

REPORT OF THE HARD TO CALL PROJECT TEAM

August 4, 2006

INTRODUCTION

Small congregations “have significant strengths. They are specialists in relationship: with each other, with God, with their pastor, with their community...Small churches are also places of high commitment...In this era when bigger is often assumed to be better, small congregations offer an important reminder of the value of each one of God’s beloved children.” (COM Handbook, Sixth Edition, section 3, p.4).

Small churches are more resilient than we often assume they are, and more of them have pastoral leadership than we once thought. But small congregations need care and attention and effective leadership from presbyteries as well as from their sessions and pastoral leaders if they are going to thrive and grow spiritually and in membership.

AN OVERVIEW

The PCUSA is a denomination of small churches. Presbyterians gather for worship and study, service and fellowship in vast stone cathedrals in the center of large cities and in small white frame buildings on the prairie, in urban storefronts and in large brick buildings in the suburbs. We belong to churches of every size, and many Presbyterians belong to large congregations. But nearly half of our congregations are small. In this report, a small church is defined as one with 100 members or less. In 2005 48% (5,191) of our congregations had 100 members or less. In 2005 only 9.4% (1,024) of all PCUSA congregations had 500 members or more.

The number of small congregations in the PCUSA is increasing. In the twenty-one years between 1984 and 2005, the number of congregations with one hundred members or less increased nearly 25%, from 4,171 to 5,191. The downward shift in average size of congregations is explained by the fact that while the total membership of the PCUSA has decreased, the total number of congregations has not decreased significantly.

From 2002 to 2005 the number of small churches (100 members or less) increased by 187, and the number of congregations of 500 members or more decreased by 100.

The number of congregations that cannot afford compensation for a fulltime minister of Word and Sacrament is increasing. Data from the Board of Pensions indicates that in 2004 there were 396 congregations that no longer paid dues on a called installed pastor position on which dues were paid in the past. It is not possible to specify the exact year in which payment ceased prior to 2002. However, it is known that 26 congregations ceased paying dues in 2002, 36 ceased paying in 2003 and 32 ceased paying in 2004. Within these 396 small churches, ministry is still taking place, but in a different form rather than with the traditional pattern of a called and installed pastor. This is another signal of the declining number of congregations that can afford the compensation for a fulltime minister of Word and Sacrament.

A look at causes

The reality is that small churches can seldom match the compensation offered to pastors by larger congregations. Although the terms of call are not the only factor in a minister or candidate’s decision to accept a call to a particular congregation, financial considerations do play a part. Some candidates and ministers are so burdened with

educational debt that they are unable to accept a call to a congregation where the compensation is lower than what they are offered elsewhere.

Contextual realities are a very significant part of the challenges facing small and racial ethnic congregations. Some are in small towns or rural areas where, if the pastor is married, the spouse is less likely to find satisfactory employment. In some cases pastors with children of school age perceive that public education in small towns offers fewer quality educational opportunities. Others are reluctant to exchange the amenities of urban areas for the amenities of small towns.

In addition, the culture of small congregations is unfamiliar to many candidates for ministry, 48%¹ of whom are members of congregations of 500 members or more. Candidates' lack of experience in small churches may contribute to their reluctance to consider a call to a small congregation.

For racial ethnic congregations, language barriers, cultural identity, and immigration issues create significant challenges. In addition, there are not enough racial ethnic and immigrant ministers of Word and Sacrament available to serve in the areas where leadership is most needed now and for a growing church in the future.

It is important to remember that the problems facing small churches in the PCUSA are very similar to the problems facing small churches in other denominations such as the UCC, the ELCA and the RCA. Among the reasons are population shifts away from rural areas and small towns to suburban areas, generational changes, vastly increased population mobility, a loss of loyalty to denominations, a growing distrust of institutions among younger people, and a lack of willingness on the part of many congregations to adapt to changing multicultural realities. Responding to the needs of congregations of all sizes in the 21st century requires creativity, flexibility, and a willingness to let go of some of our traditional ways of being church.

Research shows that the issue of “hard to call” congregations, although still very significant, is not as problematic as we once thought.

