

EXIT INTERVIEW

Purpose

The Exit Interview can be a unique parting gift of pastoral guidance, helping to review the past with an eye on setting the stage for a productive future. When a pastor is leaving, there will be a variety of thoughts and feelings, all of which will be present in the departure process. Although exit interviews should allow time for all participants to ask their own questions in order to add their own perspective, it should be remembered that this interview is focused mutually on the departing pastor and the ministry of the congregation. **The purpose of an Exit Interview is intended to provide a time to reflect and review the pastorate with honesty and candor so as to support the ongoing ministry of the congregation as well as the pastor in his/her leave-taking.**

Participants

COM representative as facilitator

Departing pastor

Representatives of congregation's leadership: e.g. members from Church Council, Consistory, Deacons, Pastor-Parish Relations, and/or Personnel Committee

(how many people to include and who shall be determined by the pastor and the congregation, being particularly sensitive to situations where conflict or great pain may exist)

Conference staff – preferably the staff person who will help with the Search/Call process

Timing

As soon as the pastor announces his/her planned departure, the pastor should contact the Administrative Assistant to the Associate Conference Ministers to schedule an Exit Interview. It will take time to coordinate schedules and prepare for the interview. Ample time should also be allowed for distribution of discussion questions to participants.

Process (sample agenda attached)

1. Send agenda and discussion questions ahead of time to the moderator, departing pastor, and COM rep./Conference staff with ample time given to review and reflect before gathering for the interview.
2. Open and close the interview with prayer, reminding everyone involved of the greater covenant and faith that bonds the entire process.
3. COM member/Conference staff will facilitate the conversation, using the discussion questions that were previewed by the participants as a guide, and allowing for diversions in the conversation when needed.
4. COM member/Conference staff will explain and advocate for these ground rules:
 - a. Participants in the interview are urged to speak for themselves and from their own experiences only.* Self-reporting about one's own actual experiences is far more reliable than reporting on what has been heard second or third hand.
 - b. Limit sharing and conversation to a review of the shared ministry.* Open and honest conversation will include recounting times of celebration and achievement as well as struggles and concerns. Areas that need attention will be referred to those who have responsibility for those areas, but this interview is not the time to try to fix anything.
 - c. Name areas of struggle without blaming or accusing.* If problem areas surface, they are simply to be named, and will be referred on to the appropriate people as needed. Most problem areas may have different interpretations. A good report will note differing points of view when they exist.

* COM member/Conference staff will explain and define at the beginning of the interview the scope and purpose of notes from the interview. There should be clear agreement about the information which the pastor wants kept confidential and that which can be included in the notes. The pastor will be given an opportunity to read the notes and respond/revise as necessary following the interview.

* Note-taking: Remember, **the purpose of an Exit Interview is intended to provide a time to reflect and review the pastorate with honesty and candor so as to support the ongoing ministry of the congregation as well as the pastor in his/her leave-taking.** Notes taken by the COM member/Conference staff should focus on that purpose. Notes should be made available to the moderator, the departing pastor, and conference staff person. Notes will be given to the staff person helping with the search/call process and will be kept with the church file in the Conference office, available to staff and to future pastoral leadership of that particular setting.

EXIT INTERVIEW SAMPLE AGENDA

- I. Introductions
- II. Opening Prayer
- III. Define process, ground rules, expectations and note-taking – facilitator
- IV. Discussion Questions
- V. Prayer of blessing

SAMPLE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Please use these questions as suggestions or discussion starters, and feel free to alter these for your use or create other more appropriate questions for your particular situation. There are more here than would be helpful or practical to fit into one discussion. Focus on the few that seem most helpful or appropriate for your congregation and situation.

Questions may be selected and structured in any number of ways. For example, the same questions may be asked/answered of all participants, allowing the pastor to answer first, then allowing others to answer/respond/clarify. Or, unique questions for just the pastor or just the leadership may be used. Remember, the goal of the Exit Interview is an opportunity to review the past honestly with the task of creating a solid foundation and hope for the future guiding the discussion.

For the pastor:

1. How did you sense God's call to pastor in this place?
2. What surprises did you encounter after you came here?
3. What are some of the strengths of this congregation/setting?
4. What are some of the things you have felt best about?
5. How have you seen the congregation's ministry evolve over your tenure there?
6. What suggestions do you have about new goals for this congregation to consider?
7. In what ways do you perceive the congregation as being different now from when you came?
8. Are there special pastoral concerns or points of grief? If so, what are they?
9. In your opinion/experience, how is this congregation likely to help and hinder its own best intentions?
10. What are your hopes for this congregation as they move forward?
11. Share with us your future plans regarding relationships to this congregation/setting.
12. Is there anything else you'd like to share?

For the congregation leadership:

1. What were some of the expectations you had at the beginning of this pastorate?
2. What surprises have you encountered in the ministry of this setting and pastor?
3. What are some of the strengths of the pastor?
4. In what ways is the pastor different from when he/she first came?
5. How have you sensed God's call grow or change for the ministry of this setting while with this pastor?
6. What are some the things you have felt best about?
7. Are there any special concerns or grief? If so, what are they?
8. What are your hopes for the pastor as he/she moves on from this setting?
9. How have you seen the ministry of this setting evolve during this pastor's call?
10. Is there anything else you'd like to share?

For all participants:

1. What was good about our time together?
2. What was hard about our time together?
3. What are the issues, challenges, and opportunities before this congregation/setting right now?