



CONGREGATIONAL PARTNERSHIP MODELS

Thinking about forming a ministry partnership?

The traditional dual parish arrangement might be the most familiar model, but it's not the only one. Read on to learn more about the possibilities for working together.

THE MODELS AT A GLANCE



DUAL PARISH

Two congregations of similar size partner in ministry.



HELPING HAND

A larger congregation assists a smaller congregation.



CIRCUIT RIDER

One pastor serves several small churches.



REGIONAL

One larger congregation partners with 2+ smaller churches.



MULTI-SITE

Congregations form one entity with multiple ministry sites.



CONNECT WITH TECH

Congregations use technology to share mission and ministry resources.



BLESSED END

One church closes, with potential to help ministry elsewhere.



OTHER

The options aren't limited to what you see here.

PARTNERSHIP MODEL SNAPSHOTS

What might work for *your* congregation?



ABOVE: Zion, Offerle and Our Redeemer, Kingsley have been in dual parish partnerships (and not just with each other) for decades. The dual parish is the most familiar partnership model in the LCMS; resources for planning such arrangements are fairly easy to find.

DUAL PARISH

Description

Two neighboring churches experiencing similar challenges (e.g., difficulty filling a vacancy) form a partnership that enables them to support a pastor.

Advantages

Solves the vacancy dilemma: "How do we support a new pastor?"

Can maintain a Lutheran presence in the communities

Increased awareness of activities in the other congregation

Considerations

Distance between congregations needs to be manageable (closer than Regional model; see page 4)

Need to make both congregations feel equally loved

Possible Challenges

Limiting mindset: "Paying for a pastor" vs. expanding the ministry

Disagreement over share of support for pastor

Death by meetings

Unnecessary duplication (e.g., newsletters, printing)



There are many blessings with partnerships. The key to healthy relationships is open dialogue with the understanding that:

1. It's God's money, and we're simply called to be good stewards
2. We **MUST** work together, and (at times) suffer together — bearing one another's burdens — for Word and Sacrament ministry to effectively continue.

Pastor Stan Palmer

Zion, Offerle
Our Redeemer,
Kingsley



VARIATION HELPING HAND

Description

A smaller congregation arranges for essential help (e.g., worship services) from a neighboring larger congregation

Smaller church typically isn't in a position to call a full-time pastor.

Partnering with a larger church might make sense if there's no dual parish partner available.

A smaller version of the Regional model (see next page).

Advantages

A congregation can remain a viable outpost for the Gospel

Consistent presence in the pulpit

A congregation might benefit from the health/ideas of the larger church.

Considerations

Necessary ministry mindset: Don't do ministry **IN** the building but rather **FROM** the building.

Can the pastor find a way to be active in the community where he's assisting?

Training needed: Emphasis on the priesthood of all believers

What do members of the larger congregation think about the helping role of their pastor?

Possible Challenges

Operating in maintenance mode

For the smaller congregation: Ministry only one day a week?

Outreach is difficult; time for adult instruction?



CIRCUIT RIDER

Multiple small congregations experiencing challenges agree to worship at different times so one pastor can serve them all.

Advantages

- Word-and-Sacrament ministry can be sustained in established sites
- Offers a way to provide a suitable salary for a pastor

Considerations

- Requires more than one partner church
- Distance can vary (dictates worship times)
- Requires good time management and an ability to manage a more complex arrangement
- Are congregations flexible on worship times and days?
- Better if you can synchronize services
- Need to keep things simple (same bulletin; same music)

Possible Challenges

- Maintenance ministry can be an issue
- Challenges caring for property
- Pastor burnout
- Pastor retention
- Accountability of pastor
- Potential duplication of resources
- Meetings could be burdensome
- Ability for members to communicate and connect with one another.
- Finding times for Bible studies and other classes