We have known since at least 2002 that, contrary to conventional wisdom, we do not have a shortage of ministers in the PCUSA.² We thought at that point that we had a shortage of pastors willing and able to serve small congregations. However, in 2005 at least 81% of PCUSA congregations were being served by pastoral leaders, including ministers of Word and Sacrament, commissioned lay pastors and ministers of other denominations.

A survey done in March 2006 by Presbyterian Research Services (Appendix I) suggests that the number of congregations without an ongoing relationship with a pastoral leader is probably less than 1,200 and may be as low as 750. Although reports to the Office of the General Assembly (OGA) indicate that 81% of our churches do have pastoral leadership, the fact that so many congregations do not have any pastoral leadership is reason for grave concern.

The March 2006 survey by Research Services was sent to clerks of session in the 1,212 congregations listed in the records of the OGA as without any pastoral leadership for a at least two years as of that time. Responses indicate that in fact, most of those 1,212 probably do have a pastoral leader. Of the 56% of congregations whose clerks of session responded to the survey, 50% have what the clerk of session describes as an interim, stated supply, temporary supply, tentmaker or commissioned lay pastor. An additional 63 churches or 14% are being served by a pastor of another denomination.

¹ Source: Office of Support for Committees on Preparation for Ministry, 6/06.

² Jack Marcum, “Why so Many Vacant Pulpits? A Look at the Numbers,” Research Services, 2002.

It should be noted, that of those congregations that responded that they are being served by a non-PCUSA pastor, the great majority (48 or 75%) are being served by pastors who are not from the Formula of Agreement denominations (ELCA, RCA or UCC). Statistics from the OGA show an additional 405 congregations being served by a minister of another denomination. Only 103 churches are served by ministers from the ELCA, RCA or UCC. We know, then, that at least 350 PCUSA congregations have a pastor who is neither PCUSA nor a member of a Formula of Agreement denomination. This presents a special challenge to presbyteries in carrying forward the Reformed tradition in those 350 (or more) congregations.³

A significant source of hope in our small membership churches is that we have more racial ethnic churches every year, and every one of them is a small congregation at the start. As the PCUSA strives to meet its goal of 20% racial ethnic membership, we applaud these small congregations that the presbyteries are starting in racial ethnic communities.

The comments in this section of our report do not indicate that the PCUSA has no problems in finding and keeping pastoral leaders in our congregations. In fact, 3,051 congregations did, according to OGA records, have “other leadership” at the end of 2005. Those temporary pastoral relationships are a reality because the presbytery and the COM in particular have worked diligently and effectively to help the congregations secure such leadership. That diligence comes at the cost of significant investments of time and energy and by the gifts of creativity and flexibility in presbyteries and congregations. Even if the number of PCUSA congregations without an ongoing relationship with a pastoral leader is “only” 750 (and it may be larger) that is a significant percentage (7%) of all our congregations and still presents significant reasons for concern.

Presbyteries are being creative in helping small churches secure pastoral leadership.

Congregations are served by stated supply or temporary supply pastors, by part-time pastors or tent-making pastors, by retired ministers, and by commissioned lay pastors. Some are in yoked situations with other Presbyterian congregations, or with non-Presbyterian churches. Still others have student pastors who are supervised and mentored by experienced pastors.

In addition, the 2006 General Assembly approved and sent to the presbyteries an overture that would amend the Form of Government by adding the possibility of licensure for candidates who have completed all requirements for ordination except successful completion of the ordination examinations and final assessment by presbytery CPMs. Such candidates could be licensed to serve as pastors under the supervision of a minister of the Word and Sacrament. Should this proposed amendment be approved, it would offer another possibility for presbyteries to use in providing pastoral leadership for “hard to call” congregations.

Every congregation and every presbytery is concerned with finding and keeping, not just any pastoral leaders, but appropriate and effective pastoral leaders who are well suited to serve the congregations in which they minister.

³ The complete survey is attached to this report as Appendix I.

But does every church have appropriate and effective leadership?

Ultimately, that is a question that can only be answered by the congregation and the presbytery in partnership with one another. However, anecdotal evidence from presbytery staff and COM moderators suggests that the answer is, “not always.”

