

# GETTING TOGETHER: MODELS AND PROCESSES FOR LOCAL CHURCH COOPERATION

A Paper from the Office for Church Life and Leadership

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to assist United Church of Christ local churches and their conference or association in considering and making decisions on new possibilities for formal, structural local church cooperation in a particular geographical area.

A significant proportion of the local churches of most mainline denominations average fewer than 50 members in worship each Sunday. Many of these churches are located in rural areas or small communities where growth is not likely. Most of these churches, as well as others, are engaged in a constant struggle to find and keep trained pastoral leadership and to maintain the basic functions and activities of a local church. Under this pressure, attempts often are made to find ways for two or more churches in this situation to enter into a cooperative arrangement to meet their needs better.

This paper describes five models for such local church cooperation that have developed over time. The names of the models are not used uniformly and consistently among denominations or even within the United Church of Christ. The names and descriptions that follow are meant to be suggestive of the possibilities and to provide a common language for discussing the matter within the United Church of Christ. Some titles have been assigned historically in certain geographical locations, such as the term "union" for churches in Pennsylvania, which denotes the specific union of Lutheran churches and UCC churches. It is important for all people involved in a discussion of these models to agree

upon common definitions of models they are considering, even if those definitions differ from the ones in this paper.

This paper identifies the issues that need to be considered and decided in any form of local church cooperation. The paper is written from the perspective of two churches of different denominations getting together. It should be noted that the same principles would apply if three or more local churches were giving consideration to a new cooperative arrangement. Some, but not all, of the principles would apply if the exploration were between two or more United Church of Christ local churches.

## MODELS

The five models proposed to help conversations begin about possible cooperative arrangements and some of the defining characteristics of each model follow.

**1. Yoked** churches occur whenever two or more local churches in a given geographic area share a pastor. There are usually separate facilities, mostly separate programming, and separate local church budgets. In some arrangements there may be a joint "parish budget" which includes the pastor's salary and that of some support staff, and perhaps the costs of some mutual programming and mission. While two UCC churches may enter into a yoked relationship, yoking typically involves churches of different denominations and each church retains its denominational identity and relationship. The joining of

financial resources by two churches often enables them to have a better trained and qualified pastor than would be possible for either of them alone. Sometimes a larger church with a full-time pastor and a smaller church without a pastor form a "yoked" arrangement in order to secure a person to serve as associate pastor of the larger church and pastor of the smaller church.

2. **Clusters** (sometimes called larger parishes, cooperative parishes, or multi-church parishes) are several churches sharing a team of two or more ordained, commissioned, and/or licensed ministers of one or more denominations, part- or full-time. This is a form of the yoked churches model, except it is usually characterized by more

than two local churches and a pastoral staff of two or more who have specialized ministries within all the cooperating local churches (e.g., education, preaching, teaching, outreach, etc.). Each local church retains its denominational identity and relationship.

3. **Federated** churches come into being when two local churches form one new local church organization with one governing board, but maintain two denominational identities and relationships. The two denominational identities are continued by maintaining denominational membership rolls and denominational financial commitments. The local church governing board is composed of persons from each of

Characteristics of Five Models to Consider	Yoked	Cluster	Federated	Union	Consolidated
One church, one location, one denominational identity					X
One church, one location, two denominational identities			X	X	
Two or more churches, two or more locations two or more denominational identities	X	X			
One membership roll				X	X
Separate denominational membership rolls	X	X	X		
Shared pastor	X		X	X	X
Shared pastor and staff team		X			
Separate church budgets	X	X			
One church budget, but separate denominational support and benevolences			X	X	
One church budget, support of one denomination					X
A governing board for each church	X	X			
One governing board			X	X	X

the denominations who are elected by their own denominational membership in separate meetings. Usually federated churches have one facility and do most, if not all, local church programming together. There probably is a federated church budget, but separate denominational support and benevolence budgets. Usually there is open communion and a choice regarding the form of baptism.

