

3. CONGREGATIONALISM IN PRACTICE

SECTION 3.1: BASIC ETHICS

Boundaries are Important

The relationship between the pastor and his or her congregation is a special one. Pastors have the privilege of walking with the people of God through all of life's joys, challenges and transitions. Good pastorates and good churches build trustworthy relationships together. Trust happens when all are clear about what to expect from the relationships. This doesn't mean that hurts and conflict won't happen in the life of the church, but trustworthy relationships weather the differences and difficulties and create stronger bonds in the process. An understanding of basic ethics will help create trustworthy relationships.

Bylaws are Important

Your Articles and Bylaws are the primary articulation of who you are together. Compliance with your bylaws and procedures is foundational in practicing trustworthiness. If your bylaws no longer fit your congregation, you may consider amending them so that all will know what to expect in your corporate identity and process.

Confidentiality is Important

You may expect your pastor to act with professional confidentiality. Professional confidentiality means that your pastor will not gossip about parishioners, disclose their difficulties to others without permission, or divulge what is learned in pastoral care/counseling sessions or health care settings.

However, there are limits to confidentiality. Often, pastors will receive people in pastoral care/counseling only when there is another person in the building. **This is a good practice and should be followed whenever possible.** Additionally, the pastor's office may have a window (advisable) or, if not, the session may be carried on with the door open. The fact that a person came in for a session with the pastor is not confidential. What is said within the session is.

Sometimes, by virtue of the need to coordinate schedules, events, and pastoral care, other church staff may become privy to pastoral concerns and needs. Church staff members are also under the ethical mandate not to gossip about parishioners, disclose their difficulties to others without permission, or divulge when someone has come for pastoral care/counseling sessions or accessed health care services.

Clergy are often mandated reporters. This means the state requires a minister contact state agencies when there is a disclosure or reasonable suspicion of child abuse or neglect. Proof of such a claim is not required. This is often true for disclosure or reasonable suspicion of elder abuse as well. State laws vary, so it is imperative that the church leaders and clergy know your state's laws. (see Section 3.2) When in doubt, a clergy person should assume he or she is a mandated reporter.

A Pastor's Relationships in the Church

The pastor's role in a church is outwardly a highly social one. Relationships are important. From interactions at board meetings, to hospital bedsides, to counseling and pastoral care, to home visits, to coffee hour chit chat, a pastor's presence is part of the spiritual richness of the church community. However, the burdens of the pastorate can put an internal strain on the pastor. Burdens such as conflicting personalities, carrying confidential knowledge, and unduly high expectations of the pastoral role by parishioners can create a sense of isolation and loneliness for many pastors. Because of these typical dynamics, there are some general guidelines that help maintain healthy relationships in the church for parishioners and clergy alike.

Concerning Friendships: Because the church is its people, the church is a social place. Friendships of all kinds and of all levels are formed there. The pastor is no exception. Pastoral friendships will develop over time and with personal experience. Like all people, a pastor will find personal compatibilities with some, but not with others. Still, the pastor must accord all parishioners respect, acceptance of differences, and opportunity to spiritually grow. Deeply personal and exclusive relationships between a pastor and a parishioner can be problematic. Such relationships can cause other parishioners to feel resentment or accuse the pastor of "cronyism." They can tempt the pastor to speak too frankly about church difficulties and frustrations, potentially placing the parishioner-friend in an awkward position as a parish member. They can compromise the pastorate in many unintended ways, especially when one or the other becomes disappointed in the friendship and the "special" status accorded by it. This is not to say friendships don't form, but that they can only go "so far." Friendships whose depth and transparency compromise the pastor-parishioner relationship are "too far." For these and many other good reasons, a pastor must form deep friendships outside of the congregation. These friendships are necessary for a pastor to remain healthy and balanced in his or her pastoral role. A congregation can encourage their clergy person to form outside relationships by allowing time to serve on community boards and attend community functions, and giving the pastor adequate time off away from the church duties.

