

A black and white photograph of a person's hands holding a white cloth with a small object on it. The person is wearing a light-colored, textured garment. The hands are positioned to hold the cloth steady, and the object on the cloth is partially visible. The background is dark and out of focus.

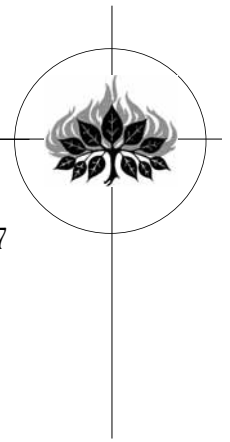
For Elders

November/2007

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**Writers: Dorothy Henderson, Don Muir
The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 2006**



November 2007

Dear Elders,

Rethinking the Annual Congregational Meeting

As 2007 winds down, congregations will begin to make ministry plans for 2008 and beyond. One step in the planning process will include an annual congregational meeting. Congregational meetings can sometimes be dreary affairs that seem to accomplish little. Other times, they can be far too exciting as stress levels reach unhealthy and unhelpful heights. *Rethinking the Annual Congregational Meeting* was co-written by The Rev. Gordon Timbers and Ms. Joan Masterton. Together they tell the story of how Unionville Presbyterian Church moved towards a revitalized and effective annual meeting.

Memories of Annual Meetings

Enjoy reading comments from clergy and laypeople about their best and worst memories of annual meetings. There is something to be learned there!

Session Starter

This issue's Session Starter continues this theme and reflects on how **annual meetings** can be opportunities for congregational and spiritual discernment.

The Ministry of Reconciliation

Lori Ransom offers a reflection on the ministry of reconciliation and encourages you to invite *her* to be present with you in your congregation.

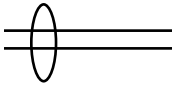
What's On Your Mind?

In the August issue of *For Elders*, an invitation was extended to elders to send in questions about Presbyterian polity, or why Presbyterians do things the way they do. One elder asked, **"How much input does a session have regarding a minister's continuing education?"** This issue offers an answer.

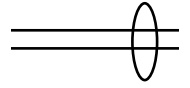
Blessings,

Donald Muir
Associate Secretary
The General Assembly Office

Dorothy Henderson
Associate Secretary
Life and Mission Agency



Rethinking the Annual Congregational Meeting



Writers: Joan Masterton (elder) and Gordon Timbers (minister)

Unionville Presbyterian Church, Unionville, ON

“That was the best congregational meeting I ever attended. Thank you!”

“I don’t remember ever having laughed so much at an annual meeting!”

These were unbelievable but welcome comments heard after the annual meeting at Unionville Presbyterian Church in February, 2002. How did we get there? It was a journey ... and well worth it.

Looking Back

Our congregation, Unionville Presbyterian, had been going through a period of reflection and change. The session and our minister, The Rev. Gordon Timbers, were examining what we were doing as well as *how* and *why* we were doing things. One of the challenges was our annual general meeting.

Elders helped to prepare for the annual general meeting but neither the preparatory process nor the meeting itself were as enjoyable or productive as we hoped. Focusing on the “nitty-gritty” of the proposed budget sometimes led to increased levels of tension, lost time, and unproductive discourse. The process was not conducive to building relationships. There was no fun or laughter. The annual meeting was becoming onerous to prepare for and to sit through. Why not try a new and different model?

The Context for Change

Reforming the annual meeting did not happen in isolation from the rest of the congregation’s ministry. Around this time we had done these things:

- explored *Natural Church Development*, identifying our strengths, weaknesses, and new goals
- sent a team of four people to the *Stewards by Design* conference
- sent a team of people to a national conference on planned giving
- became involved in HIV/AIDS as a result of our minister’s mission education trip to Malawi, and we continued our involvement in HIV/AIDS at a local level

These events and activities have occurred over several years, influenced other congregational procedures and activities, and created an atmosphere of willingness to consider new ideas. We began to develop new ministry goals and to drop some old and not-so-productive habits.

