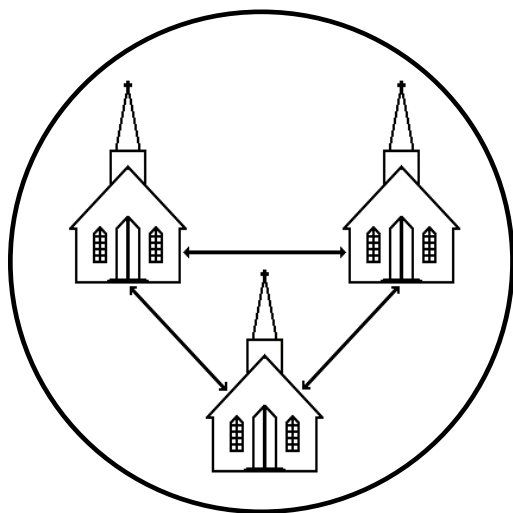


TOGETHER WE CAN

Twelve Ways to Start and Strengthen Cooperative Parish Ministries



by
Jerry D. Chapman

Copyright © 2003
Jerry D. Chapman

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form, except for quotations and excerpts used for educational purposes, without permission in writing from the author or publisher.

Excerpts, quotations and graphics may be copied and used for educational purposes. Those using these materials for educational purposes are asked to credit the work by including the following:

Excerpted from
Together We Can
Twelve Ways to Start and Strengthen
Cooperative Parish Ministries
by Jerry D. Chapman
(228)-860-4384.

Also, please inform the author concerning how the material was used and its effectiveness or helpfulness for the intended application by writing to the author at
317 Washington Ave.
Ocean Springs, Mississippi
39564
(228)-860-4384

Printed in the U.S.A.

This book is dedicated to...

Cara and Diane

Wesley and Ruth

A.C. and Willie

Burnis and Stella Mae

all of whom made it possible.

This book was made possible through the help of a multitude of people including...

Dr. Gladys Campbell, Dr. Judy Matheny and Dr. Harold McSwain, who have guided the author down the path of cooperative ministry for more than thirty years...

Lisa Jean Hoefner, Dorsey Walker and Mel West who helped with editing...

...and a great “cloud of witnesses” who have led, taught and journeyed with the author in the cooperative ministry movement including...

George Almquist, Bill Appleby, Don Barnett, Reba Beck, Rene Bideaux, Walt Boigegrain, Warren Booker, Richard Bowyer, Earl Brewer, John Burton, Minerva Carcano, Marvin Carr, Jackson Carroll, Bob Chapman, John Clark, Faye Cleveland, Thelma Crosby, Pat Crotty, Ernest Dixon, Frank Dorsey, Wanda Eichler, Phil Ernst, Kathy Fadick, Royal Fishbeck, Bob Folkers, Dale Foshee, Ross Freeman, Doris Gidney, Lucy Gist, Hector Gonzales, John Graham, Doyce Gunter, H. H. Greene, Jim Hankins, Harry Hawk, Judy Heffernan, Ken Hicks, David Hollingsworth, Larry Hotchkiss, Kim Jefferson, Chester Jones, Marvin Judy, P. K. Rowell, Ed Kail, J. Karl Jones, Lloyd Knox, Gayle Leisure, Gary Locklear, Jay Loftin, Felton May, O. A. McBrayer, Bruce McConnell, Ted McEachern, Brian McGarvey, Joyce McSwain, Harlow Mills, Ralph Nichols, Victor Nixon, Randy Nugent, Bob Paul, Betty Purkey, Arnie Rhodes, Eli Rivera, Tom Robinson, Israel Rucker, John Schott, Sharon Schwab, Carol Seckle, Kevin Seckle, Harry Sellers, Clay Smith, Jack Smith, Barbara Stachowiak, Carol Thompson, Ida Timpson, Laura Trent, Sam Varnell, Al Vaught, Jim Waugh, Alan Wood, Lloyd Wright, and Jenny Youngblood.

A great part of the credit for the existence of this book goes to Dr. Diane L. Chapman and Cara Anne Leggett Chapman who helped so much, encouraged so greatly and complained so little.

Also, many thanks are given to many friends and colleagues in the Seashore District of the Mississippi Conference, the Tallahassee District of the Florida Conference and the staff of the General Board of Global Ministries for their help and support and for being part of the experiences that make this book possible.

CONTENTS

- 1 **SECTION ONE:**
 WHAT IS COOPERATIVE MINISTRY?
- 45 **SECTION TWO:**
 TWELVE WAYS TO MAKE COOPERATIVE PARISH
 MINISTRY MORE EFFECTIVE.
- 49 1: Build a Biblical understanding of why
 cooperation is necessary for ministry.
- 65 2: Carefully choose the clergy and congregations
 who will be involved.
- 85 3: Enlist the understanding, help and support of a
 core group of key leaders.
- 103 4: Build relationships within the clergy and staff team
 and among the laity of the congregations involved.
- 127 5: Establish a productive lay-clergy working pattern.
- 145 6: Utilize as many helpers as possible.
- 163 7: Have an ongoing effort to tell people what you're
 doing and gain their support.
- 185 8: Design an organizational form and planning process
 for the next 18 months.
- 199 9: Become mission-centered.
- 213 10: Forge links with other United Methodist
 institutions, ecumenical groups, and helping
 organizations.
- 227 11: Continually educate, train, and prepare yourselves.
- 247 12: Be committed to the long run.
- 259 **SECTION THREE:**
 A VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF
 COOPERATIVE PARISH MINISTRY.
- 313 **GLOSSARY**

INTRODUCTION

TOGETHER WE CAN was written in response to the need for current understandings of cooperative ministry to be available in one volume. While this work does not claim to cover the whole field of cooperative ministry, it provides an overview of ideas and practices at the core of cooperative ministry today. Certainly there are many other papers and books that will be beneficial to those interested in cooperative ministry. This volume offers as a starting point understandings and strategies necessary to effective cooperative ministry.

As such, this volume is limited. It is written from a viewpoint within the United Methodist Church. Cooperative ministry is considered here as it relates to current United Methodist structures and understandings. Apologies are offered to readers from other denominations for this limitation. It is hoped that you will be able to translate this to the current terminology and structure of your denominational home.

Further apologies are offered for the very limited treatment of interdenominational cooperation. It is hoped that the reader can take the principles in this volume and apply them to the varying opportunities for cooperation beyond denominational circles that are available in your own locale.

This book is intended for laypersons, local church clergy, and other church leaders who wish to help start a cooperative parish ministry or make existing cooperative ministries more effective. It is based on observations of the author over more than thirty years working with cooperative parish ministries at the local, district, annual conference and general church levels. (*Author's note: That means I visited lots of cooperative parish ministries, went to lots of cooperative parish council meetings and pastors meetings and wrote down what worked and what didn't work.*) It is hoped that these observations will be helpful in your ventures in cooperative ministry.

Together We Can has three sections:

Section One, “What is Cooperative Ministry?” gives a basic introduction to cooperative ministry, how it works, its purpose and benefits, and some of its more common forms. It also outlines some steps for starting a cooperative parish ministry.

Section Two, “Twelve Ways to Make Cooperative Parish Ministry More Effective” examines in some detail necessary considerations for effective cooperative ministry, whether in starting a new cooperative parish ministry or revitalizing one already in operation. It also offers ways for helping a functional, maturing cooperative parish ministry to be most effective.

Section Three, “A Vision for the Future of Cooperative Parish Ministry” looks at how cooperative parish ministry can work interactively with lay pastoral ministry and small congregation development to offer a way for the church to minister to a multitude of people with whom we currently have little contact. It also considers a number of changes that need to be made for cooperative ministry to be most effective as a strategy for change and renewal both for the local church and our denomination.

It is hoped that this book will offer some ideas for starting your cooperative ministry or making it more effective and that together we can use this tool to better serve our congregations and communities.

SECTION ONE

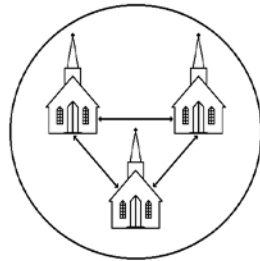
WHAT IS COOPERATIVE MINISTRY?

SECTION ONE

WHAT IS COOPERATIVE MINISTRY?

If you've picked up this book, you have some interest in or at least some curiosity about cooperative ministry. Maybe you want to know what cooperative ministry is, or how a cooperative parish ministry works. You may be interested in starting a cooperative parish ministry or want to see if what you're doing now can be considered one.

In the three sections of this book, we'll examine these basic questions about cooperative ministry, think about some ways to make a cooperative parish ministry more effective, and look at a vision for the future of cooperative ministry and some changes we need to make to get the most out of it.



In this first section, we'll explore cooperative ministry and what we can do through working together.

We'll take a look at:

- What cooperative ministry is.
- How a cooperative parish ministry works.
- The purpose of cooperative ministry.
- Cooperative ministry and theological integrity.
- The benefits of cooperative ministry.
- Some forms for a cooperative parish ministry.
- And a process for starting a cooperative parish ministry.

Let's get started!

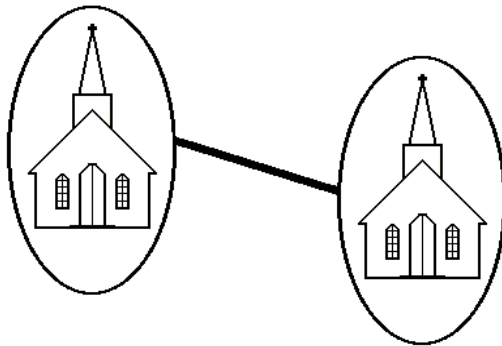
WHAT IS COOPERATIVE MINISTRY?

Many times people ask what cooperative ministry is or wonder if what they are doing can be considered a cooperative parish ministry. Actually, it's fairly easy to tell.

Cooperative ministry is not any one particular form, structure, or activity.

Cooperative ministry is two or more congregations working together to share their ministry.

Notice we've said "to share their ministry." When two congregations just share the same pastor or a piece of real estate like a parsonage, that's not cooperative ministry. That's what's known as the old *circuit* or *yoked* configuration.

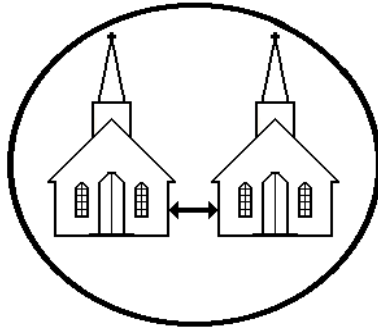


CIRCUIT or YOKED CONFIGURATION

The two churches are structurally linked, usually by sharing a pastor, but their ministry is carried on entirely separately.

Section One: What is Cooperative Ministry?

If these same two congregations minister together through a mission project like building a Habitat for Humanity house or if they share a youth group with kids from both churches, these are cooperative ministry **projects**, and their shared efforts could be called **cooperative ministry**.



COOPERATIVE MINISTRY

If a group of people representing both churches meets regularly to intentionally plan their work together, and sees themselves ministering in a continuing shared relationship, this is a **cooperative parish ministry**.

If we want to be exact in our terminology, we could say that when we share our work together, the activities we do are cooperative ministry **projects**. When we do these projects together, our shared effort is **cooperative ministry**. When we formalize our sharing relationship with an intentional, ongoing, officially recognized structure, that is a **cooperative parish ministry**. In other words, our working together on cooperative **projects** through **cooperative ministry** may lead us to establish a **cooperative parish ministry**.

Together We Can

However, when thinking about these labels, it's important to remember that the emphasis is not on structure, but on *what* we do together and *how* we regard each other.

Just being linked together in a structure does not make us a cooperative ministry. Seeing each other as brothers and sisters, worshipping in separate congregations but working together for the cause of Christ does.

HOW DOES COOPERATIVE MINISTRY WORK?

Cooperative ministry works through pastors and laypersons from the congregations involved...

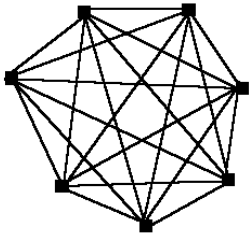
- getting to know each other,
- sharing their faith and visions, and
- finding ways together to make these visions become reality.

Section One: What is Cooperative Ministry?

Let's take that one step at a time.

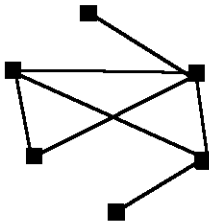
- *getting to know each other...*

Every local church can be seen as a **web of relationships**. A diagram of these relationships might look something like this:



STRONGER WEB

In this web, the dots represent the people in the congregation, and the lines represent the relationships they have built with each other. Lots of lines running from each person to several others signify a strong congregation whose members have many ties to each other.



WEAKER WEB

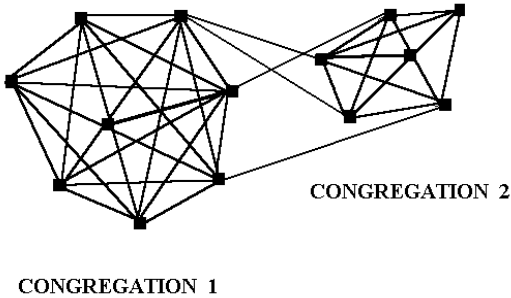
Fewer lines signify fewer relational ties and indicate weaker congregations.

In cooperative ministries we often talk about churches *relating* to each other...but *churches* don't relate to each other.

People do. So one way cooperative ministry works is by helping people from separate congregations get to know each other and build these relationships.

Together We Can

Relationships among people from the congregations might look like this:



As a few people from these two congregations get to know each other, they establish relationships that allow them to work together. Then they

can plan ways for other people from their congregations to become acquainted and build relationships also. This happens as they meet together to share visions, make plans and carry out common projects and ministries. This is the way relationships and cooperative ministries grow.

- *sharing their faith and vision...*

These relationships allow persons to share their faith and visions for their churches. They should get together regularly to exchange ideas and explore how their congregations can help each other. Almost always their visions are greater than what any one person or one local church is able to do alone. Many times, people's visions for their own involvement in ministry go beyond what they can do solely within their own local church.

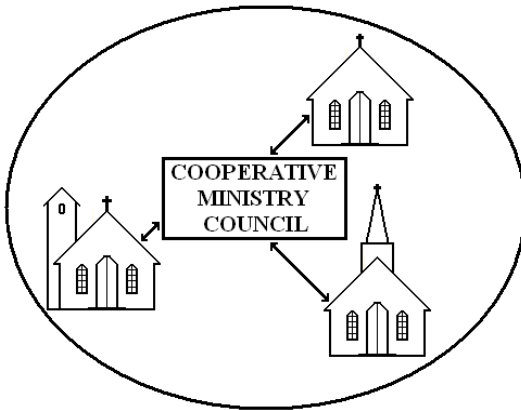
Section One: What is Cooperative Ministry?

- *finding ways to help these visions become a reality.*

Cooperative ministry helps people from different congregations find the resources to make their visions become real. Working together, we find ways to do things we might never be able to do alone. Also, opportunities for ministry beyond the bounds of our local congregation become possible.

To make these dreams become reality we need some structure that provides us with a way to get together, build ongoing relationships, plan what we want to do, and make our plans happen. This is the function of a cooperative parish ministry.

A diagram of a typical **cooperative parish ministry** looks something like this:



In this cooperative parish ministry, these churches all share some part of their ministry together. Each church sends its pastor and a number of lay representatives to

be part of the **cooperative parish ministry council**. The council meets regularly to consider ideas and make decisions about what the churches will do together through the cooperative parish ministry.

Together We Can

We'll examine several different models for cooperative parish ministry in detail a little later. However, right here at the beginning, let's understand a few points about how a cooperative parish ministry works:

Some important points about how a cooperative parish ministry works...

- In many cooperative parish ministries each church retains its own pastor, and each pastor is assigned to a particular church. People in each church identify with the particular pastor appointed to their church and also have access to all the pastors in the cooperative parish.
- The council decides what activities the cooperative parish ministry will work on together. Each church decides what activities they will take part in. Nothing says that everyone has to participate in everything.
- The council meets regularly to plan. Anyone, not just the council members, can be on task forces or ministry teams to help plan specific events and carry them out. (More about ministry teams over in Section Two.)
- The council finds ways to raise finances needed for the work of the cooperative parish. In most cooperative parishes, each local church maintains its own budget in the usual manner.

Section One: What is Cooperative Ministry?

THE PURPOSE OF COOPERATIVE MINISTRY.

Now that we've seen *what* cooperative ministry is and a little about how it works, let's consider the *why* of it.

The purpose of cooperative ministry is...

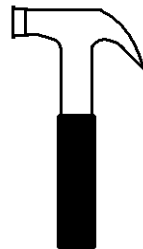
To help the church minister to all the needs of all the people of the community.

It's easier to think about this purpose if we take it apart to look at it.

"To help the church"...

Cooperative ministry is a *tool* to help the church minister. It is not ministry in and of itself, but rather it is a way for the church to be in ministry. Like any other tool, cooperative ministry is only as helpful as the skill and dedication of the person using the tool.

A hammer by itself cannot build a house. The hammer can produce life-sustaining shelter when it is used by one who chooses to use it and uses it well. Likewise, the quality of the structure built depends largely on the skill and dedication of the person using the hammer.



Together We Can

Sometimes people ask, “What will cooperative ministry do **for** my church?” The only truthful answer is “absolutely nothing.” But **you** can do a lot for your church using cooperative ministry.

“To help the church minister”...

The good news has been brought to us through Jesus Christ. We are now the bearers of that news. But our job is not only to tell people the good news. We are called to share the good news with them by ministering to all their needs in whatever places and conditions we find them.

*“I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”
(John 10:10 RSV).*

The gospel is clear that we are called to minister to people in all places and conditions of life, to minister to them as we find them, in all their need and brokenness. This call to minister comes to the church as a whole *and* to each of us as individuals. We are to minister together, and we are each to minister individually. We are to work both together *and* separately in this job of ministry.

“To help the church minister to all the needs of all the people”

About 1910 a young minister named Harlow S. Mills was serving the church in Benzonia, a small village near the shore of the great lake in northwestern Michigan. He was offered higher positions in the great cities of the day but choose to remain with his people while searching for a larger vision of the work of his church.

Section One: What is Cooperative Ministry?

As Mills puts it,

“Just here the vision came. At first a whole township was revealed as a possible parish, with every family tributary to the church, and the church performing a valuable ministry for them all. It became plain that almost half a county was tributary to the church, that five hundred families and twenty-five hundred people were waiting for its ministry.”

“It dawned upon my mental vision that I was called upon to be the pastor of all these people, for five or six miles in every direction, that the Benzonia church was responsible for them all, that they had a right to look to us for service and help, and that if we failed to give it we should be unfaithful to our Master and recreant to our trust.”

“And then came the vision of The Larger Parish. I saw the church reaching out its hand and touching tenderly but effectively all the people in the surrounding country... I began to think of all those people as my parishioners as truly as were those who lived near the church and were members of it. Then I said: ‘Here is something worth doing...It was for this that God has kept me here.’”

from “The Making of A Country Parish” by Harlow S. Mills

Together We Can

Mills' vision began the modern era of cooperative ministry. It speaks to us today, reminding us that our job is to minister to "*all the people,*" not just those who happen to live "*near the church,*" or who are "*members of it,*" or who are like us socially and economically.

We are also called to bring the news of abundant life to "*all the needs*" of "*all the people.*" It's not enough to tell people the "good news" and then leave them poor, or illiterate, or homeless, or outcast. If we bring the good news and with it the command to "take up your bed and walk," then our call is to help people pick up their bed, and help them learn to walk.

As Paul said, "*I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.*" (*I Corinthians 9:22 RSV*). Like Paul, we also are called to be all things so that we might minister to all people.

This phrase "all the needs of all the people" is only disturbing and threatening to us if we look at what we are called to do without looking through the eyes of faith. Without the faith that can move mountains, we see only what we can do as individual persons, or at best as a group of persons acting individually.

This is "1 + 1 = 2" thinking. We see only what we can do as we are right now. We ignore what we might become and what we could do together in the future.

Section One: What is Cooperative Ministry?

$$1 + 1 + \textit{faith} > 2$$

We don't take into account that one plus one plus faith can add up to more than two.

One cooperative parish ministry made up of several small country churches decided in September to build a new house for a woman and her three children who had lived in a run-down trailer for twenty years. Their goal was to have them in the house by Christmas. There was no money or materials available. It was not realistic...but 36 working-together days later, the house was built, complete with Christmas tree and presents.

“To help the church minister to all the needs of all the people of the community”...

A cooperative parish ministry must both enlarge and restrict itself. One of the goals of cooperative ministry is to help us enlarge our vision beyond our own individual congregations so that we may see the other churches and the community as a whole. On the other hand, we have to define what constitutes the “community,” the primary piece of geography that binds our congregations together, the area where we work and serve.

Together We Can



This concept embodies the notion of “thinking globally and acting locally.” Through the larger church we are connected to the whole world. Through cooperative ministry we make sure Christianity is lived out on our own doorstep.

COOPERATIVE MINISTRY AND THEOLOGICAL INTEGRITY

Through cooperative ministry we learn to cooperate rather than compete. Nothing undermines the witness of the church more than pastors and congregations competing to “outdo” each other rather than working to help people and serve the community.

Working together helps us to open our windows and look beyond our local congregations to see that there is a much larger world out there with greater things to be done and with many brothers and sisters to help us do them.

Let’s take this a little further and see how cooperative ministry helps us be true to Biblical and scriptural Christianity.

Section One: What is Cooperative Ministry?

Christianity calls on us to follow two equally important commandments. When asked what was the greatest commandment, Jesus answered,

“You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.” (Mt. 22:37-40 RSV)

We are called to live out these two great commandments in two ways, *individually* in our own personal and spiritual lives and *together* in that great fellowship of believers, the Church. Two familiar passages of scripture help make this clear.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”
(John 3:16 RSV)

“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one spirit we were all baptized into one body...and all were made to drink of one Spirit....Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”
(I Cor. 12-13, 27 RSV)

Together We Can

The passage from John teaches us the importance of a personal faith and commitment to Christ. The Corinthians passage shows us the importance of our personal place in the Church as the body of Christ and the equal importance of the gifts each of us brings with us to the Church.

Now, what does all this have to do with cooperative ministry?

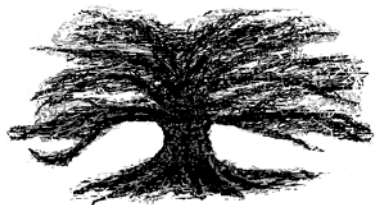
If we love God and our neighbor, then it's not enough for any one person or any one congregation to isolate ourselves and focus only on our own needs and desires.

- I can't be all that it means to be Christian if I'm happy and well fed while you're hungry and miserable.
- My church can't be all that it means to be a church if we have three choirs and a basketball court while you don't have an adequate building or anyone to teach your children.

Practically, this means that congregations who focus on themselves without regard to their brothers and sisters in the church around the corner give up hope of making a difference in helping others find the abundant life that can be experienced only through community.

All of us need to be involved in growing both inwardly and outwardly at the same time. We are called to grow in our own inward faith **and** to reach out to others.

Section One: What is Cooperative Ministry?



We are like the giant Live Oak trees. One near Long Beach, Mississippi, is known as the Friendship Oak. It's estimated to be over 500 years old and has branches that stretch out over 150 feet around the trunk. The tree's outward and inward growth are connected. The maximum reach of the limbs is equal to the spread of the roots. The life of the tree is balanced.

If either the limbs or the root system is cut back or damaged, the rest of the tree has to adjust in order for the balance to be maintained. If you pave over some of the roots, some of the limbs die to maintain the balance. Throw the tree too far out of balance, and it dies.

The same is true of us as individuals and of our local churches. Our inward, spiritual lives need to be in balance with our outward lives connecting us with our neighbors and the world.

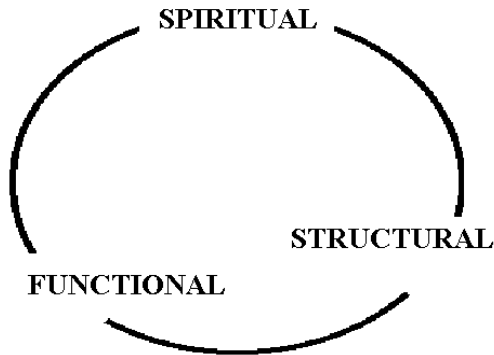
Through our inward life we get the insight and motivation to relate to others. Our experiences with others deepen our inward life. It is easy, though, to become wrapped up in ourselves as individuals or as local congregations and become isolated. Then the potential for outward vision and growth is lost. The balance isn't there. Inward growth becomes shallow and self-serving. When we cease to reach out, we also cease to grow inwardly.

Together We Can

Cooperative ministry gives us the vision and connections for effective outward growth. It provides possibilities for inward growth and the deepening of personal spirituality through sharing with others while serving the needs of those beyond our own congregations.

THREE MAJOR BENEFITS OF COOPERATIVE MINISTRY

Working together cooperatively offers many benefits to the Church. Three of the most important are the **functional, structural, and spiritual benefits** of cooperative ministry.



These three benefits interact. Together they show us the importance of working cooperatively. Let's look at each of them.

Section One: What is Cooperative Ministry?

Functional Benefits of Cooperation:

- *To do together what we can do better than if we worked separately,`
...and*
- *To do together what we could not do at all by working alone.*

These are the reasons usually given for doing cooperative ministries, and the most obvious benefits. There are some things we can do better together than alone. Also, there are some things that many churches can't do at all by themselves with only their own available resources.

Consider a couple of examples. Most churches want to have some sort of program for their youth and children, at least a weekly youth group and a once-a-year membership training program or confirmation class. But it's hard to have a youth group with just four or five teenagers or a confirmation class with one or two kids.

In one community, kids from several small churches came together to form a youth group for the whole cooperative parish ministry. Their number grew to over thirty, allowing them to have experiences that one small church could never provide alone, to say nothing of providing dedicated adult leaders for the group, something many churches struggle with regardless of size.

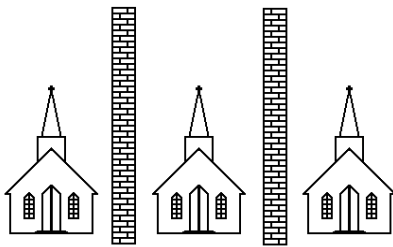
Together We Can

Likewise, a confirmation retreat involving several churches can include a number of children and the resources of all the leaders involved. Even a larger church may find it difficult to build a Habitat house or organize a mission trip by itself. All this becomes possible when we share our resources.

One of the strengths of cooperative ministry is the ability to do together things that few of us could do alone.

Structural Benefits of Cooperation:

- *To give every congregation access to a wide variety of lay and clergy leadership skills, abilities, and experiences, ...and*
- *To offer every Christian a greater field of opportunity to live out their personal mission.*



Over the years we have gotten so used to the idea of each congregation and each pastor working alone that we have acted as if there were walls between our churches that none of us could pass through.

Section One: What is Cooperative Ministry?

Living within these walls means that all of us are confined to working in our own church. Each congregation has to exist with only the talents and abilities of its own members and pastor.

Through cooperative ministry we can move beyond these limitations. In a cooperative parish ministry, each congregation has access to a multiplicity of pastoral skills, abilities, and interests. Laypersons have a larger area of involvement in which to use their abilities and to learn from others. The skills and abilities of pastors become available to several congregations, rather than restricted to only one or two.

Through cooperative ministry the field in which we serve and are served is broadened.

Spiritual Benefits of Cooperation:

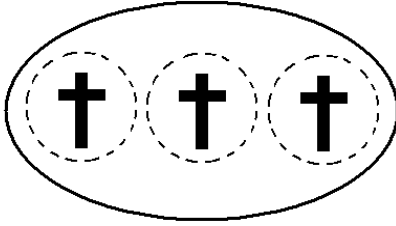
- *To connect all of us as parts of the greater body of the Church so that we are not alone, ...and*
- *To allow individual members of participant congregations the opportunity to exercise their unique spiritual gifts and call to ministry in ways that may not have been previously open to them.*

To be a part of the Church, that great fellowship of believers, means that we no longer have to be alone. This gives us the opportunity for real spiritual growth, the chance to share our own experience of God and expand our horizons through the experiences of others.

Together We Can



All too often, we have limited that circle of sharing to only our own congregation.



Through cooperative ministry we can extend the circle of sharing to include not only those closest to us in our own church, but also persons in other congregations whom we otherwise might never know.

One cluster of churches started a Disciple Bible Study with persons from four churches taking part. Since there were African-American and white churches involved, this was the first time some of these persons had the opportunity to share insights about God's word with their brothers and sisters of another race.

This opportunity for spiritual growth goes not only to individuals but also to the congregation as a whole. Some persons have thought that cooperative ministry was primarily for small churches so that they could “do what big churches can do.” We need to look beyond this rather limited view.

Section One: What is Cooperative Ministry?

We all need to look out beyond the four walls of our local church to the world around us. It is particularly tempting for some larger congregations with a full-time staff of ministers, a Christian education person, a youth director, a music director, and a basketball court to say, “We don’t need this. We already have everything we need.”

Any congregation feeling this way needs a larger vision of their mission...a sense of God’s calling them *to serve all the needs of all the people* of their community. Perhaps if we open our doors and windows to look out toward the next congregation down the road or around the corner, we can also begin to see the community that lies in between.

Through cooperative ministry, we reach out to each other and to the world around us as we grow both outwardly and inwardly.

Cooperative ministry also helps us get beyond the powerlessness of feeling alone. When we feel alone we tend to feel powerless, to feel that the forces opposing us are overwhelming. We feel that we can do nothing. Aloneness disempowers us through the very feeling of being alone...the feeling that we have to do it *all* by ourselves and that we are overcome by it.

All of this changes when we combine our efforts with others. How many of us have ever voiced what we thought was an unpopular or minority opinion only to be surprised when others let us know they felt that way too? When we join with others, we find those who have a similar vision and will help us.

Together We Can

We escape our aloneness when we become part of a group of Christians working together to serve. We don't have to do it *all*, just our part that we have been given for this day.

FORMS OF COOPERATIVE PARISH MINISTRY

Now that we have an overview of what cooperative ministry is and why it exists, let's get down to nuts and bolts and see how a few forms of cooperative parish ministry really work.

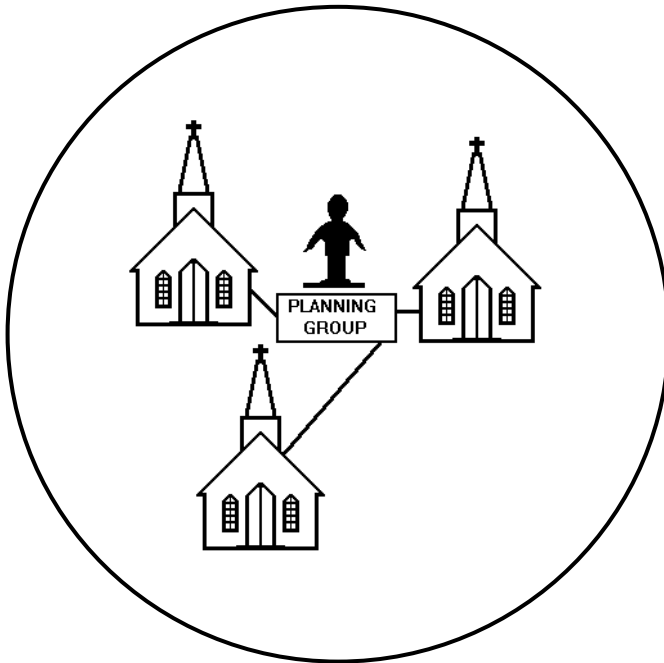
Although there are quite a number of recognized forms of cooperative parish ministry (you can find a listing and descriptions of officially recognized forms of cooperative parish ministry in the *United Methodist Book of Discipline* at paragraph 206) we will look at just three of the most common: the **enlarged charge**, the **group ministry**, and the **multiple-charge parish**.

Please note that these titles are not exclusive. They are just the ones used "officially" for particular types of cooperative parish ministry. You may find the same types of cooperative parish ministry used in different places under different names. For instance, you may find a **multiple-charge parish** someplace named the "West Lincoln Larger Parish," or that the "Hillsboro Cooperative Ministry" is really an **enlarged charge**. Don't be confused by this name game. What counts is how we are learning to work together, not the label that's attached.

Section One: What is Cooperative Ministry?

Let's take a quick look at these three basic forms of cooperative parish ministry:

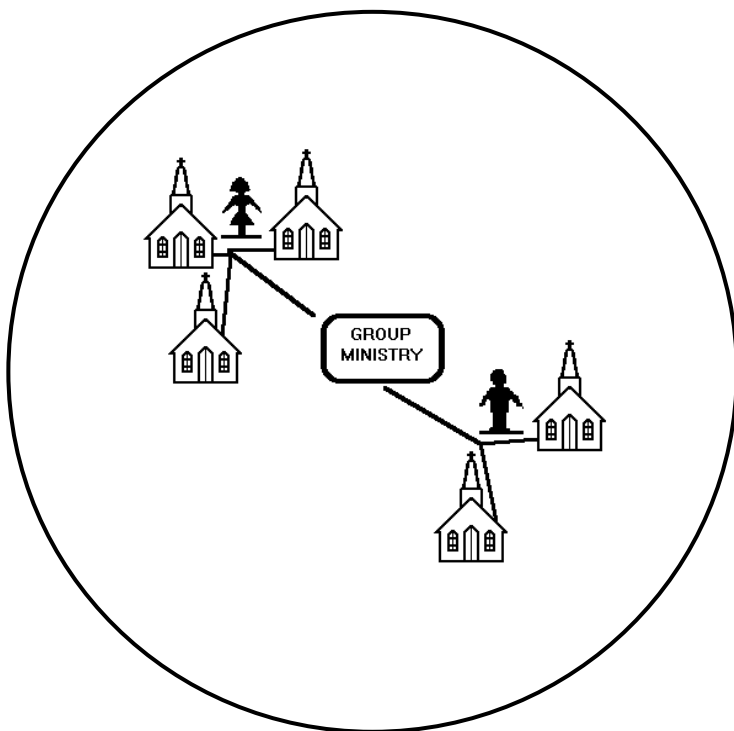
In an **enlarged charge** two or more congregations located in a common geographic area are served by one pastor and share many of their ministries on a charge-wide basis.



A planning group made up of people from the churches and the pastor may work to plan some of the ministries they share.

Together We Can

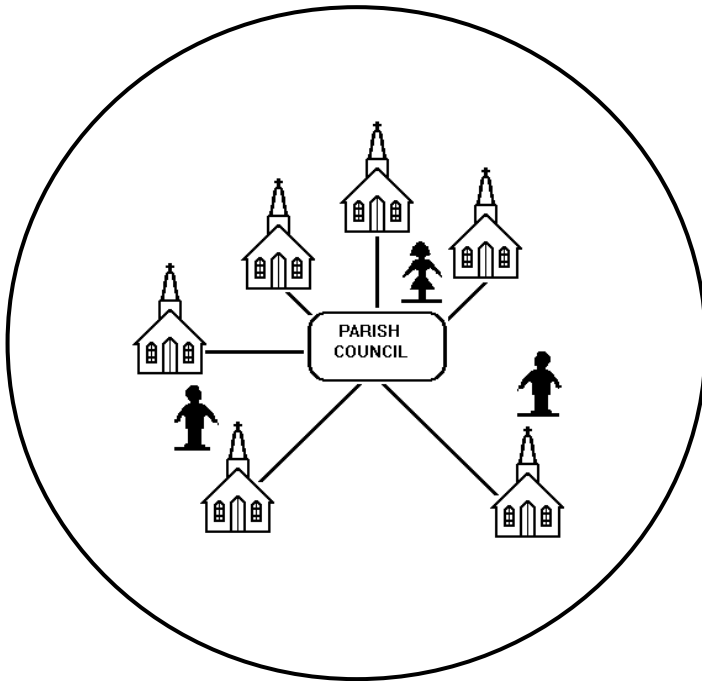
In the **group ministry** several *congregations on two or more pastoral charges* agree to work together cooperatively.



Again, there may be a group of laypersons and the pastors who work together to plan their shared ministries.

Section One: What is Cooperative Ministry?

In a **multiple-charge parish** several churches on two or more charges agree to minister together to their community. Each church and charge retains its own identity with the clergy appointed *both to the charge and to the cooperative parish ministry*.

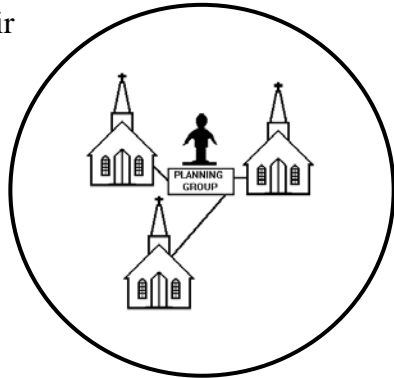


A **parish council** is organized, made up of lay and clergy members from all the churches and leads the planning and ministry of the parish.

Let's look at each of these forms of cooperative parish ministry more closely.

The Enlarged Charge

In an **enlarged charge** two or more congregations located in a common geographic area are served by one pastor and share many of their ministries on a charge-wide basis. The enlarged charge is different from the old *circuit* or *yoked* pattern in that the congregations are sharing their ministry, not just sharing a pastor. They plan and do things together.



Congregations still meet in their own churches and retain most of their own administrative structure relating to finances and facilities. One major difference is that the congregations begin to think about ministry *in their community*, not just among their own members.

There is some type of planning group made up of the pastor and a few persons from each of the local congregations. Alternatively there may be short-term task forces acting as ministry teams focused on each project the enlarged charge decides to undertake.

The **enlarged charge** helps open the door beyond our own congregation to the world around us. We can work with our neighbors in congregations close by, many of whom we probably already know because of being on a charge together.

Section One: What is Cooperative Ministry?

This very fact may be something of a problem, since some churches that are on charges together may see themselves in competition with each other for the minister's time or in conflict over some other control issue. The only way to get beyond this is to begin building relationships among the people involved and to decide if the call of Christ's mission is more important than our power struggles.

The **enlarged charge** allows us to plan on a basis larger than one church. We can work together to benefit all the churches and people involved. We are more likely to find the leadership and talent that are needed for whatever we try to do together.

One of the major strengths of the **enlarged charge** is that, because it involves only one clergy, it is fairly easy to get started. Since there is only one pastor involved, however, the enlarged charge does not allow the congregations access to the multitude of clergy skills and experience made available by some of the multiple-staff models of cooperative parish ministry.

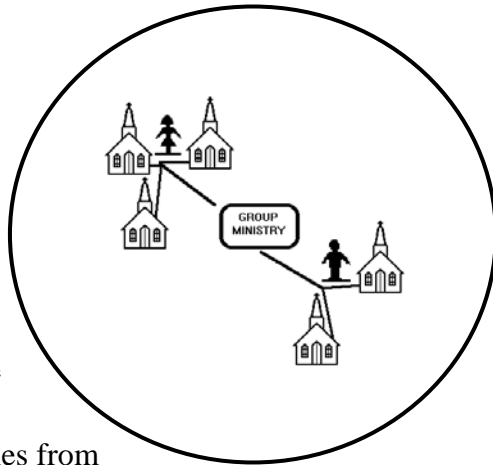
The **enlarged charge** is a beginning that allows any pastor or layperson the opportunity to help their church experience some of the strengths offered by cooperative parish ministry.

The Group Ministry

In the **group ministry** several congregations *on two or more pastoral charges* agree to work together cooperatively.

The **group ministry** is much like the enlarged charge except that it involves churches from

more than one pastoral charge. This means that since each charge has at least one assigned clergy there will be more than one pastor in the group ministry.

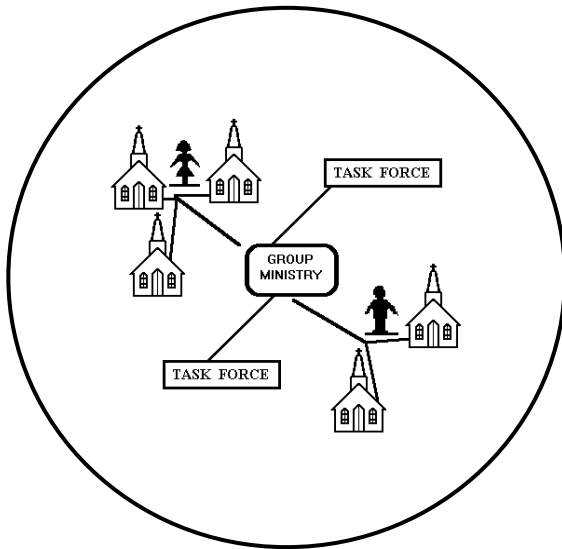


In this way, the **group ministry** offers a major benefit of cooperative parish ministry, the possibility of persons relating to clergy other than just the pastor of their own congregation. This makes it possible for all the churches in the group ministry to have access to all the varying levels of skill, training and maturity among the clergy assigned to these churches.

Section One: What is Cooperative Ministry?

Sometimes a group ministry is started by clergy already in the area, who begin meeting together and soon have some ideas of things they want to do together as pastors, such as a combined confirmation retreat or a Bible study open to persons from all the churches.

