



Acknowledge Potential Obstacles and Deal with Them Directly

“Martin Luther advocated dealing with problems, anxieties, and temptations directly through bold faith, action, and, at times, lightheartedness to spite the devil. He emphasized confronting fears with the Word of God, engaging in prayer, and refusing to let worries paralyze daily life.”

(Anonymous)

There are often potential obstacles to shared ministry hopes and plans. There may be a lack of accurate information about shared ministry models. There may be uncertainty about the “success” of shared ministry activities. There may be a history of troubled, even competitive, relationships between potential shared ministry congregations and their respective members that feed unhealthy suspicions in the Body of Christ. Past hurts and differences have a way of lingering; these can impede constructive resolution and ministry enhancements between prospective collaborators. Acknowledge potential obstacles; don’t deny them. Start slowly, but deliberately, to tackle potential obstacles and do so with confidence in God’s forgiving and empowering mercy.



What potential obstacles do you foresee as you consider your shared ministry hopes? What potential obstacles do others perceive? As you embrace the mercies of God and His will that His Word go forth expeditiously and zealously, what can your congregation and its sister congregations do to address potential obstacles to shared ministry pursuits?



Act in Informed Ways

*“The most valuable commodity I know of is information.”
(George Gekko)*

It’s one thing to make plans, set goals, and take action; it’s another thing (and a much better thing) to do so with accurate and adequate information in-hand. It sounds unnecessary to even have to mention this obvious and sensible point, but many times we can feel pressured to act (Do something!) without first having that accurate and adequate information. When we do so, we risk making poor decisions - even about shared ministry. Gather the information you need; make sure you have up-to-date information; make sure the information is accurate; gather the information from reliable sources. Then, and only then, move toward your decisions. Act in informed ways!



What types of information do you initially need to help you make good decisions regarding your shared ministry hopes and pursuits? As you move through your respective phases of planning and then implementation, what additional information will you likely need to make good decisions in those respective phases? Why is it important to obtain accurate information and up-to-date information in considering your options and then making sound decisions? From whom could you obtain the accurate and adequate information you need to make your decisions?



Be Proactive

“The way to bring about change is to be proactive and active.”

(Octavia Spencer)

When it comes to exploring shared ministry collaborations anticipating needs, looking ahead, and being proactive can be very important. The opposite mindset would be to sit back, be carefree, and simply and continually react to what’s going on around you. There’s certainly ample room for that way of thinking but thinking in a proactive sense and taking proactive actions is often what is needed. This approach can help you look ahead, plan ahead, and even act ahead. It serves to prepare you, not alarm you. It can readily facilitate your ongoing learning and growth and provide you a greater sense of confidence to develop goals and objectives and help you make informed decisions going forward.



What’s your first (and honest) reaction to this topic, “Be Proactive”? Do you consider yourself to be a “proactive” sort of person or congregation? How can you tell? How could a proactive approach to the exploration of shared ministry help you secure the necessary, digest the necessary information, and design your shared ministry model? What sort of information would you likely need in order to get yourself into a proactive frame of thinking and acting? With whom could you visit to assist you in becoming more proactive?

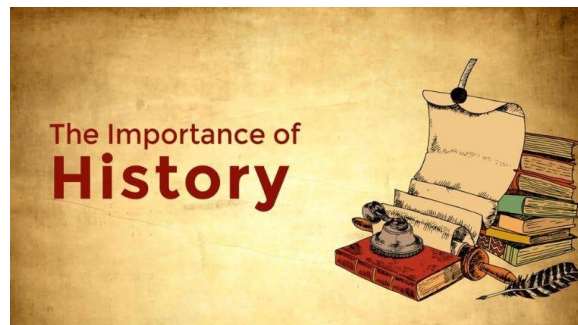


Become Acquainted with the History of Shared Ministry

“The only thing new in the world is the history you don’t know.”

(Harry S. Truman)

President Truman said a “mouthful,” didn’t he? His well-known saying about history and the ignorance of history is a precaution we would do well to heed - even when it comes to the history of shared ministry. “Shared Ministry” in one form or another has existed in the Christian Church for centuries. In some regions of our own church body the concept of shared ministry is receiving renewed interest as congregations establish essential working relationships with one or more sister congregations to enhance a wide range of congregational and regional activities including worship, fellowship, the teaching of God’s Word, evangelism, and social ministry. In other regions of our church body one or more shared ministry models have been effectively utilized by congregations for hundreds of years. In fact, in a sense, the entire LCMS IS a shared ministry model at work at this moment.



The Lord of the Church is no stranger to the challenges and the opportunities that engage shared ministry partnerships at this time in history. The Lord’s gracious guidance, provisions, counsel, and presence are evident for each congregation and each respective shared ministry partnership.

As you embark upon “Shared Ministry” take comfort in His faithfulness. Rejoice in the unity we share. Recognize the uniqueness of each congregation. With confidence in Him, proclaim this day the marvelous truth: “Elect from every nation, yet one o’er all the earth; her charter of salvation: One Lord, one faith, one birth. One holy Name she blesses, partakes one holy food, and to one hope she presses with every grace endued.” (“The Church’s One Foundation” – Lutheran Worship #289) Enjoy your journey back in history. Learn more about shared ministry over the centuries.



Beware of Fatalistic Thinking and Naysayers

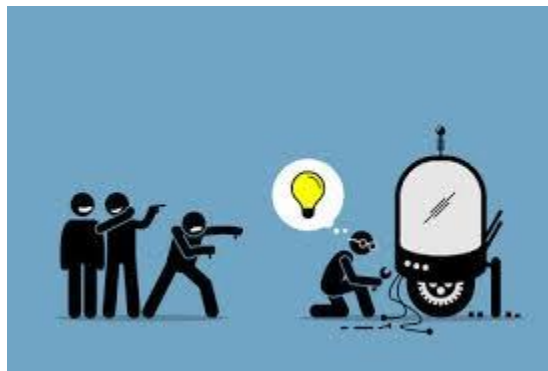
“Forget the world and its naysayers. Go boldly into the day knowing that there’s a God Who values you, paves the way for you, and is cheering you on.”

(Ron Lambros)

“We need to hear the Gospel every day, because we forget it every day.”

(Martin Luther)

If someone is predisposed to rejecting the idea of shared ministry, it is unlikely that this person will fairly explore shared ministry. In fact, naysayers and fatalistic thinkers (“This will never work; we’re just wasting our time!”) can throw the proverbial wet blanket over any and all hopes for establishing shared ministry. Maybe you have witnessed this very thing in your own life. The exploration of shared ministry will require a “safe” nest to enable a fair and unprejudiced exploration process to prayerfully unfold.



Into whose hands will you entrust your shared ministry explorations and activities? What factors will determine your decisions about this matter? What roles does one’s appreciation for and eager sharing of the Gospel play in this matter?

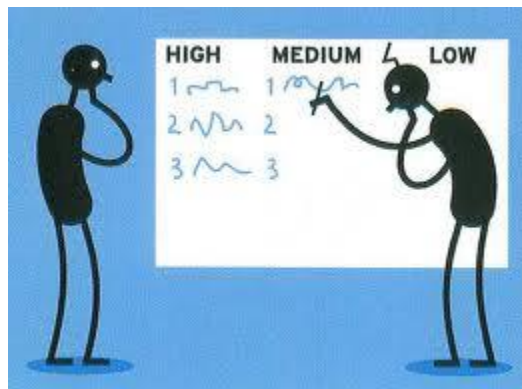


Big Rocks First: Prioritization

*“The key is not to prioritize what's on your schedule, but to schedule your priorities.”
(Stephen Covey)*

*“Life is full of happenings and surprises that is why you should prioritize the things that you think most needed.”
(unknown)*

Determining the order of importance for dealing with important tasks is imperative. Through prioritization, the goal is more attainable because the flow of the process has a plan. This is also essential in designing and implementing shared ministry endeavors.



