Pastoral Care
The Ministry of Pastoral Care and the Teaching Congregation

Pastoral care is ministry provided by clergy to members of the congregation in times of personal crisis or during life-changing events. Above all else, it is bringing to the awareness of Christians the spiritual resources that are available to see them through critical times. During the time with a teaching congregation the new minister will seek to develop skills in this area that will equip her or him for a lifetime of ministry alongside people of faith. Full participation and cooperation by the members of the teaching congregation extend their own ministry far into the future as ministers that they have helped to develop lead other faith communities.

In order to develop skills in pastoral care the new minister will benefit from a number of specific contributions by the teaching congregation. One of these will be permission from church members to be present with them as they face events where spiritual resources are valuable. As congregants confront situations involving birth and death, stress brought about by life changes (whether sought or unexpected), illness, and other times of crisis, their willingness to allow new ministers to stand beside them, pray with them, and offer comfort and solace will not only ease their own burdens, but will provide invaluable training for the new minister that can only be gained through experience.

Additionally, those who see young ministers in these roles and experience their care can supply important feedback regarding the minister’s skills, gifts, and areas of needed growth. Among the qualities needed by all ministers for effective pastoral care are empathy, ability to listen actively, biblical knowledge, spiritual discernment, and ability to articulate through prayer. As parishioners observe ministers at work, their willingness to offer constructive feedback relative to these areas will allow the minister to concentrate on improvement in areas where it is most needed.

The congregation must also grant the new minister pastoral identity. Though he or she may not be the senior minister of the church and may have only recently graduated from seminary, members must recognize that new ministers have gifts to offer precisely because they come as representatives of Christ and the church. Seeing them as pastors lets them grow into that role.

When one is facing a critical issue, many individuals, both from within and without the congregation, may be there to offer solace, encouragement, and spiritual guidance. However, the minister is there specifically as a representative of Christ and the church. This is a role to which the new minister must become accustomed. It will be through congregants relating to the minister in that role that he or she will “grow into” that pastoral identity. The new minister is more than a student. He or she is a minister of pastoral care and when church members view him or her in that way the new minister experiences growth in ministerial identity.

Members of the pastoral staff are important resources for the growth of the new minister. As such they play key roles in the teaching congregation. Those specifically responsible for the administration of congregational care can ensure that the new minister has ample opportunity for gaining experience. They may at first allow the new minister to accompany them on pastoral visits to observe proper ministerial conduct and pastoral skill. As the new minister develops, more experienced ministers may allow him or her to take the lead in the dispensing of care. Following the experience a debriefing affords an opportunity for the new minister to ask questions and for the more senior minister to offer constructive criticism and advice. The goal will be for the new minister to gain enough experience to feel comfortable in this ministerial role and to be competent to provide care.
The support and encouragement of the senior minister of the congregation is essential for the optimum learning experience for the new minister. Whether or not the senior minister is personally responsible for pastoral care of the congregation, he or she can encourage the entire staff and congregation to view the new minister in a pastoral role. Endorsement of the minister’s qualifications and gifts will open doors that might otherwise be closed. Frequent reminders to the congregation by the senior minister that they are a “teaching congregation” help the members to understand why new ministers are present in pastoral care situations and often make them more open and encouraging in their acceptance of ministry from someone with whom they may not have much personal history.

Opportunities to be involved in pastoral care often arise out of congregants seeing new ministers in other pastoral roles. Particularly through worship the new minister has an opportunity not only to lead people in their experience of the presence of God, but also to be seen as one in touch with the spiritual resources necessary for the facing of life’s crises. Through proclamation and prayer that assure people of God’s involvement in daily life and God’s grace when we have failed, the minister provides immediate pastoral care, but also creates within the minds of the church members an expectation that, should they have needs for care now or in the future, this is someone on whom they could call. Therefore it is essential that the new minister participate in worship leadership whenever possible. These same factors hold true whenever the new minister leads in Bible study, so exposure to the congregation through the church’s teaching ministry also helps the new minister to grow in the area of pastoral care.

It is important for both the teaching congregation and the new minister to keep in mind that pastoral care is to be distinguished from pastoral counseling. New ministers may from time to time aid congregants in clarifying difficult issues and help them to reach healthy conclusions, but counseling over a number of sessions and involving complex problems requires special instruction and certification that is beyond basic seminary training. Unless the young minister has become certified as a pastoral counselor, it will be only after years of experience that he or she should feel confident to provide more than a few sessions of counseling with any individual. Therefore, the new minister will need to grow in the area of ministerial referral, learning when situations are beyond his or her expertise, and knowing the helping professionals in the community to whom members may be referred.