As we reconsidered the annual meeting, we tried to integrate changes we had been making, reflect on them at the meeting, and celebrate our ministry and our vision for the future.

Rethinking the Annual Meeting

We knew the words we *didn't* want attached to the annual meeting:

- Long and boring (people reading from the Annual Report)
- Uncomfortable (controversy over minutiae)
- No fun (How much fun is truly possible at a corporate-style annual meeting focused on a line-item budget?)

We designed a new model for our annual meeting, and it looked like this:

- Not after the worship service but *within* it
- Not in the sanctuary but *in the fellowship hall*
- Not after lunch but *during* lunch
- Not a long line of committee convenors reporting on last year's activities (already captured in writing) but *speakers from all age categories addressing a mission or ministry for which they had passion*
- Not focused on line items in a budget but on *pictures of our people living life together as a congregation*
- Not language such as, "Our Church School will cost \$..." but language that says, "*This year, we will invest \$ into the Church School.*"
- Not chaired by the Minister or the Treasurer but *by a volunteer as MC or facilitator*
- Not eyes cast down on a written Annual Report but *eyes gazing up at a visual presentation of pictures, graphics, and simplified explanations of next year's budget*
- Not just a few key leaders involved but *including many participants—from seniors to young children*
- Not just "sit, listen, and vote" but *engagement* by everyone
- Not only gavels and the counting of votes but also *music, laughter, expressions of hope, and excitement for the future*



The change was significant enough to prompt us to have a full "dress rehearsal" on the preceding Friday night. The elders also decided to surprise the congregation with lunch—a meal that the congregation had not been asked to prepare. Plates of sandwiches, nibble food, salads, desserts (complete with chocolate "hearts and kisses"), and beverages were set on tables adorned with colourful placemats and serviettes.

After the opening portion of worship, the minister said grace for the upcoming luncheon and the congregation was invited to follow him out of the sanctuary and into the fellowship room where lunch was ready and waiting. The result was amazing. The congregation was so surprised that everyone stayed on!

How it went

Our first “new and improved” annual meeting went well. People appreciated ...

- the connection with the worship service. (We began in worship with hymns and prayers and the benediction concluded the meeting.)
- that many from all age groups briefly participated and shared their vision and enthusiasm for a particular mission or ministry.
- the photos about life together as a community of faith which brought back memories of key events and activities during the preceding year.
- the five-minute, pencil-and-paper activities which allowed participants to talk and work together on a specific task at each table, and then report back to the plenary; it was a helpful change of pace; gave people input to the question being asked; and sparked conversation after the meeting.
- the presentation of the simplified budget and the focus on new mission and ministry opportunities for the future.
- the relaxed and uplifting mood of the whole meeting.

(A printed report, including the financial report, had been provided to everyone prior to the meeting.)

How we do it now

Since that first experiment with our annual meeting, we have continued to make some changes and try new things.

Planning for the new year begins in the fall when ministry teams are asked to review the past year and establish goals for the next twelve months. What stays? What gets added? What should be dropped? Groups are encouraged to work with in a longer timeframe, establishing goals and milestones that fit within a more strategic, multi-year plan. “Sprint teams” are identified for short-term tasks, such as planning the annual meeting. (We believe that some people are much more willing and able to commit to specific activities when the timeframe is known and the tasks are clearly defined.) Before Christmas, each ministry will be asked to decide their next year’s activities and to have a plan with milestones (including budget requirements) for accomplishing those activities.

Steps to prepare for the meeting

The following steps help us prepare:

- Session reviews finances from the current year and approves the new budget.
- A “sprint team” is formed to pull together the annual meeting, and they:
 - gather the material (reports, financial tables, photographs, graphics) to be inserted into the annual report.
 - post the report on the website and e-mail it to everyone with access to the Internet.
 - make sure others have a hard copy.

