Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 21

How to Maximize Personnel Committee Effectiveness

Why are we gifting you this volume? Because the mission statement of our primary publication—*The Parish Paper: New Ideas for Active Congregations*—is to help the largest possible number of congregations achieve maximum effectiveness in their various ministries. *The Parish Paper* is a monthly newsletter whose subscribers receive copyright permission to distribute to their constituents—more than two million readers in 28 denominations. Go to www.TheParishPaper.com for subscription information.

Purpose of this Volume: Provides in-depth answers to questions that readers of *The Parish Paper* ask regarding principles and procedures that help a congregation's personnel committee (1) interact positively with staff and governing board, (2) achieve maximum effectiveness in the church's ministries, and (3) maintain positive relationships among staff, lay leaders, and church members. (*Some denominations call the personnel committee the staff-parish relations committee or the pastoral-relations committee.)*

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How to Use this Resource

Information on paper does not equal transformation in congregations. Knowing does not equal doing.

Positive change, either in a church or an individual, more often comes by interactions with other respected persons than by solitary study.

Therefore, this resource provides a long-term study-discussion—though which the congregation can experience itself into new insights, and action-directions.

Unfolding this Study-Discussion Process

Step #1*:* If our congregation does not presently have a personnel committee or its equivalent, the governing board appoints a special task force to (a) study "How to Maximize Personnel Committee Effectiveness" and (b) draft and recommend procedures for the governing board's approval. Comprise the task force of six respected laypersons and the senior pastor. (Some churches call this group the Personnel Policies Planning Team, or PPP Team.) A good selection formula for this special task force: two people above age forty, two people under age forty, two adults who became members within the last three years, and the pastor.

Warning: No matter how small the number of active leaders in a congregation, do NOT hand this material to any presently-existing group, such as the governing board or a committee. Experience indicates that this *always* short-circuits the opportunity for positive results! Do not succumb to the temptation to think that our church is an exception to this rule! Better not to use the process at all than to block its effectiveness, then say, "We tried that!" when we didn't actually use it. Avoid the temptation to appoint a husband and wife to the PPP Team. By reducing the number of viewpoints, we reduce the creativity.

Avoid the temptation to make the PPP Team larger than six people plus the pastor. Research indicates that any kind of group, regardless of the excellence of its individuals, reduces the likelihood of thinking outside the box of recent history, reduces its insight-generating ability, reduces its creativity, and reduces its planning ability when it moves beyond five-to-seven members.

If our congregation presently has a personnel committee, the governing board may wish to (a) appoint that group as a task force to study "How to Maximize Personnel Committee Effectiveness" and (b) draft and recommend procedures for the governing board's approval.

Step #2*:* The PPP Team or personnel committee schedules four, one-hour discussions of "How to Maximize Personnel Committee Effectiveness" during four consecutive weeks. Make copies and distribute one to each person. Ask them to prepare for each discussion by reading that section.

Step #3: The personnel committee or PPP Team, following the four-week discussion sessions, drafts and recommends procedures for the governing board's approval.

Biblical Basis for this Study-Discussion Process: "Without counsel plans go wrong, but with many advisers they succeed (Proverbs 15:22)." "The ear of the wise seeks knowledge (Proverbs 18:15)." "Behold, I make all things new (Revelation 21:5)."

Study-Discussion Session #1

PPP Team Member: Prepare for this discussion session by making notes in the margins, especially with regard to the following questions.

1. Do you recall instances where this paragraph or section was true in your personal experience and/or in a congregation?
2. What would you like to add or subtract from this paragraph or section?
3. In what ways does the idea in this section or paragraph seem true of our congregation?
4. What suggested methods from this section or paragraph should we consider using in our congregation?

PPP Team Discussion Leader: As you move through this discussion session, ask PPP Team members to take turns sharing their answers to the above questions.

I. Why Does Our Congregation Need a Personnel Committee?

John and Sarah have a great marriage. After five years the future looks sunny in their relationship.

Harry and Phyllis filed for divorce this week. Neither knows for sure what went wrong. But something did. “I’m simply not happy anymore,” Phyllis says.

“It really doesn’t matter that much to me,” says Harry. “I’m tired of the hassle.”

What made the difference between those two couples?

John and Sarah meet most of each other’s emotional needs. Harry and Phyllis don’t.

Relationship outcomes in (a) clergy-congregation unions and (b) church staff-congregation unions exhibit marked similarities to the above experiences. When a pastor meets most of his or her congregation’s spiritual, emotional, and traditional needs, the congregation stays happy. When parishioners meet most of the clergyperson’s needs, he or she stays around. If either’s needs go unmet, relationships deteriorate. Effective ministry diminishes. One or both sides start thinking divorce.

How can clergy/staff and members of congregations recognize these mutual needs, so that clergy/staff relationships with their congregations reach optimum levels? In a few very small churches, key leaders tend to assume responsibility for their new pastor’s effectiveness. During the first few years, these laypersons shape his or her ministerial knowledge through close personal relationships marked by frequent conversations. These laypersons know the church cannot succeed unless its pastor succeeds, so they work hard to make that happen.

However, many pastors and staff members find no such laypersons in their new parish and/or the church is too large for that small-church system to work. Consequently, the communication lines are down. Lay leaders tell their friends but never the pastor or staff member. Thus, the clergyperson or staff member tries to achieve a “good marriage” with little or no direct communication from his or her new partner.

A. Most congregations try to prevent these ecclesiastical truck wrecks with a personnel committee that oversees the relationship. Called the staff-parish relations committee in some denominations, other communions use the term pastoral-relations committee. Whatever its name, such a committee deals with personnel issues and, if operating effectively, brings big dividends to any congregation.

An effective personnel committee

1. Helps the pastor and staff do a better job in their ministries
2. Helps the lay leaders do a better job in their ministries
3. Helps the congregation’s members do a better job in their ministries
4. Adds years of effective tenure to clergy and staff service
5. Adds personal satisfaction and meaning to the lives of clergy and staff
6. Provides clergy and staff some of their best continuing education experiences

B. A personnel committee aids clergy and staff in performing effective ministry by (a) advising them of conditions within the congregation that affect the clergy/staff and parishioner relationship and (b) continually interpreting to the parishioners the nature and function of the clergy/staff ministry roles. At optimal performance, the personnel committee delivers the ministry dividends listed above with the following methods:

1. Gives clergy and staff a more accurate picture of how parishioners view their performance than they might receive informally
2. Clarifies expectations on both sides of the clergy/staff and parishioner equation
3. Identifies areas of conflict or disappointment that adversely affect working relationships between and among clergy, staff, and parishioners
4. Allows clergy and staff to express opinions regarding how well the governing board is fulfilling its responsibilities to them
5. Adds advice and counsel regarding clergy, staff, and congregation goals and priorities for the coming year
6. Provides an additional tool for the governing board to use in setting future clergy and staff compensation
7. Acts in accordance with denominational rules and state/national laws in matters related to charges such as clergy and staff sexual abuse, harassment, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, and embezzlement (With a jury awarding sixty-nine million dollars in damages to the plaintiff in the sexual abuse trial of a mainline congregation's pastor during 2004, few of a personnel committee's responsibilities are more important.)
8. Holds the senior pastor accountable as chief of staff (either directly or in large churches through his or supervisor-designates), for the ministry-performance quality of all clergy, program staff, and clerical staff

When the personnel committee operates effectively, with a maximum of openness and honesty and a minimum of defensiveness, everyone wins: God's people, God's lay leaders, God's clergy, God's staff, and God's church. That goal is surely one of the major secrets to fielding an effective clergy/staff-parishioner ministry team—the passionate conviction of all concerned that they are servants (not owners) of God's church and team members together in accomplishing God's purposes in mission and ministries.

II. How Is the Personnel Committee Organized?

Protocols for personnel committees vary greatly. A few denominations provide detailed rules for the committee's election and structure, requiring it to meet a specific number of times each year. In other denominations, local bylaws define the personnel committee's composition and duties in detail. A wide majority of congregations name the committee in their bylaws but lay down few guidelines and no procedural track for its operation.

A. Who serves on the personnel committee? Comprise this committee of duly elected lay members of the congregation plus the senior pastor (no other clergy and no lay staff). Scrupulously apply three-year term limits to elected lay members of the personnel committee to (a) protect people from burnout and (b) avoid the appearance that "a few people make all the decisions around here." Where possible, nominate people with a background in personnel matters. Examples: school principles and corporate executives. In most cases, limit committee size to six lay people plus the senior pastor.

B. How does the personnel committee relate to the governing board? As with all church committees, the personnel committee is accountable to the governing board.

In some denominations, such as The United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline* clearly spells out the duties, responsibilities, and authority of the personnel committee. In other denominations, such as The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *The Book of Order* does not clearly state the personnel committee's role and authority regarding hiring, supervision, and dismissal of clergy and staff.

In other denominations and congregations, local church bylaws spell out the personnel committee's authority, usually by (a) stating its responsibility for clergy and staff performance and (b) requiring that its recommendations for hiring and dismissal of staff come to the governing board, which takes final action. Note: the rule requiring the personnel committee to recommend dismissal of a staff member to the governing board works well in congregations with governing boards that number twelve-to-fifteen or fewer members; in the old-style governing board comprised of thirty-to-seventy or more members, church fights often result from that policy.

What denominational rules and local bylaws govern our personnel committee's roles, responsibilities, and authority? The personnel committee, at the beginning of each program year, should study those documents. This prevents unnecessary misunderstandings, since newly elected committee members begin their service each year.

C. Establish clear, written operating guidelines. Healthy, effective churches do more than merely appoint a personnel committee and hope for the best; healthy congregations have a clear-cut set of procedures that charge the personnel committee with its responsibilities and hold the committee accountable for accomplishing those duties.

Without such guidelines, the quality of a personnel committee's ministry results depend entirely on the skill-level (or the whims) of whoever occupies the chairperson role at the time of a crisis. In such situations, personnel committees sometimes go beyond failure and do more damage than having no committee whatsoever. For example, some such failures happen when the personnel committee operates in a purely *reactive* mode: (a) the committee meets *only* when there is a clergy or staff problem to discuss and (b) the sum total of each such meeting consists of relaying parishioner complaints to a clergyperson or a staff member.

III. How Can Our Committee Behave Proactively, Not Just Reactively?

Do not wait for a good reason before calling the first meeting. That is like waiting for your first heart attack before you get an annual physical. By then, the problem has grown too big to deal with effectively—and the emotional bias of some committee members may stifle open communication.

Use the procedures outlined below to keep the personnel committee's team spirit strong as its members work together to respond to the congregation's needs and God's call to ministry.

A. How frequently should we meet? The personal committee should meet at least quarterly (six times a year is better). Set the meeting dates and times at the beginning of each program year and stick to them, even if the chairperson and the senior pastor "cannot think of any reason why we need to meet."

Committees that meet less than quarterly or "only when we have to" experience the following handicaps: (a) All meetings tend to take on the emotional tone of an inquisition. (b) Because they have not become comfortable talking with one another about small matters, the members lack the skill to deal with significant matters. (c) When too much time passes, minor issues grow into wooly mammoths, difficult or impossible to address in a positive way. Healthy clergy, staff, personnel committee, and parishioner relationships cannot flourish in such adverse soil conditions.

