

CONGREGATIONAL MUTUAL MINISTRY COMMITTEE



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PURPOSE

Why have another committee?

Our Lutheran understanding of the church sees ministry as being shared by all the baptized people of God. At no time can we assume that only the pastor and lay professionals are responsible for ministry. The whole people of God have a ministry with and to one another. It is a mutual ministry. Out of this theological awareness emerges the rationale behind a congregational mutual ministry committee.

The ministry of any pastor, lay professional, and congregation is strengthened when there exists a small group of persons who act out of mutual concern for the pastor, lay professional, and congregation. This mutual ministry becomes specific in such ways as:

- (1) Open communication concerning the attitudes and conditions within the congregation;
- (2) Early warnings of misunderstanding within the congregation;
- (3) A "listening post" for the pastor, the lay professional, and the congregation;
- (4) Conflict resolution;
- (5) Appraisal of the ministry of the pastor, the lay professional, and the congregation;
- (6) Sounding board for the pastor and lay professional in time of personal or professional stress;
- (7) Identifying continuing education that would assist the ministry of the pastor and lay professional and the goals of the congregation;
- (8) Concerns for the spiritual, emotional, and physical needs of the pastor and lay professional.

Through listening, interpreting, advising, conferring, evaluating, recommending, affirming, and forgiving, the ministry of the pastor and lay professional is strengthened as well as that of the congregation.

Considering these benefits and drawing upon the experiences of many synods and congregations, every congregation is urged to consider establishing a Mutual Ministry Committee. Such a committee would be appointed by jointly by the pastor and the congregational president according to Chapter 13 of the Model Constitution for Congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The following sections of these guidelines will offer suggestions for the variety of situations within our ELCA congregations. The Mutual Ministry Committee can be tailored to fit the situation and the needs of the congregation.

② FUNCTION

What would a Mutual Ministry Committee do?

The primary function of a Mutual Ministry Committee is to keep the pastor and staff advised about the conditions within the congregation and to interpret to the congregation the ministry of the professional leaders. The Committee's responsibilities and opportunities can be outlined in four general areas or functions.

(1) Selection

- (a) Identifying the professional leadership needs of the congregation and seeking persons to meet those needs through congregational study and survey of leadership needs at the time of pastoral vacancy.
- (b) Preparing job descriptions for all paid staff persons.
- (c) Serving as the call committee or interview group when a congregation calls a pastor or employs a lay professional.
- (d) Serving as the exit interview group when a pastor or lay professional leaves the congregation.
- (e) Serving as a personnel committee for the support staff of the congregation such as the secretary, organist, choir director, and sexton.

(2) Education

- (a) Identifying continuing education possibilities in light of:
 - 1) concerns and ministry goals of the pastor and lay professional.
 - 2) concerns and mission goals of the congregation.
 - 3) concerns and mission goals of the synod and ELCA.
- (b) Enabling the pastor and lay professional to participate in continuing education by:
 - 1) mutual commitment of time.
 - 2) mutual commitment of money.
 - 3) shared evaluation and planning.

(3) Evaluation

- (a) Sharing with the pastor and lay professional the expectations of the congregation.

- (b) Providing for an annual evaluation and theological reflection upon -
 - 1) the ministry of the pastor and lay professional.
 - 2) the mission of the congregation.
- (c) Providing for periodic review of the call extended to the pastor and the contract extended to the lay professional.

(4) Support

- (a) Serving as a personal and confidential support group to pastor and lay professional.
- (b) Serving as an open communication channel regarding conditions and attitudes within the congregation.
- (c) Serving as agents of reconciliation in time of conflict in the congregation.
- (d) Reviewing annually the details of compensation, housing, pension, and other benefits provided for the pastor and lay professional.

③

MEMBERSHIP

Who would be on the committee?

It is recommended that such a committee not be the church council because of its duties and time commitments.

At the same time, the committee should not be an informal gathering with specific interests or narrow focus. Groups lacking official status will not be trusted by the pastor, the lay professional, or the congregation.

It is, therefore, recommended that such a committee have representation from various leadership areas within the congregation and be appointed by the church council. (Nomination of the persons should be made by the president of the congregation and the pastor. Members should also be selected in light of their skills and ability to function on such a conferring and consulting committee.

