

Overview of the Indiana Ministries Consultation Ministry

Often churches get busy doing business as usual and can benefit significantly from persons outside of the church providing some level of assessment of the church. This may make some pastors and church boards anxious as it can be uncomfortable to go through this kind of critique. However, if a church is committed to making a difference for the kingdom, this risk is a chance they are willing to take.

Indiana Ministries of the Church of God is using a consultation approach developed by a number of consultants, refined by Paul Borden, and further refined by Florida Ministries and Indiana Ministries. Our primary goal is to intervene in the life of the church and empower the church to become outward focused. Most Church of God congregations in Indiana (other states as well) are inward focused. The people in the church often see themselves as the customer and believe the ministries and church staff exist to serve them. Generally, it is acceptable for new persons to join the congregation as long as they buy into this paradigm. The intervention of consultation challenges the church to see itself as existing for persons who are not yet part of the church and do not have a relationship with Jesus Christ.

The consultation focuses on assessing the health of the local church (using outward focused metrics), identifying a growth plan, and coaching follow-up and accountability for the pastor and leaders. Consultants often generate reports that are only partially implemented because the pastor and/or the leaders are not sure how to fully implement the recommendations or unable to overcome systemic obstacles. Our process realizes that the key to significant change in existing churches results from intense prayer, identifying systemic growth obstacles by a team of experienced coaches, and then an ongoing relationship with a coach who works with the pastor and the leaders to implement the recommendations and guide the church in becoming outward focused.

The consultation process involves the church leadership (not the pastor) completing a congregational self-study. Various parts of the self-study can be assigned to leadership personnel (or others in the church) to be completed. It is critical that all of the requested information be submitted, or it will delay the process. The final product needs to be in electronic form and, once completed, emailed to csnyder@indianaministries.org.

The Indiana Ministries coaching team (comprised of uniquely trained and experienced pastors) spends time individually and as a team reviewing the self-study data. Some preliminary questions are developed and issues to be explored are identified before any onsite visits are made. The intercessory prayer team is notified of the consultation and asked to pray before and during the consultation weekend. The consultation team (approximately three to five persons) for each church is identified from the coaching team based on availability and expertise needed.

The onsite consultation is a three-day event. Beginning on a Friday, the consultation team interviews the pastor (if the church has a pastor), any other staff, and a focus group of approximately 15-20 persons from the church (evening). If the church is larger than 400, we may choose to have multiple focus groups meeting simultaneously. On Saturday morning, the consultation team meets with church leadership (main board). On Saturday afternoon, one of the consultation team members will lead a two-hour workshop on the church life cycle and the role of vision, relationships, ministries, and structure play in a healthy growing church. Though the

workshop is especially for the staff and leadership, the entire congregation is invited and urged to attend.

As deemed beneficial, the consultation team may request a predetermined number of 20-minute individual or couple interview slots the Thursday prior to the consultation and the Friday morning of the consultation for which people can sign up. We encourage those who sign up to talk about whatever they want to talk about.

The consultation team meets on Saturday after the activities are completed and begins developing a report that identifies approximately five strengths, five areas of concern, and five recommendations that correspond to the concerns. The lead consultant writes the report (approximately four pages) on Saturday night and will review the report with the lead pastor on Sunday morning so he/she is informed of what will be shared with the congregation following the morning service. Someone on the consultation team will preach a message during morning worship that is designed to expand the congregation's vision so it is outward oriented and prepare them for the consultation report. Guests are invited to leave at the conclusion of the morning service. Then, a copy of the consultation report is distributed to each family and the consultant walks the congregation through the report. Additional commentary is provided as needed for clarity. This presentation normally takes 20-25 minutes. At the conclusion of the presentation, everyone is dismissed without fielding questions.

Congregations often have questions about various recommendations. The consultant offers to meet with the pastor and/or church leadership to field questions and then asks the pastor and leadership to convey the answers to the church. Congregational members often ask detailed questions related to implementation of the recommendations. We generally shy away from implementation responses and focus on the recommendations. Implementation questions are addressed later in the process. (Some are addressed in the covenant and some after the covenant is adopted and implementation begins.)

Two weeks following the consultation weekend, the congregation has a special called business meeting to vote on the recommendations. Some congregations have a question and answer meeting about the recommendations prior to the day of the vote and some do it on the day of the vote. If the recommendations are not approved, the process is completed and there are no hard feelings on our part. If the congregation approves all the recommendations (they are a package), they enter the covenant phase.

If the recommendations are adopted, the consultant prepares a church health covenant that delineates the responsibilities and commitments of all parties involved in the covenant (i.e. Indiana Ministries, the consultant, the lead coach, specialty coaches, the senior pastor, the church leadership and the congregation). The covenant also identifies any special needs or commitments, such as financial assistance provided by Indiana Ministries. The covenant is written specifically for the recommendations that were identified and adopted. A week is allowed for the development of the covenant.

We've found that it is very helpful for the consultant to meet with the church to answer covenant questions in advance of the church vote on the covenant. Church members and even leaders (pastors are not exempt) are sometimes fearful that their church is being "taken over" by Indiana

Ministries. Because of our expenses related to doing a consultation and coaching, if the church is not conditionally deeded to Indiana Ministries, we require that be done as part of the covenant. This is not because Indiana Ministries has any intent to seize properties (we cannot under law). Rather, it protects our financial investment in the church if at any time in the future the church were to close. Church members often have fears about conditional deeding that are based on inaccurate understandings or paranoia of state ministry. Feel free to ask questions about this.

If the congregation approves the covenant, a coach is assigned to the church and the implementation process begins. If the recommendations and covenant call for bylaws changes (such as suspending present bylaws and adopting a governance model), then the vote to adopt the covenant must meet the present bylaws requirement for a bylaws change. Often that is two-thirds or three-fourths of members voting. If the covenant passes, bylaws articles related to organizational structure are suspended immediately and a transitional structure is implemented to prepare for a new governance board. If the covenant did not involve bylaws changes, then a majority vote would be a sufficient to approve the covenant.

The two-step process (adopting recommendations and approving the covenant) takes four to six weeks and may seem time consuming. However, we have found that this period allows the consultant to be present with the church two or more times and to continue building trust with the leadership and the congregation. It also gives congregational members time to emotionally process the recommended changes.

If the covenant is approved, the coaching relationship begins immediately. The months following the adoption of the covenant are critical since enthusiasm, hope, and cooperative spirits are usually running high. Therefore, changes are relatively easy to implement. The coach assigned by the Indiana Ministries Coaching Team meets (in person or over the phone) with the pastor monthly to coach him or her regarding the implementation of the recommendations. Depending on the church and the level of expertise of the pastor in the area of governance, coaching may also involve regular sessions with the transitional and/or the new governing board. The coaching relationship is for three years. At that point the congregation or Indiana Ministries can discontinue the covenant relationship. The goal during this three-year time period is to help the church become healthier and to expand the Kingdom of God.

The only cost to the local church for consultation is providing hotel lodging and meals for the consultation team members. Indiana Ministries covers the rest of the consultation expenses. The actual cost for a weekend consultation is around \$7,000. The covenant does include the church giving a certain percent of its budget giving to Indiana Ministries. Indiana Ministries also underwrites the expenses related to coaching the pastor and the church leadership. All implementation costs and who pays those costs are identified in the covenant. Church costs often include but are not limited to outreach expenses, purchasing needed materials, and pastor business expenses for travel. Workshops are periodically held to provide training for the pastor and sometimes the board, bringing a unique thrust in our efforts to grow healthy churches.

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