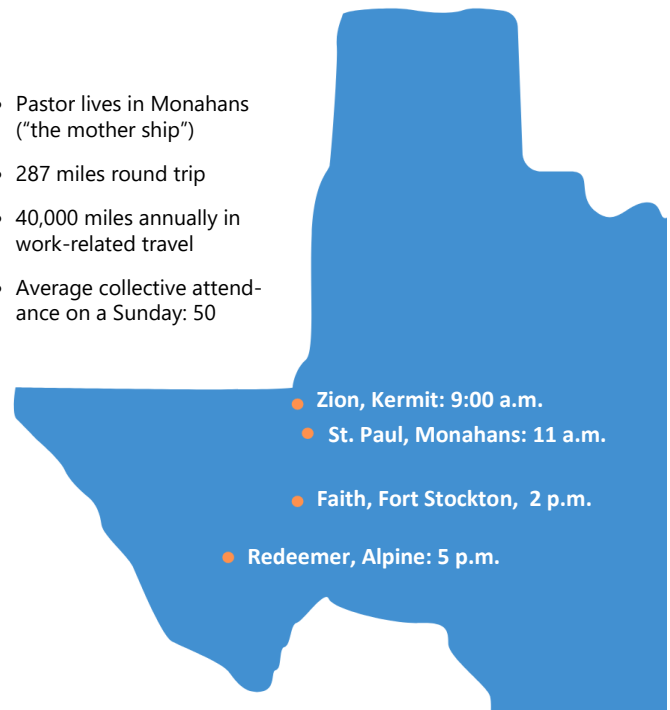
Example: West Texas Partnership

Rev. Mike Fickenscher

We have an annual meeting every year in mid-November to determine my salary and mileage for the next year. ... What's remarkable to me is that the churches are all honest and open with each other. They all seem to realize that they're all in this together, they all need each other, and there's no reason to be guarded or protective of their financial conditions. Once the financial health of each church is revealed, they decide what percentage each congregation will pay. It is based solely on each church's financial ability to do so. ... They genuinely look out for each other.

Once a year, in late April or early May, we have a joint four-church worship service at a state park out here. We worship together and then we have a barbeque lunch together. It is a time when the members can meet and mingle and fellowship with the members of the other congregations, and for a moment, we feel like one congregation being served by the same pastor, worshiping our one Shepherd and Savior.

- Pastor lives in Monahans ("the mother ship")
- 287 miles round trip
- 40,000 miles annually in work-related travel
- Average collective attendance on a Sunday: 50



- Zion, Kermit: 9:00 a.m.
- St. Paul, Monahans: 11 a.m.
- Faith, Fort Stockton, 2 p.m.
- Redeemer, Alpine: 5 p.m.



Thinking about a partnership? You're not alone.

- ✕ The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod currently has over 500 dual- and multi-congregation parish arrangements served by sole pastors (15% of our congregations).
- ✕ More than 60% of reporting congregations have weekly worship attendance of less than 100.
- ✕ Congregations, circuits, and districts are encouraged to explore greater opportunities for collaboration for care of members and the mission to proclaim the Gospel.

2019 LCMS Convention Res. 1-03
To Study Shared Ministry among Small Congregations





REGIONAL (3+ congregations)

Description

One church is the hub and partners with 2+ sites around it

Lends itself to multiple staff

Helps if the hub church has resources to share

More flexibility in the kinds of churches involved

Can accommodate more distance between churches

Advantages

Strength in numbers

Team approach (akin to Jesus sending out disciples in pairs)

Increased efficiency

The ministry can grow (add congregations)

Promotes a regional mindset

Creates a network

Possible Challenges

Unequal influence

Communication can be more complicated

Weekly schedule can be hard to figure out

Death by meetings

Consider if ...

Smaller congregation is struggling on its own or struggling to maintain a dual parish (i.e., experiences the "ah ha!" moment of realization that something needs to change)

Rapid turnover of pastors; difficulty calling a pastor

Stable, thriving congregation nearby that's willing to help

Interested in recharging mission focus (not simply in survival mode)

Distance between congregations makes it difficult to arrange a workable Sunday schedule

Members are flexible and open to compromise and new ways of operating



Example: T.I.G. Ministry

Rev. Michael Hageman, Senior Pastor

How does your partnership work?

