

Building a Lay-led Pastoral Care Network for Your Church

Introduction

Kevin Ford, in his book *Transforming Church*¹ has pointed out that, in our culture, the consumer is the center. Individualism has been present in our nation since the founding. This sense of the individual, and the consumer mindset that has accompanied it, has found its way into the church.

We are constantly called, in the Christian world, to a life in community. And yet we reside in a culture that pulls us decidedly in the opposite direction. When people are connected, they tend to see themselves as partners in the life, ministry, people, and mission of the church. When they don't feel connected, they tend to have a consumer mindset. A healthy community is one where people experience deep relationships and feel personally connected to the church's purpose.

So how do we go about building community? Bearing each other's burdens? Becoming intentionally involved in each other's lives? Churches are filled with people with many needs: spiritual, psychological, relational, and physical. Churches are also filled with people who are uniquely gifted and resourced to meet those needs. An excellent strategy for building community while at the same time bearing one another's burdens and exercising the gifts in each member is to develop a Lay Pastoral Care Ministry (LPCM).

Let's build on what we've already said about church culture, how to change it, and especially how to help congregants recognize, develop, and deploy their gifts.

Expectations

Organizational life is about expectations – setting expectations, monitoring expectations, recalibrating expectations. Before going further with this study, sit down with the church staff (and/or lay leadership) and discuss the expectations that congregants have in your church regarding lay involvement – How do congregants view their own involvement in the ongoing ministries of the church? Do congregants feel they are adequately prepared for participation in church ministry? Do congregants know which ministries within the church they could usefully participate in? Does the staff support lay folks in developing and participating in church ministries, or does the staff inadvertently thwart lay efforts at involvement?

Prior to this discussion, and as an aid in this discussion, it would be beneficial to administer the Transforming Church Index (TCI) to the congregation. This survey will render a great deal of information as to the church's functioning, and the expectations of the congregants. This instrument will point up the five key indicators for healthy church functioning:

¹ Available on the www.transformingchurch.net

1. How church members relate to each other. Unhealthy churches are a collection of individuals, while healthy churches relate as a community.
2. The church's genetic "code". Unhealthy churches lack a clear identity, while healthy churches have a clear sense of their DNA and take steps to align their ministries and culture with their code.
3. The church's leadership. Unhealthy churches tend to be overly autocratic or bureaucratic (all decisions and initiatives must flow from the top down), while healthy churches view leadership as a shared function and as a ministry.
4. How the church relates to the local community. Unhealthy churches disengage from the world around them, while healthy churches are focused on their mission and have an outward orientation that starts with their own locale.
5. How church members think about the future. Unhealthy churches resist change and fear or deny the future, while healthy churches embrace change, even when it is painful.

The Transforming Church Index will help you discern the culture of your church. Are people within your church merely a collection of individuals who sit and watch, and expect paid staff to do all of the work (and be there for them when they need them)? Or is the congregation engaged in ministry, seeing themselves as integral parts of that ministry?

Below is a section of the survey which will assist in understanding how congregants see their role in the ongoing work of the church.

Practical Matters that Matter

This ministry is designed to organize the practical resources of the congregation to assist in the various needs that arise within the congregation. It is one of the first care-giving ministries that needs to be put in place. It is also a ministry in which virtually everyone in the congregation can be involved.

The larger the church, the more of these particular subunits you can develop with its own leadership. Small churches will not need all of the hierarchy.

There are four committees that are part of this ministry: the Compassion Ministry, Household Services, General Church-wide Ministries, and Professional Services. For those of you in smaller churches, you might want to scan through the list of services that are presented below, and pick out those that would be most practical and manageable. You will undoubtedly find that you are already doing several of these ministries. There is also the Duty Caregiver. This is a person (which rotates weekly), who is on call during the week as special needs arise.

Database. As the LPCN is developed, it is important to construct a database that can be accessed and used by all who are involved in this ministry. An IT specialist within the congregation should be able to assist in the construction of this. We are not including specific instructions here, because each church will find that it has different needs from other churches that need to be included in the database.

Compassion Ministry

The Compassion Ministry is specifically designed to express compassion at those times in the church's life when people are in particular need.

