

## **Pastoral Staff Configuration**

Because the needs of congregations vary widely, there is no single multi-staff configuration that can be recommended based on church size alone. When changing staff size, hours, or assignments, there are a number of factors to take into account. These include:

*Demographics.* Factors such as age, location, residency patterns, and so forth will affect the pastoral needs of a congregation.

A few examples: A church with many young families will need staff time devoted to education, while one with a predominantly older and retired congregation may need time devoted to visitation, and/or to social/community volunteer organization. Congregations adding new members may have added needs for adult education and faith formation. If many members live at a distance there may be need for local clusters of social support.

Obviously there can be a great many different patterns and variations.

*Congregational transitions.* As a church changes size or demographic makeup, some longtime church members may retain historical expectations of the needs of the congregation and the focus of the pastor's time. This can create needs that don't necessarily align with the demographic characteristics of the church. Church-wide conversations can help a church get in touch with its current needs.

*Vision and Mission.* The focus of a congregation's expectations and desires for its life together are at the heart of staff size and configuration. For example, a church with an active social justice and service focus, involved in community ministry, will certainly have need of pastoral support in these areas. But the type of support and time needed will depend on the ministries, and the extent and type of the congregation's support for them. If there is a lot of actual physical participation, there may be need of a volunteer coordinator for the church, who may or may not have pastoral training. However, if there are ministries of outreach housed in the church facility the coordinator might well have need of pastoral or other specialized training.

Likewise, if the congregation provides primarily monetary or administrative support for community ministry, or is involved more in political activism rather than providing social services, the needs will be different. A church which is focusing on growth will need pastoral skills and time devoted to evangelism; while a church devoted to adult faith development will have different needs.

## **Analyzing your situation**

It's always a good idea to consult your conference staff about staffing changes. They may have suggestions based on the experience of similar congregations. And they can help with perspectives on some of the common issues that arise in congregations in transition.

It may be that your church's pastor and leadership have a shared understanding of the needs of the church based on a good basic understanding of your mission and demographics. What are the current pastor's skills and strengths? What needs are being met? Where are other needs being expressed, and how widely shared are those needs in the congregation?

On the other hand, pastoral staff transitions can be a good time for re-visioning the mission of your congregation, and engaging in some planning. Developing a shared view of the variety of needs and expectations in the church can help clarify pastoral needs. Likewise it can pave the way to a smooth transition with widespread congregational support.

One word of caution: written surveys of the congregation are notoriously unhelpful in this effort. The act of building community while pondering these questions is an important part of the process and can't be underestimated. Surveys can have an opposite effect on the congregation. They often emphasize the divisions and conflicts which are a normal part of congregational life, making those the focus of the effort, rather than positive visions.

There are a number of resources available through The Alban Institute which may be helpful in this effort. A short bibliography follows; again, consult your conference staff for their advice on these resources, and on the approach and scope of your congregation's visioning and planning efforts.

**Resources from The Alban Institute 1-800-486-1318 ext 244, or [www.alban.org](http://www.alban.org):**

What Size Should We Be? Visioning the In-Between Church. (Video) Alice Mann

The In-between Church: Navigating Size Transitions in Congregation. (book) Alice Mann

Discerning Your Congregation's Future: A Strategic and Spiritual Approach. Roy M. Oswald and Robert E. Friedrich, Jr.

Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations. Gil Rendle and Alice Mann.

The Once and Future Church: A Study Resource. Video and guide. Loren B. Meade

Not Trying Too Hard: New Basics for Sustainable Congregations. Bob Sitze

Letting Go: Transforming Congregations for Ministry. Roy D. Phillips

Redeveloping the Congregation: A How To for Lasting Change. Mary K. Sellon, Daniel P. Smith, and gail F. Grossman.