By sorting the “big rocks first,” a foundation can be established. Think. What is most important in the process? Do not be naïve and believe that the important aspects will take care of themselves. You have to decide what the big rocks are, and delegate them appropriately to team members. Have a plan!



Build Capacity

“The principles of living greatly include the capacity to face trouble with courage, disappointment with cheerfulness, and trial with humility.”

(Thomas S. Monson)

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

(Philippians 4:13)

“Capacity” refers to the potential for growth, development, or accomplishment. In conceptualizing and launching shared ministry, “capacity” refers to the ability to fulfill the plans and promises that you propose. Our capacity is in Our Savior and His abundant resources to bring His Word to all nations. One such divine resource is each other. Building capacity for shared ministry includes identifying and securing the resources (including people and congregations) to carry forth shared ministry. Building capacity also requires the wise use of these resources.



What resources (think personnel, expertise, collaboration, financing, etc.) can you enlist in order to boost your capacity for successful shared ministry? Look to Him, the Giver of every good and perfect gift, to guide you and to faithfully bless His Kingdom’s work.



Build Trusting Relationships

"The person who's in love with their vision of community will destroy community. But the person who loves the people around them will create community everywhere they go."

(Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

Your commendable efforts to establish a shared ministry model may be met with a degree of distrust or suspicion. Some people may think you are attempting to “steal” their church members or to undercut their own congregation’s ministry. These suspicions may arise from troublesome relationships between congregations and their respective members. Rumors and innuendo are yet another source of such destructive perceptions. To counter such perceptions, take the time to establish (and continually strengthen!) trusting relationships established and fortified by the Means of Grace, Christian consolation offered to one another, a consistent focus on the Gospel, corporate worship, and mutually enjoyable fellowship activities.



What plans can you develop and then initiate to build trusting relationships as you begin to explore shared ministry ventures with your brothers and sisters in Christ? What is the importance of attending to this in your context?



Carefully Consider the “Cons” of Shared Ministry

“An essential part of seeing clearly is finding the willingness to look closely and to go beyond our own ideas.”

(Cheri Huber)

A discerning mind and spirit look closely and examine. Discernment requires that we not only look for the positives, but also, and in all honesty, identify the potential weaknesses and challenges of a given idea or proposal - even shared ministry. This important step does not make us fatalistic thinkers or paralyzed perfectionists. It does, however, make our assessments honest and our perceptions balanced. As we consider the potential challenges of shared ministry, we take the time to learn from others who are engaged in shared ministry. We diligently take stock of their wisdom and counsel as we prepare to embark on our own shared ministry adventures in His Name.



Consider some of these “cons” of shared ministry and please add to this list:

Won't be able to satisfy everyone's preferences; will need to compromise; Loss of control/independence; Requires more time and energy for communication; distance between congregations might make communication and contact difficult; Possible issues with interpersonal dynamics (individual or group; Might be difficult to merge congregational cultures (but on the plus side, might yield new insights in the process); Scheduling challenges (worship; classes; other activities); Lack of available support staff/volunteers (e.g., organists; Bible study leaders) may increase the burden; Could create inefficiencies (e.g., duplication; time pastor spends traveling); Pastor might not be as available; might not live in your city; family might not be members of your church (i.e., one congregation might feel slighted); Could lead to pastor burnout; “Fair share” tensions (finances); Congregation may sacrifice voting privilege (but not voice); If the arrangement isn't formalized, ministry activities may not be represented accurately (e.g., in directories; for succession planning); Lots of preparation work in hammering out details (but on the plus side, could yield dividends later); Danger of “maintenance ministry.”



Carefully Consider the “Pros” of Shared Ministry

“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”

(Philippians 4:8)

Seeing the positives in shared ministry does not mean we need to be naïve about the many potential challenges that come with shared ministry. It does, however, ask us to have a balanced perception, to learn from others who are engaged in shared ministry, and to take stock of their wisdom and counsel as we prepare to embark on our shared ministry adventures.



Consider some of these “pros” of shared ministry and please add to this list:

“Three-fold cord” advantage: Strength in numbers; Renewed enthusiasm for/understanding of the mission of the Church; Sharper strategic focus; Renewed commitment to outreach; Expanded view of the body of Christ; Expanded view of the mission field; Greater awareness of neighboring congregations and their activities; Encouragement through walking together (“We’re all in this together”); New ideas from the partner church; Solves supply/demand challenge: A reasonable solution to demographic pressures; Congregations can maintain Word and Sacrament ministry and a Lutheran presence in their respective locations; Combining programs, events, and activities (e.g., confirmation classes) is an efficient use of resources (i.e., good stewardship); Shared resources (e.g., expertise of individual members with special skills; equipment); Shared financial load (e.g., pastor’s salary; program expenses); Ability to provide suitable support for a pastor and family; Potential for more opportunities for laypeople to serve; Individuals and groups benefit through sacrifices and compromises made for the sake of the larger mission.

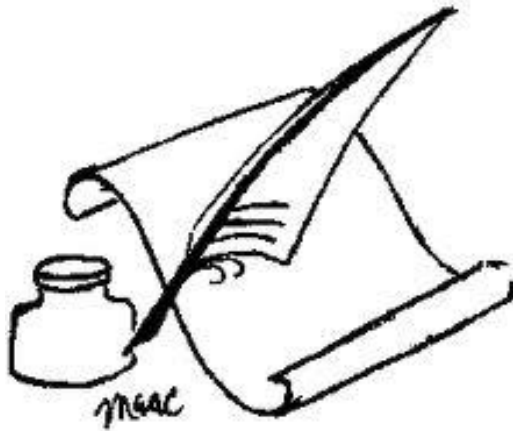


Carpe Diem: Write It Down!

“The discipline of writing something down is the first step toward making it happen.”

(Lee Iacocca)

Ideas often came at the most unusual (and often the most unpredictable) times. Unfortunately, those ideas can be easily misplaced or even forgotten in the flow of your busy times and your busy thoughts about shared ministry. It’s important to capture your ideas. Sure, those ideas will likely need further nurturing down the road (What idea doesn’t?), but if you fail to seize the moment (carpe diem!) and record those ideas, you may later find yourself with nothing at all to nurture. As they say, “If you don’t write it down, it never happened.”



Do you have an efficient way to capture your ideas? What “capture and keep” methods have you found that work best for you? Minutes? Journaling? Once recorded, how can you continue to nurture and refine those ideas in anticipation of doors opening for you?



Consider Both Propinquity-Based and Affinity-Based Collaborations

“Having only one option is not an option.”

(Anonymous)

Sometimes we limit our thinking and, thereby, limit our options when it comes to forming shared ministry collaborations. Shared ministry can occur between one or more congregations which are geographically close to one another (“propinquity-based collaborations”). However, shared ministry can also occur between one or more congregations which may not be geographically close to one another, but which do have similar interests and possess a genuine willingness to work together in ministry (“affinity-based collaborations”). For example, these affinity-based collaborations can occur between an urban congregation and a rural congregation or between a rural congregation and an urban campus ministry. These collaborations also generate enhanced (and often creative) ministries whereby each partner congregation learns a great deal about the opportunities and resources in each respective ministry context.



Have you limited your thinking when it comes to possible shared ministry collaborations the Lord may have waiting for you? What could you do to expand your vision for securing partners to form and conduct shared ministry? What roles could your District staff or Circuit Visitors play in your explorations?



