

Talking Points for COM Liaisons (For a first visit!)

1. Remember why you've been invited to meet with a Session. Typically, COM Liaisons are summoned to help churches in time of pastoral transition. But there may be other occasions: everything from just checking in to helping manage some conflict. Do your homework and remember why you're there.
2. If the pastor is still at the church, he/she will usually introduce you. If there is conflict with the pastor, you may need to ask the pastor to excuse themselves. Be sure to talk about this with the pastor before the meeting begins.
3. Be careful to thank these elders for inviting you in. Remind them who you are and where you currently serve (i.e. Ruling Elder or Minister of Word and Sacrament)
4. Also, remind them of their important role as elders in this congregation and our connectional system of polity. We are a relational church.
5. Be aware that this connection may be strong with this congregation or it may be strained. Your presence may be welcome or it may be held in suspicion. Part of your job is to listen and discern how well or not so well this Session is connected to the Presbytery of Arkansas.
6. Remind them that you are there to help...in this time of transition or in this time of conflict...whatever. If there is conflict with the pastor, help this Session understand that COM is there to support both the congregation and pastor. They should not assume that COM always sides with the pastor.
7. It is important to establish and build trust. Relationships matter, so summon up your best relational skills. Confidentiality is a must. There may be anxiety, grief, anger and blame—directed at the current pastor or Presbytery. Listen and try not to be reactive.
8. If you are there to help with a pastoral transition, you will need to address immediate needs with the Session. E.g. If the pastor has left, filling the pulpit, pastoral care for hospital calls, emergencies and funerals will need to be discussed. Are there elders or pastors who can help with this? Are there elders who can assume more responsibilities?
9. At some point in the conversation, you will want the Session to begin thinking about pastoral options in the future. Do they want short-term or long-term interim? Do they want a full-time, called & installed pastor (i.e. a PNC search and congregational vote)? Do they want a part-time pastor? You might begin this conversation and ask them to do some homework before your next visit.
10. Of course, the church's financial situation will need to be discussed. What financial resources are available? Do they have an Endowment? Are these restricted in any way?

11. Do not assume that everyone on the Session knows all the details of the Church's finances. The treasurer may need to do some homework as well and report at the next meeting.
12. Be Careful. There will always be some level of anxiety in a church system. These Elders may expect too much of COM—some may expect you to fix their problems. Do not promise too much. Remind them that you are not there to fix their problems...you are there as a guide. But in the end, they'll have to do their own walking.
13. There are Book of Order rules that sometimes apply. Remind them you will be a help in pointing out these constitutional guidelines when necessary. Still, your primary role is as a coach, not a referee. You are not there to call penalties, but to help them stay in the game.