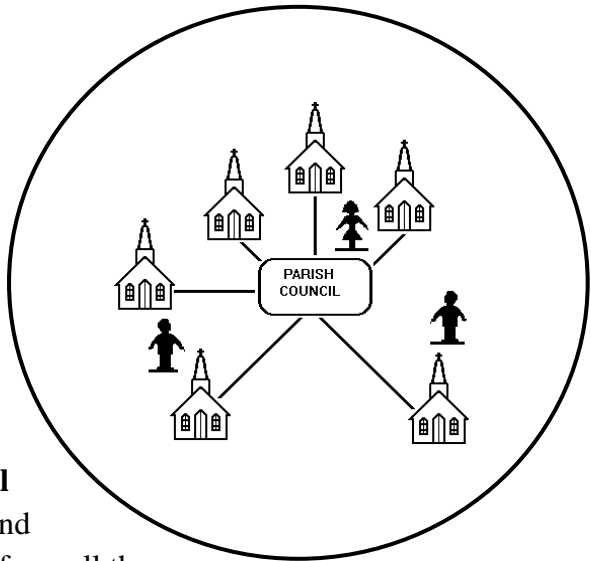
After a while they also have some ideas of things their congregations might benefit by doing together. At this point it is appropriate to organize some short-term task forces or ministry teams. These teams plan specific projects the group ministry wants to do and are made up of people from the churches.



This is an excellent way to begin building the web of relationships necessary for longer-term cooperative ministry. These persons may then go on to become an ongoing planning team for the group ministry.

The Multiple-Charge Parish

In a **multiple-charge parish** several churches on two or more charges agree to minister together to their community. Each church and charge retains its own identity with the clergy appointed *both to the charge and to the cooperative parish ministry*.



A parish council made up of lay and clergy members from all the churches leads the planning for ministry in the parish.

Although any number of financial plans are possible, in most cases each church retains their own financial process and directly pays their pastor. Funding the work of the cooperative parish ministry must be provided for in the planning of each particular project or in some arrangement agreed upon by all the churches.

Section One: What is Cooperative Ministry?

Each church is urged to share their strengths and needs with all the others. Laypersons and clergy are encouraged to share their talents and abilities across the parish and in other congregations as well as their own.

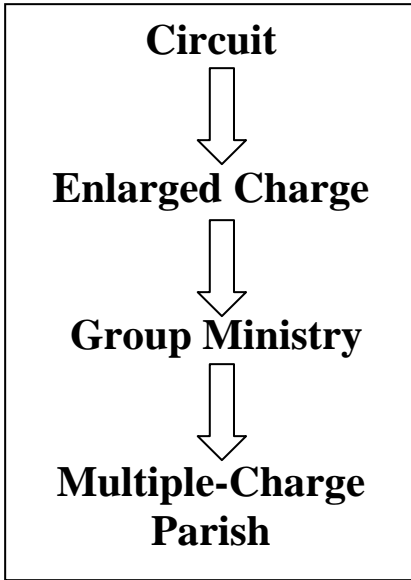
With a number of congregations and clergy involved, each church has access to the skills, interests and abilities of a number of clergy, while the clergy have a much larger opportunity to minister through their particular interests. Appointments within the cooperative parish ministry should be made with the realization that any pastor coming to this area is not just taking an appointment to a particular church but is also joining a team.

Every layperson has the opportunity to be involved in their special area of interest with members of other congregations, and each congregation can benefit from the talents of laypersons from other congregations in the cooperative parish ministry.

The goal of ministering in the community as well as within the member congregations is taken seriously.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF COOPERATIVE MINISTRIES

It's possible for one type of cooperative parish ministry to **evolve** into other types.



For instance, a pastor might be appointed to a charge of two churches in the usual **circuit** formation with the churches sharing the pastor. If these congregations agree to begin sharing their ministry, planning and some of their structure, they become an **enlarged charge**.

If they are then joined by the churches and pastor of another charge to work together as a whole, they become a **group ministry**. If they form a parish council and are officially recognized by the annual conference, with pastoral appointments made both to the cooperative parish ministry and to the particular churches, they become a **multiple-charge parish**.

In this way, cooperative efforts that start with just a few persons in one or two congregations can grow into ongoing cooperative parish ministries.

SOME RESULTS OF COOPERATION

Now that we've looked at what cooperative ministry is, some of the forms it takes, and its spiritual, structural and functional benefits, let's take a brief look at some of the benefits persons taking part in a cooperative parish ministry might expect.

- Different interest and age groups can bond together in ways that might otherwise be impossible. Senior citizens ministries, divorce recovery programs, youth and children's ministries, singles groups and other special groups become possible in a cooperative parish ministry made up of several churches, when none of the churches alone have enough persons to form a group.
- Clergy and laity can put their talents to use in a scope not possible before. A gifted musician can lead a choir made up of persons from all the churches or do music workshops in each church. A pastor trained in evangelism can lead all the churches in planning their evangelistic work. People's talents can be used beyond their local church. Likewise, churches can benefit from this broader range of talented persons.

Together We Can

- Special training for particular purposes can be made available. One training event might be held for all Vacation Bible School teachers. This joint training can be much more in depth than if each congregation did it separately. Also, it can be closer to home and more tailored to the local situation than a larger event at district or conference level.
- Persons who are more mature in their faith can have a greater opportunity to share it by leading Bible studies or study groups, becoming lay preachers, and through many other involvements made possible through shared ministry.
- Younger persons and new leaders can try out their leadership skills in other congregations as well as their own, giving them some relief from the notion that “a prophet is not without honor except in his own country.” (Mt. 13:57 RSV)
- Through opening the doors of our churches and reaching out to each other, our eyes are opened to the community around us. Resources of people and materials can be shared to make community ministries possible that otherwise would not be within reach.

Section One: What is Cooperative Ministry?

- Mission projects that have seemed beyond reach become possible. Cooperative ministries of a few small churches have built Habitat houses, sent work and medical teams to foreign countries, opened canneries for food programs, and done many other amazing “impossible” things.
- We can refocus our vision from survival to mission. A lay preacher or lay speaker can be appointed through the cooperative parish ministry to small churches that are just hanging on financially. This can free them to use more of their funds for ministry.
- With the differing skills, experience, and interests of several pastors available in the cooperative parish ministry, we can call on the pastor whose gifts, training and experience best meet the needs of a given situation both in the pastoral and program work of the church.
- Lay speakers and lay preachers can fill pulpits and serve as pastors of some congregations with the guidance of an experienced, ordained pastor from within the cooperative parish ministry. In this way, churches have a pastor assigned specifically to them, and these persons have an opportunity to fulfill their call to this special service.

Together We Can

- Less-experienced pastors can be appointed alongside those from whose experience they can benefit. In this way, a pastor's probationary time can become a learning experience rather than a trial period.
- Churches can share equipment and supplies like office machines and audio-visual equipment. These can be made available to all and save the needless duplication of each congregation buying equipment that it uses only occasionally. The cooperative parish ministry may be able to purchase some items together that no congregation alone could afford.
- Churches have different buildings ranging from small chapels to large sanctuaries and recreational facilities. With several congregations involved, the best facility for any given activity can be chosen and more fully utilized for the good of all.
- Churches that have not seen their sanctuaries filled in many years can experience the joy of seeing their facility put to full use through activities of the cooperative parish ministry.

Section One: What is Cooperative Ministry?

- People from the congregations can begin to have a much better understanding of the church beyond their own congregation. When we work with other congregations it becomes easier to see the district, conference, and beyond as “the Church” rather than being limited to our own congregation.
- Persons active in the cooperative parish ministry are more likely to take part in activities beyond the local church and to have the opportunity to assume positions of leadership in district and conference activities. This gives the local church an opportunity to feel ownership for the work of the larger church when one of their own is involved helping to make the decisions.

Now let's take a look at a brief process for starting a new cooperative parish ministry.

STARTING A COOPERATIVE PARISH MINISTRY.

After looking at this overview of cooperative ministry, you may want to consider starting one in your own area. Although this is a subject worthy of lengthy consideration and discussion, here are 10 hints for starting a cooperative parish ministry.

1. Begin today, where you are.

Do something, even if it's just a phone call to another person to say, "Let's get together and talk about this." Remember the web of relationships...it grows one person at a time and has to start somewhere. Don't wait for someone else to make the first step.

2. Talk to administrative leaders.

Talk with the District Superintendent and pastors in the area. Help them to understand what it's all about. Get them on the same wavelength and investigate possibilities together.

3. Begin building the web of relationships between churches.

Help the pastors get together and get to know each other. Then bring in some laypersons from each church. Make sure relationship-building is an intentional part of everything you do.

Section One: What is Cooperative Ministry?

4. Teach and preach cooperation and togetherness.

Don't expect people to understand automatically why working together is important. Start from the Biblical base in Corinthians 12, teaching that each of us is an important part of the body. Help people see the benefits of working together.

5. Get lay and clergy leadership meeting together regularly.

Plan to meet on a regular basis. Getting together regularly is important if we want to build relationships among the lay and clergy leaders of the churches and to learn what is important to each congregation. Make sure each meeting builds on the last one. Don't fall prey to the idea of "meeting only when we need to meet."

6. Pick one thing and do it.

Find something all your churches feel is important, want to do, and can do together successfully. Choose a project that will help people get to know each other and experience the blessings and benefits of cooperation. Learning to work together and building relationships are more important than exactly what the project is, as long as everyone feels it is important and needs to be done.

7. Tell people what is happening.

Make sure people know what the cooperative parish ministry is and why it's important. Use church bulletins and newsletters to tell everyone about what you're doing. Get articles about special projects in local newspapers and other media. Have someone report regularly in the Sunday worship service of each church.

8. Have a continuing process with administrative leaders.

Invite the District Superintendent in from time to time. Keep leaders informed of what you are doing. Make sure they remember that you are there. Meet with them to communicate clearly what the cooperative parish ministry needs from them.

9. Build and use the structure you need.

Base structure on what you want to accomplish. To begin with, one short-term task force or ministry team for each project may be all that is needed. Build structure as you need it. Don't set up a complex structure and then try to find something for it to do.

Section One: What is Cooperative Ministry?

10. Keep looking ahead.

Spend your energy on today and tomorrow. Evaluating yesterday is good only when it helps prepare us for the future. Concentrate on what brings people together, unites them and sends them out to serve together.

These guidelines can be helpful in starting cooperative ministry. Section Two offers help in developing a cooperative parish ministry and bringing it to maturity.

Together We Can

SECTION TWO

TWELVE WAYS TO MAKE COOPERATIVE PARISH MINISTRY MORE EFFECTIVE

Together We Can

SECTION TWO:

TWELVE WAYS TO MAKE COOPERATIVE PARISH MINISTRY MORE EFFECTIVE

- 1: Build a Biblical understanding of why cooperation is necessary for ministry.
- 2: Carefully choose the clergy and congregations who will be involved.
- 3: Enlist the understanding, help and support of a core group of key leaders.
- 4: Build relationships within the clergy and staff team and among the laity of the congregations involved.
- 5: Establish a productive lay-clergy working pattern.
- 6: Utilize as many helpers as possible.
- 7: Have an ongoing effort to tell people what you're doing and gain their support.
- 8: Design an organizational form and planning process for the next 18 months.
- 9: Become mission-centered.
- 10: Forge links with other United Methodist institutions, ecumenical groups, and helping organizations.
- 11: Continually educate, train, and prepare yourselves.
- 12: Be committed to the long run.

Together We Can

ONE:

BUILD A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF WHY COOPERATION IS NECESSARY FOR MINISTRY.

Effective cooperative ministries continually stress the Biblical basis and practical need for individual Christians and congregations to minister together cooperatively. Although we humans are naturally social and must work together even to survive, we live in a society that constantly stresses and reinforces the image of individualism. Yet we follow a gospel that puts relationship and connectedness at the center of its teaching. This causes an ongoing tension we need to recognize.

WHY IS COOPERATION NECESSARY?

The most important reason for cooperation is that the Bible calls us to be a part of the body of Christ. The twelfth chapter of I Corinthians is one of the clearest portions of Scripture in spelling out the need for cooperation. Look at what it tells us:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--Jews or Greeks, slaves or free--and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

For the body does not consist of one member but of many...if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing?

Together We Can

But as it is, God arranged the organs in the body, each one of them, as he choses. If all were a single organ, where would the body be?

As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you."...On the contrary, the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable... But God has so adjusted the body...that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

(I Corinthians 12, RSV)

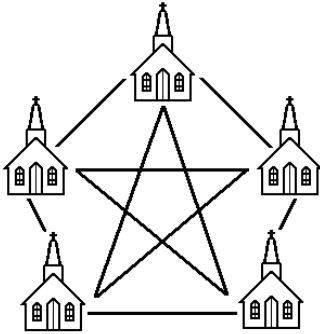
This passage of scripture clarifies what it means to be a part of the Church, the body of Christ. Each part is important in itself, but it is doubly important because of the particular role it plays in relationship to all the other parts and to the whole body.

Seen in this way, the need to work cooperatively with other parts of the body becomes clear. It doesn't make sense for us to be a hand or eye or foot separated from the rest of the body. In separateness we lose our meaning. We only live and function meaningfully when we are attached to and functioning with the rest of the body.

Likewise, the body has little meaning if the parts are detached with each doing its own thing. The body becomes alive and functional only when all the parts are attached in the correct relationship and are working together.

*1. Build a Biblical Understanding of
Why Cooperation is Necessary for Ministry.*

If we, the church, are to live out the mission God has given us, we need to have all the parts correctly related and working together. This is true not only for individual Christians and their relationships with each other, but also for congregations and their relationships to other congregations.



Surely it's clear that congregations are also parts of the body and need to be connected to other parts of the body. The relationship of individual Christians to one another doesn't stop at the walls of the local churches of which they happen to be a part. Working together beyond our local churches is imperative.

It's not enough to say we are connected to the body just because we are a part of a larger denomination. To some congregations, being a part of the denomination has meant only sending money, accepting an appointed pastor, and receiving literature...not really relating to others around them.

No, what the Scripture talks about is relationship, and the only way of building relationship is coming together with people who are in close enough physical proximity that they can be encountered with enough regularity to form and nourish those relationships. This calls for intentionally building relationships and forming a local connectionalism among our congregations. Cooperative ministry can be a way to do that.

Together We Can

If people are to understand scriptural concepts like I Cor. 12, we have to help interpret this to them and provide a cooperative framework in which it can be carried out.

Another reason cooperation is necessary is to help us to minister to “all the needs of all the people of our community.”

Think about all the concerns people have today just under the heading of “family” -disintegrating marriages, divorce, child abuse, spouse abuse, infants left in day-care centers for many hours each day, the demand for two-income families, school drop-outs, single parents raising children alone, parents who don’t make child-support payments, alcohol and drug-abuse, teen-age pregnancies, gangs, and many more.

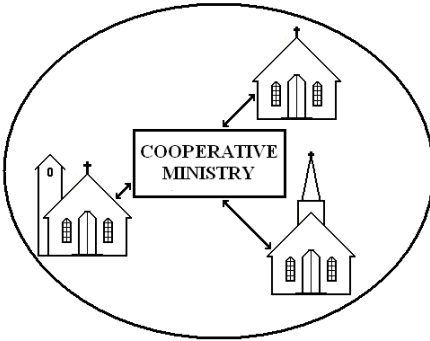


No single church and no one pastor alone can effectively meet the needs of children, youth, young adults, middle adults, older adults, singles, young-marrieds, separated, divorced, widowed, nuclear families, single-parent families, blended families, and sometimes many of these in one congregation.

The church is rightfully concerned about all this, but what do we do about it. How many of our churches can do all this? How many actually are doing something? How many are effective? These problems sometimes feel overwhelming.

Our connectedness through cooperative ministry has much to offer here. If there is a day-care center at one church, a youth ministry at another, a parenting program at another, and a divorce recovery center at another, all the people in all the churches benefit.

*1. Build a Biblical Understanding of
Why Cooperation is Necessary for Ministry.*



Perhaps one minister in a team has counseling skills, while another has an interest in working with senior citizens.

If we can learn to work together as churches, we may also learn to work with community agencies

that deal with these problems every day. All our people benefit.

The only way to meet people's needs in our fractured society is to face them cooperatively with others. Being a part of the whole body means offering what we have, what we can do and who we are in order to make the body greater than it would be otherwise. This wholeness allows us to minister to the brokenness people experience today.

SOME BLOCKAGES TO COOPERATION:

As in any worthwhile endeavor, there are some blockages that must be worked through in building an understanding of the need for cooperation in ministry.

**INDIVIDUALISM AS MYTH AND THE
REALITY OF COOPERATION.**

Think about the images of rugged individualism that are constantly before us. John Wayne riding his horse into Monument Valley, alone. Charles Lindbergh flying across the Atlantic, alone. Or in United Methodism, the circuit rider riding through the wilderness, alone. It's worth noting that these images are all romanticized, all male, and all false...they never existed in the way we perceive and remember them.

If we could step through the screen into John Wayne's movie set, we would see that Wayne was far from being alone in Monument Valley. Many people were there in the movie crew, working to record his lonely ride into the sunset.

Lindbergh's recognition and fame, far from being the work of one man, represented the work of thousands who built his plane, supported the flight, or were part of the huge news organization that transformed him into a legend.

Even the circuit riders wouldn't have been out there were it not for the already-growing Methodist organization, the bishop who appointed them, and the people in the communities to which they rode who fed them, gave them a place to stay and became part of their congregations.



This does not diminish individual accomplishment in the least. But individual accomplishment always takes place in the context of a larger cooperative structure and combined effort that makes it possible.

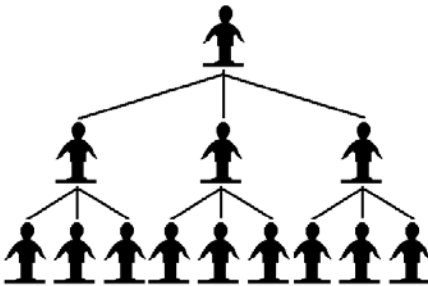
*1. Build a Biblical Understanding of
Why Cooperation is Necessary for Ministry.*

A good example of this is the first moon landing. It was a great individual accomplishment when Neil Armstrong set foot on the moon. His words, *“That’s one small step for (a) man, one giant leap for mankind,”* were entirely appropriate, for without the efforts of thousands and the tax money of millions the astronauts would never have gotten off the ground.

A CULTURE OF HIERARCHICAL ORGANIZATION

The organizational culture of the society we live in can function as a blockage to our understanding of cooperation. We are accustomed to organizations being hierarchical with most of their functions running up and down the structure.

These hierarchical structures look something like this:



Someone at the top makes decisions and gives orders. These flow down the system through layers of mid-level managers to those at the bottom who are supposed to implement these decisions.

Reports and accounts of action then flow back up the system.

Ideas originating at any level have to go all the way to the top to get approval. Then they flow back down to be assigned to some pre-determined group that may or may not include the persons who originated the idea or anyone who has a real interest in it. This group is given the idea because it falls in their “area of responsibility,” an area of work to which they have been assigned though they may or may not have any real interest or ownership in it.

Together We Can

This way of operating communicates a number of things:

- Ideas are not really welcome unless they come from the correct group.

“I’m sorry, but according to your standing rules we cannot consider resolutions that do not come from a conference board or agency and have not first been distributed ten days prior to the beginning of the annual conference session.”

- Members of the lower echelon can’t really be trusted. Anything coming from them has to be checked out by someone in a higher position of authority...someone who can be trusted.

“Thanks for that idea, Jim...and we’ll be happy to consider it if you’ll just get the approval of the committee on nurture first and then submit it to the finance committee for a cost analysis.”

- Someone near the top of the pyramid finally has to approve everything and controls who fits where in the organization.

(Can anyone think of a church-related example for this sort of thing?)

*1. Build a Biblical Understanding of
Why Cooperation is Necessary for Ministry.*

Let's compare some of the beliefs that underlie the cooperative and hierarchical models:

COOPERATION

Everyone is an equal part of the body.

Organization is built on supportive relationships.

Everyone has an important, God-given vision.

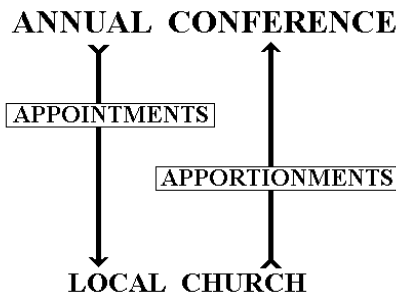
HIERARCHY

Some persons are more valuable than others according to the position they hold.

Organization is built on structure and the position of persons within that structure.

Some visions are important, while others are suspect and have to be weeded out or approved at the top.

United Methodist tradition is based on connectionalism. However, like much of today's society, this structure is a pyramid so that our connectedness is played out only vertically, top to bottom and bottom back to top.

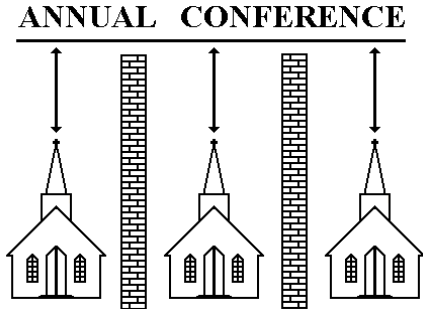


Pastors are appointed *down*, and apportionments paid *up*, through this vertical hierarchical system.

Together We Can

This has served to keep the organization moving along, with a church for every preacher and a preacher for every church. But very little happens horizontally to connect local congregations.

In fact, this vertical way of operating often leads local churches to feel that there are walls between them.



The result is that local churches may feel isolated from each other and have the sense that they are out there all by themselves, trying to minister to all the problems of the world alone. This leads congregations to lose their

sense of connectedness and fall into a congregational mentality.

If we continue to operate the Church in this hierarchical way, we send very mixed messages when we talk about cooperation because the hierarchical model does not help us in building local or horizontal connectional relationships.

The question is, “How do we help people learn the value of cooperation in the face of a culture and structures that run contrary to the idea of working together?”

If we are to overcome this sense of aloneness and minister to all the problems people face in today’s complex world, it is necessary for us to provide a framework for cooperation.

*1. Build a Biblical Understanding of
Why Cooperation is Necessary for Ministry.*

PROVIDING A COOPERATIVE FRAMEWORK

As important as individual initiative and accomplishment are, a cooperative structure is just as necessary. Both are essential to the success of any worthwhile endeavor.

Through cooperative ministry we help to provide that cooperative framework. Within it individuals can live out the mission to which God has called them and use the talents God has given them.

It's the work of many different individuals that make up the cooperative effort. This cooperative context links together and gives meaning to the work of individuals. Otherwise, there would be only disconnected parts instead of a meaningful whole. An important task in cooperative ministry is to help people see beyond the surface culture of individualism to understand the essential nature of cooperation.



So at the very beginning of starting a cooperative parish ministry, and on throughout its life, one of the most important things is to explore the Biblical reasons we should work together and build a common understanding of cooperation as a necessary part of Christian witness.

WAYS TO BUILD AN UNDERSTANDING OF WHY COOPERATION IS NECESSARY

Preach cooperation. Christianity stresses *both* the importance of our individual relationship to God *and* the importance of our relationship with others. Yet much of our preaching is aimed only at the inward spiritual life or at some mission involvement, usually located far away. More of our preaching needs to focus on our being connected to other Christians both in our own congregations and in nearby congregations through some means of local connectionalism.

Our sermons, prayers, and meditations should reflect this. If we believe God is calling us to work together, we need to tell people about it. People need to hear scripture that calls us together and sends us out to do God's work. We cannot preach only individual salvation and expect people to have any idea of why it is important to work together in a cooperative way.

Teach cooperation. Use Bible studies, Sunday School lessons and other teaching opportunities to help people see the cooperative nature of the Gospel. Again, people may not understand the message of working together in the gospel unless we help them to see it.

We are not taking some special slant on the Word of God, but just teaching all of what's there. Over and over again in the Bible story, God calls someone individually to take on an important job for the group as a whole.

*1. Build a Biblical Understanding of
Why Cooperation is Necessary for Ministry.*

God calls Joseph...to save his family in a time of famine.

God calls Moses...to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt.

God calls the prophets...to call the nation of Israel to faithfulness.

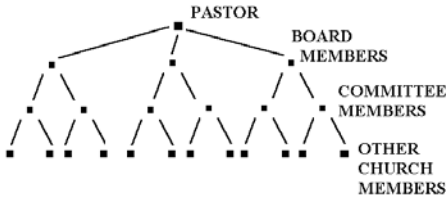
Jesus calls the disciples...to join his group of followers and found the church.

Rarely does God call anyone to go off alone and have nothing to do with others. Whenever someone is sent into the wilderness, it is to prepare for an experience that will be important not only to themselves, but also to the whole community. If our teaching is to be faithful to the Gospel it must reflect this cooperative component of the Biblical story, not just the call that the individual receives. All our teaching responsibilities are opportunities for this.

Live out cooperation in the local church. If we want people to understand cooperation we need to operate the local church in a collaborative rather than a hierarchical manner, based on supportive relationships rather than position.

If we were to diagram how many local churches work, it might look something like the following diagram.

Together We Can



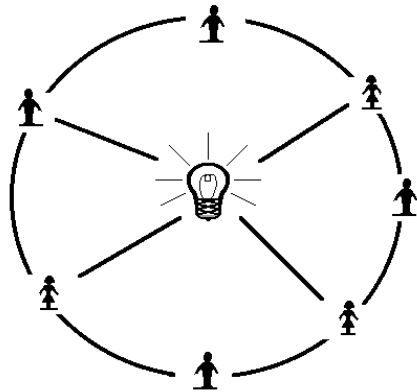
Interesting how much this looks like some of our earlier pyramid diagrams isn't it? That's because this is a basic

hierarchical model. Things flow up and down, not side to side.

If we want congregations to work cooperatively, it makes sense to move to a cooperative style of working within each local congregation. When an idea arises, it is put forward for consideration to see who responds.

If enough persons want to take part, we go ahead with it. If not, we don't.

This is a vote-with-your-feet approach. If you like something and think it needs to be done, sign on and help do it.



If not enough people commit to the idea to make it workable, then we don't do it. (We will look closer at this process later in the chapter on planning.)

*1. Build a Biblical Understanding of
Why Cooperation is Necessary for Ministry.*

This approach communicates several things:

- All ideas get the same treatment, no matter from whom they come or in what group they originate.
- People can choose what they want to work on, not what gets assigned to them by someone else.
- We do what we as a congregation and as individuals feel called to do. We are not spending our energies on some pre-packaged program prescribed for us by someone else.
- The pastor is a part of the group, trying to **help** things happen, not apart from the group trying to **make** things happen.

This approach builds cooperation by letting people experience it. If we want people to learn to be cooperative, we have to operate in a cooperative manner so that they can experience it.

Encourage local church leadership to lead in a cooperative manner.

It may not do a lot of good to preach and teach cooperation if our local church leaders act like nothing has changed. This includes everyone from Sunday School and Vacation Bible School teachers to the lay leader and chairs of various boards or committees. We need to be aware of the messages we are sending when we arrange competitions or contests for our children or run every church meeting strictly according to Robert's Rules of Order.

Together We Can

The idea here is “Whatever you do, be cooperative.” People need to experience cooperation in the local church as well as among the congregations. We may learn more by acting ourselves into a better way of thinking rather than by thinking ourselves into a better way of acting.

Whatever you do, be cooperative!

Two:

**CAREFULLY CHOOSE THE CLERGY AND
CONGREGATIONS WHO WILL BE
INVOLVED.**

A large measure of the success of a cooperative parish ministry depends on who is involved. Cooperative parish ministry is a tool, and the usefulness of any tool is highly dependent on who is using that tool, how they use it, and their skill in the use of it.



Likewise, the results of a cooperative parish ministry will vary depending on who is involved, their dedication to working together, and their skill in leading a cooperative group.

Since this is the case, it's clear that the decision on who will be involved is very important. Actually, this is a two-part decision:

- 1. What clergy will be involved?**
- 2. Which congregations will be involved?**

Let's take a look at each of these.

WHAT CLERGY WILL BE INVOLVED?

To work in a cooperative parish ministry requires pastors who have some special qualities. This is important not only at the beginning, but anytime appointments change and new pastors replace those who are leaving.

Together We Can

Here are some of the qualities we are looking for:

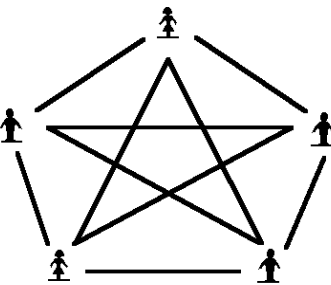
Clergy with a desire to work cooperatively.

We need pastors who want to work with others. A cooperative parish ministry is no place for someone who would rather be working alone. One resentful pastor who feels forced into a cooperative parish ministry rather than being willingly and creatively involved can hold back the entire group.

Pastors in a cooperative parish ministry need an understanding of the importance of being “parts of the body” and the fullness that is experienced when all the parts work together to make the body whole. Through this understanding they can lead their churches to experience this fullness.

Include in the cooperative parish ministry pastors who see the need for cooperation and want to work with others to make it happen.

Clergy willing to learn to minister as part of a team.



Teamwork is learned, not something that just comes naturally. It's not enough just to want to be in a cooperative group. Cooperating as a team together has to be learned. In this team there are no prima donnas or stars. We succeed or fail together as a group.

2. Carefully Choose the Clergy and Congregations Who Will be Involved.

This is obvious in many arenas. Sports teams, orchestras, even race-car pit crews spend untold hours planning, rehearsing and practicing together. In a cooperative parish ministry, the equivalent is time spent in planning retreats, staff meetings, church fellowship times, and even picnics and softball games. Those webs of relationships don't just happen. They have to be carefully planned for and intentionally nurtured.

Clergy involved in a cooperative parish ministry have to be willing to spend the time and do the work to help relationships happen as they learn to be a cooperative team.

Clergy with a sense of self-assurance.

Cooperative ministry needs pastors who are mature adults with a sense of self-assurance, persons who are not dependent on proving themselves through their work.

Look at the inverse of this. Some pastors define themselves through the accomplishments of their churches. They are the ones who constantly tell about how many members they just took in, or their record attendance last week, or how much things have improved since they came and took over the mess left by their predecessors. These persons will have a hard time working as part of a group or taking part in any activity not held in their church building. Why? Because it is extremely important to them to get credit in order to maintain their sense of self-worth.

Former U. S. Congresswoman Lindy Boggs once said that you can accomplish anything as long as it doesn't matter who gets the credit. This is the kind of attitude we need in working together.

Together We Can

Cooperative parish ministry is for pastors who are mature, self-confident adults and have as their motive serving people and building the life of the church.

Clergy willing to commit themselves to stay long enough to make a difference.

Our United Methodist system is an itinerant one with pastors regularly moving from one church to another. Sometimes moving has occurred so frequently as to be detrimental to the lives of the congregations and the ministries of the pastors.

It has been observed that little of significance happens when pastors stay less than about three years in an appointment, and that considerably longer appointments usually accomplish much more. This is particularly true in cooperative parish ministry, where there is a need to build a working relationship not only with the people in the congregation, but with other members of the clergy team and community leaders as well.

For instance, if there are three pastoral charges in a cooperative parish ministry and the clergy serving these charges stay an average of three years, there will be one new pastor almost every year. This means every year we begin building the clergy team relationship all over again.

In a cooperative parish ministry pastors should commit to serve significantly longer appointments than have been the average in some parts of our connection. This requires a commitment that also includes the congregation, district superintendent, and bishop. For cooperative ministry to be effective, pastors have to stay with it long enough to help make it so.

*2. Carefully Choose the Clergy and Congregations
Who Will be Involved.*

One final word about the choice of pastors to serve in cooperative ministry:

Choose only pastors who want to be involved and are aware that their appointment is part of a cooperative parish ministry.

- **Don't** start a cooperative parish ministry by trying to draft all the pastors already in the area regardless of whether they want to be included or not.
- **Don't** bring in new pastors from outside the area only to have them find out, on the day they move into the parsonage, that their churches are involved in a cooperative parish ministry.
- **Do** look for pastors who want to be in cooperative ministry, are willing to learn to work together, are mature adults, and are willing to stick around long enough to make a difference.

WHICH CONGREGATIONS WILL BE INVOLVED?

As with the choosing of clergy leadership, the choosing of the congregations to be involved in a cooperative parish ministry is very important.

Although choosing the congregations to be involved sounds like something to be done at the beginning of the cooperative parish ministry, it can be a continuing concern for a growing or ongoing cooperative parish ministry. Why?

- Some new congregations may want to join.
- Some may wish to transfer out to work with another adjoining cooperative group.
- An initial cooperative group may find itself to be too large and wish to divide into smaller groups.
- A congregation may just want “out.” (The question here is **why** they want out. More about this later.)

Just as important as the decision about which churches should be included is *how* the choice is made. Will it be done in a cooperative or hierarchical manner? This sets the tone of the entire cooperative parish ministry, how it is perceived, and the style of its operation.

Since this process is so important, let’s look at it carefully.

2. Carefully Choose the Clergy and Congregations Who Will be Involved.

First we need to consider a concept necessary to the formation of any cooperative parish ministry, the **defined geographic area**.

First, define the geographic area the cooperative parish ministry will serve.

A cooperative parish ministry should bring together all the United Methodist entities in a defined geographic area in order to minister to the needs of the people in that setting.

This means that a cooperative parish ministry could include...

- local congregations
- a community center
- a retreat facility
- a mission to the homeless
- a day care facility
- a camp
- and any other United Methodist institutions or facilities in the area as well as interested ecumenical partners.

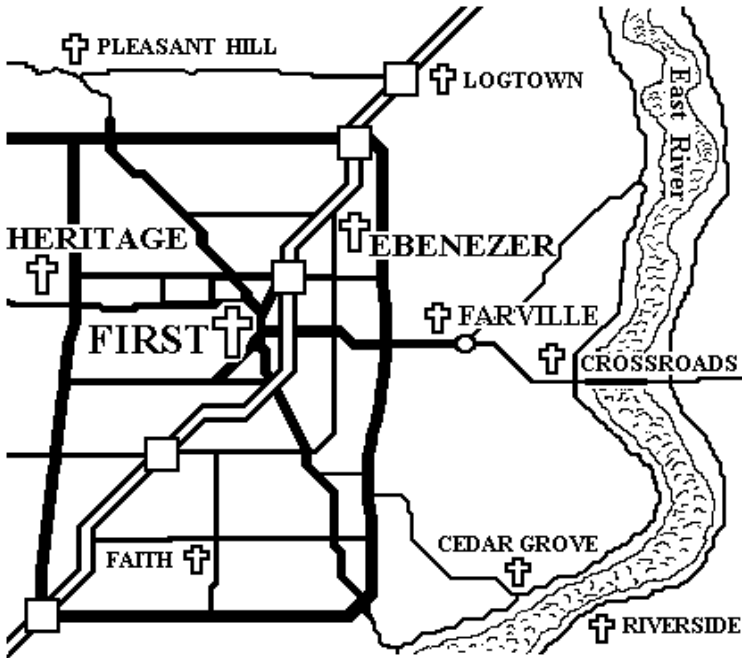
The idea is that a cooperative parish ministry should involve all the parts of the body in the defined geographic area. But how do we go about defining this area and deciding whom this could include?

Together We Can

There are a number of factors that should be considered:

Is there a common geographic area that the people relate to?

We need to look carefully at the geography of the area.



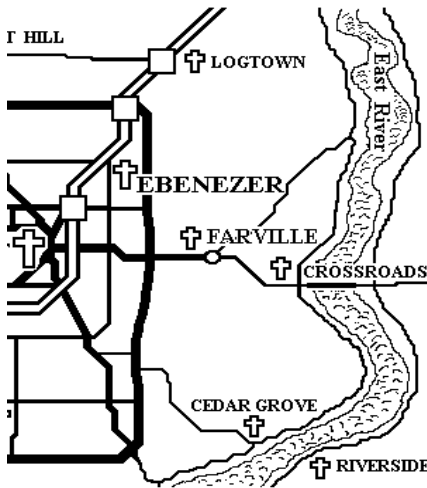
In rural areas this may be a county or rural community centered around a town where most people shop, do business, go to the doctor, and where a high school or other institution is located.

In urban areas it may be a group of neighborhoods in one section of town, or a certain geographic area that has its own identity within the city. The prime concern is that there is some common identity that makes people feel related to the geographic area.

2. Carefully Choose the Clergy and Congregations
Who Will be Involved.

Are the **church locations** close enough to each other so that travel between them is not perceived to be a problem? Note the word **perceived**. The actual number of miles or time of travel is not the most important factor here. Distances that would not be a problem in some places would be considered prohibitive in others. And a distance of only a couple of miles could seem much too far in some cities. The important thing is that people *feel* that the travel times and distances involved are not a problem.

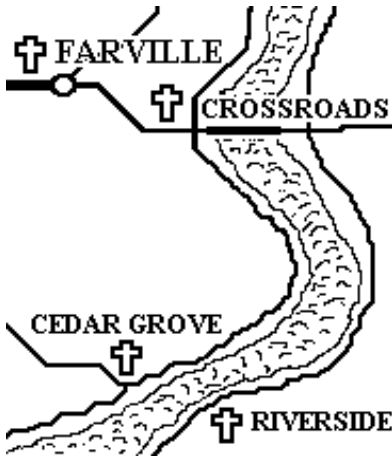
Are there **geographic barriers** that may get in the way? These could include...



- a river
- a range of mountains
- an interstate highway
- railroad tracks
- ...or anything else that blocks movement from one area to another.

Are there psychological barriers that come to bear?

These can be just as real as, and perhaps more troublesome than, geographic barriers.



A rural county is cut in two by a river. Modern roads and bridges make it a short journey to go from one side to the other. But long-held patterns of thinking mean that the people on opposite sides of the river have real difficulty seeing themselves as a group. The same can be true of urban racial and ethnic neighborhoods that have a history of seeing

themselves as islands or enclaves within the city.

Are there cultural groupings people identify themselves with? People tend to have a mindset of who they are.

Those wearing cowboy boots and driving pickup trucks who live a few miles outside the city may see themselves as different from the professionals downtown at Old First Church...and both groups may be different from the suburbanites out at Heritage United Methodist Church built only a few years ago. They all live within a few miles and shop at the same mall...but there is a difference.

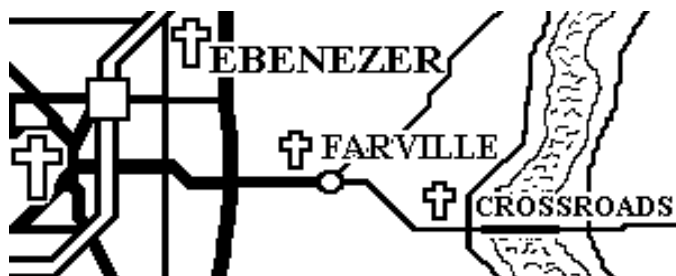


*2. Carefully Choose the Clergy and Congregations
Who Will be Involved.*

Does **traffic flow** play a role in the mix of people and communities? People feel drawn toward a population center rather than away from it. Generally, they are willing to travel about twice as far toward the population center for any given activity or service as they would be willing to travel in the opposite direction.

Take care when scheduling activities in churches far away from the center of the cooperative parish ministry.

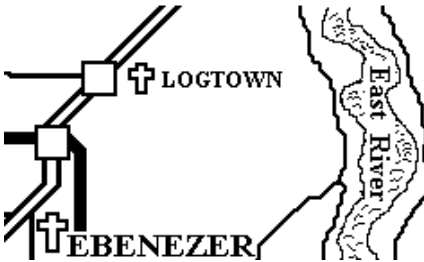
Does **proximity to a larger population center** have an important effect on the community? Since people feel drawn to larger population centers, there are situations where a smaller town near a larger city presents the need to be especially careful.



This is particularly true for the churches in the area between these two communities where it may not be clear to which community people feel most closely related.

Are there **political realities** to consider? Being “wise as serpents and guileless as doves” is a worthy trait according to scripture. If we’re trying to start a cooperative group, and the neighborhoods out on the edge of town are being forcibly annexed into the city and don’t like it, it would be wise to take those feelings into consideration.

Do **previous identities** play a role in interactions among the people? Some communities may have identities still held firmly from years past that are not obvious to the newcomer or casual observer, but which are still very important to some of the residents of that community.



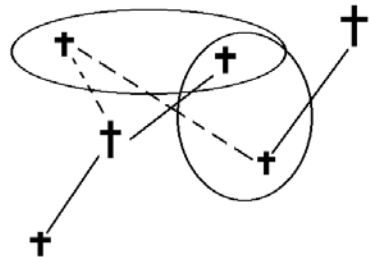
Logtown may be located right at the edge of the city, its people working there and shopping in the mall by the interstate. But many of the older residents remember when they were their own

community far out in the country from the growing town and ran all their own affairs.

And guess who the chair of the Logtown United Methodist Church administrative board still is?

What is the **connectional history** of the churches involved? In the past our efforts to link congregations in ways to provide at least a minimum salary so that a pastor could be in full-time ministry has led us to combine churches in every imaginable grouping.

Sometimes the frequent changes from one alignment to another have led to negative feelings among congregations and suspicion toward any type of new grouping that might be proposed.