- **Funerals.** Funerals are a time when families, due to grieving, are particularly vulnerable and in need of care. This care usually begins with the pastoral staff, but the needs of the family can quickly outstrip the resources that the average pastor(s) can provide. This ministry will help bereaved families make arrangements for an organized and comforting funeral or memorial service. The following elements would be most helpful in the process:
 - ✓ The lead of this committee is the person who contacts the family to discuss their needs and wishes (done in conjunction with the minister).
 - ✓ A reception is organized through this committee for the family as desired. It is important to determine the number of people the family anticipates will attend.
 - ✓ A telephone tree should be in place to alert committee members of impending funerals along with attendant receptions so that members can perform pre-determined functions.
 - ✓ If the family chooses a reception at home, the committee can deliver cookies or a deli tray (however will not set up or serve it).
 - ✓ Church receptions usually require at least an hour prior to the service for setup.
 - ✓ A procedural manual would be most helpful that would detail each responsibility. This would be kept at the church, and passed on to each new chairperson of this committee.

- **Cards and sympathy plants.** The purpose of this committee is to express love and concern to members of the church family in time of illness, discouragement or loss of an immediate family member. A supply of appropriate greeting cards is kept at the church. Receptionists, small group leaders and others involved in the LPCN are alerted to forward information as they receive it concerning those in the church who should receive a card. The card can be combined with the delivery of plants when a death occurs in a church family (it is important to coordinate this with the funeral ministry above).

- **Hospital visitation.** This ministry is designed to provide support and encouragement to persons in the church community who are ill in the hospital. It is important that those involved in this ministry keep in close contact with the

church staff regarding who is ill and what their special needs are. Coordination with the Duty Caregiver is important in the following ways:

- ✓ The Duty Caregiver (see definition below) must be kept informed as to needs of the hospitalized person and his/her family while the person remains in the hospital. It is also important to alert the Duty Caregiver as to what needs the hospitalized person will face when s/he returns home.
- ✓ As soon as a release date is known, the person ministering to the hospitalized patient should alert the Duty Caregiver and ask for arrangements to be made for meals and, if necessary, discuss other services the LPCN can provide.
- ✓ In cases of permanent need, the Duty Caregiver should be asked to call the Friendship Calling Coordinator.

- **Nursing home ministry.** This ministry provides worship services to local nursing homes. The coordinator of this ministry should contact the Activities Director of each institution, give them his/her name, and ask for any suggestions they might have.

Volunteers need to be scheduled who will do the worship services. On Monday before the scheduled worship service, confirmation needs to be obtained that all volunteers are in place. Following the service, thank you notes should be sent to volunteers.

- **Tele-care.** The ministry uses the phone periodically to contact every visitor and church member in order to express support, gather prayer requests, and disseminate information. All Sunday visitors should be called on Monday evening. It would be good to call every member every 6 to 8 weeks. The following items can be attended to during calls:

Members

- ✓ Offer love and encouragement.
- ✓ Find out ways the church can help this person.
- ✓ Take prayer requests – pray with the person.
- ✓ Work at getting them into small groups.
- ✓ Work at getting them into one of the caregiving ministries.

Non-members

- ✓ Offer love and encouragement.
- ✓ Answer any questions about the church.
- ✓ Take prayer requests – pray with the person.
- ✓ Look for evangelism opportunities.
- ✓ Encourage them to get involved in a small group.

- **Friendship calling.** This ministry is designed to express the love and concern of the church family for individuals in times of illness, divorce, death of a spouse, or loneliness and old age. Also, this ministry will determine if these individuals have other needs. If so, arrangements will be made for meeting these.

An up-to-date list of members and friends needing the support of the church family needs to be kept. There are three categories:

1. Elderly people.
2. Chronically ill, divorced, widowed, and lonely.
3. Temporarily ill.

Discretion needs to be used for the type and frequency of visits. Some people need a personal visit, others only a phone call to express support and concern.

The Duty caregiver will apprise this committee as people in the hospital are in need of services.

Typical needs that arise:

- ✓ Pastoral call.
- ✓ Home communion.
- ✓ Tape of sermon or inspirational tape.
- ✓ Transportation
- ✓ Meals
- ✓ Home aid
- ✓ Financial counseling.

Also under the purview of this committee is the Holiday Deliveries. This ministry makes deliveries of food and/or presents at Thanksgiving and Christmas. A list of families to receive these deliveries along with addresses and phone numbers needs to be kept in the data base.

