

**SO—**

**WHAT'S A COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY TO DO??**

**THINKING ABOUT  
MINISTRY  
AND  
COMMITTEES ON MINISTRY**

**[Handout]**  
**2004 HEALTHY CONGREGATION CONFERENCE**  
**MID-SOUTH DISTRICT**  
**COLUMBUS, GA**  
**OCTOBER 9, 2004**

## WHAT IS MINISTRY?

**Ministry could be called the central activity of any religious congregation.**

**“Ministry is the spiritual and emotional care of human beings for others, that care being passed from hand to hand and enduring over millennia.”**

Ministry is the restoration of an interior quality of life. Ministry is a rehabilitation and engagement in the relationships that make persons of people, that anticipate, imagine and encourage the restoration of soul.

**Ministry is “anything a congregation does in pursuit of its religious mission to its own membership and the wider CoM munity.”**

**“Ministry is assisting members of the CoM munity in finding for themselves whatever spiritual and emotional nourishment they might need and in elevating the CoM monplace to a level of holiness.”**

***“Ministry is reminding people of what they know in their souls.”***

**“Ministry is seeing CoM passionately and clearly, and speaking honestly and lovingly what you see.”**

“Ministry is Dermatology of the Soul: Identify, acknowledge and care for warts while helping the person who has the warts to live a healthy life.:

**MINISTRY IS ALL THAT WE DO--TOGETHER.**

OUTLINE AGENDA  
*October 2004*  
“MINISTRY AND COMMITTEES FOR MINISTRY”

Session Leader: Eunice M. Benton, Mid-South District Executive

**OPENING PERSPECTIVE**

*A fully-empowered and healthily-functioning Committee on Ministry focuses on the full ministry of a congregation – including but not limited to the professional staff. Used well, a congregation’s Committee on Ministry is pivotal and central to the life, work – and ministry! – of the congregation. But committees like this are just coming into being in most of our UU congregations. This is because our congregations are still transitioning from the ancestor of this committee – usually known as the Ministerial Relations Committee – a committee which focused more on the professional clergy.*

*It is well to pause here to talk about what “ministry” is, anyway. Here are some definitions to get us thinking. [See opening page of this document.]*

*The new concept for a Committee on Ministry is much more than the old Ministerial Relations Committee. The contemporary CoM can be a very important voice in focusing a congregation on its identity, mission and vision – and on monitoring its ministry, the whole ministry of the congregation.*

*So, it is this kind of Committee on Ministry we will be talking about at this 2004 Healthy Congregation Conference. For many this is new. For most congregations in our region it is still beginning to be understood and implemented. Perhaps out of this conference will come some new directions for Committees on Ministry in Mid-South.*

**[ INTRODUCTIONS, NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS FROM TODAY ]**

[About a dozen participants attended this track in 2004, representing about that many congregations. Congregation sizes from the smallest to the largest were represented. The participants noted that they wanted to learn how to use the CoM to educate the congregation, how to use the CoM to evaluate a congregation’s ministry, what the current thinking is about a COM, and how to support a CoM.]

## DISCUSSION and PRESENTATION OUTLINE

### I. WHAT DOES THE COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY DO?

#### A. WHAT ARE THE OLD AND NEW CONCEPTS OF THIS COMMITTEE? WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A “MINISTERIAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE” AND A “COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY?”

*The earlier ‘Ministerial Relations’ version of this committee – encouraged for over a decade and talked about in a series of editions of the UUA’s Congregational Handbook, focused the work of the committee on the professional clergy – the minister – in the congregation. A MRC advocated for the minister and was the group to which congregants were invited to come to express wishes or concerns about the minister.*

*The Committee On Ministry model recommended today focuses on the ministry of the entire congregation and takes into account the pivotal role of “shared ministry’ in a congregation – the concept that says that all can minister and that a professional minister functions as the ‘first among equals’ of the many in the congregation who minister. This concept fully acknowledges the leadership role – the crucial leadership role! – played by clergy in a congregation, but it holds the entire congregation responsible for its ministry.*

*This new concept of a Committee On Ministry is well-illustrated in sections of a recent publication of the UUA: Assessing Our Leadership: Promoting Effectiveness in Congregational Leadership. (\*Particularly, see p. 20.)*

*\*\* Assessing Our Leadership: Promoting Effectiveness in Congregational Leadership is appended here, and it is frequently referenced in this outline as AOL.*

