

Moving Beyond Shame: Mutual Ministry Reviews

**A workshop for the pastors and church leaders of the
Hawaii Conference United Church of Christ**

**This material is made available by your contribution to:
Our Church's Wider Mission and
The Friends of the Conference Fund**

PART 1: MUTUAL MINISTRY REVIEW CULTURE

Objective

To move beyond a framework that reviews are for the purpose of assigning culpability for when things don't get done or when conflict erupts in the church and to move to a framework that utilizes reviews as points of creativity, resilience and adaptiveness.

Approach

The approach taken in this workshop is from the Appreciative Way as developed in the work of Rev. Dr. Rob Voyle, Executive Director of the Clergy Leadership Institute. The Appreciative Way is a mixture of Appreciative Inquiry, positive psychology and the practice of compassion as understood in the Christian and Buddhist traditions.

Appreciative Inquiry means to inquire, analyze, or probe a system for its strengths. From an organizational point of view, to "appreciate" means to investigate an organization from its strengths and not from its weaknesses. When inquiring from strengths people become more creative, more resilient and more adaptive. Whereas, when probing from weaknesses people become closed off, paranoid, embarrassed and shameful. Shame shuts people down, causing us to become unimaginative and rigid.

Positive Psychology does not mean ignoring the wounds and injuries of society: that is denial. "Positive psychology is the scientific study of what goes right in life, from birth to death and at all stops in between. This approach takes seriously the examination of that which makes life most worth living. Everyone's life has peaks and valleys, and positive psychology does not deny the valleys. Its signature premise is more nuanced, but nonetheless important: what is good about life is as genuine as what is bad and, therefore, deserves equal attention," (Christopher Peterson).

From the **Appreciative Way** we learn two things that underlie all that follows:

1. A person is doing the best they can in any given situation.
2. Shame leads to blame and blame shuts people down.

Clarifying

Why do we engage in reviews?

What is the purpose of reviews?

The Folly of Feedback

Rob Voyle is also an executive coach and at one time taught at the College of Executive Coaches. He shared his experience of asking other executive coaches what the purpose of feedback was. He reported that the majority of the coaches replied that people needed to know when they are failing (culpable). On rarer occasions a few

coaches reported that people also needed to know when they had been successful – motivating us with celebration in place of blame. According to Voyle, eventually someone would finally indicate that feedback was necessary so they could improve their client's future performance. However, feedback is ineffective in achieving the desired goal of improving future performance as feedback reports only on past performances and past behavior.

Playtime

In your own mind think of the performance reviews you have been the subject of – how many of those reviews left you feeling energized, resourceful and empowered to change future performance?

The Wisdom of Feed-Forward

The renown executive coach, Marshall Goldsmith, reported a similar finding to that of Voyle regarding the ineffectiveness of feedback for improving future performance. Goldsmith found that what was very helpful and effective was feed-forward. He described feed-forward as advice on what to do differently in the future to improve performance.

Playtime

Think of a time when you had to give someone negative feedback.

Theory

The feedback process moves from **observation** of performance to **evaluation** of performance plus **contempt** for the performance. Feed-forward changes just one item in the process: **observation** of performance to **evaluation** of performance plus **curiosity**.

Playtime

How would the encounter you brought to mind have changed if – instead of holding the performance in contempt – you approached the performance curiously knowing that in any given situation at any time we are doing the best we know how?

Feed-forward moves us from a position of blaming to a position of compassionate responding. When we replace contempt with curiosity, we move from culpability to creativity.

A Tale of Two Church Cultures

First Church UCC recently called a new pastor without any clear understanding as to the purpose and goals of the congregation outside of a vague hope of growing. For the first bit most folks are happy with the new pastor's ministry. But at some point, complaints begin to rise. Perhaps some folks feel they have been looked over pastorally, or that the pastor does not take interest in their social or theological concerns.

While these complaints are listened to, they are essentially ignored for they represent a small number of the total congregation. Over time the people with the complaints began to feel alienated and become louder to assert their voice and point of view which they understand as indicating real deficits in the pastor that is harming the church. These folks will also began recruiting others to their point of view, particularly in face of an unyielding church leadership, yet another sign of the pastor's "control."

Eventually, to indicate that all voices are being heard, the leadership will call for a performance review of the pastor. During this evaluation most of the pastor's strengths will be ignored as focus is placed on the complaints. The review emphasis then is placed on the pastor's personality and character instead of asking what resources the pastor may need to perform the desired behavior at the heart of the complaints.

Others in the congregation become resentful and form a pro-pastor coalition. The purpose of this coalition is not only to protect the pastor, but also to impugn the character of those set against the minister. Further entrenchment sets in and voices on both sides get louder. Usually at this point the Conference office is called and asked to provide some type of mediation. This mediation typically takes the form of surveying the church members for the unspoken purpose of apportioning out judgement and blame for the conflict. An orientation is held on participating in difficult conversation and mediated conversations are held. Both parties typically remain bitter, angry, and feeling justified in the actions they participated in.

