

Ecumenical Shared Ministries

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1. INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION TO ECUMENICAL SHARED MINISTRIES

Ecumenical shared, or collaborative ministries have become for various reasons a more common option in Canada in the last thirty years. In some cases, a commitment to an ecumenical model of ministry is the primary motivation for collaboration. In other cases, declining membership and resources move congregations in both rural and urban settings to consider shared or collaborative ministries. Tiny, isolated, or ecumenically committed congregations from different denominations may choose to worship together so that in this way they may be able to continue as a community of faith in an alternate form. In other cases the formation of a new ministry in a community may prompt those involved to deliberately choose to form a collaborative ministry from the outset. Because of the different theological, legal and statistical requirements of each denomination, the process of entering into an ecumenical shared ministry is not as simple as it might at first seem. Therefore, those with experience in this dimension of ministry have put together an information package to help interested Christians explore the possibilities of Ecumenical Shared Ministry at the congregational level.

The Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian and United Churches in Canada have formed (as of November, 2006) a national ecumenical shared ministries task force, which will collect and disseminate resources about ecumenical shared ministries. Using material initially developed by ecumenical shared ministries in northern Alberta and British Columbia, and reviewed by the Anglican-United Church Dialogue, they are preparing a *Handbook for Ecumenical Shared Ministries*. The following introductory material, posted on the national churches' websites, will be supplemented with more resources as they are developed.

2. DEFINITION OF ECUMENICAL SHARED MINISTRIES

1. What is an Ecumenical Shared Ministry?

It is people worshipping and serving God in a unified way while still maintaining their denominational identity and connections.

It is any combination of denominations sharing a program, mission, ministry or building.

2. What do Ecumenical Shared Ministries look like?

Ecumenical shared ministries take many forms.

- They may be as simple as sharing programs and/or staff.
- Some congregations may share a building only and otherwise maintain their own denominational ministry and services.
- Sometimes several denominations may have one ordained minister and alternate the forms of worship of the participating denominations.
- Sometimes several denominations may have one ordained minister and one common service that meet the needs and requirements of each denomination.
- Sometimes several denominations share and maintain church buildings in a number of locations and rotate services.

Many other combinations are possible.

3. Who would join an Ecumenical Shared Ministry?

Faith communities who are looking for fellowship and want to worship together in a caring, welcoming Christian Church would join.

Faith communities who want to retain their denominational identities but are willing to develop a better understanding of and tolerance for others would join.

4. How are ordained ministers found for Ecumenical Shared Ministries?

Selection of an ordained minister for an Ecumenical Shared Ministry is a joint responsibility of the local Ecumenical Shared Ministries and the appropriate denominational authorities (judicatories).

An ordained minister from one of the participating denominations would be called to serve.

An ordained minister eligible to receive a call in her/his denomination who is willing to respect the needs and requirements of the participating denominations while focusing on common aspects and building on them would serve.

The specific needs of the Ecumenical Shared Ministry would be clearly outlined in a parish profile to provide opportunity for applicants responding to a call to be as informed as possible.

5. How is an Ecumenical Shared Ministry supported?

Each participating denomination should provide some initial financial support until the congregation becomes self-supporting.

The participating denominational authorities should visit, provide counsel and contribute to the life of the Ecumenical Shared Ministries in the same way they do for an individual denominational ministry.

6. When are Ecumenical Shared Ministries formed?

They are most often formed when there are two or more small congregations who cannot support themselves. Formerly this was in rural communities; now it is also occurring in urban centres. These congregations continue to have a common need for Christian fellowship and a strong desire to worship God together. They are also formed when faith communities of different denominations believe that they will be better able to provide Christian outreach and ministry together rather than separately.

7. Why is an Ecumenical Shared Ministry a good alternative?

- It may allow a Christian congregation to exist where otherwise it couldn't.
- It provides a more unified Christian witness to a community.
- It may be more economical.
- It provides more opportunity for programs (e.g. Church choirs, Sunday Schools) not always possible in very small congregations.

8. Where can someone learn more about an Ecumenical Shared Ministry?

Contact your denominational office.