Household Services

- **Meals.** This ministry is designed to prepare and have on hand meals for members of the congregation and others whenever the need arises. People who are volunteering in the LPCN need to know that meals are available as they come across needs within the congregation. When it is determined that a need exists, it is strongly suggested that volunteers do not ask if a meal is wanted, as it is usually declined. Instead, assure the people being helped that the caregivers have a meal and want to deliver it. The database should include a listing of people who are willing to make and/or deliver meals. Check to determine food preferences and allergies, the number of people in the family, the address, and preferred time of delivery. Meal storage can be accomplished in one of two ways. If the church has adequate storage facilities for frozen meals, a number of meals can be stored for future use. It is important to label each meal as to date prepared, contents and cooking instructions (Meals should be used within three months). If the church does not have adequate storage for meals, individual volunteers can be asked to store a meal at their homes.
- **Transportation.** The purpose of this ministry is to provide transportation for those unable to drive themselves to worship services, medical appointments, or

on routine errands. It is important for the lead of this ministry to have a roster of volunteers with a designation as to when each volunteer is available.

- **New mothers aid.** This ministry is designed to offer love and support to mothers and babies. The lead of this ministry should new mothers and ascertain any needs that have arisen. As needs are articulated, the lead can contact the various other ministry heads for assistance (e.g. often meals will be needed when a new mother has just returned from the hospital).
- **Babysitting.** This ministry is designed to provide babysitting to people who do not have the resources or personnel to provide for their children. A roster should be kept of volunteers complete with times of availability.
- **Extended family.** This ministry provides an opportunity for church families to “adopt” a single, widowed, or international church member, or a single parent family by including them in family activities (e.g. dinners, outings, holiday gathers).

General Church-wide Ministries

These are areas of ministry which (excepting the Altar Guild) are more seasonal in nature.

- **Altar guild.** The Altar Guild is made up of people who assist in the weekly preparation of the church for services. Duties include the arranging of flowers and preparation for communion. Duties may also include the servicing of pew racks with visitor cards, etc.
- **Caregivers fair.** The purpose of the annual (or semi-annual or quarterly as may be deemed appropriate) Caregivers Fair is to provide the congregation with information as to the ongoing Pastoral Care Network and to elicit support and participation from the congregation. Tables should be set up in a conspicuous place for people entering and leaving the sanctuary for Sunday services. These tables should be manned by caregivers who can explain the various ministries, and provide opportunities for people to add their names to the various volunteer rosters.
- **Caregivers fund.** This is a fund that is established to meet the short-term needs of the needy and those in distress who come to the attention of the LPCN. The order of priority can be based on physical needs such as food, medical care, child care and emergency housing. Needs other than financial can be channeled to other ministries within the LPCN (e.g. financial counseling, home aid, emotional support). It is best to form a committee out of the various ministry leads within

the LPCN. This committee should meet regularly to consider requests (and on an ad hoc basis when emergency needs arise).

All active caregivers, members of the church staff and other designated leaders in the church can be allowed to spend up to fifty dollars if supported by proper documentation and receipts. Expenditures over \$50 need to be submitted to the fund committee for approval.

Funds may be distributed in one of two ways: 1)an outright gift to the party requesting funds; 2)a no-interest loan that will be repaid at whatever schedule can be worked out between the borrowing party and the committee.

It is important to maintain contact with other area churches in order to be able to coordinate assistance if necessary as needs arise. This will also help prevent abuses to church funds (e.g. someone going from church to church seeking assistance).

Funds can be obtained in several ways:

1. United Way (application to this non-profit organization can be made through the local chapter).
 2. Monthly special offerings during or after worship services.
 3. Direct, designated donations from the congregation.
 4. Monies set aside from the general operating budget.
- **Needs and blessings.** This service is established to provide the congregation a means of communication whereby specific needs as well as blessings can be shared. People from the congregation submit needs and blessings to the church office weekly. These are then screened and published in the church newsletter (and/or posted on a bulletin board). Requests need to be dated when received, and removed after a set period of time. A decision must be made as to whether to include items and services for which there is a charge.
 - **Senior Citizen Services.** This service is established to provide a number of ministries to the senior population within the congregation.
 1. **Dinner.** An annual dinner and entertainment for the elderly in the community is provided.
 2. **Day Program.** A half or full day program once a week (month, quarterly) is provided for seniors in the community to come to the church for programming, crafts, meals, etc.
 3. **Family Services.** Many families find themselves in positions where they must care for aging parents. This puts strain on the family, and often family caregivers feel isolated. In addition to the other LPCN services provided, a support group for family caregivers is provided each month

where people can come together, voice common concerns, and gain support from one another.

- **Blood bank.** This service is provided for blood replacement as necessary for members, their families, and others in the community. The chair of this service will be responsible for organizing the blood donor program, and contacting mobile units to be available twice a year at the church. A list needs to be maintained of names and numbers for contacts at the blood bank and agencies that have a high need for blood replacement

Professional Services

These are areas of ministry that will utilize the particular professional expertise that resides within the congregation.