The Form of Government says, “Every church should have the pastoral services of a minister of the Word and Sacrament.” (G-14.0500a) In fact, all congregations deserve and should have *appropriate and effective pastoral leadership*. But what constitutes appropriate and effective leadership varies according to the individual character and context of the congregation.

The “Hard to Call Churches” Project Team has recommendations for addressing the question of appropriate, effective leadership for all congregations.

Recommendations of the Project Team

In many cases, presbyteries are already responding to the needs of congregations in the presbytery for appropriate and effective leadership. The first section of recommendations invites the church at large (presbyteries, synods, Presbyterian colleges, seminaries, and GAC) to continue and/or improve what is already being done.

1. Role of the presbytery

Each one of our presbyteries wants to have the very best possible leadership for every one of its churches every Sunday of the year. With many churches unable to afford installed pastors, the presbyteries continue to seek good leadership for their small membership churches. In the last decade, many of the presbyteries have instituted Commissioned Lay Pastor programs; worked with ministers from the Formula Partner denominations (ELCA, RCA, and UCC) to provide pastoral leaders for congregations; developed larger parish arrangements; and created other new patterns. We congratulate the presbyteries for seeking creative ways to provide strong leaders for their small churches. We also encourage presbyteries that have not already done so, to establish a priority to recruit racial ethnic leaders.

Presbyteries are called to be presbyteries, “...a corporate expression of the church...” ((G-11.0100) Especially in our context of rapid social change, presbyteries have the responsibility to lead congregations in strategies for mission and ministry; to encourage and care for all congregations and church professionals, and to support norms of excellence in ministry that value the strengths of small congregations as much as larger ones, and of racial ethnic or multicultural congregations.

Presbyteries are also called to be good stewards. It is possible for a presbytery to spend an enormous amount of time and energy with a very few very needy congregations – often to very little effect. A carefully designed mission strategy and a thorough knowledge of the congregations of the presbytery will enable a presbytery to choose wisely where to invest resources of people, time, energy, and funds. Presbyteries should be clear about which congregations need and can probably benefit from an investment of the presbytery’s resources, and which probably cannot.

Strong, healthy congregations of every size are the pillars of a presbytery. Many churches do not ordinarily need the assistance of the presbytery. Healthy, or even relatively healthy congregations manage reasonably well most of the time. Often their primary need of the presbytery occurs during times of pastoral transition or conflict.

Some congregations are essentially family chapels. For those “chapels” the appropriate role of the pastor is likely to be limited to preaching and leading worship, providing pastoral care, and moderating session meetings. Such congregations need and deserve a pastor who will love them as they are, hold out the vision of a larger purpose for their life as a congregation, and stand with them, whether they accept that

larger vision or not. These congregations usually need little from their presbyteries except acceptance and respect.

Other congregations, however, including very small and/or racial ethnic congregations or immigrant fellowships, have the potential to be transformed into churches that will grow spiritually and numerically, given appropriate and effective pastoral leadership and the right mix of assistance and support from presbytery and the denomination as a whole. These are the congregations that should receive the most support from the presbytery. Any congregation, whether very small or very large, that engages in intentional transformation will need the partnership of the presbytery. However, smaller congregations will often need more assistance from the presbytery if they are to engage in successful transformation. This is not a judgment on the commitment or capability of the members of a smaller congregation, but recognition that smaller membership means a smaller pool of people whose energy, experience, skills, and talents can become part of the movement toward transformation.

Characteristics of congregations that are ready for transformation

According to Carl Dudley and Nancy T. Ammerman congregations that are able to be – or can learn to be -- transformation congregations (adapting congregations) have the following characteristics:

- Adapting congregations are curious about the world around them and know what is happening in their neighborhoods.
- Adapting congregations know themselves, their history and resources and are capable of honest self-assessment.
- Adapting congregations try new things; they have a habit of playful experimentation.
- Adapting congregations are able to imagine new resources, new partners, and new ways to use existing resources; they exhibit entrepreneurship.
- Adapting congregations understand the importance of imagination to envision something new; they make appropriate use of drama and symbols in congregational life and worship.
- Adapting congregations welcome and incorporate new people; they are hospitable.
- Adapting congregations are able to disagree, yet move forward together; they can embrace conflict.
- Adapting congregations are grounded in scripture and prayer; they have the capacity for spiritual discernment.⁴