**4. Union churches** are local churches with one membership roll, one governing board, and one pastor (or staff). However, they continue to maintain a denominational identity and relationship in both denominations represented in the union church. Usually, union churches are planned churches from their inception, such as in newly-developing communities. However, they may be churches that come into being with membership from two cooperating local churches. Union churches are much like federated churches except that they do not maintain separate denominational membership rolls and members are not identified by denomination. The total membership may be reported to both denominations with which the local church is affiliated.

**5. Consolidated or Merged churches** are the result of an organic union or merger of two local churches. The original local churches are dissolved and a charter membership roll for the newly-named local church is established. The consolidated church usually chooses to identify and relate to the denomination of one of the churches in the consolidation, and identity and relationship with the other denomination are terminated. Sometimes a new denominational affiliation is chosen. All buildings, assets, and furnishings become the property of the new local church.

## REASONS FOR GETTING TOGETHER

There are a variety of reasons which lead local churches to consider a cooperative

ministry with one another. Ideally, local churches approach one another about cooperation out of a desire to strengthen the mission and ministry of the church in the community. It must be recognized, however, that most often the motivation behind these approaches to one another occurs when there is a perceived problem. Sometimes the strength of one or both churches is perceived to be on the wane. At other times, although stable in size, the churches are not able to keep up with increasing costs, particularly the cost of a full-time, seminary-trained pastor.

Those who would give leadership to efforts of local church cooperation need to recognize that initially many church members perceive the idea of new cooperative arrangements as less than desirable, even as moving backward and giving up something valued, such as their autonomy, heritage, and tradition; building; or sense of close family relationships which exist among the members.

Whatever the initial motivation, experience has shown that to be successful it is necessary for the two churches to view the cooperative arrangement as strengthening each church's mission and ministry capability. Even if the initial motivation is out of a sense of survival, unless the members of both churches are helped to envision the cooperative effort as a faithful response to God's call to service and witness in that community, the ability to meet the challenges of cooperation is not present.

The conviction that the community deserves a better witness and better stewardship from the churches is a solid foundation upon which to engage in church cooperation discussions. Similarly, theological understanding and commitment to the unity of the church can be an important source of energy and determination to sustain those who look and listen for God's call in the midst of the explorations.

Some of the reasons local churches typically have approached one another to explore new cooperative arrangements follow.

- One or both churches foresee the time when they will not be able to continue to

secure full-time, ordained pastoral leadership. This usually occurs when membership has not grown or has declined, resulting in budgets not able to keep up with rising costs.

This is often experienced at the time of a pastoral vacancy when a local church is not able to secure an adequate number of candidates for the pastorate through the usual United Church of Christ placement process. This sometimes results in strained relationships between the local church and the conference or association. The conference or association becomes concerned because this situation often results in the local church securing other than United Church of Christ pastoral leadership on its own. When this occurs, it sometimes results in less able pastoral leadership and often weakens the church's United Church of Christ identity and commitment.

- The presence of the two churches in the same community is perceived as no longer needed or desirable. Often multiple churches were organized in a single community to meet the needs of specific members of that community such as ethnic churches formed by settlers from a specific part of the world with a common church tradition and/or who spoke a common language. With the passage of time, the original reasons for the separate churches have diminished or disappeared altogether. Now, the two churches are seen as duplicating their efforts by competing for the same people and carrying out similar programs.
- Sometimes two churches in a single community resulted from a conflict or division that occurred in the past and led to individuals leaving one church and starting a new church. With the passage of time, the conflict no longer exists and the wounds have healed. There is no longer a need for the two churches to continue separately.
- Occasionally the initial motivation may result from an issue involving a church's facilities. A church building may be

destroyed by a fire or wind storm or may be in need of major repairs beyond the financial capacity of the congregation. A cooperative venture with another local church seems to be a reasonable option to explore.

- Sometimes two smaller local churches perceive that most of the resources of each church are devoted to maintenance functions with little remaining for mission and ministry. They perceive that through a cooperative relationship they may be able to increase their ability to witness and serve in their community.
- Some churches may choose to acknowledge the ecumenical partnership between the United Church of Christ and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) through a visible connection.

