

# the Church Staff handbook



By Laura Keeley  
with Henry Kranenburg and Leonard Vander Zee

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Grand Rapids, Michigan

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# Preface

After Moses led the people of Israel out of Egypt, his father-in-law, Jethro, noticed that Moses was spending all day judging the people's disputes. "What you are doing is not good," Jethro said. "You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone" (Ex. 18:17-18). Moses took his father-in-law's advice and selected capable leaders to share his work and help settle disputes.

Today's churches are faced with similar problems. The pastor doesn't have the time or the gifts needed to lead all the ministries of the church, so a congregation chooses other capable leaders to help. This book is written to help churches provide appropriate support and guidelines for church staff—those people we have chosen to lead us in ministry.

For the past 21 years I have held a part-time position as director of Children's Worship in my church. I share this position with my husband, Bob. We joke that this means I do most of the work and he does what I tell him to do. That is mostly true. But we have also found that working together gives us someone else to talk with about theories of faith formation, new ideas, or events. I have enjoyed working in ministry in my church and thinking about what it means to be part of a church staff.

In 2005 I was hired for one year to help build the Association of Christian Reformed Educators (ACRE) for the Christian Reformed Church in North America. As coordinator for ACRE, I represented church educators on the Staff Ministry Team, a denominational committee representing unordained church staff. After two years as an ad hoc member, I became a member of this committee, and I have chaired that group for five years. These experiences have given me many opportunities to see what church staff ministry is like in a number of churches. I have truly enjoyed meeting many dedicated and talented people working in churches across North America.

In writing this book I researched and interviewed church staff and pastors. The stories in the book are all true, although I did change the names of the ministry staff and the churches. I also asked for help from two people who had expertise

in a couple of areas I didn't. Leonard Vander Zee, former editor in chief of Faith Alive, wrote an excellent chapter on calling. Henry Kranenburg, pastor of Immanuel Christian Reformed Church in Hamilton, Ontario, wrote a very helpful chapter about building a team.

I would like to thank several people for giving their time to help me know better what was happening in their situations and to describe their hopes and dreams for church staff: Lyle Arhenholz, Norma De Waal Malefyt, Steve Dozeman, Marv Hofman, Bryan Keeley, Kathy Mouw, Lori Scheur, Missy Sculley, Larry Slings, Meredith VanderHill, Howard Vanderwell, Sally VanEss, and Frank Weaver. Thanks also go to the Youth Ministry Task Force of the CRCNA, who gave advice for this book: Derek Atkins, Ty Hogue, Darwin Glassford, Jeanne Kallemyn, Jeff Kruithof, and Steve Koster.

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# 7 Evaluations

Evaluations sometimes get a bad rap because we think of them as occasions for a supervisor to tell us what we're not doing well. Though that does sometimes happen, most of the time evaluations are opportunities to celebrate the good work being done by church staff. They are occasions to look at the course that we are on together and to talk about possible adjustments.

## **Yes, Do Them Yearly!**

It's good to know where you stand with those you work with and for. Imagine going five years without an evaluation! That happens in some church staff situations where evaluations are only scheduled when something is not going well. No wonder the very thought of evaluations can cause consternation.

Without periodic evaluations you begin to wonder if what you're doing is good enough. Did the chair of council avoid talking to you, or did he simply not see you? Are more decisions being made without your input, or is that just your imagination? Why didn't the pastor include your work in the congregational prayer? It only takes a few of these types of experiences to make church staff start to second-guess their role and wonder if they are being effective in their ministry.

In the book *Evaluation Essentials for Congregation Leaders*, authors Norm Thomasma, Cecil Van Niejenhuis, and Jeanne Kallemeyn view evaluations as a way to encourage and ensure "that leadership gifts are being exercised faithfully and fruitfully."<sup>1</sup> When that perspective is articulated to the congregation, the council, and the staff, everyone understands that evaluations aren't about whether or not a staff member "measures up" to some mythical yardstick. Rather, evaluations offer opportunities for discovering how best to use and exercise church staff gifts in ministry.

So what makes a good evaluation? Good evaluations need to be 1) realistic, 2) accurate, and 3) just.

- ▶ An evaluation is *realistic* when it evaluates a staff member only on those things that he or she has some control over. While perfection is nice,

church staff should not be held to unrealistic expectations. For example, part-time ministry staff should not be expected to work full-time hours.

- ▶ An *accurate* evaluation occurs when the evaluators take the time to get good information and collect data from a number of sources.
- ▶ A *just* evaluation is one that includes appropriate transparency and good process. Just evaluations provide opportunities for church staff to discuss their thoughts and frustrations. Ultimately, a just evaluation feels “fair” to a staff person.

