

# TRIENNIAL VISITS

B.01.00 – Red Book

*From the Book of Order: (G-11.0502) c. the committee on ministry shall visit with each session of the presbytery at least once every three years, discussing with them the mission and ministry of the particular church and encouraging the full participation of each session and congregation in the life and work of presbytery and of the larger church.*

After a church is assigned to you, reach out to the Minister and Clerk of Session and introduce yourself. Share email addresses to make communication easier. Reaching someone by telephone can be difficult with our busy lives. Going out to lunch with the Minister can facilitate your introduction and conversation. Explain your job as liaison to their church emphasizing that you are their advocate. If you have an on-going relationship as liaison, communications and visits will be less stressful for all involved.

## PRIOR TO VISIT:

*The liaison shall...*

1. **arrange a date** for the meeting with the church, which is satisfactory with the Minister and Session.
2. **send a TRIENNIAL VISIT CONFIRMATION LETTER** (Page 8) after communicating with the Minister and setting up the visit. Send a copy to the Clerk of Session and another to the Minister. (If you have a teammate, send a copy to them.) **This can be done by email.**
3. **arrange for a teammate to accompany you.** Give them as much advance notice as possible. (Normally, visits will be made by a team of two persons, one minister and one elder whenever possible. Ideally, both should be members of COM, but other ministers and elders may be co-opted if necessary. Ideally, they should not be members of the same church. They may not be members of the church that is being visited.)

## PREPARATION FOR THE VISITING TEAM:

*Consult before visit...*

1. with GP, COM chair, prior COM liaison and others on any known or perceived difficulties.
2. GA Statistics [<http://www.pcusa.org/search/congregations/>]
3. recent mission reviews
4. CIF
5. PIF
6. annual congregational reports
7. other data
8. share the information with your visitation team mate

*Communicate with church being visited...*

Liaisons should prepare their churches before the visit by making sure the Minister and Clerk of Session have copies of (Page 7)

**PREPARATION FOR SESSIONS FOR TRIENNIAL VISITS** – request that a copy of be emailed to all the session members prior to the Triennial visit. This should be sent as soon as possible so that session members have time for reflection prior to the Triennial Visit.

### **METHODOLOGY OF THE VISIT**

[The team should make clear that its purpose is to discuss the mission and ministry of the congregation and overall life of the church. It is an **information-gathering meeting, not a problem solving session**. A church's liaison from the *Committee on Ministry* is meant to be a connecting link to the Presbytery. A liaison's job is to be a source of information, sounding board and guide.]

[One member of the team should take notes. A copy of the questions should be available for everyone at the meeting so that they might also keep notes.]

#### ***Meet in this order....***

1. with the **Minister** alone, preferably away from the church
2. with the **Session** in the minister's absence – *there is an evaluation form that can be complete in 10 minutes or less. It should be filled out by both the Minister and Elders before the interviews – see page 5)*
3. with the **Minister** and the **Session** together

**[If problems surface, the Session and Minister should be assured that the Committee on Ministry will provide whatever assistance is appropriate.]**

**The Minister and Session members should have a copy of page 3 to follow during the discussion.**

## TRIENNIAL VISIT

### **Suggested Questions for the Minister:**

1. What is most joyful for you in ministry? What have been your most satisfying experiences as a Minister in this church?
2. Where are the tensions, if any?
3. What are your dreams for this church?
4. What are the most pressing needs facing this church?
5. Is the ministry of this church sustainable?
6. What is the church doing to make it sustainable?
7. What are your mission directions/goals for the next 3-5 years?
8. How have you used continuing education time? What benefits has it brought to the congregation?
9. How are you taking care of yourself?
10. (If living in a manse.) Is the manse being maintained to your satisfaction?
11. Do you feel you are being adequately compensated?
12. Is there some way the COM may be of particular assistance to you?