- **Financial counseling.** This service is designed to offer free financial counseling by qualified volunteers for acute problems of financial crisis, including the special needs of widows, those divorced, and the unemployed. All matters involving financial counseling, including names and circumstances, are to be held in strict confidence between the counselor and the individual or family being counseled. Counselors should have a designated amount (see Care Fund notes) they can use at their own discretion. Higher amounts of loans/grants must be submitted to the fund committee.
- **Legal counseling.** The purpose of this service is to offer legal counseling by qualified legal volunteers. All matters involving legal counseling are to be held in strict confidence.
- **Unemployment services.** This service is provided as a resource for those who are seeking employment. Volunteers for this service will
 1. Instruct job seekers on the technical aspects of the job search.
 2. Stay in contact with job seekers during their search either by telephone or meeting face-to-face.
 3. Build a job search library and loan job search books to job seekers.
 4. Encourage job seekers to help each other through the exchange of information. This is usually done by holding monthly meetings.
 5. Mail information to job seekers to broaden their awareness of resources which would further their job search.
 6. Seek out suitable speakers who are qualified to provide information which would enhance effectiveness of job seekers.
 7. Request a copy of every job seeker's resume. Establish a special posting either of hardcopy on a designated board in the church, or a button on

the church website for digital resumes for those seekers who would like interested parties to know of their qualifications.

- **Auto maintenance.** This service is provided to assist in the area of car maintenance and repair for those people who are unable to do the work themselves or pay for the services. The chair of this service will organize help to perform the work needed. As an example, a team of church mechanics could be available at the church once a month to assist members with car problems. Bills of reasonable expenses are presented to the Caregiver Fund committee for approval.
- **Home maintenance.** The purpose of this service is to provide assistance in the area of home maintenance and repair for those people who are unable to do the work themselves or pay for the services. The chair will organize volunteers to perform work as needed. Bills of reasonable expenses are presented to the Caregiver Fund committee for approval.

Duty Caregiver.

This is a rotating position with a new person fulfilling the duties each week. The Duty Caregiver roster is taken from all of those who are the leads of each of the various caregiving ministries (e.g. Compassion, Household Services). The Duty Caregiver will carry a pager. The church phone system needs to have an extension that is dedicated to the Duty Caregiver. As people call the church requesting assistance, calls are routed to the pager of the Duty Caregiver. It is the responsibility of this person to take the vital information from the requester, and then route the request to the proper ministry.

A Duty Caregiver notebook needs to be established. Contained in this is congregational and outside resources that might be needed in the event of a crisis. Another section contains information on ongoing needs within the congregation that are being cared for by the LPCM.

The Duty Caregiver will:

1. Pick up Duty Caregiver notebook in the office after church on Sunday.
2. Call the church office in the early afternoon each day to see if anyone has gone to the hospital, needs transportation, needs food, etc. The receptionists will call if something urgent comes up.
3. Contact person or family to ascertain particulars and then call the Caregiver responsible for that area. This may involve many different committees for each situation. If this appears to be a permanent need, advise the chair of the Friendship Calling committee.
4. Call the Hospital Visitation Committee on Monday morning for an update on people listed in the Sunday bulletin as sick.

5. Ask Card chair to send greeting cards appropriate for the event (e.g. sympathy, get well).
6. Notify the church secretary of any illness, hospitalization or other problems reported to you.
7. Confer with another caregiver or one of the pastors if there are any questions about how to meet the need.
8. Make note of all information received and the disposition of services in the Duty Caregiver notebook.
9. Take the notebook back to the office on Sunday morning to be picked up by the next Duty Caregiver.

Preparing a safety net for church marriages

1. Premarital Issues.

Every church has some procedures in place to assist couples who are seeking to be married within the church. The suggestions included below were made to expedite the process while at the same time to provide couples with information and services that would strengthen their bond.

- **A premarital flow chart** needs to be established so that couples can be moved through the process, receiving the help and information necessary at each juncture. There is a need to decide which parts of this are optional/ mandatory.