At the first meeting of the year, or the first meeting after the governing board establishes a personnel committee, little of significance may transpire. But that happens at the first meeting of many newly established groups. This first session prepares committee members for working together well when more complex matters arise at a subsequent meeting.

B. How do we conduct our meetings? Even in congregations that have had personnel committees for several years, the chairpersons often ask, "What do we do at the meetings?" The following outline provides an effective protocol and format.

Rule #1: Insist that *every* committee member participate at *every* meeting, each time an opinion is requested on any matter; no one may remain silent. People who will only speak when the senior pastor is absent usually have a personal power agenda that keeps them from being an effective member of this committee. (See exceptions to this rule below.)

Rule #2: Expect and require total confidentiality from every committee member (including not sharing anything from these meetings with spouses). Breeches of confidentiality become especially dangerous in legal situations; and who knows when a personnel matter could at a later time become a legal issue?

Rule #3: The committee does not invite a clergy or staff spouse to any of its meetings. Everyone tends to adopt a defensive stance when others criticize their spouses (as they do when others find fault with one of their children). The presence of an employee's spouse adds a complex group dynamic that litters communication channels with confusing debris.

Exceptions to Rule #1: Only under extreme circumstances (such as clergy and staff sexual abuse, harassment, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, and embezzlement), do common sense, the church bylaws, and denominational guidelines suggest an "executive session" of the personnel committee that meets without the senior pastor present. In instances where such a serious issue relates to the senior pastor, the personnel committee should meet only with the senior pastor's advance knowledge. However, when the senior pastor is not to be present, inform him or her prior to such a meeting. Otherwise, during subsequent weeks the senior pastor's friends will cry foul by spreading the rumor of "secret meetings"; thus, causing unnecessary conflict due to accusations that the personnel committee "went about their work in a poor way."

As soon as possible after such an executive session, bring the senior pastor into consultation with the full committee; *never* ask one member of the committee to convey a description of the committee's deliberations or decisions to him or her.

In such executive sessions, the personnel committee meticulously follows the procedural guidelines of the congregation's bylaws and its denomination. Some communions require the presence of a regional-denominational-structure official such as the district superintendent, bishop, or regional minister at executive sessions of the personnel committee. Even if not required by denominational rules, such a practice often exhibits common sense.

The chairperson unfolds the meeting in the regularly scheduled meetings in the following way:

Step #1: Opening prayer.

Step #2: Ask each individual (including the pastor) to take turns sharing orally with the group the answer to this question: "What one or two 'good things' do you see happening in our church?" This starts the meeting on a positive note. Otherwise, the meeting may deteriorate into an unconstructive gripe session. Then, too, starting this way always gives the pastor some positive strokes, creating a warmer emotional climate.

Step #3: After everyone has answered the first question, the chairperson asks each person (including the pastor) to share his or her answer to a second question: "What one congregational challenge do you feel our committee may want to consider discussing?"

At this point, some extraneous matters usually arise. "The thermostat is never set high enough in our classroom!" a committee member may say. The committee members, under the chairperson's leadership, try to accept everyone's feelings without judging their input as inappropriate or putting them down. However, with many comments of this sort the chairperson refers committee members or their problems to another committee or a staff member; in this instance, for example, to the property committee or the custodian's supervisor.

Step #4: While committee members answer the second question, the chairperson notes any issues that seem to warrant further discussion. After everyone has answered, the chairperson puts those issues on the table by saying, "Let's talk some more about . . . . Does anyone else have something to add to that subject?"

Step #5: The chairperson leads the committee in discussing each issue—one at a time. The chairperson (a) shepherds the discussion to keep the committee members "on point," issue-by-issue, tactfully blocking their natural tendency to discuss several issues at once and (b) guiding the discussion of each issue toward a constructive, consensus solution.

Step #6: After the committee concludes the discussion of each issue, the chairperson brings up another of the issues surfaced during Step #3 that he or she feels merit discussion at this meeting. "Let's talk some more about . . . . Does anyone else have something to add to that subject?"

Step #7: Prior to each meeting, the chairperson reviews the minutes of the previous meeting and decides whether any of its issues need more discussion. If such issues did not come up during Step #3 (they usually do), the chairperson asks, "How do you feel things are going with . . . ? We talked about that at the last meeting."

Warning: Often, a power-needy personnel committee member waits until the end of the meeting to bring up something he or she was not willing to put on the table during Step #3. This control maneuver ends the meeting with his or her "two cents worth of criticism," without the committee having time to discuss the matter.

When such a person attempts this power-and-control play, the chairperson pleasantly and firmly says, "Other committee members would probably like to comment on that concern, but we do not have time to address it this evening. You may want bring that up at the beginning of our next personnel committee meeting."

Step #8: Close the meeting by forming a circle, asking people to join hands, and asking each person to say a one-sentence prayer.

Under times of extreme duress, personnel committees may want to form a daily prayer covenant with one another. Go to www.TheParishPaper.com to download a free electronic version of *The Secret to Abundant Living: Learning How to Ask*. Congregations receive free of charge the copyright permission to photocopy this card for local use.

IV. How Do We Relate to the Senior Pastor?

In healthy, effective congregations *of every size* with minimal levels of conflict, the personnel committee has one employee: the senior pastor. The personnel committee holds the senior pastor responsible as chief-of-staff: he or she supervises all staff (is accountable for each staff member's behaviors and ministry results).

In small and midsize congregations, the senior pastor supervises each staff member directly. In large and megachurches, the senior pastor usually supervises staff via (a) the business administrator, who supervises office, clerical, and custodial staff; and (b) a senior associate pastor or executive pastor, who supervises associate pastors and program staff. Total staff accountability happens through the senior pastor's weekly meetings with those two staff leaders.

In other words, in any effective organization, regardless of size, one person must be the boss. If the senior pastor is unwilling to assume, or incapable of fulfilling, the chief-of-staff role, chaos either immediately or eventually results somewhere in or throughout the system. Therefore, one of the most important personnel committee's functions is to provide encouragement, advice, and counsel to the senior pastor as he or she coordinates and coaches staff members in accomplishing the congregation's various ministries.

What if two clergypersons serve as co-pastors? What if husband and wife serve as co-pastors? By definition, the term co-pastor means co-equal. At the application level of this concept, at least two formats are observed. In some churches, the co-pastors attend all personnel committee meetings. In other churches, the co-pastors choose to divide oversight responsibilities: one pastor handles personnel issues and the other pastor relates to other committees.

V. How Do We Relate to Associate Pastors and Lay Staff?

Each additional clergyperson and lay staff member relates to the senior pastor as chief-of-staff—either directly in small and midsize churches or indirectly in large and megachurches. The senior pastor acts (a) as each staff member's immediate supervisor and (b) as the person to whom he or she is ultimately accountable for planning, results, and evaluation.

In healthy, effective congregations, each staff member communicates with the senior pastor in (a) weekly staff meetings, (b) individual, quarterly communication conferences (described in detail below), and (c) quarterly visioning meetings in which all staff meet together (described in detail below).

In multiple-staff congregations of every size—small, midsize, large, or mega—each clergy and lay staff member relates to the church in a manner that we could picture as a circle in the center of four circles that overlap that center circle and one another.

Circle A: Each staff member is a specialist who relates to certain groups, ministry teams, and committees. Example: youth director and youth ministries team. Members of committees, teams, or groups both (1) provide creative input to the staff person's role and (2) support him or her in executing that role. Communication occurs both in meetings and through informal conversations.

Circle B: Each staff member relates to other staff, because no ministry stands in isolation from all other ministries; like the human body, the body of Christ works best when appropriately interconnected. Each staff member receives some input from other staff members and, under the best circumstances, feels emotional support from them. That communication occurs in weekly staff meetings, through informal conversations, and on an experiential basis during congregational ministries and events.

Circle C: Each staff member relates to the senior pastor either as his or her direct supervisor or as chief of staff and as the person to whom he or she is ultimately accountable for planning, results, and evaluation: this occurs (1) in weekly staff meetings, (2) in the quarterly, individual communication meetings outlined below, (3) in annual reviews when the pastor makes salary recommendations, and (4) in some instances via performance reviews such as provided by *Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 15, How to Obtain Accurate Feedback on Ministry-Role Performance.* Download this free at the www.TheParishPaper.com Web site.

Circle D: The staff member relates to the personnel committee as both (1) an employer (through accountability to the senior pastor) and (2) a support group. In a few churches, the personnel committee schedules an annual, thirty-minute interview with each staff member sometime during the year (at a time different from annual salary review). To avoid the danger of conflict-producing "triangulation," personnel committees that use this procedure *always* insist that the senior pastor be present during such interviews with staff.

To summarize the picture of a staff member in the center of four overlapping circles, remove any one of the four circles and a certain amount of destructive unhappiness and conflict begins. That is especially true if we remove the circle that involves the senior pastor acting as chief supervisor of all staff. The church governing board, through the personnel committee, holds the senior pastor accountable for the results of each staff person's ministry. Any other configuration leads to clergy, staff, senior pastor, personnel committee, and congregational dysfunction that adversely affect the mission and ministry abilities of all concerned.

Warning #1: In healthy, effective congregations, the senior pastor makes annual salary recommendations to the personnel committee which, in turn, recommends salaries to the finance committee for approval by the governing board and/or the congregation—depending on denominational rules and traditions. In some denominations, the congregation must vote on the annual budget; other denominations require that only the governing board approve the budget. The larger the congregation, the more likely individual salaries are confidential, included in a "salaries" line item in the annual budget. Whatever the congregation's polity, bylaws, or traditions, the personnel committee *never* sets or recommends salary increases except by recommendation from the senior pastor. Violating this principle inevitably creates triangulation of feelings that produce unnecessary conflict.

Warning #2: What if one spouse is pastor and the other spouse is an associate pastor or a program-staff member? This relationship creates some complexity at the point of the senior pastor making annual salary recommendations to the personnel committee. In some congregations, the senior pastor asks the personnel committee to make salary recommendations for his or her spouse. Large congregations sometimes resolve this matter by keeping the spouse's salary comparable with that of their other clergy or staff members who serve in similar leadership or supervisory roles. Whatever method it uses, the personnel committee informs the finance committee and whatever governing group approves the annual budget of (a) its salary-setting rationale and (b) how it arrived at a spouse's recommended salary or salary increase. The principle: avoid any appearance of financial favoritism, and make sure the appropriate governance groups know we have done so.

Warning #3: Do not assign specific personnel committee members to provide individual staff members communication and supportive relationships. This procedure creates "triangulation" opportunities that lead to conflict among and between staff members and the senior minister, rather than a sense of mutuality and unity.

Warning #4: Another dysfunctional system observed in some small and midsize churches is the assignment of a staff member's accountability for behavior and ministry results to an individual committee rather than to the personnel committee through the senior pastor as chief-of-staff. Examples: Assigning the worship committee responsibility as employer of the choir director; assigning the Christian education committee responsibility as employer and supervisor of the youth director. This model is 100 percent dependable in its outcome: in *every instance* where a church uses the model, it creates unnecessary conflict and dysfunctional behavior!

Study-Discussion Session #2

PPP Team Member: Prepare for this discussion session by making notes in the margins, especially with regard to the following questions.

1. Do you recall instances where this paragraph or section was true in your personal experience and/or in a congregation?
2. What would you like to add or subtract from this paragraph or section?
3. In what ways does the idea in this section or paragraph seem true of our congregation?
4. What suggested methods from this section or paragraph should we consider using in our congregation?