### **Suggested Questions for the Session:**

1. What is most joyful about your congregation? What makes you want to come to church?
2. What have been your most satisfying experiences as a Session in this church?
3. What is most challenging in your work as a Session?
4. Where are the tensions, if any?
5. On what subject have you spent the major amount of time in Session meetings?
6. Is it difficult to get people to serve on Session? Why?
7. Does this congregation fit with the Minister's theology and style?
8. How are the children involved with the church?
9. Is there an adult Bible study class? Is there other adult education?
10. How has the Minister used continuing education time? What benefits has it brought to the congregation?
11. How do you train lay leadership? How does the Session keep the congregation informed of its work?
12. What are your dreams for this church? What are your mission directions/goals for the next 3-5 years?
13. What are the most pressing needs facing this church now?
14. Would you consider merging or yoking with another congregation? (*if applicable*)
15. Does this church have a recent mission statement? a recent mission study?
16. Congregations need a clear sense of purpose and identity. Can you tell in six words or less what this church is about? (examples: *Sharing faith, changing lives; Church of the open arms*)
17. What is the role of the church in the community and how does the community relate to the church?
18. How are you taking care of your pastor and encouraging him/her to take care of him/herself?
19. Is there some way the COM may be of particular assistance to you?

## **Sharing together – Minister and Session**

The liaison team will know where to take this discussion from the responses of the Minister and Elders.

### **Summarization of responses:**

1. Are the Minister and the Session's joys similar?
2. Are the Minister and the Session's fears similar?
3. Do the Minister and the Session have similar mission goals and directions?
4. Do the Minister and the Session have similar visions of the church's strengths and weaknesses?
5. Are the Minister and Session aware of problems one might have with the other?
6. Has this visit been beneficial for the Minister and Session?
7. What stands out as a high point of the discussion?

# EVALUATION FORM – PAGE 5

*Bring enough copies so that everyone can fill out a form. Leave a blank copy with the Minister and Clerk of Session as the questions may stimulate further discussion.*

This evaluation form is to be completed by both the minister and the Session separately and shared with the Committee on Ministry by the church’s liaison.

**(This form should be completed in 10 minutes or less when first meeting with the Session.)**

## EVALUATION FORM – MINISTER (This form may be filled out anonymously.)

CHURCH \_\_\_\_\_ NAME \_\_\_\_\_

MINISTER \_\_\_\_\_ LIAISON \_\_\_\_\_

**Please rate each of the activities listed below. If not applicable or you had no opportunity to observe, please circle #6.**

	Poor	Average				Excellent	NA
1. Leading worship and administering sacraments	1	2	3	4	5	6	
2. Preaching	1	2	3	4	5	6	
3. Implementing agreed-upon goals	1	2	3	4	5	6	
4. Spiritual development of members	1	2	3	4	5	6	
5. Congregational home visits	1	2	3	4	5	6	
6. Hospital and emergency visits	1	2	3	4	5	6	
7. Promoting congregational fellowship	1	2	3	4	5	6	
8. Counseling services	1	2	3	4	5	6	
9. Evangelism (introducing people to Christ)	1	2	3	4	5	6	
10. Planning Congregational life and mission	1	2	3	4	5	6	
11. Managing Conflict	1	2	3	4	5	6	
12. Development of educational program	1	2	3	4	5	6	
13. Teaching responsibilities	1	2	3	4	5	6	
14. Mission in the congregation’s communities	1	2	3	4	5	6	
15. Congregational communication	1	2	3	4	5	6	
16. Administrative skill	1	2	3	4	5	6	
17. Stewardship and commitment education	1	2	3	4	5	6	
18. Financial and property management	1	2	3	4	5	6	
19. Evaluation of program and employed staff	1	2	3	4	5	6	
20. Responsibilities with Presbytery, Synod, GA	1	2	3	4	5	6	
21. Work with youth and children	1	2	3	4	5	6	
22. Implementation of goals agreed upon	1	2	3	4	5	6	
23. Healing of grief over the past	1	2	3	4	5	6	
24. Enhancing member relationships and communication	1	2	3	4	5	6	
25. Clarification of congregational identity	1	2	3	4	5	6	

**Additional comments or suggestions** (may be continued on back):

## POST MEETING

Soon After the meeting, the team should send to the Clerk of Session – with copies to the Minister, the Secretary of COM, and the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery – a hardcopy of a **Triennial Visit “Thank You” Letter** (Page 9)

A hardcopy of the **Triennial Visit Report Form** (Page 10) should be sent to the Secretary of COM and the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery at the same time.

