

A Conversation Guide for Pastors and Staff-Parish Relations Committees in Their First Year

As soon as a new pastor arrives, both pastor and congregation begin learning about each other and sharing their hope and dreams for the future. Detailed planning for the future will take time and involve lots of church leaders. However, this conversation guide is offered as a structured way for new pastors and their Staff-Parish Relations Committees to have a conversation that might help everyone start this journey together. Some of these concepts may have already been shared in one-on-one conversations, but now this will give everyone on this important committee a time to share and to learn from one another. Think of this as a resource to help you move forward together.

Step One: Preparing for the Conversation

Prayer. Commit to praying for each other daily in the coming year as you work together to seek and do God's will for your congregation.

Participants. The participants are the pastor and the Staff-Parish Relations Committee members. If it would be helpful for others to be involved, the pastor and the committee should decide this together and invite others to participate.

Preparation. All the conversation participants should be given this outline in advance. Set the time and place for the conversation in advance so people have adequate time to prepare. Allow adequate time for the conversation so that participants do not feel rushed and are comfortable sharing openly.

Format. The pastor and the committee should decide on a format that works best for them. Participants will want to prepare to respond to the questions, perhaps making notes for themselves. If the group decides that they wish to have input ahead of time for distribution, this should be a group decision with clear instructions about what is expected of everyone. This guide is prepared so that it can be worked through in one session in most cases.

Step Two: Learning More about Each Other

The Pastor's Gifts and Passions

Begin with the pastor sharing with the committee how the pastor assesses personal strengths and, especially, those aspects of the church's mission and pastoral leadership for which God has instilled a passion.

As the committee listens, make notes of key words and themes. Take time to ask questions if that would be useful.

The Congregation's Strengths and Passions

Next have committee members share their answers to the following questions:

- What are the passions of our church?
- What do we do really well (key strengths)?
- When the community thinks of our church, what words do they use?

All make notes, listening for key words and themes.

The Needs and Opportunities of the Congregation and its Community

Now have committee members talk about these questions:

- What are the most pressing challenges and opportunities we face in the coming year?
- What factors will most shape the strength and vitality of our congregation ten years from now?
- If our church closed today, who would miss it other than the members?

All make notes, listening for key words and themes.

Step Three: Where Pastoral and Congregational Passions, Strengths, and Needs Intersect

What are some gifts and passions of our pastor we have discerned in our conversation?

What are some strengths and passions of our congregation that emerged in our conversation?

What are some needs and opportunities of our congregation and community that we named?

In light of all this, what goals seem most appropriate for the coming year for the pastor and congregation? Discuss those ideas and then write from one to three that emerge as most important.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Pastor

Staff-Parish Committee Chair or Representative

Date