

**THE
COMMITTEE
ON
MINISTRY
MODEL**

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THE COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY MODEL

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Following is a brief outline of the Committee On Ministry model that was invented in the early nineteen eighties and was honed as a working model over an almost ten year period in a mid-sized congregation. This refinement brought it into being as an effective agent for keeping mission and ministry at the cutting edge of congregational life. At the beginning of this refinement the old Ministerial Relations Committee was deleted from congregational life as an un-necessary and often counter-productive agent of effective ministry.

DISTINCTIONS

Focus:

- Mission is why a congregation exists.**
- Ministry is everything it does to fulfill this mission.**
- Mission is reason for being and ministry is how that reason is processed.**
- This mission and ministry are inseparable. Form follows function. Mission is function and ministry is form. The latter will always reflect the former.**
- Thus, whatever the stated mission, the form will reveal the congregation's real mission. An audit of where the congregation's energy is dominantly focused will display this real mission.**

Principle

- **There is a singular principle that governs the religious community driven by congregational polity: the congregation owns its mission and ministry.**
- **This means that all leadership and all organizational life are servants of this principle.**
- **Therefore, all success and all failure are owned by the responsible congregation. This is true irrespective of all other attributions having to do with success and failure.**
- **Powerful and transforming congregations are always invested in ownership of this responsibility.**

Oversight

- **The Committee On Ministry is concerned with the spiritual health of the entire ministry of the congregation – as a reflection of mission fulfillment.**
- **The Ministerial Relations Committee is concerned with the spiritual health of the relationship between the professional minister and the congregation – as a reflection of a unique alliance.**
- **One essential problem of the MRC is that its goal is to achieve and maintain a good relationship with the congregation rather than to specifically empower the ministerial leadership toward fulfillment of the congregation's mission and ministry. Thus, its very existence is grounded in a**

public relations goal that is not necessarily compatible with either the purpose of professional ministry or the congregation's reason for being.

Confusion

- **The COM, as outlined in this document, was invented in the early 1980s.**
- **Its title was usurped in the 1990s as a new label for the old MRC.**
- **This application of the COM title to the function of the MRC implies that the congregation's ministry is about a professional relationship rather than a leadership devoted above all else to the fulfillment of religious mission.**
- **This shift has created confusion between the two models. It is important to be clear as to which model is being given the COM label and to validate the why of this usage.**

Leadership

- **Lay Leadership tends to be:**
 - **Short term**
 - **Minimally trained**
 - **Part Time**
 - **Voluntary**
- **Ministerial Leadership tends to be:**
 - **Long term**

- **Maximally trained**
- **Full Time**
- **Vocational**

This general comparison between lay and professional leadership does not lower or raise the value of either. It only underscores the nature and differences that exist between the two. Both are generally essential to institutional success. However, their nature and differences demand that each be utilized and assessed in different ways.

Principle: “Leadership makes everything happen that is going to happen.”

This principle applies to both lay and professional leadership and particularly to the possibilities inherent in their collaboration.

WHY A COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY?

I Limitations of the Ministerial Relations Committee

- **It has a limited focus on Congregation-Minister relationship as its label suggests. This narrows its function to only one possible facet of a congregation’s ministry and only one aspect of the purpose of professional leadership in congregational life.**
- **Generally, only the professional minister is assessed as to effectiveness by this committee. The**

- implication is that the minister owns the congregation's mission and ministry.**
- **The tendency is for the MRC to become the minister's advocate – and its members are generally chosen to fill this role. That is, they normally are chosen because they already have a positive bias toward the existing minister.**
 - **Ministerial advocacy easily becomes counter-productive through non-objectivity and protectiveness. It may fall into the trap of “us versus them” attitudes and actions. The result is that the MRC perspective is often automatically discounted by many congregants as a skewed perspective.**

Question: Why is there need for a special PR committee to manage the relationship between the minister and the congregation? Does the existence of such a committee imply an inherent problem in the relationship that seems to denigrate both the capacity and stature of professionalism as well as congregational integrity? Is there a subtle implication that there is an inability on the part of the minister to empower her/his congregational relationship with inspiration, persuasion, and transformation – that the professional may not be able to be professional without an internal lay support committee?

