

Mutual Ministry Committee

A Vision for Building Up the Body of Christ



EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

Preface

Since its first publication in booklet form in 1989, the Division for Ministry has distributed over 75,000 copies of *Mutual Ministry Committee: A Vision for Building Up the Body of Christ*. The overwhelming response to this book indicates the importance of this area of service for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

We have learned much about the variety of ways in which we can tend the relationships between congregations and their public leaders since 1989. The Division for Ministry, The Division for Congregational Ministry, and Augsburg Fortress Press are presently engaged in a project to provide a new resource, tentatively entitled *Pastor and People: Making Mutual Ministry Work*. This new book will talk not only about the mutual ministry committee, but also about the personnel committee and staff support. *Pastor and People: Making Mutual Ministry Work* is scheduled for publication in Spring 2003. Until this new resource is available, we hope you will make use of this booklet. You may reproduce copies of this publication as needed for use in your congregation.

The sponsor of this resource is the Leadership Support Department of the Division for Ministry, dedicated to providing resources and support for lay leaders, associates in ministry, deaconess, diaconal ministers, and pastors. We thank George E. Keck for his work on this important resource.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Mutual Conversation and Consolation

God has entrusted the Gospel to earthen vessels – people like you and me. As earthen vessels, Christians can both empty themselves *for others* and they can be filled *from another*.

Pastors and other called leaders have assumed the responsibility to be servant-leaders for the church. Day after day they are expected to care for others. Day after day through calling, meeting, writing, teaching, planning, preaching, speaking, laughing and crying—these servant-leaders care for others. Day after day, these servant-leaders empty themselves for the sake of the Gospel. And that is what should happen. But there comes a time for mutual ministry. A time to care for those who are our servant-leaders.

Some may ask, “But why another committee? We’re already too busy!” That, I suggest, is the very reason we need mutual ministry. Councils and programmatic committees have far too many things on their agendas. Pastors and other called leaders have far too many appointments, meetings, and demands placed on their time. And in the midst of all this business, no one takes time for what Luther called the “mutual conversation and consolation among Christians.”

The evidence is all too clear. Clergy burnout. Sexual boundaries crossed. Broken marriages. Bickering congregations. These are symptoms of busy people who do not set aside time for the mutual conversation and consolation called for by Luther. In short, our busy schedules cry out for mutual ministry.

Why another committee? Because God has entrusted the Gospel to earthen vessels, and vessels like you and me require some intentional care: some refilling, some renewing, some refreshment in the midst of busy times.

The original organizing documents of the ELCA Model Constitution for Congregations, in chapter 13, called for a Staff Support Committee within each congregation. We have learned much in these first seven years of the ELCA. Congregations have adapted our suggestions to meet their needs. New insights have been gained about family systems, the need for boundaries, and causes of burnout. To convey more clearly the focus, we are now using the title of Mutual Ministry Committee rather than the previous term of Staff Support. I am indebted to the hundreds of phone calls, letters, and comments which have come to me since a handbook was first published in 1988. In, with, and under all of this feedback, there has emerged the clear testimony that Mutual Ministry Committees, when equipped and focused, are providing for “mutual conversation and consolation” in hundreds of ELCA congregations.

Since there are over 11,000 different congregations in the ELCA, one brief handbook like this cannot speak to all sizes and situations. But, as I prepared this material, I kept certain realities of the ELCA before me. First, most ELCA congregations are small to medium in size - under 200 at Sunday worship services. Second, the only called staff person in most ELCA congregations is the pastor. Chapter III, however, does have special suggestions for multiple staff or multiple congregation situations. Third, the term “called leaders” refers to those persons under official call and on the rosters of the ELCA such as pastors, associates in ministry, diaconal ministers, and deaconesses. Each “called leader” is normally a full member of a Mutual Ministry Committee. Other support staff persons (secretaries, musicians,

custodians, administrators, etc.) may come under the care of the committee but they are not regular members of it.

The ELCA is blessed with over 11,000 congregations and nearly 19,000 leaders on its ordained and lay rosters. This handbook was written with these partners in mind. Now it is dedicated to the pastors and other rostered leaders in the ELCA and the congregations they serve.

May this vision for mutual ministry stimulate the ministry and mission in the place where you serve.

II. THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

We Have This Treasure in Earthen Vessels

For some it may be a scandal that God chose to use an earthen vessel - Jesus of Nazareth - as the vehicle for salvation. But that is the biblical story and that is what theologians call the incarnation. In turn, Jesus of Nazareth chose twelve persons - earthen vessels - for his disciples. Pentecost is the account of God's Spirit spreading throughout the world through human vessels - people of every color, gender, age, and language. Earthen vessels may be a scandal of particularity for some, but it is the focus of mission and ministry in the New Testament.

Earthen Vessels

God chose to entrust the gospel to earthen vessels - human beings like you and me. For Paul, this imagery took on vital theological significance - “. . . we have this treasure in earthen vessels to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us” (II Corinthians 4:2).

Earthen vessels do make good carriers. They can be filled. They can be emptied. They can be filled and emptied again. And again. And again.

But earthen vessels demand some care in their handling. Vessels can be upset, rims chipped, parts broken and the contents can be lost!

Our baptism prepares us for a ministry *of earthen vessels* - a life of being filled and being emptied. At the same time, it calls for a ministry *to earthen vessels* - a mutual ministry to one another. Without this mutual ministry our earthen vessels will soon be empty and have no ministry for the world.

