

# Team Works

October 2005

A Resource for Congregations from Hamilton Conference Staff

## **CHANGE IN PASTORAL LEADERSHIP: CURSE OR OPPORTUNITY?**

**By Jenny Stephens**

Why do we have to go through Needs Assessment again?

Has the process changed much since we called our minister 15 years ago?

Presbytery! Why do they have to be involved, what is it to do with them?

What do you mean, you think it might take us 6 months or more to find the right minister for us?

These and many other reactions are common once a minister requests a change in pastoral relationship or when a pastoral charge decides to add to its staff team or reduce its ministerial team. In this “TeamWorks” I will address some of the questions about the pastoral relations process that I get asked regularly. I will also give rationale for processes which seem at times lengthy and burdensome. I offer this resource to complement the Pastoral Relations Handbook and other related resources.

### **An Overview**

The pastoral relations process (process for calling or appointing a new minister or changing the terms of employment of current ministry personnel) involves two tasks: Needs Assessment gives a pastoral charge opportunity to review the needs of the community it serves, its ministries and resources and to determine the ministerial leadership needed to fulfill its mission, while Search is the process for filling a vacancy.

### **How do we start?**

The process for a minister to leave is triggered when he/she writes a letter requesting ‘a change in pastoral relationship’ to the secretary of the Presbytery with a copy to the Church Board/Council (hereafter termed “Board”) (The Manual 2004 s. 046). The secretary of Presbytery passes the request to the Presbytery Pastoral Relations Committee for action. The response is threefold: bringing a motion to the floor of Presbytery to accept the request for change in pastoral relationship; if it is a solo minister, naming a Pastoral Charge Supervisor for the pastoral charge effective when the minister leaves; and recruiting a ministry personnel and lay member of the Presbytery to serve on a Joint Needs Assessment Committee (JNAC). Either the Pastoral Relations convenor or one of the Presbytery representatives works with the Board chair to call a meeting of the pastoral charge to elect the members of the JNAC. In our Conference, Presbyteries have the ability through general or executive meetings to deal with such motions each month, except perhaps over July and August.

Where a Board, perhaps on the recommendation of the Ministry and Personnel Committee, wishes to change the terms of call or appointment of the current ministry personnel or to add a new minister, a letter is written from the Board to the secretary of Presbytery requesting the establishment of a Joint Needs Assessment Committee. Once again this is implemented through action of the Presbytery Pastoral Relations committee working with the congregation through a pastoral charge meeting.

### **Who do we need?**

A pastoral charge must name between three and seven people to sit on the JNAC. It is helpful to have skills in gathering, analyzing and interpreting data, and in writing clear reports. As the Needs Assessment process is open and consultative it is not necessary to have the various groups of the church represented as all will be consulted

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either in person, through questionnaires or in meetings held for the purpose. Therefore it is wise for a pastoral charge to elect people whom they trust, who are active in the faith community and have a good 'read' of the congregation(s)' life and history. The individuals should care about the congregation but not have a vested interest in the recommendations of the JNAC. For example, it is not helpful to include people who have been involved in recent conflict and have a preconceived idea about the outcome of the transition in ministerial leadership.

The Needs Assessment is a time not just of data gathering and analysis, but also of discernment. What do others see in us? What is God calling us to be and do? Do we need to work on particular goals? Are we a potential learning site for a student minister? In multi-point pastoral charges, the needs of each congregation are unique. How will the report reflect the particular needs of each as well as the leadership needed for the whole? Communities are guided by God's Spirit through conversation—speaking the truth and listening with respect to one another. I notice that the Spirit does not always follow a schedule, so be prepared for a time of reflection before drawing up the recommendations from the Needs Assessment. Take time to include all in the community. This is opportunity to hear many voices.

## Why Presbytery?

Your congregation or pastoral charge is not an island. It is connected to the wider denomination of the United Church of Canada. The denomination as a whole is responsible for training and accrediting ministers. Pastoral charges (the combination of congregations for which a particular minister is responsible) are grouped regionally into 'Presbyteries.' In our polity, Presbytery is like the bishop. It has responsibility for support and oversight of pastoral charges and ministers in its midst.