Delegate

*“Surround yourself with the best people you can find, delegate authority, and don't interfere.”
(Ronald Reagan)*

*“No person will make a great business who wants to do it all himself or get all the credit.”
(Andrew Carnegie)*

*“Delegating work works, provided the one delegating works, too.”
(Robert Half)*

Delegation is the assignment of responsibility to another person to carry out specific activities. The shared ministry exploration, designing, launching, and ongoing evaluation tasks consist of numerous tasks, many of which are complex. Teamwork will be an essential part of the wonderful work that lies ahead, and the effective delegation of assignments will maximize your proposal's presentation and eventual success.



Have you familiarized your team with the various tasks that lie ahead? As you do so, involve each team member in the assessment of their respective work strengths, and then work with your team to align the tasks with the appropriate team members. Make sure all assignments are clear, and everyone is on the same page. Are expectations focused? Are timeframes understood? Delegation is hard work - and important work! Once you've worked your "delegation magic," how will you support the work of each team member?



Develop Your Mission Statement

“The whole being of any Christian is faith and love. Faith brings the person to God, love brings the person to people.”

(Martin Luther)

“If you do not where you are going, every road will get you nowhere.”

(Henry Kissinger)

Who? What? Why? Where? When? How? These are some of the basic components of a well-stated (but brief!), mission statement. Such a statement helps you articulately conceptualize your endeavor, and it is used in every subsequent phase of your thinking, your writing, and your speaking.



Have you “boiled down” your concept so you can state it in three sentences? In one sentence? Have you pushed your conceptualization skills and your “wordsmithing” skills far enough to effectively catch the Who, What, Why, Where, When, and How of your proposed adventure? Get thinking and get writing – effectively, insightfully...and economically!



Discovery Card



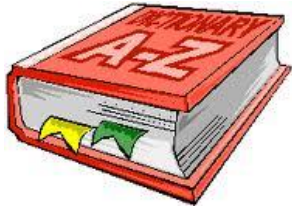
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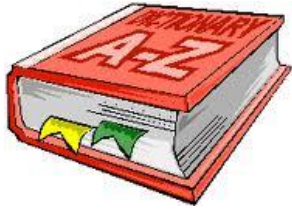
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Don't Fall in Love with Your First Idea

"As concerning faith we ought to be invincible, and more hard, if it might be, than the adamant stone; but as touching charity, we ought to be soft, and more flexible than the reed or leaf that is shaken with the wind, and ready to yield to everything."

(Martin Luther)

Are you excited...passionate...absolutely in love with your idea? Well...STOP!! Try not to get too attached to your idea about shared ministry; others may not see things through your eyes (or through your idea). They might not share the same level of enthusiasm as you exude. This does not mean that you should carelessly discard your ideas or avoid taking the necessary risks in boldly and convincingly presenting your proposal. It simply means that the best idea may be your second or your third idea - in determining needs, in designing your proposal, in developing your objectives, in formulating your budget, in evaluating your findings, in securing your shared ministry partners... Be passionate, but also be flexible and alert to the better idea that may be just around the corner.



Where can you look for ideas? How can you be flexible enough in your work to generate and to simultaneously entertain several possible ideas about shared ministry, rather than just one? How can you (and your team) become confident enough to remain flexible, and, if necessary, pursue and seize upon the **best** ideas that may not necessarily be the first? Ah, romance; isn't it sweet?

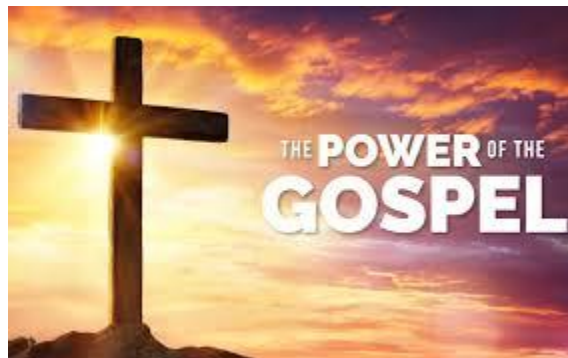


Embrace Shared Ministry as an Impetus to Ministry Expansion

“God does not need your good works, but your neighbor does.”

(Martin Luther)

It may be tempting to regard “shared ministry” as a fatally flawed model for ministry inaction, compression, and eventual ministry (and congregational) collapse. How sad. Shared ministry is actually a wonderful impetus for ministry expansion and can enhance a variety of ministry activities such as witness, worship, service, teaching and learning, fellowship, and pastoral care. Shared ministry can also give rise to the planting of new congregations and the initiation of new ministries such as campus-based ministries. The possibilities are endless!



As the partners in shared ministry readily and eagerly partake of God’s Means of Grace and eagerly share His Good News with one another, the Lord of the Church strengthens faith and emboldens us to carry His Gospel to all nations. What steps can you take to assure that the Gospel is central in your thinking and serving together? How does the Gospel work to enhance our appreciation for the opportunities and the resources which the Lord has placed before us?



Evaluate

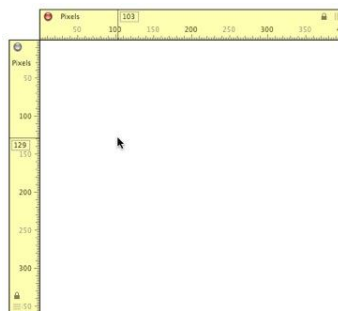
“One of the great mistakes is to judge policies and programs by their intentions rather than their results.”

(Milton Friedman)

"Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason-I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other-my conscience is captive to the Word of God."

(Martin Luther)

Yes, you could say that even Martin Luther utilized an evaluation tool (in his case God’s Word) to determine the truth or the falsehood of a situation. In a true sense, evaluation also plays a key role in your shared ministry endeavors. It’s not a “bad” thing at all. How can you best determine your progress: step-by-step (formative evaluation); and at the conclusion of your work (summative evaluation)? What sort of “hard data” (e.g., that gathered through quantitative methods such a formal assessment tools) and what sort of “soft data” (e.g., that gathered through qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups) can you press into service?



Have you settled on a suitable evaluation component for your project? Revisit your mission statement. Consult your research questions. Embrace your objectives. And while you’re at it, don’t be shy about getting some consultant support on this matter of evaluation. Many times a good evaluation consultant is “just what the doctor ordered.”



Identify Needs

“God does not need your good works, but your neighbor does.”

(Martin Luther)

Identifying and documenting needs is an essential step in determining if your idea (and then your proposed project) will actually be beneficial. In spite of the obvious importance of this step in the shared ministry process, many times we fail to actually conduct such a thorough investigation. Does anyone really care? Is there really a need? How can you best determine this? And if a need exists, how do you propose to address these identified needs? How will people benefit from your idea? You can quickly see how the accurate identification of needs is an essential first step. So, be thorough, be diligent, and be accurate. First things first!



Have you kept the proverbial “horse before the cart?” Have you accurately identified the needs before designing your shared ministry project? It may sound silly to even raise this point but consider the consequences if you err in this step. How do you plan on identifying needs? Some suggestions: listen to congregation members, reach out to sister congregations, confer with your District and Circuit leaders, meet with people from the community, listen to your heart....Find ethical, accurate, and creative ways to gather evidence to show that your shared ministry is needed and that people will benefit from it.

Joker

“Let’s put a smile on that face.” (The Joker)

Roger von Oech writes that the court jester’s job was extremely important. It was the jester’s role to parody any proposal under discussion in order to make it appear in a fresh light. He might extol the trivial, trifle the exalted, or reverse the common perception of the situation. The jester served to break the kings (and their courts) out of the groupthink environment and into fresh thinking.