Through the waters of Holy Baptism you and I - earthen vessels - are made carriers of the gospel and made members of the one holy, catholic, apostolic church. For this reason, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) speaks of the “ministry of the baptized people of God.”

*“This church affirms the universal priesthood of all its baptized members. In its function and its structure this church commits itself to the **equipping and supporting** of all its members for their ministry in the world and in the church. It is within this context of ministry that the church calls or appoints some of its baptized members for specific ministries in the church” (Constitution of the ELCA 7.11; emphasis added).*

It is the water of baptism that fills us for the ministry we carry into the world as the baptized people of God. Thus, mutual ministry is the *equipping and supporting* of all baptized members (earthen vessels) so they can, in turn, carry the gospel into the world and into the church.

When The Vessel is Empty

Committed Christians soon find out, however, that carrying the gospel in earthen vessels into the world and into the church is a never ending task. Day after day there are new opportunities to empty ourselves. But that's what ministry is all about!

We need a place where we can be refilled. Fortunately, our weekly corporate worship is such a place. God promises to be present in word and sacrament so these earthen vessels can be refilled and refreshed.

Our Lutheran liturgy is designed for earthen vessels. We begin with the cleansing of confession and the words of affirmation for what has been spilled. We are filled. “The body of Christ given for you. The blood of Christ shed for you.” Being filled we are told to go in peace and serve the Lord!

As an earthen vessel we need that cleansing and filling every week. As earthen vessels, we are indebted to our pastor and the worshiping community for the cleansing, filling, and refreshing experience of corporate worship.

Vessels Don't Fill Themselves

Paul's image of the gospel being in earthen vessels has another valuable theological insight. Vessels don't fill themselves! Water does not come from wishing for it. Burnout is not overcome by trying harder. Sin does not disappear by our good efforts.

Luther said it clearly - God's Word always comes from outside. God's love always is mediated to us.

But where is the religious leader filled and renewed? Each week your pastor stands before the congregation and says, “I therefore declare to you the entire forgiveness of your sins.” But who speaks the word of assurance and absolution to your pastor?

Confession and absolution are a renewing power possessed by all baptized Christians. The Small Catechism calls it the “office of the keys” - the authority which Christ gave to his church to forgive the sins of those who repent. The Large Catechism puts it more bluntly. “Now, all of us are debtors one to another, therefore, we should and we may confess . . . no one being afraid of anyone else. Thus by divine ordinance Christ himself entrusts absolution to his Christian church and commands us to absolve one another from sins.” (Book of Concord, Tappert Edition, page 458).

Confession and absolution. Mutual conversation and consolation. Out of our Lutheran heritage come these theological themes which lay the foundation for mutual ministry.

Mutual Ministry Committee

In the Model Constitution for Congregations, the ELCA has provided that each congregation should have a Mutual Ministry Committee (C13.04). Without question, mutual ministry is basic to our Lutheran theology and necessary for earthen vessels to whom God has entrusted the gospel. With these theological reflections in mind, the following pages outline how mutual ministry might become a reality.

III. MUTUAL MINISTRY COMMITTEE

It Doesn't Just Happen!

Mutual ministry doesn't just happen. Simply appointing a committee won't help much. Committees are made up of people - earthen vessels - who themselves need to be filled for their work. The concept of a Mutual Ministry Committee may be a totally new idea for some people in your congregation. Some members may lack clarity regarding the task of such a committee. Some may see the task of such a committee as merely "hand holding." At times, committees can easily forget to whom it is that they are accountable. It is necessary, therefore, to start by clarifying the purpose of a Mutual Ministry Committee and identifying some of the organizational details which are important.

The idea of a Mutual Ministry Committee is not totally new. Congregations have had similar committees for years under the name of pastoral care, pastor parish relations, personnel, and staff support committees. During the past twenty years, we have learned some things that are beneficial and some things that need to be avoided.

Some Things To Be Avoided

- ! Do not start a Mutual Ministry Committee at time of conflict.
- ! Do not see a Mutual Ministry Committee as a way "to get rid of the pastor."
- ! Do not wait and meet only when there is dissatisfaction.
- ! Do not use a Mutual Ministry Committee for counseling or therapy.
- ! Do not use a Mutual Ministry Committee to do tasks belonging to the congregation council: i.e., preparing position descriptions; matters of clarifying accountability.

Some Things To Do

- ! Include the pastor, and any other called leaders, as part of the committee.
- ! Begin with the vision of strengthening the mutual ministry of all baptized.
- ! Have all members read the handbook. You should be able to print it out from the internet.
- ! Have the committee appointed by the congregation council.
- ! Set up a yearly agenda and a regular meeting time.

The following suggestions are written with the realization that there are over 11,000 congregations in the ELCA. Your congregation is unique and you should feel free to adapt and adjust these suggestions to fit your local situation and particular needs.

Purpose

Affirming and strengthening the mission of the congregation and the ministry of the staff is the primary purpose of a Mutual Ministry Committee. This is done not through programs but through:

- ! Listening and clarifying
- ! Sharing and communicating
- ! Reviewing and reflecting

Why bother having another committee? Isn't it the job of the whole people of God to carry out mutual ministry? Of course! If it were not for sin, the church would probably be a perfect community and not need such a group. But God chose to entrust the gospel to human beings - earthen vessels. The reality of sin requires that we must be intentional about mutual ministry.

