

Ministry Evaluation

Ministry is best evaluated church-wide, according to the experience of churches and consultants.. While the pastor plays a key leadership role, it is intertwined with the characteristics of the congregation. Effective evaluation depends on commonly developed understandings and expectations.

While many are familiar with a survey-style instrument for evaluation in the workplace, it has been found to be poorly suited to evaluating ministries. Such tools are generally intended for use by businesses or organizations where there is a single supervisor and a relatively clear job description and a (more or less) single set of expectations. No matter how well designed, such surveys in the setting of a congregation are likely to create misunderstandings. Each member of the congregation has a set of assumptions about ministry which are difficult to pin down in survey form. Leaders are often hard pressed to form a clear picture from surveys. And, conveying negative feedback to pastor and staff from surveys can create discouragement rather than understanding and change.

The book *Completing the Circle* provides a concise picture of the process of evaluation and a guide to developing a method for your congregation. Its title refers to the circle of communication. Conversations about congregational priorities and needs can help to build community, as well as gather and share feedback in a helpful and productive way. This guide was written by David McMahill, a United Church of Christ minister who has served as Association and Conference staff. It's published by the Alban Institute and is available from United Church of Christ Resources, 1-800- 537-3394. Alban publishes other helpful books on evaluation; you can review their publications at www.alban.org.

If your church is currently experiencing a degree of conflict, particularly if the disagreements focus on the pastor's performance, evaluation can not be expected to address the issues. In fact it frequently exacerbates them, since factions will attempt to use the evaluation process to "make their case". Not only does this deepen conflict, by placing more emphasis on opinions of the pastor it may prevent the participants from exploring other underlying reasons for disagreements which may exist. Unaddressed conflict almost inevitably escalates, damaging relationships, impairing the church's ability to minister effectively, and causing deep emotional pain for members. If your church is experiencing conflict, your Association or Conference staff can assist you in working through the issues.

With some work and study, you can devise an evaluation which will deepen your congregation's sense of trust and community and enhance all of your ministries.