

Northern California Nevada Conference
United Church of Christ
Committee on the Ministry, Section D

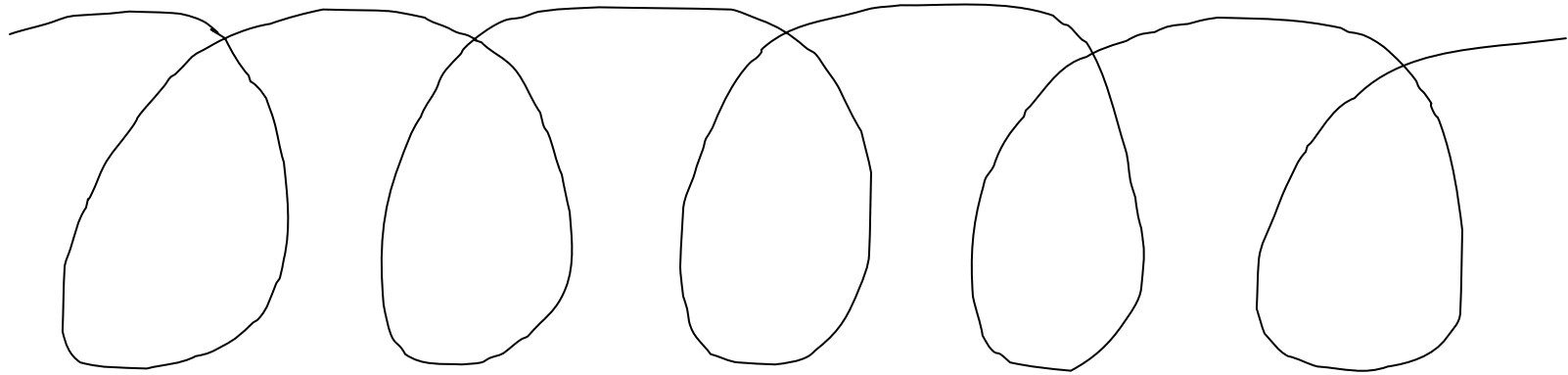
Annual Meeting 2002

Nurturing Communities of Faith
Through
Pastor – Parish Relations Committees

What is the function of a pastor-parish relations committee?

Goal: mutual nurture, fulfillment, challenge for pastor & congregation

Ongoing congregational life



Quality of relationship

Tenures of pastorates

- •
- • Monitoring group
- •

What does a PPR look like?

What a PPR is not

- A personnel or salary review committee
- An evaluation committee
- A channel for complaints about the pastor

What a PPR is

- A group to monitor the health of the pastor-congregation relationship

How is the committee composed?

- Composed of people mutually agreeable to pastor and governing body (council)

What are the characteristics of its members?

- Trusted by pastor to give truthful support
- Possess perspective on, and knowledge of, congregation

What are its powers?

- Advisory vs. direct decision-making power

Key question for the PPR: "What's it like to be a pastor here?"

Every faith community is different.

90% of what clergy do is invisible to 90% of the people, 90% of the time.

Much is confidential.

Help the congregation be realistic about expectations.

A handful of understanding people are invaluable to your pastor.

Complexities of the pastoral role

"role ambiguity" – the "mystical person"

The pastor easily becomes a lightning rod for congregational dissent, hard feelings, and expectations.

The pastor naturally attempts to respond to differing needs and expectations of many people. This leads to:

- Ambiguity in understanding one's role
- Stress trying to reconcile the ambiguity
- Tendency to over-extend oneself in the attempt to live into other people's projections of what a pastor is/should be

Therefore, the pastor is in a constant process of

- Role negotiation and re-negotiation
- Working to multiple (unspecified) "psychological contracts"

How the pastor-parish relations committee can assist

By helping to resolve the conflicting expectations, the ambiguities, which result in the message to the pastor: "You have to do it all!"

By being a source of concern and support for the pastor's family (understand their role ambiguity, too).

By being alert to the ways in which the pastor-congregation relationship

(a) can be kept healthy

(b) can be broken

How can the congregation–pastor relationship be broken?

By wounding, demeaning, destructive behavior on either side

By the pastor

- Belittling, patronizing
- Abusing
- Exploiting
- Untrustworthy behavior
- Sexual misconduct

By the congregation

- "clergy killers" (but avoid labeling which tends to become permanent!)
- Scapegoating (congregation fails to deal with own issues)
- Pastor consistently "putting out" and getting nothing (affirmation, \$\$) in return

Micro-management of the pastor by the laity may indicate past wounding by clergy in this community.

