

## JOB DESCRIPTION FOR YOUR COMMITTEE

I cannot write your job description for you. It must be done by or for the local committee in each congregation. This is true because each congregation has its own special personality and its own special needs. This may take some time and careful thought, but in the end a viable job description will emerge. A job description is important so that the committee keeps itself on track as far as its purpose is concerned. What follows will be suggestions that give some structure to *your* job description.

The place to start is with a definition for the committee. It need not be complicated, but boundaries and expectations need to be clearly stated. Do not feel that the job description that you write will be carved in stone and will be the job description for the next 50 years. Before your term of office is up, you may see a need to revise your document. Do it! And, don't feel guilty about doing it.

### 1. What is the purpose of the committee?

#### A. LISTENING AND CLARIFYING

Each congregation is an emotional system and within that family people see things differently. Peter Steinke, in his book, *How Your Church Family Works*, offers helpful observations:

*The church family has its 'distancers' in the nonactive and the quitters. It has its share of 'fusers' who consider the church family to be their property. Moreover, people act out their own unfinished agendas in other relationships with members of the congregation. Some are intent on haranguing others so that they do not have to change themselves. Some are forever cheating others out of their birthright for their own special place in the family. Still others form a crankiness crowd, looking for external conditions to explain their own unhappiness. And what church family doesn't have a sunshine squad? Fearful of differences and differing, they brighten the family's life and distract from threatening storm clouds.*

In every congregation there will be differences in expectations. The pastor may have one set of **expectations about the mission of the congregation** while the members have another. Differing viewpoints, left unclarified, can and often do lead to conflict. Conflict is basically the failure to understand the other point of view and the refusal to grant the other person the privilege of holding a point of view different from one's own.

Thus, the primary task of a Mutual Ministry Committee is finding ways to listen to one another. Clarification of expectations begins by listening – to the called pastor(s) – to the congregation.

Another issue is **role clarification**. Who is responsible for what?

A third part of listening and clarifying is to **pick up early warning signs** of any dissatisfaction in the congregation concerning staff. Why is the pastor's energy level so low? Why is our worship attendance and weekly offering declining? Why do people not want to serve on the Church Council? We make assumptions and seldom take time to listen. Sending a questionnaire

to the congregation is not a very personal, or helpful, way to listen. Face to face chats, or small group discussions can be very effective.

A fourth opportunity for listening and clarifying is to **provide a “sounding board”** for new or creative ideas. When new ideas are brought forth, whether by pastor or congregation members, don’t debate, but listen. Some ideas might provide new directions at the right time. Shared and evaluated in MMC meetings may give opportunity for new ministries, new directions, new focus for the congregation.

In summary, the first step toward building up the body of Christ is listening and clarifying. It is through listening, conferring, clarifying, forgiving, and reconsidering that the ministry of the whole body of Christ can be strengthened.

## B. SHARING AND COMMUNICATING

Each meeting of the MMC should provide time, probably at the beginning, for the pastor (and staff) and members, to share personal joys and frustrations about their life and ministry. So often we want to rush into an agenda, or to get on with the “business” so that we don’t take time to share with one another. Our personal lives are filled with good times and bad times. We react emotionally to all of these things in life. Congregations need to foster some safe places where members might be able to talk about such things. The MMC could model what Martin Luther called “mutual conversation and consolation of Christians.” To model this in the MMC will demand a **level of candor** that does not come easily for most Christians today. At the same time, it will require a **commitment of confidentiality**. That, too, does not come easy. Therefore, part of the expectations outlined for members in the job description for a Mutual Ministry Committee will be confidentiality. Most of the time, what you talk about is public information and conversation. But, there may be times when things are shared that will require all members to hold what has been said in confidence. It may be sharing by the pastor (or staff) or by a member of the committee. Or it may be sharing about someone or something in the congregation.

Gossip can destroy community. It can bring illness into a healthy congregation. It is important not to spread anonymous criticisms or listen to anonymous comments. Mutual ministry can never permit someone to say “I can’t tell you who told me this, but....;”. If there is no name, there is no credibility to what is being said.

This raises a third purpose for sharing and communicating. If mutual conversation and consolation happens, there will be times when **confession and absolution** will be needed. It is strange that we limit our confession and absolution to our liturgy on Sunday morning. Why does this happen only on Sunday? Why is the pastor the only one to speak words of absolution? Where does the pastor receive a spoken word of absolution and forgiveness?

I wonder how much of what we call career burnout, inappropriate crossing of sexual boundaries, or depression is related to the absence of confession and absolution?

A fourth dimension of sharing and communicating is **how we interpret the ministry and expectations of pastor (and staff) to all other members of the congregation**. Each year the

pastor should have some new emphasis or priority in ministry. The “Definition” form related to the Call provides for seven things which will receive special attention during the coming year. How are all members of the congregation kept abreast of this list of seven?

### C. REVIEWING AND REVISING

So often an annual review is misunderstood as an “evaluation” of the pastor. If our vision is mutual ministry, then **the scope of an annual review should be both the ministry of the pastor and the mission of the congregation.** Said differently, the goal of any evaluation or review is the “building up the body of Christ” – not finding fault.

Pausing to evaluate, to celebrate our success, to review our strategy for the future, is the only way to avoid walking blindly and falling into the ditch. Membership needs change. Our communities change. Our pastor changes. You and I change. Thus, we must constantly be checking our directions. If there is not some revision each year, then it probably suggests that we are not going anywhere.

Each meeting of the Mutual Ministry Committee will contain some element of reviewing and revising, but at least once a year devote one full meeting to an annual review.

It is out of such ongoing dialogue that the ministry of the whole people of God is strengthened. It is out of such dialogue that mutual ministry can and will develop in our congregation.