2. Carefully Choose the Clergy and Congregations Who Will be Involved.

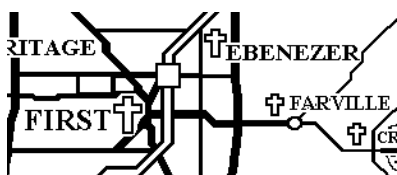
Some persons in these churches may see the cooperative parish ministry as simply one more round in a marathon of changes, all instigated from outside. It is important to perceive and take into account their feelings.

Are there significant size differences among the churches? A problem may exist when larger congregations are grouped together with much smaller churches.

This is more often true when the larger churches have full-time youth or music directors, family-life centers and other personnel and facilities that are far beyond the reach of the smaller churches. The smaller churches may feel intimidated and suffer from comparing themselves to the larger congregations. Conversely, larger congregations may feel they already have “everything we need” and see little need to be linked to others.

This may be a problem of perception and poor theology, but still must be addressed if these congregations are to work together.

Is there perceived paternalism among some of the churches? When a smaller congregation lives under the shadow of Old First Church, the cathedral of the area, they may perceive a feeling of paternalism from the other much larger congregation.



People from the smaller congregation may feel intimidated by the larger congregation's facilities, multiple staff, standing in the community, and the attention Old First Church gets from church leaders that they feel they do not receive.

Together We Can

They may perceive it as paternalism when we start talking about cooperation and the first thing people from the larger church offer is their building or bus and other material things that the smaller congregation can't begin to match.

Whether accurate or not, it is the perception of this feeling of paternalism that counts and has to be dealt with if these congregations are to minister together.

At the end of this process you should have a pretty good idea of what a realistic geographic area for the cooperative parish ministry is and which congregations are likely to be ready to take an active part.

In an existing cooperative parish ministry, this same process is useful for looking at whether new churches should be added or deciding if modifications should be made to the area the cooperative parish ministry is trying to serve.

One additional thought. Don't be totally bound by the geographic area you've defined. There have been cases of congregations outside the area being excited by the idea and wishing to be involved. In this case, their involvement should certainly be given consideration.

Our first consideration in choosing the congregations to be involved was: Define the geographic area the cooperative parish ministry will serve. What's next?

First, define the geographic area the cooperative parish ministry will serve.

Next, include those who want to be included.

2. Carefully Choose the Clergy and Congregations Who Will be Involved.

There are a couple of considerations involved here:

- **People can't be coerced into cooperation.**

You can group churches, put them in different appointment settings and do whatever else you like, but you can't force people into the kind of cooperative spirit we're looking for in cooperative parish ministry. Instead, give each congregation in the geographic area the opportunity to choose to be included if they wish...but don't try to push them. That type of coercion always hurts the effort more than it helps.

Give them good reasons to want to be involved. Help them to understand how cooperative ministry can help them to minister better and to live out their mission. Help them build a vision of what ministry can mean in their area and for their congregation. The best way to do this is by example. Go ahead with your cooperative parish ministry and enjoy what you gain by working together; they'll be watching. Give them time, and don't try to coerce them. In the end, it's their choice to be involved or not.

- **People should be involved in decisions that affect them.**

This is important because it's about **how** you make decisions in the cooperative parish ministry and how people perceive ownership of the cooperative parish ministry and the way it will operate.

Get people from all the churches together to look at the geographic area you've defined and see if it makes sense to them. Should it be changed or modified in some way?

Together We Can

Ask them to help plan how all this will be presented to their congregations and how the story of cooperative ministry will be told. Bring them inside the circle of those who are trying to help the cooperative parish ministry become a reality.

During this important time in the life of the cooperative parish ministry, people will be watching how decisions are handled and will figure that whatever style is set here foretells how it will operate in the future. If you let everyone have their say, folks will understand that the cooperative parish ministry belongs to them and that they are important and have a voice in it. If decisions are made in an arbitrary and authoritarian way, they will see and understand that also.

First, define the geographic area the cooperative parish ministry will serve.

Second, include those who want to be included.

Next, don't be upset if some churches decide not to take part.

It may be that one or more churches in the chosen geographic area may choose not to be a part of the cooperative group. Let's see what our alternatives are:

Try to force them in? Obviously this won't work. We can't force people to cooperate.

Forget the whole thing? Why? Just because a few people don't want to be involved?

Go ahead with those who do want to be involved? This seems to be a sensible approach.

2. Carefully Choose the Clergy and Congregations Who Will be Involved.

There are a couple of things we can do relative to those congregations who choose not to participate. Some consideration should be given as to why they choose not to be involved. Is there a geographic or sociological reason? A theological or cultural difference? Does it have to do with their current pastoral leadership? Are the stated reasons and the real reasons one and the same?

Nevertheless, if they choose not to be involved, it's not only useless but counterproductive to try to coerce them in. That leaves a **don't** and a **do**.

Don't continually try to pull them in or make little jabs at them about their not being involved.

Do leave the door open and let them know that if at some time they want to take part in some of the cooperative activities, say a Vacation Bible School training workshop, they are welcome.

Remember, just because a church chooses not to be involved now doesn't mean they will never be involved. **Churches** don't choose to be in or out. **People do**. What you are seeing is the reaction of a certain group of people within that congregation, possibly a small group. It is quite likely that not everyone in the church agrees with them.

If the refusal of several churches in the area makes questionable the feasibility of a cooperative parish ministry at this time, all is still not lost. Remember, cooperative parish ministry is whenever **two** or more congregations share some of their ministry together. You can still begin doing some short-term cooperative projects with only two or three congregations. This will build relationships for the future.

Together We Can

Don't allow negative attitudes in one or two congregations to spoil the whole group effort. Many cooperative parish ministries have been started with just two or three congregations. It's better to start off with a small, strong group and possibly add others later, than to build in friction and dissension right at the beginning by trying to include those who have negative feelings or misgivings about their involvement.

Remember, we're talking about **cooperative** parish ministry, a group of people who want to serve God and their communities by working and ministering together.

There's one other thing that we should think about...

CONSIDER FORMING A COVENANT AMONG THOSE WHO WANT TO BE INVOLVED.

It may be helpful to form a covenant among those who decide to become involved in the cooperative parish ministry. The purpose of a covenant is to formalize the decision to enter into a cooperative working relationship.

By covenant, we are talking about a statement of intent and relationship, not a legalistic contract. The written covenant is a document that symbolizes the relationship we have built and the connection we intend to enter.

*2. Carefully Choose the Clergy and Congregations
Who Will be Involved.*

A covenant should contain several things:

1. An **agreement** that several congregations will seek to work together to serve God and their communities within a set geographic area. If necessary this can specify a term, a minimum number of years after which discussions will be held as to whether the relationship will continue or be modified in some way. We are asking pastors to agree to work with this concept for a definite period of time; the same should be true of the congregations involved.
2. A **commitment** to share with others in the group our strengths, abilities, and resources to better serve God and the people of our congregations and communities.
3. A **commitment** to take part in planning meetings and other efforts necessary to the ongoing life of the cooperative parish ministry and to follow through on responsibilities we accept for activities in which we agree to be involved.
4. An **understanding** that there are frictions and conflict in all human endeavors and that we will bring our disagreements and misunderstandings openly to the table and work with others to resolve them in a Christian way.
5. An **agreement** to support our pastors as they seek to learn to work as a team and to be willing for them to share their abilities with other congregations in the group.

WARNING!

Some people have a very difficult time dealing with written agreements in other than a legalistic way. Beware of those who want to go over every word in the covenant repeatedly in an effort to “perfect” it. This will assure that the covenant is seen as a legal document of rights and responsibilities rather than a symbol of relationship and commitment. The wrangling that goes on in this process can hurt relationships and has seriously hampered some cooperative ministries. It’s better not to have a covenant at all than to get into this situation.

The covenant can be formalized in a number of ways. This may be done by getting the approval of each church and the covenant being signed by the pastors and other officials from each of the congregations involved.

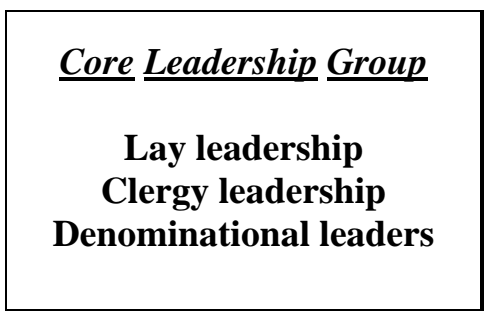
Another way to formalize the covenant is to take it around to each congregation for **everyone** who will to sign as a symbol of their support and involvement. After all, **cooperative ministries are made up of people, not churches.**

THREE:

ENLIST THE UNDERSTANDING, HELP AND SUPPORT OF A CORE GROUP OF KEY LEADERS.

One important thing any cooperative parish ministry must have is a **core group of key leaders**. These key leaders are people who work together from their respective positions to make cooperative ministry possible.

These key leaders come from several different positions to make up the core group:



Lay leadership from the churches of the cooperative parish ministry.

Clergy leadership from among the clergy who are assigned to the churches located in

the defined geographic area of the cooperative parish ministry.

Denominational leaders responsible for the churches of the cooperative parish ministry.

Let's take a look at three points concerning this important leadership group:

- * **What is a core group of key leaders?**
- * **What are some characteristics of key leaders?**
- * **How does the core leadership team work and what do they do?**

WHAT IS A CORE GROUP OF KEY LEADERS?

By a core group of leaders, we mean a group of persons holding strategic positions who are committed to taking the necessary steps to bring a new cooperative parish ministry into being or helping an ongoing cooperative parish ministry to work most effectively. This can involve many considerations, including:

- ⇒ Helping people see the church as larger than just their own congregation.
- ⇒ Working to ensure that only pastors who want to work cooperatively are appointed to the congregations in the cooperative parish ministry.
- ⇒ Designing a process to determine which congregations will initially be approached about becoming part of a new cooperative parish ministry or, in the case of an already-existing cooperative parish ministry, guiding decisions about redefining the area when necessary.
- ⇒ Helping people consider the long-term welfare of their church as well as short-term problems and possibilities.
- ⇒ Examining the current appointment configuration of the churches to determine if they are conducive to the cooperative ministry process and considering how any prospective changes should be dealt with.
- ⇒ Helping design an ongoing planning and evaluation process for the cooperative parish ministry.
- ⇒ Serving as a sounding board for ideas and concerns.
- ⇒ Considering ways to deal with problems that may arise.

3. Enlist the Understanding, Help and Support of a Core Group of Key Leaders.

The core leadership group sees that everything that needs to be done is done to get the cooperative parish ministry started and build an ongoing strategy for its growth and development.

In an ongoing cooperative parish ministry, the core leadership group monitors how the cooperative parish ministry is doing and what changes or adjustments are needed to further its continuing development. At this point they are more concerned with *how* the cooperative parish ministry is doing than with *what* it is doing. They are helping the process of development, not imposing their values as to what projects or activities the cooperative parish ministry considers.

The core leadership group should ask key questions about the process of developing the cooperative parish ministry, questions about what's being done and what's needed. These questions might include:

How is the cooperative parish ministry helping the local churches to minister better?

What are the churches doing to support the cooperative parish ministry?

How are we helping people to understand what working "together" means?

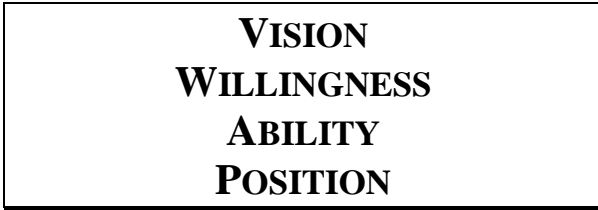
What administratively do we need to do to help the cooperative parish ministry along? Are there changes or adjustments that need to be made?

How is the cooperative parish ministry progressing?

What should we be planning for the future?

WHAT ARE SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF KEY LEADERS?

Key leaders in a cooperative parish ministry need to have **four** common characteristics:



- 1. A VISION of what cooperative ministry is and the difference it can make.**
- 2. The WILLINGNESS to work to make the vision a reality.**
- 3. The ABILITY to work to help bring about change.**
- 4. A POSITION that allows them to achieve this function.**

Let's take a closer look at each of these characteristics.

- 1. A VISION of what cooperative ministry is and the difference it can make.**

"Where there is no vision the people perish. . ."

Proverbs 29:18 KJV

Where there is no vision the people perish, and without a clear vision on the part of the core group of leaders, a cooperative parish ministry will perish pretty quickly, too.

3. Enlist the Understanding, Help and Support of a Core Group of Key Leaders.

Here we're talking about a common vision of purpose. Why are we promoting this idea of cooperative ministry? If the District Superintendent is simply using it to solve an appointment problem, while a lay leader thinks it will help her church get new members whose contributions will help the budget shortfall and one of the pastors sees it as a way to "grow the church," trouble is on the way.

It's necessary that the core leaders have a **common** idea of what cooperative ministry is and why it's necessary. Basic to this is a common understanding of the theological and scriptural reasons for cooperative ministry.

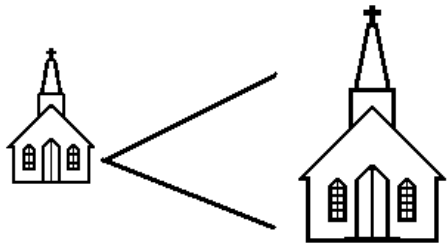
Beyond this common vision of **theological** purpose, these key leaders need to have an **operational** vision of how a cooperative parish ministry will work. They need to understand how pastors and congregations work together and have an appreciation for the benefits to everyone involved.

One of the skills needed is the ability to communicate to both pastors and laypersons what cooperative ministry can mean to them and their churches and how they will benefit from the cooperative parish ministry.

A further vision that is needed is the difference cooperative ministry can make to the long-term future of the church's presence in the community. Leaders need to be able to help people look beyond their present-day church to a better future for the church and the community through working together.

Together We Can

Usually, when we think about the future of the church, we describe it in terms that reflect what currently exists, only larger. We see our current congregation with four times the membership and a basketball court.



We need to help look beyond this simplistic straight-line projection to see what the future might be like if we change what we are doing **and the way that we do it.**

Tomorrow doesn't have to look like an enlargement of today. It can be very different. Perhaps it is this different future God calls us to that we can discover through working together in cooperative ministry.

2. The **WILLINGNESS** to work to make the vision a reality.

A vision is of limited benefit unless we also have the **willingness** to expend the effort to make it become reality. This willingness springs from our vision of a better future and drives us to do things differently and make the necessary changes to bring the vision to life.

The key here is that word we all profess to love but secretly avoid...**change**. If we are going to work together, we can't continue to think, act, and operate in the same old ways. We have to change.

3. Enlist the Understanding, Help and Support of a Core Group of Key Leaders.

- **Clergy must change** to see themselves as a team, leading not only their own congregations individually but the whole group of churches. We have to give up traditional measures of success to see our work not merely as adding more members to our own church but helping all of our churches to grow in ministry.
- **Lay leadership must change** to extend our area of concern beyond our own congregation to include all the churches in the area. We have to get beyond the mentality of thinking “it only counts if it happens within the four walls of my church” and see the church as all of us together.
- **Denominational leaders must change** the usual ways of operating, along with some expectations and procedures. If we are to have a cooperative parish ministry, we have to consider whether pastors will be a productive part of a team of clergy as well as serving the primary congregation to which they are appointed.

Future evaluation of clergy within the cooperative parish ministry should include how they work as team members, not just how they serve their individual congregations. Starting a cooperative parish ministry and keeping it working effectively requires active participation by denominational leaders to help in understanding the concept and showing their continuing support.

Without these critical changes in the way we see and do things, we will not be effective in bringing our vision of cooperative ministry to reality.

Willingness means we believe in and care enough about our vision that we change the way we have seen and done things in the past in order to make a new future possible.

Together We Can

3. The **ABILITY** to work to help bring about change.

Bringing about significant and lasting change takes certain abilities. Abilities that key leaders need include:

Abilities...

- to work with people,
- to analyze problems and find ways of dealing with them,
- to examine the geographical and demographic layout of the community and decide what response should be made,
- to consider the financial situations of the local churches and understand what effects these have,
- to deal with the needs of both the local churches and of the institutional church at higher levels,
- to communicate and interpret what is happening to local churches,
- to deal with the feelings of pastors already in place and those who may be arriving soon.

Fortunately, when we have a core group who work together well, these abilities can be supplied by the group as a whole. No one person must have them all.

Perseverance, the ability to stick to what we are doing until it reaches fruition. No one ever said starting a cooperative parish ministry would be easy, or that keeping one going doesn't take some work. To be effective, the core group must be willing to stick with the task, even through setbacks and discouragements.

There will certainly be reservations and even resistance to new ideas like cooperative ministry at both the local level and higher. Core leaders have to interpret over and over what they are doing and why.

3. Enlist the Understanding, Help and Support of a Core Group of Key Leaders.

There will be the temptation to fall back into doing things as we've always done them, simply out of habit or organizational inertia. Key leaders have to keep on track and constantly ask, "Is this the appropriate way to do it now that we're working together?"

At times we will suffer disappointments and be ready to give up. When this happens it is the key leaders who have to pull us back together, get us going again, and remind us that the race goes to those who keep running. Cooperative ministries succeed in the long run when leadership refuses to let them fail in the short run.

Longevity, the ability to stay around long enough to make a lasting difference. It's not good if every time the group begins to learn to work together and we are just about ready to accomplish something, a large part of the core leadership changes.

We all know that there are unavoidable and unforeseeable changes in life that we can't control, but there are also some that are avoidable, foreseeable, and controllable. Those who are part of the core group need to estimate the time commitment involved both in hours and in length of tenure and make a commitment so that the group can do its work without being disrupted by unnecessary turnovers of its membership.

Like any group of people, the core leadership need time to build a web of relationships among themselves so that they understand each other and learn to work well together. Like any other group, this takes building some history together... and that takes time.

Together We Can

What the core leadership group does is critical to beginning a new cooperative parish ministry or the health of an ongoing one. A reasonable length of stay by members of the group is necessary for it to be effective.

4. A **POSITION** that allows them to achieve this function.

Those who serve on the core leadership group should come from a position of recognized authority. Otherwise, why should anyone pay attention to the plans they make and the work they do? For some of the folks we're talking about, it's easy to determine what position they should be drawn from. Others take a little closer examination.

Denominational leaders - The prime denominational leader in the process is the one directly responsible for the churches involved, the one on the next "step" beyond the local churches. In the United Methodist system, this is the district superintendent while in, for instance, the Episcopal Church it is the bishop. These are the persons most directly responsible for churches and how they relate to each other. They have to make decisions that directly affect the local congregations, and are critical to the ongoing life and work of the cooperative parish ministry.

There may be more to this issue than is obvious at first glance, though. In some situations there may be a district or conference staff person with expertise and experience in cooperative ministry who is assigned to work with new and ongoing cooperative ministries. In these cases that person may be expected to take the denominational leader's "seat" on the core leadership team.

3. Enlist the Understanding, Help and Support of a Core Group of Key Leaders.

This is fine, and we may well profit from their experience and expertise. In the end, though, everything must be communicated back to the person making those key administrative decisions. That administrative leader will have to be brought on board to know what is happening and why, and understand what effects their actions will have on the cooperative parish ministry.

Lay leadership - Equally important to the core leadership group is the *position* from which lay leadership persons come. We're not only talking about their official position in the local church (lay leader, Sunday School teacher, etc.) but in what *position* they stand concerning the long-term progressive growth of their church. Obviously you want persons who are leaders in their local congregation, but this isn't determined only by what positions they hold. We're looking for those who are actively working to help their church look for a new and better future, whatever their formal role in the church.

Many times when we talk about lay leadership we mention that person in the congregation who may not hold a formal leadership position but tries to exert a controlling influence behind the scenes. Although this person will have to be recognized, they aren't usually the person we would want in the core leadership group.

Usually, these behind-the-scenes power-brokers want to hold on to their position. They need to keep their congregation enclosed within itself. If it opens up to outside influences and concerns, they fear they will lose control. Therefore, they are unlikely to be very interested in cooperative ministry, which moves things beyond their sphere of influence and power.

Together We Can

Rather, we are looking for lay leadership who want to help their congregations grow in openness as well as in numbers. We're looking for people who have the potential to see beyond the four walls of their own sanctuary and who are open to growth in their own personal faith and vision. This is the type of layperson who can help as we plan for the future.

As we choose lay leadership to be a part of the core leadership group, their theological understanding of the church and vision of a widening mission is as important as their official position in the local congregation.

Clergy leadership - A critical need in the selection of the core group of key leaders is the choosing of clergy leadership. This position is held by a clergy person who, in many cases, may be the director or coordinator of the cooperative parish ministry. As such, this person will be key, particularly in the first years of operation of a beginning cooperative parish ministry.

To fill this critical role in the key leadership, this person needs:

- A thorough understanding of cooperative ministry.

This understanding should include a working knowledge of why cooperative ministry is important and how it works, and a growing understanding of the nuts and bolts of cooperative ministry, including what has worked for others and what has proved to be problematic.

3. Enlist the Understanding, Help and Support of a Core Group of Key Leaders.

- A deep commitment to team ministry.

To lead other clergy in building a working relationship, this person must first evidence a commitment to team ministry themselves. One of the most important ways this is evidenced to other clergy and to the laity of the congregations is that this clergy leader is clearly more interested in remaining here and building the team than in personal advancement up the ministerial career ladder. Also, others will be watching to see if this person is content with working as the leader of a collegial group, or if they insist on being the *director* in an autocratic sense.

- A set of personal values that support working with others and helping congregations work together.

Personal values supporting what we do are very important. Other clergy and laypersons from the congregations will be more interested in what the clergy member of the leader team does than what is said.

People watch a clergy leader's actions to determine whether they are more interested in building a kingdom or forming a cooperative parish ministry.

Together We Can

For instance, will the clergy leader promote having activities at all the churches or try to schedule the bigger events at their own church? Will the clergy leader work for equity in compensation for all the clergy in the area, or try to arrange the alignment of the churches so that their own salary is larger?

- A length and breadth of experience in ministry that lends authority to their position.

The clergy member of the leader team needs to have some length of service in positions that lend authority to their leadership.

Although there is no particular number of years of experience set as a standard here, it's obvious that this would not usually be someone in a first appointment out of seminary. A person who has served as pastor of a congregation would be likely to have more authority, particularly among other clergy, than someone who has been an associate in a larger congregation or comes from a non-congregational position.

- An ability to communicate with and lead other clergy.

This all boils down to the question, "*Can they work with other preachers?*" Whenever we form a new cooperative parish ministry or redevelop an existing one, we are working on something with which many clergy have no experience. How will they understand it? Why should they want to risk it?

3. Enlist the Understanding, Help and Support of a Core Group of Key Leaders.

The decision to try something new comes from our trust in another person and how that person portrays the new experience to us. For the clergy, that will be the clergy member of the leader team. That must be someone other pastors can trust who will help them try this new experience of cooperative ministry.

The **position** for the clergy member of the core leadership team is one of being a leader of the clergy in the cooperative parish ministry. This may be someone who is already in the area and is an established leader among clergy. Other times it may be someone who will be appointed to the area with the specific intent of helping to form the cooperative parish ministry.

CAUTION! Sometimes there is an established clergy leader already in the area. This person may have many years of experience as a pastor, be serving a larger congregation, and be an identified member of the conference leadership. It may be that this is just the person we want for our clergy leader of the cooperative ministry, and then again maybe not.

Check carefully the items we listed as qualifications for the clergy earlier. Some highly experienced pastors have lots of investment in the status quo and may not be interested in changing it. Some have worked for years to get to the top of the heap and want to see the heap stay hierarchical, with themselves at the top. Some are willing to work at a group effort as long as they are in charge, but abandon it immediately when there is a need to share the authority.

Together We Can

The position the clergy leader must come from is one of cooperation, team-building, and building the cooperative parish ministry as a whole.

The make-up of the core leadership team may differ considerably according to the cooperative parish ministry's current stage of development.

In a new cooperative parish ministry, the leadership team might be quite different than in an established cooperative parish ministry where it could be made up of the chairperson of the lay council, the clergy coordinator or parish director and the district superintendent.

HOW DOES THE CORE LEADERSHIP GROUP WORK?

The core leadership group should work like a cooperative parish ministry or a local church...**together**. This means they need to:

- ⇒ Get together often enough to build a network of relationships that will give them a base from which to work.
- ⇒ Clarify a vision of what they are doing.
- ⇒ Analyze what each member of the group should do given the positions they represent.
- ⇒ Consider how that job should be carried out relative to the present stage of development of the cooperative parish ministry.
- ⇒ Follow through so that the cooperative parish ministry can move on in its development.

3. Enlist the Understanding, Help and Support of a Core Group of Key Leaders.

Some of the specific things we do will differ depending on whether we are dealing with a new or ongoing cooperative parish ministry, but the basic way we operate will be similar. The main point is that the way the core group operates should model the way we want the cooperative parish ministry and the local churches to act.

The core leadership group helps us get the cooperative parish ministry off to a good start and keeps us on track in helping local churches work together in ministry.

The core group does **not** become a controlling group that runs the cooperative parish ministry with no input from anyone else. It tries to get things off to a good start and then guides the process so that everyone can have a part in helping the cooperative parish ministry come about, making sure that everyone involved has their say in what it is and what it does. The members of the core leadership group should serve as *guides*, not controllers.

They help guide us by asking these important process questions:

- How is the cooperative parish ministry progressing?
- What can be done to move it forward?
- What should we be planning for the future?

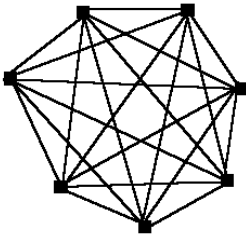
The core leadership group helps us get the cooperative parish ministry off to a good start, keeps us on track while making adjustments, and supplies resources needed to be effective in helping local churches minister together.

Together We Can

FOUR:
BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE
CLERGY AND STAFF TEAM AND AMONG
THE LAITY OF THE CONGREGATIONS
INVOLVED.

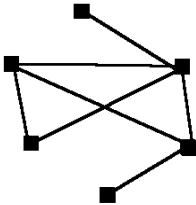
Relationships are the foundation on which all cooperative ministry is based.

Earlier we said that every local church can be understood as a web of relationships. A diagram of those relationships might look something like this:



STRONGER WEB

The dots represent the people in the congregation, and the lines represent the relationships they have built with each other. Lots of lines running from each person to several others signify a strong congregation with many ties to each other.

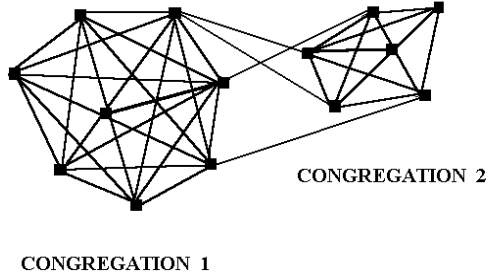


WEAKER WEB

Weaker congregations with fewer ties among members have fewer relational lines.

Together We Can

In cooperative ministries we talk about churches *relating* to each other, but churches don't relate to each other. **People do.** Cooperative ministry works when we help people from different congregations get to know each other and build these relationships. That might look like this:



As a few people from these two churches get to know each other, they establish relationships that will allow them to work together. This helps provide ways for other people from these congregations to get to know each other. This is the way relationships and cooperative ministries grow. Now let's go a little further with that idea.

IN COOPERATIVE MINISTRIES ALL OUR SUCCESSES AND FAILURES ARE ULTIMATELY DETERMINED BY RELATIONSHIPS.

In fact most of this can be expressed in three statements:

1. **Everything you do successfully will happen because of relationships.**
2. **A major cause of anything you fail at will be because of the breakdown of relationships.**
3. **Everything you do or choose not to do will have an effect on these relationships that determine your successes and failures.**

4. Build Relationships within the Clergy and Staff Team and Among the Laity of the Congregations Involved.

Let's look at those three statements and how they relate to cooperative parish ministry.

Everything you do successfully will happen because of relationships.

Joe shows up at the parish council meeting and announces, "I hear there's a great youth choir looking for places to perform on a trip through our area. We could invite them over. It might be an inspiration to our kids and fun too." Someone else says, "What if we all pitched in? We could give a special supper along with the program, take up an offering, and use it to help some mission work."

After some discussion the Council adopts these ideas and everyone takes them back to their own churches. As a result the youth choir sings to a full audience of people from several churches, a good supper is held, \$250 is raised for the Grace Children's Hospital in Haiti, and some of the youth of the cooperative ministry now want to start their own choir.

Why was this successful?

- A cooperative structure was in place and helped to make it possible.
- Relationships had been built so that several persons from a number of congregations were present and felt free to share ideas with each other.

Together We Can

- The relationships were strong enough to allow the free flow and open evaluation of ideas. Would the idea work? Were the various congregations really interested in the idea? Did they really feel free to say yes or no?
- There was a commitment, once a plan had been approved, to take it back to their congregations and support it...to follow through.
- When the event came, those who planned it took part and encouraged their congregations to come with them. The relationship was such that they saw this as a joint effort and worked together to make it a success.

A major cause of anything you fail at will be because of the breakdown of relationships.

Joe shows up at the parish council meeting and announces, "I hear there's a great youth choir looking for places to perform on a trip through our area. I talked to our pastor about it. We invited them to come, and they'll be at our church on August third at 7 p.m. We're going to give a supper and use whatever we make off it to support a mission project. I make a motion that this be a parish project and for everybody to take part. How about it?"

Someone seconds the motion and it is unanimously adopted with no discussion. A few weeks later the visiting choir sings to an audience of people from Joe's church and four other persons from the cooperative ministry. A \$100 offering is taken for the mission. A great deal of the food prepared by the people of the hosting church in expectation of a much larger crowd is left uneaten, and people from that congregation ask Joe, "Didn't the cooperative ministry vote to support this?"

*4. Build Relationships within the Clergy and Staff Team and
Among the Laity of the Congregations Involved.*

What happened here?

- Joe violated the basic covenantal relationship of the cooperative parish ministry in the first place by the way he presented the project. He wasn't really asking the council to consider an idea for all the churches. He was trying to get them to come and support something he had already decided on and set the date, place, and time. It was all Joe's idea; no one else on the council had any input into it.
- Joe "ambushed" the council and put them in a position where they couldn't say no by making an official motion to adopt **his** project and do what **he** wanted instead of offering the idea for consideration and possible changes. His was the "take it or leave it" approach rather than a "here's something to consider" presentation.
- Joe's pastor knew about this, but didn't do much to help the relationship with the other pastors or the council by allowing Joe to drop it on them in this manner without making the other pastors or the council aware of it.
- Since the council members had no real say in making this plan and no real choice in saying yes or no to it, they felt no real ownership of it. They didn't go back and promote it in their own congregations. When the night of the program came, they didn't feel any commitment to show up. This might be called the "y'all come" approach. Joe set things up and then announced, "y'all come." When the event happened the "y'alls" didn't come...and they seldom do when things are done this way...because it is Joe's event, not theirs.

Together We Can

- The breakdown of relationship occurred when the council members were treated not as co-workers to share in the decision-making and accomplishment, but simply as pew-sitters to fill the sanctuary so Joe could feel successful because there was a “good turn-out” for his program.

Everything you do or choose not to do will have an effect on these relationships that determine your successes and failures.

In these two examples, we see the tremendous differences good relationships, or the lack thereof, make in the success or failure of things we try to do. Relationships have to be formed and nurtured intentionally. They take continuous maintenance and care. If we ignore them, they will deteriorate or never be formed in the first place. This says a lot about what we do or fail to do in cooperative ministry.

THE NATURE OF RELATIONSHIPS IN COOPERATIVE MINISTRY

Now let’s take a careful look at that word **relationship**. Recently this word has become one of the most overworked in our language and can mean all kinds of things with lots of different connotations. Take a look at these usages:

- *“I think Janet was hurt by having to leave a bad **relationship**.”*
- *“His **relationship** with those in authority is the source of most of his problems.”*

Obviously these sentences imply very different meanings for the word. So what do we mean when we talk about **relationships** in cooperative ministry?

4. Build Relationships within the Clergy and Staff Team and Among the Laity of the Congregations Involved.

That type of relationship should include:

- **Communication** - We should be able to share with each other our hopes, visions, and dreams...our concerns, wants, and needs...our realistic evaluation of what will work and what won't...and our identity, who we are and who our churches are.
- **Honesty** - We need to communicate what we really think and feel. Will Joe's latest idea work or not? Why? Will we personally support this plan? Or are we just being "nice"...willing to approve it, do nothing, and watch it fail?
- **Personal investment** - Are we willing to put in the time and effort to make this relationship work so that we can minister together? Or do we just expect it to happen without our having to do much?
- **Continuing participation** - Will we support the group with our presence at meetings, fellowship times, and whenever the plans we've made together call for it? Cooperative ministry works through participation, not just representation.
- **Reliability** - Will we be reliable, so that we are a part of the ongoing process of building the cooperative parish ministry and the relationships that allow it to work? Or will we just show up now and then, so we can say we attended while not really becoming involved?
- **Predictability** - Are we willing to work under the guideline of "no surprises," taking our ideas through the process and allowing others to evaluate them and suggest changes? Or do we attempt end runs as Joe did with the visiting youth choir?

Together We Can

- **Commitment and trust** - We need to feel that we can expect and will receive communication, honesty, personal investment, continuing participation, reliability, and predictability from each other.

It might be noted that these qualities desirable in cooperative ministry are quite similar to those we hope for in a local church, work environment, family, marriage, or any other productive and satisfying relationship. If we assume that people do want to have these kinds of relationships with each other, the real question is “How do we help build relationships that enable us to work together?”

HELPING BUILD RELATIONSHIPS IN COOPERATIVE MINISTRY

Let’s look then at some suggestions for building relationships in the cooperative parish ministry:

1. Meet frequently enough that people in the group get to know each other.

Parish councils, for instance, seem to do much better meeting monthly than if they only meet every other month, quarterly, or less frequently. A group that meets quarterly sees each other only four times a year...and if someone misses a meeting, it is six months before they are with the group again.

Even groups meeting bi-monthly are together only six times a year. Since there is usually some turnover in the membership each year, every sixth meeting is basically a reforming of the group, starting the process again. Think about what effect it would have if your local church got together only once every two months, or four times a year.

4. Build Relationships within the Clergy and Staff Team and Among the Laity of the Congregations Involved.

Opportunities for Relationship Building

(at meeting times of group)

Months designated for meetings

	J	F	M	A	M	Ju	Jl	A	S	O	N	D
Quart-erly	☺			☺			☺			☺		
Bi-monthly	☺		☺		☺		☺		☺		☺	
Mon-thly	☺	☺	☺	☺	☺	☺	☺	☺	☺	☺	☺	☺

By contrast, groups meeting monthly see each other every 30 days or so and have a chance to build a group identity in their 12 meetings each year. They get to know each other much better and establish a common history. Newcomers can become part of something ongoing. This is particularly true if there are also a planning retreat and recreational and fellowship times through the year.

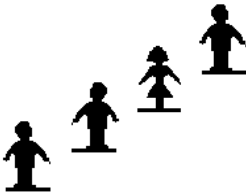
This sounds like a lot of involvement - and it is. But the parish council is modeling a cooperative relationship to all the people back in their congregations. It is the council's relationship and that of the clergy staff from which most people will mold their ideas about what the cooperative parish ministry is like.

One thing we can be sure of...in the absence of meeting together, nothing happens.

2. Make sure the staff models relationship-building for the rest of the cooperative parish ministry.

The relationship of the clergy with each other in the cooperative parish ministry is critical to the success or failure of the whole venture. Over and over again it's been shown that cooperative ministries do much better when the staff meets weekly for prayer, Bible study, fellowship and sharing, as well as to carry out whatever business is on the table at that time.

One of the things we are trying to do here is learn how to work together as part of a team. This is not always easy for pastors. We have been trained to work alone and come from a system that rewards us individually for what our congregations do. We feel that our personal success and value is based on the size of our congregation, how many members we take in, the growth in the budget, the amount of the salary, and whether we pay all our apportionments.



Anyone who doubts this should see a group of pastors who have somehow gotten hold of the graduated salary scale used in appointment-making. All the questions are related to “Where am I on the list? Who’s ahead of me and behind me? How in the world did he get up there?”

The point is, we have gotten used to thinking of ourselves in a “who’s-ahead-and-who’s-behind” hierarchical and competitive system.

4. Build Relationships within the Clergy and Staff Team and Among the Laity of the Congregations Involved.

Breaking out of this kind of mold only happens when the team we work with becomes important to us and we get some of our self-value from that relationship rather than solely from what's happening in our own congregation and our ranking in the system. Coming together to support each other is critical to building this kind of relationship.

We need to be together regularly on an ongoing basis. There is no such thing as shortcutting the process with just a few minutes here and there of "quality time." Many groups have discovered that when staffs decide to meet only occasionally or just "when we need to meet," their relationship declines and the whole cooperative parish ministry starts to head downhill. The message is, "We're not really interested and don't want to be bothered. Don't call us unless there's an emergency."

One other danger sign is the pastor who is just "too busy" or "doesn't have time" for staff meetings. It's interesting that other pastors in the team can find the time. Pastors in larger multiple-staff churches are able to find time for staff meetings. The bishop and cabinet manage to work out regular times to meet. Even the President of the United States, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Cabinet have time to meet, but this pastor is just "too busy."

The four pastors of the Lakeville Parish gather each Monday morning for fellowship and a staff meeting. Just as the coffee is ready and the three pastors present are pouring themselves a cup, the phone rings and Jean, the parish director, answers it:

"Hello...Yes, I see...Well, we're sorry you can't make it. I do hope you can be at the Parish Council meeting Thursday night...Okay, well, thanks for calling."

Together We Can

“Who was that?”

“Bill, he’s got someone in the hospital he has to visit.”

“Right, this is the third week in a row he’s had someone in the hospital who just had to be visited first thing on Monday morning.”

“Yeah, it’s real interesting how all his people seem to get deathly ill every Sunday night.”

Sometimes there is a pastor who always has an important meeting, or a study group, or an urgent hospital call to make just at the time of the staff meeting or other cooperative ministry function. Usually this is an avoidance technique that says, “I don’t want to be part of this. Here’s my excuse.”

But think of how different this situation could be if we build on the idea of caring for and sharing with each other:

The four pastors of the Lakeville Parish gather each Monday morning for fellowship and a staff meeting. Just as the coffee is ready and the three pastors present are pouring themselves a cup, the phone rings and Jean, the parish director, answers it:

“Hello...Oh, I’m sorry to hear that. OK, we’ll go ahead until you get here.”

***4. Build Relationships within the Clergy and Staff Team and
Among the Laity of the Congregations Involved.***

“Who was that?”

*“Bill, he’s got someone in the hospital he has to go visit,
but he said he’ll be here as soon as he can.”*

*“Right, We all have those emergencies, but you can
always count on Bill to show up.”*

*“Yeah, it really helped when some of my folks were in
that accident while I was gone on vacation and he went
right to the hospital to see about them. It’s great to have
someone like that with us.”*

Here, Bill’s call to the meeting of the other pastors said, “I have an emergency, but I want you to know it’s important to me to be a part of the group, and I care about you.” This type of attitude opens the door for him to perform an important ministry at a time when he is really needed and build a deeper relationship with a fellow pastor.

The fact is, if you’re going to play on the team you have to come to the practices. If there is a problem with the scheduling, frequency, or anything else having to do with staff meetings or other aspects of the cooperative parish ministry, we need to lay it on the table, work it out together, and then be part of making it work.

Highland Hills

Cooperative Parish

Weekly Staff Meeting

Rev. Charles Azender Rev. Jean Boyd
Rev. Scott Foster Rev. Troy Petersen

Agenda

1. Prayer concerns
2. Personal sharing
3. Bible study
4. How's it going in your church?
5. Things we need to do in the Cooperative Ministry
6. Upcoming parish council meeting
7. Other sharing, lunch together for those who can stay

Additional Information: Parish Council, Thursday,
7pm, Arundel UMC.

*Let's all continue our support for the Grace
Children's Hospital project.*

4. Build Relationships within the Clergy and Staff Team and Among the Laity of the Congregations Involved.

The content of the meeting is just as important as its frequency. Every staff meeting should allow time for:

- ✓ Bible study.
- ✓ Personal sharing.
- ✓ Prayer concerns and prayer.
- ✓ Talking about how things are going.
- ✓ Sharing and helping those who have a special need.
- ✓ Taking care of the “business” at hand.
- ✓ Hearing from anyone working on special projects.
- ✓ Open fellowship time.

To allow for this, some groups have found it useful to allow one morning each week for the staff meeting and then have lunch together...or to meet for breakfast and then go to the staff meeting. The important thing is to allow enough time for these concerns and not be constantly rushing off and breaking up what you are trying to do as a group.

The way we do this is to set aside a time, say Monday morning from 9:00 -11:00, and covenant to hold on to that time to be together, not letting other things detract from it. Another part of that covenant is that we will start on time and end on time, so that everyone knows what the boundaries are.

We need to have the sense that this is an important time...just as important as the other things that we do. It is here we get our recharging and support that helps us in doing all the thousand-and-one things pastors are called to do. The question is not, “Can we afford time to have a staff meeting?” Rather, it is “Can we afford to do without it?”

Together We Can

In their meeting together and relationship-building, the clergy are modeling to their congregations what it means to work together cooperatively. People understand that the old rivalries of trying to build up one's own congregation without regard for others are not the case with this group of pastors. We are concerned about the whole church as well as the congregations that we serve. People see that these clergy support each other rather than undercut or criticize their colleagues.