II Values of the Committee On Ministry

- **Represents the entire ministry of the congregation including both programmatic and personnel (lay and professional). It sees all leadership as servants of the congregation's mission and ministry and all programs as intended enhancement.**
- **It views ministers as professionals who need no special advocacy or relationship management other than that which they present out of their own self-empowerment (training, integrity, skills, devotion, wisdom, etc.).**
- **Assesses the effectiveness of the entire ministry and its inter-related facets. Its perspective is the big picture – assumes no independent parts.**
- **Advocates means for all parts that increase the effectiveness of the whole ministry.**
- **Approaches the congregation as a holistic body of wisdom commitment which parts are mutually supportive and accountable.**
- **Values, weighs and incorporates the perspectives of both professional and lay leadership and is devoted to the concept of collaborative leadership.**
- **Assesses and performs with a posture of constancy relative to how the function of each part affects the function of the whole.**
- **Being owned by the congregation it ultimately answers only to that body.**

While the COM often deals with issues of conflict this is not its primary function. Its primary function is to do all that is necessary to elevate the effectiveness of the congregation's ministry in fulfillment of its

mission and to do so from the standpoint of this ministry's holistic nature and synergistic possibilities. However, an effective COM will significantly reduce the level of negative conflict by keeping the congregation's eye on fulfilling its mission through its ministry. If it is appropriately assertive it will also deal effectively with issues of consequence before they snowball into congregation-wide conflict.

Principle: What is best for the whole is best for the part.

This means that the only function of the part is to enhance the power of the whole. This power enhancement returns to the part as visible benefit.

III Who Needs A COM?

Whether a congregation employs a minister or not it must look to how well it is fulfilling its mission through its ministry. Thus, it will benefit from a COM which will perform exactly the same service as it would in a congregation that has professional leadership. The COM exists for the sake of the congregation's mission and ministry to the world, irrespective of its structure of leadership. It is the congregation's committee not the leadership's committee.

In this respect, the congregation without professional leadership will profit immeasurably from the service

of a strong COM which would serve as a constant reminder of the mission for which it exists and a touchstone for effective ministry fulfillment.

The answer to the question is that it makes no difference the kind of leadership a congregation employs, the COM is about fulfillment of its mission through its ministry and is, therefore, deeply relevant to the oversight of potential success.

Principle: The congregation owns its mission and ministry irrespective of the nature or structure of its leadership.

WHAT ARE THE COM'S FUNCTIONS?

I Education (Ministry Awareness)

- Hold high the congregation's mission and ministry:**
 - New member orientations**
 - Annual Mission-Covenant Renewal Service**
 - Appropriate usage of the Mission Covenant statement (brochures, paraphernalia, worship services, etc.)**
 - Annual Meeting Reports**
 - Monthly Board Reports**
 - All ministry component mandates**
 - Retreats, workshops, leadership meetings**
 - COM brochure outlining its function and availability**

- **High committee visibility in all aspects of the congregation's life**

II Assessment (Ministry Status)

- **Establishes reasonable rhythms and cycles between congregational assessments and professional leadership assessments – normally, every other year.**
- **Focuses on clarity and conciseness.**
- **All assessments are tailored to the congregation's perceived ministry needs. Assessment tools are not canned – they are deliberately created with specific ends in mind – avoids the misimpression that one size fits all.**
- **Reports and recommends to the various agents of ministry, the board, and the congregation – whenever and however it is most appropriate.**
- **Its useful gages are the congregation's mission-covenant statement, by-laws, standing rules, group mandates, policies, vision goals, out-standing issues, state of functionality, spiritual mood, perceived needs, and social impact.**

III Recommendations (Ministry Improvement)

No agent of the congregation's ministry is exempt from evaluation by and recommendation from the COM. The synergistic power of wholeness demands attention be paid to every part.

- **Approach (Empowerment)**
 - **Improvement over blame**
 - **Potential over problem**
 - **Positive over negative**
 - **Redemption over estrangement**
 - **Transparency over hiddenness**
 - **Mission over all other agenda**

- **The Congregation's Interdependent Web (Mutual Affect)**
 - **Every ministry agent of the congregation**
 - **Board**
 - **Lay leadership**
 - **Staff**
 - **Professional leadership**

IV Protection (Ministry Threat)

- **Irrespective of source**
 - **Individual**
 - **Group**
 - **Staff**
 - **Minister**

- **Irrespective of nature**
 - **A misunderstanding**
 - **An issue**
 - **A conflict**
 - **A program or event**
 - **A proposal**

- **A vision**
- **Posture**
 - **Pro-active**
 - **Neutrality**
 - **Win-Win**
 - **Reconciliation/Redemption**
 - **Active listening**
 - **Gain clarity**
 - **Face to face**
 - **No anonymity**
 - **Assumed responsibility**
 - **No triangulation**
 - **Conversion of negative to positive**
 - **Creativity**
 - **Firm follow-through till the issue is brought to as satisfactory a resolution is possible.**

Given this posture, how does the COM avoid triangulation? Being triangulated is essentially assuming responsibility for another party's issue. It relieves the concerned party of responsibility for issue outcome. The COM avoids this by requiring that the party involved take ownership of the expressed concerns or suggestions and by policies that require the party to go through some process that assumes responsibility for outcome. In other instances it may point the concerned party to existing information or prior decisions that address the concern or suggestion, thereby enabling the

individual to arrive at a proper outcome of ownership and ascertain a rightful conclusion.