- ask everybody to read the report prior to the meeting and note questions or comments they want to raise.
- plan the content and order of the meeting portion of the worship service.
- capture photographs of congregational events taken throughout the year and insert them into the PowerPoint presentation that guides the entire meeting.
- simplify the budget for insertion into the presentation.
- create a “road map” that details the choreography of the meeting—who does what and when, what motions must be made and voted on, and so on. This tool greatly facilitates the smooth and efficient running of the meeting.
- identify who will plan the lunch and the setting of the tables.
- identify and confirm an “MC” for the meeting.
- identify who will plan and execute the clean-up afterwards.

Content of meeting

The opening worship involves a call to worship, prayer, hymn, and pausing to remember those who died during the past year. Our meeting includes approving last year’s reports, listening to proposals for the new year, discussing “hands on” activity where the congregation’s views on some issues are solicited (table discussions, and feedback), voting on the new budget, and the closing hymn and benediction.

A PowerPoint presentation guides the congregation efficiently through the meeting. A detailed agenda guides the MC, the key presenters, and the person who runs the presentation through the process to ensure that appropriate motions are raised, discussed, and passed, and that nothing is forgotten.



Variations on our theme

Since we inaugurated the new model for the annual meeting, we have continued to experiment with new forms.

- One year we tried a buffet-style meal, with people being given 15 minutes to line up for their lunch, find seats, and begin to eat. A silent PowerPoint presentation of “people pictures” of the past year’s activities was run automatically, with humour being a key element. Some photos had captions and “dialogue balloons” added for special effect.
- We have included photographs from members of the congregation, who have participated in overseas or local mission activities. Sometimes these photos are supplemented with photographs from the national church website (www.presbyterian.ca), particularly from *Presbyterians Sharing ...* and Presbyterian World Service and Development. This is an effective way to affirm our participation in the ministries of The Presbyterian Church in Canada.
- The presentation of our financial situation for the preceding year and our budget for the new year are presented in simplified form, with all line items being grouped under the relevant “mission” or “ministry.”
- We anticipate our givings on a quarterly basis. We know givings are reduced in the summer months, for example, and are higher at Easter and Christmas.

We use data from the past five years to calculate average givings for the four quarters of the year. That way, we can say we are “on target” for the summer months, for example, if the July-August-September period givings are similar to the average for those months over the past five years. This approach is linked to our stewardship efforts to place mission first, knowing the money will follow. Other stewardship efforts include an intentional program for planned giving, establishment of an endowment policy (new territory for us), and encouragement for members to take advantage of the Pre-Authorized Remittance (PAR) program.

- We provided the congregation with a “pie chart” illustrating the range of giving by individuals and family units.
- We encouraged people to consider their opportunities to “move up” a step on the stairway of givings.

What we’ve learned along the way

Although it hasn’t solved every challenge we face, our new approach has been very helpful.

Every year, we change the name of this event. “Annual Meeting” has turned into our LOVE event (Live Our Vision Everyday), our “Gathering,” and so forth. We try to minimize the use of “AGM” and similar terminology.

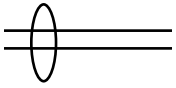
We also learned that balance is required between people’s involvement and length of the meeting. We have learned that being efficient continues to be important, but we still want to encourage people-to-people interaction.

We learned that people need involvement and information while still keeping their focus on our mission. We continue to look for new ways to engage the larger community in our missions and ministries, and there is always room for more visitors in the pews.

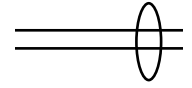
What’s next?

Every year our annual meeting is a little different as we add and subtract specific activities and actions. Currently, we are in the process of acquiring our own projector, laptop computer, and screen for use not just at annual meetings but also in worship services. Activities for children (either within the annual meeting or in a separate room while the meeting is going on) change each year as well, and depend on how many children are likely to attend. We continue to learn and grow and risk experimenting with new ways in which we can continue to be God’s faithful people.

