

Shared Leadership Basics for Congregations

In Community of Christ there has been increasing interest and practice of shared leadership as a way to sustain our shared mission. Historically we have looked to the role of the pastor to provide a broad spectrum of leadership gifts from pastoral care to skilled administration. We have come to recognize that no one person possesses all the gifts necessary to lead a congregation. In addition, many congregations have found it increasingly difficult to find one person who is willing to serve as pastor.

As a result we have seen various forms of shared leadership emerge including:

- a) Election of single pastor and sustaining of a leadership team that supports the pastor in basic decision making and leading the congregation in disciple formation and mission.
- b) Election of a single pastor and sustaining of counselors that provide advice and support to the pastor (i.e. our traditional model).
- c) Election of a group of pastors or pastorate that functions to provide a variety of dimensions of leadership to the congregation. These dimensions typically include pastoral care, administration, spiritual formation, disciple formation, and missional leadership. Each member of the pastorate is typically assigned a function and these functions are then communicated to the congregation for clarity.
- d) Election of co-pastors and sustaining of a leadership team that supports the co-pastors in basic decision making and leading the congregation in disciple formation and mission.

Why Utilize a Pastor Leadership Team?

There are a number of very good reasons to consider utilizing a pastor leadership team to lead and sustain mission in the congregation. The following represent the key reasons a congregation should seriously consider this approach:

- 1. The very heart and soul of the gospel is lived out through relationships. Jesus modeled this principle in his ministry with people and in the time invested with his disciples. Through prayer, conversation, and *intentional* action Christ's message and mission was shared.
- 2. Community is at the heart of our message and mission as a movement. Community is in our name and is central to our call to seek to bring forth and establish signal communities of justice and peace. We are in this together!
- 3. The diversity of skills needed for leadership require a team approach. Very few individuals possess all the skills needed to effectively lead a congregation.
- 4. Our model of bi-vocational ministry and leadership works better when we support one another. It simply makes sense to share in the joys and burdens of leadership together. It is also more meaningful as a supportive and cohesive team develops.

5. A leadership team approach creates a group of people that learn to pray, discern, discuss, disagree, and plan for mission together. The team can also provide continuity when there is need for a pastor change. The congregation will experience less disruption and the new pastor will have a supportive team that will share in the responsibilities of leadership.

Selecting a Pastor Leadership Team

What is the best way to select a pastor leadership team? Stassi Cramm's article, *"Building a Pastor Leadership Team"* in the Pastor and Leaders Field Guide provides some good suggestions. Here are just a few things to consider:

- Consider your strengths and gifts as a pastor or co-pastor. What gifts and skills would best supplement what you bring to leadership? For example, if you don't feel skilled in administrative matters you might want to ask someone that is a skilled administrator or brings organizational gifts to the team. Make this a matter of thoughtful prayer.
- Consider individuals that can work in a team environment. It is good to invite diverse perspectives and gifts but you also have to be able to work with individuals in a team environment. It is important to select individuals that understand the congregation does not exist to respond to their personal preferences. They need to have a "we" approach to conversation and decision making.
- In smaller congregations (i.e. 10-25 active members) a smaller leadership team of three to five typically works best with frequent opportunities (i.e. typically once a quarter) to invite the larger congregation into discussion and discernment about direction and key decisions.
- In larger congregations (i.e. 25-50 active members) a larger leadership team of five to seven is often required to include key functions of ministry in discernment, discussions, and decisions. It is also important to plan times (i.e. typically once a quarter) to invite the larger congregation into discussion about direction and key decisions. *Note: If a pastor leadership team gets too large (i.e. greater than 10 people) it can be difficult to engage in conversation and work toward building consensus as a team.*
- Not all team members need to be priesthood members to serve on the team.

What does the Pastor Leadership Team Do?

First, the pastor leadership team (PLT) helps to cultivate a congregational culture or environment that:

- is shaped by an ongoing encounter with the living Christ in community,
- is grounded in the witness of scripture,
- is radically relational and invitational,
- shares the joys and challenges of leadership in sustaining mission,
- is safe to explore and experiment,

- discerns and connects individual gifts and sense of call with opportunities to live Christ's mission in all its forms, and
- embodies and lives the concerns and passion of Christ.

The key word is "**cultivate**". Similar to cultivating soil for planting, the PLT creates rich soil for encounter with the Spirit, deep relationships, and new understandings of mission to emerge.