It bears repeating: Unless churches considering cooperation can see and affirm within the exploration the possibility of enhancing their identity and ability as the "Body of Christ" in their community, the effort will likely not achieve its potential. Thus, all involved in giving leadership to the exploration need to find ways for the members of both churches to acknowledge and own this goal.

## ADVANTAGES OF GETTING TOGETHER

Those who are enthusiastic about local church cooperation cite the following as some of the advantages:

- It embodies theological commitments to the unity and mission of the church. It communicates to the community that mission is more important than differences, and it transcends denominationalism. When it is with a Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), it embodies our partnership with that denomination.
- Studies show that churches in cooperative arrangements in rural areas and small communities have a greater community awareness and involvement than do their unaligned counterparts.



- Churches in cooperative arrangements develop skills in managing differences and in decision-making. The community is advantaged as these skills of members are utilized in other settings of the community.
- It has been shown that churches in cooperative arrangements are more open to newcomers than are other churches in the community.
- Local church cooperation is an important model for the future of small churches. Many rural and small communities will have vital churches only through this means.

## EXPLORING COOPERATION: IDENTIFYING AND ADDRESSING ISSUES

The initial idea for a possible local church cooperative relationship may come from a variety of sources. It may be raised within a local church which may then approach one or more other local churches in its community. It may be raised by the pastors or by a few members of two local churches in a community as they work together in the community or in ecumenical activities. In some cases, a conference or association staff person raises the possibility in the course of assisting a local church in the pastoral search process. In other cases, a local church of another denomination or a judicatory staff person from that denomination approaches a UCC church or a conference or association staff person to discuss the possibility.

When a local church is considering exploring cooperation with one or more other local churches, it should keep in mind some of the following questions and issues:

- Are there options besides local church cooperation that should be considered? Are there lay leaders within the congregation who, with some training, could provide pastoral leadership for the congregation? Is there the possibility of finding a bivocational pastor to serve the church? This is a person who would serve part-time

while providing a portion of his or her support through part- or full-time secular employment. It is always good to explore all options with the conference staff person before deciding on a particular route.

- Consider which churches are more compatible from the perspective of theology, worship style, polity, mission commitment, tradition, ethnicity, etc. Some provide a better fit than others.
- Determine if there is a Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregation which could be approached. The United Church of Christ is in a partnership relationship with this denomination, and cooperative relationships between local churches of these two denominations are being encouraged. This is particularly important since these two denominations are working at ways to acknowledge the mutual recognition and reconciliation of ordained ministries.

However the issue is raised, it is helpful to involve all of those who have an interest in the possible cooperative relationship as early in the process as possible. Thus, if two local churches in a community begin the conversation, it is important for each of them to inform their appropriate judicatory offices to invite participation into the process. It is vital for these judicatory bodies to be involved in all phases of the process.

It may be helpful in communities where there is an ecumenical organization, such as a council of churches, to invite its staff to participate in the conversations. Such an organization often includes persons with experience and expertise in church cooperation efforts. Also, staff of these organizations may be aware of other local churches in the community interested in a cooperative exploration.

The conference or association needs to determine who should represent it in these local church discussions. Often it is a staff person assigned to this kind of responsibility. In some cases, a conference or association has a committee prepared to work with local churches on cooperative relationships. The issue may be of particular interest to

committees on the ministry. It is important to have a person or persons who have authority to represent the conference or association and who can provide continuity throughout the process.

Local churches exploring the possibility of a cooperative relationship should consider several alternatives. Often the temptation is to raise the possibility of only one model which may not be the most advantageous for the situation. The possibilities of a positive and strong relationship are increased when consideration is given to all models and the churches are encouraged to be creative in designing a model particularly suited for them. Throughout the discussions, the focus should be on two basic issues—how best to meet the needs of the two local churches and how best to fulfill the needs of the community for ministry and mission.

When conversations between two local churches move from an informal discussion of possibilities to a more formal exploration, there are several principles to follow.