PPP Team Discussion Leader: As you move through this discussion session, ask PPP Team members to take turns sharing their answers to the above questions.

I. Maintain an Up-to-Date Personnel Manual

This document (in some churches called a Policies & Procedures Manual and in other churches called an Employee Handbook) is essential for several reasons, among which the following are especially important: A Personnel Manual provides (a) clarity regarding the terms under which employees work and receive compensation, (b) a basis for employee dismissal in instances where those terms are not met, (c) procedures by which employee termination can occur should that become necessary, (d) recognition in most states as an employment agreement, and (e) congregational protection in the event of litigation by a present or former staff member.

If our congregation has not yet created a Personnel Manual, do so as soon as possible. Contact three congregations in our state and ask them for a copy of their document. Contact our regional denominational structure or the ministry department at our denominational headquarters and ask for models and suggestions. The applicability of nonprofit employment laws vary with congregational size; the larger the number of employees, the greater the likelihood that some state laws apply. Some federal laws apply to all churches, regardless of their size.

Employment laws vary from state to state, so ask a local lawyer to provide a model and/or to review our draft before we recommend it to the governing board for ratification. A few law firms specialize in nonprofit organizations and can provide models. Ask a local attorney for contact information for such a firm. While more expensive than a local lawyer, such firms also increase the likelihood of maximum legal protection; in a law suit, the legal fees necessary to create the best possible Personnel Manual may look quite inexpensive.

If our congregation already has a Personnel Manual, what year was it prepared? Does it need updating? Has a local lawyer looked at it?

II. Create Job Descriptions for Each Clergyperson and Staff Member

If these are not already in place, develop a job description for each person who receives financial compensation from our congregation. Just as important: prepare job descriptions for any volunteer staff who serve without financial compensation. Review and discuss these job descriptions annually with each employee or volunteer staff member; updating them every year (more than once a year in some fast-growing congregations) in accordance with each individual's changing responsibilities and congregational needs.

If we do not presently have job descriptions for each employee, request from three large congregations a copy of their job-description models. Generally speaking, the larger the congregation, the more likely it has perfected a high-quality model.

The following categories describe the contents of every staff member's job description in one large church; include these categories in each employee's job description.

Position Description

Date:
Position Title:
Works Directly For:
Purpose of This Position:
Duties:
Skills Required:
Desired Education:
Continuing Education Requirements:

The following one-page questionnaire demonstrates how one personnel committee involved each staff member in creating his or her job description:

Date:
For: All Employees
From: Senior Pastor

Please list as thoroughly as possible your understanding of the answers to the following questions regarding your present responsibilities. Please return your answers by . . . (date).

1. Describe in not more than two or three sentences the purpose of your job: what goals do your responsibilities seek to accomplish in the congregation's overall mission and ministry?
2. List and describe the three activities that require the largest percentage of your time.
3. What percentage of your time do you estimate each of those three activities consumes?
4. List and describe other activities that take up a small percentage of your time, some of which you may only do occasionally, monthly, or annually.
5. What are your top priorities; what activities do you deem more important than any other aspects of your job?
6. Among your responsibilities, what roles and goals do you most enjoy accomplishing?
7. To whom are you directly accountable for your job performance; who supervises your work?
8. Over what decisions do you have direct authority?
9. If applicable, list and describe any responsibilities for supervising the work of other employees.
10. If applicable, list and describe any responsibilities for supervising, guiding, or equipping the work of church volunteers or committees.
11. What special knowledge or skills are needed in your job?
12. What special equipment do you use in performing your job?
13. What special physical strength or demands are essential for someone who does your job?
14. Please circle the people on the following list with whom you have work-related contact: parishioners, potential parishioners, non-parishioners the congregation assists in some way, community residents, service or product suppliers, or job applicants.

The larger the congregation, the more difficulty members have in understanding and remembering the roles of specific staff members. To combat that constant communication challenge in large and megachurches, print a continuous series of brief articles in each church newsletter and/or worship bulletin that introduces each staff member. In each one-inch or two-inch vignette, include a picture, a brief biographical squib, and a description of his or her ministry roles and goals.

III. Promote a Healthy Staff Environment

Several societal changes have reshaped the way businesses, corporations, and congregations manage and lead employees. Three examples:

- *Reductions in company loyalty.* People born before 1946 (today's age-60-65 bosses) expected to spend a lifetime with one corporation. By contrast, few people with post-1945 birth dates view their employer as a lifetime partner.
- *Low unemployment percentages.* During recession and corporate downsizing years, high unemployment figures made many employees fearful of job security. This unease inclined many employees toward conformity to policies with which they disagreed.
- *Revised employee expectations.* More comfortable with conformity, World War II veterans trusted their corporate hierarchy. By contrast, post-1945-birth-date workers want consensus with their boss and coworkers, not just expectations from above.

Churches are not corporations. Most church employees are motivated more by ministry opportunities than by money possibilities. Yet, effective pastors and staff supervisors say that leading, managing, and retaining capable staff requires a different work environment than employees expected three decades ago.

A. Research indicates that the following five climate-factor clusters create a healthy and magnetic staff environment. (Source: several hundred church staff interviews and "21st Century Leadership" by Mark David Nevins and Stephen A. Stumpf, *Strategy & Business*, Issue 16.)

1. Clear goals and values: Staff members want to know what vision drives their daily efforts. The bigger the church, the more frequently its pastor must state the vision. As John Maxwell observed in what he calls The Nehemiah Principle, "Vision and purpose must be restated every twenty-six days in order for it to stay alive in the minds of many people."

2. Opportunity for personal and professional development: Staff members want to acquire new knowledge and skills through both formal and informal channels.

3. Frequent feedback and recognition: Staff members want (a) fair compensation that equals comparable job opportunities in their community or specialty, (b) crystal-clear oral expectations and job descriptions, (c) timely performance feedback, and (d) frequent recognition of their contributions.

4. Enriching and regenerative environment: Staff members want (a) a congregation in which they take pride and to which they can dedicate their energies; (b) the resources and equipment necessary to achieve their ministries; (c) a safe, stimulating, and challenging atmosphere; (d) regular opportunities to express opinions; and (e) employers who understand individual employee differences.

5. A collaborate relationship: Staff members want more than a paycheck. They want a team environment that includes (a) high competence standards for every staff member; (b) active involvement in shaping the church's ministry vision; (c) being "in the know" about coming changes; (d) spending informal as well as formal time together (many church staff teams meet informally for lunch each week at a time different from the weekly staff meeting); (e) frequent opportunities to laugh together; (f) genuine care about personal stresses and needs; (g) open, honest communication with their supervisor; (h) the feeling that they are on the same philosophical wavelength as their leader(s); and (i) expectation of balance between work hours and personal life.

Summary: Effective leaders create a motivational climate that includes the largest possible number of the following elements: (a) responsibility, (b) trust, (c) listening skills, (d) praise, (e) recognition for new and creative ideas, (f) freely flowing upward and downward communication, (g) several teams that achieve a variety of specific ministry goals, (h) problem-solving relationships within and among the various teams, (i) reinforcing communication regarding each person's knowledge of why he or she is important to achieving the congregation's ministry goals, (j) clear direction (clear key result objectives, expectations, and measurements), (k) knowledge (skills, training, information, goals), (l) emotional support (approval, coaching, feedback, encouragement), (m) steady balance between firm and flexible supervisory controls, and (n) readily available educational and equipment resources.

The Bottom Line: Removing one or more of those staff environment ingredients erodes the motivational climate and makes the congregation's vision and goals difficult to accomplish, regardless of how hard the senior pastor and staff work.

Do the above lists match the staff environment in our congregation? How can we maintain awareness of which factors are present and which are absent? How can we improve our staff environment? The procedures detailed below enable positive answers to those three questions.

B. The larger the congregation, the more complex is the senior pastor's leadership role, and the more hours per week he/she spends in accomplishing ministry through and with a staff team. Senior pastors must therefore perfect their coaching skills as they relocate from small churches to midsize churches to large churches to megachurches (or, as the congregation they serve grows from one size to the next size).

At each of these changes in church size, communication complexity doubles or triples. Senior pastors in large and megachurches enjoy having more staff with which to accomplish more ministries. But to achieve the requirements listed above that are essential to maintaining a healthy, magnetic staff environment, these senior pastors must give an increasing amount of time to staff meetings and enabling staff to stay in touch with one another and work together in beneficial ways.

The following books are helpful for multiple-staff study and discussion, one chapter at a time, in staff meetings: *Improving Your Multiple-Staff Ministry* by Ann Marie Nuechterlein (Augsburg Fortress Publishers); *Church Staff Handbook* by Harold J. Westing (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications).

At www.equippedforeverygoodwork.org the senior pastor and/or executive pastor can download, free of charge, a useful toolkit of staff-insight-producing, self-analysis, and team-building instruments, authored by Dan R. Dick and Barbara Miller. Use this set of resources over a period of several months.

IV. Provide Effective Staff Supervision and Coaching

The following procedures are beneficial to individual staff members, the senior pastor, and the congregation in a variety of ways.

A. Leading lay, program-staff members and associate pastors is more complex than leading and managing secretaries, administrative assistants, and clerical staff. To use the following formula for quarterly communication conferences with each clergy and lay program staff member, give each individual a copy of the following five points:

1. In preparation for each quarterly communication conference, the senior pastor asks each staff member to list at the top of one sheet of paper his or her goals and priorities for the next three months. On the bottom of that sheet, the staff member is to note items needed from other staff members in order to succeed at those goals and priorities.

2. The senior pastor schedules an informal quarterly communication conference with each staff member to review and discuss his/her three-month goals and priorities sheet.

3. In each quarterly communication conference, the staff member prioritizes his/her goals and priorities and gives some narrative of the importance of each one, along with a brief action plan. He/she may also mention potential obstacles to some of the goal achievements. In some instances, this discussion provides the senior pastor opportunity to suggest an additional goal and/or coach the staff member in reprioritizing some of his/her goals.

4. At the second and subsequent meeting, the first item of discussion is the staff member's review/evaluation of the three-month goals and priorities sheet from the last communication meeting three months ago and what he/she learned in the process.

5. The discussions in these quarterly communication conferences create opportunity for
   - (a) Positive communication with the senior pastor
   - (b) Discussing goals and challenges in a timely rather than a haphazard way
   - (c) Setting goals and priorities in communication with ones supervisor; thus, achieving a clear understanding of expectations
   - (d) Timely feedback from the senior pastor regarding desirable or undesirable behaviors
   - (e) Timely opportunity for the staff member to express concerns and describe needs related to his/her roles and goals
   - (f) Creative coaching/learning opportunities
   - (g) Adding priorities
   - (h) Deleting or postponing priorities
   - (i) Asking, "Are there ways in which I can help you with your job?"
   - (j) Emergence of job performance evaluations in a natural way throughout the year, which is far superior to the old "annual performance review"; quarterly meetings provide opportunities for continuous coaching and problem-correction rather than annual hind-sight, brow-beatings regarding inferior performance in some areas

6. In large congregations, each supervisory staff member uses the above procedure with members of his/her department. For example, the business administrator uses this procedure with the administrative, clerical, and custodial staff.

