

Mutual Ministry and the Whole People of God

“The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”

— *Ephesians 4:11-12*

“We are all consecrated priests through baptism.”

— Martin Luther, “To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation” (1520)

The work of Mutual Ministry

In the early church, the work of ministry belonged to the baptized, the whole body of Christ. In the Lutheran tradition, ministry belongs to the whole people of God— “the priesthood of all believers” and not just to pastors or deacons. The ELCA constitution and its theological reflections affirm this, too: *“All baptized are called to ministry in daily life and in the church.”*¹ Responsibility for the Church’s mission is shared by all, not placed solely on the clergy.

Mutual ministry reflects this shared calling. It emphasizes the partnership between laypeople and pastors in living out the Gospel. All the baptized are part of Christ’s one ministry, each called to serve according to their unique gifts and the roles they have been given.

The Role of a Mutual Ministry Committee

Since this is so, the primary role of a mutual ministry committee is created to focus on how the goals of the ministry are shared among pastors and people. This means regularly evaluated and well known communal goals or focus points are necessary to begin and sustain the work of mutual ministry. These goals should be well communicated and curated with support from the whole congregation, not just the council or a handful of leaders. Some goals may be well thought out and mission based. Others may be on-going values that could serve as goals. For example: a healthy community, a church that focuses 25% of its ministry reaching out to its neighbors, excellence in worship for the sake of deep connection and service, for example. An annual focus could be a way of determining goals: The year of discipleship, for example.

Forming an Effective Mutual Ministry Team

At its healthiest, a mutual ministry is a group of 3-6 people curated with support of the council president and key insight from the pastor. Key community leaders, a cross section of people who participate in various ministries, people who hold the history of the community loosely, and those excited and hopeful for the future are good people to call to a mutual ministry committee.

¹ ELCA Constitution 4.05

A mutual ministry team should never be appointed by the council “for” the pastor. Nor should the “call committee” automatically turn into a mutual ministry committee. Instead, the formation of this team should be a collaborative effort between the council leadership and the pastor.

Because care, accountability, challenge, and affirmation are all a part of the work of mutual ministry, it’s extremely important for those selected to be trustworthy and supportive of the pastor. Likewise, it’s important to consider both consistency on the team and create term limits: on and off ramps for service to the team. This is not a legalistic committee or an evaluative team, though there are elements of evaluation. This is a committee that provides guidance, recommendation, feedback, and support.

A clear and consistent agenda helps the team operate effectively. One example might be to measure goals through a SWOT analysis, considering strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats as they relate to the partnership between pastor and people. Other agendas might be broken down into two parts: Support for ministry leaders and lay persons in effective and impactful ministry; support for the rostered minister in effective and impactful ministry. That could look like support and a check in on continuing education plans or considering together gaps in support or needs of the community in meeting shared ministry goals and healthy standards.

With regard to the team itself, it’s helpful to have a convener of the meeting and agree upon a consistent schedule. Meeting 2-3 times a year would be appropriate.

Additional Resources

There are many resources that further detail the work of mutual ministry in more depth:

[Mutual Ministry Handbook](#) by Bishop Robert Driesen

[Mutual Ministry Guide](#) from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

Pastor and People: Making Mutual Ministry Work, Richard Breusselhoff. Augsburg Fortress, 2003.