Many congregations have been working with some form of a Mutual Ministry Committee for two decades or more. Out of these years of experience, congregations have reported these benefits:

- ! Developed open communication about the expectations, attitudes, and concerns within the congregation, the community, and the staff;
- ! Were able to identify early warning signs of misunderstandings;
- ! Became a "Listening Post" for pastor and people;
- ! Served as a group where the pastor and staff could test new ideas;
- ! Conducted annual review and affirmation of staff;
- ! Were a "sounding board" in time of personal, professional stress;
- ! Planned continuing education that benefitted both the mission of the congregation and the ministry of the staff;
- ! Each year assessed the working conditions, compensation, housing, benefits, etc., provided for the pastor and other staff.

Membership

From past experience, congregations have learned some important matters related to how a Mutual Ministry Committee might best function. First, it is clear that a Mutual Ministry Committee should not be the congregation council. Council members are elected in light of fitness for overall guidance of parish life rather than being selected for this special task. Second, the committee should be *selected* by president and pastor, not elected by the congregation, *with the appointments* ratified by the congregation council. Third, never should the group selected be simply an informal gathering of "friends of the staff." All this means that a Mutual Ministry Committee should be intentionally selected as prescribed and held accountable to the congregation council.

The ELCA approved Model Constitution for Congregations suggests "A Mutual Ministry Committee shall be appointed jointly by the president and the pastor" (C13.04). In most cases this means that the president and the pastor/called leader suggest names to the congregation council who formally approve the committee each year. In this way, the committee becomes officially related to the council and reports in the same manner as do all other committees.

The committee should reflect the age, race, gender, and economic composition of the congregation and the community. Committee members should be persons who are committed to the vision of our whole church, the mission of the congregation, and the ministry of the staff.

Normally, the pastor/called leaders are full members of the committee. Also, it is important to have a designated liaison with council for regular reporting and channeling of recommendations.

Qualities and Skills

Committee members, like earthen vessels, come in a variety of sizes, shapes, colors, and conditions. Each congregation, of course, will need to determine the variety of persons who will be most helpful. Some qualities and skills committee members need are:

- ! Ability to keep confidences;
- ! Sensitivity to the feelings of others; in touch with their own feelings;
- ! Understanding of the Christian faith and the vision of the ELCA as manifest in the congregation, the synod; and the churchwide organization;
- ! Ability to speak candidly but with care;
- ! Non-anxious presence with objectivity.

Can such persons be found? Certainly. Will such persons already be extremely busy? Certainly. But the invitation can be an exciting challenge for many committed Christians.

Numbers and Length of Term

The ELCA approved Model Constitution for Congregations suggests a committee of six (6) persons. It may be necessary, however, for a congregation to adjust this number in light of local situation, i.e., size of congregation, multiple staff, multiple congregation, etc.

“Term of office shall be two years, three members to be appointed each successive year.” (C13.04) The constitution is here suggesting that three persons would be appointed in a given year for a two-year term. At the conclusion of the two years, each person would be eligible for reappointment or a new member could be added into the rotation. In addition to the congregational members, the pastor/called staff is/are a member of the committee. The committee meets only if one or more of the staff members are present. Mutual ministry requires that staff be seen as full participants in all the work of the committee.

Accountability and Reporting

Past experience has taught us another lesson - a Mutual Ministry Committee must have a clear understanding about accountability and reporting.

a) To the congregation council

As a committee of the council, the Mutual Ministry Committee should report regularly to the congregation council. Unless so authorized in the congregation constitution or by specific council action, the committee does not set policy, salary, etc. Instead, recommendations are developed and forwarded to the council, or other committees, for final approval. Recommendations about annual salary, benefits, specific duties for the coming year which are part of the “Definition of Compensation, Benefits, and Responsibilities” form used in the annual review, are forwarded to the council or appropriate committee.

b) To one another

Committee members must remember that they are accountable to one another for maintaining discretion or confidentiality when personal information is shared during a meeting. This commitment and understanding regarding confidentiality is essential. From time to time certain information may be shared during a meeting that cannot be shared outside the group unless permission is clearly given by the one who has shared it. An important part of mutual ministry is how we handle sensitive information.

Reports to the congregation council or the annual congregation meeting summarize the work of the committee and state formal recommendations but need not disclose confidential items or detailed background information when the matters are personal. Let discretion be an important guide.

c) To the congregation

Each annual meeting of the congregation should receive a report of the work of the committee during the past year and the committee's plans for the coming year. Adjustments should be made to specific duties or working conditions. Priorities for staff time and staff assignments are all valuable information to be shared with all members of the congregation.

Multiple Staff

Some congregations have more than one called staff person. If your congregation has more than one pastor, or has a pastor and an associate in ministry, diaconal minister, deacon or other programmatic staff you will find a Mutual Ministry Committee extremely valuable. It is not easy to be a member of a multiple staff. Experience shows that multiple staff arrangements need special attention. Don't expect that these earthen vessels, even though they are professionals, will always be able to care for themselves.

The "Definition of Compensation, Benefits, and Responsibilities" form related to the ELCA Call can be a great help in outlining the specific duties and responsibilities each year for each staff person.

In addition, the procedures to be followed when the senior pastor resigns or details for staff persons serving a term call should always be set forth. Having these matters in writing ahead of time will avoid many embarrassing situations later.