Through the working together of the clergy and parish council, people see what cooperative ministry is really all about, working together to minister for the good of all.

3. Make relationship building an important part of every event.

Every time any group comes together in a cooperative parish ministry, relationship-building should be on the agenda. We need to ask ourselves questions like:

- ? Do we know each other?
- ? Do we know what congregation each person is from?
- ? Do we know anything about that congregation?
- ? What exciting has happened lately in our churches?
- ? What is our great hope for the future?

Relationship-building is important whether the event is a fifth-Sunday sing, a planning retreat, or a meeting of a task force to plan training for Vacation Bible School teachers. Each time they get together, people are asking questions.

*4. Build Relationships within the Clergy and Staff Team and
Among the Laity of the Congregations Involved.*

These questions are:

Who are you?

What's it like where you are?

What can we do together to make it better for all of us?

The type of gathering may lead us to do this sharing in different ways. Sharing can be structured as well as unstructured. At a mass gathering we can ask those from each church to stand up as congregations and tell us one exciting thing they're doing. At a planning session people might work in small groups of five or six, where each person is from a different church so that they get to know more about each other and their churches during this time.

And don't forget the unstructured "cookie hour" where people have a chance just to talk to each other for a while. Try to set this up so people will stay for it. One way to do this is to have it as an "intermission" in the middle of an event or meeting rather than at the end. The important thing is to have some structured and some unstructured sharing and relationship-building time as part of every gathering.

One additional thought. The individual who chimes in at the beginning of every meeting with "I move we adjourn" as his idea of a little joke needs to be helped to see the destructiveness of this behavior or be removed from the group very soon. What he's saying is "I don't really want to take part in this and don't value what's going on here. I want to be the center of attention, so I'll try to preempt things in this way." This type of attitude is destructive to relationship-building and needs to be dealt with right away.

Together We Can

You can be sure this person will continue to try to draw attention to themselves and derail the cooperative process.

4. Design events to help those involved in the cooperative parish ministry only at the local church level get to know people from other congregations.

Some cooperative ministries have done well at building a good relationship among the clergy and those who serve on the parish council or in a task force working on a cooperative project. That's good, but it doesn't go far enough. There are many laypeople in each congregation who may never serve on the parish council or even on a task force.

To them, the cooperative parish ministry and what it's all about may remain a mystery. They need to experience cooperative ministry so they can understand it. Do some things to give them that opportunity. Try a few of these:

- ⇒ Move the parish council meeting around from church to church and invite members of the congregation to attend the meeting when its at their church.
- ⇒ Form a cooperative parish ministry choir and sing at special services in each church.
- ⇒ Every once in a while, go as a clergy team or parish council group to one of each church's special events, like a homecoming or work day on their parsonage, just to show the cooperative spirit of caring.
- ⇒ Have a youth meeting or rally across the whole cooperative parish ministry so that young people can get to know each other and experience the cooperative feeling of being together.

4. Build Relationships within the Clergy and Staff Team and Among the Laity of the Congregations Involved.

- ⇒ Have a training session for Sunday School teachers from across the cooperative parish ministry, or a day to get together to look over the upcoming material and share ideas...or a day to look at this year's Vacation Bible School material and brainstorm ways to use it.
- ⇒ Get the cooperative parish ministry together to do a repair project on one of the churches or make it handicap-accessible...or to help with a repair on the home of someone who needs help...or to build playground equipment.
- ⇒ Have a special time for senior citizens from all the churches to meet together and enjoy fellowship time and a special program. This could become a regular event. Although not all of these folks may be involved in the active leadership of their church, they carry a lot of weight on the opinion side of things. Their good feelings toward the cooperative effort will always help things along.

You get the idea...anything you do to help people come together, build relationships, and experience the good feeling of cooperation is a step forward. Make plans to help some of these things happen.

5. Spend some special focused times with each other.

Some groups just go on year after year doing things the same way, never stopping to look at and take stock of themselves. New people joining those groups experience something like trying to get on a moving train.

Together We Can

It's a good idea to start each new year with a retreat for the parish council and the clergy. This is a special time to ask some important questions:

- * Who are we?
- * What are we here to do?
- * What has this group been doing?
- * Do we need to make some changes?
- * How will we operate to help this happen?

In the process of dealing with these questions, we hope to get to know each other, build some ongoing relationships, help our new members feel included, and make some plans for the coming year.

During this time people are always testing and asking themselves questions:

“Who are these people?”

“How will I fit in here?”

“What am I supposed to do?”

*“Is this going to be something that is
valuable to me?”*

The purpose here is to help them find the answers to these unspoken questions.

In order to do this, it's good to get away together for a while. Find a special place not too close by and not too far away. The idea is to have that feeling of “retreat”...going away to a special place for a special time to achieve a special purpose.

4. Build Relationships within the Clergy and Staff Team and Among the Laity of the Congregations Involved.

To do this you need adequate time. Two hours in the basement of one of the churches on Tuesday night won't get it. A twenty-four hour period or longer is good. You're not here just to "do business," but to do the real work of leading the cooperative parish ministry...building a working relationship, establishing a group identity, and learning to lead these congregations in ministering together.

It's a good idea to bring in an outside resource person for this retreat. This should be someone who's well-versed in cooperative ministry and in processing group work, and who can help you look at yourselves and your ministry during this important time together. The viewpoint and insights shared by someone from beyond the boundaries of your group may be invaluable.

The experiences you have during such a retreat can be followed up in your monthly parish council meetings and maybe with another one-day retreat later in the year.

A further extension of this idea is to send a group of your people to training events during the year. These people can then come back and share their experiences with others in the council and across the cooperative parish ministry.

The clergy team of a cooperative parish ministry should also have an overnight retreat each year. If changes have brought new pastors into the group, time is needed to get to know these new persons and help them become a part of the team. Also, we need to share the history of what we have been doing and how we usually do things. A new covenant is in the process of being formed here.

Together We Can

Even when there is no change in the clergy team, time to go apart, think about our mission, and consider God's will for our future together is very helpful.

Finally, intentionally design in a few recreational times during the year. Meeting, thinking, and working together are all very well, but sometimes working relationships are made even stronger over a hot dog or a bowl of homemade ice cream.

A FINAL THOUGHT ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS

Now let's go back to that earlier statement,

Everything you do or choose not to do will have an effect on these relationships that determine your successes and failures.

We can make all kinds of choices about what we choose to do or not to do to build relationships in the cooperative parish ministry. We can choose to have the parish council meet only quarterly, and make it difficult for this group to get to know each other since they see each other so seldom. Or we can choose to be together more frequently, have a parish council fellowship night, and start the year with an overnight retreat to get to know each other, do some planning, and work together as a group on building those all-important relationships.

We can choose for the clergy team to have a weekly staff meeting with time for Bible study, sharing personal concerns, and prayer, and ensure that they have a chance to build a caring and trusting relationship. Or we can choose

*4. Build Relationships within the Clergy and Staff Team and
Among the Laity of the Congregations Involved.*

to come together only monthly, bi-monthly, or “when we need to meet” and see what results that brings.

We can choose to have special events to help the people of our congregations get to know each other through sings, suppers, picnics...to take the time to go to each other’s homecomings and revivals to show we care...to help the people from another church reroof their parsonage...to make sure the cookie hour is an important relationship-building part of every event. Or we can choose not to do these things.

The choice is ours. We can take the time to intentionally build, nurture, and care for the relationships that make cooperative ministry work and enjoy the successes of working together...or we can skip this and wonder why so many of our plans seem to fall apart in failure.

Whatever you choose, keep in mind that...

In cooperative ministries all our successes and failures are ultimately determined by relationships.

Together We Can

FIVE:
ESTABLISH A PRODUCTIVE LAY-CLERGY
WORKING PATTERN.

Have you ever experienced a church meeting that went something like this?

“It looks like everyone’s here, so let’s get started. Welcome to our parish council meeting, and thanks to Rocky Springs for having us. We sure appreciate those good refreshments. I’m from Wesley Church and my preacher asked me to serve as chairman, so I agreed to give it a try. We’ve got a lot to talk about. Rev. Smith, what do you have for us tonight?”

(Rev. Smith, one of the clergy of the cooperative parish ministry, explains a project he is leading for the group.)

“Good. We sure appreciate what you are doing. Now Sister Kate, what do you have for us.?”

(Sister Kate, one of the clergy of the cooperative parish ministry, describes in detail a project she is leading for the group.)

“Well, that’s good. Now Pastor Jim, is there anything you have for us tonight?”

(Pastor Jim, one of the clergy of the cooperative parish ministry, goes on at length about a project he is leading for the group.)

“Well, I know you’ll report back to us about that next month when we meet over at Faith. Now if no one has anything else, we’ll ask one of our ministers to dismiss us with a prayer until our next meeting.”

(Note: This example is not fictional, but came from an all-too-real parish council meeting.)

Together We Can

So goes another parish council meeting. Some good things are going on here:

- The council is chaired by a layperson from one of the local churches.
- The pastors are active and supportive.
- The council meets regularly, moving around from church to church.
- There are a number of different activities going on.

But there are also some things we ought to be concerned about:

- The lay chair of the council is not really leading, but just “calling the role” of the pastors who provide all the input to the meeting.
- The pastors are doing all the legwork for whatever the group is doing.
- The laity are not really getting to work together or have an opportunity to build relationships with each other.
- There is not an opportunity for people to bring new ideas to the meeting. It’s just a report time for what the pastors are doing.
- There isn’t really a working relationship between the laity and clergy since the clergy are doing the work and running the show.

It’s questionable that our example here is a productive working pattern. But what does that mean? What do we want in a productive lay-clergy working pattern?

5. *Establish a Productive Lay-Clergy Working Pattern.*

WHAT IS A PRODUCTIVE LAY-CLERGY WORKING PATTERN?

A productive lay-clergy working pattern is one in which laity and clergy find ways to work together that complement each other's roles, further the development of cooperative ministry and help carry out its purpose effectively.

Note that we are talking about a lay-clergy working *pattern*, not just a working relationship. By relationship we mean how we interact, how we deal with each other, how we feel about the way things are being done, and how we reach agreement on the way we are do them.

A working *pattern* involves what we do and how we do it. It may be possible to have a good working *relationship* without having a very productive working *pattern*.

For example, we might all agree for a small group to determine what we will do and assign others to carry out those plans. If everyone is in agreement, that might be acceptable in the sense of the relationship, but it would not be the most productive working pattern.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO HAVE A PRODUCTIVE LAY-CLERGY WORKING PATTERN?

It seems obvious that if a cooperative parish ministry is going to achieve anything of ongoing significance it will take both clergy and laity working together to accomplish it. In fact, the very life of any cooperative parish ministry is dependent on this.

Here's why this working pattern is so important:

Clergy act as **filters**. One of their functions is to tell laypersons what's really important. Every day they get several pieces of mail from the district, conference, mission agencies, camps,



educational institutions, and more. Each of these pieces of mail is saying, "Look at me. Here's something your church ought to know about and should be doing."

The majority of these items go straight to the recycle bin, but every now and then the pastor says, "This is great, just what

we need" and heads off with that item to show to someone in the church.

If you think this filtering function isn't valid, picture this:

The pastor shows up at the monthly board meeting with a large box, pours out on the table all the items mentioned above and says, "Here's what came in the mail this month. They're all important. I think we should do all of them."

5. Establish a Productive Lay-Clergy Working Pattern.

Churches rely on their pastor for this *filtering* function. If the clergy communicate by their attendance, involvement, enthusiasm and support that the cooperative parish ministry and what it's doing is important, the laity get the message.

If clergy convey that the cooperative parish ministry isn't important, they get that message, too. For any cooperative effort to be effective, clergy have to be involved, active and enthusiastic and communicate this to their congregations.

Laity have an important *validating* function that goes hand-in-hand with the filtering role of the clergy. Many congregations will listen as their pastor tells them what is important for that church to do, but they won't really commit themselves to anything until one of their number finally says, "Yes, that'll work for us."

Also, clergy don't stay around very long, there aren't many of them and their abilities are limited. If we have a cooperative parish ministry with four clergy who do all the planning and legwork, and sooner or later they all move, the cooperative parish ministry is cut short.

No matter how dedicated, interested, and involved these clergy are, the cooperative parish ministry will be limited to the abilities of these four people for the relatively short amount of time they are all together.

Laypeople reach beyond this. They have a larger vision of the community, the many skills needed for varying programs and activities, the length of residence in the community to add continuity, and sufficient numbers to get things done.

Together We Can

Take a look at the differing gifts clergy and laity bring to the working pattern:

DIFFERING ABILITIES OF CLERGY AND LAITY

<u>CLERGY</u>	<u>LAITY</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Filter out important opportunities from all the possibilities.• Provide links to church structure beyond the local community.• Help coordinate what the cooperative ministry is doing with district, annual conference, etc.• Offer a larger vision of the Church and its mission locally and globally.• Offer skills geared to church-oriented activities such as lay speaking, leading Bible studies, and other in-church activities.• Serve as specialists in areas of life having to do with church concerns and involvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Validate activities and provide energy, ability, and people to do them.• Provide links to community structures and leaders.• Provide energy, effort, and coordination across the community.• Offer a vision of the church as it applies to the local community and local needs.• Provide diverse skills from all areas of life while including church and community involvement.• Serve collectively as generalists in all human endeavors and individually as specialists in many varying fields.

5. Establish a Productive Lay-Clergy Working Pattern.

This helps us see the tremendous strengths offered when clergy and laity use their skills and abilities together, especially when we are not hampered by limiting ourselves to only the clergy and laity from one congregation. One of the strengths of cooperative ministry is that it helps us to move beyond the limitations of one congregation to combine all our skills and strengths when clergy and laity work together through a productive pattern.

ATTRIBUTES OF A PRODUCTIVE LAY-CLERGY WORKING PATTERN

Let's take a look at some of the attributes necessary for a productive lay-clergy working pattern:

- **Clergy and laity are interested, involved and active in what the cooperative parish ministry is doing.**
- **Clergy and laity both have a part in all levels of the cooperative parish ministry's work, including leading, planning, and carrying out activities.**
- **Clergy and laity work together to determine the staffing needs of the cooperative parish ministry.**
- **Clergy and laity do long-range planning and determine the future of the cooperative parish ministry.**
- **Clergy and laity work together in the local congregations to build support for the cooperative parish ministry.**
- **Clergy and laity respect each other's interdependent roles and complement each other's efforts.**

Let's take a moment to examine each of these.

Together We Can

- **Clergy and laity are interested, involved and active in what the cooperative parish ministry is doing.**

It takes clergy and laity who are interested, involved, and active to make a productive cooperative parish ministry. Both clergy and laity should feel that the cooperative parish ministry belongs to them, not just to a small controlling group. This is quite different from a situation where one side is involved and the other is just along for the ride.

This is also true for individual congregations in the cooperative parish ministry. Every church should be fully involved with both clergy and laity taking part in the work of the parish council and participating in the cooperative parish ministry as a whole. Cooperative ministry is about participation, not just representation.

- **Clergy and laity both have a part in all levels of the cooperative parish ministry's work, including leading, planning, and carrying out activities.**

Both clergy and laity should have an equal part in the visioning, planning, carrying out and evaluating of all cooperative ministry functions. Neither side is seen as the leader with the other being the followers.

This was the problem with our example at the beginning of this chapter, where the clergy were doing everything and the laity served mainly as an audience for them. The lay leadership of the cooperative parish ministry should really be leading along with the clergy, not just presiding at meetings.

5. Establish a Productive Lay-Clergy Working Pattern.

- **Clergy and laity work together to determine the staffing needs of the cooperative parish ministry.**

The making of appointments dramatically affects the entire life of the cooperative parish ministry. Each individual appointment affects not only that local church but also all the churches in the cooperative parish ministry. In the past, appointment-making has been exclusively a clergy role. This needs to change to involve laity so that they become part of the consultation and decision-making process that has such an effect on them and their church.

- **Clergy and laity do long-range planning and determine the future of the cooperative parish ministry.**

If the cooperative parish ministry belongs to both clergy and laity, then decisions affecting the future belong to both also. Both clergy and laity need to take part in long-range planning for the cooperative parish ministry. This goes beyond the usual program planning and choosing of officers to set the overall direction of the cooperative parish ministry and determine its goals and direction.

- **Clergy and laity work together in the local congregations to build support for the cooperative parish ministry.**

In the local church, clergy and laity should both be visibly involved in promoting the value of cooperation, the cooperative parish ministry itself, and the various ministries that are going on in the cooperative parish ministry. Clergy and laity play differing roles in validating the cooperative parish ministry's effort and activity. Clergy help us decide what is important for us to be doing. Laity validate this by responding to what they feel is right for their congregations.

Together We Can

- **Clergy and laity respect each other's interdependent roles and complement each other's efforts.**

Clergy and laity need to understand they have differing roles that complement each other. Cooperative ministry can help clergy and laity utilize this to work together better than would be possible otherwise.

Now that we've talked about what a productive working pattern for clergy and laity is, why it's important to have one, and what some of the attributes of a productive working pattern are, we need to look at...

WAYS TO HELP BUILD A PRODUCTIVE LAY-CLERGY WORKING PATTERN.

Let's think about some practical ways to help build a productive working pattern. We'll consider:

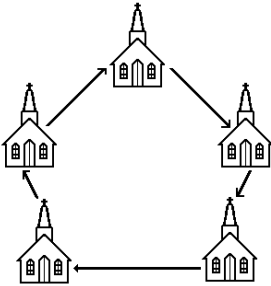
- Ways to help ensure that clergy and laity are interested, involved and active in what the cooperative parish ministry is doing.
- Ways to help clergy and laity have a part in all levels of the cooperative parish ministry's work, including leading, planning, and carrying out activities.
- Ways to allow clergy and laity to work together to determine the future of the cooperative parish ministry.
- Ways to see that clergy and laity work together in the local congregations to build support for the cooperative parish ministry and what it is doing.
- Ways to help clergy and laity respect each other's interdependent roles and complement each other.

Let's look closely at each of these.

5. Establish a Productive Lay-Clergy Working Pattern.

Ways to help ensure that clergy and laity are interested, involved and active in what the cooperative parish ministry is doing.

- People seem to be more interested in things that happen on their own turf. To capitalize on this feeling, move all the activities of the cooperative parish ministry around from church to church and to the various communities in the cooperative parish ministry.



Have the parish council alternate meetings among the churches. If you have fellowship activities like a sing or some sports event, move them around also.

- Some cooperative ministries have progressive worship services or dinners that move around and touch every church in the cooperative parish ministry in one day. Be sure to invite the people of each congregation you visit to the next activity of the cooperative parish ministry at whatever location it will be held.
- Have clergy and laity work together visibly in events held in the local churches. Don't let either clergy or laity dominate the leadership of any one event...and try not to get stuck in the rut where one of the pastors always has to give the opening prayer or the benediction. Think about the theology of having only the clergy offer the prayer and talk to God. Let the way you do things show people visibly that clergy and laity work together in the cooperative parish ministry.

Ways to help clergy and laity have a part in all levels of the cooperative parish ministry's work, including leading, planning, and carrying out activities.

- See that both laity and clergy are involved at every level of the cooperative parish ministry. Every planning group, council meeting, or task force should have both lay and clergy working together.

Don't fall into the trap of having a small group of either laity or clergy make plans and then spring them on the other. And don't come up with ideas as a council and then pass them off to be implemented by a task force made up of only laity or only clergy.

Following either of those patterns puts either the laity or the clergy into the position of just ratifying an idea someone else thought of or merely carrying out someone else's plan. Neither is a productive working pattern. We need for both clergy and laity to feel ownership of the idea *and* how it is carried out.

- Have a combined lay and clergy team lead a planning retreat for the cooperative parish ministry. Let the team work together to plan the process for the day and lead the group through it. Make sure that clergy and laity share the "up-front" time leading the group equally.
- Do an annual report session by the parish council, led by both lay and clergy members of the council. Present it at each local church. Use pictures, videotape, a skit, posters...any way to make it interesting and informative.

5. Establish a Productive Lay-Clergy Working Pattern.

Ways to allow clergy and laity to work together to determine the future of the cooperative parish ministry.

- Work with your district superintendent to help laity have a voice in how pastors for the cooperative parish ministry are chosen. Since pastors serving any church in the cooperative parish ministry affect what all of you are trying to do, it would seem logical to have either a cooperative parish ministry representative meet with the pastor-parish relations committee of each charge or local church.

Some groups have a pastor-parish relations committee for the whole cooperative parish ministry with members from all the local churches. (There is precedence for this in the charge-wide pastor-parish relations committees we have had for many years.) The point is, people should have a voice in decisions that affect them, and this is one decision that will affect everyone in the cooperative parish ministry.

- Have a day when representatives from all the cooperative ministries in your district or annual conference sit down with the bishop and district superintendent to talk about appointment-making procedures and the way cooperative ministries are dealt with in your area.
- Have a time for laity and clergy to talk about the long-range future of each local church, the future of the cooperative parish ministry and how those fit together.



Where do we see ourselves now? Where are we going? What will we be like, and what will we be doing in one year...five years...ten years? Is that the future we would like to have? Is it the future God is calling us to? What can we do about it together now?

Ways to see that clergy and laity work together in the local congregations to build support for the cooperative parish ministry and what it is doing.

- Have a report-back time to the local church after every cooperative activity. Make sure to involve the pastor and laypeople who took part. This could be a brief report after a parish council meeting or a sharing time with youth who went to a cooperative parish ministry youth activity.

- Have a column in the church newsletter written by lay people about their involvement with the cooperative parish ministry. This could be a further report on the council meeting or parish activities, or maybe a “what being part of a cooperative parish ministry means to me” piece. Let a number of different people write this column from time to time.



- Have a time at meetings of the local church administrative board or council to talk about questions like “What are we doing through the cooperative parish ministry?”, “What could we offer to help others?”, and “What could the cooperative parish ministry do that would be helpful to us?” Do this at a session prior to a meeting of the parish council.

This is your chance to have input to the planning process of the cooperative parish ministry and guide it in ways you think would be productive. It may be that because of your congregation’s unique location or experience you see a mission opportunity that no one else sees.

5. Establish a Productive Lay-Clergy Working Pattern.

Be sure to have input by the pastor and laity during these sessions. Remember that this is a discussion where you are looking for ideas.

Ways to help clergy and laity respect each other's interdependent roles and complement each other.

- Have a talkback session with laity and clergy of the parish council or core leadership group to discuss and explore their roles. Deal with issues like “What do we do together?”, “How can we help each other?”, and “How do our roles differ and how are they the same?” Try to come to a clear understanding of the interdependent nature of the roles of laity and clergy.
- Explore in the local churches what it means for laity and clergy to be interdependent. Do a Bible study or discussion having to do with the role of the pastor, the role of laypersons as ministers, and the role of your church working together with other churches in ministry to the community.

Consider having a team of a pastor and a layperson from one of the other congregations in the cooperative parish ministry come in from time to time to lead these sessions and talk about how these issues affect them and how they are dealt with in their churches.

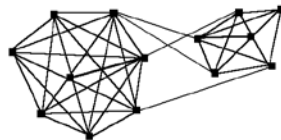
DEALING WITH...

PROBLEMS

So we're trying to move toward a more productive working relationship for the clergy and laity of our cooperative parish ministry. But there are places where a less-than-ideal relationship has already been established, and some bad habits are in place. Now what do we do?

Together We Can

- ⇒ The first thing to do is to ***realize there is a problem that needs to be dealt with.*** None of us can fulfill our total potential when we are limited by a constricted working pattern. We don't need artificial boundaries hemming us in, many of which we have merely inherited by habit or tradition and which have little use or reason behind them.
- ⇒ Next, we need to ***understand that these learned habits will not be unlearned overnight.*** Some of our number may become very uncomfortable when we seek to change them. This can be true of some clergy who may perceive laity as invading their turf and wanting to take over responsibilities that belong to them. It could also be true of laypersons who may feel that clergy who let laity take some of their traditional roles are evading their responsibilities and "just not doing their job." We'll need to work through all this if we are to solve these problems. Remember that we learn by doing, by "acting our way into a better way of thinking" rather than thinking our way into a better way of acting.
- ⇒ Working on ***building and strengthening our web of relationships*** is a good way to begin dealing with many problems. The better we get to know others we are working with in the cooperative parish ministry and build a trusting working relationship, the sooner we will be able to deal with issues like the role of clergy and laity.



The stronger the relational web becomes and the more people it includes, the better we will be able to effect the changes we need and gain the support of everyone.

5. *Establish a Productive Lay-Clergy Working Pattern.*

⇒ We need to *talk openly about roles and relationships and how we deal with them*. One of the ways to help remove constraints and resolve differences is to talk about these directly. Many times we uncritically accept the way things *are* and run headlong into the barriers that puts in our path, rather than thinking together about how things *ought to be*.

One of the best ways to deal with this is to sit down and talk openly about the question of “How should we involve both laity and clergy in the cooperative parish ministry, and what should we be doing to bring this about?” You might have an outside observer visit your meetings or projects and comment on what they see in terms of lay and clergy participation and leadership.

Finally, let’s remember that we want our working pattern to do **three** things:

A productive working pattern should:

1. Help every person utilize their God-given talents and abilities to the fullest extent.
2. Help every person share the vision for ministry that God has given them.
3. Enable laity and clergy to forge a relationship that will help everyone share all their talents, abilities, and visions with all our congregations and help us all to be in ministry to the needs of the people of our community.

Together We Can

By being continuously aware of how clergy and laity work together and by doing the types of things we have discussed to deal with these issues, we should be able to forge a working pattern that will be beneficial to everyone and to the cooperative parish ministry.

Six:

UTILIZE AS MANY HELPERS AS POSSIBLE.

Question: How many United Methodists does it take to make a cooperative parish ministry?

Answer: All you can get!

What do we mean when we say that we should *utilize as many helpers as possible*?

WHAT IS A HELPER?

Let's look at what we mean by a **helper** in the cooperative parish ministry.

A **helper** in the cooperative parish ministry is anyone who is...

- Helping the cooperative parish ministry to carry out its purpose.
- Helping people in their own congregation to reach out to other churches.
- Helping by being involved in a cooperative parish ministry project.
- Helping by assuming a leadership role in the cooperative parish ministry.

In other words,

A helper is anyone who is helping the cooperative parish ministry to become what it should become and do what it should do.

Together We Can

Why is it important to have these helpers? To be a helper, a person has to catch the vision of what cooperative ministry is and what it can do to spread the gospel. That's why it's important for people to become helpers...because of what they can do **and** what it does for them.

What they can do:

Helpers can, through the cooperative ministry, carry out their Christian commitment and use their talents and abilities on a much larger scale. They are not confined to their own congregation. They can help the people in their local church to understand what cooperative ministry is about and what we are trying to accomplish. They can be an example to others of how to reach out to persons in other congregations and in the community.

What it does for them:

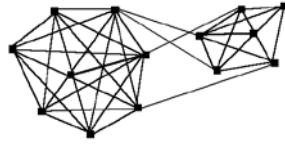
Helpers, through their involvement in the cooperative ministry, tend to widen their view of the church beyond just their own congregation and expand their view of the church's work beyond things that happen inside the four walls of their local church. They grow as Christians in their concepts, understanding, involvement, and relationships.

If we look at it *theologically*, we see that God has given each of us unique gifts and a special vision. Our cooperative parish ministry will be more effective if we use all those gifts and visions together, exploring ways to put them all to work, than if we try to control what we are doing with just a few.

Beyond that, these helpers spread the outreach of the cooperative parish ministry in an important way.

6. Utilize as Many Helpers as Possible.

Helpers extend the web of relationships we talked about earlier. They form relationships with those who are already part of the cooperative parish ministry.



When they begin to see themselves as part of that group they can build relational bridges to others in their local churches.

HOW DO WE GET HELPERS INVOLVED?

It's important then to look at helpers in the cooperative parish ministry, and at how we get them involved. Here are some principles important to involving people in cooperative parish ministry as helpers:

- **People support things in which they have a personal involvement.**

A certain local church agreed to be involved with several other churches in building a Habitat for Humanity house. Each Sunday the pastor announced the scheduled work day on the house for the following Saturday and encouraged all who would to come and help, and each week no one from that church showed up.

Finally, one Saturday the pastor invited the people to meet him at their own church for coffee and doughnuts and then go together over to work on the house. Several people came to the church and went on to the house and spent the day working.

On the following Saturday the pastor was surprised to find about half the group had come back on their own to work on the house...and someone from the church was there every Saturday until the house was finished.

Together We Can

This true story is an example of a very important principle. People support things they feel they have a personal stake in. Once the Habitat house became real and personal to them, they were self-motivated to continue their involvement.

The same is true for a cooperative parish ministry. People will support the cooperative parish ministry when they feel they have a personal stake and involvement in it, when it touches their lives and is important to them. The more *helpers* you have in the cooperative parish ministry, the more people are likely to feel it is important to them and lend their support.

- **People will do things together in groups they might never do alone.**

A district lay leader was invited to go on a Volunteers-In-Mission trip. The purpose was to begin work on a clinic in a village in rural Mexico that had no medical facilities. The work would be hard, digging a foundation, and the amenities would be few. The team would sleep on the floor of a nearby building, and their food would be cooked outdoors by the local women. The travel would be strenuous, a bus ride of several hours from their port of arrival.

The lay leader went anyway, and came back to share his experiences. Soon others were willing to go with him to work on the project. After a while he was taking two groups at a time scheduled back to back...and the clinic was completed.

6. Utilize as Many Helpers as Possible.

It's safe to say that few if any of these folks would have gone to work in a rural village in Mexico if they hadn't known someone who had already done it and would go and lead a group of others like themselves. Most of us feel there is security in numbers...and we are far more likely to try something new or different when a group of us does it together, especially if a leader we trust is guiding us.

The same is true of a cooperative parish ministry. We are much more likely to try new ideas and activities when we work together in a group of people we know, guided by a leader we trust. The more people we involve in the cooperative parish ministry as *helpers*, the more people we have who may be willing to experience change and then help guide others to do the same.

This group, when they've built a web of relationships and learned to trust each other, can lead their churches into things never thought possible before, but they need to experience cooperative ministry as helpers first.

- **It's better to have broad-based grass-roots support than narrowly-based administrative support alone.**

Some years ago there was a feeling in the cooperative ministry movement that if we could just get strong administrative support from the resident bishop in an area, all would be well for cooperative ministries there. This would ensure ongoing support for existing cooperative ministries and prepare the way for starting new ones.

Together We Can

Imagine our joy when that very thing happened in not one, but two episcopal areas. Not only did the bishops give strong support to the idea of cooperation and starting new cooperative ministries, they even helped to set up offices of cooperative ministry with the rank of district superintendents, taking part in the all-important appointment-making process.

Finally things were being done right. People began calling the cooperative ministry superintendents, asking their help to start one in their area. The existing cooperative parish ministries prospered. All was well.

Then those bishops moved, and new bishops were assigned. Almost as quickly as they had been established, the cooperative ministry positions began to decline. The persons in the positions moved. Others were assigned part-time, or while also carrying some other conference program “portfolio.” After a while the positions disappeared.

Of the cooperative parish ministries that had been started, some prospered and some faltered, depending primarily on how much support they had built up among the laypeople in their local area.

In other areas, many cooperative parish ministries had grown up the hard-scrabble way, struggling along through the ups and downs created by the appointment of some pastors who were committed to cooperation and others who couldn’t care less. Of these cooperative parish ministries, the ones who survived had long-suffering local support of the laity.

6. Utilize as Many Helpers as Possible.

The message is clear. Administrative support is clearly needed for the well-being and growth of a cooperative parish ministry, but long-term support of the local laypeople through the good and bad, the ups and downs is absolutely essential. Cooperative ministry can be initiated at any level. However, bishops change, district superintendents change, pastors change...laypeople stick around. By using many helpers in the cooperative parish ministry, you are building a foundation for the future.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF USING MANY HELPERS?

Now let's look at the benefits of using many helpers.

1. Helping individuals develop their abilities.

When people are helpers in the cooperative parish ministry process, they develop in ways not possible before. They are freed from being confined to their own congregation.



This is especially important in some smaller churches where many of the members are related or have been together for so long that they might as well be. In these situations it can be very difficult for some persons to break out of the mold they have been cast in for years and fulfill their leadership potential.

The notion that a “prophet is not without honor save in his own country” is still very much with us. For some folks it is much harder to do something new or try on an unfamiliar role in their own congregation than it might be in one a few miles down the road.

Together We Can

Also, there may not be the resources in some places for anything much to be developed except in a cooperative way. Many congregations are so small, or so strapped for resources of people, talent, and money that there is little they can do alone beyond having regular worship services. The cooperative parish ministry allows them to go beyond this by sharing their resources with other churches. A combined youth group, choir, or community service project can open whole new vistas that aren't possible when a church tries to go it alone.

2. Developing a broad-based group of leaders and workers.

By using many helpers in the cooperative parish ministry, we begin the process of building a large group of people with varying skills and leadership abilities. They bring a multitude of experience and a variety of knowledge that can help all the churches involved as well as the community. Now the local church is not dependent on the same people they have called on over the years to do everything. The door is open to people in neighboring congregations who may be better prepared in a particular field than anyone in our own church, or who may have expertise in an area that no one in our congregation knows much about.

Each congregation can benefit from exposure to people other than just those in their own constituency. Sometimes the town people can learn from the country folk and vice-versa. It may be that the blue-collar and the white-collar, the urban and the rural, the Anglo and the ethnic, all have things they could benefit from giving to and receiving from each other.

6. Utilize as Many Helpers as Possible.

3. Sharing a broader talent pool.

This opportunity for sharing among our helpers leads to a great advantage...the sharing of personal abilities, skills and experience. When we look for someone to lead a planning day for our Vacation Bible School, for instance, it may be that someone from one of the other churches is prepared and willing to help us. Or it could be that the cooperative parish ministry has put together a Vacation Bible School training school for everyone to attend. If we are looking for someone to guide our do-it-yourself repair of the church roof, we might find a person with real expertise and experience in a neighboring congregation.

When we combine the people resources of all the congregations by using many helpers, we find that we have a wealth of know-how and experience at our fingertips.

4. Sharing a deeper talent pool.

Perhaps you've shared an experience similar to this one.

Recently a friend shared with me that she hadn't been to church in six weeks. Knowing she was a regular and active church member, I asked why. "Well, they're looking for Sunday School teachers up there now. And, ooh, I don't want to do that. And if you get to be one, they just keep you in it forever. So I'm going to wait another couple of weeks, and then I'll ask my friend Gail, and when they've got them all, then I'll go back."

Together We Can

We've all experienced something along this line, particularly in many of our smaller congregations. A major crisis occurs when Miss Genevieve, who has played the piano for the last fifty years, becomes disabled and has to retire, or when the church treasurer needs an eye operation and can't continue. For small churches of very limited resources, these are major concerns. These crises cause us to act in ways that are counter-productive to involving our members or attracting new ones. We tend to immediately put people in certain positions and keep them there so long we wear them out.

The reason we do those kinds of things is that these churches have such a limited talent pool. We may have only one person capable of filling a vital major role. Once we get someone in a position, we keep them there forever and never give them a rest or a chance to try anything else.

Through the cooperative parish ministry we can share a much deeper talent pool. Across the congregations involved, we are likely to have a number of piano players or persons who may be willing to step in and help with the financial or administration needs of another congregation for a period of time. We can develop and share enough leaders so that these shortfalls don't cause major calamities.

5. Developing a breadth and depth of support for cooperative parish ministry in each congregation.

This benefit relates to the principle we spoke of earlier, *people support things in which they have a personal involvement*. This being true, if you have many helpers who support the concept and work of the cooperative parish ministry and who are part of all the congregations, you then have a core group of support that touches each congregation in the cooperative parish ministry.

6. Utilize as Many Helpers as Possible.

This relates to the other principle, *people will do things together in groups they might never do alone*. If these core groups of supportive people in each congregation grow, you have a base of support for change in the attitudes of other people in those congregations. This opens up the possibility for change in the way each church thinks about itself, how it sees itself, and what it may be able to do and become.

This doesn't happen overnight, but through the cooperative parish ministry there is the *opportunity and means* for it to happen. Not much else offers that to these congregations.

6. Developing a larger vision of the community and a larger base of community involvement.

If we use a number of helpers, it is likely that the cooperative parish ministry will have a larger vision of the community and a stronger base of community involvement. Here's why.

The council for the Northshore Cooperative Parish began their first meeting. "Thanks for coming out tonight. Let's begin by telling our names and what we do back in our own churches. I'll start. I'm Sharon Wesson and I'm the chair of the administrative board at New Zion. Oh, and I teach the adult Sunday School class and play the organ too."

"I'm Jack Matthews from Faith. I'm on the trustees, president of the United Methodist Men and the chair of the pastor-parish relations committee."

"I'm Nora Zingler from First Church. I'm the chair of the missions committee, and I'm the church secretary."

Together We Can

...and so it goes. It's not unusual for people to hold more than one job in a church. In smaller congregations, one person may have two or three jobs so that their whole life revolves around the church.

Now these sound like good, active church people, and they are. But look what this total commitment of their time means to their churches and to the cooperative parish ministry. It's very possible for the entire leadership of some congregations to be people who devote all their time outside job and family to their church and have little or no community involvement beyond it.

When we draw only from these people for the leadership of the cooperative parish ministry, we run two risks:

- 1) We further stress people who are already overloaded with other church responsibilities, and
- 2) We may have little or no leadership in the cooperative parish ministry with much community involvement beyond their local church.

This puts the cooperative parish ministry in the hands of leaders stressed out because of responsibilities in their local churches. Because of their pressing involvement in the local congregation, they are likely to heavily weight the work of the cooperative parish ministry toward in-church activities. They may not have the experience base to lead us toward balancing our work with the local congregations and with community involvement outside the walls of the church.

Using helpers with a broader base of community involvement will ensure that you don't overstress a few leaders and that your leadership presents a well-rounded view of the church and the community.

6. Utilize as Many Helpers as Possible.

Also, you may be able to get helpers who are volunteers or resource persons from community agencies and other groups that will extend your base of community understanding and support.

Note: This should not be construed to mean that you shouldn't have some of your most important leaders on the parish council or whatever leadership group serves that function. It's important to have a mix of people who are key leaders in local congregations along with persons of broad community involvement and those who have special skills. Remember, you can utilize helpers at numerous places throughout the cooperative ministry as well as at the planning level of the parish council.

Now, here are some ideas on...

HOW TO GET LOTS OF HELPERS

- **Make sure that your cooperative parish ministry invites and includes people.**

How does the cooperative parish ministry *feel*? Does it feel like an open group that anyone can join? Or like a small closed group of people doing their own thing? (“Oh, that’s something the cooperative ministry people are doing.”)

Make sure that everything you hand out, everything you send out, and everything you do starts by making it clear that everyone is invited and encouraged to take part. Design what you do so that anytime newcomers show up for any event, meeting, or activity, they are quickly recognized, introduced to others, and helped to feel welcome.

Together We Can

- **Have an open planning process.**

People are most likely to become helpers through some activity they have helped plan. One way to get lots of helpers is to give people plenty of opportunities to help plan something they can then help carry out.

Make sure you have an ongoing planning process in the cooperative parish ministry that is open to everyone. One way to do this is to have a planning session at least once per year and encourage everyone in the cooperative parish ministry to participate. When you do this, it's important to use an open-ended process that will allow everyone to get their ideas in and then sign on to whatever projects they would like to be involved with. *(Check chapter eight in this section to take a further look at that type of process.)*

The point is to give people a chance to shape at least some of the activity of the cooperative parish ministry in the way they would like for it to go. They should have an active part in making these plans become reality so that they can become an active helper.

- **Use task forces or ministry teams that give people entry to the work groups.**

Task forces or ministry teams are short-term planning groups that have responsibility for one project. They come together, plan their event, carry it out, and dissolve. They can involve anyone who's interested, not just the official representatives on the council.

6. Utilize as Many Helpers as Possible.

One of the real benefits of the task force approach is that it provides a point of entry to new helpers who want to get involved. Since the task force is not limited to any particular group of people, like parish council members for instance, it is readily open to anyone who is interested.

Another benefit is that, since the task force is specifically short-term and limited in its involvement, people don't have to fear being stuck in an unending commitment. This lets people become a helper with a limited-term involvement they can feel comfortable with.

It helps to develop a communication system within the cooperative parish ministry to let people know what task forces are working, what they are doing, when and where they meet and how to can get involved. You want to make it easy for people to become helpers. More about task forces and ministry teams later.

- **Have projects specifically designed to include the marginally involved.**

If you want lots of helpers, it's important to have plenty of inviting avenues through which people can make that first step toward involvement. The point is extending that web of relationships. We are looking for activities that will bring out potential helpers and begin the relationship-building process with others in the cooperative parish ministry.

Activities of this type include:

- ✓ fellowship (dinners, sings, picnics)
- ✓ recreation (sports, outdoor activities)
- ✓ training (Sunday School, trustees, officers,)
- ✓ mission (work teams, church or home repair)

Together We Can

Structure in ways that let helpers get to know people from other churches who are taking part in the cooperative parish ministry and help them feel comfortable to join in, too.

One hint: If you have sports activities, especially of the competitive kind, have each team made up of people from several churches. That way people get to know each other. Don't have teams from individual local churches competing against each other. This doesn't help anyone get to know anyone they don't already know and can further produce unproductive feelings of competition and separateness already existing between some congregations. If you have mission teams, make sure they are made up of people from several of the churches.