#### B. IN WHAT WAYS DOES A COMMITTEE FOR MINISTRY EDUCATE, ADVOCATE, COMMUNICATE, AND EVALUATE?

##### ◆ EDUCATE

- *Perhaps the first thing a CoM needs to do is to EDUCATE ITSELF AND, THEN, THE CONGREGATION. The members of the Committee (always including the professional clergy) should begin with educating themselves about how effective ministry can be carried out in a congregation. This is a hugely important task if one believes that a congregation’s core mission should be about ministering! (Remember those quotes?)*
- *A CoM can incorporate an educational piece into each of its meetings (held monthly, hopefully), so that it is as ‘smart’ as it can be about the varying aspects of congregational ministry – from the pivotal importance of a*

*congregation's cyclically renewing its mission, its vision, and its covenant, to the value of shared ministry and small groups, to fair compensation for staff.*

- *The CoM can then be a voice – especially through a good relationship with the congregation's Board of Trustees – to see that there is a clearly understood mission, covenant, and vision, and strategic and operational goals in place in the congregation. (see pp. 29-30 in AOL)*
- *A CoM can sponsor some special forums, write pieces for the newsletter, and offer pulpit commentaries on Sundays (among other methods) as ways of enhancing its message.*

◆ **ADVOCATE**

- *An educated CoM can advocate for effective ministry in the congregation in many varied ways, many as part of its education work, mentioned above.*
- *An excellent relationship with the Board of Trustees is key here, because much of what an effective CoM can do must be done through and with the support of the Board. Ensuring that mission, identity, vision, covenant, and specific goals work will require the buy-in of the board leaders. So, it could be said that education and advocacy begin here.*
- *Many opportunities in formal and informal communications with congregation members provide CoM members with chances to advocate for effective ministry.*

◆ **COMMUNICATE**

- *It is well just to add this verb to all the above! Skilled communication techniques and plans can make all the difference in a CoM's effectiveness.*
- *Openness is also an essential element here. Congregants need to sense that this is not a secret committee but one whose work is open and accessible to all. Thus the CoM needs to be diligent about reporting to the congregation what it is doing. Good reporting keeps doors open and builds support for the the CoM needs to communicate.*
- *Building trust and respect for the CoM is the ultimate goal here – along with a solid understanding by the congregants of the CoM and its work.*

◆ **EVALUATE**

- *Lots of questions frequently arise about how one evaluates in a congregation – and it is here that the CoM should take the lead. Excellent guidance and models can be found in AOL.*

- *The most important concept here, however, is that it is the ENTIRE MINISTRY OF A CONGREGATION THAT SHOULD BE REGULARLY EVALUATED – NOT JUST THE PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP!*
- *“Accountability” is the key word here.... not just for those leaders who are paid, but also for those who have agreed to serve in a volunteer capacity (Board, committee folks, RE teachers, et. al.). It is not OK to hold the staff rigidly accountable and let volunteer leaders off the hook in following the agreed-upon goals of the congregation.*
- *\*\* Note that no assessing can take place until the identity, mission, vision, and goals of the congregation are agreed upon! No person nor entity in the congregation should be evaluated without these agreed-upon yardsticks against which to be measured.*
- *Also, note that no assessing of leaders – especially a paid staff or clergy leader – should be done in response to conflict! Surveying the congregation to see how they feel about a particular leader at a time of conflict will only result in more conflict for the congregation, conflict that could create scars that could last for many years. Assessing Our Leadership is the best guidebook here. The models it offers may be adapted to a congregation's particular stage of maturity and growth, but it is an excellent guide.*

## II. HOW DOES THE COMMITTEE FOR MINISTRY DO ITS WORK?

### ◆ CHOOSING THE COMMITTEE MEMBERS . . .

- *This is best done from a list prepared by the minister and the CoM ( or Search Committee where there is a new minister) by the Board of Trustees, whose affirmation makes the 'official' appointment of this committee. (See p. 30 in AOL.)*

### ◆ SCHEDULE MODELS . . . .

- *An effective CoM meets monthly and incorporates into its meetings self-education and planning for education and communication for the congregation. Updates about the work of the CoM should be reported to the congregation regularly. The CoM meetings should also allow for listening to congregation members as needed. No meetings should be held without the presence of the minister unless there is an open arrangement for times when the minister cannot attend; even in those cases the report of the meeting should be made to the minister. (See p.30 in AOL for more detailed recommendations.)*