Large congregations with more than three called staff persons suggest that it is wise to have a separate personnel committee to care for personnel matters and other paid employees (secretaries, custodians, musicians, etc.). Since each ELCA congregation and the multiple staff is unique, the specific suggestions outlined in this handbook need to be adapted to your situation. For example, one large congregation has each staff person represented by a specific member on the committee. This allows each staff person to have a liaison and avoids the temptation to have a different committee for each staff person.

For the pastor who is head of staff and who has supervisory responsibility for other staff, it is important that he or she has individual time with the committee, perhaps at the beginning of each meeting, to share information about working relationships that are affecting the whole staff. Likewise, it is essential that each staff person have individual time with the committee as need dictates by the individual and/or committee. Once again, the private meeting times should be scheduled before the whole committee meets.

Whatever your situation, you will find a Mutual Ministry Committee helpful in the following ways:

- ! By assisting *each* staff member to have a written position description.
- ! To assist in role clarification and differentiation;
- ! By creating an arena in which each staff member can privately share and discuss professional and personal matters;
- ! Providing an annual review based on clearly stated goals and expectations for each staff member along with opportunity to discuss compensation, housing, benefits, working conditions, and goals for the coming year.

Multiple Congregations

In the ELCA, there are many situations where one pastor serves two or more congregations. Just as with multiple staff, experience has shown that where there is a multiple congregation situation a Mutual Ministry Committee can be extremely valuable. For example, each congregation may have different expectations. Misunderstandings can easily arise over investment of time, sharing of expenses, and priority of schedules. An active Mutual Ministry Committee can prevent many of these issues from becoming problems.

Specific suggestions in this handbook may be adapted for multiple congregations situations, and again, past experience has identified some valuable learnings:

- ! There should be one committee for the multiple congregation parish.
- ! Each congregation should be equitably represented on the committee.
- ! Programs and financial support which are shared by the parish or multiple congregations will require particular attention.

Your synod office or synod leadership support committee is in a position to provide you assistance in adapting a Mutual Ministry Committee to your local situation.

IV. MUTUAL MINISTRY AT WORK

A Vision for Building up the Body of Christ

Your Mutual Ministry Committee will want to deal with topics and concerns that are important for your congregation, staff, and community. Before we look at specific agenda details, however, let us make sure we understand the three main purposes of having a Mutual Ministry Committee. Once we have the vision in place, we can decide what specific agenda details might help us move toward fulfilling that vision. Three general activities are the focus of every committee each year: listening and clarifying, sharing and communicating, reviewing and revising.

A. LISTENING AND CLARIFYING

“What concerns me is not the way things are, but rather the way people think they are.” (Epictetus)

Peter Steinke describes it so well in his book, *How Your Church Family Works*. Each congregation is an emotional system and within that family people see things differently. Steinke offers helpful observations:

“The church family has its ‘distancers’ in the nonactive and the quitters. It has its share of ‘fusers’ who consider the church family to be their property. Moreover, people act out their own unfinished agendas in other relationships with members of the congregation. Some are intent on haranguing others so that they do not have to change themselves. Some are forever cheating others out of their birthright for their own special place in the family. Still others form a crankiness crowd, looking for external conditions to explain their own unhappiness. And what church family doesn’t have a sunshine squad? Fearful of differences and differing, they brighten the family’s life and distract from threatening storm clouds.”

In every congregation there will be differences in expectations. Staff may have one set of expectations about the mission of the congregation while the members have another. Differing viewpoints, left unclarified, can and often do lead to conflict. Conflict is basically the failure to understand the other point of view and the refusal to grant the other person the privilege of holding a point of view different from one’s own.

Thus, the first task of a Mutual Ministry Committee is finding ways to listen to one another. Studies have shown that the most common cause of conflict in a congregation is unclear expectations. It is estimated that 70 to 80 percent of all “forced” staff resignations are the result of mixed or unclarified expectations. Clarification of expectations begins by listening - to the called leaders - to the congregation.

Another issue is role clarification. Who is responsible for what? Is there a position description written for each staff person? Many members see a staff person only on Sunday morning and honestly do not understand the many responsibilities carried out the other six days of the week.

Are there job descriptions for each committee? Sometimes committees do not function, or over-function, simply because no one has taken the time to clarify the expectations or to define the boundaries.

A third part of listening and clarifying is to pick up early warning signs of any dissatisfaction in the congregation concerning staff. Why is the pastor's energy level so low? Why is our worship attendance and weekly offerings declining? Why do people not want to serve on council? We make assumptions and seldom take time to listen. Sending a questionnaire to the congregation is not a very personal, or helpful, way of trying to listen. A better way to listen might be through small group discussions, doing interviews with selected members, setting up "let's talk" sessions on Sunday morning, etc. The same is true regarding your staff. Elaborate evaluation forms are not nearly as helpful as simple face-to-face conversations. Much can be learned from talking about the joys/satisfactions and the frustrations/disappointments of the past year.

A fourth opportunity for listening and clarifying is to provide a "sounding board" for new or creative ideas. Invite the staff to test one new, even foolish, idea for the committee at each meeting. Don't debate. Listen. Keep a list. Some ideas just might provide new directions at the right time. Refer these to the congregation council or the appropriate committee for implementation. Others may simply better be left on the list.

Thus, the first step toward building up the body of Christ is listening and clarifying. It is through listening, conferring, clarifying, forgiving, and reconsidering that the ministry of the whole body of Christ can be strengthened.