One of the hallmarks of a healthy congregation is that “gracious, candid, ongoing conversations” about the work of church staff occur with great frequency.<sup>2</sup> So while this chapter will focus on the periodic (yearly) or formal evaluation, that’s only part of the story. Nevertheless, annual evaluations are important and we should do them well.

## Why Do Evaluations?

There are many reasons for doing yearly evaluations with your church staff.<sup>3</sup>

- ▶ Evaluations provide an opportunity to review the accuracy of job descriptions. As mentioned in chapter 2, job descriptions should be updated to reflect changes in your congregation and the growth of your staff members. Yearly evaluations provide a wonderful opportunity for this to happen in a nonthreatening way.
- ▶ Evaluations provide the time and opportunity for church staff and supervisors to look back at the year and think about how God has worked in their ministry. This can be a time of celebration!
- ▶ The evaluation process provides a valuable tool for personal and professional growth for church staff.
- ▶ The evaluation process gives the church a chance to look at the performance of individual staff members. What strengths has the individual used well? Where is there room for growth?
- ▶ Evaluations can serve as a basis for salary and promotion decisions. (Some people caution against having evaluations tied too closely to salary decisions, so this is tricky. We’ll look at this issue in greater depth later on. )
- ▶ Evaluations provide an opportunity for a discussion about goals. Does the individual staff person’s goals fit with the goals of the congregation? If this conversation is handled well, it can reduce problems in the future.

- ▶ The evaluation process can enhance communication between ministry staff and the people who supervise them.

Evaluations of pastors and staff are one way of considering how the joint work of the congregation, pastor, and staff is a faithful and fruitful response to God's call to be the people of God in their particular place and time. When members of the congregation and its leaders know that ministry is being observed and evaluated, it increases trust and encourages ownership of the church's vision and goals.

While evaluations should occur yearly, annual evaluations are not really one-size-fits-all. During the first year of ministry, frequent brief evaluations are appropriate. After many years of ministry, the evaluation may shift from the basics of ministry to focusing on the staff person's role in supporting the strategic vision of the church.

In a church, evaluations are typically performed by the pastor, council members, and/or a personnel committee. Many long-time church staff remember a time when the evaluation was pretty much just an elder asking, "So, how's it going?" But there are better ways to do an evaluation. Let's look at some of them.

## Organizing Meaningful Evaluations

Suppose your congregation's personnel committee meets to plan ways to evaluate the church staff. Jim, who works for a local building contractor, brings in an evaluation form that has worked well for his company. The temptation is to take that form and use it at your church. But there are several factors to consider.

The goal of a business is to make money. That goal should be reflected in the evaluation form a business uses. In churches, though, the goal is to build relationships and make disciples of Christ. The evaluation that the church uses should reflect the church's goals. For example, while productivity is important in a church setting, it isn't as high a priority as it would be in a business setting. Before deciding to use an existing evaluation form, look at it critically through the lens of your congregation's goals.

Doug Fagerstrom (*The Ministry Staff Member*) provides a helpful way to think about evaluations. He suggests that evaluations ought to be done in three directions: upward, downward, and horizontal.<sup>4</sup>

- ▶ **Upward evaluations** involve getting input from those who supervise the staff member. Perhaps this will be church council members or the head of staff. Sometimes, but not always, this is the senior pastor.

- ▶ **Downward evaluations** involve hearing from the congregation. If the staff member works in music, speak to members of the choir. If she is in worship leadership, speak to the other worship planners or members of the congregation who sit in the pews. If the person is a youth or children’s ministry director, talk with the children, teens, and parents in your congregation.
- ▶ **Horizontal evaluations** consider the feedback of peers. This could be other staff members or people who are volunteer youth leaders alongside a staff member. For a children’s ministry director, talk with other staff and with those who teach Sunday school. For a music director, talk with church musicians who work closely with the director.

Evaluations that invite feedback from all interested parties are known as “360 reviews.” To get a complete picture of an individual’s work, get input from people in many different roles and relationships to the individual. If a youth leader frustrates parents with his lack of organization but is much loved by the teens, both of those voices must be part of the conversation. Highlight the strengths your youth leader can build on, rather than focusing only on his inability to get his act together with parents.

Regardless of which evaluation type you choose, ask the staff person to complete a self-evaluation. This allows the staff person to be actively involved in the evaluation process and encourages his or her participation. Often a person will be aware of her own weaknesses or areas where she needs growth and will highlight them in some way in the self-appraisal. This opens the door for a discussion of these areas while also allowing the supervisor to encourage the staff person to continue to work on them.<sup>5</sup> Noting areas of strength first is helpful if there are also concerns to address.

