

Presbytery of Boston Committee on Ministry

Guidelines for Pastors' Reports

The Committee on Ministry has been asked on various occasions to provide guidelines for pastor's reports to session. Here are some brief thoughts on the function of such reports and a possible template outline.

First and foremost, the pastor's report is a very important tool for the leadership of a congregation. It is strongly recommended that it be a written report, distributed to the session well in advance of the stated meeting. The benefits appear in all three facets of the session-pastor team:

- The reports help **the pastor** by forcing him/her to reflect on her/his work during the past period, set priorities, and approach the future supported by that explicit awareness. Too often, we just run from one job to the next without stopping to think what our ministry really ought to be about. Writing it all down, preferably on a monthly basis, strengthens this exercise and gives it more power.
- They help **the session** to see all that the pastor is doing, providing a more comprehensive picture of all work in the ministry of the congregation, and hence enabling the session to make better policy decisions. This will result in a more balanced ministry and a better use of, usually scarce, resources. After all, the session bears ultimate responsibility for that ministry.
- They help **the relation between session and pastor** by providing a better awareness of what the other is doing. This will usually lead to better appreciation of the pastor's work and head off any potential conflicts caused by lack of knowledge or communication.

We suggest a template for a pastor's report that contains three sections:

- **Accomplishments**
List the things that got done: what was achieved, last month? It is also helpful for the session to provide a breakdown of how the pastor's time was used – not necessarily every time, but periodically. The session needs to have some idea of how much of your time is taken up by the various tasks if it is to be able to set priorities in a meaningful way, or re-evaluate task assignments (such as: are there things you are doing that should, or could, be done by lay members?).
- **Issues**
What were the things that did not get done but should have been done? And why did they not get done? What problems were encountered?
- **Plans**
What are your goals for the coming period, as well as for the longer term (though the latter may need to be done only occasionally). Goal-setting is an important part of effective planning and time management. One should also not forget to compare this month's accomplishment section with last month's plans section; that comparison, again, can be revealing and helpful in adjusting the use of time and resources.

- **Reflection**

If there is a particular thought or experience that came to you in the past month and that has a bearing on your ministry and that of the church. This may be optional, but it can help put the preceding sections into a wider perspective, provide spiritual nourishment, or appeal to our motivations.

What concrete lessons should one learn from these reports?

The pastor may hope to gain a better understanding of how (s)he works best and can make effective use of her/his time; at the same time this stop-and-think-about-what-you-are-doing may be refreshing and rejuvenating. Session and pastor should periodically discuss these reports with an eye towards the ministry of the congregation and specifically ask questions like:

- Do we make the best use of the pastor's time?
- Are the tasks performed by the pastor those that have the highest priority in our mission?
- Are there task done by the pastor that can as well, or better, be done by a lay person – non-ordained staff, elders, deacons, members?
- Is the distribution of tasks and responsibilities balanced?
- How can we improve our ministry?

We would like to emphasize that these reports are not meant to be an additional burden on the pastor. On the contrary, they are meant to make the pastor's task easier. In addition, they contribute significantly to the health of the congregation. And pastors who have got into the habit of producing them every month generally enjoy doing it and would not want to give it up again.