The Ecumenical Office
Anglican Church of Canada
80 Hayden Street
Toronto, Ontario M4Y 3G2
Phone: 416-924-9199 Ext. 281
Contact: Alyson Barnett-Cowan
abarnettcowan@national.anglican.ca
<http://www.anglican.ca/index.htm>

The Presbyterian Church in Canada
50 Wynford Drive
Toronto, Ontario M3C 1J7
Phone: 416-441-1111
Contact: Gordon Haynes
ghaynes@presbyterian.ca
<http://www.presbyterian.ca/>

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada
#302 - 393 Portage Avenue
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3B 3H6
Phone: 204-984-9156
Contact: Paul Gehrs
pgehrs@elcic.ca
<http://www.elcic.ca/>

The United Church of Canada
3250 Bloor Street West, Suite 300
Toronto, Ontario M8X 2Y4
Phone: 416-231-5931
Contact: Gail Allan
gallan@united-church.ca
Contact: Marvin Anderson
manderson@united-church.ca
<http://www.united-church.ca>

Prairie Centre for Ecumenism
600 – 45th Street W.
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7L 5W9
Phone: 306-653-1633
pce@ecumenism.net
<http://www.ecumenism.net/>

3. GUIDELINES VITAL TO BECOMING AN ECUMENICAL SHARED MINISTRY

As stated earlier in the introduction, it is wise to begin consideration of shared or cooperative ministry by dispensing with second-hand stories heard and assumptions made about such endeavours, and communicating first-hand with those who are involved in one. Their experiences can be helpful in fashioning a process for setting up such a ministry and in exploring different models of shared ministry. Lists of existing shared ministries across Canada can be obtained from denominational national offices as listed on the previous page.

1. Congregational consensus

- Identify the ministry needs in your community. Get demographic profile for your area from:
Rev. Philip Hink, Director of Canadian Missions, ELCIC Synod of Alberta and the Territories, 16014 - 81 Avenue, Edmonton, AB T6E 1W8. E-mail phink@elcic.ca. Phone 780-439-2636. FAX 780-462-5838. (Cost: \$25.00)
- Have congregational discussion on the need for and type of Ministry. View video *A Love Story* available from denominational national offices as listed on previous page.
- Have some joint worship services.
- All congregations involved in a proposed shared ministry should individually agree to become a part of such a ministry according to the process appropriate to their particular denomination.
- A covenant should include a willingness to cooperate ecumenically with the other congregations involved, an openness to using new ways of worship and service as well as different forms of congregational organization and governance, and an acceptance of a fair proportional share of the financial needs of the new ministry. (See #5 below)

2. Judicatory Awareness and Support

From the very beginning of a move toward shared ministry, the judicatory of each participating congregation must be involved. Anglicans and Lutherans: Local Bishop. Presbyterians and United Church: Presbytery. Support for such a venture must be forthcoming from these judicatories if the process is to continue. Only those congregations that receive permission from their judicatories to proceed should continue exploring the possibility of shared ministry.

3. Communication with all Concerned

Throughout the whole process every effort must be made to ensure that all parties concerned in the discussions, local, regional and national, are kept informed. When a shared ministry is established continuing communication among the judicatories and the congregation is indispensable.

4. Some Concerns to be Addressed

- An appropriate board structure to suit the particular congregation and denominations involved
- Financial arrangements that are accepted as fair by all. Consideration should be given to proportional responsibility based on numbers of supporting households and ability to pay.
- Personnel required. Processes available through the participating denominations, such as the Joint Needs Assessment of The United Church, should be employed and followed carefully to determine the number and type of personnel needed.
- Worship format and sacramental practices that are meaningful and acceptable to the new congregation. The possibility of alternating formats for a trial period to explore different possibilities may be helpful.
- Denominational responsibilities - the congregations to their denominations and the denominations to their congregations. It should be clarified from the beginning what demands will be made by the denominations involved upon the Minister(s) and the denominational members in terms of time commitments, financial obligations, appointments to judicatories, etc. The expectations of the congregations on their denominations should also be clear from the beginning, particularly in terms of authority to administer the sacraments and conduct worship, financial support, supervision, pastoral care, etc.
- A Christian Education structure that will provide opportunities for Christian development for all people in the congregation. Developing such a structure should include, besides Church School and midweek children and youth programs, consideration of including children in the worship services as part of their Christian development, and providing study groups for adults.
- Adequate preparation for clergy before undertaking the shared ministry, and through continuing education regularly thereafter.

5. Ecumenical Shared Ministry Plan to Include

- Pastoral leadership needed and how it is chosen/determined
- How the ministry is reviewed
- How worship style is determined - honouring traditions - familiarity with resources
- Special services of worship to be held including anniversaries acknowledged by all involved
- Development of a common installation/covenanting service to mark a new ministry
- Process for choosing liturgies for baptisms, weddings, funerals etc.
- A way of everyone involved recognizing Confirmations/Church Membership
- A financial plan appropriate to the nature of the partnership
- How assets such as buildings and memorials are to be shared
- Means and handling of financial support for local, denominational mission funds, etc. - recording of offerings through envelopes or preauthorized remittance

- (PAR), issuing of charitable receipts, developing a sense of stewardship
- How denominational records are kept
 - The kind of governing board to be used, how it is set up - a way of development into one
 - A method of orientation for both lay and clergy to start, and newcomers after initial orientation
 - A withdrawal clause including terms