations apart from the **discernment of the community**?

7. Have you consulted with your **Area Conference Minister**? He/she will offer helpful perspective, support, and resources for your evaluation process.

8. Have you as a congregation prepared the process with a **prayerful listening to God's Spirit**?

D. INTRODUCTION TO EVALUATION TOOLS

The following tools have been developed and used in our various area churches. They represent our best practices to date. Feed back on your experience with these tools will be welcomed.

D. 1. A Mini-Pastoral Evaluation

This short questionnaire is designed to provide a basic review of a pastor in the **second year** of ministry. It is designed to provide helpful feedback to the pastor and the church council at a formative moment of pastoral development.

D. 2. A Suggested Approach for Pastoral Reviews developed by Mennonite Church Manitoba, Mennonite Church Canada.

This approach contains a program both for congregations that use a vote for renewing a pastor's term as well as congregations that use open-ended or "vote free" renewals of terms.

D. 3. Congregation/Pastoral Review developed by Western District Conference, Mennonite Church USA.

This questionnaire can be used for an all member survey or a survey of selected members. There is an introductory instruction sheet. **Section I** focuses on a Congregational Review. **Section II** focuses on a Pastoral review.

D. 4. Pastoral Review Form developed by Western District Conference, Mennonite Church USA.

Because this approach has minimal emphasis on reviewing the congregation, it will function best when there is clarity about the vision of the congregation and there is the practice of an on-going conversation about how well the congregation is living up to its vision.

D. 5. Pastor Evaluation suitable for lead pastor or associate pastor evaluation, developed by Normal Mennonite church, Normal Illinois, Mennonite Church USA.

There are three documents: An introductory outline of the process, a letter of explanation for the persons being asked to complete the questionnaire, and the questionnaire itself.

D. 6. Pastoral Evaluation Suitable for a Small Congregation

This approach is based on a highly relational approach that often suits a small-sized congregation. It features an every home visitation approach.

D. 7. An Appreciative Inquiry Approach to Pastoral Evaluation compiled by Mennonite Church Eastern Canada, Mennonite Church Canada.

The Appreciative Inquiry approach to a pastor's review focuses on "what is life-giving" or "what is working" rather than determining "what is wrong." It invites congregations to tell stories of their congregation and their pastor at their best.

D. 8. A Pastor's Self-evaluation

A healthy evaluation experience requires a pastor to be engaged in realistic reflection on his/her ministry. These questionnaires provide two ways of doing self-evaluation. They are designed to guide a pastor in reflecting on and reviewing his/her strengths and weaknesses, and learning/growth challenges in the ministry.