Our collaboration currently includes three congregations, with the opportunity to expand as need arises. Trinity Lutheran, Garden City has reached out to two congregations, Immanuel, Lakin and Grace, Ulysses to continue Word and Sacrament ministry in these locations, with the intention of revitalization through the strategy of replanting. To support this endeavor, a senior and associate pastor are serving all three congregations. The senior pastor, along with the larger hub congregation, acts as a mentor and support for the associate pastor as he primarily serves the two smaller congregations with the intent of starting new worshipping communities. Much of the administration of the three congregations is run through the hub church. In the interests of fairness and oversight of the ministry, a council with representatives from each church solely focuses on how the collaboration and ministry agreement is going. Part of this council's service is to support the pastors and communicate to the congregations about the progress and needs of the ministry.

What blessings have come from your partnership?

Although the three congregations are as far as 60 miles apart and have been in decline, excitement and mutual collaboration has strengthened their continued willingness to share the Gospel. Often in declining situations, conflict, discord and an inward mindset control decision making. However, with the support of one another, the three congregations' decision making has become more Gospel-centered. With the combination of shared resources, shared pastors, and a common goal of proclaiming the Gospel, the churches are focusing strategically on how to proclaim Christ to others. They're also being strengthened by the Gospel through Word and Sacrament in their particular locations. Due to the distance between congregations in southwest Kansas, these locations are important for the proclamation of the Gospel.

What about a Bi-Vocational or Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP)?

A **bi-vocational pastor** might be an option IF a) one is available, b) expectations are reasonable, and c) his other vocation is secure.

A **Specific Ministry Pastor** might be an option IF a) someone is willing to do it, b) a good mentor is available, and c) the congregation can afford it.





The whole point of this streaming video experiment is to enable us to continue proclaiming the Gospel, Christ crucified and resurrected.

Ministry is incarnational. Many churches take for granted the fact that they'll have a flesh and blood minister there every Sunday morning. But the reality is, especially in rural areas, that may not be the case. So we make due the best we can. We will keep going, as God's people of faith. He will sustain us.

Rev. John Vallie
Tri-parish Pastor, Montana

CONNECT WITH TECH (3+ churches)

Description

Multiple small congregations share resources to call a pastor to keep ministry going, with the help of technology

Congregations aren't close enough to function effectively in a more traditional multi-parish arrangement

For worship, might utilize either live streaming or recorded sermons, with elders handling the liturgy

Considerations

Need to have resources (or be able to obtain them) for tech infrastructure and equipment

Pastor needs to be comfortable with technology

Elders would need training

Churches need to coordinate schedules

Better to work with mileage reimbursement or a vehicle purchase?

Advantages

Spirit of camaraderie

Churches can retain their respective cultures

Possible Challenges

Decreased motivation to attend

Might affect sense of community

Pastor physically present only every three or four weeks (meaning less frequent communion)

Aesthetics (screens; other equipment) might take some getting used to

Creating Efficiency in Partnerships

Efforts should be made to create as many efficiencies as possible in any congregational partnership, which enables the partnership to function optimally. More importantly, it allows the people (called workers and lay people) in the partnership to use resources (time, energy, money, etc.) to be about the mission of God. Consider how a partnership for farming might work in this way. If two farmers join together for their mutual benefit, they could share a combine and many machinery costs. Not only does this save money, but the farmers can use the same combine to harvest the land that each of them farm. However, if they both buy their own combines, they'll spend more money, and one of the combines will be sitting idle since only one of them is needed to drive the tractor for the grain cart. Partnerships in which partners are most able to compromise and create efficiencies will be best able to function for the long term while seeking to further the mission of God.

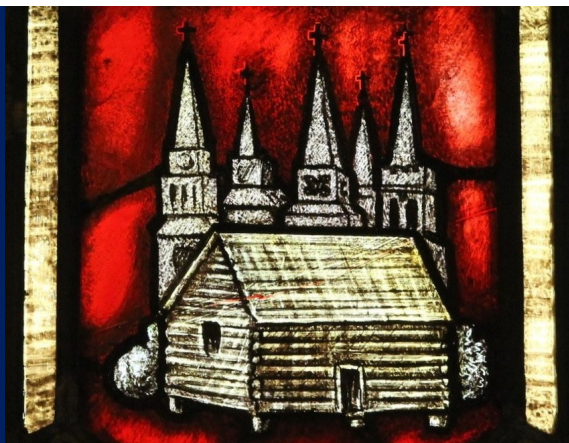
LCMS Definitions

Congregation

Local church, having its own constitution, membership, officers, etc.