The experience of PCUSA Congregational Transformation staff offers similar guidance for identifying congregations that are capable of transformational change. The key components of such congregations are:

- Flexibility and willingness to change (including a willingness to give up some of what they have valued in the past.);
- Commitment to welcome and make a place in leadership for new members;
- Willingness to embrace diversity and the multicultural makeup of our society;
- A pastor who will commit to stay with the congregation for the long term;

⁴ Carl S. Dudley and Nancy T. Ammerman. *Congregations in Transition, A Guide for Analyzing, Assessing, and Adapting in Changing Communities*, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2002, pp.8-11.

- An entrepreneurial spirit in both the congregation and the pastor so that new venues for mission and new avenues for funding can be found.⁵

Congregations that are, or can become, ready for transformation need and deserve appropriate, effective pastoral leadership and significant support and assistance from the presbytery. Such support and assistance might, in a few presbyteries, include some financial support, but in many presbyteries, the support and assistance will come in the form of the energy and expertise given by staff and leaders of presbytery. In some cases, presbyteries will partner with congregations for short-term transformation grants.

Another option that some presbyteries have explored, and more could consider, is shared ministry among Formula of Agreement congregations. An event held in April 2006 in Pennsylvania and West Virginia (“Abundance of Opportunity”) brought together ELCA, PCUSA, RCA and UCC middle governing body staff. Using maps of Formula of Agreement congregations with less than 50 in worship, they began conversations about sharing new multicultural work, creating cooperative ministries and planning a three-denomination new church development. Participants will continue shared work without national staff support. Although still in a beginning stage, this pilot will provide more information in the future. It is the hope of denominational staff in the four denominations to sponsor similar gatherings in other overlapping regions.

When the COM is aware that a congregation has very few persons in worship and is struggling financially, the COM should be prepared to assess the congregation's future with the session, and to encourage the congregation to consider merger with another congregation, or yoking or some other form of shared ministry with a nearby congregation, either PCUSA or a Formula Partner congregation.

Some presbyteries have created collaborative programs with other presbyteries for training and educating Committees on Ministry and/or Commissioned Lay Pastors or for providing continuing education aimed at supporting healthy ministry.⁶ Such partnerships are to be commended.

Presbyteries that have developed successful policies or programs for helping congregations secure appropriate and effective pastoral leaders can share such policies and programs through MGBConnect⁷ or the Office of Ministry Support⁸.

2. The role of the Committee on Ministry (COM)

It is important to the future of the PCUSA that we find ways to reverse losses in membership. One way is to decrease the number of churches that lose members because of destructive congregational conflict or a “bad match” between a newly called pastor and the congregation she/he serves. Small congregations are often especially vulnerable to the loss of even a few members, and in the year or two after a congregational conflict may decline from being a vital congregation to being barely viable. Well equipped Pastor Nominating Committees (PNCs) and a steady on-going relationship with the COM through the search process and at least the first year of a new pastorate are two major components in preventing the kind of trouble that can rapidly decrease the number of members and the vitality of a congregation. Committees on Ministry should invest the time and energy necessary to assist congregations through the call process and in the start up time as the new pastor and the new congregation

⁵ From an interview with Phil Tom, Associate for Urban Ministry, January 2006.

⁶ A new program of the Board of Pensions of the PCUSA provides grants to multiple presbytery partnerships for such programs. Information is available at <http://pensions.org/programs/assistance/mgbgrant.htm>.

⁷ www.pcusa.org/mgbconnect/.

⁸ Contact dfortel@ctr.pcusa.org.

discover how they relate to and work with each other. Congregations need good transitional leadership after an installed pastor has left, both from the COM and by a trained intentional interim pastor wherever possible. COMs that give support and training to PNCs will help the members of PNCs to be well equipped to discern carefully and make wise choices as they seek a new pastor.

