

## **M. COOPERATIVE PARISH MINISTRY**

*(Adopted 1996 Annual Conference)*

### **Preface**

We are yoked to Christ and to one another in baptism. Therefore, in order to establish Cooperative Ministries, we must begin to claim our baptism and, being empowered by the Holy Spirit, we are formed as spiritually gifted communities who move beyond survival into mission that can be implemented, then celebrated as disciples engaged in ministry.

The vision for Cooperative Ministry may begin with anyone or any group in the context of ministry. It then becomes the responsibility of local congregations and/or networks of congregations to assess and initiate the strategy for mission in their context of ministry.

The role of the Annual Conference, agencies of the conference, district and networks of congregations is to engage in discussion that would enable the development of Cooperative Ministries in making informed decisions for building relationships and utilizing resources for effective mission and ministry.

The goal for Cooperative Ministries are rooted in Jesus' mission as described in Luke 4:18, 19 and in his commission stated in Matthew 28:19, 20, namely,

- (1) make disciples [not members] through inviting, gathering, nurturing, consecrating and sending
- (2) identifying and implementing missional imperatives locally and globally
- (3) enhancing and enlarging the Body of Christ to the glory of the God who was, and is to come.

### **Why Parish Development?**

The Central Pennsylvania Conference is searching for new and effective ways of being the Church in mission and ministry in the geography of the Conference. This geography consists of twenty-six counties and extends from the New York border to the Maryland border and from the Susquehanna River in the East to the Bedford-Altoona area in the West.

The congregations that make up the conference number 887 and vary in size from eight members to 1859 members. It is important to note that 358 have less than 100 members; 658 have less than 250 members; 813 have fewer than 500 members. Only 74 congregations have 501 members or more; only 20 have 801 or more members, of those only 11 have 1001 members or more.

One of the objectives of parish development in the Central Pennsylvania Conference is to strengthen all congregations in order to help them become more viable parts of the Body of Christ. (See Appendix I: Objectives of Parish Development).

How, then do we as a Conference go about the business of providing opportunities for congregations of all sizes to realize their potential for mission and ministry in cooperative parish development? How do we develop a spirit of cooperative ministry that goes beyond our contractual understanding of a spirit of covenantal and collegial ministry?

We need to be intentional in the process of discovering the context of each local congregation and its understanding of ministry, both individually and cooperatively, as it relates to the context and setting of the community in which it is located, in staffing those areas where cooperative ministry could take place, in providing the resources — both financial and human — to help bring this about, and in supporting the staff — both lay and clergy — in their work. Systematic evaluation must also be included in this process.

Cooperative parish development must be understood as a way of ministry and not intended as a way of closing or uniting churches. Rather, it is a way of reshaping the task of fulfilling the mission of the local congregation.

### **HOW DO WE DEVELOP COOPERATIVE MINISTRIES?**

*The Book of Discipline 1992* paragraph 206 provides some guidelines for cooperative parish ministry. In view of these guidelines, designs for cooperative parish ministry can be developed:

Annual Conferences shall implement a process of cooperative parish development through which cooperative parish ministries are initiated and developed, in both urban and town and country situations.... The conference shall direct the appropriate conference boards and agencies to develop strategies designed to make use of cooperative ministries as means of creating greater effectiveness in nurture, outreach, and witness ministries of urban, suburban, and town and country situations.... Parish development is an intentional plan of enabling congregations, church-related agencies, and pastors in a defined geographic area to develop a relationship of trust and mutuality which results in coordinated church programs and ministry, supported by appropriate organizational structures and policy. (*The Book of Discipline*, paragraph 206)

One need only look as far as the Objectives of Parish Development to realize that the goal of cooperative ministries is to serve persons better and to assist them in enlarging their vision of ministry. It also becomes evident that an adequate support base for ministry is also essential. Each situation must be dealt with on an individual basis in light of all the objectives of parish development.

Parish Development is a strategy for the purpose of enabling every congregation to enter into vital ministry. Congregations benefit from cooperative ministry by extending their witness beyond what any local church can accomplish alone. These outreach ministries are often determined by:

1. the identified real needs of the communities being served;
2. careful demographic studies;
3. consultation with existing agencies within a region;
4. the gifts and graces available through the coalition of congregations in cooperation with each other.

It is expected that all local congregations and cooperatives will make full use of the resources of our Conference, the larger United Methodist Church, and the ecumenical community.