Parish

Two or more congregations being *served by* one or more pastors



MULTI-SITE MERGERS

Two or more congregations merge their ministries, creating a single unified ministry with multiple sites (in some respects similar to a multi-site church planting effort).

Considerations

Mergers with the greatest chance of success involve at least one partner that's strong and vibrant (e.g., strong + challenged; strong + strong), with mission-minded opportunity as a driver.

Requires a harmonization of missions and ministry and a spirit of unity; churches must be able to get behind a united vision.

What do we have in common? What are the differences?

Advantages

Helps churches move beyond the status quo, providing an opportunity to refocus mission and ministry

Potential to revitalize ministry in a promising location

Might reduce inter-congregational tensions that can arise in dual or multi-point parish partnerships

Amplifies the presence of a ministry and its message

Possible Challenges

Naming of the ministry

Keeping everyone well informed; allowing too much time to elapse without sharing info with a broader group

Waiting too long

Minimizing doctrinal or cultural differences; lack of clarity about non-negotiables.

Lack of attention to transition management (e.g., emotional pain)

Tension between multi-site merger models and LCMS emphasis on congregational self-governance/independence

LCMS multi-site examples exist, but the pattern isn't widespread in our Synod.

One congregation might feel overshadowed or swallowed up by the other

"Communication is key to a successful merger. Congregational leadership cannot communicate enough."

Rev. Brian Hesse

Trinity Lutheran Church, Amarillo

["Best Practices in LCMS Congregational Mergers into Multi-site Ministries," 2018.](#)

Hesse's study is worth checking out if you're thinking a multi-site merger might work for you. Below are nine best practices that emerged from the study.

RECOMMENDED BEST PRACTICES FOR MERGERS

- Saturate with prayer (Prayer Team; prayer guides; prayer requests).
- Attempt to over-communicate.
- Focus on mission, not uncertainty.
- Be flexible.
- Get legal assistance.
- Choose a governance and use it.
- Names are important.
- Be honest about challenges and opportunities.
- Go! (I.e., don't wait too long)



BLESSED END

A congregation decides that the best course of action is to close, with the potential to build up/support ministry elsewhere.

Advantages

- Promotes a larger view of the life of the Church
- If closure is timed well, resources can be used to extend mission and ministry elsewhere
- Member movement can help other churches in the area

Considerations

- Community is shrinking/aging
- Can't pay for maintenance and upkeep
- Lack of available church officers
- What kind of presence does the church have in the community?
- When does it make sense for people to drive to the pastor instead of vice versa?
- Are people in the community already commuting to other communities for other reasons?
- What are the 5-year projections for the community?
- Can equity from closing fund missions elsewhere?

Possible Pitfalls

- Skewed perspective: Big active church model looms large as "normal"
- What happens to the elderly and shut-ins?
- What happens to the cemetery? (Give to a neighboring church? The township?)

Saying Goodbye in Hugoton

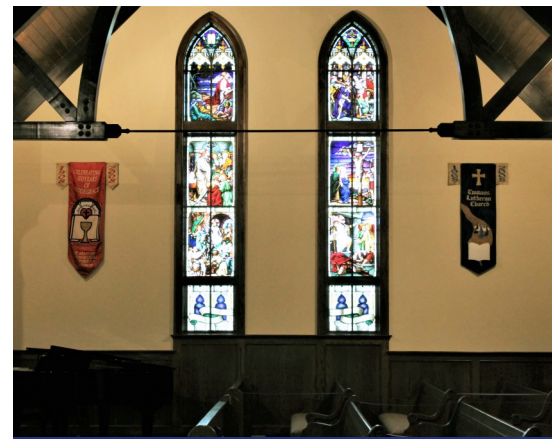
Karen Yoder, former member

No one wants to close "my church." Looking back it was the best decision, and I know now that God was paving the way for that to happen. I think as members who went on to find another church, we've been blessed and were made to feel welcomed. I'm sure the members from Faith have increased the membership in the church families they joined.