Dating in the Church: In the "old days," when the single, male pastor came to town, many people wanted to introduce him to somebody they thought would be a good spouse. With today's interpersonal complexities, this quaint notion is just that . . . a quaint notion. For many

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reasons, it is unadvisable for a single pastor to date parishioners. In some states, it is even illegal for a clergy person to become romantically or sexually involved with a member of the church. One reason has already been covered in the previous section on friendships, but other reasons exist. For instance, in the course of dating, if misunderstandings arise or the relationship turns out to be an incompatible one, the break up can cause emotional and spiritual wounds to the individuals and, with its ripple effects, to the congregation. Another important reason is the perceived power in the role of the pastor. Many times, people project onto the pastor qualities of morality, reason, and virtue that aren't always earned and may not be present in the individual. This can cause someone to feel "love" for the pastor out of proportion to their knowledge or experience of the pastor (this can be true if the pastor is single or married). If the pastor begins dating a person who has these feelings and the relationship doesn't work out, it is easy for that person to feel led on or deeply rejected by the pastor. He or she may believe their feelings have been exploited by the pastor. Again, the effects of the disillusionment can adversely affect the entire congregation. This is not to say that dating in the church doesn't happen and that it can't lead to happy endings, but that the complications of relationships that don't work out make it risky business, and best to be avoided. If such feelings develop between single, consenting adults, it is important that one of the couple leave the church for a time so that the relationship can develop outside of the complexities of church relationships.

Relationships that Transgress Boundaries: Under no circumstances should a pastor initiate or respond to an overture that is flirtatious, sexually suggestive or sexually involved with anyone in the parish, male, female, single, married, young, old. Such relationships violate the trust of the congregation and may result in dismissal. If sexual engagement or erotic behavior occurs with someone who is not yet an adult, it is illegal and needs to be reported to authorities. Check your state's statutes regarding mandated reporting. If in doubt, **consult an attorney.**

Please **See section 3.2 on Safe Churches.** There, you are urged to adopt policies and procedures that promote good, healthy and trustworthy relationships in the congregation. We direct you to the website of Church Mutual Insurance Company where you may find free, helpful, safety resources. www.churchmutual.com. If allegations are substantiated, be sure to inform the NACCC. You are also directed to the NACCC website (nacc.org) or the Center's website (www.centerforcongregationalleadership.org) to access "Misconduct in Ministry: A Handbook for Congregational Churches."

When a Minister Leaves

All pastorates come to an end. The reasons why they end vary, but each ending changes the relationship of the pastor to the congregation. The general rule is that when a pastor leaves, he or she relinquishes all pastoral duties and interests, and leaves the congregation at least for a designated period of time. The primary reason for this is to help the congregation receive and

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bond with their new minister, whether that person is an interim or a newly called and settled minister. If your former pastor doesn't return your phone calls, or when contacted gently but firmly redirects you to your current pastor, it is not that she or he doesn't care for you. Your former pastor cares so much for you that he or she wants you to have the best possible relationship with the new pastor that you can have and not stand in the way of that. The goal of any former pastor should be the unqualified success of the new pastor. The goal of any church should be the same.

Keeping the “Interim” in Interim Minister

The time between settled pastors is called the interim period. This time of change often provokes congregational anxiety. The pastor called to help the congregation through this time is called an Interim Minister or an Intentional Transitional Minister (see the NACCC website for more information). Often, a church is comforted by the presence of the interim and enjoys the good skills and gifts the interim minister brings to this time of congregational change. The natural inclination in such circumstances is to want the interim to stay on as the settled minister.

However, the tradition and wisdom is that it is unethical for an interim minister to place his or her name in candidacy as the settled pastor. This rule ensures that an interim minister does not interfere with the search process or the church in their discernment of new leadership. This ethical rule helps the church stay true to its task rather than be tempted by a potential “quick fix” to their need and relief of their anxiety. This is a time of vulnerability for churches. A good interim knows this, respects this and does not position himself or herself to take advantage of that vulnerability by candidating for the settled position.

Upon conclusion of an interim ministry, the same rules for when a pastor leaves (above) apply.

Basics for Pastoral Discretionary Funds

Many churches have discretionary funds for pastors to distribute to those in need. Often, use of these funds is confidential, protecting the dignity of those who come asking for help. However, certain safe guards should be put in place to reduce the temptation to misuse or misappropriate these funds. Some simple policies will help. First, a pastor should keep a balance sheet of the fund and record the type of help given (e.g. gas, \$20.00). The pastor should generate a monthly report to the trustees or deacons or other appropriate groups showing the beginning balance of the fund, monthly expenditures and the remaining balance. If you collect discretionary funds through a special offering, the treasurer should be responsible for counting and depositing the offering, and then informing the pastor of the deposit and fund balance. Also, the treasurer should balance the account as appropriate.