The “Joker” card is now in your hand, and you must “play the jester”! Your assignment is to assume the role of the “joker” in your group. Play this card (and your important role!) at a precise time in the group’s thinking (or in your own thinking) when a little humor and parody may be just what is needed to keep thinking clearly, refreshingly, and cleverly. Give it your best effort and watch to see what happens. Lights, camera, action!

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Know Your Stakeholders

“If you have an apple and I have an apple and we exchange these apples then you and I will still each have one apple. But if you have an idea and I have an idea and we exchange these ideas, then each of us will have two ideas.”

(George Bernard Shaw)

You have a wonderful idea for designing and initiating shared ministry, but have you carefully identified those who have a stake in your idea? Your stakeholders could include potential fellow congregational members, sister congregations, your District, and your community - and that's just for starters! The careful and methodical identification of your stakeholders (including *potential* stakeholders) can help you gain essential insights as you further refine your idea, develop a solid project plan, gather necessary resources, and secure important endorsements. There's a lot “at stake” for you and your idea, and the stakeholders will play very important roles – now, and in the months and years to come.



What have you done to identify the stakeholders in your idea? Have you conducted a thorough search for your stakeholders? Have you looked in every nook and cranny? With whom could you collaborate in this important task? Once you have identified your stakeholders what would be the best way for you to communicate with them, and the best way that you could allow them to communicate their ideas to you? Remember, it's a two-way street! Share, listen, and grow. Your stakeholders are wonderful gifts.

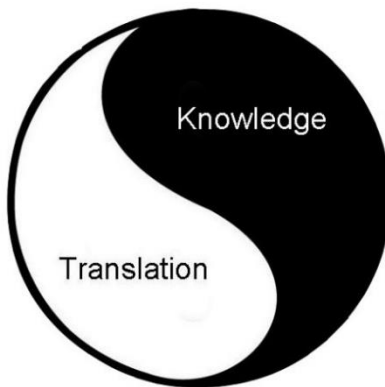


Knowledge Translation

“Knowledge is like money: to be of value it must circulate, and in circulating it can increase in quantity and, hopefully, in value.”

(Louis L’Amour)

Recognizing who your stakeholders are (for example, congregation members, sister congregations, your community, the District, and all others who will be impacted by your project) and involving them in meaningful ways throughout your conceptualization, implementation, and evaluation phases of your shared ministry adventure is crucial. “Knowledge Translation” (KT) refers to the exchange, synthesis, and ethically-sound application of knowledge across your spheres of influence. KT builds creativity, quality, capacity, and positive project consequences.



Who are your stakeholders? How will you meaningfully include them in the planning, implementation, and evaluation activities of your project? Teamwork is essential - every step of the way, even in the dissemination of your project outcomes. Think ahead, get your stakeholders on-board, and collaboratively set sail for a bon voyage!



Lay the Solid Foundation

“Build a strong foundation and you can reach even the most unthinkable heights.”

(M.J. Morris)

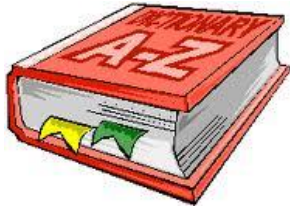
“On Christ the solid rock I stand...”

(Lutheran Worship)

Experience has shown that a solid foundation is required upon which shared ministry plans can subsequently be built. Skipping over this important “prep” work can result in subsequent failures to launch. Doubts, fears, jealousies, and even suspicions can block the way to shared ministry starts. One congregation conducted a series of informal but meaningful “get acquainted” sessions with each prospective partnering congregation and their officers. In these sessions an uplifting devotion was shared, introductions were made, and each congregation summarized their respective ministry activities and future plans. Areas for possible one-time collaboration were identified (for example, a collaborative Reformation service and quarterly pulpit exchanges) and some of the congregations agreed to begin meeting on a quarterly basis to further develop meaningful relationships and possible longer-term collaborations - possibly even more formal shared ministry.



Take the time to identify some “foundation laying” activities that you could sponsor with sister congregations. Become a welcoming and supportive host for get acquainted sessions, and watch for God’s blessings to flow as hopes, ideas, and the precious Gospel is shared.



Leadership

*“Lord, take my hand and lead me upon life’s way; direct, protect, and feed me from day to day.
Without Your grace and favor I go astray; so take my hand, O Savior, and lead the way.”*

(Lutheran Worship Hymnal)

Leadership is providing positive, influential guidance to one or more people in order to reach a common goal. This skill is essential in the exploration, design, launching, and ongoing evaluation of shared ministry endeavors. Effective leaders practice their skills at both the team level and at the individual level. Effective leaders attend to goals, details, determination - and also to people. Leaders “lead by serving” and they “serve by leading.”



First, take comfort in the Lord’s leadership and in His unconditional will that His Kingdom comes to all people. Next, take comfort in the Lord’s blessings upon you as a leader. He is ever faithful to you. Next, how do you rate your leadership skills? What leadership styles and skills work best for you? What leadership styles and skills need more polishing for the endeavors of shared ministry that await you and your partners in the Gospel? Take this inventory now. Inquire of your collaborators what leadership styles and skills will make the best and the most efficient match. Continue to grow as a leader - it will pay dividends in the weeks and months ahead.



Let it Brew

"The blessedness of waiting is lost on those who cannot wait...The main thing is that we remain in step with God and not keep rushing a few steps ahead, though also not lagging a single step behind."

(Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

Sometimes you just have to get away from an idea in order to allow the fresh thinking or the breakthrough concepts to emerge. Even in shared ministry, sometimes it's "The faster I go, the farther behind I get." Good ideas cannot be rushed. Let it rest. Let it incubate. Let it brew. Whatever expression you prefer to use, the lesson is still the same: Pause. It's a great way to work wisely, creatively, and efficiently. Step back from a task and figure out where you are in the process. Positive discovery is empowering and motivating.



Do you and your team stop and "smell what's cooking"? How can you build in those efficient pauses to allow the fresh ideas (and ingredients!) to get into your recipe? Yum-yum!



Listening

"The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice."

(Proverbs 12:15)

"Christians have forgotten that the ministry of listening has been committed to them by Him who is Himself the great listener and whose work they should share."

(Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

"The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists in listening to them."

(Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

As Bonhoeffer reminds us, the art of listening is a precious skill, indeed - for all Christians. In fact, Bonhoeffer goes on to describe listening as a "ministry" - a profound service that the Lord performs through us. Of course, such a gift begins with the Lord's own listening, doesn't it? You and I are assured of His attentiveness to our every need and the devotion He has to us day after day. Listening will also play an essential role in the exploration, design, launching, and ongoing evaluation of your shared ministry endeavors. Imagine how unbearable these essential tasks would become if we were to forego Christian listening - to one another, and, of course, to the Lord Himself. But at the same time, rejoice at the unnumerable blessings the Lord bestows upon our fellowship as we listen, listen, and listen.



The importance of listening may be easily overlooked in our eagerness to press on with our shared ministry hopes. How can you and your collaborators enhance your listening skills and, thereby, assure all stakeholders that they are heard and respected for their thoughts, questions, and interests?

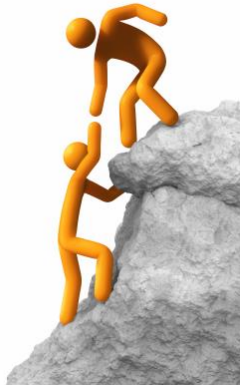


Mentor: Get One; Become One!

“A mentor is someone who sees more talent and ability within you, than you see in yourself, and helps bring it out of you.”

