

UNDERSTANDING OUR MINISTRY TOGETHER: AN EVALUATION PROCESS FOR CONGREGATIONS

ORIGIN AND CONTEXT

This model was developed by the Rev. Dr. Anita Farber-Robertson. The process employs small focus groups and an adaptable set of questions to assess holistically the effectiveness of the ministry of the congregation, lay leaders and minister(s).

The process fosters the understanding that the minister and the congregation function as a ministry team. Positive strengths as well as areas of growth for both congregation and minister are explored.

BENEFITS OF THE MODEL

- Model assesses the minister as well as multiple facets of the congregation's ministry and leadership.
- Requires only a moderate amount of time for planning and implementation.
- It can be easily adapted to focus on different areas of ministry or programming interests.
- It allows for the use of existing small groups (choirs, RE teachers, etc.) or the creation of specific focus groups for assessment.
- The number of focus groups required can be easily adapted depending on the size of the congregation.
- Questions can be created and focused on specific areas of ministry or goals of the congregation.
- Model questions are presented that can be used as a core or inspiration for the development of other questions.

CHALLENGES OF THE MODEL

- This model does not include a specific process for creating an action plan to address concerns raised during the assessment process. The creation of such action plans would be the next logical step.

PROCESS

The purpose of this process is to learn something about yourselves and your relationship with your pastor, including:

- The congregation's strengths; the pastor's strengths
- The congregation's areas of growth; the pastor's areas of growth
- The ways in which the pastor and the congregation function as a ministry team.

Area of Interest

The area of interest of this particular evaluation is to be determined prior to the selection of the focus groups and the development of the questions to be used.

¹ in collaboration with the First Baptist Church of Wollaston

The Process

1. Identify the team to oversee the evaluation process. If a Pastoral Relations Committee or a Committee on Ministry exists, they are likely to be in a good position to perform this function.
2. The oversight team, in consultation with the governing board chooses an area of interest for specific reflection within the evaluation. Often that area is one part of a more general evaluation.
3. Choose focus groups to participate in the evaluation process. Smaller congregations can comfortably use two groups. Larger congregations will most likely want three.
 - a) The choice can be made in collaboration with the governing board. If it is determined by the oversight team, that choice should be presented to the governing board for their acceptance or alternative suggestions.
 - b) Focus groups can be existing groups in the church such as standing committees, choir, religious education teachers, women's/men's groups, adult discussion or study groups, or they could be generated specifically for the purpose of being a focus group of people with mixed interest. It is suggested that these groups be comprised of people who are actively participating in the congregation and have knowledge of its current life.
4. Develop questions
Keep in mind that these questions will generate conversation. Keep them focused, open ended (not "leading questions") and few enough in number that the conversation of the focus group can be kept within a 2 hour time frame, and will be comparable to the conversation in the other group(s). (Sample questions are attached below)
5. Bring these questions to the governing board for their acceptance or refinement.
6. Meet with the focus groups to explain the process in which you wish them to participate. You can share with them a sheet explaining the general process so that they understand where they fit in.
 - a) If the focus groups are existing committees or groups, a member of the oversight team can ask for a few minutes at their regular meeting to present the process, answer questions and allow them to select a time and date for their meeting.
 - b) If the focus group (or groups) is one convened only for this evaluation, a member of the oversight team can meet with them briefly before or after worship to explain the process and allow them to chose a date and time for their meeting.
7. Each focus group goes through the questions recoding the answers on newsprint visible to everyone.
 - a) This is a structured conversation with rules for the discussion that allow each person to be heard and each person's opinion to be recorded.

8. After the discussion the group must come to a consensus on the responses to the questions and record that consensus on an 8 1/2X 11 sheet of paper to be given to the oversight team.
 - a) It is recommended that this consensus either be created at a separate, follow-up meeting, or be initially constructed by a designated member of the focus group to be reviewed and refined by the focus group.
9. The oversight team collects the consensus reports of the meetings and compiles out of them one coherent report that is presented to the governing board.
 - a) It can be useful to share that report with the focus groups that participated prior to its presentation to the board to insure they feel properly represented.
 - b) The final report to the board may include suggestions for future goals or actions that respond to interests or ideas that have emerged.
10. It is valuable for the oversight team to meet at this point and evaluate the evaluation process, possibly generating refinements for future use.

Sample Questions for Focus Group Evaluations

What stands out for you about the ministry of this church?

- To what extent does the laity provide leadership, energy, talent, and support?
- To what extent does the pastor provide leadership, energy, talent, and support?

In what ways is this church different from how it was a year ago?

- How have the laity contributed to this change?
- How has the pastor contributed to this change?

What about this congregation's ministry is working really well?

- How does the laity contribute to that?
- How does the pastor contribute to that?

What about this congregation's ministry could be improved? Are there gaps?

- What role should the laity play in addressing those deficiencies?
- What role should the pastor play?

Do lay leadership and pastor work effectively together and support one another's efforts?

Provide examples.

Sample Area of Interest Question:

- Is this interim ministry preparing the church to choose and settle a permanent pastor who is appropriate for the needs and goals of the congregation? Provide examples.

Or

- Is this congregation implementing its stated goal of _____ ? Provide examples.