Other members of the church staff will be invaluable in directing the new minister to certified pastoral counselors, mental health professionals, and spiritual directors who can help the new minister to understand when referral is the proper option. These professionals may also provide guidance to the new minister as he or she engages in limited counseling of church members.

Perhaps of all gifts a teaching church can give to a new minister, the most valuable may be an example of a spiritually healthy congregation in which high quality pastoral care is allowed to take place. By showing love and concern for one another and by being willing to receive spiritual care from its ministers, the church places a picture in the new minister’s mind of what pastoral care should look like.

New ministers involved in teaching congregations will likely be called at some point to other places of service. For whatever time members of the teaching congregation and the new minister serve alongside one another, the church has an almost unparalleled opportunity not only to shape a new minister’s skills, but to affect positively the lives of other congregations and, indeed, the kingdom of God. The new minister will be observing and learning from the way this congregation “does church.” This calls for a serious commitment on the part of the congregants, but one which can be uniquely rewarding.
Pastoral Care Action Guide

Summary:

*This module identifies the importance of pastoral presence and building pastoral authority through response to members in times of need, participation in worship, and involvement in teaching leadership opportunities. Also emphasized is encouragement of the congregation to see and accept this new person in a pastoral role.*

Focus:

The focus for this module is to draw from the actual experiences and activities of which the new minister has been involved and provide affirmation and feedback for continued growth as a pastoral leader.

Introducing the Module: *(Approximately 10 Minutes)*

- Inform the group that the next meeting will include giving attention to the subject Pastoral Care.
- Provide a copy of the essay for each member of the Minister Support Committee and the new minister.
- Share the Summary Statement and the Focus (listed above) with the group.
- The following assignments should be stated and a handout copy given to the group members:

Assignment for the Minister Support Committee: Two items of preparation are required for the committee members.

1. Bring a symbol of what pastoral identity looks like, a symbol which reflects the minister, any minister, being a representative of the church and of Christ. Though this is not necessarily an easy assignment, it is important. The selection of a symbol and sharing about the symbol chosen provides for each member to emphasize the power of symbol, and thus the power of the pastoral presence as a symbolic representative of the presence of Christ. Furthermore, this will communicate the diversity of understanding and meanings that people attach to the symbolic nature of pastoral ministry.

2. Take the opportunity to reflect on the times when you have observed this new minister in a role or roles where he or she has exercised leadership in pastoral care, and been in a position to exercise ministerial leadership and authority with the congregation. As you recall one or more of these experiences consider the following questions and be prepared to share in the next meeting about your reflections and observations.
   - Where and in what ways have you observed this new minister in a position of leadership and authority?
   - What did you identify as strengths of this new minister in this situation?
   - Which of the pastoral care qualities in the article did you observe in the actions and presence of the new minister? What other qualities of pastoral identity did you observe?
   - What, if anything, would you recommend to the new minister to do differently in a similar situation?
   - What did you observe in the response of others to the new minister’s leadership and presence?
Give the following assignment to the new minister:

1. Prepare a brief listing of the dates, venues, and roles of actual leadership with the congregation (for example: Date, Sunday Worship, Reading Scripture; Date, Wednesday Study, Sermon on the Mount). Start with the present date and work back, for a total of no less than 4 months and no more than 6 months. Also, include funerals attended, funeral home visits, hospital visits, and one-on-one conversations/visits with members related to life crises or spiritual matters. The more you include, the fuller picture you can gain in seeing where you touch individuals and the congregation’s life in a role of ministerial authority. This may seem tedious, and time consuming, however, the benefit is providing a snapshot of the full range of types of ministerial presence and leadership you have had with the congregation, and in what capacities. Look for the variety of exposure and experiences, or the lack thereof. Is your role limited? Do you have few opportunities to be in a leadership role as minister and priest? Do you ever preside over communion? Have you participated in funeral or graveside services?

2. Have a copy of this list for each member of the committee.

3. Also, take time to give reflection to this list being prepared to state what you have noticed in this snapshot of ministry.

**Engaging the Module: (Approximately 40 Minutes)**

**Phase 1**
Invite the committee members, one at a time, to share their symbol of pastoral identity. Have each member do so using the following statements and questions. Encourage the members to keep their comments brief, and limited to 1-2 minutes. Ask the group to allow each individual to share uninterrupted.

