

June 24, 2021



Dear Partners-in-Ministry,

About 25% of all the churches in our presbytery can only sustain halftime (or less) pastoral leadership. That number has only grown in recent years and will most likely continue to grow. The pool of potential leaders to take these positions is not growing at the same rate as the opportunities. In fact, it's shrinking. The overwhelming majority of these churches still have strong leadership amongst their members and still have the energy and passion for thriving congregational ministry but lack the bandwidth.

The shared hope of Committee on Ministry (COM) and Church Development Commission (CDC) over the next few years is to present, what we have already begun to explore with some of our churches is a ***"Cooperative Parish" model***. We feel this model is an opportunity for many of these churches to increase their bandwidths. Here's what that might look like... Church A and Church B, who are within 10 miles of each other, that can each only afford a half time pastor, would come together as one search team to select one candidate. This pastor would have a full-time salary but serve 2 different churches. This isn't a new idea. Our own presbytery did this regularly for smaller congregations. Presbyteries and middle governing bodies from other denominations, mainly in rural areas, still use this model. Just to be clear, this isn't "yoking" 2 churches. They each would maintain their own autonomy and they each would have their own session. Ideally the relationship would grow between the churches so that they could share some of the same missions and ministries. Using the ***"cooperative parish model"*** would require some flexibility in scheduling, such as Church A might have to move the time of their service up and Church B would have to move their service back and not hold both session meetings on the same day of the month. These are relatively easy trade-offs for securing longer term leadership that is only focused on congregational ministry. Ideally the pastor would lead a worship service at Church A, shake some hands, drink a cup of coffee, and then hop on their horse/bike/car/bus to lead the same service (in the flavor and tradition) of Church B.

Our plan is to have 2 additional ***"cooperative parish model"*** opportunities beginning this Fall and 3 or 4 more throughout 2022. By sharing our resources more churches will benefit and the bandwidth for thriving ministries will increase. So, for those of you reading this who might be sitting on the session of a church without a pastor or a part time pastor who is (and might have been for a while) ready to move on to a new calling, consider this your invitation to partner with us in this dream. If it sounds too farfetched right now and you're not sure how it could possibly work in your context, please invite me to join you at a session meeting. I'd love to vision alongside you.

"So That Our Churches Can Grow"

John

