CONTINUING EDUCATION AND PEER REVIEW MODEL

ORIGIN AND CONTEXT
This model comes from six ministers (The Revs. Kaaren Anderson and Scott Taylor, Roger Bertschausen, Peter Morales, Mary Katherine Morn, and Don Southworth who gathered at the meeting of Senior Ministers of Large Unitarian Universalist Congregations. They began talking about the kind of feedback that would be helpful in ministerial formation and development. They devised a process designed to illicit feedback drawing from the insights, experience and best practices of colleagues who they knew and respected.

It requires that the ministers engaged in the agreement with one another and committed to
1. be in regular phone conversation with one another;
2. Be involved in a group (such as be in the same district) and be willing to meet a day early for a regularly annual scheduled meeting (in their case, the Senior Minister (with the option of arranging for a facilitator); and
3. Gather annually for three days and four nights (over a weekend) at one of the minister’s congregations.
   a. On the first day participating colleagues reflect together on the specific issues of the host’s ministries.
   b. On the second day, time is spent with the host congregation’s board.
   c. Colleagues will spend Sunday in worship and with small groups.

Because each of our congregations and ministries is unique, it is expected that many insights will emerge during a site visit. It is therefore beneficial for one of the visiting ministers to accept responsibilities for recording observations shared so that reflection and absorption of new ideas can be incorporated over time. After sharing with the host minister a verbal and written assessment, a version of the recorded insights can be made available to the board and lay leaders of the congregation so that they can understand and support the minister in current changes, challenges, growth and successes.

Outcomes sought by colleagues during a site visit are three-fold.
1. Provide host minister with feedback regarding the direct observations of the ministry provided.
2. Group discernment regarding best practices, from the observations and reflections of the ministers from five congregations.
3. Provide congregational leadership new insights from other perspectives of successful ministry as well as create an experience of inter-congregational collaboration.

BENEFITS OF THE MODEL
- Can provide a minister with first hand observations by colleagues who know the challenges of ministry and have a uniquely qualified perspective and insight into the challenges and possibilities of ministry
- Colleagues, because of the empathy that comes with carrying out similar responsibilities and having similar experience, often address each other with a deeper level of trust. This might allow observations and insights to be heard, understood and incorporated more readily and more deeply
- Very beneficial for all ministers participating to hear best practices from multiple perspectives within a particular context
- The assessment is not carried out nor initially shared with anyone in the congregation who has ‘oversight responsibilities’ over a called minister, thus reducing anxieties over job security
- Presence of the ministers can offer a clarifying objective view for lay leaders that may help them see/hear information from a new perspective
- Creates a sense of inner-connectedness of congregations and ministries and gives a congregation a new understanding of the ‘interdependent web of which we are all a part’
- Ministerial group has freedom to create their own assessment materials.

CHALLENGES OF THE MODEL
- For each of the ministers to receive a full review and feedback, it would take five years.
- Such a long cycle means that there is likely going to be a turnover in the group of ministers.
- Fairly arduous commitment from ministers to add 4 full days/year (1 day prior to annual meeting and 3 full days – over a weekend – to peer review)
- This model has little formal precedent to draw from in terms of structure or materials used

PROCESS
1. Group forms and clarifies (this can be done with a facilitator)
   a. Group of between 3-5 ministers create covenant of what kind of relationship they will have together
   b. Group creates calendar of when they will meet as well as schedule order of congregational visits
   c. Group creates itinerary of each congregational visit and develops materials appropriate for the group and the specific congregations
2. After congregational visit, group offers feedback directly to the minister and agrees on the format, breadth and depth of report given to the congregation’s board and lay leadership.