

LISTENING TEAMS

Definition

Conflict is inherent to the fallen human condition. One joyful duty of the Church is to proclaim, bear witness to, and participate in the blessing of reconciliation accomplished by Christ for us on the Cross (Eph. 2:14). At times, however, a congregation may find itself engaged in conflict that resists their efforts at resolution. In such circumstances, a trusted third party may help the church along a path to resolution through objective and pastoral listening. **Listening Teams** are teams of three to five Ruling and Teaching Elders commissioned by the Committee on Ministry (“COM”) to visit a congregation, listen pastorally to members and staff, and report their findings to the Church and Pastor Relations Subcommittee (“CPR”) of COM. They shall not be considered an Investigating Committee. CPR shall review these findings and then consult with church leadership to assist in reconciliation efforts.

Constitution

COM may assemble a Listening Team (“LT”) when:

- Requested in writing by the Session
- Requested in writing by a pastor
- It concludes that doing so is an appropriate way to respond to conflict in a congregation.

Ideally, at least one member of a LT shall be a member of CPR.

Duties

1. Once assembled, the LT shall meet as soon as possible with the CPR Moderator, the COM Moderator, and/or the Presbytery of the James (“POJ”) General Presbyter for training. This training shall include:
 - Review of events leading up to the formation of the LT
 - Review of matters that are the subject of the dispute or complaint
 - Guidelines for pastoral listening
 - Guidelines for the LT’s report to CPR
2. The LT shall then contact the pastor and session of the congregation to schedule times when the LT can visit and listen to congregation members. Depending on the size of the church and the number of people who wish to speak, multiple visits may be needed.
3. If someone wishes to voice their concerns to the LT but is unable to meet, they may submit their concerns in writing or electronically to the LT. All comments must be signed and dated.
4. Once the LT has heard all who wish to speak, it shall provide CPR a report of its findings. All members shall maintain confidentiality. This report shall include (but not be limited to):

- a. The nature of the conflict
- b. Principals involved in the conflict
- c. The LT's assessment of the merits of the grievances
- d. Efforts already made by the congregation and/or staff to address or resolve the conflict
- e. The LT's analysis of the reason(s) for the failure of previous reconciliation attempt(s)
- f. Scripture passages the LT believes are relevant and/or helpful in addressing the conflict
- g. Number of listening sessions conducted
- h. Number of congregants, Session members, and staff listened to
- i. Number of people who submitted written input to the LT
- j. A statement characterizing the church's receptivity (or resistance) to the LT's ministry/visit(s)

The LT is responsible only to listen and report its findings to CPR. It shall not engage in efforts to resolve the conflict, nor share its findings with church members. Such actions are the responsibility of CPR.

Follow-up

Once CPR has received and reviewed the report (in consultation with the COM Moderator and the POJ General Presbyter), it shall schedule a meeting with the Session to review the findings of the report. The CPR (in consultation with the COM Moderator and the POJ General Presbyter) shall have discretion over which aspects of the report it shall share, and in what format. CPR may meet with the Session more than once in pursuit of a satisfactory resolution.

Following the meeting with CPR, the pastor and Session shall jointly publish a letter to the congregation reviewing the process and the meeting(s) with CPR and presenting its plans for reconciliation and moving forward. The Session shall provide a copy of this letter to the CPR Moderator, the COM Moderator, and the POJ General Presbyter.

Approved COM November 14, 2019