The JNAC is 'Joint' because both the pastoral charge and the Presbytery are

involved. Presbyters designated to work with your JNAC should be familiar with the process, bring some experience of working with other congregations, know how to access information, and work with your representatives to do the most comprehensive job possible. Primarily in the JNAC they should facilitate or support the process, ensuring that appropriate consultation is happening, that the final report is in a format likely to be acceptable to the Presbytery, and that all the steps have been followed. Likely one or other of the presbyters will chair the pastoral charge meetings. It is not necessary or usual to name one of the presbyters chair or secretary of the committee. While at least one presbyter makes up the quorum of a decision making meeting, it is in order for the JNAC to work on gathering data and writing material without the presbyters. Your Presbytery representatives may ask the finance committee of the Presbytery to review your Resource Profile, particularly the financial statements, to ensure the financial stability of the pastoral charge prior to making a commitment to new staff in the long term. In this way your presbyters are liaisons. Their role includes ensuring that the employment standards of the United Church of Canada are met and that in the search, human rights are not violated.

## How far reaching should the Needs Assessment be?

We work in a context: even if the needs assessment was triggered by, for example, the Outreach Committee's seeking someone to run a particular program, the needs assessment should be broader than examining the outreach. It should review the whole ministry of the pastoral charge because it is in this context that the outreach minister will carry out his or her ministry. I hear regularly of situations in which a recent Needs Assessment has supported the idea of filling a vacancy left by a minister and then, within a month or two, the youth minister leaves and suddenly the whole Needs Assessment has to be redone because the youth needs were not taken into account in the original Needs Assessment. I have also heard sad stories of

an individual arriving to fill a new position and hearing from Board or congregational members that of course if it wasn't for this new staff member there wouldn't be a deficit in the congregation. The Needs Assessment is done to ensure that there is a need for the ministry personnel and that there are the human and financial resources to sustain the new ministry.

### **JNAC, Board and Congregants**

Throughout the full pastoral relations process, there are opportunities for the Board/Council and the pastoral charge as a whole to have input and be part of the decision-making process. Specifically there are three full meetings of the pastoral charge required throughout the process. The first is to elect the representatives to the JNAC. The second is to receive the report and vote on the recommendations of the JNAC and to elect members to a Joint Search Committee (JSC) or to a Transition Team depending on the recommendations of the JNAC. The third is to receive the recommendation of the JSC (the name of ministry personnel to fill the vacancy) or Transition Team (the name of the Interim Minister). There may be other times in the process where pastoral charge meetings are called but they are not requirements. It is important that congregants see the JNAC report and recommendations ahead of time so they have every opportunity to understand the content and implications. A vote for the recommendation is an agreement to move in the new direction and support it with volunteer skills and finances.

Both the JNAC and JSC may give regular written or verbal reports to the congregation for information, perhaps through the bulletin or in Sunday worship. It is likely that there will be consultation between the JNAC and Board on a regular basis to test each profile and some of the conclusions being reached. The final JNAC report comes to the pastoral charge having been acted on (recommended or not) by the Board. There may be times when, for example, cutting staff time or changing job descriptions are recommended after a consultation with the incumbent ministry personnel or members of staff, usually involving the Ministry and Personnel Committee. It is my experience that there is a lot of pain and misunderstanding happening when this is the case and so consultation ahead of time with Conference Office may be helpful to you. Note that there is a clearly laid out process for reducing staff with or without cause in The Manual 2004 s. 045 & 046.1, and there should be full consultation with Presbytery Pastoral Relations Committee and myself to ensure fair employment practice for the ministry personnel.

### **The Search**

The Joint Search Committee (JSC), consists of several full members of the pastoral charge, elected by the pastoral charge, and two presbyters named by the Presbytery Pastoral Relations committee. It has responsibility for filling a vacancy declared by Presbytery as a result of a recommendation from the JNAC that a new minister be called or appointed. There may be recommendations from the JNAC that do not lead to a JSC; for example, appointing an Interim Minister or a Supply Minister. The pastoral charge may decide the new position is less than eight hours per week and the job description is geared to a lay person. If this is the case, a congregational accountable minister (CAM) is needed; the pastoral charge may consult the Presbytery but Presbytery is not directly involved. There is no vacancy declared nor Joint Search Committee formed. The guidelines for CAMs indicate the lay person should be a member of the United Church of Canada. If there is any possibility that the job might grow to eight hours or more, I recommend the process for designation as a staff associate be followed so that the CAM can move smoothly into the Presbytery accountable position necessary for a lay person working eight or more hours.

### **Conflict of interest and perception of bias**

Those serving on a JSC should be familiar with the JNAC report, well regarded by the pastoral charge, not members of any prior group of protagonists, and not employees of the congregation. Family members of employees and ministry personnel can be perceived to have bias and should not be elected either. In multi-staff situations, it is also inappropriate for the remaining ministry personnel to be members of the JSC, in part because of the power inequality which exists between a ministry personnel and congregants, and because the person chosen must meet the requirements of the JNAC, not the specifications of the incumbent. It is usual, however, for the ministry personnel to have an opportunity toward the end of the search process to meet the recommended candidate in order to give feedback to the JSC in response to the question, "can you work with this individual?"