This does not mean that the COM does not have opinions about issues that come its way. It does. After all, one of its goals is to both enhance and protect mission/ministry consciousness. However, when possible, it avoids stating its opinions in favor of creating processes and providing information that empower the party involved to arrive at perceived outcomes that are in the best interest of the congregation's mission and ministry. This is a creative endeavor that is designed to enable such parties to raise their level of devotion to why the congregation exists and, if pertinent, to reduce their level of commitment to consumer attitudes.

This approach might be called mission/ministry objectivity. However, it is not cold. It has a warm compassionate edge. Its goal is always redemptive in terms of a higher level of commitment beyond personal agenda toward why the congregation exists and insights about how parts and the whole relate in synergistic possibility. A great deal of the COM's stature derives from this non-instructional approach to both members and their issues.

➤ **Means**

- **Through pre-established policies and procedures.**
 - ✓ **How COM members respond uniformly to all expressions and concerns.**
 - ✓ **How any congregation member can process a concern or make a suggestion.**
 - ✓ **How all concerns and suggestions will be consummated through satisfaction, resolution, impasse, or cessation.**
- **Through created processes**
- **Through presentation of information**
- **Through mediated assistance**

➤ **Approach Questions**

- **Are judgments made with a view toward principle?**
- **Are judgments made with a view toward a specific end?**
- **Are judgments made with a view toward the distinction between task and relationship orientations?**
- **Are judgments made with a view toward a conflict management outcome?**
- **Are judgments made with a view toward the paramount issue of mission fulfillment?**

IV Threats To Success

➤ **Permitted triangulation**

- **Low creativity**
- **Inflexibility**
- **Lack of courage**
- **Elevating any agenda over ministry well-being and mission fulfillment**
 - **Friendship preservation**
 - **Private goals**
 - **Status quo**

➤ **Attacks on the COM**

Typical insult of COM member integrity when concern about the minister is involved and perceived satisfaction is not gained: “The COM lives in the back pocket of the minister.” This accusation reflects:

- ✓ **Elevation of the part over the whole**
- ✓ **Processing a consumer agenda**
- ✓ **Refusal to trust lay leadership**
- ✓ **Assumes the minister inordinately influences anyone but themself.**
- **Typical insult of COM as a whole that it “Processes through secrecy and is not transparent.” This accusation reflects a refusal to acknowledge the necessity of confidentiality in COM proceedings.**
 - ✓ **Secrecy is an attempt to hide information for purposes of control, manipulation and the gain of unwarranted power or to preserve the needs of friendship.**
 - ✓ **Confidentiality is an attempt to keep avenues of communication open, to honor the need of people for privacy; to facilitate the well-being of all involved, to allow time**

for resolution, to avoid harmful misinformation and gossip and to prohibit the possibility of escalation.

IV Successful Meeting Necessities

- **Absolute confidentiality by all members.**
- **Commitment to group wisdom.**
- **Attendance of non-members by invitation only.**
- **Always meets at a private venue (never at the congregation's meeting site).**
- **Not publicized except as to date and contact person for communication of suggestions or concerns.**

V Certification/Ordination Recommendations (relative to those interested in the professional ministry or representing its normal professional services).

- **Establishes governing policies that are adopted by the Board of Trustees.**
- **Vets and makes recommendations to the Board of Trustees.**

WHIO SHOULD BE ON THE COM?

