



Department for Mission
Lutheran Church - South Australia / Northern Territory

Congregational Match-Making Options & Discussion Paper

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Situations often arise where one or both of two neighbouring congregations can no longer afford a full-time pastor. Some form of cooperation is desirable but it is not clear what shape the relationship should take. This paper provides some options and a starting point for your discussions.

A Staffing Possibilities

If the two or more congregations work together their combined resources often allow the employment of a part-time lay worker in addition to the pastor. In what area(s) should such a lay worker serve?
child, youth, family, pastoral care & visiting, small groups, ???

B Match-Making

No model is necessarily the best in every situation. Sometimes a combination works best. Sometimes an interim model may be adopted for an agreed time before more permanent arrangements are made. It depends on local conditions and history. Sometimes there needs to be forgiveness for past hurts and reconciliation before meaningful cooperation can occur. Whatever model is chosen endeavour to keep structure to a minimum and limit the number of people serving in administrative roles.

5 Marriage

Form one congregation that worships in two locations. Only one of everything – elders, church council, men’s, women’s, youth etc. One treasurer and one set of books. Offerings from different services can still be tracked separately. This works best when the congregations are in reasonably close proximity.

4 Engagement

Form one parish with two congregations with a small parish council that deals with parish-wide issues. Otherwise congregations remain pretty much as they are. Each congregation has its own elders, church council etc. The parish calls and pays for the workers and each congregation contributes according to an agreed formula. This is our traditional parish structure.

3 Going Steady

Remain two parishes but establish a memorandum of understanding that defines how the ongoing relationship is managed. One congregation pays both workers and the other contributes to staff costs on the basis of an agreed formula. Other costs are the responsibility of each congregation.

2 Dating

Each congregation calls and pays for a worker: One a pastor and the other a part-time layworker. There is an understanding that each worker will help the other congregation on an ad-hoc basis that is monitored and discussed from time to time. Ongoing cooperation in other areas where there is a mutual advantage, for example with youth ministry and men’s/women’s groups.

1 Flirting

The neighbouring pastor provides help with emergencies and maybe takes a few services over a year. Other joint ministry from time to time.

Unity



Independence

C What does each congregation need from the Pastor?

Options 4 + 5 presume that the pastor is called to serve both congregations doing all the normal things a pastor does. He is in effect “the pastor” of everyone. Options 2 + 3 need specifics as to what services each congregation gets from the pastor and what services the lay worker provides. Under these arrangements the congregation without a pastor may, for example, need the pastor to take services, provide some pastoral and crisis care and to support the ministry and mission of the congregation. This would need to be negotiated.