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Sometimes, a person wants to help an individual by passing money through the discretionary fund, thereby ensuring a tax deduction for their help. This is never a good practice unless there is a church wide appeal for a specific cause and clear communication that all funds received for that purpose will be used for that purpose. Sometimes, an appeal will generate more income than needed. Be sure to state in your appeal how overages will be used.

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SECTION 3.2: SAFE CHURCHES

Disclosure Process

The NACCC requires that all ministers seeking a church call through the NACCC search process create a disclosure file for church inspection. This is a service the NACCC provides to our member churches to support you in making informed choices for pastoral leadership without breaching your autonomy to discern who the Spirit is calling to ministry in your church.

Use of NACCC services for the purposes of seeking a pastoral position is considered a privilege and not a right. We believe that healthy relationships between a pastor and parish are built not just with attention to ethical confidentiality but also with appropriate transparency. The NACCC disclosure policy creates a reasonable standard for the privilege of using the NACCC network when a minister is seeking a pulpit. It is a tool for member churches that, when used, helps a church make healthy decisions when looking for new pastoral leadership. This process provides an avenue for self-disclosure with dignity and for documentation of reconciliation. It allows appropriate communication of group findings so that an abusive personality exposed in an NACCC church in one region can't easily go to another region and repeat the harmful behaviors. This policy is established as a service to member churches. This is not a "credentialing" policy. ***The NACCC does not guarantee the accuracy or veracity of the file contents.***

Child Protection Policies

The NACCC ***strongly*** encourages its churches to adopt child protection policies. To that end, we direct you to our website for sample policies other churches have used or are using. We also direct you to the website of Church Mutual Insurance Company where you may find free, helpful, safety resources. www.churchmutual.com. All churches should have glass in all classroom and youth room doors. Special attention to chaperone policies is also essential, including, *but certainly not limited to*:

- No youth leader will be alone with a minor, especially in a car, unless there is an emergency
- All youth group gatherings will have at least two chaperones in attendance, one of each gender if it is a mixed gender group
- Overnight youth functions of any kind will also have at least two chaperones in attendance, one of each gender if it is a mixed gender group
- Background checks on all volunteers

Again, we cannot emphasize enough your responsibility to create safe space and engender trust through child protection policies.

A helpful resource to guide your policies concerning all forms of misconduct is the document “Misconduct in Ministry: An Handbook for Congregational Churches.” You may access this handbook at the NACCC website (www.naccc.org) or the Center’s website (www.centerforcongregationalleadership.org). **Please familiarize yourself with the information in this handbook before need arises.** It will help you put good practices in place to reduce the possibility of misconduct in your church.

Background Checks

The NACCC is proud to announce its partnership with Intellicorp, a company that does background checks of clergy, staff and volunteers for the NACCC and its churches. Intellicorp delivers trustworthy, inexpensive, and timely assistance for such things as pastoral searches, newly hired church staff, and volunteers in any number of church ministries and programs (such as youth workers, Christian education workers, church day care workers, etc.)

More Information

More information on the disclosure process, child protection policies and background checks can be found on our website at www.naccc.org

Dealing with Scandal and the Media

Churches occasionally find themselves embroiled in situations where their minister or other high-profile individual associated with the church is accused of improprieties or criminal behaviors. Sometimes, the nature of the accusation(s) attracts unwanted media attention that must be managed by the church. In such cases, it is important that the church appoint one and only one spokesperson to receive media requests for information and statements. **There should be no comment made by any other staff person, officer, or member of the church.**

Additionally, if deemed appropriate, that person should have access to legal counsel and confer with one other designated person for guidance before issuing any statement(s). If the allegations are criminal in nature, please inform the Executive Secretary of the NACCC. We are available to support you through these difficult times.