I Personal Characteristics

- **Commitment to the congregation's mission and ministry above all other agenda**
- **A big picture perspective**
- **Personal integrity**

- **Caring honesty**
- **Keeps confidences**
- **People skills**
- **Collaborative**
- **Healthy ego**
- **Creative**
- **Institutional savvy**
- **Membership stature**
- **UU experience**

II Terms

- **Lay Leaders**
 - **Three years rotating**
 - **Six members**
 - **Two on/two off each year**
 - **One year must pass before an old member can be considered for another term.**
 - **Maximum six years in a ten year period**

(terms and rotation assure the preservation of the committee's historical memory)

- **Ministers (Called/Hired)**
 - **If more than two ministers then generally the lead minister. If deemed valuable then maybe other ministers.**
 - **Advisory and non-voting.**
 - **Serves indefinitely.**

- **The minister represents special information and professional insights for the COM that are unavailable from other sources.**

III Lay Leader Election

- **A group of appropriate names are proposed to the congregation's nominating body by the COM through a special committee process.**
- **Out of this group of names the Nominating Committee (or its equivalent) nominates to the congregation the prescribed number needed to fill the rotating system. The congregation's president and COM members are given priority consideration over all other elected positions.**
- **Elected by the Congregation**
 - **No floor nominations (non-politicized)**
- **Nominees hold no other major congregational offices so as to avoid representational conflicts and to assure maximum objectivity.**

CRITICAL ISSUES THE COM FACES

I Source of Power

A successful COM needs no other source of authority aside from its processed wisdom and the impact of the work it performs. Its authority should and must derive from its:

- **Stature**

- **Purpose**
- **Posture**
- **Policies**
- **Recommendations**

The only stated authority given to the COM via its mandate is that of assessing the work of the congregation and its minister which it does within the context of its ongoing assessment of the function of all congregational agents of ministry. Out of such assessing it makes non-binding recommendations. Thus, while this is specific it is not exclusive – it is done within the context of the whole. Since it assesses the effectiveness of the professional minister it may also recommend changes in the minister’s compensation package.

II Sources of Failure

- **Allowing itself to be triangulated**
- **Lack of ministerial support (low ministerial ego strength)**
- **Allowing itself to be triangulated**
- **Lack of definitive policies governing every aspect of its function**
- **Allowing itself to be triangulated**
- **Inability of its members to rise above private agenda or friendship issues.**
- **Allowing itself to be triangulated**
- **Poor congregational visibility**
- **Allowing itself to be triangulated**
- **Poorly structured**
- **Allowing itself to be triangulated**

- **Failing to be pro-active**
- **Allowing itself to be triangulated**
- **Losing sight of its purpose**
- **Allowing itself to be triangulated**
- **Lack of courage**
- **Allowing itself to be triangulated**
- **Low congregational stature**
- **Allowing itself to be triangulated**
- **Practicing therapy**
- **Allowing itself to be triangulated**

III Policies

Policies are critical to the COM's success and inevitably play a role in any of its failures. Therefore, having the right policies, having these policies well defined and refusing to back down from these policies will contribute significantly to COM power, stature and success.

➤ Internal Function Policies

- **How the COM uniformly interfaces with congregational members**
- **How COM members interface with its own members (covenant)**
- **How the COM makes recommendations to the congregation's ministry agents**
- **The intent of all COM interactions**
- **How all processes will be determined**

- **How triangulation will be avoided**
- **How follow-through will happen**
- **How and when assessments will be made.**
- **How conflict will be managed**
- **How ministers will be engaged in COM deliberations**
- **How visibility will be maintained.**
- **How functions will be managed**
- **How confidentiality will be kept and its distinction from secrecy**
- **How the COM chooses its internal leadership**
- **How the COM recommends replacement of its members to the nominating body**

➤ **External Function Policies**

- **How congregational members may process their suggestions and issues beginning with the COM and moving to the board and finally to the congregation**
- **How the membership of a congregational member may be terminated**
- **Certification and Ordination**

Since the COM has no authority aside from that of its stature and capacity to assess and recommend, these three policies need to be authorized by the congregation's board. They can be created by the board or by a joint committee of the board and members of the COM in order to reflect the broadest possible

wisdom.

THE BIG PICTURE IS THE WISEST PICTURE

Principle: Pars Pro Toto – a Latin phrase that captures an ancient wisdom that the part exists for the sake of the whole. This is also the principle of the synergistic power of systems. This wisdom is the very ground of the COM's existence and function.

Negative congregational conflict seems the norm rather than the exception in our religious experience. It continues to sap the focus and energy of community life. After almost forty five years as a UU minister, working in a wide variety of denominational positions, it is my assessment that most negative congregational conflicts, irrespective of their nature, could be satisfactorily addressed through the existence of a stured and devoted COM as exemplified in this model.

A more detailed expression of this COM model is found as an addendum in Rev. Latham's book: *Moving On From Church Folly Lane*. His consulting website is MYTHingLink.com.