### ◆ HOW AND WHOM DOES THE COM EDUCATE?

- *As afore noted, the CoM educates itself and the congregation by scheduling regular meetings, making presentations to the congregation as needed, and posting information and reports of the committee's work via electronic and printed communication media for the congregation. \* The CoM also works closely with the Board to ensure the regular review of the congregation's identity, mission, covenants, vision, goals, and evaluations.*

### ◆ HOW AND FOR WHAT AND WHOM DOES IT ADVOCATE?

- *An effective CoM advocates for effective ministry for the congregation – that is, it advocates for effective ministry by alllll the programs and members of the congregation, including the staff and board leaders. It does this through its educational work and by being attentive to the functioning of the congregation. It constantly 'monitors' the ministry of the congregation.*

◆ HOW AND WITH WHOM DOES IT COMMUNICATE?  
(AND, WHAT ABOUT CONFIDENTIALITY?)

- *The CoM communicates with its members, the Board, and the members of the congregation as a whole. (Note that the minister is a member of the CoM.) It is well to emphasize again that meetings and work of the CoM should never be done in secret. Although all meetings may need to be held 'in confidence' to allow openness and the voicing of concerns, reports of meetings and work should follow appropriately. (See AOL for further guidelines.)*

◆ HOW AND WHAT AND WHOM DOES IT EVALUATE?  
(IS THIS AN IMPORTANT FUNCTION? HOW SO?)

- *The CoM oversees the regular assessing (evaluating) of the entire ministry of the congregation. How this is done may be tailored to the culture and maturity and size of a congregation. Excellent models can be found in Assessing Your Leadership. An assessment (including self-assessment) of the paid staff of the congregation is a part of this process, as is assessment of the work of the Board and committees and other programs and functions of the congregation.*

### III. TOUGH PLACES, PITFALLS AND BURNING QUESTIONS

◆ HOW DOES A CoM MEMBER RESPOND TO A CONGREGANT WHO COMES WITH A CRITICISM OF THE PROFESSIONAL MINISTER?

- *The guiding principle here is that congregants are encouraged to speak directly with the minister, with the support / aid of a CoM member when helpful. If the CoM finds it important, a complainant may be invited to speak with a meeting of the CoM (at which the minister is present). Helping to manage conflict in this area is a major task of the CoM.*

◆ HOW CAN A CoM PROVIDE LEADERSHIP WHEN SOME DISSATISFACTION WITH THE MINISTER IS RISING?

- *Again "Helping to manage conflict in this area is a major task of the CoM." When this kind of dissatisfaction becomes serious (a judgment call, to be sure), it is well to be in touch with the District Executive for support and advice. Addressing dissatisfactions early on and managing conflict so that it does not become unduly destructive is very important. The district office and the District Executive have resources to offer in these times.*

◆ HOW SHOULD THE CoM RESPOND WHEN SOME GROUP—OR THE BOARD--CALLS FOR AN EVALUATION OF THE MINISTER?

- *If regular evaluations of the ministry of the congregation are scheduled, then the committee should point to these. And, it is hoped that the Board and most congregants are educated about regular evaluations.*
- *When a situation like this arises, it usually signals both a wish by some to see a change of clergy leadership and a lack of understanding (or respect) by some for the process being used by the congregation to evaluate its ministry. If there is, obviously, a move by a good number of folks to ask for a change in clergy leadership, then the CoM can play a major role in managing conversation about this. \*Contact with the District Executive at the district office is highly recommended for support and guidance.*

◆ IS A VOTE OF THE CONGREGATION ABOUT THE MINISTER A GOOD IDEA? WHY OR WHY NOT?

- *Although most congregation bylaws allow for this avenue for discharging a minister, the fallout from this is usually very destructive for the congregation, creating tensions that hang around for years. From a legal standpoint, it is fine to have such options noted in bylaws. In practice, it is*

*better to find a solution born of dialogue with the minister and congregation leaders. Again, the district office and the District Executive can be helpful.*

◆ **IS THERE A TIME TO CALL THE DISTRICT EXECUTIVE OR A CONFLICT MANAGEMENT TEAM?**

- *Yes! See notes just above.... !!*

◆ **IS THERE A TIME WHEN A MINISTER NEEDS TO LEAVE? HOW DOES THIS HAPPEN IN THE HEALTHIEST WAY?**

- *When it is pretty clear that a change in clergy leadership is needed, honest conversation with the minister and congregation leaders is the best avenue for facilitating a change. Usually this begins at the CoM level. The District Executive and UUA Department of Ministry can help. The healthiest changes happen when all parties agree to the change and the terms of the change and offer that to the congregation for approval.*