Holy Mountain Church UCC has also called a new minister. During the time of the interim minister, they decided that they wanted to make youth a priority for the church. Specifically, they decided to focus on making the worship service more attractive to youth and young adults. The new pastor arrived and worked with church leaders to create a worship committee which purpose was to research what youth and young adults were asking for in terms of a worship experience. This committee was composed of the pastor and music director, as well as youth and young adults and key lay members with a keen interest in worship.

The committee spent time in reading material about the younger generations, visiting and talking with churches which had good youth and young adults' attendance in worship, and they entered into discussions with youth and young adults in their community. Pulling their growing understanding together the committee discerned the

core purpose of worship was connecting and reconnecting: youth and young adults want to feel reconnected to God, themselves, and their neighbors.

The committee also made the decision, that instead of starting a separate youth and young adults' worship, a revamping of the primary worship service would take place. An underlying value of the church was for inter-generational spirituality. The committee committed to meeting weekly and asking these questions: What worked well in helping people feel connected to God, themselves, and their neighbor? What do we want to improve for next Sunday? What do we need in order to make these improvements?

The committee also decided to include weekly feedback forms so that all members could be ensured of an avenue for sharing their experience of the new service. The emphasis was to discern how they could improve the quality of connection. No anonymous comments were allowed, and the committee agreed to be in touch with every parishioner who raised a concern. While they could not guarantee that every concern would be met, they did guarantee that the wisdom behind every concern would be taken seriously and acted upon.

Playtime Contrasting the Two Cultures

First Church UCC

Focused:

Goal:

Underlying culture:

Atmosphere:

Performance Review:

Time Orientation:

Holy Mountain UCC

Focused:

Goal:

Underlying culture:

Atmosphere:

Performance reviews:

Time Orientation:

Important Notes

- A Mutual Ministry Review done in a church culture of culpability will fail miserably.
- Church leaders might need to undertake shifting a church culture from culpability to creativity in order to create an ethos that best utilizes Mutual Ministry Reviews.
- This paradigm shift involves:
 - Clear communications on the orientation: past or future
 - Clarifying goals
 - Embracing a sense of adventure with its ups and downs
 - Prioritizing discovery over the status quo

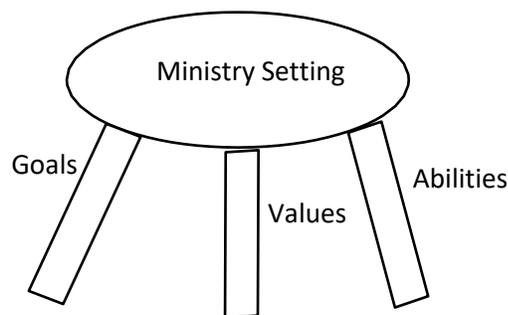
PART 2: MUTUAL MINISTRY REVIEW TEMPLATE

Mutual Ministry Review

A mutual ministry review is a partnership in which the congregation and the pastor(s) engage in a shared assessment process so that the congregation and pastor(s) might be better equipped to enhance the mission and ministry of God in the community which is being served.

When conducting a review of the ministry of both the congregation and the pastor(s) it is helpful to think of ministry setting as a three-leg stool. Each leg of the stool provides for stability.

A stool supported by two legs can still be balanced, but a stool supported by only one leg is inherently unstable. Most traditional reviews focus only on one leg – the abilities (and inadequacies) of the pastor



A mutual ministry review seeks to understand how goals, values, and abilities are advancing or hindering the mission of the church. This type of review is considered mutual for it encompasses both the role of the pastor(s) and the role of the membership in its scope of valuation.

Please note that mutual ministry reviews are developed with the following assumptions:

- The ministry of the church is the responsibility of both the congregation and the pastor(s).
- Reviews work best when outlining expectation for attitudes and behavior moving forward as opposed to addressing problematic behavior (see Conduct Accountability Process below).
- There is low to moderate conflict in the congregation (see Scaling Conflict below).
- The culture of the church is oriented toward creativity and not toward culpability.
- The pastor(s) and congregational leaders are filling out the review at the same time.
- This is a template and should be modified to fit each particular church context.

Goals

Goals are desires about the future with legs: they take us somewhere. Goals provide the movement from our present state to a more desirable future state. The opposite of goal setting is problem thinking where the focus is on what is wrong, not on the desired future.

Each goal has two components.

- The **outcomes** of the goal are about our destination and where we are heading.
- The **process** of the goal is about the journey and how we are going to get to our destination.

Goals are stated in the positive in order to form a picture of the desired future in consciousness.