There are, of course, many good ways to organize evaluations. The important thing is to be realistic, accurate, and just. Examples of many types of evaluations are given in *Evaluation Essentials for Congregational Leaders*, which is available free as a download at [crcna.org/sites/default/files/evaluation\\_essentials.pdf](http://crcna.org/sites/default/files/evaluation_essentials.pdf). Hard copies are also available from Faith Alive Christian Resources.

## **Growing from Outcomes**

What outcomes can you expect from the evaluation process? According to *Evaluation Essentials for Congregational Leaders*, a “well-managed evaluation provides some direction and wisdom for future approaches and activities. Here are some possibilities:

- ▶ an intentional and articulated shift in a person's priorities
- ▶ some educational objectives responding to one aspect of the evaluation's finding
- ▶ changes to the job description
- ▶ a change in the administrative structure that better honors the gifts and tasks of the pastor and/or staff
- ▶ a more intentional communication strategy that helps the congregation understand the role and responsibility of the staff person
- ▶ some learning objective agreed upon for the coming year
- ▶ some task objectives agreed upon for the coming year
- ▶ clearly stated affirmation of how the person is contributing to the life of the congregation and the mission of the church."<sup>6</sup>

This list does not link financial compensation to evaluations, for several reasons. The most prominent among those reasons is that if current pay is adequate, increases in salary seldom motivate better performance. Things that do help to motivate ministry staff are "achievements, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, advancement and growth."<sup>7</sup>

When you have completed an evaluation, it is the responsibility of the council to keep and file the evaluation and make sure that it is in a safe, locked place and that it is available to authorized people for future use. Chapter 3 suggested creating personnel files for this purpose.

## **Coping with Difficult Evaluations**

### ***Families***

Jasmine, the worship coordinator at Second Church, brought a proposal for a new projection system to the worship committee. The worship committee consisted of five members, including Jasmine's sister and Jasmine's brother-in-law. Whenever a committee member brought up a problem, Jasmine's relatives came to her defense. A frank discussion of the proposal was impossible.

Many churches are like Second. For example, at SeaShore Church, the administrator is the supervisor of the church secretary. But the church secretary is his wife. Family members often end up serving together in churches, and sometimes that works well. Other times it doesn't. When churches evaluate staff, they need to

consider how family relationships might influence and affect the evaluation. In situations like these, having a written protocol is helpful.

### ***Insiders and Outsiders***

Lakeside Church is a congregation with a rich history that spans one hundred fifty years. When the congregation began to shrink, they hired Wilma, a 22-year-old children's director, to help children and young families find a place at Lakeside. About a hundred people attended worship services on Sunday mornings, but Wilma discovered that the membership list included about four hundred people. It was difficult to reach the non-attenders until Wilma's husband joined the indoor soccer team for a local business owned by members of the church. The whole congregation turned out for the games, since everyone on the team was from the church. Wilma met more people at the soccer games than she had at church. Until she attended those games, she had no idea that there was an entire network of Lakeside Church people who were deeply enmeshed in the church ecosystem without actually showing up on Sunday mornings. Many of these people had a long shared history together.

In *Evaluation Essentials for Congregational Leaders* the authors explain that some congregations are places where the gathered people share much history—not just as a church but also as an established community and often as extended biological family. In other congregations nearly everyone is a transplant. For them, the church often becomes a family. In some congregations there are “insiders” who share history or biological family connections and “outsiders” who have not been part of the history and are not related to many of the congregants. In these situations, it makes a difference if the pastor or staff person is seen primarily as an “insider” or “outsider.”<sup>9</sup>

When the congregation has many extended family relationships or much shared history, greater attention should be given to having formal protocols that manage the evaluation process. It is a good idea to try to minimize the number of dual relationships that could result in conflicts of interest.

### ***Unsatisfactory or Ineffective Ministry***

An evaluation can be difficult for both church staff and the employer if the person's work is not meeting expectations. The discussion will be awkward and sometimes painful. Chapter 8 deals with work not going well, and chapter 11 outlines a path for termination. While it is never nice to think about terminating someone's employment, congregations need to realize that sometimes God can speak to the church staff and also to the church by closing this door.

Today's churches are busy places that strive to do ministry in a variety of ways in the community where they live. In many cases the pastor doesn't have the time or gifts to lead all the ministries of the church, so a congregation chooses other capable leaders to help.

This handbook will help church staff and those who hire and supervise them to build a better and more focused ministry together. In engaging chapters filled with real-life examples, Keeley guides churches to hire according to ministry needs and to treat their staff with fairness and respect. She challenges staff to continue their lifelong learning and to look for opportunities for spiritual renewal.

Topics include writing vision statements and job descriptions, forming personnel committees, setting salaries, finding joy in ministry, working with pastors and councils, and many more.



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