(Bob Proctor)

Even if you do not remember your Greek mythology lessons, remember this: Mentor (from which the word “mentoring” is derived) was the loyal friend and advisor of Odysseus, and the teacher of his son Telemachus. You don’t have to be from New Orleans (think Mardi Gras!) to appreciate those names and the concept of a “mentor” - especially when it comes to the shared ministry journey that lies ahead for you. Mentors: get one; become one. It’s an old, old idea that’s well worth your consideration today.



Do you have a “shared ministry mentor” in your life? What roles does your mentor fill? If you do not yet have a mentor (or mentors!), how could you secure one? What skills are important for your mentor to possess? Do you think you are ready to serve as someone else’s mentor? What resources do you as a potential mentor bring to the table?



Monitor Your Decision-Making Effectiveness

“It is your decisions, and not your conditions, that determine your destiny.”

(Tony Robbins)

One size doesn't fit all. That's certainly the case when it comes to making decisions and the processes or steps people use in arriving at their decisions. Some people are very impulsive in their decision-making. Others are more methodical in making their decisions. Some people surround themselves with advice before making a final decision. Others prefer to basically go it alone, preferring to trust their own instincts and feelings. How do you make decisions? Does your decision-making style vary from situation to situation or from issue to issue? And, of course, there's the bottom line about your decision-making: How effective is it?



How do you go about making decisions? Do your decision-making preferences tend to be flexible or are they pretty set? How effective is your decision-making? If you were to ask others to describe the quality of your decisions, what would they honestly say? What changes, if any, would you like to make in your decision-making when it comes to the planning and ongoing management of your shared ministry endeavor? Why?



Graciously Accept the “Not Yet”

“Perseverance is not a long race; it is many short races one after the other.”

(Walter Elliot)

Maybe the news regarding your shared ministry project was “Sorry, Not Yet.” As such, maybe that news tasted a little bitter and at the same time a little sweet. Perhaps your timing was off in the submission of your ideas. Perhaps your prospective partner in shared ministry was not yet ready to make the commitment to shared ministry. Perhaps your notification included a suggestion that you strengthen this part of that part of your proposal and then submit the revised proposal at a later date. Instead of grabbing the crying towel (or throwing in the towel!), look for the silver lining behind the cloud. “Not Yet” could be just the impetus you need to get your idea eventually over the top.



What will you do with the “Sorry, Not Yet” news you received from your prospective shared ministry partner? Will you regard it as a polite rejection, but nevertheless a rejection? Or will you carefully ponder the news, secure clarifications, take their counsel to heart, and keep on keeping on? With whom could you collaborate in this process? Remember, good things could be just over the next hill!



Overthinking

“You cannot plough a field by turning it over in your mind.”

(unknown)

An active mind is a wonderful tool as you work your way through the shared ministry process. But what about an “overactive mind” or “overthinking”? Have you ever considered the possible difficulties that overthinking could create - maybe procrastination, maybe perfectionism, maybe just a continuous cluttered brain with spider webs of thoughts? Perhaps you have had experiences with such matters and realize what it’s like to get too much of a good thing - even thinking. Acquiring your focus, maintaining your focus, and making good, timely decisions will be essential throughout the phases and the stages of shared ministry, but at the same time you will need to guard against overthinking so you can place your hopes and your plans into action.



Do you tend to overthink? Would you describe yourself as a procrastinator? Would you describe yourself as a perfectionist? If so, you may want to give this matter some thought (if you will pardon the ironic suggestion!). How can you and your team best make decisions? How can you obtain and retain good thinking habits without becoming immobilized by “overthinking”?



Pastoral Staffing in the Shared Ministry Models

“Lutheran theology emphasizes the pastor as a faithful steward of the Word, focusing on preaching ‘Christ and Him crucified’ rather than personal wisdom. Pastors are viewed as instruments or ‘masks of God’ with their primary duty being the administration of the Sacraments and the pure preaching of the Gospel.”

(Anonymous)

“It is He who is baptizing. It is He who is active. He Himself is present there. Thus, the preacher does not speak for himself; he is the spokesman of God, the heavenly father.”

(Martin Luther)

Just as there are many, many shared ministry models (see the Vocabulary cards in this Deck), there are also a variety of ways to provide for pastoral staffing in shared ministry. On size does not fit all situations. These options include sharing full-time called pastors, sharing part-time worker-priests or bi-vocational pastors, sharing contract pastors, sharing supply pastors, sharing retired pastors, sharing a vicar who is under a pastor’s supervision, and sharing an SMP (Specific Ministry Pastor, one who is enrolled in seminary studies leading to ordination but who simultaneously resides in his place of residence here in the District as he serves a congregation).



Are you fully acquainted with the wide variety of pastoral staffing options and clergy resources available in your immediate area? Have you discussed this matter with your Circuit Visitor or District President? If not, explore these possibilities with them. As you do so also consider combining available resources in meaningful ways.

Process Suit





Recognize Multiple Options in Administrative and Financial Matters

"Success stems from the producer creating the optimal conditions for the filmmaker's own creative process. Not from steering the filmmaker through a one-size-fits-all approach."

(Jason Blum)

"One size does not fit all" means a single solution, product, or approach rarely suits everyone due to individual differences, emphasizing the need for customization in areas like education, healthcare, clothing, and business, as people have unique needs, backgrounds, and body types. It highlights the failure of generic methods (like a single curriculum or standardized clothing) to address diverse circumstances and achieve optimal results, advocating instead for tailored strategies that respect individuality. This is also true with regard to shared ministry, particularly so with regard to the administrative structures that are developed and the financial models that are put in place. One size in these matters (i.e., one administrative model or one financing model) does not fit all sizes. Be creative. Individualize. Tailor your designs to meet your context and needs.



How can you best design an administrative structure and a financing/budget model that best serves your shared ministry needs and the needs of your collaborators? With whom can you confer about such matters? For example, consider learning from your shared ministry mentors, but tastefully, freely, and joyfully adapt their models or develop your own that best fits you.



Set Goals, Objectives, Strategies

“Setting goals is the first step in turning the invisible into the visible.”

Tony Robins

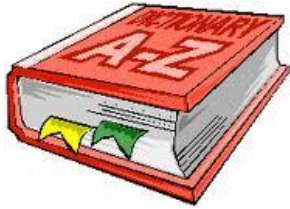
The old adage is “Plan your work and work your plan.” I know you cannot do this with all areas of life, but there is ample reason for such thinking and doing when exploring and designing shared ministry partnerships. Think of your goals as broad statements of where you want to be. Think of your objectives as specific strategies that move you toward each respective goal. In this way you have a broad picture of where you are headed (your goal statements) and also have some specific strategies in-hand (your objectives/action statements) that will help each of your goals hopefully come to fruition. Strive to have both goals and specific strategies for reaching your goals. The two concepts go hand-in-hand and will help you “Plan your work and work your plan.” This is a key component in your ongoing learning and growing. Go for it!



What goals do you have for your shared ministry endeavor? How were these goals generated? Next, what strategies do you have for working toward each respective goal? What resources (people and otherwise) can you leverage to help you carry out your strategies? What would be some effective ways to monitor your progress toward each goal and the steps you will take toward reaching your respective goals? What role does “holding yourself accountable” for setting goals and implementing strategies have in all of this?

Shared Ministry: Putting (and Keeping!) All the Cards on the Table





Shared Ministry Models: Dual Parish

“Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success”

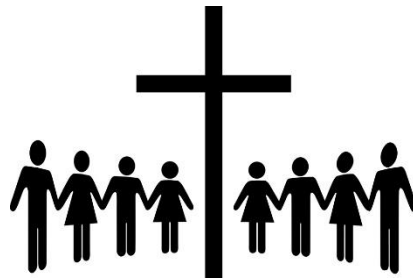
(Henry Ford)

Description: Two neighboring churches experiencing similar challenges (e.g., difficulty filling a vacancy) form a partnership that enables them to support a pastor.