This approach to leadership is not about having the answers or driving toward a particular agenda. It is about living with essential questions in a particular context. These questions then begin to shape conversations, discernment, and action as a congregation. Both the questions and answers emerge out of our willingness to slow down, be in relationship with one another, and engage in missional practices that draw us into deeper relationship with God, one another, and our neighbors.

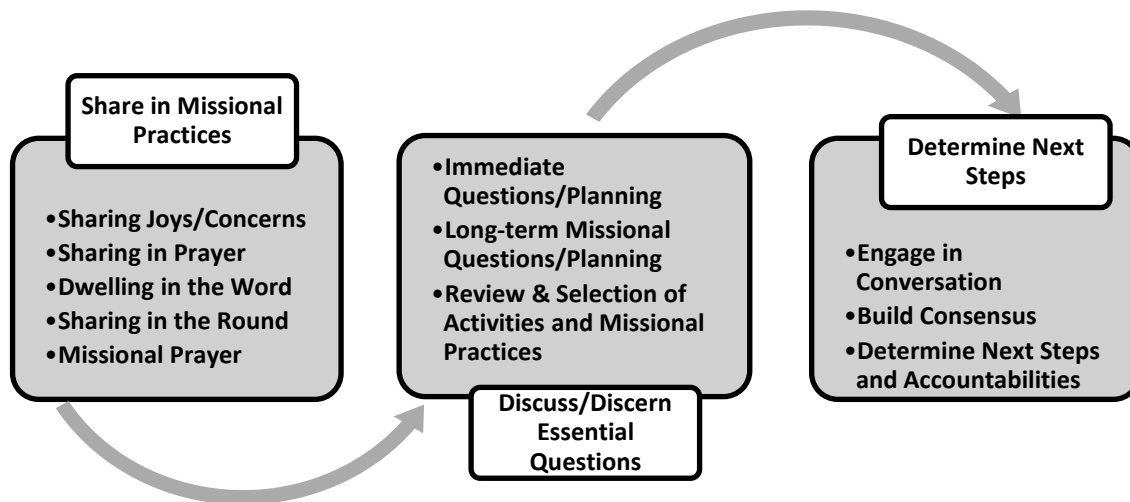
Slowing down is key!! Engaging in practices of relationship building and spiritual discernment create room for the Spirit to reveal new insights. This is not about doing more but going deeper!

Second, the pastor leadership provides administrative oversight to the congregation by ensuring that:

- congregational activities and ministries are planned and communicated in advance including the development of an annual calendar,
- the congregation is a safe place for children and youth by ensuring everyone that works with children is a registered youth worker (i.e. or equivalent in nations outside the U.S.),
- the building is maintained and safe for persons of all ages and physical limitations,
- an annual business meeting is conducted for the election of pastor, other offices, and the approval of a congregational budget, and
- periodic (typically quarterly) financial reports are provided to the congregation that communicate income and expenses versus budget.

As outlined above, the Pastor Leadership Team shares in administrative responsibilities as well as cultivating an environment that leads to meaningful relationships, spiritual formation, and engagement in mission. When the PLT meet together they will address short-term planning and logistical questions as well as longer-term questions that relate to the unfolding mission of the congregation.

The model below illustrates a typical meeting flow:



While the above diagram provides a detailed image regarding flow and content, let's "boil this down" and look at what's at the core.

At its core, ***meetings of the PLT can be as simple as engaging in conversation around 3 things*** that should be at the heart of every meeting:

- a. Set aside ample time to share together in *Missional Practices*. (For example: *Connecting, Centering and Dwelling in the Word*)
- b. Identify and discuss essential questions we should be asking ourselves as a leadership team.
 - i) Long-term questions that should be explored, pondered, and prayed about over time (Examples: *What is God doing in our community? How are we called to join God there? What are our congregational gifts? Etc.*)
 - ii) Immediate questions. (Examples: *Are we ready for the congregational soup supper next weekend? Are we up-to-speed on ordering new Christian Education material for all ages? How much are we going to spend on the new carpet—stained from the 12 soup suppers we had last year? ☺*)
- c. Determine the next steps we should be taking in regard to these questions.
 - i) Remember to take time to explore the long-term questions in order to make room for the Spirit's stirring.