Goals Evaluation

1. How will you know you have achieved this goal?
2. What mile markers are you aiming for along the way?
3. How will you know if you are off track?
4. How will you check if you are on track?
5. What is the timeline for achieving this goal?

Values

Values are often the why or impetus for the desired future we seek. Values not only generate the goals we set but also become our compass on the journey to our preferred future. It is important that there is alignment between values and goals as misalignment results in goal failure. Also, the congregation and the pastor(s) need to agree on the values being expressed by the goals, or confusion about the goals will arise.

Values Evaluation

1. What agreed upon value(s) support this goal?
2. How will we be living this value in the process of goal achievement?
3. What are the ecological benefits of the goal?
 - a. What are the ethical consequences for others?
 - b. What is the cost in time, money, opportunity?
 - c. What is important in the present state which must come with you to the desired future state of the church?
 - d. What in the present state should be left behind?

Abilities

Abilities are skills and resources needed to achieve the goal.

Abilities Evaluation

1. What obstacles stop us from achieving this goal?
2. What is needed to address these obstacles?

Sample Action Plan

Goals	Responsible	Deadline	Resources	Obstacles	Actions	Measurements
Increase Revenues	Finance Committee	By end of fiscal year	Enriched Stewardship Ministry Additional revenue streams	Pastor doesn't want to be known as always asking for money We are underdeveloped in stewardship leaders Our people are giving as much as they can We are a poor church	Attend a stewardship training event and implement two ideas derived from it Develop unused portion of facility and property for rental purposes Sell ice-cream at the community event	Revenues are up over last year
(A less boring sermon) A vibrant worship service	Pastor Worship leaders	Three months out	Advanced communication seminars Liturgy review Expansive musical experience Remodel dull sanctuary	Adaptability of pastor Adaptability of congregation to worship experimentation Funds for enhanced worship materials	Taking seminars Dialogue with members on meaningful worship Update sanctuary	The number of people grumbling about the worship service decreases by 90% (from 20 to 2)
Pastor to spend more time in the office	Pastor Church leaders Church members	One month	Office space	The pastor is spending 65% of her time in the community	Talk with the pastor about expectations of accessibility	A clear schedule of when the pastor is available and if needed in the office
Less confusion over the direction of the church						

Scaling Conflict (1 – 7) and the Use of these Models:

1 – 3: Mutual Ministry Review

4 – 5: Conduct Accountability Process followed up by Mutual Ministry Review if conflict scales down.

6 – 7: Outside mediator

PART 3: CONDUCT ACCOUNTABILITY PROCESS

Problematic behavior of the pastor(s) cannot be handled through an annual evaluation. Such a move is tantamount to triangulating the congregation, or at least key members of the congregation, against the pastor(s). Rather, when the leaders of a congregation deem a pastor's behavior is proving problematic what is needed is an intervention with the pastor. An intervention does not mean harsh treatment of the pastor(s). Rather it means that church leaders and the pastor(s) are involved in a conversation directed at the problematic behavior while the issues are still moderate within the congregation.

From an Appreciative Way perspective such a conversation would include these types of questions to be answered by the pastor or, in some cases, by a church member involved in problematic behavior.

Questions to Discover Desired States

- What were you trying to achieve when you did this?
- What other choices do you have?

Questions to Discover Underlying Values

- What are you hoping to get from this behavior?
- What is the reason that is important to you?

Questions of Ecology

- What are you willing to give up to accomplish this?
- What are you unwilling to change?
- What is good about the present situation?

Question of Ability

- What can you learn from this?
- What will you do differently going forward?
- What could be stopping you from taking action?

Questions to Shift Thinking Patterns

- What is the worst thing that could happen if you did this?
- What is the best thing that could happen if you did this?
- What is the worst thing that could happen if you didn't do this?
- What is the best thing that could happen if you did not to this?

Action Steps

Once the above questions have been worked through and the answers discussed, the next step is to draw up a written action plan.

Some action plans will need to be complex, naming specific situations, people involved, and behavioral expectations. The more complex the action plan, the more pressing is the need to have official entities involved, such as personnel committees and possibly legal advice.

Regardless of how complex or simplified the action plan is, they contain basically three components:

1. I behaved this way in the past in order to:
2. I will behave this way in the future in order to:
3. If I do not behave as agreed, then I will face these consequences:

Please note that personnel handbooks and grievance policies often outline steps to be taken in these situations. In order to be in compliance with your church's protocols and policies the church must follow what is stated in such documents.

Sources

Appreciative Coaching: A Positive Process for Change, by Orem, Binkert, and Clancy, pb. Jossey Bass, 2007.

Coaching with NLP: How to Be a Master Coach, by O'Connor and Lages, pb. Element, 2004.

Creating Cultures of Excellence: An Appreciative Inquiry Based Guide to Mutual Ministry Reviews, by Voyle and Voyle, pb. The Appreciative Way, 2016.