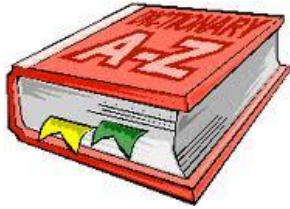
Advantages: Solves the vacancy dilemma: “How do we support a new pastor?” Can maintain a Lutheran presence in the communities. Increased awareness of activities in the other congregation.

Considerations Distance between congregations needs to be manageable (closer than Regional Model). Need to make both congregations feel equally loved.

Possible Challenges: Limiting mindset: “Paying for a pastor” vs. expanding the ministry. Disagreement over share of support for pastor. Death by meetings. Unnecessary duplication (e.g., newsletters, printing).



Take a few moments to evaluate the possible strengths and possible weaknesses of the model summarized above. You may also want to directly contact the Kansas District (and your own District office) and interview participants in each respective model. This will likely give you further insights into each model and further encourage your exploration and discussions.



Shared Ministry Models: Helping Hands

“You never know when a helping hand will change another person’s entire life.”

(Zig Ziglar)

Description: A smaller congregation arranges for essential help (e.g., worship services) from a neighboring larger congregation. Smaller church typically isn’t in a position to call a full-time pastor. Partnering with a larger church might make sense if there’s no dual parish partner available.

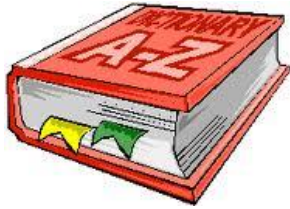
Advantages: A congregation can remain a viable outpost for the Gospel. Consistent presence in the pulpit. A congregation might benefit from the health/ideas of the larger church.

Considerations: Necessary ministry mindset: Don’t do ministry **IN** the building, but rather **FROM** the building. Can the pastor find a way to be active in the community where he’s assisting? **Training needed:** Emphasis on the priesthood of all believers. What do members of the larger congregation think about the helping role of their pastor?

Possible Challenges: Operating in maintenance mode. For the smaller congregation: Ministry only one day a week? Outreach is difficult; time for adult instruction?



Take a few moments to evaluate the possible strengths and possible weaknesses of each model summarized above. You may also want to directly contact the Kansas District (and your own District office) and interview participants in each respective model. This will likely give you further insights into each model and further encourage your exploration and discussions.



Shared Ministry Models: Circuit Rider

“A good long ride can clear your mind, restore your faith, and use up lots of fuel.”

(Anonymous)

Description: Multiple small congregations experiencing challenges agree to worship at different times so one pastor can serve them all.

Advantages: Word and Sacrament ministry can be sustained in established sites. Offers a way to provide a suitable salary for a pastor. **Considerations** Requires more than one partner church. Distance can vary (dictates worship times). Requires good time management and an ability to manage a more complex arrangement. Are congregations flexible on worship times and days? Better if you can synchronize services. Need to keep things simple (same bulletin; same music).

Possible Challenges: Maintenance ministry can be an issue. Challenges caring for property. Pastor burnout. Pastor retention. Accountability of pastor. Potential duplication of resources. Meetings could be burdensome. Ability for members to communicate and connect with one another. Finding times for Bible studies and other classes.



Take a few moments to evaluate the possible strengths and possible weaknesses of each model summarized above. You may also want to directly contact the Kansas District (and your own District office) and interview participants in each respective model. This will likely give you further insights into each model and further encourage your exploration and discussions.



Shared Ministry Models: Regional (3+ Congregations)

“Great discoveries and improvements invariably involve the cooperation of many minds. I may be given credit for having blazed the trail, but when I look at the subsequent developments, I feel the credit is due to others rather than to myself.”

(Alexander Graham Bell)

Description: One church is the hub and partners with 2+ sites around it. Lends itself to multiple staff. Helps if the hub church has resources to share. More flexibility in the kinds of churches involved. Can accommodate more distance between churches.

Advantages: Strength in numbers. Team approach (akin to Jesus sending out disciples in pairs). Increased efficiency. The ministry can grow (add congregations). Promotes a regional mindset. Creates a network.

Possible Challenges: Unequal influence. Communication can be more complicated. Weekly schedules can be hard to figure out. Death by meetings.

Consider if... Smaller congregation is struggling on its own or struggling to maintain a dual parish (i.e., experiences the “aha!” moment of realization that something needs to change). Rapid turnover of pastors; difficulty calling a pastor. Stable, thriving congregation nearby that’s willing to help. Interested in recharging mission focus (not simply in survival mode). Distance between congregations makes it difficult to arrange a workable Sunday schedule. Members are flexible and open to compromise and new ways of operating.



Take a few moments to evaluate the possible strengths and possible weaknesses of each model summarized above. You may also want to directly contact the Kansas District (and your own District office) and interview participants in each respective model. This will likely give you further insights into each model and further encourage your exploration and discussions.



Shared Ministry Models: Connect with Tech

“With technology in the classroom, the world becomes a classroom without walls.”

(Anonymous)

“Technology is best when it brings people together.”

(Matt Mullenweg)

Description: Multiple small congregations share resources to call a pastor to keep ministry going, with the help of technology. Congregations aren't close enough to function effectively in a more traditional multi parish arrangement. For worship, might utilize either live streaming or recorded sermons, with elders handling the liturgy.

Considerations: Need to have resources (or be able to obtain them) for tech infrastructure and equipment. Pastor needs to be comfortable with technology. Elders would need training. Churches need to coordinate schedules. Better to work with mileage reimbursement or a vehicle purchase?

Advantages: Spirit of camaraderie. Churches can retain their respective cultures.

Possible Challenges: Decreased motivation to attend. Might affect sense of community. Pastor physically present only every three or four weeks (meaning less frequent communion).



Take a few moments to evaluate the possible strengths and possible weaknesses of the model summarized above. You may also want to directly contact the Kansas District (and your own District office) and interview participants in each respective model. This will likely give you further insights into each model and further encourage your exploration and discussions.



Shared Ministry Models: Multi-Site Mergers

“By working together, pooling our resources, and building on our strengths, we can accomplish great things.”

(Ronald Reagan)

Description: Two or more congregations merge their ministries, creating a single unified ministry with multiple sites (in some respects similar to a multi-site church planting effort).

Considerations: Mergers with the greatest chance of success involve at least one partner that’s strong and vibrant (e.g., strong + challenged; strong + strong), with mission-minded opportunity as a driver. Requires a harmonization of missions and ministry and a spirit of unity; churches must be able to get behind a united vision. What do we have in common? What are the differences?

Advantages: Helps churches move beyond the status quo, providing an opportunity to refocus mission and ministry. Potential to revitalize ministry in a promising location. Might reduce inter-congregational tensions that can arise in dual or multi-point parish partnerships. Amplifies the presence of a ministry and its message.

Possible Challenges: Naming of the ministry. Keeping everyone well informed; Minimizing doctrinal or cultural differences; Lack of attention to transition management (e.g., emotional pain). Tension between multi-site merger models and LCMS emphasis on congregational self-governance/independence.



merger

Take a few moments to evaluate the possible strengths and possible weaknesses of the model summarized above. You may also want to directly contact the Kansas District (and your own District office) and interview participants in each respective model. This will likely give you further insights into each model and further encourage your exploration and discussions.



Shared Ministry Models: Cathedral Ministry Model

“The goal is to help the weak grow strong, not to let the weak become weaker.”