A presbyter is part of the quorum for each JSC meeting. Both presbyters have a vote or a say in the final choice, however most wise presbyters choose not to exercise their vote to avoid unduly influencing the JSC. After all it is the pastoral charge members of the JSC who must live with their choice and be fully accountable to their congregation(s).

### **Manners**

I hear from many applicants to JSCs about the lack of

sensitivity concerning acknowledging receipt of applications, sending the Needs Assessment report when requested, providing a timeline to applicants about when interviews and decision-making might happen. I hear too often, “I never heard anything so I guess I didn’t get the job.” Please respond to each applicant in a timely manner.

### **Call or appointment?**

A call to a ministry personnel always fills the vacancy; an appointment may fill the vacancy. Whether you fill your vacancy by call or appointment is dependent on the status of the minister you have chosen. Active (i.e. not retired, under discipline or on the Discontinued Service List) ordered ministers of the United Church of Canada are the only ones who can be called. There are two streams of ordered ministry personnel—diaconal who are commissioned to service, education and pastoral care; and ordained who are ordained to word, sacrament and pastoral care. Diaconal ministers can be licensed to officiate at weddings and conduct sacraments.

All other ministry personnel must be appointed. These include retired ordered ministers, staff associates, lay pastoral ministers in training, lay pastoral ministers, diaconal or ordained ministers from other denominations, and candidates for ministry (student supply or candidate supply). Appointments are time-limited and (except for Interim Ministers) made annually. Diaconal or ordained ministers from other denominations must have their credentials cleared by General Council and meet the educational requirements of the Admissions Process. As you make decisions concerning ministers from other denominations, lay pastoral ministers in training or student supply, you need to ask yourself whether the pastoral charge and the Presbytery has the people resources for the training committees and pastoral charge supervisors required to support them.

### **Good Standing?**

Prior to the recommendation of a candidate to the pastoral charge meeting, the individual’s status is checked through the Personnel Minister. The church has a duty of care to the vulnerable in its midst to ensure that those in leadership (paid and volunteer) have been appropriately screened. There may be issues with a ministry personnel from their previous pastoral charge that their Presbytery is dealing with; perhaps the minister is being supervised in a directed program, perhaps they are under review in accord with The Manual s.363, perhaps their credentials have not been cleared by General Council, etc. You need to know that the name you are bringing to the pastoral charge is able to be called or appointed by the Presbytery.

In practice, most JSCs check with me when they have narrowed down the list to a few. I phone my colleagues in other Conferences to ensure accurate information.

### **Negotiating Terms**

If a good job has been done with the Terms Profile of the JNAC report, negotiating terms should be relatively easy. However, I receive questions which reflect that not enough thought was given at the needs assessment stage. In multi-staff situations, ministry personnel should be paid an equal formulae, e.g. five percent above minimum increment category. Regardless of the parable of the workers in the vineyard, the currency of recognition in our culture is salary. If two ministers are to work in team then their salary, housing and benefits should reflect their equality. Yes, in our culture we recognize years of service—this is taken into account by increment category. Housing is based on criteria outside of the church and who the individual is, so all ministry personnel in a pastoral charge have the same housing, prorated for hours worked. Full time is considered 40 hours per week.

### **Communication**

At the end of JSC, communicate clearly with the Ministry and Personnel Committee. Did you promise the minister that the bathroom in the manse would be redone or that there would be a personal e-mail account paid for or a cell phone provided? Did you agree to a sabbatical after five years? The information you share can help an M & P committee get off to a good start in the new pastoral relationship.

### **Curse or Opportunity?**

Few of us like following processes that we don’t understand or see the value in. Knowing ahead of time the many steps on the journey toward a new pastoral relationship can prepare us for the way and open us to opportunity. Needs assessment can be blessing rather than curse because it provides opportunity to see who we are or want to be as a congregation, and determine the kind of leadership we need to get us there. I have known Needs Assessments to take one month, particularly where there is a recent one on file which only needs updating, or one year, where a pastoral charge dragged its feet. I have known Search to be completed within two months, but more common is about 6 months or even more than a year.

When the JNAC and JSC do their work diligently and responsibly the rewards are enormous—a new pastoral relationship enabling congregations to live out their calling to bear the love of Jesus Christ in the world.

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