Healing from Trauma

Congregations that suffer trauma of any kind need skills and time to heal. Sometimes, that skill and help can come from the church’s pastor. Other times, especially when the pastor is the source of the trauma, outside help is needed. There is no handbook that can provide a step-by-step response to experiences of betrayal and bullying. But there are several resources a church can call upon for help. The experience of the NACCC staff is a good place to begin. Because

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betrayals of trust have deep repercussions in a congregation, it is often a good idea to bring in an outside advisor to help people sort through their feelings and begin the conversations and actions that can bring healing. At times, it is appropriate to turn to community experts such as counselors, social workers, psychologists, doctors, attorneys and other clergy who may have experience in leading a congregation through difficult times. Services and liturgies of grieving can be of great help in acknowledging the reality of the circumstances while also opening the door to hope and, sometimes, reconciliation. Prayer is always needed. It is important to know that you do not have to go through difficult times alone or without the reminder that God's grace is present even in the midst of hurt.

Again, we refer you the document "Misconduct in Ministry: An Handbook for Congregational Churches." You may access this handbook at the NACCC website (www.naccc.org) or the Center's website (www.centerforcongregationalleadership.org). **Please familiarize yourself with the information in this handbook before need arises.** It will help you put good practices in place to reduce the possibility of misconduct in your church.

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SECTION 3.3: PERSONNEL CONSIDERATIONS AND POLICIES

Importance

A healthy church has policies and procedures by which the church and the minister can dialogue effectively about job expectations and performance. Because the relationship between pastor and people is a partnership, it is vital that each tends to the health of the relationship. A supportive pastoral review process is a way to do this. Unfortunately, too many churches try to implement the process as a reaction to growing dissatisfaction or conflict. A healthy process is one that, when in place, can avoid conflict to begin with. The review is *not*, and never should be a punitive process.

Review Process

There are many fine resources for adopting good review processes. The NACCC has some resources on its website. The Center for Congregational Leadership has many helpful books referenced on its web site. If you choose, an advisor can help you establish and implement personnel reviews for church staff, paid and unpaid. A healthy and fruitful process will allow for mutual dialogue between church representatives and employees. A good and fair review will be based on a person's job description rather than vague "feelings." It will help set mutual expectations for the upcoming year and allow the employee to express how the church leadership might help promote successful goals. It may also protect the pastor from a future disgruntled member. Ultimately the review process is an opportunity to work together in ministry for the glory of Christ.

Pastor/Parish Relations Committee

Many churches follow a model of pastoral support through a pastor/parish relations committee. This committee often acts as a supportive "sounding board" for the pastor and occasionally is called upon to mediate disputes with the pastor that may arise from the congregation. While this committee can be of help to a pastor, it is not the same as a personnel committee that is responsible for staffing policies and performance reviews, and should not be used as such.

Call and Employment

Because of the unique nature of ministry that presumes a person does not choose to be a pastor but is called by God to be one, there is often hesitancy to treat the pastor as a church employee who is subject to accountability. Indeed, many lay people feel uncomfortable

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reviewing their pastor given their reverence and respect for the office. There are even some pastors who will claim that their unique profession places them outside the accountability of personnel reviews.

However, in spite of the unique aspect of call in ministry, the pastor is still collecting a pay check from an employer, who happens to be the church. Personnel reviews are perfectly appropriate and highly desirable, promoting transparency and healthy ministries. A church can acknowledge and even celebrate a person's call to ministry, the anniversary date of being called to that church, an ordination date and other pastoral milestones. (October is Pastor Appreciation month). However, a pastor who is also an employee should never be exempt from personnel reviews.

Compensation

It is important for churches to provide the pastor with compensation and benefits appropriate for the duties the church expects of their pastor. A person with a Master of Divinity degree should be compensated at a level equivalent to other, similarly degreed professionals (for instance, teachers in your community.) A person with a doctorate (D. Min. or Ph.D.) should be similarly compensated (school superintendent is a good parallel here.)

Full time lay ministers can expect a lower compensation than someone with a seminary education. Part time ministers can expect compensation based on the number of hours the church asks for. Regional, urban and rural areas, church size and economics all play a part in determining a compensation package.