(Neale Walsch)

Description: 3-5 churches form a partnership that includes the strongest area congregation (the cathedral congregation/church), other area congregations or partner congregations/churches in an association, and the district (if desired) for the purpose of placing (calling) a pastor on staff of the cathedral congregation who would be deployed to serve several other area partner LCMS congregations for blessing in, and growth of, God’s Kingdom in our midst. Partner churches contract for services needed.

Advantages: Partner churches can maintain their own identity. Ministries are stabilized. Strong support for called associate from the cathedral church and association. Potential for growth and expanded view of ministry.

Possible Challenges: Might need to check with your district about representation and governance issues. Staffing costs will decrease, but cost savings might not extend to equipment. Expected equipment cost benefits might be negligible, offset by the need to have equipment in every location, as well as the assistance of a technology specialist.



Take a few moments to evaluate the possible strengths and possible weaknesses of the model summarized above. You may also want to directly contact the Kansas District (and your own District office) and interview participants in each respective model. This will likely give you further insights into each model and further encourage your exploration and discussions.



Shared Ministry Models: The Hybrid

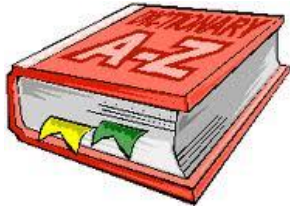
“Creating new combinations (hybrids) involves merging distinct elements to form something stronger, more innovative, and often unexpected.”

(Anonymous)

The respective shared ministry models can be combined to form a “hybrid” model that is unique to your situation and best suits the ministry needs and opportunities and resources at-hand. Be creative; be flexible. You have our permission to think.



What would be a suitable “hybrid” model of shared ministry in your context? What elements from some of the respective models of shared ministry could be best leveraged by your team to enhance ministry? Listen to the ideas of others; be patient; combine; rearrange; and dream.



Shared Ministry

"Ministry is not a solo act; it thrives in community. Together, we can achieve more than we ever could alone. Shared ministry reflects the heart of collaboration and unity. In partnership, we find strength and purpose in our mission. Effective ministry is built on the foundation of shared gifts and talents. When we share our ministry, we multiply our impact and reach."

(Anonymous)

Pioneered in rural and urban communities (e.g., even as early as the 1860's in the LCMS), the shared ministry model yokes two or more congregations together to share pastoral personnel resources. Congregations in the shared ministry model also encourage the committees/boards of the respective congregations to regularly meet together to share plans, explore joint ministry opportunities, and to enhance Lutheran ministry across the region. Such collegial enhancements can pertain to worship, teaching, fellowship, community service, and a host of other outreach endeavors. The congregations in the shared ministry model often share costs for the pastoral staff and coordinate these pastoral personnel to maximize each congregation's corporate life in Christ. There are many, many types of shared ministry; "one size (or style) does not fit all." In addition, there is always room to design "hybrid" shared ministry models. Be alert to your needs, resources, and creative shared ministry designs that may best suit your context.



Compare this statement about shared ministry with your own understanding and perception of shared ministry. Share your perceptions with those around you; listen as they share with you. After doing so, share your respective interests in this topic.



Show Appreciation to Your Team

“Appreciation is a wonderful thing: It makes what is excellent in others belong to us as well.”
(Voltaire)

“The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists of listening to them. Just as love of God begins with listening to his word, so the beginning of love for our brothers and sisters is learning to listen to them.”
(Dietrich Bonhoefer)

Appreciation is the act of estimating the qualities of things and giving them their proper value. It involves showing gratitude towards others and being thankful. The sincere expression of appreciation for a job well done can energize a person and a team - even those toiling away at shared ministry endeavors.



What would be a meaningful way to show your appreciation to your team? By showing your team members how much they (and their work) mean to you, they may well have an enhanced sense of pleasure in their work and may also be re-energized to continue to give their best as the project phases continue - often with many demanding and sometimes unexpected challenges.



Simultaneously Attend to Shared Ministry Health and Congregational Health

“Dietrich Bonhoeffer defined Christian caregiving as a ministry of listening, serving, and bearing one another's burdens, rooted in Christ's love rather than human expectation. He famously emphasized, ‘The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists of listening to them,’ regarding this as a vital form of Christ-like care.”

(Anonymous)

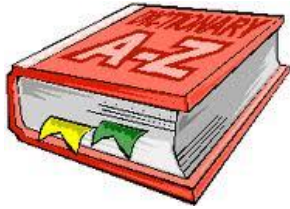
As you have probably come to realize, there is a certain “balancing act” that needs to be performed in shared ministry endeavors. On the one hand, attention must be given to the overall health of the shared ministry partnership itself. Is everyone “on the same page”? Is the arrangement beneficial to each partner? What adjustments need to be made to keep the collaborations vital and thriving in Grace. On the other hand, careful attention must be given to the health of each respective congregation in the shared ministry alliance. Are the needs of the respective congregations being met? Is decision-making shared? Are there any significant issues in the respective congregations that need special attention – for example, additional pastoral care and counseling, encouragement, conflict resolution, financial assistance, etc. You can quickly realize that both foci (not just one or the other!) will need your gracious attention and care. It’s not one or the other; it’s both/and.



What can you do to monitor the overall health of the shared ministry alliance and simultaneously monitor the overall health of each congregation in the shared ministry partnership? Don’t hesitate to be creative about this matter. Find out what works best for each congregation and then use your time, attention, and devotion in loving and Christ-centered ways. Be a good listener, and a fervent encourager.

Skill Suit





Sustainability

"I think I could, I think I could, I think I could..."

(The Little Engine)

"With a stout heart, a mouse can lift an elephant."

(Tibetan Proverb)

Sustainability refers to the capacity of your shared ministry endeavors to keep going after the initial launch. Sustainability asks you to think ahead, and to plan for the next phase before it occurs. Although we are not clairvoyant, the Lord has given us the wherewithal to think ahead and to begin to identify and gather the resources that can continue the shared ministry endeavors or even take them to new heights.



What resources will keep your project afloat in its next phases, perhaps even foster the expansion of your shared ministry activities? Staff? Finances? Management? Where could you look now for future collaborators and ongoing support for shared ministry? Start asking now, and plan ahead!



Temerity

“Be a sinner and sin boldly, but believe and rejoice in Christ even more boldly, for he is victorious over sin, death, and the world.”

(Martin Luther)

Temerity is a 25-cent word for “boldness” – as in “boldly going where no one has gone before.” Temerity isn’t pushiness, arrogance, or self-centeredness; nor is temerity “acting like a bull in a china shop.” Temerity is daring, courage, possessing a sense of confidence, and doing whatever it takes to “step out in faith.” Don’t blink. Stay focused. Stock up on temerity and keep an extra supply on hand.



On the scale of 1 to 10, where do you rate yourself on temerity when it comes to the conceptualization and implementation of shared ministry? Does your boldness seem to vary from phase to phase or from task to task? What steps can you take to “go forth with boldness” as you embark upon (and steadily continue) your fabulous, shared ministry pursuits.



Tenacity

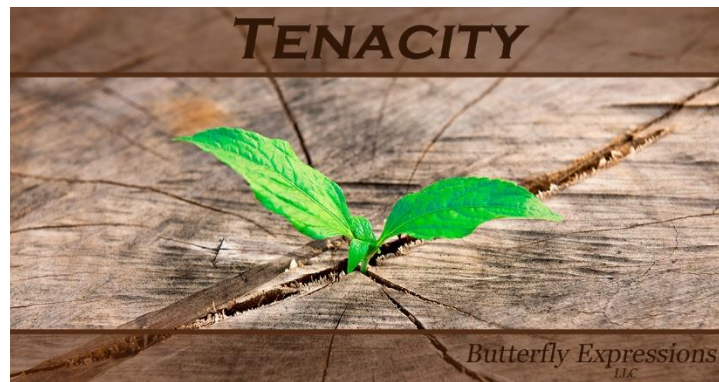
"Praise be to the Lord, for he has heard my cry for mercy. The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me. My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise him."