#### IV. SOME (RAMBLING...) REFLECTIONS AND KEY IDEAS TO TAKE HOME . . .

- ◆ *The work of the CoM is about the whole ministry of the congregation! Even small congregations can have effective CoMs, and these committees can help move a congregation to next growth stages. For many congregations some education will be needed to understand how this can work. See the resources listed at the end of this document and call the District Executive for more help.*
- ◆ *Trust is the key to good relationships between the CoM and the Board and the congregation. If you are beginning with this new approach to CoM structure in your congregation, this is vital to remember!! Begin with plenty of time for education! Give your congregation full information and time to talk about it. Then, as you go, remember that keeping the trust is the key to effective work. \*See p. 29 in AOL for more details.*
- ◆ *Planning for regular evaluations – assessments, as described in Assessing Your Leadership – is the path to healthy habits in this area. This path is the one to take to avoid crises that call for “congregational surveys” in the midst of rising conflict or board or congregational votes. Read AOL and tailor its recommendations to your congregation.*
- ◆ *A CoM can lead through education and modeling, to show your congregation how to sustain healthy ministry. This is not passive work. Is there anything more important to the church than its ministry?*
- ◆ *Keeping a library of materials – for the CoM and the wider congregation membership – can be an essential element in the educational process.*
- ◆ *When advocacy is needed by CoM members – especially when advocacy for professional behavior of and with the clergy and other staff is at issues – then CoM members can advocate in the way that PFLAG folks can advocate for GLBT folks, that is, they can advocate and educate in ways that a staff person or clergy/minister would have a harder time doing. Sometimes CoM lay voices can be heard more easily by other lay folks.*
- ◆ *When conflict arises, early identification offers the best hope for healthy management and resolution. And, a last reminder here that the district office and the District Executive are available to help leaders assess and determine action steps.*

## RESOURCES HELPFUL TO COMMITTEES ON MINISTRY

March 2001 – Church Basics Conference

### FROM THE UUA:

**Assessing Our Leadership—Promoting Effectiveness in Congregation Leadership.** Available at the UUA website at: <http://www.uua.org/programs/ministry/publications/assessing.pdf>

**Churchworks -- A Well-Body Book for Congregations** by Anne Odin Heller, Illustrated by Sinclair Crockett Skinner House Books. Available thru the UUA Bookstore, or, online at [www.uua.org/bookstore](http://www.uua.org/bookstore)

**The Congregational Handbook -- How to Develop and Sustain Your Unitarian Universalist Congregation** - Edited by Lawrence X. Peers Available thru the UUA Bookstore, or, online at [www.uua.org/cde/handbook/](http://www.uua.org/cde/handbook/) and

**A Process Tool to The Congregational Handbook** by Angela J. Merkert Available online at [www.uua.org/cde/tool.html](http://www.uua.org/cde/tool.html)

**The UUMA Guidelines:** Guidelines for the Unitarian Universalist Ministers' Association. Online at [www.uua.org/uuma/guide.html](http://www.uua.org/uuma/guide.html)

**Committee on Ministry Resource Reader** -- A 93-page pdf file collection of resources archived on the TJ District website, under "District Executive Pages." Visit [www.uua.org/tjd](http://www.uua.org/tjd)

### FROM THE ALBAN INSTITUTE:

**Annual Church Review Procedure-The Church's Ministry and the Minister** by Catherine Holmes Clark. 1986.: Available through The Alban Institute, Inc. [www.alban.org](http://www.alban.org) or (800) 486-1316

***Evaluating Ministry: Principles and Processes for Clergy and Congregation.*** by Jil Hudson, M.The Alban Institute, Inc., 1992. Available through The Alban Institute, Inc. [www.alban.org](http://www.alban.org) or (800) 486-1316

**Alban Institute Approach to Assessment, Clergy Assessment and Career Development** by Roy Oswald. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1990. Available through The Alban Institute, Inc. [www.alban.org](http://www.alban.org) or (800) 486-1316.

**So, how would YOU answer.....**

- *WHAT IS MINISTRY?*
  
- *WHO DOES IT?*
  
- *TO WHOM DOES A CHURCH MINISTER?*
  
- *WHY DOES A CHURCH NEED A  
PROFESSIONAL MINISTER TO NURTURE MINISTRY?*

*and.....*

*THE MISSION OF A COMMITTEE FOR MINISTRY IS \_\_\_\_\_*