B. SHARING AND COMMUNICATING

"The main problem is not the differences in points of view, it is the emotional reactions to the differences." (Michael Nichol)

Each meeting of a Mutual Ministry Committee should provide time, probably at the beginning, for staff and members to share personal joys and frustrations about their life and ministry. So often we want to rush into the agenda, or to get on with the business so that we don't take time to share with one another. Our personal lives are filled with good times and bad times. To all of these things in life, we react emotionally. Congregations need to foster some safe places where members might be able to talk about such things. Where is the safe place for staff to personally share? Could your Mutual Ministry Committee model what Luther called for when he spoke about the "mutual conversation and consolation of Christians?" To model this in your Mutual Ministry Committee will demand a level of candor that does not come easily for most Christians today. At the same time, it will require a commitment of confidentiality. That, too, does not come easy. Therefore, part of the expectations outlined for members in the job description for a Mutual Ministry Committee will be confidentiality. Most of the time, probably 95 percent, what you talk about is public information and conversation. But there may be times when things are shared that will require all members to hold what has been said in confidence. It may be sharing by a staff member or by a member of the committee. Or it may be sharing about someone or something in the congregation.

Gossip can destroy community. It can bring illness into a healthy congregation. It is important, therefore, not to spread anonymous criticisms or listen to anonymous comments. Mutual ministry can never permit someone to say "I can't tell you who told me this, but...;" if there is no name, there is no credibility to what is being said.

This raises a third purpose of sharing and communicating. If mutual conversation and consolation happens, there will be times when confession and absolution will be needed. It is strange that we tend to limit confession and absolution to our liturgy on Sunday morning. Each Sunday we offer our general confession of “thought, word and deed.” In response each Sunday our pastor pronounces words of absolution. But why does this happen only on Sunday? Why is the pastor the only one to speak words of absolution? Where does the pastor/called leader receive a spoken word of absolution and forgiveness?

I wonder how much of what we call career burnout, inappropriate crossing of the sexual boundaries, or depression is related to the absence of confession and absolution? The Small Catechism says that Christ gave to the church (all baptized believers) the power to forgive sin. I take that to mean it can happen on Monday through Saturday, as well as on Sunday.

A fourth dimension of sharing and communicating is how we interpret the ministry and expectations of staff to all other members of the congregation. Each year, in most congregations, staff should have some new emphasis or priority in ministry. The “Definition” form related to the Call provides for seven things which will receive special attention during the coming year. How are all members of the congregation kept abreast of this list of seven? What recommendations are forwarded to council, or other committees, related to shifts in emphasis or staff time? The committee can provide a full report not only of its work, but the work of staff as well, in the annual report for the congregation meeting. Finally, a regular column in your monthly newsletter can go a long way toward promoting and understanding mutual ministry.

C. REVIEWING AND REVISING

“If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.” (Matthew 15)

Sin blinds us all - called staff and lay members. That is why reviewing and revising can only be done in light of the first two purposes for a Mutual Ministry Committee - listening and clarifying, sharing and communicating.

So often an annual review is misunderstood as an “evaluation” of staff. If our vision is mutual ministry, then the scope of an annual review should be both the ministry of the pastor/called leader and the mission of the congregation. In short, the goal of any evaluation or review is the “building up the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12) - not finding fault!

Pausing to evaluate, to celebrate our success, to review our strategy for the future, is the only way to avoid walking blindly and falling into the ditch. Membership needs change. Our communities change. Our pastor/called staff change. Thus, we must constantly be checking our directions. If there is not some revision each year, then it probably suggests that we are not going anywhere.

Each meeting of the Mutual Ministry Committee will contain some element of reviewing and revising, but at least once a year devote one full meeting to an annual review. Many procedures and forms are used in the business world to evaluate performance. Unfortunately, many of these approaches are simply not well suited within the church.

In the “Definition” form related to the call there are possibilities of listing seven emphases of staff ministry and seven ways the congregation will encourage and support the ministry. Each year this document can serve as the basis for reviewing and revising. Each year the Mutual Ministry Committee

can discuss with the staff the seven priorities. Each year, the Mutual Ministry Committee can review the ways the congregation has committed itself to support the ministry. Each year we can find ways which were helpful and determine what might be even more helpful during the coming year.

It is out of such ongoing dialogue that the ministry of the whole people of God is strengthened. It is out of such dialogue that mutual ministry can develop within the life of your congregation. The next chapter will help us define some of the terms related to your work on Mutual Ministry Committee.

V. DEFINITIONS

The Place to Start

Peter Steinke talks about “change through definition” (page 85 - *How Your Church Family Works*). Steinke says the way to start to change things is to start to define things! That means, the place to start changing things related to mutual ministry is to start by defining things - your expectations, new committee or old committee, a job description for the committee, and staff-congregation partnership. Let’s start with you.

Your Expectations

A Mutual Ministry Committee will not provide any magical answers, but it will provide a place to begin to define your vision for building up the body of Christ within your congregation.

A Mutual Ministry Committee will not change your pastor into “exactly what you want,” but it will provide an arena for the two of you to define your differences and respect each other as partners in ministry.

A Mutual Ministry Committee will not solve all personal problems for staff or members, but it will be a “safe place” for mutual conversation and consolation. A place of forgiveness, absolution and renewal.

New Committee or Old?

