

*“Shifting to Shared Ministry:
Better Understanding and Navigating the Dynamics of Change”*

Introduction

“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 purpose of this learning tool is to further acquaint you with shared ministry and making the shift to shared ministry as you become equipped through a fuller understanding of the change process, the dynamics of change, and specifically how to better navigate this shift. This learning tool is best used in conjunction with other shared ministry learning tools in this series, including “The Shared Ministry Workbook,” “The Shared Ministry Interactive Card Deck,” and the “Shared Ministry Card Deck Manual.” Furthermore, this learning tool endeavors to enhance your creativity and to further enkindle the exploration and initiation of shared ministry opportunities in your community.

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 endured.” (“The Church’s One Foundation” – Lutheran Worship #289)

Conceptualizing Change

One practical and evidence-based conceptualization of the change process is “Motivational Interviewing.” This model explains that change often takes place through a series of stages. Each stage presents unique questions for our consideration and unique issues that are to be addressed. Here are some of the “basics” of the Motivational Interviewing model:

Motivational Interviewing (MI) works as a collaborative, client-centered conversation that helps people resolve their ambivalence (mixed feelings) about changing the status quo by drawing out their own reasons and motivation for change, rather than telling them what to do, using techniques like open-ended questions, affirmations, reflections, and summaries (OARS) within a spirit of acceptance and empathy. The goal is to strengthen the individual's internal motivation and commitment to making a change, empowering them to find their own path forward. The MI process has been effective in a variety of individual and family counseling settings and in addressing such issues as mental health and career transitions.

Motivational Interviewing speaks of the “stages of change.” These are Pre-contemplation (unaware/resistant), Contemplation (ambivalent), Preparation (planning), Action (actively changing), and Maintenance (sustaining change).

“Stage” theories in general that speak to such matters as “change” or “grief” can be helpful in better understanding ourselves and others. The stages, however, can often overlap and do not always come in a nice, precise orderly fashion. One’s progress through the respective stages is not “one time through and done.” Many times, individuals, families, and organizations recycle through the respective stages.

An appreciation for the stages of change and for the specific techniques of Motivational Interviewing can help us navigate many of the challenges that occur when a congregation is considering a transition to shared ministry. Let’s begin with an opening devotion and then look at each stage in more detail.

Devotion 1: Stages of Change

THEME: Change is not inimical to the Christian faith-It is what the Christian faith is all about!

***⁵¹ Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,
⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.”
(1 Corinthians 15:51-52)***

Through the prophet Malachi the LORD proclaims, “For I the LORD do not change.” The LORD does not change regarding his character. He is just. He is love. The LORD does not change regarding his promises. He makes them. He keeps them.

In order for the LORD to be constant regarding his unchanging character and his promises there needs to be change. He creates then he recreates. That’s a change. He punishes then he restores. That’s a change. He kills then he makes alive. That’s a change.

In the beginning the earth was without form and void . . . Then the LORD spoke, “Let there be,” and there was. Wonderful Change!

Adam and Eve ate what the LORD commanded them not to and brought death into the world. Consequential Change!

The LORD destroyed the world with a flood while saving Noah and his family. Devastating Change!

The LORD told Abram to “Go” and he would bless him and through him all the nations of the earth. Abram went. He was blessed. All nations were blessed. Blessed Change!

The LORD, through His servant Moses and powerful signs and wonders, led his people out of slavery in Egypt. He tested them in the wilderness for 40 years and then led them to the land promised to Abraham. Adventurous Change!

The LORD through the prophet Joel, turn your “plowshares into swords.” Bellicose Change!

The LORD through the prophet Isaiah, turn your “swords into plowshares.” Peaceful Change!

The voice of John the Baptist crying in the wilderness, “Prepare the way of the Lord.” Anticipatory Change!

The repentant crowd responds, “What then shall we do?” Fruitful Change!

Jesus Christ walks by. John points and proclaims, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” Atoning Change!

Jesus Christ, lifted up on the cross to take away the sins of the world, cries out, "It is finished." Redeeming change!