The most difficult part of closing Faith was saying goodbye. In some ways, it seemed that we had failed by not being able to bring those that had left back to the church. I also felt that we had been abandoned by those that had left too. I know that sounds selfish, but it may have been easier to leave sometimes than to stay.



I do think that God has a plan. When we follow that plan, we are at peace. I think we are at peace.



Variation: BLESSED END, NEW BEGINNING

1908

St. Martin's Evangelical Lutheran Church established in Wallula, Kansas; later moves to Basehor

1968

Emmaus Lutheran Church formed in Bonner Springs

2007

St. Martin losing membership; Emmaus struggling with debt; Emmaus has an offer to buy their property

2008

The two congregations decide the time is right to merge (an option that had been considered and rejected twice before). St. Martin and Emmaus close, and Risen Savior opens in a new facility.

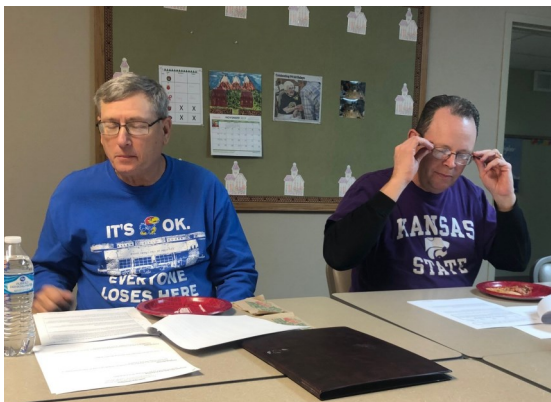
2018

Risen Savior, with over 300 members, celebrates its 10th anniversary.

2019

Risen Savior's story appears in *Lutherans Engage the World*, a publication of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

For additional details, see "Church History," risensaviorlcms.org.



Above: Bruce Ansel and Jay Meyer at a call meeting for the new T.I.G. Ministry Partnership (Trinity, Garden City; Immanuel, Lakin; and Grace, Ulysses).

Making Partnerships Work

What it takes to shift gears

- ✕ Prayer
- ✕ Steady focus on the "priesthood of all believers"
- ✕ Expanded view of the larger Church
- ✕ Shared vision of ministry (e.g., What do we have in common?)
- ✕ Bible study
- ✕ A lot of conversation
- ✕ Realistic appraisal of opportunities and limitations
- ✕ Willingness to adjust expectations
- ✕ Flexibility
- ✕ Patience
- ✕ Commitment
- ✕ Trust in God and His promises

"The ability of members to roll with the punches has generally made dealing with the challenges a blessing."

Pastor Rick Rostek

Immanuel, Norton and Grace, Hill City



OTHER

The models on the preceding pages aren't the only possibilities for shared ministry. Feel free to be creative as you develop something workable for your context.

EXAMPLE: THE CATHEDRAL MINISTRY MODEL

Following is a summary snapshot based on documentation from the LCMS Michigan District. The complete document can be found at michigandistrict.org.

Description

3-5 churches form a partnership that includes the strongest area congregation (the cathedral congregation/church), other area congregations or partner congregations/churches in an association, **and** the district (if desired) for the purpose of placing (calling) a pastor on staff of the cathedral congregation who would be deployed to serve several other area partner LCMS congregations for blessing in, and growth of, God's Kingdom in our midst. Partner churches contract for services needed

Benefits

Partner churches can maintain their own identity

Ministries are stabilized

Strong support for called associate from the cathedral church and association.

Potential for growth and expanded view of ministry.

Possible Issues

Might need to check with your district about representation and governance issues.

Staffing costs will decrease, but cost savings might not extend to equipment.

Expected equipment cost benefits might be negligible, offset by the need to have equipment in every location, as well as the assistance of a technology specialist.

Need help thinking through your options?

Contact your **circuit visitor**, **district president**, or **missions executive**. In the Kansas District, contact Rev. Dan Galchutt, Assistant to the President for Missions and Stewardship, at dangalchutt@kslcms.org or 785-357-4441, ext. 223

For additional partnership resources, visit **The Partnership Project** page on the Kansas District website at kslcms.org/partnerships.



RESOURCES FOR LCMS CONGREGATIONS