



Questions for Discernment as it Relates to Changes in Pastoral Roles within a Congregation

Approved by CTC – July 7, 2016

Note: These questions help pastors, sessions, and the presbytery to discern if a change in pastoral role within a congregation is in the best interest of the congregation and consistent with the mission of the presbytery. This discernment process is required by the *Policy on Changes in Pastoral Roles Within a Congregation*, National Capital Presbytery Congregational Transitions Commission (CTC).

Power Dynamics

- What is the evidence that the congregation and other staff members can see the pastor in a new role? For example, how likely is it that staff will be able to relate positively to the current associate as their supervisor, as opposed to their peer and colleague?
- To what extent does the associate pastor have the skills and experience required to assume the role of co-pastor or senior pastor?
- In the case of moving to co-pastors, what are the indications that the congregation/staff will be able to see the former associate as equal to the former senior pastor? What is the danger that they will see former senior pastor as no longer pulling his/her weight? How will the decision on who is head of staff be made?
- In the case in which an associate applies for a senior position in an open search, what would be the impact on the associate and the congregation if s/he isn't called to the new position? Can s/he stay on as associate or will not being selected mean that s/he leaves?

Effects within the Congregation

- What do the personnel/session/congregation see as potential gains and liabilities in moving pastor(s) to these new positions?
- What does the congregation gain/lose by staying with someone(s) they know?
- What does the congregation gain/lose by searching for a new pastor? And, alternatively, what does the congregation gain/lose by not searching for a new pastor?
- What likely “factions” will develop within the congregation in support of or against the shift in role?
- What are the impacts of having a public debate within the congregation

- regarding the competencies of the associate pastor in the new role as co-pastor or senior pastor?
- To what extent will the congregation feel “cheated” that they have not had the opportunity to explore other candidates or feel that they have “settled” for a possibly less qualified candidate? What level of excitement and energy exists within the congregation for keeping a pastor they know?

Attention to the Systems

- What is the overall health/strength of the congregation? How is that made evident?
- What is the overall health/strength of the personnel committee or session who will be most intensely participating in this discernment? Do they have the capacity for this depth of discernment? How is that made evident?
- What is the state of the current working relationship between pastors? With other staff? With session? Is there health in those relationships? How is that made evident?
- How can this discernment process be shaped so that leaders in the congregation (and ultimately the congregation itself) feel they have adequate participation in the discernment? (We want to avoid the perception that the COM or the pastor is strong-arming the congregation.)

Logistical Considerations

- What is fair compensation for the pastor changing roles? (Particularly in the case of co-pastors where some level of parity needs to be achieved — though not necessarily equal.)