

CONGREGATIONAL DEVELOPMENT & TRANSFORMATION

CD&T-1 POLICY GUIDELINES FOR SELF-STUDY PROCESS

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I Introduction

The Congregational Life Ministry Team (CLMT) understands that there are at least three distinct reasons exist why congregations will engage in self-study. These reasons are Interim period entered, healthy congregational adjustments or redirection desired, and the congregational transformation process. In each case, those who enter into a congregational study must realize that they must do so with both great humility and care. This is because the subject of your work is a community of faith filled with people whose lives must be treated with both love and respect.

A good congregational study is one which seeks to undertake a process which will be a disciplined examination of a congregation. “This study should expect to find various patterns and structures that lie seemingly beneath unrelated issues. To evaluate the various successes and failures in their life as a community of faith and to try and discover the elements of strength which held them together until this point.”³

“In this analysis, we must also understand that this may expose some areas which we do not like about our congregation and in truth is painful to us.”⁴ In spite of the painful nature of what we discover we must be faithful to expose these revelations in a constructive fashion, which will allow both the leadership and congregation to react and to address them.

Our reasons may vary for undertaking a self-study but the overall goal is the preparation of a congregation in her ability to better serve the call of Christ in her community. It is to this end that we invite you now to heed the call given to Timothy by the apostle Paul when he wrote: “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” 2Timothy 2:15 NKJV

Your study therefore, is an important work of your church approved unto God, in the many ways in which your congregation can improve her service in your community.

II General Assumptions

In the introduction we spoke of three reasons for a self-study and each reason has within itself a different set of assumptions to explore. Your task is to explore these assumptions and choose one or more which best fits your starting point and frame of reference.

The reason of Interim Period entered carries with it two distinct assumptions; a.) That we must do this because the Presbytery says we cannot form a Pastor’s Nominating Committee (PNC) until it is done and b.) we must do this fast, quick and in a hurry so that we might get on with calling a minister. Our Church needs a Pastor, we need a leader.

³ Nancy T. Ammerman, Jackson W. Carroll, Carl S. Dudley, William McKinney...[et al.] Studying Congregations A New Handbook Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1998. p11

⁴ Ibid. p11

We would add to these assumptions also by stating in this interim period when the church is without pastoral leadership that lack is not due to pastoral retirement. It is suggested that a congregation or pastor knowing retirement is near start a self-study six months to a year before retirement. This concept of retirement would place the church in a position of redirection as opposed to the discussion below in interim period self-study.

Assumption a: We must do this because Presbytery says we cannot form a PNC until it is done.

“Congregational Life Ministry Team: Prior to the election of a Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC), a representative from the Congregational Life Ministry Team (CLMT) will consult with your Session about completing a self study.”⁵

Yes, it is true that the presbytery affirms that your congregation needs to do a self-study before a PNC can be formed and it is for these reasons:

In this interim period when a pastor resigns or is called to glory, the church is hurting in a sense, Presbytery uses this period as a time to heal or mourn the loss and to help a church step back to re-evaluate the life, mission, and ministry of a congregation.

“It is important to keep in mind that a change in pastoral leadership generates strong feelings in the congregation, about the pastor leaving, about past activities in the church, about the effect of transition, and about the future of the congregation.”⁶ All of these issues most find some time to be aired, reviewed, and addressed by both the leadership and congregation.

Assumption b: We must do this fast, quick and in a hurry so that we might get on with calling a minister. Our Church needs a Pastor, we need a leader.

We feel this assumption of speed in order to move the process along to get to the end result of finding a leader or calling a pastor is wrong. We need to reaffirm that what we are doing is an important part of the will and work of God within our congregation and it is good for our health as a congregation. We must also affirm that it is important to fully understand who you are as a congregation of people and where you believe the direction, God is calling your congregation into. This direction which can be discovered in a self-study and will enable the future PNC to ask the right questions of any potential ministerial candidate. It is our hope by taking the time to do a good self-study you will be able to create a better match with ministers to congregations in the calling process.

It shall be the position of the Congregational Life Ministry Team to support the use of an **intentional interim pastorate**, through your Committee on Ministry representative.

It is the intention of presbytery that they will work with you in the identification of an interim pastor, and your understanding of the possibilities for an interim ministry in your church.

⁵ Presbytery of Detroit Committee on Ministry, Guidelines for Interim Period, Detroit Presbytery, revised 6/2003. p 6.

⁶ Ibid. p.5

We believe that the true first move of COM ought to be helping a congregation to establish stability and secure pastoral leadership through the interim process and that the clock ought to start within two weeks of Session notice that the minister is leaving a congregation and the process ought to be secured within 60 days after the minister is lost.

