

Exit Interviews When a Church Staff Minister Leaves

By Warren Lynn

While not unlike exit interviews in secular settings, an exit interview of a church minister or any other staff member also holds additional intrinsic qualities. How exit interviews of church staff are conducted, what a church does with information gleaned from such interviews, and how participants in such experiences are treated during and after the process express much about the ministry, theology and spirituality of the ongoing life of the congregation.

Thus, secular models of exit interviews can be helpful as examples of items to consider and questions to ask, but a congregation should seek a deeper, spiritually mindful, approach to the policies and practice of such interviews. Such careful intention in such matters can empower the congregation to be, more, the kind of community of G_d calls them to be, the kind of people they intend to be, and the kind of people they want others to actually understand them to be.

With this in mind, then, the following Website will provide actual questions and considerations for any exit interview process:

http://jobsearchtech.about.com/cs/interviewtips/a/exit_interview.htm

Certainly, congregational leadership should consider whether any proposed question form any source is appropriate for their setting and or theology of ministry (who they seek to be in living out G_d's call upon them as a congregation). So also, should leaders put the same consideration into how they shape their processes.

But moving deeper, a congregation will also want to consider what person/team/committee/body should conduct the interview. Some of the questions to be asked in establishing who will do the interview, include:

- Who determines the person(s) or group conducting the interview process?
- Are there possible conflicts of interest that should/can be avoided by refraining from giving this responsibility to certain persons or groups?
- Is there a person or group of people who are best positioned and/or qualified to be most supportive to, both, the person being interviewed and the congregation following the interview?
- What is the purpose of such interviews in the life of the church, and this interview in particular? How can this interview process best serve the congregation and the minister into their diverging futures?
- How will all information gleaned from the interview be treated?
- With regard to the interview process and information obtained, what is an appropriate practice of confidentiality?
- How will appropriate levels of confidentiality be maintained?
- How will the results of the interview be interpreted to others (the wider-congregation, region, others asking about this previous minister) in order to be most-helpful, pastoral, constructive, truthful but non-judgmental, legal, and ethical?
- How will those conducting the interview be accountable to, both, the congregation and the person being interviewed?

Certainly, there are other considerations that will come to light as the exit interview process develops.

Recently, some additional questions were offered by a congregational church expert as to what could additionally be asked in the contextually specific situation of a congregational ministry staff person who was about to leave a current church setting. These include:

- What were your hopes and dreams for this position when you came into this ministry position? How were those dreams met? In what ways did you experience disappointment?
- How do you believe this position and experience shaped what you want to do next? How was your calling refined in this position?
- What do you think are the strengths of this particular congregation's ministry? What are the challenges to growing this ministry?
- Reflect with me on our partnership in ministry: what do you consider highlights in this partnership? How might other leaders (staff and lay) have been better partners in leadership with you?
- A variety of Christian leaders have suggested that our task is to discover what it is our souls were created to be. How has this experience shaped what you believe your soul was created to be? How are you headed there?

As you form your own process for interviewing a person who is leaving a current position of ministry, my prayer is that the shape of your experience takes form within the womb of Christian discernment. May G_d's life-giving breath of Spirit breathe hopeful possibility into your effort. May all who are a part of this holy occasion bring a bounty of generous humility and truthful compassion to the table of shared conversation. And from that place of radical and inclusive hospitality, may a transformational feast of renewing ministry be celebrated in, both, the lives of the minister and the congregation. May it be so. Amen.

©Warren Lynn, 2014