B. The senior pastor and/or staff supervisors use the following formula to stay in touch with the needs of the administrative assistants and clerical staff. Use every six months or annually, depending on circumstances. In a memo, the senior pastor or supervisor (depending on the congregation's size) tells the staff member that this meeting is oral in nature, not written. However, ask him/her to prepare for the conversation by reflecting in advance on the following questions:

1. What goals do you see yourself working toward during the next three months in relationship to your role of helping our congregation achieve its ministry goals?
2. What are the biggest challenges you are experiencing right now in regard to your role with our congregation?
3. In what areas are you trying to increase your skill levels, so that you can accomplish your role more effectively?
4. What aspects of our organization's structural and communication interaction cause you the most frustration right now?
5. How can I help you do your job better?
6. Please review your job description and be ready to discuss and possibly update some parts of it.

C. Schedule quarterly visioning meetings, at which every staff member is present, for the following purpose: (a) look at the big picture of issues that are important to achieving our overall congregation's mission and ministry objectives, (b) do long-term planning, and (c) build and maintain positive staff-team relationships.

Ask each staff member to be ready to share orally, from his or her viewpoint, the answers to these three questions:

1. What one or two "good things" did you see happening during the last few weeks?
2. What one or two challenges do you feel we need to deal with effectively during the next three months?
3. What two or three priorities are you personally attempting to accomplish during the next three months?

Meeting Format: Ask each individual to take turns sharing orally with the group the answer to the first question. Then go around the circle again, asking individuals to share answers to the second question. Repeat the process a third time, for the third question.

As this process unfolds, considerable communication and positive synergy occurs. Other staff members chime in to provide information helpful to the group and to the person sharing. This interchange (a) helps everyone recover from the normal assumption that he/she is the only busy person on the staff, (b) creates serendipitous opportunities for creativity among staff members regarding mutually important issues, and (c) gives the senior pastor an opportunity to restate major congregational visions and reinforce the important role each staff member plays in moving toward that vision's accomplishment.

D. In some circumstances use a standard "developmental review" process with administrative assistants, clerical staff, or custodians. Examples: (a) during the first year of employment, (b) when an employee exhibits questionable job performance, and (c) during a probationary period.

This procedure has two primary benefits: (a) It maintains a high level of communication regarding employee performance goals. (b) In case termination of an employee becomes necessary, this procedure provides a paper trail that proves warnings were given prior to his/her dismissal. More and more, such legally recognized procedures are seen as essential in all employment situations, including churches. The procedure unfolds as follows:

1. Quarterly, the senior pastor or the supervisor fills out a developmental review sheet such as the one illustrated below.
2. The staff member also completes a sheet on himself or herself (with at least one week of advance notice).
3. The senior pastor or supervisor and the staff member meet together for a discussion.
4. The staff member shares with the senior pastor or supervisor a copy of the sheet he or she has completed, giving the senior pastor or supervisor an opportunity to study it for a few minutes.
5. The senior pastor shares a copy of the sheet he or she has prepared on that staff member, giving him/her a few minutes to study it.
6. The senior pastor or supervisor and the staff member discuss similarities and differences, and the conversation proceeds along lines that are directed toward arriving at a mutually agreed-upon version of the sheet.
7. After the discussion, the sheet is typed up and signed by the staff member and the senior pastor or supervisor.

Developmental Review

Date:
Name of Employee: Position:
Name of Supervisor: Position:
Employee's Strengths:
Areas in which Growth Is Important:
Goals/Objectives for the Next Three Months:
Other Comments:
Employee's Signature: ________________________________ Date: _____
Supervisor's Signature: ________________________________ Date: _____

E. Some senior pastors and supervisors prefer to use more specific "developmental review" instruments with administrative assistants, clerical staff, and custodial staff. These can have value, providing they do not become a substitute for regular sit-down-together conversations such as those described above.

An example of such an instrument is provided below. Under each of the ten categories, the word *Comments* provides (a) an opportunity for conversational interaction doing quarterly reviews and (b) a written record for the staff member's personnel file. (Some parts adapted from Aubrey Malphurs, *Strategic Planning* [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999], pages 27-28)

General Appraisal

Date:

Name:

Position

1. Job Knowledge: familiar with the duties, requirements, practices, policies, and procedures of the position.
Poor, *Fair*, *Good*, *Excellent*, or *N/A*
Comments:

2. Quality of Work: does thorough and accurate work.
Poor, *Fair*, *Good*, *Excellent*, or *N/A*
Comments:

3. Productivity: accomplishes a reasonable, acceptable amount of work in a reliable and timely manner. P*oor*, *Fair*, *Good*, *Excellent*, or *N/A*

4. Punctuality: arrives for work on time and honors the boundaries of lunch and break times.
P*oor*, *Fair*, *Good*, *Excellent*, or *N/A*
Comments:

5. Organization: files, records, etc. are orderly and accessible.
Poor, *Fair*, *Good*, *Excellent*, or *N/A*
Comments:

6. Initiative and Resourcefulness: a self-starter who identifies opportunities, improves procedures, and suggests new ideas.
Poor, *Fair*, *Good*, *Excellent*, or *N/A*
Comments:

7. Sociability: cooperative, supportive, enthusiastic, and gets along well with people.
Poor, *Fair*, *Good*, *Excellent*, or *N/A*
Comments:

8. Communication: a good listener who communicates clearly and accurately when writing or speaking.
Poor, *Fair*, *Good*, *Excellent*, or *N/A*
Comments:

9. Character: a person of integrity (respectful, trustworthy, honest, not a gossip, humble, etc.).
Poor, *Fair*, *Good*, *Excellent*, or *N/A*
Comments:

10. Grooming: dresses appropriately and exhibits a professional appearance.
Poor, *Fair*, *Good*, *Excellent*, or *N/A*
Comments:

F. Senior pastors and supervisors should memorize John Maxwell's adaptation of "The Correct Way to Give Feedback/Coaching" by James Jenks and Charles Dickson (Adapted from John Maxwell, "Things I need to Say—Staff to Pastor," Audiotape, Vol. 10, No. 9, 1994)

1. Tell the employee you are concerned and why.
2. Cite an example of a good effort by the employee to show that he/she can do what is expected.
3. Give specific feedback regarding what concerns you about the employee's behavior.
4. Heighten the employee's sense of responsibility by describing the effect of that behavior; make the employee aware of its consequences.
5. Give the employee a clear picture of the standard that he or she must meet. Even if stated at an earlier date, restate it.
6. Ask the employee to describe why he or she acted that way. But steer clear of a scolding "why haven't you?" challenge!
7. Criticize one thing at a time. Do not dump a list of concerns on the person in one conversation.
8. Do not repeat a point once you have made it.
9. Object only to actions the other person can change. If you ask the employee to do something that he or she is incapable of doing, you build frustration into the relationship.
10. Avoid sarcasm—which signals that you are angry at people instead of at their actions. When you express anger disguised as sarcasm, you cause people to resent you.
11. Avoid words such as *always* and *never*. They usually detract from accuracy, build resentment in the employee, and make you come across as a weak thinker.
12. Do not apologize for your criticism of his or her behavior. An apology detracts from the intended impact of your criticism—positive behavior change—and signals that you are not sure your statements are accurate and/or that you have the right to make them.
13. Ask the employee to suggest a solution. But be ready with your own solutions in case the employee does not offer any.
14. Decide together on a plan to correct the behavior.
15. Do not forget compliments. Thus, when you criticize someone's behavior they are more likely to consider and accept it as accurate.

G. The larger the congregation, the more crucial to its effectiveness is the senior pastor's role of staff supervision and leadership. The little book titled *The Five Temptations of a CEO* by Patrick Lencioni contains excellent principles from the business world that also apply to church leadership. For additional insights, see the section titled, "What Makes the Senior Pastor an Effective CEO?" in *Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 22, How to Strengthen Clergy/Staff Leadership & Relationship Skills*. Download this free at the www.TheParishPaper.com Web site.

The Bottom Line: Will these formulas and resources eliminate all personnel problems? No! Interaction stresses are a normal part of all systems involving two or more persons in ministry together. But application of such methods reduces the volume and intensity of personnel stress.

V. Team with the Senior Pastor in Setting Priorities

Pastors in congregations that (a) average fewer than 150 in worship attendance, and/or (b) recently experienced major conflict concerning the previous or present pastor's performance, and/or (c) have a multiple-decade history of short clergy tenures, should consider teaming with the personnel committee to use the following "Ministry Priority" procedure.

As each year begins, the personnel committee assists the pastor in setting his/her time-use priorities, consistent with what the committee feels God is calling the church to accomplish during the coming year. This process allows the committee members to accomplish three things:

- Hold the clergyperson accountable for focusing energies in ways that are the most productive
- Interpret to other church members "the focus of our clergyperson's ministries at the present time"
- Protect the clergyperson from unreasonable expectations that can occur when several members of the congregation place a different set of demands on clergy time (For example, this process allows pastors to say something like the following to comments that contain expectations different from those agreed upon by the personnel committee: "Every ministry is important. However, our congregation's personnel committee instructed me to give that activity a low priority this year, in favor of several other ministries that they feel require more of my attention right now, such as . . . ."

The personnel committee may want to add additional items to the following basic list, since circumstances differ widely.

At their first meeting of the program year, ask each committee member, without discussing these items with anyone, to rank them according to his or her feelings. Mark the most important with #1 and the least important #3. Designate as #2 the items that fall somewhere between #1 and #3.

Since only God can give everything equal energy and time, ask committee members to mark *an equal number of the items* with #1, #2, and #3. Ranking definitions: a #1 priority means it always gets done; a #2 priority may get done if time is available; a #3 priority may never get done.

After each committee member has marked a sheet, tabulate on a fresh sheet the number of people who ranked each item #1, #2, and #3. This provides the pastor a "top five priorities" list.

___ Preaching
___ Worship
___ Teaching adults
___ Teaching children
___ Teaching confirmation class
___ Funerals
___ Weddings
___ Children's sermons
___ Counseling
___ Visiting the homebound
___ Visiting members' homes
___ Visiting people in the hospital
___ Visiting prospective new members
___ Visiting inactive members
___ Visiting the elderly
___ Training members in evangelization skills
___ Organizational leadership
___ Staff supervision
___ Training leaders in financial stewardship methods
___ Overseeing financial matters
___ possible additional items . . .
___

___ Youth ministries
___ Vacation Bible School
___ Working with civic organizations
___ Working with other churches in the community
___ Working with community-service endeavors
___ Regional denomination service
___ Personal devotional life
___ His or her family responsibilities
___ Returning telephone calls
___ Summer camping ministries
___ Long-range planning
___ Prison ministry
___ Prayer groups
___ Supervising the care of church property
___ Public relations/press releases
___ possible additional items . . .
___
___
___

Study-Discussion Session #3

PPP Team Member: Prepare for this discussion session by making notes in the margins, especially with regard to the following questions.

1. Do you recall instances where this paragraph or section was true in your personal experience and/or in a congregation?
2. What would you like to add or subtract from this paragraph or section?
3. In what ways does the idea in this section or paragraph seem true of our congregation?
4. What suggested methods from this section or paragraph should we consider using in our congregation?

PPP Team Discussion Leader: As you move through this discussion session, ask PPP Team members to take turns sharing their answers to the above questions.

I. The Value and Design of Weekly Staff Meetings

"I don't have time to meet with the staff every week," the senior pastor said. "Our staff members have job descriptions. They know what they're supposed to do. If they need something, they can ask me."