“Basically, the interim pastor provides leadership to help the congregation continue its ministry, rediscover and renew its resources, and prepare for a new pastor. The interim pastor is not a caretaker, but rather the interim pastorate, is an intentional ministry with the following minimum tasks we find supportive of a self-study process:

- helping your congregation and Session come to terms with history, including understanding and valuing where the congregation has been;
- helping your congregation and Session to discover a new identity, congruent with but no longer defined by the past;
- facilitating shifts of power, authorizing persons and processes in ways appropriate to the new situation;
- building commitment to new leadership and to a new future, developing a shared vision and working relationships with each other and with new pastors.

(From Mead, The Developmental Tasks of a Congregation in Search of a Pastor).”⁷

All of these tasks will be a part of the discovery made by such a disciplined self-study and the leadership of an **intentional interim pastor** will enable the Session to review, react and address issues of importance but will also provide the congregation with the stability to sustain the ministry with both vim and vigor while the search process goes on. Therefore, the need to rush this self-study process with an intentional interim pastor in place should not trouble your congregation nor defeat the concept of ministry in your community.

The second reason for self-study was healthy congregational adjustments or redirection. The word healthy is not a statement of the congregational condition, but of the state of the leadership’s condition, in their understanding that every church needs to take some time to evaluate the ministry in the life of a congregation.

The general assumption here is that the evaluation of the internal life of the congregation, the various programs and ministries of the church without consideration to the community around your congregation in this we have failed.

The direction for such a self-study needs to include not only your community of faith but how that community interacts with the general community at large. The self-study needs to include and understanding of the general needs of the community at large. This is not done by our normal method of saying that we live here and know what the community wants. The reality of the past is that we have done just that and have nothing to show for it.

In order to discover what the community at large needs you must engage the community by asking them. Jesus commanded his disciples in Matthew and Mark to “Go into all the world...” Therefore you must at least enter your own community and achieve two things while you are out there a sample of something new or a confirmation of what you thought was needed as a concern

⁷ Ibid. p7.

of your community. The result of your efforts is that you will effectively announce the presence of your congregation in the community at large.

The evaluation of both in and out added together will aid the process, and determine the level of ministry that will be most effective in both how you see your selves and what you are able to provide in your community.

The third reason for a congregational self-study is the congregational transformational process. This carries with it three clear assumptions and many hidden reasons in which to engage in the process. We will investigate the assumptions and time will reveal the hidden reasons.

Assumption one: your external community is caught in an ethnic and cultural change. The second assumption: your internal community is aging, dying and the support of the ministry is in jeopardy and you are unsure of what to do. There is also a third possibility assumption one and two are at work in your church at the same time.

If this is your reason for the study, either external or internal change is taking place and a self study will help you and your congregation discover direction. This process will enable you to address the issues or challenges your congregation must realistically face and conclude before your congregation is able to call a minister. This will be the job of both your **intentional interim pastor, and the work of Presbytery with your Session.**

III. Guidelines for the Presbytery Self-Study Sub-Committee.

Your task is to aid in the oversight process and to provide information to our congregations on how to do a self-study. Your role will be to set up a meeting and send representatives to meet with Sessions or congregational self-study committees. You will act as an enabler by recruitment of two persons on the committee for contact, information disbursement and encouragement. You will train these persons in how this work is done and adopt at least one onto the presbytery level self-study committee. This process will enable other churches in the presbytery to have help from someone who has been through the process and will train their replacement.

Your role will be to read and evaluate the document and to provide Presbytery with both personal and written observations to enhance the effectiveness of the total process.

This committee will work with the interim ministry committee of COM in an effort to provide direction from the study process. This will aid the process by giving the interim minister goals to achieve which can be measured. Those aspects which need addressing can then be addressed before the process of calling a Pastor into a broken or divided congregation, or into a misinformed and ill prepared interview on an unenlightened situation could happen. Your reason for being is to aide in the process of preparing congregations and Sessions for the process of doing ministry in a community.

IV. Guidelines for the Session and its Clerk

Whenever, for any reason a self-study is needed and you desire the assistance of the Presbytery of Detroit, call the presbytery office to request that someone from the committee be assigned to your congregation. Leave the important information of who to contact and the best time in which to make that contact.

A self-study committee member will then respond to set-up a meeting with either your session or your self-study committee. It is suggested that the sooner you get the meeting established the faster you will be able to begin the process.

The Session will be charged to provide a budget that the local self-study committee will be able to use to perform its task and to print the results.

V. Guidelines for the Local Self-Study Committee

This committee shall be responsible for the collection of, assimilation of and distribution of the self-study information. This committee shall consist of between five and seven members plus an active Session elder. This committee will be asked to meet with the presbytery self-study committee representatives and elect for themselves a moderator, vice moderator, and clerk for this committee.