

# GIVING AND RECEIVING FEEDBACK

There are five basic principles to observe when giving feedback of any kind.

Wherever possible feedback should be

1. Specific and clear
2. Regular and balanced
3. Timely and planned
4. Owned
5. Constructive in nature - you might consider trying....

## **1. Specific and clear**

In order to obtain feedback that is clear and specific the questions posed when seeking feedback also need to be clear and focused. The questions need to ask what is good and valued, could be improved or adapted, what is less helpful or unhelpful, and what suggested areas for attention and improvement there are (see **E20, J20**). The questions need to elicit examples of practice and behaviour that fit these categories. Too generalised questions will elicit too generalised feedback. While specific and clear the feedback questions must be open questions (rather than closed ones) so it is helpful to ask,

What are the gifts and skills of -- (*presbyter*) -- that you most appreciate?

It is not helpful to ask,

Is -- (*presbyter*) -- a skilled and inspiring leader?

## **2. Regular and balanced**

The series of feedback questions must challenge respondents to name some positive as well as more challenging comments. Feedback, which is only negative, prevents the hearer from engaging with it. Less balanced feedback is more likely just to be rejected. If a range of views can be expressed it is easier and more possible for a minister to engage with it well.

Many ministers are not used to receiving and engaging with feedback on a regular basis. This will change as ministers become more familiar with seeing supervision and MDR records. It is important for those offering written feedback to consider how best to support a minister engaging with written feedback, especially if they have not been through a re-invitation process before, or for a very long time (see **E25, J23**). Care should be taken to ensure that feedback is offered in a supportive and not a careless way.

## **3. Timely and planned**

The same principles underlying a consultation period apply to the element of giving and receiving of feedback, namely that it should allow sufficient time to be comprehensive but limited in length so that it is not too dominant and stressful and uncertain an experience. It is therefore important to set out in writing the time-line for seeking feedback, the process used to collate the feedback and offer it to the minister indicating who will do this and agree a venue and date to offer it. This kind of careful planning can re-assure a minister that the process is not careless or rushed or too drawn out. Make a plan, agree it and stick to it!

## **4. Owned**

In the life of a Christian community all feedback should be owned when submitted and not be anonymous. The process of collating the summary of feedback then removes names to prevent individual comments being identified. It should be clear when seeking feedback that this is the case. Those collating the feedback need to know who offered which comment – in order to assess its significance and context but these identifying markers are then removed during the process of collation (see **E24**). Roles *can* sometimes be used helpfully, - a church member said... or a colleague minister said....

## **5. Constructive**

Feedback must be honest and real but wherever possible it should be positive about how something that is less than helpful could be made better. So a comment that identifies that chairing of meetings is a little unfocused and process not always clear could be attached to a suggestion to try using a timed agenda to keep better focus. The framing of the questions seeking feedback can suggest to respondents that they might offer suggestions of how to improve in a particular area of work. Feedback on a personal characteristic that cannot be changed or amended is not valid and should never be feedback in a re-invitation process. Feedback on someone's ethnicity, gender, nationality or age is not permitted in any circumstances and should be shredded on receipt. Those receiving and engaging with written feedback will engage more effectively with requested changes of practice if they feel encouraged by hearing what is valued and going well and if it is their practice of ministry which is the focus of the feedback.

It is helpful for those giving and receiving feedback to recognize it is demanding as a process for all concerned and one to be characterized by integrity, care and skill.