Jesus Christ, bursting forth alive from the spiced tomb. Death-defeating Change!

"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." O Happy Ex-Change!

So much change! Like the author of Hebrews recounting the heroes of faith, what more shall I say for time will fail me too to tell of all the change that comes from the LORD who does not change. What of Peter's restoration, Paul's conversion, Cornelius conversion signaling that this evangelical change is even for the Gentiles and on and on the great story of the Gospel goes. Change is everywhere and unavoidable. And that includes the epic story of change for us men and our salvation from the God who does not change. The God who is just but whose demand for justice was filled by his Son, Jesus Christ on the cross. The God who is love and so he loved us all by sending His Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

So let your faith be strengthened by the God who does not change! And let your faith be stretched to embrace the abundant and wonderful change which comes through His Gospel. For the Gospel is the power of God for the salvation of all! Which means the Gospel is all about change. That change has already begun in you through faith in Jesus Christ. And may the same Jesus Christ keep you steadfast in that faith until in the twinkling of an eye, when the trumpet sounds and you are changed, forever. Immortal Change!

Prayer: Lord God, who does not change but changes me through your Gospel, strengthen my faith so that I may be courageous in contemplating and enacting change that will be to your glory and for the blessing of my neighbor; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Change: A "Stage-by-Stage" Process

The Pre-Contemplation Stage (Engagement and Curiosity)

Pre-contemplation, the first stage, often reveals a lack of motivation to change because people see no need to find a solution to a problem because they usually do not believe that one exists. Individuals in this stage are unaware of or have limited awareness of the problem. People (and even congregations) in this stage can often seem resistant, unmotivated, unready, and unwilling to change. Furthermore, in this stage individuals can often focus strictly on the negative side of change rather than

recognizing the benefits that they would gain. How does one progress to the next stage of change when there is no consideration of recognizing a problem in the first place? Education, learning further about the concerns, and changes in life circumstances, may help.

In this stage the congregation may not even be aware of shared ministry, or at least not in any meaningful way. Consequently, it has not yet given thought to the shift to shared ministry in their congregation, potential shared ministry models, or potential collaborating congregations. This is a fine opportunity to “sow the seeds” of information, perhaps through the District webpage, District newsletters, circuit forums, or District conventions. Lest the congregations harbor any misinformation about shared ministry, acquaintance with “The Shared Ministry Workbook” or with several pertinent cards from the Shared Ministry Deck may also prove to be valuable during this stage. Cards such as these have proven to be especially meaningful to congregations and their members/officers in this stage: Shared Ministry, Shared Ministry Models (from the Vocabulary Suit); Carefully Consider the “Cons,” Carefully Consider the “Pros,” Impetus to Ministry Expansion, Multiple Administrative and Financial Options, The Centrality of the Gospel (from the Skill Suit); Build Trusting Relationships, Propinquity-Based and Affinity-Based Collaborations, Work and Think Creatively (from the Process Suit); and Become Acquainted with the History of Shared Ministry, Uncover New Resources and Relationships (from the Wild Card Suit). The Pre-Contemplation Stage is a wonderful opportunity to be proactive as you winsomely, yet intentionally, “get out the word.”

Devotion 2: Pre-Contemplation (Engagement and Curiosity)

THEME: Engaging change begins with being curious . . . about Jesus Christ.

³⁸ Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. ³⁹ And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to his teaching. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.” ⁴¹ But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, ⁴² but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:38-42)

Football, basketball, baseball, softball, volleyball, tennis, racquetball, pickleball, you name it. If it involves catching a ball, hitting a ball, spiking a ball, or striking a ball there is one all-important rule for accomplishing this athletic skill: Keep your eye on the ball!

Christian congregations that are hesitant to consider change even in the face of the obvious need to do so have almost always taken their eye off the ball. Leaders meet and talk a lot. But never about the Gospel or outreach. Instead, it is all internal: bills, maintenance, etc. The result: the ball is dropped, swing and a miss. Drop the ball often and discouragement sets in. Strike out a lot and you may want to quit.

