



Minnesota North District
THE
LUTHERAN CHURCH
Missouri Synod

Minnesota North District

Church Partnership Model for the Bemidji Circuit

MULTI-SITE CONNECTED WITH TECH CIRCUIT RIDER Model



From the Kansas District came several partnership models.

<https://kslcms.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Partnership-Doc-7.1.20-revised-06.28.22.pdf>

The following presentation is a detailed merging of several of the models which might serve the congregations in the Bemidji Circuit.

This presentation model will also allow for the future of, if, or when, other congregations need to be incorporated.

This presentation is intended to provide additional information for the Vacant congregations as a possible starting point for further discussion.

This presentation is not officially from the Minnesota North District but has been reviewed by President Finnern



With the congregations of **Bagley, Bemidji, Blackduck** and **Cass Lake** currently vacant, the selected model includes a Multi – Site model.

This **Merged model** will also present what could happen if the Churches are connected through **Technology** and with some aspects of the **Circuit Rider** model.

This presentation can be shared with all congregations in the Bemidji Circuit and can be shared with any other Circuit as deemed appropriate.
It is intended for all members who are interested.



- The proposed model would have the four congregations collectively call a young pastor of about 5 years experience.
- The pastor would visit each congregation on a once per month basis – rotating through each site for on-site Worship services, including Communion and Bible Study.
- The other three congregations would attend their local church building where they would participate in a Live streaming of the worship service. Access to the live streaming would also be available to those who for whatever reason cannot attend a local parish site.
- Each church site would have the capability to broadcast and receive the streaming of the worship services.



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.
 - In our specific situation, the geographic center of the grouping will be Bemidji.
 - However, as per the Convocation on October 28th 2023, each congregation expressed a strong sense of retaining the individual character of those congregations.
 - The merger therefore would be centered on the sharing of the pastor and the logistics of how that sharing would occur.



MULTI-SITE MERGERS

Considerations

- Requires a harmonization of missions and ministry and a spirit of unity; churches must be able to get behind a united vision. (All things are possible through Christ)

CONNECT WITH TECH

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 possibly handling the liturgy
- One Advantage would be that LWML could borrow the Technology equipment to Live Stream their Zone Rally's and District Conventions.



CONNECT WITH TECH

Considerations

- Need to have resources (or be able to obtain them) for tech infrastructure and equipment
 - One such resource is a company called Dacast.
 - This company has a detailed guide on how to Live stream an Event.
<https://www.dacast.com/blog/how-to-live-stream-an-event/> See Appendix B
 - This company also has a dedicated web page for Live streaming worship services.
<https://www.dacast.com/church-live-streaming/> See Appendix A
- Pastor needs to be comfortable with technology
 - That requirement would be part of the Call process.
- Elders would need training
 - The MN N District can provide that training. The role of the Elder would be crucial to supporting their congregation for when the pastor is not available due to the extended responsibilities of shepherding multiple congregations



CONNECT WITH TECH

Considerations

- Churches need to coordinate schedules
 - With the Circuit Rider option, each congregation would hold their worship service at the same time each Sunday.
 - A bible study time (possibly after a break for fellowship) could be agreed upon.
 - Each congregation may need to have a church council meeting time established when the pastor is visiting that congregation. Thus, no shared church council meetings with other congregations.
 - Special events and other meetings would be established in a Multi-point Parish agreement.
 - Kansas District has provided a sample. <https://kslcms.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Multi-congregation-Parish-Sample-Agreement.pdf>
- Better to work with mileage reimbursement or a vehicle purchase?
 - This would be covered in the combined call process.



CIRCUIT RIDER

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

- Actually, in this model, the worship times would be identical, just handles the situation with the technology of watching through live streaming.

Advantages

- Word-and-Sacrament ministry can be sustained in established sites. Other congregations can be added.
 - With the pastor only visiting a single congregation on a once per month basis, each congregation would be provided with the Sacrament only once per month.
 - A possibility to resolve this issue would be for The Circuit Visitor pastor or any other retired pastor to show up (on a rotating basis) at one of the other congregations and bless and distribute the Bread and Wine.