COMs have been creative in working with small congregations that are seeking pastoral leadership. In many presbyteries education, oversight, and mentoring of Commissioned Lay Pastors (CLPs) is a responsibility of the COM. CLPs who are well educated for the pastoral role, and given the support and encouragement of good mentoring, are providing excellent pastoral leadership in many small congregations.⁹ In some presbyteries that are using commissioned lay pastors, however, there are concerns about issues of the quality of their educational preparation, about their accountability and supervision, and about their compensation, including health insurance and retirement benefits. (See Appendix III)

Some congregations are well served by part-time pastors who have other employment (Tentmakers/Bi-Vocational Pastors), or who are honorably retired. Still other congregations choose to become part of a larger parish, some of which are served by a minister of Word and Sacrament in collaboration with one or more Commissioned Lay Pastors.

The Committee on Ministry may increase its effectiveness in working with small congregations by cooperating with the presbytery nominating committee to recruit racial ethnic and members and pastors of small churches to serve on COM.

3. The role of the Committee on Preparation for Ministry (CPM)

CPMs play a vital role in preparing inquirers and candidates for the reality of ministry in the PCUSA. Seminarians should be encouraged to prepare themselves to serve in small or mid-sized churches.¹⁰

Because 48% of inquirers and candidates come from larger congregations (500 members or more), and because the inquirers and candidates often have little or no experience of life and leadership in a small congregation, CPMs may insist that seminary field placements be in a congregation that is different from the home church. They may also find it helpful to urge seminarians to take course work in ministry in small rural and/or urban congregations. CPMs should also be aware that for racial ethnic inquirers and candidates this picture is different. Most of them come from small to medium sized congregations.

Like the COM, the CPM may want to ask the nominating committee to recruit racial ethnic persons and members and pastors of small churches to serve on CPM.

4. The role of Presbyterian colleges

Presbyterian colleges also have a part to play as they encourage students to consider their vocation as a response to the claim of God on their lives in their baptism. Although the Presbyterian Church may not need large numbers of people whose vocation is pastoral ministry, we need many more members, elders and deacons of congregations who live out their baptismal call to ministry within and beyond the congregation.

⁹ In July 2006, OGA records indicated that 652 CLPs were serving 751 PCUSA congregations. Please see Appendix III for recommendations concerning Commissioned Lay Pastors.

¹⁰ "Consider Your Calling", a series of six pamphlets published by the Preparation for Ministry Office, PDS#72234-05-008.

Some Presbyterian colleges choose to partner with presbyteries in their regions to offer coursework that can be used as partial fulfillment of the required preparation for service as commissioned lay pastors. The Christian Ministry Minor¹¹ at Hastings College is an example of such a program that prepares graduates to meet some of the requirements for serving as part time (tentmaker) commissioned lay pastors.

5. The role of seminaries

The increasing number of small congregations that cannot make the financial commitment necessary to call a fulltime pastor will impact seminaries, as will the number of small congregations being served by part-time commissioned lay pastors. The reality is that there may not be a call to pastoral ministry in the PCUSA for every Presbyterian Master of Divinity degree recipient.

Most PCUSA theological seminaries offer some elective courses that focus on small, rural or urban/inner city ministries. In many instances there is material in other courses that relates to ministry in small congregations. Often, field education and supervised practice of ministry programs required for seminary graduation encourage students to serve in churches with different profiles from the home churches of the students (e.g., students from large churches assigned to small churches).

Seminaries encourage students to understand the disciplines of pastoral leadership that are very different from management skills. Many courses offer the necessary tools for careful analysis of the contextual realities of congregations. Even though students are not always at the point of “readiness for learning,” an introduction to the necessary habits of the heart, knowledge, and skill sets can be of great benefit when students become newly ordained clergy.

Seminaries can be of great help to the denomination by encouraging students to consider a vocational call to ministry in and with small congregations and/or a call to Tentmaking/Bi-Vocational ministry.

Providing coursework for the education of commissioned lay pastors is another way that the seminaries can be of service to the denomination. It is essential to ensure that CLPs are well-grounded in the Reformed tradition, committed to it, and able to articulate it. Seminaries are and can be key partners in that important part of education for commissioned lay pastors.