- Make certain the person or entity that has the final authority to make such agreements is involved. This could be a bishop or district superintendent, or other representative of a judicatory, in addition to the local church.
- Anticipate and be clear about the decision-making process from the beginning. Typically, a joint committee is formed to guide the effort. It should be composed of representatives from the two local churches and from the judicatories of their respective denominations. Consideration should be given to whether any others should be included, such as a representative from the local council of churches or one or more other local churches in the community. Voting membership on the joint committee needs to be determined.

It needs to be decided if the joint committee reports and makes its proposals directly to the two local churches or whether it reports and makes its proposals to the governing boards of the two local churches which, in turn, report to the congregations.

The role of the joint committee is to:

- + Develop a proposal for cooperation to be considered by the two local churches, including a joint mission statement.
- + Keep both churches thoroughly informed as discussions proceed. It is very important for regular communication to happen in both churches and for both churches to receive identical reports. It does great damage to the process if rumors are allowed to circulate or if the two churches have different perceptions of what is happening. One way to achieve consistency in reporting is to share the minutes of the meetings of the committee with both churches. Another way is to hold informational meetings in which members of both churches are invited to be together to hear reports from the joint committee and to raise questions and share ideas with it. Or, committee members from one church could report to members of the other church.
- + In addition to the work of the joint committee and its reports, create ways for members of the local churches and their organizations to become acquainted with one another. The process is enhanced when fellowship and educational events for members of both churches are planned that allow members to become better acquainted and provide for them to engage in activities in one another's facilities. Joint meetings of similar organizations (women's and men's groups, youth fellowships, etc.) could be planned. Members should be encouraged to visit one another's worship services.
- Careful records of all meetings should be kept that highlight agreements that have been reached. The joint committee should have as its goal a written proposal that spells out in great detail the nature of the proposed cooperation between the two churches. The document should be written so that in the future those who have not

been involved in the process can understand clearly the agreements reached.

- Determine in advance the vote necessary to move into a mutual agreement. It should be more than a majority; some recommend as high as 80%. The final agreement may be put in terms of a covenant between the two churches. The language of *covenant* not only indicates that the terms of the agreement are between the two churches but acknowledges that the two churches have developed and entered into the agreement through an intentional process of trying to discern the will of God in their relationship. The covenant acknowledges that God is a partner in the relationship that now exists. If this perspective is maintained throughout the exploration and ways are found for the joint committee and the two local churches to seek the will of God, the entire experience is enriched for all involved.
- If, at the conclusion of the process, a formal proposal is placed before the two local churches for a vote, it is recommended that a joint informational meeting first be held in which members of both local churches together hear a presentation of the proposal by the joint committee and engage in a question-and-answer time with the committee. Following this, at a later time, each local church should have its own meeting or meetings to consider the proposal and vote on it. Votes should not be tabulated until both churches have voted, and then the tabulation of both should be done at the same time and reported simultaneously in both churches.
- After decisions are made, it is important to celebrate the process and the decision. If a cooperative relationship is to be entered, a special liturgical service needs to be created for all the churches involved to celebrate the anticipated future and to offer it to God. If the result of the exploration is not to enter into a cooperative arrangement, ways should be found for the churches to wish one another well as they continue in their separate ministries. A common worship service, or even a joint party, could

be held for expressions of gratitude and appreciation for the exploration together.

## FACTORS TO CONSIDER IN DEVELOPING THE MODELS

Within the five models identified at the beginning of this paper, or within adaptations of them, there are basic issues common to all which must be explored and decisions reached as part of the cooperative relationship. In considering these issues, it is important to keep in mind that there usually is not one right or wrong way to resolve the issue. Experience has taught some of the complications and pitfalls of which to be aware. However, the critical issue is for those involved to explore the issues thoroughly, to consider as many options as possible, to involve as many persons as possible in the decisions, and to reach agreement which is clear to—and represents—a consensus of those affected by the decision.