CIRCUIT RIDER

- Offers a way to provide a suitable salary for a pastor.
 - The Minnesota North District provides access to a link for a Pastor Compensation program.
<https://tc.cbiz.com/CompToolCPS/Login.aspx>
 - In addition the congregations would need to combine resources and provide an Administrative assistant so that the pastor can focus his attention on Preaching, Teaching and Shepherding his multiple flocks. *(See slides 23 through 27 for more details)*

Considerations

- Requires more than one partner church. Which is our situation.
- Distance can vary (dictates worship times)
- Are congregations flexible on worship times and days? Better if you can synchronize services
- Need to keep things simple (same bulletin; same music)
 - None of these are a problem under this model being discussed.



CIRCUIT RIDER

Considerations

- Requires good time management and an ability to manage a more complex arrangement
- The time management would be for all the non standard duties.
 - Agreements would be required for:
 - Lenten Services (Possibly also on a rotating parish basis)
 - Advent Services
 - Confirmation Classes (Possibly through Zoom meeting where the youth can discuss directly with the pastor in a question and answer basis)
 - Voters Meetings
 - Special Events (Marriages, Burials, Shut-in visits, etc.)
 - This would need to be worked out in any Multi-Parish Agreement Contract



MULTI-SITE MERGERS

Advantages

- Helps churches move beyond the status quo, providing an opportunity to refocus mission and ministry.
- Potential to revitalize ministry in a promising location
 - Since this won't be a true merger, this model retains the Lutheran presence in each of the existing locations.
- Might reduce inter-congregational tensions that can arise in dual or multi-point parish partnerships. [In this model each congregation retains its own individual personality.]
- Amplifies the presence of a ministry and its message
 - With live streaming, the links to the broadcast worship service can be shown on a website and Facebook page allowing for the opportunity to reach a much larger audience.



MULTI-SITE MERGERS

Advantages (Cont.)

- Amplifies the presence of a ministry and its message
 - With live streaming, the links to the broadcast worship service can be shown on a website and Facebook page allowing for the opportunity to reach a much larger audience.
 - From the Dacast webpage are the following items: (More information found on Appendix A)
 - Did you know that over 30% of church-goers have found their current place of worship through an online live stream?
 - Roughly 60% of people who attend virtual church services say that they prefer tuning in online as opposed to the traditional church television networks.
 - Use live and on-demand video hosting to bring your sermons to your parishioners' smartphones, tablets, and laptops.
 - You can share to YouTube and Facebook for easy viewing access.
 - Unlimited viewership is included with each of Dacast's plans. There are no limits to the number of believers that can tune into your live streaming service. You can share streams on social platforms and deliver HD video content in most geographic regions.



MULTI-SITE MERGERS

Possible Challenges

- Naming of the ministry
- 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 Kansas Synod.
 - Neither of these challenges would be very much of a problem as the proposed model allows for the retention of each separate congregation.
 - No separate name is required.



MULTI-SITE MERGERS

Possible Challenges

- Keeping everyone well informed; allowing too much time to elapse without sharing info with a broader group
 - There are several technology methods that can be used to assist in meeting this challenge.
 - It would be the responsibility of the Administrative assistant to closely coordinate with the pastor to disseminate the information.
 - This can be done through a variety of methods including:
 - ❖ Sending text messages
 - ❖ Sending emails.
 - ❖ Using a web based company such as “Dial My Calls” which allows for sending voice recordings of messages.
 - ✓ The messages can be recorded on a case by case basis or pre-recorded (Such as worship is cancelled due to the blizzard)
 - ✓ The messages can be grouped in any fashion required, such as;
 - All congregational members, Each separate congregational members
 - Elders, church council members, parents of confirmands, etc.



