



Considerations for Multiple Staff Ministry

Definition

Multiple staff ministry describes two or more persons who function as a ministry team. These may be credentialed and salaried staff, un-paid staff and/or credentialed or un-credentialed lay ministers.

Anabaptists believe that all members of the congregation are called by Jesus and gifted by the Spirit to serve and minister for the good of the whole. Therefore, in Mennonite congregations, it is natural for much of the ministry of the church to be shared. This is different than a multiple staff ministry team whereby persons carry the title pastor or minister in some form (solo, lead, associate, youth, co-, etc.).

Multiple staff ministry exists when there are multiple persons serving as pastors on staff.

Expectations and Reality

Pastors entering multiple staff ministry teams can begin with high hopes and idealistic expectations. Many see it as an opportunity to share ministry with others in a way that provides support, camaraderie, and professional growth.

This is also true for congregations. Congregations often move to team-based ministry in response to the shortcomings of other staff structures. There is a belief that team ministry, in and of itself, will correct problems with other models.

This is not always the case. Multiple staff ministry is complex, often difficult, and sometimes conflicted. Supervision of multiple staff ministry teams is equally complex and requires governance structures that are capable of managing accountability in a complex setting.

All that is to say that multiple staff ministries can be a blessing, and it takes work.

Models of Multiple-staff Ministry

- Hierarchical models – This model consists of a lead or senior pastor and one or more associate pastors. There is one person who is designated and understood as the leader

and, therefore, the one ultimately responsible. Often, but not always, associate pastors are accountable to the lead or senior pastor.

- Egalitarian models – In these models two or more persons are equal in terms of authority and responsibility, and accountability is mutual. They may be different in assigned tasks and functions, but in every other way they are equals. Some egalitarian models use the term co-pastor to indicate equality.
- Combination of professional and lay ministry – In these models two or more persons function as a team, but differ in terms of paid/unpaid, full time/part time, and/or credentialed/non-credentialed status. These can be either hierarchical or egalitarian.
- The “Bench” – This is a Mennonite tradition with the threefold ministry of bishop, preacher, and deacon in each congregation, each with their own ministry roles.

It is useful to reflect on these models. **What is most important is that the church and staff have clarity on what model is being used and what their role is within the model.**

Observations

Almost any model will work...until it doesn't. The most important factor in making any model work is the disposition and behavior of the team. Humble, steady, and open leaders who are quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger can function well in any model.

If (or when) conflict or tension arises within a team, it is important to have effective governance structures in place with clear lines of authority and supervision.

In most multiple staff settings, the preferred model is one with hierarchical/authoritative structures and egalitarian/collegial relationships. If you have egalitarian structures, but the team functions through hierarchical/authoritative relationships, conflict will likely arise.

Never assume that changing ministry models will solve problems of relationship, governance, or ineffective supervision

Keys to Effective Ministry Teams

- Strong calling in the context of deep faith.
- Love for, and commitment to, the congregation.
- Mutual respect.
- Excellent communication.
- Clear expectations, clearly communicated in clear job descriptions.
- Supportive structures.
- Effective governance and supervision.
- Reasonable expectations that allow for work-life balance

- Clear directions on how to handle conflict, harassment, or abuse.

Potential Conflict Areas

Conflict is inevitable in human relationships. It is rarely comfortable, but it cannot be ignored. When conflict is ignored, it grows. The challenge with conflict is to figure out what is going on and take the necessary steps to address it. Some things to look for are:

- **Task Problems** – When tasks are not clearly identified or communicated, persons can end up doing the same thing while other tasks are left undone. This can lead to conflict.
- **Authority Problems** – People should not be accountable for outcomes they have no authority over. When it is unclear who is in charge of what, it can lead to both over functioning and under functioning. Both lead to conflict.
- **Communication Problems** – Sharing the wrong things and failing to share the right things can both lead to conflicts. Who needs to know and whose responsibility is it to tell them?
- **Performance Problems** – how well are we doing, individually and as a team? Are we engaged in quality ministry that is building up the church? Is there room for improvement? How are performance issues addressed?

Supervision

One key for a successful ministry team is clear lines of authority and supervision. How do the members of the team relate to one another? Who supervises the team?

In **hierarchical** models, the board or governance body often supervises the lead pastor, who then supervises the team. The lead pastor is accountable to the board. The other staff members are accountable to the lead pastor.

In **egalitarian** models, the board or governance body often supervises each pastor directly. In these models, the team may designate a team leader who manages the team in day-to-day functions.

Again, what is most important is that expectations are clear and the team members abide by those expectations.

Decision Making

Another key to successful ministry teams is clarity about how decisions are made.

In **hierarchical** teams, often final decision making authority rests with the lead pastor. While each team member will have authority over particular decisions, final authority on disputed matters often rests with the lead. It is still best for team leaders in hierarchical models to make decisions based on consensus. And, if there is not consensus, it is good to have someone who is designated to make the final decision.

In **egalitarian** teams, decisions are made through consensus. Each team member may have spheres of decision-making authority (i.e. the youth pastor makes certain decisions relative to the youth program), but larger decisions are often made by consensus. When there is no consensus, egalitarian teams can appeal to the governance board to discern a way forward.

Conclusion

Ministry teams can be an effective staffing model. Multiple perspectives can lead to better decision making. Ministry colleagues can reduce isolation and loneliness, while increasing support.

To ensure teams are effective, clarity about the model, decision making authority, and supervision are essential. Making careful plans and following them will help ensure a successful multi-staff team.

For additional conversation about multi-staff ministry, please contact the MC USA Church Vitality team.