- **MOST IMPORTANT! Clearly communicate that helpers are wanted and help them find their ministry.**

The key question is, “Do the people of the congregations in your cooperative parish ministry know and believe that their ideas and help are wanted?”

Consider how your parish council is structured, how the planning process is run, what committees or task forces are set up and how they operate, what kinds of activities are available for people to take part in, how accessible the leaders of the cooperative parish ministry are and how open to new ideas.

6. Utilize as Many Helpers as Possible.

Look at it this way...

If you were a typical member of one of your churches, and had no current involvement in the work of the cooperative parish ministry, and you had a great idea for something the cooperative parish ministry might do...

What would you do with your idea?

Who would you go to?

How would your idea be received?

Would it be given serious consideration?

What would be done with it?

Would it have a real chance to be used?

Would you be involved in carrying out your idea?

Would there be a structure to help you do this?

Would others help you make your idea a success?

How would you be likely to feel about what happened?

Would you be likely to come up with another idea?

If your cooperative parish ministry can answer these questions positively, you are well on the way to being prepared to **utilize as many helpers as possible**.

Together We Can

SEVEN:

HAVE AN ONGOING EFFORT TO TELL PEOPLE WHAT YOU'RE DOING AND GAIN THEIR SUPPORT.

Here's something that's important whether you're starting a new cooperative parish ministry or working with one that's been going for many years. First let's take a look at some important principles:

People can't support what they don't know about.

We tend to be suspicious of anything we perceive to be kept secret and controlled by a small group who seem to be more powerful than ourselves, anything that's not out in the open and in the full view of everyone.

Good communications help people be involved and aid in building an environment of trust and good feelings among everyone taking part in the cooperative ministry.

With these ideas in mind, let's focus on three questions:

- 1. Why should we tell people?**
- 2. What should we tell them?**
- 3. How should we tell them?**

WHY SHOULD WE TELL PEOPLE?

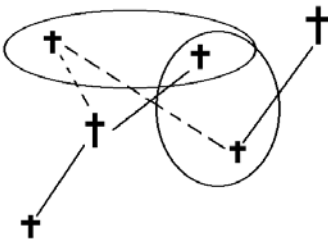
To inform them -

We want people to know what cooperative ministry is and why it's important. We want them to know what's happening as we start a new cooperative parish ministry or continue developing an existing one. We want them to know what we're currently doing and why. We want them to know what difference it's making. And we want them to know what this means for the future.

To build support -

If any cooperative parish ministry is to succeed, it must have the acceptance and support of the vast majority of the people in the churches that are part of it. There may be a few holdouts, but the cooperative parish ministry won't last long if they are numerous and influential. If support is to be forthcoming, you have to earn it...and the first step is telling people what's happening.

Remember the principle about people not supporting things they don't know about and being suspicious of things that they don't understand?



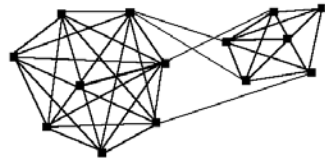
This is especially true with cooperative ministries, particularly in smaller churches that have seen realignments and restructures come and go over the years and have been bounced around by them, often with little involvement or consultation on their part.

7. Have an Ongoing Effort to Tell People What You are Doing and Gain Their Support.

If they are not aware of what's happening, they may well be suspicious that this is just another ill-conceived change. Certainly they will have no basis to understand or support the cooperative parish ministry if they don't know what's happening and what the benefits may be.

To involve people -

If we go back to our web of relationships, we know that a church or a cooperative parish ministry is built through a growing set of relationships.



The way to start building these relationships is through helping people get to know others by being involved in what the cooperative parish ministry is doing...and the first step in that is telling them about it.

Good relationships are helped to form and grow through good communication. Likewise, suspicion and distrust rapidly develop in the absence of good communication.

Because it's the right thing to do -

This goes to the core of what we're trying to do and who we are. If we're an open group trying to help people grow and take leadership in their churches, open communication will be a natural part of what we're doing.

If we seek to control and manage, and have a predetermined agenda we're determined to put into action, then we don't want others knowing about everything and sharing control over it -- and whatever we set up probably won't be around very long.

WHAT SHOULD WE TELL THEM?

We need to tell people...

What we're doing.

Why we're doing it.

How they can take part.

To do this we need to deal with a number of topics including:

What cooperative ministry is.

Why cooperative ministry is important.

What we're presently doing.

How it will affect people and how they will have a say in what is happening.

What we hope for the future.

Let's take a look at each of these topics.

We need to tell them...

What cooperative ministry is.

Cooperative ministry is deceptively simple. It's easy to feel that we understand a phrase like "two or more congregations working together to do what we couldn't do alone."



We may know this intellectually, but still be in the habit of working independently, so we continue to act the way we always have. We set up something and then "invite" others to take part, thinking we are acting cooperatively, when actually we are just trying to co-opt them into what we are already doing ourselves. It's easy to remember a definition or a purpose, but much harder to change how we do things to reflect a new understanding of ourselves. We need to remind ourselves and tell others repeatedly that cooperative ministry calls for a change in the way we think and act.

7. Have an Ongoing Effort to Tell People What You are Doing and Gain Their Support.

We need to tell them...

Why cooperative ministry is important.

We need to deal with this on several levels:

- ***Biblically*** - We need to consider what scripture says about how we are called to work together and how we should relate to each other as individual Christians and together in groups.
- ***Denominationally*** - We are a connectional church, and cooperative ministry is local connectionalism. Through cooperative ministry we are connected to each other in our local areas so that we can minister together to the needs of people.



- ***Pragmatically*** - There are some things we just can't do alone...and some things that it makes better sense to do together.
- ***Morally*** - How can we overlook all the hurt in our communities when, by working together, we can do something about it?

Together We Can

We need to tell them...

What we're presently doing.

People need to know what's going on currently, so they will be informed and can become involved.

WE NEED TO TELL PEOPLE WHAT'S GOING ON WHEN WE:

- ◇ Start a new cooperative parish ministry.
- ◇ Begin a new program or activity.
- ◇ Have a special event.
- ◇ Set the date, time, or place of a meeting.
- ◇ Have a planning process or retreat.
- ◇ Look for new ideas.
- ◇ Want new people to become involved.
- ◇ Plan a special event or meeting.
- ◇ Make a decision that will affect them.

We need to tell them...

How the cooperative parish ministry will affect people and how they can have a say in what is happening.

Let's face it. Whenever any of us hears of a new idea or event, the thought that quickly runs through our mind is "What does this mean for me?" That happens when we hear about something that affects our community, our family, our job...or our church. It's just human to be concerned about how any change in things around us will affect us personally.

7. Have an Ongoing Effort to Tell People What You are Doing and Gain Their Support.

That being the case, we need to tell people how the cooperative parish ministry will affect them personally. Will it make their life better? What will happen to things that are really important to them? Will they have a voice in what affects them, or will things be “handed down” to them? People need and have a right to know these things. A good general rule is...

“People need to know about things that affect them and have an opportunity to help make decisions regarding those things.”

One of the prime purposes of your communications effort should be helping people find out how what’s happening will affect them and how they can have a part in making those decisions. In this way they can begin to build some ownership in what you’re doing together.

We need to tell them...

What we hope for the future.

People have a lot of investment in the future. Anyone who opens a savings account, plants a tree, builds a house or joins a club is making an investment in the future...usually a specific future they hope will become reality.

We want to save enough money for a specific purpose, eat the fruit from or enjoy the shade of the tree, make a home in the house, or meet new friends with similar interests.

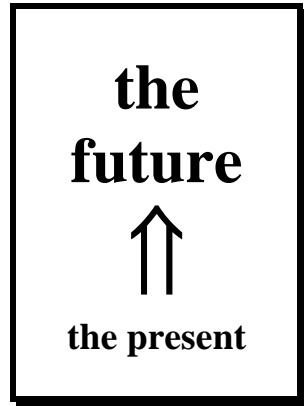
The epitome of this hoped-for-future idea is when people have children. Parents have lots of ideas about what they want their children’s futures to be like...but sometimes not as much control over them.

Together We Can

Most people are quite future-oriented.

Much of our talk is about the past; that's where all our experience lies. But our most creative action is oriented toward the future.

People will invest quite a bit of effort in something they feel will lead to a positive future for someone or something they care about.



That includes their church. If they feel that cooperative ministry will lead toward a better future they will support it and work to help it happen.

This means that one of the purposes of our communications effort is to tell people about how cooperative ministry will make the future better for them and their church. How will it help them become what they want to become? How will it help them to do what they feel called to do?

One warning here: be honest and temper what you say with realism. Don't claim that cooperative ministry can solve all of everyone's problems (it can't) or that it will immediately bring in the kingdom (it probably won't). However, if we work together we can solve some of the problems we face and we might come a little closer to being God's kingdom.

7. Have an Ongoing Effort to Tell People What You are Doing and Gain Their Support.

HOW SHOULD WE TELL THEM?

If this communications effort is so important, then how will we go about it? What means should we use to communicate with the people in our cooperative parish ministry?

The only good answer is, “*Every possible way.*” Many times we make the mistake of just using the traditional ways of communicating in the church and assuming these will reach all our people.

*Flawed communications
assumptions. . .*

- “I’ll announce it in church so that everyone will know.”
- “We’ll just put this in the bulletin, and everybody will read about it.”
- “I don’t understand why he didn’t know about it. It was in the newsletter last month.”

Obviously these are flawed communications methods. Not everybody might happen to be in church on the Sunday it’s announced, and not everyone who is present might read everything in the bulletin. People may not read the entire newsletter; it may get lost at home or be eaten by the dog. It’s safe to say that no one form of communication will reach everyone and that if anything can go wrong it will.

Together We Can

It would be nice if communications were as simple as making announcements or putting something in the bulletin and the newsletter but, alas, life is not so simple. In today's media-oriented world we need to use every means possible to communicate our important message to people.

Here are a few ways to communicate our important message:

- **From the pulpit.** Here's an effective way to get your message to those who are present at the worship service...but you have to *make* it effective. It can't be hurried over in the usual announcements. Try letting a layperson do it. Or do it as a special "explanation time" apart from the usual announcements, something that says, "Pay attention. This is important."

A particularly important point is to let the parish council representative from the church report back in the worship service after each meeting. In a group of churches like a cooperative parish ministry, it's important to be sure that these reports or announcements are made in each congregation so that everyone knows what's going on, not just members of those congregations where the announcement *happened* to get made.

- **At all OFFICIAL meetings.** It's important to "tell the story" every time we get the chance. That means that every time we get people together for whatever purpose, we use the opportunity to talk about cooperation and what we can do together as a cooperative parish ministry.

7. Have an Ongoing Effort to Tell People What You are Doing and Gain Their Support.

Here are some possibilities:

Youth meetings - Talk about how our youth could work with the youth of other churches to do a mission project in the community, raise money for the youth mission fund, form a choir with the kids from all the churches, or get up a bus load to go to a youth event.

Women's groups - Discuss how we could cooperate to have a fund-raiser for missions, bring in a special speaker for the mission study, or support some ministry in the local community.

Men's groups - Make a proposal about how we could work together to repair a church or parsonage that needs help, volunteer for a Habitat for Humanity project, or do other needed community service.

Local church **Administrative Board** or **Council on Ministries** - Announce upcoming cooperative ministry events and tell why it's important to support them; talk about things we want to do that might be done better with another congregation; use one of the other pastors as a resource person for something your church is planning or wants to do.

Whenever you have people together, there's always an opportunity to do a little communicating about the cooperative parish ministry and what it's doing.

Together We Can

- **At special teaching sessions.** Consider having a “School of Cooperative Ministry” to do some in-depth teaching on cooperative ministry. This could be an all-day or weekend session where you go more deeply into what cooperative ministry is, how it works, its benefits, and the nuts and bolts issues of everyday operation.

This type of training helps people to understand what’s going on and usually deepens their commitment and support. It might be offered as the *advanced* portion of a Lay Speakers’ School.

- **Through the newsletter and the bulletin.** These “traditional” ways of communicating are fine if you don’t rely solely on them. Don’t use them as your only communications methods, and don’t think that just because you put something in the newsletter or bulletin everybody will know about and understand it.

All the usual rules about telling *who, what, when, where,* and *why* apply, as well as making what you say brief, clear, and interesting. There are some good newsletter guides around. You might want to pick one up.

Remember to include an event in every issue until it happens, with an especially noticeable spread just before the event. Be sure you tell clearly who the event is for and how people can be involved. We don’t want people coming to events that are not relevant to them and being disappointed. This can leave a bad taste about everything we are doing.

Just remember to see the bulletin and newsletter as one part of your communications effort, not the whole thing.

7. Have an Ongoing Effort to Tell People What You are Doing and Gain Their Support.

- **Through local media.** Local media (newspapers, radio, television) have four great things going for them:
 1. ***They are local.*** They are primarily concerned with your local area and what's going on there.
 2. ***People pay attention to them.*** Nearly everyone in the community reads the hometown newspaper and watches the local TV news.
 3. ***They can be free,*** if you're not buying advertising...and if you're smart, you won't need to.
 4. ***They're always looking for material,*** which you are going to supply.

Your local media person and you have something in common. You have a story you want to tell (the story of your cooperative parish ministry and what it's doing.) They have a never-ending need for new and interesting material about the area where you both live and work. You can help each other.

To get this going, you have to determine how what you're doing might be interesting to others. Is it some special activity (the opening of a Habitat House or a medical clinic)? A human-interest story about someone who's involved in the cooperative parish ministry (an older person working with children)? A special accomplishment (your youth have collected manual typewriters to send to third-world countries through the United Methodist Rural Fellowship)? These are the types of stories media people will be interested in.

Together We Can

In order to get your story in your local media you have to do two things.

1. **Tell them about it.** You have to call them up and let them know *ahead of time* what's happening and how they can cover it. Not many newspaper or TV stations have resident psychics who will intuitively know when you are doing something. You have to tell them in time for them to schedule coverage.

2. **Help them do the coverage.** Set up interviews with people involved. Get those involved together for a photo opportunity. Write up a press release with all the names, dates and other pertinent information. (This also helps make sure everyone's name is spelled correctly, that nothing important is left out and the right date, time, and place for the big event that you've worked so hard on is given.) Be prepared to tell the facts and get the story across.

Finally, don't be afraid of the media. They want to help you get your story across. Most of those who complain about being misquoted or having their story distorted were poorly prepared. The media, especially the electronic media, like crisp quotes that tell a story in a few words. Give them those quotes. If you blather on and on, don't get angry if they inadvertently pick a few quotes that don't happen to tell the whole story. You know your story and, with the help of your local media person, will be able to communicate about your cooperative parish ministry not only to the people of your churches, but also to many people across your area. You can do it. Give it a try.

7. Have an Ongoing Effort to Tell People What You are Doing and Gain Their Support.

- **Through new and creative ways.** There are many ways to tell people about your cooperative parish ministry, what it's doing, and why it's important. Here are just a few you might want to consider trying:

⇒ ***Make a videotape.*** Become your own TV producer. Use a video camera to tape things that are going on in the cooperative parish ministry. Your production can be as plain or as fancy as you want to make it...all the way from the simplest format, where you just shoot a little of each event on the same tape, to a real extravaganza that's edited with fades, titles and background music.



The point is to make it interesting and keep it moving along. Keep it brief. Five to ten minutes is plenty. People will enjoy seeing themselves and their friends and neighbors.

⇒ ***Have a children's play or puppet show.*** This could be a play based on any Bible story, or on the benefits of working together. Make sure you involve children from several of the churches. Give everybody a part. Don't have some "doers" and some who are just "watchers." You could make a video of this to take around to all the churches and to shut-ins. Be sure and give all the proud parents and grandparents a copy. The name of the cooperative parish ministry should be prominently placed on the label and in the title and credits.

Together We Can

⇒ ***Be on a local TV talk show.*** Most television stations have local talk shows focusing on interesting events in the area. They are constantly looking for new material for these programs. Many would love to have something from a group of churches who are working together. Remember, though, it will have to feature something interesting you are doing, not just the fact that you are working as a group. Many cooperative parish ministry projects are visually appealing and would qualify. It helps to have some video from your events to fill in with. Get a tape of the talk show program you are on and take it around to show at all of the churches in the cooperative parish ministry.

⇒ ***Make a CD or audiotape.*** If your churches are like most, they probably have plenty of choirs, soloists, instrumentalists, and other musicians. Make a tape or CD of these folks and distribute it through the churches in the cooperative parish ministry. If you have a combined choir for Christmas or other special music, put that performance on your CD and fill out the time left with soloists and instrumentalists doing other appropriate music. With today's technology, you can have this tape or CD put on your cooperative parish ministry website (more about this in just a moment). Beyond providing something many people will enjoy, the cooperative parish ministry will gain the support of all who performed.



7. Have an Ongoing Effort to Tell People What You are Doing and Gain Their Support.

⇒ ***Do a tabloid.*** A tabloid is sort of like a small one-time newspaper. It's usually printed on newsprint paper, has larger type and lots of open space with large headlines for the articles, sometimes in bright eye-catching colors like red and black. Lots of graphics help too. It literally screams "LOOK AT ME." Have an article on what cooperative parish ministry is, several articles on projects you're excited about, a listing of the churches involved, and a calendar of upcoming events. This is something you could do once or whenever it would be helpful. Make sure one gets into every home in each church. Distribute some of these around the community.

⇒ ***Do an Annual Report.*** Many corporations do a very attractive annual report for their stockholders. If you look at one of these slick, attractive reports, you'll notice it is filled with photographs, emblems, charts and other eye-catching items. You'll come to realize that one of the main purposes of this booklet is to be a public relations piece and help establish the culture of the company. It says, "Look at all this. We must be doing well."

You can do an annual report for your cooperative parish ministry. Write up a number of the projects you have done during the year. Take pictures of what you do as the year goes by. Put them together in the report and give a copy to each church, each pastor, and each parish council member. Make sure they share them back in their own congregations. Better yet, get it printed and give one to everybody.

Together We Can

- ⇒ ***Write an Advent or Lenten devotional book.*** Many persons have special thoughts and meditations that could be shared during these times. Make sure there are contributions from someone in every church. Distribute them to every home in each church. Use these meditations in worship services during these seasons. Include a section on the cooperative parish ministry and how working together relates to these special seasons and their emphasis.
- ⇒ ***Write a book (or at least a booklet).*** With the computers and word processing programs we have today, anyone can become a publisher. You could do a short book on your cooperative parish ministry.

Here are some possible chapter headings:



- WHAT IS COOPERATIVE MINISTRY?
- HOW OUR COOPERATIVE MINISTRY WORKS.
- WHAT OUR COOPERATIVE PARISH MINISTRY IS DOING.
- OUR HOPES FOR THE FUTURE.

This material, along with a map of your area, some explanatory diagrams, and pictures of your churches and projects would make a great short book to give to every family in your churches. It tells them what you're trying to do and why, and helps to illustrate it.

7. Have an Ongoing Effort to Tell People What You are Doing and Gain Their Support.

- ⇒ **Have a traveling road show.** Get people together who are working on projects in the cooperative parish ministry and take them around to do a presentation in each congregation. Or make an audio-visual program using videotape, slides or a computer graphics presentation to take to each congregation and show what is happening. You'll reach a lot more people if you take it to each church than if you just do it once in one location and expect everyone to come to you. The message is, "This is so good and so important, we're coming to your church to tell you about it."
- ⇒ **Have a caravan.** Here's where you get everyone together and caravan around to visit each church in the cooperative parish ministry...all in one day. While you're at each church, stay a minute to have someone talk briefly about a subject relative to the cooperative parish ministry and what you're doing.
- ⇒ **Set up a website on the Internet.**



Many people are connected to the Internet with more going on-line every day. It's possible for any cooperative parish ministry to have its own website or web page for little or no additional expense.

Several locations are willing to give space on their computer servers, and many persons, possibly some in your own local churches, have the knowledge to organize and set it up.

Together We Can

Once this is done, you then have a twenty-four-hour worldwide presence providing information about your cooperative parish ministry and what you are doing.

Schedules, addresses, and even pictures of last week's youth retreat can be put on the website for everyone to see. One of the advantages is that this allows people to call up and "look in" on the cooperative parish ministry rather than just waiting for the next piece of material you send out.

You get the idea! With all these means of communication, you can use whatever you think up to get people's attention and tell them about your cooperative parish ministry. Use everyone in your churches, especially the children and youth, to help with this. Get their ideas, find a way to get started, and go for it.

The question may arise, "How long do we need to go on with this communications effort?" The realistic answer is "from now on." Telling people what we are doing is not just for new cooperative ministries, but also for everything we do regardless of how long we have been in operation. Remember, people can only take part in and support what they know about.

A special note...

How you feel about what you're communicating makes a difference. If you feel it's really important, that will show through. If you're "just going through the motions," that will be clear also.

This is especially true with pastors. Their attitude tells laypersons what to really pay attention to. Be enthusiastic in what you communicate and how you go about doing it.

*7. Have an Ongoing Effort to Tell People What You are Doing
and Gain Their Support.*

Finally, remember that communication is a job that's never finished. Each communications effort simply gets you one more step down the road so that you can go on from there. Every day we have to go one more step in telling people...

What we're doing.

Why we're doing it.

How they can take part.

Together We Can

EIGHT: **DESIGN AN ORGANIZATIONAL FORM AND** **PLANNING PROCESS FOR THE NEXT 18** **MONTHS.**

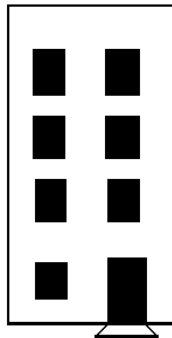
In this chapter we'll look at the following questions:

- **Why do we need a structure?**
- **What do we want our structure to do?**
- **What are some possible organizational structures for a cooperative parish ministry?**
- **What are some ways we can do planning?**

OK, here we go.

WHY DO WE NEED A STRUCTURE?

In order to do anything we must have a structure. The building you are sitting in as you read this has a form and structure based on its use.



A church, an office building, a home, a school...all have some things in common, like walls and a roof. But their designs are quite different, based on their intended uses.

Together We Can

Structure is a tool to help us get something done or achieve a specific purpose. Generally we tend to remember this guideline when we are designing objects like a building or a machine. But unfortunately we may overlook it when setting up organizational structures and find ourselves just throwing together something similar to what we have encountered before and waiting to see what it produces.

Structure provides us with the framework necessary to organize our actions and energies in order to accomplish what we set out to do.

This leads us to our next question...

WHAT DO WE WANT OUR STRUCTURE TO DO?

Basically, what we want our structure to do is help us carry out the purpose of the organization.

Remember the purpose of cooperative parish ministry: *to help the church bring the Gospel of Christ to all the needs of all the people of the community.* To do this we need an organizational design that will...

- help bring people together.
- help us begin building a web of relationships.
- help us share hopes and ideas with each other.
- help us find ways to make these ideas become a reality.

We need an organizational structure that helps bring people together to share their dreams and join with others to make those dreams happen.

*8. Design an Organizational Form and Planning Process
for the Next 18 Months.*

BIG PROBLEM!

**Not many of the forms we are familiar
with do this.**

Take a look at most of the organizational forms we know so well. They are based on a “board of directors” corporate business model or a representative “legislative” model. People come to an “official” meeting to vote things up or down.

Usually the meeting is run in a very predictable manner using Roberts’ Rules of Order, even if a split vote hasn’t happened in the last decade. The dead giveaway is when the chairperson asks for the minutes of the previous meeting to be read aloud in their entirety and then for a motion to *adopt* the minutes.

All this is OK if all we intend to do is to approve or disapprove a number of items, but this structure doesn’t do much for fostering creativity as we look for new answers and creative approaches for the work of the cooperative parish ministry.

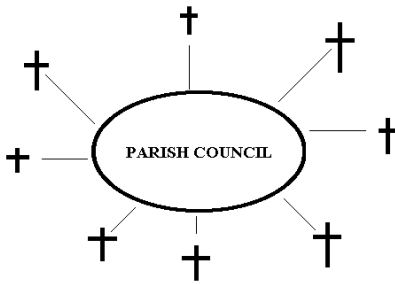
This means that we need to replace the model that we know so well with something else. That leads us to our next question...

**WHAT ARE SOME POSSIBLE ORGANIZATIONAL
STRUCTURES FOR A COOPERATIVE PARISH MINISTRY?**

Earlier we spoke of several forms that cooperative ministries take. Let’s look at one that’s well suited to the functions we just mentioned (*bringing people together, building relationships, sharing hopes and ideas, and helping them become a reality*).

Together We Can

A good organizational form for a cooperative parish ministry is a parish council made up of persons representing all the churches in the cooperative parish ministry with ministry teams to carry out the activities the churches do together.



In a typical situation, each church sends a number of representatives, including clergy and laity, to be part of the council and plan what the churches of the cooperative parish ministry will do together.

At this point, the council is a representative body and can become like a lot of other groups we have encountered in the church and in community settings. It can be very easy for this group to take on the official board mentality we talked about.

This situation is greatly improved if we use the **task force** or **ministry team** model.

First let's say what a task force or ministry team is:

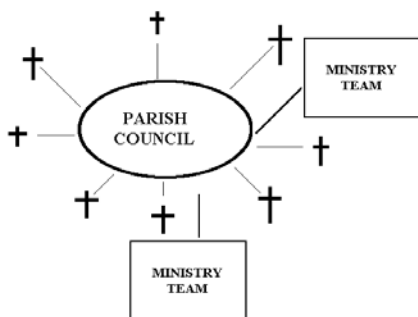
A task force or ministry team is a group of people who come together to plan and carry out one specific activity and then disband when that activity is completed.

You bring people together, help them get to know each other and share their ideas, and then let them choose short-term ministry teams they can work together on to do the things they want to do. For instance, a ministry team may come together to plan Vacation Bible School training for all the churches in the cooperative parish ministry.

8. Design an Organizational Form and Planning Process for the Next 18 Months.

They do all the planning of who, when, where, and how it will be done and then put on the event. After the event is over and they have evaluated it and reported back to the parish council, their job is finished. The group disbands and the members are free to go on to other pursuits.

A parish council with ministry teams working through it might look more like this:



Each of the ministry teams is related to the parish council. They do their work and report their plans back to the council for approval and resourcing.

Members of the ministry team are not limited to those people that are part of the parish council but can include anyone who wants to help with their task. This way we help people to use their individual skills and talents on what they are interested in, and we increase our range far beyond just the abilities of those who are members of the council.

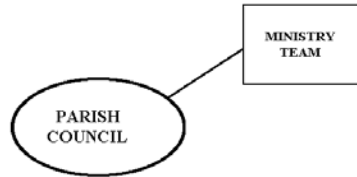
One benefit of the ministry team method is that it moves us away from the “official meeting” toward a more relaxed and creative way of operating. Little creativity is generated in an official meeting, but that can change when we meet in a more relaxed setting, usually over a cup of coffee in someone’s home, rather than around a long table in some church meeting room.

Ministry teams tend to be smaller and include people with interests in a particular area. With a well-defined task they have agreed to work on, ministry team members can let their imaginations go on how they will go about it.

Together We Can

Ministry teams are a great way to help people build personal relationships. Because they are smaller, more informal, and focused on a set purpose, they provide a framework for people to get to know each other and help build working relationships and friendships.

It's important to understand the ministry team's link to the parish council. The job of the ministry team is to plan and carry out something the council has decided to do.



The ministry team reports their plans back to the council. If the team feels the need for significant changes in what they have been asked to do, they negotiate with the council. The same is true if they get further ideas they would like to implement beyond the specific project they have been asked to carry out. The convener of the ministry team may or may not be a member of the council, but should meet with the council and share what the ministry team is doing. After the event, the ministry team evaluates it with the council.

When we use the *ministry team* way of working together with our operating *parish council*, it's important to keep their respective purposes and functions clear:

*The purpose of the **parish council** is to bring together people who represent all the churches to decide **WHAT** it is we want to do together.*

*The purpose of the **task force** or **ministry team** is to bring together people who have special interests or skills in one of those things we plan to do and use their knowledge, skills, and creativity to come up with specific ways of **HOW** to do those things together.*

8. Design an Organizational Form and Planning Process for the Next 18 Months.

WHAT ARE SOME WAYS WE CAN DO PLANNING?

Even if we have a good organization for our cooperative parish ministry, with a parish council meeting regularly and ministry teams handling short-term events, we need to be intentional about how we do planning and how we continually evaluate what we do and how we do it. Let's look at some of the factors affecting this style of planning.

Creativity - the main thing.

One of our main purposes in working with the task force or ministry team model is to foster creativity and put it to work for all of us. We don't want to do together only the same things we have been doing separately in the past. We want to come up with some new ways of doing things. The people on our ministry teams may come up with some new ideas. We want to foster the creativity to get them out and put them to work.

Creativity rarely comes about in large groups meeting around tables working through an agenda within a short (1-2 hours) meeting time. Instead, creativity usually happens in smaller groups working in more relaxed settings with an open agenda and a flexible time line.

Why should we set up our planning for the next 18 months?

Note that we're talking here about setting up a planning *process*, not doing the planning or carrying out our plans.

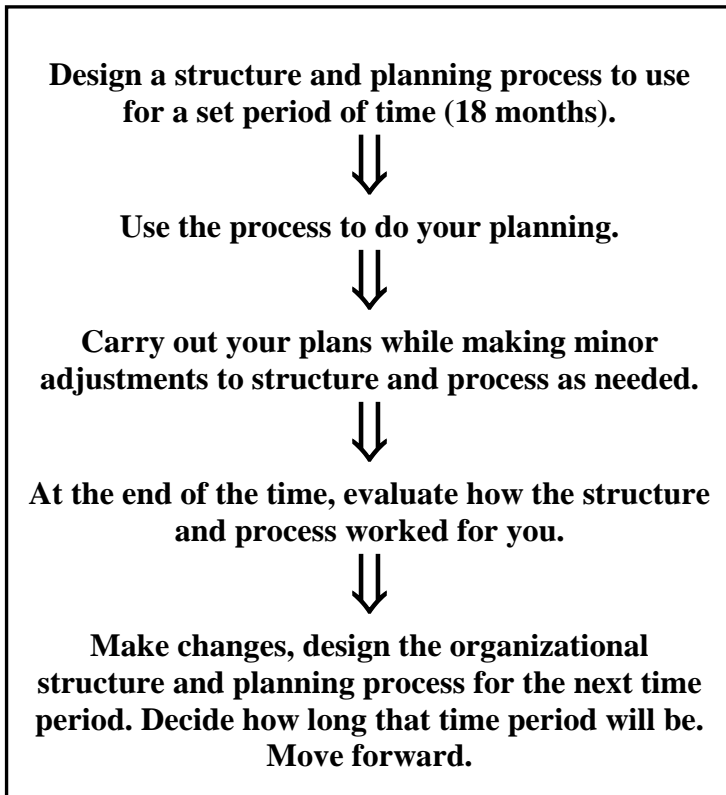
Sometimes when people get together to organize or set up a structure, they act as if they were building a house. They put it together with the expectation that it will stay essentially the way they built it for a long time...possibly many years.

Together We Can

It shouldn't be like that with a cooperative parish ministry. Things change, and we need flexibility to change with them. However, we don't want to be flipping from one way of doing things to another so quickly that we spend all our time on how we do things rather than actually doing them.

It's good to pick a short time, like 18 months, and say, "Let's try it for that long. Then we'll stop, reevaluate, and make whatever changes we need." The point is to set up something workable, then go on and use it. Make adjustments as you go along but don't spend time tinkering with the organization. At the end of the period of time stop, evaluate, decide what changes to make and move on into the next planning period.

A flow chart of the process might look like this:



8. Design an Organizational Form and Planning Process for the Next 18 Months.

In this way, you keep moving ahead with what you are trying to do while giving a realistic amount of attention to how you are doing it, rather than getting lost in the *how* and losing sight of the *what* and *why*.

A Planning Process for Working with Ministry Teams

Here's a simple planning process designed to do three things:

1. Get people's ideas out so they can be put to work.
2. Help people group together around a common interest.
3. Organize ministry teams that work to help these ideas become reality.

Look over the steps in the process and see how they help to achieve these goals.

- **Brainstorm.** Put people in groups of no more than six around small tables. Have them answer the question, "If we went away and came back in three years, and all the things we would like to see going on had occurred, what would it look like?"
- **Write them up.** Put a sheet of newsprint up on the wall and get every idea on it. Write up every idea, no matter how wild or far-fetched. Jump around from group to group. Don't let one group list ten ideas in a row. Get all the ideas. Don't accept vague generalities like "more prayer" or "more people in church." Push for specifics. Ask, "What would that look like?" "Where would those prayers be coming from? Prayer groups or prayer services around specific needs?" "Who are those people in church? Where did they come from? What would we be doing to get them here?"

Together We Can

Don't evaluate the ideas in any way, just write them up. Get a short verbal explanation of the ideas as you go along, but don't get into discussions about how something would be done, whether it would work, or how much it might cost. You can say something like, "We'll get to those kind of decisions later on. Right now, let's keep the ideas flowing."

- **Discuss in small groups.** Talk with each other about the ideas. Ask, "Which ones interest you? Which ones seem exciting? Would any have an important long-term effect for the church or the community?" Remember, this is an explorative discussion, not an evaluative one. Try to steer away from "Will it work? Is it too hard for us to do? How much will it cost?"
- **Raise exploring and informational questions.** Back in the total group, raise any *informational* questions about any of the ideas. Keep these focused on information and exploring, not evaluation and particularly not fault-finding or "It just won't work" statements. Remember that **how** to do something will be up to the ministry team. The decision about whether the team's plan is feasible will be left up to the parish council after that plan has been formulated.
- **Sign up.** Now comes the real fun! Take ten to fifteen minutes and let everyone in the group sign their names by any of the ideas they would be willing to work on as part of a ministry team. They may sign on to as many or as few groups as they wish. This is called *voting with your feet*. Here we're selecting our priorities by what we are actually willing to invest our own time and energy in, not just by voting for what we think somebody else should do.

*8. Design an Organizational Form and Planning Process
for the Next 18 Months.*

- **Examine and analyze.** Which ideas had a number of people sign up for them? These are your ministry team “starter groups.” Pick one person to be the convener of each group to set up the meetings and get them started. If you had ideas that few persons or no one signed up for, hold onto them, but recognize it’s clear we aren’t ready to work on them right now.
- **Get the word out.** Put out the word about the ideas you came up with to the churches, along with the lists of the ministry teams. Give others who weren’t at the planning meeting the chance to take part and sign onto the ministry teams also.
- **Go to work.** Let the ministry teams begin work and start exploring ways to carry out their ideas. They should formulate a plan and a timetable for what they want to do and what resources will be needed to make it happen. They need to figure out how much it will cost and some potential way to come up with this amount. Who, what, where, when, and how much?
- **Bring plans back to the Parish Council.** Bring the plans and needs back to the parish council. Work through them there. The council representatives should then go back to the local churches and tell them what is being done and why. With the approval and support of the council, the ministry team is ready to carry out their plan. After it’s done, they need to evaluate what happened and share their findings with the parish council. Then they are finished and can go on to other things.

How the ministry team approach to planning is different.

One big difference between this process and the way we usually operate is that we generally divide the church up into groups with responsibilities like evangelism, missions, stewardship, family, children, youth, etc. or nurture, outreach and witness and then tell each group, “Here’s your responsibility. Now put on a program for the whole church around it.”

Each group gets together, tries to think up what to do in their area, and then works to put on their program, usually depending on utilizing the resources of the entire church. However, at the same time, all those other groups are trying to do the same thing with their programs, all utilizing the same resources. The result is we just can’t do all that is planned, so someone ends up feeling like a failure because they didn’t do what they thought they were supposed to have done.

The ministry team process allows people to come together in groups around specific things they are volunteering for, not some general responsibility. Also, they have a specific group of other people they will be working with who are interested enough to have volunteered to work on this particular concern. Many times, ministry teams organized around specific topics are more likely to look beyond the local congregation to the community to resource what they are trying to do. (For example, they might call in a social worker and a pediatrician they know to help lead a forum on children’s issues.)

Rather than a **top-down** method that sets up a pre-determined idea of what the church should be like, this is a **growing-out** method that helps people express their visions, meet others who share those visions, and come together to find ways to make the visions a reality. This helps build the web of relationships that is so important to every group.

8. Design an Organizational Form and Planning Process for the Next 18 Months.

The greatest difference is that we learn to trust the vision of the people. We can't be sure their visions will cover every item someone outside the group thinks is important, but we do learn what their visions are and help them find a way to put their visions to work.

Basically then, what we've said is:

- ***Set up some simple organization for your cooperative parish ministry.***
- ***Choose a planning process to find what you want to do together.***
- ***Agree on a period of time that you will use this organization and process, during which you may make minor changes.***
- ***Begin planning and working together and see what you can accomplish.***
- ***At the end of the time period, evaluate what you've done and make adjustments for the future.***

Using this type of framework, you should be able to devise an organizational structure and planning process that will help your cooperative parish ministry to function and bring people together in a growing cooperative relationship.

Together We Can

NINE:
BECOME MISSION-CENTERED.

Now let's talk about what the cooperative parish ministry is going to do and the importance of the things you choose to do through it. The things you choose to do will reflect how the cooperative parish ministry and the churches that are a part of it see themselves, their mission and their future.

We'll look at these three questions:

What does it mean to be mission-centered?

Why should a cooperative parish ministry be mission-centered?

What can we do to become mission-centered?

First, take a look at these two diagrams.



The one on the left spirals around and around and then turns back in upon itself.

The one on the right spirals around and finally turns outwardly away from itself.

If we are honest we have to say that most of our churches are far more like the *inwardly-directed* spiral on the left than the *outwardly-directed* spiral on the right. Most of our time, energy and money are spent on our church, our pastor, our program, our interests, and ourselves. And rightly so, to a point. It takes a tremendous amount of money, energy, effort and interest to keep anything going, whether it's a family, a school, a club, or a local congregation.

Together We Can

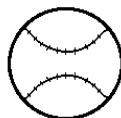
But in all things there must be a balance, and that's where our local churches suffer. We can become so inwardly-directed that we get far out of balance. Take **nurture**, for instance.

Nurture...

The great majority of what goes on in our churches is done in order to nurture our people. Worship services, Sunday School, Bible studies, mission studies, spiritual formation, youth and children's events - all are nurture activities. All of these are important. But one of the purposes of nurture is to prepare us for reaching out to others through mission. Sometimes we fail to remember that point.

One larger church analyzed their budget according to nurture, outreach and witness. They found they spent 85% on nurture, 15% on witness (and the largest part of this was for their annual revival) and 0% on outreach.

Sometimes we are like a baseball team that recruits players, helps them deepen their commitment to baseball, teaches them about great players of the past, helps them learn basic skills, buys them uniforms and all the necessary equipment, shows them how to help recruit and train more players, provides inspirational literature and messages about playing baseball, but never gets around to playing a game.



9. *Become Mission-Centered.*

This overbalance toward nurture has become pathologic in some congregations, to the point that people considering joining the church are turned off by the lack of outreach. People have actually left congregations because they want to be a part of some ministry to others that is not being provided by the nurture-dominated congregation.

An interesting study was done by the Gallup polling organization dealing with youth who did not take part in any church. When asked what would lead them to be part of a church program, most showed little interest in the choirs, youth programs and other activities churches typically offer. But two-thirds responded they would be interested in taking part in some outreach program that helped others.

If the energy we spend nurturing doesn't lead to outreach and witness, then we are overbalanced and need to move more toward a different model:



Here we have balance between *inwardly-directed* and *outwardly-directed*. A local church like this spiral has found balance with nurture and outreach both being important. This church understands that nurture helps us to define ourselves spiritually and prepares us to reach out in mission to express our Christian faith to others and the world around us.

How can cooperative ministry help with this? Let's take a look at those three questions.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE MISSION-CENTERED?

Being **mission-centered** means to be constantly reaching out. It means moving from our inward-directedness toward outward-directedness. It means being connected to the world around us.

This can be played out in a number of different ways depending upon the setting:

⇒ *For an individual person...*

Being mission-centered means reaching out beyond ourselves to others, to feel how they feel, to be concerned about what concerns them, and to act on that concern. Being mission-centered can mean a phone call, a visit, giving our time and money, working on a mission project, or showing our caring in other ways.

⇒ *For a local congregation...*

Being mission-centered means reaching out beyond what serves only the interests of our group. It means being concerned about and involved in the life of our local community and with the lives of the other congregations around us.

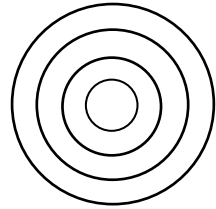
⇒ *For a cooperative parish ministry...*

Being mission-centered means helping the people who are part of the congregations in the cooperative parish ministry find ways to actively reach out beyond themselves and their local churches to each other, to other congregations, to their community and to the world to *help the church minister to all the needs of all the people of the community.*

Being mission-centered means being **active**, involved in actions that reach out.

9. *Become Mission-Centered.*

Reaching out can look like concentric circles where each circle symbolizes one step further outward beyond ourselves. Being mission-centered means crossing the lines that separate us and moving outward in our caring and concern.



The church at each level should help us move into the next circle of caring.