Note: The PLT is challenged to spend as much time in relationship building and Dwelling in the Word as working through their agenda each meeting! Seriously, this investment in relationships with God and one another will have significant impact on the quality of leadership and ministry offered by the pastor leadership team.

How Decisions Are Made in a Pastor Leadership Team

Although some general guidance can be provided it is important to note that each congregation is different and will need to think through what works best for them. In general here are some variables that will affect how and what decisions the pastor leadership team makes:

- a. Model of Leadership - What model of leadership did the congregation elect? If the congregation elected a pastor and sustained counselors or a leadership team then it is the pastor's decision how to utilize the leadership team or counselors. This often occurs on a spectrum from a team of advisors to a group that functions as a pastorate and makes decisions together. If the congregation elected a pastorate (i.e. several pastors) then the expectation is that those individuals will make decisions together. It is important for a pastor leadership team to discuss and make clear what decisions will be brought to the team for discussion and decisions.
- b. Type and Sensitivity of Decision - In certain administrative matters that require confidentiality to protect the rights of individuals it is best to discuss these situations only with those who need to know. This is typically a very small group (i.e. sometimes one individual). Examples of these decisions include disciplinary action due to ethical misconduct of priesthood, priesthood calls, divorce situations, and other life circumstances of members where discretion is required. In the specific case of priesthood calls this will vary depending on the model of leadership elected by the congregation and the actual members of the leadership team. In some cases, priesthood calls may be discussed with the leadership team in terms of the calling and giftedness of individuals but the actual process of recommendation and discussion with the candidate is limited to one or two trusted individuals on the team.

Most topics are appropriate for discussion and should be considered by the team. The primary purpose of the pastor leadership team is to discern and lead mission together. The pastor leadership team needs to determine what decisions to bring to the group versus delegate to specific individuals or subgroups. To the extent that routine administrative decisions can be delegated to specific individuals this frees up time for discernment, discussion, and consensus building on mission related concerns and questions.

- c. Common Sense Approach – The general rule is to use common sense in determining the appropriate venue for discussion of various topics and decisions. Here are a few questions to consider:
 - i. Is this a topic related to an individual that would be best handled by a smaller group or even one individual?
 - ii. Is this a routine administrative decision that does not require the creativity and diverse skill set of a leadership team?
 - iii. Is this topic and decision one that has impact on other areas of the congregation and other leaders?

- iv. Would this topic and decision benefit from diverse perspectives helping to shape the conversation and decision?
- v. Would discussing this topic and making this decision together help build a broader consensus and ownership of the discussion, process, decision, and next steps?

Shared Leadership will likely be more challenging than the single leader decision-making model. It is during the initial start-up phase of a shared leadership model that some teams decide it is too cumbersome because of the challenges of group conversation and decision-making. This is precisely why this approach to leadership is so critically important to our future! If we can't work out how to be in conversation and make decisions in a small team we will have even more difficulty with the larger congregation.

This is so important to us because it is about how we create loving community! The Pastor Leadership Team becomes a laboratory where we experiment and learn to discuss, disagree, and build consensus together. These skills then can be extended to the congregation as we learn how to become signal communities that look different than the prevailing culture.

For very small congregations (6 to 15 members) a Pastor Leadership Team may seem like more than what is required to lead a congregation. You are encouraged to experiment with this model and see how it can help bring focus, intentionality, and a sense of community to the congregation. Remember that it is also an opportunity to create shared ownership of the future of the congregation. Be flexible! A Pastor Leadership Team may consist of three individuals but you may choose to invite everyone to participate in very small congregations.

Trust in one another and the Holy Spirit as you gather together, share in meaningful relationships, dwell in the living Word, and discern and discuss Christ's mission!

Very Important Considerations for Pastors and Leaders

Moving from individual-focused leadership to shared leadership requires leaders who are self-aware of how their interaction with others can either facilitate or shut down participation. Outlined below are common challenges that often discourage the participation of others:

- When a leader/pastor is always the first one to speak it can convey they already have the correct answer. Holding back and allowing more quiet individuals to speak first can result in the sharing of important perspectives.
- The pastor/leader does not always have to facilitate meetings. This role can be shared with others and conveys confidence in others. This can also help develop others on the leadership team.
- The pastor/leader should actively seek perspectives of others. In a Pastor Leadership Team or congregation this means specifically asking people for their perspective. Do not assume that silence means agreement!!