For Christian congregations the ball is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Without an eye on the Good News of Jesus Christ there is no “why” for a Christian congregation. Without a “why” there is no reason to even think about contemplating change. Without a “why” the result is the congregation becomes anxious and upset about many things. And the frustration with others grows and blame is laid, “why doesn’t anyone do anything around here except me?”

Before walking away from the change discussion and its challenge to the status quo take some time together and like Mary sit at the feet of Jesus, the one thing necessary, and listen to him. Be curious . . . about Jesus! Keep your eye on him, the author and completer of your faith and he will renew and inspire your kingdom work in directions you never thought possible.

Perhaps read together John 4:1-42 taking note of Jesus purpose and compassion. Or read together Acts 10 taking note of the obstacles to change and what the Holy Spirit did to overcome them.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I am often distracted and anxious by my circumstances. Help me to sit at your feet and be changed by your life-giving Word so that I may consider the changes it will take to help others put their faith in you, the one thing necessary. In Your Name I pray. Amen.

The Contemplation Stage (Intention and Exploration)

The second stage is contemplation. This stage is marked by awareness and acknowledgment of the concerns with serious consideration to change. However, the person and the congregation are uncertain if the problem is worthy of correcting. In contemplation, the problem sits “center stage,” but the actor never moves. The ambivalence and indecisiveness that occur in this stage can cause people and congregations to remain stuck in “contemplation” for an extended

period of time. In general, people and congregations in this stage are more open to receiving information regarding their behaviors and finding solutions to correct them. They may make comments such as, “I know I have a problem, and I think I should do something about it.”

In this stage the congregation is beginning to become “curious” about shared ministry. It is a time of information gathering and further learning. These essential activities could be facilitated through face-to-face consultations with District staff, conversations with those congregations currently engaged in shared ministry, and through a more in-depth study of “The Shared Ministry Workbook.” The Deck could also be quite meaningful at this time by providing a degree of comprehensive information and engaging the congregation in several of the “learning games” described in the Deck Manual. An organized and more comprehensive (rather than an informal and piecemeal) approach to such exploration is recommended that is tailor-made for the learning styles of the learners and their respective knowledge gaps. Perhaps the entire Deck would be likely meaningful in this stage of change. Especially pertinent cards would likely include Listening, Shared Ministry, Shared Ministry Models (from the Vocabulary Suit); Act in Informed Ways, Lay the Solid Foundation (from the Skill Suit); The Learning Team, Work and Think Creatively (from the Process Suit); and Carpe Diem: Write It Down, Show Appreciation to Your Team, and Uncover New Resources and Relationships (from the Wild Card Suit). During this stage the congregation wants to keep all options open as they continually and confidently gain comprehensive knowledge leading eventually to informed decisions.

Devotion 3: Contemplation (Intention and Exploration)

THEME: Enacting change begins with serious consideration about what is possible.

²⁸ For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, ³⁰ saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ ³¹ Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³² And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. (Luke 14:28-32)

Goals and means. Simple concept. A wise concept. Yet it is often ignored in planning when “religious” people are involved. They counter a lack of means to fulfill often grandiose goals with “you just need to have faith.” This phrase is code for borrow a whole lot of money from the bank because the Lord is going to send you a whole lot of new people who will pay your bills. The actual lesson learned by many churches: Debt is stressful. When the large debt overwhelms people leave rather than come. Big buildings with no one in them and a huge mortgage. Lesson: You need to be wise! Don’t borrow and expect Jesus to pay! He asks you to use the means He has provided from his gracious hand. He does not ask you to borrow and spend what you do not actually have.

Thankfully, the Lord Jesus has a different idea regarding goals and means. Our Lord, even when discussing following him, still asks those listening to count the cost. He then uses two analogies on the wisdom of goals and means. The first, a building project. The second, going to war. The goals are obvious: Complete the tower. Win the war. Then, in evaluating the means, the conclusions are equally obvious: If you don’t have the money to finish the tower—you don’t start. If you don’t have the weapons or the manpower to win the war—you don’t go to war. To start a tower you can’t complete and start a war you can’t win are both foolish. That’s the biblical word in these matters: foolish. Not faith.