A good resource is the Compensation Handbook for Church Staff available at www.yourchurchresources.com and also on the website of the Minister's and Missionary's Benefit Board (MMBB) at <http://mmbb.org/search/results/?q=compensation+levels>

Part Time Ministry and Tentmakers

Tentmakers (so called because the apostle Paul made tents while also engaging in itinerant ministry) are people who work full or part time at a job while also serving a church. Necessarily, the church work is part time and is secondary to the person's other job. In part time ministry, it is essential that the expectations of the church and their minister be clearly set forth in a job description. The contract of engagement should be reviewed at least annually. Churches with part time ministers often must have strong lay leadership to "fill in the gaps" of ministry.

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Compensation is More than Money

- **Vacation Time**

- Because a full time pastor puts in 50 to 60 hours of work per week, is on call 24/7, spends many evenings away from home in church meetings and rarely has two days off in a row, vacation time is essential. The “industry standard” for full time ministers is four weeks off. Many churches add another week for so much time served up to a certain amount (for example, an extra week off for every 3 years served up to six weeks off). Some churches grant additional “light duty” weeks after Christmas and Easter.

- **Compensatory Time**

- Because the nature of ministry creates unpredictable schedules, many churches encourage pastors to take “comp time” when a week has been extraordinarily demanding of a pastor’s time or emotional and spiritual resources. Because this flexibility is based on trust that the opportunity will not be misused, it is important that the pastor be able to explain exercising the privilege if asked.

- **Continuing Education Time**

- The demands and rapid changes of ministry make continuing education a necessity for pastors and churches. A pastor who engages in no continuing education often becomes a less effective pastor for the church than those who do. Many churches recognize this and grant two weeks off for continuing education beyond vacation time. Continuing education time may be used for attendance at the Convocation (see Section 1.5), at a retreat or at a seminar. Continuing education keeps a pastor’s skills sharp and their attitudes fresh and positive.

- **Sabbatical Time**

- Along with vacation time and continuing education time, many churches grant their pastor three months off, with pay, after every 7 years of service. This is a time for the pastor to engage in a time of intensive study or to take on a professional project that requires more focus and attention than can be otherwise had. Sabbatical planning is usually undertaken in an intentional way by both the church and the pastor. While the idea of the pastor being away for such a length of time is often intimidating to a church, by its conclusion, both the church and the pastor have found new strength, resiliency and discernment. When done with intentionality, it is a positive experience for everyone. If you would like to speak with churches who have taken this step, the NACCC can put you in touch with them.

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- **Benefits**

- Just like the families in your church, clergy families need and deserve access to and help with health insurance, retirement savings and disability insurance. The NACCC has an agreement with MMBB to provide opportunities for these things. When coupled with other compensation, the benefits provided by MMBB provide protection and peace of mind for your pastor and his or her family. You may contact MMBB directly for the name of a representative in your area. You may find more information at their website, www.mmbb.org

Compensation Packages

Many churches set a total for monetary compensation and then allow the minister to designate the dollars as he or she sees fit. There are many clergy tax advantages to doing so. Clergy may divide their monetary compensation into categories of:

- Salary – given directly to the pastor as taxable income
- Housing Allowance – given directly to the pastor, but the IRS considers this to be nontaxable income
- FICA – is usually fully paid by the minister unless the church and minister agree that the church pays ½
- Health Insurance – paid directly to the health insurance provider by the church
- Disability Insurance - paid directly to the disability insurance provider by the church
- Retirement Savings - paid directly into an established retirement account in the pastor's name by the church
- Books – reimbursed by the church to the pastor upon submission of receipts
- Auto Mileage Reimbursement – reimbursed by the church to the pastor upon submission of mileage log
- Continuing education – reimbursed by the church to the pastor upon submission of receipts or paid directly by the church

Clergy and churches can be guided through this process with the *Church Law and Tax Report* and *Guide for Church-related Employers* available on the MMBB website. www.mmbb.org

On Members being Employees

A final word is in order on the difficult issue of church members as employees of the church. In Congregational practice, the settled minister becomes a member of the church. In common practice, many church employees are also members of the church. Perhaps it is the organist, or the Sunday School Superintendent, or the Parish Nurse. No matter what the position, the supervision of employees who are church members is often difficult, yet especially necessary in these circumstances. Needing to terminate an employee who is also a member often creates conflict in the church. For this very good reason, many churches have policies in place that