6. Continuing GAC, Synod and presbytery programs that support newly ordained ministers

Seminaries offer excellent preparation for ministry through the Master of Divinity degree. However, some of what ministers need to learn can only be gained by experience as a pastor. Such learning will be greatly enhanced by opportunities to reflect on that experience in a structured setting. Continuing and enhancing programs of continuing education and support for newly ordained ministers will be of great value to them and to the congregations they serve, many of which are small.

Two kinds of programs offer support, encouragement, and education to newly ordained ministers, many of whom are serving small congregations. Each offers new pastors the opportunity to reflect on the nature of pastoral ministry and to learn additional skills for ministry at a time when the new pastors are more ready to reflect and learn than they probably were during their seminary years.

¹¹ Information on the Christian Ministry minor at Hastings College is available from the Reverend Dr. Trace Haythorn, thaythorn@hastings.edu.

Programs for newly ordained pastors such as the Entrance into Pastoral Ministry pilot programs and similar programs in some synods and presbyteries offer newly ordained ministers of Word and Sacrament the opportunity to come together with peers, experienced pastors, and, in some cases, seminary professors, to reflect on the realities of pastoral ministry, to learn additional skills for pastoral ministry, and to engage in mutual support and accountability. Typically, the groups meet once annually over a two or three year period. In some cases, participants continue to be in touch with each other in the intervening months.

The Company of New Pastors, a program of Theology and Worship (CMD), begins with a select group of seminary students in their middler and senior years, and offers them formation in spiritual disciplines. The program continues with meetings during the year focused around shared readings in theology and conversations that include opportunities for mutual support and for reflection on the nature of pastoral ministry.

Presbyteries should ensure that participation in one such program is part of the call for every newly ordained pastor, and participation in the program should be required of the pastor. Congregations should provide for the pastor's participation by providing extra study leave time for the program for newly ordained pastors.

The Pastors' Sabbath conferences are another excellent opportunity for renewal of pastors that will foster healthy pastoral leadership in large and small congregations.

Two recommendations for “next steps”

1. A partnership in recruiting pastors for small, “hard-to-call” congregations

The Project Team recommends a pilot study of a residency program for newly ordained ministers serving small congregations. (See Appendix II.)

2. A recommendation for further study: Supporting excellence among commissioned lay pastors

The Project Team recommends that the GAC initiate a study of Commissioned Lay Pastors to ascertain the use of CLPs in presbyteries, to evaluate the programs of education for CLPs and to make recommendations regarding the future of CLPs in the PCUSA. (See Appendix III)

SUMMARY

Appropriate and effective pastoral leadership for all our congregations will come as congregations, presbyteries, synods, Presbyterian colleges and theological seminaries and the national church partner with each other in the design of strategies and options for recruiting, educating, and supporting skilled pastors and candidates who are committed to small church and racial ethnic congregational leadership. We must acknowledge that the PCUSA is a denomination of small congregations, and that we hope to become increasingly a denomination of racial ethnic and multicultural congregations. For the sake of all our congregations it is essential that all the partners in preparing and supporting pastoral leadership collaborate to serve the congregations with appropriate, effective pastoral leadership.

APPENDICES

Appendix I: Congregations That Do Not Have a Pastor

How Many Congregations Do Not Have A Pastor?

In trying to understand why we have found so few congregations without pastoral leadership in our current survey compared to what has been reported previously, I have been alerted to a problem that our office discovered earlier and is working to fix.

In Comparative Statistics, we have reported the numbers of congregations that do not have an installed pastor (the column headed “congregations without pastors” in Table 15). In 2004, that figure was 37% of all congregations. We thought this indicated that 37% of PC(USA) congregations did not have any permanent pastoral relationship—that is, no solo pastor or head of staff, co-pastor, associate pastor, designated pastor, tentmaker, or **commissioned lay pastor**. We arrived at that figure by looking at the occupational code for each minister (in the minister file) and matching that data with the congregational file. We had assumed the data in the clergy file are more accurate than the congregational data.

When I asked for a list of congregations that did not have a pastor for the current survey, I received a list of 1,212 congregations (11% of the total). These were congregations coded as seeking a pastor (a code of “S”). That does not necessarily mean the congregation is actively seeking a pastor, but rather that there is no clergy or lay pastor listed for the congregation, and it is not regularly supplied (a code of “R”).