This strategy would include innovative coalitions of churches, deployment of lay staff, the appointment of clergy, and the sharing of resources for accomplishing the mission identified by these cooperatives in their strategic geographic areas. Of first importance is the careful identification of the ministry to be accomplished within a particular region, while enabling each congregation to engage in various aspects of that ministry.

A word needs to be said about the tenure of commitment for both clergy and laity in establishing a cooperative ministry. It is difficult to identify this with a specific time-line, realizing that a long-term commitment is most productive.

### **Due Process**

When a congregation finds it difficult to engage in vital ministries within a particular region, as hindered by such issues as membership loss, leadership, land, money, population and economic decline, this congregation will be invited by the District Superintendent, in consultation with the Cabinet and the staff member in parish development, to engage in conversations regarding its own future in ministry. Such conversations may lead to any of the following actions:

- (1) Carefully consider the options related to Discontinued or Abandoned churches within the guidelines of the *1992 Book of Discipline* (paragraph 2548, pp. 673-674), and the policies of the Conference Board of Trustees regarding such matters, or:
- (2) Carefully review any trends, through a self-study process, which may point to the continued growth or decline of the local congregation beyond the impact of any short term measures, and determine the implications of this study regarding clergy appointment, program development, and the church's future in ministry. Congregations responding to the self-study may benefit from incremental adjustments in their shares of ministry to assist in their transition; or:
- (3) A careful review of the total stewardship life of the local congregation including the impact on the Conference shares of ministry on the life of the local congregation or cooperative in question through the staff of the Stewardship Foundation. When a congregation responds to an invitation to engage in new or more vital initiatives, then the shares of ministry may be adjusted to allow for incremental movement toward 100% paid in full; or:
- (4) Be encouraged to move into one of a variety of forms of cooperative ministry including extended ministry, which will provide outreach opportunities and enable the local church to become more vital, thus entering the process to become a transitional or transformational congregation. Shares of Ministry may be adjusted incrementally to assist in this transition, or:
- (5) Be encouraged to unite with other local congregations within the same region in order to form a new transitional or transformational church. Care should be taken to determine the missional use of any facility abandoned by these congregations in order to provide new forms of outreach through these facilities; e.g., temporary shelter, food distributions, habitat housing, local health clinic, senior citizen center, community center, offices, etc.

### **Concluding Decisions**

After the due process outlined in the preceding paragraph is followed, all else failing, the issues are to be concluded by action of the Cabinet and Bishop under the authority of the *1994 Book of Discipline* (paragraph 2549, pp. 673-674) including confirming action by annual conference.

### **STAFF AND APPOINTMENTS**

The clergy who are willing to work in cooperative ministries must be willing to work in a team relationship; they must be willing to share the load. They should develop specialized skills in specific areas of ministry and labor collegially. Special attention must be given to the recruitment of persons who exhibit the kinds of skills and attitudes required for cooperative ministry or are willing to learn those skills. The Central Pennsylvania Conference will provide opportunities for the training of clergy and laity in the staffing of these cooperative ministries.

The process of parish staff formation includes the following:

1. A study as outlined above shall be used to determine staffing requirements.

2. As much as possible, the clergy and lay representatives of the congregations involved shall help determine staffing needs.
3. The Parish Director shall be part of the consultative process when staffing changes are made.
4. In addition to being appointed to a Church or Charge, ordained clergy shall also be appointed to a "Parish" or a "staff" thus affirming the special skills of each member of the appointed staff.
5. After being appointed, all persons involved with cooperative ministries, superintendents, pastors, and lay staff shall be trained as soon as possible in the following areas: team-building, conflict management, time and program planning, and other ministry skills. This training shall be the responsibility of the Bishop.
6. Evaluation shall be the responsibility of the district superintendent in consultation with the Parish Lay Council.

#### **Some Concluding Comments**

We affirm that every appointment, including cooperative ministries, is legitimate and significant for clergy in the Central Pennsylvania Conference. Congregations must also be encouraged to view cooperative ministry as a legitimate model of ministry. One only needs to read St. Paul's admonition to the Corinthian Church to see the need for both clergy and laity to be supportive of and to uphold each other in ministry (I Corinthians 16:1-3). Cooperative parish ministries must be seen as opportunities to engage in covenant, with one's sisters and brothers in faith, for the up building of the ministry and the mutual support of one another in that ministry.