

Covenant Commission: Collaborative Ministries – Creating Partnerships

Regional Council

Antler River Watershed

Horseshoe Falls

Western Ontario Waterways

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What is Collaborative Ministry?

Collaborative ministry is the term used to describe any arrangement where two or more congregations, or pastoral charges, enter into an agreement to work together. This can include:

- Sharing ministry personnel
- Sharing other staff, for example office administrator, music director, custodian
- Nesting (sharing space and often ministry personnel)
- Sharing programs, for example Messy Church, Vacation Bible School, Youth or Seniors activities
- Purchasing resources and supplies together in bulk to save money
- Outreach programs such as Canada Foodgrains Growing Project
- Anything else you can imagine.

Sometimes these partnerships are created for a specific purpose, such as sharing services in the summer months, or joining together for a special service or event. In these situations the agreement is usually simple and informal. Other times the arrangement may last for years and require a written agreement outlining how decisions will be made, division of expenses/income, responsibilities of each party etc. This is particularly important for agreements involving staff or ministry personnel.

Background: Pastoral Charges and Congregations

In the United Church of Canada, any group that gathers to explore their faith, worship and serve together, and has been recognized through a covenant with a regional council, is called a community of faith. One type of community of faith is the congregation. Every congregation is also part of a pastoral charge. Sometimes there is only one congregation in a pastoral charge, but often two or more congregations are part of the same pastoral charge. Congregations in a pastoral charge are sometimes referred to as “preaching places” and they are all served by the same ministry personnel. A pastoral charge also has a governing body, as does each congregation.

B.4.2 Multi-point Pastoral Charges If a pastoral charge has more than one congregation, the congregations and the regional council decide how the responsibilities and governance requirements for the community of faith are divided among the congregations and the pastoral charge as a whole. *The Manual 2019*

A pastoral charge has a governing body that includes representatives from all congregations in the charge. In general this governing body:

- Issues a call or appointment to ministry personnel
- Oversees the budget for the pastoral charge
- Oversees any shared property or investments
- Submits statistical information to The United Church of Canada
- Represents the pastoral charge in matters with the regional council
- Manages the charitable account held by the pastoral charge
- Enters into any collaborative agreement related to ministry personnel

A congregation has a governing body with its own responsibilities, including the following:

- Hires, oversees staff who are not ministry personnel (administrator, musicians, custodian etc)

- Oversees the budget for the congregation
- Contributes to the expenses of the pastoral charge as per an agreement
- Submits reports for the pastoral charge annual report
- Submits statistical information for the pastoral charge report
- Manages the charitable account held by congregation
- Manages the congregation's property and investments
- Represents the congregation in matters with the regional council
- Makes decision related to worship, membership, fundraising etc.
- May enter into a collaborative agreement with another congregation or pastoral charge that is not related to ministry personnel

In many ways the pastoral charge is a good example of collaborative ministry that evolved from a time when neighbouring communities of faith were joined together in a circuit, or other arrangement, to share the expenses and services of a minister. In The United Church of Canada today there are approximately 2100 pastoral charges and 2800 congregations.

When considering a collaborative agreement, it is important to clarify whether this is an agreement between congregations, or pastoral charges. If it is for the purpose of sharing a ministry personnel position then it must be an agreement between pastoral charges.

Collaborative agreements do not supersede or eliminate the responsibilities shared by congregations in a pastoral charge.

Best Practices for Collaborative Ministry

The key to creating a successful collaborative ministry is to nurture and maintain a healthy relationship with the others in the arrangement. Best practices include:

- Open and clear communication
- Flexibility
- Willingness to cooperate
- Shared sense of vision or purpose for the collaborative ministry
- A well written, workable agreement that is reviewed regularly and updated as needed
- Well written position descriptions (for ministry personnel and staff involved)
- Clear understanding of each partner's role and responsibilities

Collaborative Ministry to “Share” Ministry Personnel

An agreement to create a ministry personnel position that would be shared by more than one pastoral charge is a common form of collaborative ministry. This can be done in two ways:

Option A. One pastoral charge calls or appoints the ministry personnel. The salary is paid through their ADP account. The other partners pay their share of salary, benefits, continuing education allowance, Canada pension and employment insurance to the employing pastoral charge. The amount is based on

the hours per week of service they receive from the minister as set out in the agreement. Mileage is reimbursed directly to the minister if it is not included in the salary.

Option B. Each pastoral charge agrees to separately call or appoint the same person as their minister for an agreed upon number of hours that added together does not exceed 40 hours per week. The minister is paid separately by each pastoral charge through ADP.

In both options, the agreement must allow for some flexibility recognizing that the hours worked in a given week may occasionally be higher for one congregation than another as the minister responds to pastoral care needs or special events. It is understood that the number of hours will average out to meet the agreement.