2. Educational Issues.

- .New married class. Have a Sunday school class just for couples married under 2/3 years. Those married in a particular year could be formed into a group covenanted to meet for that year. A dinner could be held at the end of the year to commemorate the first year of marriage. Implementation. The Wedding Coordinator could be directed to organize this class, select a teacher for a year, and see to it that all newly-married couples are notified as to time/place of meeting.
- Preaching series on marriage. Emphasis could be on commitment and ongoing accountability. Implementation. Clergy needs to sit down and draw up a list of times/topics.
- Strong teaching on singleness, and encouragement of those who choose to remain single. Could be part of the marriage sermon series.
- Couples discipleship. Have a list of strong couples who could take on a newly married couple to help them along for a year.

- Intensive marriage workshops (e.g. PAIRS). Have several levels of workshops, seminars in a variety of marital topics that can involve different levels of involvement (one day, intensive week away, PAIRS, etc). These could be arranged in a progression, beginning with a half day presentation that would lead into a more intensive workshop format. Implementation. A task force of people involved in teaching/counseling couples at the church should convene to determine a series of programs to be offered to the congregation. There is a need for coordination in planning between all who are involved in marital helping. This is especially true with the educational side. After the task force has organized the series of couples programs, those who have, or who plan to do any teachings—seminars, workshops, Wednesday night adult classes, etc., need to sit down on a regular basis and plan strategically as to what is working, what needs to be added/subtracted from the program.
- Marital issues adult class. A class for married couples that would meet on a weeknight, emphasizing various topics:
 - ✓ Communication
 - ✓ Conflict resolution
 - ✓ Intimacy
 - ✓ Budgeting
 - ✓ In-laws
 - ✓ Leadership
- One day intensive workshop.
 - ✓ How to make the most of your marriage (topics from above could be expanded at this time)
- Marriage Encounter Weekend. This requires a strong church representative to be successful. For more information, go to www.wwme.org.
- Marriage Alpha. This is a program offered through the auspices of Alpha International. For more information, go to www.alphausa.org.

2. Marriage Groups.

- Groups of couples could be organized to come together (therapist or lay led) to discuss common concerns, support each other.
- Group for people married to unbelieving spouses. A support group, lay lead, for people in the church who are married to unbelievers.
- Men/women groups. Same sex groups to discuss common concerns.

3. Additional Marriage Considerations.

- Announcements. Include a page each month in the church newsletter entitled: "Marriage Enrichment Activities." (This would coincide with a Singles page of activities.) Include on this page all upcoming events that couples can utilize (seminars, classes, etc.) for that month.
- Pertinent articles could be included. Also couples in trouble could be referred on that page to a counselor for assessments and possible referrals.
- Therapist list. Development of couples therapists list in the area, including those who can do intensive therapy at special rates for parishioners in financial difficulties.
- In addition, establish a fund as part of the church budget to be used for counseling for couples who cannot afford it.
- Annual couples retreat. Weekend retreat for couples featuring a special speaker. Can begin on Friday night, run through Sunday. Or Friday night and all day Saturday, ending Saturday evening.
- Honor 50 year marriages. Mention all 50+ wedding anniversaries during announcements Sunday mornings.
- Date nights with child care. Once a month Saturday nights out. Couples can go out in groups or alone together.
- Men's/women's night out. A time when men and women can get out without spouses to enjoy same sex activities. This could involve a time of singing, testimonies, and a teaching from clergy. At this time, men could be instructed/encouraged in their particular roles as husband/father. It also provides an opportunity for men to make friends with each other. A similar program could be developed for women.
- Babysitting. Have a list of people willing to babysit for extended period (over weekend) allowing couples to be away for a weekend.

Who's going to lead all of this?

Organizing your Lay Pastoral Care Network will take time and thought. Understand that the organization of the Lay Pastoral Care Network can be very simple at first. Then, as ministries and people are added, the need for more organizational levels will become apparent.

Getting Started

Bring together several key lay leaders and possibly staff from the church who have expressed particular interest in pastoral care. All small group leaders must be included at this time. Also involve among this number people from the ruling board of the church. At least four hours should be set aside for this meeting. The meeting should be introduced as a strategic conversation with a view toward organizing a lay led pastoral care network within the church.

In the Presbyterian and several other traditions, this LPCN is performed by the deacons. This body is often elected to a set term (e.g. three years) at the same time the ruling board is elected. The benefit of this system is in the clarity of expectations (see below).

Leadership

It would be best, before having the strategic conversation with key church leaders, to already have appointed a person who will serve as the overall lead of this LPCN. This person should be appointed for a designated amount of time (2 to 3 years would be best). This person would then work closely with a designated staff person (lay or clergy) who would coordinate with this person and the staff.