*In contemplating change around the idea of shared ministry there needs to be a common goal around the mission followed by a wise discussion of resources you have on hand to accomplish that change. If you’re coming up short, how do you acquire those resources/means **BEFORE YOU BEGIN—NOT AFTER!** This is being wise. It is being faithful.*

The object of your faith is not an empty wishing for resources you do not have. The object of your faith is Jesus Christ. Knowing this take a look. See all that He has provided and ask how do our shared ministry resources prompt a changed reality for engaging in the mission of proclaiming the gospel together.

Prayer: Gracious heavenly Father, the psalmist prays, “O Lord, you open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.” Give me eyes to see your gracious and abundant provision and fill me with wisdom to use them in an equally gracious and abundant way for the mission of proclaiming your Gospel; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

The Preparation Stage (Planning and Decision-Making)

The next stage along the continuum is the preparation stage. At this point in the change process, the person or congregation can easily acknowledge that a behavior is problematic and can make a commitment to correcting it. Now, there is an acknowledgment that the pros of change behavior outweigh the cons. People begin gathering information from various sources as they start to develop a plan of action. Gathering information is a vital step in preparation. If bypassed, we tend to plan insufficiently, without thoughtfully considering the impact the change will play. As such, we may stumble when challenges arise, and relapses back to the status quo often become inevitable.

In this stage preliminary investigations and learning move to more in-depth discussions and explorations and, gradually, to decision-making. Initial hopes can become somewhat overwhelmed by uncertainties and can lead to indecisiveness. Carefully weigh the many models of shared ministry, the vast pastoral staffing options available, the array of administrative arrangements, and the variety of financing options. Beware: “One size does not fit all.” Choose your options and your words carefully. Consider “easing” into shared ministry via a phase-by-phase approach. Communicate, communicate, communicate. Among the many cards in the Deck that may be especially important to consult are these: Act in Informed Ways, Know Your Stakeholders, The Centrality of the Gospel, Choose Your Words...Wisely (from the Skill Suit); Build Trusting Relationships, Evaluate, Watch Your Pace, Graciously Accept “Not Yet” (from the Process Suit); and Let It Brew, Overthinking, Temerity, and Tenacity (from the Wild Card Suit). Go boldly and with confidence, assured that God would have His Kingdom come. The Lord of Salvation is also Lord of the Church and the Provider of everything needful in carrying His life-giving Means of Grace to all nations - and to your precious community.

Devotion 4: Preparation (Planning and Decision-Making)

THEME: Own your reality, understand the possibilities and choose the best solution.

He also said to the disciples, “There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions. ² And he

called him and said to him, ‘What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.’³ And the manager said to himself, ‘What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg.’⁴ I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.” (Luke 16:1-4)

The manager in this parable is busted for wasting the rich man’s possessions and is fired. There really is no surprise there. But the manager, whether you care for this character or not, immediately recognizes the desperateness of his situation. He understands that his situation is going to get bad and fast. He quickly brainstorms his options. Rules out the ideas that won’t work and chooses the one that will.

The manager demonstrates three things that need to happen in preparing for change: own your reality, understand the possibilities and choose the best solution. All three of these things are necessary in order to engage in shared ministry discussions and the changes, sometimes dramatic, that will be necessary to create a shared ministry.

Own your reality: First, regardless of congregational institutional realities you have been baptized into Christ Jesus. Your faith is in him who loved you with his life, death and resurrection. And through him forgiveness of sins, life and salvation are yours. This provides confidence for the second point: denying congregational institutional realities is not allowed. Repentance is. If revitalization of the congregation through a shared ministry is the goal then each congregation must own the difficult circumstances they are in and look for a way forward together, not as separate congregations but as fellow disciples of Christ: “There is one body and one Spirit—just as you (plural) were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” (Eph. 4:4-5)

Understand the possibilities: When Christ is your foundation for discussing ministry a discussion of shared ministry resources is no longer a scarcity discussion but a discussion of God’s bountiful provision. Look at all that you have been given and consider the many possibilities that could come from putting them to use.