Among these issues are:

- **Pastoral Identity**

In all the cooperative models, except the consolidated or merged model, two or more churches of different denominations enter into a cooperative relationship in which denominational identities are retained. A characteristic of the relationship is the selection and sharing of pastoral leadership in some form. This raises several issues which need to be resolved in the cooperative agreement:

- ✦ What is to be the denominational identity of the pastor? Several possibilities exist. It is common for cooperating churches to agree to alternate in the calling of a pastor so that every other pastor is a United Church of Christ pastor. Sometimes this is modified to achieve more balance in the length of pastoral service by representatives of two denominations. Thus, if a United Church of Christ pastor served for fifteen years, several shorter pastorates by pastors of the other denomination may follow.



Other cooperative agreements provide for candidates of both denominations to be considered each time there is a vacancy. The best qualified person, regardless of denominational identity, is selected.

- **The Pastoral Selection Process**

Significant issues are raised if the cooperating churches are of denominations with different polities and different pastoral selection practices. The typical process in the United Church of Christ is for a local church to name a pastoral search committee which, with the assistance of a conference or association staff person, carries out the search and recommends a candidate to the congregation. In denominations of other polities, the process is considerably different. For example, in some denominations, the pastor is appointed by the bishop.

Thus, it is vitally important to develop agreement and clarity about how the pastoral selection process is to be conducted.

- **Pastoral Tenure**

Related to the pastoral selection process is the issue of pastoral tenure. While the prevailing practice in the United Church of Christ is for a pastor to serve indefinitely, some churches have stated terms or the pastor may be moved by the bishop or other church official. Clarity needs to be reached about how this is done.

- **Where the Pastor Lives**

How churches identify "our" pastor often is related to where the pastor lives. If a church has had a long experience of its pastor living in its parsonage, to have an empty parsonage or to have the pastor living in the parsonage of another church is a negative experience. Similarly, if the pastor lives in another community, it may be perceived that the pastor is more closely related to the church and members in that community.

If possible, housing that is not so readily identified with any of the churches should be sought. If this is not possible, the pastor needs to find ways to actualize and symbol-

ize his or her presence in the community of the church where she or he does not live.

Ownership of the pastor's housing and how expenses are handled are important issues. Several factors often make home ownership by the pastor not a viable option. Pastorates in local church cooperative arrangements typically are not long-tenured, and the home re-sale market in these communities is often limited. If the pastor lives in church-owned property, it is important to have a written agreement about the ownership of the property and about how housing expenses are shared by the churches.

- **Pastoral Salary and Expenses**

Determining how to share the cost of pastoral services and other expenses of the cooperative arrangement is an important issue to address. It is often typical to share these costs based on the relative size of the membership of the two churches or the relative size of attendance at worship. Thus, where churches of similar size are involved, it is often the practice to share these costs equally.

It needs to be anticipated that the relative size of the churches may change in time. Clarity is needed in the beginning about how costs would be adjusted if the basis on which they are initially determined changes.

- **Pastoral Job Description and Priorities**

It is very important for the pastor and the members of the cooperating churches to know what is expected of the pastor. A description of the pastor's responsibilities should be written, and it should be noted what responsibilities the laity have in the churches.

It is typical for laity to carry more responsibility in cooperating churches for the educational program of the churches, the organizational life of the churches, and some of the pastoral care needs of the churches than in individual churches with full-time pastors.

It is not unusual for a local church in a cooperative arrangement to feel it is not receiving its share of the pastor's time. This is particularly true if one of the churches is



to receive more of the pastor's time because of its size or its share of the costs. This is often true, as well, in situations where the pastor lives near or in the community of the church.

It is most important for members to know that the pastor is available when needed and how the pastor can be reached. Beyond this, members need to know how the pastor's time is allocated among all the pastoral responsibilities. Members should receive reports about how they are receiving their fair share of the pastor's time.

- **Denominational Assistance**

There are times in the life of all local churches when they look to their denomination for assistance. Obviously, the time of pastoral search and selection is one of those times. At other times, a local church may want outside assistance in developing leaders, selecting a church school curriculum, resolving a conflict, or celebrating an anniversary.