In another congregation, a part-time staff member said, "The Tuesday staff meeting eats two hours of my time. The Wednesday staff luncheon eats another hour. If we didn't meet so much to *talk about* doing ministry, I'd have more time *to do* ministry."

In another church, the senior pastor said, "I know what programs I want our staff to put energy into. Staff meetings create unnecessary conflict when the staff tries to change my mind about that."

What do those comments have in common? (a) They are a natural result of time pressures. (b) They contain some truth. (c) They distort reality. (d) If acted upon, they damage a congregation's mission and ministry effectiveness.

Churches that do not conduct weekly staff meetings reap five negative results: (1) an unusual number of complaints about "poor communication in our church," (2) higher than normal amounts of conflict among staff members and church members, (3) three times as many hours per week spent correcting miscommunication and putting out conflict fires than is saved by not holding staff meetings, (4) reduced creativity resulting from flawed personal relationships, and (5) much emotional energy spent on political maneuvering with other staff members and lay leaders to gain power for "the way I want to do it."

Every congregation, regardless of size, needs a weekly staff meeting whose purpose is to (a) review what is happening, (b) review what is coming up during the next couple of weeks and months, (c) consider what types of communication can help to facilitate the ministries of the various committees, ministry teams, and fellowship groups, (d) calendar events, (e) coordinate staff responsibilities, and (f) create new ideas for possible implementation in the future. For additional insights regarding how to facilitate staff meetings, see the sections on how to lead meetings in *Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 23, Fine-tuning the Organizational and Communication Engine.* Download it free at the www.TheParishPaper.com Web site.

If possible, find a time for the weekly staff meeting when all the staff can be present. This significantly increases communication and tends to reduce the incidence of conflict. Participants should include all clergy, program staff, secretarial staff, and custodial staff.

Even if all staff members are present at each meeting, publish minutes by the end of that same day. This immediate communication on paper (a) gives any absent staff member information and (b) reminds the staff team of decisions, responsibilities, and deadlines agreed upon.

Use the following guidelines for weekly staff meetings. Modify them to account for differences in the structure and staffing of small, midsize, large, and megachurches.

Staff Meeting Format

Our Congregation's Vision Statement:*

Our Congregation's Mission Statement:

Brief Devotion: led by senior pastor or by a different staff member each week (a helpful model, with which some congregations also begin their governing board and committee meetings, is the pamphlet by E. Stanley Ott, "Small Group Life: A Guide for Members and Leaders," [Pittsburgh: Vital Faith Resources, 1994], pp. 16-20; www.vitalchurches.com)

Pray for One Another: share joys and concerns from personal life and pray together (in large churches, divide the staff into groups of three for sharing and prayer).

Review Last Sunday:

Attendance Compared to One Year Ago:
New Members:
Absences:
First-time Visitors:
Other Concerns:

Review Next Sunday's Plans:

Review Next Week's Events Plans: discuss custodial needs for each event (after which the custodial staff may leave the meeting).

Review Coming Events Calendar for the Next Several Months:

Worship Bulletin Inserts/Video Display Ads for Next Sunday:

Oral Announcements for Next Sunday:

Publicity/Advertising for the Week:

Pastoral Care Reports/Assignments for the Week: hospitalizations, homebound, grief, and crisis situations.

Information Sharing: items of which staff need knowledge and reminders regarding upcoming priorities.

Proposals for Discussion: development and review of new ministry ideas and plans for addressing problem areas. In some cases, assign a specific staff member or staff team the task of gathering information to report at a future staff meeting.

Deferred Matters: Items previously tabled for discussing at a later staff meeting.

Staff Reports and Ministry Updates: Information from staff members that may be of interest to the entire team.

Additional Types of Staff Meetings: Midsize and large churches should also conduct a two- or three-day annual planning meeting, plus quarterly one-day meetings, during which clergy and program staff (a) look at the big picture and (b) discuss complex issues not possible during time limitations of the weekly staff meetings.

Staff Meeting Atmosphere: Sixty years of studies show that employees covet respect almost as much as money—sometimes more so. This is especially true in nonprofit organizations. Respect employees' individual worth. Recognize them for what they contribute to the organization. Treat them as partners, not hired hands. No organization can thrive on one person's skills.

The Bottom Line: Leaders exert more influence through relationships than through the authority of (a) their role, (b) delegation, and (c) job descriptions. Do the regularity, format, and atmosphere of our weekly staff meetings build and maintain the quality of relationships essential to effective mission and ministry in our congregation?

*For the distinction between Vision Statement and Mission Statement, see *Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 23, Fine-Tuning the Organizational and Communication Engine.* Download this resource free of charge at the www.TheParishPaper.com Web site.

II. How to Create a Staff Covenant

Few congregational health factors are so helpful when present and so destructive when absent as a cohesive, mutually supportive staff team. The entire staff may want to, over a period of several weeks, work together to perfect a "covenant of mutual support" that each staff member signs. Through such a covenant, staff members hold one another accountable for (a) exhibiting positive behaviors and conversational statements and (b) avoiding negative behaviors and conversational statements in regard to another staff member.

As part of this staff covenant development process, and to protect themselves and one another against the damage caused by "triangulation," staff members sometimes agree on and memorize statements that they use when a church member tries to engage them in critical, hurtful conversations about other staff members.

One helpful book that discusses a procedure for developing staff covenants and also makes a good study-discussion book for staff meetings: George Cladis, *Leading the Team-Based Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999).

The following staff covenant illustrates this type of document.

Desiring to be faithful to Christ in our relationships with one another, we covenant to the following attitudes and behaviors with other staff members. We will . . .

- Respect, honor, and support one another's ministries.
- Intentionally encourage one another.
- Speak well of one another to others.
- Avoid speaking unkindly of one another to others.
- Disagree openly, discuss and work through differences of opinion, and avoid burying issues.
- Avoid triangulation when others attempt such alliances with us—by not appearing sympathetic to criticisms of other staff members and by making statements such as, "Have you discussed that with . . . ? I strongly suggest that you do that."
- Scrupulously maintain confidentialities.
- Forgive ourselves and one another.
- Faithfully attend all staff meetings, unless illness or travel prevents our presence.
- Respecting the pressured time commitments of others, start and end meetings on time.

Signed by Every Staff Member:

III. Classic Transition Issues during the Six Stages of Clergy Tenure

A clergyperson's service with each congregation unfolds in six predictable stages. Effective clergy navigate these stages without getting washed overboard. Effective personnel committees understand and assist in these transition stages.

Stage One—Honeymoon: This getting-acquainted period is a glorious time. Unless the new pastor does something truly stupid or immoral, these are happy months. Since neither party in the marriage is well acquainted with the other yet, each has little about which to complain.

Stage Two—Sighting Hidden Icebergs: This period runs from year one through year two in small churches, year one through year three in midsize churches, and year one through year five in large churches. Icebergs invisible at the honeymoon stage begin looking formidable. Both parties learn the real truth about each other—the good, the bad, the ugly. Some of this information is not positive. Like the same time-frame in marriages, irritation is a synonym for this stage. Faultfinding increases. Divorce court looms in the distance.

The complexity of this second stage increases when (a) the seminary student serves his or her first parish, (b) a clergyperson comes from the military chaplaincy to a congregation, (c) a layperson assumes the role of part-time pastor in a small congregation, (d) the pastor of a small congregation (fewer than 125 in worship attendance) becomes pastor of a midsize or large congregation, (e) the pastor of a midsize congregation (between 125 and 300 in worship attendance) becomes pastor of a large congregation.

For practical principles and procedures that assist clergy in addressing those and other special transitions, see *Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 22, How to Strengthen Clergy/Staff Leadership & Relationship Skills.* Download this resource free of charge at the www.TheParishPaper.com Web site.

Stage Three—Liking You, Anyway: Clergy enter this pleasant phase after a major crisis or series of small confrontations—at approximately three-to-five years—sometimes seven years in large churches. At this stage, pastor and parish reach a positive relationship. They know each other, flaws and all. And they like each other anyway. "It takes two years for you and your church to get to know each other. Then it takes a year or so to get over it." (Michael and Rebecca Sanders, *The Pastor's Unauthorized Instruction Book*)

Stage Four—Specialization: The pastor gets bored, though she or he may not recognize or admit it. Seven times around the church-season cycle leaves a pastor with few surprises. People appreciate their pastor but do not say so as often. In unconscious response to boredom and/or affirmation needs, the pastor devotes more time to a specialized field. Examples: counseling, civic work, denominational service, Holy Land tours, public speaking, writing, scouting, or Lions Club; the possibility list is infinite. The big difference between effective pastors and less effective colleagues: specialization does not cause neglect of their congregational responsibilities.

Stage Five—Rocking Chair Temptations: At ten years beyond the starting gate, the pastor knows the parish personalities and foibles. He or she knows how to get things done with minimum time expenditure. As someone quipped, the three great clergy temptations are to "whine, shine, or recline." In this fifth stage, the "recline temptation" dominates. Effective clergy overcome this temptation to homestead in a rocking chair on the church's front porch. They attend seminars, read books, and research new ideas. They do not grow stale; they grow wiser.

Stage Six—Benevolent Grandfather Years: Twenty years into their tenure, pastors perform weddings for children whose mothers they visited in the hospital at delivery time. Clergypersons who make it this distance have developed immense pastoral skill. Parishioners now view them as "family" and think of them in the same way they do their grandfather: *he has always been there; we expect he always will.* This is a delightful, dangerous stage. Delightful because self-confidence has never been higher; dangerous because sunbathing in this relational warmth can distract pastors from energetically and creatively sprinting for the finish line.

The Bottom Line: Through which stage is our pastor(s) navigating? Is our lay crew assisting or hindering this stage of the voyage?

IV. Classic Conflict Issues in Twelve Congregational Sizes

Congregational size greatly determines appropriate leadership style and emphasis. Churches face many obvious obstacles on the road to greater effectiveness; other barriers are doubly challenging because they are invisible. Which of the following pictures give clues for how to lead our type of church?

● Churches that average one to forty in morning-worship attendance operate like farms that employ a seasonal worker to pick apples. The congregation's leaders give their "supply preacher" authority for that task. Laypersons make all other decisions.

To grow beyond this size, a church must add two more adult groups, i.e. adult Sunday school classes, prayer groups, and weeknight covenant groups. Many of the congregation's leaders who said to the arriving pastor, "We want our church to grow!" staunchly resist adding the new adult groups that make that growth possible. To them, it feels like we are dividing the family. Conflict increases before, during, and after these positive changes.

● Churches that average forty-one to seventy in morning-worship attendance operate like a farm family: it employs outsiders for specific tasks such as bailing hay (preaching, hospital calls, burying, marrying). The part-time pastor has authority for specific ecclesiastical tasks. Family members make all other decisions.

To grow beyond seventy to eighty in average worship attendance, a church must develop (a) an excellent nursery with one paid staff person and (b) a junior high and/or senior high youth group in addition to Sunday school. Leaders often veto these and other new ideas because "that is too expensive" or because they think the changes are unnecessary. Conflict increases before, during, and after changes that permit membership growth.

● Churches that average seventy-one to one hundred in morning-worship attendance operate like a "mom and pop" grocery store. Clergy are like the one employee of such a business. They are "chaplains" who lead little. Matriarchs and/or patriarchs make the major decisions.