- ◇ For the local congregation, this means helping us move from our inwardly-directed self-concern toward an outwardly-directed concern for others.
- ◇ For a cooperative parish ministry, this means helping us move from concern for our own congregation and those who are a part of it to actions that express concern for our brothers and sisters in other congregations and in the larger community.

For a cooperative ministry, being mission-centered means helping people find ways to actively reach out beyond themselves and their local churches to each other, to other congregations, to their community and to the world to help the church minister to all the needs of all the people of the community.

Now let's deal with the *why* of being mission-centered.

WHY SHOULD A COOPERATIVE PARISH MINISTRY BE MISSION-CENTERED?

◆ *Because that's where the gospel leads us.*

It's clear that the New Testament gospel leads us toward a balance of the inner and outer life. We are to deepen our faith through study and prayer and through our relationship to those around us, our neighbors. This call is extended not only to the individual Christian but also to every Christian congregation, group or organization.

Just as individually we should be concerned about and reach out to others, so should our local church and cooperative parish ministry. Through these organizations that bring a number of Christians together, we can multiply our strength to do things that none of us could do alone, like setting up a community-based Vacation Bible School or running an adult day care center or assisting a tutoring program.

◆ *Because the cooperative parish ministry is ideally situated to help local churches reach out beyond themselves.*

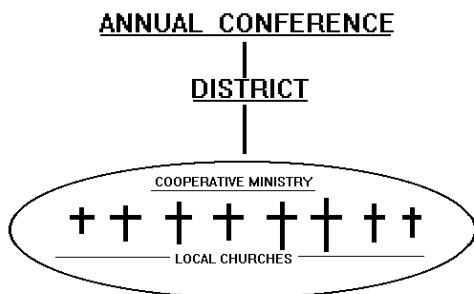
A cooperative parish ministry is made up of people from the local churches. It is geographically located right in the midst of the local churches. It involves the pastoral leaders of the local churches. It has people that know all the problems of the local area and where the resources are to help deal with them. It offers the opportunity to help local churches reach beyond themselves to each other and to the community.

Unlike other parts of our church structure, the cooperative parish ministry is *beyond* the local church but not *above* it.

9. *Become Mission-Centered.*

The cooperative parish ministry is *beyond* the local churches in that it includes other congregations beyond the individual local church. But it is not

above the local church. It is made up of the local congregations and, like them, exists within the area that it serves. It is, like the congregations that are part of it, **local**. The cooperative parish ministry is not structurally or administratively above the local churches and has no administrative power over them. It is an extension of the local churches.



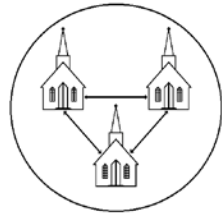
Because of this, the cooperative parish ministry offers the unique opportunity for local churches to reach beyond themselves, without the threat level that is sometimes perceived regarding other parts of the organizational church that are administrative levels above the local church.

- ◆ *Because by working together we have the opportunity to make a difference in some of the problems that affect the lives of the people in our community.*

Today we live in an increasingly complex world. The problems our people face are such that no one congregation, and no one pastor, can deal with all of them. Think about all the needs having to do with providing decent housing, with education, with medical care for our children and our older citizens, with unemployed and low-income persons, and all the needs we mentioned in an earlier chapter concerning families.

Together We Can

If we are to minister to people's needs, we must have a way to do it, and cooperative ministry can be that way. Given all the needs in our communities and the opportunity for cooperative ministry to provide a way for us to deal with those needs, it seems clear we should use it in that way. With these understandings in mind, let's now deal with the *how* of becoming mission-centered.



WHAT CAN WE DO TO BECOME MISSION-CENTERED?

- **Keep the idea of reaching out always before you.**

We should always be helping people to reach out one more level. (Remember the diagram of the concentric circles?)

Whenever we plan something in the local church or the cooperative parish ministry, we should ask ourselves, “How does this help people reach out beyond themselves? Beyond their local congregation? Beyond their own community?”

**How does this help people reach out
beyond themselves?**

Beyond their local congregation?

Beyond their own community?

9. Become Mission-Centered.

Ultimately we want people to become aware of global connections, how they, their church and their community are interconnected to the rest of the world.

Everything the cooperative parish ministry does should have reaching-out as part of its purpose. We need to use each activity to help people be aware they are reaching out and consider what that means to them.

- **Keep the purpose of cooperative parish ministry always in mind.**

Remember the core purpose of cooperative ministry: *“to help the church minister to all the needs of all the people of the community.”*

If we keep this purpose in mind, it helps us hold to the vision of the cooperative parish ministry as a way for our churches to serve all the people in the community, not just ourselves. We need to ask ourselves, “How can we reach out to all the people in our community, especially those who are not a part of our congregations and who are different from us?” This leads us toward being mission-centered.

- **Look for ways to *reach out* through everything you do.**

Most cooperative ministries have little trouble thinking of numerous things they would like to do and that need to be done. One problem is that, like most local churches, much of what we see needing to be done tends to be nurture-centered, focusing inwardly upon ourselves.

Together We Can

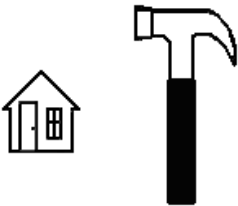
By simply broadening our vision, many of these projects can become mission-centered and have significant outreach. What if, while planning the work of our own Sunday School, we decide through the cooperative parish ministry to set up a Sunday School or Vacation Bible School in a housing project or in a low-income community not presently served by any of our churches? What if we started a youth or children's group in a trailer park or apartment building? There are many more possibilities.

Even the church fellowship supper can be broadened to include a congregation of different racial makeup than our own, or we could hold the church dinner at a retirement home or senior citizens center. When we think in a mission-centered way, it is not difficult to make many of our usual activities outreach projects.

- **Look for mission projects at home and around the world that people can relate to and that will help them realize they can be missionaries.**

People want to be involved in mission...and we have many opportunities to help them experience being missionaries at home and around the world.

Many opportunities await for first-hand mission experience right in your own neighborhood.



One cooperative parish ministry started a housing rehabilitation program for elderly persons needing repairs done on their homes. They received a grant to buy materials and used volunteer labor to do everything from repairing front steps to adding whole rooms.

9. Become Mission-Centered.

Volunteers in Mission go to work in projects just a few miles away or in another country. A cooperative parish ministry can sponsor one person or a whole mission team. Through these encounters, people become aware of the different lives and viewpoints of people living in other cultures. An important part of this is a report-back time with Volunteers In Mission members sharing their experiences and showing photos or videos from their trip. This can be done at a celebration dinner when they return. You might also want to have a program in each church so that everyone feels they have a part in this mission.

And don't forget that our money can go places we can't go and do things we could never do. Several churches in a cooperative parish ministry did fund-raising projects to help support through our Advance Special giving the children's immunization fund that provides important vaccinations to a child for only a few dollars (UMCOR #982645). They were proud to know that a thousand children were spared the risk of serious disease by the money they raised.

These types of projects can be sponsored by a cooperative parish ministry and help people reach out beyond themselves to make significant contributions to their communities and to mission around the world.

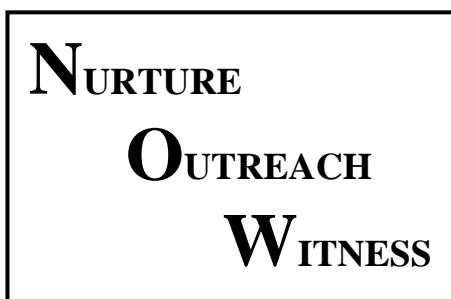
- **Sponsor special events that help us to have an awareness of mission.**

Many churches have mission-saturation events bringing missionaries in from many places to share their work or Volunteers In Mission participants to tell about their experiences. Others hold mission fairs highlighting mission projects from their own communities and around the world.

Together We Can

A cooperative parish ministry can sponsor these projects to make people more aware of the mission activities of the church and the part they can play in them. Just as important can be sponsoring local mission projects like a Habitat house.

- **Use the Nurture-Outreach-Witness model to help the churches and the cooperative parish ministry analyze what they are doing.**



The NOW (Nurture-Outreach-Witness) model can be helpful when used to help analyze what we're doing. (For more on the NOW model, see the *United Methodist Book of Discipline*.)

Take 3x5 cards and write on each of them one thing the church or cooperative parish ministry is doing. Then put three large letters, N-O-W, up on the wall and tape each card under the one where it best fits. Be fair about it. Don't put the annual revival under Witness if no one but church members comes to it...and don't let someone justify putting Sunday School under Outreach by saying, "Well, the doors of the church are open. They could come if they wanted to." This process will graphically illustrate where the interests and efforts of the church currently are.

WARNING

None of this means that anyone should try to subvert the planning process of the cooperative ministry to “make sure we get in something so that we will be mission-centered.” Most cooperative ministries show an interest in mission early on. We need to find ways to help people take that interest and move toward whatever type of outreach mission they feel called to do.

It would be very destructive to the planning process and the trust relationship in the cooperative ministry if someone in the leadership were continuously pushing to insert their own agenda of pre-conceived mission projects into the planning of the cooperative ministry. It is better to let peoples’ interests emerge and then help them find ways to do what they feel led to do. Helping people discover the needs that exist around them and explore ways to meet those needs is one place to start.

If the cooperative parish ministry becomes mission-centered, we build a way of helping people connect with each other and establish relationships from one church to another so that we can work together. Through being mission-centered we become able “*to help the church minister to all the needs of all the people of the community*” and to make the world a little better for others and for ourselves.

Together We Can

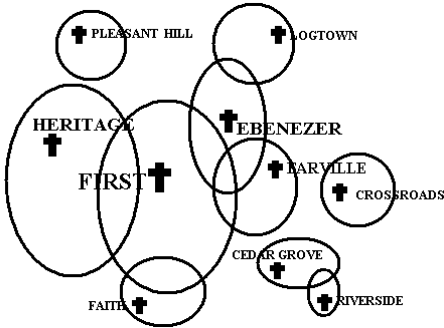
TEN:

FORGE LINKS WITH OTHER UNITED METHODIST INSTITUTIONS, ECUMENICAL GROUPS, AND HELPING ORGANIZATIONS.

GOING BEYOND CONGREGATIONAL MINISTRY TO COOPERATIVE MINISTRY

To begin with, let's think about the difference between **congregational ministry** and **cooperative ministry**.

Congregational ministry is the approach most Protestant denominations have taken for the majority of their churches. As United Methodists, we like to talk about being connectional, and we are, at least when we are dealing with administrative matters like appointments and apportionments. At the local level we have, except for property matters, been as independent and congregational as the rest.



In congregational ministry, churches stake out their own geographic area and try to serve at least some of the people in that area. They sometimes get upset if they perceive that another church, especially one of their own denomination, is moving

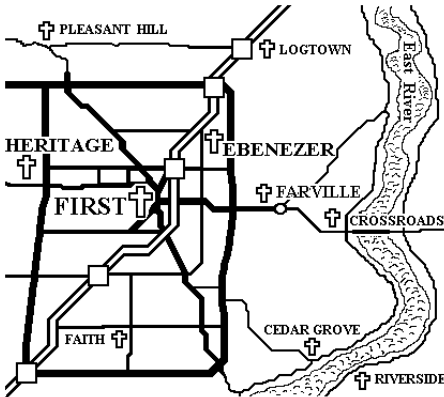
in on their territory. This has led to some areas being served by two or three churches while another area is not covered by any of these churches.

Together We Can

Denominations generally have served certain types of people. It's clear that the Episcopalians, the United Methodists, and the Church of God usually serve different groups of people. This breakdown is often along social and economic lines. The reason? We're simply dividing up the people who live in the geographic area these congregations share.

In **cooperative ministry** we choose a common geographic area and seek to work *together* to serve the people in that area.

Here's what that means. Every cooperative parish ministry has a specific geographic area that it serves. Early in the life of the cooperative parish ministry, we have to decide the boundaries of that area and what it contains.



This is usually done on the basis of sociological and geographic factors that have an effect on the area. (We looked at this in some detail back in the Section 2, Chapter 2, entitled Carefully Choose the Clergy and Congregations Who Will Be Involved.)

We talked about how congregations within a geographic area can work together to strengthen each other and serve the needs of the people in that area. But now we need to go beyond that.

GOING BEYOND BEING LOCAL CONGREGATIONS

If we want to serve all the people in the community, there's an important principle we need to recognize:

A cooperative parish ministry should include ALL the United Methodist entities that are located in its geographic area.

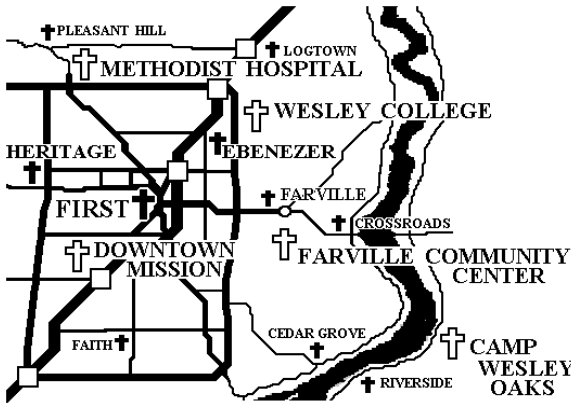
As United Methodists we have lots of entities that are not local churches. These include:

United Methodist entities

- Retreat centers
- Community centers
- Retirement homes
- Special urban and rural ministries
- Colleges and universities
- Camps and campgrounds
- Mission agencies
- Food pantries and thrift shops
- Mission schools
- ...and more.

If we are going to use our cooperative parish ministry to serve the needs of the people in our local community, it makes sense that we not stop with just involving the local congregations but also reach out to include these other United Methodist entities.

Together We Can



Our cooperative parish ministry might now include local churches, a retreat center or camp, community centers or other service agencies, an urban mission,

a college or other church-related school, or other United Methodist or United Methodist-related entities.

In one cooperative parish ministry in a medium-sized semi-urban coastal county, the United Methodist presence includes:

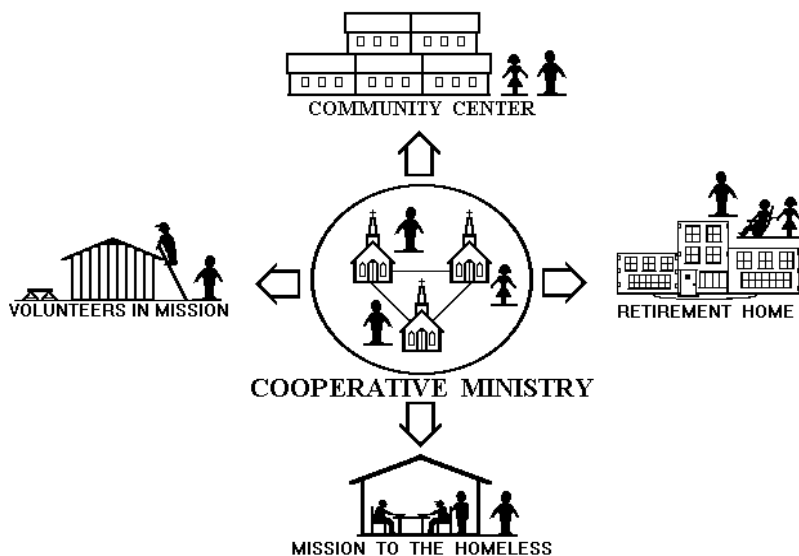
- thirteen local churches*
- a retirement home and personal care center*
- a conference retreat facility*
- a community center*
- a transient shelter and ministry*
- a United Methodist Women's retreat facility.*

The problem is that many of our United Methodist institutions work almost entirely independently of each other, as if they had nothing in common whatsoever. Like the local churches, they act in an independent rather than connectional manner.

10. Forge Links with other Institutions, Groups and Organizations.

We need to think together about what we are trying to accomplish as a church and why. Earlier on, we talked about the purpose of cooperative ministry.

The purpose of cooperative ministry is to help the church minister to all the needs of all the people of the community.



One thing is for sure: if we ever hope to live up to this calling and really help the people of our communities in all their need, we have to build a team that includes everyone who's working in that community. We have to put our efforts *together*.

**BRINGING TOGETHER UNITED METHODIST
RESOURCES TO SERVE THE COMMUNITY.**

In cooperative ministry we are trying to bring together all the resources in the community to meet all the needs of all the people of the community.

There are a number of good reasons to do this:

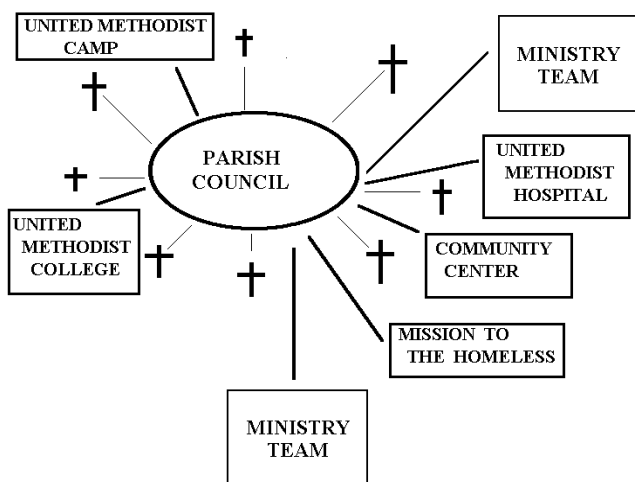
- **Theologically** - As a church we are the body of Christ. It just makes sense that the parts of the body ought to have some kind of coordination. We can't be a body if the parts go off in different directions independently.
- **Logistically** - How can we ever effectively use what resources we have (people, facilities, equipment, money) if we don't get together to plan and coordinate what we are doing and to help each other?
- **Relationally** - We need to build a web of relationships that includes everyone who is a part of anything United Methodist in that area. Through those relationships we can better support and understand what each is doing. Otherwise we begin to feel that we only call on each other "when we need something," and that can breed resentment.
- **Evangelistically** - If we are to evangelize in our community, we need to show that our real goal is to care for people and serve their needs. We are much more likely to appear that way to persons outside the United Methodist fold if we are working together in a coordinated way, rather than each doing our own thing with our own interests at heart, possibly even competing with each other and with other denominations.

10. Forge Links with other Institutions, Groups and Organizations.

It just makes sense that if we are all working in the **same** community, and we are all trying to serve the people of that community, and we are all part of the **same** denomination and are called to our work by the **same** Lord, then we would want to coordinate and make the best use of all our efforts by working together. Cooperative parish ministry gives us a way to do that.

BRINGING UNITED METHODIST RESOURCES TOGETHER STRUCTURALLY

Structurally a cooperative parish ministry that involves these other United Methodist entities would only look a little different from what we have already discussed.



Besides the usual representatives from the local churches, persons who are part of operating ministry teams and the pastors in the cooperative parish ministry, we would also have representatives from each United Methodist institution located in the area of the cooperative parish ministry. Also, any United Methodist clergy appointed to these institutions should be a part of the cooperative parish ministry council.

Together We Can

All the United Methodist entities would be considered full members of the cooperative parish ministry council. We are *all* working together to find ways to help everyone in the cooperative parish ministry and to serve the people of our community.

BENEFITS OF UNITED METHODIST ENTITIES WORKING TOGETHER

Now all this seems simple enough, and it is. But, look what it lets us do:

Local churches now have access to all kinds of people with special skills and abilities that work at the community center, the college or the hospital. Anytime we want a special program on a topic they are dealing with, we know whom to contact. Church members find many new places to be in mission and be involved in numerous service activities they may not have known existed before.

Service institutions have direct access to a large pool of potential volunteers through the local churches. Bringing their needs to the parish council meeting is much different from just writing a letter or sending out a brochure to the churches. They have a way to introduce the people they serve to people who are part of the local churches on a one-on-one basis. Relationships can be built that may teach an inner-city youth served by the community center the skills needed to get and keep a job. Or the mission to transients can offer ways for local church members to be in mission right in their own community.

10. Forge Links with other Institutions, Groups and Organizations.

Colleges and hospitals, which are usually large self-contained institutions, have a better way to connect with the people of their local community and provide important services that may not have been possible before. United Methodist Hospital can provide a health fair at the United Methodist Retirement Center with people from all the churches taking part. United Methodist College can work with the Community Center to help show youth that it really is possible for them to get an education and make their dreams a reality in a productive way. Members of local churches will know people from the college and hospital that can come to their church and help people understand what is offered in their own community.

Camps and retreat centers offer a place for a cooperative parish ministry day camp or a combined confirmation retreat or Bible School. Local churches will feel more comfortable using these facilities for church retreats or planning days if they see some of the staff regularly at parish council meetings. Staff of the retreat center may offer special sessions like “How to Plan in Your Local Church” (a guided one-day planning retreat for churches who want help doing this). Sometimes a camp or retreat center is the only expression of the church in its geographical area. In such a situation, a camp can be a potential base for ministry.

The result of all of us in the area working together is that our horizons are vastly widened. We can do things never before thought possible, and...

***Meeting all the needs of all the people
begins to have meaning!***

WAYS TO BRING UNITED METHODIST ENTITIES TOGETHER

Now let's look at ways to bring United Methodist institutions and local churches together in the cooperative parish ministry:

- **Don't be put off by size.**

Don't assume that just because United Methodist College or United Methodist Hospital is much larger than your local churches, they won't be interested in working with you. Remember, institutions (like hospitals and churches) don't relate to each other. People do. Look for some particular person in the college or hospital who is interested in joining a particular cooperative effort.

- **Seek out those with similar interests.**

Look for someone within the institution who shares some of the interests you and others in the cooperative parish ministry have. Who has an interest in being connected directly to the local community? Does a teacher have students who need to do some work in a community project? Who wants to help serve community needs? In the college situation, don't forget the students.

- **Think about special things you're doing and who might want to be involved.**

If you're sponsoring a Habitat for Humanity house, are there students at the college or people living at the retirement home who would like to help? If you're sending people on a Volunteers In Mission project, are there doctors or nurses at the hospital who would like to go along?

10. Forge Links with other Institutions, Groups and Organizations.

- **Look for things the institutions are doing that your people might help with.**

Is the United Methodist camp holding a Children's Camp during the summer? Would some of the people from your local churches be interested in helping with some of the evening programs? Would folks from the retirement home consider being Grandparents For A Day, to help with children who may be a little homesick? Are there times at the retirement home, besides Christmas, when some entertainment or special program would be enjoyed?

- **Don't let artificial differences get in the way.**

Many people who work for United Methodist institutions, especially clergy, feel somewhat left out. Many times these clergy, labeled as being appointed to extension ministries, aren't included in district or conference activities. Some people seem to feel that this avenue of service is not as valid as being pastor of a local church. Send the message that this is not the case in the cooperative parish ministry, that all of us are ministering together here.

The same is true of size. Our culture teaches that bigger is better. Some of your smaller churches may feel overshadowed by larger institutions. We need to remember that it is the extent of our commitment, not the size of our organization or building, that counts. Don't let the differences others have established divide the body of Christ in your cooperative parish ministry.

- **Keep your purpose in mind.**

We aren't just trying to set up another administrative level or institutional meeting here. What we are trying to do is to *bring everything United Methodist together so that we can serve all the needs of all the people in the community.*

WORKING WITH COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS AND AGENCIES

So far we've dealt with how to get United Methodist entities to work together through the cooperative parish ministry. That would be a significant improvement in many areas where these institutions and the local churches have operated independently of each other. But if we really want to try to minister to all the needs of all the people of the community, it's clear that we have to reach out beyond what we United Methodists can do alone.

It's important to build working relationships with all the service agencies and institutions in the area. That would include law enforcement, health care, social services, referral agencies and others. Doing holistic youth ministry may well include building a working relationship with people from the police force and the high school. Ministering to abused women and children would include relationships with health care, police, social services and others.

It's clear that the church acting alone cannot adequately deal with these issues. We have to work with others to face these complex problems. That's why it's essential to build working relationships with people in all areas of human services.

Some steps in doing this are:

1. Realize that we have something in common.

We have something important in common with those who work in these agencies: we are all trying to help the people of our community. We need to get past our surface differences and find how we can help each other. You may find that these folks attend your churches.

10. Forge Links with other Institutions, Groups and Organizations.

2. Find out what they are doing.

One good thing to do is to spend some time with the people from local agencies and find out what they do, how they do it, and the problems they are facing. Look for what you have in common with them and what you can do together to help people in your community.

3. Help them to see what you are trying to do.

Talk to them and educate them about cooperative ministry. Invite them to make a presentation to the parish council. Help them make a presentation about their work in some of your local churches.

4. Build the web of relationships.

Make contact on a regular basis. Have these folks come to a parish council meeting. Invite them to make a presentation at an event you have involving the whole cooperative parish ministry. Help them form attachments to the web of relationships among the leadership of the cooperative parish ministry.

Remember that if you want to serve the whole community, those who work with community institutions and social service agencies can help you gain access to a whole new group of people and resources that will help you do it.

A word about

ecumenical cooperation . . .

It's clear that, if we take seriously our purpose of *serving all the needs of all the people of the community*, we need all the help we can get. It's also clear that it is just good theology and good sense to have all God's people, including all denominations, working together.

Whether involving other denominations directly in the parish council is the best step for a cooperative ministry would depend on a number of factors. In one place, direct involvement with a regular representative on the cooperative parish ministry council might be the way to go. Somewhere else, ecumenical cooperation might be better handled through a regular meeting a few times a year with leaders of other groups or by sending a representative to their group.

One approach is to include all our United Methodist entities in the cooperative parish ministry and on the parish council, while at the same time seeking what would be the best relationship with groups from other denominations and community service agencies.

Our rule of thumb would be to ensure that we United Methodists are doing all we can to learn to work together while we seek ways to work with others.

ELEVEN:

**CONTINUALLY EDUCATE, TRAIN,
AND PREPARE YOURSELVES.**

Education, training and preparation are necessary to be effective in cooperative ministry. Cooperative ministry is a complex process requiring skills, a body of knowledge, and the ability to act and work as a team.

We'll look at this in three parts:

- 1. WHY SHOULD TRAINING IN COOPERATIVE MINISTRY BE EXPERIENCED AS A GROUP PROCESS, NOT JUST INDIVIDUAL SKILL IMPROVEMENT?**
- 2. WHAT TYPES OF TRAINING ARE NEEDED FOR COOPERATIVE MINISTRY?**
- 3. HOW CAN WE PROVIDE THE TYPES OF TRAINING WE NEED FOR COOPERATIVE MINISTRY?**

Let's take a look at each part in some detail.

WHY SHOULD TRAINING IN COOPERATIVE MINISTRY BE EXPERIENCED AS A GROUP PROCESS, NOT JUST INDIVIDUAL SKILL IMPROVEMENT?

Usually when we talk about training we're referring to either imparting a body of knowledge or helping build a certain level of skills.

Together We Can

Take using a computer, for example:



To effectively use the computer, we need to have a certain **body of knowledge** regarding the computer itself, including what the different keys do, and about the particular program we're using, whether it's a word processor, spreadsheet, or something else.

It's common for a manual on a given program, if you're lucky enough to get a printed one, to run to hundreds of pages, to say nothing of the manual on the computer itself and peripheral equipment, such as a printer. In addition to this body of knowledge, we also need a certain **skill level** at typing with some amount of accuracy.

These concepts are reflected in many church training events. A pastor's school may offer courses on *Lessons from the Journeys of Paul* (body of knowledge) taught by a popular professor from whatever seminary most of the pastors in that conference attended, and *Great Expository Preaching* (skill level) usually taught by the pastor of a very large church from another state.

Sometimes there are courses that combine the two, like *Counseling Families in Divorce Recovery* (requiring both skill in counseling and knowledge of the dynamics of separation and grief) led by an imminent psychologist or pastoral counselor.

11. Continually Educate, Train and Prepare Yourself.

This is also true in cooperative ministry. There is a certain body of knowledge we need and a level of skills required. Among these are:

Body of Knowledge

- Basic Biblical and theological understandings
- How our denomination works and how we fit into its system
- Cooperative ministry structures and operation
- Basics of team relationships and dynamics of cooperation

Skills

- Pastoral skills
- Single and multi-church administration
- How to lead groups.
- Multi-congregational programs and planning
- Leadership development with lay and clergy

The big difference is that *effective cooperative ministry needs not only a body of knowledge and a reasonable skill level, but even more importantly, the learned ability to work with others in a team.* Otherwise we are likely to use the cooperative structure we have set up to continue to operate in the individualistic manner we are accustomed to and become frustrated when these two things run head-on into each other.

Training as a group process, not just individual skill improvement.

We need to remember that cooperation is a *learned* method of working together. Sure, we instinctively huddle together and help each other in certain circumstances. All of us are aware of the stories of selfless cooperation and helping that occur whenever disasters strike.

Together We Can

But knowing how to work in an ongoing team and deal with the dynamics that are sure to arise when people are together in groups requires a body of knowledge and skill level that must be learned and practiced. It requires an intentionality that is more than merely instinctive. So in cooperative ministry, *it's not only important what we learn, but also how we learn it.*

In cooperative ministry it's important for people to learn as teams, not just as individuals.

In cooperative ministry it's important for people to learn as teams, not just as individuals. These teams might be made up of the clergy staff, a lay and clergy core leadership team, a group of youth on the youth council, or the directors of the Vacation Bible Schools from all the churches. One of the major purposes of any training in a cooperative parish ministry is to build ways for people to learn to do things together, not just to strengthen individual skills.

A cooperative parish ministry is a team effort. Individual skills are necessary basic building blocks, but a group's team effort is necessary for those skills to come together to bear fruit. Team chemistry is critical to achieving our goal.

The important question for cooperative ministry training is "How do we improve individual skills while at the same time building the team?" Part of the answer to that question lies in the way we do training.

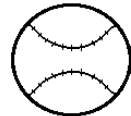
*Ways we do training...
and how well they work.*

- *Sessions where an “expert” talks and everyone else sits and listens probably won’t do much for either skills or team work.*
- *Sessions that are experiential with individuals doing as well as hearing are better.*
- *Sessions where people learn by doing together in team groups are best of all. Then we not only learn about the subject matter and build the skills involved, we also learn how to be a team.*

Cooperative ministry groups need to plan training events and pick leaders that will guide them through **an experiential process in learning together as team groups** rather than merely imparting knowledge through the lecture method.

What is a team, and what are we hoping the team can do?

At one time we used all kinds of sports metaphors whenever we talked about teams. Teams had *players* who worked together for the *good of the team* to win by beating the other guy so that they could *go on to victory*.



Together We Can

If those metaphors were ever any good, they aren't nearly so helpful today when *superstars* jump from team to team as *free agents* in order to grab the biggest *multi-million dollar contracts* and *product endorsements* in order to pay off their *lawyers* in their latest *criminal indictments*.

No, that's not the kind of teamwork we're talking about. What we need is the kind of team where people share their skills, interests and abilities to achieve something that they all agree is important and worthwhile. On this team everybody wins.

For this to happen we need to sharpen the individual skills of everyone on the team and learn to work together so we can use all the skills of everyone who is a part of the team. This is what makes a team more than just the sum of its parts...the opportunity for one person to learn from another person's skills in one area so they can use what they've learned in an entirely different area of endeavor. For instance one person's sensitivity in counseling may help another be more sensitive to people's needs in their teaching or preaching.

In a true team, the talents and abilities of each person help everyone else in the group. That's how working as a team becomes more than just the sum of the skills of the people involved.

$$1 + 1 > 2$$

Training and education that help bring this level of skill and sharing about is what we are looking for in cooperative ministry.

WHAT TYPES OF TRAINING ARE NEEDED FOR COOPERATIVE MINISTRY?

Since cooperative ministry is a different way of doing things, one that calls for learning in a team relationship, let's take a look at some of the areas of training that are needed.

11. Continually Educate, Train and Prepare Yourself.

Theological concepts

We are accustomed to thinking about our relationship with God and His call to mission in our lives on a one-on-one basis. Much of the material we read, sermons we hear, and hymns we sing focus on this. Cooperative ministry, however, leads us to focus on living out God's call through our relationships and work with others. That's why we need to include exploring our theological concepts in training for cooperative ministry.

Cooperative ministry is based on the concept that each of us can more effectively live out our relationship to God and respond to our Christian calling when all of us work together.

Cooperative ministry is based on the concept that each of us can more effectively live out our relationship to God and respond to our Christian calling when all of us work together to help each other minister in ways better than we could alone.

It's not enough just to understand cooperative patterns for ministry and the paragraphs in the *United Methodist Book of Discipline* that support them. We need to thoroughly examine the underlying concepts and beliefs that support what we are trying to do and the effect that they have. This needs to be done in a group setting so we can come to some common understandings together.

Concepts of the Church and of Ministry

We need to recheck our concepts of the church and of ministry. Culturally, we are tied to the notion that bigger is better - if it happens in one big church it's somehow better than if it happens in several smaller churches.

Consider this. . .

First Church has an average attendance of 375 with 47 new members this year, 20 of these by profession of faith. It has a mission program upgrading people's homes and operates a food gleaning program and cannery that sends food to urban feeding programs.

What's your impression of First Church and how they are doing? Would you like to go to church there? If you are clergy, would you like to be appointed pastor of First Church?

These are actually a recent year's statistics and mission outreach for a cooperative ministry of eleven small congregations in a rural area.

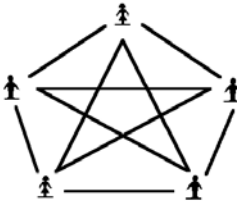
Does our perception change? Are we still as excited about going to one of these churches? Would we like to be appointed pastor of one of these churches?

If this were all going on in one church building, we would think that congregation was doing great. We tend to be less impressed when we're told that several small congregations in a cooperative parish ministry who meet in separate buildings are doing it. Our impression is tainted by our cultural obsession with size and the desire to see everything done under one roof.

11. Continually Educate, Train and Prepare Yourself.

Our concepts of ministry may likewise be clouded. We tend to value ministries that add to the institutional welfare of the church (fund-raising, enlisting new members, having programs inside the church building) far more than we value outgoing mission ministries (helping the homeless, providing support to those in need, justice ministries). This perception constantly affects our thoughts and actions. We need to carefully consider our priorities and values and check how these relate to the gospel and how they affect the way we do cooperative ministry.

Team-building



An understanding of the principles of team-building and the skills necessary to build teams is essential to effective cooperative ministry. We need to be constantly helping people form

teams and nurture the relationships that help them function effectively. These teams may be short-term task forces, the clergy and professional staff, the parish council, the youth group, or the congregation of a local church. In fact, the church is a team, and all of us should be concerned with building it.

Unfortunately, some persons have negative images of team-building, because in some training events what has been billed as team-building has been no more than a few games to be played in small groups one afternoon. This is far from what true team-building is about. Team-building includes working together for a common goal, learning to use the dynamics of human relations in a positive way, and bringing the team together to move on toward a new vision of the future.

Together We Can

Any Christian group trying to do God's work needs to be knowledgeable about working as a team. This is true of the local church and the cooperative parish ministry.

Team approach to ministry for churches and pastors

Cooperative ministry calls for churches and pastors to work together in a team setting. But little of our training in seminary, at pastoral seminars, or in church-sponsored workshops prepares us for this situation. We need training in how to share our ministry and, just as importantly, how not to feel threatened or build a competitive atmosphere among the pastors and churches in our communities.

Training for a team approach includes thinking together about what our real goal in ministry is. Is it simply to build our own congregation's numbers, or is it to deepen the spiritual life in our congregation and serve the needs of the people of our community regardless of church affiliation? Whatever these goals are, they influence how we do the work of the church.

If our goals lead us to work together, we need to think about how we do the day-to-day tasks of visitation, sermon preparation, counseling, working with youth, children, and other special groups, how we deal with issues in the community...and how we can help each other as pastors and as congregations in all these efforts.

The types of training we seek should help us to consider these questions and deal with these issues.

11. Continually Educate, Train and Prepare Yourself.

Relationship-building

Relationships make a cooperative parish ministry go, and any well-functioning cooperative parish will give attention to building and maintaining relationships.

Again, relationship-building has suffered at some training retreats when it was relegated to a small portion of the allotted time. *“All right, we’re going to spend a little time relationship-building before we get on with our main business. Everyone get a partner and introduce yourself to them so they can introduce you to the whole group.”* In this setting relationship-building is only a compartmentalized part of what we’re doing instead of an integral part of all our efforts.

Relationship-building should be part of everything we do. It’s being aware that how we do things either helps or hinders relationships and that we should plan how we do what we do to help the process of relationship-building along. It’s thinking about how we set up a room or organize the schedule of an event, or whom we ask to be on a planning group, and considering how these decisions will affect relationships.

The kind of training we need, then, makes us aware of the power and importance of relationship-building and helps us to be conscious of how everything we do affects relationships. It helps us to make decisions about what we do in such a way that relationships will be encouraged, formed and strengthened.

Planning

<u>MARCH</u>	
1	2
8	9
15	16
22	23
29	30

<u>FEBRUARY</u>	
1	2
8	9
15	16
22	23
29	

<u>JANUARY</u>						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	16	27	28
29	30	31				

Planning, as it has generally been done in the church, is another area that needs attention in training for cooperative ministry. Usually, we have gone to one of two extremes when we

do planning. We may simply be *calendaring* events for a period of time (“Let’s see, we always have Bible School the third week in June.”). If we do planning this way, we make the future merely a prolongation of the present by just doing more of what we are doing already.

Other times we are *dreaming* about the distant future. “*Now everyone write down what you would like to see happening in our church ten years from now.*” Usually we see the future as merely a larger version of the present, ignoring possible intervention by the Holy Spirit and the probability of change in our community or mission setting.

Productive planning is different from either of these extremes. Productive planning helps people bring together their different ideas of what God is calling them to do and share those ideas with others in a way that opens opportunities for them to work with each other and make those dreams a reality. In doing this we build a common goal we can work toward together.

11. Continually Educate, Train and Prepare Yourself.

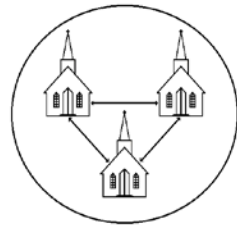
This kind of planning is much more than just scheduling or dreaming about a distant future. It leads us to learn to work with each other so that our plans can become real in the short term, usually one to twelve months. In this way we build, one step at a time, an ever-growing vision of how God will lead us into the future and help us see a vision for the longer term. Also, we learn the group skills to make this vision a reality.

The type of training we are looking for helps us to understand how to do planning in ways that bring people together and help them work cooperatively on their individual callings.

Cooperative ministry structure and operation

Although the basic structure and methods of operation for cooperative ministry are not complex, a general knowledge of them is important. We need to understand these so that we can draw on the learnings of others

while we build a structure to suit our own particular situation. (A few of the basic structures are briefly examined in Section One. Others are listed in the *United Methodist Book of Discipline*, paragraph 206.)



It's also helpful to know what others have learned that works well or does not work so well in the day-to-day operation of a cooperative parish ministry and how it relates to district, conference, and other activities. Learning about how a lay-clergy team can function together is particularly important.

Skills and abilities

As is always the case, we need training in building certain skills and abilities. These might include teacher training, music-related activities, work with children or the aging, and many other areas. This may seem much like the usual, but there needs to be a particular difference. We need to have a cooperative view of everything about which we offer training.

If we are training Sunday School teachers, we need to look at that activity in a cooperative framework. In a cooperative parish ministry, Sunday School teachers don't have to go it alone anymore. For instance, the elementary teachers from all the churches can get together to look at the material for the next quarter and share ideas about how to use it.

If we're training the leaders of youth music, we can now have a youth musical group that comes from all across the cooperative parish ministry and builds a program they can share with all the churches. We aren't limited to just one congregation.



Particularly important is that any training we offer leads us to see the opportunities for what we can do together and does not lead us to look just at what we can do in our one congregation.

One other element to be aware of is the assumed values in any type of training event. Usually these underlie the actual training taking place and are subtle rather than openly stated.

11. Continually Educate, Train and Prepare Yourself.

An example of this is the value implied in many “small church” training events. We tend to assume that small churches should be trying to find ways to act like big churches. Given this value, many of these events are focused on ways small churches can try to do things large churches do, like having many different age-level classes in church school, multiple youth groups, etc.

Sometimes these values lead small congregations to do things that are not necessarily good for them, like using all the younger adults in the church to teach numerous Sunday School classes with only two or three children per class in order to have all those age-level groupings. These younger adults may need to be in a class themselves gaining a basic Christian education and building a sense of relationship that bonds them together. We need training to help all of us see how we can work towards fulfilling our mission together, not how to follow someone’s preconceived notion of what we should be like.

HOW CAN WE PROVIDE THE TYPES OF TRAINING WE NEED IN COOPERATIVE MINISTRY?

When it comes to training for cooperative ministries, there are basically three ways we can provide it:

3 Ways to Provide Cooperative Ministry Training

- 1. Find where it’s being done.**
- 2. Join with others and do it together.**
- 3. Do it ourselves.**

Let’s take a look at each of these.

1. Find where it's being done.

During any given year, there will usually be a number of worthwhile training events concerning cooperative ministry going on somewhere around the country, maybe at a location near you. The problem is finding when and where these events will be occurring.

Two sources of information are the Office of Town and Country Ministries of the General Board of Global Ministries, and the Office of Small Church and Shared Ministries of the General Board of Discipleship.