Thus, it is necessary to have a clear policy on which denomination provides what kinds of assistance. For example, assistance with the pastoral selection process may be alternated between the two denominations. Assistance with other kinds of needs could be determined on which denomination has the better capacity to respond in terms of skills, resources, time, or proximity. This includes guidelines for how information about the local church is shared with both denominations.

- **Denominational Relationship and Participation**

This issue has to do with how the cooperating churches participate in the life of the denominations, such as in annual meetings and serving on national or judicatory boards and committees. In some models (federated and united) this is an issue for the congregation. In other models (yoked and clusters) this is an issue for the pastor or pastors.

It is particularly important for cooperating churches and their denominations to recognize the demands on a pastor who is

expected to be a participating member of the two denominations.

- **Denominational and Mission Support**

A local church that belongs to a denomination provides financial support for the program and structure, as well as the mission and outreach efforts, of its denomination. For churches associated with two denominations, careful attention needs to be given to how this wider church support is provided.

Often an arrangement is made whereby denominational and mission support are shared with the two denominations based on the percentage of—or the actual giving of—each denomination's members in the cooperating churches. At other times, the giving is divided equally between the two denominations.

- **Standing and Membership of Pastors**

The official recognition, membership, and standing of pastors in the cooperating denominations need to be determined. Most often, pastors who serve in a UCC church either have ordained ministerial standing or dual standing in the United Church of Christ. Ordained ministerial standing means that their basic identity and accountability are to the United Church of Christ. Dual standing is an authorization granted to ordained ministers of another denomination while they are serving in a UCC church.

It is important to be clear how the two denominations participate in support of the pastor as well as how they participate in oversight and discipline. Generally, it is better to have one of the denominations carry primary responsibility and to involve the other denomination at critical points of support or discipline.

In the United Church of Christ, pastors are members of the local church they serve. In some denominations, pastors hold membership in the judicatory rather than in a local church. If pastors are serving more than one local church, then the location of membership needs to be determined.

Membership often has symbolic meaning for a congregation so that membership is a sign that the pastor is their pastor. In some cases, pastors are considered full members of both churches. In other cases, they hold membership in one church and associate membership in the other. If denominational policy and local custom permit, it is seen as an advantage for the pastor to be a full member of both churches.

- **Membership and Participation of the Pastor's Family**

For pastors with families at home, the issue of the membership and participation of members of the family in both churches needs to be clarified. In general, the principle recommended is that members of the pastor's family have the option of membership and participation in one or in both churches.

In most cases, it is unreasonable for both churches to expect the members of the pastor's family to participate fully in the worship, education, and other activities of both churches. This should be permitted, but not expected or required.

- **The Status of Pastors at the Time of a New Cooperative Relationship**

If there is a pastor in one or both churches when two local churches enter into a new cooperative relationship, one of the most critical issues for cooperation is pastoral leadership. The critical issue often is the perception by members of the two churches of whether the incumbent pastor or pastors can minister fully and impartially to both churches. Options for resolving this include:

- : If there are two pastors, a way for both to continue as co-pastors or as senior pastor and associate pastor is found.
- : If there is only one current pastor, she or he may continue as the pastor of the new cooperative relationship.
- : Any present pastors are expected to resign and a new pastor is sought.

- **Facilities**

A strong component in the identity of any local church is its worship and meeting place and other physical facilities. In cases where the cooperative arrangement calls for a single facility in place of two facilities currently being used, there are many issues to be explored to prevent feelings of "why should we pay for upkeep of *their* building."

- ✦ Obviously, an initial consideration has to be whether one or both of the current facilities meets the needs of the new cooperative relationship. This includes consideration of size, condition, and location in relation to where members live.
- ✦ Location also needs to be considered from the perspective of the visibility and image of the church in the community, as well as from the perspective of the location most conducive to carrying out mission and ministry in the community.
- ✦ It is often very difficult for the members of one church, particularly if it is perceived to be smaller or weaker than the other church, to move to the other's facilities without feeling it is losing something important in the new cooperative relationship. Thus, this issue needs careful exploration. In some cases, cooperating churches have considered whether a new facility is possible which would allow a new identity to be established. If one of the existing facilities is to be used, careful planning needs to be done for the installation into that facility of important and symbolic components and furnishings from the other church's facilities.