The question is: Why is there a discrepancy between the number of congregations without pastors as presented in Comparative Statistics and the number used for the current study? The discrepancy is caused by the fact that in previous years we worked from an incomplete minister file that listed only the primary employment for each minister. Thus, if a minister’s primary employment is as staff of a middle governing body, for example, and his or her secondary call is as a part-time solo pastor, we had no way of knowing that that congregation had regular pastoral leadership. When the data from secondary, tertiary, etc., positions are included, the discrepancy largely disappears. This is shown in the data for 2005 below. (Congregations served by pastors of other denominations are taken into account.)

Congregations without pastors (calculated as in previous years)	3,212
Congregations that have pastors reflected in secondary occupational codes	-1,207
Congregations that are listed as being regularly supplied	<u>-410</u>
Congregations without pastors.....	1,595

Note that this number (1,595) is a little larger than the number we used for the survey because the data are from a different month.

I think it is safe to say that the number of congregations without pastoral leadership is not more than 11% of congregations. To me, that is the first important finding of our study.

The second important finding is that many of the congregations making up that 11% do not see themselves as without pastoral leadership and may not be seeking more than clergy services on Sunday and possibly a few hours during the week. We have some clues that allow us to make an educated guess as to what that number is. We know that over 80% of survey respondents said their congregation is regularly supplied with pastoral leadership. Some insight can be gained by examining how they responded when we asked: “who supplies this leadership?” (see table below). The percentages add to over 100% because they could choose more than one answer.

Pastor shared with another Presbyterian congregation	16%
Pastor shared with a non-Presbyterian congregation	5%
Pastor of another denomination	15%
Interim pastor	7%
Stated supply pastor	22%
Pulpit supply pastor.....	11%
Commissioned lay pastor	18%
Temporary supply pastor	13%
Tentmaker pastor	3%
Other	21%

More than 10% of the congregations that said they had pastoral leadership did not answer this question. Based on phone calls received from some congregations, we believe that many of these have an installed pastor and did not understand why they received the questionnaire.

Written comments from the survey suggest that the term “regular pastoral leadership” was understood by many to mean that the congregation had leadership on Sunday morning. What we do not know is the number of these congregations that want more than the services of a pastor simply on Sunday. We do not know why 22% said they were served with a stated supply pastor when none is listed for the congregation.

We plan to correct the information in past issues of Comparative Statistics that are listed on our Web site. To date, we have not received a positive response from the Office of the General Assembly when we requested the secondary occupation codes for previous years.

Keith Wulff
 Research Services
 Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
 June 2, 2006

Appendix II: Residency program for newly ordained pastors serving small congregations

Background:

Research done in 2005 confirms the expectation that programs designed to support, nurture and continue the education of newly ordained pastors are effective and appreciated by participants. The reality is that even the very best student in the best seminary cannot learn everything she or he needs to know to be an effective pastor. Some aspects of pastoral ministry can only be learned after some experience as a pastor who is fully responsible for all or part of the life and ministry of a congregation.

Small churches often find it difficult to call a fulltime minister of Word and Sacrament to serve as their pastor. Their location, their size, their financial situation, and, sometimes, their reputation, play a part in this difficulty.

At the same time, the number of candidates for ministry who have received permission from their Committee on Preparation for Ministry to seek a call is increasing, while the time they wait to find a call lengthens.

Proposal:

A collaboration between presbytery and seminary partners and GAC to identify seminary students or recent graduates who have the potential to become excellent pastors of small congregations, and mediate calls to them to serve as Designated Pastors in small congregations.

The role of the presbytery:

1. Identify healthy small congregations that are seeking a pastor and that have enough kindness, flexibility and energy to become teaching congregations for newly ordained pastors. Those congregations should be financially viable, and have the potential to grow both spiritually and in membership.
2. Encourage such congregations to apply to enter the Program.
3. Covenant with those identified congregations to enter into Designated Pastor relationships from a pool of screened candidates.
4. Identify and recruit experienced pastors (one for every three students) who will serve as mentors for a small group of newly ordained pastors, and who know the world of small church ministry.
5. Identify one member of the COM, and two other presbytery leaders, including the EP/GP if possible, to serve on a screening committee for congregations and applicants.