Do you have a creative annual meeting story to tell? Send it along to dhenders@presbyterian.ca or dmuir@presbyterian.ca.



Memories of Annual Meetings



Compiler: Dorothy Henderson

Wow! I sent off a quick e-mail to a few people asking for their best and worst memory of a church annual meeting. The e-mails flooded back, telling me that people have strong feelings about the church annual meeting.

What you can do with these responses

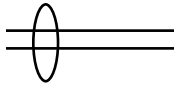
- Copy them and discuss them with session.
 - What stands out for you among the “best memories”?
 - What can we learn from the “worst memories”?
 - Are there specific things we need to change about our annual meeting?
- Put this in your church newsletter, on your church web page, or use as a handout in the church bulletin.
- Give this sheet to the group/committee (“sprint team”) that is planning the annual meeting.

My best memory of an Annual Meeting at church was the time when ...	My worst memory of an Annual Meeting at church was the time when ...
... there was a serious discussion about the state of the congregation with everyone having a chance to speak. Then we agreed on how to proceed. [Elder]	... money dominated the meeting and there was a total lack of consideration shown to the leadership within the congregation. [Elder]
... we had a men’s pie-making contest and everyone won a prize. It was lots of fun and delicious too. [Elder]	... the minister and spouse were sent out of the room and we discussed their work and stipend. I thought it was very demeaning. [Elder]
... we used a pie chart to indicate how our money was a part of the ministry of the church. It connected the rather dry budget items to the life of the church. [Elder]	... we tried to tie in some "visioning" - too fast, too shallow - ultimately meaningless. [Elder]
... we focused on celebrating the good things the church had accomplished over the years in a variety of ways. [Minister]	... we argued about whether the soloists should be paid for offering their services as part of the choir. [Minister]

My best memory of an Annual Meeting at church was the time when ...	My worst memory of an Annual Meeting at church was the time when ...
<p>... we worshipped more than we “meeting-ed.” Celebrating and giving thanks for the work of the year gone by and thus looking to “new business” with cheerful and positive demeanor. [Minister]</p>	<p>... the congregation debated, at some length, whether the minister should stay in the meeting while his stipend was being discussed. [Minister]</p>
<p>... we watched a well-scripted multimedia presentation with pictures of meaningful ministry - i.e., baptisms, fun fellowship events, people. We laughed and remembered what the church was really about. [Minister]</p>	<p>... we got buried in numbers, procedure, and institutional semantics.[Minister]</p>
<p>... one of our Christian Education teachers announced that we need more facilities to handle the increased number of children coming to church. [Minister]</p>	<p>... a member stood up and made a negative personal statement about another member. [Minister]</p>
<p>... the congregation had a positive meeting because their focus was on mission and congregational activity, not on dollars and cents. [Minister]</p>	<p>... someone got up to challenge my stipend as too much money (although it was in my call), and I had to leave the room while they discussed the issue. [Minister]</p>
<p>... everyone brought desserts and someone brought one with Barbie-doll legs upside down on the top. [Elder]</p>	<p>... one of the members talked on and on, monopolizing the meeting. [Elder]</p>
<p>... kids, adult males, and adult females all split into groups to visualize and brainstorm for the coming year and everyone came back with similar ideas ... one’s heart and mind was easy that night! [Member of congregation]</p>	<p>... a controlling treasurer threatened to leave the church if money was spent on a specific project. The money was spent and she did leave. It was a nasty meeting! [Member of congregation]</p>
<p>... when the treasurer answered a rather abrupt question with grace, care, clarity, and firmness. [Minister]</p>	<p>... when a board member was rude, insulting, and majored in minors–big time. [Minister]</p>

