

Frequently asked questions about the Leadership Staff Parish Relations Committee

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1. Introduction – Why do we need a special committee to address relationship issues? The very nature of our community is relational, and our work together has a significant relational component. As a congregation, we think of our pastors and church administrator as our friends and companions in our spiritual journeys. And we also think of them spiritual guides and even “prophets.” Because we fill so many roles in each others' lives, the relationship between the congregation and its leaders can be complicated. For example, sometimes we want our leaders to comfort us, but at other times we expect them to challenge us. Thus, they are often moving between polarities.

The Church Council, on behalf of the congregation, decided in 2006 that we could all benefit from a specific committee to tend this relationship. The committee is made up, by design, of two types of members – six lay members representing the congregation and our four Leadership Team members.

2. What is the LPRC? And what is it not?

Relying on the leadership/congregation covenant the Leadership/Staff Parish Relations Committee (LPRC) serves the church by monitoring the ongoing relationship between the Leadership Team and the congregation. In essence, it is a sounding board to assist the church in maintaining a healthy relationship between the congregational and Leadership Team and in identifying and resolving issues.

Members of the congregation may share questions or concerns about church leadership staff with members of the LPRC who will listen and assure responsiveness to those concerns. Of course, LPRC members are not the only avenue of communication. The LPRC encourages congregational members to meet directly with leadership staff to discuss their concerns. Depending upon the topic, LPRC may encourage church members to take concerns to other relevant church boards or Council.

LPRC members can advise those who bring concerns to them, serve as an intermediary between those concerned, or bring up issues honestly in monthly meetings of the LPRC. Similarly, the Leadership Team may raise questions and concerns that might affect their relationship with the congregation. Again, the LPRC can serve as an initial sounding board, listening and offering insight on behalf of the congregation.

It is also important to know what LPRC is not. It is not an advocate, mediator, or peacemaker.

As a listener, communicator, and occasional adviser, it does not take on causes, does not have formal proceedings, and cannot mediate conflicts as a committee. The LPRC is not a replacement for any other existing function or processes in the church, including those pertaining to personnel/management issues. Being a monitor and a sounding board focused on the healthy relationship between the congregation and the Leadership Staff, the LPRC does not play a counseling role for church members or Leadership Staff.

3. When are LPRC meetings? How does one become a member?

The LPRC meets once a month on the second Monday. Meetings include only committee members, and every effort is made to maintain privacy and confidentiality.

Lay members of the committee serve six year terms, and one new member is added each year to replace the one whose term expires. The Leadership Team compiles a list of potential members and then the committee as a whole determines who will be invited to become a member. Members are then approved by the Church Council. Candidates are actively involved in the life of the church as well as people from different sectors of the church community.

4. How does the LPRC serve the congregation?

We serve the congregation by openly and frankly sharing issues that we have identified from fellow congregation members. At monthly meetings, the lay members of the LPRC represent the congregation and its concerns, questions, and perspectives to the full committee. The LPRC also responds to issues raised by the Leadership Team. The monthly meetings provide a frank, private and confidential dialogue focused on the relationship between the Leadership Team and the congregation. In this dialogue, the lay members “stand in” for the congregation as a whole, since it would be impractical to have such a conversation with the entire congregation.

5. How does the LPRC serve the Leadership Team?

All congregations have a variety of hopes, needs, opinions and sensitivities. Pastoral leaders find it helpful to discuss issues and concerns with a small representative group. The diverse membership of the LRPS yields a variety of congregational perspectives and assists the Leadership Team in addressing issues and identifying potential problems.

Here are some examples: Sometimes a pastor may come to the committee and say, “I have this new idea (or project) that I’m really excited about, but it’s different from what the congregation is accustomed to. Should I go ahead with it? What do you think?” Or a member of the Leadership Team may bring up a personal perspective on an issue and ask, “Is this good or bad? Is it something I should keep to myself or share with the congregation? What do you think?” In this way, pastors can ask for feedback and avoid “blind spots.” Such feedback can be especially helpful in decisions where the personal and professional aspects of a pastor's life might intersect or overlap, and to address life-balance issues.

6. How are the roles of Personnel Board and LPRC different?

The personnel Board serves UCUC in a human-resources capacity, conducting annual performance reviews of leadership staff, handling personnel matters as they arise. These may include calling a pastor, hiring personnel, compensation, training, and termination issues. The sole focus of LPRC is the ongoing congregational/leadership team relationship.

7. When should I contact the LPRC?

If you have an issue or concern about the Leadership Team or one of its members, you can contact any member of the LPRC. He or she will help you figure out your next steps.

If you have identified an issue that has an impact on the community, then it's congregational, and the LPRC can help you.

Members of the LPRC, with their contact information, are always listed on the back of the Sunday bulletin.

8. Once I have shared an issues with an LPRC member, what should I expect to happen? First, you should expect open ears and appropriate respect for your privacy and confidentiality as noted above.

An LPRC member will first try to assess whether the issue is appropriate for the LPRC.

You should then expect the LPRC member to work with you to plan how to assure that your issue is addressed including providing you with information about what will happen next. This may include bringing it up at an LPRC meeting.

You will hear back from that member after the meeting regarding the results of the discussion, along with any follow-up plans.

9. How will LPRC deal with a specific issue?

As issues arise in monthly meetings, LPRC determines whether issues are relational (i.e., impacting the relationship between the congregation and the Leadership Team) or performance-related (i.e., a leadership-team member is not fulfilling his/her duties).

If an issue is relational, the Leadership Team will outline steps to address the problem and keep the LPRC fully in the loop. If performance-related, the Leadership Team will take steps to improve performance, and LPRC will involve the personnel board if necessary. I

n gray areas, LPRC and leadership-team members will refer to the leadership/congregation covenant, to prayer, and other sources of inspiration to clarify how best to handle the issue. If an issue has been determined to be relational, it will be an ongoing agenda item during LPRC meetings until it's resolved, and congregants who brought the issue to LPRC's attention will be kept apprised of action items and resolution.