Their addresses are:

**GENERAL CHURCH OFFICES
WORKING WITH
COOPERATIVE MINISTRIES**

Office of Town and Country
Ministries
General Board of
Global Ministries
Room 1550
475 Riverside Dr.
New York, NY 10115
Telephone (212)-870-3831

Office of Small Church and
Shared Ministries
General Board of Discipleship
P. O. Box 840
Nashville, TN 37202-0840
Telephone (615)-340-7200

Every few years, beginning in 1975, a Consultation on Cooperative Ministries has been held somewhere in the United States. These events are a great way to see what others are doing in cooperative ministry around the country. Also, many conference, regional and jurisdictional events offer training relevant to cooperative ministry.

11. Continually Educate, Train and Prepare Yourself.

One small church center that has been active and helpful with training for cooperative ministry is:

Hinton Rural Life Center
P. O. Box 27
Hayesville, NC 28904
(828)-389-8336

2. Join with others and do it together.

Many United Methodist annual conferences have several cooperative ministries. Each of the five geographical jurisdictions in the United Methodist Church has a number of cooperative ministries. One good way to have the type of training you need is to link with the other cooperative ministries in your annual conference or jurisdiction and work together to plan and carry out such an event.

It's possible that some organization in your conference or jurisdiction might be interested in such an event. The point here is to work with others of similar interests to provide the training you need.

If these conference or jurisdictional entities are not active or interested, take it upon yourself to be in contact with persons in other cooperative ministries in your conference or jurisdiction to think about and plan the type of training event you need. You can then contact the national offices listed above to talk about persons who might be leaders in your event, as well as to consider using some persons from your own group. Here the idea is to think together about what you need and then get something going around that topic. Sooner or later you'll be able to put together the training you need.

3. Do it Ourselves.

In every cooperative parish ministry there is the need for specific training for differing jobs and responsibilities. These may include training for Sunday School and Vacation Bible School teachers, workers with children and youth, people involved as trustees and in the financial life of the churches, those working with the music program of the churches, opportunities for local and foreign mission involvement, and many others.

Many times we simply want to send our people off to district or conference workshops that offer these training possibilities. There is one danger here, however, that we've mentioned before. Many of these workshops will be run on the "small churches ought to act like big churches" model and will train people accordingly. There are several results to this:

- People may feel that what's offered won't work for their church and simply return home without an idea of what to do.
- Some may try what they have learned in the workshop, fail, and feel discouraged.
- Others may feel that it all should be done in their own congregation, which may be unlikely or impossible, or see the cooperative parish ministry simply as a way they can act like the big churches.

It may be better to plan training yourself and hold it in your cooperative parish ministry area. You can bring in resource people to help with the event. Possible sources for these leaders may be recommended by the national offices or by conference and district staff dealing with cooperative ministries.

11. Continually Educate, Train and Prepare Yourself.

This way you can spend some time with these resource people and better understand what they might offer that you and your people need.

Another plus to this method is that you may be able to help resource leaders offering this type of training better understand what churches in cooperative ministries really need. Then you get the training you need and help other cooperative parish ministry churches that will need this same training in the future.

CAUTION! Don't bring in anyone to do any kind of training and just "turn them loose" without having some time together to make sure that they understand what you're doing cooperatively and consider what effect their presentation will have.

Suppose you have a prominent pastor of a large church come in to address an evangelism rally for all your churches, and this outside expert says, "The most important thing today is church growth and that can only be done by each local congregation individually." This sort of thing can undo quickly the spirit of togetherness you've worked long and hard to build because it appeals to our cultural bias toward largeness, individualism and isolation.

Before you have anyone do training in your cooperative ministry, make sure you know **what** they are going to say and **how** it will affect what you are trying to do. (Hint: This includes even United Methodist hierarchy like bishops, district superintendents, and conference staff.)

Use the real experts:

Don't forget people from other cooperative ministries, either in your conference or other parts of the country. Many are dealing with the same issues you are and have tried different ways of solving problems cooperatively. They are the real experts on how to make cooperative ministry work.

By whatever means, it's entirely possible for you to plan your own training event to meet the specific needs of your cooperative parish ministry. The most important thing is to remember that we are helping people learn to work together through a team relationship while we are learning to use our individual talents for the good of all.

Finally, remember that cooperative ministry is an ongoing developmental process that calls for ongoing learning by all who are part of it. Through learning about working together, while at the same time building relationships, we undergird and strengthen all that we do together.

TWELVE:

BE COMMITTED TO THE LONG RUN.

**The cooperative ministry that
will succeed in the long run is
the one whose leaders don't let it
fail in the short run.**

First let's take a look at what success and failure mean in cooperative ministry by examining our notion of "success."

WHAT IS SUCCESS?

If someone tells us that something they did in their church was a "success," it usually means one of several things:

- It was big. A lot of people came or a lot of money was raised, more than usual in that situation.
- A particular goal, usually numeric, was met...or maybe even exceeded!
- The expected happened: whatever the people who put this thing together wanted, they got.
- It fit institutional expectations. It was like similar events we have experienced, and somewhat better.
- It was a little bit different. We stepped over the line beyond where we've already been just a little bit, but not enough to make us too uncomfortable.

We feel it's a really great success when we can combine two or three of these factors.

Together We Can

There are a few other factors we might notice if we analyze the notion of success as we apply it to what happens in the church...

- **Success** is oriented to the very short term: what's happening here and now. (*"Our Vacation Bible School was a great success. We had 38 children."*)
- **Success** is very event-oriented. It places more value on what we do than on who we are. (*See the above.*)
- **Success** is very comparison/competition focused. (*"We had as many in worship in the churches of our cooperative parish ministry last Sunday as they do in some of the big churches."*)
- **Success** is obsessed with numbers. (*Do we really need an example of this?*)
- **Success** leans toward a theology of justification by works. If we are **successful** enough, we may prove our worth and be institutionally justified, or saved.

The question for us in cooperative ministry is: Will we buy into this cultural concept of success?

If we do adopt this notion of success, it's going to cause plenty of difficulties for the cooperative parish ministry and could eventually lead to its failure. Let's take a look at why this is true and then consider a different concept of success.

Anyone who has spent any amount of time in cooperative ministry knows that sooner or later problems crop up and that they usually appear sooner rather than later.

12. Be Committed to the Long Run.

Here are a few common problems we are likely to encounter:

- Someone in one of the churches gets mad or has their feelings hurt and tries to get their church to pull out of the cooperative parish ministry; this is their ultimate way of striking out at whoever they choose to blame.
- A pastor who doesn't want to work with anybody gets appointed to the cooperative parish ministry.
- A program that was seen as a sure winner turns out to be a big flop.
- People go to a cooperative ministry event when it's at their church but stay home when it's at anybody else's church.
- Some conference or district leader castigates the cooperative parish ministry and declares it a failure because it hasn't led to as much numerical church growth as they would like.
- Attendance lags at the council meetings.
- Our bright expectations from the beginning of the cooperative parish ministry become tarnished with the realization that we are moving forward painfully slowly, or sometimes not at all.
- There are plenty of others...you fill them in.

Now let's face it. Anything that has this many shortcomings and problems is a failure...and we ought to give up on it and get rid of it as soon as possible.

Together We Can

But before we throw it away, let's compare it to some other things...our children, for instance:

- They get mad and strike out at whoever is nearest, usually their parents.
- Sometimes they don't want to work with anybody.
- They take part in a school or church program, perfectly prepared, and blow it anyway.
- They want to play when they can choose the game and go home when it's someone else's turn.
- They get mad when things don't turn out like they want them to.
- They want to skip church and school.
- Our bright expectations of what they should be like become tarnished when we find they are individuals with ideas and wants of their own.
- There are plenty of others...you fill them in.

Now let's face it. Can we see anything that has this many shortcomings and problems as anything but a failure? Should we give up and get rid of them as soon as possible? No. Although sometimes it's tempting, we're not going to do that, because we believe it's worth working through all this... and because we care and are committed to them.

So on we go, hoping that the trials and tribulations of today will prove to be worthwhile tomorrow. And there's one other thing: the joys and successes of today are what make our life together worthwhile. It's the living of today that counts, even more than some hoped-for dream of success way off in the future.

12. Be Committed to the Long Run.

Now let's apply this to cooperative ministry.

UNDERSTANDING SUCCESS IN COOPERATIVE MINISTRY.

In cooperative ministry, even though we talk a lot about program and structure, what we're really trying to do is change the way we do things...from working completely individually to working together cooperatively.

The real measure of our success is not in any one event or in numbers, but in how we answer questions like...

- *Are we building helpful relationships with each other?*
- *Are we making progress in growing together?*
- *Are we working together better now than when we started?*
- *Are the things we do meaningful to those involved?*

The real reward in cooperative ministry is not some grand event or program out there that we may reach some day in the future so we can declare ourselves a success. It's right **here, now, today** as we become one body moving ahead together.

The reward in cooperative ministry is right here today, as we become one body moving ahead together.

Together We Can

To deal with this idea of success in cooperative ministry, there are several points we ought to ponder:

Cooperative ministry is not a project to be tried out. It is a process to be embraced.

Sometimes we hear people talking about cooperative ministry as if it were just another short-term project we should try out to see how it works.

*“Well, let’s commit to try cooperative ministry for a year and then reevaluate to see how **it** did.”*

*“What will cooperative ministry do **for** my church?”*

This makes it sound as if we’ll just work together for a while and then...what? Stop cooperating? Go back to acting totally individually again?

Any group that enters into cooperative ministry with this attitude has a couple of strikes already against it.

Strike one - We aren’t really committing to working together...we’re just giving it a try for a little while.

Strike two - We’re retaining an individualist attitude as our real understanding of ourselves and seeing the cooperative parish ministry as just another way of benefiting ourselves.

12. Be Committed to the Long Run.

If we understand cooperative ministry as a process, a way of ministering together that we are adopting, things are changed. **It's what we do together today that counts, and most of all, how we do it together.** It's how together we can become more than we could have been otherwise that is the real reward.

We are not in cooperative ministry just to do something, but to become something. It is the becoming process that cooperative ministry is all about.

We need to understand success as today-oriented instead of solely future-oriented.

Go to any church planning session and you'll hear plenty of talk about the future, both short-term (*"Vacation Bible school is next month. We'd better get some teachers."*) ...and long-term (*"Five years from now, I really wish our church could..."*).

Our present-day plans tend to be unimaginative repeats of the past (*"If we just did it the way we used to, we'd be putting chairs in the aisles again, like we did back in the '50s"*), tinged with dealing with emergencies (like finding those teachers we need next for our Vacation Bible school next month).

Together We Can

One characteristic of this kind of planning is that the further out into the future we look, the bigger and rosier our plans tend to get. They are usually just bigger visions of who we are today, with little room for real growth in attitude or mission.

“In 10 years I’d like to see us have five times as many people and a whole new education building with a gym” is the kind of thing we often hear.

Rarely do we hear something along the lines of *“I’d like to see our church include people from all parts of our community, including the poor and homeless.”*

These visions of success tend to be way out there where they are not constrained by reality. One reason for this is that we base our ideas of success on our cultural expectations of big and bigger. Rarely does some new focus of ministry affect them. They continue to focus on the individual success of one congregation, measured in numbers, rather than on people and their growth.

Have you ever heard an exchange that goes something like this?

Mrs. Smith: We just had a wonderful Spiritual Enrichment Event over at our church!

Rev. Jones: That’s great. How many did you have?

12. Be Committed to the Long Run.

Cooperative ministry can change this obsession with numbers and limited focus. In cooperative ministry we need to look for our successes today, in what we are becoming together. Success is often in what we look for and how we look for it. There is not just one definition of success.

One cooperative parish had a training day for directors of Vacation Bible Schools. When asked how the day went, one person commented, "Well, what they did was good but the attendance wasn't all that great. They only had about seven come." When pressed a little further, it turned out there were only nine churches in the group, and some of them shared Vacation Bible Schools together. Every director of a Vacation Bible School in the parish had been present.

The point: Sometimes it's better to have a small group of the right people than a large group of the wrong ones.

Success in cooperative ministry is in relationships more than in events and numbers. Success is in building relationships to minister to people in our churches and communities. Those relationships and ministries are being built **today**...we're not waiting for something that may happen sometime off in the future.

We need to see problems and failures as temporary.

Failure is temporary unless we let it become permanent.

Look at a marathon runner. The 26 miles of a marathon represent over 45,000 steps. If on any one of those steps the runner says, "I give up, I've had it," he fails. But if he goes on at whatever speed, he'll finish the race. He may or may not come in first, but as anyone who has run a marathon, written a book, built a house, raised a child, or completed any arduous task will tell you, it's finishing that counts. Everything else is secondary.

Fortunately, in cooperative ministry we don't have to worry about how fast we go. It's keeping on going, making steady progress, that's important. Earlier we listed some of the problems we are likely to encounter. Any of these can finish us off or be overcome, depending on whether we decide to keep going.

What looks like defeat today may seem like only a small bump in the road a few years hence.

As we said, "The cooperative parish ministry that will succeed in the long run is the one whose leaders don't let it fail in the short run." The way to do that is to "keep on keeping on," not doggedly insisting on always doing everything in the same way, but keeping on trying. In this way, what looks like defeat today may seem like only a small bump in the road a few years hence.

12. Be Committed to the Long Run.

Try to look at change and the unexpected as opportunities.

The only thing that is permanent is change...and we all know that the unexpected is always just around the corner. That being the case, it's our attitude that will determine whether we act as if changes are to be feared or accepted and capitalized on.

- *A committed leader in the cooperative parish ministry moves away. Is it a disastrous loss or an opportunity to bring a new person, with new skills and abilities into the core leadership team?*
- *Funding for a critical ministry is withdrawn. Do we wring our hands in despair or look for other funds and support in the community, or make changes in the focus of the ministry?*
- *One of our church buildings burns. Do we see it as a calamity or a chance for all of us to show our caring for that congregation, and help them relocate or build a new structure that may better serve their needs today?*

Whatever happens to our cooperative parish ministry and our congregations has the potential for a productive or destructive result...and a great deal of that will be determined by whether we see what happens as a disaster or an opportunity.

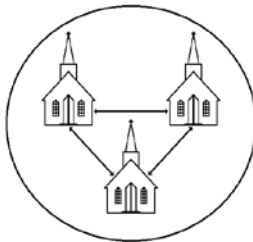
THE BOTTOM LINE.

Usually when we hear someone talk about the bottom line they are referring to turning a quick short-term profit...and that's something our culture relates to quite readily. In cooperative ministry, things are a little different.

The bottom line in cooperative ministry is that our success or failure is basically dependent on what we're looking for and how we're willing to work at it.

If we want an easy, short-term success with big numbers, few problems and no long-term commitment to basic changes in how we do things, we're most likely to be disappointed because we are headed for failure.

If we're looking for long-term, day-by-day sharing and growing together, and if we're willing to stick with it through thick and thin, and if together we deal with whatever comes our way and enjoy sharing the achievements we experience...then all these achievements and the fellow believers and co-workers we meet along the way will be our success and our reward.



SECTION THREE

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF COOPERATIVE PARISH MINISTRY

Together We Can

SECTION THREE

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF COOPERATIVE PARISH MINISTRY

Here's the purpose of this section:

To consider how cooperative ministry, lay pastoral ministry and small congregation development can work together to provide the vision, people resources and geographic strategy to minister to all the needs of all the people of the community and make possible a new future for the church.

And here's an outline of how we'll look at it:

- **The Vision**

The mission of the church is to minister to all the needs of all the people of the community.

- **The Challenge**

There is a huge gap between where we are as United Methodists, serving only thinly segmented slices of the community, and where the vision calls us to be.

- **The Strategy**

How cooperative ministry helps us move toward the vision.

- **The Change**

What we need to do to fully use cooperative parish ministry as a strategy for change and to continue the movement already begun across the church.

OK, let's get started.

THE VISION

The mission of the church is to minister to all the needs of all the people of the community.

Back at the beginning of our exploration of cooperative ministry, we said that the purpose of cooperative ministry is **to help the church minister to all the needs of all the people of the community**. If we think about a new and greater future for the church through cooperative ministry, it has to be related to this purpose and to the whole mission of the church.

Every time we hear a statement like this, we ask ourselves, “Isn’t it impossible to minister to all the needs of all the people of the community?” We can just hear someone reciting that time-worn phrase, “We can’t be all things to all people.”

But isn’t that just what the gospel calls us to do...to be all things to all people? Didn’t the Holy Spirit at Pentecost speak to **everyone** in their own tongue? Weren’t we sent to go into **all** the world?

Imagine what the gospel would read like if Jesus had chosen to minister to a *few* of the needs of *some* of the people. Or if he had chosen to minister to all the needs of a *few* of the people. Or if he had told us to go into *some* of the world to make disciples of *some* of the people. That does not sound like the Christ that we know.

No, the gospel shows us a Christ who was concerned about *all* the needs of *all* people. He sent us out to go into *all* the world and make disciples of *all* people.

We need to affirm that it is the mission of the church to minister to all the needs of all the people in all the world.



It is not a sin to take on this lofty mission and fall short of it, but sometimes we in the church have been guilty of cutting short the mission and limiting ourselves to dealing with *some* of the needs of only a *few* of the people.

The Challenge

There is a huge gap between where we are as United Methodists, serving only thinly segmented slices of the community, and where the vision calls us to be.

At one time we Methodists thought it was our job to follow the spread of population all across the United States and carry our message to people around the world. As a result we minister to millions of people in thousands of local churches all over the globe. Today we have about three and a half million people who regularly attend about 39,000 local churches.

But somewhere along the line our vision began to diminish. We began to limit our vision to following a smaller and smaller group of people. We came to see our job primarily as being chaplains to our regular attendees in fewer and fewer places. Our practice of opening and closing churches shows this attitude. The number of churches we start each year is a small fraction of the number of churches we discontinue or abandon. Nearly all of these new churches are in growing, middle-class, white, suburban areas.

Together We Can

Look around at our ethnic brothers and sisters. Practically all of the African-American United Methodist congregations in our present annual conferences came to us through our 1968 merger with the Central Jurisdiction, which was made up of African-American Methodist congregations across the country. Many of the new ethnic congregations that are started come to us through the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference or the Spanish-speaking Rio Grande Conference.

It is such a rarity for us to start a new ethnic congregation in one of our majority-white annual conferences that when we do start one, we carry on a tremendous commotion as if we had just done something above and beyond the call of duty. And many of these new congregations are begun among the ethnic middle-class in growing suburban areas.

One annual conference put up for sale a large church building complete with multi-story educational wing, church hall and fully-equipped kitchen. Thirty years ago this building housed a growing congregation to which many clergy wanted to be appointed. Then the neighborhood changed. The congregation moved away or died out. Now the church is discontinued and abandoned. The neighborhood around it is filled with people...but they are poor and black.

A pastor purchased the building for \$50,000, a small fraction of its original cost, and started a non-denominational congregation ministering to the people living around the church. Now they have over three hundred in worship and are serving the needs of the people of the community, but the church is no longer United Methodist.

Section Three: A Vision for the Future of Cooperative Parish Ministry.

Current demographic projections predict expanding diversity in this country. Present trends indicate that within twenty years the population of the United States will be divided equally with about one-third African-American, one-third Hispanic and one-third Caucasian. Yet our church extension practices dramatically narrow our field of mission.

Take a look at our church extension practices across the years. In 1830 we sent circuit riders on horseback to the frontier to establish small congregations in cabins and brush arbors in every community and settlement. In 1930 we assigned preachers driving Model A Fords to four or five point circuits in order to serve small churches in every town and every rural community. Yet today, with ever-improving systems of communication and transportation, we have narrowed our vision of church extension to starting only what we hope will become mega-churches among the white, upwardly-mobile middle class in growing suburban enclaves.

Is this church extension policy, with its extremely narrow scope and requirement for very large financial expenditures, bound to fail? If it does, it has a good chance of taking our denomination along with it. We can only sustain this approach to church extension in a very few places among a very thin slice of the population. Yet it appeals to us because it satisfies our cultural obsession with bigness...we love to see lots of well-dressed people together in a new building all under one roof? Following this model, there is no way we can hope to serve the diversity of peoples and cultures that is growing day by day.

If we choose this limited approach to church extension as our mission, we are like the chain stores, multiplex theaters, and fast-food outlets that follow this same plan. We are simply following the money to sell to those who can best afford what we have to offer. This is not our great commission to *go into all the world*.

Together We Can

This limited vision is compounded by our practice of each congregation working individually in an isolated way and serving only a thin slice of the population. One church in a community is located near a United Methodist retirement home. Not surprisingly, the majority of the congregation are elderly, with a few children and grandchildren thrown in. Nearby, another church is made up of younger families with lots of children, teenagers and babies, but only a few grandparents. Halfway in between an ethnic congregation serves mostly African-American professionals. At another church nearby you can see working folks at church in their jeans, while another is for professional older whites, and so it goes.

Each church has a well-defined congregation that determines its personality and the direction of its ministry. Our congregations get divided up into **categories** of the type of people they serve.

Categories we use for dividing people up:

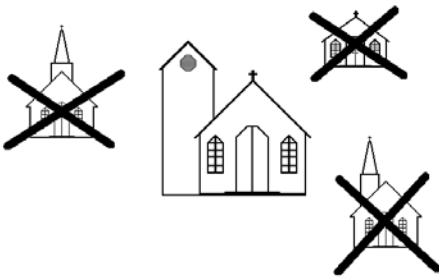
- Ethnic background (*white, black, Hispanic, Asian*)
- Location (*suburban, inner-city, rural*)
- Theological outlook (*mainline, charismatic*)
- Economic strata (*blue-collar, professional*)
- Age (*generation X, baby boomers, older adults*)
- Church background (*seekers, long-time church-goers*)

As a denomination we have particular preferences, or prejudices, about these categories. If you doubt that, talk to a few pastors about whether they would like to be appointed to a suburban, professional congregation of baby boomers or an inner-city, blue-collar congregation of older people.

Section Three: A Vision for the Future of Cooperative Parish Ministry.

Also check where our church extension money goes. How long has it been since your annual conference spent significant money to start a new church among ethnic people? In the inner-city or in a rural area? Among people with something other than a mainline theological outlook? Among older people? Our money shows where our heart is.

Each year at annual conference we celebrate *the* new congregation we started that year; but we don't say much about the several churches that we have just closed or discontinued.



Since we start only a few new congregations across the denomination each year and close many, we tend to become more and more slanted toward the type of churches we are starting, while losing many other types.

We will go to any length spending money and sending leadership to assure the success of a few new congregations while allowing many more older ones to die of neglect, isolation and inadequate leadership.

After a congregation has been around for a few years and some of the new has worn off, unless it's obvious it is headed towards becoming a mega-church, we subject them to the same vagaries and shortcomings of our system that killed off so many others.

If we follow our usual United Methodist practice of working entirely independently, each of these congregations will have a narrow band of involvement, exposure, ministry, and attitude. Again we will be isolated with no way *to minister to all the needs of all the people of the community*. We need to make some distinct changes in the way we do things.

THE STRATEGY

How cooperative ministry can help us move toward the vision.

If we want to follow the mission of ministering to all the needs of all the people of the community, we need ways to reach beyond ourselves to serve those who are not like us.

Three concepts of growing importance have arisen in United Methodism that, when used together in an interdependent fashion, offer new opportunities to help us with that mission.

These are:

Cooperative Ministry - a form of local connectionalism that allows congregations to work together as a body serving the community, doing things that none could ever do alone.

Lay Pastoral Ministry - the use of laypersons in the role of lay speakers, lay pastors, and parish associates to be bearers of the word and to serve small congregations under the guidance of ordained clergy.

Small Congregation Development – the starting of many new small seed congregations in many differing settings.

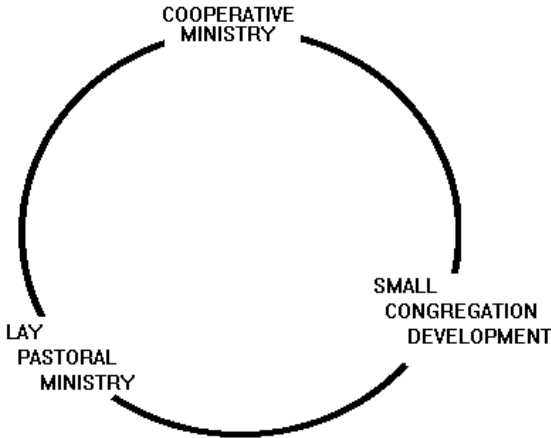
Section Three: A Vision for the Future of Cooperative Parish Ministry.

These concepts have several attributes in common:

Each emphasizes the primary importance of ministry at the local level in a specific geographic area.

Each helps persons find an outward expression of their inward spiritual growth and development.

Each has the potential for making available to the church at large new opportunities for ministry, for the rebuilding and revitalization of local congregations, and the redirection of the denomination.



None of these concepts alone can bring about the changes needed to fulfill our mission of serving all the needs of all God's people. However, when all three concepts are linked together interdependently, many new opportunities become possible. Let's look at each of these and consider how they can be used in an interactive manner.

COOPERATIVE MINISTRIES

Cooperative ministry offers a system of local connectionalism that allows lay ministers to serve existing churches and to start new congregations that open new avenues of service and growth to the entire denomination.

For some time cooperative ministry has offered the possibility for several congregations to connect with each other and minister together. Often cooperative ministry has been seen as a way for smaller churches to work together, allowing them to offer ministries none could do alone.

When linked with new concepts of lay pastoral ministry and small congregation development, cooperative ministry becomes a much more powerful tool for mission and the renewal of the church. In a cooperative parish ministry, lay ministers can serve with an ordained pastor who functions as the parish director or as the pastor-in-charge of congregations to which these laypersons are assigned.

In this way each congregation can relate to one person as the primary pastor serving their local church while also benefiting from the guidance of an ordained, trained and experienced person who has responsibility for the congregation. This arrangement allows lay ministers to serve a congregation while receiving guidance and supervision from ordained clergy with whom they minister. Through the cooperative parish ministry, lay ministers can begin new seed congregations in small communities, mobile home parks, apartment houses, prisons, retirement homes, and other places usually not seen as areas for new church development.

LAY PASTORAL MINISTRY

Laypersons have much to offer as bearers of the word, serving in a pastoral role in existing and new congregations under the guidance of ordained clergy.

From the earliest days of Methodism, laypersons have served as pastors of many congregations. Lately we have tried to push lay pastors into the mold of the ordained clergy, making them full-time, salaried employees of the church moving within the itinerant system. In this way, the benefits of a community-based, tent-making ministry have been lost. (Tent-making ministry is where pastors earn their living from sources other than their ministry. Pastors might receive a small expense reimbursement from the church.)

Lay ministers can serve in a cooperative parish ministry as **lay speakers**, **lay pastors**, and **parish associates**.

Lay speaker – *A certified lay speaker who preaches from time to time in the various congregations of the cooperative parish ministry, perhaps making more regular services possible in some congregations.*

Lay pastor - *A person appointed as pastor of one of the congregations of the cooperative parish ministry, under the guidance of an ordained elder. The elder may be the parish director or coordinator. The congregation may be a traditional one or one of the new seed congregations started within the cooperative parish ministry.*

Parish Associate - *A person, either clergy or lay, who preaches regularly on the preaching schedule in the congregations of the cooperative parish ministry but is not appointed as pastor to an individual congregation.*

Together We Can

By utilizing lay ministers in the framework of cooperative parish ministry to serve existing churches and develop new small congregations, great new benefits become possible.

Lay pastors can be appointed to local congregations within a cooperative parish ministry with primary responsibility for one congregation. They work alongside an ordained elder who has oversight for the parish area and all the congregations within it. Lay pastors can live and serve in the local area for long periods of time, while ordained clergy are part of the moving itinerancy.

Lay pastors may earn all or part of their living at other forms of employment, freeing their appointment from being salary-driven and possibly freeing more of the church's limited financial resources for ministry and mission.

Lay speakers and parish associates can start seed congregations in places not traditionally thought of for beginning new churches.

New seed congregations could be started in apartment houses, mobile home parks, retirement homes, nursing homes, transient-worker communities and other places not served by



traditional congregations. Using lay speakers for this purpose frees new churches from the immediate need to raise money for pastoral support and opens the door to starting congregations where financial support of ordained clergy might be difficult.

When this is done within the supportive framework of a cooperative parish ministry, the new congregation benefits from both the presence of its own lay pastor and the training and experience of the ordained parish director.

SMALL CONGREGATION DEVELOPMENT

One of the primary ways to help the Church grow is to start many new small congregations served by lay ministers linked to existing churches and guided by ordained clergy.

Much time, energy and money has been spent in recent years dealing with new church development and church growth. However, we have tended to limit our vision and our efforts to large, suburban, middle-class, growing, upwardly-mobile areas where new congregations could quickly be established and become self-supporting.

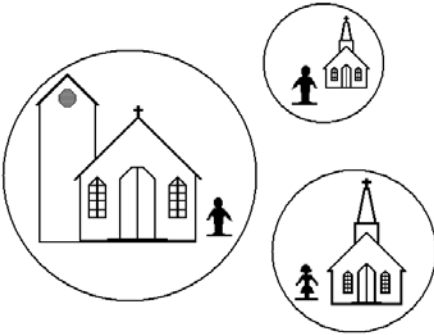
Our vision must grow to include starting many small congregations rather than only a few big ones. We need a theology of "Go into all the world..." to meet the people where they are, as they are. Through cooperative parish ministry we can send out lay speakers and lay volunteers to start a Sunday School, hold a Vacation Bible School or day camp, provide tutoring for children and do all the things that show our caring for people and help establish a seed congregation in that place. Under the guidance of an ordained clergy parish director, we can utilize lay ministers as pastors in those situations.

Established churches in a cooperative parish ministry can serve as sponsoring churches helping found seed congregations, making them a part of the United Methodist system through this form of local connectionalism.

In this way our opportunities for church extension and new congregational development expand from a few growing areas that can afford all the expenses of starting and supporting a church to thousands of places and millions of people across the country that we currently do not reach.

Together We Can

Now let's take a look at how these concepts might function together in an actual situation.



Here's a typical congregation-based group of churches.

Even though they may be connectionally related to a structure beyond the local church, they have little connection to each other locally.

This is how many of our churches and pastors have functioned in the past, each operating individually within their own church and congregation.

There is little contact or communication with each other. Each church is congregationally-based, and the ministry of the pastor is largely confined to that one congregation. Many of our churches and pastors still function this way.

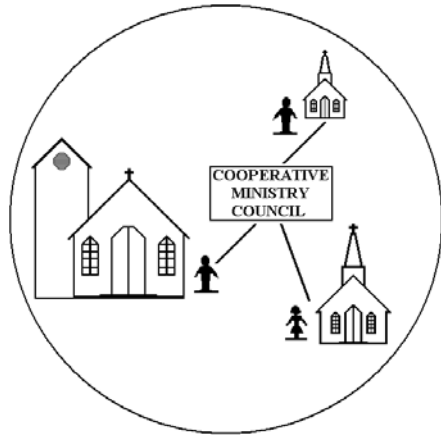
Note that the community in which these churches exist is not to be seen, for although the churches are in the community they have little to do with it and for all practical purposes are not a part of it. Their ministry has little to do with the community in which they live.

Section Three: A Vision for the Future of Cooperative Parish Ministry.

Here's how a typical cooperative parish ministry might look.

The churches relate to and have contact with each other. The pastors are connected to each other, support each other, and function as a team.

Each pastor is appointed to a specific church, and each church is clear about who is their primary pastor. They know they can call on one of the other pastors if there is a specific or emergency need.



Each pastor's ministry is no longer confined to one congregation, but can be offered to the whole cooperative parish ministry. Specific talents of individual clergy or laypersons can be shared across the cooperative parish ministry.

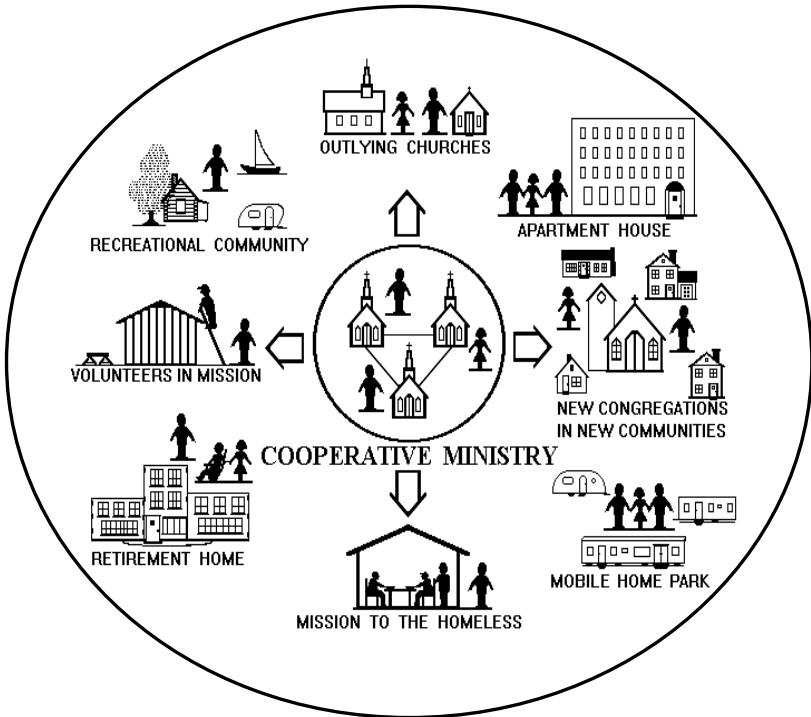
The community that is home to the cooperative parish ministry is considered its primary mission field. An effort is made to serve the needs of persons beyond just those who attend worship services in the local churches.

Even in this model, though, the work of the cooperative parish ministry is almost totally based within the local congregations that existed before it began. Although there is significant lay leadership through the cooperative parish ministry council and its task forces or ministry teams, the worship leadership, visitation, and other leadership roles thought of as part of the work of the pastor is left mostly to the clergy. The growth of the churches is confined generally to persons joining the pre-existing congregations.

Together We Can

If we utilize the concept of **cooperative ministry** in concert with **lay pastoral leadership** and **small congregation development**, something new and different becomes possible.

COMMUNITY-BASED
COOPERATIVE PARISH MINISTRY



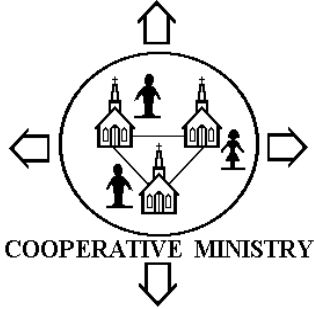
Here we see something very different from the traditional cooperative parish ministry. The primary difference is one of *vision*. Our vision has grown to include the whole community with all its opportunities and institutions.

Our utilization of God-given resources has increased to include not only clergy but also laypersons serving as lay pastors, lay speakers, and parish associates.

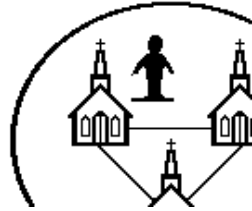
Section Three: A Vision for the Future of Cooperative Parish Ministry.

Congregations exist not only in churches but also in apartment buildings, retirement homes, correctional facilities, recreational communities, mobile home parks and other places we never before thought about having a “church.” Now we can begin to deal with “all the needs of all the people of the community.”

In our example there are several churches that make up this cooperative parish ministry. In a community-based cooperative parish ministry, these would be connected not only by their participation in the cooperative parish ministry, but also by the working relationships among the clergy and their concern for the community as a whole.



At least one of the clergy in the group would be an ordained elder with considerable experience as a local church pastor. This person could be appointed as pastor-in-charge of several or all of the churches in the cooperative parish ministry.



Each pastor and each congregation is directly connected to an ordained elder who can share experience and abilities. No longer are we appointing persons with lesser experience and training without providing them the guidance and leadership they need in order to have a productive and successful ministry.

Many new opportunities for ministry are possible in the community-based cooperative parish ministry, including starting new congregations in places that we may not have considered before.

Together We Can

Teams of laypersons serving as lay speakers or parish associates can start seed congregations in:



apartment complexes,
mobile home parks,
retirement homes,
recreational communities,
jails and prisons,
nursing homes and
personal care facilities.

What if we rented a three-bedroom apartment in an apartment complex? The bedrooms can be used as Sunday School rooms. Bible studies and worship can be held in the living room. We even have a kitchen and a bathroom.

Tutoring for children living in the apartment complex could be offered in the afternoons, with support groups or training classes for parents in the evenings. We could have Bible school or Mothers' Morning Out. Yes, the space is small, but surely we United Methodists, whose great-grandparents started churches in brush arbors, can figure a way to adapt.

We could rent a mobile home in a mobile home park and do the same thing, ministering to the people who live there. We could have a church in a retirement home, or in one of those factory-built homes retirees are moving into in recreational and retirement communities all across the South and Southwest.

Through the community-based cooperative parish ministry, we could use lay speakers, lay pastors and parish associates to start and lead these seed congregations. They might even live in the apartment houses and mobile home parks where we are starting these churches. God has put within every community and every place God's person. Our job is to discover this person and their vision and ask, "What do you need to make it happen?"

Section Three: A Vision for the Future of Cooperative Parish Ministry.

We need to be clear about a few things, though:

- We are starting a new church, a new congregation...not just going over to hold a worship service now and then.
- We're building a community-based congregation among the people who live there...not just providing an activity.
- This congregation is an end in itself and is for those who become part of it...not just a strategy to eventually get them to join one of our pre-existing traditional congregations.
- We're providing leadership from our churches to get these new congregations started and help find leadership among those who become members...not just adding this to the job of the clergy we already have.
- We realize it's okay if this congregation stays where they are, doing ministry in their own locale. This is not a strategy just to build a new church building somewhere else.
- We realize God may have some surprises in store for us. We don't know exactly where all this is going and what our new congregations may eventually become.

We can adopt the approach of **“Let's go where people are and find a way to start a church with them.”** These new ways of sharing the gospel are based on the notion that sometimes we have to take the good news to people where they are, instead of waiting for them to come to us in our churches.

All this doesn't have to be done by ordained clergy. They can help in guiding the new congregations and work with the lay speakers and parish associates in each of the seed churches. We can use the community-based cooperative parish ministry to provide lay leadership and relate these congregations to our existing churches and to our United Methodist structure.

Together We Can

The churches of the community-based cooperative parish ministry may decide to start a new traditional church by providing leadership from among their congregations in order to secure a pastor and place of worship.

The pastoral leadership of this new congregation could come from the lay pastors and parish associates of the cooperative parish ministry, or might be ordained clergy. This seed congregation could become a self-supporting traditional church or may remain a mission of the cooperative parish ministry.



The community-based cooperative parish ministry gives us a way to start congregations wherever they are needed without first having to come up with hundreds of thousands of dollars to fund a pastor and provide a church site and building.

A major difference with the community-based cooperative parish ministry is that the church is concerned about and directly involved in all the areas of life of the community: the hospital, the retirement home, the apartment building, the recreation area, the new community, the places where migrant or transient people live.

We can build partnerships with local community organizations like schools, health-care providers, local government, and others to enable all of us to enhance the quality of life for everyone in the community. These partnerships make it possible for all of us to live out the gospel together...and that can make the impossible possible.

Section Three: A Vision for the Future of Cooperative Parish Ministry.

We are no longer sequestered in our church buildings serving only our regular attendees. We are directly involved in serving all the needs of all the people of the community.

The community-based cooperative parish ministry has these components:

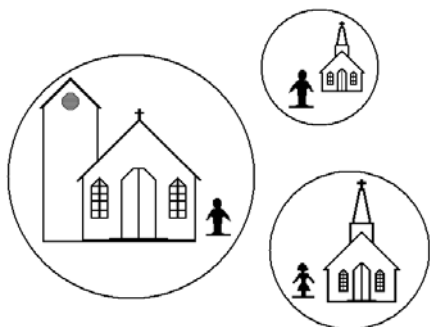
**Parts of a Community-Based
Cooperative Parish Ministry:**

1. An operating cooperative parish ministry with a parish council and staff, on-going regular meetings, and intentional movement toward cooperation among the local churches.
2. Seed congregations begun in one or more locations led by laypersons and clergy from the cooperative ministry.
3. An ordained elder appointed to support and supervise those serving the seed congregations.
4. Ministries being developed in many parts of the community.

Together We Can

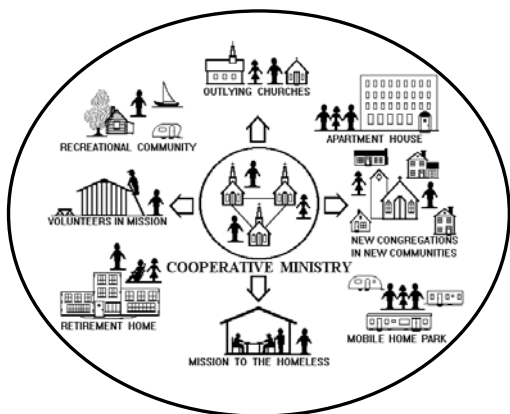
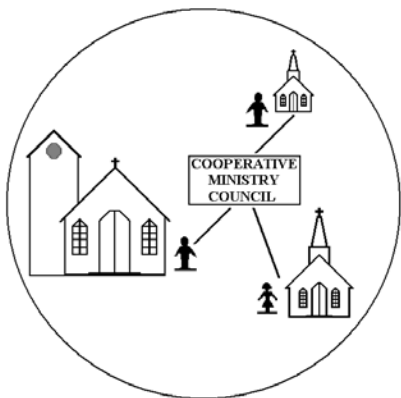
Now let's take another look at those three diagrams and see how there can be a progression through them.