A final **Written Report** including the Evaluation Forms should be sent to the Chair of COM, the Clerk of COM, the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery, the Minister and Clerk of Session of the visited church.

## **PREPARATION FOR SESSIONS FOR TRIENNIAL VISITS**

### **Mandate**

The committee (on ministry) “shall visit with each session of the presbytery at least once every three years, discussing with them the mission and ministry of the particular church and encouraging the full participation of each session and congregation in the life and work of presbytery and of the larger church.”

### **Purpose of Visits**

1. To discuss with the session the mission and ministry of the particular congregation over the previous three years.
  - Objectives and results
  - Strengths and weakness of this congregation’s life and work
  - Other issues and questions
2. To discuss the particular church’s participation in the life of presbytery, synod and General Assembly.
3. To provide counsel and guidance as to possible avenues for growth and development.

### **Suggested Questions**

Session members may wish to reflect on the following questions in preparation for the discussion:

1. What have been your most satisfying experiences as a session/congregation in the past three years?
2. Where have you spent the major amount of your time in session meetings?
3. What are your mission directions/goals for the next 3-5 years?
4. What is the pastor’s three-year plan for continuing education? What benefits has the pastor’s continuing education brought to the congregation in the past three years?
5. What are the most pressing needs facing your church now?
6. Is there some way the COM or other committee may be of particular assistance to you?

Committee on Ministry  
December 1996  
The Presbytery of Long Island  
Committee on Ministry  
Review of Churches

**TRIENNIAL VISITS CONFIRMATION LETTER**

(This is a sample draft of letter to be sent after telephone call to pastor setting up a triennial visit. It should be sent to the clerk of session with a copy to the pastor. Be sure to include a copy of Preparation for Sessions for Triennial Visits – Page 7.)

Dear (Name of Clerk of Session):

This is to confirm that on  (date)  at  (time) ,  (name of team member)  and  (name of team member)  will attend your session meeting. We hope to have approximately one hour to discuss with you the mission and ministry of your congregation.

We see this as an opportunity to simply hear how things have been going, to let you know we care about you, and to offer any help that you might need from the Committee on Ministry. We are looking forward to hearing how you are being challenged as the Church of Jesus Christ and what you see as your mission.

Please contact  (name of team member)  at  (phone number)  if you have any questions before the above meeting.

Sincerely,

Committee on Ministry  
March 1992

**TRIENNIAL VISITS “THANK YOU” LETTER**

(This is a sample draft of letter to be sent to the clerk of session with copies to the pastor, the secretary of COM, and the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery **after** the triennial visit has taken place.)

Dear (Name of Clerk of Session):

We want to thank you and your pastor for the opportunity to meet with all of you. We appreciated your openness and willingness to share with us as The Committee on Ministry truly values such times as these.

(Summary comments on the visit in this space)

We want to applaud your continued commitment to the Church and its work in your community. Without dedicated people, the Church would soon be lost in the world.

Again, thank you for sharing with us your work and enthusiasm. Please let us know if we can be of help at any time.

Sincerely,

Committee on Ministry  
March 1992

**TRIENNIAL VISIT REPORT FORM**

(This form is to be filled out after a triennial visit and sent, along with a copy of B.01.022, Thank You Letter, to the secretary of COM and the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery.)

**NAME OF CHURCH** \_\_\_\_\_

**COM REPRESENTATIVES** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**DATE OF VISIT** \_\_\_\_\_ **TIME** \_\_\_\_\_

**PLACE** \_\_\_\_\_ **HOW MANY PRESENT** \_\_\_\_\_