The committee usually has six members. Persons from the following leadership areas could be considered:

- (1) members of the church council
- (2) representative from worship concerns
- (3) representative from learning concerns
- (4) representative from witness concerns
- (5) representative from service concerns
- (6) representative from support concerns

- (7) representative from youth concerns
- (8) representative from WELCA concerns
- (9) the pastors and lay professionals

Length of term should be three years to allow sufficient time for experience and trust to develop. Staggering the terms provides continuity.

④ ACCOUNTABILITY

To whom and for what would they report?

A Mutual Ministry Committee is accountable to the church council and reports directly and regularly to the council. At the time of reporting, the Mutual Ministry Committee would also forward any recommendations requiring council or congregational action.

Committee members are to be accountable to one another for maintaining strict confidentiality of all personal information shared during their work together.

The committee would meet a minimum of four times a year. The meeting schedule and agenda will reflect the local situation and the areas of responsibility assumed by the committee.

⑤ TIMING

When is it best to begin such a committee?

Since many ELCA congregations do not have such a committee, it is urged that a Mutual Ministry Committee or some such equivalent be established as soon as possible. Congregations having a committee with somewhat similar responsibilities might wish to examine the scope of its functioning in light of these guidelines.

If you are just starting a Mutual Ministry Committee, consider the following suggestions:

- (1) The most ideal time to begin such a committee would be at the time of vacancy or when a new pastor arrives.
- (2) The next most logical time might be during the first year or upon the anniversary of the call or contract.
- (3) Other times would be identified by the pastor and church council.
- (4) During open conflict or upheaval would not be a good time to initiate such a committee.

⑥ MULTIPLE PARISHES

What about multiple church parishes?

A Mutual Ministry Committee can function in a setting where one pastor or lay professional serves two or more congregations. These guidelines are intended to be flexible and applicable, to such situations. The primary adaptation would be to assure that each congregation is equitably represented on the committee. A major agenda concern will focus on the ways that a congregation shares in program and mission and in the financial support of the pastor or lay professional.

⑦ MULTIPLE STAFF

What about multiple staff congregations?

A Mutual Ministry Committee is extremely valuable in a congregation which has more than one full-time paid professional, that is, more than one pastor, a pastor and a lay professional, or a pastor and various other full-time employees. The multiple staff situation requires that some committee give attention to staff composition, work relationships, accountability, and responsibility. Such concerns are natural for a Mutual Ministry Committee.

These guidelines will need to be adapted, since each situation in a multiple staff congregation is slightly different. In some congregations the senior pastor is responsible for all staff supervision. In other congregations where there is more than one pastor, the responsibility is shared. In other congregations all professional staff are under a personnel committee. Whatever the situation, a Mutual Ministry Committee can be helpful by:

- (1) Insuring that all staff members have a written job description spelling out duties, responsibilities, lines of accountability, and reporting.
- (2) Serving as a forum for the staff members to discuss personal needs and work relationships.
- (3) Reviewing performance evaluations.
- (4) Providing annual review and opportunity to discuss compensation and benefits, working relationships, and goals for ministry.

⑧

GETTING STARTED

Once a Mutual Ministry Committee is established by the church council, the initial meeting will be important. Here are suggestions for getting started.

- (1) Have all members review these guidelines to gain an understanding of the concept and opportunities for such a committee. Later the committee will need to adapt these suggestions in light of the local situation.
- (2) Arrange the initial meeting as an overnight gathering, preferably away from the church building. This will provide opportunity for the group to develop rapport, trust, confidence in one another, and time to clarify the purpose and scope of its work together.
- (3) Build an agenda for future meetings which includes:
 - (a) A review of the expectations of the pastor, and lay professional regarding the mission of the congregation.
 - (b) A review of the ministry of the pastor and lay professional in light of the expectations of the congregation.
 - (c) A review of the job description of the pastor and lay professional.
 - (d) A review of the compensation package and housing situation provided for the pastor and lay professional.
 - (e) Other concerns which have been identified in the local situation.

⑨ RESOURCES

Pastor and People: Making Mutual Ministry Work. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003.

Lang, Sue. "A Healthy Approach to Mutual Ministry," *Lutheran Partners*, July-August 2006, http://www.elca.org/lutheranpartners/archives/060708_03.html

Schaller, Lyle E. "Survival Tactic in the Parish." Nashville: Abingodn Press, 1977.

Summy, Rick. "Shaping a Mutual Ministry Committee." *Lutheran Partners*, July-August 2006, http://www.elca.org/lutheranpartners/archives/060708_05.html

These guidelines are based on material developed by the Division for Professional Leadership of the Lutheran Church in America.