- When a leader/pastor speaks definitively like there is only one response to a question it can significantly limit others from sharing. It is helpful to state a perspective and own it as a personal perspective and not THE perspective.
- When a leader/pastor is a perfectionist and somewhat controlling it can have a very negative impact on others willingness to volunteer for a project. Individuals often feel that regardless of what they do it won't be good enough. The amazing thing is that the people who need to be more aware of this are the ones who most often are not. In other words, take a good look in the mirror or ask for some feedback from a trusted and honest friend. This is critical!
- When a leader/pastor is hesitant to admit they don't know the answer to a question or becomes defensive in conversation it creates an environment where others will be hesitant to share their opinions or feedback. It is important for leaders to be transparent, honest, and genuine. The role of the leader is not to have all the answers but to engage with others in first identifying the questions and then working together to discover answers.
- When a leader/pastor never shares feedback (i.e. constructive) it leaves others to wonder if their contributions are appreciated. This can impact motivation and willingness to volunteer in the future. Providing and receiving genuine feedback is critical to the learning process and growth.
- It is important for leaders/pastors to not take themselves too seriously. Have fun and be able laugh at one's mistakes. If working with a particular pastor or leader is always intense or serious others will be reluctant to engage with that person.

Setting Mutual Expectations for the Team

It is very helpful when establishing a pastor leadership team or any leadership team to first establish some mutual expectations for ground rules. These expectations are agreed to by the group and become the responsibility of the group to lovingly uphold. Some examples of expectations might include the following:

1. In all our conversations and disagreements, we will always lovingly uphold the worth of each person on the team.
2. We will commit to spending as much time in community building and spiritual practice as we do in conversation about agenda items.
3. We will commit to meeting once each month.
4. Only one person at a time speaks.
5. What is shared in the group stays in the group unless the group decides it is o.k. to share.
6. We will share openly and honestly with one another.
7. When making decisions we will take the time to time to hear from each member of the team.
8. We will move ahead with a decision when ____ number of the group indicate support for moving ahead.
9. We will not move ahead with a decision if ____ number feel we need more time for discernment and discussion.
10. When an assignment is made and accepted by a team member, they are expected to follow through or notify the team in advance if they will be unable to complete the assignment.

11. In general, members of the team will serve for 3 year staggered terms unless the team decides to extend or change this expectation. We desire to bring new people on to the team to hear new perspectives and develop leadership in the congregation.
12. We will rotate facilitation of the group to those who are comfortable facilitating.
13. If there is conflict on the team, we will commit to working through and resolving the conflict together. If needed, we will seek help.

Transitions in Leadership Teams

As indicated above, it is helpful to *plan* for transition in leadership teams. One way to do this is to set an expectation that members of the team will rotate off after a set number of years. It is also helpful to discuss transition for the role of pastor if an individual is designated as the pastor. If a team is voted in as pastor, then discussion also needs to occur about the transition of members on and off the team. Planning for leadership transitions is much less disruptive for the congregation and helps ensure continuity of leadership and mission.

This does not need to be a rigid requirement but a guideline to facilitate new members coming on and off the team in an orderly manner. As with all transitions they have to make sense for the specific context. Some very small congregations will not have additional members to rotate on and off a team. In these cases, they may be determining who to nominate as pastor and team lead from year to year.

For larger congregations, planning the transition of team members is helpful and should be a part of the pastor leadership team conversation each year prior to the annual business meeting. It is helpful if team members can be self-aware of the potential need to come off the team if expectations have not been set. The need to plan for transitions on and off the team is not an indication of a member's contribution. The goal is to always broaden the base of those who have the opportunity to participate in the leadership of the congregation based on giftedness and potential.

When a new member comes on the pastor leadership team it is essential that the team do the following:

- Revisit mutual expectations for participation or establish them for first time (see *Setting Mutual Expectations for the Team*).
- Discuss the giftedness of all individuals on the team and how that meets the leadership needs of the congregation. For more help with this task see "Getting Started with the Pastor Leadership Team" at www.missionalleaders.org.
- Provide some orientation to how the team has been working together in terms of decision making and the general flow of meetings.
- Review some of the basics of Leading Congregations in Mission together. A resource entitled *Initial Steps: Leading a Congregation in Mission* provides the essential elements of LCM and is a great review for the team. It is worthwhile to invest some time discussing these key elements together. It will provide a good review and ground everyone in the same concepts and practices. This resource can be found on www.missionalleaders.org.