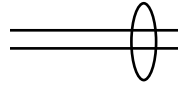
<p>My best memory of an Annual Meeting at church was the time when ...</p>	<p>My worst memory of an Annual Meeting at church was the time when ...</p>
<p>... the session and planning team put a focus on “celebrating” the ministry and mission of the congregation with well-delivered reports and audiovisuals as well as great hospitality with spring flowers, catered sandwiches and wraps, and inviting desserts. No one was in a hurry to go home, joy was abundant, and good news was shared. [Minister]</p>	<p>... I was new to the church and came to the annual meeting looking forward to hearing about the direction of the ministry of the church and meeting some members. Instead a debate began as to whether there was a quorum for the meeting and whether the lack of attendance was a sign of how the saints were not equipped for ministry in this place? [Minister]</p>
<p>... when we divided the congregation into groups for discussion. They were asked how the church was like an orange. The discussion was good and the comparisons were creative. [Minister]</p>	<p>... someone (who had never attended an annual meeting) was asked to chair the meeting with no idea of how to chair a meeting. [Minister]</p>
<p>... the minister actually encouraged people to attend and didn’t make the meeting seem as unpleasant as a trip to the dentist. [Congregational member]</p>	<p>... things were deliberately said to embarrass the treasurer and Finance Committee. [Congregational member]</p>
<p>... it was clear that participation in information sharing and discussion was more important than having the meeting end at a particular time. [Congregational member]</p>	<p>... a member supported the minister’s request for an increase to his stipend, saying the minister wouldn’t be asking for this unless he had talked to God about it, and God had told him it was the right thing to do. [Congregational member]</p>
<p>...a senior elder spoke in favour of a major building project and mission commitment saying, “We have an opportunity to leave a legacy and to honour those who had vision 60 years ago.” The report passed unanimously. [Minister]</p>	<p>... the questions of a new member were dismissed with the oft heard, “When you’ve been here longer, you will understand why we do it this way.” [Minister]</p>
<p>... we ate pies made by the guys and enjoyed the companionship of a wonderful group. [Elder]</p>	<p>... a fight broke out when the church leadership was accused of misusing money and trying to hide things. [Elder]</p>

My best memory of an Annual Meeting at church was the time when ...	My worst memory of an Annual Meeting at church was the time when ...
<p>... struggling to approve a very challenging budget, on the spur of the moment a \$2000 target was added for the tsunami relief. [Minister]</p>	<p>... someone stood up and said that God was directing her to push for a certain direction on an issue, and someone else rose and said that God was pushing her in another way. [Minister]</p>
<p>... reports were circulated ahead of time, but not read at the meeting. PowerPoint presentations told the big picture and looked to the future. [Elder]</p>	<p>... tempers flared, and the meeting went on for hours, starting after lunch, and it was boring and dull. [Elder]</p>
<p>... we asked people to talk in table groups about where they had seen God at work in the life of the people and/or the church in the past year. [Minister]</p>	<p>... meetings were not well run—people got off topic and complained but didn't have a positive solution or let their feelings rule the decisions. [Minister]</p>
<p>... we decided to change the focus from a 'meeting' to a 'celebration' and we began with a catered roast beef supper so that no one from the congregation had to work! [Minister]</p>	<p>... financial report got so complicated that no one really knew what was being said or what we were trying to do. Fortunately, we were rescued by a wise elder who was able to sum it all up in two or three minutes! [Minister]</p>
<p>... we served a potluck meal prior to the meeting. The motions were written crisply and had explanatory preambles, where necessary. [Elder]</p>	<p>... when two couples complained about the various financial statements having no apparent relationship to one another. They were right! [Elder]</p>
<p>... we focused on issues of our future; the discussion was thorough, respectful, and intelligent. A good decision was made and people left feeling like we were on the right track and together. [Minister]</p>	<p>... we spent about 30 minutes discussing whether to include money in the budget to get the custodian a \$19.95-shovel at Canadian Tire or the ergonomic \$27.39 one. [Minister]</p>
<p>... having discussed what to do with a large sum of money that had been bequeathed to the church, we decided to use half for mission work (locally as well as overseas) and use the other half in our own congregation. [Elder]</p>	



Why Do Presbyterians Hold Annual Congregational Meetings?

