SITUATIONAL SUPPORT CONSULTATION - PROCESS AND MEETINGS OUTLINES

How a concern may come to a COM

- The COM may receive a request from a minister or a church
- The COM may hear of a conflict or a situation and in response, offer an SSC as an option
- The COM may determine a situation warrants initiating an SSC and invite all parties to meet
- May be a referral after a Fitness Review Concern

Setting up a SSC

- COM chair or rep connect with pastor and/or church leadership
  - Determine if the situation fits criteria for an SSC
    - Is there a concern about ethical misconduct? (if so, an SSC is not appropriate and the Fitness Review process should be engaged)
    - Is this an issue that would best be addressed with a hosted conversation and/or outside expertise?
  - Determines who should participate
  - Determine dates and number of meetings
  - Determine location
  - Decide who from COM should participate
    - Those who:
      - have excellent listening skills
      - have a good sense of congregational polity and process
      - have experience with conflict management
      - have the time and ability to see the process through to completion
      - do not have a conflict of interest with congregation or pastor
  - Determine sequence of meetings/people

Goals and Best Practices for all meetings

- With minister, then individuals/committee small groups, goal is to understand the situation and dynamics
- With everyone together, goal is to create transparency and increase communication, and discern a way forward
- Give attention to the content of the issue that has been raised
- Pay even more attention to what’s underneath
  - Feelings and values
  - Difference in expectations - generational, cultural, etc.
  - Priorities
  - Hurt or grief
  - Hopes
- COM may offer some healing just by listening
Preliminary conversations with the pastor and key stakeholders will provide insight necessary to develop a proposed format for initial meetings and scope as well as clarify expectations.

Sample Meeting format

- Common meeting structures for situation involving Pastor and Congregation
  - 4 pm: COM meets with Pastor
  - 5 pm: COM dinner break
  - 6 pm: COM meets with Council*
  - 7 pm: COM meets with Pastor and Council together*

*Terminology and understanding of leadership structure may vary. Your preliminary conversations should include an understanding of how leadership functions in this particular congregation.

Common meeting structure for situation involving interpersonal relationships with person or smaller group:

- COM meets with Pastor
- COM meets with other involved persons
- COM meets with Pastor and involved persons
- On subsequent meeting, COM meet with Pastor and involved persons and Council/PPRC so that there is broader accountability and appropriate cultural shifts become possible

Meeting Outline

- Opening Prayer led by COM member
- Check-in with people
  - “How are you actually doing today?”
  - “How is everyone showing up today?”
  - “What are you setting aside for a time so that you can be present here?”
  - “What are you hoping for?”
  - “What question do you bring into this space?”
  - Other more specific questions may be appropriate for meetings with pastor or individual leaders.
- Invite people to tell you their story
  - “Tell us about what’s going on for you in the life of your church.”
- Listen with curiosity and compassion, withholding judgment
- Ask open ended questions
- Invite stories beyond the surface level with “Tell me more”
- Practice “the pause” to make space and to allow people to process what’s said
- Remember the presenting issue is rarely the actual or only issue
- Ask about the feelings behind their account of events
- When the situation seems clear, summarize what you’ve heard
• Ask what way forward they could imagine
  o Closing Prayer led by COM member

**Small Group Meeting format (bookended with prayer)**

• Sit in a circle or create zoom equivalent with community building
• Set the intention
• Open time with prayer or devotion
• Suggest group norms
  o Confidentiality
  o Listen with attention
  o Share speaking space
  o “I” statements
  o No anonymous feedback or “some people think”

**Large Group Meeting Format (bookended with prayer)**

• Sit in a circle (or zoom equivalent)
• Set the intention
• Open time with a “Holy 3rd”
  o Prayer, devotion, scripture, church mission statement
• Suggest group norms
  o Confidentiality
  o Listening with attention
  o Sharing speaking space
  o “I” statements
  o No anonymous feedback or “some people think”
• Set the tone. Summarize what hopes you have heard each party express
  o Ex. hope for healthier church
• Summarize what you heard the different groups as articulating as happening. Check in for correct summary or additions.
• Summarize what you heard the minister articulate as happening. Check in for correct summary or additions.
• Reframe the summaries, if appropriate.
• Open up conversation. Be curious about the circumstances and what’s really underneath
• Summarize the differences in interpretations, if appropriate
• Encourage them to dialogue openly with one another
• De-escalate unhealthy conflict
  o Not all conflict is unhealthy
  o Pause if there are accusations or name calling, redirect and reframe
  o “I know you are a smart and compassionate person and that your first reaction didn’t really sound like you. I’m wondering if you might want to try that again?”
• Simply name if things are tense or conflictual and invite the group to pause
• Wonder with them about what a way forward could look like?
• If needing to spur creative thinking, propose an extreme or the absurd, simply so they can say “no”
This reestablishes their agency
- Makes the group the experts again
- If they are avoiding an answer because it is too hard to say, ask if they are avoiding saying something hard, encourage brave space
- Most groups can identify ways forward
- COM task is to help the group distill a plan for themselves about the “next faithful step,” as well as any goals and timelines

COM Steps after meeting with Pastor, individuals, and small groups
- Summarize with COM member(s) what you each heard and experienced
- Assess where the stories or interpretations are different and why
- Assess where sticking points are to moving forward
- Discern who in the groups have the ability and/or relational capital to move past the sticking point
- Create a basic plan for questions or approach needed for next and/or the all group meetings
- Help discern the best faithful next steps as well as any goals and timelines

Outcomes
- There are 4 specific outcomes of a Situational Support Consultation
  - No further action needed
  - Mutually agreed upon plan of action
  - Advisory statement issued by the COM
  - Season of Discernment about continued ministry together or separate

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