[**What is “Nesting”?**](#)

Nesting is the term used to describe a situation where one congregation physically moves into the church building of another congregation. In a simple situation, they may simply be renting space. They continue to have their own separate worship service, ministry personnel and other staff. They remain a separate congregation with their own governing body, budget and finances. In other situations they may share worship, ministry personnel, programs etc. but still remain a separate congregation. Sometimes this is a first step in moving toward amalgamation.

[**Ecumenical Shared Ministry**](#)

This is a shared ministry agreement between a United Church pastoral charge and a non-united church congregation or faith group. Information on ecumenical shared ministry is available on-line, in a [handbook](#).

[**Collaborative Ministry Agreements**](#)

While it is important to recognize that each agreement needs to reflect the unique needs and ministries of each pastoral charge, there are some key points that need to be included in every agreement.

Items to include:

- Purpose: What will be accomplished by this collaborative ministry? For example, pastoral charges A and B will join together to support a full-time ministry personnel position which will provide ministry to both pastoral charges based on the details outlined in this agreement.
- Clearly identify the pastoral charges in the agreement and name the congregations that make up each pastoral charge
- Set the date and time for this agreement. For example a commitment to a three year term.
- Clearly state the percentage of expenses to be paid by each pastoral charge and how and when the money will be paid by each partner.
- Determine if there will be a joint committee to oversee the agreement, how each party will be represented and how often they will meet
- Set up a process for resolving disputes, addressing concerns or modifying the agreement
- Outline the process for a pastoral charge to leave the agreement if necessary due to unforeseen events. For example: a minimum of 120 days notice shall be given to ensure proper notice can be given regarding a change to the call or appointment

- If this is for a nesting agreement, be sure to include terms regarding use of space in the building, shared building expenses etc.

Writing an Agreement for “Sharing” Ministry Personnel

When pastoral charges make the decision to share a ministry personnel position, it is important to have an agreement that will support the pastoral relationship between the minister and all partners. In addition to the items listed above, it is helpful to include:

- Clearly state the number of hours per week will be spent with each pastoral charge (if there is more than one congregation in each pastoral charge state how many hours per congregation)
- Clearly state the percentage of expenses to be paid by each pastoral charge and how and when the money will be paid by each partner.
- Determine how the M&P committees will work together for ministry personnel.
- Determine how special worship events such as Christmas Eve and Easter Sunday will be scheduled
- Determine how vacation and study leave will be co-ordinated
- Decide on a location(s) for the minister’s office and office hours
- Co-ordinate meetings to make it possible for the minister to be in attendance. This is particularly important if the pastoral charges represent multiple congregations.
- Decide on worship times to enable the minister to travel between preaching points.
- If it is decided that the minister will not be in attendance at every congregation each week, decide if pulpit supply will be arranged separately or as part of the agreement. (same for vacation and other times the minister is unavailable)
- If there needs to be a search to fill the position, determine how each pastoral charge will be represented.

Best Practices When “Sharing” Ministry Personnel

- Follow the same or similar order of worship
- Schedule joint services throughout the year to bring the communities of faith together and give the ministry personnel a break from leading multiple services each Sunday
- Share programs such as bible study, confirmation classes etc. when possible
- Communicate the terms of the agreement clearly with the members and adherents
- Establish a clear communication policy between the partners and ministry personnel
- Be flexible

Approving Collaborative Ministry Agreements

Congregations and pastoral charges are required to conduct regular self-assessments. The completion and annual updating of the profile and living faith story is the recommended way to identify strengths, challenges and ministry priorities. The worksheets are available on the regional council website in Congregational Support Toolkit #2.

This discernment process may lead to the decision to explore collaborative ministry opportunities. The congregation or pastoral charge may decide to investigate this option, or the governing body may gather information to share with the community of faith. If the agreement involves changing the position description for ministry personnel who are currently serving in a call or appointment, it is necessary to contact the Minister for Pastoral Relations for the region for guidance on the proper process.

Once the partners have drafted a collaborative agreement, a copy may be sent to the Minister, Congregational Support and Mission for the region for review. It is then presented to each community of faith for their approval. If the agreement involves ministry personnel or property it is also submitted to the Covenant Commission of the regional council for review and approval.

Additional Resources

[The United Church Manual 2019](#)

[Ecumenical Shared Ministry](#)

[Sample Shared Ministry Agreement](#)

Antler River Watershed Regional Council

[Minister for Congregational Support and Mission](#)

[Minister for Pastoral Relations](#)

[Sample Shared Ministry Agreement](#)

[Congregational Support Toolkit #2](#)

Horseshoe Falls Regional Council

[Minister for Congregational Support and Mission](#)

[Minister for Pastoral Relations](#)

[Sample Shared Ministry Agreement](#)

[Congregational Support Toolkit #2](#)

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