The LPCN lead, along with the staff representative, first decide which ministries will be instituted first. Then develop a leadership list of people in the congregation who could serve in the LPCN. This will be relatively easy if a Church Resource Data Bank (see below) has been developed. Potential lead caregivers should be brought together for an introduction to the program. This meeting is for information regarding the program, not for sign-ups. This meeting expectation should be clear from the beginning. The overall vision for the ministry is presented, along with the various ministry areas. Attendee should be told that they will be individually contacted within two weeks to determine interest in the program.

It would be good to have an idea, looking at the list of attendees at the introductory meeting, as to who would best serve as lead for each of the areas you have decided to initially open as part of the LPCN. Then, in contacting the attendees, each person can be offered one or two possible lead opportunities within the LPCN.

Each new lead can then be supplied with the church list of people who have signed up as volunteers, so that each lead can begin to fill in their areas with volunteers to do the work.

Expectations

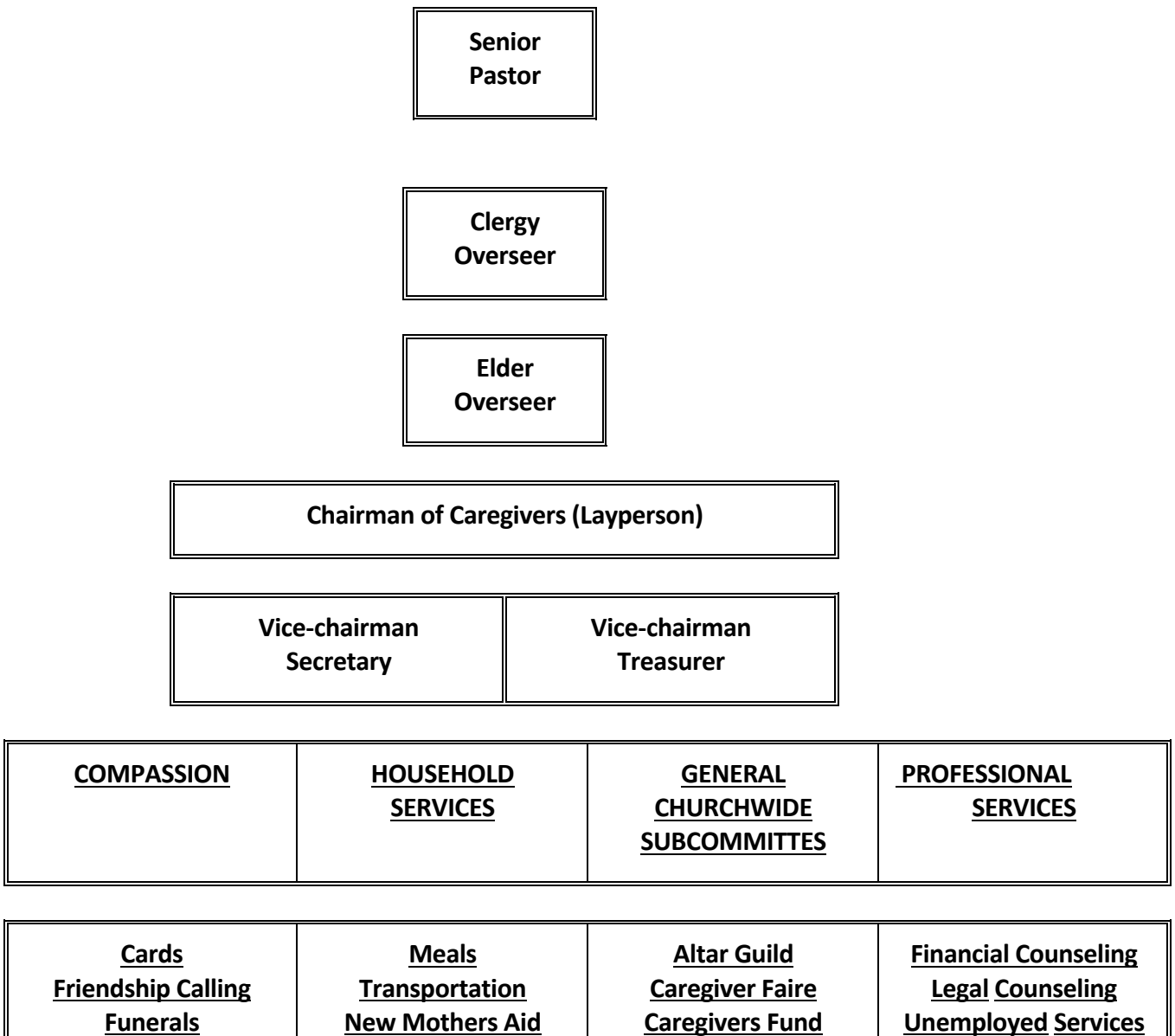
There are two critical expectations that must be specified up front with each leader and volunteer who subsequently joins the LPCN.

