

## An acronym for personnel

*Atmosphere, clear understanding, thoughtful administration provide keys to personnel work*

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**FARMINGTON, MINN.** – Creating a simple acronym for the important and sometimes complex issues that surround personnel matters in church settings, the Rev. Phil Barrett came up with three letters — ACT.

Barrett, general presbyter and stated clerk in the

Barrett has served the Presbytery of Des Moines for 18 years. “I’m not an expert,” he joked. “I just have a lot of experience.”

He pointed out that atmosphere, clear understanding and thoughtful administration — remembered by the acronym ACT — are keys to a church’s personnel work.



*The Rev. Phil Barrett leads a workshop on “How Churches Can Do Good Personnel Work.”*

Atmosphere — the A of ACT — is the feeling of being truly welcome.

A congregation needs to be welcoming, Barrett said, without being overwhelming and be intentionally open, creating space for others. “The atmosphere of your congregation is going to impact how people are treated,” Barrett said.

When he speaks of people in this case the word includes employees and, he emphasized, volunteers.

Presbytery of Des Moines, addressed “How Churches Can Do Good Personnel Work” when he led a workshop by that name at the annual Synod of Lakes and Prairies COM/CPM Leadership Conference here in January.

The three-day COM/CPM event drew more than 45 leaders from across the synod to the Mt. Olivet Conference and Retreat Center.

The central letter of acronym — C for clear understanding — could also stand for communication.

A written personnel policy is a necessity, Barrett said. And once the policy is in place, it needs to be communicated to the congregations — “not only the policy, but who’s on the committee,” he added. Barrett said it’s important to make sure the policy  
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covers all employees and volunteers, not just the pastor.

The written personnel, ultimately the responsibility of the session, “provides the procedures that will be followed” regarding personnel practices, including hiring, supervising and dismissing of employees, and that policy needs

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to be part of the congregation’s manual of operations.

Without a written policy, Barrett said, “Everyone in the church thinks they’re [an employee or volunteer’s] supervisor.”

Equally important to the policy is informing the congregation. “In some congregations there are people who don’t even know who’s on the session,” he said. That doesn’t work, he added, for a personnel committee — or session, for that matter.

When it comes to naming a personnel committee,

or even in congregations where the session retains personnel duties, those with personnel responsibilities need to have honesty, integrity and candor. He said, too, that each individual “has to have — absolutely has to have — confidentiality.” Church staff needs to “know that [those who work with personnel] can be trusted and trust only comes with time.”

Finally, when a group has been selected to work with personnel responsibilities, Barrett simply said, “Get them trained,” noting that presbyteries are often the source for resources regarding church personnel and training for those church groups handling personnel concerns.

And it’s important to remember, Barrett said, that we are talking about personnel issues in the church, leading to the final letter in the acronym — T — for thoughtful administration.

“We are a church, not a business,” Barrett said.

Those who work with personnel need to remember that people are important, he said. “We need to take into account the person’s gifts and styles when working with [employees and volunteers] and we need to be flexible.”

But as a last comment, Barrett added, “My one encouragement is to hire well.”