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prohibit members from becoming employees, with the exception of the pastor. Since such a policy isn't always practical, here are a few guidelines that can help navigate these choppy waters. That person:

- Is always an employee first and a member second. This means there is no separating what one does as a member from how one behaves or what one says as an employee. The employee designation trumps the member designation. (Such is true for the pastor as well).
- Is subject to the same review process and personnel policies as all other employees.
- Must respect his or her supervisor and act accordingly. This includes being subject to termination if the supervisor is charged with that authority. If the supervisor does hold that authority, then the church leadership must support the decision of the supervisor even if they don't agree with it. The time to question the decision is in the supervisor's review process, not in the "court of the congregation."

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SECTION 3.4: CHURCHES IN CONFLICT

Conflict Happens

Conflict in a church, while never welcome, is to be expected. We come together as people at different stages in our faith journey and with different ideas to contribute to the community. Naturally, opinions can differ, one from another. Conflict can be both healthy and destructive to the church depending on the circumstances, the leadership, the personalities involved and any number of other diverse factors. It can be brought out by major decisions to be made, by an acute and precipitating incident in the church, by disagreement over purpose and/or over how to resource the church's ministries or other events. Destructive conflict left unaddressed will cause great harm to the body of Christ and calls for the engagement of an outside advisor to help you navigate the turbulent waters. In cases of destructive conflict, an advisor, as an outside voice, is a must and is a most worthwhile investment in the health of the church. A church might also employ an advisor to help avoid conflict, for instance to help manage a difficult discussion coming up or to help a congregation recover from a significant trauma.

How the NACCC Can Help

The NACCC has advisors to help you navigate the waters of conflict. Knowledgeable in the dynamics of conflict and skilled at listening, advisors help you examine your challenges, identify your opportunities and discern your options for personal healing and institutional health.

The NACCC will introduce you to an advisor based on your initial contact with us. After that, the advisor and the church contract together the terms, scope and compensation of the engagement. Each advisor is independent of the NACCC. The NACCC simply acts as a referring agent.

To Engage a Conflict Advisor

The beginning of the advising engagement is initiated by a telephone call to the NACCC. A call for information may be initiated by anyone in the church. However, if a church wants a referral, a call must be initiated by the pastor, moderator, or chair of a committee or board.

Each advising engagement will be tailored to the specific circumstances of the church. In general, the advisor, in an initial phone call, will gather basic facts from the pastor or lay leader who is designated as the "contact person" for the church in this process.

In some cases, but not all, a formal agreement will be drafted to promote clarity, trust, and understanding among all parties. Signed by a representative of the Church governing board (moderator, clerk, president, etc.) and with the knowledge (and sometimes the signature) of the pastor, it will include, among other things:

- the scope of the engagement
- articulation of goals for the engagement
- the time frame for agreed upon activities and goals
- how the arrangement will be publicized to the church
- agreed upon fees for both on site and off site labors

In engaging an advisor, the church agrees to

- commit itself to the process and do the work required to create successful and positive outcomes
- be open with the congregation about the arrangement, the process, and reason a consultant has been engaged
- facilitate and schedule the gatherings with publicity, notifications and other appropriate means
- publically disseminate the consultant's final report to the congregation or engaging board or committee
- depending on the duration and scope of the engagement, reimburse the advisor for all expenses related to it, i.e. transportation costs, accommodations, and any materials needed. A fee may be negotiated for longer term consultations

Note: if your church's financial circumstances make it unable to pay for an advisor, please inquire of the Dean of the Center for Congregational Leadership about the availability of grants.

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SECTION 3.5: ADVISORS AVAILABLE TO CHURCHES

What Are Advisors?

The NACCC networks with a number of skilled individuals who are willing and able to help churches in a variety of ways. These advisors are people who have significant experience in Congregationalism and church life. They are also willing to make themselves available to churches who wish to engage in conversations that enhance church vitality.

Why Choose an Advisor?

A church, for a variety of reasons might choose to engage an outside facilitator to meet with its leadership groups and concerned individuals.