MULTI-SITE MERGERS

Possible Challenges

- Waiting too long
 - All affected congregations here in the Bemidji circuit need to be proactive in meetings and discussions.
- Minimizing doctrinal or cultural differences; lack of clarity about non-negotiables.
 - These meeting with the congregations that agree to this or any other model would need to clearly address the sharing of the resources of the Pastor and the Administrative Assistant. Each congregation needs to clearly communicate with them to best resolve any potential conflicts.
 - In addition, the multi-parish agreement needs to be written in great detail so that the Pastor, Admin Assist. and each congregation understands the duties and responsibilities.
 - As always the MN N District is available for assistance in any conflict that can't be easily resolved. Which may require a modification to the "Agreement".
 - Some future multi congregational meetings will be required to address such things as Cost of Living raises shared by the congregations.



MULTI-SITE MERGERS

Possible Challenges

- Lack of attention to transition management (e.g., emotional pain)
 - Yes, the proposed model does present some unique challenges
 - One such is that congregations with an older membership may not be comfortable with handling the new technology of screens, projectors and computers and having a curtailed access to the Pastor and the Sacraments.
 - Congregations may require assistance with the training and operation of the equipment, not only with the initial setup but with continued operation.
 - LCMS does offer all the music from the Lutheran Service Book. This music is available to be downloaded onto the computers that will be used for the broadcasting of the worship service.
 - So, either a common organist is hired to go with the pastor to each congregational site, or
 - Each site requires an organist to play the music or
 - A person trained to operate the music from the computer. Lake George has a person who can provide assistance in training how that can be done.



MULTI-SITE MERGERS

Possible Challenges

- One congregation might feel overshadowed or swallowed up by the other
 - A key here to remember is that this is not a true merger, but a common sharing.
 - As such each congregation is to have an equal share of time and talent of the pastor, no matter how large or small the congregation is. (Unless decided otherwise among all participants)
 - One possible solution is for this model to request that Synod provide a Vicarage program such that the Pastor would have a pastor in training each year to assist and learn while providing care to each congregation.
 - ❖ A challenge to this is the additional burden to the pastor of having to provide that training to the Vicar.
 - A second possible solution is to examine the possibility of calling an associate pastor.
 - A third possible solution would be to call a part-time pastor to assist.



CONNECT WITH TECH

Possible Challenges

- Decreased motivation to attend
 - Hopefully with the possibility of utilizing a retired pastor, Vicar, Part time, or Associate Pastor, the congregations would have sufficient spiritual assistance to help with this challenge.
 - Another consideration is that the younger generation is very connected to new technology. If that connection is available, then there might be a greater opportunity to reach out to that younger generation.
 - Providing Sunday school programs that would keep younger families involved would need to be addressed.
- Might affect sense of community. Pastor physically present only every three or four weeks (meaning less frequent communion)
 - See previous discussion points about this topic.
- Aesthetics (screens; other equipment) might take some getting used to
 - Pray earnestly and diligently about this potential challenge.



CIRCUIT RIDER

Possible Challenges

- Maintenance ministry can be an issue
 - The congregations need to see this as a model which can be used to grow the Church as specified in Christ's Great Commission to all believers. Rather than just getting by.
- Challenges caring for property
 - With each congregation sharing a smaller portion of their budgets to the Pastors Salary, travel expenses, retirement and medical benefit package, more financial resources might be available to maintain each separate property.
 - However the cost of additional pastoral assistance may mitigate this financial benefit.
- Pastor burnout
- Pastor retention
 - Previous points about using Vicars, or calling an associate pastor or part time pastor may help in these challenges.
 - With a potential larger budget from combining all congregations in paying for a pastor, there might be a better chance to offer a salary to help retain a pastor.
 - The quality of an Administrative Assistant can be a huge factor, either plus or minus.



CIRCUIT RIDER

Possible Challenges

- Accountability of pastor
 - Any called Pastor would need to have good records and reports available to all the congregations. Need details of how much time is spent where.
 - May require the Administrative assistant to compile the information and distribute.
- Potential duplication of resources
 - With a strong Administrative assistant the duplication of resources can be minimized.
- Meetings could be burdensome
- Ability for members to communicate and connect with one another.
 - See previous discussion points about this topic.
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- Finding times for Bible studies and other classes
 - See previous discussion points about this topic.



