

# Geographical Parishes

## *A Guide to Joint Ministry Agreements for Congregations* from the Northeastern Iowa Synod

### Why form a geographical parish?

Mission, modernization and survival are among the reasons that rural churches pursue cooperative ministries, known as geographical parishes.

Entering into a geographical parish — in which churches share any combination of pastoral staff, contractual agreements, or government — is a way for rural churches to modernize and transform, so that they can continue to meet the needs of their congregations — religious, Christian education, fellowship, historical family roots and community.

### What characteristics are needed for a geographical arrangement to work?

Cooperative ministry is most likely to succeed if congregations already have certain backgrounds in common:

- **Acquaintance** — members know each other, and their families interact
- **Communication** — members share the same phone districts, newspapers, radio and television stations
- **Geography** — pastor and members can go from one congregation to another quickly and easily



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The model of the 1960s when each church had its own pastor is gone. Today's culture is emptying the rural landscape of populations.

Churches need to be willing to look at creative ways to change.

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- **Health Care** — members are served by the same hospitals and retirement homes
- **Cohesion** — congregations are located in the same county, synod conference or, perhaps, same town
- **School** — the majority of members share the same district
- **Social Atmosphere** — members participate in the same community events

### What types of arrangements are possible?

#### **Yoked Call** — *share pastors*

Congregations call and support one pastoral staff.

#### **Parish Contract** — *share pastors and programs*

Congregations agree to the same pastoral staff job description, but issue calls as individual congregations.

#### **Parish Council** — *share pastors, programs, government*

Congregations agree to an additional level of church government to call and finance pastoral and cooperative ministry. All the congregations use the parish name and contribute representatives and money to the parish council. For property and local needs, each church keeps its own name and council.



## Guiding Principles for Transforming Rural Congregations

- Congregations are motivated to change for survival.
- Rural people understand change and progress.
- Transformation starts with the current situation.
- Local control and involvement is crucial.
- Congregations need to restructure for outreach.
- Each ministry is unique for its own geographical area.
- Cooperation and neighborliness are the norm in rural life.
- Local ownership is the only guarantee of continuity.
- Shared knowledge builds trust.
- Leadership must love the land or the people who love the land.
- More than 50 percent of ELCA churches share pastoral staff.
- More than half of ELCA churches worship with fewer than 100 people.
- Realistic goals look to the future, not past glories.

## What does an agreement include?

1. Purpose (vision)
2. Type and style of call for rostered staff
3. Call procedures
4. Pastoral staff needs, functions
5. Staff relationships, titles
6. Pastoral staff time management
7. Parish government processes
8. Methods and dates to evaluate ministry
9. Worship, holiday schedules
10. Joint budgeting
11. Pastoral staff salaries, support items
12. Office expenses, supplies
13. Agreement renewal
14. Acceptance of new partners

To learn more about geographical parishes or to schedule a consultation, contact:

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