1. The symbol I selected to represent pastoral identity is . . .
2. This symbol represents . . .
3. This is a valuable characteristic of pastoral identity because . . .

No follow up discussion is necessary. The facilitator for this session will simply want to affirm and thank the person for their contribution, then move on to the next individual.

**Phase 2**
At this time have the new minister to distribute copies of the pastoral activities he or she has prepared. Have the new minister provide any needed explanations in reading this material. Allow a few minutes for everyone to review this then ask the new minister to give his or her assessment of what this exercise has revealed. Some questions to consider asking the new minister include:

1. How do the actual experiences you are having match with the expectations you have for pastoral leadership?
2. What areas of pastoral care and responsibility are most challenging to you?
3. Are you getting feedback from the senior pastor? How is this helpful to you?

**Phase 3**
Have the committee members share their observations of the new minister having exercised pastoral leadership and identity. Using the questions from the Minister Support Committee assignment above, have members share their feedback with the new minister. Remember this is a time to give feedback that provides affirmation of demonstrated pastoral identity, clarifications to aid in the new minister recognizing appropriate and effective expressions of pastoral leadership and authority, and encouragement for personal growth and development as a pastoral leader in areas that need attention.
Additional Comments:
Remember to be conscious of these identity characteristics as the relationship continues and through your future sessions with the new minister.

You may choose for the leader of this particular module to have a conversation with the head pastor or supervising pastor of the congregation. Gathering observations of roles and expectations for participation can be helpful knowledge and information to have prior to the engaging session of this module.

The team may want to encourage the new minister to attend funerals of church members, even those he or she does not know, or that is outside of their specific area of ministry. The team members may also recommend that the minister attend the “receiving of friends” as well to have the opportunity to express presence even more than expressing words. Though he or she may have no direct responsibilities, presence during these times by church staff is invaluable.
Member Support Committee Assignment

You are to prepare for your next meeting using the following two sets of directions:

A. Bring a symbol of what pastoral identity looks like, a symbol which reflects the minister, any minister, being a representative of the church and of Christ. Though this is not necessarily an easy assignment, it is important. The selection of a symbol and sharing about the symbol chosen provides for you to emphasize the power of symbol, and thus the power of the pastoral presence as a symbolic representative of the presence of Christ. Furthermore, this will communicate the diversity of understanding and meanings that people attach to the symbolic nature of pastoral ministry. During the meeting you will be asked to share this information by completing the following three statements:

1. The symbol I selected to represent pastoral identity is . . .

2. This symbol represents . . .

3. This is a valuable characteristic of pastoral identity because . . .

B. Take the opportunity to reflect on the times when you have observed this new minister in a role or roles where he or she has exercised leadership in pastoral care, and been in a position to exercise ministerial leadership and authority with the congregation. As you recall one or more of these experiences consider the following questions and be prepared to share in the next meeting about your reflections and observations.

1. Where and in what ways have you observed this new minister in a position of leadership and authority?

2. What did you identify as strengths of this new minister in this situation?

3. Which of the pastoral care qualities in the article did you observe in the actions and presence of the new minister? What other qualities of pastoral identity did you observe?

4. What, if anything, would you recommend to the new minister to do differently in a similar situation?

5. What did you observe in the response of others to the new minister’s leadership and presence?
New Minister Assignment

In preparation for the next meeting you are to complete an overview of your pastoral leadership experiences and roles with the congregation during a 4-6 month period of time. Use the following to guide you in this process:

1. Prepare a brief listing of the dates, venues, and roles of actual leadership with the congregation (for example: Date, Sunday Worship, Reading Scripture; Date, Wednesday Study, Sermon on the Mount). Start with the present date and work back, for a total of no less than 4 months and no more than 6 months. Also, include funerals attended, funeral home visits, hospital visits, and one-on-one conversations/visits with members related to life crises or spiritual matters. The more you include, the fuller picture you can gain in seeing where you touch individuals and the congregation’s life in a role of ministerial authority. This may seem tedious, and time consuming, however, the benefit is providing a snapshot of the full range of types of ministerial presence and leadership you have had with the congregation, and in what capacities. Look for the variety of exposure and experiences, or the lack thereof. Is your role limited? Do you have few opportunities to be in a leadership role as minister and priest? Do you ever preside over communion? Have you participated in funeral or graveside services?

2. Have a copy of this list for each member of the committee.

3. Also, take time to give reflection to this list being prepared to state what you have noticed in this snapshot of ministry.