To grow beyond 115 in worship, long-term members must begin feeling comfortable with not knowing the names of everyone in the sanctuary. Because this feels like having strangers at your family dinner table each evening, some members make comments like, "Things aren't the same anymore. With all those new people, I just don't know anyone." Because of that anxiety reaction, some leaders unconsciously throw antisocial gravel into the gears that make possible the attendance growth. Conflict increases before, during, and after attitude and behavior changes that permit membership growth.

● Churches that average 101-300 in morning worship attendance operate like a YMCA. Most of the several specialized programs are volunteer-led. Committees make the major decisions.

To grow beyond 170-180 worshippers, a church must add two part-time staff members, one of whom focuses on youth. Often, the governing board blocks this change by saying, "We can't afford it. Why can't we do it with volunteers? If we pay a youth director, are we going to start paying the Sunday school teachers?" Conflict increases before, during, and after positive changes that permit membership growth.

● Churches that average 301-450 in morning-worship attendance operate like a family-owned business corporation. The family-member owners mingle with the paid staff to manage the various ministries. The standing committees retain the decision-making authority.

To grow beyond 290-300 worshippers, a church needs twenty-one regularly meeting adult groups that focus on fellowship, study, or service (not counting the standing committees). Often, the staff resists adding the new groups that provide entry points for new members because (a) it seems like "we are already doing that with the 'thus-and-such group'" and (b) it seems to add unnecessary hours to already packed staff-clocks. Often, the overworked staff members, committees, and volunteer leaders ask, "Are you sure we need to do that? We have a lot going on already. Just look at the monthly calendar and the list in the worship bulletin! Where do I get the time to develop and lead those groups and ministries? Where do we get the volunteers?" Conflict increases before, during, and after attitude changes that permit membership growth.

● Churches that average 451-700 in morning-worship attendance operate like a large department store. Like department heads, the staff members lead the committees, providing most of their new ideas. Yet the committees retain most of the decision-making authority.

To grow beyond 450-550 worshippers, a church must develop evangelization methods that match its size, especially at the point of hospitality to first-time worship guests and getting new members into groups. Often, the staff members are so busy serving the corporate subdivisions that they have little time for that purpose. Conflict increases before, during, and after the changes that permit membership growth.

● Churches that average 701-900 in morning-worship attendance operate like a shopping mall containing several privately managed stores. Like store owners, staff not only provide committees with ideas; they set the vision and direction. The senior pastor, like a shopping mall executive, exerts *control* mostly through overall visioning, budget processes, and wise staff selection (as the mall executive decides who rents retail space).

To grow beyond 700 worshippers, a church must combat feelings of depersonalization and employ a full-time director of volunteer ministries who develops systematic procedures for assimilating new members. More than 70 percent of the members must (a) start feeling comfortable with someone other than the senior minister as their pastor and (b) derive their primary fellowship from one of the congregation's subgroups. Conflict increases before, during, and after the changes that permit membership growth.

● Churches that average 901-1,800 in morning-worship attendance operate like a publicly owned corporation that values its staff because they bring special expertise to the corporation. Standing committees sometimes number only three: personnel, finance, and programming. Short-term task forces institute most major changes, led by the senior pastor and staff. "Corporation president" describes the senior pastor's role.

To grow beyond 900-1,000 worshippers, the organizational structure must move beyond committee-led and become staff-led—while remaining lay-governed. Specialized lay and clergy staff organize and lead large numbers of volunteers in specific ministries. Committees and governing boards still exist, but the balance of their functional role shifts toward establishing and maintaining policies and procedures for ministries, not just serving as volunteers in those ministries. Because many governing boards fail to develop structures that allow for this shift, only 1 percent of American churches exceed this size. Conflict increases before, during, and after the changes that permit membership growth.

● Churches that average 1,800-3,000 in morning-worship attendance operate like a denomination. The congregation may send money home to support the denomination, but the senior pastor behaves much like the CEO of a denomination. Increasing the membership beyond this size produces little conflict; staff and volunteer leaders have grown accustomed to multiplication.

● Churches that average 3,001-10,000 in morning-worship attendance operate like Harvard Medical School. The congregation (a) cares for attendees' spiritual needs, (b) teaches other professionals, and (c) publishes specialized literature. The senior pastor is often a distinguished author and speaker whose thinking and writing influences other congregations.

● Churches that average more than 10,000 in morning-worship attendance operate like a large university with a medical school, a law school, etc., each functioning under the huge organizational umbrella. The senior pastor is like a university president.

The Bottom Line: Which of these twelve pictures provide clues for leading your congregation? Do any of the twelve describe the nature of a past or present conflict?

V. Prevention and Management of Normal and Abnormal Conflict

As noted above, normal conflict happens at size-transition hinge-points and/or (a) when clergy in one size church begin serving a larger congregation and/or (b) when a senior pastor continues in a congregation that grows through those hinge-points.

In congregations that suffer from long-term and/or repetitive conflict between (a) pastor and church members, (b) church members and other church members, or (c) both of the above, those conflict patterns repeatedly create agenda items for the personnel committee. In such circumstances, wise personnel committees attempt to shift church leaders from fire-fighting behaviors to fire-prevention behaviors. One way to accomplish that shift is to lead the congregation's governing board in a study/discussion of *Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 3, How to Prevent and Resolve Congregational Conflict.* Its principles and procedures assist clergy, staff, and lay leadership in minimizing the damage that differences of opinion and a few "bent" personalities inflict on congregational mission and ministry effectiveness. Download this resource free of charge at the www.TheParishPaper.com Web site.

Study-Discussion Session #4

PPP Team Member: Prepare for this discussion session by making notes in the margins, especially with regard to the following questions.

1. Do you recall instances where this paragraph or section was true in your personal experience and/or in a congregation?
2. What would you like to add or subtract from this paragraph or section?
3. In what ways does the idea in this section or paragraph seem true of our congregation?
4. What suggested methods from this section or paragraph should we consider using in our congregation?

PPP Team Discussion Leader: As you move through this discussion session, ask PPP Team members to take turns sharing their answers to the above questions.

I. How Much Staff Is Enough for Our Size Congregation?

Church members know that effective staffing is a crucial component of congregational effectiveness. Less often, however, do members agree on, "How many staff members, and what kind?" The following observations do not cover every staffing issue in the various sizes of congregation. But the suggestions address the most frequently expressed concerns in more than 700 on-site consultations with congregations in twenty-five denominations.

For several reasons, some of which are as follows, the average congregation requires far more staff members than it needed in the 1950s. (a) Smaller numbers of children per family mean more households per 100 worship attendees. (b) Fewer volunteer church workers are available because more women work outside the home. (c) Smaller family units create more pastoral care needs per 100 worshipers. (d) Parishioners' expect a wider range of church-staff skills that provide greater variety in specialized programming, such as singles ministry, Parents' Day Out, etc.

Small Churches: The majority of members in churches that average fewer than 125 in morning worship want a full-time pastor. Escalating health insurance premiums increasingly make that an impossible dream. When we change the question from "What do people want?" to "What works best?" we get a different answer.

Everyone can cite an exception to the following statement. Generally speaking, however, small churches more often grow in membership under the leadership of a part-time, bi-vocational lay pastor than when a seminary trained pastor divides his or her time between two congregations. Recognizing this fact, many denominations are taking more seriously the need to train, certify, and give appropriate recognition to part-time and full-time diaconal or licensed pastors.

Secretarial Staff: Like elevated blood pressure in the human body—called "the silent killer"—insufficient secretarial/clerical staff often goes undetected, uncorrected, and damages mission and ministry effectiveness.

At 100 in average worship attendance, churches need an office secretary who works five mornings per week—twenty hours. What if the secretary also carries financial secretary, treasurer, and bookkeeping duties? That requires a Monday-through-Friday, thirty-hours-per-week secretary.

Small and midsize churches (fewer than 300 in average worship attendance) should employ their church secretary from outside their congregation's membership. This reduces the natural inclination of church members to feel that the secretary (because she is a member) exercises more power and control in church life than is appropriate. Additionally, hiring a member as church secretary in a small church is similar to employing relatives in a secular business. They are easy to hire, and they often bring a high emotional commitment to their work. However, if they experience unhappiness or job performance deficiencies, the emotional damage from discharging them is far greater than when they are not family members.

Midsize Churches: One full-time pastor and a full-time church secretary can care for a congregation whose average worship attendance is 125-150. For each 100 worship attendees beyond 150, congregations need one additional program staff member or part-time equivalencies thereof (in addition to part-time music staff such as organists and choir directors).

As they grow from 150 to 250 in worship attendance, wise congregations add one, then two or more, quarter-time or half-time lay staff who specialize in ministries such as youth, elementary children, hospital visitation, etc. Examples: a quarter-time person for youth ministry (junior high through college age); a quarter-time person for sixth grade and below, including all programs that pertain to these age groups; a quarter-time person responsible for children and youth choirs.

Why is employing several part-time laypersons wiser than adding a full-time associate pastor who carries several portfolios? (a) The amount of ministry accomplished is greater per staff dollar spent. (b) Lay staff specialists usually stay longer. (c) The first full-time clergyperson in this size church usually fails, partly because he or she displaces some of the decision-making and leadership of several laypersons who had been handling these roles as volunteers. Yes, they feel overloaded and they want help. But they also feel uncomfortable about giving up or sharing their authority. A part-time lay staffer provides an easier emotional transition than does a full-time associate pastor.

Employing part-time staff from within the congregation always involves some risks. What if the job performance proves less than satisfactory? What if the working arrangement proves unsatisfactory to the staff member? Minimize those risks by employing part-time lay staff members on a yearly contract basis, with both parties reviewing the contract at the end of each year. Other options include seeking gifted laypersons in other local congregations whose theological perspective is similar to ours by asking the pastors of those congregations for names. Generally speaking, as a church grows closer to 300 in average worship attendance, employing members as staff becomes less dangerous.

What qualifications are required in these lay staff positions? Each person should possess a *passion* for his/her ministry role, *spiritual gifts* appropriate to that role, *aptitude* for the role, *skills* appropriate to the role, and *willingness to work some evening hours each week* to accomplish the role. Passion, gifts, and aptitude are essential qualifications; staff members who possess those qualifications can increase their skills through workshop and continuing education training, whereas no amount of continuing education compensates for the absence of passion, gifts, and aptitude for a particular ministry role.

What about music staff? If the church adds a contemporary-style worship service when it reaches 180 or more in average worship attendance, strongly consider two part-time music directors instead of one full-time director. If possible, as the congregation grows, add children(s) and youth choirs under the leadership of quarter-time directors. Contact three large or megachurches of your denomination and ask them to share copies of job descriptions for their music staff, since churches of that size typically have such documents.

In growing congregations of this or any size, if the new part-time staff member is genuinely needed and if the person is competent, the new position usually generates sufficient increased donation revenue to pay for itself in six months to one year.

At the 250-to-300 average worship attendance range, the pastor begins needing someone to carry additional clergy responsibilities such as weddings and funerals. If such a person is available, the best step is calling a one-fourth-time or one-half-time retired clergyperson. In a few instances, such as congregations near military installations, ordained chaplains who are members of the congregation can assist the pastor at times when another clergyperson is needed.

Another possibility at the 250-300 average worship attendance range is a full-time specialist (with an undergraduate degree) whose responsibilities cover music, Christian education, and youth ministry. Such individuals are trained in undergraduate programs at the following schools: Centenary College, Shreveport, Louisiana; Presbyterian College, Clinton, South Carolina; Oklahoma City University, Oklahoma City Pfeiffer University, NC.