(Psalm 28:7)

"I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

(Philippians 1:3-6)

Tenacity is perseverance. It is persistence in the face of distractions, adversity, and even confusion. Tenacity isn't a stubborn refusal to see reality or to make necessary changes, but rather it is a steady determination to work through changes and challenges - whatever they may be. This tenacity is a gift from the Lord, our true Strength.



Distractions, fluctuating energy levels, and even unexpected changes will occur as you begin and continue your shared ministry pursuits. What resources can you tap to help keep you focused, farsighted, and faithful in the great Kingdom work that lies before you?



The Centrality of the Gospel

“Martin Luther considered the Gospel the central, indispensable doctrine of Christianity, referring to it as the ‘principal article of all Christian doctrine’ that must be ‘beaten into our heads continually’. He defined it as a comforting word of grace and salvation through Christ alone, rather than human merit.”

(Anonymous)

My experiences with shared ministry (and congregational ministry as well) have taught me (the hard way) how easy it is to lose the centrality of the Gospel and replace it with the Law. Perhaps by nature we begrudge ourselves and others of the Gospel. Perhaps we often lack trust in the Gospel to do its wondrous work and resort to anger, threats, or neglect of one another. Perhaps by nature the Law is our companion and “master” and that we continue to push back against the Gospel and its power - unto salvation and unto sanctification. Fortunately, the Lord insists on bringing to us His precious Gospel through the Means of Grace, and through the Gospel makes us eager through in our relationships with Him and with one another.



It may be easy and convenient to minimize the role of the Gospel in our relationships - even in shared ministry relationships. How can we avoid this temptation? How can you order your shared ministry focus and actions to keep the Gospel of central importance in your words and actions? What place does Bible study and corporate worship have in your meetings, your conversations, your Christian consolation of one another? This is not a harsh matter to discuss; it is an enriching matter, and one of foremost joy.



The Learning Team

“Alone, we can do so little; together, we can do so much.”

(Helen Keller)

There’s an old expression that goes, “Two heads are better than one.” This expression reminds us that collaborating with others can often achieve many goals that working only with oneself could never accomplish. The charge before you to continually learn and grow is a significant assignment, isn’t it? As you launch into (or prepare to resume) this shared ministry quest, consider the value of forming a learning TEAM - a collaborative, encouraging, and creative way to help you (and everyone else on your learning team) to keep learning and growing - particularly so when it comes to identifying needs, identifying potential ministry partners, identifying resources, designing your shared ministry model, launching your endeavor, and continually improving your design and service.



How could a learning team assist you in your ongoing learning and growth? What are some advantages that a learning team could bring to you? Who would you select to be on your learning team? How could you divide the various tasks (e.g., studying community demographics, conducting congregational studies, reaching out to resources such as your District or the Church Extension Fund, etc.) among learning team members?



Think Theologically

“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

(Ephesians 2:10)

“I want you to know how to study theology in the right way. I have practiced this method myself...The method of which I am speaking is the one which the holy king David teaches in Psalm 119...Here you will find three rules. They are frequently proposed throughout the psalm and run thus: Oratio, meditatio, tentatio” (prayer, meditation, trial).”

(Martin Luther)

The many suggestions put forth through the cards in this Deck are reasonable and practical insights into such things as setting goals and objectives, establishing a learning team, communicating effectively, and so forth. These can play significant roles in your exploration and establishment of your shared ministry endeavors. However, as reasonable as these suggestions may be, there is one primary and vastly superior focus that awaits you, one vastly superior to anything reasonable. This is the insistence that you think theologically and allow this divine gift to lead the way in your shared ministry thinking and actions and at all times let it be the master of all other suggestions that are offered here. Thankfully, the Lord takes charge of making us His theologians and forms us and shapes us as His theologians. He undertakes to do so through those very tools Luther summarized so brilliantly and so humbly: prayer (*oratio*), study of God’s Word (*meditatio*), and experience (*tentatio*). Think theologically, and continually so.



As St. Paul exhorts, “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world...Therefore put on the full armor of God.” Ephesians 6) Yes, as the hymnwriter shares, “Put on the Gospel armor; each piece put on with prayer. Where duty calls or danger, be never wanting there.”

Partake of His gifts to you. Encourage your brothers and sisters in Christ to do the same. Take comfort in His Gospel’s workmanship. Rejoice in His faithful care and guidance.



Uncover New Resources and Relationships

“It just comes down to good old-fashioned detective work. It’s knocking on doors and asking lots of questions.”

(Ron Palefsky)

When it comes to exploring shared ministry needs, models, partners, and potential resources think of yourself as a detective - a very good detective! What skills does a good detective have? Curiosity? Creativity? A certain tenacity and temerity? An ability to make many contacts and secure important information from each contact in order to solve the case? A trusty sidekick or a team of colleagues? This is exactly how it works with your shared ministry explorations and learning. Nose around. Look for clues. Contact all sorts of people and congregations. Weigh the evidence you uncover. Persevere. Be creative. Consider all possible options. Use your team wisely. And have fun as you go about your detective work. Go, go, go, and as you do so, be sure and share your discoveries with others. They (and you!) will be enriched in many, many ways.



Are there other people who could join you in your explorations? What experiences and skills could such individuals bring to your search? To your thinking? To your planning? Indeed, there are many times when we “have not” because we fail to see those resources that God has graciously placed before us. Go forth with confidence in Him, the Lord of the Church.

Vocabulary Suit





Watch Your Pace: Be Deliberate, Yet Eager

“Haste makes waste.”

(traditional proverb)

“Don’t put off until tomorrow what you can do today.”

(traditional proverb)

How quickly can a shared ministry partnership come together? Well, it depends, doesn’t it? There are any number of factors that play a part in this matter. These factors often include willingness, trust, open and sincere communication...The list is lengthy and often complex and certainly varies from context to context. How quickly can your envisioned shared ministry partnership come together? The two quotes cited on this card suggest that it’s a matter of not being rushed into it and yet not becoming a procrastinator about it. Be deliberate (taking care as you work step-by-step), but also eager (with a sense of urgency with the Kingdom’s work of the Lord) as you do so. Here’s the counsel: “Be Deliberately Eager.”



What factors need to be addressed in sowing the seeds for your shared ministry partnership and then successfully launching your shared ministry work? Give thought to starting slowly, even informally, before moving (if ever) into the more complex and formal aspects of shared ministry. Pray fervently for a discerning spirit about your pace. Trust His Spirit to gently and faithfully guide you, knowing His unconditional and gracious will: “Thy Kingdom come.”

Wild Cards





Work and Think Creatively

"When it comes to faith, what a living, creative, active, powerful thing it is. It cannot do other than good at all times. It never waits to ask whether there is some good work to do, rather, before the question is raised, it has done the deed, and keeps on doing it."

(Martin Luther)

Creativity is the use of the imagination or original ideas in the production of an artistic work. One such artistic work is your shared ministry design. Creativity is not an “optional” part of this process. The active use of your imagination, fresh thinking, and innovation must be evident throughout your work. Your proposal must be significant and original. Your proposal must tangibly demonstrate its unique design and its unique contributions - just for starters.



How well-equipped are you and your team when it comes to creative thinking? As you envision the work that lies ahead in the design and initiation of your shared ministry, where do you feel you need to warmly embrace creativity? Please note: Creativity cannot happen overnight. It must be nurtured, and then smoothly be assimilated into each phase of your work.