

Albany Presbytery Annual Process for Conducting Triennial Visits

The Committee on Ministry (COM) has appointed a trained team of visitors to conduct triennial visits, with at least one person on the team to serve as liaison to COM. This team will ensure that

- there is adequate preparation for each visit on the part of the team and the congregation.
- the visit is as pastoral, effective, and productive as possible.
- there is thorough follow up, with referrals made, reports submitted, and requests fulfilled to the best of our ability.

Preparation for Visit

1. The visiting team contacts the pastor and/or clerk of session and establishes a date for the visit.
2. When the date has been established, the team notifies COM's administrative assistant in the Presbytery office, who sends a letter and packet of materials to the Clerk of Session outlining what to expect for the preparation, visit, and follow up. The clerk then ensures that all members of the church leadership team (elders and other key leaders) receive the letter and sends all requested materials to the visiting team.
3. The visiting team talks to the GP and COM liaison (if there is one) about the church, hearing any information they may have, and then keeps an open mind, prepared to re-interpret the church to the appropriate people given new information.

The Team provides:

- an invitation to pastor (and spouse) to meet after the visit for a short time (coffee, dessert).
- a packet of materials for the church's leadership team to read ahead of time including:
 1. the congregation's 10- year statistics (from PCUSA website).
 2. Albany Presbytery's current goals.
 3. questions for reflection.
- a packet of materials to take along and give out if and when appropriate including:
 1. a checklist on what makes for a healthy church.
 2. any pamphlets on upcoming events, resources, etc. that we offer.
 3. any policy statements that might answer questions, i.e. apportionment, study leave, sabbatical, maternity leave, vacancy dues, new medical dues, etc.

The Church provides:

- an up-to-date list of elders and other key leaders of the congregation, and a commitment to have as many of these individuals present during the visit as possible.
- the church's current mission statement, the latest annual report, two to three recent newsletters, welcome brochures, and any other materials considered germane (i.e. mission project reports, capital improvement project reports, etc.).

Questions for Preparation and Reflection by all leaders:

1. Do you look forward to Session (deacon, committee) meetings, why/why not?
2. Describe your church.
 - What makes you proud of your church?
 - How is your church unique?
3. Does your congregation have a current Mission Statement—what does it say and how do you use it?
4. As you look at the 10-year statistics for your congregation and the other materials provided, are you surprised by anything you find?
5. The visiting team has a particular agenda for this triennial visit, to listen to your vision and practice of the mission and ministry of this congregation, and to offer help in ensuring that you have all the resources, training, and tools you need to carry out your vision. Do you have any specific goals for this triennial visit?

Meeting Agenda

Triennial Visit with Session and Key Congregational Leaders

(meeting should last about 1 ½ hours)

Opening Prayer by Moderator

Introductions (*visitors might ask the moderator to have each member of the church's leadership team briefly provide one or more of the following bits of information as they introduce themselves*)

- *When and why did you join the church?*
- *What kinds of leadership positions have you held?*
- *Have you ever attended a Presbytery, Synod, or GA meeting?*
- *Do you have any particular agenda for this meeting (#5 prep question)?*

Bible Study – Discovering the spiritual vitality of the people in one brief visit is extremely hard - some do not have the vocabulary to express their commitments, and some are much too facile with the vocabulary. A brief Bible study in which the visiting team would have the opportunity to explore a text with the congregation's leadership team would be a helpful start. David McMillan will create a model.

Or – Extended Moment of Prayer

Statement of Purpose of Visit:

According to the Book of Order, G-11.502c, the committee “*shall visit with each session of the Presbytery at least once every three years, discussing with them the mission and ministry of the particular church and encouraging the full participation of each congregation in the life and work of the presbytery and of the larger church.*”

Discussion:

1. What is happening in your congregation that excites you? Share some joys you have experienced this past year as the people of God.
2. Are there particular forms of the congregation's ministry or mission that have been significant to the wider community during the past three years? What do you see as your congregation's strengths?
3. Where is something going on in your church that is notable and might be helpful for other congregations to learn about?
4. What are some areas of ministry and mission that present challenges to you? What specific concerns do you have?
5. Are you involved in any kind of team ministry or cooperative project with another church or group?
6. What new ideas have you tried? What have you learned from your failures or successes?
7. What Presbytery resources or training have you used or attended in the past year? What was helpful? What further resources or training would be helpful to you?
8. Where do you see this church in three to five years?
9. What is the most important thing you'd like to see happen as a result of this visit?
10. How do you experience the connectional nature of the PCUSA (for good or for ill)? Are there people in your congregation who might be willing to serve the church at Presbytery, Synod, or General Assembly levels? Who is currently serving in these judicatories?

Closing Prayer

Goals of the Visiting Team

Before the Meeting:

- ensure that all necessary documents are provided to the church at least a month before the visit.
- ensure that all necessary documents are received from the church at least two weeks before the visit.
- set up a post meeting visit (over coffee or a meal) with the pastor and spouse if possible.

During the Meeting:

Normally two people will go, but occasionally one will suffice.

- One visitor may use the report form to take notes on specific strengths, concerns, and other relevant information.
- The other may use the discussion questions to take notes on the flow of the conversation, and the themes that emerge.
- Both visitors may observe not only content but body language...who talks and how much; who's silent; who's frustrated, angry, joyous or hopeful, etc.
- Both visitors should try to find a creative balance between getting through the agenda and gaining as much information as possible. They should also be attentive to the kinds of tangents that church leaders want to pursue, and their own agendas and concerns.
- Get the church leaders to prioritize urgent needs for follow up and let them know how you do referrals.
- Leave information for future contacts, i.e. your email, address, phone, etc.

Within Two Weeks After the Meeting:

- Team members will consult with each other and ensure that immediate referrals are made to the appropriate Presbytery committees, based on the needs expressed during the visit.
- One team member will send a thank you note (on Presbytery letterhead) to the Session, with a copy to the Pastor, and include in the letter a specific list of referrals made. A copy should also be sent to the Presbytery office.
- Team members will complete a Triennial Visit Report form and provide any other narrative information they deem useful. A draft is to be sent to the pastor for review and any comments added as an addendum. A final copy is sent to the Presbytery office. Any concerns that need to be reflected back to the congregation may be most effective when posed as questions.
- When making referrals and you're unsure about what would be most effective, consult with the GP.

Four to Six Weeks After the Meeting:

- Team members will call or email the church and the appropriate Presbytery committees to check on what kind of follow up ensued after referrals were made, and then report their findings to COM.