Secretarial Staff: At 150 in average worship attendance, congregations should move as quickly as possible to employing a full-time office secretary. One of the best financial investments a congregation of this size can make, a capable full-time secretary facilitates the ministry involvement of church members, maintains high-quality communication flow, and maximizes efficient time-use by the pastor and other staff persons for tasks that they and they alone can perform. Gayle Hilligoss sums up a church secretary's role this way: information center, office manager, administrative assistant, computer specialist, writer, editor, publisher, public relations director, communications chief, graphic designer, resource source, and bookkeeper. Who performs these ministries if the church lacks sufficient clerical staff? The pastor; thus, draining time away from ministries that he or she alone can do.

Warning #1: Lay leaders in many midsize churches fail to see that "get more volunteers" is a mirage answer to staff overload. Volunteer "office angel" teams who answer the telephone and serve as receptionists provide valuable ministry. However, paid office-staff members play a *different role*. They bring daily continuity—without which communication breaks down and misunderstandings multiply, diverting precious clergy and program-staff time to repair work.

Warning #2: Two part-time secretaries do not equal one full-time secretary. Someone must carry the communication ball between the two secretaries. Inevitably, that person is the pastor. Supervising two part-time secretaries also takes more than twice as much of the pastor's time as does supervising one full-time secretary. Nor do a half-time secretary, plus two-to-five "office angel" volunteers who fill in during the afternoons, equal one full-time secretary. Some of the volunteers sometimes fail to appear on their day, without providing a replacement. Guess who fills in for those absent volunteers? The pastor, of course!

Warning #3: "We have 300 in worship," the governing board member said. "Our full-time secretary also handles the financial secretary role—keeping track of contributions. I think we need another secretary, but my board does not agree. What do you think?"

To carry a growing load of financial and accounting responsibilities that a volunteer can no longer handle, a midsize church that grows from 150 toward 300 in average worship attendance also needs an additional clerical staff member with bookkeeping skills.

Warning #4: Unfortunately, many churches use marginal ethics when establishing clerical, secretarial and administrative assistant salaries. This usually produces short-term, less than satisfied employees and frustrated pastors who waste mountains of God's and the church's ministry time training new people. To determine the appropriate salary, check with (a) churches of your size in your community, (b) the state employment office, (c) private employment agencies, and (d) if your community has one gigantic employer such as a university, check their starting salary levels, since this is likely to be the organization that lures away underpaid church clerical staff.

Warning #5: Stresses produced by insufficient secretarial staff become especially obvious when churches grow beyond these worship attendance levels: 100, 175, 290, 450, 700, 900, 1,800, and 3,000. Caught up in the "we have never needed that before" mentality, the governing board and personnel committee often fails to see the overload and take action to correct it.

Large Churches: Beyond 350 in average worship attendance, economy of scale in staffing is mostly myth. One full-time program-staff person (or part-time equivalencies thereof) is needed for each additional 100 people beyond 150 in average worship attendance, especially in mainline congregations (in addition to part-time or full-time music staff such as organists and choir directors).

Some large congregations have developed strong, large youth groups that serve both the congregation and the community by employing a full-time staff member trained by Young Life. For information and/or to initiate the process of securing such a youth director, contact the National Director for Young Life Church Partnerships, Charlie Scott at 407/628-3303.

Secretarial Staff: "Our worship attendance averages 900." he said. "Our two full-time secretaries are bordering on burnout, despite the assistance of fifteen volunteer receptionists who cover the telephone. How many secretaries should we have?"

One reliable formula is, "one clerical staff member for each additional 200 worshipers beyond 350." Another reliable formula is, "one clerical staff member for each two full-time program staff or part-time equivalencies thereof.

Megachurches: Above 1,000 in average worship attendance, staff members must function in a different way than in previous years. In smaller churches, staff members can have delegated to them responsibilities by which they serve as assistants to the senior pastor or the other pastors. Above the 1,000-average-worship-attendance level, the senior pastor must hold staff members accountable for results in their area of expertise, rather than merely delegating to them assistant responsibilities and closely supervising them.

In other words, the senior pastor must place more stress on actual results than on detailed guidance in how staff should attain the results. This is a difficult transition for a senior pastor. Few continuing-education events are designed for precisely this need, and they are expensive. However, failure to successfully make this transition is even more expensive. To get a description of one of the best of these, a one-week course titled "Management of Managers," contact the University of Michigan Business School, Executive Education Center, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1234, 734/763-1000.

Other education options for senior pastors, executive pastors, and supervisors in large congregations, available from and scheduled through the American Management Association (www.amanet.org/catalog) each year in various parts of the United States, include seminars such as Management Skills for New Supervisors (Seminar #2248), Making the Transition from Staff Member to Supervisor (Seminar #2243), Survival Skills for Supervisors (Seminar #2106), Leadership Skills for Supervisors (Seminar #2517), and Confronting the Tough Staff: Advanced Management Skills for Supervisors (Seminar #2140).

At approximately 1,000 in average worship attendance, the senior pastor should begin taking what some describe as "one step back" from the administration role. At that point, the church needs a business administrator (who can be either a pastor or a layperson) and a program director (who can be either a pastor or a layperson). These two individuals direct operations, programming, and staff. They are accountable to the senior pastor for results in their leadership roles. This arrangement frees the senior pastor from day-to-day details. Thus, he or she can focus on preaching, teaching, pastoral concerns, and serving as the public and parish symbol for the church.

Most churches that grow beyond 1,500 in average worship attendance *must* add to their staff an executive pastor. This person works in tandem with the senior pastor and usually serves as staff supervisor (including supervision of the business administrator who supervises the clerical staff) along with helping to guide the overall direction and function of the church.

For detailed ideas to expand the staff effectiveness in a church of this size, see procedures for staff meetings and other tips on pages 152-167 of Adam Hamilton's excellent book, *Leading Beyond the Walls* (Nashville: Abingdon Press).

In most megachurches, one of the custodial staff works second shift, usually 3:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. That individual handles matters such as locking the building, evening room arrangements necessary after daytime meetings in that same space, and cleaning that is easier to accomplish when less traffic is present.

The Bottom Line: What steps should our congregation take in addressing staffing questions?

II. How Much Should We Spend on Salaries?

As First Church's finance committee prepared the annual budget, someone asked, "What percentage of the budget do congregations of our size normally spend on salaries?"

That complex question has at least two answers: (a) a statistical generality and (b) a list of factors that influence the way most congregations answer the question.

A. Statistical Generality. Whether worship attendance averages 30 or 1,800 people, the *average* congregation expends approximately 50 percent of its operating budget on personnel. This includes all salaries, related benefits, and expenses—such as pension fund and health care—for *all* personnel (including clergy, program staff, secretarial, and custodial). A few churches spend 60 percent. Some spend 44 percent. But churches typically spend about one-half of their operating budgets to provide the clergy and lay staff members who recruit, coordinate, and lead the ministries of lay volunteers.

B. What Factors Influence the Percentage Congregations Spend on Personnel? Among the many factors that determine what percentage of the members' financial giving the congregation spends on staff, the following list is especially noticeable:

- In a large percentage of mainline congregations, especially those founded prior to 1960, the majority of members view the church staff as "people we hire to do the church's ministries for us." That tradition requires many more staff members per 100 worship attendees. In many nondenominational congregations established since 1960 and comprised of younger-median-age-members, parishioners view the staff differently—as "people we hire to help us involve the members in ministries." This attitude requires fewer staff per 100 worship attendees.
- Congregations that use more than 20 percent of their offerings on debt service to building mortgages tend, of necessity, to lower their budget percentage spent on personnel. The downside of that pattern: shortage of staff may stifle a congregation's membership growth, thus making the mortgage increasingly difficult to pay. The antidote: conscientiously conduct another capital campaign at the end of every three-year capital campaign. This (a) prevents an approximate 30-to-50 percent drop in total giving at the end of each three-year capital campaign and (b) keeps the congregation's debt service from robbing its operating budget of the money needed to maintain sufficient staff.
- Congregations whose leaders try to pay their staff the lowest possible salaries tend to, during the earlier decades of this philosophy, spend a smaller percentage of their budgets on personnel. Over time, that financially conservative attitude (often seen in a church with numerous lay leaders who operate small businesses) begins to undermine the congregation's future. Unappreciated staff members produce hidden financial expenses. Highly skilled people leave. Less-skilled people stay. Short-term savings resulting from low salaries become big, long-term expenses when ministry quality diminishes.
- In too many congregations, financial stewardship levels far below the potential of members dictate (a) high percentages of the budget spent on personnel and (b) inadequate numbers of staff. Thus, when leaders discuss staffing needs, the question of "what kind and how many?" is often sabotaged by the poverty-syndrome question of "can we really afford that much staff?" The prime reason for inadequate financial stewardship is virtually always an inadequate (or non-existent) annual stewardship campaign.

When a church needs more staff, the governing board often needs to institute an effective annual stewardship campaign at the same time it addresses staffing questions. Avoid the pattern of saying, "Let's get the money first and then discuss the staff." That pattern usually means the staffing needs never get discussed. A far better procedure is to simultaneously (a) institute an effective annual stewardship campaign and (b) search for the best possible answer to the question of "how much and what kind of staff do we need?"

For assistance in addressing financial stewardship questions, obtain *Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 5, How to Increase Financial Stewardship.* This resource provides principles and procedures that (a) make financial stewardship part of member/attendees' spiritual growth and (b) adequately support congregational ministries. Download this resource free of charge at the www.TheParishPaper.com Web site.

III. How Do We Obtain Quality Staff?

Personnel committees can prevent numerous personnel headaches by fine-tuning their hiring procedures. Note: Due to the great denominational protocol variations regarding clergy (called versus appointed), this section focuses primarily on lay staff selection. However, many parts of this section are valuable for congregations in denominations that "call" their pastors and associate pastors.

The personnel committee benefits from asking itself the following questions:

1. Do we use appropriate hiring procedures? Delegate the search process to the staff member who supervises this individual. That supervisor updates the job description, or drafts a new one for a new position, and begins searching for candidates.

That supervisor chairs the interview team, often appointed by the personnel committee. Usually, one personnel committee member serves on the interview team, plus two other people who are (a) involved in this ministry area and/or (b) possess expertise in a discipline relevant to this staff position.

Advertise the position as "open to all qualified applicants, both inside and outside the congregation." That prevents church members from assuming that they automatically have the inside track. Distribute the job description to all interested parties.

2. Is the job description accurate and clearly stated? An effective job description answers the following questions: (a) What are the three, four, or five primary responsibilities of this position? More than that means you lack clarity about this position's goals. (b) What general objectives am I trying to achieve in this work? (c) What *top priorities* are more important than anything else I do in this job? (d) How does our church measure effectiveness in this position? Example: number of kids in the youth group, etc. (e) I am directly accountable to what staff member; to whom do I report? (f) When and in what manner does my supervisor evaluate my performance? (g) Over what decisions do I have authority?

3. What qualities are essential to effectiveness in this job? Put the answer in writing *before* you begin considering candidates! Example: this staff member should possess (a) *passion* for his/her ministry role, (b) spiritual *gifts* appropriate to that role, (c) *aptitude* for the role, (d) *skills* appropriate to the role, (e) *"people skills"* in working with other staff, (f) *cooperative spirit* in working with the senior pastor and supervisor, and (g) *willingness to work some evening hours every week* to accomplish the role. Staff members can increase their skills through workshops and continuing education. No amount of training compensates for absence of the other qualities.