Generally, churches engage an advisor when they want to:

- Ensure good practices of Congregationalism
- Determine vision and purpose
- Chart out steps for the future
- Understand challenges
- Manage conflict
- Promote healing

Advising topics include:

- Finding your next minister
- Celebrating ordinations and installations in the Congregational Way
- Creating a healthy culture for church vitality
- Creating a culture of generosity for year round stewardship
- Charting your course with strategic planning
- Updating your church's structure and governance
- Reviewing your pastor and other church staff and volunteers
- Managing conflict
- Church revitalization
- Closing Churches

Resources are Available on Line

Before deciding to engage an individual you will want to check out our resources and suggestions on line at www.naccc.org and www.centerforcongregationalleadership.org. Under the Advising topics, you will find useful information and a variety of resources to guide you. After reviewing these materials, you may decide to engage an advisor to help you take the next steps.

An advisor can help a church make healthy decisions when responding to current challenges. Delivery of consulting services varies based on the type of services needed and the circumstances of the request. Services may be delivered by telephone, by computer or in person, or a combination of all three. The costs for services also varies based on delivery method and length of involvement in the consulting process.

Our advisors come from around the country, with a variety of backgrounds (clergy, laity, NACCC staff). The type of advising, the depth of involvement and the follow-up will vary depending upon your circumstances. In every case, the NACCC works with you to ensure you are receiving high quality, appropriate help to address your needs. Each advisor is independent of the NACCC. The NACCC simply acts as a referring agent. To find an advisor best suited to your circumstances and needs, call the NACCC office at 1-800-262-1620 or use the Contact Us page on our website. <http://www.naccc.org/contact-us.html>.

Advising at a Glance

	Length of Engagement	Methods of Engagement	Costs and reimbursements	Formal agreement needed?	Vote of Congregation or governing board needed?	Web Link
Finding your Next Minister	Short term	Web resources Telephone Webinar In person	No fee No fee No fee Travel expenses	No	No	http://www.naccc.org/Churches/FindingAMinister.aspx
Ordinations, Installations and Anniversaries	Short term	Web resources Telephone	No fee No fee	No	No	
Church Vitality	Moderate term	Web resources In person	No fee Travel expenses	Yes	Yes	
Generous Stewardship	Short term	Web Resources In person	No Fee Travel expenses	No	No	
Strategic Planning	Moderate term	In person	Travel expenses and stipend*	Yes	Yes	
Church Structure and Governance	Moderate term	Web resources In person	No fee Travel expenses	Only if travel involved	Yes	http://www.centerforcongregationalleadership.org/governance.html
Reviewing Pastor, Staff and Volunteers	Moderate term	Web resources Webinar In person	No fee Travel expenses	Only if travel involved	Yes	
Managing Conflict	Long term	In person	Travel expenses and stipend*	Yes	Yes	

*based on a sliding scale and ability to pay

Making the Hardest Decisions of All

Advisors can help churches engage in a number of discussions and decisions that can help create and maintain church vitality. However, not all churches can sustain themselves. Today, less people are practicing their spirituality in an organized church and an increasing number of people in American society consider themselves to have no religious identity or affiliation. The result of these contemporary trends is that many of our churches are experiencing declining membership numbers, increasing average age of members and loss of youth in the church. Sometimes, churches find they have become too small and aged to continue as a self-sufficient community. There are many options for a church facing these circumstances. Some options include:

- Federating with another church
- Merging with another church
- Starting over in a different way
- Dissolving, liquidating and distributing assets to:
 - Missions
 - the NACCC's "Remembered Churches Fund" for Church Vitality
 - the NACCC Shared Ministries Fund Endowment
 - the Center for Congregational Leadership Endowment
 - any number of other worthy Christian endeavors

Before making any decision, an NACCC advisor can help you look at options for revitalization and lead you in the difficult and sometimes contentious discussions that come about in times of extreme challenge and when facing momentous decisions. Call the NACCC to discuss options for advising and other considerations at times such as these. A cautionary note: sometimes, a "maverick" minister with a small but significant following will come to a struggling church offering to "grow" the church by bringing his or her flock into the fold and becoming the minister of the entire group. At first glance, it seems to be an opportunity to keep the church open and going. In our experience, these "opportunities" usually have very unhappy endings for the original Congregationalist members and the beloved Congregational church with its assets becomes the property of another group. Again, before making any decisions, call the NACCC for support and information.