It is tough to teach an old dog new tricks. In the same way, it is often difficult to redirect the work of the committee that has been working with an agenda other than mutual ministry. Sometimes it is simply easier to start with a clean slate. But that is for you, your congregation, your pastor, to define and to decide.

There are, however, some proven times when starting a Mutual Ministry Committee is easier than other times.

1. The most successful time to start a Mutual Ministry Committee is within the first year after a new pastor/called staff person has arrived. At this time, several members of the call committee are obvious selections for the Mutual Ministry Committee. Some synods, in fact, are making this a part of the call process. A synod staff person will return to the congregation about nine months after the official call action, review the working relationship, and assist in the establishment of a Mutual Ministry Committee.
2. The second most successful time to start a committee is on the anniversary (one or two years) of the call. The longer the delay, however, the more difficult it will be to start off with a clean slate.
3. A final time might be after the congregation has thoroughly worked through some difficult or major problem with an outside consultant or counselor. Note - the Mutual Ministry Committee appropriately comes after the disruption has been settled. You do not set up the Mutual Ministry Committee to settle the conflict. That is the work for an outside counselor or consultant.

Job Description for Your Committee

Some folks get excited about mutual ministry, rush off, and set up a committee before they define their own expectations or the boundaries for the committee. Unfortunately, these committees are seldom helpful in building up the body of Christ. In fact, they may create even more problems than they solve!

The place to start is with a definition - a job description - for the committee. It need not be complicated, but the boundaries and expectations need to be clearly stated.

1. What is the purpose? (see Chapter IV for some thought starters.)
2. Who are the members? How are they selected? What is the length of term (see Chapter III for some suggestions).
3. What is expected of members/staff who are part of the committee?

All members of the committee should have a copy of this job description. You may decide to change it, but each time a new member joins the group, the job description should be discussed, revised, and agreed upon so everyone is comfortable with the boundaries that have been set.

Staff - Congregation Partnership

In 1994, the ELCA developed a new resource for defining staff- congregational partnership. It is part of what every congregation works with during the official call process and is called “Definition of Compensation, Benefits, and Responsibilities.” It is the expectation that all called leaders (pastors, associates in ministry, diaconal ministers, and deaconesses) will have opportunity to annually review and update this “Definition” form with the Mutual Ministry Committee.

Because the “Definition” form is so basic for staff-congregation partnership, it is absolutely necessary that each member of the Mutual Ministry Committee have a copy of the “Definition” form which was completed at the time of the call or was updated in the previous year. In addition, members of the committee will need blank copies so that the form may be updated annually. You may secure copies from your synod office.

The “Definition” form is an extremely valuable resource for every Mutual Ministry Committee. Used each year, it provides a common format and uniform process for staff and congregation to clarify expectations, identify special emphases, and to discuss compensation and benefits. Once in place, the “Definition” form becomes a benchmark or starting place for the annual review. Thus, the “Definition” form becomes a normative basis of evaluating and strengthening both the mission of your congregation and the ministry of your staff.

Since the “Definition” form is new to all of us in the ELCA, the following comments may assist you in using it. You are urged to begin your review of the “Definition” form with Part E which outlines the partnership of staff emphases and congregational support. We begin with Part E because it is a brief and simple example of how each congregation can put mutual ministry into practice. After all members of the committee understand the special priorities or emphases of each staff person and the ways the congregation has agreed to encourage this ministry, then the committee can review the details of compensation and other agreements which also are part of the “Definition” form.

! *Staff Emphases (Part E - “Definition” Form)*

There is no better way to clarify expectations than to talk about the special emphases in the ministry of each staff person. What are the priorities regarding the use of time? What is the main focus of ministry? How does an emphasis change next year from last year? What are the implications of mutual ministry and how volunteers might share and assist staff in his/her ministry? In short, can some things be done by volunteers rather than by staff?

Part E may be the most valuable section within the “Definition” form. Because of its value and importance, it may take one or more meetings of the committee simply to discuss the expectations and agree upon the specific duties for the coming year. Writing the details down provides a basis for review and revision next year. Finally, this section has particular value in situations where there is more than one staff person serving within a congregation or when one staff person is serving in a multi-congregation situation.

! *Congregational Encouragement (Part E - “Definition” Form)*

The second section of Part E is the partnership side of mutual ministry. Here is an opportunity to set forth what the committee, or congregation, commits itself to provide in way of support and encouragement for the staff person during the coming year. Here is an opportunity for the congregation to be specific regarding its mutual ministry commitment. How can empty vessels be refreshed and refilled? How can caregivers be cared for?

How will your committee agenda throughout the year focus on this mutual ministry? Once again a review of the three purposes in Chapter III may give you some ideas.

Having looked at the partnership outline in Part E, you are now ready to talk about how the congregation will compensate the staff person for the ministry which is expected.

! *Compensation (Part A - “Definition” Form)*

Part of the congregation’s commitment for mutual ministry is the financial support provided to each staff person. The “Definition” form distinguishes between base salary, housing allowance or parsonage, which is compensation in kind rather than direct dollars. Most synods have guidelines or information regarding salaries to guide you in this area of discussion.

The compensation section needs special attention each year in light of changing tax laws, housing arrangements, cost of living, and merit increases. If questions arise regarding local, state, or federal tax laws for church employees, you may wish to contact a local tax consultant. It is important to find a consultant who is familiar with the unique regulations regarding pastors who are considered self-employed.