4. Where do we look for staff? If we employ someone who attends our congregation, include the following sentences in the hiring interview and new-staff orientation: While church members are free to express an opinion on any issue, a staff member who is also a church member *relinquishes that prerogative* in favor of behaviors appropriate to the "staff member" role. (That principle *includes* the spouse of lay staff members.) In other words, we expect our employees to voice concerns about church policies or procedures *only* to the senior pastor and/or in staff meetings—then in all private and public conversations support whatever decision the senior pastor and/or staff deem appropriate—never making remarks such as, "I think we should have done it differently." A church member is loyal to his or her personal opinion about what is right for "our congregation." By contrast, an effective employee's loyalty is to the staff team. He or she is accountable to the senior pastor as chief of staff (and in large congregations to the immediate supervisor). Any other type of behavior by an employee who is also a staff member creates conflict and ill will that damages the employee, other staff, and the congregation's ability to deliver effective mission and ministries.

5. How do we run references on potential staff? Never rely *only* on paperwork reference checks. Telephone, use the following outline, and take notes:

I'm . . . from . . . Church in . . . . Our church is looking for someone to fill the position of . . . . One of the people we are considering is . . . . He/she gave us your name as a reference. May I ask you a few questions and get your opinion about . . . ?

After the reference answers this and each question, say, "thank you" and go to the next question.

How long have you known . . . , and in what capacity have you observed or interacted with him/her?

If you were making a list of his/her greatest strengths, what would come to your mind for that list? At first, some references do not know how to phrase their responses. They become more comfortable with the conversation after they begin talking.

Do *not* ask, "What are his/her weaknesses?" Instead, say the following: *No one is perfect. Everyone has some growing edges in which they or the people who work with them wish they had greater skill. If you were forced to make a list of his/her growing edges, what would you put on that list?* Now that the reference has listed several strengths and become comfortable with the conversation, he or she does not hesitate to answer this question.

Listen responsively. Ask follow-up questions such as, "It sounds like . . . would be really good at . . . , but might not be as comfortable in doing . . . ?

What is his/her most endearing quality?

What is his/her most irritating quality? Some references cannot think of an answer to this question. Other references respond with amazing information not revealed in their previous answers. Example: After giving positive answers to the first two questions, one reference said, "He needs to listen more. He over-talks. He talks for his wife. He talks for other people. He often comes across in a dominating way during meetings."

Anything else you would like to say about . . . ?

Would you mind giving me the name of one other person who has had the opportunity to observe . . . 's ministry? After the reference responds, ask, *"Do you happen to have his/her telephone number handy?"*

Almost every applicant can provide a list of references that highly recommend him/her. This "second ring" of information often produces a wealth of new insights. Telephone this second ring of references. Repeat the process, with only one variation. On Question #1, say, *"I believe you are acquainted with . . . ?*

<u>Reference questions for clerical staff</u>: On a scale of one to ten, with ten being the highest, how would you rate her telephone manner? . . . her neatness? . . . her personality and ability to relate positively to other people in the office? . . . her ability to understand letters and other written communication? . . . her ability to understand oral instructions the first time? . . . her ability to handle stressful workloads by organizing her priorities? . . . her accuracy with details and figures?

<u>Reference questions that determine quickness, energy, and productivity levels</u>:

On a scale of one to ten, with ten being the highest, how would you rate her enthusiasm level? . . her general energy level? . . . her willingness to take initiative in moving ahead to the completion of projects and responsibilities? . . . her tendency to procrastinate on things that are difficult to accomplish? If you were comparing her with other employees you have known, how would you describe the volume of work she produces in an eight-hour day—extremely high, higher than average, or lower than average?

Background checks on church workers (paid staff and volunteers) are essential. Obtain the names of security companies from your denominational office, local law enforcement officers or the Chamber of Commerce.

6. How do we avoid the halo effect? This inclination—inherent in all hiring processes—happens when a job applicant possesses one or two wonderful qualities that impress the senior pastor, supervisor, or some of the search committee members. They rush to close the deal, forgetting other important factors. Later, the disregarded deficiencies become apparent in the employee's performance pattern. Committee members wonder how they overlooked those obvious flaws.

To reduce this danger, ask prior to hiring someone, "What personality traits are essential to effectiveness in this ministry role?" To the following questions add items pertinent to this position in your congregation:

1. Is this candidate's vision for the church's ministry similar to that of the senior pastor and lay leaders?
2. Is the candidate's theological orientation compatible with that of the senior pastor and lay leaders?
3. Do the candidate's ministry strengths compliment rather than duplicate those of the senior pastor and other key staff?
4. Does the candidate have a history of loyalty to supervisors, even when disagreeing with some of their ideas?
5. Do the candidate's primary passions for ministry match the passions needed in this position?
6. Is the candidate gifted for the ministry responsibilities outlined in the job description?
7. Do the candidate's core values seem to match the ministry role in our congregation?
8. Does the candidate's spouse have a positive attitude regarding partnership with someone in a professional Christian ministry position?
9. Does the candidate have sufficient years of and the types of experiences needed to prepare for this position?
10. Does the candidate capably handle confidential information about church and staff members?
11. Is the candidate a self-motivated self-starter?
12. Does the candidate consistently deliver on promises and commitments?
13. Does the candidate usually follow through in completing administrative details?
14. Does the candidate have good interpersonal relationship skills?
15. Is the candidate a team player with other staff?
16. Is the candidate a person of honesty and integrity?
17. Is the candidate an effective time manager?
18. Is the candidate an effective conflict manager?
19. Does the candidate have a high energy level?
20. Does the candidate usually exhibit a positive appearance?
21. Is the candidate sensitive to people's feelings and needs?
22. Is the candidate a good listener?
23. Does the candidate communicate clearly?
24. Is the candidate joyful and positive in conversation and manner?
25. Does the candidate possess spiritual enthusiasm and optimism?

7. How do we interview the candidate? Try this outline:

Wait until you have at least two strong candidates; three is better. Two candidates can polarize a search committee; a third person often provides a point of comparison, making a clear choice easier.

Schedule one hour for each interview. Mail resumes to interview-team members in advance.

During the first twenty minutes, only the interview-team chairperson asks questions. Other team members listen. Ask open-ended questions so the candidate talks at length.

Possible interview questions (you may not complete all of these during the first twenty minutes):

As you look back across the years, what are some of the ministry experiences you have found the most satisfying?

Among a pastor's (staff member's) wide variety of activities, what are the two or three things in which you feel you have the most skill?

If you had to list a couple of things in which you feel you need to develop more skill, what would they be?

Among all the things that churches do, what do you feel are the three most important ones?

In your experience as a . . . , among all the things that you usually do during a typical week, what are the three highest priorities for how you use your time?

What is your present housing situation? (If you live in a parsonage, can you see your way clear to making the transition into owning your own home? If you own your own home, would you consider moving to a church that provides you a parsonage?)

At the twenty-minute mark, the chair excuses the candidate from the room. The team compares observations/concerns and develops additional questions.

At the thirty-minute mark, the candidate returns. The interview continues, with the team chair asking all questions.

At the fifty-minute mark, the team chair opens the floor to the rest of the team for any follow-up questions they wish to ask.

Ask the candidate whether he/she can think of any additional information to add or has questions he/she would like to ask regarding the position.

Thank the candidate for his/her interest in the position. Tell him/her approximately when you plan to finalize the decision. Do not promise a precise date!

After completing the three interviews, team members decide whether they have sufficient consensus to offer one of the candidates the position.

Teams that lack consensus agree to a course of action. They may decide to dig deeper into the candidate's background or present ministry setting. Sometimes, the team asks the candidate to answer additional questions in writing or at a subsequent interview. (Several points adapted from Paul Nixon, *Fling Open the Doors* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002], pp. 169-170)

The Bottom Line: No one is perfectly suited for any position. Every new employee must grow some to effectively fill it. But personnel committees that faithfully follow this process (a) reduce the number of staff headaches, (b) increase the number of "happy camper" staff, and (c) more effectively accomplish the ministries to which God calls their congregation.

IV. How Do We Prepare for a New Pastor?

The following tips increase the likelihood of predominantly positive results in the new pastor-congregation marriage.

1. Deal with any unresolved conflict from past years or the previous pastor. Do not expect the new pastor to fix old problems. If you let those problems lap over into the next chapter, irritable feelings from past conflicts can damage the new ministry. People from both sides will urge the new pastor to become their "knight in shining armor" who fixes the problem. Translation: Fixing the problem means fixing the problem *the way I want it fixed.* Many people are less than perfectly satisfied. The new pastor gets blamed for the old conflict.

2. Dismiss ineffective or problem-producing employees. Examples: secretaries, custodians, program staff. Were they a pain in the past? The pattern usually continues. Failure to discharge problem staff in a timely fashion usually means the personnel committee wants to avoid confrontation rather than do its job. What happens when the committee insists on handing the new pastor a hatchet? Even the most incompetent staff members have friends who believe they are wonderful. Church-member disagreement with personnel committee decisions typically cause only minor disruption. If the new pastor gets blamed for the dismissal, major thunderstorms often erupt. Result: the congregation journeys into a side alley of emotional turmoil, away from its central mission of changing lives and helping hurting people.

3. Expect to work with your new pastor in strategic planning. That often includes basic questions such as the following: *Who are we?* (What is our congregation's "story," its self-identity; who are we historically in this place?) *Who is our neighbor?* (Beyond taking care of our own members, on what people groups or challenge does God call us focus our ministries?) *Why are we here?* (Is our task only to do annual reruns of our cherished traditions and community service, or should we encourage our neighbors outside the congregation to spiritually connect with Jesus Christ?)

4. New pastors often attract additional first-time worship visitors. Plan a hospitality response. Make a front door visit within thirty-six hours that (a) says "we appreciate you attending the worship service" and (b) hands them a copy of your church newsletter and a brochure that describes its ministries. Monday, the church secretary mails a welcome letter from the pastor. The following Saturday, another layperson telephones to get acquainted. For detailed how-to instructions, download the *Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 1, How to Transform Worship Visitors into Regular Attendees* at the www.TheParishPaper.com Web site.

5. New pastors sometimes reconnect inactive members. To encourage that serendipity to greater productivity, consider using the "Home for Christmas" program the first year after he or she arrives. Done by the book, Home for Christmas recovers up to 15 percent of inactive members. Especially effective in small and midsized churches, the program includes (a) lay leaders making home visits to all inactives during early November, (b) a fellowship luncheon after Sunday morning worship two weeks before Christmas, (c) an invitation letter and reservation card two weeks before the Home for Christmas luncheon, and (d) lay leaders making reminder telephone contacts four days prior to the Sunday luncheon. For detailed Home for Christmas how-to instructions, download free of charge the *Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 6, How to Shrink Your Church's Inactive Member List* at the www.TheParishPaper.com Web site. This resource also provides numerous other principles and procedures that (a) prevent active member/attendee dropout and (b) recover long-term inactive members.

The Bottom Line: The caption on a poster picturing a playful kitten reads, "Things are always at the best in their beginnings." With careful preparation, your congregation achieves that quality during the new pastor's first months of ministry.