UCC churches also need to keep in mind that the ownership of church facilities may be different for local churches of other denominations. In the United Church of Christ, property usually is owned by the local church; in some denominations, local church facilities are owned by an agency or judicatory of the denomination rather than

by the local church. This underscores the importance of having full participation by representatives of the denominations in these discussions.

- **Worship Scheduling**

One of the critical issues when two or more churches continue in different locations (typically yoked and cluster models) is the scheduling of worship. In order for the pastor to conduct services in each church on Sunday morning, distance and driving time need to be considered.

Changing the time of worship is one of the most difficult changes for local churches to make, so whatever times are selected should be maintained for substantial periods of time. Some churches change three times a year. This way one church doesn't always have early services in the summer and the other in the winter, for instance.

The value of having the pastor available for interacting with members either prior to the worship service or following the service needs to be considered. Where more than two churches are part of the cooperative arrangement, it is often necessary for worship in the churches to be held on an alternating Sunday basis in order for the pastor to be present. Some consider having a weekly service on Saturday as an alternative.

- **Worship Forms and Christian Education**

Successful cooperative arrangements between churches often require a certain degree of theological and liturgical compatibility among them. The need for pastoral adaptation to very different theological viewpoints and to diverse worship forms and practices should be kept to a minimum. The pastor should not be expected to prepare for and conduct completely different worship services for the churches.

Because music and Christian education are two parts of the church program which are highly emotional as well as reflective of

theology, issues related to them need to be explored if worship and Christian education are shared experiences. If music committees exist, they should meet together to talk about music in worship, and Christian education committees or teachers should meet to work out agreement about Christian education.

## **How COOPERATIVE ARRANGEMENTS CAN BE CHANGED OR TERMINATED**

At the outset, it is important to have defined procedures whereby the arrangement can be modified if needed. How are dissatisfactions with any of the arrangements addressed? If the scheduling of Sunday morning turns out to be unsatisfactory for one of the churches, how does it raise the issue and have it addressed? If one of the churches can no longer meet the financial obligations of the cooperative arrangement, how is this handled?

These questions highlight the importance of having an official deliberative and decision-making process to which all have agreed. Typically, some form of joint council is established where these issues are brought and discussed. The council is empowered to make certain decisions; other decisions must be taken to the local churches. When more than one local church identity is maintained, the system needs to insure that each local church retains control over its own capacity to decide issues for itself, even though it may be out-numbered or out-voted by the other congregation.

Particular attention needs to be paid to how the cooperative arrangement can be terminated. It is not unusual for one church in a cooperative arrangement to increase its size and/or strength so as to desire to end the cooperative arrangement and go on its own. This situation involves legal issues such as who holds title to property. It involves questions about the call and support of the pastor.

Whatever the motivation for considering ending the cooperative arrangement, there are a number of issues to be resolved. The more these issues can be anticipated and identified and means for handling them determined at the

time the cooperative arrangement is created, the better off the churches will be in their life together.

## A FINAL WORD

The success of any of these models is dependent first of all upon the members' understanding of, and commitment to, what God is calling them to be and to do at the time. The theological clarity the members have about the nature and purpose of the church must be achieved before structural and organizational forms are meaningful.

The culture has taught us that we should measure a church's success by membership growth; increased budgets; many programs; acquired property; and full-time, fully-trained pastors. While all of these have importance, the church has been called not to certain forms of institutional life but to faithfulness in its witness and mission in whatever situation it finds itself.

Those who would provide leadership for two or more local churches to explore a cooperative arrangement, first and foremost, lead them in an exploration of how to be faithful to God's call. Emboldened with conviction about God's mission in their communities, they then seek the organizational forms to join that mission most effectively and joyously.

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