! *Pension and Other Benefits (Part B - “Definition” Form)*

The ELCA has an inclusive pension and benefit program for all called leaders. Currently, the pension expectation is 10, 11 or 12 percent of the total defined compensation. Defined compensation is the total of cash salary (including housing allowance or 30 percent for those living in parsonages), plus any social security allowance. Other benefits may include special life insurance programs or malpractice insurance.

The cost of ELCA medical and dental plan is computed each year by the Board of Pensions. The percentage varies according to the family situation of the staff person. Currently, the percentages range from approximately 10 percent to 18 percent. Updated information needs to be secured each year from the ELCA Board of Pensions in Minneapolis, MN.

! *Agreement (Part C - “Definition” Form)*

Each call to a staff person has certain other agreements related to it. Vacation is normally four weeks each year. Continuing education time is usually two weeks each year in addition to vacation. Do not overlook the opportunity, however, to spell out other agreements on a separate page. These items may include such things as procedures for resignation in a multiple staff situation, length of term in a call for a stated period of time, responsibilities related to military duty, or any other important matters in the life of an individual staff person. Once again this section is of particular importance in multiple staff or multiple congregation situations.

! *Expenses (Part D - “Definition” Form)*

The budget of each congregation will include expense items which are neither compensation nor benefits but are necessary to carry out the ministry on behalf of the congregation. It is important to understand that these items are not part of compensation, but are part of the overall commitment of the congregation to undergird the ministry of staff and congregation.

Each year these items need to be reviewed, renewed or changed. Occasionally, a shift in specific duties (Part E) will have implications regarding travel or other expenses in this section (Part D).

One item that is a standard expectation within the ELCA is the support for continuing education which has been set at an annual contribution by each congregation at \$700 and \$300 by the pastor/called leader. This partnership underwriting the cost of continuing education means that each staff person will have at least \$1,000 each year which may be used toward continuing education activity.

The above comments are provided to guide you through the various sections of the form, “Definition to Compensation, Benefits, and Responsibilities”. It is important each year to take time to discuss the items within each section. In this way, the “Definition” form becomes a convenient way to lay the foundations for mutual ministry. In short, any vision for mutual ministry among the partners must include a serious discussion related to the items within the “Definition” form. Enjoy what Luther called “mutual conversation and consolation” (Book of Concord, Smalcald Articles, Part III, Article IV).

VI. AGENDA

Mutual Ministry Throughout the Year

Defining your expectations, setting the boundaries, and preparing a committee job description are the starting points for having a Mutual Ministry Committee in your congregation. Many congregations report that having an overnight retreat each year is very helpful for committee members. Each year you will need to order new copies of the “Definition” form. When new members join the committee, you also need to provide copies of the committee job description and tell them where to find this site on the internet. Finally, many congregations have found it beneficial to develop an overall annual agenda.

Projecting an annual agenda assures that you will cover the full range or scope of committee work as outlined in your committee job description. It also avoids the pitfall of having meetings degenerate into an “ain’t it awful” gripe session.

Once you have an outline of an annual agenda, you can build a specific agenda for each committee meeting. In some congregations the Mutual Ministry Committee meets monthly. Other committees meet six to eight times a year. Experience has shown that quarterly meetings are feasible for most congregations, and there should be at least two (one after the annual council election and organization; one before the December council meeting) every year.

Annual Agenda

Here is a sample annual agenda. It focuses on different areas of concern according to the events in the life of the congregation, the details in the committee job description, and the time of the year.

January-February

- a. Review the annual congregation meeting and any goals or emphases that were established for the coming year.
- b. Review the investment of time of staff for the past year and determine what adjustments are necessary in light of new goals or emphases for the coming year.
- c. Prepare an article for your newsletter communicating specific duties outlined in Part E of the “Definition” form. Be sure to report any shifts in emphases of staff time.

March-April

- a. Plan vacation coverage for staff.
- b. sponsor a recognition dinner for staff. Note any anniversaries of call, birthdays, etc.

May-August

- a. Give a temple talk to the congregation about the work of the committee.
- b. Have staff prepare an article for the newsletter related to the joys and stresses of ministry.

September-October

- a. Set aside two meetings for the annual review. Use this time to go over the details in “Definition of Compensation, Benefits and Responsibilities.”
- b. Formulate recommendations that will be forwarded to the congregation council or appropriate committee in time for inclusion in the next year’s budget.

November-December

- a. Review continuing education plan.
- b. Review the congregation's goals, the goals of staff, and the work of the committee during the past year.
- c. Prepare a report for the annual congregation meeting.

This is how one Mutual Ministry Committee planned its annual agenda. You will want to adapt this sample to fit the situation in your congregation and the responsibilities written into your committee job description.

Generic Meeting Agenda

Each meeting of the Mutual Ministry Committee is meant to promote a healthy conversation among leaders who are concerned about God's mission and ministry in this place. The chairperson and pastor can do much to set the tone of "shared ministry" through positive and open communication.