1. What is the task I am asked to do? Beginning with the lead for the whole LPCN, then with leads for each area, then with each volunteer that is recruited for each area.

- How long am I being asked to perform it? All lay caregivers should be given a specific length of service which is understood from the beginning. (e.g. 3 years).

Commissioning: A formal time of commissioning, at which time church leaders can have the opportunity to lay on hands, should be conducted at the start of the term for these people. In this way the whole congregation can observe and participate and be reminded that these people have been set apart to serve.

Decommissioning. Some churches have found it helpful to have a formal decommissioning whereby people can be thanked and dismissed from service. At this time a certificate of appreciation can also be given. This clearly marks the end of a person's ministry.



<u>Hospital Visitation</u> <u>Nursing Home</u> <u>Visiting</u> <u>Tele-care</u>	<u>Baby-sitting</u> <u>Extended Family</u>	<u>Senior Citizens</u> <u>Needs and Blessings</u> <u>Blood Bank</u>	<u>Auto Maintenance</u> <u>Home Maintenance</u>
--	---	---	--

DUTY CAREGIVER

How do we get the people to sign up? A perennial problem in churches is the need to motivate people to get involved. This problem needs to be seen from two perspectives: mission and expectations.

Mission: The first question church leadership must ask is, Is the mission of our church clear? People will fail to volunteer when they are uncertain as to the mission of the church (and the code of the church generally). Building on this first question is then, How the task for which they are being asked to volunteer fits into the mission? When people have a clear sense of the code and mission of the church, and how each ministry fits into that mission, they will be much more readily volunteer.

Expectations: The second difficulty we find in congregants getting involved has to do with expectations. Many churches inadvertently communicate a message of consumerism – “Come to our church. We’re the best show in town. We’ll meet all your needs.” (See *Transforming Church* suite at www.transformingchurch.net) These consumer messages provide no expectation that we are a community, and as a community, we expect all who come here to be involved in the ongoing ministries of the church. Some churches, to combat this, give an initial message to newcomers, “Welcome, we’re glad you’re here. Should you choose to affiliate with us, we will expect that you will become involved in one or more of our ministries here. That’s because we believe that’s what church membership is all about.” Not only is this message given to newcomers, it’s reinforced constantly from the pulpit and throughout the formal and informal communications of the church. Then, these churches give gifting surveys, or provide people with listings of the ongoing ministries into which people can go.

A sign-up sheet should also be provided for new members to attach themselves to one or more of the ongoing ministries of the church. The nature of the LPCN is such that people can be loosely involved (calling, or card-sending), or greatly involved.

Church Resource Data Bank

- ✓ The norm is set as new members arrive = You are expected to use your gifts to help each other. So we will help you identify your gifts, then we will channel you into our various ministry options.
- ✓ A form is distributed that lists many different practical areas, many of which are covered in the LPCN, within the church where service can be rendered (e.g. transportation, meals, carpentry, etc.).
- ✓ Data from forms is transferred to computer where it can be tapped by various ministry teams.

Community Resource Data Bank

Pull together file of outside resources available:

- ✓ Other churches
- ✓ Parachurch resources (e.g. Salvation Army)
- ✓ Community non-profit resources (eg. Red Cross)
- ✓ Governmental resources
- ✓ County Social services
- ✓ Mental health centers
- ✓ Hot lines
- ✓ Shelters

What to Do with those Pesky Seniors²

I would argue that this senior demographic is an excellent place to begin to implement the safety net in your church. Probably the most untapped resource in any congregation is this seniors demographic. Unfortunately, a common theme often emerges from the pastor: “I have a number of senior citizens in my congregation. Virtually all of them complain that I do not spend enough time with them, that they feel neglected and resentful.”

It is this contingent that often contributes the lion’s share of the budget. And when it comes to church life, people tend to vote their approval or disapproval with the wallets and their feet (by going elsewhere).