Choose the best solution: Not all of the ideas will work or be possible. But from that list choose the one that makes the most sense “now” with the resources God in Christ Jesus has blessed you with.

Prayer: Dear Lord, as we prepare to consider and choose options for shared ministry give us wise and discerning hearts that our decisions may serve your gospel and bring you glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Action Stage (Modification and Execution)

During the Action Stage change happens and decisions are implemented. While in this stage, people gain confidence as they believe they have the ability and perseverance to continue on the journey of change. They continue to review the importance of the behavioral change while evaluating their commitment to change. People in this stage are willing to receive assistance and support. Developing short-term positive reinforcement sustains motivation. Considering potential hurdles to overcome and then developing plans to counteract potential triggers that may lead to relapses is prominent. Prematurely jumping to this stage without adequately preparing will lead to difficulty.

Your plans are now put into action. This is an opportunity for celebration, thanksgiving, and fervent follow along. Are there adjustments to be made? Are there misunderstandings to quickly address? Among the many cards in the Deck that may prove helpful to you in this Stage are these: Delegate, Set Goals (from the Skill Suit); Acknowledge Obstacles, Watch Your Pace (from the Process Suit); and Don't Fall in Love with Your First Idea, Overthinking, and Tenacity (from the Wild Card Suit). Continue steadfast in your collaborations. Realize (and appreciate!) that it's not "one and done." Upon implementation of your shared ministry design, ongoing attention to your shared ministry design and operations is necessary. These are also enjoyable opportunities for further growth as His people of faith. The Lord is at hand!

Devotion 5: Action (Modification and Execution)

THEME: Enact change before the resources/possibilities are no longer available.

⁵ So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' ⁶ He said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' ⁷ Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' He said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' ⁸ The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. ⁹ And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings. (Luke 16:5-9)

Shark Tank is a popular show where entrepreneurs present their product to influential investors to give their business a decided boost. Investors make offers. But beware—they are easily insulted if the offer is not immediately accepted. Just like that and poof, the offer is gone. Many of the entrepreneurs walk away with no offer because they were foolish. They seem to be woefully ignorant that the resources being offered to better their business position is not going to be on the table long.

The fired manager in Jesus' parable understands that the resources he has available to help him out are not going to be available for long. He must act and act now if he is going to make it. So, he acts. He is commended for his shrewdness in doing so. And the impression is that his decisive action did in fact save him from his desperate situation.

This is the most challenging part of the change process: Taking action. All of the other steps are important to get to this point but if no action is taken then change does not occur and the status quo wins. For contestants on Shark Tank it means their business could fold. For the fired manager it would have meant starving to death. And for congregations it means a slow, agonizing decline ending in closing—institutional death.

Avoid a negative mindset: Fear. Paralysis of Analysis. Looking backwards to the comfortable status quo and believing that's good enough.

Embrace a positive mindset: The whole change process was leading to this moment of action. Take it! Jesus Christ was the greatest change agent the world has ever seen. In order to accomplish that change he had to decide to willingly suffer and die a gruesome death on a cross. Why did he do it? Why not stay in heaven and let mankind figure out their problems? Hebrews tells us he did it for,

“the joy that was set before him.” That joy was you! That joy was your salvation! He looked through the cross to you—the object of his sacrificial love! Take action with that forward looking Spirit of Christ and you will never look back to the good ol’ days because the good days that are coming are far better!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, give us the strength to take action according to the wisdom you have provided through this process and bless it according to your good purpose; in Your name we pray. Amen.

The Maintenance Stage (Continuation and Perseverance)

Continuing the new behavior change is the focus of the maintenance stage. As people and congregations progress through this stage, the more confident they become in their ability to sustain the positive changes and the less tempted/fearful they feel of relapsing. They can maintain a new status quo and can remind themselves of the progress they have made. At times, they may have thoughts of returning to old habits; however, they resist the temptation and remain on track because of the positive strides they have made. People become skilled at anticipating potential triggers that may result in relapses and have constructed coping strategies to combat these situations in advance.