Here is a generic meeting agenda:

- a. Devotions. (This task can be passed around. Passages from the Pauline writings are replete with references to the body of Christ and the interdependence of the congregation.)
- b. Introductions and brief personal sharing. People need a chance to say what has been going on in their lives. This gives them an opportunity to disengage from the world and to engage in the task at hand.
- c. Statement of meeting objective(s). If the intent is simply to bring a new member up to date, indicate that is all we need to do. If the main task is discussion and approval of the pastor's Continuing Education Covenant, say so.
- d. Review of the shared ministry. At this point, the chairperson or pastor begins the process by asking, "How are things going?" Then (s)he takes a few moments to share perceptions about the life and ministry of the congregation, including both high points and low points. These comments provide a model for others each to take a turn and give authentic input. It helps the process to use "I" statements, such as: 'I felt myself being rushed two weeks ago because the early service went longer than expected.' It also helps to be specific about events and areas of ministry, such as: affirmation of involvement of parents in Confirmation program, ministry of learning.
- e. Discussion of primary issue(s). Issues arising from the review of ministry are dealt with. Here it is important to keep the discussion within the framework of "where the Spirit is leading us in the context of our mission and our leadership opportunities". Often the sharing itself is all that is required. Sometimes, action is called for.
- f. Decision(s). The chairperson may need to offer a resolution or course of action. Or, a member of the committee may be assigned to carry out a given task or to have a conversation with a person or group within the congregation.
- g. Go around the circle, giving each person opportunity to comment on content or process of the meeting. The purpose of this is to get into the good habit of immediate feedback for the sake of the group's own life. It is okay for people simply to say "pass", but it is important to give everyone a chance to speak.
- h. Closing prayer together.

Shared Planning of Continuing Education

It is good to surface the issue of shared planning of continuing education early in the year, so that the committee as well as the pastor can be thinking about it in the weeks ahead. When the time comes to present a continuing education plan, some pastors may wish to present a preliminary plan to the committee early on, and then to revise it at a later date. Other pastors may send a proposed plan to the committee and then have it discussed, amended and approved at a meeting later in the year.

Here is a generic agenda for shared planning of continuing education:

- a. Opening prayer.
- b. Review ministry highlights. This is done in the same context of sharing perceptions of “how things are going.” However, the purpose of this sharing is to relate the pastor’s continuing education to the leadership needs of the congregation’s mission and ministry. The pastor can help the process by relating high and low points of parish life in terms of recent continuing education experiences. For example, “When I was involved with that three-day conference on hospitality and liturgy, I didn’t see how it would fit here; but Easter and all those new faces convinced me otherwise.”
- c. Determine areas for leadership growth. This growth often happens in areas where the pastor has particular gifts which can be made stronger. However, if a community served has a new a different language, i.e., Spanish, a pastor might well be encouraged to become bi-lingual for the sake of the gospel. Again, the evangelical commitment guides the discussion and deliberation.
- d. Discuss first draft of continuing education plan. Neither the pastor nor the committee may be aware of particular events or courses planned and available. It is sufficient for the planning process to determine those mission and ministry priorities which are most affected by pastoral leadership. Then the group can translate the leadership needs into the categories of leadership growth among these five areas: Bible/Doctrine, Personal/Spiritual, Ministry Development, Church/Society, Ministry Practice.
- e. Modify and approve, or refer for later approval.
- f. Go around the circle, asking each member to comment on how the group functioned.
- g. Benediction.

A Closing Prayer

The ELCA is blessed with nearly 19,000 servant leaders and over 11,000 congregations. Everything written in this handbook has been focused on how these servant leaders and congregations might build up the body of Christ where they live. With this vision in mind, I invite you to share in a closing prayer from a book of “Prayers” by Michel Quoist.

The Wire Fence

*The wires are holding hands around the holes;
To avoid breaking the ring, they hold tight the neighboring wrist,
And it’s thus that with holes they make a fence.*

*Lord, there are lots of holes in my life.
There are some in the lives of my neighbors.
But if you wish, we shall hold hands,
We shall hold very tight, And together we shall make a fine roll of fence to adorn Paradise.
It is my prayer that this vision for mutual ministry may stimulate new visions for ministry and mission in the place where you live and serve.*

From *Prayers* by Michel Quoist, Sheed and Ward, New York, NY, 1963.

VII. MUTUAL MINISTRY STATEMENT

Adapted from a Greater Milwaukee Synod document

Mutual Ministry Mission Statement

Mutual Ministry is a call to a wider vision of the church as the interconnected Body of Christ. All the baptized are linked together as God's people in a shared purpose and a common adventure in the service of Jesus Christ in the world.

The marks of mutual ministry:

- ! mutual communication
- ! mutual growth
- ! mutual accountability
- ! mutual affirmation
- ! mutual vision

Together as a Mutual Ministry Committee we commit ourselves to strengthen the life and mission of _____ Lutheran Church, a congregation of _____ Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

We are called to care and pray for the leaders of this congregation. We believe that God's power is meant to be shared with and for others, not over others. We intend to share this ministry for the sake of the Gospel.

Our goals:

1. Mutual communication means listening and speaking, advocating and clarifying the expectations of ministry together, as well as addressing the needs of our congregation. Our goal is to listen carefully and to speak with the people of our parish.
2. Mutual growth means encouraging our leaders and all our members to participate in continuing education. We intend to assist our rostered leaders in the planning of their continuing education so that the corporate ministry is strengthened.
3. Mutual accountability means assessing the growth of both rostered leaders and congregation. We intend to discern and nurture all the resources of people which God has placed in our midst.
4. Mutual affirmation means celebrating the gifts God gives to our congregation to lead in ministry together. We intend to share such affirmations specifically and personally.
5. Mutual vision means to imagine what God's particular plan is for our congregation and what might happen if leaders and members were to make a renewed commitment to the shared vision. We intend to set aside time and to develop a process so that this vision can be widely shared.

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