Session Starter Number 11



Unison Prayer:

Eternal God, the lamp for our feet, the light for our way;
let us hear of your steadfast love in the morning, for in you we put our trust.
Teach us the way we should go, for to you we lift up our souls.
Save us, O LORD, from our enemies; we have fled to you for refuge.
Teach us to do your will, for you are our God.
Let your good spirit lead me on a level path. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.
(Based on Psalm 143:8-10)

Introduction:

Section 153 of the Book of Forms states:

Every congregation should hold an annual meeting for receiving the report of the board of managers or the deacons' court, and transacting any other business regularly brought before it. It is recommended that the annual report be printed and circulated among the members of the congregation.

For this reason, congregations all across Canada faithfully print annual reports, gather in church halls, discuss plans, and vote on a variety of recommendations. We guard against allowing such an assembly to become repetitive and mundane when we remember that this is one more way in which a congregation seeks to discern the will of God.

Scripture:

(Invite an elder to read the following passage.)

Following the death of Judas, it was agreed that someone should be chosen to take his place.

Peter said, "So one of the men who have accompanied us throughout the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection." So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. Then they prayed and said, 'Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.' And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.



Acts 1:21-26

A Brief Commentary: *(Invite another elder to read the following commentary)*

The apostles were faced with a decision regarding their ongoing ministry. What discernment process did they follow?

First, they used their minds. The apostles identified a need. Their group required one more member. They further pondered the qualifications the new member ought to possess. The candidate should be someone who had been with them, at least on the periphery, from the baptism of Jesus through to his ascension. Two people possessed these credentials. Second, they prayed. The apostles opened their hearts and minds to the leading of God's spirit. Third, they made a decision. They "voted" by way of "casting lots". Whether they tossed a dice or drew straws, a thoughtful, prayerful decision was made. God's will was discerned. Mathias became an apostle.

Reflection:

The words "annual meeting" probably conjure up a range of images, thoughts, and emotions for everyone in this room. The event itself may be one that people eagerly anticipate, anxiously dread, or treat with bored indifference.

Regardless of how we approach the annual meeting, it can be encouraging to remember that the meeting is a significant part of our congregation's journey of faith. We gather to decide how we will be the body of Christ. Together, we seek consensus on how we will spend the time, talents, and treasures that God has entrusted to our care.

Of course, adopting a budget for the new year is generally a major focus of the meeting. It might be useful for us not to think of the budget as just another column of numbers but as a promise of how our congregation will glorify and enjoy God over the next year. The budget tells a story about how much we intend to invest in children, young people, families, and individuals within the congregation, the municipality, and the world. It describes some of the ways we can demonstrate love for God and neighbour (Matthew 22:37-39), make disciples (Matthew 28:19), rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, and persevere in prayer (Romans 12:12).



Above all, the annual meeting is an opportunity for our congregation to seek God's will, listen for God's guiding voice, then walk humbly with our God.

In the pursuit of this high calling, we can look to the disciples as role models. Like the disciples, we ought to use the minds God has given us to think clearly about how to be a Christian community. Like the disciples, we must come together in prayer, to open ourselves to God's spirit and leading. Like the disciples, we need to make decisions and move on in faithful service. Like the disciples, we must try to discern the will of God and be directed by it.

Teach us the way we should go, for to you we lift up our souls.

Teach us to do your will, for you are our God.

