

The Senior Minister Relations Committee

First, we have some new members! This prompts us to remind you about this committee and what they do (and introduce the committee to folks who are newer among us). The members are: **Karen Nousen (chair), Dean Whitten, Melinda Sims, and Eli Matthews.**

In our CAUCC governance structure, the Personnel Committee is not charged specifically with support/reflection/communication responsibilities regarding the Pastors, but the CAUCC bylaws recognize the need for a body that will attend to these areas. That body has been working with Pastor Michael Bush (Pastor John has his own committee), and is called the Ministerial Relations Committee (MRC).

The purpose of this group is to provide *support* for the Pastor and provide a *regular channel of communication* between the Pastor and the congregation. The idea is that PRC will help do the following (from Pastoral Relations Committee guidelines developed by the Christian Church DOC):

1. *Building Up The Body of Christ*

The MRC can help *build up the life of the church and its ministry*. The church is the Body of Christ, knit together by God for the mutual up-building of life. This responsibility calls for sensitive care and careful discernment regarding what is beneficial and is to be exercised in a humble and loving way.

2. *Support*

The MRC is to provide focused, consistent support for the pastor. Ministry is a high stress profession. The high level of personal and congregational expectations contribute to the need for support. Being a primary caregiver, the pastor needs a supportive environment for renewal. All human beings need the love and support of other human beings. Personal growth and the effectiveness with which a person functions depends in large measure upon the quality of support she or he receives. The MRC is a way in which a congregation is intentional about providing support for pastors. Focused attention has been given in recent years to clergy stress. Following is a summary statement about some of the factors that contribute to stress.

- **Work related stress factors for pastors can include:**
- **role ambiguity** – congregation members expecting pastors to “do it all” and meet all of their perceived needs.
- **role conflict** – clash between ministerial functions and personal life
- **role overload** – being overwhelmed by the potential of work that never ends
- **time demands** – constantly being thrown off schedule by unexpected issues
- **lack of pastoral care** – not having a solid counselor to turn to with your own problems
- **lack of chances to “de-role”** – to be taken care of yourself (instead of only caregiving)
- **future uncertainty** – knowing your whole future can depend upon how you get along in one parish and that “paying the bills” is connected to an institution that is in decline/collapse
- **loneliness** – the fact that few outside the ministry understand the demands on you that make you feel isolated even in the midst of commitment

Additionally, changing social patterns, demographic transitions, marginalization of the church, and conflicting beliefs are factors that contribute to *ministerial stress and impact the pastor’s personal life*.

- Following are “Three C’s” that provide a fuller definition of what constitutes support. Of the three, clarification will probably be the central focus of MRC sharing.
- ***Comfort:** This involves affirmations and expressions of care, appreciation, and acceptance.
- ***Clarification:** This involves integration of information, developing a holistic picture, sorting out the relevant from the irrelevant, and giving a focus to matters.

- ***Constructive Criticism:** This is probably the most difficult element. People are sometimes reluctant to criticize and are not always constructive. It means offering critical appraisal on matters of concern, or biblically speaking, to “speak the truth in love.”

3. Feedback And Communication

The MRC also helps to provide a regular channel of communication for cultivating an open, affirmative and creative relationship between the pastor and congregation, and enabling the church to fulfill its mission effectively. Communication is a vital ingredient in the provision of support. By providing a regular means of feedback and sharing, the MRC helps to prevent major crises and helps in the building of trust which is crucial to the function of ministry.

The MRC’s focus is *relational* as opposed to being a task centered group. It will give attention to feelings and emotional factors of ministry in the context of building up the Body of Christ.

4. Not a Grievance Committee

This group is not a “catch all” for all church-related issues. This is not the “go to” group to talk about the sanctuary temperature or how the hymns are played or the type of coffee brewed on Sunday mornings. However, if you have an issue that you have unsuccessfully attempted to resolve with the Pastor (in other words, you have already talked with him about it), this is when you most likely go to the MRC members.

The committee looks forward to working together with all of you!