Just as a newly sprouted tender plant requires ongoing care, so newly sprouted shared ministry collaborations also require ongoing care and nurturing. In this stage such care and nurturing is essential. With such ongoing care initial misunderstandings can quickly be resolved, doubts can be met with Christian encouragement and the corporate study of God’s Word, the health of the respective congregational partners and the shared ministry collaboration can be monitored, and necessary adjustments can be identified and quickly made - all with confidence in the Lord - the same Lord Who has faithfully guided His Flock for generations. Some of the more significant cards in the Deck to put (and keep!) on the table may include: Knowledge Translation, Listening, and Sustainability (from the Vocabulary Suit); Act in Informed Ways, Set Goals, The Centrality of the Gospel, and Simultaneously Attend to Shared Ministry Health and Congregational Health (from the Skill Suit); Acknowledge Obstacles, Build Capacity, The Learning Team, Work and Think Creatively (from the Process Suit); and Overthinking, and Show Appreciation to Your Team (from the Wild Card Suit).

Devotion 6: Maintenance (Continuation and Perseverance)

THEME: Work the decision while allowing for even newer possibilities because no change is permanent.

³⁵ “Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, ³⁶ and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. ³⁷ Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. (Luke 12:35-37)

If a decision to change is going to fail it fails here. An example that happens time and again in struggling congregations is when they decide to change their governance. And, yes, many congregations need to and should change their governance. One popular change is a move to a type of governance called, “policy governance.” Why this move often fails: The congregation adopts the change but they do not act any different. It is their old governance, whatever it was, masquerading as policy governance. Why does this happen? It happens when what is new is misunderstood or objected to and so a reversion happens to what is known and comfortable.

Taking action is not the end but only the beginning of the actual change process. James exhorts us regarding this reality with the change that comes through faith in Jesus Christ, “For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in the mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.” He is reminding us that through faith we have been changed and he exhorts us to act like it. Apply that wisdom to your shared ministry change process: You have made a change—act accordingly!

Our Lord encourages us to always be looking forward when doing kingdom work. Always looking outward to those who yet need to be invited to the feast. Always looking forward to the joyful day when the master comes home. It is that anticipation of His return that creates in us a lively spirit of perseverance and endurance to see our ever changing kingdom work through to the end.

Prayer: Gracious heavenly Father give us the strength to follow through on the change we have decided so that it may result in your praise and honor as the eternal gospel is proclaimed; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Additional Thoughts to Ponder

*How can the “stages of change” help you better understand the dynamics of change in a congregation and help you move toward your goals?

*How can the “stages of change” be misunderstood or even misused?

*What stage (or stages) of change best describes your congregation with regard to shared ministry? Your potential collaborators and collaborating congregations in shared ministry?

*What obstacles do you perceive in making the shift to shared ministry?

*One important aspect of developing shared ministry collaborations is building trust between the collaborators. Do you agree with this thought? If so, how can such trust be developed and nurtured?

*What steps can you take to engage a mentor in your shared ministry explorations? Have you contacted the District? Congregations that are currently in shared ministry collaborations?

*“One size doesn’t fit all.” In other words, there are many, many varieties of shared ministry collaborations. Why is this point important to keep in mind?

*One practical suggestion is this: “You may want to ease gradually into shared ministry, taking things one step-at-a-time with your collaborators, perhaps beginning rather informally (but meaningfully) and later moving into a more formal collaboration if necessary.” What is your initial reaction to this suggestion?

*If you have not yet secured a copy of “The Shared Ministry Workbook,” “The Shared Ministry Card Deck,” and the “Shared Ministry Card Deck Manual,” do so by contacting the District office. These additional resources work together with the learning resource offered here.

“Lord God, you have called Your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go but only that Your hand is leading us and Your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.”

(Lutheran Service Book)

Your partners in the Gospel,
Rev. Jan Case & Rev. Stefan Wismar, 2026