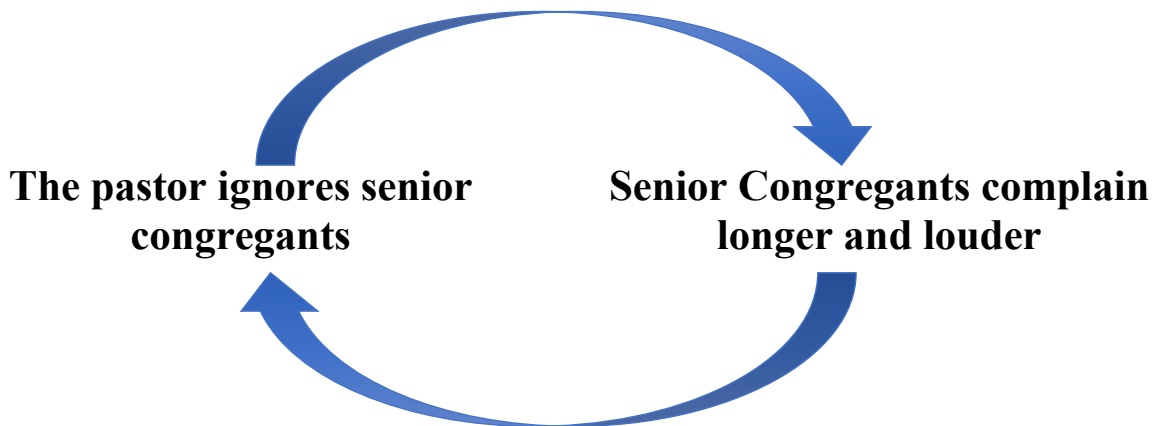
Unfortunately, our current church culture, which spans denominational bounds, tends toward a consumer mentality – I am here at the church to get my needs met. When this is no longer occurring, I’ll go elsewhere.

Listen and Acknowledge Them

² And by the way, I’m one of them!

Unfortunately, as ministers interface with their senior congregants, a pattern emerges. We call this a recursive pattern, in that the very thing that I do elicits exactly the behavior that I don't want from the other. And the response is the very thing that elicits from me my original behavior.

Look at this pattern with seniors.



The more the seniors complain, the more the pastor ignores them. And the more he ignores them, the more they complain. And if you ask either what the problem is, he or they will say either, "The pastor ignores us." Or, "The seniors do nothing but complain." Neither contingent understands their own role in this conundrum.

So the first step, though it may be painful depending on how long you have not listened to them, is to sit down with seniors and just listen. Try not to be defensive and answer them point by point. This will merely say to them, You just don't understand.

You really must hear them out. If you can do that (and I'm not talking about agreeing with them, merely hearing them), you then will be able to get a hearing from them about what you wish to suggest.

Present Them with a Legitimate Need(s) that will Make a Difference

In my understanding, here's what your trying to accomplish: Turn complaining consumers (e.g. the seniors) into valued community members who are making a real difference in the church community.

We call this a transformational issue, an issue that cuts to the very heart of our values, which then translates into behavior. As I have said, most congregants in the 21st Century church, not just seniors, are consumers. They attend the church that meets the greatest number of their needs. Over against this model of church is the community of believers where everyone's giftings are identified and utilized – the body of Christ in action.

Now we come to the senior contingent. You the pastor have heard their complaints: the church, beginning with you, ignores them. The music is too loud and contemporary. People don't dress the way they 'should.' On and on. But if you're patient with them, and let them know honestly that you're genuinely concerned about them, and want to utilize them in service to the church, you'll win the right to be heard.

Before entering this phase, make sure you have thought through a possible safety net organization – what it would look like, who might lead it, what areas to begin to get volunteers to staff. Once you have your ideas, and a potential leader in place, I'd suggest beginning with the seniors.

Let them help you shape the contours of the solution

Buy-in emerges as people are able to wrestle with problems and solutions. Compliance usually is a result of people being told arbitrarily what to do. So once you've framed up the contours of the problem(s) with the assistance of seniors, the next step is to begin to frame the solution(s). This cannot be an idle exercise. It must be meaningful both as to the nature of the problem(s) seen and the solutions that are proposed.

If you treat the seniors as a valuable resource for the church, they will respond in kind (a positive recursive pattern). And this is not just a one time experience. The problem-identification-solution-generation needs to be held periodically, seniors being solicited for their thinking and their potential assistance.

Turn Them Loose

Depending on the nature of the problems you are tackling, the seniors may need some organization to get them moving in the right direction with the right people involved. Leadership will usually emerge within the senior ranks that will greatly aid in motivating people to action.

Give Them a Lot of Legitimate Praise. Take every opportunity to recognize the efforts of the seniors, and render them legitimate praise.