

Team Works

January 2005

A Resource for Congregations from Hamilton Conference Staff

YOUR MINISTRY AND PERSONNEL COMMITTEE: THE KNITTING NEEDLES OF YOUR PASTORAL CHARGE

By Jenny Stephens

*But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and **knit together** by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love. Ephesians 4: 15, 16*

Your Ministry and Personnel Committee members are the knitting needles of the pastoral charge. They take up the threads of the congregations' life and work and knit them with the skills and gifts of the Ministry Personnel and staff to make a new garment which gives shape to the vision and mission of the congregations making up the pastoral charge. Unlike Christ's robe this new garment is not seamless.

Like most people's knitting, certainly mine, there are stitches dropped along the way. Sometimes I notice them and go back to pick them up. Other times I only see them when I am too far on to pick them up and I later try and work them into the garment. There are times when the garment I am making is not the shape or style I originally planned. There are the squares which grow into scarves or the sweater that gets redesigned into a shawl. Running out of a particular wool, I add another colour.

So it is in the pastoral relationship being knit together through the work of the M&P Committee. Sometimes it involves looking back and reworking the dropped stitches. Sometimes it means starting over with a new

staff team, or a new M&P Committee. Sometimes the shape of the relationships gets redesigned as the mission is redefined. Sometimes new people are added into the mix of the pastoral charge's relationships. This can happen as congregations bring in new people or lose some of the stalwarts. It happens in realignment, disbanding or amalgamation. It can happen as new programs or ministries are introduced.

As in knitting, it is important for the members of the M&P Committee to know their left from their right hand and know what each is doing. They need to know the value of each thread and what it offers to the whole. They need to have an understanding of the pattern and how to follow the pattern. They need to be comfortable with figures as the rows are counted! There are times to hold one's tongue in exactly the right way so the knitting goes better. At other times, chatting while knitting with others can work well. There are times for confidentiality and for transparency, times for discerning the overall shape and times for focusing on the particular stitch in a particular row. There are ways of communicating which are helpful and ways that accelerate or exacerbate conflict.

Like knitting, the activity of the M&P Committee can be both satisfying and frustrating, but in the end it has immense rewards: the reward of seeing the garment become something beautiful, practical, and effective—a ministry worthy of God's calling.

For those who have never had the opportunity to knit in the context of the pastoral relationship or for those who are new knitting needles, I offer the following pieces of the knitting pattern! This pattern might help individuals within congregations, Board or Council members, staff or Ministry Personnel themselves or members of the M&P Committee to find the most satisfaction from the knitting process.

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The Basic Pattern

The Manual 2004 (s.244) contains the United Church of Canada's bylaws regarding the pastoral charge's M&P Committee. *A Handbook for Ministry and Personnel Committees* produced by the Ministry and Employment Policies and Services of General Council, provides the basic rubrics of knitting in this context. Published in October 1999 and revised September 2003, it should be in the hands of every member of the M&P Committee and available to others who give leadership in your congregation or pastoral charge. Available from the United Church of Canada website (www.united-church.ca), your local resource centre, or from Conference Office, it teaches M&P members the basic knitting stitches. It is not my intent to regurgitate its contents, but rather to highlight the parts about which, judging from the phone calls and e-mails I receive, congregations are confused.

Three to seven people who are representative of the pastoral charge should be on an M&P Committee. In a multi-point charge this would include at least one person from each congregation. The ministry personnel and staff are not members of this committee, nor are members of their immediate families. To prevent confusion and conflict about role, members of the M&P Committee should not also be chairs of other committees of the church, nor serve on the Joint Search Committee or the Transition Team during an Interim Ministry, or an Educational Supervision Team, in the case of an appointment of a minister from another denomination. Individuals in positions of authority in a pastoral charge should not serve on the M&P Committee since they are likely to be parties, with personnel, to many of the conflicts about which an M&P Committee consults and mediates.

M&P Committee members are appointed at the Annual Meeting as are the other officers of the congregation or pastoral charge. It is wise that a nomination process give consideration to the nominee's suitability to serve on such a committee. The individual

needs to have knowledge of United Church policies and practices, good inter-personal and communication skills and experience within the pastoral charge. It can be helpful to have at least one person with human resources or personnel training or experience on the committee as well as someone with conflict resolution skills. A term of office can be helpful, preventing burnout of volunteers and allowing many people in the congregation(s) the opportunity to serve in this important ministry.