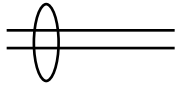
(Psalm 143)

Suggested follow-up question:

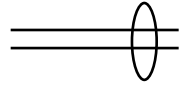
1. What do the words "annual meeting" mean to you?
2. Talk about a negative experience at an annual meeting. What lesson can be learned from that experience?
3. Talk about a positive experience at an annual meeting. What made it positive?
4. Someone once said, "I wish God would use e-mail so I'd know what to do." Figuring out God's will is not simple. Talk about a time that you believe the congregation clearly discerned God's will.



Healing & Reconciliation
THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA



The Ministry of Reconciliation



In *The End of Words*, Richard Lischer, a Lutheran and a Professor of Preaching at Duke Divinity School, claims that the end or goal of preaching is reconciliation. Reconciliation is at the heart of everything we are called to do as Christians. As The Presbyterian Church in Canada's Healing and Reconciliation Animator, I naturally sat up on reading this and started to think about the implications of Professor Lischer's conclusions.

Why is reconciliation so important in our theology, in our understanding of what Christ calls us to do? Why is healing and reconciliation being given such emphasis in the work of The Presbyterian Church in Canada today?

Congregations, mission and education committees, WMS groups, and others are exploring these questions. I have been pleased to accept opportunities to speak about healing and reconciliation with many groups, in particular with Aboriginal people, and to reflect on how we may get to better know our Aboriginal neighbours. Funding is available to help Presbyterians reach out to their Aboriginal neighbours locally.

Elders are invited to contact me for more information. I welcome invitations to speak or to reflect with others on the importance of reconciliation with Aboriginal people. I'm available to discuss project ideas, or to offer information or suggestions. Call me at 1-800-619-7301 or (416) 441-1111, ext. 283; or send me an e-mail at lransom@presbyterian.ca.

*All this is from God, who reconciled us to
himself through Christ, and has given us the
ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18)*

Lori Ransom
Healing and Reconciliation Animator
The Presbyterian Church in Canada

WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?

How much input does a session have regarding a minister's continuing education?

When a minister* is called to serve a congregation, the congregation makes several promises. For example, the congregation vows to treat the minister with all due respect, encouragement, and obedience in the Lord, and to provide suitable stipend and housing. The congregation further pledges to support the minister's ongoing education by setting aside an annual study leave allowance and offering time away from the daily expectations of pastoral care and leadership to participate in educational opportunities. This is an important aspect of the call and how we live together in a supportive and growing Christian community. (See Book of Forms, Appendices A-29, 30, 32, 34 for more details regarding these promises.)

Who decides what the minister should study? This is a decision made between the minister and the presbytery. The minister selects a subject of interest, then applies to the presbytery for permission to use study leave time and money for that purpose. It is the responsibility of the presbytery to determine that the course of study chosen is suitable before granting approval.

Nevertheless, elders ought to feel welcome to make appropriate suggestions in this regard. For example, a session might want to introduce modern music to Sunday worship. Consequently, an elder could recommend that the minister attend a course on how to make such a transition without unduly upsetting or dividing the congregation. Ultimately, the elder must respect the minister's freedom to choose some other theme. Elders may suggest, but they may not insist.

There are many kinds of programs available to ministers. Theological colleges and other Christian institutions offer programs whereby groups of ministers gather and study together. It is also permissible for a minister to plan a self-directed study leave that may consist of reading, reflection, or prayer. Study leaves are intended to help the minister develop a deeper understanding of our faith and ministry.

The church's regulations about Continuing Education are available on The Presbyterian Church in Canada website or by contacting the Ministry and Church Vocations office at (416) 441-1111 or 1-800-619-7301.

Blessings,
Don Muir

**This subject applies equally to members of the Order of Diaconal Ministries.*

**Do you have a question about
the polity of our church?**

**Do you wonder why Presbyterians
do things the way they do?**

**Are you ever confused by something
that happened at session, presbytery,
synod or general assembly?**

Puzzling over a section of the Book of Forms?

If you send your questions to The Rev. Don Muir, he will include answers in issues of For Elders in a manner that maintains confidentiality and seeks to be helpful to the church at large.

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