MULTI-SITE CONNECTED WITH TECH CIRCUIT RIDER Model

Summary

Each congregation retains it's individual location and personality

Each parish supports and shares a Pastor and administrative assistant

Each congregation has a worship Service at their location at least once per month with a minimum of receiving the sacraments once per month and possibly more often.

With a broadcast system, worshippers who can't make it to a physical building due to illness or travel can still participate in a worship service through phones, computers or "ipads"

Possibly grow by reaching out to a younger generation who are comfortable with "Technology".

As discussed in the 2023 convocation, it is Christ that *Grows* the Church, not us.



MULTI-SITE CONNECTED WITH TECH CIRCUIT RIDER Model

Financial Discussion

Thanks for coming to our convocation!



Rev. Brady Finnern

MN North District President

From the Bemidji Circuit Convocation held October 29, 2023, our District President stated that a Full time pastor with family would require a financial package of at least \$85,000.

This includes

- Salary,
- Healthcare,
- Retirement,
- Milage and
- Continuing Education



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Financial Discussion

Salary

- Actually, looking at the resource from the district website, the Salary alone should cost \$85,000 as the midpoint pay for a Pastor with 5 years of experience. (Sample calculation and details are available as [Bemidji Circuit Compensation Estimate.pdf](#)) Attached separately
- A higher range would be \$96,000 per year.
 - Considering the work load on any pastor called to shepherd all four congregations, this higher value would be the more reasonable number.
 - This would break down into \$24,000 from each of four congregations.
 - A lower amount may be considered if the plan calls for a pastoral assistant of some form.

Healthcare (*Concordia Plan Services*)

This might cost an additional \$30,000/yr or \$7,500 per congregation. Includes:

- Health Insurance, Accident Insurance Plan, Concordia Disability Survivor Plan and Concordia Retirement Plan



MULTI-SITE CONNECTED WITH TECH CIRCUIT RIDER Model

Financial Discussion

Housing Allowance

- The average cost of a mortgage for a home in the Bemidji area was about \$1100/month
- If that value were raised to \$2000/month for the tax benefit, it would still only run about \$500 per congregation. (Accounts for homeowners insurance possibly) Equals \$6,000 per year
- This also may allow for a lower proposed salary (Differential of about \$10,000/yr)

Milage allowance

- With an average of less than 30 miles from Bemidji to each of the other three congregational sites, the pastor would travel (60 miles round trip times 52 weeks plus advent and lenten services) ~4000 miles a year.
 - Then add in Shut-in visits, hospital calls, extra meetings – he would add another 6000 miles easily.
- At the Federal allowed rate of 65.5 cents per mile that equals \$6,600 or another \$1,650 per parish

- Requiring recordkeeping of actual miles traveled would be an extra burden. Possible thought would be to allow the pastor to keep track of the milage the first year and then adjust a flat rate milage package based on that.



MULTI-SITE CONNECTED WITH TECH CIRCUIT RIDER Model

Financial Discussion Summary

Salary	\$24,000
Healthcare	\$ 7,500
Housing Allowance	\$ 6,000
Milage allowance	<u>\$ 1,650</u>
	\$39,150 per Congregation
Administrative Assistant (Bemidji ~ \$18/hr)	\$37,440 per year
Per congregation	\$ 8,360 per congregation
Plus Healthcare at (\$7,500 each congregation)	<u>\$ 7,500</u>
	\$15,860
Total financial per congregation (approx.)	\$55,010



MULTI-SITE CONNECTED WITH TECH CIRCUIT RIDER Model

Financial Discussion Summary **with Part Time Pastor**

Salary	\$36,000
Healthcare	\$15,000*
Housing Allowance	\$ 7,200*
Milage allowance	<u>\$ 3,000</u>
	\$61,200 Total
Part Time Pastor per congregation	\$15,300 per year
Total financial per congregation (approx.)	\$70310*

* These may be high especially if the part time pastor has some health and housing from his other job.