Like good knitting, selecting the right size and length of needle, whether a single circular needle or a pair of pairs of needles, establishes the form before the wool is ever selected. Preparation of the committee is important. Establishing a pattern of meetings sets the tone. The Committee should meet as a whole at least four times a year. When there are several staff who are the responsibility of the M&P Committee, as is the case with team ministry, and a number of lay employees such as choir director, organist, secretary, caretaker, then more meetings might be necessary.

While some Committees function by having one member assigned to one staff person for the purposes of liaison or support, it makes the relationship more effective if the staff person meets with the whole committee periodically, not just with their representative or liaison person. A group hears things differently than one person. The Committee functions better if each member has the good of the whole in mind, not just the interests of their particular staff member. I advise meeting with each member of staff twice a year: in the Spring as part of the performance review and in the late Fall as part of the salary and benefits negotiations. Each staff member needs to know how to access the committee to raise any particular concerns.

The Stitches in the Knitting

While in knitting there are only two basic stitches, purl and knit, in the life of the M&P Committee there are four basic stitches: consultation, supervision,

education and conflict resolution. These are modes of being, or the roles in which M&P Committee members will find themselves.

In the **Consultation role**, M&P Committee members can be a sounding board for the ideas of the various members of staff, particularly your Ministry Personnel, who are called to exercise leadership in the vision and mission of the pastoral charge. Supporting the staff as they go through personal or professional challenges or transitions is significant as the relationships between staff and congregation are knit. The M&P Committee is a valuable resource to the Official Board or Council concerning how the decisions made affect the staff and whether the staff have skills or gifts not being utilized by the pastoral charge.

The **Supervision role** includes developing clarity around job descriptions and expectations. The Annual Review is a review of the ministry conducted by each staff person in relationship to the vision and mission of the congregation/pastoral charge. It may result in renegotiating job descriptions. Your M&P Committee ensures that you are fair employers, meeting the minimum General Council guidelines for ministry personnel and the provincial standards for lay employees. Approving vacation, study leave, compassionate, bereavement leave, etc. and reporting to the Board for information is within the mandate of M&P Committees.

Meeting with each member of staff in the Fall to determine their requests and dreams for their salary and benefit package is an important early step of the budget process. The M&P Committee members are the advocates of the staff in making recommendations to the Finance Committee, Board of Stewards or Treasurer. Don't renege on prior agreements with staff, including Ministry Personnel. If at point of call you agreed to pay 10% above minimum, stick to that agreement, don't waste time and energy 'nickel and diming' your staff. You want to get the best from them! Mandated by *The Manual* (s.332(d)vii) is the M&P Committee's accountability to the Presbytery Oversight Committee for reviewing and documenting ministry personnel Police Records Checks every three years.

Reporting is part of the **Education role**. Preparing the congregation for the realities of the terms of employment for all staff can minimize conflicts. For example, with a month's vacation which might involve five Sundays and three weeks' study leave including three Sundays, every congregation can expect that their full-time minister will not be in the pulpit a minimum of eight Sundays per year. Is there a budget line for pulpit supply or what are the

provisions for covering these Sundays? Does the worship committee, session or M&P Committee arrange the pulpit supply? Does the congregation understand the role of their M&P Committee? How can the profile of the M&P work done on behalf of the congregation be raised? By putting an insert in the bulletin, having an article in the newsletter or a minute for M&P on a Sunday morning? If a member of the congregation has a concern do they know to raise it initially with the appropriate staff member before bringing it to M&P? Are congregants aware that the M&P Committee will only deal with concerns which are in writing and signed? What are M&P procedures for dealing with grievances?

The latter leads us into the **Conflict Resolution role**, a role which is challenging and benefits greatly from consultation and training. How familiar is both the M&P Committee and Board/Council with the United Church of Canada's Alternative Dispute Resolution Policy? Are people aware that complaints of sexual harassment or abuse are dealt with under a separate policy and that there are consultants available to work directly with complainants?

Some of the fancier patterns

Once a knitter becomes proficient in the basic stitches and learns to read a pattern, fancier projects (such as stocking stitch or ribbing) can be attempted, building on some standard combinations. Here are a few more complex matters an M&P Committee might deal with.

Voluntary Associate Ministers? Our retired ministry personnel or those retained on the roll of the presbytery need a congregation to worship in. They can be a great resource to the congregation, especially where expectations of them are clear and negotiated. Becoming a Voluntary Associate Minister (VAM), while a 'must' to maintain or obtain a license to marry, is a helpful process for clarifying expectations on both the congregation's part and the minister's. Your M&P Committee may be asked to interview a possible VAM and clarify these expectations. Make sure you are all clear on whether this VAM is covering all the minister's absences, doing weddings and funerals, offering to lead a bible study each year, or to visit in the nursing home. Will you pay an honorarium? There are no prescriptions on what a VAM will do – it is to be negotiated in each situation.

