

## Making Pastoral Evaluation Worthwhile

by Gil Rendle

Doing pastoral evaluations that are helpful to both pastor and church can be very tricky, especially in churches that tend to have unclear goals and volunteer leaders who don't always see and know all that their church and their clergy do. Let me begin with some cautions!

- Many congregations don't want to evaluate their clergy until they are unhappy with him or her. Be sure that it is not unhappiness or conflict that is driving your evaluation. These issues are best addressed in other ways.
- Most personnel committees do not know all that their pastor does or should be doing. Don't try to evaluate everything about your pastor's work. Is there a part of your pastor's work or goals where she or he would most like feedback?
- Clergy and staff should not be evaluated apart from the goals of ministry for their congregation. (The laundry list of duties and roles in the denominational book of polity is not helpful, and the personal preferences of the personnel committee members are equally unhelpful.)
- Evaluation should be *formative* (What have we learned over the past year and what should we work on next?) rather than *summative* (Is he/she good or bad? Do we keep her/him or not?).
- Many denominations provide standardized evaluations forms or processes for all of their congregations, which may or may not be helpful to you. Standardized evaluations may not honor the size and uniqueness of your congregation and your evaluation needs. Before you begin with any of these standard forms ask, Will it help? Does this get us to the conversation we need?

Having said all that, let me offer several things to consider:

- The time of evaluation is an opportunity for conversation about the state of the ministry of the church. The evaluation tool or instrument is best used as a means to structure an honest conversation about what is happening, or not happening, in the life of your church and what the relationship of the role and work of the pastor should be to that work. The form of the evaluation process may not be as important as the shared conversation about it.
  - I like to use a performance planning meeting document that you can find at [http://www.alban.org/Weekly/InProgress/PF/IP04\\_06\\_Rendle.html](http://www.alban.org/Weekly/InProgress/PF/IP04_06_Rendle.html). This is actually a form and process for staff supervision to be used by the senior clergy with other staff. However, the basic flow of the conversation and the periodic revisiting of the conversation is something that I encourage personnel committees to adapt with their clergy.
  - One of the healthier resources that I know is Jill Hudson's book, [\*When Better Isn't Enough\*](#), published by Alban. There are tools in the back for the clergy's self evaluation and for the personnel committees (and other groups if adapted) to self evaluate their own role and responsibility in the work of the church.
- Good luck.

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