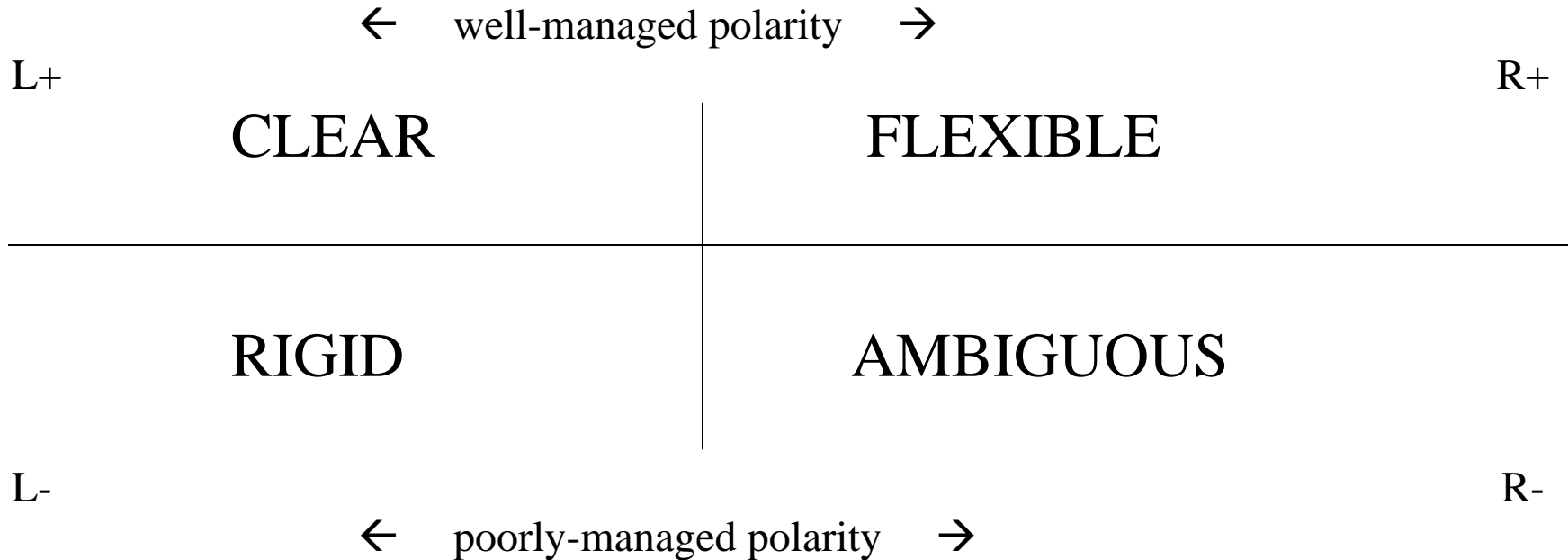
For Reflection

(You are invited to jot down thoughts or responses on the post-its during the first portion of the video presentation and place them on the large posters at "half-time." We will discuss, and later distribute copies of all the responses to you)

1. (on pink) An issue of concern the video raises for me is ...
2. (on yellow) A way our pastor-parish relations committee is *NOT* like the one suggested in the video is ...
3. (on blue) An issue to raise to my congregation's governing body or council regarding a pastor-parish relations committee is ...

Complexities of the pastoral role

POLARITIES - "a world of simultaneous, interlocking truths"



A problem can be *solved*.

A conflict can be *resolved*.

A polarity can only be *managed ... more or less well*.

Nurture – Transformation Polarity

← well-managed polarity →

- Caring for people
- Attending to the wounded
- Reaffirming God's love for everyone

- Challenge to grow up
- Encourage spiritual maturity
- Confronting sin

Nurture

Grace

Law

Transformation

Priest

Prophet

- Codependence
- "Take care of me"
- "What have you done for me lately?"

- Pushing excessive demands
- Relentlessly criticizing
- Impatience

← poorly-managed polarity →

The church has always stoned its prophets and crucified its leaders.
Who can help? Who will understand?

The PPR & Clergy Evaluation (Preferred: "ministry evaluation")

PPR can insure that inappropriate clergy evaluations are not conducted. Never allow the pastor to be the **only one** evaluated.

What do we like about ourselves as a spiritual community?

What concerns us about ourselves as a spiritual community? (Rev 1-3)

Ministry evaluation is a major intervention in the life of a congregation. Should be tied to strategic planning.

Evaluation process is mutual and contained, resulting in role negotiation
Pastor and leadership ask of one another:

"What would you like more of from me/us?"

"What would you like less of?"

"What would you like to keep the same?"

PPR & The Doing-Being Polarity

← well-managed polarity →

- Visiting the sick
- Pastoral care
- Prepare/deliver sermons

- Feeding the soul
- Rest and revitalization
- Time for reflection/perspective

DOING

BEING

- Neglecting own needs
- Neglecting spouse/children
- *Burnout*

- Narcissism
- Over-focussing on self
- Neglecting needs of others

← poorly-managed polarity →

The PPR can insure that the pastor has "being" time so that burnout is avoided.

Burnout – A "disease of the overcommitted"

Characteristics of burnout

- Physical and emotional exhaustion
- Cynicism
- Disillusionment
- Self-deprecation

Burnout can result from an unhealthy pastor-congregation relationship – the relationship that the PPR must monitor

Burnout coping strategies

- Spiritual formation
- Time out
 - Daily
 - Weekly
 - Yearly
 - Sabbatical

Loss of pastor's physical }
 relational } – well-being → *the congregation loses!*
 spiritual }