The role of the CPM:

1. Identify candidates for ministry who are ready to receive a call, and who have the potential to become excellent pastors of small congregations.
2. Recruit applicants who are willing to enter into a Designated Pastor relationship through the Program.
3. Identify one member of CPM to serve on a screening committee.

The role of the seminary:

1. Identify students or recent graduates who have the potential to be excellent pastors of small congregations.
2. Collaborate with the presbyteries and the mentors chosen by the presbyteries to train the mentors and design an annual consultation/conference for the newly

ordained pastors, two members of the session of the congregation each serves, and the mentors.

The role of the candidates:

1. Apply for admission into the Program.
2. Commit to limit their search process to only congregations in covenant group for a period of three months
3. Commit to staying with the congregation for at least three years
4. Commit to participate in both bi-monthly mentoring groups and annual consultations/conferences.
5. Commit to learning how to be an effective pastor in a small congregation with a focus on relationship-building

Funding: To be secured through grants.

Appendix III: Proposed Study of Commissioned Lay Pastors

Background:

Commissioned Lay Pastors were intended as a response to the needs of small, often geographically isolated congregations, for pastoral leaders. As the number of small congregations in the PCUSA increases, the need for and use of CLPs increases. In 2000 there were 208 Commissioned Lay Pastors. By 2005 the number had risen to 579, and by July 2006, 652 commissioned lay pastors were serving 751 congregations.

As the number of commissioned lay pastors increases, the questions about the variety of ways presbyteries administer their programs for education, use, mentoring, and oversight of CLPs increase. Because each presbytery is responsible to educate lay pastors within certain broad parameters (G-14.0800), some presbyteries require CLPs to participate in weekend educational events focused on one aspect of the Book of Order requirements of CLPs, while other presbyteries are considering requiring those interested in serving as CLPs to complete seminary courses in required subjects of study.

In addition, concerns have been raised in many quarters about the justice of compensation and benefits for CLPs. The number of CLPs who receive benefits as well as salary is unknown.

Finally, there are some cases where CLPs are being used as a fulltime pastor for a congregation. The number of congregations where that is the case is uncertain. Concerns have been raised about whether it is appropriate for commissioned lay pastors rather than installed pastors to serve a congregation fulltime.

Proposal:

Commission a study by Research Services and OGA in collaboration with each other to determine:

1. The number of congregations being served by commissioned lay pastors and the function they fill in the congregation (pastor, associate pastor, other)
2. The number of commissioned lay pastors serving full time and part time.
3. The number of commissioned lay pastors receiving benefits and what presbytery policies, if any, govern that.
4. The consistency (or lack thereof) in training/education for CLPs from one presbytery to another.

Funding:

The source of funding is to be determined. The cost would be approximately \$5,000.

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The Assignment

The Project Goal: “To explore challenges of providing pastoral leadership to small churches in “hard to call” contexts and develop a strategy to help congregations and presbyteries to address the complex issues.

The Outcome: “A national strategy for appropriate pastoral leadership for every PCUSA congregation.”

Project Sponsors are Marcia Clark Myers and Joe Small on behalf of the MWP Core Team.

The Project Team

Project Managers are Marcia Clark Myers and Deborah G. Fortel

The Project Team is

John R. Evans (Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary),

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Until May 1, Diana Stephen, (then Network Support: Rural and Small Church Ministries in NMD).

Barbara Campbell-Davis, EP in New Hope originally agreed to serve on the Project Team but had to withdraw.

Methodology

The Project Team met face to face four times (including one brief meeting during the 2006 meeting of the General Assembly and participated in 4 conference calls. From the time of the first meeting in December 2005 until the completion of the project report in July 2006, the Team reviewed research on small churches, read numerous books and articles (a partial bibliography is attached), commissioned a special project by Research Services and conducted several surveys and numerous informal conversations with people not on the project team. Each member of the Team brought experiences in and knowledge of small congregations to our work. More important, each had a profound appreciation for the strengths and joys of life in small congregations as well as an understanding of the challenges they face