Team ministries are a challenge to establish. There are many models, some of which are outlined in *How Will We Team?* I was lucky when I was serving a larger parish in the Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario. The M&P Committee had worked with staff teams for at least 20 years since the larger parish was formed. I was

one of three ministers and the M&P Committee met monthly and spent the last half-hour of their meeting with one of us on a rotating basis. The pastoral charge set aside a budget for the ministry personnel as a trio to meet with a team consultant. They educated the pastoral charge that we would be in staff meeting most of every Tuesday morning. We spent time building the team in order to serve the pastoral charge effectively. If you are trying to establish a team ministry, remember to budget time, energy and money into the process, and consult about appropriate resource people.

Sick leave is an area that needs the M&P Committee's attention. For ministry personnel, short term disability extends up to 6 months. The pastoral charge is reimbursed for 85% of salary and housing through the Restorative Care Plan of the United Church of Canada from months two to six of this short term disability. Long term disability for members of the pension plan, lay employees and ministry personnel, begins at month seven and must be applied for. The start date of the original medical absence (or last day worked) needs to be documented in board minutes to facilitate application both to the Restorative Care Plan and Maritime Life who carries long term disability insurance. Your lay employees working 14 hours or more must join the United Church of Canada Pension and Group Insurance Plan.

Etiquette can go a long way toward bringing out the best of those in your midst on a temporary basis. Just as there are appropriate places and times for knitting, so there are some etiquette matters which a congregation needs to attend to, either through their M&P Committee or through another committee responsible for arranging for guest ministers. All of us who have been guest preachers can tell horror stories (or at least stories of profound embarrassment) when etiquette was not followed. I learned in the Girl Guides in England, 'Be Prepared'. Your treasurer and your M&P committee has the salary schedule sent to them each June for the following January. In it is the amount to be paid to a guest preacher (Sunday Supply) or a minister giving worship leadership and a day of pastoral care (Weekend Supply). Have a cheque ready with that amount plus mileage based on your best guess at the current kilometer rate. Don't ask the guest in the hearing of a group of congregants "So how much do we owe you, Reverend?".

Do not assume that your guest preacher is familiar with your surroundings. It is delightful for the guest preacher to be greeted, shown where the office, washroom and sanctuary are, offered a glass of water for the pulpit, provided the appropriate technological support for the sound system, and even to have a Board or Council member give the announcements and a public welcome and introduction. Let the minister know of other

expectations of them, for example, attending lunch after service. These social niceties make all the difference to the relationship that the guest is trying to establish with the congregation.

Knitting Coaches

My mother taught me to knit, and while I now live across an ocean from her, I have a friend to whom I can go when confused about my knitting. You too have people resources to coach you as M&P Committees to do your work well. *The Manual* (s.389(b)ii) makes clear that both the ministry personnel and the M&P Committee may consult the Presbytery Pastoral Relations Committee confidentially. You may also consult the Conference Minister for Congregational Support, Judith Johnson or myself. At the end of this article are listed various print resources available to you also.

Knit into the Body of Christ

As I chat to my friends who knit, many tell of a garment begun and not completed. Perhaps being the knitting needles of the pastoral relationship is to be perpetually knitting a garment which is always in process! However if we follow Paul's exhortation to speak the truth in love and to build up the body of Christ, the partly finished garment will enrich our life together and further the mission of the church every bit as much as the perfectly formed winter hat! So much is to be learned in the process of knitting; relationships are built and transformed as the threads are woven, and simple and complicated patterns followed. Serving on an M&P Committee or working with your pastoral charge's M&P Committee can nurture your sense of courage and faith. May God bless you in this creative work.

Jenny Stephens is the Hamilton Conference Personnel Minister.



Resources:

Employment Guidelines for lay employees in pastoral charges and other church related organizations. The United Church of Canada.

A Handbook for Ministry & Personnel Committees. The United Church of Canada, 1999. Revised September 2003.

How Will We Team?, Catherine Barnsley and Carol Stevenson Seller. The United Church of Canada, 1990. Revised 2003.

The Ministry of Music in The United Church of Canada. The United Church of Canada, 2004.

Restorative Care Plan. The United Church of Canada.