In the first, a typical **congregational ministry**, we see our



churches as many still are today, isolated and constrained by a vision of ministry that includes only the individual local congregation and, too often, only those who regularly attend that local congregation.

In the second, a traditional **cooperative parish ministry**, our vision has broadened to include other congregations in our community, and we are able “to do things together we could not do by ourselves.” Our approach, however, as viewed by the community, is still largely one of “come join us in what we are doing.”



In the third, the **community-based cooperative parish ministry**, our vision has grown to include the *whole community* and all the churches.

Section Three: A Vision for the Future of Cooperative Parish Ministry.

Our approach has changed from “Come join us” to “Come let us join together.” We have moved to build partnerships with community organizations and other denominations.

A key element is that we are establishing congregations in places not usually served and building relationships with the people there. We are not just going over periodically to hold a worship service, or sing our Christmas and Easter music. We are there regularly and for the long term. We are truly starting new congregations with people in these places.

In the community-based cooperative parish ministry, the emphasis is on mission *with* people, not just signing them up in our pre-existing congregations. It must be based on a desire to serve with people where they are, not just to co-opt them into congregations that we simply want to see grow larger.

United Methodism is currently facing continuing dramatic changes that alter the church and the whole society. These include membership decline, the difficulty of keeping up with the escalating costs of fully-paid/housed/insured/pensioned clergy and the challenge of finding enough of them to fill our appointments. As Dr. Earl D. C. Brewer of Candler School of Theology said, “We are a large denomination of small churches in danger of becoming a small denomination of large churches.”

At the same time there is a growing desire by persons to be directly involved in mission, rather than simply paying for someone else to do it.

We have in our denomination the tools to deal with these changes and convert them into new opportunities. Cooperative ministry, lay pastoral ministry, and small congregation development are concepts that are ready to be put to work immediately if we will do what is needed for the church to move speedily in this direction.

The Change

What we need to do to fully use cooperative parish ministry as a strategy for change and to continue the movement already begun in various places across the church.

In order to use cooperative ministry, small congregation development, and lay pastoral ministry as creative tools and make possible the vision we have considered, there are several things we need to do in the United Methodist Church:

- 1. Realize individual congregations are not the Church, and let go of our notion of every congregation operating individually.**
- 2. Expect cooperation as the norm for United Methodist congregations and clergy.**
- 3. Assign or appoint to each local church a pastor who is primarily responsible for only that congregation.**
- 4. Realize it's not necessary for every preacher to be full-time, ordained or on the way to conference membership.**
- 5. Commit ourselves to every congregation having access to the guidance of fully-trained, experienced, ordained clergy who live out the concept of shared ministry.**
- 6. Move toward a standardized salary system that would free us from the stepladder system of appointment-making and allow us to serve where we are needed, when we are needed, for as long as we are needed.**
- 7. Accept the challenge to start new seed churches in all sorts of non-traditional places.**

Section Three: A Vision for the Future of Cooperative Parish Ministry.

Let's take a closer look at each of these needed changes:

1. Realize individual congregations are not the Church, and let go of our notion of every congregation operating individually.

Contrary to how we sometimes refer to local congregations as “the church,” these individual congregations are not the church in and of themselves. The Church is the worldwide fellowship of all believers. Congregations are local cultural groupings of believers in a particular geographic area. Only through being connected to other congregations, denominational structures, and ecumenical alliances do we truly become part of the Church.

Yet we continue to judge and evaluate pastors and congregations almost exclusively on what they accomplish within their individual local churches. We feel that a congregation and their pastor are doing well if they accomplish certain things within the bounds of their local church. Most of the things we use to measure this success are very church and organization-oriented, like offerings, attendance, and numerical growth. We conclude that if a church has paid its denominational apportionments in full and added a few members to the role, it has done all that's necessary to be connectional.



This is contrary to the idea that each congregation should be part of the larger fellowship of believers around the world. The notion of evaluating a church's ministry solely on what they do for themselves and whether they send in a certain amount of dollars leads congregations and pastors to continue to isolate themselves within the small segment of society represented by their own membership.

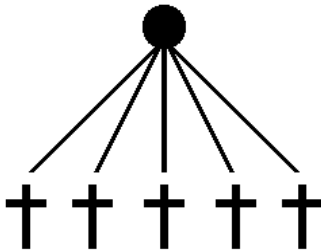
Together We Can

It's amazing that we can have one large congregation surrounded by dying churches in a community beset by problems and still glow about what a great job that one church is doing. This attitude contradicts the Biblical idea that we each have responsibility for our neighbor.

We need to understand that none of us is truly doing well when some of us are perishing. We must change our institutional expectations to include the notion that we are the Church together and that each of us has a responsibility to all of us. As a part of this we need to carefully examine the “rewards” system that continues to undergird this isolationist way of thinking.

2. Expect cooperation as the norm for United Methodist congregations and clergy.

One of the most important distinctions about our United Methodist way of doing things is our connectionalism that ties us all together in a way that reaches out to every church. Yet our connectionalism has been like an organizational chart that stretches down from the top.



directly related to the part above or below it.

It has served us well as a way for resources like the appointments of pastors to flow *down* the system and for apportionments to flow *up* the system. Using this method we have built up a system of **vertical connectionalism**. Every part of the system is

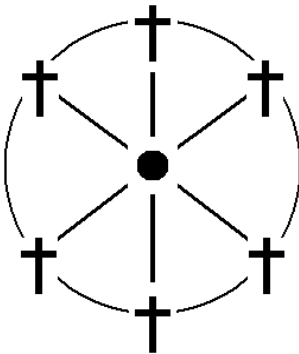
Section Three: A Vision for the Future of Cooperative Parish Ministry.

This system hasn't done much for horizontal or **local connectionalism**. The result, for our local churches and pastors, is that everyone knows who's right *above* them on the system (the district and the district superintendent) but few of us know who is right beside us in other churches just a few minutes or miles away, much less what they are doing and what we might have in common with them.

The end result of vertical connectionalism alone is that many of our churches and pastors work in isolation, cut off from other parts of the United Methodist body nearby. As long as this is the case, our connectional system is working way below full strength because we are using it for only half of what it could be doing.

We need to build a system of local connectionalism among our United Methodist churches.

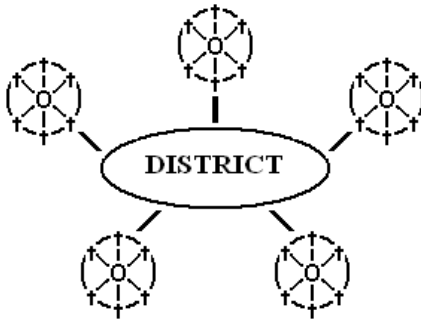
This local connectionalism might look more like this:



Here the churches are connected to each other locally as well as being vertically connected to the district and annual conference.

Together We Can

If we carry this even further, a district made up of a number of cooperative ministries might look something like this:



Each church is connected to the district in the usual way, but it is also connected through the local connectionalism of the cooperative parish ministry to the other churches in the area.

But how do we move beyond where we are to this local connection? An important factor is **expectation**.

People pay attention to and respond to what is expected of them by others... by friends, co-workers, and those in leadership positions. Consider these commonly heard expressions:

*“Treat people like they already are
what they might become.”*

*“Expect the best of people;
they just might live up to it.”*

*“However high or low your expectations are,
you’ll reach them.”*

Section Three: A Vision for the Future of Cooperative Parish Ministry.

These thoughts stem from a facet of human nature: we tend to look at what those around us expect of us and respond to those expectations.

This being the case, it seems we ought to change some of our expectations as a church.

- We ought to **expect** every United Methodist layperson and clergy to minister along with others.
- We ought to **expect** every United Methodist church to share in ministry with other congregations around them.
- We ought to **expect** every United Methodist pastor to minister with other pastors in the area.
- We ought to **expect** every United Methodist bishop and district superintendent to help organize, encourage, and sustain cooperation among the churches in their area.
- We ought to **expect** every congregation to minister to their community as well as to their own membership.

This expectation is prophetic. It is an embodiment of our vision for the future, a vision of how things ought to be. Let's be clear. The source of this expectation is *scripture*.

The twelfth chapter of I Corinthians makes it clear that God expects us to function together as one body.

*For the body does not consist of one member but of many...if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing?...But as it is, God arranged the organs in the body, each one of them, as he chose.
(I Cor. 12:14-18 RSV)*

Together We Can

Though this expectation may be communicated through our leaders and colleagues, it comes to us from the word of God. Ministering cooperatively together is God's expectation for us.

It's also clear that this expectation is one of privilege rather than duty. Having others share our joys and help bear our sorrows is a gift to help us, not a burden to carry.

...But God has so adjusted the body...that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. (1 Cor. 12:24-26 RSV)

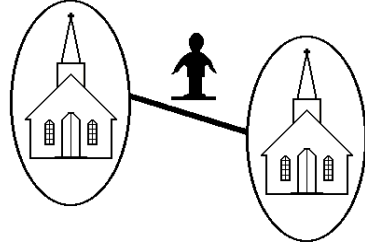
These expectations give us the combined strength to push past our individualistic culture to share our connectedness.

Our expectation of cooperation in ministry should extend not just to a few churches in formalized cooperative parishes, but to every United Methodist congregation and every pastor. After all, it's not just those in cooperative parishes that ought to be connectional, and it's not just those in cooperative ministries that the scripture calls to be part of the body.

Cooperative ministry is a way of building the connectional spirit among all our churches and all our people. If we are called to build that connected spirit, we should expect it of each of us.

3. Assign or appoint to each local church a pastor who is primarily responsible for only that congregation.

We need to recognize that the old circuit or yoked configuration is no longer useful or desirable. These patterns were devised back during the circuit rider days and filled a need then. At that time we had very few pastors, and they had to cover a number of congregations in a large geographical area using a slow means of transportation....riding horseback.



Over the years we made single-church appointments (stations) out of those churches who could meet a set salary level and grouped together in multiple-church appointments (circuits) those who could not. The whole purpose of this exercise was to provide the salary level necessary for a professional clergy.

Today the times and the needs have changed. We have many potential pastors if we will just begin to use the people who want to be lay preachers and lay speakers. We don't have to provide a full-time salary and support package to all these people. Most already live in the area where they would serve. Unlike the horse-borne circuit riders, we now have a means of transportation and communication adequate for them to do their job.

Together We Can

There are **two** other dynamics we should consider:

Dynamic 1 - Most congregations want a pastor who gives full attention to that one church.

Many congregations have been a part of a situation where two, three or more churches shared a pastor... and they are well aware of the dynamics involved. They know that inevitably one church will receive the great majority of the pastor's leadership, time and attention, while the other churches become simply preaching places receiving minimal pastoral services and attention.

Think about it. How many multiple-church circuits do you know that have shown real improvement, growth, or change in *all* the congregations involved?

These congregations long for someone to be *their* pastor. In the past we have perceived this as a control issue, that some folks in the church wanted someone they could pressure to do whatever they wanted and, in the most extreme cases, to hold a paycheck over the pastor's head in order to get their way. In fact, this is much more an attention and caring issue than one of control. "We want someone who cares about us, who will be one of us," is an oft-heard refrain.



Many times we have bemoaned those congregations as having a "bad case of *stationitis*" meaning they had a strong desire to have a pastor assigned just to that one congregation rather than sharing their pastor with one or more other churches.

Section Three: A Vision for the Future of Cooperative Parish Ministry.

Mostly, the people in these churches just want to be loved and cared for like we all do. They know that's not likely to happen when the pastor's attention is split between two or three churches.

There are a couple of things we need to remember:

- ⇒ For years that's just what we told every church they should do - raise their salary and get their own pastor. So why are we surprised when that's what they want?
- ⇒ The only reason we think it is wrong for these churches to want their own pastor is because they are small or poor and don't have enough money to pay a full salary. It's perfectly okay for First Church to want their own pastor... or for the big high-steeple church in the city to have four or five pastors. But if a small or poor church wants to have its own pastor, we brand them as having *stationitis*. What all these people want is the same thing as other congregations, full attention to their church, but the narrow confines of our appointment system and the way we fund salaries makes that difficult.

The reality of the situation is that most churches are more likely to grow and prosper when someone, lay or ordained, full-time or part-time, is giving full attention to that congregation. Our challenge is to find how to do that for every church.

Together We Can

Dynamic 2 - Most pastors prefer to serve one congregation rather than several.

Pastors are also aware of the dynamics of serving multiple congregations.

Due to financial difficulties, two churches that had been station appointments for several years began sharing a new pastor. Right away, several items were at issue:

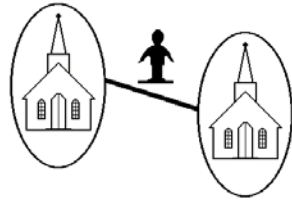
- In which parsonage, and which community, will the pastor live?*
- Which church office will the pastor primarily use?*
- Which church will have worship at 11AM?*

Although seeming at first glance to be ownership and control issues, these are really attention and identity issues. Which church is going to be the one the pastor **really** serves (the one with the parsonage, the office, and 11AM.)?...And which is going to be the **other** church? Pastors know that issues like these are active in every one of these multiple-church appointments.

The real issue is “Are we getting as much of the pastor’s attention as we should?” Most of the time, since they aren’t getting 100%, the answer is likely to be, “We don’t think so.”

Section Three: A Vision for the Future of Cooperative Parish Ministry.

The issue isn't how much time the pastor works, but what portion of the pastor's attention they get...and anything less than 100% is not enough. It's this sort of thing that keeps the life of a pastor serving multiple churches interesting...and makes them look forward to serving a single congregation.



For this reason, and the economic one of pastoral salary, those who serve multiple-church appointments are much more likely to move after a short period of time. Short pastoral tenures tend to ensure that these churches stay small and poor, sharing a pastor, getting less than anyone's full attention and continuing a cycle that keeps them locked in place.

It's inevitable that we will continue to have thousands of churches stuck in this ongoing cycle until we find a way to give them someone's full attention and care and help them break free to become more than they are presently.

It needs to be clear, though, that having a pastor assigned to one local church does not mean operating independently for either pastor or congregation. This should be done only through the connection of the congregation with other congregations in the area in some form of cooperative parish ministry and with the pastor receiving guidance through a relationship with an experienced ordained elder serving in that cooperative parish ministry.

Mount Zion United Methodist Church

Mount Zion had gone along for years, a small African-American rural congregation of a few faithful persons, served by the pastor of a larger church in the nearby town. Then a new pastor was appointed, a retired teacher. Mount Zion was her only church and got all of her attention, at a salary just large enough to pay her travel costs.

Soon, nearly a hundred were at church each Sunday. A ten-week day camp served 150 children per week in the summer. A van was purchased to carry neighborhood children and church members to many activities.

The church received a grant from the Annual Conference to purchase twenty-eight acres of land. Their dream is to build a new church and community center for the surrounding area.

Mount Zion is part of a cooperative ministry among other churches of the area.

4. Realize it's not necessary for every preacher to be full-time, ordained or on the way to conference membership.

God calls many different types of people in many different situations to do many different things. Some are called to the full-time, ordained, itinerant ministry. Some are called to minister where they are. Some are called when their life circumstances make seminary training impractical. Some are called to continue earning their living in other professions while ministering for little financial compensation. We need to help people respond to the call to ministry in all these different kinds of situations.

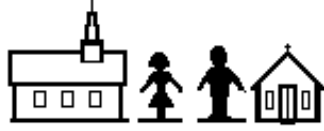
It's interesting that we are currently experiencing a shortage of pastors at the same time that we are seeing a great increase in interest in lay speaking and lay ministry.

One district decided to have regular lay speaking schools. A few months later a meeting was called for any certified lay speakers who might be interested in working in teams to help serve small congregations. Thirty-eight certified lay speakers showed up from one county. All this happened while a number of churches in that same county were experiencing real difficulty in the ability to pay a full-time pastor's salary. Also, there was a need to start several new churches in a number of areas, but no money was available for pastoral support. Is God trying to tell us something here?

Together We Can

God does the calling of people to ministry, but we have to figure out how and where to put them to work. We need to recognize that God is calling lots of people to part-time ministry and tent-making ministries.

God is calling those who want to be lay pastors and lay preachers and already live in their own homes in areas where they could serve.



If we can just recognize this and help it to happen, we will see that God is providing ways to meet not only the needs of our established churches, but is also giving us a way to reach out to missions far beyond what we are presently doing. The people and the call are there. We need to give up some of our preconceptions of what ministry should look like and find ways to help put them to work.

5. Commit ourselves to every congregation having access to the guidance of fully-trained, experienced, ordained clergy who live out the concept of shared ministry.

Across the years we've tried a number of ways of supplying preachers to our local churches. On one hand, we have sent people with practically no experience or training to serve churches with little supervision or guidance.

At the same time, we have required more and more rigorous educational achievements, psychological testing, and longer probationary periods of time served under the supervision of a district superintendent in order to become full conference members.

The message seems to be, "We will appoint practically anybody to serve as pastor of a church, but we are very selective about who we let into conference membership."

Section Three: A Vision for the Future of Cooperative Parish Ministry.

The result of this practice has been to turn loose all kinds of folks on smaller congregations at the lower end of the salary range while reserving the plums of the congregations paying larger salaries for those who gain admission to annual conference membership.

It's time to recognize that this is an unfair and unwise process, both for the churches involved and for many of the persons that receive these appointments. It is unfair for the churches because many of these appointments are unsuccessful due to their short term, the lack of training and skill of the pastor, or the lack of supervision that allows situations that might be corrected to grow beyond cure.

It is unfair for those appointed in that many smaller churches do not have the support system necessary to help a beginning pastor learn the ropes of serving a local congregation or to sustain them through the inevitable stormy times. Many persons who might become fine pastors and give valuable service to the church are lost through traumatic experiences in just such situations.

When a denominational leader gets under pressure to fill an empty pulpit, the temptation is to assign the nearest willing and somewhat capable person. These new pastors are often left on their own until serious trouble comes along. This practice has cost us far too many churches and ministers. Presently we have many persons willing to serve a small congregation who could be put to use...but not in this timeworn way.

We need to place every United Methodist congregation in a cooperative working relationship, under the guidance of a fully-trained, experienced, ordained elder. Such a person can be appointed as pastor-in-charge to a number of churches in a cooperative parish ministry.

Together We Can

Working alongside them and with their guidance can be a number of, lay pastors, parish associates, lay speakers and candidates for ministry. These persons can serve local churches, start new congregations, and work in all kinds of missions and ministries, but they need the guidance and support of an ordained elder. The annual conference needs the coordination and accountability that an ordained elder can provide.

The cooperative working relationship among the pastors and churches in such a situation is essential. It is absolutely necessary that they recognize themselves as being in some form of cooperative parish ministry. The notion of ministering to the community as a whole is an integral part of this plan. Otherwise we are still at the point of each pastor serving their own congregation. If we don't move beyond this, a ministry of teamwork will not be feasible.

In one group of eleven small rural churches, a regular lectionary study brings lay speakers, local pastors, and full-time ordained clergy together for study and fellowship. It is a time of studying the lectionary material, thinking over sermon ideas, and sharing ideas on leading their churches. Parish staff meetings also provide opportunities for sharing.

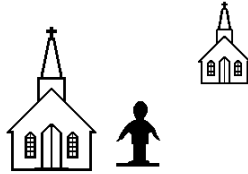
6. Move toward a standardized salary system that would free us from the stepladder system of appointment-making and allow us to serve where we are needed, when we are needed, for as long as we are needed.

Perhaps the most disruptive part of the United Methodist system today is the way we handle pastoral salaries. Once a pastor moves beyond the minimum salary range, salary is totally determined by which church or churches they are appointed to. This brings many undesirable results:

- When a pastor is approached about a particular appointment, one of the early responses to this opportunity is likely to be “What does it pay?” The answer to that question can hinder a prayerful consideration of whether this is where God could best use the person’s time and talents.
- Salary is used to determine pastors’ and churches’ *place* in the system. Their status and standing is determined by what the church pays or what the pastor receives.
- Appointments are made with salary given more weight than any other consideration. Salary level determines whether a church will have their own pastor or share one. The amount of salary determines whether a pastor can be considered for a given church, or whether that pastor would get too much of a raise or cut in salary to be considered for that appointment.

Together We Can

All sorts of schemes are devised to manipulate the system. A pastor wants to take on a small “drive-out” church in addition to his regular appointment, adding a few thousand dollars to his salary. Soon the pastor asks to move, at the salary paid by these churches combined.



The next pastor quickly tires of having two churches and wants the smaller church given to someone else...but he wants to continue to receive salary equal to the amount he was *promised* when he came to serve both churches.

- Pastors are very aware of who is where in the system and who gets what, monetarily. All kinds of enmities and jealousies are aroused by this situation.

At one pastors meeting, someone had obtained a copy of the graduated salary scale, a list of pastor's salaries ranked from highest to lowest on which appointments are based. For a couple of hours the group looked up the salaries of one person and one church after another.

Interestingly, far more concern was expressed about where in the ranking someone stood than how many dollars they received. It seemed that those in the group knew they could live on just about any of these salaries. The real question was who is ahead of whom. “How did he get there?” “She didn't start in the ministry until five years after I did.” “It's just not right the way they jumped him ahead of the rest of us.”

Section Three: A Vision for the Future of Cooperative Parish Ministry.

- Some pastors move after a minimal time in each appointment in hopes of getting further up the system. They have learned that, in many areas of our United Methodist system, three years is considered an acceptable time for a minimally successful appointment. So they move every three or four years, asking for a raise each time and often receiving one. These short appointments limit the church they serve and also hinder their own professional growth. They never discover what they could accomplish after building a mature relationship with a congregation over a longer period.

Let's look then at **three reasons** why we need a salary system that will help us to be what we need to be and do what we need to do.

Reason 1: We need a **theologically-based** salary support system.

Let's be clear about one thing. The system we presently have is not based on anything Biblical or theological. Nobody sat down to determine what would serve us best under our theological mandate and decided that this was it. We simply inherited it from the culture we live in. If anything, our present system is based on competition, using money as the currency of reward or punishment. But it doesn't necessarily reward those who do a good job as a pastor, and some have learned to "play the system" to benefit themselves. This is a highly questionable foundation for supporting people who are called by God to be in ministry. It's time for us to determine what could serve us better.

The purpose of salary in the United Methodist Church should be to provide for the needs of those God has called to ministry so that they can live out that call.

As United Methodists, we believe God calls people to ministry. We carefully examine these people at the local church, district, and conference levels to determine if we agree that their call is to ministry within the United Methodist Church. They spend considerable time, effort and money preparing themselves for ministry. We further examine them. They serve for a proscribed period of time under the guidance and supervision of a district superintendent, are further examined, voted on, and finally become ordained elders of the church.

We need to see that these persons who are called, educated, prepared, examined, and approved receive sufficient support so that they can give their full time and attention to the work to which they have been called and appointed. **They need a suitable place to live, a way to provide for their families and educate their children, affordable health care, and provision for retirement.**

It's our responsibility as the church to provide for these needs so that they can fulfill the ministry to which they have been called, since we are the ones who approved, ordained and appointed them. And since we all have basically the same needs, this support ought to be about the same. It's not right for us to take care of one pastor's needs fully, and with a good bit extra besides, while we let another's go begging. When we do this we leave that pastor to spend his time and energy figuring ways to survive rather than ways to be in ministry.

Section Three: A Vision for the Future of Cooperative Parish Ministry.

Reason 2: We need a system that **supports and enhances our ministerial and missional covenants.**

Our appointment and salary system should bind us together in ministry. Many years ago we talked about the “brotherhood of the ministry.” Now we talk about the “covenant” of serving together, a term describing our notion of what it means to serve in a sense of relationship with other clergy. How wonderful it would be if our salary and appointment system really helped us make these ideas a reality.

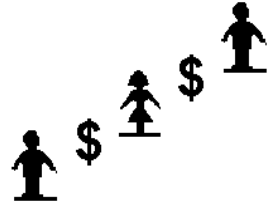
Unfortunately, tremendous dissimilarities exist:

In one community with several United Methodist churches, the highest-paid pastor receives a salary exactly ten times what the lowest-paid pastor receives. Both of them are full-time ordained elders of the church, one serving a large white congregation and the other serving a small ethnic congregation. Yet both have been called, approved, prepared, ordained, and appointed...and both need to support themselves and their families so that they can be in ministry.

Together We Can

In many annual conferences it is common for pastors at the higher end of the salary scale to receive three or even four times what those at the lower end receive.

There is no way we can be a covenant community and talk about fairness where these kinds of inequities exist. It especially makes a mockery of our talk of concern for ethnic



pastors and churches, many of whom are on the lower end of the salary scale. This system sets up all kinds of jealousies, animosities and grievances among our pastors. Everyone has their story of how they have been treated unfairly or didn't get what was promised.

If we wanted to set up a situation to undermine our ministry, our morale and our feelings toward each other, we would be hard-pressed to design one more destructive. Surely we can envision a system where we would all be in the same boat together, where the basic needs of all our pastors are provided...one that binds us together to support each other in covenant ministry.

Reason 3: We need a system that supports and encourages effective and creative appointment-making.

Our appointment and salary system should help us appoint people where they are needed, when they are needed, for as long as they are needed.

An important part of our Methodist tradition, the ability of our clergy to move about where needed, has been thwarted by our salary-based appointment system. In reality, we cannot send pastors to the church they might best serve, but only to the church they can best serve *within their salary range*.

Section Three: A Vision for the Future of Cooperative Parish Ministry.

We can't keep pastors in a given appointment for as long as they are needed...but only as long as finances increase so that they are not penalized in their next move to another appointment. Much concern is expressed about keeping pastors up in salary with their "class," the group who came into the ministry about the same time they did.

We can't use some of our pastors in missional situations, where they would have much to offer, unless we can put together a salary package that meets their current level. We need to move to a salary and appointment system that will allow us to appoint pastors when and where they are needed.

We need to devise a plan of standardized salaries based on our understanding of the Church and God's call, on our notion of covenantal ministry, and on our concept of mission. Such a plan could be arranged so that all who covenant together to serve as ordained clergy could have their basic financial needs met and allow them to give their full attention to fulfilling God's call to ministry. It could remove barriers of competition and inequity that currently separate us. It could help us trust and support each other.

It could allow United Methodist pastors to go wherever they are needed and stay there as long as they are needed. It could remove some of the inequities that exist between small and large churches, suburban and inner-city and rural churches, and ethnic and Anglo churches.

Surely it is worth our consideration to at least give our permission as a denomination to annual conferences that wish to try to devise and enact such a plan.

7. Accept the challenge to start new seed churches in all sorts of non-traditional places.

Presently we have a very limited concept of how and where we will start new congregations. We tend to start new congregations only in suburban, upwardly mobile, growing communities.

We do this through a process of buying land, appointing a full-time ordained clergy as pastor, and building a new facility. This is a very expensive, time-consuming process.



The result is that we start only a very few congregations among a very limited group of people. Most annual conferences are lucky if they average starting one new congregation per year. At the same time we are closing many congregations in areas where there are diverse groups of people. This is no way to build up the Church.

We are limited by some assumptions that we make:

- We *assume* that we should start churches in growing areas so the new church can become self-supporting in a short time, usually within four or five years.
- We *assume* that we need to buy land, build a church, appoint a full-time pastor, and acquire a parsonage right away...a very expensive process.
- We *assume* that this church should primarily serve young and middle-aged families with children...and that they should be able to take on the financial burden of paying for all this.

Section Three: A Vision for the Future of Cooperative Parish Ministry.

There are three problems here:

Problem 1: By making these assumptions, we severely limit where we can start new congregations and who they will serve.

Problem 2: The economic and demographic data show that there are only so many young, upwardly mobile families out there who can afford to support this process.

Problem 3: These assumptions lose sight of our great commission to “go into *all* the world to *all* people.” They confine us to going into some of the world to a few people who are pretty much like us.

If we could drop these assumptions, we would then be free to make some basic changes in the way we start new churches. Our one guiding principle of new church development ought to be, **“Let’s go where people are and find a way to start a church with them.”**

Now let’s see, where in our society today are there groups of people not reached by the church? They are in:

- **apartment complexes**
- **mobile home parks**
- **retirement homes**
- **recreational and retirement communities**
- **jails and prisons**
- **nursing homes and personal care facilities**

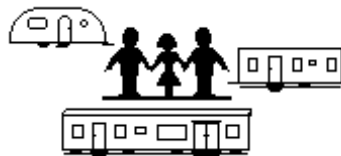
We can start churches in all these places if we can get beyond the assumptions that limit our vision.

Together We Can

What if we began to envision a different future?

What if we rent an apartment and start a seed congregation in an apartment complex?

What if we buy a mobile home and start a church in a trailer park?



Why not a congregation in a retirement home, or in the retirement communities that are springing up? Are any retired United Methodist clergy or laypersons already living there?

Could we have a congregation in a jail or prison? And could it be that God might call one of the inmates to help serve it?

What about in a nursing home or personal care facility? Shouldn't we have congregations of the residents, many of whom can't go beyond the bounds of the facility? How many of them, with a lifetime of service to the church, want to help in whatever ways they are able?

Lay speakers, lay pastors and parish associates can start and lead these congregations. Some of them might even live in places where we are starting new seed churches.

Together we can adopt an approach of "Let's go where people are and find a way to start a church with them."

Together we can use strategies like the community-based cooperative parish ministry to start seed congregations and relate them to our existing churches and our denomination.

Together we can start thousands of new churches ministering to millions of people. A whole new avenue of mission can open for us.

A FINAL WORD...

Today we are very fortunate.

We have many blessings:

We have a *denominational system* in place that reaches into nearly every community in this country through more than 39,000 local congregations and is connected to other churches around the world.

We have a multitude of dedicated *laypersons* living in all these communities and taking part, each in their own special way, in every one of these local churches.

We have dedicated *clergy* working with all these churches in all these communities.

We have skilled *denominational leaders* familiar with every one of these local congregations who travel through and are knowledgeable of all the communities they serve.

We have *communication and transportation systems* that allow all of us to connect with each other.

But we also have a challenge:

We live in a world that is increasingly divided, dehumanized and broken.

We have children growing up in this torn and broken world.

We have families that are torn apart relationally, physically, and geographically.

We have people who are struggling mentally, physically, morally, and financially.

And what are we, the Church, going to do about it?

Together We Can

We have a choice:

We can choose to continue to be isolated, or we can choose to cooperate.

If we choose to cooperate we have a tool, cooperative parish ministry, to help us minister to the needs of all our people.

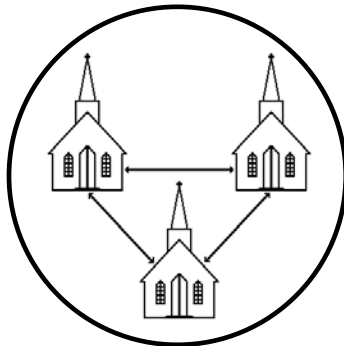
It is this writer's hope and prayer that the people of the cooperative ministry movement will continue on, helping us to see a vision of what we can become through working together, and helping our denomination make the needed changes for our vision to become a reality.

Is all this an idle dream or a realistic vision?

Can we do all that is needed to help the church minister to *all the needs of all the people of the community*?

I believe that...

Together, we can.



**A GLOSSARY
OF TERMS USED IN
COOPERATIVE MINISTRY**

Together We Can

A GLOSSARY OF TERMS USED IN COOPERATIVE MINISTRY

charge - A church or churches to which a pastor is appointed. Officially this may be one church or a group of two or more churches. In practical usage, the term charge usually refers to an appointment to two or more churches (Rev. Smith is pastor of the East Jackson *charge*.)

circuit - A form of a charge where a pastor is shared by two or more churches. The churches may own a shared parsonage or other property. In common usage the term may indicate an appointment to a group of churches (Rev. Jones is pastor of the Georgetown *circuit*.) This form does not assume any shared program or ministry among the congregations. If the congregations do begin to share ministry the circuit may become an enlarged charge. See Section One.

cluster - Officially, a group of churches located in the same geographical area with a loosely-knit organization that allows the participating congregations to engage in cooperative programs to a varying degree. In general usage the term may mean anything from a multiple-charge parish to a group of churches with little formal organization that just get together for some special event from time to time.

cluster coordinator - The clergy director or coordinator in a group of churches designated a cluster. See *parish director*.

cluster council - A planning body made up of representatives from each church and the pastors of the churches in a cluster. See *parish council*.

Together We Can

cooperative ministry - A term with several levels of usage. On the general level it may indicate the whole field of endeavor having to do with churches working together (“We are all part of the *cooperative ministry* movement.”) Also, it may be used to indicate two or more local congregations working together to share their ministry in an organized structure (“Our church and Second Avenue church are going to form a *cooperative ministry*.”) Alternatively, the term may be used to indicate a project or activity being undertaken by two or more congregations in their local area (Our congregations are going to establish a center for the homeless as a *cooperative ministry*.) See Section One.

cooperative ministry council - A planning body made up of representatives from each church and the pastors of the churches in a cooperative ministry. See *parish council*.

cooperative ministry superintendent - A person appointed at the level of district superintendent to work with establishing and supporting cooperative parish ministries in an annual conference or episcopal area. This person is involved at every level of support of the cooperative ministries including the making of pastoral appointments to the churches that are part of these cooperative parish ministries.

cooperative parish - Usually refers to a specific cooperative structure in a given area (“Our church is part of the West Lincoln *Cooperative Parish*.” or “We are exploring the possibility of becoming a *cooperative parish*.”) Does not indicate the type of structure being used in that situation such as multiple-charge parish, cluster, blended ministry, etc.

Glossary

cooperative parish ministry – Sometimes used the same as *cooperative ministry* to refer to the whole subject of churches working together. (“There will be a class at pastors’ school on *cooperative parish ministry*.”) More specifically it refers to an officially formulated and structured setting in a defined geographical area where a number of pastors and churches have covenanted to share their ministry together. (“The churches in Clarksdale have formed a *cooperative parish ministry*.”)

core leader group - A small group of persons including laity, clergy, and denominational leaders who work together to help a new cooperative parish ministry come into being or an existing cooperative parish ministry become more effective. This group does not take the place of the parish council but may operate in concert with the council in a continuing cooperative parish ministry, or pave the way for forming the council in a new cooperative parish ministry. See Chapter Three in Section Two.

council (parish council, cooperative ministry council, cluster council) - The central planning body in a cooperative parish ministry. The council is made up of representatives from each church, the pastors of the churches, any other employed church professionals within the cooperative parish ministry (Church and Community Worker, Christian education person, etc.), the chairs of any operating short-term task forces or ministry teams, and other persons deemed helpful to the cooperative parish ministry. The council meets regularly to plan the work of the cooperative parish ministry and share what is going on in their congregations. The council chairperson, usually a lay member, leads the meetings and works with the clergy parish director or coordinator to set the agenda and do other preparatory work. See Section One, also see Chapter Eight of Section Two.

Together We Can

enlarged charge - A group of two or more churches, served by one pastor, with a number of ministries and much of their planning done on a charge-wide basis. There may be an ongoing central planning group made up of representatives of each congregation and the pastor. There is an intentional effort to share in ministry together. See *charge*, also see Section One.

geographic area – Refers to the defined area a cooperative parish ministry sees as the community to which it ministers. The cooperative parish ministry is made up of the United Methodist churches and institutions within this area. Several factors should be considered in setting this area. See Chapter Two in Section Two.

group ministry - Officially, a loosely-organized group of two or more pastoral charges in which clergy are appointed to the charges, sometimes without the benefit of also being appointed to the group ministry. The pastors and lay council representing all the churches may designate a coordinator. In general usage, the term refers to a recently-begun cooperative ministry effort where a group of clergy have agreed to explore together what they and their congregations can do that will be beneficial to all.

larger parish - Officially, a group of congregations working together through a parish council with representation from all the churches; guided by a constitution or covenant; and served by a staff appointed to the parish rather than to individual churches or charges, with one of the clergy designated as parish director. In actual usage this term has been applied to every possible form of cooperative ministry and, in a few situations, to situations in which individual congregations wished to express their concept of ministering to a community larger than their congregation. See the discussion of Harlow Mills in Section One.

Glossary

lay pastoral ministry - In cooperative ministry, the movement to enable laypersons to serve as lay speakers, lay pastors, and parish associates to provide full ministry to all the congregations within the cooperative parish ministry and to start new seed congregations in both traditional and non-traditional church settings. See Section Three.

lay pastor – A layperson appointed as pastor, either full-time or part-time, of a local congregation. This congregation may or may not be in a cooperative parish ministry. If it is in a cooperative parish ministry, the lay pastor would be considered part of the clergy staff. See Section Three.

lay preacher – A layperson who is licensed to preach and who preaches regularly in the congregations but is not assigned as pastor of a congregation. In a cooperative parish ministry this person could be seen as a *parish associate*. See Section Three.

ministry team - A small group, acting at the request of the parish council, that focuses on planning and carrying out one specific project for a set time period. The task force may be made up of persons who are members of the parish council and any persons not members of the council who are called on or volunteer to work on the project because of their personal interests or abilities. The chair of the task force meets with the parish council during the time the group is active and may be a member of the parish council. After the project is finished, the task force disbands and its members are free to move on to other activities. See Chapter Eight of Section Two.

Together We Can

multiple charge parish - A form of cooperative parish ministry where several churches on two or more charges agree to share their ministry together. Each church and charge retains its own identity with clergy appointed both to the charge and to the cooperative parish ministry. A parish council is organized and is made up of lay and clergy members from all the churches. The council leads the planning and ministry of the parish.

NOW model - A simplified organizational and planning model for the local church. Based on the notion of Nurture, Outreach and Witness, it takes the place of the old cumbersome system of multiple committees and age-level coordinators. This model can be more useful as an analysis system for the work of the local church, to identify where the focus of the church's ministry lies, than if it is used as a prescriptive planning model to make sure the church is doing something in each area. See Chapter Eight in Section Two (NOW model and planning process).

parish associates - A person, either clergy or lay, who preaches regularly on the preaching schedule in the congregations of the cooperative parish ministry, but is not appointed as pastor to any individual congregation. This person may be appointed as a pastor to the cooperative parish ministry as a whole, although not to any particular congregation within the cooperative parish ministry. Also, this person is not the director or coordinator of the cooperative parish ministry, hence the term parish associate. See Section Three.

parish coordinator - see *parish director*.

Glossary

parish council (cooperative ministry council, cluster council) - The central planning body in a cooperative parish ministry. The council is made up of representatives from each church, the pastors of the churches, any other employed church professional within the cooperative parish ministry (Church and Community Worker, Christian education person, etc.), the chairs of any operating short-term task forces or ministry teams, and other persons deemed helpful to the cooperative parish ministry. The council meets regularly to plan the work of the cooperative parish ministry and share what is going on in their congregations. The parish council chairperson, usually a lay member, leads the meetings and works with the clergy parish director or coordinator to set the agenda and do other preparatory work. See Section One and Step Eight.

parish development - An all-encompassing term generally used to refer to the whole field of cooperative ministries. This term may also be used to describe the process of developing individual congregations or parishes in the smaller, non-cooperative ministry sense.

parish director (parish coordinator, cluster coordinator) - A person, usually clergy, who is appointed to lead the clergy team of a cooperative parish ministry. This person's job is to work with the clergy, the parish council, the core leadership team, and administrative leadership such as the district superintendent to see that all that is needed is in place to enable the cooperative parish ministry to function effectively. The parish director would help the parish council chairperson carry out the planning function of the council, meet with the district superintendent concerning administrative and appointment needs of the cooperative parish ministry, and help local churches deal with the issues of being in a cooperative parish ministry where their pastor is part of a clergy team.

pastoral charge - see *charge*.

seed congregations - Small congregations that are started in non-traditional settings such as apartment houses, retirement homes, recreational communities, trailer parks, prisons, etc. The vision is that these will be true congregations living and serving in those places dedicated to and made up of the persons who live there. They are an end in themselves, not a means to go out and build another church building or sign these persons up in a pre-existing congregation. These congregations may be begun by laypersons and clergy from the cooperative parish ministry. See Section Three.

small congregation development - The notion of beginning many smaller seed congregations in both traditional and non-traditional places with all kinds of people. See Section Three.

station - Officially, one congregation served by a pastor or a group of pastors. Generally used to refer to smaller or medium-sized congregations to differentiate them from those on a *circuit* where two or more congregations share a pastor.

stationitis - A pejorative term used to indicate a church who, according to the person using the term, has an obsession with having a pastor “of their own” thus becoming a *station* appointment rather than sharing a pastor with one or more other congregations on a *circuit*. (“Mt. Pleasant just won’t talk about being on a circuit with Taylor Chapel. They’ve got a bad case of *stationitis*.”) See Section Three, change # 3, dynamic 1.

task force – see *ministry team*.

Glossary

team ministry - In reference to clergy, a group of pastors who seek to minister together to their congregations and community rather than working individually with each confined to their own congregation. This intention may lead to a formally-organized cooperative parish ministry.

yoked configuration - Two or more congregations sharing the same pastor. Generally used to denote a situation where the congregations are of different denominations (“Grace Presbyterian and Faith United Methodist make up the Rolling Hills Yoke.”) May be used to refer to congregations of the same denomination sharing a pastor (“Wesley and New Prospect are yoked together.”) Does not indicate that these are involved in cooperative parish ministry. Also see *circuit*.